Cosmo is Good Dog

by Pisan_Zapra

Summary

See Cosmo, the Collector's Dog. What does Cosmo see?

Speak, Cosmo. Speak!
Cosmo

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tivan is good boy; he just doesn’t remember sometimes. So is very good think he had Comrade Cosmo around to remind him, da?

Who is Comrade Cosmo?

Let Cosmo tell who Cosmo is!

But first, let’s shake.

Shake.

Shake.

Good, good Terran.

I need to warn you, though. Cosmo is Russian dog, so life story is a little long and kind of sad.

You still want to hear?

Oh, boy, Cosmo will be gettin’ bacon for tellin’ story? Cosmo will speak, Cosmo will speak!

Cosmo short for Cosmonaut. That is what scientists call Cosmo, along with somethink else Cosmo forget, when they pick Cosmo off streets of Stalink’grad. Well, not right away because Cosmo did not become Cosmonaut right away. Nobody does.

You should visit Stalink’grad, Terran, if you haven’t. Stalink’grad is beautiful. So beautiful, but dangerous. Like beautiful thinks always are.

Oh, you have?

What?

Nyet, they would not!

Really?

That is what is called now?

Such an ugly name!

Cosmo loves Stalink’grad. Stalink’grad always Stalink’grad to Cosmo. Cosmo was born there, in litter of syem, on the streets, but Cosmo does not remember much about parents or siblinks. Batya was gone before Cosmo and siblinks born. Mama was sad and often tired, but pretty. Oldest of siblinks, Bol’shoy Brat, tried to keep us siblinks together after Mama passed. We lost Mladshya Sestra, the youngest of us. We were crossink a street together and, next think we knew, she was gone. Most of us stopped lookink for her after month passed. Because we had to, not because we wanted to. Mladshiy Brat, the second younkest, didn’t want to give up. We never saw him again. Another sestra passed, drowned in the beautiful river. Another brat hit by tram. Street and River we had to avoid after. Is hard to do that in Stalink’grad. Only so many places for doggies to go.
Bol’shoy Brat had cold when Cosmo last saw him, but he still tried hard to keep Cosmo and other siblink together. Cosmo hope he got better.

What Cosmo miss most about Stalik’grad is playink in snow with siblinks. It was cold, but safe. Cosmo used to like swimmink in river before we lost sestra.

My siblinks and I were sleepink on doorstep when they got me. My brats woke up when I called for them. My younger brat was too weak. Stayed down after he got first hit. Bol’shoy Brat had teeth in leg of Man-who-grabbed-me, and did not let go when they kicked him and hit his nose. I couldn’t move when they were carryink me away, because they inject me with somethink that made me sleepy like Mama. Bol’shoy Brat let go when they inject him too.

Cosmo still think of Bol’shoy Brat sometimes.

Cosmo picked with other stray dogs from all over because we were stronger, heartier than normal dog. We’re used to extreme cold. That is what scientists tell Cosmo and other dogs. They put us in cages. They feed us strange thinks. They give us shots. They cut us up in places and sewed us up again. They use radiation lamps. They expose us to cold again. They repeat. Over and over. They wanted to expand our minds. Many of us dead instead.

It work on Cosmo, but Cosmo was clever doggy and didn’t show right away. Cosmo knew it worked because Cosmo could hear them talk without movink lips. Cosmo heard mental-talkink. Thought I was goink crazy, at first. Cosmo hear scientists thinkink about Laika, the first Terran creature sent out to orbit the planet. And about the other dog whose head they kept. Head and nothink else. And it was still alive, poor think! Terrifyink way to live. Cosmo did not want to be like dog head. Cosmo would rather be like Laika. Cosmo obey, when told to do most thinks, but Cosmo did not show new abilities.


Cosmo had fun with ball for a day, but it had to end because Cosmo knew it was time to think for big think.

Make Cosmo like Laika. Even if Laika did not survive, Cosmo would rather go on this program and get out of experiments instead of windink up like dog head. Cosmo knew, after what they did to Cosmo, they would not send Cosmo back to street of Stalink’grad. That, and Cosmo wondered what it would be to float in the stars Cosmo saw each night. Hopefully like snow. Safe. So Cosmo think. Make Cosmo like Laika, Cosmo think.

And Cosmo became Cosmonaut, flyink for glory of Mother Russia. Cosmo will be good, they said. Cosmo will be good dog. Or Cosmo was told Soviet government scrub failures and after Laika they would not have another failure. Soviet government changed pictures for failed human cosmonauts, scientists say, so nobody knew they existed anymore, but Cosmo did not know if scientists only upset with Cosmo and makink thinks up. Anyway, they wanted new dog to test new propulsion system for craft before usink on humans.

Cosmo trained with three other dogs. Cosmo no longer remembers their names. Scientists brought Laika to their home, to play with their kids, because they knew Laika would not live long and
scientists like her. Scientists did not do that to us. They do other thinks to us like Laika. They put us in cages, to train us. Then, move us to smaller cage. Cages shrank each day. Shrank and shrank and shrank and shrank. We’d be left days at a time, sometimes. Became hard to think. Became hard to eat. Became hard to defecate or pee. Then, they put us in centrifugal device and spun us. Had us try suits on. Fed us even softer food, which made it harder for us to defecate. Our stomachs hurt. Even if hard for Cosmo to think, Cosmo still think so they send Cosmo. Cosmo think. And think.

They send Cosmo, leave other Cosmonauts on ground. Cosmo doesn’t know what happened to other Cosmonauts. Cosmo thought of many thinks when they launch Cosmo. Cosmo mostly think of ball and siblinks.

Launch was terrifyink. More frightenink than beink spun in device. Like Cosmo was beink squeezed, beink stepped on by giant. But Cosmo couldn’t move. Cosmo was pressed down and could feel heart beat like it would have come out of chest. Cosmo had trouble breathink. Cosmo wanted to howl, but Cosmo could not move mouth.

Scientists said they fixed flaw in craft that stymied thermal control system, so Cosmo would not die same way like Laika. Flaw was fixed. Thermal systems worked. But ships fickle. One wrong number in calculations, just one, and it is enough to throw whole system off. Cosmo think somethink happened with pressure, but not sure. Cosmo is a telepathic dog, not rocket scientist, eto panyatno?

Cosmo couldn’t breath. Cosmo couldn’t breath.

So Cosmo thought. Thought as loudly and quickly as Cosmo could. For anybody.

For scientists. For Bol’shoy Brat. For my other brat. For the other dogs. For God. For anybody.

Cosmo blacked out.

Then woke up, still in suit, but out of craft and surrounded with green. More green than Cosmo seen. So many leaves. So much soft grass. So many trees. So much tender fruit growink. So many plants Cosmo could not name! And eyes, fixed on Cosmo. More eyes than Cosmo seen lookink at Cosmo. And the creatures they were attached to--Cosmo never saw creatures like them before! Beasts with so many legs, with strange colors, with odd number of organs, with organs Cosmo never saw before! So many smells! So many thoughts! And Tivan was there when Cosmo woke up. Tivan had answered Cosmo’s call!

Tivan treated Cosmo. Tivan brought yummy food and water, and Cosmo didn’t even have to ask.

Tivan told Cosmo that Cosmo was the most unique specimen of Terran-based *canis lupus familiaris* he had seen and that Cosmo would stay in green place with Tivan and go with him in this green place to another. (This green place was only part of his craft, you see.) Cosmo would just have to use mental gifts to help him maintain his Collection.

Cosmo know Cosmo is dog of simple taste. Don’t need much to be happy, Terran. But Cosmo was happier than Cosmo had been in so long.

That is why Tivan is good boy, even if he does bad sometimes and other people think he’s bad. And that is why Cosmo wants to be good dog and stay with him, to remind him he’s good boy.

Chapter End Notes
The 'shake' bit above is from the "Guardians" cartoon. My favorite bit. Go watch the cartoon, it is wonderful.
Tivan

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I totally do think the Collector's pretty evil.

But, this is written through his dog's POV and dogs always seem to focus on the good in their owners.

Zdravstvuyte again, Terran! What is that behind your back?

You have somethink for Cosmo?

Ha--a ball! Oh, and it's pink!

Bozhe Moi! Did you hear that, Terran?

It-it squeaked when I sunk my teeth into it! Ah, so delightful! Spasibo, Terran, thank you!

You must be excellent liar to have hid that surprise from your surface thoughts, Terran!

Mmm, what was that?

Well, Terran, most creatures are like hard-boiled egg. They have hard shell that protects softer insides, so you see none of the inside. You see only outside. Not unless someone cracks the shell. Cosmo sees past shell without needink to crack, so to speak. Under shell, you don’t just have one think though. You have egg-white coverink egg-yolk. It's easy for me to see past shell, but, unless Cosmo tries really hard, sees just egg-white. Well, egg-white and shell at same time. Is complex. Egg-white is white like shell, is very much like shell but softer. It is what you think you think, what you tell yourself to think. And affects how shell holds up and what you show to everyone. You know? Like you think you are serious person, or you think you ought to think you are serious person, so that is how you present self to everyone by sittink with straight back or talkink in certain tone. But it is all just coverink for yummy yolk. Yolk is softest and most different than white and shell. Yolk is what you are when nobody looks, under everythink. Yolk is thoughts you keep to self, is truest self. Yolk is even thoughts you forget or don’t know you think. Yolk is you alone.

You are a lot of shell and a lot of egg-white, Terran. But you are also like Cosmo, da? You want to break shell and look past egg-white to find yolk. It’s why you talk to Cosmo.

Oh, Cosmo like spendink with you too. Knowink you lie and want to know Cosmo’s yolk doesn’t make Cosmo less hesitant to talk with you. It makes Cosmo more willink, since we are like kindred spirits, you and I. Just so you know: Cosmo sends thoughts right to you, in order for us to talk, so Cosmo can assure you are gettink egg-yolk directly. Cosmo is a dog, and most dogs are like that. Doggies are all yolk.

Do not worry, Terran. Cosmo has not gotten into your yolk. Egg-white that you show only. Cosmo is man and woman’s best friend. Cosmo would not get into yolk unless Cosmo has your permission. On my honor as Cosmonaut.

If Cosmo tells you more about Tivan, will you help Cosmo find him?
In first hours on Tivan’s craft, Cosmo thought Cosmo was dreamink. It smelled so wonderful, Terran. Tivan is so clever and keeps thinks so neat and organized. Parts of ship were warm, like green room, but even cold parts were good too. Not only because Cosmo is Russian doggy that loves snow. And it was so roomy and beautiful. The cages Tivan had were not like the scientists’. They were bigger. You could look out, without any bars to block you from makink eye-contact. And the food was so fillink too. Did not hurt Cosmo’s stomach.

Tivan looks a little strange, but is good boy. His hair is white like shell and his eyes are dark, on outside and, up close, light with iris. Smells a little like very spicy black licorice. Dresses dramatically and gesticulates weirdly while talkink, a little like an actor.

Except Tivan is not an actor. He is good-lookink like actor, but he lacks shell and lacks egg-white. He doesn’t even wear cologne, he just smells a little like licorice naturally. He is all yolk, says only all that he means. Tivan doesn’t lie. It doesn’t make him nice, but it’s another reason why Tivan is good.

He tells Cosmo many thinks. Cosmo had hard time, at first, with readink his mind. Cosmo could tell him thinks, but harder to hear anythink other than what he told Cosmo with his mouth and words. Tivan is very fluent in Russian, by the way. He is so intelligent and well-travelled, knows many languages. Anyway, it was not because his mind was sealed, hard to delve into, or because he thinks in different language than one Cosmo knows--most everyone thinks in same mind-language, just hard to follow patterns sometimes. It was just so complex. His mind. More complex than Russian scientists’. All yolk, but not simple yellow-all-over yolk or even some-grey-outside-and-mostly-yellow-yolk. More like rainbow-y yolk. Some parts yellow, other parts red, other parts...not even colors Cosmo could recognize. Actually, Cosmo can’t see red. Can see blues, greys, and yellow. But Cosmo knows it’s there. Just because you can’t see somethink doesn’t mean it isn’t. But Tivan’s mind--is beautiful, but feels dangerous to look too deeply into. Sometimes, with beautiful thinks, it is best to keep a distance and only look. If you bit ordinary yolk, you know you bite into yellow. But, with Tivan, Cosmo would not know where bite would go into--if it would go into red, or blue, or other colors Cosmo could not recognize. Is easy enough to get lost in most minds, but a mind like Tivan’s--!

But, it was Tivan that encouraged Cosmo to look deeper into his thoughts. Tivan had known beinks with ability like Cosmo, but not one exactly like Cosmo. Cosmo is, after all, most unique specimen of canis lupus familiaris . He wanted to help Cosmo hone ability, so that Cosmo could help more with Collection. He had timer. Cosmo would look in, Tivan would ask Cosmo what Cosmo sees. When timer went off, he’d rub my ears, tell Cosmo that Cosmo is good dog, and we were done. Is very effective. Positive reinforcement goes long ways with teach dogs new tricks. Somedays, I’d practice pushink thinks with mind and creatink bubble around. Like barrier around Cosmo. Still with timer and positive reinforcement. But Cosmo liked lookink at Tivan’s mind most for practice. Some parts of Tivan’s mind Cosmo could understand, and some Cosmo could not.

Tivan’s mind is old. Older than centuries. It contains far more information than Cosmo could ever hope to understand. So many lives he leads, so many Collections he maintains. And he remembers all of it. Is very complex yolk, that remembers all flora and fauna and in between in all Collections throughout the galaxy. Tivan has back up Collections to Collections too, in case somethink could happen to them. Tivan has some on Terra, Cosmo knows. Cosmo does not know Tivan’s current itinerary, so Cosmo can’t say if he’s scheduled to visit his Terran Collections in this century.

No. Cosmo does not know where exactly these Terran Collections are. So sorry.

Oh, what does Tivan collect? Terran, Tivan collects everythink. Tivan collects and catalogues so many species from places you could only dream of. Is not as important as why he does it, though. It
isn’t some compulsion or somethink done out of pride. Havink lived a long life, Tivan knows of threats out in galaxy and wanted to develop contingency plan. If all life on every planet was wiped out, Tivan and his Collection alone could provide ample genetic material to repopulate.

Is noble, is what a good boy does.

Oh, forgive me, Terran. Cosmo is all over place with description. There is just so much Cosmo loves about Tivan. So much Cosmo loves.

When Cosmo was well enough to walk again, Cosmo always started off day on Tivan’s craft by gettink out of little bed in cold corner of cockpit (Cosmo picked corner because Cosmo loves cold and wanted green place to be special place Cosmo does not spend all time in). Cosmo would get out of little bed, trot down the halls. So many halls. And it took long time, because Cosmo has little legs. Cosmo would trot and trot, until Cosmo came to Tivan’s room. Tivan’s room simple, neat. All grey. Lightink is of relaxink intensity. Tivan had nice, soft bed. But Cosmo was always too short to jump on it. Tivan would wrap blanket all over himself, wind it up like he is insectoid with a cocoon or chrysallis of some sort. So, instead, Cosmo would go to foot of bed and sink to Tivan. Give him wake up call.

Wake up, Ta-na-leerrrrrr! Wake up, wake up, wake up!

Is one of Cosmo’s favorite thinks to do with Tivan in those early days, along with trainink.

Oh, must be odd experience for you Terran. You hear me howl but also hear Cosmo thinks. Both are Cosmo’s voice. Is a duet, da? Cosmo sometimes add more to song, change up melody. And Tivan, some days he’d groan and stay in bed. But, on the lucky days, he would unroll blanket a little, look over shoulder, and smile at Cosmo. On very lucky days, he roll over in bed a lot, unwind a lot of blanket, reach over, pick Cosmo up, and tuck Cosmo in with him. Unless very important, Tivan always loves to sleep in. He always spends late nights and early morninks prunink plants or checkink on creatures, so late mornink was his time to rest. Maybe, if he did not have Collection or Cosmo to wake him, he would have spent all day in bed.

Tivan is very old. He is just so good-lookink and so clever you forget. But old people, they appreciate thinks like that more. They like hearink their name, so they don’t forget how it sounds comink from someone else. They like when someone minds for them, does thinks like that for them.

Cosmo is older than Cosmo looks, so Cosmo knows what Cosmo means.

When Tivan finally gets up, he picks somethink to dress up in. Tivan has many strange clothes. Coats that look like livink beasties. Pants that look like liquid. Shoes—oh, his shoes! So curved and tall, but too weird colors for Cosmo to chew. Sometimes Tivan would ask Cosmo what Cosmo thinks of them, of what he wants to wear that day. Cosmo always tell Tivan, Cosmo still love you even if you wear awful think like that. Always synthetic materials or plant fibers he wore. No beast killed for his wardrobe. Another reason why Cosmo like Tivan. Tivan wasn’t hypocrite.

Then, he’d keep up Collection. He’d feed creatures, give check-up, gather fruit from plants for food, repeat. Always had to time well. There were over a thousand specimens on that ship, not includink Cosmo. Lots of plants to keep in right artificial biospheres, animals to feed on certain days. And Cosmo would help. Cosmo always happy to help. Cosmo would carry thinks for Tivan, would ask animals that were panickink to calm down, and would keep look-out for escaped animals or any intruders.

It was lovely, beink on craft and beink one of few around to help Tivan.
And after all things done, Tivan and Cosmo would always shake and say 'good night and good mornink'. Then, we separate to our own beds. Tivan’s bed is luxurious and warm, so Cosmo doesn’t join Tivan in it to let it stay special like green room. Cosmo sleep in cockpit instead, check that autopilot workink, and watch stars a little before gettink shut-eye.

You spend days like that doink same think over and over. You never think it could stop, Terran. You just do it and think you will be doink that again next day. And next. And next. And, when it stops, you are ok at first because you think it could happen again tomorrow instead. And then you do do it again next day. And next. You go to special places and less special places, and when all of those places are gone and you are not doink thinks you were last day and last, you realize even less special places were special.

And you wonder why didn’t you realize how special less special places were.

_Eto panyatno_, Terran?

Terran, why are you lookink at Cosmo like that?

Terran.

Terran.

Terran--_privet_! That is my squeaky ball! You are takink my squeaky--Terran! No, Cosmo was not snoozink so Cosmo should not lose! What are you doink with my squeaky ball?

Oh. Oh!

Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy! Cosmo’s ready, Cosmo’s ready!

Cosmo’s--Terran! Ha, ha, you faked like you were goink to throw! Ha! So tricky, so tricky! Ok, ok, Cosmo thinks is funny too. Now, Cosmo’s ready, now. Cosmo’s--!

There it goes, there it goes, there it--! And--and Cosmo did it! Cosmo did it! Cosmo caught it in teeth! _Ura_! Cosmo gets victory squeaks! _Ura! Ura!_

Oh, again, Terran? Can we play again? _Pozhaluysta_?
Terran, how did you know Cosmo was craving hard-boiled egg? Oh, no, don’t peel it! Shell is yummiest part! It makes good crunch and is good source of calcium!

Mmm, yum, *spasibo*, Terran!

How old is Tivan exactly, you ask? Cosmo does not know. Tivan had stopped celebrating own birthday long before Cosmo was picked up and recruited to help him. Nobody Tivan really wanted to celebrate his birthday with, anyway. There was other old man Tivan knew and sometimes talked to, but other old man too crazed with playink games. Taneleer used to be married, but Cosmo does not know much about that.

But Tivan thought occasionally about old marriage, so Cosmo would read mind and see that.

Tivan’s wife was Matani. Very pretty. She had long, long dark hair. Lips were naturally purpley. Tivan forget what she smell like, but he liked it. They had daughter, named Carina. They were, as Tivan remembered, happy. Then Carina left home, and somethink happened. Tivan’s wife died. Tivan was very confused by this, because he thought Matani was like him and would live long time. Matani was confused while it was happenink too, but there wasn’t much that could do about that.

He has not seen his Carina in long time either. Has not been able to find her.

So he make girls to be her.

Cosmo didn’t really understand how somebody as kind to Cosmo as Tivan could fail to see how...how weird this was, but Cosmo supposes this sort of think happens when you get very old. And when you love somebody, like Cosmo love Tivan, you try to understand. When you become very old, other people’s existences become like blink or like drop in fountain. Other people not so important anymore, not unless you make them to be. What you see is right or wrong is because you play out for longer, see consequences in long-run. Cosmo does not think what Tivan did was necessarily good, but Cosmo still try to understand. Tivan had told Cosmo that their bond and buildin its up was important, so Cosmo’s powers work well. Maybe Tivan needed a Carina so he’d work well too.

First Carina Cosmo remembered seein on ship was A’askvarian. Lots of tentacles and teeth. Cosmo liked her lots. She’d play catch with Cosmo, throw multiple balls at once. Tivan did not like how tentacles oozed and tracked mucus over glass, and he already had A’askvarian in Collection, so he let her off at next pitstop ship made.

Next one Shi’ar. Cosmo love her singin voice. She was part bird, so her voice very beautiful. She and Cosmo love to sink duets. Or trio. However you call it. Shi’ar Carina did not do so well with cat-like creatures, so Tivan added her to Collection. Cosmo did bad think, and help Shi’ar Carina escape. She walk out with priceless specimen of florals, which she sell to black market. Tivan so
upset with Cosmo.

Then, Tivan hired Krylorian Carina. She displeased him, so Tivan put her in Collection. Tivan made Cosmo promise not to help her escape, reminded Cosmo she would be preserved for own good.

The second Krylorian Carina Cosmo saw last longer. Second Krylorian Carina was one of many captured by slavers. In turn, slavers and wares tractor-beamed by Collector’s craft. Tivan hates slavers. But Brood liked them and Brood eat well that day. Brood are huge, brown-white-grey creatures with many teeth and claws. Terrible think to have eatink you.

The creatures slavers had that were not in Collection were added, rest let go with good amount of money to start them off on new life. New Krylorian Carina wanted to stay, at first. Said she was not ready to go back and live normal life again. So Tivan let her stay, in exchange for her service. She regret after havink to clean after Brood, but she sign contract and had to stay. Cosmo feel very sorry for that Carina.

Cosmo try to talk with Tivan about it, tell Tivan that Carina very upset to stay around and that those types do not work well. So Tivan ask Cosmo if Cosmo still happy to be there, if Cosmo still love Tivan like Cosmo say Cosmo would with bad clothes.

Cosmo say of course Cosmo still love Tivan, but Tivan has to think and has to be nicer to Carina or she leave too. She’ll leave or do bad job. Either think would be bad.

Cosmo notice Tivan try to be little bit nicer to Carina. She was originally set up to sleep on kitchen floor, but Tivan give her cot in green room to sleep in. She was to take meals separately from us, but then Tivan had her eat with us that day. Tivan and I usually use meal-times to also practice mind-readink, but we didn’t this first meal with her. Tivan ask me to scan Carina’s mind, while he ask her thinks. We would tell her about Cosmo’s abilities later.

Tivan start by askink Carina about her family.

Carina said she had none.

It was lie. Carina ran away from home, had many siblinks and parents. She hadn’t spoken with them since she left, because she ran away to be with cousin that sold her into slavery to pay his debts.

Tivan ask if Carina had done crimes.

Carina lie again. She rob banks with cousin, she accessory to his drug-dealink. He hit her, but she’d stay with him. Cosmo did not understand why she would stay with him, or why, even now, if he came back for her, she would still go with him.

Tivan kept smile up, as Cosmo transmitted all of this to him. Carina was not to be trusted. She was very thick eggshell. Very dishonest, but very sad. Cosmo did not hate Carina. Is hard to really hate anyone after goink so deeply into their mind.

That night, Tivan’s ship was goink through asteroid belt. Tivan was at controls. Carina and Cosmo had to remain with creatures and plants, make sure they were secure and safe. Power went out, while Carina and Cosmo in the same room as Brood. Carina screamed. It was too much for her, beink in room with Brood and in stressful environment with loud noises. She got down into fetal position and started to cry, afraid that Brood would come for her. Cosmo would not let that happen. Cosmo bark and bark, at Brood. Tell Brood Carina has had hard enough day, hard enough life. Leave her alone. Leave her alone. And Brood growled, but apologize after. It scared too, but
acknowledge that wasn’t good reason to scare others.

Cosmo then go to Carina and try to sink to Carina. Folk Russian song about man with crates. Not yet usink mental-voice.

*Oy polnym polna moya korobushka*
*Yest’i sitets i parcha.*
*Pozhaley, dusha-zaznobushka,*
*Molodetskogo plecha.*

*Vyydu, vyydu v rozh' vysokuyu,*
*Tam do nochki pogožhu,*
*Kak zavizhu chernookuyu,*
*Vse tovary razložhu.*

*Tseny sam platil nemalye,*
*Ne torguysya, ne skupis’,*
*Podstavlyay-ka gubki alyye,*
*Bližhe k molodtsu sadis’--*

No, Terran. Cosmo never heard of game called Tetris. Cosmo sang only because Carina remind Cosmo so much of man with crates. She was overwhelmed, carryink more than she ought to’ve at her age. Cosmo lick her wet face, and she hug Cosmo back. And Cosmo felt like Cosmo understood Tivan, Carina, and even Matani a little more.

They wanted love, more than anything. Even if it didn’t make sense, even if it hurt, they didn’t know how to be without it.

Carina tell Cosmo Cosmo is good dog, and Cosmo stay with her until lights come back on. Cosmo sleep with her too, to protect her from bad dreams she could have. And she almost had bad dreams that night, but Cosmo help.

Chapter End Notes

I think I'm going to update this fic twice a week. At least. Haven't figured when exactly, other than it's probably just going up on weekdays, but this has been really fun to write.

If you have a pet, please go give them a hug.

Pets are so innocent. They give so much love, and all they really want is to be fed and loved in return.

I'm like 87% sure Hobbes from "Calvin and Hobbes" said that.
Long-One

Chapter Notes

Ok. Had an epiphany late last night and realized it was actually totally Calvin that said the thing.

By the by, Long-One is a name for the slugs from James Gunn’s "Slither".

Is weird game, Tetris. Weird, but fun. Spaisibo for bringink and playink, Terran. Now, Cosmo have to answer question for you. Da?

Ah, ah.

Terran, you ask again what kind of creatures Tivan have. None but one truly dangerous enough to keep eye out for. Not Brood. Brood big and has sharp teeth, but is reasonable beink if you know right way to talk to it. Cosmo love Brood a little.

Nyet! Cosmo does not love all thinks, Terran! Raccoons and most ducks--Cosmo dislike! But, do not worry, Cosmo like cats.

No, what gave you that idea? Terran, Cosmo love you too!

Cosmo just hasn’t used name Terran gave because Cosmo knows it isn’t real.

Oh, no--Cosmo didn’t break promise! Cosmo can just smell fake name from miles away. Is not unique power only Cosmo have, all dogs can do it. Oh, da, Cosmo is not makink it up! When you give real name, which Cosmo will wait to be given, Cosmo will use.

Now--!

There was one species beyond reasonink. Tivan only kept because he dedicated life to preservation of all species and because he knew he was only one currently with proper resources to keep it from hurtink anyone else.


Its shape...it has many forms, Terran. Sometimes, it looks a little like slug. And then...and then, it changes when it finds host to merge with. Then it combines its material with host, until it kills host. Mind first, then body. Some remnant of victim's personality remain, but only just enough real consciousness to feel what body goink through and voice to mock loved ones with.

Under no circumstance was Carina allowed near Long-One. Cosmo forbade Tivan from orderink her near it and reminded him how inexperienced she was. Entire Collection could be compromised if she let thinks out, even if accidentally.

Cosmo would feed Long-One, but from safe distance and usink mental abilities to open their cage from top and would feed with artificially created meat only. Even from distance Cosmo kept, Cosmo
would hear their thinks. Is no shell or egg-white or yolk. Is shape not at all recognizable to Cosmo. They knew, as Cosmo could hear them, of Cosmo’s gifts. Would try to beguile Cosmo. They tell Cosmo that Cosmo is lonely dog, doesn’t need to be. Could belong with them, could help poor lost Long-One. They say they are no different than Cosmo. They lost home too, they’ve been travelink and lookink for love and a place to call their own. They say, good dog Cosmo, if you do this for us, you never need to worry about anythink again. You won’t have to feel anythink. No anger, no homesickness, no responsibility, no sadness. Is potent.

But Cosmo say Cosmo happy with Tivan and this Carina. Cosmo ask, if you use Cosmo, would you make sure they were happy? Do you believe in mission of Tivan, to preserve all life in the galaxy?

Long-One quiet a little while after.

Cosmo talk to Tivan at lunchtime, tell him about Long-One and suggest for first time that we eliminate a species for good of galaxy.

Carina was very fond of Cosmo at this point. She was startink to give tablescraps when she thought Tivan wasn’t lookink (but he was). She thought it was weird how quiet our meals were, but Cosmo glad Carina couldn’t hear Cosmo. What would she have thought of Cosmo, if she knew Cosmo thought such horrible think about another livink beink?

It was somethink Cosmo learn, especially on Tivan’s ship, that all life has value and worth. Yet, after meetink with Long-One, Cosmo was doubtink. Why preserve the life of another species that seeks only to kill others for own gain? Wouldn’t it save more species in long-run?

We quietly finished up, then Carina was asked to wash dishes. She ask if Cosmo could join, because Cosmo had been joinink her in green room before sleepink at night since she come and she’d grown to love Cosmo’s singink. Tivan said no. Cosmo needed walksies. That was what Tivan said, but Cosmo really knew why. Carina asked to trade. Tivan gave another curt no.

Cosmo walk alongside Tivan into green room, Cosmo’s favorite room, and we didn’t say anythink to each other until we came to very old tree in center. Had lots of lichens all over, lots of bugs and critters crawlink around. Is lovely. And, then, somethink unexpected happen.

Well, not entirely unexpected to Cosmo because Cosmo reads minds and Tivan all yolk. But Tivan clapped his hands and mechanical appendage above began slowly lowerink big silver piano as ground just in front of us raised in large, circular shape as stage for piano. Tivan accumulated all sorts of strange antiques and curios from all over. But anyway, it had been while since he brought it down and played. Was definitely first time he play for Cosmo. There was dusty old candelabra on top of piano, so Tivan push it away, pick up Cosmo, and put Cosmo on top of instrument.

And he stood close to keys, leaned in so that face was close to flat bit of piano Cosmo on, and he began to ask if Cosmo knew Tchaikovsky. Not personally, Cosmo say, is he friend of yours?

Tivan only laugh, as he start to play. Slowly at first. Actually, not slow at all. So loudly, so passionately.

Dum-dum-dum-dum–bum!

Dum-dum-dum-dum-bum!

Dum-dum-dum-dum–little bit Cosmo forget here, then:

Woah! Woah! Woah!
Woah! Woah! Woah!

Very epic openink. Rest of song good too. Cosmo could have sworn Cosmo heard other instruments, too, as Tivan played.

Is good melody.

And the stage—it began to turn as Tivan play! Cosmo see room spinnink, but not speed too bad for doggy belly. Still, Cosmo focus on Tivan. And Tivan focused on keys and Cosmo.

As Cosmo said, Tivan very handsome. So it’s very easy to focus on his face. And Tivan ask Cosmo what ecosystems need to function.

Is easy. Since Cosmo began workink with Tivan, we had talked about this. For an ecosystem to sustain life, you need a source of energy, a source of water, a bit of soil, breathable gases, plants, animals, and thinks to break down matter so that they can convert them into usable materials for livink beinks or more breathable gases.

What happens when you take one away?

Other parts try to take on role or they migrate or die out.

Tivan takes break from hittink keys for a second, to stroke Cosmo’s head, then questions what kind of ecosystem I see Long-One belongink to.

Cosmo tell Tivan that their world was pretty much kaputskies, so they have no ecosystem they belong to.

So Tivan ask about other creatures from dead planets and no longer existink ecosystems. Do they have a place anymore?

Cosmo say...none as dangerous as Long-One. And Cosmo think others could be better integrated into other ecosystems.

So Tivan remark Long-One is dangerous, but species all over galaxy constantly evolvink and becomink more dangerous. What if there are creatures as dangerous as Long-One? Could we handle them all by themselves?

Maybe not, Cosmo acquiesce. It depend on how much and how many other species worse than Long-One.

Then Tivan say, why only Cosmo and him deal with them when we have menagerie?

And Cosmo about to respond, but then Cosmo gets it. Long-One dangerous, but could be useful in future if we deal with worse and could be better fit to keep those other species in check. And could protect more species in long-run.

Everythink, even horrible Long-One have place and purpose and value. Even if not immediately apparent, Terran, and is always good to remember.

Then Tivan finished playink for Cosmo. Is good technique to make point with. If need to reason with someone, try to work in music. Is good for gettink attention. When Tivan done and take Cosmo off piano, Cosmo wonders to Tivan why Tivan didn’t do thinks like that for Carina or her predecessors. Why is it hard for Tivan to be as nice as Tivan is to Cosmo but for a Carina?
Tivan carry Cosmo as he walk away from lowerink platform and raisink piano, and he tell Cosmo it is easier to be nicer to most non-peoples. They’re mostly simple. Give them food and shelter, and they are grateful. And is true. At least, with Cosmo. Peoples tend to be more demandink.

Still, Cosmo remind Tivan to be nice. Carina lost, needs place to stay, needs to be shown kindness and needs guidance. She really didn’t want to go home, but she didn’t know what she was doink with herself at all. She could be dangerously willful, otherwise.

At dinner, Tivan ask Carina if she wanted to be adopted as his daughter. Carina spat up yummy soup and say, absolutely not, Master. (Collector, Carina, and Cosmo all spoke a little funny but Cosmo fond of how round and long Carina’s vowels sound in her high-pitch voice.) Cosmo almost spat up soup too, but had to hear why she turn him down. She ran from last Dad, she claimed, and didn’t want another. Would rather have a Master than a Daddy. Carina was a little hard to understand, but Cosmo sensed she said that mostly out of pride. Tivan said was fine, then asked her to wash dishes again.

This time, Cosmo allowed to help.

Carina spent time gripink and washink. Still didn’t know about Cosmo’s mental-voice, since Tivan still hadn’t let Cosmo tell her, but Cosmo listen. She call Cosmo her dog and ask if Cosmo could believe what Tivan said and had been doink. Except she didn’t say Carina’s dog, but she like Carina better than actual name she had. Her actual name was Maverdevia. Unusual name for Krylorian. She really preferred Carina, though. Anyway, Cosmo could believe chores, but not adoption really. It turned out that she met old Krylorian Carina and was plannink on leavink before windink up like her, but she didn’t know how, and she promised she would take Cosmo with her. Cosmo object with doggy-whine, but then Carina talked about galaxy outside of ship. And Cosmo realize, aside from occasional walksies at pitstops, Cosmo mostly saw rest of galaxy through memories and windows. Carina wanted to show Cosmo shoppink malls and restaurants and movies with Krylorian film star, Bereet, in them. Cosmo did not know what any of those thinks were, but skimmed her thoughts and saw bits of them. Carina’s hair naturally curly and her nose adorably round, so Cosmo thought she was very cute. Her natural smell like bubble gum and cinnamon. Cosmo barely knew her but already loved her, yet Cosmo couldn’t imagine leavink Tivan to go with her. Tivan is weird and out-of-touch with many thinks, some beink morals considered basic to some cultures, but Cosmo still love him too. But Tivan was havink Cosmo do weird think of not allowink Cosmo to tell Carina of Cosmo's powers, of how Cosmo looked deeper into her mind without her permission and knew her past and it was makink Cosmo feel bad at that point. Bad enough to not want to do it to her or anyone again. (Is why Cosmo does not do it now, with you or anyone Cosmo met after gettink separated from Tivan.) Then she ask who on Krylor would be happy beink cooped up like this and havink to do chores all day, livink like this?

Cosmo was. Cosmo was, Terran.

Nyet. Cosmo did not tell Carina’s real name to get you to tell real name. Would be redundant, since Cosmo has been askink.

How come you don’t believe Cosmo? It is true, Terran! Is true! Ha, ha!

Terran.

Terran, are you ok?

What?

You’ll say name, if Cosmo get real close?
Will you promise not to blow raspberry in Cosmo’s ear instead of tell it, if Cosmo promise to keep it secret? Da, Cosmo good at keepink secrets. Very good.

Ok.

Ok.

Cosmo very close.

Natalia. But friends used to call you Natasha--which do you prefer Cosmo use?


Yes, you look more like Natalia and Natasha than fake name Betsy Ross. Is lovely names. Very lovely, Natasha.

Da, Cosmo won’t tell anyone. Not government people lookink for you, not sweet neighbor Ana downstairs, not even Liho (unless your Cat already knows).

She does--good, Cosmo didn’t want to keep secret from Liho! Would have made livink with you and Liho unbelievably awkward!

Chapter End Notes

If you want to hear what song Space-Liberace was playing, here's a link: https://youtube.com/watch?v=GVuxReEE1Ic

And, yes, Terran is Natasha "Black Widow" Romanov. It just didn't feel productive to be coy about it any longer. Come the next update, next week, I will be adding her name and more relevant tags to this fic. She'll also be getting her own bits and her first chapter will be the next one.

See you then!
Liho

Chapter Notes

I love Edmondson and Noto’s "Black Widow" series, and one of the reasons why I love it so much is that a bit of it could be interpreted as Natasha telling her cool spy stories to her cat. I do feel that the film-version of the character is a little more colloquial than the comic-version, so the Natasha I wrote for this isn’t a carbon-copy of Edmondson and Noto’s. She's kind of a Molotov-cocktail of the film versions (who are pretty different and slightly the same in each cinematic appearance) and several comic iterations.

EDITED: There's a difference between 12 and two hours. I'm pretty embarrassed by this mistake, but, hey, I caught it.

Liho. How did I let him in? How did I let you in? How did I let you into this--no, not home. This isn’t a home. I don’t keep those. I haven’t had one of those in too long; I’ve had a lot of tastefully minimalistic collections of furniture, contained in sets of walls. That’s all this is. I don’t pretend it’s anything else, and I’ve never pretended any of them were anything else. I’ve never had any impulse to make any of these temporary living spaces more ‘homey’ or anything like that. I understand making a place not-ugly--because why would anyone want to spend time in a place you can’t even stand to look at? But having a place that you can stand to look at, it isn’t the same as building a proper home. Some people like doing that sort of thing. I don’t; I don’t need a home, I just need a place to live in until I don’t any more.

That’s why I let you in, wasn’t it? You and me, we’re strays. I know a stray when I see one, and I’m thinking you must too. It must be why you’ve accepted food from me and let me talk--well, that was probably because I gave you food. You and I eat when we can, stay where we’re welcome, and we take care of ourselves, because we’ve learned and accepted that nobody else will.

So, why did I let this homebody dog stay with us? Because, Liho, he was kind to you. People like that, people that are kind to strays, are far and few between. You collect people like that and keep them together for as long as you can.

Was I scared when I found you and him on my apartment’s balcony? Yeah, mostly because I was afraid you’d get hurt by him. That, and my balcony is on the fourth floor. How does a telepathic dog, wearing a cosmonaut suit, wind up on a fourth floor balcony in an apartment building?

You know what--there is too much about that question that just raises more.

I know how you got up there. You’re a cat. Cats are just wherever they want to be. The Earl of Southampton’s cat managed to navigate the Tower of London’s many stairwells and windows, shimmy down the right chimney, and keep its imprisoned owner company. You’ve been showing up at my balcony since I’ve moved in, and Ana’s told me you’ve been waiting for me while I’ve been gone.

Maybe this dog is just weird. Alright, not maybe. He’s really weird. And, trust me, Liho, I don’t use that word lightly. I’ve seen a lot of weird. Did I tell you that I’d helped defend the world from an alien invasion? Like a literal guys-from-space- Galaga- kind-of-thing. I’ve had to stop a terrorist
organization from killing large numbers of people again and again; I’ve had my mind picked apart and spread before me once or twice. That didn’t even cover half of the weird I’ve been through. Weird happens more often than I’d care to talk about. More than I can talk about, really. Definitely makes it impossible to just hold a conversation about the weather.

All the weird is why I’m lying low, in X_____ City, with an icy blonde dye-job and a name faker than my hair color. Natasha Romanov, codenamed “Black Widow”, was allegedly last seen in her sleek catsuit and on surveillance footage, where she was shooting at a Wakandan King, who was, of course, dressed up in a ceremonial cat-costume, so that her friend, the man dressed in the American flag and in very good shape for his age, could hightail it with his other friend, the assassin who was also in very good shape for his age (and was the most normally dressed person in the room at the time). If anyone asks, I’m not Natasha. At least, not now. I’m Betsy Ross, a bottle-blonde country girl who had big dreams of making it in big in Hollywood, but, after so many disappointing small roles and entering her thirties, gave up on those dreams and just had too much pride to go home to her folks. Betsy’s just here, working a dishwashing job at the diner owned by the relative of a friend’s best friend’s cousin, and she’s trying to pick up the pieces of her life; she just wants to figure where she can go from here, what she can do with herself, and how she can use her God-given talent best.

Alright, let’s see you come up with a cover story.

It does its job, this corny story. At least the dog and most everyone else bought it. Or, he didn’t figure who I really was and why I was here until I decided he seemed trustworthy enough for me to tell him. A good cover doesn’t make people mistake you for someone else; a good cover should divert attention from your true intentions, put people at ease, and help them think that you’re so much about one thing that you can’t possibly be there to, say, compile intel to compose a proper character assessment on behalf of a government organization or lay low after striking at a foreign dignitary.

Betsy is a little hokey and simple, but people don’t look past the icy blonde locks or Midwestern accent and think ‘ex-KGB operative in plain sight’. People don’t typically look for spies in their daily lives, and they won’t think ‘spy’ unless someone puts that thought in their head. Betsy doesn’t do that. She’s safe, and, as long as she’s safe, I’m safe.

When Cosmo showed up on my balcony, my first thought was for your safety and my second was that my cover was blown. I mean, dog in a cosmonaut suit? It could be someone’s esoteric way of telling me they know I’m Russian and, at some point, worked with the Russian government. What do you do, Liho, when you think your cover could be blown? You don’t get out right away, because then there’d be no reason for them to continue laying low and trying not to get caught by you; you have to act like it isn’t, until it’s confirmed that it was.

So, I carried you in my arms and let the dog in. And the dog talked. I can honestly tell you, Liho, it was the first time I’d ever been assured by a dog that my cover wasn’t blown. He also said that he would never hurt you and that he’d only come up to ask you if you’d seen someone, someone he was desperate to find. I would have had a full-blown panic-attack over that talking dog or thrown him out, if I wasn’t too busy acting as if my cover wasn’t blown. It would have been far too suspicious if I just ran out there and then, if we were under some sort of surveillance. So, you and I just sat on the couch (because I really needed it) and listened to the dog talk. I bribed him with bacon, so he’d tell us about himself, and I let him stay because he offered to share his bacon and wash the dishes for us. We didn’t sleep that night, just in case somebody would be coming into my apartment that night, but I can also tell you that that was the first and only night I’ve ever had a dog promise to protect me and bite anyone that would come to arrest me. I’ve kept an eye on him for long enough to trust him.

Even if his story doesn’t make a lot of sense. The cosmonaut dogs were a little before my time,
Liho, but I still remember hearing things about the program. And I definitely recall hearing that all of the subjects were grabbed around the Institute of Aviation Medicine, where the program was held, in Moscow. Stalingrad, or modern-day Volgograd, is about twelve hours away from Moscow. It makes absolutely no sense for the scientists to travel nearly half a day from their workplace just to randomly grab strays. All of the dogs selected were also female and, for once, the Russian scientists involved were kind to their subjects. I know, Liho, it is hard to believe. Some of the scientists working on the dog-program adopted the dogs, after the experiment was complete.

I haven’t asked Cosmo to remove his suit yet, and I’m going to have to do that when he comes back from giving himself a walk, but, regardless of what comes from that, there’s still the question of Stalingrad. My gift-giving has had two purposes, Liho. First, because he seems like such a nice dog and I have to admit it’s kind of gratifying giving a gift to someone so grateful and happy to receive them. The second, Liho, you can consider a sort of informal psychological assessment. This dog seems too honest, too proud of his honesty to be lying about where he’s from, and too sincere to fake any of that, so that leaves two other options about Stalingrad: (1) he’s mistaken about where he’s from or (2) as far as he knows, he is actually from Stalingrad. The latter would, obviously, involve much more investigation than the former.

Do I believe most of what this dog’s told me? Oh, Liho, I’ve told enough lies to know that there’s a limit to it. This dog has been consistent and too detailed for all of it to be made-up.

I’d love...well, anyone’s help with this, but I can’t ask for it; I haven’t been in contact with any of my old friends. Why else do you think I’ve just been talking to you? (No offense meant.) This one I’ll have to handle alone.

Chapter End Notes

Dumb factoid-time: did you know that Nicole Perlman, who wrote the first "Guardians" film, was given the option to write a treatment for a Black Widow movie? While I feel like she's an incredibly good fit for "Captain Marvel", because of her love of Sci-Fi, I'm always going to wonder what a Perlman script for Black Widow would have been like.
Chapter Notes

I delayed this chapter to research a little bit and spend an inordinate amount of time looking at pictures of both the film and comic versions of Cosmo’s suit and the real cosmonaut doggy suit, trying to figure how you put it on. There were no articles I could find about the subject. In the end, I wound up having to make the suit operate like a Russian human sokol spacesuit. (Specifically like in this video: https://youtube.com/watch?v=1FMzdWfsI04)

If this is not at all how a cosmonaut doggy suit works, let me know.

Or, you know, we could say that this is how cosmonaut dog suits work in the MCU. Whatever works for you.

EDITED: I rewatched the vid and I edited this to be even more accurate to that suit. And Google further informed me that the Sokol suit is from the ’70s, a little past when Cosmo was blasted off. But, you know what? Cosmo’s suit looks nothing like Laika’s suit and it looks more like a sokol suit.

So it is staying.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A bubble bath, Natasha? *Ura!* Cosmo would love one--ooh, maybe Liho would like to join!

Liho! Would you wa--what? What do you mean takink a bath goes against your beliefs? Comrade Liho- *Kot*, there should be nothink religious about good hygiene! You could be gettink very sick, or smelly, or both!

*Da, da.* It’s just dog-shampoo you bought this mornink? Cosmo will be leavink her alone, then, Natasha. But she should be gettink bath too.

What? How do I get my suit off?

You know, Natasha...I don’t really know. Tivan and Carina usually helped take off my suit, and it’s been so long.

How do I--Natasha, I don’t need to do that anymore! Eatink Tivan’s food for so long affected my digestive system in good way, so my body uses all food 100% and no longer creates byproducts of waste.

*Da!* It is true! Tivan told me! Cosmo no longer has to defecate or pee! Cosmo just go on walksies for fun and exercise! Oh, and to look for--

*Da*, it is a little weird but Cosmo does not miss it. Too much time is wasted on thinks like that, and, this way, Cosmo can be 100% efficient with time.

Cosmo’s memory isn’t what it used to be, but Cosmo think...oh, there is two tight zippers on chest in
V-formation! Unclip clips then unzip, please, Natasha!

And be careful, suit is old.

Ok.

Da.

There we go.

You are doink good job!

Alright. Ooh, Cosmo forgot about weird middle bit. Cosmo can’t just slip out. Natasha, would you be able to pull on helmet a little bit so that Cosmo can get Cosmo’s head out. Liho can’t help because Liho has no opposable thumbs.

Spasibo. Maybe. Maybe also help tug on area around neck, so Cosmo can pull head out.

Ooh! But could you remove doggy tag first?

Be gentle with doggy tag—don’t forget where you put it.

Yes, it is unusual doggy tag. Works a little different than most. Please set it down slowly.

Spasibo. Now. Let us go again with head and neck.

Alright. Alright. Oop, watch for inner bit! And—head is out. Now, legs. We will need to do each leg.

A----den.

Dva.

T---t---tree.

Chye--tir-----ye!

It’s been awhile since Cosmo took suit off. Cosmo apologizes to everyone for the smell.

My tail! Cosmo almost forgot-- spasibo, Natasha!

Oh, Liho! Don’t look! Avert your innocent eyes!

What do you’ve seen better and you’ve seen worse?

Natasha? Why are you lookink at Cosmo like that?

You thought--oh, ha ha! Just because Cosmo’s mental voice sounds like a boy’s! Cosmo calls self boy sometimes, thinks of self as boy sometimes, but-- da. All dogs nabbed for space-program had girl bits, chosen for their sweet temperaments and ability to adjust to usink bathroom in suit.

But Cosmo is still Cosmo.

Are you good with this?

Da, Cosmo knows Natasha is kind and sweet and would be good, just had to double-check!
You ask again about Stalingr'ad. No, Cosmo does not know why. Natasha buries intentions deep in yolk, so all Cosmo sees with shell and white is list of actions and very flatterink thoughts about Cosmo. Is why Natasha is good liar and surprise-giver.

Wouldn’t you rather watch Cosmo give authentic doggy-paddle?

_Da_ , Cosmo does not remember statue of lady with sword. Must have been built after Cosmo’s time.

But Cosmo remembers fountain with three girls statue. It was pretty new, a little before we lost _brat_ to tram and _sestra_ to river. My siblinks and I called them the _Sestras_ and we liked sleepink close to them because we felt like they could protect us. Because they were siblinks like us, and they understood how hard it was to just have siblinks in world.

Have you seen fountain, Natasha? Oh, good.

The _Sestras_. Are they still together?

Good. Is very good.

You will scrub behind ears, then, Natasha? Cosmo can’t reach. _Da_ , be careful.

What? You have second surprise for Cosmo that you got from shoppink this mornink? Oh, you are embarrassink Cosmo with your generosity. Natasha--is it somethink I can share with Liho?

Good. You are lucky Liho is humblest, sweetest, least jealous cat.

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_Da_! Is possible to dance to Tchaikovsky, Liho! Dance, Liho, dance!

_Nyet_ , you are too cool to dance?

Alright, Cosmo and Natasha will just have to dance extra, for you!

Natasha!

Oh, Natasha!

Natasha! You are very good dancer! So graceful! How do you move like that?

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Cosmo is a little too tired to be answerink questions, Natasha. Do you mind if Cosmo doesn’t put suit back on? It was a lot of effort to take off and it will be too much effort to put back on. Cosmo danced a little too much, but Cosmo has to stay awake to guard you and Liho--

You think we are safe, Natasha?

No, of course you don’t just think, you know.

Alright, Cosmo will sleep on ground right here.

Do you mind if Cosmo sleeps in buff on your floor?

_Nyet_ , you don’t have to carry Cosmo to your bed. Cosmo just wants to sleep here, listenink to
Tchaikovsky a little longer.

Is it ok? Can we keep Tchaikovsky on a little longer?

Spasibo, Natasha.

Oh, nyet, Liho. Go sleep in bed with Natasha, not on floor next to Cosm—ok, Cosmo has to admit you feel warm and it is kind of nice sleepink close to you.

Good night and good mornink, Natasha and Liho. Good night and good mornink.

Chapter End Notes

Time to learn about Volgograd! Yay!

The statue of the lady with the sword is known as "Homeland-Mother is Calling" and it was built between 1959-1967. It is the second largest statue of a woman in the world, the largest statue in Europe, and one of the largest statues of a person in the world, but, at the completion of its construction, it was the tallest sculpture in the world.

The fountain with the three sestras was erected on the central embankment in 1957 and is dedicated to the arts or friendship. It is said that they are dancing.

Ha ha, made you learn!

Anyway, after this point, the story will shift back and forth between Natasha and Cosmo's POV's. Next week, Cosmo will talk about Howard the Duck.

See you then!
What can I say?

This chapter features the star of everyone's favorite George Lucas film.

He seemed extra jerky in his one post-credits scene or mid-credits or whatever, compared to the comic-version, so this version just follows suit.

There are all kinds of humans that live beyond Terra, Natasha. Some of them not even completely human.

Please finish up your toast and eggs, while Cosmo explain himself.

There are universes that exist past the only one you and I normally see. Tivan has lived long time, so he has heard of them, but he also possesses sight that few ever gain. Some achieve the sort of visions he sees through fastink, prayer, the like. Tivan has to lie in total silence for the equivalent of many days, to fully study visions he has; when he is seeink thinks, he does not even let Cosmo into his room. Is rare and only happened twice while Cosmo was with him.

Is why he began collectink. One mornink, very, very long ago, before Cosmo or most anyone even born, he got up, stared into infinity, and had a glimpse of a universe like ours, but consumed by total death and love of death. Frightenink think to be seeink in lifetime, let alone before breakfast. Vision took days to pass. Matani and Carina were very worried for him, because they were still around for him then and struggled to get him out of vision-induced funks.

So if Cosmo was not careful, when readink Tivan’s mind, Cosmo could stumble into one of these old visions and lose self, because visions like those could never leave anyone’s thoughts. Not even the mind of one as clever and disciplined as Tivan. If it wasn’t for timer we used, while practicink with the mind-readink, we would have spent all day decipherink what he had seen of other universes.

There is a multiverse, filled with infinite impossibilites and home to many sorts of creatures and humans.

Admittedly, some of those universes have stupider thinks than others.

Like Duckworld.

Da, Liho. Is exactly what it sounds like.

A world of duck people.

So...like...what, Natasha?

...nyet, Cosmo does not know what you mean if it is like duck-tails-whoo-hoo...they are humans who are also ducks somehow. They have duck tails, I suppose.
Oh--! Is American cartoon! Like Donald Duck!

I suppose. But imagine if Donald Duck was an even bigger jerk who sounded like he smoke too many cigarettes, without regard for own health.

Cosmo does not know how a duck would smoke with a bill, if it is even anatomically possible...but just imagine.

Then, you would have Howard the Duck, a duck-human specimen from Duckworld. Tivan never dissected his livin' specimens, so we never understood how he worked or knew how human or how duck Howard was.

He had four ducky fingers, and he used to raise second finger to thumb up to Cosmo, Carina, and Collector. Cosmo didn’t know what exactly this meant. Tivan would just shrug off with usual nonchalance. But Carina—oh, how upset she would get! Cosmo knows it is not nice to raise middle finger, but Howard had even number of ducky-fingers so he had no middle one. Cosmo not even sure if they were really fingers or mutated feather-clusters or somethink else.

Howard was also lazier than Liho.

No offense, Liho.

Cosmo still loves you because you are sweetheart and not insultink deadbeat like Howard. Howard would lie around all the time, fake sick to get extra attention, would sneak out of cage often, and would let more dangerous creatures out. We never knew what to do with him. He used to be penned with other ducks. Not duck-humans like him. Only had one like him in any Collection, and probably for good reason! Anyway, we kept him with normal duckies. Until he tampered with their bread-crumbs and got them extra irritated, one time. Ducks are evil enough, even without extra irritation.

Poor Carina got the short-end of that and wound up pecked by duckies, because Howard had snuck in soap-flakes to their feed-basket. Cosmo think Howard single-handedly-or-wingedly-or-whatever contribute to her wantink to leave even more with that one think and Cosmo knew, from her confession a few days ago, she was already not interested in stayink.

Tivan, by the way, still wasn’t told Carina was plannink on escapink, because Cosmo didn’t know how he’d take it. Cosmo was thinkink Cosmo could make thinks nice enough so that Carina would want to stay. That plan lasted about a Terran day, that day to be exact, and it was spoilt because of Howard and this callous prankink. Cosmo had to get close to Carina and create bubble-barrier around her, to protect her. She know Cosmo could lift thinks with mind, but didn’t know Cosmo could do that yet; she still didn’t know about Cosmo’s mental voice either.

Cosmo bark at Howard about this stunt, as Cosmo stood by Carina, and told him to leave Carina out of his pranks.

Howard simply laughed and said he was thinkink about his fellow ducks. Too many bread crumbs make you fat, he insist, and they wouldn’t be able to swim anymore if they ate so much.

Cosmo object, tellink Howard that ducks buoyant because of uropygial gland, air trapped by feathers, other internal air sacs, and hollow bones.

Howard just stare and then remark if Cosmo really was tryink to teach a duck about ducks.

And Carina cut in, askink if Howard could speak dog. Because Cosmo hadn’t let her into conversation and, to her, Cosmo was woofink Cosmo’s half of the conversation. Howard had been
speakink the language of Duckworld, which, by the way, somehow sounds very similar to Terran English. Is very familiar to you, but not at all to Carina.

So Howard got very wicked look in his beady, hateful, ducky eyes.

No, Cosmo howl, Tivan still hasn’t given Cosmo permission to tell Carina! Do not tell her yet, she may not be ready!

Cosmo know and love Carina very much, by this point. Carina was young and impressionable and she hated most thinks about stayink with Collection and Collector. Only think she loved about it was Cosmo. Tellink her before she was ready could have fowled thinks up, even if Cosmo felt weird keepink all of this from her, but Cosmo trusted Tivan and the knowledge he gain from long life. If he say Carina wasn’t ready to know, Cosmo know she wasn’t either.

So Ducky tell her, in a very largely spoken dialect of Nova Empire, which is allied with her native planet of Krylor, yeah I speak mutt.

Oh good, she tell him, because I would like to speak it, so that Cosmo could understand me better.

Howard laugh. Why would you want to waste time talkink to lame doggy, he query?

Because I love him, she declare, and he is the only one on this ship that I know really cares about me.

Cosmo know it was true and, even though it was, still hid face under paw out of bashfulness.

Howard quack-crack-up even more. Then tells her he would tell her how to tell me she loved me.

But Howard didn’t. Instead that Duck told her syllables regarded as incredibly rude phrase in several star systems.

Cosmo try to warn her with doggy-whine, but Carina didn’t catch on. Instead, she pick up Cosmo, hug Cosmo tight, and tell Cosmo very dirty words. Cosmo growl at Howard, but Howard simply lifted single, evil ducky finger at Cosmo.

At dinner table, Carina made mistake of repeatink phrase to me and in full ear-shot of Tivan.

Tivan give her careful, measured look, then mentally ask Cosmo where Carina learned awful words. Cosmo told right away, like good dog.

So Howard was transferred into isolated chamber immediately after meal. And Tivan explain true meanink of Howard’s lesson to her, and not in nice way. Cosmo love Tivan for many thinks, but he really needed to work on how he talks to people. Tivan call Carina foolish child, then tell her what exactly she tell Cosmo.

She slap him after findink out.

It was first time Cosmo had ever seen anyone do that to the Collector. Tivan looked on, not as coolly as usual, and Carina simply glared back. Cosmo didn’t know what to do, who to defend, because Cosmo love them both so much. It was Howard she should have slapped, not Tivan! If Cosmo could, Cosmo would have just smushed those people Cosmo loved together until they got along. But people never work like that Natasha! Why are people so complex? Why do they have so much in common, but focus on the most arbitrary thinks? Cosmo knew them both well, knew they both really loved animals and really hated a lot of people, but Cosmo also knew it wasn’t enough to get them to get along.
Instead, they were just standink there and lookink at each other.

So then Carina broke away without sayink a think, picked up Cosmo, and stomped off to green room. Cosmo had been in green room enough times that it didn’t seem as special as it used to, but Cosmo still love it because Cosmo still love Tivan. Even if it felt hard to, while Carina curled self up in bed and sobbed so loudly. Her bed was in a corner of the green room, far from old tree in center and other lovely thinks that probably couldn’t have cheered her up and out of this sadness.

I feel so humiliated, Carina cried out. I can’t trust anyone on this bloody ship except you! And you can’t even talk back! And she repeated that, often with different words, or told Cosmo more sad thinks about herself and her life.

Cosmo wanted so badly to check on Tivan, but it felt wrong to leave Carina. Carina held Cosmo tightly, so Cosmo couldn’t wiggle out even if Cosmo wanted to anyway. So Cosmo wait, lick her face, and try to find ways to tell her that Cosmo loved her very much and was sorry Cosmo couldn’t talk back yet.

We both fell asleep like that.

Cosmo woke up a little earlier, because Cosmo could hear somethink.

Carina’s hold was a lot looser, so Cosmo finally able to wiggle out and head to center of room.

Tivan was there, crouchink over his piano and still in same embarrassink outfit he was wearink night before.

Tivan, Cosmo address, you should be asleep by now. You love sleepink.

Tivan say nothink. Just turn, stare a bit, and quietly fiddle with keys.

And he tell Cosmo, this Carina is the first to do somethink that reminded him a lot of his Carina.

Cosmo wasn’t sure what to think about this, if this was good or bad think, so Cosmo beg, please don’t throw her out for this. She is young, she has been in bad relationships, she might not make it out there on her own. At least, not now.

Tivan blinks and plinks.

Cosmo tell Tivan that we should not hide Cosmo’s mental voice from her anymore. Carina is so lonely on this ship, and she just wants someone to talk to. Even if she’ll get mad that Cosmo hid mental voice, it will be better than hidink it from her any longer. Mad could be better than sad.

Mad certainly feels better, Tivan respond. But they say that with depression, you are much more cognizant of your environment.

Cosmo chide Tivan, tellink him it is cruel think to say. Carina deserves to be happy, even if she has to get mad at us before that.

Tivan turn, pick up Cosmo, put Cosmo on flat bit, and play softly while confidink somethink.

He knew Carina wanted to leave, he could see it in her eyes. The anger, the sadness, the cooped-up feelinks. Even if she is not ready yet, it is desire that consumes her. Like his own Carina, before she left him and his wife. He also recognize that she could never like him, she could never understand what he was doink and why.
So Cosmo had to ask, Tivan, do you love her like I love her?

How do you love her, Tivan remark back almost immediately.

She tells me her innermost feelinks, Cosmo confessed. She trusts me with her secrets, lets me see her cry, and includes me in her wishes to go out there. Carina told Cosmo about what it would be like if Cosmo went with her out of Collection and became just her dog, how she would watch films with me, how she would never have a boyfriend or girlfriend who didn’t like me, and how I would always get last bit of food on her plate with every meal we’d share. But Cosmo can’t imagine leaving this place without Tivan and Cosmo so scared of her being alone out there. Cosmo love her so much that chest could burst, but Cosmo love Tivan that much too. So chest could doubly burst.

Tivan played a little quieter. No particular tune Cosmo could recognize, but it was too short to be proper song.

Cosmo ask again, do you love her too, Taneleer?

I have not loved anyone in too long a time, Tivan insist. I would not recognize how it felt, let alone recall what to do if I felt such sensations. All I could do is go through the motions.

It is cold answer, colder than Cosmo expect, but it was fair and terribly pitiable to Cosmo. So Cosmo tell him, talk to her and let me talk to her.

Tivan slowly fiddle with keys a little longer, then agree to do so at breakfast.

Speakink of, have you finished up your breakfast-in-bed, Natasha?

Oh, no, don’t get out of bed to help wash up! Liho and I can do the dishes. Well, Cosmo can wash and Liho will watch like Liho usually does.

You have to leave for work tonight anyway, right? Rest while you can. We have enough food for the rest of the week in the pantry and Cosmo and Liho don’t need anything more for a while, so you don’t have to go shoppink unless you really want to.

Da, we are sure we can handle a few dirty plates and pans and such. You do more than enough to take care of us, let us take care of you for once!

Chapter End Notes

The breadcrumbs bit is a reference to the "Howard the Duck" comic.
Thank you so much for clicking, reading, and enjoying this story about some very strange, sad people and the telepathic, Communist doggy that stays with them. It makes hitting ctrl+f to eliminate a considerable amount of the "ing's" and replace them with "ink's" feel very worthwhile.

It feels like the more I research on the Collector, the more it totally makes sense why he's a completely out-of-touch weirdo. Like, this dude never got a break. He can be an awful person, a lot of the time, but his life stinks. When he appears again in the films, I really hope they keep his bizarre accumulation of powers and incredibly sad backstory. Or, at least, have him share a conversation with Jeff Goldblum's Grandmaster. Really weird, sad stories like the Collector's are why I really enjoy Cosmic Marvel.

Natasha seemed very happy about breakfast. Didn’t she, Liho? We have to remember to do nice thinks like that. Natasha, she is a very good owner. Secretive, but sweet and a very kind listener.

While you’re sittink up on the counter, do you mind passink Cosmo dish-soap? Just bat it over with paw. Is blue, color Cosmo can see. Can you see blue too, Liho?

Oh, Liho, colors you can see and can’t is important to know.

Why?

Well...what if Natasha and Cosmo get tied up, with bomb in room and only Comrade Kot can reach? Cosmo and Natasha could scream at you to cut blue wire only, but we wouldn’t know if you could tell which wire was right one until we kablooey or not. Cosmo will get soap for self, then, since Liho seems unwillink.

Step a little farther from sink before I put on water, Liho, if you don’t want to get wet.

Da, Cosmo can get a little grim with jokink. When you see what Cosmo had seen, you just have to joke whenever you can about mostly everythink.

But, anyway, owner as nice as Natasha is rare. Cosmo just wishes she were kinder to herself. Instructions she gives herself are so stern. Not at all in friendly voice she uses aloud with us and not in Terran English. Is Russian, delivered by old matronly type of some sort. Like she has somebody else givink her orders.

Oh, nyet! Natasha seems incredibly mentally healthy. Plenty of people use mental-voice different than real one, especially with mental-list of thinks to do Exhibit: Cosmo.

Woof!

You hear how different that sound than mental-voice?

Do not worry, Liho, Matron-voice in egg-white of Natasha’s mind. Cosmo does not even know if
Natasha is aware how different that voice sounds than her own, but Cosmo will remain considerate and will not look into yolk to verify.

Because Cosmo hasn’t looked, Cosmo not so sure if Natasha really is interested in Cosmo’s bizarre backstory. Especially since Cosmo has to admit Cosmo got very off-track with last tellink. But there just aren’t too many people Cosmo can be tellink those thinks to. It feels...how do you say *ochischayusche*?

Why does Cosmo speak two languages in mental-voice? And with accent? Is just how Cosmo prefer to talk! And some words in Russian don’t have neat translation. Some Russian words mean more than one English word and vice-versa.

Cosmo think it is...purifyink, Cosmo is tryink to say. Cosmo not really sure if Natasha is really interested in listenink, but she sure looks like it.

Cosmo just doesn’t know how to tell next part of story.

Oh, *da*, Liho! Cosmo has been tryink very hard to phrase it chronologically, in ways Natasha can understand, and in fairly reasonable amounts at time. Is tricky. You ever hear of *fabula* and *syuzhet*, Liho? No, is not alien terms. Is Russian. Tivan was tryink to teach Cosmo about them, way back when, so Cosmo could be efficient with givink security reports of what happened with Collection in parts Tivan couldn’t see but Cosmo could.

*Fabula* is the events and *syuzhet* the way you present those events. Many *syuzhet* to a single *fabula*. *Syuzhet* must always serve to tell *fabula* and respect intelligence of audience or they won’t understand *fabula*.

What is it Cosmo is strugglink with tellink Natasha?

Cosmo was not happy with way Cosmo tried to explain Tivan’s lookink into other worlds, for instance. Explanation needed more quantam physics. Is alternate worlds Tivan sees, but Cosmo neglect to say alternate universes infinite and contain in them all thinks that could happen. All iterations. Our universe could very easily converge or become like one of alternate universes, so you could say Tivan’s visions are a little like how we perceive precognition.

Precognition, Liho! Ability to see in future! Except future not set, and it isn’t definite future Tivan sees. Just more possibilities played out in universe-worlds that could be like ours. Usually scary ones. Cosmo ask once why Tivan could never just have relaxink vision of bunnies in field, and Tivan insist it was because it would be waste of time and he would just get out of bed and end vision analysis sooner.

Do you really get confused when Cosmo brink up people Cosmo knew, Liho?

Why?

Well, is impossible to really fully describe a person so people that don’t know them can feel like they do. Cosmo tried and is very sorry Cosmo didn’t make it clear enough to Liho. Some details and events just don’t feel so necessary or relevant yet to brink up, so it probably contribute to incompleteness of people’s profiles.

Cosmo hasn’t told you how often Carina used to talk about Bereet, for example.

How often?

Oh, all the time. She love Bereet and really look up to her. Bereet pink like her, though Cosmo
could only vaguely perceive pink and mostly knows when thinks are pink when others’ thoughts note it. Bereet is pink Krylorian film-star who produces, films, writes, and stars in own production. Practically a one-woman show. And all of her stories involve action and her and buff, green man, played by frequent co-star and ex-fiance Baab Ba-Niir. They often fall in love in movies, fight monsters, or both. Carina always upset that engagement didn’t work with Bereet and Baab. Their names even formed cute couple portmanteau, like they were always meant to be together she’d say. Baabereet. She used to call them that, when she talked about them as a unit.

Well, Cosmo mostly know Bereet films from what Carina say.

No, Cosmo never got to watch a Bereet film.

Why? Cosmo just never got chance to.

Cosmo finished with last pan and is shuttink off water, now. Is safe for Liho to get closer to sink.

Why didn’t Carina ever show Cosmo a Bereet film? Well, we just never had chance to sit down and watch one.

Why? Well, we--is another think Cosmo havink hard time figurink how to say to Natasha.

Could Cosmo practice with you, Liho?

Cosmo should just spit it out?

Nyet, Liho, is hard.

Any time Cosmo even about to think one word about it, little doggy throat gets choked up, chest feels a little heavier, and Cosmo forget what exactly Cosmo wanted to say.

Cosmo prefer to think of happy times with Collector, or times when Collector Crew of Collector, Carina, and Cosmo workink together. All C’s, is cute. Well, as cute as impressionable but angry alien woman, mostly immortal and most probably cosmically indifferent beink, and telepathic Soviet mutt can be. Maybe Cosmo even prefer to think more so of bad times, than good. But Cosmo promise it wasn’t all bad.

Tivan was man of word, he talk at breakfast with Carina and renegotiate her contract. Before, it was just that she work to stay. For once, he didn’t bungle what to tell her. Tivan was weird, but he runs many corporations in many fields to fund his Collections and often spent time holo-teleconferencink with associates to run businesses. So he tell her she could just go, or they could talk over what he needed to do to insure she would do very good job. If she didn’t do good job, already enough Krylorian specimen in Collections and didn’t need to add her. When she ask why, he told her it was because she was first attendant to stand up for self to his face and he could respect that. No, he never told Carinas that they were sort of his replacement daughters. Even he knew that wasn’t professional and it was weird to say aloud. They were usually called attendants and, when he’d call them Carina, they mostly thought it was a term of endearment or word for attendant in another alien language. She said what he was doink with collectink was mostly, probably illegal, but Tivan shrug and say police from various empires could catch him if they ever dug up proper proof for anything he did that explicitly went against their laws. They just never had proper cause, because he never give it. So Carina and him talk, and she wind up signink on until end of her vital Krylorian development period. (Tivan had to fudge a bit on that and say it was exact amount of time he needed her help with Collection.) It seemed best, because she seemed like she would have been mature enough by end to take care of herself. In return, she’d still get room-and-board and now be paid a
ridiculous amount with limited time out of Collection, get very good recommendations from him to future employers if she showed good initiative and performance, and get choice of one creature to bring out of Collection with her upon termination of her employment. Naturally, she asked for Cosmo, but Tivan refuse that. And that was when he revealed I have high intelligence and ability to talk, so I would get to make choice if I wanted to leave with her when she did so.

Cosmo prove it, by tellink Carina it was true. Carina squealed very loudly and hug Cosmo too tightly and quickly for Cosmo to mention that Cosmo had been scannink her mind, in addition to hidink Cosmo’s abilities to talk. Tivan neglected to mention it too, and sent very private mental note to Cosmo that they’d have to talk about why we had to keep that ourselves. Carina then said since Cosmo got to pick whether Cosmo stay or go, Carina should pick another creature to take and she wanted old Krylorian Carina. Tivan agree to that. Then Carina add that Cosmo should also get paid. Tivan said it was silly, since Cosmo was pet, but Carina insisted that if Cosmo clever enough to make own choice for self, Cosmo should also be gettink paid for efforts. And Tivan agree. For once, she was happy and a little less upset with Tivan. Cosmo was so proud of Tivan and happy for Carina. Tivan was just satisfied that both of us were content.

What is hard to say about that, compared to their fightink? Because, Liho, it hurts most to think about times when thinks looked like they were really goink to work out! We were incredibly dysfunctional, but, in that time and times like that, we were just so happy and so oblivious that it was so blind-sidink when it didn’t work in end! It didn’t!

What happened, Liho?

Right that afternoon, Tivan got struck by terrible vision from another universe and the Collector’s Crew got set on very tragic path.

How tragic?

Liho, Cosmo knows you haven’t been wonderink at all why Cosmo hasn’t been talkink about lookink for Carina. But Natasha has in egg white. And that it what makes proceedink so hard.

What--what happened to Carina?

Oh, Liho--!

Carina--!

Maverdevia--!

She is like Cosmo’s littlest sestra! Cosmo never wanted to see her get hurt, because she was just an innocent. All of this potential in her, all of her kindness, all of her dreaminks…

No, no. Don’t get off counter, Liho. Don’t rub up your back against me--actually that feels very good. Your fur is so soft. No, Cosmo just got a little wet from water that spray off dishes and hit ground area where Cosmo standink. Cosmo also got little doggy cold. Ah-choo. See? Is why nose runnink and eyes waterink a little. My eyes are also just irritated. Got little dust speck.

Yes. Dust speck in both of them. Is pervasive. We should really clean kitchen when we have chance. Or, I can and you’ll watch.

Do you mind if Cosmo use your fur to wipe off dirt specks in Cosmo’s eyes?

Spasibo. Your coat is so nice and soft, like grass.
Cosmo doesn’t know if you and Natasha would like Tivan, even though Cosmo love him, because Tivan can be a little weird. You’d really have to look into his mind to appreciate him even half as much as Cosmo does. But Natasha and Liho definitely would have loved Carina like Cosmo does. When you really talked to her and got to know her, it was just so hard not to.

Chapter End Notes

You know, just in case they don't have the Collector share a scene with Grandmaster (which I'm thinking is unlikely but you never know), I'm going to write a chapter about them. Yes, Goldblum's Grandmaster hasn't made any appearance outside of publicity shots for Thor 3, but Goldblum Grandmaster. I am as excite for that casting as I am for Cate Blanchett as Hela.

But, first, we are going to have to check-in with Natasha.

Next week.

But, I have to give a very fair warning now. Because of the nature of the source material, this fic will inevitably include a major character death. I will not be adding this tag until that event takes place, but chapters after this point may cover the emotional fall-out. If anyone feels that the tag for major character death should be added sooner and/or the general audiences rating should be altered, please let me know right away. I do not want to mislead readers about the contents of this tale.
Rooster

Chapter Notes

So, I've got a pretty busy week ahead of me and I signed up to participate in some open challenges for this site. I'm still going to update the Drax fic I've currently been posting, but, to make time for writing the open challenges, I am going to take a break from writing this fic.

I am happy to inform you, however, this means that you'll be getting two chapters today.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I’ve always been a cat-person. H.P. Lovecraft, who most people recognize as the guy who wrote about oddly marketable tentacle monsters, once wrote an essay about why cats are better than dogs. You might like it, if you ever read it. Get a dog if you want a slave, he’d said, and a cat if you want a companion. I’ve never really needed a companion and I’ve definitely never wanted a slave, but I always admired the self-sufficiency of cats. Dogs I knew usually demanded constant attention while the cats I knew were content to lie around and let things come as they will.

That dog might make a dog-person out of me yet. And, yes, that’s probably the breakfast in bed making that choice for me. I’ll still love cats, as I always have, Liho, but I’m starting to think the dichotomy between the pets is a little wrong. Why choose one or the other, when they both make great companions? You need a little bit of both.

Have you heard of the story of the the rooster and the cat or the rooster and the dog? Both are Russian folktales and both involve the pairs making their livings in their own ways, as animals in folklore typically do. The cat managed living with its rooster by learning to play the fiddle for money, like cats in these stories do, and forbidding the rooster from leaving their shared house. The dog and its rooster resorted to living in the forest together, hunting for food. Both stories had their foxes. The cat’s rooster disobeyed the one rule its cat gave it by leaving their house to eat some bits of wheat, which were left out as bait by the fox. The dog and its rooster slept in the same tree, with the dog hiding in a hole at the tree’s base and the rooster up in the branches. Their fox just talked with the dog’s rooster, trying to convince him to come down. Cat’s rooster only got out because the cat was close enough to hear its cries, as the fox was taking it away to feed his family, and it was able to save it. The dog’s rooster, meanwhile, told its fox that it would go with it if only its companion could join them. Barely a moment after the dog’s fox agreed, the dog popped out of the hole and bit the fox in the nose.

Both of those kids’ stories have their own morals and teach their own lessons. With the cat’s tale, the rooster learned it was better off listening to its housemate. With the dog’s, the other rooster only survived by trusting in its ally. Well, both roosters were rescued by their cat or dog. But the cat’s rooster really wouldn’t have gotten into that mess if it followed its housemate’s simple rule.

Cats and dogs. Intel and connections. You need use both, to last.

Maybe I’m taking this talking dog a little more seriously than I ought to, but I can’t help it. I’m very naturally curious. That, and...how does anyone deal with a talking spacedog suddenly showing up and washing their dishes for them?
With equal parts humor and seriousness, I think.

What sort of jokes have I got? Stop me if you heard this one before: a black widow set up a web.

Alright, it’s a pun. Not much of a punchline with it. Hopefully just results.

I’ve called in favors, to obtain a few files. Whatever can be found on the cosmonaut-dog program (that you can’t just find on Wikipedia); on Soviet programs to develop psychic abilities in animals; whatever can be found on the amoral man called Taneleer Tivan, or “The Collector”, who seems to take a dog’s advice a little too weirdly often; and anything on Tivan’s associate, Carina. Anything to prove Cosmo is who he says he is. I know Cosmo can’t be a robot, since he eats and can get wet; I also know he can’t be a mogwai, since he eats after midnight and gets wet without consequences. Alright, that last assessment’s kind of a joke. Along with this investigation into a dog’s past. A talking dog. That fries really good eggs. That could literally be out of this world.

Alright, I don’t know if I can believe he’s fallen to earth, David Bowie style. He’s a weird enough dog that...I might buy it. I just don’t feel fully ready yet, you know?

I really wish I’d kept contact with a former SHIELD therapist, if only to have a person to talk about this with. With anything Cosmo’s told me in the past few days, really. Some of the things he tells me I don’t fully understand, and I don’t know if I should really be keeping all of it to myself.

No offense, Liho. You’re a good listener. I just feed you a little, and you’re always willing to put up with me and my paranoia.

For all I know, the dog could be delusional. But this delusion is just a little too consistent, detailed, and lengthy. And, even with my knowledge of psychology, I’m not experienced enough with talking-animal mental health, let alone animal mental health, to make that assessment.

Other than the Barton family dog, I can honestly say that I’ve never met a dog I’ve liked so much; I really want to trust him, even if it feels naive to trust a mind-reader, it feels like I can. Maybe we’d be better off if I didn’t pull this thread, Liho.

I had a friend, once, who I gave a little too much information to, warned him there’d be trouble if he pulled on the thread attached. Now, I have no idea where he is and it’s been a very long time since I last spoke with him. Maybe I could just learn a lesson from my friendly neighborhood star-spangled fugitive and leave this alone.

Maybe we could just stay like this for a while, Liho. We could listen to the dog tell his strange stories, we could take care of each other until this cover isn’t needed anymore, and we wouldn’t have to think about anything else.

But it’s not in my nature. Cat person, remember?

This dog seems a little too perfect for me. Russian, ex-Russian government operative, goofy, cute, curious, red-headed, has a troubled past--it’s too many coincidences. Like someone manufactured the perfect dog for me. I don’t know how or why yet, though, but I’ll find out if that’s the case. His suit wasn’t bugged and, since his arrival, I’ve checked this apartment again and again for some sort of bugs. The lack of bugs doesn’t tell me enough just yet. My web needs to pull more to prove otherwise, before we could just continue living like this. Happy, or something like it.

I’m grinning ear-to-ear, Liho, just waiting for Ana to call us and let us know he’s at the front door and coming back to us from his walk in the park. (And, yes, I’ve tailed him a couple of times to verify it’s the park he always heads to.) I’m sure, in your way, you’ll be glad to see him too. He’s
just so eager to please and easy to amuse. Like a kid. He loves nearly everything and everyone like a child, like the Barton kids, and I like him a lot. I think you do too. It’d be nice, to just live like this.

But a man I have great respect for told me once that nothing but trouble lasts, and I think he’s right. I’ve seen empires fall and alliances crumble. As much as I like this dog, as much as I think I can trust him, I have a feeling there’s a nearby fox we’ve got to keep an eye out for.

Chapter End Notes

I've been looking like everywhere, and I haven't found any sort of comic interaction between the Black Widow and Cosmo the Spacedog. I think, in the MCU, they're probably the least likeliest to even share a scene together, and I think it's a bit of a shame. These are two characters that have a pretty weird amount of things in common and I'd love to read even a short conversation between them.

Anyway, like I promised, the Grandmaster chapter will be up in like the next few minutes.
I have no idea how serious or silly the Grandmaster could be written in "Thor 3", since "Thor 3" seems like it's going to be more of a comedy, but yeah. I tried to write a dude who's just a little eviler than you suspect, but comes off like the goofy uncle-type that you'd want to play board games with. This chapter is a little longer than some of the previous ones, but it was very fun to write.

Walksies were very nice, thank you for askink! The park was beautiful today. Sun shinink through trees, cute little birdies singink little melodies of own invention, and grass very sweet to eat. There was a squirrel that forgot where it buried some food, so Cosmo help it find. Squirrel was very grateful after and promised to tell Cosmo if it ever saw Tivan. Cosmo wishes Liho less lazy and Natasha not hidink out, so they could come with Cosmo on walksies. Natasha, you were right about how much nicer it was walkink without suit! Felt so much lighter, but also a little scandalous! Added new bit of excitement to Cosmo’s walk. Have you ever done somethink like that, Natasha?

Ha, ha!

Why does Cosmo always go to park to look for Tivan? Is only place in town Cosmo about ninety-two percent certain Tivan would turn up in. Is full of lots of flora and fauna he would love to study. He didn’t like places where he would have to interact directly with people not in just business-context, too, and park good place for just walkink around in silence and collectink one’s thoughts. Cosmo look there all the time, just to make sure Cosmo doesn’t miss him if he’d turn up.

Has Tivan ever been in this area? Natasha, Cosmo only read Tivan’s mind. Cosmo didn’t commit everythink in Tivan’s head to Cosmo’s memory, even though Cosmo has pretty good way of rememberink thinks.

How does Cosmo remember thinks? Cosmo do what Tivan does, but less literally. Cosmo take memories and make figurative mental palace. When memory important, Cosmo put in palace and, to recall, Cosmo envision palace and retrace memories until Cosmo find.

Oh da, you could say Collection was his way of rememberink thinks he absolutely had to. Sometimes, before Maverdevia-Carina came to craft, Tivan would have Cosmo rearrange thinks in Collection on craft to remind him absolutely important think. Empty containment unit, for example, by entrance of room to help him recall he needed to transfer a specimen into new one. Containment unit of animal that needed bath put right by wash-up room, so Tivan recall to give it bath. If he forget he have to do somethink, all he have to do is walk in Collection. Carina have less grandiose way of rememberink thinks and just wrote on little pieces of paper that she stuck around in notebook. Her notebook was blue, so if she lost she could ask Cosmo to help her find it.

What ever happened with Carina, Natasha?

Oh, after the-the think. Carina—we talk over her contract, like we said we had to, and she...she choose to stay. Then, we did some chores together. It was Cosmo’s turn to make lunch, so Cosmo ask to cook with Carina. We made somethink---that you could maybe compare to curry. After we
finish, we do what we usually do and we call on automated system for Tivan. We set table and we wait.

Curry got cold. So, we call again to give last call. Curry got congealed. We eat, then we look for Taneleer. We head together to his room. Cosmo knock first, because Cosmo polite.

Tivan usually never yell, and is think Cosmo love a lot about him, and he tell us to leave him alone for next few days because he was havink a vision. Cosmo nod and step away from door, knowink how important his visions were.

Carina give Cosmo look, then say, Master, you have to eat. Whatever you are seeink can wait.

And Tivan repeat, tellink us we were distractink him.

Cosmo tug at Carina’s dress a little, beg her a little to head with Cosmo and leave him alone.

Carina repeat self.

And Tivan yell, for first time since Cosmo with him, sayink he absolutely had to focus and we could be puttink galaxy at risk by just standink by door and talkink with him.

Carina step back, and Cosmo tug a little harder. So we go away from door together.

Carina ask if Tivan often act like that, and Cosmo tell her his visions rare but important. She clarify and ask if he shut people out and yell like that. Cosmo tell her Tivan is private but he doesn’t yell like that a lot, but it was because he was doink somethink very important. She say it’s not good excuse.

His visions, if Cosmo wasn’t too clear, Natasha, show ways that thinks could work out in our Universe. Could be potential future for our Universe, could be, and is definitely bad future for another. So is a little like he see into future, but not at all. More like--bad think happens with same cast of characters involved. Bad think did not happen in our Universe, but could.

Carina and Cosmo clean thinks up together, decidink to leave some tasks for Tivan when he was done. We slept together after tellink each other that we loved each other, woke up together, checked again on his door to find it closed, had breakfast, and continued with chores.

Tivan have more than plants and animals and piano. His Collection also feature tchotchkes, so that if all civilizations ruined he would reeducate them of ancient cultures and insure new people would not be without history. He have excellent room of games, bigger than this apartment. Possibly bigger than entire apartment-buildink. He have all kinds of games, even from civilizations with names Cosmo couldn’t pronounce. Tivan and the rest of Collector Crew didn’t usually have time for games, so we had to go into room once in a while just to dust everythink. This time was unusual. There was a fairly tall, thin man right by entrance, strainink, liftink, and stackink up tables.

Cosmo guard dog of Collection, so Cosmo step in front of Carina, tell her to follow protocol, and start to growl and charge at intruder.

Carina head to door and about to hit alarm, like protocol says, but then she call out and say the alarm could distract Tivan from whatever it was he was doink in his room.

Cosmo realize it is right, so Cosmo just ask Carina to stay in safe place as Cosmo use Cosmo’s liftink abilities to take chairs and tables out of stack. Carina didn’t listen and, instead, came rushink to Cosmo’s side with pretty deadly firearm in hand. She fire. This get intruder’s attention, and he turn
to us. Is first time we see his face.

Carina tells me to hold on, and she say he look a little like Tivan. And he did! Both a little tan with dark eyes, light hair, and very weird fashion sensibilities. His face was a little handsome in unconventional way like Tivan, but Cosmo think Tivan handsomer. Colorink on bags of his eyes and line on lower lip and chin blue, though, instead of black like Tivan. Man also smelled like chocolate orange you smash to get pieces of, and it wasn’t puttink Cosmo at ease. Dogs don’t like chocolate and it doesn’t like them back.

*Da, Natasha. Many aliens smell a little like Terran candy.*

Not aliens you know?

Oh, how do they smell?

Like sweat and muscles? Or death? Mmm--is probably because Cosmo’s nose a little different than your adorable one.

Anyway, Cosmo vaguely remember seeink this man’s face in Tivan’s memories. Wasn’t enough to convince Cosmo to stop growlink.

And then...is weird to describe what happen next. Before Carina’s shot could graze his forehead, it is like...his very beink blink out for a split-second. We stop for a bit, turn to him when we hear sound behind us. He show up again there. We rush at him again.

Man hold out hands and do weird gesture with fingers, like formink V, and tell Cosmo and Carina that he come in peace and just want to find a game in Collection.

Carina tell Cosmo to trap him with chairs and tables, so he can’t move away from us again, so Cosmo do it. Man incredulous, lookink as tables and chairs piled up around him. Carina then stand with legs apart and firearm aimed for area his chest would be, like people are supposed to hold firearms, and she ask him who he is and what purpose he has here.

He answer, very close to my face, tellink us he is Tivan’s brother and Tivan called him there. Cosmo yelp and Carina pivot self to look at man. Man hold hands up, while Carina ask Cosmo if Tivan really has siblinks.

Cosmo tell Carina Tivan mostly last of his kind from very first era of life in the Universe. Only others of his species, wife and their daughter, either dead or very long-gone. Tivan have no biological siblinks. Answer make Carina a little quiet and Cosmo realize it must be first time she learn that about Taneleer.

Man tells us that he isn’t related by blood, but he is closest think Tivan have to brother. His right hand shift position, so is held out like how people make talkink-dog face with hand, and he offer to shake it with Carina. His name En Dwi Gast, the Grandmaster.

We stare at him.

He manage entertainment fightink-games, which he sure we’d seen at some point, and he start to namedrop famous fighters. Kl’rt. Kallark. Formerly Baab Baaniir, who was frequent costar of famous Krylorian, Bereet.

Carina remark, really? He say yes, so she take his hand into hers, and they shake. Cosmo vaguely start to remember this man. Is old man that like games. Tivan thought very, very rarely of him.
Grandmaster tell Carina he was sorry about showinking up without notice, but he didn’t know there were people other than Tivan currently on craft that he had to notify before showinking up. He tell Carina that he likes her because she is cute and deadly. Her eyes have a fire, have proper killer instinct. He also like me, my abilities, and my suit and he was amazed Tivan made outfit for me.

Cosmo tell Grandmaster that Cosmo come here in suit.

Grandmaster tell us, of course, and that he was gettink bored of waitink and he was stackink up chairs to stand on top and see if Tivan got a certain game he wanted to try out. Terran “Star Wars” pinball table, he say. Carina eager to help him find it and, because Carina eager, Cosmo agree to help out.

So the three of us go to arcade game section and man gets as giddy as little puppy. Is a little unusual to see older man, who dress in odd way like Tivan, jump around, excitedly shake Carina by shoulders, hug her tightly, kiss her on both cheeks, and hurriedly rush to me to rub my head. Cosmo allowed him to pet Cosmo, because Carina was gigglink about odd treatment. Man reach into his pockets, pull out sacks, and empty them on ground. All kinds of coins in little sacks, all shapes and sizes for all Empires. He even have old Unit coin, before Nova Empire phased out physical moneys in favor of convertink to fully digital currency.

He ask us to help him sort out coins with specimens of *haliaeetus leucocephalus* on them and we do, so he give us rest of pocket change, put them into machine, and start to play. Such happy music playink, so many bright lights. Carina watch, so enchanted by machine, since she never see somethink like it before. Cosmo a little too short then to see it. Carina notice, so she strain a little, because Cosmo was gettink a little older and heavier even compared to night before, and lift Cosmo a bit so Cosmo can see. As he play, Carina asked him a lot about what Baab was like and En Dwi Gast tell her. He was fond of Baab, say he has hard time tryink to find replacement for him because he was team-player and well-loved by crowds. Considerink a Terran-equivalent he only hear of in pirated transmissions, and was monitorink to see if he have same potential to be next Baab. Carina ask him many thinks and, as she talk to him, he didn’t lose concentration with pinball machine at all.

Man played for equivalent of hours, until he filled up entire leaderboards with top scores. And man repeated with other pinball tables nearby. “Addams Family”, “Twilight Zone”, somethink with a rocket in it. And finally we move on, per his request, to board games. Tivan have many board games, some of his own invention. We set up about 20 games at once in circle, Grandmaster tell us how to play all of them and make up rules for games he didn’t recognize or have patience to read instruction manual for, and we play. Carina played 10 games against him, Cosmo play other 10, and Grandmaster play all 20. Is exhaustink for us, but, by end, even after beatink us, Grandmaster still laughink and ask to see videogames. Gast wasn’t...how you say...sore winner. When we lose, he joke with us that we didn’t stand a chance because he was connected to super-computers on home planet (Carina didn’t believe but Cosmo looked in a little and verified it was true) and he told us that we had potential, but we just weren’t thinkink enough about type of game we were playinking. These were non-cooperative games we were playinking, ones which we could not form alliances to play or bargain for better deals, so we just had to rely on our strategies and analyze our enemy’s strategy. You had to play those sorts of games many times, to know all of the strategies, but you could gain advantage by gettink to know opponent with even simple conversation to predict single type of strategy they could use in game.

Carina look at wristwatch and realize how much time we lose, so she ask him if he want to join us for heavy dinner instead. Grandmaster turn us down, but politely let us off because he didn’t want to hold us back.

We eat somethink a little comparable to Terran pizza but not quite, check on Tivan, and then go back
to gameroom and find him playinking foosball against himself. Carina ask if he want us to set him up a room, so that he could sleep. He turn us down, so excited as he score against himself. So we tell him goodnight and let him play, because he look so happy that we didn’t feel like endink his fun.

Before we tell each other we love each other and go to sleep, Carina tell me she really like En Dwi Gast. Cosmo think he is a little too...too energetic for Cosmo, but Cosmo think he is okay-enough guy. Cosmo preferred Tivan over him.

We repeat process for equivalent of next few days, playinking less and less with Gast to help maintain with Collection. Gast was guest, so we didn’t ask him to help us out, but he did join us for some meals and dominate conversations. Carina ask him, once durink a lunch of somethink a little like Terran balut but artificially made, why he was there for Tivan even if Tivan unpredictable and weird.

Gast didn’t seem offended by question, but he did say him and their siblinks just had each other to depend on. Nobody else like them. Of their siblinks, Gast felt closest to Tivan. He knew that if Tivan perished he would play Death for Taneleer’s soul, to brink him back, because Tivan would do the same for him. Cosmo feel like Cosmo like Gast a little bit more after he say that, mostly because it remind Cosmo of own big Brat in good but sort of sad way.

Few days later, durink breakfast, Tivan finally show up. We were havink...think most comparable to Terran shakshuka. Cosmo so happy, Cosmo just trot over to him and lick his fingers. Tivan didn’t pet me back, but it was alright because he had just spent many days havink vision and was probably very exhausted. Carina just give little nod and Gast stand up, with arms open, callink for his brother to join.

Tivan ask where other siblinks were, since they were also called. Gast remind Tivan that others had lives they were livivink and they could just dispatch message to them after they finish plannink thinks out, but first they have to eat or he say he will not help make plan with Tivan.

Tivan sigh and tell Gast that our Universe more important than breakfast, so Gast put his finger into his own left ear, tell Tivan he can’t hear him, and scoop up more red sauce for his synthetic eggs. Tivan groan, but he join us. Is way Cosmo never really see people handle Tivan and it worked. After breakfast, Taneleer remind Cosmo and Carina that we have thinks we have to do. Carina ask if we could hang out a little longer Gast, maybe give him more extensive tour of Collection, but he tells us he and Gast have incredibly important thinks they need to discuss.

We leave them alone, let them have private lunch, and see them again at dinner. Gast come to table with arms filled with rare spears Tivan had, for event with entertainment-fightink games, and, after meal, he let us know it was pleasure to have met us and that he hope to see us in next century. Tivan have contact on Xandar, to serve as intermediary to make deal with Ravagers. Second party was trickier to get a hold of, but just as necessary.

We leave them alone, let them have private lunch, and see them again at dinner. Gast come to table with arms filled with rare spears Tivan had, for event with entertainment-fightink games, and, after meal, he let us know it was pleasure to have met us and that he hope to see us in next century. Tivan remind Gast that Krylorians and *canis lupus familiaris* typically have shorter lifespans than that, so Gast correct himself and wish aloud that we see him sooner. We shake hands with him, and, like he did days before, he blink out. Carina already miss him second after he leave.

Tivan let us know we have thinks we must do, to preserve our Universe. Ship had been filled to full-capacity, so we were headink over to KNOWHERE to relocate full Collection currently on craft to a more permanent storage structure, but, with his vision, we had to change plans a little. Vision had shown very valuable object on planet called Morag, in Temple Vault. Was not reachable because Lesser Sea hid away Temple Vault and hadn’t lowered in almost three-hundred years. We were goink to hire two parties after sea lower, to obtain object. Tivan have contact on Xandar, to serve as intermediary to make deal with Ravagers. Second party was trickier to get a hold of, but just as necessary.

Carina question hirink two groups to get object, and Tivan agree it was a little weird to him. But
Gast, when they talked, told him chances of securing object would be higher if we approached this like non-cooperative game in which we were allowed to bargain and form alliances. It was necessary to keep Universe safe. Would have two-way purpose: to put incredibly rare object in Taneleer’s hands and to help put a group together that absolutely needed to form for safety of Universe. To guard galaxy, you could say.

In same vision, he knew group of very powerful aliens would seek his aid to contain another object and that we needed to prepare the place for that.

Carina ask when that would happen, and Tivan reply in a couple of years. She give look, and ask if we could hear whole vision he had. Tivan say no. Carina stare again, but shrug and accept it.

You ever hear of theory of 'Invisible Hand', Natasha? Cosmo think it says somethink about how society benefits if all people act on own interest, rather than people directly actink on behalf of improvink society? Cosmo disagrees with that theory. Probably because of Cosmo’s Communist leaninks. If everyone acted on own interest only, Cosmo does not think we would still have a Universe. Both self-interested people and greater-good types needed, Cosmo knows, to preserve the Universe. Maybe all thinks like noncooperative game En Dwi Gast told us about. We are all competink to win somethink we want, and our chances of winnink always higher when we form alliances and bargain with others instead of just playink on own and for our own wants and needs.

Even if Tivan was not entirely good person, Cosmo glad to have him if only to have incredibly powerful player on side of preservink life.

Chapter End Notes

Oh yeah. I totally have this theory that probably is all but confirmed that the Elders of the Universe are playing a grand game to get a hold of the "Infinity Stones" before Thanos and are using the Marvel heroes as pawns to get what they want.

Tivan totally hired both Peter and Gamora, I think, to assemble the Guardians, summon them to his Collection, and make them listen to his spiel about the Infinity Stones, so that they'd be better prepared to face other forces that want to get a hold of them.

I totally think Grandmaster is bringing Hulk and Thor into this plan so that he can slowly, but surely, bring the rest of Earth's Mightiest Heroes to the fold.

I'm going to take a break from this fic for a bit, due to a busier week and other writing commitments, but, when I return, I'll start incorporating the Guardians into this mix. Starting with Gamora.

Since it will be a while before I return to this fic, let me share a song that I've had stuck in my head while I was writing this chapter. Enjoy:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWRWYYt47RI
You ever have that thing where you hit ‘enter’ and, then, you realize you missed mistakes or figured you could make something a lot better?

Right here. All the time. Sorry about that, guys. I really am.

There was a different chapter 11 up here before. And, yes, I did delete it because I wasn’t happy with its quality and the long-term effects it had on the rest of the plot.

While I do have a plan for this 42-chapter beast, it’s a living, breathing organism. Stories, I think, have to evolve and change to get better. I’ll still try not to delete a chapter after posting it again, though. If I do that again, I solemnly swear, I will write more Howard the Duck into this behemoth as penance.

I also went back and changed Carina’s past. It’s not anything big, but I feel like this newer thing ties more into the theme of ‘lost immediate family’ versus ‘slightly unstable found family’. In this new past, she ran away from home to be with a criminal cousin, who she was very close to and who her immediate family forbade her from hanging around. They still robbed banks and sold drugs. He still hit her and sold her into slavery, to settle some debts.

This fic borrowed the Lesser Sea lowering bit from a Guardians Prelude comic, and this chapter is intended to fill in how the Collector first got in contact with Gamora to make the deal in that Prelude comic in the first place.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Welcome home, Natasha! You’re back very late! Very very late! How was washink dishes?

Nyet, you don’t like washink dishes? Why?

People leave whole pieces of cake on plates?

Oh, how terrible! To waste cake…is think, no, crime that should be punished!

What have you got in bag, Nata--ah! You save pieces of cake for us!

Natasha! Cosmo and Liho agreed that you don’t have to get us anythink more, that we are just happy as we are and we can’t have most sweeteners or chocolate anyway…

Da, Cosmo like smell of sweets, but can’t eat. You do not have to eat all of those pieces by yourself in one sittink. Maybe save some for breakfast and day after. And Cosmo and Liho won’t let you eat alone anymore--Cosmo can have yummy pieces of fruit at same table and Liho...Liho, what do you like?

Cheese? Oh, da, Cosmo think cheese is yummy too, but are you still able to have cheese without upsettink stomach? Little kittens can indulge in cheese, Comrade Kot, but older cats become lactose
intolerant!

You’ve only had cheese once, but you really liked it? Well, alright. Natasha, can Liho have cheese? Just small piece at first, to make sure Liho isn’t allergic, then more?

Spasibo, Natasha!

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Does formink alliances and bargainink really go against noncooperative game’s objectives? Natasha, let Cosmo ask: what is point of noncooperative game? In noncooperative game, people are not bound to work for single cause. People rarely do that, unless is means to end of gettink what they want. They bargain, make self-enforcink agreement. Is contract between parties, so long as people involved believe it is beneficial for them. Neither can break terms of deal they make, or group would fall apart. Nobody really forcink them to work together, only they among themselves decide to remain.

Like Cosmo, Liho, and Natasha. You like havink company of cat and dog, we like you. So we stay together, because we all agree we like each other and is good reason for us to live together.

Can Cosmo talk a little about Tivan again, or have you gotten sick of hearink about him, Natasha?

Ura!  Tivan, Carina, and Cosmo form self-enforcink agreement. Carina stay to get paid very well, Cosmo stay because Cosmo love Tivan and Carina, and Tivan stay because he couldn’t work to keep Universe safe on own while tendink Collection, maintainink his businesses, and dealink with millenias-backlog of visions of other worlds and memories of his own sad, long past.

Carina was young and energetic, keepink us both on our feet. Since she appeared on ship, her outfit was the same because she didn’t have anythink else to change into. So Tivan, he offer to get her new, professional wardrobe because she could be makink public appearances and should be proud of way she present herself to everyone. Carina ask, unsubtly, if she could purchase from places other than wherever he shop. And he notes to her that we don’t have time to stop in shops for long, but he can port in his outfitters and she could tell them what she wants. His outfitters are nice, but they charge too much and they design and craft outfits only every fifty years or so. When they come in, take Carina’s measurements, they ask her about what kinds of clothes she likes. She talks to them only of a really beautiful white dress she see Krylorian celebrity, Bereet, wear for award-shows and is all she gets for wardrobe. Like, multiple copies of same one. Carina expect that they would also make sensible clothes like pants, maybe just base designs on what this famous Krylorian wear, so she complain to Tivan that she can’t do cleanink and runnink after animals in all evenink gowns. Tivan respond that that is good to know, but the dresses were expensive and she could get good use out of them. So, when Carina show up in a new dress, it is chopped. Sleeves are gone and skirt is much shorter. She do this to her other dresses too. And Tivan, he stare. She replies, so matter-of-factly, that is look she can take pride in. And he let her wear chopped up dresses! He even allowed her to give one outfit to old Krylorian Carina, to replace old outfit she was wearink!

Thinks like that good for Tivan! Cut into his broodink time considerably and helped him expand horizons!

Cosmo helped, by allowink Tivan to review his otherworldy visions exactly. Taneleer couldn’t do that, before. Used to have very, very short visions. Like blink. With time, he learn his precognition like dreamink. If left undisturbed and if he really focus, vision could last a lot longer. Try as he could to resummon vision after it end, he found it was like wakink. It was hard to brink back vision on his own and, as time went on, if he did not immediately make note of details, he would forget about them. Never whole kablooey-Universe-is-doomed-think, just parts like faces of peoples
involved. Cosmo could look into Tivan’s mind and let him replay past visions of other doomed multiverses.

Is what Cosmo was hopink Tivan would ask Cosmo to do, after he was done havink vision.

Instead, when Cosmo go into his room and ask about it after givink him doggy wake-up song, he ask to see me to fetch Carina. So Cosmo play fetch, because Cosmo is good dog, and brink Carina into Taneleer’s bedroom. He stand at foot of bed, with his hands clasped together, and give us very serious talk. About multiverse, about numerous ways he watch Universes perish in his visions of them and how he did not want that to happen to ours. Since he see it happen once in person already, and he wasn’t happy about it. So, there were goink to have to be changes with how thinks were on Collector’s Craft. He would have to leave more often, to make very necessary deals, and we would have to work more to maintain Collection. Possibly, we would have to help him with very extensive background checks for parties he wanted to hire.

Cosmo agree right away, but not Carina. Carina ask to hear about whole vision again, and Tivan deny her. Instead, he say he can only tell us parts and only if we agree not to quit before he enact Universe-protectink plan he make with Gast. Cosmo agree that Cosmo will not quit, but Carina demand to hear even a little bit more before agreeink to stay on.

So Tivan pull out remote from pocket, hit button, and gesture for us to look behind. We do. There is split- screen, fallink from ceilink. On left half of screen is Gamora, called the most dangerous and deadliest woman in galaxy. Gamora is green, Cosmo hear, like froggy, and favorite daughter of Thanos, the worst person in Universe ever. At her side is Nebula, also very deadly and also daughter of Thanos. Both are leadink Thanos’ forces on planet he wish to conquer.

On other half of screen is Ronan the Accuser, also also very deadly but not daughter of Thanos. Behind Ronan is army of Kree Empire’s soldiers. Also also also very deadly but also also not daughters of Thanos. Ronan and his forces fight Nova, who are military-police of Xandarian Empire and are also also also also deadly but also also also not daughters of Thanos. Ronan, Kree, and Nova in thousand years of warrink. Kree wish to wipe out all weaker life forms and Xandar wish to protect life on its own planets, because it is seen by Kree as weaker life forms.

Is nothink we hear outside of regular news channels for Xandarian Empire and all those linked to Xandarian empire. But is not enough to let us know what Tivan want. We turn to him, and ask what he intends to do about Xandarian and Kree war or if that is what is endangerink Galaxy.

Tivan say it is not. War is common, happens everywhere all the time. Is Ronan’s possible association with Thanos that could do it. War could be endink soon, but is not good think because it could drive Ronan into makink desperate alliance with Thanos in order to have forces to continue fightink Xandar. In alliance with Thanos, Ronan could be teamink up with deadliest daughters Gamora and Nebula.

Lesser Sea could be lowerink, allowink people access to very dangerous object. And it would be very bad think if Thanos have his favorite daughter Gamora, his less favorite daughter Nebula, and his not-at-all daughter Ronan fetch terrifyink object for everyone. All parties involved were wildly unpredictable and could easily turn against one another to keep weapon for own and use for own awful purpose.

Carina could help but ask who we were havink go against them other than Ravagers. Ravagers, the space-pirates we talk about night before. But there was other group Tivan alluded to.

Tivan say we are lookink at catalyst for other group.
Carina shout that is daft idea.

Tivan coolly say back he know it is daft, but Gast suggested it. And Gast's mind is incredibly brilliant. Of this group, Gast determine Gamora least satisfied by situation (given background and way she was horribly recruited) and could be turned to our side with right sort of negotiation. Super-computers connected to Gast’s brain also think there was chance Nebula could join Gamora with betrayal, since they were more often than not seen together and could be close. Ronan was likely to betray others too, but would probably not be willing to give us object. More likely, object would be kept for himself. Deadly duo would be enough, to turn against Ronan and Thanos if they were one to obtain object before Ravagers do.

Carina query again, askink how we would talk with Gamora. Since Gamora more often than not surrounded by cast of deadly weirdos that talk with Ronan and Thanos. So, Tivan hit button and angle of footage change. While Gamora slicink and dicink at non-Nova foes like automatic chopper you have in kitchen, she look at wall. On wall, there is writink. Writink does not match alphabet of planet they are on. Is harmonious and unbroken. Could be mistaken for gang-sign, if people cannot read it. And nobody else but Gamora care to stare at it for longer than one second.

Writink is Zehoberei, like Gamora. Gamora, she is last of Zehoberei, one of the few in Universe still capable of readink it, and only one on battlefield there who understand what it say. Tivan tell us he is engagink in long-term conversation with Gamora and enactink test, to see how much Zehoberei remain in her after tortures by Thanos. Zehoberei was very moral people, good people. Went very quietly when they were killed en masse. She was only kept alive to be bandied as trophy of world Thanos killed and conquered, like his other daughters, and Tivan theorize she was Thanos’ favorite because of how much Thanos had twisted somethink so good. If there was enough Zehoberei in her, if she always take time to look at Zehoberei greetinks and words and songs he hire people to write on walls in planets she’s on, Tivan knows he can appeal to her conscience.

Carina remark if it is really conversation, instead of monologue, since only he talk in dialogue with her.

Tivan push button on remote, repeatedly, closink up on her eyes. Look, he tell us. Her eyes talk. And the look. Is not look of killer, Cosmo think. Is look of very sad person.

Carina still cross arms and ask if this could lead to war between Ravagers, Gamora, and Nebula over object or if Gamora stop takink time to look at Zehoberei.

Tivan say that girls would crush Ravagers but add if, say, in two years time Gamora stops lookink at what he writes, he will look to hire elsewhere. But there is somethink sad in his tone. For person like Tivan, who lost what he did and live to preserve cultures and people, it would be very worst think if awful person like worlds-conqueror and worlds-killer Thanos capable of killink an entire people in heart of that people’s last survivor.

Carina, she give sad little smile, tell us that Master’s payink too much for her to turn in resignation letter mere day after signink new contract, and reminds us that we should be havink breakfast.

Cosmo tell Tivan Cosmo loves him and Carina too much to let them try to negotiate with daughters of Thanos alone, so Cosmo stay. Carina start to leave. Cosmo start to follow, until Cosmo notice Tivan stay.

While Cosmo happy Tivan sharink vision with Carina, too, Cosmo wonder to Tivan why Tivan does not lessen burden of horrifyink vision on himself by allowink Cosmo to see whole vision of other Universe like he used to.

Tivan remark that his brother had told him Cosmo did not thoroughly scan his mind, only look in
once to verify that Grandmaster’s brain actually linked to super-computers (which it was). Gast could have been a charlatan, could have put Collection in grave danger. So, he ask why.

Cosmo tell Tivan that Cosmo remember Gast from recollection of Tivan’s, which affirmed his claims, and Cosmo ask when we would talk about why Cosmo cannot tell Carina of her mind scannink.

Tivan just stand there and say nothink. But, his yolkish mind, it go everywhere. To Gamora, Nebula, Ronan, Thanos, Gast, Carina, to many thinks.

Cosmo beg Tivan to join us, tug on his teal pants while remindink Taneleer I could tear them if I tug too long, and, finally, Tivan follow.

Like Cosmo said, we needed each other. He needed us, while Universe really needed him.

Like Natasha need cake, Liho need cheese, and Cosmo need yummy pieces of fruit!

Chapter End Notes

And now: Peter’s chapter!

Coming up really soon!

Like, in the next few minutes!

Or, if you read this hours later, just a click away!
So. If you didn’t get the message: I altered chapter 11, because I was dissatisfied with it and the way it would have impacted the rest of this bizarre fic.

If you want the explanation, feel free to look at the last chapter.

Now, this one: it’s rather serendipitous that chapter 12 is Peter Quill’s. But, then again, what other chapter could be his? Sometimes Peter’s pop, Ego the Living Planet, is considered an Elder of the Universe and, sometimes, he is not. So, for this fic, I’m leaving that open to interpretation.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Liho, how is your stomach? You seemed to sleep pretty well, but Cosmo just want to triple-check that Comrade Liho isn’t allergic to cheese.

Good, good!

Natasha! Which cake slice are you havink for breakfast? They all smell very yummy! You want the piece with the strawberry jam in it? Oh, yes, it smells very nice! If Natasha wants protein, Cosmo can fry egg to go with your breakfast.

Nyet? Alright! Liho, do you want hard-boiled egg? Cosmo want little crunch with breakfast and will be preparink batch of them, but Cosmo could make somethink else for Liho.

Da, alright. Cosmo will start boilink water!

Natasha? Oh, Natasha, you were thinkink of somethink?

Are there Terrans in space? There was Cosmo! Cosmo technically specimen of Terran-based lupus canis familiaris!

Nyet? You mean Terran-based homo spaizens?

Oh, da! Nova Empire deputizes Terrans for Nova Corps all the time! (What is Nova Corps? Is Xandarian Empire’s police-military, basically. They travel throughout planets of Nova Empire and planets allied with Nova Empire, to enforce laws.) One Nova Cosmo met bought Cosmo squeaky bone at market. Was very good Nova.

And people get abducted from Terra terribly often.

Sometimes because other aliens like to eat them, keep them as exotic pets, or use in experiments as stand-in for other humanoid species. Da, is sad! A lot of planets and some empires have yet to make experiments on Terran-based humans illegal!

Tivan wanted to hire Terran-based human to help save galaxy. Well, mostly Terran-based human beink.
Da! A lot of thinks in Cosmo’s mind lead to Tivan! Cosmo can’t help, Natasha! Cosmo spent so much time with Tivan, since Cosmo was very small dog. Tivan taught Cosmo nearly everythink Cosmo know.

If Natasha doesn’t want to hear about Terran, is alright. We could talk about somethink else. Like...like weather!

Da.

Weather is borink to talk about.

Terran was named Peter Jason Quill. Is confusink, all the names he had. He also had other name he was tryink very hard to have other people use, but it didn’t catch on like Collector did for Tivan. What was name?

Star…

Star…

Well, Nova records call him “Star-Prince”. With quotation marks around. Usually indicates sarcasm.

How did Tivan get Nova records? Tivan have some Nova on his payroll. Tivan have many, many people under his payroll. Could be another Collection of sorts. Is how Tivan found more information on which crew of Ravagers to hire, since there are many Ravag--oh, what is Ravager? Ravager. Is...is most comparable to pirate. In space. But all wearink red uniform and havink some sort of hierarchy or laws across entire...groupink, so is unusual for pirates.

Da , some pirate groups had democracies and laws. But all Ravagers ever follow these same rules and such. Not all pirates bound to same set of rulinks.

Have I seen pirates of the Caribbean? Nyet , Cosmo has never even been to Caribbean. Only studied from records and watched footage of.

Way we assign chores and organize time change on Collector’s Craft for a few months, and never exactly changed back to how it was after. Tivan needed to spend more time for business ventures, to increase profits for expandink operations and improvink facilities for powerful objects, and also to perform very extreme background check by monitorink hires he had to fight terrible end in his vision. This meant Cosmo and Carina see him less, and have more to do. Tivan was considerate enough to take time and teach Carina some of more difficult tasks that were never assigned to her before, like composink brief narrative observations of creatures and usink typink machine to have it translated into millions of languages at once in second. But, more of the time, it was Cosmo and Carina cleanink, cookink, curatink, etcetera. Some days, we would not even see him for mealtimes, but Cosmo and Carina would always remember to save meal portion for him, deliver to his room, knock on his door, and leave after he come to door, take food, and say spasibo . When he is still on Craft, anyway. Most of time, however, he is away and only sometimes he remember to tell us goodbye before he go. Carina didn’t mind seeink him less, but it did confuse her since she’d thought she’d be seeink him more after they renegotiate contract. Cosmo make sure she is never lonely, in spite of his absence, and talk extra with her, curl up closer to her in bed, and help her pick out which chopped up dress to wear for day in her new closet (which was broom closet we clean up).

Tivan contact Xandarian Broker and ask him to provide associate Ravager names, security recordinks of face-to-face deals Broker have with Ravagers in his facilities, and list of purchases Ravagers make from him in past few years. Peter Quill was schmuck Tivan find in his reviews of
Ravagers stuffs and was the one that seemed most likely to separate from his group and act on own, based on Peter Quill's own bizarre history. This likely betrayal was either good or bad think. Peter Quill did not appear in list of names or in recordinks, but one Ravager Broker see, called Yondu Udonta, develop very sudden interest in purchase of very usual number of tchotchkes that were Terran in origin.

Tivan cross-reference with Nova criminal records and footage, security footage from places frequented by Ravagers, and the like, findink Peter often arrested with other associates of Udonta and seen with other associates of Udonta in public places.

Tivan know, by Quill’s genetics as determined by look alone, that he is not son or anythink of one of Udonta’s crew. Peter Quill, Tivan determine, had criminal record with Udonta’s Ravager crew that went back at early enough age that he theorize Peter Quill was abducted and forced into this bunch.

Like Cosmo said, could be good think or bad think. This could mean, if Udonta’s crew picked among hordes of Ravagers, Peter Quill could betray all to deliver powerful object on own. Would mean Tivan would have to pay a little less for it, since less people would be brinkink think to him. Not that money was problem for Tivan. It could also mean less people involved in plan to grab object, which could lessen opportunities for plan to get messed up. That would be very good.

Cosmo know because Tivan tell us all this, when he pass off monitorink Gamora and Peter Quill to us. Was a month or two after he talk about Gamora. Carina question, like she always do, so Tivan let her know it was because he had to know as much about hires as possible so that their actions would not be surprise to him and so that he would be better prepared to make negotiate with them. Carina still ask why we do not get Peter Quill out of Ravagers, since his plight seems sad, and brings up if Gamora and Nebula could kill Peter Quill for object after Tivan possibly succeed in negotiatink with them. And Tivan claim he does not have time to intervene in every sad situation in Universe ever and he also determine Gamora, if she still have conscience, could talk with Nebula and Peter Quill about doink right think by workink together to deliver object to Tivan and, then, split moneys among the three of them.

Carina say she definitely cannot see the three of them gettink along.

But we agree to monitor anyway.

So is think we do durink lunch and/or a bit after. Carina and I eat, take note of how long Gamora read new Zehoberei Tivan have someone write on wall in whatever region she is sent to, and watch what new weird think Peter Quill do. By end of first monitorink month, we know him better than his own mother (Cosmo thinks). Well, except Carina and I didn’t know who his dad was. But Tivan knew and he let us know Peter Quill’s father was jerk. That was good enough for us.

Peter Quill is really weird. Everyone a little weird, but Peter Quill extra weird. Not even Tivan’s kind of weird. One time, we watch as he romance member of Gramosian Royal family (Peter Quill romance new men and women very ofen). Is different with member of royal family, because is illegal. Looks like nobody told him. Soon enough, he is tied up, without rocket-boots or weapons, and about to get execute publicly. What does he do? He challenges executioner to dance-off and do Michael Jackson moonwalk. (Da, Cosmo know Michael Jackson. Who doesn’t?) Anyway, everyone stare, confused, so he take time to teach executioner how to moonwalk. Everyone start to scream, demandink his head get removed from neck. Executioner still does lesson and is able to do sufficient moonwalk by end of it. Then, bright light appears over the weird Ravager and Peter Quill start to get lifted up in sky like very weird angel as he laugh and tell executioner and everyone that he was just buyink time for his crew to locate him and pick him up. They shoot lasers at him, but he dodge as he get lifted up and his ship shoot down at them too. Cosmo and Carina never see anyone
use that sort of way to get out of being killed, but it work!

Carina thought that Peter Quill was cute, in inoffensive way (just not her type), and she admit that she kind of shipped Peter Quill and Gamora after seeing them side-by-side on screens. Cosmo shake doggy head, because it would be weird if they fell for each other. Last Zehoberei was much too good for weirdo like Peter Quill. But it would have made thinks simpler for this convoluted plan of Gast’s. What if two try to grab object of great power, fall in love at first sight if they should both land on Morag and head to Temple at same time, and then team up to deliver object to Tivan? Would not be terrible think at all. Maybe Peter Quill could even teach Gamora and Nebula moonwalk.

Jokingly, Carina and I began talkink over our monitors of Peter Quill and Gamora. Carina speak for Peter Quill and Cosmo bark for Gamora. Carina would make Peter tell Gamora thinks like he really love way she tears apart her enemies. Cosmo woof back that Gamora could crush Peter Quill with her awesome muscles if they ever have make-out session. Carina giggle and have Peter tell Gamora that his love for her would protect him from her ridiculously awesome abs and abs and that he like girls with body-tone. Cosmo woah that Gamora never met boy as weird as Peter, but it strangely turn her on. Carina kiss air, in over-the-top way. Cosmo laugh and lick her face. Carina laugh more, hug Cosmo, and say is very good think Tivan was not on Craft at time so he could not see us.

And Cosmo stop laughink. It had been while since we had seen Tivan that day and it felt weird we had seen more of Gamora and Peter Quill that day, when they were very far and we had never met them in person, than we had of Taneleer, who Cosmo knew for good amount of Cosmo’s life.

Taneleer did not come back to us on Craft until later that week. Carina was asleep then. Cosmo only know because Tivan go into green room, briefly, to check on us. And Cosmo did not follow after Collector because Carina was holdink too tightly to Cosmo.

Next mornink, when Cosmo trotted into Taneleer’s room to give good mornink doggy song, Taneleer did not stir from cocoon-blanket. Did not groan, did not smile, did not reach over and grab Cosmo like Tivan used to. Nothink. Cosmo tell Taneleer that his love for her would protect him from her ridiculously awesome abs and abs and that he like girls with body-tone. Cosmo woah that Gamora never met boy as weird as Peter, but it strangely turn her on. Carina kiss air, in over-the-top way. Cosmo laugh and lick her face. Carina laugh more, hug Cosmo, and say is very good think Tivan was not on Craft at time so he could not see us.

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Cosmo misses you, Cosmo tell Taneleer. Taneleer didn’t open eyes, but he ask Cosmo why Cosmo didn’t just look a little more thoroughly into his Collectorly mind to find latest vision of other Universe. Cosmo tell Tivan that Cosmo was not doink that unless Tivan give permission. Tivan denied permission.

Cosmo take time, again, to ask about why we cannot tell Carina about Cosmo’s mind-scannink capabilities. And answer finally come, probably from exhaustion.

He tell Cosmo he still cannot trust her because he knows Carina has very different morals from him. In order for her to do good job, she has to like someone on Craft. If Cosmo tell Carina, Carina could stop likink Cosmo and lose trust in anyone on Craft. So, she could betray us.

Is unthinkable to Cosmo, because Cosmo love Carina very much and Cosmo try to tell Tivan to spend more time with Carina. If he spend more time with Carina, he could see how sweet she can be, and how trustink and good.

Only response he have is that it is very good think that she have Cosmo to trust.

Chapter End Notes
Next week: Natasha, once more!

P.S. Did you spot the reference to Richard Rider's Nova?
Fury

Chapter Summary

Black Widow talks to a cat again.

Chapter Notes

I freakin' love Black Widow.

Where the heck is her solo film?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It’s probably the blonde hair that has me thinking like a Hitchcock heroine, Liho. I can’t tell you the number of cute talking animal books I’ve read with the Barton kids, but I can definitely recall that none of them turned out like this. People are usually just happy in those talking animal stories, instead of running background checks.

Except for this one really weird book where a dog has alphabet soup or something. Everyone just got annoyed by the talking dog. But, even then, that story had a happy ending. The dog felt bad about talking too much, laid off the soup for a while, and then helped thwart a home-robbery. I forget what that book was called. But the Barton kids loved it. For about a month, they just wouldn’t give up force-feeding Lucky his ABC’s.

I’ve told you about Lucky the Pizza Dog. Haven’t I, Liho? The Barton’s dog?

Lucky’s a weird dog. Not weird like Cosmo, but pretty weird. Barton’s kids told me his favorite food is pizza. And their daddy took him from the tracksuit Mafia. He’s a really sweet dog, though.

You, Lucky, and Cosmo would get along pretty well. The Barton kids would just eat you three up together. Cooper, Lila, and little Nat. They could split you three up evenly. Cooper’s the best behaved, like you’d expect out of any oldest sibling, and he’d probably stay loyal to Pizza Dog. Lila’s really creative; she was writing and drawing the best stories, the last time I saw her. Cosmo would probably adore her as much as she’d love him. Little Nat’s the shyest and the lowest maintenance, so you’d probably love to keep him company.

I really miss those kids. Haven’t seen them in maybe some months. Not since I got sent to arrest their father. And, even after their daddy busted out, his wife wouldn’t even let me hear any of them on the phone. I haven’t tried calling them in months, and, since nobody should have my number, they haven’t tried calling me either.

In maybe a few more months or a year, this thing might blow over and I can see them again. It’s not the first time this sort of thing’s happened. Not in my field. You try not to get too attached to those sorts of things, knowing how it’s all just in flux. It’s like, you’re always moving to some destination. When you think you’ve settled, you’re wrong. It’s just some rendezvous point, to continue on to wherever it is you need to go.
Do you think it’d be a bit much if I asked that dog to stay? Even if he found his owner? Who, by the way, seems to be a nonperson on my web.

Do you think Cosmo made him up? He definitely sounds a little too weird to be real. And Cosmo’s story...now that I think about it, some parts don’t mix too well. I could come up with explanations for those parts, but, even then...it’s a talking dog’s story; I’m still a little incredulous with myself for even looking into what he’s been telling me.

I had his weird doggy tag examined the other night. X-ray, lab-test, the whole deal. It’s star-shaped with red-looking gibberish carved in, but, according to the analysis, it’s the same material as any normal dog tag. No tracker inside, no nothing.

And his Russian. He’s been calling you Kot, right? Kot is for male cats and Cosmo knows you’re female. Then again, it could have been a while since he last spoke Russian. And he could be rusty.

I just want to shut off my brain, you know? Just let those things go, enjoy my dog. Maybe even steal him from his owner, if his owner’s real.

His owner. What am I going to do if his owner shows up?

Sometimes I just don’t know why that sweet dog loves somebody that sounds so terrible. His owner—he’s the most comicbook-y villain I’ve heard of. If anything Cosmo’s told me about him is real—or, if he really says things like that or acts like that.

No, I think he’s too weird for the comicbooks. Cosmo’s owner. It’s like...it sounds like if David Bowie was cast as Michael Corleone and played him by way of James Mason, circa “20,000 Leagues Under the Sea”, in a Bond film. As the bad guy. In space.

Maybe with a dash of Liberace.

I wonder why, but then I remember my own lapdog days at SHIELD. And I remember my guy, my old boss. Nicholas J. Fury. The guy had a real eyepatch and he looked like he stepped out of a Tarantino flick. We used to joke about how he looked a lot like Jules Winnfield. Like they could have been brothers. When we fake-buried him, we even put Jules Winnfield’s made-up bible quote on his tombstone.

Do I still remember that quote?

“The path of the righteous man...something something something…”

It’s been a while. Something about shepherds and...thieves, I think. The word ‘beset’ was in it, I’m sure. Like all of those old, psuedo-bible-quotes.

Nick Fury. I was prepared to follow that man anywhere, do anything he told me. Because I was just so used to taking orders. I was so good at doing whatever it was that the KGB wanted me to, until I developed something of a conscience. With Nick, what he asked just seemed better. Like I could be better, use my skillset for better things. Make the world a better place.

He fooled me with his death once, you know? And he kept me out of the loop.

I didn’t think he’d do that, you know? It was weird, but I thought he trusted me as much as I trusted him. I understand why he did it, but...it--I haven’t seen him in maybe a year. He’s an old spy, so he’s hard for even someone like me and my web to track down.

I want to tell that dog to just forget his old owner. Find him, while he’s out taking his walk right
now and ask him to stick with us. We might not have a lot, but we could just goof off and be happy. And it would hurt for him a lot less, when he realizes his owner isn’t looking for him.

Then, I remember the part of me that still thinks Nick is going show up in this apartment one day. He’ll just be sitting in that chair, over there, smoking a cigar and ready with a casefile in his hand. Maybe it would have Steve’s whereabouts. Or Clint’s. Or Bruce’s. Somebody’s. And I’d be sent to talk with them, lasso ’em in one more time to do some dirty-work for SHIELD. Even after SHIELD’s disbanded.

I can’t believe it; I’m just pouring my heart out to a cat.

Maybe that dog’s been affecting me. Hearing him and his really weird story, maybe it’s...mmmhm.

You know how the dog’s been telling us how people’s minds are stratified or whatever? Layered? Tiered? How we have a shell, an egg-white, and a yolk?

I almost want to ask that dog to dig in past the egg-white and find if I have anything underneath. Because I just feel like I’ve just been—no, I feel like I’m just what other people have told me to do. Maybe that is all I am. I am a lot of red, with a few good deeds sprinkled in. But, is a good deed still a good deed if you do one to make up for something bad you did? I don’t really know how that works.

I never had very many choices presented to me. Usually, it’s been other people who picked out what I got to do. I traded one bad boss for one that I thought was good. Then, the boss left. And Sokovia happened. So, of course, the Sokovian Accord happened. My friends and I, the Avengers, our powers were getting limited by the UN. And, for once, I got to choose if I wanted to go along with the UN and Stark or if I wanted to run fugitive with Steve. Stark and Steve were both my friends, but I chose the UN. Because I thought I’d be choosing to help the Avengers continue saving the world.

Now, I’m alone. Talking to a cat. Worried about a dog, getting put into the same situations that I was. And I’m worried about that dog just putting its faith so blindly into people that only want to use him. That don’t love him back.

Liho. The park. What if...what if it’s just a rendezvous point for Cosmo and his owner?

What if Cosmo was just here to monitor me for his owner?

He’s a sweet dog, but, according to him, it wouldn’t be the first time he did something like that.

Does that mean I believe him? I really don’t know. Maybe I do.

I have to go, Liho. I have to tail him one more time, just to make sure.

It’s a dog, but...I just--I’ve never been one of those happy storybook types of people. You know? I get bored reading about them, even while reading about them aloud to entertain kids. I don’t know how people could just blindly trust like those make-believe characters could.

Chapter End Notes

Come Thursday, see the Black Widow tail a talking Soviet dog.
Cheese

Chapter Notes

Edited: had bits of the Hachiko tale incorrect. That is what I get, for writing it up from memory only.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Zdravstvuyte, squirrel! Are you same squirrel Cosmo helped other day?

What? When you help one squirrel, you help rest?

That is very sweet!

Could Cosmo call you Comrade Belka?

Ura! Could Cosmo call all squirrels Comrade Belka?

Ura, ura, ura!

Comrade Belka, what are you lookink at?

Squirrel is lookink for moose? Reall--what is so funny? You just wanted to hear Cosmo say that? Why?

Because of Cosmo’s accent, Cosmo sounds a little like higher pitched version of American cartoon character Boris? That is weird. Why is everyone so obsessed with American cartoons? But what are you really lookink at?

There is woman some way aways lookink at Cosmo?

Ah, what is her hair color?

Brownish or blonde? Blonde!

Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy, Cosmo has to go to her-- dosvedanya and spasibo, Comrade Belka!

Natasha! Natasha! Natasha!

Do not look so worried, Cosmo only has you in current mental-conversation, so only you hear Cosmo call, Natasha! Comrade Belka saw you!

Oh, Natasha! Cosmo is always happy to see you, but Cosmo is extra happy to see you now!

Did Cosmo forget somethink in apartment?

Ah, my doggy tag! You found it! Cosmo has been lookink everywhere for it! Spasibo, Natasha! Can Cosmo have it back? Can you put it around Cosmo’s neck?

Da, gently. Gently. Spasibo, Natasha. Let Cosmo lick your fingers a little as show of gratitude.
Oh, Natasha! What about your cover? The wrong people could see you out in open--ah, but do not worry! *Comrade* Cosmonaut will protect you! Comrade Cosmonaut is very overqualified for position! Comrade Cosmonaut acted as guardian for Collection for many years and subsequently acted as Head of Security on KNOWHERE. Even without uniform on, Cosmo is still very capable of bitink anyone that would harm Natasha!

*Nyet,* not nowhere! Is abandoned head of Celestial floatink in space that Tivan develop as real estate and for business!

*Da!* Is very clever think to do, since nobody else want it or know what to do with it!

Natasha?

Natasha, what is it?

What is what--well, you usually smell like very nice artificial floral perfume, but sometimes you smell a little sad mixed with artificial florals.

You’re not sad, you only smell like it?

What does sad smell like?

Is--is hard to describe. Like explainink color blue to someone who cannot see it. But it doesn’t smell like blue.

It’s more heavy-smellink.

Natasha. There are a lot of lovely florals and faunas in this park. Do you want Cosmo to show?

*Nyet?* Alright. Let us do somethink else. What do you want to do?

You don’t really know? Oh, Natasha, why did you go out without knowink what you want to do?

You want to do what Cosmo wants to do?

Mmmm.

What is it?

Well, nobody usually asks Cosmo what Cosmo wants to do. Is usually other way around. Cosmo usually asks others what they want Cosmo to do.

You like shoppink gifts for us, *da*?

*Da,* Cosmo meant mostly Cosmo was content and didn’t need any more gifts and you know Liho just kind of goes along with what everyone else is doink out of politeness. Cosmo thinks Liho could be extra-surprised by gift! Let’s go to market and get Liho a gift!

*Da,* cheese! That is wonderful idea, Natasha! Liho was so happy gettink cheese!

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Why are you mental-talkink to Cosmo in Russian, Natasha?

*Da,* is lovely language, but you do not usually speak it. Even with Cosmo.
Alright, for old time’s sake.

*Kakogo roda syr my dolzhny iskat’?*

*Konechno, vkusnyy syr! No kakoy?*

*Vozmozhno shveysarskiy syr! Da!* Liho could enjoy the holes.

Oh, *prosti!*

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Liho, Liho, Liho! We are home!

And Natasha has surprise for you!

Ta-da! Cheese! In little bite-size portions, so that you do not have too much per sitink!

What do you mean it smells funny? Isn’t the shape amusink with the holes? Oh, Liho, could you give it a chance?

Cosmo and Natasha can try some first, in front of Liho, just to show Swiss cheese is delicious.

Would you mind, Natasha?

Good, good! Would that make you feel better about tryink it out, Liho?

Alright!

Natasha, do you want to try first?

Oh, Liho, look at how eagerly she eats it. It is very interestink taste, isn’t it? Mmmmm!

Now, Cosmo will try a square!

Oh, oh, oh! Mm-mm-mm! Is so very good, Liho! Even with sort of funny smell! Oh, the texture! The silkiness! The way it crumbles so satisfyinkly!

You will try now? Alright! Just a bit, to see if you like. If you don’t, more for Natasha and Cosmo. And we will fill up bowl of water for you, so that you can wash out taste.

Well?

What do you think?

Oh, she likes it! Natasha, Liho likes it! Liho likes it!

Can you tell Natasha *spasibo?*

Well, in way nontalkink cat can then!

Aw, rubbink up against Natasha’s leg. There we go! That is good way to show gratitude!

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Liho? Liho! Are you still awake?
Oh, I'm sorry I interrupted dream.

Was it a good one?

Oh, I am very sorry, then.

Since you are up, can Cosmo talk with you for a bit? You are a very good listener and Cosmo is certain, at this point, we are friends. Aren’t we?

Oh, that is good to hear. I am happy.

_Da_, I am usually happy. But I am especially happy to hear that Liho considers herself Cosmo’s friend too.

Since we are friends, can Cosmo confess somethink to you?

Alright, Cosmo didn’t think it was possible but Cosmo tell Natasha little lie.

She was just smellink a little sadder than usual and Cosmo just wanted her to be happy. You smell the sadness on her too. Right, Comrade Liho _Kot_?

Cosmo didn’t read deeper into her mind, but Cosmo can tell Natasha still doesn’t trust Cosmo. She loves Cosmo, Cosmo thinks, probably as much as Cosmo loves her. But she doesn’t fully trust Cosmo yet.

How does Cosmo know? Natasha took Cosmo’s doggy tag and she asks more questions than someone who just trusts.

No, do not worry. Cosmo wouldn’t leave because of that.

Natasha, she leads hard life of secrets. It cannot be easy havink to maintain covers and do work that does not make her feel fulfilled, like washink dishes. She is smart, so Cosmo expect her not to trust Cosmo.

But today, she began tellink Cosmo about Hachiko. Do you know story of dog called Hachiko?

Cosmo knows some Terran thinks because, every few years or so, Tivan update his database of information on Terra. That include popular culture. But Cosmo let Natasha tell it.

Have you heard of Hachiko, Liho?

Hachiko is loyal dog, like Cosmo. Was dog of Japanese professor. Would always go with owner to train station, Cosmo thinks, and then would wait for professor to come back on return train. One day, owner didn’t come back because he had brain hemorrhage. Nobody tell dog, so dog just kept waitink for years and years. There is statue of dog, now, waitink for owner.

Cosmo tell Natasha that Cosmo thinks is sad story, but Cosmo felt there was other motive to her tellink it so Cosmo ask Natasha why she tell it.

And Natasha, with her lovely blue-green eyes lookink extra sad as we walk back here, she just tell Cosmo that Cosmo shouldn’t have to spend so long waitink for somebody that might not show up. Cosmo wasn’t sure what to tell her, so Cosmo just tell her alrighty.

Of course that is not lie. Cosmo tell little lie earlier.

Is about Tivan and why Cosmo go to park.
Cosmo knows Tivan won’t show up there, but Cosmo lie and tell Natasha that that is why Cosmo goes to park.

Why does Cosmo go to park, then? Because Cosmo love all flora and fauna there. Is beautiful place.

Why didn’t Cosmo tell Natasha truth? Because Cosmo know Natasha had his doggy tag and Cosmo knew Natasha could get too suspicious to give doggy tag back.

Why is doggy tag special? Is custom-made and very expensive. Tivan, he is brilliant inventor in addition to many other thinks. Doggy tag have excellent technology that it undetectable to scientific labs of most planets, especially of backwater Terra’s.

Doggy tag contains, in it, endless space. Is for smugglink thinks, in case Tivan need to sneak in weapon or somethink. Currently doggy tag have device that allow Cosmo to travel around countries and planets in it, to help Cosmo find Tivan.

Why hasn’t Cosmo used it in a while? Because Cosmo meet you and Natasha. You both smell like you need doggy help.

Natasha seems so lonely, Liho, and so sad. Cosmo think Cosmo’s last story made her extra-sad. Cosmo was happy to tell it, but Cosmo forget to think of how it would affect someone as kind as her and someone goink through somethink as stressful as maintainink cover.

Oh, da, Liho! Stories can really affect people. And, with someone as kind as Natasha, whose heart must hurt when hearink sad, strange thinks like that, Cosmo thinks Cosmo told her too much.

Cosmo will stay, like good dog, to make sure she is ok. But, for her, Cosmo will stop tellink stories to her until she is less stressed.

Why? Because Cosmo love her very much.

One day, Cosmo want to continue tellink stories to Natasha, but now just seems like wrong time.

But, Liho, Cosmo have somethink to ask of you. In meantime, can Cosmo practice tellink thinks to Liho?

Spasibo, Liho, you are excellent friend.

Chapter End Notes

Next week, Rocket and Groot.

Sort of.

Well, you'll see what I mean.
The relationship between Carina and Tivan has been the trickiest thing to write for this fic. If you watch the Thor 2 post-credits thing, read the prelude comic, and then see Volume 1 of Guardians, I think it looks like it kind of went through some sort of progression. It’s very ambiguous in Thor 2, almost congenial in the prelude comic (‘almost’ being the key), and very unhealthy in the Guardians film.

The most fascinating thing about this one Youtube clip of the Guardians’ Collector scene is how conflicted some of the comments are with the destruction of the Collection. There’s a few that say Carina was dumb or pity the Collector for losing his Collection, while some others sympathize with Carina and say the Collector got what he had coming.

I empathize with Carina. But, with the way this fic handles their relationship, I want to fill in the blanks of what happened before and between the film scenes and comic and present it in a complex, true-to-canon way that isn’t entirely depressing to read. This is meant to explain why things happened as they did, not give a pass for any abhorrent behaviors.

After some deliberation, I also decided that, as of the next chapters, the rating had to be bumped up. So, buckle up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Natasha seemed a little happier today, didn’t she?

She smelled a lot less sad. Especially after I made her cup of coffee and you snuggled close to her, so that she could pet your lovely, dark fur. She seemed especially happy, when we talked about Tolstoy and Walt Disney. Cosmo was just so selfish with talkink about self that Cosmo did not really know how much she love to read or watch a lot of cheesy movies.

I hope nobody throws away whole pieces of cake at her job today. Is sad when people just toss away really nice thinks and take them for granted.

Some people would be really happy to have cake.

Did she talk to you again while Cosmo took walksie today?

That is good. It is also good that you do not tell Cosmo what she told you. Cosmo is curious, but it must be meaninkful to Natasha that she tell you and not Cosmo. Maybe she is also practicink, so that she could tell other people that she loves one day. In meantime, she needs patience and trust. Person who live covers and keeps secrets, they probably do not have a lot of people they can trust. Cosmo cannot remember ever seeink Natasha use her phone to send dispatch to anyone. So is important that she have total privacy and confidence with you.
Does Cosmo miss telling Natasha about Tivan and Carina? A little. But, is not right time to tell her thinks like that.

Liho, do you mind hearink thinks like that? You are already hearink thinks from Natasha, and Cosmo doesn’t want to stress you out too much.

Oh, you really are very good friend.

Cosmo can get you cheese before you listen, da?

Nyet?

Alright, Liho. Should I just start around where I was last talkink with Natasha or is there somethink you would like me to go back and clarify?

A bit of both if possible? Ok. What does Cosmo need to make clearer to Liho?

How Cosmo feel about cagink others. That is—that is very heavy question, Liho. The cages Tivan have were much nicer than Russian scientists’. He engineer them himself, to accommodate specimen’s individual needs. There were four panels of material comparable to glass (but sturdier) and metal over seams, on top, and bottom. Metal was rare, of course. From heart of long-dead planet with name and people forgotten by most. In each cage, cocktail of gases would enter and recreate natural atmosphere of creature’s habitat of origin. Would have been death-sentence to have taken some of creatures out of cage for too long.

Not all of them wanted to be there. Cosmo knew that well enough, and used to ask Tivan about it. His answer was always the same. It was for their own good. Cosmo would often hear them cry, but Cosmo would always run to them and try to speak comfortink words. First Krylorian Carina cried all the time. Cosmo was never allowed to speak with the Carinas with mental-voice, and so Cosmo didn’t talk with her until after Maverdevia-Carina knew. Still, Cosmo would go to first Krylorian Carina and try to keep her company before Maverdevia-Carina even arrive. First Krylorian Carina’s name was not actually Carina, but Corrina. She was a lot happier when Maverdevia-Carina arrived, and the two of them would talk a lot. Usually about Bereet and her daughter Bereet (who was also actress, but was workink way up to becomink as formidable as her mother). Corrina-Carina cried, when Maverdevia-Carina told her about her deal with Tivan, but it was different than her tears of sadness.

Maverdevia-Carina ask Taneleer once why we couldn’t let loose those creatures that could live in atmospheres similar to ones we were breathink. Tivan point that some are pure carnivores and would not hesitate to hunt down weaker creatures. When creatures come to Collection, we do not turn them into vegetarians. Instead they eat same meat, which was synthesized in labs by Tivan himself, that Cosmo, Carina, and Collector eat.

But Carina was not satisfied by that, so she question if that sort of think would happen if we released just humanoids. Tivan point out to wars, genocides, and social stratifications. Remind us of Kree and Nova warrink. They are ways humanoids hunt weaker humanoids. Even if they do not bare their teeth and take bite out of their victims’ jugulars, they still willinkly participate in societies that build policies to murder the weak and defenseless. And Carina, she didn’t really know what to say, but Cosmo just look at her face and recognize that she did not agree with that sort of reasonink.

Carina was like that a lot, with much of the thinks she would ask Tivan and the thinks he’d reply to her.

Do you remember blue notebook of hers Cosmo tell you about? In period when Tivan was gone for
very long times, she used to write up cache of questions she want to ask him. And, in times he showed up in kitchen table or in room, Carina would share all of them with him. Often, there was around thirty. Once, there were one-hundred and eight. And Tivan, he always make point to state that his time is limited, listen carefully, and answer everythink. Each answer she would write down and date, very carefully.

In another life, Cosmo thinks Tivan would have maybe liked to be teacher of some sort. Maybe not with little kids. Or Tivan could maybe be better as lecturer. He know a lot and take pleasure in accumulatink facts, but what he really, sincerely enjoy was to share what he knew.

With Carina, it was strange. She want to know much and she ask him when she can, yet, at same time, many of his answers were not satisfyink to her. Often because she did not agree with the morals, did not understand perspective, or it was not what she want to hear.

Only question he never answer for her was about entire vision he have, around when Gast visit time ago. And Cosmo think that have some impact on rest of answers she got. Though she still work for him, unless she get days off (which she ask for and he grant).

It irked her that she had to stay on ship durink days off. She used to ask why Taneleer couldn’t take her and Cosmo somewhere, when he left for business, and he let her know that planets that he typically visited for trips were dangerous for young woman and telepathic Soviet dog. She suggest droppink us off on other planets, but he told her unexpected thinks happened at his meetinks all the time and we could wind up stranded someplace or kidnapped and used as leverage against him.

They eventually come up with some compromise, that she could shop by orderink thinks through multiply-encrypted dispatches and he could pick the stuff up at postboxes in post offices throughout galaxy for her. (Postboxes and fake recipient names had to change with each order, so that we could not be tracked down.) He could respect that she wanted thinks and would pay for them with her own wages. Usually it was thinks like normal tube socks, blue eyeshadow, inexpensive toothpaste, stuff she told Cosmo that she regretted takink for granted. No films of Bereet, though, because she say we would not have time to enjoy and they would make her too sad. Once, he offer to buy stuff like tube socks and inexpensive toothpaste for her instead of her payink. She refused.

Some days after Tivan reveal why Cosmo cannot tell Carina about mind-scannink, Tivan join us for breakfast of homemade, day-old bread and butter. (Was simple, but lovely. And makink bread is so nice and relaxink.) The crust was wonderfully chewy and the inside was beautifully soft. It was just weird, because, even though Cosmo still give good mornink dog song and brink food with Carina, it had been while since Cosmo have conversation with Tivan. Cosmo would still ask if Tivan is ok, but, when Cosmo ask Tivan what is on his mind, Tivan beckon Cosmo to tell him. Is hard, to talk with someone after they ask that sort of think. Even harder because Cosmo still remember beink trapped in Soviet rocket and Tivan helpink him out.

Doggy didn’t talk.

Taneleer told us why he was back. It was only to engineer new cage for Dark Elf. As per agreement with new clients, he would take captive they have and provide observational intel on Elf. We would also have to gather mint-condition shields and Krogarran swords, to arm his new clients. As much as he liked those weapons, developink business relationship with Asgardians was even more necessary. Asgardians are beautiful people, but haughty. Tivan admired and loathed them at same time. Carina only heard tales of them, believed they were made-up, and let us know that. Cosmo was neutral on them, and, even if Cosmo wasn’t talkink to Tivan, still trust his judgement in dealink with them.

Then Taneleer was quiet, until Carina speak.
Carina, probably tired of asking about whole vision and hearing nothing really, question how his abilities work. Is very good question. Tivan thought it was good too and, while buttering bread, he let her know.

His abilities didn’t come with instructions, he have to figure out himself through careful experimentation. He would have visions, write everything down or paint it or compose music or whatever to make sure he did not forget, and then he would verify what information he could in his visions. Some of the thinks would be true or appear to be coming true soon, while other bits were not. Is way he figure it was not definitive vision of our future he was having, but vision of parallel universe with people that look like people in ours and act similarly to ours.

Carina ask if he had proof of Lesser Sea on Morag falling or of Thanos workink with Ronan (if and when war between Kree and Nova would end). First think was affirmative, through Tivan Group scouts monitorink that planet’s dropping sea levels and other planets under guise of scopink potential real estate. (Tivan Group was official name of his biggest business.) The scouts were providink daily updates of sea levels and guesstimated it would fully drop within years. The others were ‘no’.

The ‘no’ got Carina a lot less excited than the affirmation of the Lesser Sea’s receding. And she got even less happy after he answer her next thing. She ask why he didn’t make his visions public or, at least, tell law enforcement agencies. Because if Kree Ronan did team up with worst-man-in-Universe Thanos, lots of people could be hurt.

Tivan extrapolate that his visions could be wrongly politicized, used by lawmakers to further their careers. Maybe religions would interpret them incorrectly. Some would make it their platforms. Many would deny what he had to say, no matter how much evidence he could produce. Could have highly negative impact on normal people trying to live own lives. Or, worse, if he let information slip to wrong person, Thanos and Ronan could take inspiration from it and team up, when they wouldn’t have done so before. Or, even worse, nobody would believe him and they’d lock him away.

And this really did not amuse Carina, who look very disgusted as she groan that war may not end and there was possibility Thanos and Ronan would not work together. Our work could be for naught.

But Tivan, so coolly, while bitink into bread, reminded that even if war did not end and/or those two did not work together, there was still legendary valuable in Lesser Sea. Nobody but Tivan, as far as he was aware, knew location or was given it. When time was right, we would have to relay information to trusted individuals and send our parties so it would fall into safekeepink of his Collection.

This answer really did not put her at ease.

They stare for a bit, until alarm go off. Carina take Cosmo and she inform Tivan that we would be checkink it out.

Raccoons had run away from their containment unit. They usually did that at least twice a month, which was more often than Howard. They were very annoyink. All while we were recollectink raccoons, Carina griped all throughout cleanup. It must not be healthy for someone like that to travel so much and put self through so much, she complain. Always, he looks so tired. Sure, his moneys could allow him to indulge in weird hunches but it could also lead to huge waste of time for people he involve. Person like Tivan should be locked up, because he did terrible thinks like lock people up, steal people, spend absurd amount of money on thinks when others were livink in poverty, and hoard based on stuff he probably made-up, she complained.
And that was when Cosmo realize that she really didn’t believe in his visions. She was just goink along with everyone else. Why? Cosmo didn’t want to look into her mind to find out and it seemed rude to interrupt her while she talk.

But she start to tell Cosmo about her uncle who was sentenced away to a place. Place is asylum for criminally insane. They hook people up to machines and have them minded by happy animals augmented with cybernetics. (Although one enhanced critter flew the coop.) Maybe Tivan, she say, would enjoy beink minded by animals.

Thought of it scared Cosmo so very much, because you had to be very bad to go to that place and, even if Cosmo wasn’t talkink to Tivan, Cosmo didn’t think he deserved to be put there. It hurt a lot, to hear anyone say somethink so awful about someone Cosmo still love very much and it hurt doubly so because it was from someone Cosmo also love. So Cosmo let her know that his visions were real, that Cosmo saw most but recentest one.

And Carina, as she handle especially angry raccoon in her adorable hazmat protective suit, look back and question how Cosmo did that.

Cosmo gulp, rememberink what Tivan told Cosmo about Carina. But Cosmo had to tell. All of it. So Cosmo did. Cosmo tell Carina that Cosmo can scan minds, that Cosmo scanned hers once very long ago and Cosmo used to frequently scan Taneleer Tivan’s too.

Carina did not believe, until Cosmo ask her permission to read her mind and tell her what she was thinkink. She gave it. So, Cosmo prove self.

She gasped and, then, looked very livid. This wasn’t like when she found out Cosmo could talk, when she was just happy to have someone on craft to talk with. Not at all.

Cosmo beg her not to be too mad at Tivan because, even though he ask Cosmo to read her mind, Cosmo agreed to do it. Because we did not trust her at first and thought she could be danger. But, now, Cosmo love her very much. And Tivan, even though he did not show it, trusted her more than before. (Well, alright, Cosmo fudged with Tivan there. Cosmo didn’t know for sure. Tivan say he didn’t trust her, but at least it felt like less than before.)

Carina just drop raccoon on ground and command Cosmo to leave, as she started removink her suit and got very angry expression that looked a little like she was goink to cry too.

It hurt Cosmo’s heart, but Cosmo turned tail and agreed.

It was probably foolish think to do. Cosmo was still a little too trustink back then.

Not knowink where else to go, Cosmo went to Tivan’s lab, which was close to his room. Always the efficient worker, Tivan had goggles and protective gear on. Already, he had prototype nearly assembled and was weldink it when Cosmo interrupt and confess what Cosmo had just done.

Tivan. When he was upset, it also upset Cosmo. Not because Cosmo was afraid of beink thrown out by him, beink locked in cage, or of gettink yelled at by him (which never happened). It was more because he would have such sad look on his face, like Cosmo was afraid would happen here. It happen, as he remove goggles. Cosmo almost wanted to cry there, because Cosmo really felt like Cosmo failed everyone.

And another alarm went off.

Carina, as much as I love her, had a lot of thinks she was dealink with. A lot of anger she never really knew how to handle. Even though she had hated Collection at first, Cosmo was hopink she
was startink to find peace in work. Like Cosmo and Collector. It was lookink like that was happenink before.

Tivan hit button on remote and screen lowered from ceilink. On it, Carina had large firearm in hands and she was shootink it at thinks. Irreplaceable objects, near creatures’ cages. Anywhere. Many thinks break. When shots run out, she start to use weapon like Terran baseball bat. More thinks break when she swinks. Tivan upset and fearful for thinks and creatures contained in the area, so he drop what he was workink on, ask Cosmo to follow, and rush out.

But Cosmo’s heart was breakink, because, even though there was no audio feed, Cosmo could see the hurt in her face and the tears stream down her cheeks as she scream and attack.

Cosmo is sorry, Liho. Cosmo isn’t ready to tell how this ended yet. Maybe one more think about it, and then Cosmo want to finish.

Is that ok, Liho?

Spaisibo, Liho.

How did Cosmo feel about cagink other creatures? Cosmo felt bad, but, sometimes also, was a little afraid Tivan was right about that as usual. People and creatures, they can really be dangerous. There had to be some way to stop them from doink thinks like that, some other way than cagink them, but Cosmo didn’t know what.

To be honest, Cosmo is still not sure what.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, this has the smallest blink-and-miss-it bit of Rocket Raccoon. (I did, however, have him in mind throughout writing this chapter.) The asylum is comics’ Halfworld, where Rocket came from, and he’s the implied escapee. There is a good reason for barely any Rocket yet. If you watch the first Guardians film, you’ll probably catch why a larger appearance wouldn’t make sense at this point in this fic. The reason will be outright stated in a chapter, somewhere down the line.

But, for now, after a chapter like this, it’s time for something lighter.

Grandmaster will be returning for the pretty beefy Groot chapter.
Like the Rocket chapter, this one's also pretty light on Groot but he was definitely on my mind while writing it.

I feel a little bit better about how Grandmaster is written in this fic, after reading an interview from Jeff Goldblum, but I still do not know for certain how he’ll be written and, with this chapter, I’m going to put in a few things to cover my butt just in case he’s being written differently than how I’ve handled him. (That, or, if this and/or anything is like completely and totally different to stuff in this fic, you could just say that this fic takes place in like a parallel universe to the MCU that has some comic stuff in it. Whichever floats your boat.)

But, anyway, Grandmaster, Grandmaster, Grandmaster.

As much as I love writing someone as kind as Cosmo, I also really enjoy writing En Dwi Gast. The Master of Games is just a lot of fun. Probably totally evil, but thoroughly enjoyable. I'm excited for Thor 3, if only to see how the MCU officially handles him and to read this dude in more fics.

In honor of Wrestlemania, let's give this chapter an entrance theme. You, the reader, can pick.

For the NXT fans (although I thoroughly believe the Champion's belt belongs to Nakamura), here is a glorious choice: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xndQPqScKFQ

For those that adore the Game: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYmm5YQSv2I

Because this is technically a Guardians' fic, Batista's theme: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNpAAg5sE6Q

And, in honor of a Legend that retired: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHH0YgiD8WQ

Or, feel free to pick a wild card.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Was it good think that happen this mornink, Liho?

Was it?

Was it really?

Cosmo didn’t do somethink wrong?

Nyet?
It was just strange, that Natasha asked Cosmo not to make breakfast or do dishes. Cosmo is wonderink if Cosmo did them wrong yesterday or day before.

*Nyet?*

She still call Cosmo good dog, even though she made us breakfast and asked us not to help her with dishes. Cosmo is not sure if Cosmo deserve it, but Cosmo is--Cosmo still feels pretty happy about it.

Do you think she’ll remember to get disc of talkink mouse film, like she said she would?

That would be nice.

Liho, would it be ok if Cosmo continue talkink about Carina and Tivan? Cosmo feels ready, but only wants to tell if Liho wants to hear.

*Spasibo*, Liho.

Carina was attackink thinks in Collection. Me and Tivan, we try to talk with her. She wasn’t havink any of it, shoutink at us and demandink to know why Tivan didn’t just order me to use my abilities to stop her and make her do what we want.

Taneleer was lookink pretty upset as I look over at him, but he manage to keep his voice low when he speak somethink even Cosmo wasn’t expectink to hear. He told us he was realizink Cosmo had conscience and will of own, upon which Cosmo was now basink decisions. Used to come from pure rationality, but now Cosmo’s decisions were also comink from feelinks and attachments that went beyond loyalty to Tivan. It was highly unusual for Terran-based *canis lupus familiaris*. It also no longer felt right to order Cosmo into doink thinks Cosmo did not wish to and, because it was very evident Cosmo love Carina, it definitely did not feel right to give that order.

His yolkish mind spill over with genuine regret as he shared this! It did! Cosmo turn back to Taneleer for a second, whisper to Taneleer that Cosmo forgive his weird behavior in last few days if he promise to never again coerce Cosmo into usink powers without gettink permission first, got nod in return, then Cosmo faced Carina again. Cosmo probably forgive too easily, but this was Tivan. Tivan, who Cosmo knew since Cosmo was very small dog. Cosmo was tired of not speakink with him.

It was hard to focus, with din in this part of Collection. Still Cosmo join with doggy beg, whinink for Carina to put the weapon down before she hurt herself, damage more artifacts, or harm anyone in Collection. The cries of the others were almost as loud as hers. Everyone was scared. Cosmo wanted to just comfort all at once, but, to that, we had to calm Carina down first.

After that, Tivan did somethink else Cosmo had never seen him do, after Cosmo make plea. Give apology to a Carina. It was not perfect, but it was first he give since she start workink for him. He told her he was sorry his actions offended her and what he did obviously damaged their trust, even if he felt it had to be done because of nature of his life’s work, so he offer to do somethink to make up for it.

It wasn’t workink. She get close to very irreplaceable Spartoi pottery set, smash each piece, and tell us she have thinks in her head she didn’t want anyone to see, that Tivan won’t tell her his whole vision but he did this without her permission.

Cosmo plea. Cosmo told her that Cosmo was so sorry too, that Cosmo still love her even after seeink stuff in her head and that Cosmo still love her now.

Got a huge sniffle from Carina. She sob to us both that Cosmo shouldn’t love her and Tivan should
fire her.

Cosmo refuse to stop lovin' her.

And Taneleer inform her that she could have simply quit instead of lashink out like this, if she only wished to resign.

Carina drop weapon and cover eyes with an elbow, callink Tivan a condescendink smeg. No insult for Cosmo, so Cosmo crept up until Cosmo was close enough to her freed hand so that she could feel Cosmo’s fur if she bend down or Cosmo jump a little. Neither of us do those thinks.

Tivan figure aloud that she wanted somethink other than to quit, maybe make a statement or demand that she normally felt she couldn’t.

Carina stand there and, so sadly, let us know that she reckoned why Taneleer Tivan wasn’t tellink his whole vision to us. Some version of her must be in vision.

He confirm it to her.

And, so soundly, she bend down and start pettink Cosmo. Cosmo did not know if this was good think, and Cosmo was still makink sense of Carina’s realization, but Cosmo was glad to see Carina pull her elbow away from her face and look at Cosmo again. Without lookink back at Taneleer, she tell him he is a know-it-all and, even if he is last of his kind tryink to save Universe with fairly understandable reasons for actink so weirdly, he had no excuse to act like a total a-hole.

Is first time Cosmo hear anybody call Tivan that. Cosmo turn back, to find very genuinely shocked visage on Tivan.

Wasn’t a-hole claim that took him aback, though. He ask, instead, how she knew he was last of his kind.

Cosmo apologize immediately, rememberink it was Cosmo who told her because Cosmo did not think it was big secret.

It was, accordink to Taneleer Tivan. It was somethink he rarely ever tell anyone.

And Carina make point to ask Collector not to be upset with Cosmo, since is almost same think he have Cosmo do with her. Thinks in her head are as private as that information he was last of his kind.

Cosmo apologize to everybody, but, almost immediately, they excuse Cosmo because doggy didn’t know any better. It was probably because Cosmo was the cutest one in the room. (And Cosmo only tell you and Natasha about Tivan beink last of his kind because Cosmo trusts you both and is desperate measure Cosmo take to find Taneleer.)

After good deal of quiet, Tivan still remark that he still had no idea why Carina did what she did. Sighink and rubbink on her temples, Carina confess that she really have no idea either. There was still a lot of anger in her, and Cosmo could smell it, but she wasn’t actink on it.

Tivan say to us both that he still cannot share whole vision and that he need to check on damage in Collection, but he would give us time to settle selves. Let Carina figure what she want. And he leave us. Everyone in Collection sound a lot calmer.

Cosmo promise very quietly that Cosmo will not do what Cosmo did to her again. That it was through love of her and trust she had in me, by sharink secrets, that Cosmo learn what Cosmo did
was very wrong. Carina only smile and suppose, aloud, that it would mean Cosmo would not be willing to gaze at Taneleer Tivan’s whole vision either. Cosmo nod and tell her Cosmo love them both and could not do that to both anymore.

Like she always do, she ask why, as she get on knees and rub Cosmo’s back through suit a little more aggressively. It felt good. Cosmo had to lie down and roll, so she could rub belly too. She did. Cosmo did not even have to ask her. We just knew each other that well enough.

Cosmo ask her if she still love Cosmo. She called me silly dog and said of course she did. She forgive Cosmo a little too easily and Cosmo knew it. Oh, but Cosmo was too happy to think about that. So happy that Cosmo wiggle in place and laugh aloud. That is why, Cosmo confess to her. Both of you are sad, strange people, and, even though Cosmo does not always do thinks you want Cosmo to, you still do lovely thinks for Cosmo. Cosmo had seen you at your best and worst, but Cosmo will still love you both because you both adore Cosmo very much.

And then, there was crash into display near us. More of valuable Spartoi pottery gone, but, now linking on remains, was En Dwi Gast. (Cosmo recognize him before even seeink his face, because of his chocolate-orange-smell, which was mingled with somethink else.) Carina gasp happily, roll Cosmo back onto Cosmo’s feet, and we go to help him up. Old people, Liho, always need help gettink up after they fall. No matter how young or fit they look.

Carina squealed and hug Gast, callink out his name.

Gast made eye-contact with her, then with Cosmo, and examine us as if we have somethink written on our foreheads. He question if he knew us.

Carina, she twitch like she swallow somethink not at all tasty and it was probably obvious to peoples without telepathic gifts that her heart break a little more, but she still introduce herself and Cosmo.

While Carina support his weight on her shoulders and Cosmo use abilities to give him lift, Gast hold out hands in open palm like way people make talkink dog hand and he reintroduce himself to us. En Dwi Gast, the Grandmaster. It was pleasure to meet us. She shake his hand and Cosmo shook his other with psychic abilities, which got him to do double-take at Cosmo. He note that Tivan has telepathic dog and got me a little suit.

I tell him again that Cosmo came to place in suit.

Gast snap his fingers and call out, yes. There is spark in his eyes, accentuated by the blue on his lower eyelids. It seems like he will say somethink else, so we wait.

And…

Nothink.

But then he snap fingers again and inquire if we were workink for Tivan. Cosmo answer in affirmative. Carina only check if Gast wanted us to take him to his Brother.

Gast quickly remark that it was unusual Taneleer told us about their brotherhood and he want to know what else Taneleer said about him. Carina grimace and informed him it wasn’t much, but we had met before. All of the pinball machines still had his high scores, if he needed to see them as proof, since we didn’t have heart to unplug machines and erase his hard work.

Gast gaped, with a lot more consideration, at Carina and Cosmo, and he wanted to know if we had “Star Wars” table. We confirm and, so swiftly, he apologize for not rememberink us. There were many people he had to manage for entertainment fightink, planet he was runnink, another planet he
wanted to acquire, more fighters he wanted to obtain, super-computers constantly calculatink thinks, loanink out mercenaries, games to play, and very full life he was livink. Made it hard to remember thinks like that.

Carina just accepted it right away, but Cosmo goggle him a little longer. Gast goggled back at Cosmo, give odd blink with one eye, and confuse Cosmo even more.

We found Tivan by broken containment unit of Brood. Of Collection, only specimen harmed was Brood. Brood was incredibly rare. She was bonded to yellowy Aakon woman that was dyink of a horrible, slow disease and the two of them formed a sort of symbiotic relationship. Brood would help woman live longer and woman kept lonely Brood company. Their identities became one. They actually enjoyed livink in Collection, because, in Collection, Brood could not hear hum of her species’ Queen. We tell her many times Queen wasn’t around anymore and neither was hive. But she never believe. Now, they were gone. Instantly killed by Carina’s outburst.

Cosmo sob aloud when Cosmo see Brood, because Cosmo was fond of her. Tivan was speechless, and Cosmo knew he was especially fond of beinks like her that liked beink in Collection and were pretty much last of their kind like him. Carina choked up a bit, but did not cry as hard as Cosmo--because her relationship with Brood was always challengink--and she apologize in very small voice, lettink us know that she didn’t mean for anyone to get hurt, never wanted to hurt anyone, and never hurt anyone this badly really.

Gast, on the other hand, just loudly greet his Brother, claim it had been too long since they last see each other, and question why Tivan called him over. Taneleer gesture to Brood with both arms. There was barely blink that passed Gast’s face, let alone full grief colorink his expression, when those eyes of his gaze upon Brood. All he muster is a huh.

Tivan frown, demandink Gast take this seriously and brink Brood back. This confuse Carina and Cosmo a lot. Not Gast, though. For first time on this trip, Gast’s expression did not look so confused by what was goink on around him.

Gast assume Brood was dead within last eight hours and they still had eleven-and-a-half hours to brink Brood back. Taneleer corrected his Brother, tellink him Gast’s gift allowed twenty-nine and a half hours in all, but waitink on Gast to use it was disrespectful to Brood. This seemed new to Gast, who pursed his lips and his eyes got a little wide like puppy gettink new bowl of food.

This meant they had extra time. He point at Carina and at Tivan, sayink to them both that it was obvious they were mad at each other. Like searink rage.

It was very true. Cosmo could smell that Carina was still upset with Tivan and, with destruction of part of his Collection, he was upset with Carina too.

Gast command Cosmo to confirm his claim. Cosmo growl at Gast, but, for good of everyone, let everyone know that they really stank of candied anger mixed with a little sad and Skornheim hotpot.

Carina quirked her brows and Taneleer fixed eye-contact for Gast. Gast raise hand and announce to us that the hotpot was him, because Tivan had called him while he was in the middle of scopink homeworld of a potential acquisition. And he try to transition out of weird lull in conversation by requestink to know what everyone had been up to recently.

Carina, with a gulp, flatly deadpan that she just killed somethink.

Cosmo tell everyone that Cosmo was gettink hankerink for fresh pasta or yummy vindaloo, to get rid
of other scents Cosmo had been smellink, and was plannink on makink batch of either.

Taneleer Tivan shifted his position akimbo and plainly informed Gast that he was engineerink containment unit when Brood turned up dead and a portion of his Collection was ruined beyond repair, but it was alright because he still had Universe that he was workink to protect.

Gast just smile and nod.

Tivan place an arm around his chest, put other on top of arm in T or L-shape, rest face into palm and groan that Gast forgot about plan to save Universe in same tone you use to scold somebody who return milk to fridge without puttin cap back on. Carina and I both know how important Universe is, and had been spendink while now workink to save it, so we turn to Gast and gape when he shrug and proclaim to us that he is guilty as charged.

His alibi was the same. Super-computers. Planet. Entertainment fightink. Own life he was livink.

Brood, who was mostly last of her kind, is gone and the Universe is in danger, Taneleer snarl with very active gesturink, why can nobody else take these thinks seriously?

Carina interjected that she and Cosmo were.

Gast lightly admonish Taneleer for scarink the kids (probably Carina and I), give condolences for loss of Brood, and remind Tivan that they still had time, Universe was still around, Thanos was still sitink around on his big purple butt, it was statistically possible that thinks could go pear-shaped at least a couple billion ways, and that last-of-kinds were not terribly unique. Tivan was last of his kind, Gast was too, so were their other siblinks, Zehoberei, Flora Colossus, and Cosmo was too weird to have anyone else like him. What should matter now is repairink relationship between Taneleer and Carina.

Both argue that they already handled thinks.

But Grandmaster counter-argue that if they did, they wouldn’t still be smellink angry like Doggelstein said. Cosmo ruff with disapproval. That was not Cosmo’s name! But Gast ignored and continued with conjecture. What they were doink was handlink superficial incident, without addressink underlyink issues, and bottlink up resentment that came from sweepink those thinks aside. Resentment could evolve into somethink even more dangerous and even more trouble. It had to be addressed right away, before those feelinks could even settle and fester.

And none of us could really object to suprisinkly insightful diatribe. Not Cosmo, intellectual Tivan, or curious Carina.

There was only one way we could properly address think like this and get rid of angry energy, Gast wagered, and that was through a caged Taipei deathmatch.

Both very quickly object. Tivan did not wish to hit Carina and Carina didn’t want to kill anythink else, even person like Taneleer Tivan.

Gast assure it worked all the time with his fighters and rarely did anyone die.

They still object.

Gast shrug and tell them he would delay savink Brood (but not past time-limit), until they find some way to settle issues. Is terrible wager, but it work. The two wound up talkink their issues out while playink skee-ball, after Carina sit down for minutes and internally settle with feelinks over accidentally killink somethink for first time. (When she sat, we comfort her in our own ways.
Cosmo lick her face and sink. Taneleer promise her issue would be addressed soon. Gast assure her first time is always hardest. Taneleer admonish Brother for that.)

But, anyway, skee-ball! Both came to agreement that Tivan’s ability to look into alternate universes was pretty much worst power ever. Taneleer tell Carina all that Cosmo told him (which Cosmo confirm) and promised to never have Cosmo read her mind without her permission again. And Carina open up in way that she never did before with Taneleer. Tivan accept that Carina was pretty desensitized by violence and sometimes got urge to smash thinks (due to combination of growink up in less safe Krylorian neighborhood, gettink spanked by petty thug father for misbehavink or smacked by cousin for failink to meet quota with drug dealink, needink to resort to harsher methods when helpink rob banks and livink on the run with cousin, ingestion of much media that normalized thinks like that, and maybe a few other factors none of us fully cognizant of), but he also set down ground rule that it wasn’t fair to Collection if she wrecked any part of it every time she was upset.

All three of us would find peaceful, alternate way for her to channel her aggressions. Carina begrudginkly listen to Taneleer’s theory that her morality was based on seekink instant gratification and, in exchange for aidink and abettink his Universe-savink plan that Gast had forgotten about, she would be gettink own room and would sometimes accompany him on business trips so that she could get better idea of what he do. Cosmo would have to stay behind when they’d go on these travels, to guard Collection, but Cosmo completely did not mind. This was also when Tivan announce Cosmo would be gettink more responsibilities and promotion as Head of Security, in light of Cosmo beink very, very good dog.

Carina won the skee-ball match.

After that, we prepare dinner of vindaloo and rice. Gast did not help, because Gast was guest and Tivan bribed him with Terran somethink called…’Boy of Game’ as payment for…whatever it was he was goink to do to Brood. So, Gast was testink out bribery and makink sure it was acceptable exchange. Game he played involved collectink funny little creatures that could only say own names. Gast shared aloud belief that Tivan would have enjoyed game, if he ever bothered to set aside time for playink it. Taneleer let his brother know that he had more important thinks to mind. So Gast name his player after himself and his rival after Taneleer. If he was able to name Taneleer's starter, Gast privately disclose to doggy, it would have been named Cosmo.

We eat together. Meal was surprisinkly pleasant. Tivan and Carina discuss possible improvements that can be made for ship, about makink it faster, about his older craft called the ‘Case’, about beink more efficient with fuel and transferink life-support systems. Gast describe nuanced, subtle flavors of Skornheim hotpot and how it differ from other cultures’ hotpots. Cosmo start layink out new security measures Cosmo would implement, with new position. Carina passionately convince us of merit to cinema and addink more cinematic artifacts to Collection (currently, there were none). Gast and Tivan chat in multiple languages, some Carina and Cosmo recognize and some we do not. At some point in their dialogue, Taneleer make very stolid expression and deadpan, in language Cosmo and Carina understand, that Gast was speakink gibberish and made up what he was sayink. Gast point and tell his Brother that he was just testink, to make sure Tivan was payink attention. Tivan also took this time to remind Gast about Brood. Gast snap fingers, stand up, take his chair, and start headink out.

Rest of us all get up from table and follow behind Gast, as we run to Brood’s containment unit, circle around, and watch as Gast prepare self.

Behold, he command, and bask in the might of the Grandmaster!

He slam chair into bottom edge of hole. Chair just got stuck and hole did not get much larger. So Cosmo help by pullink out lid at top of containment unit, bringink out body of Brood, and lowerink
it before Gast.

Gast thank Cosmo and, then, touch Brood’s forehead.

There was bright light and great gust of wind that break rest of Spartoi pottery in area of Collection near Brood. Carina cover eyes and keep skirt down, to stop it from flyink up. Tivan allow airflow to billow faux-fur cape behind him majestically. Cosmo open up helmet and stick tongue out.

When light and air clear, Brood was alive, floatink, and kickink.

Carina and Cosmo cry out with joy and get closer to Brood. With hesitation, Carina pat Brood on head and apologize. Brood did not bite back. Cosmo happily lick at Brood’s anthropod-leg.

Like we knew Carina would, she ask how Gast did this.

Gast just shrug and, with sadness colorink his voice, inform us that he had to go.

Carina ran up to Gast and hug him very tightly. Gast blink twice, but then wrap arms around her and give her two squeezes back.

Cosmo nod at Gast and Gast gave back really weird lookink salute.

Tivan and Gast shake hands, while Gast double-check that they weren’t in the middle of a feud. They weren’t, accordink to Taneleer. Grandmaster smile, tellink him is good think, and he ask his Brother to brink the kids (probably still us) next century he come to visit. Taneleer remind his Brother, once more, that Krylorians and *canis lupus familiaris* do not typically live that long. So Tivan’s Brother clap his hands once and remark, of course, we have to see each other before that then.

Before he disappear, he remind us Universe could end in billions of ways. Everywhere, there were last-of-kinds, and awful thinks happenink. But, as long as we didn’t lose sight of what mattered and tend to them, thinks could be ok.

Very cheesy think to say, but wasn’t entirely terrible.

For man who smell like death, Liho, Cosmo almost fond of Gast at times.

Excuse Cosmo, Liho, there is--there is dust speck in both of Cosmo’s eyes. *Da*, both. Would you mind--oh, *spaisibo*, Liho. Your fur is excellent for wipink sad, old dog’s tears.

Sometimes is--is nice to remember better times.

Chapter End Notes

Spot the "Red Dwarf" references!

And...next week: piano-lessons, the war between the Kree and Nova ends, KNOWHERE, Gamora, Asgardians, and a cocoon that might or might not have cosmic significance.

But, first, let's give this chapter a quick outro: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHSRbD_69yk
If you ever wanted to know how I imagine Cosmo sounding, it’s probably Louis CK doing a bad Polish accent. Go find the SNL skit, if you haven’t seen it already. It is a treat, in a terrible-joke-that-you-feel-kind-of-bad-laughing-about-but-still-kind-of-do kind of way.

I have at least eighteen chapters posted on Drax’s past and people in another fic, featuring headcanon based on stuff from the artbook and film, but I’m not using anything from that in this fic. Drax didn’t get mentioned in the promoish thing last week because: (1) like Rocket and Groot, it wouldn’t make any sense at all for Drax to appear in this fic at this point (and, possibly, most of this fic); (2) I think, even if the Collector knew what the heck Drax was, he wouldn’t have a specimen from Drax’s species in his Collection that could appear or be talked about; and (3) Drax kind of just showed up in the film and randomly joined the bunch. Like this chapter name is randomly coming out of nowhere.

Also, like Rocket and Groot, the Destroyer was also on my mind when writing 'his' chapter.

Also also, after going through fics, I’m regretting tagging some characters but only giving them like a mention. So, instead of removing the tag for a character, they’ll be talked about a lot more and/or may appear in this fic. (Yes, especially Pizza Dog.)

Also also also, starting off with a song from the talking mouse film known as “The Rescuers”.

Also also also also, have a smidgeon more Gast. In honor of the Thor: Ragnarok trailer coming out and National Siblings Day.

Edit: Holy shit, of all the references that aged badly...alright, please don’t imagine Cosmo sounding like that. Just any non-terrible person-actor putting on the fakest Russian accent is better.

Yet another super-delayed edit: so, after watching “The Shape of Water” with my brother, I’ve fallen in love with the idea of Michael Stuhlbarg as Cosmo.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Heads held high--um...heads held high!

La la la la la!

What an adorable movie! Ah, the mice! The myshkas! It was so nice of Natasha to get the movie and watch it with us before her shift! Liho, didn’t you like the film?

What??!

Why not?

Of course mice in our Universe do not act like that! (At least, I have not seen data indicatink otherwise.) Is cartoon! Mice, when they sink, warble more like birds and in pitches hard for humans to hear. Most mousies do not wear clothes, speak with accent, or rescue Terran-based, young, female homo sapiens from sad livink conditions. But that is the fun of a film! All of the rules can be broken and reality rewritten!

Did I ever tell you what Carina said about films? What she said that convinced the Collector to add them to his Collection?

Nyet? Alright, she wasn’t goink to brink it up really, until Gast mentioned how there weren’t games in his ridiculous Brother’s Collection for at least a half-billion years and how Gast really had to vouch for it. Collection was kind of for Collector, since it gave him somethink to do with his incredibly long life, but it was also beink compiled to give history and culture to animals and peoples if all other civilizations collapsed and only survivors were in his Collection or came from genetic material of those in his Collection. Gast had to argue that games weren’t just a distraction, like Tivan usually dismissed them as, but also good mental stimulation that allowed players to practice problem-solvink in controlled environment, develop own strategies, and understand strategies of others. That, and peoples livink after fall of societies could be bored or sad without games to entertain themselves with.

Fictional films were never in Collection, Tivan told us, because Tivan dismissed them as a fad that could die out because viewers ingested these pretend, unchallengink thinks passively. New peoples could not become layabouts who wasted time just watchink vanity projects of prima donna film peoples, or Universe’s new order would collapse way sooner than older one’s. Very dangerous for newer Universe.

Carina convince us otherwise. Films could be very mentally stimulatink and challengink, workink up the mind like a game could. Even the dumber films could.

We all ask, how?

So she tell us. Films start off by bringink pieces together. Is no different than game, in that way. Because bits all have own functions and purpose to tell story. You have to figure out who is good guy and who is bad guy, and you do that by gettink to know pieces. Usually see it in how they dress, act, talk, the like. Low camera shot lets you know someone is very powerful, while high one makes someone look smaller and weak. However, unlike game, you have to figure out rules as you go along too. They do not give all rules, for instance, of reality that they are in. When that is more or less complete and all of the pieces are assembled in box, bam! Box gets shaken! Rules change! Pieces change! Chaos! What can be done? You figure out, as pieces do! Box gets shaken more! More thinks happen! Maybe piece gets taken out or rule turns out to be based on somethink false! Maybe piece turns out to be another piece’s parent!

So, what can be done to stop the box from shakink?
Bite hand of person shakink box, Cosmo suggest.

Carina just laugh and inform us best bit of film. Box never really stops shakink. Perhaps it shakes a little less violently, but, once it shakes, it can never be stilled again. Pieces can participate in way of reducink shakink, yet they will cannot do so without forever beink changed. Have to get used to shakink.

But what does viewer gain from watchink box shake, Taneleer Tivan, for once, question Carina.

Perhaps it is a little like your visions, Carina venture to suggest. Viewers see themselves and others as pieces, get thrown in to watch other world that they cannot manipulate in any way, and witness others’ methods of dealink with scenarios that they, the viewer, could encounter in their own, real life. Could inform how they handle their own conduct or see world. Allow them to find box-shakes in own life.

Tivan got pensieve after that comparison, but Gast insisted on playink Devil’s advocate and notink aloud books kind of already did that.

In a way, books do, Carina admitted. But films could be more accessible. If you did not know language of book or strange cultural bits like metaphors, you could not understand. Films spoke audiovisual language. Color, music, facial emotions. Even if you did not know language dialogue spoken in, somethink else could translate over to viewer.

Ah, I am terribly sorry! I did not ask if you wanted to hear about time with Collection!

I do not have to--why not, Liho? Cosmo does not want to stress you out.

You like hearink about Collector’s Crew?

But why?

Do I really look happier and sadder at same time?

Is it possible?

Is it good think to be happier and sadder?

Da, Cosmo asks too many questions.

Well, if it is alright: Cosmo will start around time Cosmo last stopped. After Gast left, we immediately got to movink Carina out of green room. Tivan folded up her cot, Carina gathered up armful of tchotchkes, Brood picked up other armful (since her containment unit was broken and she was helpful), Cosmo pick up rest with mind, and the four of us walked into hall. Carina cut in front of Tivan, and he let her, so she could pick new room. Choice was pretty obvious. Carina chose room with meticulously put-together display of Ba-Bani priestess’ bedroom chambers. Pre-Civil War, that had embroiled whole planet. Was very hard for Tivan to procure, especially with Ba-Banis’ current status. But, word was word.

So, enormous bed, stone curios, and incense that tickle Cosmo’s nose were, with some Collectorly sighs, Carina’s now.

She wish Tivan good night, brush teeth with cheap toothpaste, and slept very well that night. Cosmo join her, but not without givink Tivan hearty good night and good mornink, thankink him many times, and sneezink quite a bit.
Brood promise Cosmo that she would make sure Tivan would get sleep soon, and he did.

Next day, we breakfast on mornink buns, move her clothes, mull over Spartoi pottery remains (which Tivan really was not so attached to), plan ways to catch raccoons (who were still very much at large), and Tivan start with Carina’s piano lessons. Carina, Brood, and I stood by, while Tivan got on stage in green room and make sales pitch.

Is first time he do that for a Carina, let alone lower piano for her, and is part of scheme he let her in on. How he phrase his scheme was elegant, monotone, and a little hypnotic. So like him.

With each question, there was often answer, he began. Sometimes it was absolute, or right, or neither of those thinks. But, as Carina was probably findink out, answers in and of themselves were not satisfactory. Answers were plentiful, often right under nose. True satisfaction from askink question and gettink answer came from patiently pursuink truth. Musical instruments and playink them could satisfy her desire for instant gratification. Plink a key, you get a note. He demonstrate by playink simple Mozart composition about stars, with one finger on one hand pluckink at each key. Other hand he use to cover mouth while yawnink. Stage underneath did not move and there was no other instrumental accompniament. Then, Tivan reached into bedazzled folder and pulled out sheet music. If she had patience to practice and learn more complex tune, he promised, it could be even more pleasink. He demonstrate by playink even more complex sonata with both hands. There were bright lights, accompaniment, and the like! Was very lovely! Lots of applause when he was done! When he was done, he told her they would give this try for a week. If she did not like it, she could pick next think to try out.

Sounded reasonable to her, but she still had to inquire why they didn’t just meditate like people typically recommend other people with aggression issues and impulsivity (like her).

Tivan’s reason was that Carina was still a very young think and, when his own daughter was around her age, she used to get very bored when Tivan and his wife try to teach her meditation. (Is most he ever tell a Carina, as far as Cosmo knew, of his old family!)

Carina bit lip and asked if she was allowed to know name of Tivan’s wife or daughter. Tivan denied her, as he usually did. For once, she did not protest this refusal to share information.

While Tivan got on with teachink Carina proper hand position and basic notes, Cosmo confer with Brood about escaped-raccoon problem. As new Chief of Security, Cosmo knew this was challenge Cosmo could prove self with.

But, after talkink with Brood, it was clear neither of us were in right mindset to have this done. Cosmo like Tivan’s cages and so did Brood. We didn’t really understand why anyone would want to get out of them, especially when they came with free food and healthcare.

So, when Tivan let Carina plink away at piano on own for a bit, Cosmo ask him if Cosmo can assemble security team. (It was measure Cosmo discuss last night, but was still good to check.) Tivan assured Cosmo that this craft had older models of robot sentries that he could fix up, but Cosmo woof that it is not enough. Robots were good and obedient, but security team should not be all good and obedient. We needed rule-breaker, to get into mind of other rule-breakers.

Is reason why Tivan usually prefer hirink criminals for his work. Only so much that could be done legally, so he usually preferred thinks done lawlessly. But, to play like that, you needed team who could understand other players in this illegal field.

He approve, with caveat that he had to screen my selections.
Cosmo vouched heavily for Corrina. Tivan denied, based on her limited capabilities. Instead, Cosmo’s security team consisted of Cosmo, Brood, and Howard the Duck. (Cosmo was planning to screen more, when we had time, but raccoons really had to be dealt with.)

Nyet. Cosmo still did not like Howard, but, of Collection, we had to agree that he was second-most experienced with escaping from containment unit (after raccoons) and probably around first with causing us mischief. Tivan just asked that we be careful with subject G5-18-2E18 (Howard’s classification), if we manage to convince him, because Howard was biggest proof in Collection that there were other Universes different than our own.

Howard was very mad at us, after we put him in solitary, and he flipped us off with feathery-nodule-finger-think when he saw Cosmo and Brood approach (like he always did); but, when we spoke our case, he revealed to us that he shared our hatred for raccoons too. Something about their weird little clawed fingers creeped him out and the way raccoons would get very violently protective over garbage was beyond his understanding. For payment of getting out of cage and getting better feed, he would help us.

Took three tries to capture raccoons, because they are terribly clever creatures. Cosmo tried talking calmly with raccoons. Brood took on form of Aakon woman and pretended to be mannequin in display of jazz band, but she got eager and struck too soon. Howard’s idea was terribly brilliant. We just had to wait until older models of sentries were updated (which took while) but reformatted so that they could function with emptied-out-center-of-chest, we put up as display, and did not activate machine until critters spent a couple of weeks going into cavity and living in it. (We operate robots by giving command in long-dead language of Taneleer’s culture. Is security measure that Tivan had, so that few others could hack into his machines.) Howard’s plan was terrible, but it worked. After success of capturing raccoons, Tivan told Brood and Howard of what he’d told Carina and Cosmo of his visions and the long-term scheme we’d had going. Brood heartily believed and Howard shrugged, more or less accepting it in ducky-way.

We operate as three of us with giant human-shaped robot sentry, unless Carina and/or Tivan came back. Collection on craft became mostly under our care and protection. Our weird, new little group was significantly less cute than group of Cosmo, Carina, and Collector, but it was still technically expanded version of Collector’s Crew. Cosmo call this extension Cosmonauts, so that they also start with C’s. Howard said it was dumb. Brood was good with it and so was sentry, so, by democratic process of voting, we were all Cosmonauts. Cosmo loved them all very much, especially Brood and even robots and Howard a little. There was no need to add more to Cosmonauts.

Carina stuck to practicing piano, even when Tivan was gone from Craft, but she would play and tell all of us what she would see when Tivan would take her along.

Once, it was to see Shi’ar opera. Was very beautiful, with a lot of singing and flying. Carina found herself tearing up after first aria and got to dry eyes with hanky discreetly passed from Taneleer.

Tivan got invitation in exchange for supply of biological information of aggressive neighbor Kree Empire’s dominant species. Intelligence was excellent for galvanizing Shi’ar defences.

Another time, Carina join him for dinner in house of Xandarian Broker. Broker was sweet, telling Tivan about beloved Xandarian culture and worries of nephew-or-son-or-some-young-male-relative falling in with Ravagers. Carina also got to hear more about Peter Quill, and how Yondu was bringing him along more often to private meetups with Broker. (Broker did not enjoy Quill’s lack of seriousness, but he had worked with Udonta for long enough time that it was tolerated.) Udonta’s crew was being tested by Taneleer, through acquisition jobs from the Collector through the Broker (but Collector’s name was never given), and they were out-performing the other Ravager crews that the Collector pretended to consider hiring. Broker was pleased to hear that Tivan was pleased, since
that meant more business from someone as esteemed as Taneleer. Carina and Collector had to leave Xandar almost immediately after dinner, before Nova could figure that Taneleer and his young associate were in area.

It was after the dinner that Carina had clever conjecture that Udonta did not allow Quill to be eaten because he was growing attached to Quill. May not be other way around, but, thus far from Broker’s updates, it seemed that Quill had yet to break away and betray Udonta (if that was still happenink). Could be possible that to hire Quill, we could not have Broker give information only to him. Broker did not trust Quill alone. Tivan believed that Broker’s lips could get too loose and information could spill to others that Broker had more faith in completink job. We had invested too much time in Quill, to have information spread to too many others in Ravager-bunches than him. To have information of Morag channeled to Quill, it would probably have to be sent to Udonta. It could also be possible that we may just have to hire both, if they were attached and Quill would not betray him. Taneleer noted that is a very good, clever observation.

Time passed. Cosmo got even bigger, so Tivan got more material for Cosmo’s outfit and Howard helped Cosmo adjust suit. Carina grew out of teens and more into pretty young-adulthood. We all celebrated her birthdays with cake, music, and dancing. Tivan often had to be away from parties Cosmonauts would hold, but he would not forget to gift. Often it was simple thing like bands to do up her hair or more piano books. She preferred that to extravagant gifts. It was in this period that Carina stopped thinking of herself as Maverdevia, which was name that she never really liked anyway. Carina always sounded much nicer to her. We kept up on progress of Quill, who, for some birthday, got own ship (but still was workink in capacity with Udonta). After the two years and then some, Gamora still took time to read the Zehoberei messages Tivan would hire someone to write for her.

And then, it happened. The war between the Nova and Kree was pronounced over. We were happy, at first, but also nervous.

It wasn’t until some months after that we had confirmation of other thing that we weren’t hopink as much to hear, over Xandarian radio news channel. Ronan and Thanos were an item. Many innocent peoples in Xandarian outposts were being slaughtered by them.

Most of Collector’s Crew cried, even Howard. Only robot sentry and Tivan did not. We knew he could not tell law-enforcement agencies, but it was still terrible knowink this could happen and watchink this awful think come true.

This was when Carina begged Tivan to make his museum public and to give tours. At this point, it was really just him and us that enjoyed his Collection. Peoples were dyink, but, with Collection, there was chance they would not be forgotten by public. Tivan promised to test out on KNOWHERE.

It was finally time for us to set up in KNOWHERE. Because, with risk we would take with obtainink object of great power, we could no longer travel so openly. Especially against combined enemies of Ronan and Thanos. Our operations needed base with excellent security.

We’d spent so long gettink to know our pieces and gettink them ready, so now it was time to get them together. Soon, box would be shakink.

Chapter End Notes
There is another reference to the Howard the Duck comic!

Thursday: the rest of the stuff. And maybe also a rather gratuitous Stan Lee cameo.
Although I’m pretty sure that Uatu can’t appear in the official Marvel Cinematic Universe, because he first appeared in an issue of “Fantastic Four” (which is still owned by Fox, I think), I buy the theory that Stan Lee is him. Other than the, you know, nonintervention-thing being broken quite a few times.

Anyway, there isn’t really an official origin for KNOWHERE in the comics. Abnett and Lanning, according to Wikipedia, were apparently just like, ‘let’s have a severed Celestial head in space,’ and, soon afterwards said something else to the effect of, ‘with, like, a talking Russian dog on it.’ So. It’s time to make something up based on the film and artbook. (Like, seriously, if you haven’t, go check out the artbook for “Guardians of the Galaxy”. It is such a good read.)

Oh, and, I swear I like Adam Warlock. His comics are some of Jim Starlin's finest work and, if you really like weird space religions, I would recommend any of his series. I also think some Asgardians are definitely butts (i.e. Odin "WORST SPACE-DAD EVER" Borson), but they're a pretty ok bunch.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

KNOWHERE, Liho. Starts with a ‘kay’, so it is not nowhere. Is pun. Because it is in head of Celestial. Tivan talked in detail about it, once with us, after simple dinner of dish fairly (but not at all) comparable to Terran ratatouille. And was never repeated after. It was really special, what he told us. Cosmo can never forget it.

Although Cosmo does not remember when exactly it happened. Cosmo thinks it was days after Kree and Nova warrink ended or maybe when we found out about Ronan and Thanos. Either way, Carina was of drinkink age and she, Howard, Taneleer, and Brood broke out some good Shi’ar wine in the green room. Cosmo did not join because Cosmo is dog, happy teetotaler, and would have to act as...what do you call it?

Nyet , not responsible adult!

Ah, designated driver! Cosmo would have to insure Taneleer’s robot sentries got everyone to bedrooms safely and man the controls, to insure Howard would not reprogram autopilot and redirect us to Restaurant at End of Universe. Or some place like that. Cosmo got to like and trust Howard a little more than most ducks, but alcohol did funny thinks to peoples and duck-peoples.

KNOWHERE, Taneleer dreamily mused with a glass of red wine in his hand and slow gesturink, KNOWHERE holds no allegiance to any empire and falls under the legal jurisdiction and time-table of none. It is a near unreachable place, out of known time and known space, a chaotic little dream contained in the cranium of a Beink that some mistook as divine. It is in this place, and this place alone, that only criminals may enter and pick a god’s brain, perchance to find matter of worth.

This only made Carina giggle, as she plunked a bit at piano keys, and Howard insist on toppink Taneleer off and addink more to his cup of fine Sryllan Supernova glass. (Cup was highly durable, of same material as containment units’ glass. Was in case he had to poison enemy surreptitiously,
with acid of some sort. Very clever!) Brood was already asleep, so, really, only Cosmo heard this and yipped happily, to let Taneleer know it was nice idea. Taneleer, he smiled somethink careworn and patted Cosmo between Cosmo’s ears. It was nice!

Takin over a planet is hard work. Does not surprise Cosmo that even someone as powerful as Gast struggled to get it done. You not only have to overthrow existink governments, but you also have to upend all systems and replace them with ones that work for you. Is much easier to do what Taneleer did, and either purchase large shares of governments or buy unused, big property in space, with knowledge that there was some sort of marketable resource to keep people comink to property and livink there. KNOWHERE took hundreds of years to fully develop. But Tivan, he had years to spare and patience to have it done. It was through his very careful experimentation that he found materials worth minink in this skull. It was also through his ties to black markets all over Universe that he found purveyors for the Celestial’s byproducts and contacts with governments, cultivated through wartime supplyink and consultation, that he was able to shunt first wave of workers. Criminals, his preferred hires, considered worst of worst. There was collar around workers in early days, that would shock them if they went into restricted areas or tried to escape. Collars were eliminated after workers were settled, years later. All in that first wave chose to stay, even after term was served. Through word of mouth in only the lowest bellies of criminal underworlds, lower than weiner-dog bellies, that even outlaws came to work willingly, to mine head of Celestial.

Why was this?

Because the very worst outlaws were often denied basic rights in their homeworlds. No longer could they vote, they were looked down on by everyone, and they were often refused jobs. Created huge brain-drain in galaxy! Here, in the Celestial’s head, they were able to operate as part of a society (albeit a lawless one). They could be among people like them, earn good and equal wage regardless of gender or race, and even enjoy good healthcare. Some workers could even renegotiate term of contracts, to run own shop, bar, or club in lieu of workink with mines. Side-businesses like that were good for society in KNOWHERE. Taneleer even found way to have some cases send pay to their families on their respective homeworlds. Even if the work was tough and the screenink could be stringent, as one would expect of Taneleer, lots of outlaws came and many also stayed in this prisonworld.

Bit of near-indestructible, hard-to-find livink space in space, teemink with people loyal to Taneleer, was definitely good spot for Collection to set up base of operations. There was older facility, guarded by newer sentry bots and fortified with decade of work for purpose of containink newer objects of power. All those benefits to base and Tivan got a twisted pleasure out of repurposink an ancient godlike beink’s cranium.

A person like the Collector, who had lived such a terribly long time, grew a special dislike for the rules of empires (that he always felt would not last long) and for psuedo-godlike beinks. Tivan did not believe himself to be a god, in spite of his abilities and good Looks, and, once, asked Cosmo to throw him out of airlock if he ever acted like one. It would not kill him, but it would do wonders to set him back in right mindset. Person as smart as him, who also wished to protect Universe, knew what a threat he would be if he ever fell into that way of thinkink.

Cosmo believes in a God. Is rare for Communist, but, then again, Cosmo is not pure Communist. Tivan also believed in somethink of one, but it wasn’t the same as Cosmo’s.

There is another old man on Terra. (This old man and maybe Cosmo are probably why Tivan was so fascinated with Terra.) But, anyway, very old man! Old-lookink too, not like Taneleer and Gast. Tivan collected security footages of old man, who appeared in so many places in short span of time. Man could not be skilled teleporter, because he was very accident prone. Teleporters had to be
carefuller, or they could appear in concrete block and would not appear again. Old man also managed to survive drinkink irradiated blood that compromised South American soft drink. Is highly unusual for older, Terran-based homo sapiens! A couple of times, old man has begun appearink on other planets in our galaxy. Sometimes of Xandar, even! Once, Taneleer thought of addink old man to his Collection.

But that is story for another time.

Maybe.

Annoyance with space-deities was why he obtained giant cocoon. Vision of alternate Universe let him see, in it, there was figure who would be worshipped by terrible cult. Cult could kill a lot of people. That, and figure seemed a little overly Byronic to be liked by Tivan. So he obtained, for surprisinkly low price, and kept cocoon. All of us had to be careful around think, lest we wake whiny god-figure.

Other annoyink space-deities to him were Asgardians. They are kind of pseudo-space-gods that are dishy babes, accordink to Carina. (Cosmo never actually got to meet Asgardians, because Tivan was fairly certain they’d sense the telepathic capabilities on Cosmo and it could jeopardize trust he spent many years buildink up.) Their advances are admirable to Taneleer. Holograms, teleportation, unification of multiple worlds. And what is it they usually do? They stick to own corner of Universe in Nine Realms and wage wars among themselves. Taneleer wasn’t the most outgoing, outside of business ventures, but this incredible arrogance got to even him. Beink given task of examink and safekeepink Dark Elf upset him even more, since, accordink to intelligence that he had gathered from local lore, all of the Dark Elves were killed or buggered off in ships. Did not return until many, many, many years later and, then, also got killed on Terra.

So what was it that he’d gotten for Collection? Was it actual Dark Elf, procured when ship was makink pitstop, or mere hologram construct? He could not verify, since he’d never been able to procure one. Nonetheless, gift could not be turned down or trust would be broken. So Taneleer treated it like actual Dark Elf and observed like proper Dark Elf.

Even though he felt it could be massive waste of time.

But it would be worth it, he told us, after Asgardians sent communication to us about needink him to have an object in safekeepink after Terra dealt with yet another alien invasion. (Terra was becomink hotbed of trouble lately. But it was gettink rest of Universe interested in them.)

That was when he sat us down in green room and told us about Infinity Stones. Objects of near-unimaginable power, formerly used by Celestials. Concentrated inglots of singularities from beginnnink of somethink, somethink, somethink. Taneleer said in lovely way, even with little audiovisual bits, but this Cosmo did not fully understand. Try hard as Cosmo could. Neither did Carina, Howard, or Brood, to Taneleer’s annoyance. So, he give us nice little summary. They do thinks that would make it bad think if someone bad (like Thanos) got all six. This just confused Carina more, who, although more mature, still questioned what Taneleer did and wondered aloud why he’d only spent last few years talkink about obtainink two of them when it was plainly obvious that he was interested in gatherink all six. He asked what led her to this conclusion, to which she gesticulated at very detailed light display of all six stones and insisted this was too much work in presentation to only want two stones and would have been very unnecessary to have even mentioned other four.

That was when he supposed that she was right and he gave very straight answer. For now, to his vast knowledge, window was openink for him to obtain two stones only. Others he still had to locate. Maybe with Gast’s and his other siblinks’ help. Or maybe not.
Anyway, takink in Dark Elf paid off. Asgardians went to KNOWHERE, bearink great object, and they left big, decorative burn-mark on our floor. We brought in carpet to cover it up.

Thinks were happenink very quickly. We spent very long time gettink ready for happeninks that were takink place in relatively quick succession. In few days we’d just touched down on KNOWHERE, got greetink from workers, and began movink thinks from Craft to new facility, Asgardians had sent message (about droppink by to give object of power) and so had Gamora.

Gamora. Cosmo mostly thinks Cosmo liked her, even if she seemed like psychopath at times. Some called her extendink sword Godslayer, coincidentally, because of the peerless, merciless way she’d wield it. But she’d still take time to read Zehoberei in our security footage. Then, just a day after we got message from Asgardians and before they arrived, while we were movink stuff in and sprucink place up for them, Howard came in and let us know we really had to watch security footage from Xandarian outpost from last day cycle.

Tivan never hired same people to write communications and set up cameras for Gamora. Was always a local, hired through an intermediary who was hired through an intermediary. They were screened very carefully before beink hired, usually never given task without a couple of years’ worth of experience in espionage. Cameras and messages were always set up at odd hours. In footage, our person was just put up Zehoberei on wall and was settink up camera. Person’s face only appeared at bottom of shot, which was shakink a little as he set-up camera. Then, all of a sudden, he was pulled under and took camera with him. Shot went black. Howard fast-forwarded a little, until picture was restored.

And there, before us, with Zehoberei song lyrics on wall just behind her, was Gamora. Starink right into shakink camera. She was wieldink Godslayer, growlink at cameraman to stop shakink. Growl didn’t work, so she yelled instead.

Shot remained still, now.

Gamora glared right into camera, lookink directly at us in way we had never seen before, and began deliverink message of her own. Even after interrogatink our guy, who she assured was workink the camera, she had no idea who we were or why we’d done what we were doink. It was dumb think, she claimed. But she wanted to cut to chase. She needed somebody to talk with, about legendary Orb (same object of power that was on Morag, that we were monitorink, but she did not mention location). If it meant anythink to us and if we made it worth her time. She just needed to know who we were and, if we were up to her snuff, where we could meet. When would be up to her. Feed cut and that was it.

We were silent after video. Until Carina said, without intendink offense, that she recalled Taneleer claimed nobody else knew where object was. She gave voice to awful assumption we all had, awful think we were afraid of happeink for years.

To his knowledge, he corrected. In three-hundred years time, fallen civilizations like Morag tended to fall out of common people’s minds. But the mind of Thanos, the Mad Titan, was unknowable even to immortal, intelligent seer like him.

Chapter End Notes

There’s a “Contest of Champions” reference somewhere in there.
Just before we hit the midpoint of this bizarre little tale, I'm going to need to take a week-long break to rejigger the outline that I'm currently following. Black Widow will be getting more to do, as are some other tagged characters. I might go back and edit a few things, but, if it's anything bigger than like an unintentional continuity error or unintentional grammar mistake, I'll put it in the beginning notes of the next chapter.

If there's anything you, the reader, absolutely want to see in this story, now is the time to make yourself heard. Request it, and I may try to work it in. I just ask, before you type it in and hit enter, to consider if it is something that would be tasteful and sensible for Liho the Cat to hear from Cosmo and/or Natasha.

Happy almost Easter. Go hug your pets and your family members. Whether you get it done in that order, or not, is entirely at your discretion.

Here's a song to play this break out: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_tWFhQ1A_8
Thanos

Chapter Notes

Hello again! I’m back, I watched stuff, read other things, and revised my outline; I also found some peeps theorizing that Thanos was working with the Collector. While it’d be pretty convoluted for the Collector to hire a maybe-Ally’s psuedodughter (when he could have just asked to borrow her instead) and Thanos is too smart to ever cooperate with anyone who tried to take his “kid”, I did read something in the comics that referenced Thanos and the Collector working together at least once and, apparently when asked about “Infinity War”, Josh Brolin expressed his excitement for doing scenes with Benicio Del Toro. So, yeah, I think it’d be a neat post-Guardians development.

Do I believe it could happen? Maybe. Maybe not.

Here we go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Natasha was a little quiet today. Wasn’t she, Liho? She did work a little late last night or this mornink. Cosmo asked her if she wanted to stay in bed, and we could brink her breakfast, but she didn’t want. She just got up, made her bed, and made breakfast for us.

I love her, Liho. I love her very much. She carries so much stress and smells so sad sometimes, but she always makes herself get on her feet and move on. It worries me a little, Liho. To carry so much and just make yourself keep on goink, is not easy on a person at all. Everything I love about her.

I love here so much, Liho. I don’t want to make her sad. I don’t want to see her sad.

Do you know how to do it, Liho? How to make people smell less sad?

Gast knew. But that is because Gast is master-manipulator, who probably works with weird, violent types all the time. Cosmo is only dog.

No, Liho, is not dust-speck in both of my eyes this time. Cosmo really is--ah, spasibo! Liho, your fur is third best handkerchief Cosmo has ever used in lifetime.

Nyet, your guess is wrong. First-best was not Tivan’s. Well, not anymore. Was one given to Carina-Maverdevia by Tivan. Second-best was Tivan’s, when Cosmo was very tiny dog and had cold. That was when Corrina was Carina, just before she displeased him.
Do you mind hearing, Liho?

Spasibo, my comrade! Cosmo will start with second-best first! Cosmo and Corrina were waterink Everblooms when she and Cosmo got into jokin' water-fight. Was good fun at time, but it got in my suit and I got sick. Cosmo was actin' very unusually. Cosmo was hot in temperature, not eatin', sadder than usual, and throwin' up. Tivan, he was so worried and a little upset with Corrina, but it wasn't what completely displeased him. Corrina had more chores to do for next few days, since Cosmo got sick and Tivan was mindin' Cosmo, lettink Cosmo use his very soft and silky handkerchiefs and lettink Cosmo lie in Tivan's luxurious bed. Is second-best because terrible-think happened after, Liho. When Cosmo was better, we went about normal business. Until we were about to head to specimen of Brethren's cage, one of Tivan's favorite specimens in his Collection. Corrina, she tried to convince us to examine other place, to leave Brethren for later. This got Tivan incredibly suspicious, made him more adamant about checkin' up on Brethren. We did, and found specimen that had been gone for forty hours. It turned out that Corrina gave Brethren strong antibiotic. Tivan recognized, when he saw way that Brethren appeared eaten from inside, and admonished her. Brethren was of species altered by Celestials and bacterial in basis. Antibiotic broke down Brethren specimen, leavin' barely husk behind. Gast could not come. If Corrina hadn't hidden this and we had known sooner, Brethren could have been saved. Tivan had told her many times not to use antibiotic, but she was too young. So she wound up in Collection, with lit-up cuffs, collar, and nodes attached to head. Sometimes, nodes to head would port into information about Collection that Tivan knew was vital and knew she could have forgotten.

He'd told Cosmo that she was bein' kept there for own good, but it really scared Cosmo, even though Cosmo loves him very much and his hankies really are nice.

Cosmo got to use first-best handkerchief after we had seen message from Gamora. Tivan, he was so anxious after message from Gamora. We didn't know how exactly he'd planned to hire Gamora before she spoke with, but plan had to change. We didn't know what she knew of Orb. We did not know what terrible people she worked with knew either. We did not know if this could be stink operation, to smoke us out for her fake Dad. We did not know if, by tellin' her location of Orb, we could help Thanos find it. And Tivan was very worried. He'd tried contactin' Gast. Gast was too busy to respond. Tivan told us Gast was doin' many thinks includin' seekin' incredible acquisition, who changed face at least twice maybe. Possibly induced by excess of radiation. Or maybe he was plastic surgery junkie. Either way, made it hard to keep eye on him.

Even though Tivan and Carina were gettin' along better than when Carina was just teenager, they would still have times when they would get upset with each other. This became one of those times. Carina, questionin' thinks like always, ask why Tivan didn't just use device to port to Temple on Morag to grab object for self. And Tivan got very florid in the face, but he didn't yell as he try to calmly tell her that sendin' people to grab Orb was somethin' of a final assessment for group to gather rest of Stones for him. Obtainin' Gamora for group was absolutely necessary. If he could not convince her, and quickly, we were left with just Peter Quill and maybe Yondu and Yondu's crew. Peter Quill seemed like ok-enough guy a lot of the time, just very inoffensive and clueless about many thinks. Was not good on own. Would have been slightly more favorable to have Yondu and Yondu's crew yet they were more offensive, maybe less clueless, but too many and too unpredictable. (Plus, there was chance that Peter Quill could still betray them down the line. Would have been better for Tivan's plans if he were able to make deal with Peter Quill post-betrayal.)

Gamora, on other hand, was clever, disciplined, and formidable. Tivan emphasized importance of takin' her from Thanos, of psychological victory it would be if he managed to steal the Mad Titan's favorite daughter away from him and of message it could send to rest of Galaxy. If Gamora broke away, it could tell rest that Thanos' methods were not perfect. Could cripple Thanos' influence.

Carina hesitate to say it, but Cosmo could hear her egg-white thoughts. Even Carina thought tactic
was cruel, to take another man’s daughter and use her like that. Awful person like Thanos deserved it, yet it couldn’t warm up the cold-blood of act any bit. She couldn’t help herself, Cosmo knew, but she had to blurt out question if Tivan had ever seen or dealt with Thanos.

Thanos we hear all about in news, with worlds he conquers and destroys and the children he snatches from them. But seeing him is rarer.

Tivan point to his head and confirm that he had seen that hateful purple face in more than one vision, smilink as rest of Universe suffered. Often it was Thanos in his visions that razed Universe and often, Tivan claimed, Thanos smiled grin wide enough to tear apart any normal humanoid’s face.

Maybe it was way that his deep-set gaze became so stern. Or way that he trembled, as he gestured to forehead. Or maybe how his own mouth so subconsciously imitated expression that has haunted him for so long. Perhaps it was combination of many thinks, but somethink about it made Carina very quiet and tremble a little herself. Cosmo did not know what to do, if Cosmo had to comfort Carina or calm down Tivan. But, by this point, Tivan had worked with Carina for long enough, stood over her shoulder as she practiced piano, shared enough meals with her that he could sense what Cosmo could in this moment (and without telepathic powers to boot!); so, he stood more solidly, remove finger from face, stop his smilink, and ask her if she want to leave room for a while. So she did, without answerink. And he asked if Cosmo could go with her, to insure she would be okay. Tivan would plan with Howard, who had previously and continuously proved to have pretty tactically sound mind. Cosmo was not jealous of Howard, because Cosmo was very relieved that Tivan was ok with Cosmo checkink up on Carina.

Place Carina went was not to bedroom or piano, but right to foot of Corrina’s containment unit. Carina, she she lay head down in front of Corrina and started to cry. Although the two were so close in age, you could say Corrina acted little more like one of Carina’s older sisters or mother to Carina. Corrina was certainly nicer than either of Carina’s real ones were, and right away she got close to glass and spoke such kind Krylorian words to Carina. It was hard to see her eyes with her hair all loose and in her face.

The years of her contract were almost up. She was almost done with what was considered Krylorian young adulthood. Then, Corrina, Carina, and maybe Cosmo (if Cosmo wanted to join) would get out together. (Corrina was a little wary about me, especially after findink out I could talk and read minds, but she knew Carina loved Cosmo so very much.) We could catch up on Bereet films together, find out what had become of Bereet’s daughter Bereet’s career.

This didn’t ease up Carina’s cryink at all. So tearfully, she told Corrina that she didn’t know what she wanted anymore. Universe could be endink and it frightened her. And other thinks she did not understand. So, she turn to Cosmo and ask Cosmo to find for her. Cosmo was so happy to be able to help her, so Cosmo looked in past her eggwhite-thoughts and found somethink Cosmo never expect to see yet it unsurprised too.

Carina, she’d spent very long time resentink her own father, forgettink her uncle, loathink yet missink her cousin, beink little bit mad at Howard still for trick he played on her when she was younger (even though he apologize and they get along better now), and even gettink a little upset with Gast for not visitink in so long and especially for not helpink us this time. But, for first time in so long, there was male adult in life that she trusted. At last, she sincerely cared for Tivan and was worried about his well-beink. Trust was still a little marred by caution, given thinks he did callously like order murder, withhold information, and imprison lovely people like Corrina, but it was gleamink there like lovely little star. He never hugged her or held her hand (unless it was to shake it), yet this didn’t bother her.
Oh, Cosmo was so happy that two people who Cosmo loved very much, who really needed to love someone and to be loved back, could finally care about each other. So happy that Cosmo tear up and started crying. Somethink about Cosmo’s barks of joy made Carina laugh a little, maybe because she was just lookink for somethink like this to cheer her up, and she pulled out Tivan’s old hanky and started to wipe Cosmo’s eyes. Cosmo just got so choked up, but Cosmo still managed to let it out and tell her that she was afraid for Tivan because, very deep down, she cared about him.

This answer produced the most interestink reaction. Carina’s eyes got a little big and her smile faded a little. Corrina said nothink for a bit, and then tapped a little more desperately against the glass. Her voice was a little different when she said what she had to. Still soothink in its way, but not as slow and easy a pace. She begged Maverdevia to let her know if this was true. Carina didn’t answer, just lettink more tears well around her eyes and fall down her face so slowly. Again, Corrina tapped the glass and implored Maverdevia to be careful around Tivan and to keep her wits. Person like Tivan, Corrina reminded Carina, could be pretty unpredictable. Strategically nice, intellectualizink horrible treatments, and operatink with barely a conscience. Carina still said nothink, still wipink Cosmo’s nose and tears. Somebody needed to wipe Carina’s, so Cosmo wiggled a bit out of her hold, climbed a bit on top of her, got face close to hers, and started to lick. This got more laughs out of Carina, breakink her silent spell. We stayed with Corrina a little longer. Then, Brood’s growls echoed across the sound-system. We promised we’d see Corrina again tomorrow.

Brood wanted to make dinner that night, all by herself. Meal consisted of chopped lovely raw meat, with herbs and vegetables. Tartare. Tivan was already at table, lookink much calmer, and with Howard next to him. Carina took a place near Howard and Cosmo sat between her and Brood.

Howard informed us that we had situation handled. We got in contact with guerilla soldiers in faction opposed to Gamora and her forces, soldiers who were already prepared to perish and probably would do so, and offered to fly out their families and people in their hometowns, via mercenaries hired through conduit, and support them financially for rest of their lifetimes. If they approached the Deadliest Woman in the Universe and told her what Tivan allowed to be known about him. Only two words would be given. Collector. Conjunction. He would not yet give out his full name, but his moniker. Is pretty infamous moniker in Universe, associated with him, but did not outright confirm him. Could be imitator. Conjunction was a black market planet he partly owned.

Was done.

People of Conjunction would not be warned of Gamora’s possible arrival, to avoid havink word spread to wrong ears, but security would be surreptitiously fortified, should she arrive with forces. Tivan would not meet with her in flesh, instead optink for hologram. We would give Gamora about three days to show up on planet. As soon as Tivan’s eyes and ears on the ground spotted her, we would relay information of job on Morag to Broker and give explicit instruction to give only to Yondu and his crew and to act as swiftly as possible. If she did not show up in three days, we would relay information anyway. If she did, Tivan would offer job and also try to assess what exactly she knew. If she would accept, upon her exit, she would find craft that she used marked in Zehoberei. Letters would inform what she would be paid, should she complete job, and numbers would give coordinates to KNOWHERE. (Person as clever as her would figure that out.) Dependink on what else she knew, there would either be one-word order to take Orb from Ronan or take from Broker (after Peter Quill and/or Ravagers give to him). Anybody else that saw craft would mistake symbols on it as a gang-sign. Ducky ask us what we thought of it.

Cosmo gave approvink woah. Carina just nodded, lettink us know it was very sound. No questions from her.
Howard didn’t seem to mind.

But, Tivan! Tivan looked over at me, then at Carina, and back to me. I sent note only to him that she was still a little shaken. Because she was worried about him. (Cosmo was ok with tellink this, because, to most normal people, this sort of think would be obvious. Howard, Brood, and Sentries knew. Ah, but not Tivan!) This made Tivan break eye-contact, focus a little more intently on the slab of meat on his plate, then back to Carina as he began to tell us that many governments have trusted him with incredibly deadly weapons and he’d managed to safekeep them. This would be no different.

Carina said nothink.

Faces are a little weird, Liho. You spend so long lookink at them. There are often eyes, mouth, somethink of nose, ears, chin, etcetera (dependink on species). You can spend so long lookink at a face, but then notice a bit of green in eyes or beauty mark in chub. For many years now, Tivan had worked with Carina and it was only now that, as he studied her very serious expression, he really notice the scars on her cheeks and chin. He had seen them before, mistook them for pimples or weird birthmarks. But they just didn’t grab his attention. Only now did the pattern, the oddity of its symmetry, grip him. He check with Cosmo if they’d always been there, and Cosmo only let him know that she came to this ship with them but he should ask her how she got them in private. Since it was somethink she preffered to keep secret, like how he didn’t tell too many about the names of his family or how he was probably last of his kind.

Rest of the meal, more or less, was in silence, until we all let Brood know that raw meat she prepare was delicious.

People are very weird, Liho. You’d think when they find out they care about each other, after wantink so much to care about someone and to be cared about, you’d think that would make them happy. You’d think it would make them brave enough to trust, to share their secrets. With some people, it does. With others, though, Liho, you just don’t know how they’d take it until you’d see it for yourself.

Chapter End Notes

Just to make things clear about the timeline:
Late 1950’s and 1960’s- The USSR sent out cosmonaut dogs.
2003ish - Maverdevia, aged at the Krylorian equivalent of 17 Terran years, joined the crew. (The Hulk referenced was, at first, Bana’s. Then he became Norton’s and Ruffalo’s.)
2014ish - The Kree-Nova War ended, Ronan and Thanos got together, etc.

Alright, Thursday: Nothing ever lasts.

Except trouble.
Chapter Notes

After some fairly long chapters, this and the next few are looking a little lighter in word-count.

Please enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Comrade Liho! Comrade Liho!

Comrade Koshechka!

Please be calm down! Natasha has been gone for few days, but you need not worry! We have more than enough food last us for rest of week and Natasha has to be back before then!

How do I know? Because she is kind! She would not be leavink us without good reason!

Nyet! Natasha would never abandon us! Somethink probably happened! She has been livink under cover! Is hard way to be livink!

Nyet, Liho, nyet! I am sorry your old owners did that to you, but Natasha isn’t them! She bought Cosmo gifts! She bought you cheese! We danced together, we ate together!

Liho, no! She gave me gifts because she is kind! There are less kind ways of testink others you don’t trust! She could have kept me on leash and starved me! She could have put me in tiny cage and hid me from light! She didn’t have to let me out for walkses and watch movie and talk with me!

Nyet, Liho, nyet! Cosmo--Cosmo is so sorry about yellink at you, Liho. Cosmo is sorry. Cosmo is so sorry. Cosmo is so sorry. It is okay that you are afraid. It is normal. It is okay.

Cosmo is afraid too.

Cosmo has lived with aliens, dealt with criminals, and walked beats alone on lawless space godhead, but Cosmo doesn’t know what to do. Cosmo has already lost Carina and Tivan and Cosmo doesn’t want to lose Natasha too.

Cosmo has worked as watchdog, as a part of duty as Chief of Security on Collector’s craft and on KNOWHERE. I am used to stayink up at weird hours. Please go to sleep, my friend. Get some rest. I will wake you, if I see her comink in window.

I will not be gone when you wake. I promise. You are my friend, Liho. Cosmo does not abandon friends. I love you, Liho. You are so patient and sweet. I love you and I won’t leave you tonight.

What do you mean? I can’t stay forever.

I am goink to have to leave one day, Liho. To continue lookink for Tivan.

I have to. Because KNOWHERE and Universe need him. Because Gast is probably still too busy.
Because governments he advise and safekeep objects for probably haven’t noticed he is gone. Because he could be havink vision or defenseless or be injured or captured by worse people and I need to know he is okay.

It isn’t because I don’t love you or I’ll ever stop lovink you and Natasha, Liho. He is just the only family I have left. Maybe he wasn’t entirely good, but he still took care of me. He still listened to me when nobody else would, he would tend to me, and he would teach me so many wonderful thinks. (Howard used to say it was because I was his favorite, and maybe I was. I was a little embarrassed by how nicely he treated me, but it was far better than I’d ever been treated before.) He even appointed me as Head of Security on KNOWHERE, and had older gentleman holdink title gracefully retire with good pension, because he was so confident in my abilities even though I am only dog. He convinced entire workforce of outlaws to give me chance to prove self, informink them they would be discriminatink by species if they did not and remindink them that was somethink he and their unions agreed that he could not do. When I was only test animal, thrown into space to be forgotten. Only him that see use in little dog like me, or terrible Long-One, or frightenink Gamora, or weird Peter Quill, or talkink raccoon and tree and...and blue-grey-green-brownish human-shaped muscle-mass with red markinks, or planets’ outlaws, or talkink duck-human like Howard, or last-of-kind Brood, or bizarro Gast, or sad girl like Carina.

But it won’t be easy, leavink you both. Even if I have to. I am still goink to love you, my friend. I promise I will always love you, and I will not leave you while we are waitink for Natasha to return.

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Liho! Liho! Liho!

The door! Do you hear the jingle-janglink of keys? Somebody is openink the front door!

Do not be afraid, Liho! She is back! She has come b--what is it, Liho?

Ah, in the balcony--!

It is Comrade Belka!

Do not worry, Liho! All belkas are friends of Cosmo now. Come with Cosmo to balcony. See how friendly Comrade bushy-tail Belka can be.

Balcony door goes open--hello, Comrade! What brinks you to Cosmo’s and Liho’s and Nata--oop, Betsy’s home?

Get out? Oh, that is rude think to tell someone in own home!

Da , person that was tailink Cosmo nearly week ago is comink home. Is cute blonde!

Nyet?

Brunette?

Brun-- bozhe moi! She is takink long time with keys! You are right! Come, Liho, we have to go.

Nyet, we are not jumpink off balcony! Landink could hurt, even if you would land on feet! Cosmo has to use device in doggy tag. We will port.

Do not worry, Cosmo has done many times before.
We will do short distance.

Come, Liho. Come.

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Oh, Cosmo is sorry, Liho. Cosmo did not know it would upset your stomach so much...nyet, Comrade--back away into shadow of trash bins! We cannot let brunette see us!

Ah, my suit! Cosmo left Cosmo’s suit behind!

Nyet, we can’t--it is alright, my friend. Cosmo does not need suit for mild Terran atmosphere anyway. This is not weird new frontier, but Cosmo’s homeworld! I will be alright!

Comrade Belka, do you and your comrades know where we can find blonde?

Alright, we will port there in short distances. Comrade Belka, can you operate device since you know way? Just hold it and us, think of destination, and we will be on way.

Just give Liho some time to throw up between each port.

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Natasha! Natasha! Oh, Natasha, please do not be alarmed! Liho, my friend, it is not polite to be throwink up on shoe of Natasha, who loves you very much!

Who is squirrel who ran by your open window and threw up out of it? Oh, Natasha, this is Cosmo’s friend, Comrade Belka! Da, same belka Cosmo help find nut!

Comrade Belka, this is Natasha!

Ooh, drats! I mean Betsy, Betsy!

Comrade Belka, can you keep that secret, please?

Oh thank you, Comrade!

What do you mean ask her if she knows a Boris? Is this another American cartoon think?

It is! Or you would not be laughink like that!

Natasha--Natasha, whatever it is we did that was wrong, that made you check into cramped little motel room at edge of town without tellink us, we are sorry. We miss you. You could have called telephone in our apartment and Cosmo could have answered. And Cosmo is really sorry about not tellink you about doggy tag havink portink device in it. Cosmo knew you already didn’t trust Cosmo and Cosmo was afraid you wouldn’t trust Cosmo even more if--

Natasha? What are those on the wall by your bed?

Ah, is photos of Cosmo in suit and in park! Quite a few! Ah, you really got my good side! And other dogs in black-and-white!

Ah, there is Laika! Her suit is so interestink! So different than Cosmo’s! Oh, are all cosmonaut dogs! But how tiny they look compared to Cosmo!

And are pictures of us! In market! When we were buyink Liho--
Natasha.

Natasha, where did you get these pictures?

They were posted on our door...

The brunette!

What brunette? She came to the apartment, Natasha! I did not see her, but Comrade Belka--Comrade Belka, how does she look?

Pale, thin brunette with sunken sort of eyes. Very slow-moving. Wearink jeans and dark shirt with leather jacket. Such a detailed memory you have! Havink with determined look in-- bozhe moi, Comrade!

Is she in your sight in window?

Oh, why did you not tell us she is arrivink in line-of-vision and gettink off of motorcycle? Get away from window, Comrade!

How did she do that? How did she find us--never mind!

Da, Natasha! We have to be gettink out!

Very far and very fast!

Natasha, I am sorry. It is probably not easy to trust Cosmo, knowink Cosmo hid think about doggy tag, but please trust Cosmo one more time. We have to use device in doggy tag. Cosmo does not know Terra well, only heard of it and watched video clips, so Cosmo does not know place that is far and safe for us to hide from brunette.

You have to. We have to hold onto each other and you have to touch doggy tag, while thinkink of safe place.

Please.

Cosmo promised to protect you.

Cosmo does not want to lose you too.

Please.

Please!

Spasibo, Natasha. Spasibo.

Be careful. Liho and Belka have sometimes thrown up a few times after portink short distances to get to you. Without proper cosmonaut trainink, portink can be rough on stomach.

Alright. We are all holdink each other? Hold on tight, Liho.

Comrade Belka, will you be joinink us?

What do you mean she’s climbink up windows to get here?

Comrade, please! Jump away and join us quickly!
There we go! Hold to Cosmo’s fur!

Natasha! Hurry! Think of a safe place! Far from here! Think and touch doggy tag! Think of all of us there!

Think!

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Ah, such a soft landink! Oh and so smelly and yellowy! Is not grass we landed in! What is this?

Natasha! Are you okay!

You are throwink up, but you are okay! Ura!

Belka and Liho! How are you?

Belka! Spasibo for not throwink up in my fur!

And Liho! It is not nice to throw up on shirt of someone, like Natasha, who loves you so!

Where are we, Natasha? What is this big, wooden place?

Ah, there is sunlight peekink in--there is door!

And there is somethink by door!

It is--oh! Oh! Oh, Natasha! Who is that majestic specimen of canis lupus familiaris starink at us?
He is blond like you!

Ooh, he is barkink at us! So loudly! Is that how most canis lupus familiaris on this planet greet each other?

Well, alright, Cosmo can greet in normal Terran way too!

Bark!

Bark!

Bark!

Ba--oh, this seems tedious, Natasha. I’d rather be talkink to him! What is his name?

Easy Lucky? Dog with two names seems very unusual--ah, you’re tellink him to take it easy as you calmly approach him! How sweet!

Easy, Lucky!

Bark!

Easy!

Bark!

Easy.

Easy. He likes you a lot, Natasha! Especially vigorous way you pet him.
Natasha, he’s askink if you brought any pizza slice for him! You didn’t happen to, did you?

*Nyet,* I am sorry! Comrade Lucky! Natasha has no pizza slice for you today!

Ah, he says Laura-Mommy will want to know if you are here, Nata--

Natasha? Why do you look so upset?

Chapter End Notes

Next week: Natasha sits down with Laura Barton and attempts to explain what the Don Heck is going on.

Meanwhile: Cosmo, Liho, Comrade Belka, and Lucky the Pizza Dog enjoy both seen and unseen farm stuffs.
Laura

Chapter Notes

Say it with me: WHERE THE HECK IS BLACK WIDOW’S SOLO FILM??!

She has such untapped potential and so many awesome potential character arcs!

And on a semi-relevant note: I swear I love Iron-Man. He is my brothers’ and father's favorite, so he's like a special piece of shrapnel in my heart.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Laura, I’m—I’m really sorry. I don’t know where to start.

*Nyet*, Comrade Cosmo—*vy ne mogli by govorit' pomedlennee*. We don’t want to scare or overwhelm her too much. People are a lot harder to reason with when they’re like that. I know you’re excited, but you have to talk slower. Lot of people have never met a Russian-speaking, telepathic, cosmonaut dog--let alone a talking one.

Yeah. Laura. He talks. Like that Martha book. The dog’s Cosmo, the cat is Liho, and the squirrel is...Comrade Belka! *Spaisibo*, Comrade Cosmo! Say hello to Laura, everyone!

The others don’t talk like the dog does. He ported us here with something in his dogtag, I think—Cosmo, do you mind demonstrating so Laura doesn’t think I’ve completely lost it? Could you please turn the device on again? You need a second to rearrange things in your dogtag?

Alright, just let me know when you’re ready.

Someone took pictures of me and the dog. Stuck it on the door of my apartment, one morning. I didn’t go back to the apartment that night, since I was going to hunt for this stalker on my own, but then these guys found me and rushed me out. Apparently my stalker’s a she, a brunette, and with a motorcycle. I think it’s been awhile since Cosmo’s been on Earth, so he asked me to pick a safe place that was far. We got out before I could get a good look at her.

I’m really sorry about bringing you into this; I thought you and the kids went on your biannual road-trip to Grandma’s around this time.

Your sister took them? Why didn’t you go with—?

Laura—I’m sorry. It’ll be a while before he can contact you and a lot longer before he can show his face around here. This is the first time in years that he’s had to run from the law. When was the last time he’s had to do this--was it around the time you were expecting Cooper?

It was. It was definitely around that time. We were in Budapest, him and me. And he spent a lot of the trip worrying about you, worrying about becoming a father, and worrying about the Hungarian authorities.

Cosmo, what is it? You’re ready to show Laura? Alright. Fire away, buddy.

Good dog! *Da*, that was excellent teleporting!
Now, Cosmo--Pizza Dog over there, he knows this farm really well. There’s a lot of really nice animals and interesting plants around. Why don’t you ask Pizza Dog to show you, Liho, and Secret-Squirrel over there around?

Of course he’d want to, he’s a really good dog too!

See, Comrade? Now, go. Go! Tell me what you find out there, okay?

He’s really a nice dog when you get to know him.

Yes, Cosmo’s a him. Well, he told me that he thinks of himself as a boy and I’ve never heard him use a female voice to speak. Or is it technically him thinking thoughts in my head in a guy’s voice?

Of course you need a second. Take as many seconds as you need. I’m just glad you can hear him too.

I’ve seen a lot of weird stuff, but Cosmo--

Yeah. It is a lot like someone made the perfect dog for me. Cosmo says he’s even from Stalingrad, like me. Says he was experimented on and blasted out into space. He didn’t really believe me, when I started telling him about the fall of the Soviet Union. With all of the weird things he tells me, you’d find that a little odd. I didn’t believe half the things he tried telling me, but after this I’m really not so sure.

Alright, Laura. He’s out of earshot. Laura, I’m really sorry for bringing you into this, but I think someone’s using that dog to get to me.

I don’t need to sit down, I am sitting down. I’ve dealt with a lot of really crazy shit, Laura. Aliens, government organizations secretly being run by global terrorists who change history in their favor, guys who turn big and green, all that good stuff. And the things he told me--they’re really weird, but I found holes in what he’s been telling me. He thinks he’s a cosmonaut dog, but the suit he claimed that he was launched into space in--I think Laika had a weird lacy number and the others just wore vests. Him, he was dressed in something that looks like a Sokol suit and a helme--what’s a Sokol suit? I think it was called a “rescue suit”. You couldn’t actually wear it outside of a spaceship, but you put it on in case the spaceship depressurized.

Where’s the--I don’t know where the suit is. I had him take it off and checked it for some sort of bugs or wiretaps. I’m sure he left it at the apartment.

And he’s way too big, Laura. They only sent off smaller dogs.

I had pictures, Laura. Of all the cosmonaut dogs. He wasn’t there. None of them looked like him.

Laura--Laura, I swear I’m fine. I swear.

You heard him too. I’m just--

What would you do if you found a talking dog?

I’m a fugitive from the law, Laura. I can’t call critter control or the police. Most of my friends are also fugitives, whose current locations I can’t pinpoint, without risking blowing their covers, so I can’t call them either. I didn’t keep in touch with anyone from the SHIELD days, so they’re out.

The only one I could call is Tony Stark, but, the last conversation I had with him, I pretty much threatened him and ran. Had to make up a cover in like a second, get in touch with people not
attached to covers that were blown by SHIELD’s files going public or things I did while I was attached to the Avengers Initiative, and I’d been trying to maintain it since. I’ve been constantly moving, blowing acting auditions all over LA and other parts of America, and basically playing keepaway with my identity. I think I owe Stark a sock to the jaw before I give him a second of my time.

I--I know this isn’t his fault. I know it isn’t. Just don’t tell me you’ve never had the urge to punch Tony Stark in the face. Even if this was—this was my choice. I chose to go along with the UN, not because of him, but because I think I really felt like I had to. I didn’t enjoy getting called in to arrest some of my closest friends, and I’m really sorry how this decision affected your family.

You remember when SHIELD fell. I spent years, working for them, thinking somehow it’d help me atone for everything I did before your husband was sent after me. You probably read what I’d done. I was young and dumb to think that.

I was. I was, because I learned that there really isn’t a good or evil. There’s just action and reaction. With maybe some prevention. There are people with power who call the shots, people under them who take it, and people who could get hurt by these orders or won’t. And no matter what you do, it always affects someone in a way you won’t intend.

The Avengers were getting too powerful, Laura. I miss them all the time, but we needed oversight and accountability. We were going to have to answer to somebody again, eventually. Stark created a murderbot. I let a Hulk loose into the world, and I haven’t seen him since. Wanda, as much as I adore her, inadvertently caused a diplomatic crisis. I could go on and on.

I—I miss them.

I really do.

I’m really sorry, Laura. I really am.

I really miss feeling like I knew what I was doing. I’m so out of my depth with that dog.

I’m pretty sure I love him, and I don’t think he knows somebody’s probably using him.

I think he’s really too innocent to be doing that, Laura. He seems to mostly say what’s on his mind and I think he’s eager to stay with me because he might have lost both of his owners.

It’s kind of dumb, but part of me really wants to think that this could be like Lucky. You remember when Clint and I got here, with Lucky in his arms? How we got him treated and you worried he’d bite the kids because he was some petty thug’s dog? Or we thought, maybe, his owner was serious when he’d threatened us with the ‘connections’ he had if we took his dog? Then Lucky just turned out to be a goofy goober and that tracksuit mafioso really was full of it?

I really want to keep this dog. You have no idea how much I love this freaking dog. He’s just the sweetest. I wish this was just like a Disney film, where talking animals didn’t mean dumb ominous looming vague threats.

But I honestly can’t even guess what’s going to happen next.

You’re just going to have to stay close to me, stay alert, stay calm, and we’ll get through this. I promise you.
Thursday: watch a bunch of animals have fun on a farm.
Lucky

Chapter Notes

I haven’t seen GOTG Vol. 2 yet, but I did spoil myself quite a bit (just to see if there was anything with KNOWHERE and because I love spoilers). After reading stuff, I really have to say that I’m looking forward to the mid-post-whatever-credit scenes. I heard the rest of the movie is lovely too, but the credits-bits man. Now I’m just waiting to hear more on the Disneyplace ride, which is a Twilight Zone Tower of Terror being repurposed into a Collector-Fortress-thing, to see if they put in something that I could use for this fic or contradict some bit of it (and I’d need to go back and edit something) or whatever. From what I’ve read, for those interested in Disneyplace rides and weird-jokes-Nebula-says-in-trailers-that-may-or-may-not-be-appearing-in-the-films-that-theyadvertize, I heard they are building a Gardens of the Galaxy outside of the Fortress.

Alrighty, back to this fic: the funnest bit about writing Cosmo is his light-hearted goofiness, especially when he’s surrounded by some fairly dark stuff. It’s honestly very hard to be in too bad a mood after writing things through this dog’s perspective. And, dude, Lucky the Pizza Dog. And Liho. I have been wanting to write this interaction for a while. The squirrel is just an added bonus.

The woahs have definitely been a tribute to one of the best talking, adventure-going dogs in comics, Snowy/Milou of Tintin.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Old Clint Hawkguy had a farm, Ee-Ai-Ee-Ai-Oooh!

And on that farm he had a cat, Ee-Ai-Ee-Ai-Oooh!

It is your time to shine, Liho--with a miao miao here, and a miao miao there!

Here a miao, there a miao, everywhere a miao miao!

Good job, my comrade --old Clint Hawkguy had a farm, Ee-Ai-Ee-Ai-Oooh!

Old Clint Hawkguy had a farm, Ee-Ai-Ee-Ai-Ooh!

And on that farm he had some dogs, Ee-Ai-Ee-Ai-Ooh!

With a woah woah here, and a woah woah there!

Here a woah, there a woah, everywhere a woah woah!

Excellent, Comrade Lucky--old Clint Hawkguy had a farm, Ee-Ai-Ee-Ai-Oooh!

Old Clint Hawkguy had a farm, Ee-Ai-Ee-Ai-Ooh!

And on that farm he had a squirrel, Ee-Ai-Ee-Ai-Ooh!

With a--
Comrade Belka, what is it that squirrels say?

Eat nuts and kick butts? Nyet, I did not mean an adage your kind follow. Cosmo meant like a cute, monosyllabic sound.

All Comrade Belkas communication is too complex to be reduced in such a way?

Alright, if you say so! Liho, didn’t Natasha look happier talkink to Laura-Mommy? Is first person Cosmo see her talk to in while! Is very good for Natasha! As fun as it is for us to be talkink to her, Cosmo knows people need to talk to people too!

Ah, Comrade Lucky, what is this?

It is called pick-nick table? What do you use it for?

Eatink outside? Ooh, is it really safe to be eatink out here?

You make sure it is safe and fun for Cooper-kid, Lila-kid, and Little Nat-kid and they love to eat out here with you! Ooh, you really are a very good dog!

Why do you keep callink me Cosmo-Bro?

I would not mind beink called Cosmonaut-Bro, but Cosmo-Bro is fine enough! I was just curious why you call me Bro and Liho Bro and Comrade Belka Bro.

Oh how sweet, you don’t get to hang out with other pets too often! You know, other than the other creatures in my owner’s Collection, I don’t think I’ve met too many other pets either!

We are movink on with tour, right! What is significant about this axe?

Captain-American used it? I suppose that is interestink!

Have I heard of--oh, yes! A lot of folks outside of Terra have been keepink tabs on Terra after Captain-American and the Revengers fought those Chitauri forces of Thanos.

Oh, did I get those names wrong?

I am sorry, Comrade, my owner had tabs on many thinks but, in latest years while Cosmo was with him, he focused on affairs in another galaxy. But he does believe that his Creator is American-Terran in origin!

Oh, da, is like David Bowie song! God is an American! Maybe. Well, he seems to be old man that appears in epicenters of big events. Da, a very sweet-lookink old man! My owner, Tivan, was very close to addink old man to Collection once--would you like to hear story?

Oh okay, another time.

I am lookink for my owner, Comrade. Belka and Liho promised they’d help look too.

Ooh, you are also missink owner? How sad! So many owners goink missink! Comrade, if you help me find Tivan, I will help you find yours! It was Old Clint Hawkguy, right? Can you tell me what he looks like?

A little like you? So does he walk on all fours and chase after raccoons?

Hm, he sometimes walked on all fours when he plays with Cooper-kid, Lila-kid, and Little Nat-kid
and he sometimes does chase after raccoons? He sounds very sweet and sensible in choosink opponents. Raccoons are the worst. So, so smelly and rude! I was jokink about that though.

Really? Pets look and act a little like their owners and vice-versa?

Ahh, he is blond like you and he also loves pizza! Lucky, the blond sounds a little like coincidence and the pizza is probably causation. He likes pizza, so he probably brinks it in, you eat it as many times as him, and you learn to like it.

You did like pizza before he stole you from your awful, old Tracksuit Dracula and made you his dog?

Alright, that is kind of sweet.

I suppose Tivan is a little like me. We both talk with accents, but his is different than mine. And he does wear a lot red, but is different than my reddish fur! We both like talkink, though, and sharink information. But it might be because I learned that from him. We both also love Terra and he’d tell me a lot of thinks about your planet, because he felt like Cosmo should know a lot about home planet!

Ah, but he has many pets! In some ways, he is like them, but does that also mean, because Cosmo is a little like him, Cosmo is like his other pets?

Da , is confusink.

Now that you mention it, Liho is a lot like Natasha.

Da , you are! You are so nice, Liho! You are patient and sweet and incredibly private!

You’re both also strays, never settlink into places?

Is think she told you and you agree?

That is kind of sad. But Cosmo is glad to hear it doesn’t bother you too much.

You and your Hawkguy also consider yourselves stray, Lucky? But how? You have this beautiful farm with pick-nick table and Captain-American axe!

Is think he only tell you?

Da , you really are his pet if he tells you thinks like that in private. His only real home was missions, like tasks not like other word for churches. Correct?

Is really very sad.

My owner is a lot like that too. He has a lot of thinks. Planets full of thinks. Even very nice space-god head to live in! But only place he really consider home no longer exists, so he told Cosmo he could never really settle on planets or in Celestial’s head or spacecraft or anywhere really.

You want to know where he was from?

You have to keep it secret, though!

Alright, Cygnus X-1 is closest pronunciation I can give you.

Da , is unusual but lovely name.
Where did it go?

Is complex and even Tivan doesn’t really, fully remember. It was one of first planets teemink with first livink beinks to form when this Universe began, in very first age of life. Then somethink happened. It was slow and quick at same time. Heat-death, planet-economies failink, crops dyink, many people perishink, many thinks at once. But then somebody--some sort of Death or higher beink--picked out members of various races on planets to survive. About everybody else died and even some chosen survivor members of those races died too.

He was one of lucky ones, because he had pregnant wife (or maybe she already had baby) to keep him preoccupied and sane. Others lost everybody they knew and never got to know.

And then, somethink weirder happened. The survivors, Cosmo thinks, got affected in unusual way. There was massive surge of energy, I think, maybe from all of the destruction or from somethink else. Some survivors got to live extra long lives. And some also got gifts, I think. Unless they had them before, or maybe they got augmented, Cosmo isn’t entirely sure.

My owner, Tivan, started gettink visions of awful thinks happenink in other Universes, he took heed from visions, and took up life’s work of preservink all life after this big terrifyink think happened. He knows many thinks about many cultures, still livink and long gone, but he doesn’t feel too much a part of any of them. Only one was of Cygnus X-1, but he is old and his memory is good in many ways but isn’t so great unless he have some physical tchotchke to remind him of thinks. While he knows normal atmospheric conditions of Kree Empire’s base planet of Hala, he can no longer remember what a sunrise looked like on Cygnus X-1. Tivan speaks primary language of Nova Empire very fluently, but he struggles to strink together full sentences in his own long-forgotten language. His penmanship in Zehoberei is excellent, but most of his homeworld’s alphabet he’s never had time to sit down and write in.

But he is one of the luckier ones. Most of his still-livink siblinks, who are not his born-blood-related siblinks but have lived about as long as he has (give or take some centuries), they do not remember name of home-planet or even a single word from their original culture’s language. I think it bothers them like it does Tivan. It bothers them all a lot. And, when people get very bothered, they take their minds off with hobbies. En Dwi Gast, the closest of his weird brothers (and maybe sisters), contents himself with takink other planets over, manipulatink lesser peoples, enjoink what delights they have, and leamink their games. There is nothink wrong with that (alright except the takink planets over and manipulatink lesser beinks), but Cosmo thinks, because you go through somethink terrible like what they went through, where you have choices taken from you, you need to do somethink to feel like you have some sort of control over your own life again.

Da, it is really very sad.

But Cosmo never felt that way, even though Cosmo was also stray, because Tivan made wherever he was livink with me my home.

Let’s continue with the tour?

Alright!

Cosmo is sorry for makink everybody feel a little sadder.

Is alright? How come it is alright?

Sometimes you just need to feel a little sad, Comrade Lucky? Belka and Liho, do you agree?
Ah, why is that?

So that you can appreciate being happy? How unusual sounding!

Ah, the barn again where we landed! Oh, it is still very smelly! Very, very--

Comrade Lucky? What is--doesn’t Cosmo smell it too?

Ooh! It does smell like a different kind of smelly! Very faint!

Lucky--you are such a brave dog, dash into barn before thinking!

Oh, *da*, my apologies, Comrade! You were thinking of Laura-Mommy!

Ooh!

Ooh, ooh!

Lucky--Lucky! This man standing in middle of barn isn’t blond, so I am guessing he is not your owner! I will greet him in typical Terran-based *canis lupus familiaris* way, then!

*Bark!*

*Bark!*

Ba--Lucky? Comrade, why are you only standing by him and not greeting him?

Ah, he is petting you!

Ah, now he is coming this way!

Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy! Liho, *Belka*, I think we are getting petted too! Aren’t you excited--Comrade *Belka*, why are you running our--

Ah, help! Help! Man is picking me up! *Nyet!* *Nyet,* heavy-cologne-smelling man with eyepatch! Cosmo does not like being picked up! Cosmo is going to wiggle our--oh. Oh. Mm, alright! How did you know Cosmo likes being stroked on head near ears?

You just know?

Ah, you are not surprised by Cosmo’s abilities!

What do you mean you’ve seen stranger?

Sorry, Lucky, you were saying something?

Oh! Liho, Lucky is introducing man! Liho, this man is called Nick Fury!

Nick Fury, the cat is our friend and she is called Liho!

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I did feel obligated to stick in a Squirrel Girl reference.
Next week: another tale from KNOWHERE and Nick Fury on the farm.
Chapter Notes

On an impulse, my bros and I saw the new Guardians film. Loved it.

Also saw some Benicio Del Toro films ("Traffic" and the first volume of "Che"), because I kind of thought I subconsciously worked in a couple of references to "Che" even though I never saw the film. They are also good. I am excited to finish up "Che" eventually.

Anyway: this chapter's kind of beefy, because it's been a while since we've had a chapter about the Collector's Crew. I've also got like this theory that the Collector probably hasn't been overthrown on KNOWHERE because working for him is kind of like working for Hank Scorpio on "The Simpsons". He's like the most obvious bad guy, but he also pays really well and, as long as you do your work, you get a lot out of it.

I also think Pizza Dog came out pretty mature in this fic, probably because he was told by Clint to take care of the family.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Cosmo has seen Natasha when is happy, Lucky. Cosmo has seen her dancink. Cosmo has watched a movie with her. Cosmo has shared meals with her--and there is a special privacy to that, to sharink meals. You sometimes prepare the meal together. You allow what passes through others’ systems to pass own digestive system. For while, you possess same insides.

Da, is very weird way to think of food but is true!

Cosmo does not think she was happy to see Nick Fury’s face, like you think.

Da, Cosmo can read minds.

Cosmo cannot verify because Natasha buries her feelinks deeply. Deeper than any surface thinkink. And she has not given Cosmo permission to look in and past outermost thoughts. If her feelinks are very strong, Cosmo can smell them like you and Liho. But somethink happened when Nick Fury showed up. Didn’t you smell the difference, my Comrade?

Da, Cosmo can only smell the artificial floral perfume too.

Nyet, Cosmo is pretty sure she cannot do that on purpose.

Da, she was smilink. But Natasha smiles even when she is sad. Even more when she is sad. Is- is...what do you call it?

What do you mean what do I mean? Cosmo speaks many, many languages. More than Russian and American-English. Even languages outside of Terra. But Cosmo struggles to think of word to describe person like Natasha, who smirks even and especially more so when she is upset.

You are worried for her too, Liho?
Da, me too!

Da, Comrade Lucky, she chatted happily with Fury before dinner. But she chats happily even with beinks she does not trust.

Cosmo knows because she chatted very friendly with Cosmo, even when she did not trust him.

Nyet, is very smart think to make friendly with people you do not trust. You can get very close to them, chat with them on more private level, learn thinks from them that you would not.

How is it like behavior of godfather? Godfathers take in kids if somethink bad happens to parents, so that is very different behavior than--

Ooh, is American film! Is it an enjoyable one?

Ooh! Is it good one Clintguy watches with the kids?

Nyet?

How strange. Film can be good and yet not allowable to show to everyone.

Nyet. There cannot be different kinds of good, Comrade Lucky. Is very dangerous way of thinkink. Is probably different word you are thinkink of, like enjoyable to adults. Is different than good.

What danger is there in different goods? If you use word too often, it could lose meanink. Good becomes flexible. Is like if you use word ‘love’ more often than you mean. Cosmo only uses it when Cosmo really loves. Or ‘truth’, when think is not carefully experimented and given body of evidence to verify it. If you use word too much, you forget what it really means. And then what would that mean about the opposite? If you believe good is flexible, what does that mean about evil?

What?

What?

What are you starink at, Comrade?

Oh, nyet.

Nyet! Cosmo has not been overthinki--okay, maybe a little. Is just think that has been on Cosmo’s mind. Doink guard duty outside, while night is creepink in, brinks out those sort of thoughts in Cosmo.

Liho, Natasha told Cosmo that Cosmo wouldn’t have to use abilities on Nick. She can talk to him on her own, to find what she wants. Cosmo is confident she can because she is very smart. She worked with Nick Fury, she told us, so she has relationship. Could allow her access to a lot of answers. Cosmo has feelink she really needs to talk with him. More people for Natasha to talk with is always good. Laura-Mommy will be right there with her, to talk with Nick.

And Nick seemed very nonplussed with Cosmo’s abilities. There is possibility my abilities would not work to reveal what he wants from Natasha.

Oh, da, there are people who know how to rearrange mind and make it confusink to read. Even if all minds speak understandable enough mental language, right sort of meditation and preparations can allow them to scramble out and make meanink hard to understand. Or makink thoughts happen
quickly, so that it is difficult to trace way of thinkink, is simple way of disorientink telepath.

*Da*, Cosmo has seen these sorts while dealink with Collection and on KNOWHERE.

*Da, da!* You do not have to ask, Liho. Cosmo is sure Natasha would love all of the support she can have. Go back inside, Comrade Lucky and Comrade Cosmo can guard thinks out here.

*Da, da!* We will be alright!

I love you too, Liho.

Comrade Lucky, I am guessink you have been protectink Laura-Mommy on this farm for some time on your own.

*Nyet*, Cosmo did not look past your surface thoughts. You just have bearink of guard dog. Loyal. Dutiful. Lackink in the discipline of formal trainink, but enthusiastic nonetheless. Have you done security detail before comink to farm?

Really!

You were dog of Russian Mafiya member?

Ah! *Govorite so mnoj po-russki!*

*Nyet?* Why not?

Oh! Oh, my friend, I did not know that you are self-conscious about your inability to speak to peopleses with words. Does that mean you were intimidated by Cosmo?

Ah, I am so sorry. If it is any comfort to you, my friend, you intimidated me a little too at first.

Oh, *da*, you are such a magnificent specimen of *canis lupus familiaris* and you barked so loudly.

*Da*, you are fantastic. Why do you deny your own magnificence?

Oh.

Oh! Your old owner sounds like such a jerk! To insult you by talkink about your mixed heritage in derogatory way!

*Da*, there is nothink wrong with beink mutt. Cosmo is also mutt--mix of Golden Retriever and Labrador and other doggies. Tivan used to say that it was most beneficial, because it would allow me gifts of many dogs. Beink purebred is overrated and, in long-run, bad for biodiversity of planet if it happens too often. You are incredibly gifted dog and good for Terra. Your owner was just too stupid to see it.

It is no problem, Comrade. I am only tellink you what is true.

Is definitely true! Tivan, my owner, he studies all kinds of specimens all throughout galaxy and he would have ample evidence to support that claim. You truly are unique, gifted dog.

Hm.

Well, you are first person Cosmo ever met to say Tivan sounds like nice guy.

Oh, *da*, Cosmo thinks Tivan is good and sort of terrible person. And Cosmo loves him. He is many
thinks. But nice is not one of the thinks even Cosmo can say, even though Cosmo has loved him all
of Cosmo’s life since Cosmo met him when Cosmo was very small dog. Sometimes he does thinks
that are nice. Even people he does nice thinks for cannot think of him as nice.

KNOWHERE, he does many nice thinks for people on KNOWHERE.

Ah, KNOWHERE, my friend, is space-god head that he purchased very long ago and got criminals
to mine for very valuable materials. Over course of hundreds of years, it has developed into criminal
society with functionink market. Cosmo loves it on KNOWHERE.

But, anyway, my owner, Taneleer Tivan or the Collector, does regular collective bargainink with
workers’ unions. There are always workers minink materials in space-god head, at every hour of the
day, and they talk to insure that the number of people workink do so at shifts of fair amount of hours
and with excellent benefits package. He is very active with insurink doctors of KNOWHERE have
most up-to-date medical information, to treat all kinds of workers. Textbooks and curriculum for
public schools on KNOWHERE are also very regularly updated so that the kids of his workers learn
much about KNOWHERE and galaxy outside. He is even workink in anticipation of nonrenewable
resource in space-godhead runnink out--by maintainkink contacts outside of KNOWHERE,
developink gamblink dens (like importink Orloni from Morag as a part of cover for monitorink
planet), improvink bars, bringink in more people to have specialty shops, stimulatink growink
scientific community so that they could repurpose current minink tools and other inventions they
could make into marketable products in other parts of galaxy, passink off some duties to workers
with natural negotiation-skills so that they would not need always to be entirely reliant on him to
maintain business contacts, easink on relations with neighborink Empires by doink thinks like
allowink their delegates to privately negotiate on KNOWHERE and use KNOWHERE as a neutral
territory so that KNOWHERE could be allowed to operate and would not have embargos levied on
them (is successful with many Empires), have Cosmo revamp security to crack down on the sorts of
activities that could make place too awful to live in or attract too much attention from neighborink
Empires when Cosmo was first installed as Head of Security, and...ah, Cosmo has lost track, but he
has done a lot for KNOWHERE. In addition to purchasink and essentially creatink place.

And, yet, nobody on KNOWHERE thinks of him as nice.

Is not undeserved. He can really be mean, not even while tryink.

Like way he broke up with Broker, Tivan’s long-time Xandarian business associate. (Xandar is
planet very similar to Terra and not, Lucky.) Cosmo understands why he was so upset with Broker,
but it doesn’t make it any less mean. Tivan had spent equivalent of eleven Terran years preparink to
obtain very powerful object called Orb, Lucky, but, in all years he had worked with Broker and
planned to use him as intermediary to hire a party after object and have Broker serve as point for
second party to pick up object, he neglected to tell Broker what exactly object was and who exactly
would want to get it. Da, is incredibly cruel to ask somebody to do think like that without fully
lettink them know what they were gettink into. So when first party came in with object and revealed
genocidal enemy of Xandar was after it, Broker refused to allow Orb to stay under his shop’s roof.
Second party came too soon, fought first party for object, then somehow tree and raccoon got
involved (da, do not ask, is needink too much explanation), and everyone got arrested by Nova
police force on Xandar.

Although Tivan had bribed people on Nova police force, he did not have connections that were in
high enough position to send parties he’d hired over to him. We would have to think of other way to
take them out of awful space-prison and brink them to us.

Nearly eleven years of preparation. Nearly kiboshed. Understandably, he was furious and also sent
incredibly stern word to Broker. Not only did he sever all of his ties, but he also had his own associates sever ties with Broker. And Tivan have many, many associates. Really crippled his business.

They’d had dinner together, they’d worked together for equivalent of at least two decades.

Is incredibly cruel way to break off a relationship.

And Howard, whose idea it was to have one party drop off object with Broker and another take object from Broker, he disappeared. We did not find him, let alone even think to look seriously for him, until--ah, is terrible what happened with him! He was alive, but...ah!

And Carina!

Ah, Carina! Carina, Carina, Carina!

Carina was name of his long-lost daughter, Lucky, and after he lost her he’d consciously and subconsciously looked for replacements. Latest Carina that he had--I-I don’t even know where to start.

Nyet, start ink at beginnink would take too long.

Last negotiation. Do you mind if Cosmo talks about that?

Carina was already feel ink pretty stressed by many thinks, stressed that her near eleven year contract was expir ink end of that week (since she’d been work ink for Tivan from equivalent age of seventeen), incredibly nervous about get tinking one object of power on place teem ink with peoples like KNOWHERE and possibly obtain ink second (after one of the alien parties that delivered first important object warned about danger of hav ink two objects like that so close together), afraid for people she’d known since she was seventeen get tinking hurt, and some thinks she really didn’t understand. Cosmo told Tivan that she was worried, and what did he do? Point-blank, at start of her talk near piano that only him, her, and Cosmo present with, he ask her about her face scars.

Da, Carina had face-scars. Cosmo knew why, but Cosmo wouldn’t tell Tivan because it was very private to Carina and she made Cosmo promise not to tell Tivan.

Is very tact less, to just ask someone about their face scars. But Tivan did thinks like that. At least once, Tivan has asked person to sign away their corpse to him.

Of course Tivan knows it is tact less, but he does it anyway. Not always on purpose. He has lived very, very, very long time and lived before language to construct most laws even conceived. Be ink tact ful like that isn’t high on list of priorities. Cosmo loves him, but Cosmo doubts it was anywhere even near list. Probably not even written down with same pen used to write list down. Maybe not even written down on paper in equivalent of five-mile radius to list. That is, if it was even written down.

Oh da, Cosmo got a little carried away there with metaphor.

So he got her very upset all while they were supposed to be talk ink about her and possibly extend ink her contract or about what she wanted to do outside of Collection.

It really doesn’t surprise Cosmo that she asked to end negotiation before it could even take place. Instead, she got over to keys of piano and started to play. At least Tivan caught on that she was upset and told her that her play ink had really improved before he left her alone by piano.
Only when he was completely out of earshot did she stop playing, crumble down, and start to cry. She’d been doing that a lot lately. Really, entire thing was too stressful for her. Had been happening too slow, but now it was too fast. Cosmo got very close to her, started to sink a little song from her native planet of Krylor, and she got up and played song by ear as Cosmo sank. Doing little things like that always cheered her up.

But then Tivan, he—as much as I love him, he does these sorts of things sometimes. The sort of things that have really, very good reasoning behind but sometimes its execution is poor or results in highly morally disagreeable things happening. Right after just the three of us have simple dinner (Cosmo does not remember of what), Tivan got up from table and asked us to follow him. Even after talking her contract over went badly and parties obtaining highly powerful Orb were in space-jail, his steps were a little lighter than usual. We all walked out of kitchen, past exhibit of giant plant cell, and stop at wall. Wall was clever facade. Tivan pushed in bits of the curved design in a complicated manner, so soon door opened up and stairway leading downstairs was revealed. We followed him down all ninety-nine of those steps, even after Carina complained about lack of elevator around the fifty-second.

At bottom, there was small room with huge screen, small beaten-up couch, small black rectangle at foot of couch that was plugged into wall, and stacks and stacks of smaller, thinner black rectangles. He asked us to look at the rectangles. So we got close, remove one from stack, and Cosmo help Carina read text (since it was in language she could not read). Had weird title. We turn over and read more text. Was film of Terran Simon Williams.

So we turn to him and he tell us that he bought disks with these films in very huge bulk. Is tentative extension of Collection. Since Carina adores films, he wanted her to look over these selections before her contract expired at the end of this week. Entire stacks did not have to be reviewed. Just what we could get done.

Carina, like always, ask her question. But it wasn’t how he got disks or why we had this weird little room hidden away in wall. Instead she wanted to know if he would be joining us.

With slow shake of head, he inform us that he had to journey to center of space-godhead and experiment with one of objects he had gotten. Properties were very unknown, so experimentation was very necessary. Would be safest to tinker with such a thing deep in bony walls of godhead.

Carina give a sad sort of smile, told him she guessed she was thankful, and set down Simon Williams film box.

Tivan turned around, gave a sort of half-mumbled happy early birthday, and headed back up stairs alone.

Would have almost been salvageable if Carina hadn’t found stack of Krylorian films. Was mostly featuring her idol, Bereet, and/or her daughter, also Bereet. She thumbed the picture on the front, very slowly, sayink nothink for while.

It had been literal years since, she tell me, since she had seen film in her hands. Usually was seen on repeat viewings at cinema house, since her own family never bought any systems to watch films at home. Was incredibly surreal, just holding it in her hands.

Cosmo ask if it meant that she wanted to watch it.

And she just shrug and tell that she guessed so.

So we figured out how to open bigger black rectangle, put disk in, jumbled with buttons, got screen
on, sat on couch, and waited.

Text appeared on screen. Cosmo has watched many, many, many surveillance thinks, but is first time Cosmo sat down to watch fictional movie. So Cosmo thought text appearink was normal. Still, Cosmo had to turn to Carina and question meanink of Krylorian text that apologize about disk beink region-locked.

Answer was not pleasant. She growl loudly, jumpink off of couch and kickink bigger black rectangle. Cosmo jump after her and try to calm her down. Other smaller rectangles were next. She ran up and knocked over stacks, took out discs, stomped them up, all sorts of destructive behavior. Had been long time since Cosmo saw her act like this. Cosmo was really scared, but Cosmo still try to talk with her.

She scream thinks like he always did thinks like this, always just did what he wanted in way he wanted.

And she only stopped after last stack, taller than her, toppled and nearly blocked us from stairway entrance. She turn to me and, in very low voice, ask if Cosmo thought she was bad person. Cosmo told her truth that she was good and sweet and just upset. And she query why it was, then, that she was like Krylorian equivalent of magnet to many smegheads. There was awful Dad, complicit Mother, rude Sisters, Uncle in asylum for criminally insane, Gast (who was probably awful but she still loved even if he hadn’t visited us in nearly eleven years), and there was Tivan. (Cousin wasn’t on that list, even though he totally should have been.) Cosmo could understand why she was so upset, but it didn’t make Cosmo feel any easier about her sayink such a think about Tivan. Tivan is good and terrible, but beink smeghead is very worst insult. So Cosmo ask if she want to play piano. She turned it down. Cosmo quickly follow up by suggestink instead we take walksie. Walksie always calm Cosmo down. Maybe look and see if Howard is at Starlin’s, bar less popular than place like Boot of Jemiah but her prefered place to get drink. She agree to that.

We insure Tivan’s sentry robots are functional, say goodbye to Brood and Corrina, and head out of Collector’s Museum.

Cosmo still regrets suggestink that.

Why?

Oh, Comrade Lucky. Maybe it was inevitable. Space godhead isn’t nearly as big as it looks and, even with many, many peopleeses comink in and officially registerink or forgettink to do so, is inevitable that you rub elbows with everyone. Even though Tivan very strict about who is officially hired, many sneak on godhead. And Tivan does not entirely mind. Is up to Head of Security Cosmo to insure they weren’t drivink property value down.

We ran into big, burly pink man on way of Starlin’s. Cosmo didn’t know he got on, or when he did so. But when Carina saw him, her face got very still. Then lit up in way even Cosmo never see. She ran, arms out, and he recieved her in same way. Both smiled so widely, sayink only each others’ names.

Maverdevia was her birth name and he call her Mav. She called him Brite.

Cosmo could read on their surface thoughts who this was, but, after huggink for long time, she still turn to Cosmo and introduce man as big as couch we were sittink on not too long ago. Man is Brite Lordd. Her cousin. Same cousin she ran from home with and sold her into slavery.

Da, Comrade Lucky. Cosmo was nervous about this man and seeink him near Carina. But Cosmo
just froze. Didn’t know what to do. Even though Cosmo knew Cosmo had to do somethink.

Don’t you just hate when that sort of think happens, my friend? Is worst feelink, especially for dog.

Chapter End Notes

Thursday: the Black Widow chats with Nick Fury.

See you then!
Sorry for the delay, this one was a little tricky to write because I figured Nick Fury isn’t a cat who would remain silent while Black Widow talks about most things. So, I found a work-around.

Nick Fury in California. Hiding out in a haunted beachside hotel.

Sorry, keeping tabs on Tony Stark in a haunted beachside hotel. I’ll bet the rates were amazing.

You check Inglewood while you were down there?

Why wouldn’t you check out Inglewood? Randy’s Doughnuts. Stark’s favorite moping spot. As the hole in the giant doughnut. Perfect place for him, really.

It’s like a koan. A hole in a hole. Because Stark’s an a-hole.

You don’t think it sounds fitting?

Last time I saw him, which was...a little more than a year ago, I think, he said a couple of unkind things about me. So, I owe him a few unkind words. Eye for an eye, says the good book.

Screw turning the other cheek. What, did you become Jules Winnfield after retiring--are you going to quote Ezekiel 25:17 at me?

Do I really get to pick a vers--alright, how about the “Pulp Fiction” version.

Huh.

No, it’s--it’s just--that’s how it really goes.

I whip out a bible, I open up to that verse, and that’s how--hand me that frying pan--that’s what it’ll say.

Figures. Movies usually have the better versions of things.

Hand me the eggs.

Hey, Liho! Step away from the stove--I don’t know what I’m going to do if you get burned.

Laura, you know how Lucky likes his eggs?

Yeah, dogs can have eggs. Fried, boiled, or plain. Although the fried eggs should be in moderation, because of the fats that could cause health problems down the line. Raw egg will just cause stomachaches.

Go ask the spacedog outside, if you don’t believe me. He told me, and I verified the information online. It’s legit. Cosmo usually has hardboiled with the shells, but he’s been a very good dog and
he’s earned a treat of a fried egg.

Nick, I haven’t been feeding him an egg a day. He tells me it’ll make him too fat to fit into his suit.

...what?

It’s nothing.

It’s nothing.

It’s nothing, really. I just think it’s funny you’re concerned about what I feed my dog.

Of course it’s funny. It’s my opinion and I’ve got a pretty messed-up sense of humor. But, don’t worry, I don’t plan on killing him. I like him too much.

One egg down.

Laura, I think I’m making Lucky the same as Cosmo’s, but, maybe, we can add like a little Ragu with it.

What?

Why not?

Really?

Nick, I never knew you knew that much about dogs.

Alright, Laura, nix on the sauce. Tomato sauce is apparently too acidic for dogs. I’ve only had Cosmo for...a couple of weeks, I think? And that was only a few days after that gal over there, Liho, officially-unofficially became my first pet. So I’m pretty new to this ‘taking-care-of-animals’ thing.

Yeah.

Yeah, Dad. I get that it’s a responsibility.

I’ve been good, haven’t I? They’re both still alive and I really do like ‘em.

Alright, alright. Hey, Nick. You know if dogs can have pizza?

Well, Laura, of course Pizza Dog’s still alive. But it’s just something none of us ever thought to look up.

In moderation, as long as Pizza Dog isn’t lactose intolerant. And I’m pretty sure he isn’t. Alright, good to know. That one fried up quicker than the last one--I love that about eggs. Could you pass over that empty plate--

Thanks, Nick.

While the pan’s still hot, anyone want me to fry them up an egg?

Last call?

Alright.

Set the plates down over there, would ya?
Thanks.

_Ha--!

Laura! Laura, Laura, Laura--calm down! Calm down! I’m fine, he’s fine--I still need him alive! I just knocked him out! I just knocked him out with the frying--calm down! Calm--calm down, this isn’t Nick Fury! This isn’t Nick Fury! This isn’t Momma Fury’s Boy!

Calm down!

Calm down.

Calm down.

As much as I want to sock Nick Fury sometimes, that isn’t him.

Laura--Laura. Calm down--how do I--Laura, I know that isn’t him because of three things. I know because of three things.

One--look at his outfit.

No, seriously, look at that black trench.

Or, you know what--look past the black trench. Pull the left side back a little.

His left.

Yes.

Like that.

Tell me what you see, on his shirt, that shouldn’t be there?

Yes. A SHIELD insignia on his shirt. Nick burned up his SHIELD gear. He’s been at this game for too long to be sentimental and keep any part of it.

Two, he misquoted the Ezekiel thing. You remember Nick’s tombstone. You have to.

You know he wouldn’t.

Yes.

Exactly.

And three, there is no way in hell that he’d take orders from anyone. Not even to help out in the kitchen and especially not from me.

Laura, I have no idea who the hell this is. I don’t know how he wound up with the best Nick Fury costume I’ve ever seen. I’ve got some hours before he gets up, and I’ll be sure to ask him when he’s good and ready to answer. I just need your help with some things. I need you to help me find some rope and I need you to remember where Clint puts his extra gear. You have to get these things for me, while I stay behind and keep an eye on this guy. After you get back, I’ll need you to deliver these eggs to the dogs and don’t tell them about fake-Fury. If you can, don’t even think it.

Come on, Laura--you did like...yoga. I think it’s kind of like that. You channel out thoughts about me knocking out a fake-Fury. Work on your breathing.
It’s totally like yoga.

Come on.

Come on--you can do it, Laura. Or you’re going to have to fake it, until you make it. The spacedog—as much as I love him...it’s for him. Alright? As long as you don’t think it, you’ll be good. He’ll stay out of your outermost thoughts. And the spacedog won’t catch on.

I know he won’t look deeper. He’s never looked past my outmost thoughts.

How do I know? If he did, he’d probably know that I was never planning on helping him find his owner and he would have left sooner.

Laura—I’ll explain later. If we have the time. Please, Laura. We have to work fast. Before this guy gets up. I’ll make a sandwich for you.

Thank you, Laura.

While I’m at it, I’ll boil an egg for Liho too.

Liho.

Liho, sweetie.

Liho, please don’t tell Cosmo about any of this. I still love him, but I’m pretty sure he’s involved in this somehow. He just doesn’t know it.

Chapter End Notes

For those of you that are curious: no, I don’t think Black Widow would be in the best sort of place after "Civil War". This time, however, she’s right. The man who came to Clint's farm and wound up unconscious on the Barton family’s kitchen floor, in this story and at this point, is not Nick Fury.

Next week, Black Widow has a few questions for fake-Fury and Cosmo dishes on a very personal secret.

See you then.
Righteous-Man

Chapter Notes

I love Black Widow. Found a copy of "Name of the Rose", reread it, fell in love with her again. Rewatched her interrogation scene with Loki. Reviewed a script of "Civil War".

Ah, she is just so wonderful and scary and merciless and awesome.

There is nothing else to be said.

On with the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

--is must be a lot for you to handle. I’m sorry, Laura. I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry.

Laura. Lau--he’s up. He’s moving, he’s just not opening his eyes yet. Basement. Please take Liho with you. We’ll talk later. Has to be just him and me.

I already promised, didn’t I? I’ll be neat.

You’re up. You gave yourself away with the fingers--fingers don’t move like that. Not unless the person’s awake. Just stick around in the kitchen with me. I checked your person for some manner of tracking or recording device, and found none. Tells me nobody cares about you enough to keep an eye on you, while you’re down here. Nobody but me. So let’s talk.

Don’t bother struggling, you’re only making it worse for yourself. Used a lot of constrictor and double-constrictor knots--those only get tighter the more you move. And what are you going to do if you get out? I clocked you cold with a hot frying pan and you’re probably still smarting. Not a battle-ready condition. And, even if you were battle-ready, you’d have to find a way to overpower me.

And you have to know who I am. Otherwise you wouldn’t have tried to win over my trust with that face.

Yeah. I removed your eyepatch; I wanted to get a good look at both of your brown eyes. Another mistake you made, but at least it’s one in your favor. Tells me you, and/or whoever hired you, don’t know enough about Nick Fury for me to be concerned.

I do have to say, you got some very nice work done. Your features actually feel like they’re there. Not just some kind of hologram. If and when you get out of this, you have to give me the name of your plastic surgeon.

Shows a lot of initiative on your part, having your face changed. Dedication. Or a whole lot of nothing to do with your life. What do you do for a living, anyway? Obviously not anything related to espionage. You’re definitely not Samuel L. Jackson. I have a feeling Sam would be too smart to try and pull something on a former Avenger, no matter how much he’d be offered. For that same reason, I also highly doubt you’re Laurence Fishburne.
Feel free to interrupt me, if you have anything helpful to say.

No?

Alright, what can I call you then? Because there’s no way that I can call you Nick anymore. Not with a straight face.

If you don’t come up with a name, I’ll make something up.

There we go, we have something. Louder, please.

Ivan Tsarevich.

You serious about that?

Alright. If you’re Ivan, can I be Koschei the Deathless? I’d love to play Koschei.

If you google me, Tsarevich, you can easily find that, at some point of my life, I was a ballerina. There are quite a few good stories about me and my ballet days online. Whether you believe what you read on the internet about people or not is entirely up to you. But, in one of the many stories about me, I apparently joined a touring company that performed the “Firebird” play. The directors saw a lot of promise in me, like everyone who dealt with young Natalia, and, at a very tender age of twenty, had me dancing the part of the youngest kidnapped princess. There were thirteen kidnapped princesses in all, because those sorts of stories enjoy using odd numbers and Koschei wasn’t a slouch. Also, like in every fairytale, the youngest was the one Ivan fell for.

Not what I’d wanted to do, playing the kidnapped princess. I always wondered what it’d be like playing the bad guy. Seemed like a lot of fun. Lot of overly dramatic movements. Not so many delicate movements, like the youngest princess. But playing that part did get me where I needed to be with a couple of marks. You’d be surprised how many people were dumb enough to think I was anything at all like the character I played and how many of them got so eager to meet their littlest princess.

Only thing she and I had in common were my pretty face and my dainty movements.

That got a laugh out of you, Tsarevich. What’s so funny? You don’t think I can be dainty? I can be as dainty as I need to be.

I can be as much of anything as I need to be.

Do you think it happened? A part of me kind of does.

Oh yeah. Part of me believes in everything. Especially the stupid stuff.

Yeah. True fact. Girl Scout’s honor.

Let me tell you a secret, Ivan. That’s the key to telling a lie convincingly. You find the part of you that believes what you have to say, no matter how dumb it sounds. Something to remember, next time you have to convince a super spy you’re her ex-boss.

You don’t believe it really happened, do you?

The Firebird-thing.

Tell you what: my SHIELD file’s been declassified. You google it and read it on your own time. It’s a pretty good read, if I do say so myself.
You want to hear what else I google-fu’d the other day?

Alright.

Don’t laugh.

The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the inequities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. Blessed is he, who, in the name of charity and goodwill, shepherds the weak through the valley of darkness. For he is truly his brother’s keeper and the finder of lost children. And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers. And you will know that I am the Lord when I lay my vengeance upon you.

I told you not to laugh.

You want to know what that is?

Yeah, winner winner chicken dinner. Ezekiel 25:17. The “Pulp Fiction” version. I was thinking about it just the other day, looked it up, and made myself memorize it. Totally worth it. I think you ought to get a prize for that answer. What do you want from me?

Ha, nice try. You know I’m not going to untie you. But, seriously, what do you want from me?

Why are you here, Ivan?

Oh, silent again. Here I thought you and I were sort of building up a camaraderie.

Your throat dry, Ivan? You want me to get you a glass of water?

Alright. Water it is.

I’ve made it pretty clear what I want from you, Ivan. I want to hear from you why you’re here. I’ve pieced together something, but I want you to confirm it.

Of course I care about you, Ivan; I was an Avenger, I really want to get to know you, and I even got you a glass of water. Can you help a girl out? I’ll even help you get a drink. Open your mouth and lean a little bit forward.

I’ll bet you think this is an act, Ivan. That I’m not really this nice. And it hurts. Just a little bit. Really.

But, let me reassure you. I made a promise to the homeowner that I wouldn’t harm you further, to learn what I need. I don’t need to do that, anyway. That kind of technique only works on television. On CSI-type shows. It’s about as real as Stockholm-Syndrome, which actual feds don’t believe in. Just a cheap writer trick to get the plot where it needs to be, so that the little mystery gets solved in thirty minutes or an hour or whatever the budget would allow. In reality, people interrogated under torture just say what they think they need to, even if it isn’t true, just to get the beating to stop. People who interrogate like that are amateurs with inferiority complexes, trying to assert some powerplay. Taking their petty pleasures where they can get them. That won’t do anything for me here, since I don’t have an inferiority complex and I only want the truth from you. Or, at least, what you think is true.

Had enough to drink?

Alright. You ready to tell me why you’re here?
'I know too much.' You're not the first person to tell me that, Ivan, but you’re not just here because I’m a little Miss Know-It-All. You’re also here for the dog.

Yeah. You were pretty obvious, making sure I was taking care of him right. And, don’t worry, I have been. I was just pushing your buttons, earlier, to figure how much you cared about him.

So, that’s two reasons why you’re here. I know something I shouldn’t and I’ve got a dog that I shouldn’t. But I want to know some more. Can you tell me, Ivan, how you found this place and knew we’d be here?

Ha! I’m sorry, you expect me to believe that?

Alright, fine, let’s say a part of me does believe it. How did the envelope with all this intel get in your apartment?

It was handed over to you by a guy with an accent. How’d he show up there?

Of course you don’t know. Alright. Could you even tell me what kind of accent he had?

There’s no such thing as a ‘dunno-accent-kind-of-accent’. But I guess I’ll have to accept that answer. And he offered you--

Mm. Alright, and I’m betting he paid you half already, to reimburse you for the face-job, and you’ll be getting the rest of the pay upon completion.

Oh please. If you could already afford the face-job, you wouldn’t have taken this job.

And I’m also guessing he christened you as Ivan Tsarevitch.

Figures.

You know who’s paying you, Ivan?

Nice try. Describe the guy with the accent.

Ivan, a guy like that. They’re the front. That’s why they usually look that odd and have an accent--to attract attention and distract you from whoever they’re representing. And, with jobs like this, there’s always someone else behind the man with the accent, paying the bill. Did the man give you their client’s name--or, even, a pseudonym?

You really just think it was the guy?

Alright. Fine. Let’s say it was him, nobody behind him. Did the guy with the accent give you a name? Or did he just let you call him ‘guy with an accent’?

_Bol’shoy Brat_?

Ivan. After you got this envelope, did you even bother to read up on the character you had to play?

Which charact--Ivan Tsarevich.

Of course you didn’t. Ivan Tsarevich, in one story, gets himself torn apart by his older brothers.

Yeah, talk about your sibling rivalry. Ivan, you always have to research the part you’re given before you play it. You know what that makes you, Ivan?
You’d know if you bothered reading up on your part; you’re the sacrificial lamb. The guy that gets all the legwork done, saves the girl and all that, but gets himself killed by his older brothers so the other siblings can reap what you sowed. Ivan gets bailed out by a wolf, but I’ve got your wolf outside and watching the place for intruders. He totally bought that you’re Nick, so he doesn’t know who you really are or why you’ve come here. Which means he’s in no position to help you.

Only people who can help you are you and me.

You think I’m lying. Why don’t you tell me what you think I’d gain from spinning this lie?

I don’t want your trust, Ivan. I don’t need your trust.

Oh, no, I’ve got enough of your honesty. You’ve been plenty honest. Even when you weren’t trying to be. I know, for instance, that you haven’t actually been keeping tabs on Tony Stark like I have—or you wouldn’t question Inglewood—and that’s also to your benefit. Even if Stark and I don’t see eye-to-eye, he was my friend. And you’d be in deeper shit if I knew you were messing with my friends. I also know your source’s intel on Nick Fury’s horribly outdated. So this tells me that you’re an amateur at this and your boss is a pompous asshole, bringing in someone as inexperienced as you to do his dirty work.

And, judging by your reaction, you trusted this guy. This guy with the accent or the guy behind him. You trusted he’d given you a fairly straight-forward job and the information you needed, to get it done. That was your first mistake of many. You never trust anyone, when you play this game. You always verify what they give you. Was there anything else your boss had to tell you?

Your boss had a message for me, in case you got compromised? Alright, well, why not? What else does this guy want me to know?

Ooh, a warning. Let me guess, I have to get out while I can. Take the pets and the homeowner and flee.

No?

‘There’s no place for me to run.’ Please. Even if I have the dog warp us someplace nice and hot and far—like Hawaii?

Of course. ‘She’ll find me.’

Of course she will.

She an associate of yours, Ivan? Have you even met her, or seen her? Maybe she’s another ‘bol’shoy brat’ to tear you apart?

Of course not. Can you even describe her for me? I’ll bet you she’s brunette with dark, sullen eyes.

Of course.

Just a hunch, Ivan. You don’t have to know how I figure; you don’t have to know everything about me. I’ve got to keep some things secret.

How about a name, then? You know what I call her?

Sorry, can you repeat that?

Yeah. I’m touched. Really. That you’re concerned about me, Ivan.
We’re getting up. You pull something funny, Ivan, and I’ve got a close friend of a close friend’s right here. Let me introduce you to Mr. Eastwood, Clint’s magnum. You don’t want to make his day, Ivan. Just let me adjust the ropes, I’ll let you stand, you follow what I say and where I go. If you don’t want to get torn apart by your siblings.

I did promise Laura, but what good’s a promise if you don’t risk breaking it?

Ha, exactly. Just follow what Mr. Eastwood and I have to say, and we’ll continue getting along just fine. You and me, Ivan.

Oh, yeah. I think we’re getting along pretty well, all things considered.

I’m readjusting the ropes right now. Remember what I told you.

I just need to get a few things, get the dogs with the homeowner, and I need to keep you in my sights.

Yes, all of this over a girl’s name. Even if it isn’t her actual name. (Which it probably isn’t.) Just--who told you to call her Carina?

Of course. The man with the accent. You have absolutely no idea what you’ve gotten yourself into.

Ivan. Let this be a lesson to you--never take any envelopes from men with accents you can’t identify.

No shit, Ivan, you’re not in trouble. You just got knocked out by a former Avenger and now--

Shit! What was--!

Bozhe moi, calm down, Ivan! Calm down!

Calm down.

How about this: I’ve got some good news for you. If you stop panicking, I’ll share it.

Alright.

Alright, you calm?

Good. You were dumb enough to take a job that would put you in opposition with a former Avenger, but this former Avenger you were sent against likes to minimize casualties as much as possible.

Yep, that’s all I’ve got for good news. Stand up. We have to work fast, we have to move.

Chapter End Notes

Now, I know what everyone’s thinking after a chapter like this: what are the dogs doing?

Find out on Thursday.
So. I’ve been making a very conscious effort to avoid shipping with this fic. It’s not that I don’t like shipping, I just felt that a fic about a dog would already be filled with quite a bit of love and I wanted to take the opportunity to explore types of love different than romantic love.

But then, I wrote Cosmo the Space Dog talking with Pizza Dog. I have found bits of them interacting in the “Avengers Academy” mobile game (which I have not played), and I appreciate their friendship there, so I have no idea how I started writing them and, with this fic, thought about their possible puppy love. (I really think I just ship them in this fic, though. Love them as just comrade-bros anywhere else.) Maybe it’s the bit of me that shipped Black Widow and Clint back in the day, reasserting itself through their dogs that they stole from pretty terrible people. Or maybe it’s just because they’re dogs. There’s just something so pure and innocent about dogs.

Anyway, from this point forward, I’m not fighting it any further. There’s weirder stuff in this story, it’s gotten pretty dark and needs some levity, I think it fits the tone of this bizarre fic, and they’re pretty cute together. I’m just not tagging it because the majority of this fic hasn’t been about this crackship and I don’t really want to be the one to create the “Spacedog/Pizza-dog” tag on Archive of Our Own. I’ve got enough embarrassing accomplishments as is.

Every week, dear reader, I aim to write something that actively makes you question what on earth you are reading and/or is pretty hard to summarize and describe to other people. So, now, if you are the type that attempts to tell other people about the fic you read, you can say that you’ve read something about Pizza Dog and Cosmo falling in love.

Anyway. Time to fit in a bit of a Michael Korvac storyline. Sort of. This takes place more or less during Natasha’s interrogation.

Mmm. Pizza Dog.

Pizza Dog. Have you ever heard of the term poputchik?

Could I tell you what it means?

It refers to someone who is complete stranger, goink same way as you, who you connect with. By sharink deepest secrets and stories. Sometimes connectink in deeper way than others you’d known most of your life.

It has political connotations too, but I don’t intend to use any of them with you.

You, Lucky. You are my poputchik. We have barely known each other a day, but, here we are, guardink our loved ones. We ate eggs together, talked together. Now I am lyink close to you by
barn, warmed by your lovely fur, and listen ink to your heart beat. You have such a steady beat, my friend. Such a nice rhythm.

You are still worried about Laura-Mommy. Do you remember what she told us, my comrade? She did yoga. She was just practicing her breathing. And the eggs were only a little cold because she, Natasha, and Nick were so engrossed in their conversation that they forgot about them a little while.

Maybe she was just trying a different yoga than usual. Please relax, my friend. If it was something important, I know they’d let us know. Please just take in this sight. How beautiful the night is, with all of the stars shining.

Cosmo has seen many things, Comrade. Seen many nights on many planets. Cosmo loves KNOWHERE and KNOWHERE has beautiful sky, but is always light out. Really, there is no night. And definitely no sight like this one.

I’ve never felt this way about anyone before, Lucky.

Have you?

Cosmo feels like Cosmo has known you all of Cosmo’s life. I feel like I can tell you anything, because our breathing has the same rhythm and so do our hearts. Do you feel that way?

I am happy you do.

Have you felt that way with anyone before?

I am very sad to hear that they did not love you back as fervently as you loved them, but I am very happy that we are each other’s first romances.

Cosmo just never knew it would feel like this. Cosmo still loves everyone Cosmo has ever loved before, but, with you, it was just so quick and easy to do.

Da, you are very easy to love. You are very brave and good dog. Protecting your owners, taking care of them. And you are so easy to talk to. And so dependable.

Cosmo even feels like Cosmo could say things Cosmo couldn’t with others. Do you feel that way, too?

Oh, da, my friend.

Could Cosmo tell you something Cosmo has never told anyone—not even Liho, Natasha, Carina, or even Tivan? Is very personal and Cosmo absolutely doesn’t want anyone else to know. I only want to tell you, because you are very good dog. One of the best and most honorable I ever met.

Alright. Cosmo does not feel like Cosmo was very good Head of Security on KNOWHERE.

Nyet, you are being polite. Cosmo knows Cosmo wasn’t good. If Cosmo did own job, Carina’s cousin wouldn’t have seen her again and Cosmo’s family wouldn’t have gotten into the trouble that it did.

Of course Cosmo is thinking of Carina. Cosmo often thinks of her. Is like you and Laura-Mommy. You never want to see something bad happen to her. And Cosmo let bad thing happen to Carina.

Maybe it wasn’t entirely Cosmo’s fault. Maybe fallout was inevitable, since Tivan and Carina did not always get along. They were incredibly dysfunctional. But Cosmo still wishes Cosmo did more
to prevent Carina’s cousin from meeting her, because that is when they really fell apart.

Do you mind if Cosmo talks about it a little? Cosmo feels like Cosmo can tell you anything.

Oh, *spasibo*, my friend.

Cosmo knew, from looking at Carina’s old memories, that her cousin was not at all very good person. Not like Tivan, who was not nice but is good and terrible person. Cosmo was afraid her cousin, Brite Lorr’d, had even less good in him than Tivan. And, while sitting with them at bar in Starlin’s, looking into his outermost thoughts for first time, smell him, Cosmo felt all of those fears being confirmed. Made the fur at the back of my neck stand up.

He smelled like very dark chocolate. Maybe 80% pure. Not at all a nice smell, like Carina’s cinnamony-bubblegum scent. As he sat at bar next to her, and they caught up with chitchat, his most superficial thoughts revealed what awful person he was.

Anytime she said word with more than three syllables, his passions would spike and solidify into his first comprehensible thought. Thought was always to find some way to belittle her. As if those multisyllabic thoughts threatened his own sense of self-identity. Is worst kind of person, who has to put others down to feel more confident with self. So he’d tell her to speak Krylorian, unless she forgot how to. Cosmo send her little mental note that is fine that she talks as she wants. Carina assured Cosmo she was ok. But, in first hour of speaking with him, she stuck to words with three syllables or less.

Poor Carina. All she was really thinking of was their shared childhood. When she scrape knee while bikin’ and he pick her up, take her into house, and patch up with bandage. Or when they sneak off together, climb on roof of house, and look at stars. Sneakin’ into filmhouse together. Sweet things like that.

Any time she would talk about herself and her troubles, he would dismiss them or turn attention to him somehow. Thinkin’ he had been through worse, though he had been in and out of prison-system, but is only very self-absorbed and immature who listen to others’ problems and turn them into theirs.

He apologize profusely about sellin’ her, yet Cosmo found no sincerity in him as he mouthed those words. Cosmo privately told Carina, beggin’ her to notice. She was very smart girl. Had to be somethink even she noticed.

She did, and she still wanted to give him chance. Because he was flesh and blood. And if flesh and blood refused to give second chance, where else would someone like him get it?

He got her many drinks, and she drank.

He tell her that her troubles were over now, as he touch the scars on her cheeks. Cosmo growl, knowin’ she didn’t like that—he glared at Cosmo, but Carina stopped Cosmo, promisin’ thinks were alright. And he turned back to her, assurin’ now that he found her thinks would be better now. He had changed for better, through worryin’ sick about her.

She talk to him about many thinks she had dealt with in eleven years, some thinks Cosmo knows she shouldn’t have told (but Cosmo put up perception filter around them, so only they would hear it). Cosmo try to stop her. She wouldn’t.

A long time ago, Cosmo learned how to ask people to do thinks in ways that they could not refuse. That they had to listen to Cosmo’s orders. But Cosmo hadn’t used in so long, because Cosmo had
spent years surrounded by people who took care of Cosmo without Cosmo havink to ask. Now, Cosmo was very tempted to use ability to protect those same people who spent so long takink care of Cosmo.

When Cosmo was made Head of Security by Tivan, Tivan pulled Cosmo to side and had privately warned Cosmo that there were would points when Cosmo may have to do somethink to protect people, somethink very hard that Cosmo would not normally want to do. Cosmo knew this was one of those times.

But Cosmo still could not do it.

By end of conversation, Brite learned about Tivan’s visions, about his siblinks, about his life’s work, about his long-gone loved ones, about him beink last of his kind, and about the Stones (the powerful objects Tivan had spent so long tryink to get a hold of). It was not emergency, only time Tivan would be okay with us talkink about such thinks, and this was not person who could be trusted, only type of person Tivan would be aright with us tellink such thinks to. He tease Carina about not pressink Tivan to learn more about vision she appeared in. She was mature enough to respect Tivan’s decision not to tell her, and she would rebuff Brite’s goadink with laughs.

They got very drunk and, not a minute after conversation end, he convince her to take him to Tivan’s office (his private one) where Tivan kept his piano, which was often suspended in air so that guests in office had more room to sit or stand in front of his desk. Brite demanded she play for him. Cosmo knew he did not really care to hear and Cosmo send private message of truth.

After his father, her uncle, had been arrested and sent to asylum for criminally insane, he’d been cravink criminal empire that was lost to him with his own father. Same criminal empire her father had served. Really, his outmost desires weren’t to hear her play but to get private audience with Tivan. Find way to steal Tivan’s hard earned contacts and businesses, after earnink his trust.

Now, Cosmo does not like to use mental abilities to search people deeply without their permission. Tivan felt it was necessary to do this, for job, so, to comply with what Cosmo want, Tivan let all workers know of Cosmo’s abilities. Brite had to know Cosmo could read minds, since it was not secret, but Brite was lackink too much in self-awareness, to keep thoughts like this deeper inside of himself where Cosmo would not look without permission.

And Carina still got up with him, took him by the arm, and, wobblink from alcohol, guided him into Museum, past exhibits, through locked doorway, and into Tivan’s very private office.

It wasn’t that she believed him, really. As she snap fingers, lower piano, get close to keys, and tremble a little, Cosmo could smell her melancholy paintink the air. Was so thick Cosmo could practically taste it. But, as she start to play, her melancholy was tryink to transform with the keys she would press down and the notes she would create. Was tryink to become happy. She wanted to believe, even though she knew better. She wanted to believe so badly.

Poor Carina! Poor, poor Carina!

Lucky, a part of me wanted to believe for her too, even though I knew better, especially as she channel all of her emotions into that instrument. Cosmo could hear her pain, her denial of what she knew to be true. And, as Cosmo hear, Cosmo just wanted it to be ended.

Let somethink work for her, for once. Let her love, without beink so afraid of beink let down or havink her love be used so cruelly by anyone. Let her trust, without fear that trust would be broken and betrayed in front of her. Let the violence in her soul quell, and find perfect peace from a past so sad and so filled with disappointments.
And Brite—oh, Lucky, Brite. When he listen to her playink, feel his own heart touched and his spirit rise and fall with each crescendo, what is it that he does? Instead of takink in such beauty, lettink it melt the hardness around his heart, he laughed at her. *Da*, he did. He really did. So loudly and so awfully. Louder than her playink.

He got so loud that she just had to stop. Cosmo could see her face crinkle, like it usually did before she cried, but she didn’t this time. She just stood by piano and said nothink.

I really hated her cousin, especially now, so I turn to him and tell him he really has to leave. Not with voice he cannot turn down, just with normal voice. He asks me why, so Cosmo informs him that, as Head of Security of KNOWHERE and Collector’s Museum, I make this decision. He tells me he is not leavink, that I am only dog and Cosmo have no right to order him around.

Another voice cuts in, accented and somnambulant. I recognize it immediately, and so does Carina. We all turn to the far bookshelves in corner and watch man step out from behind furthest shelf that was out a little, carefully swink it back in place and over passage, and turn to us with arms crossed. His outfit is the same as it was last night (sequenced and collared pantsuit that, all thinks considered, was very conservative look for him). He slowly repeats himself, my owner, and asks Brite if he was seriously dismissink authority of his Security Chief.

As if Tivan did not know, Brite point out that I am dog. And Tivan respond that I am, in fact, dog and an excellent one. Brite ask Tivan if he wanted to know who he was, and Tivan so coolly replied that he had no interest in consortink with intruder.

So Brite turn to Carina, demandink she introduce him to Tivan.

Carina stare, breathink a little harder while lookink at Brite, then Tivan, then me, and then her hands. They are tremblink. She tilt head back up to Brite and ask what was goink on.

He laugh, smilink and so excited, as he cheerfully inform her that ‘it’ was kickink in.

I do not like sound of that at all, so I trot over to Carina and ask her permission to use my abilities to scan her. She nods her head, slowly, but her breathink gets so loud, her eyes roll back into her skull, and she falls over.

Even though I am Chief of Security and should move with decorum, I run to her and switch on the Museum’s alarms with my mind. Cosmo barks for her, as Cosmo gets close to her face, and nuzzles her to keep her calm. A jacket by Tivan’s very lovely desk gets pulled to us and placed under her head, so that she can be a little more comfortable. I tell her robot sentries will hear alarm, be here to pick her up, and take her to doctors. I beg her not to lose consciousness. I do not look at Tivan or Brite for a bit, but I hear them talk.

Is second time I could ever recall Tivan yellink at anyone, in so long that I was with him. He scolds Brite, demandink to know what sort of opioid he gave to his attendant. Brite promise it was only the good stuff, to loosen her up.

Ah, that is enough to get my attention! Cosmo scan her quickly, while the doors are pushed open and robot sentries come in. As they take her in their roboty arms and keep jacket close to her head, I identify that it is concoction sold in back alley, behind central dispatch area, and, like with opioids, mixink with alcohol was very bad move.

I relay to Tivan, and he becomes extra livid.

Brite very stupidly try to assure Tivan, informink him that Carina is his cousin and he knows her
best. As robots take her away, she yells to Tivan and demands that he not lay even a finger on Brite. Tivan tell her nothink, calmly askink me to stay.

But Carina, I hear her too. She calls me and calls.

But Tivan--
But Carina--
But--

Ooh, Pizza Dog! Is Comrade Belka!

Comrade, why did you leave us when Nick Fur-- Comrade, slow down! You are chitterink too fast!

Oh, Pizza Dog! What is it?

Oh! You do not speak squirrel! Let me translate, then!

Captain American axe. Motorcycle. Brun-- bozhe moi! The brunette! Pizza Dog, we must warp to the owners! Everyone, hold tight to Cosmo as Cosmo rearranges thinks in doggy tag...and...switches on device...and--!

Ah. Ah. Pizza Dog. Why are outside by the pick-nick table and not in house?

Bozhe moi! Get under the table! The brunette! The brunette! She has the Captain American a--! Oh, oh! Pizza Dog! Pi--I cannot join you and Belka! The brunette! The brunette--Cosmo does not know how to explain! But she is--it feels like--oh, she is squeezink my-my mind…!

Bozhe moi! She is liftink table up! Run Pizza Dog! Run Belka! Go, Comrades! Please don’t stay! Go and warn Natasha! Go! Go!

Nyet! Nyet!

Chapter End Notes

After watching some Benicio Del Toro flicks, it just felt kind of inevitable to have the Collector facing off against a drug dealer of some sort. I've worked stranger actor allusions in this fic.

Next week: Cosmo the Space Dog, Lucky the Pizza Dog, and Belka the Comrade versus Carina. Sort of. Well, you'll see.
Now that the Brunette has been revealed to be a Carina, I am very happy that I can now tell you, the reader, that I’ve always imagined her looking like Ophelia Lovibond sans the pink makeup. Ophelia Lovibond played Carina in the first “Guardians” film and she is also really good in the TV show “Elementary”.

Anyway: time for more strange headcanon! (Hopefully this will make things make slightly more sense.) This chapter is a bit beefy.

Edited: forgot an essential two words and wanted to revise a list, to make it a little clearer. And typos I didn't notice until after hitting enter. Yeah.

Is curious think, havink mind squeezed by very lovely and sad-lookink brunette. Makes Cosmo rethink model of mind Cosmo has been usink. Maybe mind is not very much like egg. Maybe mind is more like sponge. Full of holes and a little small and dry, but gets bigger when water gets in. And other liquids too. So, when liquids get in sponge, they all mix together and become new liquid. Da, as beautiful brunette squeezes Cosmo’s mind, Cosmo feels all of the liquid comink out. All of the memories. All of the lives. All of the little dogs.

Or maybe is not at all like sponge. Maybe is like cage, containink dangerous beastie you cannot identify. You talk with the beast, you get to know the beast, but you never fully know the beast. All you can do is observe, learn what you can. Try not to agitate it so much. Placate it, tend to it. Try not to let the beastie out, least it could hurt someone. Especially you.

Or maybe is not like that either. Maybe mind doesn’t keep to one form. Maybe is always shiftink. When you think you understand some properties of it, it changes on you. Is cage, is egg, is sponge, is new discovery each day.

Cosmo is sorry. Cosmo is gettink off-topic again. Cosmo was just focusink on so many thinks, as brunette was incapacitatink Cosmo. Thinks like ‘how is she doink this to Cosmo?’, ‘how did she use Cosmo’s device to pull Cosmo and Cosmo’s friends to her?’, ‘how did she get to this place so quickly?’, ‘how is she pushink me out of her head?”, etcetera. Lucky and Belka , Cosmo did not know why they were stayink. Why Belka was climbink on top of Cosmo’s head, shakin it a little. Even as Cosmo laid down with storm in head. Lucky, the brave dog, was greetink the brunette in traditional Terran way. Brunette threw pick-nick table at Lucky and Lucky, recallink his Clint-guy’s circus trainink, ducked and rolled out of way.

Cosmo will always love them. Not just because they are Cosmo’s friends, but also because Cosmo does not know how to fall out of love. Cosmo only just learned how to lie, so, perhaps, is like that.

To lie, you must convince yourself lie is truth. In spite of knowink better. You must break your mind a little, break a bit of who you are (because that is very tied to what you know), and you must pull a bit from other truths you hold to make lie convincink to others. You must be very clever, so that you’ve accumulated a lot of truths to cull lies from. Or you just come off as stupid, ignorant person.
Ah, but Cosmo is dog of such simple tastes. Cosmo knows too much and maybe does not have the best memory, but Cosmo cannot lie self out of love. Because love is truth to dog.

Most dogs do not remember thinks like Cosmo. They do not remember specific incidents or particulars. When they are bad and do bad think, they do not remember exactly. They only recall it is bad because they recall beink scolded. They do not usually feel guilt, they just do not want to get yelled at. Is just unpleasant. When they hear food bowl hit ground, they recall that it means food but is not because of specific memory of gettink food. Is from repeatedly hearink sound of food bowl hittink ground and, soon after, gettink bowl filled with more food. Is really only feelinks comink out, in response to repeated stimuli, that most dogs recall.

Even if peoples do truly unforgivable think, Cosmo cannot unlove them. Is why, as brunette wrings out Cosmo’s brain like is sponge, Cosmo’s mind goes to people that are not there, but Cosmo still loves.

Cosmo has not been able to talk with many people about those people Cosmo loved, his disappeared owners. Talkink about them with Natasha, Liho, Belka, and Lucky makes Cosmo feel truly blessed and a little cursed at same time. Is wonderful to have peoples who take interest in life of weird dog. Is just story of Cosmo’s life that always made sense to Cosmo. Tivan is good boy who forgets to be good, Carina is sad girl who gets mad, and they did not get along. But, as Cosmo tell it, only then does Cosmo realize how strange it all sounds. Not just because is from telepathic Soviet dog.

Only now has Cosmo’s tale changed. Only now, as Cosmo tries to tell it to other people, does Cosmo ask more about Cosmo’s own life and what is in Cosmo’s head. Da, is think that Cosmo should know better than everyone else, but is eggy-spongy-whatever-else-beastie-in-cage that Cosmo is tryink to observe and learn properties of.

Cosmo thinks of you, Carina. And what Cosmo would have told you.

Cosmo have many thinks Cosmo wants to tell, in way only Cosmo can tell. Would that I could be more eloquent. Cosmo wishes Cosmo could tell you that Tivan was cruel to you because he thought it would protect you, but Cosmo is not so sure about that. Cosmo wants to tell you that he wasn’t like that before we had to go huntink for the Infinity Stones, but Cosmo knows that isn’t entirely true either. Cosmo so, so, so desires to tell you that Tivan killed your cousin because he had no other choice. But Cosmo does not want to lie to you, because you had been lied to enough.

Cosmo wants, instead, to tell you story of Little Dog. Maybe it would make more sense about what happened to your awful cousin, then. Cosmo cannot excuse terrible think Tivan did to your cousin and mistreatink you, but Cosmo only wants to explain. Cosmo only wants to tell you what is true. Cosmo did not mean to tell it to Natasha incorrectly, Cosmo just didn’t recall it as clearly as Cosmo did when brunette squeezed Cosmo’s mind. Cosmo is old dog with many thinks in Cosmo’s head.

Cosmo is many dogs. Not just many breeds, but also composed from genetic material of many dogs. And all of their memories are in Cosmo’s head. All Cosmos in Cosmo’s head. Some donors alive in Collection (were not killed to make me) and others were from good doggies that died of natural causes, some from Collection and some from Terra and other planets. Some came from sad old lives with bad old owners. Some good. Some with none.

Tivan experimented this, for purpose of Collection. In case of cataclysm and he would be needink to cull from genetic material of his pets to repopulate Universe. Similar projects have happened throughout Universe (like those of Celestials and later those of Thanos, Sovereigns, and Kree), but results were never pleasink to him. He take look and knew he could do better. He had the wealth, knowledge, ample time, and resources.
There were many, many Cosmos. Took place over many centuries. Perhaps longer.

First few Cosmos did not live too long. They died of natural causes. Heart was too weak, lungs too small, etcetera. And every time, Tivan got such a sad look in his eyes. But, thankfully, he was still stubborn. Always, reusink dogs’ genetic material to perfect his process of brinink back life.

Soon, he turn to stronger dogs. Good Russian dogs from Terra. A bit of street dogs from Stalingrad, a bit of cosmonaut dog remains he pulled out of crushed test-rocket, a bit from browny Golden Retriever, another from reddish Labrador, from all over. To create most unique specimen of Terran-based *canis lupus familiaris*.

Cosmo was born with eyes shut, with such brittle bones, with organs all wrong size, and with breathink as heavy as yours after Brite snuck that backalley opioid into your drink (that Cosmo is still so sorry that Cosmo did not identify until after it kicked in). Wasn’t done on purpose. Just happened. Cosmo could not see, but Cosmo could...how do you say it...perceive presences around. Cosmo could smell the spicy licorice scent of Tivan, smell his worries as he would hover over Cosmo in Cosmo’s containment unit. And how horrible he’d feel, how inhumane it felt to let this latest experiment live in sufferink as I had. He just didn’t know how to help Cosmo. Cosmo was so unknowable. And, in this way, also fascinatink to him.

Cosmo got so afraid. Cosmo could remember all of the dogs, and Cosmo recalled from them. Cosmo pulled from memories of earlier dog that could talk like Cosmo can, little Russian dog, and beg to him in small voice. My Russian is rusty. *Bozhe Môi*, Cosmo speaks to him. Him that created Cosmo. *Izvinitye, myne nuzhna pomosh’! Pomogitye mn’e, pozhalujsta?*

Cosmo afraid it will not work, as Cosmo feels Cosmo’s chest constrictink. But Cosmo still smells him stayink by my containment unit. Standink, with very confused scents. Cosmo asks again for his help, in humblest and politest way. This was before Cosmo thought of self as boy, and that probably helped. Because voice Cosmo spoke with Tivan, so long ago, sounded so much to him like little girl voice. This person, that Cosmo knew for so many of Cosmo’s lifetimes, who worked so hard to give Cosmo life and who met Cosmo over and over again without realizink it.

*U myenya bol’*, Cosmo lets him know. *Myenya bolit syerdtsye.*

And he asks me what he can get for Cosmo, while I am havink heart-pains. In Russian, because he can be considerate.

Cosmo tells him *bol’she svezhiy kislorod*.

So he pulls me out of containment unit and takes me to Green Room, with lots of fresh air for me to breathe from the plants. Cosmo is so tiny. Cosmo fits so well in his hands.

Cosmo begs him not to leave, after he set up little blanket to serve as bed for Cosmo. So he stays until Cosmo sleeps. When Cosmo wakes up, Cosmo tries to get out of bed and find him, but Cosmo’s muscles are weak. So Cosmo calls as loudly as Cosmo can.

*Bozhe moi! Bozhe moi!*

Soon enough, he is there and he corrects me. He is called Taneleer Tivan. Most peoples call him Tivan. So is what Cosmo does too. And Cosmo wishes him good mornink.

He lets Cosmo know is not mornink. So Cosmo wish him good mornink and good night.

He rubs my ears, very, very carefully. Then, he puts my very teeny paw in his hand and shakes it. He informs me, as he does all of this, that Cosmo is most unique specimen of *canis lupus familiaris*.
he had ever encountered.

Cosmo thanks him and asks him if is normal to have so many thinks in head. He want clarification, so I give it. I remember bein all of the dogs and all of their memories are in my head, so now none of it made any sense anymore.

He pause and then let Cosmo know is not entirely unusual. Everyone have thinks in head that do not make sense and everyone have to make sense of them. Cosmo thought it was lovely to think to hear, and Cosmo still thinks it is.

So I ask him if he can help find answers, and he agrees. He is scientist, and answers interest him.

Brother Gast come in. His gifts are like mine. Is how him and Tivan talk even without dispatch. He stays for small period, to create plan of how Tivan can train me. He likes me, because I am cute dog. Cosmo tells him Cosmo does not like him, because he smells like bad person. Gast ask if he can shower to smell like better person. He knows he can’t. Is joke.

Before Gast leave, he tell Tivan to get me clothes. Because it would make me look extra-cute.

Cosmo mix up memories all the time, put them together for all kinds of stories. Tivan work hard to help Cosmo understand powers and let Cosmo look in his head and Collection, to see how he organize the many strange, lovely thinks there. He read Terran stories to me, so that I know my homeworld, and teach me many thinks to make sense. He let me know Terra is very much like Cygnus X-1, his old homeworld, because is birthplace of all life in many Universes and may be where God originated in ours. Is very, very good think to know.

One day, he ask me if I want to be called Kashtanka. Is like Terran short story by...Chekov, I think. I tell him I am not that, I am cosmonaut. Cosmo for short.

And he laugh a little, but accept. He say, technically, I am cosmonaut. I am in space, and I have journeyed farther than any cosmonaut dog ever had. It makes me really happy.

I ask him for my suit. Since cosmonaut trainink had let me know other doggies wore suits, in case ship would break or somethink. Is not fifty years since he last update wardrobe yet, so he make suit himself. Based on most recently made cosmonaut suit. Cosmo like to eat a lot, but he would always warn Cosmo that, if Cosmo ate too much, suit would not fit anymore.

When Cosmo is well, Cosmo help him take care of Collection. Cosmo talk to Collection in ways even he cannot. Some creatures in Collection did not want to be there, but others really did. Others have no home and no one to tend to them. These others would be killed, if they were not in Collection. Is think like that that made Collector very happy to hear, and Cosmo was so happy to share.

Whenever Cosmo does somethink bad, like defecate on nice floor (when Cosmo used to still do that), he would not stick Cosmo’s nose in it or yell. Instead, he would calmly talk with Cosmo about why is bad. Because he knew Cosmo was very intelligent creature. Cosmo grow bigger slowly, get deeper voice, identify as boy, and worship different god than owner. All very unusual for dog, all providink ample evidence of Cosmo’s unusual intelligence.

My point is, Carina, that he always does what he sincerely believe to be right. Not always good, but very necessary. There are different ways of reasonink. Mathematician hold somethink true, unless proven otherwise with contradiction. Politicians go by what their voters want. Lawyers create argument around body of evidence they get from others. Scientists are a little like lawyers, but laws they create are based on evidence that they, themselves, obtain through careful experimentation.
Tivan is scientist. Evidence from meetink psychos like your cousin tell him that he was best off eliminatink him as soon as possible. Terrible thinks like that make Cosmo question all nice thinks he do too.

Is probably not answer you want to hear, but is only answer Cosmo can give to you. And even if he will never be sorry about gettink rid of Brite, Cosmo always will be. Cosmo does not know if Cosmo could have talked him out of doink that, if Cosmo had stayed back then, but Cosmo does not regret goink with you when the robot sentries took you to hospital, helpink keep you calm when they pump your stomach, and sleepink in hospital bed with you. Because Cosmo loves you and will always love you, Carina.

There is other think Cosmo recalls from what Tivan tell Cosmo. Lucky the Pizza Dog, Carina, my love from Terra had theory that pets and owners are alike. And he is so right. Tivan and I both have so many thinks in head, know more than we could ever want. But he used to remind me, when Cosmo was very sad, that there is no virtue in self-pity.

My friends could be gettink hurt from brunette. Cosmo could not lick own wounds for too long anymore.

So while head throbs, Cosmo gets on all fours and stands. Bitink down and musterink all mental faculties, Cosmo takes deep breath and, with single strike and loud bark, pushes out. Expandink self beyond Cosmo. Out of head, through fields, breakink windows of Clint-guy’s house (so sorry Hawkbro), knockink over brunette’s motorcycle, and knockink back brunette off of feet. Pick-nick table falls far from her hands, landink far from Lucky. But axe she have tighter grip on.

Lucky get close and ask if Cosmo Bro is ok. Cosmo nuzzles him and tells him da. Belka hugs Cosmo on top of head. Cosmo check if all are alright and is pleased when they tell Cosmo is so.

Brunette fell flat on butt some feet away, so she have softish place to land, but Cosmo still ask her if she is ok (since Cosmo cannot feel her grippink on Cosmo’s mind anymore). Cosmo does not venture too deep into her head, just enough so she can hear Cosmo. Ooh, but her mind! Such unusual shape from first impression! Not at all like what Cosmo had ever encountered! Is not egg, or sponge, or beastie in cage. Somehow even weirder than Gast’s! (Alright, maybe that is a bit much--nobody outweirds Gast.)

Before Cosmo can really think of way to describe, she groans, stirs, and then growls.

We know, then, our fight is not over and we ready ourselves, waitink all sportsman-animal-whatever-like for her to get up. Is probably not cleverest think to be doink, but we are good animals. At least, we do not get too close to her to help her up. She definitely seemed like she could do that on own and would not want our help anyway.

But, because Cosmo is good dog, Cosmo wanted to offer it anyway. Just as soon as she stood on her own two feet and was ready for us to try and be talkink to her.

Cosmo saw sad look in her eyes and just wanted to know who she was and why she was there.

Chapter End Notes

Quite a bit of “Guardians” and “Thor”, the MCU space stuffs, are pretty much “The Saga of Lousy Space Dad Issues” (probably because of myths, Joseph Campbell, and
“Star Wars”). So, with Cosmo, I wanted to give him something similar and dissimilar.

The falsely remembered origin thing is a tribute to Silver Age comics. And because I totally didn’t know Stalingrad was 20 hours away from Moscow until weeks after I posted that first chapter. So, reader, if you take nothing else from this bizarre fic, know that wonderful, weird stuff can always come from mistakes.

Anyway, next chapter: a battle between telepaths and the destruction of the Collection on KNOWHERE. It will be a beast of a chapter, and I will be delaying posting this until Friday or Saturday.
Alright. While writing this fic, I’ve been constantly reviewing canons (the film scenes, the prelude story written by Abnett and Lanning, the artbook, and the comics’ counterparts’ stories), and more fan-run accounts of the canons like the wikis and TV Tropes; I also check things out on tumblr and read youtube comments for the clips I review, just to see how others’ opinions of the characters are different or the same as mine. In these reviews, I’ve found that Carina has been pretty unexamined. I think the MCU Carina is an enigma, much like her comic counterpart. Her walk to the Power Stone, or the Orb, is one of the most fascinating bits to review. She says nothing, but her expressions run a gamut. With a small amount of screentime in the cameo bit of “Thor 2” and the bits in the first “Guardians”, Ophelia Lovibond crafts such an interesting character with facial expressions, body language, and the tones she uses with her 3-4 lines. It’s a spectacular performance. How she is written here is kind of bits of her comic counterpart’s, bits of the comic’s Krylor, the privately angry but weirdly caring impression that I got from the prelude comic, and the very sad but interesting character in the film.

One of the biggest challenges with writing this was trying to write both the Collector and Carina somewhat sympathetically, while keeping them antagonistic toward one another. As I’ve stated, I totally empathized more with Carina after watching the first film; in spite of this, I also think there is value in examining why both of these characters act as they do. This is in no way to romanticize, glamorize, or condone mistreating other people, imprisoning them against their will, wrecking others’ stuff, or harming other living creatures. There is really no justification for behavior like that.

Although I am handling Carina’s plan to grab the Power Stone somewhat differently than a means to get her revenge or die trying (because it makes no sense in this fic), I am still adding those tags and putting a warning here. This chapter will be a bit intense, although I will be keeping to the T rating. Out of consideration for people that do not want to read something like this, but still want to continue this story, I will write it in a way that you could skip to the next chapter and still learn the most vital information of this one.

I also totally forgot the Collector’s ride was coming out this weekend. Definitely didn’t plan this chapter to coincide with that, but it works out really nicely. I’ve been looking forward to it, just to hear what they’re doing with the rest of Jeff Goldblum’s Grandmaster’s footage for the ride.

Alright, on to the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hello, Cosmo called out to the brunette. My name is Cosmo! This is my friend, Belka, and my love, Lucky! What is your name?
Lucky greet her too, in normal Terran way.

Brunette was actively pushink Cosmo out of her mind, makink it very hard to be talkink to her; instead of answerink, she stood on own two feet, gripped tighter to axe, and held out other arm. Cosmo heard the pick-nick table rustle where it had been dropped, but Cosmo tug on it back with Cosmo’s mind. Could not be lettink it get back to her so that she could throw it to hurt others again.

Cosmo sense there was openink in her mind, as she strain to pull pick-nick table from Cosmo, so Cosmo try again with greetink. Same with Lucky.

Stop barkink, she finally scold us, because we were givink her headache. So we did. Openink in mind seemed much larger. Was good time for Cosmo to try again.

In most gentle voice, Cosmo ask if she needs help. We are good animals and, even though Lucky and Belka give me look, we all agree to help her as long as she stops hurtink others. Because we really cannot be havink that.

She drops hand, givink up on pick-nick table. Cosmo sets it down in proper place, asks for her name, and we just stand and look at each other.

She tells us we can call her She-Hulk. It smells like fake-name, so Cosmo ask for her name again. She tell us to call her Ms. Walters, then. Still doesn’t smell too real, but Cosmo accept on behalf of everyone there.

*Belka* whispers into Cosmo’s ear, promisink to summon other squirrels to give her the drop when Cosmo gives call. Cosmo takes note, but does not plan to have other squirrels come in. Even if Cosmo was not best Head of Security on KNOWHERE, out of animals there, Cosmo had most suitable experience to this task and experience said try talkink it out first.

She want to know where Cat and Blondie are.

Cosmo woah what she wanted with them, if she was with cops to arrest Blonde or somethink.

She laughs a little. Is dorkiest laugh Cosmo has ever heard, with snorts and such lack of rhythm. Even if she was tryink to kill Cosmo and friends some minutes ago and Cosmo hasn’t gotten entirely clear look at her face, is just so cute that Cosmo cannot help but fall in love with her a little. She
confirms that she is not with cops, but insists we would not believe her.

Try me, I am talkink Soviet spacedog, Cosmo tell her and Cosmo translate for friends that talk after.

I am squirrel, chirp Belka.

I am ex- Mafiya dog with trainink from supercool ex-travellink-circus-performer-turned-ex-agent-turned-fugitive, added Lucky. And favorite food is pizza. Barton-kids have song for him if she want to hear.

Ooh, Cosmo did want to hear but we were doink negotiations! So Cosmo politely turn him down (but tell him he could share later), Cosmo promise we would keep secret and Cosmo can confirm is true in her head with Cosmo’s advanced mental capabilities.

She get a little more on-edge there, backink a little ways away. Mental barriers go back up, makink it harder for Cosmo to reach her. She commands that Cosmo keep out of her head, that we shouldn’t see what’s there.

Buildink up trust is always hard part of negotiatink. Can take many years to build it up, and, even after buildink it, it was too easy to break. But, right now, we did not have years. Cosmo could sense we had to build sooner.

Ms. Walters, Cosmo begin, steppink a little bit forward. Cosmo have thinks in Cosmo’s head that Cosmo doesn’t want either. We all have those thinks. But you don’t have to deal with it alone. When Blondie and my owners were upset, they talk to me and their other pets about their problems. Is good think about animals—we do not judge when we are told secrets.

Lucky agree. He talk about how Clintguy asked him to watch over the family, how Lila-kid always shares her stories with him first, how Cooper-kid relies on him to help take care of younger siblinks, how Little Nat-kid hides behind him when strangers are around, and how Laura-Mommy has been confidink all of her worries to him.

Belka claims is just squirrel, so nobody really talks to squirrel, but Belka also promised not to judge. Much.

Cosmo promise is safe place for her to talk, as we all step a bit closer to her.
She look at us, too curiously, and ask why we were beink so nice if she was attackink us just minute before.

Cosmo talks to her about her very sad-lookink but very pretty eyes. Cosmo also tell her a little about you (Cosmo hopes you are ok with that, Carina).

Not about your scars, but just you. All of the bits that I loved about you, all of the thinks I wish I could have told you and done to help you.

There was a sad girl Cosmo knew once, Cosmo begin to talk to brunette about. She was very pretty and had a lot of anger in her, because she was always treated with anger, or violence, or mistrust. Through knowink her, Cosmo learned more about what it was to love. One day, two someones that she trust very much broke her trust. It made her upset, and she did somethink really bad that made her disappear. But Cosmo still loves her and wishes Cosmo could have done more to protect her. Brunette reminded Cosmo of girl he loves very much, Cosmo told her, and Cosmo wants to help because Cosmo is good dog. Best friend to man and woman.

Cosmo remember how Gast had Tivan train Cosmo to use mental abilities and build up bond by havink Cosmo look into his Collector’s mind, so Cosmo happily woof that she can peer into mine and find that Cosmo is beink sincere.

Brunette hold out arm, with hand opened like star, and, with wave, sees you. Maverdevia Lorrd. And all of the years we spend together mix up.

Brunette watches all of the nights we had, sleepink together, as you would whisper all of the thinks that you want. Krylor was too advanced and dull, you would always say, and life of crime you were born into was too sad. One day, you wanted to be like Bereet and just travel. See the galaxy. Cosmo would be your Baab Ba-Niir, and protect you, like Cosmo has always been doink.

She even see night in hospital bed, after stomach pumped to remove drugs your cousin snuck into your drink, when you cry and hope that Tivan doesn’t hurt your awful cousin. Because you are sweet, but you trust all the wrong people. For you, Cosmo hoped Tivan wouldn’t either. Even if Cosmo knew better.

Cosmo recall when you talked about a Bereet project that you were sad would probably never happen, while we were dustink esoteric books in library on KNOWHERE. Was dream film of Bereet. Sounded a little like a short story from Terra Cosmo heard never happened either, but
everythink, even ideas, are limited in Universe. Would be almost-romance where we follow two people. We get to know two people very well, see how compatible they are. Then, before they could meet and learn to love each other, somethink would stop them from lovink each other. All we would see after would be two gettink on with life, never knowink what it was to love person so similar to them. Was very sad soundink plot. Cosmo ask why such a film would never be made, and, with knowkink look in your eyes, you tell Cosmo is because is too true. People on Krylor don’t want truth in films. They just want heroes blowink up bad guys’ stuff.

Cosmo still remembers when you were discharged from hospital and we walk back to Collection and to Tivan’s private office. Tivan was at desk, still in same outfit that he was in when we last saw him. Outfit was a little torn in parts, dark circles under eyes were somehow even darker, hair was a little out of place, and he had drink in hand. Looked like piano had fallen. So precarious, how he always kept think hangink. In area where remains of his piano was, there were robots pickink up bits, sweepink around shelf, the like. You ask him right away where cousin is. Tivan take hearty swig and then tell you he won’t be trouble anymore. You tell him is not good answer. Tivan cautiously say to you that you should not concern self about him any longer. You yell, demandink to know where he is and what happened to him. Cosmo can’t help but smell very pervasive waft of chocolate, comink from area where robots clean up near area of fallen piano and notice them aggressively scrubbink and washink floor. Tivan lets you know that Brite learned too much from you, that you had breached contract, and so would be let off. Cosmo turn back, objectink to this. So were you, Carina.

(And, for whatever reason, this was when brunette got all the more fascinated with learnink about you.)

Got very ugly arguink. You remind that you had been workink with Tivan for nearly eleven years, wearink same dress you had gotten since you were seventeen, and contract was expirink in end of week. Tivan, with straightest look, tell you that this episode with cousin showed that you were unreliable, as impulsive as you were on day-one (if not more-so), and should be kept out of his workplace. You did not back down, you tell him is first-time offense that you blab everythink to someone. And that is when you figure it. Because you were always very clever. You ask about Kyln, about Gamora, Peter, other weirdoes we hadn’t gotten enough information about to really know, and the Orb. Tivan finish up glass and let you know there was riot goink on in Kyln. Group had smart enough people in it to take advantage of riot and get out of Kyln. Group should make it to KNOWHERE by end of day, but, immediately after Nova got report of Kyln riot, accordink to Nova Corpsman on Tivan’s payroll, Nebula and Ronan’s Dark Aster reported to be in Kyln area. Our guys would probably get out alive, but defenses in Kyln would only last them few more hours and, then, everyone in there would last even less time. Corpsman on Tivan’s payroll was still on Xandar, gearink up. They doubt they could make it to riot and even less hopeful they could arrive there to defend prison from Nebula and Ronan.

This upset you even more. These were livink people, you groan. Because Tivan know this, Tivan should use information to help people instead of keepink to himself like he always does.
Tivan throw glass to ground (not shatterink it, because is same strong material that is used for containment units), and say to you that if he intervene and Ronan and Nebula get there, they will connect dots and figure Collector wants to take Orb. Would be very bad if they found out he was on KNOWHERE, would ruin eleven years of very careful plannink, and would endanger Universe. And you were fired, he add, so this shouldn’t concern you anymore.

This was your life, you scream back at him. You had been sleepink, eatink, drinkink in protectink Universe for all of adolescence and you had sacrificed so much. Missed out on datink, on proper schoolink, on dances, on normal thinks. How were you possibly goink to just get on with life as normal person, when paranoia like this was all you knew?

For once, Tivan did not have answer.

You finally both renegotiate. Is so heated. You wind up agreeink that you can stay, but if you displease him in any way, he may lock you up in containment unit like he did Corrina and probably Howard. (This was before you had me look for Howard and we confirm he was in containment unit.) You stomp out of office. Cosmo gets look at Tivan, so wantink to ask him whys. Why did he drop piano on Brite? Why did probably only person to see value in Long One take this life? Why did man who knew how fragile trust could be, who spend so long buildink up trust with you, break it so callously? Cosmo knew, yet almost wanted and did not want confirmation from him. But Cosmo wound up not askink any of that. Instead, Cosmo trot out of private office after you.

Wasn’t it just week before all of this that thinks were fairly normal? (Or, at least, as normal as they could be?) Weren’t we all havink dinner together, talkink, and makink plans for the future? Cosmo misses days when we just stayed up in the stars, spent your birthdays dancink. Because nobody else on Collector’s craft celebrated birthdays. Not Cosmo, or Tivan, or Brood, or Howard, or anyone. Just your birthdays we kept track of and looked forward to every year.

Cosmo recall findink you sittink by Corrina’s containment unit. Your face was crinklink like it usually does before you cry, yet, this time, no tears were comink out. Cosmo ask you if you wanted tissues, but you just sadly shake your head. You were all out of tears, you tell Cosmo. Cosmo believed you. Corrina was tryink to comfort you, like she usually did, so you turn to Cosmo and ask if Cosmo could put her hair up. Was hard to see her eyes with her hair in her eyes like always. Cosmo check with Corrina if there was particular way she wanted it styled. Corrina said whatever would work. So Cosmo check with you, and you say in same way as way you do your hair. Your piggy tails were so cute that Cosmo could not help but agree to do it. You give Cosmo hair bands and Cosmo sneak into airway of container, put on her hair, and styled. Corrina ask us what we thought. Cosmo barked that it looked cute. You, on the other hand, just turned and stared with most solemn look. Your thoughts suddenly shoot out all over the place, made it hard to tell what you were thinkink, but only think you could say was that this shouldn’t be normal.

Cosmo was with you when you first met Corrina. You cried a lot, wanted to stay far from her
because you were scared that you could become like her. But, at same time, because you are really good person, you made yourself get close to her cage and talk with her. Because you knew she was terribly lonely. You both had a lot in common and were very close in age. That night, at dinner, you ask Tivan why he wouldn’t let her out. Tivan just tell you she was disappointment, how she disappointed by killink Brethren, and how it was for her own good.

You stayed by pigtailed Corrina’s containment unit while Cosmo got your blue notebook, like you ask Cosmo to. Then, you tell Cosmo you are goink out for walksie. Cosmo ask if Cosmo can go along. You shake your head and say Cosmo has to find Howard.

You weren’t there when Howard left KNOWHERE. Was after Tivan disappeared too. Cosmo knew he was sneakink onboard a Ravager ship that temporarily docked on KNOWHERE, and Cosmo even saw him off with snucked bag of clothes, some food, and money (to possibly get his ducky face changed). Howard was always very clever and would be able to take care of self out there. We did not always get along, but Cosmo still misses him. Cosmo tell him he was good cosmonaut. Howard call Cosmo a good but weird mutt and advise to leave while the goink was good.

When Cosmo found Howard in suspended containment unit, ooh! Cosmo was quite upset with Tivan! Cosmo trot right up to him, so officiously, as he was reviewink lore on Orb and perfectink machine to open it and check if Power Stone was inside. Cosmo really give piece of mind! Tellink him Howard wasn’t to blame for Broker, Howard hadn't been trouble-maker he has usually been! Tivan just give most serious look, stoppink what he was doink with machine. He had fixed his hair and changed into very red outfit with fake-fur and faux-leather cape. Really was strange but nice lookink as far as his outfits went. With such sad look in his eyes, he implore Cosmo to recall why Tivan made containment units and put creatures in them. And Cosmo’s eyes got quite wide, realizink implications. Howard still seemed angry, since he flip off Cosmo, so Cosmo was guessink Tivan did not give him even this simple explanation of vague danger comink. Seemed terrible to be doink that without explanation. But is way Tivan always operate. Always, when danger comink, he never say what was comink. Just act, tell few others. Cosmo was not in bunch to be told this time. He beg Cosmo to have Brood take over duties as Chief of Security today, so that Cosmo could stay in Museum when Gamora, who had just called in, arrived with her weird group. Would be needink my services.

Cosmo thought about how scared you were, once, when you first saw Taneleer put Cosmo in containment unit. Wasn't first time ever since Cosmo put in one and it was nearly a full year since he’d employed you. Cosmo assured you that sometimes Tivan upgraded containment units and Cosmo tested them out. Cosmo was always willink and happy, because Taneleer built good containers to keep Collection in them safe. Happened a few more times after. Even while Cosmo acted as KNOWHERE’s Security Head, Cosmo still sometimes took place by entrance in Museum of KNOWHERE. To examine those that came into newly-open-to-public Museum, for safety of Collection, and to entertain childrens from the school fieldtrips. Cosmo always got bed, food, water, and even lovely woodchips in Cosmo’s cage. Still, even years later, you always got so nervous when Tivan put me in containment unit.
Just like when you got back from walksie. You hid notebook behind your back, when Tivan greet you near entrance and my containment unit. (Was some time after Cosmo call Brood to take over duties for day. Brood was far from Museum, surreptitiously ampink up security on KNOWHERE.)

You tell him you were just goink on walk, but, ooh, Cosmo could smell the lie. Cosmo wasn’t sure why you lie to Tivan. Wasn’t in outmost thoughts, and Cosmo did not want to intrude deeper into your head to find answers. Tivan shake head, still tell you that Gamora and her gang were comink. Place needed to be clean. Or you would be goink in containment unit. You nodded. Was very strange, you just accept like that. Tivan let you back in Museum, and you go. But, after you are ways away, Tivan turns to me and tells me in my mind that you just called up Broker. Gave our coordinates, list of his various crimes. He figure you knew he had ties to many other governments, so that was why you didn’t bother reportink him to them. He guessed you were hopink because Tivan did not have anyone in high enough position with Nova Empire and Broker have beef against Taneleer, Broker could use Xandarian connections, connections to Ravagers, or anybody to get to him. He knew Broker wouldn’t dare, since he is as big a criminal as Collector, but he would be coerced and share coordinates with Ravagers’ crew of Peter Quill. (Security would be gettink surreptitiously beefed up for them.)

Taneleer Tivan had been hopink wouldn’t be happenink in this Universe. Was really thinkink that, when you got upset nearly eleven years ago and we talk thinks out, we manage to curb your impulsivity. Then he see what you did in room with discs, hear from your cousin all that you confess to Brite, saw pigtails on Corrina.

It felt like thinks had been goink so slow for while. So slow for so many years. Now, with this week and then some, thinks were goink too fast. Did not even feel like time to blink anymore or catch breath. You were goink to be adult by end of this week. You were gettink out of Collection, out of life of crime. For longest time, Cosmo did not understand why you could not listen to Tivan. Why you had to do it. Why you could not listen to him for little while longer, until your contract expired.

This was strangest job you’d ever had, you always tell Cosmo. Like babysittink, house-sittink, pet-sittink, and sort of retail all at once. You practice hard with gestures and presentink, in way Tivan taught you to. You do good imitation. Cosmo ask once what other sorts of jobs you had. You confess you hadn’t many. You were always weird one, wherever you went. Association with criminal family meant other kids kept away from you. Beink so cute and youngest meant you didn’t fit in with other criminal relatives. You didn’t get good grades, so teachers hated you. Here, for once, you felt like normal one. Was nice and weird at same time.

You knew how containment units worked and this happend all too suddenly for him to have developed different containment unit to hold you. Tivan had underestimated you and knew all he could do now was keep eye on you, fake like he is ignorant of what you had done, and rein in your behavior with empty threat of lockink you up. You were behavink so well, takink orders and reactink to threats with fear in your eyes. Too well. But Tivan had almost faintest glimmer of hope that you would listen. Was his characteristic arrogance, maybe, he hoped that you would listen. If not to years of broken trust, to his threats. Cosmo was in containment unit, lookink at him and at his mind. Was not spillink out in yolkish way like it always was. Cosmo ask what he mean, ask to look deeper in mind to learn what he meant. And that is when Tivan reveal that he had time to upgrade Cosmo’s containment unit.
Nyet, nyet!

Tivan had never done think like this to Cosmo before! Cosmo try to undo top, but would not undo! Was closed in same way, but lockink did something to change mechanism! Cosmo expand self, expand out of mind, and push and push and push! Containment unit rattle and rattle, and did not open! Since Cosmo could obviously still communicate, Cosmo begged to look into Taneleer Tivan’s mind--to see what it was he was so afraid would be happenink! Let Cosmo help! Taneleer Tivan did not give permission. Instead, he walk away. He walk away! Cosmo howl and rattle and beg and beg! But he did not turn back! He didn’t turn back!

Cosmo did not see Tivan again until later that night and did not talk with him until some days later. Cosmo could barely look at him, but Cosmo still give status update (KNOWHERE was repairink self) and make promise to him, as he gulp down green drink. Cosmo promise to find you. Cosmo promise to find you, Maverdevia Lorrde. Cosmo promise to scold you, but Cosmo also beg Tivan to forgive you when I find you. You were young adult only. So young, especially compared to us. You were becomink adult in end of week. You would be leavink us. You would know better than this in next few years. Cosmo accepted why Tivan did think to Cosmo, of trickink Cosmo into gettink locked up. Would be harder to trust him, but Cosmo was alive still. Was hard even to look at face that Cosmo knew for so long that night. Cosmo leave after lickink Taneleer’s face in forgiveness, and Howard, some ways a way, ask Tivan why he let me lick him. Man with all the answers, who know most creatures in existence since dawn of time, had nothink else to tell this ducky person. This was before Tivan disappear too, without tellink Cosmo where he was goink.

We never liked how he did that. Leavink without tellink where he was goink, when he would be back. You remember how he would buy pointless little tchotchke, spend so much on it, and we would not know until it would come to Collection in brown paper package, he would open, and get upset. You remember how he got tricked into purchasin a think called Obedience Potion? He spent a lot of that. You scold him for while, for gettink this before consultink anyone when we could have told him easily such a think never existed. Cosmo struggled for so long to figure out why you do this too to Cosmo, Maverdevia, why you betray us to Broker by sharink coordinates, why you do thinks we never like Tivan doink. Why did you go on plan without consultink the rest of us?

Cosmo could still remember how sad you look, when Cosmo last remember you looked back at Cosmo. You were lyink close to Cosmo’s containment unit, with back against glass and legs sprawled out before you. Your voice was barely above volume level of breathink, barely a whisper. You tell Cosmo how Tivan removed Corrina’s light-up cuffs and nodes on head. How he put change of clothes for Corrina in her containment unit (simple grey dress), how he gathered up bundles of blankets and tossed them up and about glass of her containment unit so that she could have privacy to change into grey dress, how he waited until she said she was done, then how he removed all blankets around her containment unit and give her a mumbled apology. Was first and only one she ever got. You seemed very uneasy about this. You tell Cosmo that you had asked him, one last time, what you were doink in his vision. He still refuse to tell, because it could affect your behavior. You complain how unpredictable he is. Yet you and I both knew this was so typical of him. You also say Gamora and her group are in Boot of Jemiah. Nova Corpsmen Tivan had on
payroll were too busy scramblink to pass on more than hearsay of who others with Gamora were and Gamora was dodgy with call to Tivan, so we really didn't know who was with her. There was Peter, there was talkink rodent, there was tree (which we could not identify yet, especially not from low-quality security footage from Boot of Jemiah). Gamora’s call added another weirdo, who Gamora really didn't want to talk more about than his existence before huffily and abruptly endink call. We knew nothink else about rest of party with her. Could be very unpredictable. We only studied weird Peter and Gamora, all of these years.

Cosmo kept to self that Ravagers would probably be comink, because you told Broker where we were and he told them. Did not know if this could ruin our plannink. Was agitated by Tivan and upset by your betrayal. Was conflicted, because Cosmo still love you both. Did not know to be angry. Did not know if Cosmo was bad dog and did somethink to deserve this. Still wanted to help you both, but did not know how and could not because Cosmo was trapped.

You look at Cosmo carefully and ask Cosmo if Cosmo remember hologram with Infinity Stones and Tivan’s speech. Cosmo nod. You say because we are on head of Celestial, place should be alright if stone does somethink unexpected. That glass of containment units should be strong enough to protect creatures inside. That Tivan immortal, and could not die. Cosmo nod. You also say that Asgardians were probably right, that two stones should not be in same place. Not just because could explode or somethink, but because no one person should have that much power. Not good people and especially not bad peoples. If Tivan get this, he now knew Asgardians had another. Could be makink move to gettink that one too. Then next. Repeat until he have all six.

Could be extra bad.

Cosmo did not know what to say.

Cosmo ask to help you, ask to be let in on what you were doink.

You look away for a second, take long sniff, and say you can do this on own. You also confess, since you had learned about Cosmo scannink your mind, you could never really trust Cosmo. Was really upsettink to hear. Really broke Cosmo’s heart! Even if Cosmo understood where you were comink from, Cosmo was afraid that Tivan was right. That by tellink you Cosmo did this think, so long ago, you did not love Cosmo anymore. So Cosmo ask you if you still love Cosmo. Your face crinkle, but no tears come out, as you say you do. If it wasn’t for me, you wouldn’t love anyone. You would have forgotten how to love. Ooh, is just such sad and terrible think to hear! Cosmo get close to glass. Cosmo just wanted to lick your face and let you hug me, like Cosmo always did. But there was glass between us! All you can do is put hand against glass, and Cosmo can lick part where your hand is over on inside of cage. You whisper, so so quietly, and you check to make sure Cosmo still knew how to call up Gast on dispatch.
Oh, that was when Cosmo should have figured what you were tryin to doink. Cosmo was just so upset with you and Tivan, and so confused by love for you both, that Cosmo wasn’t thinkin straight.

That was when Cosmo thought of when we started movin thinks out of ship and into more permanent location on KNOWHERE. We would not be movin out pinball machines, because doink that would require us to unplug them and, in doink so, erase Gast’s high scores. Could not be doink that. All of us were too fond of Gast, even if it had been while since we last saw him. As you pack away boxes and boxes of boardgames, you ask Cosmo if Cosmo knew how to call up Gast. Cosmo did. You ask why we do not just call him, just to check how he is doink. We wait until Tivan is gone, so that he cannot admonish us for wastink time, and then call up. We only get machine. Prerecorded message on machine promises to get back to us if is important. We end call and do not bother leavink message. Instead, you end connection of dispatch and get very quiet. Cosmo stay close to you. You ask Cosmo, after we tuck ourselves into same bed and tell each other that we love each other that night, what if it was Gast we both worked for. Cosmo knows you love Gast very much, but Cosmo still gently bark against that. Cosmo loves Tivan and Gast smells terrible. Cosmo would not be happier livink with Gast.

Sometimes, Cosmo is indulgent. Sometimes Cosmo looks back and thinks about how thinks could have been different. Would thinks have been better if Cosmo stopped you from seeink cousin? (You and Tivan would still fight. If it wasn’t cousin, maybe somethink else would have got us to this point.) Or maybe if we never hunt for Infinity Stones? (Ah, but Cosmo is afraid Tivan would want to collect somethink else dangerous and would have had same effect on us.) What if Cosmo just told Tivan to take you back to your family or to another foster-family, instead of askink him to keep you here? (But then you would have remained unhappy and Cosmo would have never met you and gotten to know you, which is think Cosmo never wanted. Because Cosmo loved you and Cosmo still loves you.)

Sometimes Cosmo wishes Tivan was just lecturer at a small university on some backwater little planet, with quirky little collection of knicknacks and penchant for takink in strays, tendink to them, then lettink them go. You would be teenage runaway we take in. You would both realize you prefer talkink to animals instead of people, bond over it, and learn to love each other. You would find in him the father-figure who never hits you, and he would find daughter-figure who would argue with him but he would still respect. Occasionally, quirky uncle Gast would drop by. Would not take years, would be more monthly visits. Maybe even weekly or biweekly. Tivan seem to do a lot better with brother around and you like havink him around too. Maybe, in this life, Gast wouldn’t smell as deathly. Or Cosmo would just have to get used to his weird smell. Would be small price to pay so that you would have completely safe environment to grow up, even if it would make us bored out of our minds. We would be very happy as we watch you reach adulthood.

Cosmo still remember hearink Tivan over Museum’s intercom, and how he ask you to go to Boot of Jemiah and pick up Gamora and her group. Even if Tivan trick Cosmo into container, Cosmo still trust him. Cosmo still trust he know what he is doink with you, that is not just pride he is actink on. Maybe in eleven years you were together, he had gotten to know you and knew way to keep you safe while Gamora and Peter and the other weirdoes brought in Orb. You give Cosmo one last look,
whisper that you are sorry that you cannot be complicit any longer and that you love me. With hands clasped like Tivan taught you to do, you get up, go out, and do what you are told for last time of night.

Cosmo should have taken it as bad sign when you come in with Gamora and the bunch and there was last Groot and cybernetically-enhanced raccoon in party. Tivan had never encountered last known Groot in Universe in person/plant/whatever, only heard of him. If flora collosus was comink and he knew from vision of other Universe, he would have most probably talked about with us! Meant one more unexpected element added to mix and Tivan could be more than unprepared for what could happen! And Cosmo never like raccoons, but this mutated one smelled like extra bad news. They all smell weird to Cosmo. Too far and glass too thick to get good whiff, but impression isn’t best. Gamora smells like minty-chocolate-square (kind that is brown and then green and brown), Peter has not showered in while yet he smells a little like sugar mixed with artificial dyes, tree smells like oxygen, and raccoon...ooh! Ooh, Cosmo just had to growl at him, and raccoon growl back! And fifth weirdo--where was fifth unknown weirdo that was reported to have come with them? Who was keepink eye on him? You did not even sideglance to Cosmo, as you pass by for last time.

When you go past eyeline of Cosmo, you go mostly out of earshot. Cosmo is old dog, can barely hear what you are doink. But Cosmo trusts. Cosmo hears hum, indicatink hologram machines were beink used. There is other containment unit in way of Cosmo’s view, so Cosmo cannot see what is goink on with everyone. Can barely look over and see lights.

And then Cosmo hear Tivan. Is commandink tone. Cosmo can barely make out what exactly he is sayink, but Cosmo recognizes volume level and tone. And Cosmo hears you yell.

You will no longer be his slave!

Tivan yells back!

And Cosmo sees containment units go haywire! Some explode in purple light! And Cosmo hears you scream! And scream!

Everythink around Cosmo crashes! Cosmo feels Cosmo’s containment unit goink haywire, so, quickly, before containment unit takes Cosmo out too, Cosmo pushes out with mind and creates barrier around Cosmo! Is too little time for Cosmo to push further, too little time before everythink gets hit by purple lights shootink out! Before Cosmo hears rest in Museum cry out! Raccoon and tree run out!
Cosmo’s mind goes all over place, when light strikes Cosmo’s protective shield! Howard! Tivan! Corrina! Gamora! Peter! Other weirdoes! All of the livink beinks in Collection! Everyone on KNOWHERE!

And you! You!

Cosmo remember just eleven years ago, when we were in craft and goink through asteroid belt! How power went out then, too! How you cried so loudly near containment unit of Brood! How you just wanted Cosmo to come close to you and sink and just needed someone to show affection to you!

Cosmo remembers that last burst of energy! How hard it pushed back! How Cosmo struggled to get back up on feet, but how Cosmo knew Cosmo had to, and Cosmo went past remains of Cosmo’s broken containment unit in dark, to find you! You weren’t there! Cosmo only see Gamora, pushink device holdink orb shut. Where were you! Where did you go?

And that was when Cosmo knew more of your plan.

Ooh, Maverdevia. Why couldn’t you trust Tivan? Why did you do this think to make Gamora stop trustink Tivan? Cosmo spent so long askink self this.

Because Cosmo is good dog, Cosmo guided Peter and Gamora in dark, through example, and out of Museum, then trotted with decorum out to dispatch. Cosmo knew what Cosmo had to do!

And that was when Cosmo find other parties were there!

Ooh, so many security breaches! Ravagers! And Ronan! And Nebula! And their forces!

All strikink at KNOWHERE! All causink such huge racket among people! But Cosmo stuck to task you set, as much as it hurt Cosmo. And Cosmo head to nearest public dispatch station, since one in Museum was probably broken, and call Gast. Cosmo bark and use mind to type up message that is emergency, that there was accident in Museum and you and others could be dead or hurt! That his gifts were needed!

And, quick as a blink, there he was! Crouchink next to Cosmo! But, instead of smile on his face as we had usually seen him with, there was most stoical expression. Gast want to know why Tivan
sounded so urgent, as he point to his head. (Cosmo was confused by this, but now Cosmo knows what he meant. Is their brotherly connection.) And Cosmo explain. Cosmo say you did bad think, that Cosmo wasn’t sure exactly what you did but you did it in vicinity of Power Stone, that you were screamink, that light burst out and around--and we really need Gast to brink it all back, to brink you back!

And Gast--oh, Gast. Cosmo had never seen such expression on his face. So joyless, so frightenink, so utterly serious. Shadows in dispatch fell so ominously around his long face and his voice was barely above volume of hum as he so, so, so solemnly confess to Cosmo that he cannot undo deaths caused by Infinity Stones.

People around us in KNOWHERE were screaminking as Ronan and Ronan’s forces and Ravagers were goinking about! Blasts were beinking shot! Peter and Gamora and other weirdoes and Stone were probably not safe! But all Cosmo could do is stare up at Gast, as Gast’s expression remains solid, he reaches out and places hand on Cosmo’s head.

We stay like that, frozen, even as Cosmo tear up and howl until Cosmo’s throat gets sore.

It took so long for Cosmo to understand why you did this. Why Tivan did this. Cosmo felt like Cosmo should hate you both, but Cosmo never could. They say talkink about thinks sometimes just make you dwell on bad places, that is not good for you. Cosmo say to each their own.

But Cosmo feels so much better talkinking about all of this, because now Cosmo feels like Cosmo understands you so much better and what you were tryinking to do. As much as Cosmo loves Tivan, Cosmo knows, now, you were so right in keepink Orb out of his hands. Even if he work so very hard for it. You did not betray us. In own way, you were protectink Universe as we had spent so long doinking. Cosmo is sorry for spendink time beinking upset with you. But, now that Cosmo remembers who Cosmo truly is, Cosmo knows what Cosmo must do.

Cosmo must go and find Taneleer Tivan, so that he can brink you back. Like he brought back Cosmo so many times. He will probably be upset with you, even though you did not mean to cause such permanent damage, and Cosmo will have to explain to him why he should not have more than one Infinity Stone.

Cosmo just want you back. So badly. Cosmo learn lesson and would have Tivan learn. Did not mean Cosmo wanted to be without you any longer. Cosmo miss you so much. Miss your voice, your laughter. Miss your hugs. Miss your scent.

And brunette, she had been takinking closer and closer steps to Cosmo while witnessinking all of this. She
is tearink up. Cosmo does not know why she does this. So Cosmo ask if she is okay.

Carina, she says. Her name is Carina.

Ooh, how wide Cosmo’s eyes became when she introduce herself and it did not smell like fake name!

And how strange it was that she want to clarify if man was Taneleer Tivan.

Cosmo tell her was so. That man has gone missink and Cosmo has been lookink for him.

How suddenly her eyes get so much wetter, but how strong she kept those mental walls up around her so that Cosmo struggle to even talk to her. Cosmo knows Cosmo still has to keep on goink.

So Cosmo tell her Cosmo want to know why she is here, if we can help her.

She wipes eyes into sleeve and then apologize for havink to scare Cosmo, Blondie, and cat out of apartment. She needed us to warp here. Cosmo ask her why. She take eyes away from sleeve and so firmly let us know she had to get into house. That Blondie was in danger, because she had learned too much from Cosmo, and she had come to protect us for final confrontation that could only take place here.

Brunette Carina trudge forward until she was standink just in front of us.

Was a lot for us to take in, but Cosmo still wanted to know who Blondie needed protectink from.

So firmly, Brunette Carina answer. Her Father.

We all just stand there like idiots for a second, before the animals turn about-face and step so that we stand alongside Brunette Carina. And, together, we all walk to house.

Cosmo did not know if Cosmo believe Brunette Carina, could not look in her head to verify claim either. But, for safety of Natasha, Cosmo goes with her anyway.
I started checking out stuff for the Guardians ride, and I am excited about the Cosmo
plushies, creeped out by the matching Krylorian female attendants, weirdly happier than
I should be about the painting of Grandmaster and the Collector, and still waiting on
hearing about what they’ll do with Jeff Goldblum’s footage (which I’m kind of thinking
they’re saving for around the time “Ragnarok” comes out); also, after hearing that the
languages used in the fortress are English and Celestial, I’m kind of buying into the
theory that the Grandmaster and Collector are Celestials of some sort. Which makes the
Collector living on a Celestial’s head even more interesting, in a terrifying sort of way.
Even though this ride takes place in a different Universe than the MCU proper, it gives
a lot of interesting food for thought. All-in-all, I am going to spend quite a bit of this
weekend reading up on what’s in the fortress.

So, yeah. The promo. Even though this chapter was delayed, the next two will not be.
These will be the last two chapters I post before I go on a weeklong break, to revise my
outline once more. In these chapters, we will visit Natasha in the house and see the
Brunette Carina meet with the Black Widow face-to-face. After this break, I will
resume posting on Tuesdayish and Thursdayish.

Have a lovely weekend, everyone.
Alright. Bending the rules a bit and summarizing the previous chapter, for peeps that chose to opt out of it. The big take-aways:

1. Tivan smushed Maverdevia’s cousin with a piano.

2. Maverdevia realized Taneleer Tivan (aka "the Collector") is a terrible person and reported his crimes and current coordinates to the Broker. Broker passed the coordinates on to Yondu.

3. Tivan tricked Cosmo into a containment unit, fearful that his vision from an alternate universe (which he had yet to reveal) was coming true.

4. To insure Gamora and her bunch would lose trust in Tivan and would never deliver another Infinity Stone to him, Maverdevia activated the Power Stone’s capabilities and, in doing so, destroyed herself and the KNOWHERE Collection.

5. Everyone was too frazzled to keep track on the last guy with Gamora's group, who did not go to the Museum. They really should have.

6. Acting on a last wish of Maverdevia's, Cosmo called En Dwi Gast (aka "Taneleer Tivan's weird brother" aka "the Grandmaster"), to bring everything back.

7. Gast revealed that he can't undo deaths caused by the Infinity Stones.

8. Brunette-Carina revealed she's there to protect everyone from her father.

Chapter Notes

Ooh. Due to the character-constraints of the summary bit, I forgot to mention this bit: with a renewed sense of self and purpose, Cosmo now knows that Maverdevia was right and Taneleer Tivan shouldn't have more than one Infinity Stone; upon finding his owner, he also plans on asking the Collector to bring Maverdevia back, like he had brought Cosmo back multiple times. Alright?

Alright. Back to Black

Widow.

This takes place somewhat after the previous Black Widow chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Laura.  Lau--I’m sorry.  I don’t know what’s going on out there, but I’m not leaving you and Liho alone in this house.

It sounds like broken glass because it is broken glass.

I--I don’t know.  I don’t know.  Something is going on out there.

Yeah, Pizza Dog.  Pizza Dog is still out there.  And same with Cosmo--maybe Cosmo will--

Laura.  Laura!  Calm down, Laura, calm down.

I--I know.  I know, we have to head out there right now.

Yes, all of us.  I need to keep an eye on everyone.

Yes, that is fake-Fury with his hands tied and I am pulling him along with your rope.  He’s an amateur sent by a guy with an accent--we don’t have to worry about him.

Do you hear that, Ivan?  We don’t have to worry about you.  Do not give me a reason to worry about you.  Me and Mr. Eastwood, here, we are keeping our eyes on you.

Laura.  Laura, we have to get out, get the dogs, and warp someplace far.

Laura, Laura, Laura.  Please calm down.  Please.

I--if I told you what I know, it’s just going to make you more worried.

Laura--alright, fine.

Do you want the truth or the prettied-up lie?

At least I’m giving you a choice.

Come on.

Alright.  Alright, you want the truth?

I don’t really know what’s going on.

I don’t.

I really don’t, I’m not joking.  I don’t think this sort of thing’s funny.

It’s a whole lot of weird that I got thrown into.

What I know--that guy over there, Ivan Tsarevitch, which is not his real name.  Give a wave, why don’t you.  Come on, I just tied your hands together, you can still lift your arms.

There, see, he’s almost human, Laura.  Anyway, he got a job from a guy with an accent and an envelope, he got a really good face-job, and now he says he’s here because someone wants the dog and I know something I shouldn’t.

What kind of acc--an accent kind of accent, Mr. Tsarevitch tells me.

I know, it’s like the dumbest thing to take an envelope from a guy with an accent you can’t identify.
You see, Ivan. Even she agrees that it was a really dumb choice.

I’m going to keep hounding on that until it gets through that thick skull of yours, so that, when you live through this, you will not repeat your mistake.

Laura--did I tell you about the brunette chick?

Alright, I did. This brunette. She’d been tailing Cosmo for a while and I have no idea why she posted those pictures on our apartment door. I have no idea why she gave herself away. Intimidation, maybe. I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know if Cosmo was in on it--

Yes, yes if the dog was in on it. But I’m pretty sure now he isn’t.

Yes--I told you Laura, I’ve seen some really weird shit and I’m pretty sure the brunette is coming here, if she isn’t already here. Ivan, over there, mentioned her. Said her name’s Carina.

There’s this stuff Cosmo told me, this really weird stuff that didn’t make any sense. I don’t even remember all of it. There was this guy and this chick called Carina. They sounded--they sounded made-up. But the guy sounded awful.

Yeah.

Yeah, I don’t know

Yeah, I’m really sorry. It’s not safe here anymore.

No. No, we are not calling Tony Stark. We can handle this ourselves. You need to go to Clint’s stash and arm yourself, but you can--Laura. Laura, Laura, Lau--put down that phone. He comes here, I’m probably getting arrested and Cosmo will most likely fall into government custody. Cosmo will probably be dissected or whoever’s trying to get him will go after the government and this could all escalate.

Put down that phone. Put down that phone.

I don’t want to talk to Tony Stark.

No, I don’t want you to talk to him either. I don’t want to look at him, I don’t want to be in the same room as that textbook narcissist, I don’t want anything to do with him.

I don’t want to need Tony Stark.

I get that we’re in danger, but I don’t want to rely on him. I don’t want to trust him.

I get that. I get that, I get that--I get that I need to calm down. I am calm. I am calm.

I’ve dealt with worse alone. Alright, Laura? I’ve dealt with a lot of things alone. I was able to tie my shoes all by myself before, without the Avengers, and I can do this alone.

Don’t call him--please don’t call him. Please don’t call him.

SHIELD needed someone to keep an eye on Tony Stark, I was there. Pepper Potts needed someone to personally assist her while the manchild she was babysitting became unfit to run the company he inherited, I was there. Your husband got compromised by an immature space Brit with daddy issues, I joined an Initiative I didn’t plan to be a part of. The world saw, decided they wanted me as a hero, so I stuck with that shtrick. Nick needed an acquaintance to keep tabs on Captain America and the other agent sent to keep an eye on him, I was there. SHIELD’s secrets needed to be aired, when I
found out they were Hydra’s secrets, and I hit the button declassifying every dirty little lie they had. Including mine. After SHIELD went down and Tony decided he wanted to continue the Avengers Initiative, I was there. The Avengers came to an agreement that someone needed to keep the Hulk in line, I was there. Even some genocidal robot wanted to keep me for company, because he probably wanted someone to monologue at.

I’m usually the one people call when they need support.

I don’t want your sympathy, Ivan.

If I’m the ace up everyone’s sleeve and I can’t handle this, who’s to say they can?

Alright. There you go.

You should take a firearm from Clint’s stash before we head out.

No, Ivan. You don’t get one. Me and Mr. Eastwood will be protecting you, so long as you remain cooperative.

Laura, there’s only so many things I can pay attention to. I can’t turn huge and green when I’m angry, I don’t have a suit that flies, I’m not a robot, and I’m definitely not Captain America. But I’m going to protect you, to the fullest of my abilities. I promise you that, alright? I’m going to protect you. And I need you to arm yourself.

You know how to fire a gun, right?

Good.

Yeah.

Yeah, you might have to fire it at someone.

No, it really isn’t like hunting for animals.

You don’t aim for the head, unless you’re a pro. And I know you aren’t.

Alright, aim for the center of the chest. Because that is the largest area and it’s the hardest to miss.

Laura–Laura, I’m really sorry. This is probably going to be hard on you. You might not need to fire. Alright? I’ll do it, then.

Whatever’s going on out there, if I tell you to take cover, take cover. A firearm can only do so much to protect you. A firefight lasts as long as the cover you take.

We’re going to have to get the dogs, now. Are you going to be ok, going out there?

Laura. Laura, I’m sorry. You’re going to have to be ok. We have to get out of this house together. Alright? And we probably won’t be able to return for a while.

Lau–Laura. No. No, don’t call–

Ivan. Ivan, what was in that envelope?

Did it mention anyone?

Alright, did it mention anyone other than me and the dog.
Ivan, did it mention anyone other than me and the dog?

Ivan, if whoever sent you--look over there. That is Laura Barton. This is her farm. Her family lives here. She has three small children. They aren’t here right now, but, if they’re in that envelope and your demented boss knows about them--

What do you mean you don’t know?

Laura--Laura, no, don’t call your sister. We don’t know what we’re up against. We don’t know if it’s safe to call, we don’t know how they found us--we don’t know if they could be tapping into your calls. Please put the phone down.

Put the phone down.

Ivan--we are warping to the kids right as soon as I get the dogs.

I don’t care if the brunette is finding us because of the warping, I’m checking on the kids and if there are any shady assholes so much as breathing oxygen in the same room as them, you are helping me find your boss or I will eviscerate you. Completely and utterly. I will learn your real name, I will destroy your finances, and I will ruin you.

I don’t care if you don’t even really know who he is, Ivan, you should have thought of that. You should have thought of all of the people who’d be hurt by your dumbass decision before you even laid eyes on that dumb envelope.

Laura. Laur--yeah. Yeah. Yeah, we’re going. We’re going. Please watch the cat. We’ll get the dogs, get the kids and your sister, and we’ll just warp somewhere else. We’re going to keep on warping places, so that psycho brunette never finds us. And I’m going to find the guy behind all of this and I’m going to give him a piece of my mind.

Chapter End Notes

Thursday: Black Widow and Brunette-Carina talk. And Cosmo oversees.
I haven’t been able to find anything about KNOWHERE Heads of Security before Cosmo, so: have a sort of OC that kind of acts as a Jack Kirby cameo! (Because what is Cosmic Marvel without Jack Kirby?)

By the by, the Many-Angled Ones are primordial, telepathic, Eldritch monsters with inconsistent forms and live between realities and Universes. In the comics, they can grant powers and want to be worshiped. Because this fic is comics + goofy/down-to-earthish MCU, I am going to write one a bit differently.

The old Head of Security on KNOWHERE held position for equivalent of 50 years, before Cosmo took over post. (Lifespan on KNOWHERE can be long, if you are careful.) He had earned title in his teens, inheritink from his father (who perished from simple muggink in street after holdink position for equivalent of 27 years). His father, in turn, had inherited title from his own mother (who passed rather peacefully after holdink title for 34 years). And so on. Tivan had appointed the first of that family to hold position and approved of subsequent childrens inheritink position. All Heads of Security had same name, spendink out the lengths of their lifetimes actink in this part and trainink their kids to take it over after them. All have only one kid and all give kid same name as them. (Is because Jack was of long forgotten species that produce asexually and is a part of their long-forgotten culture to have families share a name.) The name all of them shared was rather complex and most tongues not the right shape to pronounce it, let alone my doggy mind recall it exactly. So, let Cosmo just do what nearly everyone on KNOWHERE did and call him and his forebearers Jack. Cosmo recalls you met him once, just in passink. Not for long enough to have even developed proper first impression.

Jack had no kids and nobody he want to pass title on to, but it was with very heavy heart he accept Tivan’s decision to let Cosmo take job over. All thinks considered, Jack was pretty good sport about it. On nightshifts of day rest of workers’ unions on KNOWHERE agree to let Cosmo take up position, Jack invite Cosmo to his little hovel he rent at top of Jemiah’s Boot. We were goink to have dinner together, followed by drink (even though Cosmo told Jack many times that Cosmo is dog and not a drinker). He ask only Cosmo come along at this time. Is why Cosmo didn’t brink you.

Most perceived Jack as cantankerous but likeable old man with pinky-browny skin, white hair, and thick-thick brows. And his mind, on first impression, was simple. Nice, but simple. Just lists of normal, old-mannish thinks to do. Do bills, get groceries, read book, etcetera. But his smell--ooh! Maverdevia, his smell! Wasn’t like anythink Cosmo ever smell! Worse than Gast or raccoons! So pervasive! It--it wasn’t like normal smell. It was somethink even my eyes and ears could smell (if that makes any sense)! But, because Cosmo is very polite dog, Cosmo did not turn down Jack’s invitation. So, we go into Boot of Jemiah, pass through lots of drunk peoples in gamblink dens, head upstairs, and go to his place. His place was tiny. Could only fit bed, simple table, small fridge, little chair. So simple.

And then, when door shut, just like that, his entire appearance flicker out like candle and gets
replaced by...by somethink immense. Larger than room could hold (if that makes sense to you).
Yet, at the same time, there was also old man with thick-thick brows. And, also, in that place, were
his father, his father’s mother, his father’s mother's mother, and all of their forebearers. All of the
Jacks in one spot, standink before Cosmo. And all of them head to little chair by table, take place,
and motion in terribly friendly way for Cosmo to join.

Cosmo stay by door, not sure how to perceive all of this. Even with Cosmo’s experience in
Collection on Collector’s craft, this was too weird for talkink dog. Doggy’s head was racink.
Perhaps Cosmo could bite him. Or perhaps Cosmo could run downstairs and warn everyone. Or--

And, all of a sudden, Jack laughs and that is when mind of all Jacks bursts out, immediately tappink
into mine and connectink to everyone’s on KNOWHERE. And Cosmo’s mind expands. Cosmo
feels it all. Minds of little orloni, runnink from bigger creature. Numbed highs of gamblers,
screamink in dens. Girl that run den, rollink eyes. Miners focusink on drillink, miles away. Shop-
owners countink wares. And you, Maverdevia, complainink while carryink thinks out of craft and
into new structure for Collection! And Brood’s dual mind. And Howard’s weird ducky head,
figurink out when he can sneak away to have a smoke. And even Tivan, broodink away while
meticulously takink thinks out of boxes and beginnink to figure where he wanted them in structure.
And even dead mind of Celestial that all of us walked!
Cosmo bark at immenseness of it, all in Cosmo’s head. Was creatink terrible headache!

And after Cosmo bark, Jack reeled it all back in and Cosmo was back to just beink Cosmo and
seeink only old man with thick-thick brows. He gesture again, so terribly friendly-like, for Cosmo to
join him at table, and he tell Cosmo that is just taste of what it take to be Head of Security on
KNOWHERE.

Is first time Cosmo recall meetink other telepath and havink them willingly open up their mind like
that to Cosmo. Is not at all like Gast (whose weird mind is...is constantly shufflink, relayink from
home planets to his mind, and almost often immediately out of his mouth, and back, and so on),
because Gast would never willingly open up full self to Cosmo like that. Was overwhelmink.

But Cosmo see such friendly look on Jack’s face, as he stand up, go to fridge, and pull out bowl of
Cosmo’s favorite food! Hardboiled eggs! He brink with him to table, sit down, and start crackink
one right away. He had been expectink Cosmo, he say, and Tivan had said Cosmo was such good
dog. Then again, Tivan always seemed fond of telepaths.

Cosmo cannot resist crunch of eggshell and flattery, so Cosmo step forward and join him at table.

He passes on story as he feeds me, and Cosmo takes care to listen while relishink hardness of shell
and smoothness of what was inside.

He was not a last-of-his-kind. There were plenty of his bunch around, still worshiped by many and
spreadink chaos throughout galaxies and realities and Universes.

He just got bored with it. Only so much buttkissink and destruction you can stand, he groan to
Cosmo. So, one day, he split from his herd and traversed galaxy, seekink somethink to keep him
interested. Took a couple of millennia (which was alright, since his lifespan is immense), until he
was drawn to deadhead of Celestial. He had heard much of Celestials, heard that they may have
belonged to Universe older than one we are in and such. Wondered what was contained in head, if,
even in death, it still thought. What it found on head was not what he was expectink.

There, through eye-socket and close to yellowy brainmatter was a man, drawink out brain tissue and
analyzink it in little makeshift lab close by. He had no protective suit or anythink like that on, and
this was before artificial atmosphere on the Godhead was so meticulously configured. Man you know as Taneleer Tivan and his mind tasted so ancient and fascination.

The beink we know as Jack watch, so curiously, and let perception filter about him fall (just to see how this man would react). Tivan glance up from work equivalent of hour after Jack first come in and lower glamour, but did not hold gaze past a couple of seconds. Instead, so like the Collector, he went back to work and focused on testink chemical properties of brain tissue.

Was first time any beink, upon seeink him, react in such a way. Without fear or awe. Was puzzlink, but, at last, somethink interestink to Jack.

Jack and Tivan did not talk, until Tivan finally take break. They shake hands...appendages...whatever, introduce selves, keep it as light and friendly as can be between two ancient, Cosmic Beinks. Tivan was there to protect most recent investment into godhead that nobody else wanted. While Jack was interestink also to Tivan, he know well enough that he did not recognize species Jack was upon sight. This meant Jack wasn’t creature from any lore or any particular planet. So, Collector would be ill-equipped to keep Jack in any of his Collections. Jack concede to that.

Yet, with laugh, the old creature we called Jack asked the other why he was not afraid.

Collector smile back and let Jack know that Jack could not kill Tivan, that bodily harm meant nothink to him, and that he was too engrossed in somethink else to really be thinkink about that.

That is when Jack decided he liked Tivan. Maybe not as an equal, but with the fondness you give an interestink sort of space oddity. (He knew well Tivan perceived him in same way, so was mutual.) And was why Jack decided to spend so long protectink KNOWHERE, masqueradink under different guises. Sometimes, when Tivan stop by to visit KNOWHERE, him and Jack go out for drinks together. They were quite possibly closest think that they had to friends. Possibly.

Cosmo munch up several eggs and crunch them while Jack relay story, chewink so slowly and savorink so well, and Cosmo was finishink up maybe the sixth or seventh when Jack wrapped it up. While chewink up this last shell, Cosmo just had to inquire why Jack was lettink Cosmo take position.

That is when Jack sigh, pattink my head, and impart strange sort of wisdom that you can only accrue from reachink certain age. When you grow old, you eventually come to point when you realize you have done all that you can. When you come to that bit, as he had so long ago, there is really only one think to look forward to: and that is watchink what you’ve done, what you’ve worked so hard for, take on a life of its own. He had spent so long as Head of Security on KNOWHERE, helped implement policies, shaped a society for hundreds of years, seen the population grow old themselves, marry, have kids, watch those kids age, and so on. It felt like it had gotten good. And that was why he wanted out. Could move on without him on it anymore. Would be able to take care of self, when he let it go. And now he needed to find new place to grow.

Wasn’t somethink exactly Cosmo was understandink and, before Cosmo could ask him more about it, he just give one last friendly smile, say that he give Cosmo this apartment and his regards to Tivan, wish me luck, and blink out of this plane of existence. Was maybe in top five strangest thinks that had ever happened in Cosmo’s lifetimes. Was somethink Cosmo still does not entirely understand, but, as Cosmo stand alongside Brunette-Carina and call out to Natasha, Laura-Mommy, Liho, and Nick Fury, Cosmo start to get it a little.

Standink by Brunette-Carina, lookink so sullen with axe in her hand, Cosmo finally get chance to really study her. Her face. Her posture. Rhythm of her uneasy breathink. Way she resettles self by
shiftink weight on right foot, for bit, then shiftink back. And great walls she sets up over her mind, encasinink it. So terribly impenetrable.

But she remind me so much of you. She seemed so sad, yet so angry.

Brunette-Carina. So strange that she had that name. Like Cosmo’s life was resettlinink itself into shape it had always been. That Cosmo knew Cosmo was goink to want to protect her. Help defend from her father. Whoever he was. (And, yet, in pit of my small stomach, Cosmo always knew who he was. Even if Cosmo could not verify.)

And yet, Cosmo thought also of Natasha. How sad she also smelled. How much she love Cosmo too. Was she at point where she would be alright? Would she and Liho do alright without Cosmo?

Well, at least, now they had Lucky. So they had dog helpink out. And Cosmo was sure if Cosmo asked squirrel nicely, squirrel would want to aid too.

Brunette-Carina mutter to herself about usink axe to chop down door. But Cosmo tell her is not nice. And she should really put down axe.

She did not.

Lucky woah to Cosmo that we really have to be careful around brunette, since she throw pick-nick table at us. But Cosmo remind Lucky that she was gettink headache from us barkink. And peoples do all sorts of weird thinks when they have headaches. Lucky, with shake of head, begrudginkly agree.

Soon enough, slowly, yet gingerly, front door open up so teeny. After a second, it opens more fully. And there is Natasha, holdink a rope in one hand and gun with another. Behind her stand Nick Fury, but we cannot see well enough behind if Laura-Mommy and Liho are there too.

Cosmo tell Natasha that Brunette-Carina is here to protect us.

Natasha calmly respond that Brunette have weird way of showink it.

Brunette-Carina ask Natasha to come closer or talk louder, that is hard to talk with such distance between us.

Cosmo ask Brunette-Carina to drop axe and raise arms, to show she means no harm.

She still did not.

Natasha, so nonchalantly, shrug and make easy steps out of door and to porch. We see now that she has Nick Fury tied up, which is confusink to Lucky and the rest of us.

So Cosmo ask, on behalf of Lucky, why Nick Fury was ti--and before Cosmo can finish question, Brunette-Carina dart forward. It happen too quickly. So quickly that Cosmo needs a couple of seconds to process. Oh, but what happens in those seconds!

Natasha tug rope forward while steppink a bit behind Nick and pushink him forward, as she take several shots. Brunette swink axe, redirectink bullet to her left, her right, and one whizzes forward.

Goes through broken window to left of Natasha. Into house.

Natasha arches back up a little, screamink for Laura.

Like little prairie doggie, bit of Laura-Mommy and firearm peek over corner. Laura-Mommy assures
Natasha she is ok.

That is when Cosmo step forward and bark, pullink Brunette-Carina off of feet and into air. With legs swinkink, she give Cosmo back glance and Cosmo’s head is searink so badly that Cosmo have to bow head down, bend forward, and have to let her go back on ground with plop.

Lucky run forward, with Belka on his head and Belka chitterink for rest of squirrels.

Before Brunette-Carina can fully regather self, Natasha is up on her feet and already chargink at Brunette-Carina. Is terribly graceful, how her body push up off of ground and she sails through air. Like she is flyink. She lands for but a second, swingink on shoulders of brunette for quickest moment and, then, with such a swift swivel, Brunette-Carina is on ground.

Cosmo get back on own legs and take advantage of Brunette-Carina’s discombobulation by yankink axe out of her hand.

Natasha fumbles for second, to steady firearm--is second before Cosmo can react properly to it--but Brunette-Carina give it look and it implodes in Natasha’s hand. She hisses in pain, droppink the firearm. Squirrels and Lucky have, for lack of better word, dogpiled Brunette-Carina. Everyone is so engrossed in keepink her to ground. So engrossed.

Yet is only Cosmo that note what she is screamink.

Get out of my way. Get out--

And that is when Cosmo turns head to house. Laura-Mommy is speechless, with Liho in one arm and gun in other hand, tryink so hard to steady it before her as Nick...oh, how can Cosmo describe? Is almost like lookink at ground on sunny day and, while steppink, watchink shadow adjust shape with you.

Shape of Fury expanded. Shoulders shot out. Arms bendink out of joints. All to get out of rope Natasha had tied him with. And while his upper body was on ground and face stared at floor of porch, another form was growink out of back. Until there was less upper body on ground and less in ropes and form that grow out of back grew a shape of face, shoulders, legs. But was not skin, man was formed of. Was liquid, resettlink self. Was shadow, adjustink shape to scenery. Was light, growink to fill up room and reach every corner. Was no longer on ground.

With hand shakink, Laura steady firearm and take shot. Center of his chest. Man still stood and lookink. So curiously.

Laura call out for Natasha, firink again and again.

Cosmo call to her too, as Cosmo struggle to get on own feet.

Natasha finally look behind, forgettink her hand, as she yell back for Laura.

Laura empty out entire magazine before throwink gun at form where man’s face should be. Man catches and throws to ground.

That is when shape of man finishes formink and Cosmo get good look.

Is not Nick Fury.

Instead, is figure Cosmo know too well. For all of Cosmo’s lives. One you know too.
Is face that Brunette-Carina recognize as well, the very face that causes her to stop fightink squirrels and Lucky and lets her mental walls crumble down. And Cosmo see, from her memories flowink and weepink for a planet long gone, that this really is her father.

Taneleer Tivan.

Chapter End Notes

Yep. Using the bit about Tivan being a shapeshifter. And after reading his comics, I’ve always wanted to see him meet his daughter again. Like, she was sort of brought back in the comics after disappearing for like decades in real-time, but I’ve never been able to find a story where they meet again. This is going to have that.

Alright. Well. I need a break to revise my outline, because I’ve gone off it a bit. This twist-at-the-end-of-chapters-thing has been tricky and fun, but I think I want the last twelve chapters to be less twist-y and go into a quieter, maybe weirder sort of place. I am done retelling the bits that happened in “Guardians of the Galaxy” and, so, I’ve been internally debating how much I want to diverge from canon and what I think could possibly happen in it. I’ve been trying to write this neat little adventure that fits between movies before “Infinity War” until “Infinity War”, but it feels like it’s a lot of guesstimation with the wibbly-wobbly-timey-wimeyness of the MCU and the films that haven’t taken place yet.

Things I have been debating: 1) how much should Natasha hang around in these last twelve chapters because I adore exploring her stuff, but...well, this is a space story that is bound to return to the stars and she belongs to Earth; 2) I freaking love writing Grandmaster and, even though he hasn’t had a film appearance outside of dancing in credits, I want to stick more of him into this story; and 3) I thought it’d actually be pretty funny to have a total Bond villain like Taneleer Tivan never get to have a monologue-like chapter, but now I kind of want to write him narrating at least one. If you have any feedback, that would be awesome. I might also just go back, go through this fic, and revise things. If it’s anything big, I’ll revise and say what it was in the beginning notes of the next chapter.

I will be back to posting on the Tuesday after next Tuesday. So, until then, take care.
Back! The one thing that I'm going back and changing (like right now, just after posting this chapter): I'm shifting when this Black Widow storyline takes place. Rather than happening a full year or so after "Civil War", I'm making it take place a few months after. Because the MCU's third phase looks like it's a little all over the map. Some of it takes place just after "Civil War", some right after "Ultron", etc.

Alright, let's learn Russian commands with some of these last few chapters. Just in case you've got a dog and want to speak Russian with them. 'Sidet' means 'sit'.

Is very strange, how thinks work out. One minute, everyone is yellink and fightink and, next think you know, everyone is suddenly inside cute farmhouse, gathered in kitchen, and talkink. Cosmo is sorry, Maverdevia, but Cosmo does not entirely remember how we all decided to go inside. Nearly everyone beink shocked and injured probably helped make transition easy.

Carina Tivan, as Cosmo recognize who she truly was, sat at the table and was tryink to explain the nature of visions from alternate Universes. How it was a lot like what they think of precognition, but not so. Was helped with energy projections Carina created, illustratink key points. The other two women still smelled incredibly mistrustink. But there was glint in Natasha’s eye, as she held up bandaged hand to her mouth, that told Cosmo she was understandink thinks a little better than Laura-Mommy. This was not her first time hearink this, after all.

Lucky remained close to Laura-Mommy, layink his head on her right thigh and nudgink for pats on the head that she gave. Laura-Mommy was smellink a lot calmer with each stroke of his silky, goldy fur. He is very good dog. Cosmo know Liho was in Natasha’s lap, but Cosmo could not see her from where Cosmo was.

Had been very long time since Carina Tivan had seen her father. Was same on Taneleer’s end. And how did they greet each other, after so many years?

They do not embrace. They do not even shake hands. They just barely make eye-contact once and, then, smell like they barely tolerate havink each other in the same room.

Such a dense cloud of memories hang over them, Maverdevia. Could be thick enough to cut with knife. So much bitterness mixed with vague inklings of what it had felt to love and care so sincerely for each other. Long-gone recollections of family dinners, in a house that no longer exists. Flashes of a quiet girlhood and private schoolink. All of the sweet little rememberinks, marred by a dark mantra of a name.


Tivan wasn’t at the table with his daughter; he was closeby, at the counter, treatink Cosmo and the squirrels with a first aid kit we’d gotten from Barton Family’s laundry room. Collector did not even change out of Nick Fury’s dark outfit. Is stressful, willink and changink entire form for long period. Was takink time, but his mind was revertink back to its normal yolky, multicolored way and his
scent shifted from that of Nick Fury’s cologne to his own familiar spicy licorice smell. His digestive system was resettling and only couple of times did he need to walk away to throw up in bathroom.

Cosmo did not know what to say while Cosmo was getting a check-up from Collector.

But what can you say to somebody you had crossed the stars to find?

Cosmo felt Cosmo had to ease into talking about Infinity Stones and bringing you back.

‘Why he leave?’ Cosmo knew well why he had to go, now.

‘Could he not do this again, could he not act without telling Cosmo where he was going, what he was doing, and why?’ Ah, but he was Tivan. He always did think like this. Cosmo just might as well ask him not to breathe, not to eat, not to be.

‘Cosmo is sorry for blabbing secrets?’ Cosmo was sorry, but, Taneleer did not smell especially upset, disappointed, or even particularly surprised. Perhaps he already knew this would happen. Made some peace with it. (For how long could he have known? Cosmo is not entirely sure.)

‘Cosmo misses and loves him?’ When Cosmo studied that careworn face, those darker eyes outlined with darker circles, the longer hair, very careful way he lay his hands upon Cosmo and check my joints and teeth, Cosmo knew he missed Cosmo too. And he already knew well enough that Cosmo love him.

Tivan was first to say something to me, by asking me if I ate well. I told him I had. He wants to know if I’d kept up my exercising. I had been. Then, he ask me where my suit was. He call me ‘Cosmonaut’ and say all this to me in Russian. Is always calm when he does think like that.

Cosmo spoke honestly and tell Tivan that Cosmo had taken it off to have a bath at Natasha’s place, but it was too cumbersome to put back on. But then, his daughter scared us out of our apartment and I was in such hurry to get Liho and Belka out of apartment, so that we could find Natasha and protect her from this intruder, that I had forgotten suit. Cosmo knew suit had to be expensive, so Cosmo was letting him know that Cosmo was sorry about leaving it behi--

And, before Cosmo could woah anything else, Tivan call over to his daughter and check that she got suit from Natasha’s apartment. (But he did not call Natasha by her name. He call her ‘Koschei the Deathless’. Natasha just rolled eyes once, but she did not seem to mind too much. So Cosmo did not mind either.) He also gives his daughter reminder that they could not risk even leaving one think that could prove we were there. Carina Tivan groan, but confirm it was with her thinks. He turn back to me and ask me if I want to put the suit back on.

Cosmo think very seriously about this. Ah, Maverdevia, Cosmo does not think you’ve ever had chance to run around in the nude but is pretty nice. Fur gets aerated in way fur would not normally be. And, for whatever reason, less people stare at you. (Although Cosmo doubts you’d get same result.) Always, on KNOWHERE, everyone gape at Cosmo and think Cosmo is weird for being dog in suit. (Probably in addition to being talkink dog.) Was strange, but nice, to be not-weird-one for while. And yet, there was weight to suit Cosmo like very much. Wearink suit made Cosmo feel surer of Cosmo’s decisions, protected by the layers.

Cosmo took little while to answer. So Tivan give Cosmo prescription to sit and think about it a little longer, before he pat Cosmo on head and, then, go to treat the belkas’ injuries.

But Cosmo did not stay and sit. Cosmo hop off of counter, soften landing with TK capabilities, and trot over to Natasha. Liho was trembling a little. Cosmo ask her if she is ok. And Liho mew that
she was hearing ringing from gunshots and retaining little anxiety, after what happened, but she was okay. Cosmo could still smell some adrenaline in her, but she never raise fuss about it. Liho was always very low-maintenance like that. Is think Cosmo always really love about her. Natasha’s back looked so straight, so solidly against back of chair. But her fingers would alternatively stroke Liho’s back, with quick and slow strikes. Wasn’t helpink Liho’s uneasiness.

This was room of people Cosmo care about very much, M averdevia. And yet, Cosmo’s stomach was rumble in upset way. Wasn’t eased at all with Cosmo layink on Cosmo’s own stomach by Natasha’s feet.

Cosmo was just startink to nod off a little, until a voice call for Cosmo. Cosmo sit up and stare back at Carina Tivan. She repeat herself, wantink to know what exactly her father had told Cosmo about alternate Universes and key persons in them.

Was very long time ago, and Tivan give Cosmo many explanations of visions that were more or less about the same with the same sort of information. But Cosmo still try to share with Carina Tivan. Cosmo tell her that, with Universes, there were key players whose actions could affect the fates of Universes. They do what is most necessary and determine outcome at pivotal points of space-timestreams. Sometimes, these people were the same in Universes.

With a snap of Carina Tivan’s fingers, Natasha’s hair, for lack of better word, puffed out. As if little gust of wind sporadically passed by Natasha’s neck. Poor Liho was already uneasy, and this just got her worried feelinks spikink. How sad and frightened her meowink became! Cosmo get back on feet and head closer to Liho, speakink words of comfort to her. Pizza Dog bark at Carina Tivan, admonishink her for worryink Liho and Laura-Mommy.

Laura-Mommy wasn’t panickink like Liho, but she hardly sounded any more at ease. Nat, she gasped, your hair--

Cosmo turn head away from Liho for second, stare up, and find red hair on Natasha’s head. Was very lovely reddish brown hair, but was very unexpected change. Still, Cosmo let her know she look very nice with this color.

Natasha just deadpan that Carina Tivan needed to provide reimbursement for the bleach treatments.

Carina Tivan groan at us, askink Cosmo to look again at Natasha and think of her father’s visions.

With another snap of her fingers, Carina Tivan drew out these memories of otherworldly thinks from my head. Even more light energy projections sprang out, almost makink Laura-Mommy jump out of her chair.

In these visions, there were such vibrant, multicolored figures traipsink around. Men and women dressed even stranger than Tivan. Jumpink around city (which Cosmo was sure that Laura-Mommy identify as Brand New version of York), fightink bright blue-hued Brethren humanoids. With windink motions, Carina close up on woman in dark, form-fittink suit and sportink very adorably short red hair. The facial resemblance was pretty uncanny.

_Boże moje_, Cosmo gasp, Natasha is the Black Window!

Black Widow, Lucky was quick to correct.

With a grand sweepink gesture from Carina Tivan, those visions of other worlds shrank and smokily curled up on themselves. They left nothink by their disappearance. No dust, no scent, nothink.

Laura-Mommy ask Carina Tivan how she was doink thi--but, then, Natasha cut in and advise Laura-
Mommy not to ask. Least she want to feed Carina Tivan’s ego.

Carina Tivan crossed her arms and hoisted her legs on top of the table, crossink them too. Cosmo jump up a little, restink paws on side of table, and tell Carina is rude to lay boots on tables. Could be gettink mud on them.

But she paid no heed and continued to exposit. Why, she query, would she be gettink any sort of ego boost from somethink as simple as energy manipulation and bringink forth potential energies? Why, when it was somethink as normal to her as brushink teeth or watchink daytime soaps?

That is why, Natasha point out, because is like set-up for her to be spoutink humble brag like that.

Finally, Tivan stood behind Carina and joined us. He shared Cosmo’s sentiments about boots on tables, very quietly demanded his daughter place them on the ground, and reminded her she was a couple of millennia old. Needed to be actink her age.

She was more than a couple of millennia, Carina Tivan correct, and far too old to be takink orders from her father. And she continue, lettink us know we have a few options.

Because Natasha is key player in this Universe, it was very bad think that she was told so much by Cosmo. Premature obtainink of knowledge by key player could affect their actions in upcomink pivotal point of space-timestream and impact entire Universe, or they could rashly act before it was their time to do so. Carina tell us that she can use her abilities to rewrite memories of Natasha and Laura and, to insure Cosmo would not blab thinks again, take Cosmo with her and her father when they leave Terra. (Could negotiate further of what the Terran women could be allowed to remember and what they could not.) Or Cosmo could stay. But Cosmo would have to get memory wiped along with Terrans. Or, everyone could hitch a ride on Tivan’s ship and be brought back to Terra at pivotal point of space-timestream—when they would be allowed to know such thinks and do as they would with such knowink. (This would require very heavy monitorink of Terran events and would be considerable gamble, since it wasn't certain that Natasha or Laura were ever meant to have known all that Cosmo told them and we would have to return Natasha at the right moment to act as she was meant to.)

Natasha commented that this set of choices stunk.

Carina claim there would not even be set of choices if she was not there.

And was probably true. Taneleer did not object to this claim, so much as blink when it was made. As much as Cosmo love Tivan, Cosmo also know he would just act on think like this, without consultink many others, in way he knew was right.

Tivan let everyone know that him and daughter would be makink repairs around house and that we would have day to think thinks over. If we try anythink, like call or make escape, they would find us.

Natasha smirk and ask Tivan (who she call Ivan) if she and Laura could just play dumb and act really surprised when they learned this stuff again. Offer was not said in Terran English. Was in Russian.

Tivan tell her, also in Russian, that it wouldn’t be good enough. They weren’t guaranteed to ever have learned what Cosmo told them in this Universe. Could still compromise Koschei’s actions, knowink what she isn’t meant to at this point.

Natasha correct Tivan’s grammar a little (his Russian was a bit rusty), and then, in Latin, flatly let
everyone know she very touched that they cared so much about her.

Tivan correct her Latin a little this time (her Latin was a bit rusty) and add, also in Latin, that it wasn’t so much that they care about her as carink about what she could do. Koschei had spent good deal of time protectink Terra and innocents due to guilt complex, accordinck to her declassified SHIELD report, and it would go very much against her psych eval to act otherwise.

While she admire that Ivan did his homework on her, the psych eval was outdated, Natasha snark in French. And it never said anything about her takink implicit threats from aliens too seriously. Even if she could banter with them in multiple languages.

Carina interrupted the pair’s conversation, sighink and askink them to cut it out. We had day to think thinks through. Maybe come up with another viable option that everyone could agree to, but that was unlikely. If we try to leave or call anyone, everyone’s minds would be gettink wiped sooner. No discussion of what could be remembered or not.

Laura-Mommy ask if anybody else would be gettink involved in this, or just everyone in kitchen.

Rest of Barton family would not be gettink brought into this, Carina put in, as they had no interest in needlessly takink the kids or Laura’s sister out of their grandmother’s house and involvink them with affairs beyond their ken. Unless they needed to be.

The smirk on Natasha’s face disappeared and we became silent.

The deafenink quiet was broken by Tivan, who start to walk away, and, in French, remind us we had day to think thinks through.

Chapter End Notes

Carina's last big comic appearance that I could find was in the comic version of "Avengers Academy" (which I have not read all of, but enjoy what I’ve seen). Her powers are based around energies, allow her to see into alternate timelines, and draw out elements from these other Universes. (I’ll explain how her telepathy works soon enough.)

Thursday: the Terrans weigh their options.
Myesto

Chapter Summary

A dog tries to talk "thinks" out.

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the delay. Work was nuts the day before and I overslept on the morning I planned to write this.

Alright: have a comic recommendation to go with this chapter. One of the most enjoyable Cosmo-centric comic issues has to be the Abnett and Lanning penned "Thanos Imperative: Devastation" one-shot. In it, Cosmo acts on the last wishes of a dear friend and manages to convince the likes of the Silver Surfer, Gladiator, Ronan the Accuser, Quasar, and Beta-Ray Bill to form an awesome space team. It is magnificent, charming, and it gives quite a bit of panel-time to an adorable dog. Track down the issue and read it, if you have the chance.

Why do I bring this up? Because this issue just highlights everything wonderful about Cosmo the Spacedog and it's most definitely affected how I've written this latest chapter. Even though Cosmo has like crazy-awesome telepathic abilities, what makes him such a delightful character are his heart, humor, and ability to reach out to all kinds of weirdos. ‘Myesto’, by the way, means ‘stay’.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Cosmo is always goink to wish that meetink went differently. Maybe with less choices of either havink memories wiped or kidnappink peoples. Cosmo worked with Tivan long enough to understand why we were only given these options, why Tivan and his daughter would see them as the only available ones in a situation like this, but that did not make them any more palatable options to the Terrans.

Cosmo wishes they could have bonded maybe. Recognize they all care very much about this Universe, made sacrifices for it, came out of it with loads of trust issues and less friends, still want to defend it, and then come up with a solution together.

But Cosmo knows personalities like this do not easily mesh like that. Especially given the circumstances they had to interact. And Cosmo dwellink on it didn’t seem especially helpful.

Terrans headed upstairs for first hour, while Carina Tivan use her abilities to undo damage to windows and Tivan took up a sort of guard duty while sittink on the stairway. Cosmo give Tivan a sort of nod as we went upstairs together, Terrans and pets and even squirrels. He give little nod back.

Behind closed door of Laura and Clint’s bedroom, first think anyone tell me was from Lucky. He say Cosmo was right about my owner, that he did not seem nice. I link everyone mentally and tell
them that I am sorry about my owners and that I put everyone through this. Natasha snuck up and
give me a hug, with Liho in her arms. She said nothink when she do this, but Cosmo did not mind.
We said nothink for couple of minutes. And then she whispered command. Well, sounded less like
directive and more like wish.

She beg Cosmo to stay, tell Cosmo that Cosmo shouldn’t have to apologize. Cosmo listen to way
her breath clinks to the vowels and Cosmo promise to stay this time. Cosmo had promised to protect
Natasha. And Cosmo would be doink that.

Then, Natasha sat on bed with Laura and began to plot. Cosmo stay at foot of bed with squirrels and
Pizza Dog, listenink a little bit. Natasha was part of a small group who handled an alien army and a
robot army. Evil alien Siouxsie Sioux and her father, evil alien Billy Idol, she claim, should not be
problem for her. While Siouxsie Sioux was distracted by repairink windows, they had to scheme.
And quickly. Laura look over to me and, then, so so carefully, ask if I should be in same room
while they plan. Natasha gave me once-over and, very confidently, say that I can be trusted.

Oh, Cosmo was so happy to hear that from her. At long last. But this happiness stung a bit. These
were people I love, Maverdevia, plannink on fightink other people I love.

Cosmo sit up and say, very honestly to everyone, that Cosmo cannot plot with them or have any part
in this. Even though Cosmo have very good abilities and Cosmo will not fight the Terrans, Cosmo
know well that Cosmo cannot fight the Tivans either. They are not entirely good people and what
they are doink now is really not nice, but Cosmo know Tivan for too long to attack him and Cosmo
would break own heart strikink at his daughter in front of him. If it was at all possible, could
nonviolent solution be crafted?

Natasha blink and give me smile, the kind that made her lovely eyes in half-moon shapes, and then
she ask if I want to go out of room as they plot. Cosmo could guard door from outside, instead.
Cosmo nod and agree to do this. Belkas agreed to join.

Cosmo’s chest was weighink so heavily. Is hard, watchink two peoples you love doink this sort of
think. Cosmo just had to lay down and think for while.

Cosmo see both sides, Maverdevia, so Cosmo have a lot on mind. Is hard position to be in, hard to
know all of this and have to see it happen. What do you do, when you are in position like this?

Cosmo could smell spikink adrenaline on Terrans, their fear. They mistrust the Tivans greatly, for
their weird powers and underhanded methods. Too greatly to want to listen to point Tivans have.
And Cosmo does not blame them.

But the Tivans also have point. Universe or some Higher Beink or someone gave them them gift or
curse of prophecy, so they know thinks most others do not. Tellink all they know makes people
panicky, act oddly, even more mistrustful of them. Even with immortality and ridiculous amount of
powers, Cosmo believe they were really no different than the Terrans. Maverdevia, they, like the
Terrans, were dealink with big, terrifyink think out of their control and in way they believe to be
right.

Just so happened both parties’ rights were in opposition with each other, even though, at core, they
really want same think. Both were too unwillink to trust one another and, presently, unwillink to
communicate effectively.

Cosmo found self between unstoppable forces and immovable objects. What is it you do when you
find yourself, Maverdevia, in place like this? Do you just stand by and watch thinks escalate? How
can anyone just watch these people destroy each other?
The squirrels smell my anxiety, as I lay down, and hear my stomach. They tell me to just give the order and they will attack or spy or whatever.

Cosmo look at them, sniffing for Cosmo's first belka friend. But is confusion. All smell so alike. All have very similar thought patterns. So Cosmo ask all Comrade Belkas why they are so loyal to Cosmo.

They say is because Cosmo is first dog they meet to help one of them and talk to them, instead of chasing them up tree.

And Cosmo want to lick all of their faces and thank them, for being incredibly kind. So Cosmo do that. Then Cosmo disclose that Cosmo wishes talking things out always worked like this. Sometimes people just felt too stubborn and unreachable. Or they lied to you and deceived you. Or they manipulated you. Made it hard to want to keep trying, to put self at risk of disappointment.

But the belkas, Maverdevia! The belkas were just so sweet and tell Cosmo that they love Cosmo for always trying.

And that is when Cosmo have idea, Maverdevia.

Cosmo thank everyone and ask them to take up Cosmo's post. They ask Cosmo what Cosmo is doing, ask to help, and Cosmo tell them Cosmo will be fine. They trust my judgement and let me go.

So, so, so, so quietly, Cosmo trot over to head of stairs and look down. There, at very lowest step, sat Tivan, Cosmic Beink that Cosmo has known for many, many, many, many lifetimes. How small he look!

Sometimes, when Cosmo talk to him, it work. Other times, it did not. This person did many unforgivable things, had Cosmo also do things. But Cosmo know him well enough and see who he truly is.

He never wanted to be a Space-God type. Nobody ask him if he want absurd powers before Somethink gave them to him. He had to watch Universes end many times, and what is it that he does? Not cower or hide away. He remake himself into person who can handle weight of responsibility that come with such terrible knowledge, that can continually pay whatever it is that Universe wants to take from him for giving him glimpse of awfulness. This is person who see peoples and creatures at their very worst, yet, Cosmo knows, he still believe, in some way, most have purpose and deserve preservation.

But even with all of this good in him, there is dark that Cosmo now have to acknowledge. Frustration, self-hatred. Compensating for itself with massive pride and pageantry. He is old man, bound to fall couple of times or lose way. Maybe even forget why he does what he does, sometimes. He has ghosts and he is not at all perfect. He is as capable of doing awful things as he is of doing good. But he is not Thanos-level of evil. Cosmo know that Tivan still want to work to save lives.

Cosmo still love him, Maverdevia, and, because Cosmo love him, Cosmo cannot just stand idle and let him do terrible things like this any longer. Cosmo just had to give him one more chance, see if Cosmo could try to talk him out of doing this terrible think.

Cosmo throw down mental-voice to Taneleer, calling out his name. Old people don't hear their full names used very often, and they always like to hear it.

Taneleer crane head up, staring back at his Doggy comink down stairs to talk with him, greeting me with nod, and mentally calling me Cosmonaut.
And Cosmo do it, Maverdevia. Cosmo say we need to talk.

Tivan ask about what.

Many thinks, Cosmo say, but we have to start with this. Cosmo tell Tivan that Cosmo know where him and his daughter are comink from, with fear that givink Natasha too much knowledge of thinks beyond her understandink could compromise her actions, but Cosmo state is not right think to wipe her mind or Laura’s mind or take them both from Terra until Natasha is meant to act at most pivotal point in space-time. In fact, could be very bad think in long run.

Cosmo maybe vaguely understand why Tivan was willink to listen to Cosmo more than others, and, thankfully, now look like time he was willink to listen to dog. He give very measured look and carefully ask why that is.

Cosmo ask Tivan how he think about rewritink Natasha’s memory.

Tivan say it is his daughter that present that option. She would be usink her abilities to be doink that.

Beink telepathic dog, Cosmo have guess about how Carina Tivan would rewrite memories. So Cosmo remind Tivan about Proust. There is Proust story where man recall much from just havink a sweet. (Tivan love hearink about little cultural tidbits like that peppered into conversation.) What if, even with Carina’s capabilities, small think like sweet could retrigther what was supposed to be written out of Natasha and Laura’s mind? Cosmo spend a lot of time with Natasha, eatink with her and dancink. What if, when Natasha have cake, she suddenly remember Cosmo? To make mind wipe successful, we would have to eliminate all stimuli that could brink this remembrance of thinks about. And, even with the Tivans’ capabilities, is impossible.

Tivan blink a couple of times, upon hearink this theory. His mind was still repairink itself. Went through quite a bit of blunt force and willink self into shape of Nick Fury-ish mind, but Cosmo just look and see him processink this.

And then Taneleer mentally concede! But, then, he ask why he should not just lock up Natasha and Laura and rest of Terrans in containment-unit until Terra was in danger and needed Black Widow. Was always tricky, discussink this sort of think of containment-units with Tivan, but Cosmo knew that Cosmo had to try.

When it come time to release Natasha, Cosmo begin, she is such good person that she will not hesitate to help other people. But what will happen if he have vision of another terrible think happenink on Terra? Natasha, who knows heroes of Terra very well, will tell them about Taneleer Tivan and nobody will listen to Tivan . Because, to them, Tivan is just terrible jailer. They won’t care if Taneleer is right. Tivan need to build up trust with Terrans. Cosmo question if Tivan currently have any Terran business contacts.

Was gamble, but it work. Tivan slowly shake head, pause, and then state that Koschei told him she didn’t want or need his trust.

Cosmo ask why Tivan keep callink Natasha Koschei, and Tivan claim it is because she wanted to be that. So Cosmo let it go. There were more important thinks we were dealink with. Cosmo say she has been goink through very weird thinks. Cosmo does not know exactly what, but it has just make it hard for her to trust people and even loveable animal like Cosmo so easily. You really have to work to earn Natasha’s trust. But, in spite of all this, she is still really good and intelligent person. Natasha did sense somethink wrong with Tivan’s Nick Fury disguise, somethink that even get past magnificent specimen of *canis lupus familiaris* like Lucky the Pizza Dog. Her trust was worth
workink for. And, if she could not trust Tivans, she tell Cosmo that she trust Cosmo now. Cosmo could act as liaison.

And, again, Tivan concede to Natasha’s capabilities! Even addink that Natasha caught he did go to plastic surgeon (was to refine Nick Fury shape he took on), she did demonstrate very keen ingenuity, she had a lot of guts, and she carried good ratio of ruthlessness and selflessness.

Oh, Cosmo was so very happy to hear all of this! There looked like hope, Maverdevia! Terrans and Tivans wouldn’t have to fight!

There will be no mind-wipinks or imprisoninks, Cosmo clarify.

This was man who give dog chance, when nobody else would. Right now, Cosmo really need him to do this again.

If Cosmo could convince Natasha to heed his warninks and if Carina Tivan was alright with this plan too, Tivan list conditions with most curious expression on face, then we would not have to go to these extreme measures.

Oh, oh! Would be tricky, but this was somethink Cosmo could was sure that Cosmo could do! Cosmo lick Tivan’s face, thank him many times, and tell him Cosmo can do this. Just as soon as Cosmo gets paws on floor and talks to Carina Tivan, then to Natasha (since Cosmo decided Carina would be harder to convince than Natasha). So, Tivan wrap arms around Cosmo, roll a bit to side, and then set me on floor. Ooh, I just have to lick his hands a little more for that!

So Cosmo does!

And, then, Cosmo trots away to get to work on convincink Carina Tivan! Cosmo step and step and step--but, then, Cosmo realize that Cosmo doesn’t hear any footfalls behind Cosmo! So, Cosmo turn around and mentally ask Tivan if he is comink along to convince his daughter to join us.

He say Cosmo’s chance of success might be higher if Tivan did not join Cosmo for this one. Tivan was goink to stay put.

Nyet! This was somethink Cosmo was goink to have to put paw down on! This was his daughter, Maverdevia! This was his child that he had not seen in so, so, so long! Cosmo run back to Tivan, tug at his Nick Fury pant-leg, and tell him he has to go with Cosmo. Even if she is upset with Tivan, Carina know him better than she know Cosmo! Would probably be more willink to listen to Tivan than to Cosmo!

And Tivan, with most stoical expression, sat and watched Cosmo tear at pant-leg. Finally, he get up and tell Cosmo that Cosmo is naive and maybe a little too trustink. But Taneleer still stand up.

So Cosmo let go and take few steps forward, then turn back. Tivan was followink this time!

Cosmo take more steps, and hear his footfalls as Cosmo move a little more forward!

Cosmo respects that you do not like Tivan, that you may never like him again because of way he callously kill your cousin, treat you badly, and do terrible thinks. Sometimes even Cosmo struggles to like him, knowink all of this.

But he is closest think Cosmo have to batya . Cosmo know him, and he knows Cosmo. Sometimes Cosmo know him well enough that Cosmo hate him, then love him, then hate him, then love him, and back and forth and back and forth. Is think that just happen when you know somebody too well.
But Cosmo also remember that he did not give up on Cosmo many times. So Cosmo refuse to give up on him too.

Chapter End Notes

Have a sort of weird chapter in honor of Father’s day.

Next week: Cosmo talks with Carina Tivan and Natasha.
Chapter Summary

In which reality sneaks up on a talking Soviet dog.

Chapter Notes

‘Fuu’ means ‘let go’ or ‘leave it’. You use it when your dog is doing something like, say, chewing on something they shouldn’t.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tivan and I go together outside, walkink out of house and a bit around to look out for Carina Tivan. Cosmo was just so happy to have him back, Maverdevia. Cosmo tell him a lot of thinks. Of how Natasha almost fed Liho and I cake (he frown when he hear that, but Cosmo excuse by tellink him Liho was only her first pet and Liho tell Cosmo that she has been with Natasha for couple of days when Cosmo first go to them). Cosmo talk about Pizza Dog too, about his kids (that are actually Laura-Mommy and Clint Guy’s) and how they tell him stories and write songs for him. One of the stories they tell him was of a red dog that grow bigger than houses! And his kids, beink such sweethearts, they beg him to grow really big and let him know, even if he never grow that tall, they will still love him. And Tivan, like he do when he is in listenink mood, listen very carefully and nod at the right points. All windows were without cracks now, but Carina Tivan was nowhere to be seen. Cosmo think at first that she do somethink to undo damage to glass, and Tivan had to tell Cosmo otherwise. She probably pulled same windows from different point, Taneleer explain, from space-time lines highly unlikely to converge with ours.

Cosmo ask if Bartons from that space-time line would miss havink their windows.

Tivan claim was probably from a doomed space-time line, somewhat knowink how responsibly his daughter try to use her powers, and windows would be the least of Bartons’ concern.

So often, Cosmo seek him out for answers. He always seem like he know everythink, and maybe he almost does. But, like Cosmo is very sure you would have felt, Maverdevia, Cosmo wasn’t likink this answer. Cosmo tell him this answer isn’t good one.

And only think he have to tell Cosmo is that answers are like that sometimes. Answers are without morals or concern; they simply are.

Is very weird think to be hearink out of Taneleer, Maverdevia, and that is really sayink somethink since Taneleer often says weird thinks. But is lovely kind of weird that Cosmo miss about him.

Cosmo’s heart was just swellink with so much emotion that that is when Cosmo tell him that Cosmo come all this way to find him, because Cosmo felt like would be while again when Cosmo could keep up Taneleer’s attention like this and Cosmo just couldn’t keep it to self any more. Cosmo come on behalf of KNOWHERE because KNOWHERE needs him.
KNOWHERE was under attack, by invisible horde. People were turning up mangled by air, since we never see assailants in footage. There were kind peoples turning mangled up. Old shopkeeper who just got grandkids. Well-loved foreman. There were bad people too, but Cosmo know they still deserve to be treated with decency. So Cosmo, Brood, and all of the workers on KNOWHERE put heads together. We figure what they want, based on increased frequency of bizarre accidents like this happenings closer and closer to ruined remains of Tivan’s Museum. (We never bother to fix, because, to repair, we would have to allocate funds from public healthcare or school system. And we figure if and when Tivan come back, he can choose to fix it up or not.) So Brood and Cosmo surreptitiously gather most valuable relics’ remains, evacuate that area, wait until is night, and blow up from safe distance with industrial-level explosives used for mininking. Left behind crater and now visible corpses of reptilian enemies. Based on analysis of devices on their persons, we identify them as rogue faction of male Badoons. Cosmo take with Cosmo most valuable objects in doggy tag, while leavink Brood in charge of Security, and Cosmo go to find Tivan, to talk with him about what to do with valuable objects and how to stop this from happenings again. Because Tivan always know what to do.

Tivan just flatly point out that Cosmo and Brood handle situation incredibly well, without him beinking there. It seem they did not really need him.

Maybe to some degree is true. But Cosmo still tell him that Cosmo need him. Cosmo know him well. Cosmo know he was very upset by destruction of Museum on KNOWHERE, yet, in spite of this set-back, because he is Tivan, he was probably still lookinking for Infinity Stones, but--

And he interrupt, after scaninking around outside area with eyes, statinking we should probably check if daughter went back inside. We had gone around house once and, now, were standinking by porch of front door once more.

He start to head to door. Cosmo hesitate to follow.

He turn back and ask me to come with him.

And that is when Cosmo tell him somethink Cosmo probably should have told him very long time ago.

Cosmo say to him, sometimes, is hard to talk with him.

He ask me what I mean. So, I tell him while he seem to be in listeninking mood.

Cosmo say Cosmo feel like fifty percent of time Cosmo can go to him, tell him thinks and know he listen, give him advice, and get advice back from him. But, durinking others, Cosmo feel like he block Cosmo out. Others have higher rate of beinking blocked out. Sometimes Cosmo try to give advice, but he will not listen. Sometimes Cosmo is a little scared of tellinking him thinks, because Cosmo does not know how Tivan will take it. If Tivan will be in mood to listen or not, or if he will even be there to hear it or not. And is especially hard when he goes and does somethink big and important like huntinking for Infinity Stones, since Cosmo knows Tivan is probably one of few people in the Universe that actually knows what they are, how they work, and why they should not end up in clutches of awful person like Thanos. Is very important work and is hard to talk somebody out of doinking think like that, since is probably very good think. But it is also dangerous and draininking. Put people around him in increasingly terrifyinking situations, made him make more and more rash decisions, drew more people to sordidness, and panicked people around him. And Cosmo was a little scared too, if he get all Stones. His ego only seem to grow with getinking first Stone. Havinking it make him more careless than usual. Cosmo say to him that Cosmo knows Tivan feels he has to collect all Stones, because could be fallinking into hands of Thanos otherwise, but Cosmo afraid of what could happen if he get even one more than Aether that he take with him out of KNOWHERE (somethink Cosmo verify
before leaving. He could be more careless, inadvertently endanger more people.

That is why he is involving less people now, Tivan tells Cosmo, in his hunt for the Stones. Having too many people involved spoiled his plans before and caused far more damage than intended.

Cosmo was terrified to hear he was still hunting for them, more so that he was doing it alone.

Cosmo says to him this cannot be right either, that cutting self off from other people will make him act even more irrationally and endanger even more people. What about Gast? Gast had already lost family that he no longer remembered. Cosmo begged him to think of how hard it was for Gast to lose family again. Especially brother he was closest to. And what about Cosmo and Brood and KNOWHERE and other people that care about him? Even if we did not think he was nice, we all still miss him very much.

He stops, furrow light brows so terribly seriously, and stare at me, then he questions Cosmo what Cosmo would do if Cosmo had visions like his. What if Cosmo was only person to know where incredibly dangerous superweapons like Infinity Stones were, know awful people like Thanos really want them and could destroy Universe with them? What would Cosmo do, if visions like this keep on turning up in his head, even if he try to settle down someplace nice?

And Cosmo didn’t know how to answer. Cosmo had seen his older visions, yet Cosmo didn’t know exactly how it would feel to have something like that pop up in Cosmo’s head and having to keep it to self until Cosmo could find people Cosmo could trust with such information. But Cosmo share only truth, that Cosmo didn’t know what Cosmo would do but Cosmo still love him. Even if this was more serious than him having terrible choice of shirt to wear for day. Even if he go, do things like this, and feel like he have to do things like this. And since there were no Infinity Stones or newer valuables turning up here, Cosmo know he loves Cosmo too. He is tired of being alone and having to act alone. He come here to see Cosmo and his daughter, since he probably learn, like his daughter, this is place in our space-time line where he can meet with child he hasn’t seen in ages. He have vision on KNOWHERE after destruction of Museum, Cosmo recall, and this must be what he saw. He was here because he know he have to be.

He laugh a little and say I assume a lot, that Cosmonaut is probably only one to ascribe so many positive motivations to what he do.

That is when Cosmo says that Cosmo really need him, because Cosmo remember all the times Tivan brink Cosmo back and Cosmo finally brink up bringing you back too, Maverdevia. Gast couldn’t do it, but if anyone could it would be Tivan.

And Tivan stop laughink.

That is Cosmo realize Cosmo had been takinking most of conversation. (Is think that Cosmo does sometimes, if Cosmo is not careful.) Cosmo talked and talked and talked, but did not listen as much to Tivan. So Cosmo query for Tivan to state why Tivan is here, then.

He turn to Cosmo and confess some days he just feels nothink. An emptiness in him. At times, only think that fills up this hollow space is chasing after somethink and gettink it. Or not. Sometimes the pursuit is enough. Sometimes is not. Cosmo was right about contents of vision on KNOWHERE. But he is not here so much to meet with Carina as to get chance to see her. Get a last look at her, before she block him out again and he have to lose her again. And also to take Cosmo back with him, unless Cosmo has no interest in being his dog anymore. In which case, he’d be willing to pay me very good sum for my DNA.

And Cosmo does not really know what to say to any of this. Is just too sad. Cosmo say to Tivan
that Cosmo refuses to believe he is so cold about seeing his own daughter and that he have such little faith in Cosmo. Cosmo scan his mind so many times when Cosmo was small dog. Cosmo know him better than he know himself. Cosmo tell Tivan this and add that Tivan is really just afraid.

Of what, Tivan debate. Death was no threat, laws were meaninkless, injuries he could wait out, and beink alone was inevitable with old age. There was nothink left for him to fear.

Cosmo step closer and answer that he is afraid of love, because he know he can’t keep thinks forever. He is afraid of beink wrong. He has great powers, but he still is afraid of beink too weak to protect thinks he cares about.

That is when he step back, turn, open door, and head back in. He does not shut door behind him. So Cosmo follow after.

We walk for a bit and find his daughter, sittink on couch and watchink television. Was very cheesy lookink show (Cosmo only briefly catch that title was “Tales to Astonish”). Somebody was announcink they were pregnant. She have hearty laugh and lit cigarette in mouth. And, as we step closer, Cosmo could feel cloud of bitterness growink and hangink over us and constrict Cosmo’s throat. (Or maybe that was cigarette smoke.)

Tivan dispassionately tell his child that smokink is bad for her health.

She take extra long inhalation, then exhale in steady stream. She is immortal, she shrug. Makes no difference to her.

Cosmo admonish too, because this is household with small children.

Carina Tivan snark back at Cosmo that the kids were gone. All adults and animals here, now.

Way she make claim was with vowels drawn out and smoke leavink through her nostrils. Is enough to make Tivan step back a bit. Keep him quiet durink rest of this conversation.

Cosmo forget for second about why Cosmo and Tivan go to look for her. She is person hardest to get readink on. Cosmo was still rememberink when Cosmo talk with her earlier and it look like she was listenink, but then it turn out to be ruse to attack own father or Natasha. Then, Cosmo remember and say to her that Tivan and I come up with other solution.

She puff and claim that Cosmo alone figure out solution, Tivan was just followink along and curious if Cosmo could convince Natasha and Carina Tivan into agreeink to it.

Cosmo deny. Tivan listened to Cosmo’s points and conceded. We both come to agree that wipink out memories from Natasha should be impossible and imprisonink her would only create more problems. Because of Natasha’s connections, would be more beneficial if we entrust her with information. If she would not trust hearink it from Tivans, she would from Cosmo.

And that is when ends of Carina Tivan’s mouth tug outwards, thinnink her lips and drawink out mouth into facsimile of smile.

She point to television and change topic completely, remarkink how fascinatink television was. Lots of people actink like people, puttink on face and mannerisms. Fakink normalcy. She love it, she coo to us both.

Da, she creep Cosmo out quite a bit. Cosmo wasn’t sure why she say thinks like this. So Cosmo just ask if she agree to this too.
Carina Tivan look to us both. She say to us her visions of Universes are perfect. Complete, incessant. Not just glimpse into one for limited period of time. In some space-time lines, Cosmo’s choice is very bad. In others, is not. The solutions she offered just required a lot less work from both of our ends.

Is so confusink when people talk like that. All cryptic-like. So Cosmo just ask her what we have to do to make Cosmo’s solution work.

Carina Tivan stare at me. Is when Cosmo think back on her dorky laugh. Was when barriers were up. And Cosmo ask self if it was real laugh, or imitation of one?

With Tivan around, even though there was more hatred in air, Cosmo also sense barriers less so around her. And that is when Cosmo come to realization. Realization that Carina give voice to. She chew on cigarette butt like it were candy, invitink Cosmo to look deeper into her mind. Knowink too well that Cosmo want to. And she want too.

But why?

Cosmo did not know, yet is very temptink to look deeper in her head. But not helpful to Natasha.

Cosmo offer to do it later, if Carina reveal what it is we need to do, if she help, and if she agree to Cosmo’s solution.

She does. Thinks we have to do and Natasha have to do are not easy, but they are doable and preferable to havink her and Laura and maybe Cosmo's mind wiped or Terrans beink taken from homeworld.

Cosmo suggest to everyone we go upstairs together, to talk with Natasha. With very little fightink, the Tivans agree to go with Cosmo.

But Cosmo just have weird feelink, walkink with them up stairs with Carina leadink way and Tivan followink after Cosmo like a shadow.

Chapter End Notes

I think it's up to the reader to guesstimate how reliable Cosmo's narration has been and how much of it has just been

in his head. (Get it? Because to speak, Cosmo thinks things and uses his telepathy to pass those thoughts along.) Yeah. I want sleep.

Thursday: Cosmo makes a promise to Liho and a few other things. I may delay the chapter a little. It won't turn up as beefy as the "Maverdevia" chapter, but I've been anticipating writing it for a while.
I love the current Guardians of the Galaxy comic. It is weird, surreal, and funny in an off-the-wall sort of way. Even if I question the current bit about Drax going through a pacifist stage. The current arc also has some excellently written Elders in it.

Anyway, ‘Dai Lapu’ means ‘give a paw’ (like to shake it).

Liho is very private cat. Cosmo adore her in different way than Lucky, who Cosmo is in love-love with. (Since Lucky is just so easy to love. What a good dog!) Liho says very little, since she prefers to observe with her adorable yellow-y eyes and absorb thinks around her. Cheese is somethink that she love and night was her favorite time because was when sky matched with her fur. She tell Cosmo very little of her past, even though Cosmo ask once. And is fine. Past is personal. When she would talk about her past, would be in little bits here and there. And Cosmo always have to promise to keep to self. Cosmo remembers all that Liho tell and keep it to self, because Cosmo really treasure what Liho want to share with Cosmo.

One day, while Natasha was out shoppink alone for groceries, she look to Cosmo and, while standink in Cosmo’s shadow, she ask Cosmo to promise somethink else. Cosmo agree, before knowink what it was. Because Liho is Cosmo’s friend and Cosmo loves her. When she is ready, she say to Cosmo, sometime in future, she want to sit down with Natasha and Cosmo. And she would tell Cosmo thinks about her own past that Cosmo would have to relay to Natasha (since Natasha speak many languages but she does not understand cat). Because Cosmo and Natasha share so much with her and she was always a little sad that there would be knot in her little kitty throat that would stop up the words from her heart. (Cosmo tell her, biologically, is impossible. But Liho say even if is impossible, it felt true.)

Is think Cosmo think about a lot, especially at this time with the Tivans and standink outside bedroom door. Belkas had refused to let Carina Tivan in, so Cosmo have to vouch for her and for Tivan.

Many thinks goink on in Cosmo’s head. While thinkink of Liho and talkink to comrades, Cosmo also review other telepaths Cosmo has met, Jack and Gast. Cosmo cannot do what Jack did, since Cosmo feels is too much invasion of privacy. Cosmo did not feel Cosmo have quick-enough calculatinink abilities to manipulate like Gast. But Cosmo think Cosmo could still take somethink away from their methods and do in way Cosmo knew was right. Keep track of everyone’s feelinks like Jack, find way to brink up commonalities like Gast. Try not to just address superficial situation so that this cannot happen again.

Cosmo remind Tivans to explain selves and apologize for startlink Terrans. They do somethink wrong and must apologize for it, so that they can be trusted. Simple as that. More or less, the pair mumbled in acquiescence.

Natasha was the one to open door and take littlest peek before openink more fully. Oh, Cosmo was so happy! Cosmo was waggink tail and stickink tongue out, runnink over and woahink to Natasha that Cosmo and the Tivans think of other solution! But we all have to talk out logistics and we all
have to be willink to listen to one another! Cosmo would monitor negotiation and intervene when it would look like violence was about to break out!

Natasha bend down, stare at me with her lovely blue-green eyes, and pet my head. Her eyes dart to the Tivans, then back to me. And mentally she ask if Cosmo was sure about doink this, because is tricky tryink to manage thinks between two disagreeink parties.

Cosmo was positive! And Cosmo say this to Natasha, tellink her is because Cosmo love both of them very much because they are both very much a part of Cosmo, Cosmo is certain that both actually wanted same think, and Cosmo and Tivans really want to make this work. Cosmo want to know if she want to make this work too.

She get very wistful look in eye, as she tilt head to side and pat Cosmo. Her eyes dart over to Tivans for bit, then back to me. And she mentally say that for me she will give this chance.

The Terrans stay close to bed while the Tivans stand by doorway and Cosmo sit between them both.

The Tivans start with apology. They say they are sorry Terrans were startled by what they have to do for good of Universe--

Cosmo woah in disagreement. Is not good apology. Is one that relieves them of responsibility for their poor choices that cause mistrust.

So, they try again. They are also sorry, they slowly insist, for makink Terrans pick between beink mind-wipink or kidnappink. Those were choices they thought sounded good at time, without considerink feelinks of Terrans. And, now, they think they can come to arrangement that could better benefit them both.

Is better apology.

The Tivans make offer, not to do any mind-wipinks or kidnappinks if Natasha agree to hear out what intel could come to them from visions of other Universes. (Natasha would not receive information from them, but from Cosmo. She smile for second to hear this.)

Natasha snark is complete three-sixty from their older offers, but she ask for catch.

They tell her she can never reveal source. Information would lose all credibility if she say she say she get from talkink dog--

Or Katinka and Mugatu, Natasha finish sentence with shrug. Laura-Mommy tap her on shoulder, chidink her a little.

Tivans turn to Cosmo and ask Cosmo to clarify. Cosmo didn’t know either, so Cosmo ask Natasha to try not to confuse the Tivans so much since is rude to do while tryink to negotiate with another person (she sigh in reluctant agreement) and then Cosmo just tell the Tivans that Natasha really likes films (even the awful ones) and books and loves to make references. She talk to Cosmo about “Duck Tales” once. Is American cartoon with duck-peoples like Howard and they go on adventures.

Carina ask if is think that have witchy duck lady and old miser duck swimmink in gold coins.

Natasha verify is so. And then they go on about it.

Cosmo see them get off-topic, talkink about other stuff, but Cosmo doesn’t stop. Is good, healthy. Somethink they both seem to enjoy talkink about. Cosmo was just so afraid room full of trust-issues
would blow up or somethink. Maybe Natasha would have secretly planned to attack Tivans with concealed carry. Or Carina Tivan would unexpectedly strike at them. Or maybe Tivan would abruptly port everyone to his ship, lock everyone up in containment-units, and call it a day. If gettink a little off-topic would stop this, Cosmo was happy to let it go.

Carina and Natasha try to explain to Tivan what “Duck Tales” is about, how it has Donald Duck’s nephews livink with Uncle Scrooge McDuck. Except somehow that doesn’t mean Scrooge is Donald Duck’s brother. Everyone just call him Uncle Scrooge.

One think lead to another, and Carina state she see Natasha before. (Natasha insist is probably on news or because she have sort of face that everyone says looks like someone else’s.) But Carina say they really, really, really briefly occupy same space. Was in Tokyo. Backstage of show for an apparently important person Cosmo did not recognize by name. Person called Millie was, Carina Tivan say, also workink runway that night.

Da , Natasha agree. She remember.

And talk went in and out of important stuff after that point.

Cosmo moderate when insults were about to be flung, rephrase bits other party didn’t understand, and repeat points when necessary.

All thinks considered, negotiation went well.

After few hours, Cosmo repeat most important parts of talk. Both parties agree protectink Terra and Universe would be highest priority and that Barton kids were innocents that would be kept as far from these affairs as possible. Natasha was not their agent and she would be free to do what she would with information given to her (other than revealink where she get it from). Cosmo would always be one sent in to give information. If information was dire, she could organize strategy to handle alongside other heroes (if and when, inevitably on space-time stream in this Universe, she meet with them again and they sort thinks out). There would be no pressurink her to act certain way with information since direness would be determined by her. Her declassified history and potential in other Universes showed more than enough ample qualification of her judgement. So that she would not look like fool when actink on information, Tivans would research and share only thinks that have highest likelihood of occurink in this Universe. If she make request for some intel, Tivans also agree to provide her with it to the best of their abilities. If Tivans give bad intel, Natasha was free to cut ties. To insure pressure of gainink valuable intel from other Universes would not get to her, Natasha and Laura-Mommy agree to talk more regularly. Natasha could not live on farm for long periods of time, because she is fugitive, but would be for weeks at a time. Laura-Mommy would also take care of Liho when Natasha couldn’t bring her along wherever she was goink. To sweeten deal, Carina Tivan would erase any cybertrail that would reveal Barton farm location to enemies (since is how Tivan found this place). She would not get paid each time she listen to information Tivans provide, since she did not work for them. Cosmo woah, checkink if everyone was happy with these conditions.

Everyone agree.

Cosmo tell them all to shake hands.

And they do.

Maverdevia, is really very best feelink! Room full of people Cosmo really love and they do not fight this time!
Cosmo ask the Tivans to join us for either very late breakfast or fairly early lunch after talk, since was around time for that. Both turn down. We respect their decisions.

Carina Tivan remind me of promise I make to her, before she leave us smoke alone outside after talk.

Taneleer flopped head-first onto couch and took nap.

Cosmo went with the Terrans to the kitchen. While we open fridge and pick out tupperwares of food to heat up, Natasha ask Cosmo what it is Cosmo promise Carina Tivan.

Cosmo use abilities to pull little tupperware close to Cosmo’s nose and remove lid. Pheugh! Is smell that is terrible to Cosmo! Out of consideration to Laura-Mommy, Cosmo use mind to empty in nearby garbage and, then, toss into sink.

And that is when Cosmo tell Natasha. Cosmo has had fun on Terra, but Cosmo is Cosmonaut. Spacedog will have to be goink back into space and Carina Tivan ask Cosmo to act as security for think she feel she must do. Alongside Tivan.

And Natasha, she walk close to Cosmo and just gets on knees, looks at Cosmo with such sad eyes. She ask if is what Cosmo really want.

Cosmo look right at her and say it is. Cosmo have gifts and Cosmo feels most fulfilled when Cosmo can use them to do good thinks, like negotiation that took place earlier. Even though Cosmo will always love Natasha and everyone, Cosmo need to go with Tivans. Because Cosmo love them too and believe in what it is Cosmo believes they are tryink to do. (Even if they do not always agree with Cosmo and vice-versa.) Cosmo knows there is way Cosmo can help them in way only Cosmo can.

Her face crinkle a little bit as she just wrap arms around Cosmo.

And she speak aloud to me, askink when I will be goink. Other Terrans have been quieter, listenink in or gettink a little bit closer. Look on other animal friends’ faces is too much for Cosmo. Belkas look stern, but nod. Lucky have such sad eyes, but he is good dog that stay close to Laura-Mommy. And Liho! Oh, Liho!

Out of consideration for everyone, Cosmo links everyone and tells them at end of day maybe. We haven’t worked out when exactly. But soon as possible is most likely preferable. Cosmo was not sure when Cosmo would be seeink everybody again after.

Liho, oh Liho! She is so small, like little fluffy shadow! She ask, in way only other animals really understand, if is possible for Cosmo to just stay.

Cosmo tell her it really isn’t. Knowink what Cosmo does, while beink able to do what Cosmo can, Cosmo cannot just stay with everyone on farm.

Oh, Liho! Poor little Liho! Cosmo never see her as upset as she was now. She say Cosmo shouldn’t leave. That is isn’t fair.

Terran humans just hear some very plaintive meowink. But is enough for Natasha to scoop her up and let her join us.

Cosmo tell her Cosmo will still try to be around. Won’t be so bad.
And she cry and say it won’t be the same without Cosmo around.

Cosmo want to tell her is partly because of her that Cosmo felt braver about negotiations, that Cosmo realize Cosmo can use abilities to bridge such wildly different people and creatures and allow them to talk in way they never can. But Cosmo sense it isn’t what she want to hear at all. Would maybe even make thinks worse. Cosmo think about her promise too, but Cosmo didn’t want to pressure her into actink on earlier promise when she maybe wasn’t ready to share her past with Natasha.

Oh, Maverdevia! Liho is such young cat! But she carry herself so much like one twice her age. Natasha was first person in while to give her food and talk with her. And Cosmo had spent so much time with her and Natasha. Is first family she have in while. This wasn’t goink to be easy on her at all.

So Cosmo try to make other promise with her. Cosmo try to say that when Cosmo goes to space and comes back, Cosmo will have gift for her. There are substances that are very similar to cheese, which cats can have. Cosmo would fetch for her.

Chapter End Notes

Have I mentioned that I love Liho? What a patient cutie.

So. Let's talk a bit about Joseph Campbell and dads. Typically, the hero has to defeat the father-figure so that, in a sense, they can grow up. Often this involves destroying the father-figure in some way. The dad also typically represents some sort of dark aspect of the hero and, by defeating their father, they lose that aspect. This didn't feel right to do with Cosmo in this fic. I wanted to write something else with Cosmo, wherein, instead of destroying his father-figure in some way (and, in doing so, crushing some darker aspect of himself), he wants to try and live with both.

Next week: Cosmo prepares to head back into space and...well, you'll have to read to find out. I promised these last twelve chapters wouldn't be a twist-a-thon, like the previousish ten, but I still want to keep a few surprises in store for you, Readers.

'til next time.
A talking dog finds that things aren’t entirely what they seemed in the last chapter.

If I haven’t made it abundantly clear: I think Cosmo in the MCU would be a little morally compromised, compared to his comic counterpart. At heart, I believe both are really good dogs who believe in doing what is right. But, in the MCU, this is a dog who was free to run away and still willingly came back to the Collector, after probably witnessing a lot of terrible things that the Collector has done, and licked his face.

It is time to deal a bit with...dog-father issues.

This is kind of a long chapter.

And I kind of forgot how closely connected Clint’s kitchen and living room were, until I rewatched “Age of Ultron” clips. Gotta hand it to Clint-guy, the place looks really nice.

‘Vperyod’ means ‘forward’.

NOTE (6/29/17): So, I hit enter on this chapter. Then, I decided to revisit the "Civil War" script and that was when I realized I totally misremembered the last exchange between Tony and Black Widow as something more antagonistic. I felt a little guilty realizing I’d written a few chapters with this misremembered bit in mind. I actually dig their friendship, so, like any continuity errors that I’ve left a little too long in this fic, I’m going to address it in a later chapter. Girl Scout promise.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Cosmo was so confused, Maverdevia. Cosmo had told Liho many times that Cosmo was goink to have to leave after Cosmo find Tivan. And Natasha askink if Cosmo really want to go...Cosmo had thought Natasha was fine with Cosmo goink too. Cosmo make it incredibly clear when we negotiate earlier. Was it only now reality of Cosmo leavink had really start affectink them? Natasha get up, after some minutes, to help heat thinks up with Laura-Mommy. Cosmo couldn’t go back to help, because Liho was just too distraught.

Liho still keep on cryink, tellink Cosmo that Tivan was bad owner that didn’t deserve Cosmo. That Cosmo was too kind, too forgivink. That Cosmo has to stay with them, because they love Cosmo and Cosmo loves them.
And Cosmo assure Liho is okay. Tivan was goink through terrible thinks, was made terrible by thinks that happen to him, but he still love Cosmo. Even if he doesn’t say it. (Because he is very afraid of love and is very sad think.) He feed Cosmo, without Cosmo havink to ask. He give Cosmo suit, train Cosmo. All are very good thinks. Even if he do terrible thinks sometimes, he is also capable of doink good thinks too. He is a little like Natasha, who is actink strangely now. She is also kind person who want to save thinks and feed animals without beink asked. (Even if she kind of didn’t know what to feed pets, but that is kind of excusable because she has never had pet before Liho.)

It only make Liho bawl more loudly.

And that is when Cosmo become more curious. If Liho and Natasha were actink like this now, why were they beink fairly agreeable durink negotiation? Cosmo was certain Cosmo had done good job of moderatink negotiation, of insurink everyone was beink heard and we all come to agreement that we seem happy about.

And that is when Cosmo realize it, Maverdevia.

And Cosmo didn’t know what to think. Cosmo turn to Natasha, who was lookink back at Cosmo. When she see Cosmo’s doggy eyes, she look back to Laura and talk about havink leftover Chinese food from fridge. Because Cosmo is very good dog, Cosmo stay to comfort Liho and does not leave her side to talk with Natasha until Liho is less upset.

Layout of area is very open. Barely any division from where we are and Tivan is restink. Couch Tivan is on is close to table Terran humans eat at. We are close enough to hear Tivan change position on couch and turn on TV. TV talk about how local hero of New Version of York, Devil of Hell’s Kitchen, hasn’t been seen in weeks. (So many missink people! First Tivan’s daughter, then Tivan, and then Lucky’s owner!) Laura-Mommy was kind and she cut up pieces of fruit for me, Liho, and Lucky. Cosmo ask very politely if she can cut up bits of cheese for Liho too, since Liho really love cheese. But little bit. Because we did not want to upset her little stomach so much. Laura-Mommy blink twice and, aloud, tell Cosmo it makes her feel very weird to talk to dog and have dog talk back. But she still agree to do for dessert for Liho.

Laura-Mommy’s breathink got pretty weird-soundink when she sat back down and her surface thoughts very scattered. The adrenaline smelled strong in her. Lucky was smellink it too, so he was keepink very close to her. The humans were tryink to talk about weather (somethink Cosmo know Natasha is really never interested in talkink about). Cosmo eat with Liho, stealink away seconds to glance up when Terran humans didn’t think I was lookink.

They were passink piece of paper between them and writink on it. When Cosmo glance up just as Laura-Mommy was in middle of passink sheet to Natasha, she give me back very nervous look. And, then, Natasha ask Cosmo out loud if it would be okay for them to be feedink Chinese take-out to Lucky.

Cosmo never have Chinese take-out before, so Cosmo wasn’t sure. Cosmo ask to smell container of food. Natasha come close with tupperware of somethink lookink very orange and let Cosmo whiff. Augh! Terrible smell!

Cosmo say it smells like junk food! Too many spices and MSG! Could be bad for Lucky’s digestive system and give him diarrhea! Or it could be makink him very fat!

Natasha smirk a bit, pat me on head, call me good dog, and sit back down. Laura look a lot less nervous, when Cosmo look at her again.
Lucky whimper to Cosmo that he likes bits of orange chicken. Especially when it’s table-scrap.

So Cosmo sigh and say to everyone is probably okay in moderation. And everyone starts feedink him bits.

Cosmo really didn’t know what to think, Mavdevia. All of this secret-keepink.

Liho was less upset after eatink, but she was still tryink to tell Cosmo that she did not like the Tivans. They deceive people and animals and make people and animals afraid. Cosmo say Natasha does that too, yet we know she is really good person. And Tivans were Cosmo’s family too. It hurt Cosmo’s feelinks to hear Liho talk about Cosmo’s family like that. Liho meow that Cosmo is part of Liho’s family and Liho didn’t want to see Cosmo go with terrible people, even if they are Cosmo’s family.

Poor Liho! She was gettink exhausted and Cosmo could tell. So Cosmo suggest Comrade Liho should rest, and she agree. Cosmo help her stand up and we trot over to Lucky.

Lucky is such good dog! Home has squirrels and cat in it, and he has thought a little of chasink after them but he does not! Cosmo ask Lucky politely if there is place for Liho to sleep and Lucky shows Liho his bed in corner of kitchen. Cosmo wait until she get very settled in bed, tell her myagkikh podushek, and trot off to talk with Natasha. Little kitty sleepily ask if Cosmo will still be here when she is awake again. Cosmo tell her of course, because Liho is friend and Cosmo will not be leavink her without sayink goodbye.

Natasha was sittink at the table, holdink hand with Laura-Mommy. Laura-Mommy was cryink, but very quietly. Lucky was placink his head on her thigh and Laura-Mommy was pettink him.

Cosmo ask why she is upset.

Natasha turn to Cosmo and say we need to talk. In the mind. And insure Carina Tivan cannot be readink it.

Cosmo step back a little, Mavdevia, but Cosmo concede that we need to talk. So Cosmo put up perception filters and we speak in the heads.

Cosmo start conversation by askink if she trust Tivans.

She say nyet. This did not surprise Cosmo, Mavdevia, because Cosmo already knew Natasha has trouble trustink peopleses.

Cosmo ask her why, then, she make deal with Tivans.

She tell Cosmo that she like Cosmo. And she also agree people like Tivans knew thinks that would be good for her to be knowink for safety of Terra. But, mostly, it was to be like “Godfather” film. To keep her enemies closer, in case they could be threat to Terra too.

Cosmo wasn’t certain what to make of this. Is very clever tactic, Mavdevia. Incredibly devious. But Cosmo say that Tivans were sincere about wantink to protect Terra. They have terrible methods, but, deep down, they are like her. They also want to save thinks.

Natasha sigh mentally that a lot of people with good intentions wind up doink terrible thinks. She has met quite a few types like that. She was one of them. But people like that needed to be put in check, to insure not too many other people would be gettink hurt by their actions. She would be actink as check without them knowink.
And Cosmo listen to this carefully. Because Cosmo is very good dog. All of this make a lot of sense to Cosmo. Too much sense to Cosmo. But Cosmo still have to ask why she want Cosmo to know all of this.

And that is when she knows, because of way Cosmo communicates with mind, is hard for Cosmo to keep secrets. Her declassified SHIELD file reveal much of what she was goink to tell Cosmo too, yet she still want Cosmo to promise that Cosmo wouldn’t reveal everythink she tell Cosmo. Because she know Cosmo, she add that, if Cosmo ever tell anyone, omit the most painful parts for her and do not go into great detail. Cosmo promise to respect her wishes. Her eyes clench shut like fingers in fist and she mentally discloses many thinks to Cosmo.

Thinks she never tell Cosmo before.

Very sad thinks about herself. About people who raise her, who she thought love her when she was younger. About the thinks they have her do, and thinks they do to her. They have her lie and they have her kill. And it affect her. It still affects her and her ability to trust anyone. How she is still so very haunted by it all. How she was on very dangerous path, so unaware, until somebody pull her out of it and lots of people work very hard to keep her out of it. She squeeze Laura’s hand a little tighter. They say nothink aloud, but Laura squeeze back. The people of SHIELD, Natasha reveal to Cosmo, give her job. They let her do good. They say it could alleviate bad she did, that, even if she cannot erase all she did, it could give her some sense of control back. It could ease the guilt. She make friends with boss, Nick Fury. Turns out Nick Fury didn’t exactly make friends back with her. She understand why he lies to her and hides thinks from her, but findink out he didn’t trust her still hurt. Good job turned out to be secretly run by bad people. To expose bad people, she have to make her entire past public. Everyone see what she is ashamed of. She do this to save world, but, people who read her file look at her differently. It was ok, though, because she had other friends she save world with. She could lie and they know what is on her file, yet they still like and trust her. But now she didn’t know where they are now too. She had to betray one friend to help another out. Comrade Stark, friend she betray, say somethink very hurtful to her. That lyink is all she do, all she is good at.

Cosmo cannot say everythink she tell Cosmo, since Cosmo make promise to her. Tears were wellink in Cosmo’s eyes, as doggy listen. Cosmo step closer to her, brushink Cosmo’s cheek against her leg. And her thoughts stopped flowink out so much. She open eyes and say nothink.

Cosmo say to Natasha that she is good at many thinks, that she is very good person.

And she still say nothink.

Cosmo thank her for trustink Cosmo with thinks like this, but Cosmo ask why she tell all of this to Cosmo.

Natasha rub Cosmo’s ears and tell Cosmo that is because she loves Cosmo and she is afraid Cosmo is like her. Cosmo is still very good dog, but Cosmo can’t recognize that people Cosmo was raised by aren’t good peopleses. They may only want Cosmo to use Cosmo. And she feel Cosmo really has to know this.

Cosmo becomes still, Maverdevia, after hearink this. And Cosmo wiggles head away from Natasha’s fingers and take step back.

She note in her mind that she knows is probably hard for Cosmo to accept, but--

Cosmo just have to turnoff connection, turn about-face, and walk out of room, after she say all of
Cosmo hear her chair scoot and her call my name. Cosmo stop for second. Cosmo wasn’t sure what to think of all of this. This is Natasha, who Cosmo work hard to protect. Natasha, who Cosmo knows is very good person. And she say Tivan, who Cosmo also knows is very good person...would do somethink that bad to Cosmo. He is capable of terrible thinks, *da*, but--

And Cosmo trot on, to couch where Tivan was now lyink on. He still have television on. (Same news station, talkink about another missink person! Was daughter of famous scientist called Hank Pym! So sad!) He is lookink only at this, away from kitchen, but his eyes are very glazed over. Cosmo greet him and Tivan acknowledge with small, upward quirk of lips.

And he state somethink in mind, where Cosmo can read. Natasha does not trust him or his daughter, he dispassionately claim. How he know, Cosmo is not entirely certain. Perhaps is simply because he is Tivan. But Cosmo does not nod or anythink.

And he tells Cosmo is alright. Asgardians didn’t really fully trust him, and he still work with them. Ravagers that work with him through Broker did not trust him, and he still work with them. Broker did not trust him, and he still work with them. Gamora did not trust him, and he still work with her. Nobody trusts him, but he still work with them.

Cosmo ask why.

He tell Cosmo is only way to get thinks done sometimes. There are thinks that can only be done by workink with people you do not trust and do not trust you back. He want to know if Cosmo could do that. Work with people Cosmo didn’t trust and that didn’t trust Cosmo back.

*Nyet*, is such a sad way to live. Too sad. Cosmo tell him is so.

He say Cosmo know Tivan do thinks like this, and is true. But still. Natasha is good person. To hear that good person like her say such a think about Tivan...

Cosmo ask, because Cosmo have to, if he really did believe Cosmo’s option was better than his or his daughter’s, or if, like what his daughter said, he just want to see if Cosmo could do this.

He respond is both. Cosmo has far exceeded his expectations of *canis lupus familiaris*. And he ask Cosmo if Cosmo want performance review.

Cosmo really didn't know what to make of his answer, however it had been very long time since Cosmo has gotten one. So Cosmo nod.

Tivan roll a bit to side, so that he is sittink upright. His hands clasp together neatly. And he tell Cosmo that Cosmo’s gregarious nature is both Cosmo’s greatest strength and weakness. Is why Cosmo was made Head of Security on KNOWHERE. Cosmo lacks viciousness, but Cosmo is excellent with workink with various types of peoplesees and animals. Cosmo is empathetic, try very hard to look for good in everyone, and want so much to brink it out in everyone. Cosmo is also very enthusiastic about Tivan’s cause. All very good traits one would want in managerial position as Security Chief. But, with Cosmo’s nature, Cosmo is also too trustink. This kind of business, that Tivan was a part of, was not one where one could be so trustink.

Cosmo blink twice, not entirely sure where this is goink.

He say that Cosmo is invaluable to him, as specimen he create from DNA of other creatures and that live longer than any of the other ones. He ask if Cosmo blame self for what happened on KNOWHERE with Museum and Infinity Stone.

Cosmo’s sting a little with tears and Cosmo feel knot on throat. And Cosmo still nod.
Tivan lean forward and pat me on head, so soothinkly rubbink my ears and place hand on doggy head between my ears. Cosmo really miss this. Cosmo just start to sob a little more heavily.

He make soothink-soundink shushink noises, as he wrap arms around me and try to lift me up. Cosmo is much bigger. Cosmo can no longer fit in his hands, like when Cosmo was small dog.

After some strainink (and with help from Cosmo and Cosmo’s TK abilities), Cosmo is by his side on the couch.

He smile very earnestly and say he spent many years thinkink of this. Of what to do when he run away to Terra, like he know he have to, and meet Cosmo and his daughter again. And he conjecture that Cosmo live longer than other dogs that die of natural causes because Cosmo find purpose in life helpink Tivan, like how him and his siblinks have hobbies to make their immortal lives more tolerable. However he still feel he have to ask why Cosmo help Tivan and why Cosmo still want to do this.

Cosmo sniffle to him it is because Cosmo loves him.

He sighs and then assure Cosmo that what happen with Museum is not in any way Cosmo’s fault. Tivan blame himself. He should have listened to Cosmo. And he deeply regret what happen to Carina there. (You, Maverdevia.) He never want you to get hurt and he did advise you to step away from Stone. It just wasn’t enough. More extreme precautions should have been taken. But, in his long life, thinks like that happen. And, as much as it pained him, he currently lack resources to brink you back.

Was painful to Cosmo, hearink that.

He now want to know if Cosmo could be emotionally prepared for another incident like KNOWHERE to happen.

Cosmo say we could prepare better, to stop from happenink.

Tivan repeat question.

Cosmo pause. And, then shake head.

Tivan say nothink for while. Then, he mentally ask if Cosmo still trust him.

Cosmo does not respond. Cosmo still love him, sure, but...after hearink these thinks...

He sighs and thinks Cosmo is too kind-hearted to continue helpink him out. Thinks he need to accomplish require a lot of mistrust and workink with people who mistrust. Thinks like KNOWHERE inevitable. Cosmo helpink him out with Collection was alright, since that require a lot of kind-heartedness, but he need to do thinks more than tend to Collection. Could lead to more heartbeat for Cosmo. Doink the sort of thinks Tivan need to do could destroy creature as sweet as Cosmo, and he never want to destroy incredibly unique livink think like Cosmo. (And is very true. He always work to preserve unique creatures like Cosmo, even terrible Long-One.) He thank Cosmonaut for comink all this way just to look for him, out of pure love for him. But, after Cosmo go to act as security for task Carina Tivan ask of Cosmo and Tivan, he say, Cosmo should really live on farm with the other animals and with Natasha and Laura-Mommy.

Cosmo couldn’t believe what Cosmo was hearink, Maverdevia! Cosmo just have to shake head!

_Nyet, Maverdevia, nyet!_ Is not what Cosmo want at all!
Tivan promise to visit farm from time to time, to tell Cosmo what Cosmo needs to pass on to Natasha, but Cosmo should not stay by his side any longer. Cosmo is dog of simple tastes and should be happier living simple life on farm.

*Nyet!* Cosmo bark! Cosmo want to go with him! Cosmo want to take him back to KNOWHERE! Cosmo doesn’t want Tivan to be alone, workink alone! Cosmo doesn’t want Tivan to leave Cosmo! Cosmo remind Tivan that Cosmo have powers, Cosmo want to use powers to do good and help Tivan in way only Cosmo can! That is what Cosmo have to do!

He smile so sadly and lecture to Cosmo that with great powers there are just great powers. No responsibilities. Usink powers continually to help others, at cost of takink care of self and own needs, is drainink. Could make Cosmo miserable and destroy Cosmo’s good nature. He never want to see that.

Tivan apologize to Cosmo, sayink it isn’t easy at all for him to do this, that he knows this can’t be easy for Cosmo either--and Cosmo just have to run out! Cosmo couldn’t go through kitchen, where Natasha and Laura-Mommy and Liho and Lucky and belkas were! Cosmo yank open front door and run out. Cosmo run and run and stop, just by stump where Captain American axe was!

There, sittink by picnic table, was Carina Tivan havink a smoke. Cosmo didn’t like creepy Carina Tivan, Maverdevia, and Cosmo’s heart felt so heavy beink near her. But Cosmo was filled with such emotion. Cosmo was already cryink and Cosmo just have to howl.

Cosmo wasn’t expectink what happen after Cosmo start howlink. Not at all. Carina Tivan put out cigarette with her tongue (very gross practice), stand up from picnic table, and wrap her arms around Cosmo. She tell me thinks were okay when they were not! But she still repeat it, as if repeatink it would make it more true!

And she didn’t stop huggink Cosmo or pettink Cosmo or repeatink this lie until Cosmo was done howlink.

She look at me very carefully and ask me if I remember what she ask me to do.

Cosmo dutifully repeat is to act as security when she goes with Tivan to what remained of planet that Tivan family used to live on, after destruction of earlier Universe, so that she can see where her mother was buried and visit her for first time in decades. Carina sigh, even though is what she ask Cosmo to do in exchange for her agreeink to Cosmo’s tactic, but she ask Cosmo to recall other think.

Cosmo reply is to read her mind more fully.

She confirm, tellink me, yeah, you silly dog.

That is when Cosmo’s eyes got wide. Because there was only one person ever that call Cosmo a silly dog in way Carina Tivan do it, Maverdevia! Only one person Cosmo ever know who do it!

Cosmo was tremblinking but Cosmo close eyes and do it.

Chapter End Notes

I want to make some other things really clear here:

I wanted to write Taneleer Tivan as a terrible parent. But not straight-up like a Thanos-
level terrible or Ego-level terrible. More like a mix of good and bad. He is a parent-figure with some good intentions, is capable of being supportive in some ways, has a pretty sad bunch of personal reasons why he treats people he cares about badly, but he still does some pretty terrible things. In this fic, he does genuinely care about Cosmo and the Carinas. This is not, however, intended to excuse any of the terrible things he does to any of them.

I still frickin’ love the Black Widow and I’m still hoping for her to get more screen-time so that her character can be further explored. Like, walking into “Age of Ultron”, I was really hoping to see Natasha’s struggle dealing with being in a post-SHIELD world where her past was made public. I can’t tell you how disappointed I was that this seemed brushed aside. I still think this affects the character and I really want some sort of on-screen thing of her dealing with it. Even if it isn’t an entire solo movie, I want at least some scenes addressing this in the next “Avengers” flicks. And I still want Liho and Pizzadog to appear. Even if it’s like in the background, running around on the Barton farm. And Laura. And Jane. You know, just bring back as many women as possible. (I can’t tell you how happy I am to hear that Pepper’s appearing in “Spider-man: Homecoming”.)

It has been weirdly interesting writing Black Widow sort of facing off against Tivan, since, only while writing this, do I notice that they are more alike than I’d thought. (Which makes me want to see more of these dudes interacting.) I’m talking about both the MCU counterparts and their comic counterparts, BTW. Both are pretty duplicitous. Both, in a way, change their forms to adjust to situations. Both are Don Heck characters. Both are very fond of animals. Both can also be a little cold and ruthless. Both have used people to get their ends. Both slide morality alignments. But, I think what separates them is that Natasha hasn’t lost her ability to love things and she hasn’t lost her compassion. Her compassion is what drives her and it’s one of the things that I really love about her as a character.

Thursday: Cosmo finds a very dear old friend tucked away in a creepy person. You probably know who it is, dear Readers.
Ko-Mne

Chapter Summary

The favorite child and the problem child of a very dysfunctional space family meet again; they have different opinions on some things, but they still love and support each other.

(See: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dysfunctional_family)

Chapter Notes

I can’t tell you how long I’ve wanted to really write this chapter, dear Readers. I don’t usually cry while writing stuff, but I needed a good sit-down after the Maverdevia chapter. It felt strange, because, due to the source-material, I knew I had to write her death and I also knew how it would really affect writing through Cosmo’s POV after this point. I went in, knowing I was going to have to write this and I thought I wouldn’t tear up after writing it. And I did. This is something that I’ve really liked about writing this bizarre little fic about a talking dog and his life. I’ve always felt surprised by it, even after carefully planning it out. I rearranged this outline quite a few times and changed the ways she’d be bought back, but her death is the one that I really want undone.

Hers and Frigga’s. (Friggin’ stupid they killed off the friggin’ warrior Queen of Asgard, I say.)

Oh, and I am going to explain Carina Tivan’s telepathy and how she could wipe minds. (She could not do either of those in her brief appearance in “Avengers Academy”, but, I promise, I have some sort of scientific explanation behind it.)

Anyway: this chapter is long and ‘ko mne’ means ‘come here’.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sometimes, Liho, Universe gives dog bone. But is not normal-shaped bone.

Do not worry, Cosmo will try to explain.

The mind is a strange place to be in, Liho. And Carina Tivan’s was very strange. Is all flow-y and smoky. Not layers like most. Not multicolored yolk, with colors of parts spillink into other parts like Tivan’s. Not thoughts streakink from the mind, to computer on another planet, back to mind, to mouth, to mind, etc. like Gast’s. Everythink felt a part of everythink. No clear delineations. Ruminations with childhood memories with glimpses into other Universes all coursink through Cosmo. A part of Cosmo. Was terrifyink, in a way. Contradictory. Confrontational.

But there, before me, stood Carina Tivan. Except it wasn’t just Carina Tivan as Cosmo and Liho saw her. There was brunette. There was also cute blondie in purple gown with eyes all glowy. And there was her.
Cosmo was about to cry out, Carina--!

But Cosmo stop self.

Maverdevia, Cosmo was also about to say, but Cosmo could not.

Instead, Cosmo ask what to call cute pinky Krylorian in pigtails.

She tell me that she no longer knew. She was above thinks and ideas like labels and names. She reckoned she was no longer a person, but she herself an abstract concept. She want to know if Cosmo would still love her in this form.

Cosmo promise of course, and was true. Because Cosmo promise that Cosmo would always love her. Cosmo wasn’t sure what to make of this, if it was sad or happy or upsettink. So Cosmo ask if it made her happy.

She shrug and say she suppose it was so.

And that was good for Cosmo. Cosmo take step closer to her, greet her by woahink hello Abstract Concept, and ask if Abstract Concept is also above thinks and ideas like hugs and gettink licked on face by silly dogs.

And she smile. Widely and beautifully. Of course not, she tell Cosmo with arms out, come here, you silly dog.

We take steps closer to each other and meet. She bends forward, while I step on hind legs, and we hug.

And Cosmo couldn’t help it, but cry. Cosmo want to know so badly how she become a part of Carina Tivan.

It turns out that energy is never destroyed, Liho. The mind, the thoughts, they are electrical pulses runnink through the brain! Memories, they are pulses of energy! And people and creatures, what makes them unique, Liho, isn’t it just their collections of memories? Although her physical form was quickly burned up by holdink the Power Stone, in briefest second she held object, she was able to manipulate energy in head and throw these recollections out of herself. (She regret that it destroy many livink thinks and she tell Cosmo that she is so sorry she did this without knowink Gast could not undo it. And Cosmo forgive her, because Cosmo loves her.) But anyway, Liho, energy is never destroyed. It is sometimes transformed and sometimes transferred. Space and time loses all meanink when you are no longer tied to physical plane by body, so energy that was Maverdevia was able to travel through them easily. Some way or another, while Carina Tivan was travellink Universe through Space-Time and lookink for truths (mostly by enjoyink wild freedom of young adulthood she was denied), Carina Tivan find and collect essence that was Maverdevia because she empathize with anger and sadness in it. Especially since it was for same person, Taneleer Tivan. Now they were part of same person. Sort of. More or less. Well, not melted identity like Brood but...

Ooh, so confusink Liho! Cosmo’s head was really spinnink! But Cosmo still try to understand, try to take in everythink! Treasure the scent Abstract Concept Cosmo love so much have on her, memorize way her arms felt around Cosmo!

Cosmo want to know if she see and hear all that Carina Tivan see and hear.

Cute Krylorian woman say yes, but she still want to talk with Cosmo about them. Just because she miss Cosmo and talkink with Cosmo.
Cosmo asks if she would mind if Cosmo tell her thinks.

She giggle and say that she was terribly interested.

So we sit and talk and Cosmo do it. Cosmo tell her about how Cosmo has been thinkink of her, especially lately. Also about the other Tivans, about the pets, and Natasha. Cosmo was just so excited, Cosmo accidentally call her Carina and mostly Maverdevia (she said was ok with that, though, since Cosmo was gettink used to her new self) and Cosmo even tell her parts she was already sort of there for.

And Cosmo end it all by beggink for forgiveness. Cosmo spend so long beink so upset with her, with how she act on KNOWHERE when, really, Cosmo just didn’t understand why she would do such a think like that. But now, Cosmo did.

And she forgive Cosmo. She rationalize that Cosmo is simple animal, even with Cosmo’s advanced mental abilities. And without perfect visions of all Universes, like she have, she believe Cosmo simplified confusink happenink in way that was most understandable to doggy mind.

Ooh, is just the most wonderful feelink Liho! Beink forgiven! Like a weight beink taken from your shoulders! Stomach unknottink! And chain in your brain finally breakink!

Cosmo just couldn’t help self, so Cosmo had to lick her face.

She laugh extra, hug me very tight, and say to Cosmo that it must have been very confusink think for Cosmo to go through, that Cosmo have to make sense of. And it really was!

She beg to do some thinks with Cosmo, now that we were together again. And Cosmo agree, because Cosmo really really want to!

Time has no meanink in the head. Time is really just an illusion. A think mortals made to measure out how old they get or when they should do thinks. There is no age in mind and there is no shoulds. At same time Cosmo agree to catch up with Abstract Concept, we go into several recollections of Maverdevia’s.

We sneak into seventeen different Krylorian filmhouses and watch different Bereet films as Maverdevia remember them. Cosmo recall Krylorian, but does not know some cultural bits. So Maverdevia whisper to explain, so that we do not get caught by ushers.

At same time, we also go to memories of malls to window shop. We laugh at horribly overpriced shirts and people-watch.

And, while laughink and whisperink, we simultaneously jump into several seats of several restaurants Maverdevia remember lookink into windows of (but never really got chance to eat in). Like she promise, she order food that she always figured she want to order from these eateries and, then, share last bit with Cosmo.

Many new memories made so quickly! Really, spendink time with another person in their head has to be most efficient way to hang out with them!

All while we do these thinks, Cosmo talk with her. Cosmo ask her if she can help Cosmo make sense of thinks, because they still didn’t entirely make sense to Cosmo. Cosmo used to be sure one person had to be good and other bad in KNOWHERE incident. But now, really, both sides just seem ridiculously flawed, limited in what they know, and just reactink to prevent terrible think from happenink. (Okay, but, mostly, it probably was Tivan’s fault). But, in tryink to prevent think from happenink, both do pretty terrible thinks. But both also have very good intentions.
Her eyes crinkle a little bit. Her head shakes and she tells Cosmo that she really can’t. She could help to best of her abilities, however she have thinks of her own to tend to as well. Abstract Concept apologize to Cosmo.

Cosmo forgive her back, because felt so easy and, beink in this space, it was easy to see where she was comink from in her mind.

Maverdevia as Cosmo know her was also a part of Carina Tivan, so their problems were one in the same. More or less. Namely, that problem was horridly powerful beink named Korvac that wanted to take over Universe and reinstate new Universal order. Korvac was from the future. Tivan had trained Carina Tivan so that she could spy on Korvac, win over his trust, and see him at his weakest. When Korvac reach lowest point, Carina Tivan was supposed to kill him. Instead she fall in love with him and they marry. Carina Tivan still try to kill him after, but then Korvac find out her powers, trace her energies to Tivan, and kill his own Father-in-Law. (Tivan got better.) And then, Korvac and Carina Tivan wind up dead. At least that was how it work out in several Universes. Was hard to tell how it happen in Cosmo’s Universe exactly, with memories of perfect visions in Universes all meltink together. (Lots of thinks in her head that even she, with all of her powers, struggle to keep track of!)

Carina Tivan, the Abstract Concept begin to try and vociferate thinks, spent decades driftink in space without a body until she was brought back by a scientist. Carina Tivan masqueraded as energy signature of his deceased wife and scientist fell for it. Brought Carina Tivan a lot of guilt, but she knew she had to do it. Because she know she is only one that has potential to defeat ex-husband via drawink out potential in herself and others. She has been honink her abilities, learnink to read minds (which was surprisinkly easy for beink that spent decades beink composed of pure energy since memories and thoughts in head are just electrical surges of energy) and adjustink to her perfect visions of all Universes. Was still gettink used to powers. And she also want to find truths and wanted to enjoy thinks she never get to while alive before, like stupid hoaky soap operas and smokink cigarettes.

Cosmo ask her why she come here to confront Tivan, then, and why she want to revisit her mother’s grave with him.

Abstract Concept presently shaped like Krylorian woman (that Cosmo love so much) tell Cosmo that Carina Tivan still has wants and needs, even with all of her powers. Has been long time since she see her mother’s grave. Has been while since she has seen father and wanted to talk with him. Even with vision of all Universes and perfect understandink of why he send his own daughter to take out horrible beink from the future and why he spend decades replacink her, she want to patch thinks up with him. Not because she fully think he deserve it, but more out of other reasons. Was drainink, carryink grudge around. Drainink holdink onto anger for so long. And, after gainink perfect visions, she also kind of pity man that used to be her father. She also want punch him in the face. At the same time as forgivink him. Yet she find herself unable to do either. Because he is her father who raised her and was just tryink his best to keep Universe safe, but he was also a-hole that pretty much messed up her life. Mostly she want closure for their relationship, even while knowink she probably could not get it. Oh, it was makink Cosmo’s head spin to hear!

Cosmo ask Abstract Concept about how she feel with Tivan, since these were Carina Tivan’s feelinks that she just share.

She say to Cosmo that she is on same boat. After witnessink Cosmo’s side of what happen on KNOWHERE, she better understands why Tivan act so terribly to her. But she still want to punch Tivan in face for a lot of the terrible ways he treat her and others, killink her cousin, threatenink her, and not just tellink her that she was goink to explode Collection on KNOWHERE and Gast could
not brink them back after (even while knowink he could never do last think, for fear that it would put idea in her head when it wasn’t there, as it probably could have). She apologize to Cosmo for all of the death and Cosmo forgive her because she was young, upset, had valid point somewhere, and didn’t know entirely what she was doink. She bite lip a little in cute way and want to know from Cosmo if is ok that she feels like this. And Cosmo is best friend, so Cosmo tell her there is no wrong way to feel. Feelinks are personal and Cosmo does not blame her for how she feel. It makes her feel very good. And she ask somethink, Liho, that nobody ask about Cosmo and Tivan. She want to know what Cosmo feels about Tivan.

Ooh, is such loaded question! Especially after what he tell Cosmo and Natasha say about him! It was so strange! This was person Cosmo had known since Cosmo was small dog, yet, at same time, after he do this think, Cosmo feel like Cosmo was really gettink to know him! And Cosmo wasn’t certain if Cosmo liked who this new person was!

He is stranger to Cosmo, Cosmo say. But at same time, Cosmo still knows him and love him. And hate him. And--

Cosmo wasn’t so sure. Cosmo want to know if she is ok with this answer.

And that is when Abstract Concept share knowledge with Cosmo. Searchink for truth in all Universes and seeink all Universes give her keen insight that tell her, sometimes, for some thinks, there were no neat or easy or perfect answers. Sometimes an answer would be satisfactory and, other times, it would not be. Maybe even when you find answer, you have to reaffirm it to yourself. Or, if you spend so long believink in one think and you learn is other, you have to accept and let go of old answer and try not to get so upset with it for disappointink you. Or maybe you have to accept only answer you find is imperfect. Sometimes is good and other times is bad. You have to believe what you believe, until you do not anymore. But you also have to make room for other thinks that could challenge what you hold to be true.

And it make a lot sense. But it also fill Cosmo with some despair. Because if there were no neat or easy or perfect answers for some thinks, how could they be dealt with? And Liho, Cosmo just have to query this to Abstract Concept.

She tell Cosmo we deal with it best way we can. We do what we can, we fight hard for thinks that are tryink, but we let go of thinks we cannot change.

And Cosmo think of many thinks. Imperfect resolution between Natasha and Tivan. Tivan firink Cosmo. Cosmo beink so afraid for Tivan, but everyone else beink so afraid for Cosmo.

Cosmo really want to use powers to help people, Cosmo say to Abstract Concept.

Abstract Concept states is good think.

But Cosmo really doesn’t think Cosmo can deal with another incident on KNOWHERE happenink under Cosmo’s watch. And Cosmo is not ok with way Tivan treat people like animals sometimes!

Abstract Concept also says is good think that Cosmo knows this about self.

Cosmo want to stay with farm-friends and Tivan, but...Cosmo is dog. Cosmo is dog with great powers, sure, but there is really only so much that Cosmo can do.

Cosmo never really think about takink care of self before.

Ooh, is just too complex!
Like she say before, Abstract Concept sigh, you do your best.

Tivan didn’t really want Cosmo at his side anymore, but Liho--oh, Liho!

Abstract Concept blink twice, pat my head, and tell me is okay that Cosmo doesn’t know what Cosmo want to do now. Cosmo have time to figure out somethink, could try it out for while, and, if it didn’t work, try somethink else out. Choices weren’t always final, Cosmo could change when it felt right.

Cosmo accept, since it sounds very good. But Cosmo say whatever Cosmo figure out what to do with self, Cosmo just want to forgive everyone.

Abstract Concept ask Cosmo if Cosmo was sure about that, since Cosmo isn’t required to do somethink like that.

And Cosmo say da, because it was never question to forgive everyone. Cosmo is dog that always sees where everyone is coming from when they do thinks. Anger and sadness is also just so drainink to be carryink around! Not great place to be dwellink in, if Cosmo can help not beink there. Cosmo know that Cosmo will be wantink to do that eventually anyway because everyone is a part of Cosmo because Cosmo love them and Cosmo want to help all people Cosmo love to be gettink along. (Even if it is not perfectly.) After peopleses do thinks that upset Cosmo, Cosmo just need to figure out how Cosmo want to deal with them afterwards. Cosmo ask how all of that sound.

Abstract Concept make adorable little humminink noise and then tell Cosmo is somethink that probably works in half of the Universes she sees.

Ah, Cosmo just want to snuggle with her and stay with her there!

But then she get look in eye and jump back on feet.

Cosmo ask her what is wrong.

She tells Cosmo we have to break link and talk with others.

Cosmo ask why that is, because Cosmo just want to stay with her.

Her eyes crinkle like they do before she cry, yet she still tell Cosmo that she feels Power Primordial and we really, really, really will need to head back to farmhouse and trace source.

And Cosmo beg a little, ask her to come out of Carina Tivan’s mind in this form, rejoin physical plane like way Cosmo remember!

She hug Cosmo one more time and tell Cosmo that she would love to, but she cannot. Her time on physical plane as Maverdevia had ended. Nothink could change that.

Cosmo say it isn’t fair.

And she tell Cosmo fairness was concept conceived and created. Not at all inherent in any Universe. Sometimes is best to just take happy endink you can get.

So Cosmo nod and accept this happy endink.

And we end the link.

Cosmo is back outside with Carina Tivan. Carina Tivan make Cosmo promise to never tell this to Tivan (Cosmo does) and she ask Cosmo how Cosmo was feelink. Cosmo was feelink strange and
confused, but mostly pretty happy. So Cosmo stick out tongue, say *spasibo* to her, and remind her of Power Primordial.

We run into house together and Tivan and Natasha are on couch (with good deal of space between them) and Laura-Mommy is pacink behind them. Pizza Dog and *belkas* were at their feet. Laura-Mommy’s phone was in her hand and she sound frantic, beggink person named Maria somethink. On television, breakink news strike. Tony Stark just disappeared, while havink quick late lunch at famous restaurant with winner of his grant. Grant-winner was teen named Peter Parker. Parker was also gone. Both just blink out of existence in full view of Peter Parker’s aunt, who was at same table with them. News lady was interviewink aunt, who seem so horribly distraught!

Natasha turn to aliens and she look angry and frantic and sad at once. Stream of questions from her. If we know what is goink on, where they could be, who could be behind this, etc., etc., etc.

Tivan only look annoyed, leanink forward with hands steeplink over his mouth and his brows very furrowed.

Cosmo found Tivans, but there was still Lucky’s owner missink! And Natasha’s friends! And other people missink from mornink! And now this!

Tivan calmly turn to Carina Tivan.

She announce to us that she can trace the source of this Power Primordial and take us there, spreadink arms out and releasink bright bursts of energy around all of us, while addink Tivan has to be one to talk Him out of...whatever it was He was doink.

Tivan groan, but agree.

Cosmo ask Tivan if is Thanos doink this.

He shake head and, in flat voice, tell us is not.

Is his brother.

Light encircled and absorbed us, startink to hide away ceilink and floor and walls around. Carina call out last chance for people to leave, before they are taken along with us. Laura-Mommy quickly jump out of rink of light and so do some squirrels. They wish us luck, but they also tell us they’ve had enough excitement for one day! Lucky has not, so he stay with us and woah to Laura-Mommy that he will be stayink to support Natasha and her hurt hand. (What a good dog!) Cosmo translate for Lucky very quickly before we disappear. Oh, and Cosmo add, rememberink what Cosmo promise, tell Liho Cosmo had to rush but Cosmo says *dos vadanya*!

Chapter End Notes

Yup. I said I’d write more Grandmaster. I’m kind of expecting that he’ll have a much smaller role in the films than what I’d originally anticipated and I definitely can’t see this next sort of thing happening in the films, but I really enjoy writing this character and I’m going to have fun writing this bit for several chapters.

The Korvac bit and the resurrection story are based on the classic “Avengers” comic storyline and the “Avengers Academy” comic respectively. And, yes, Carina does refer
to herself as an abstract entity in the latter. I changed the retelling of the second bit to make Carina a more active character in her own resurrection. (Yeah, it makes her a little more terrible too, but, well, nobody that appears in this fic, except maybe the cat and Pizza Dog, is purely good.)

Power Primordial, btw, is the source of strength for the Elders of the Universe.

Next week: a couple of family reunions.
Ryadom

Chapter Summary

En Dwi Gast proves he's either the best evil blue space fake sibling or the worst.

(Spoilers: he can't be the best evil blue space fake sibling because Nebula and he can't be the worst because Loki, so he's kind of in the middle.)

Chapter Notes

I think as soon as I heard about the existence of a character like En Dwi Gast, I knew that I really wanted to write him. Even if I never found that promotional picture when I did of Jeff Goldblum in full makeup and costume or even knew he was going to be in “Ragnarok”, I probably still would have tried to find a way to use the character. In a fic that’s basically examining several shades of moral gray, it’s been pretty refreshing writing a character that doesn’t care so much about right or wrong and really just wants to have fun. Like this is a really old, immortal dude with literal power over life and death and all he wants to do is use it to play games. He is either incredibly dead-serious or childishly gleeful about playing games. I also think him being brothers with the Collector was introduced in the comics to give him one sympathetic trait, and I think it works. Gast is the guy who nearly had a good sum of the heroes in the Marvel Universe killed twice so that he could bring his not-blood brother back from the dead and insure he could never lose a nonbiological sibling ever again. It’s still an awful thing to do, but the reason is pretty heart-wrenching. (And, yeah, I really hope they aren’t biological brothers because I feel like their relationship kind of loses something. Two awful dudes that choose to be brothers, possibly because they are the only ones in the Universe that understand and respect each other, is weirdly heartwarming. And it would give Gast amazing potential to be a good foil for Loki and/or Thor.)

‘Ryadom’ means ‘heel’.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had been while since Cosmo had last seen En Dwi Gast, Liho. Probably not since destruction of Museum on KNOWHERE. Gast seemed extra-weird then, which Cosmo wasn’t entirely certain could be possible. Gast spent while with me in Tivan Dispatch Center, just pettink my head while I howl and thinks were very loud around us on KNOWHERE.

Cosmo was shirkink duty as Chief of Security on KNOWHERE, Liho, and Grandmaster did not seem to mind at all!

Cosmo panic a little, sayink to Gast we should head out.

He ask what we could do. Cosmo was obviously not in condition to be fightink and Gast was loanink out mercenary forces to Ronan (so he really wasn’t supposed to be here). Cosmo’s eyes got a little bigger. Cosmo step back, askink Gast why he do this when he know Tivan was against
Ronan because Ronan was working with Thanos. Gast insist it was purely professional (since it would look bad to other warlords if Gast turn down one) and he send only most incompetent forces that could upend Ronan’s operations from inside. His smell was still terrible but very sincere, Liho. And skinny face paired with wide eyes give him very childlike innocence. But Cosmo still really wasn’t certain what to think.

Cosmo sigh that Gast probably forget. But Cosmo will still forgive, because he is Tivan’s brother.

And Gast just laugh very loudly. Very awkward laugh.

Cosmo beg him to help, since Cosmo did not know who else to ask.

So Gast stop laughink and look at me so very seriously.

When thinks die down outside, first think Cosmo do is call up Brood’s office and have status update. Brood and Security Agents were trackink down last of Ronan’s peoplees left on KNOWHERE, but rest had left. Cosmo ask to join, but Gast ask Cosmo to think carefully if Cosmo is in shape to be doink think like that. Cosmo hate to admit, but Cosmo really was not. Plus, Gast insist, he need Cosmo to act as Security for him, since he does not know place. And Cosmo agree to it.

Next think we do is go back to check on Tivan. His body is still on ground and all curled up. He tells us to leave him alone, he is havink vision. We do not listen. Cosmo bandage him, Gast goes through his usual routine of sayink it has been practically a century since he last him, and we both talk to find out how he is. He repeats to us how important it is we leave him alone. Gast still tries to talk with him, offerink to loan enough to cover damages done to KNOWHERE. Tivan refuse charity. Howard is close by. Miraculously, even with all of the explosions in Museum, duck person is unscratched. Cosmo woah to him and Howie quack back. We ask Howard to keep eye on Tivan, since Tivan is not feelink well, and, with sigh, Duck promise to do it. Howard really is good person. Even if he is also duck.

We go out to assess damage. Lots of people injured. Some dyink, some tryink hard to clean up messes around. Families band together, which is always nice to be seeink. Most just tryink to go about normal routine, go back to minink shift, run shop. But there are injured without families or anyone to take them to medical personnel in time to treat their injuries, so is very good think Gast is here. Always he greets with smile, a handshake, and light conversation to distract as he use his gifts. (No bright lights or anythink attention-grabbink with it this time.)

After makink many rounds like this, he ask Cosmo take him to closest bar. Cosmo does. He pull out lots of plastic cards and empties wallets of money and insist on buyink rounds for his brother, Howard, and entire population on Celestial Godhead, even offerink to tip wait-staff weeks worth of wages to go out, take orders, and deliver. If they manage to recruit street kids to help by sneakink in area of Museum and givink status updates on Tivan and Howard, he offer to pay extra. He repeat this for every bar Cosmo take him to, at his request.

The people runnink bars always react the same by gapink and askink who he is.

He smile, wink, and tell them he is only Tivan’s brother. Ridiculous make-up he wears, he point out, should prove it.

In mere hours, Gast saved a large portion of population, insured KNOWHERE would not reach huge economic depression from reparink damages caused to place, boosted morale, and stopped miners from riotink or even thinkink of overthrowink Tivan for this catastrophe. Everyone really get to like him, even if they do not really know who he is.
Even Cosmo almost like him, in spite of his terrible smell.

After all of this was done, he ask which bar Pinkie like best. Cosmo have to ask who Pinkie is. Grandmaster stops where he stands and start to list names. Mavis. Marvelous. Maleficent. And that is when Cosmo understand he means Carina, so Cosmo tell him. He shake his head, pursink his lips, and sayink to Cosmo is definitely somethink else. Cosmo almost say Mav--but he hold hand out and insist he can do it himself. Name never comes to him. Instead, he just says we should just go wherever she like.

Cosmo takes him to Starlin’s. Is first time Cosmo see Grandmaster relaxink on Godhead durink this visit while sittink at small table in booth. Gast even helps Cosmo up on chair near him, he tells wait-staff there that is Cosmo’s birthday (when it most definitely was not!), and asks if we can get fruit. Even though Cosmo like fruit, Cosmo scold Gast a little in head. And, shootink back with his mind, he say to Cosmo that he do this all the time. Wasn’t bad think to be doink occasionally. Cosmo woof a little in protest, but Gast is guest and he just did a lot of good for Tivan and KNOWHERE so Cosmo stop objectink after while.

Is while Cosmo is eatink fruit and he downs his own first drink (straight from bottle of the oldest wine in this establishment) that he tell Cosmo that he has liked playink Quirky Uncle for Cosmo. Has been while since he’s done that. He ask Cosmo if Grandmaster has won this game.

Cosmo wasn’t really certain how to answer this at all, so Cosmo tell him he is probably closest think Cosmo has had to uncle and Cosmo think he do good job.

He claps loudly with this pronouncement and demands we celebrate with another round. He chug more old wine and request more fruit for Cosmo.

Is probably after seventh round Gast confesses that he liked Pinkie and warned Tivan about her. She had violent streak, Gast pointed out, and he’d begged Tivan durink dinner on the second visit to send her with him to Sakaar. No need to surpress that violent urge in her, as was needed while tendink to Tivan Collection. She would’ve been trained and made an excellent fighter. But Tivan refused. And Gast never understood that. He ruminate, while lookink at liquid sloshink in bottle, that maybe Pinkie and everyone would have been better off if he didn’t listen to his brother and just stole her. He wonders, too, if he did right think of actink like Stone was no big deal around Pinkie. Normal kid like her didn’t seem ready to handle big think like that, but, perhaps, it would have been better for her if she really, really knew seriousness of situation.

Cosmo really didn’t know what to say here, Liho. Is always uncomfortable when grownups do thinks like this. On one paw, Maverdevia was very fond of Gast. On the other, her violence was somethink she was terribly ashamed of and Cosmo didn’t want to see somethink terrible like that nurtured in someone so cute and innocent. Instead of really answerink, Cosmo tell Gast that her loss weigh heavily on us all but we will pull through this difficult think together.

He smile at that. Somethink small. And he tell Cosmo is always a cycle. They have and they lose, then they mope for while. This time, however, the gamble had stakes that were just a little too high. Was such good luck Gast infiltrated Ronan’s forces or Stone would have definitely been lost. And would be truly awful think if Thanos’ power exceeded theirs.

Even if they weren’t related by blood, Cosmo think Gast and Tivan have lots in common with this sad sort of cryptic musink and hatink losink stuff.

He turn to Cosmo and, with most serious expression, ask Cosmo if Cosmo want to come with him to Sakaar. He knows his brother, Tivan, gets a little weirder after massive forfeitures like this. Tivan was very different beast when Grandmaster first meet him. Tivan civilize a bit with marriage to
Matani. But each loss changed his shape a bit. He got thinner. Handsomer. More cunning. But also crueler. Maybe Tivan was aware and doink this purposefully, or he was not.

Either way...he say Cosmo would like Sakaar. Lots of nice thinks for doggies to enjoy.

Cosmo politely turn him down, knowink Cosmo have job on KNOWHERE and Tivan need Cosmo doink it.

Gast said nothink much else that night.

Has been while since Cosmo last see Gast.

But there we were, Liho. Couch, Tivan, Carina Tivan, Natasha, Pizza-dog, Cosmo, and squirrels. We land in middle of screamink crowd, all gathered in circle. Place is hot and dusty and smelly. Weirdos immediately around us stop screamink when we show up, but everyone else is distracted. We land on somethink, but is ok. They were plasma-based beinks without spines. Livink liquid forms just slop their way out from under the couch.

Natasha says nothink for while, just turnink head around and starink at everythink around her. They are facink sand pit and, in pit, there is huge, ruddy-colored Krigorrath with tentacles for arms. Looks like little ants are climbink around him. Screens above close up, on these figures, showink not at all insectoid faces but humanoid faces.

They make Natasha scream, when she sees them. Pizza-Dog yelps too. They recognize these fighters. Some they know personally, others from Terran news. Squirrels identify who they are for Cosmo.


Mostly, Natasha was callink out for Tony. And Pizza-dog was howlink for him too.

They do not answer back. They are focused on task. But they are terrible at workink together. Blondie pushes Frankenstein aside with spear, and Franky nearly shoots Blondie in chest.

Armored security personnel unintrusively pushed to us, directink us out of the row. They salute Tivan and tell him that he’s been expected. Most of us follow, but Natasha--she elbows personnel that come to her. Pizza-dog growls and stays close to her side. Cosmo tells them they shouldn’t fight and they don’t stop--until big screen shows Tony, with eyes practically puffink out of his skull, lookink down at spear goink through his chest. He had gotten in way of Blondie’s toss. Crowd roars with approval. Natasha puts both hands over her mouth. Pizza-dog whimpers.

PA system turns on and a familiar voice asks what crowd think of this. Crowd bellows.

Cosmo trot up to them, askink them to beink comink along. They start to take a few steps, not once lookink away from the screen.

Ridiculously smooth voice asks if they want to see more of the Golden Avenger, or if this should be his last fight?

Crowd chants for more.

Some sort of loud music starts up. Has a lot of electric guitar. Men soundink shrill and singink somethink about shootink to thrill. Gast repeats question. Crowd repeats chant. Bright light flashes around Tony, and, soon enough, spear is out of his chest. His eyes are still wide, but he is movink
and alive again.

Natasha says nothink while we go with security.

Gast’s private suite is about as decadent and ridiculous as Cosmo thought it would have been. Furniture doesn’t match. Banquet nearby has menu that makes no sense. There are crowds of strange-colored, smelly people in glass box that get immediately shooed out when we show up at entrance. Gast gets up from long chair and turns to us, with arms extended, askink security to leave us be.

They salute in strange way and, then, leave us.

The Grandmaster stands there, studyink us for little while, as he folds his arms up.

Brother, he quietly greets, is been too long.

Tivan agrees and adds that he is displeased by the manipulative invitation Gast sent to him.

Grandmaster waves and piffles displeasure away, informink Tivan that Gast wouldn’t have had to try this out if Tivan hadn’t cut off their mental link for too long or bothered checkink in. Tivan doesn’t reply, glowerink instead.

So Gast introduces himself as the Grandmaster and, then, points at each of us, as if takink mental tally, while sayink our names.

The Black Widow, he says with lips pursed, deadly as she is beautiful.

Everyone’s favorite pizza-lovink dog, Lucky.

KNOWHERE’s Chief of Security, Cosmo the Spacedog.

A bunch of squirrels.

And--he stops, when he takes look at Carina Tivan.

His large eyes get a little larger as he holds his arms in front of him and strides over to her. He sighs, beggink to get closer look at her. She obliges, steppink forward with crinklink eyes.

They meet in the middle and embrace, takink a little long to find right place to settle arms over each other.

He coos that she’s gotten so grown up, that she looks so pretty now and her hair is so cool too.

She asks why he never checked in, and he apologizes almost immediately. He is busy with so many planets to conquer and run, and entertainment fightink, but is no excuse for neglectink to talk with his beloved niece.

Natasha is the one to interrupt them, demandink that the Grandmaster put the Terrans back where he found them. Since it look like he has what he wants now.

He guffaws, gently breakink out of hug, and points to Natasha, sayink is only what she think. He hasn’t really gotten started yet. Grandmaster want us all here, true, but is for purpose.

Natasha ask what for.

He turn to Tivan and tell his brother that he cares very deeply about him, but Collector has proven
difficult to work with. Especially with this quietly breaking away and cutting ties from everyone that cares about him. Grandmaster would not normally mind and he understand what happen on NOWHERE really made Tivan sad, but, with something as vital as hunting for Infinity Stones, would be very awful for their cause. All pieces needed to be cooperation for gamble to be paying off.

Tivan glares a bit and questions why he took all heroes from Terra, when he must also know, through research of heroes, of big role Terra must be playing in hunt for Infinity Stones.

Not all, Grandmaster sigh, since he could not find Kitty-Man or Cap and his Kooky Criminals. Which was shame, because it would have been totally neat to have gotten them around this time. But he was going to be putting them back, if someone big like Thanos decide to strike at their homeplanet.

Natasha does not fully understand Infinity Stones or care, but she get into fighter’s stance and demand Grandmaster keep away from Cap and return everyone.

And Grandmaster’s smile simply grows. How interesting Natasha is to him. How outclassed she knows she is, yet she still is all too willing to fight for own broken little family. He does not break eye-contact from Tivan, as he share assessment.

Tivan has conjecture of what it is Grandmaster wants. A Contest of Champions, using Terra’s heroes. Best two out of three. If Tivan wins, Grandmaster will return Terrans. And if Gast wins—perhaps is Aether he wants from Tivan.

Gast says is very close, but he’s played enough with Tivan and he have no interest in taking Aether. He turns his head, looking to Cosmo and to Carina Tivan. He has not played with us in while.

Natasha blink, looking to both of us.

Cosmo turn to Carina Tivan, and she look back at Cosmo.

Tivan demands to know what Cosmo and Carina will be fighting for.

Gast smiles, reminding Tivan that he respects him and his life choices greatly. But times are changing and the stakes are just too high to be making more mistakes. He knows Tivan is going through some changes and, in current state, he really isn’t in condition to be involved in big gamble like this. Plus, his inability to cooperate has endangered galaxy. So, for safety of their hunt for Infinity Stones, Gast would be playing for Tivan’s moniker as Collector and everything that come with it. Companies, Collections, fortunes, etc. Is only way he know he can take Tivan out of game for good.

Nobody says anything for a second.

A silent second that is broken by Tivan very loudly objecting this term and demanding what he would be, then, if he would not be Collector?

Gast proclaims that Taneleer Tivan would still be his brother, he would just be shunted into position that would insure he would do more harm than good. Maybe eased into adopting a new moniker and hobby. And, Grandmaster remind Taneleer, Tivan is in no position to be making counter-offers.

He head over to banquet table and tell everyone we have an hour to decide what we will do, or he will simply have Tivan snatched up by Security and Grandmaster will act as new Collector. Or Grandmaster-Collector. Or maybe Collector-Grandmaster. He would figure it out and, with shrug, he add that we should really try Kep-Mok Blood Ticks if we were feelink adventurous.
Blah blah, there are references to like a bunch of things.

So, I read older comics with these butts and I was very charmed by the thought of two terrible old guys with absurd powers deeply respecting each other, in spite of their life purposes being pretty at odds with each other. Then, I watched their most recent cartoon appearances and I realized, since it appears that the films are taking cue from the “Guardians” cartoon and having Gast run a Las Vegas-style fighting ring, there was a chance that, in the films, they may not follow the older comics I read and, instead like in the newer cartoons, they may not get along. It made me a little sad at first, and then weirdly fascinated. Like it seems to me that Gast not getting along with Tivan has been proportional to Tivan’s increasingly self-absorbed and flamboyant characterization in the comics (post the first “Guardians” film).

So, yeah. I’ve been looking for a way to work that in this fic.
Stoyat

Chapter Summary

Black Widow gets pretty fed-up by a pair of adults not adulting.

Chapter Notes

By the end of “Civil War”, I think Black Widow isn’t exactly on Team Cap or Team Stark; she sees both sides, takes a stand for both, and then winds up on her own side. I also think she’d be pretty tired of navigating between various dangerous egos and she’d be about done with playing mediator between them, even if she’d understand it’s something she has to do in a situation.

Anyway, it’s been a while since we’ve checked up on how Nat’s doing.

‘Stoyat’ means ‘stand’.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Don’t even worry about not coming along, Laura, it’s alright.

Where do I even start?

Yeah, I hear it’s a very good place to start.

Alright. There was a lot of talking. Somehow I was understanding it.

Some of it.

The words I recognized as English. Cosmo explained it as some sort of telepathic thing going on.

Some of the things they were talking about, though. They were sounding familiar. Half-remembered from what the dog was telling me.

Yes, the dog.

Not Pizza-Dog, my dog. Cosmo.

Something about stones and the Universe.

And this guy, Thanos. They keep on repeating his name with the Universe and some Stones, as if it’s actually important.

That’s when I began assessing my situation. Just sat in a chair, keeping Pizza-dog close to me.

I had the dogs and squirrels to keep an eye on, and I also had to find a way to get the Terrans out too. Terrans. It’s the term they have for humans. And the dogs and squirrels. Like Earthlings. Terra for
Earth.

I had to find a way to get all of the Terrans out of there.

There were just some overdressed, OP weirdos in my way.


Yeah. There was definitely something eldritch about them.

There was Ivan Tsarevich (who was spending a lot of time sitting in a chair and watching the spectators or whatever the heck kind of match was going on in the center). Maybe it was that thick guyliner or his very unfortunate resemblance to that one Bond villain Timothy Dalton threw into a meat-grinder, but he was looking pretty grim. Alright, grimmer than usual.

There was the hostile chick, who never listened to whatever her father told her to do. Now, she was trying to talk with the tall guy. Something about her was different, when she was talking to him. Less stuck-up, I want to say. Even while she was begging him just to return the Terran heroes and he was very politely turning her down. I really didn’t know what her deal was. Still don’t.

And there was the tall guy who claimed to be Tsarevich’s brother. Textbook manipulator. Taking Terrans and forcing to fight. Looked nothing like his supposed brother. Except maybe the make-up. And the overly grandiose hand gestures. I couldn’t tell if he was the older or the younger one, until he came up to me and wanted to know if I had a younger brother.

I ventured to guess whether I had one or not wasn’t going to change things.

He shook his head, and, while pointing to Tsarevich, added that that he both loved and hated his brother that managed to be both one of the smartest and dumbest people he knew. This was the only way he knew to reach his brother, when he got into a funk like this. If I had confided to him that I’d had a younger brother, according to this guy, I would’ve understood these lengths he went.

No. I still don’t, really.

So, now I knew which sibling he was and that he was a telepath of some sort. And that he was a lot less polite about it than Cosmo.

And there was Cosmo.

I went along for him, you know. I think I heard somewhere once you save a life or take care of it, you’re always responsible for it. And I needed to know this dog was going to be okay, cheesy as it sounds.

How did he get mixed up with guys like these?

You know what he was doing, Laura? He was checking in on everyone. (It’s kind of what the family dog always does, isn’t it?)

Sometimes he was joining the chick, trying to convince the tall guy to give back the Terrans. Wouldn’t let me in on what he was speaking in these guys’ heads, but I could more or less tell what he was saying since the other guys were just talking out loud with the dog. (At some point the tall guy turned to his brother and asked if he was just going to give up hunting for the Stones on his own, if he asked politely. Ivan just flatly turned him down. The other two would turn to Cosmo and, shrugging, swear they had nothing to talk about, then.)
He practically skipped over to his owner, made his eyes look extra wide, and tilted his head a bit. His owner’d just sigh and mutter some things. No, he’d tell his dog, he didn’t want Cosmo to act more vicious. No, he was fine. No, he didn’t need Cosmo to get him anything. No, he wasn’t going to talk with his brother or daughter.

Then Cosmo would come back to us. His tongue would be out and his tail would be wagging. He promised at first to check the banquet table for stuff we’d like to eat, and he came back times after to ask if we were comfortable or if we changed our minds about the food.

I’d tell him we were alright.

Lucky would bark back.

Cosmo would apologize that there was nothing like pizza or orange chicken, but he promised there was still something on that table that was safe for dogs to eat.

Lucky would whine. According to Cosmo, something about the table smelling too weird.

He’d check on the squirrels after this and try this all over again.

Cosmo did this maybe three or four times, before lying down on his stomach close to me and sighing about how difficult everyone was being.

I just had to get out of my chair, pull Lucky along with me, and keep them close to me.

Just to stroke their fur.

I think it’s why I like really stupid films, Laura. Things get resolved fairly quickly in the most obvious ways, you see enough of the other people to really get them, people get just enough time to mull before they have to do something big, and everyone learns a lesson that sticks. It goes smoothly or sticks to some kind of act-structure. A recognizable pattern. Maybe there’d be a couple of neat character arcs and a nice soundtrack.

I find that a lot of problems fester and repeat themselves. What you learned yesterday, you might have to learn again. And sometimes you just don’t get time to ruminate. You just have to pick yourself up and move on. Usually without some sort of background music. And people don’t turn out to be what they seemed. It’s annoying. But you get used to it.

This dog just didn’t get it yet. I still don’t know how old he is or if it was anything he’d ever learn or could learn. You know, because he’s a dog. A really sweet, naive dog.

All Cosmo wanted, he’d tell me, were for these guys to get along. Deep down, they all cared about each other. In their own ways. And they also wanted the same things. They were all just being stubborn.

I wished it would just work like that, people just being able to talk. I really did. I apologized to the dogs that things didn’t always work like that. When one or both sides just reached a point where they weren’t able to communicate, when they actively shut out any dissenting opinions, there wasn’t much you could do. I knew Cosmo didn’t want to fight with anyone here or watch any one of these a-holes fighting. Since this was the closest thing he’s ever known to a family. So I told him the only other options were disengaging entirely, passive-aggression, shouting at the top of your lungs until maybe somebody else wanted to listen, or trying to find some sort of compromise with one, if not both, of the sides. A compromise that benefitted you best.

Cosmo told me he didn’t like the first three options.
And that was about when I counted out talking Cosmo into turning on these guys and helping us make a getaway. Cosmo, I wanted to tell him, you’re too good for them. But there was just something in them that he saw that I wasn’t, something that made him want to stick by them and help them. Even if they completely didn’t deserve it.

I weighed my options, Laura.

I didn’t know where the Terrans were being kept, when they weren’t fighting, so we couldn’t just teleport to them and get them out.

The tall guy wasn’t willing to listen to me, really.

I didn’t get the chick.

And I didn’t trust the other guy.

Out of this bunch, there was just the dog I really trusted.

Yeah. The dog.

I asked the dog to clarify what was going on, exactly. Basically, the taller guy wanted to take over his younger brother’s operations and something about the stones. The dog and the girl would have to select Terran heroes, who’d have to face Terran heroes selected by the taller guy.

It looked like the taller guy had some sort of ability to undo any untimely deaths that would happen with these matches.

Winner’d have to take two out of three of the matches.

Apparently that’s how the mostly unkillable immortals traditionally settle things.

Cosmo and Whatshername were just feeling unsettled by this, unable to pick someone to fight for them. Because they didn’t want to make anyone fight against their will. Cosmo never did that sort of thing before. Duck-Tales did, but she didn’t care to repeat it. They wanted to try and solve this without having to resort to making other people fight for them, but it looked like neither guys were willing to budge.

I’ve told you a couple times I didn’t want to be an Avenger, at first.

Right, Laura?

I was supposed to assess potential candidates for the Initiative.

Then, I just needed to be one.

It was kind of like that.

At that time, I wasn’t seeing any other options.

So I asked Cosmo if I won, if that would guarantee the other Terrans being sent back home and never being involved in something like this again.

Cosmo looked a little nervous at first. Then, he wagged his tail and promised, as awful as...I didn’t exactly catch the name, but I think it was the taller man...as awful as he smelled, he was a man of his word. He’d send them back. But there couldn't exactly be a guarantee it wouldn't happen again. A guy like the tall guy was pretty unpredictable.
Men and their words didn’t mean much to me, Laura. Especially from a guy like that. I let Cosmo know that. I could fight, but I’d need someone to cut this deal with and insure Terrans would never be involved in something like this again.

And the dog just stared up at me, terribly confused.

I told Cosmo I needed something else. That was when Cosmo recommended asking his owner.

I didn’t get it Laura. From what I remembered about this guy, he sounded awful. In person, he seemed pretty lousy.

But this dog still thought this guy could do everything. Really wanted to give him another chance.

I really didn’t know why.

I didn’t think he deserved it.

But who anyone forgives or not is their choice. Forgiveness is a personal thing.

What exactly is forgiveness, anyway? Isn’t it just both parties agreeing to forget what just happened and not, while trying not to screw up again?

Out of these three overpowered LARPers, I sort of knew him longest. The only other options were Guy-I-Didn't-Know-Who-Was-Keeping-My-Friends-And-Others-Against-Their-Will and Someone-Who-Claimed-To-Be-Protecting-Me-By-Breaking-Into-My-Place-And-Charging-At-Me-With-An-Axe. Guy-Who-Disguised-As-My-Boss-And-I-Interrogated seemed like the best of the three options. He could take orders from me, I recalled.

I got up, walked over to Ivan Tsarevich and told him in Latin that I’d warned him about his older brother tearing him apart. He had nothing to say to that. So I switched to Spanish and added if I fought on behalf of his dog and his daughter and he got to keep whatever, he’d owe me.

He looks over at me, Laura. Practically studying me. And he returns the Spanish in his accent-kind-of-accent, asking who I think I am to be making such a claim.

I was feeling a little powerful, Laura. Standing over him. Maybe the power got a little to my head. I added more to the deal I’d walked over to make.

I told him in Russian that I’m Koschei the Deathless and noted that names have power. And I remind him he’s about to lose his if I don’t fight on behalf of his daughter and the only creature that still believes in him. I just needed a guarantee from him. If he got to keep his name and whatever, he’d pull his head out of ass, get everyone to seek counseling or something because it was pretty wreckless to involve so many people in their family drama, work on his relationship with the dog, and use every resource he has to keep his brother from taking any more Terrans like this. And I’d only let him keep seeing his dog because it was obvious Cosmo still really likes him, in spite of what he did, and still wants him a part of his life.

I held back from describing what I did to my last neighbor’s lousy ex--I told you about Ana and her awful ex-husband, right? But I added that I wouldn’t hesitate to toss another hot frying pan at that huge forehead of his if Cosmo told me he got mistreated. Cosmo’s eyes got a little big, but he remained quiet as I was saying all of this.

His owner’s expression didn’t change. He just stared at me for a second. Probably not believing I told him this. Then he wanted to know (back in Russian) what made me think he could stop his brother from pulling this again.
So, in Japanese, I said all of this--this stealing Terrans and trying to take his stuff--it was just a
display of power. Obviously compensating for something. Scare-tactics to get some control over his
brother. It’s all stuff he’s pulling out to probably match what power he thinks his brother has.

Maybe I half-believed all of this, as I told it to him. If I did, it was probably just because his dog
believed him. And, like I said, the dog was the only one a part of this operation that I trusted.

What is it you do with an overpowered total narcissist? When you can’t take him down, expect any
normal jail to hold him, or get rid of him, I find the thing that sort of works is to find another
overpowered narcissist that shares your views or get another overpowered narcissist to see things
your way. Then you have the both of them narcissist at it. Like Godzilla and the other big monsters
in Tokyo. Let ‘em fight. Just evacuate the city first, if you can do that, and brace yourself and others
for the collateral damage.

He told me, back in Japanese, that I had his word.

So, I made a three with my fingers, brought them close to my lips, blew a kiss, and announced to the
gal and the tall guy that I was volunteering as tribute.

No, nobody got the reference.

The brunette knows her television, but she needs better taste in films.

Cosmo barked and everyone seemed to get it after.

This got the tall guy giddy and jumping, terribly excited.

I didn’t really think there’d be much of a risk, Laura. I’d fought a ton of mooks, aliens, pretentious
robots. I thought I was going to be ready to handle whatever he’d want to try on me.

Maybe he’d throw me anyone I was close to (thinking I wouldn’t defend myself against them,
ignorant of what I just went through with my closest friends) or he’d toss a tank like the
Abomination.

Either way, I thought I was ready.

Chapter End Notes

There are references to things again.

While I do have the last few chapters roughly planned, I think I want to take my time
with writing them. So, dear readers, I will be changing my schedule. Instead of two
chapters a week, I am going to write one. The last chapters will be about doubled the
length of my previous chapters. I will figure out a day to post as I go along. (It will
probably just be up when it’s ready.)

Next week, kids: Black Widow versus the Science Bros.
Chapter Summary

Black Widow participates in a Contest of Champions.

Chapter Notes

This took a while to write. The double word count got me. I'm used to making chapters around 2500 words or so and I aimed to make this one around 4000. It's a little under what I wanted it to be, but I'm ok with this for now. I might get fickle and want to change a bit of the wording here and there.

So, Black Widow: she’s often an orphan, picked from the rubble of a burned house in Stalingrad. She had something of a caretaker, who brought her to the Red Room, and, after her graduation, she was sometimes able to recall her training for what it was. Other times, her brainwashing led her to believe she simply received ballet training. A husband was assigned to her by the State and was later forced to fake his death, making Natasha into a literal Widow. Sometimes she has a past with Bucky Barnes or Wolverine. The YA novels developed her little brother, who I think was originally featured in a children’s collection of Avengers stories. (I’ve only read the first YA novel and the story in the children’s collection, but I still liked it.)

Beyond little teases here and there about Black Widow’s Red Room training and her very bloody past as a KGB operative, nothing much has been revealed about MCU Black Widow’s history. (BTW: I do have this personal theory that the MCU's Soviet Union fell a little later than it did in actual history, allowing Black Widow to be an ex-operative of the KGB.)

But this is an AU where Ragnarok, among other things, probably hasn’t happened. Here, she’s getting something of a past outright stated.

‘Lyezhat’ means ‘down’.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You ask most yokels about me, they’d probably say I was a nice-looking girl who helped save the world a couple of times. But I really messed things up by attacking a king.

Anybody who used to be with SHIELD would tell you I was one of their best operatives.

People in other underground circles would cower if you gave them my name, maybe share a story that wouldn’t be remotely safe to share with the kids.

Everyone’s right.

But there’s some things I never told anyone. Not your husband or anyone else with SHIELD.
There’s a lot of things I’ve never told you either, Laura, but I thought about it. There are some things I’d like to share with you one day.

Did I ever tell you I barely remember my parents? Never even knew their names or looked at a photograph of them. The only name I had with me was Natalia. I can’t even recall if it was my parents who gave me that name.

I only had one name, but I should have had three. A first name, patronym (or a name you have from your father’s first name), and a surname.

I came up with the patronym when I was filling in SHIELD paperwork for the first time. The papers needed a middle name. I had no father; I had a caretaker once, but I didn’t care much for him. The name Alian I heard once and liked the sound of it. Or maybe it was from a cover I had to take. Romanoff was always kind of a SHIELD joke. I was a Russian orphan and, for all anyone knew, I may as well have been a part of the House of Romanov.

My younger brother was the only member of my immediate family that I had, and I wasn’t even close to him.

I don’t know what memories from the Red Room happened to me, what they wanted me to think happened, or what I wasn’t supposed to remember. There were ballet lessons. Maybe. I think I knew the other girls, but I don’t remember much about them. I had to kill a couple of them. The instructors were tough on all of us. Only some of us made it through childhood.

I wake up angry sometimes. Did I ever tell you that, Laura? I just sit in bed for some minutes, if I have nothing else to do, and I just feel mad. But I don’t know who to be mad at. The people who ran the Red Room? They believed they were only doing their duty to Mother Russia, products of a system and maybe no different than me. The individual, shadowy government head who approved of brainwashing orphan girls and making them into killing machines? As satisfying as it would feel, it’s like hating a shadow. I never found out who they were, met them, heard them, or saw them. For all I know, they don’t exist. It’s no different than a kid hating the boogeyman. It could’ve been more than one person and it feels less useful hating a group that I’ll never know. Russia? It would be no different than hating myself, and I have more sensible reasons to be doing that. America, maybe, for feuding with Russia and helping to create a political climate that caused individuals to necessitate the creation of a place like the Red Room? Again, pointless. I wake up with a lot of resentment and, sometimes, I just aim it at myself. From what the SHIELD therapists tell me, it wasn’t my fault. But I feel a little better doing it, because it gives me some sense of control. My anger no longer feels completely pointless. Making it my fault makes it feel preventable, like I could still do something about it. Even if I couldn’t, I tell myself feeling like this is my fault and I can change it. The onus is on me. Sometimes I even believe it.

It’s kind of why I’m always trying to do something, so that I have less time to sit in bed and justify my own anger with myself. It was why it felt easy switching from the Russian government to SHIELD. I didn’t have much loyalty to Mother Russia and I didn’t have much of a moral compass, I just needed to be doing something else. SHIELD just gave me something else. At some point, I did think it could be better.

Your husband was one of the strangest people I’ve ever met. Maybe he still is. I think Barton empathized with me, seeing a lot more of a conscience in me than I had. He was an orphan, too; he grew up with the circus, drifted, and somehow wound up with SHIELD like apparently everyone did. We had fourteen years between us and I was pretty young when he chose not to kill me and, instead, brought me in with SHIELD. Maybe I had a small crush on him and that was it. We were always taught that love was for children and my childhood ended the moment I began training with
the Red Room. But even after that crush died down, he was still somebody who was a lot nicer than
the other people I’d been working under and stranger. Because he was one of the first people I knew
who acted like my life had more worth than as a means to complete a mission.

I was put under a trial period when I just had to work with your husband, because he was the only
person SHIELD knew worked successfully with me. Nick was worked into the mix, and so was
Phil and Maria. And then I got to meet you and Cooper, when he was in your womb. Later Lila.

Suddenly, this thing that I had to do, in lieu of doing something else, it transformed. It was more
than just a thing to do. I didn’t remember my parents, but you were all the first thing that I had that
almost resembled a family. At least, I thought that was what it always felt like. Right? Family is just
a group of people that would care about each other? It’s what it looked like. And I almost felt it too.

And then, there was the Avengers Initiative. The title was a joke. I was Emma Peel and Phil was
John Steed. Or Maria was Emma Peel and Fury was John. We swapped roles a few times.

I was sent to monitor two potential hitters for the Initiative: Stark and Banner; then, I had to join the
Initiative, and we all know what happened next.

My dumb little family got a little bigger.

Then SHIELD had to be disbanded. But Tony Stark still wanted to finance the team.

And then, there was no more team.

I hadn’t met too many telepaths before Cosmo and the tall guy...I think he insisted I call
him...something like Gamemaster. The others just called him something unusual. Like ‘Gas’.

Wanda kind of had this ability that we thought involved some level of telepathy, maybe close to what
this guy could do, where she brought out our fears and made us see them, but she could never
explain her own powers.

I have to call the tall guy something.

*Bol’shoy Brat*.

*Bol’shoy Brat* started predictably, wanting to hurt me by sending someone in my memories that he
thought I wouldn’t attack. Somebody he thought he could control.

Tony Stark.

*Bol’shoy Brat* gave us a couple of minutes to prepare.

Cosmo was worried, but I promised him I would be fine. The Black Widow was a name he
recognized. It meant something out here, even to a bizarre alien like him. As their champion, I
wouldn’t lose.

The chick was folding her arms and healing what wounds I’d had from our fight...just some hours
ago. Fearful, looking into different Universes and giving offers to switch my mind with one of my
counterparts’ and bringing them here. (Apparently, there’s at least one Universe where I wield
Mjolnir. I definitely never thought I was worthy.) I turned her down. *Bol’shoy Brat* waltzed right
up to her and began talking calmly with her. This was her first Contest and he’d promised he’d start
off easy on his niece, he’d assure her, even if he knew, like she probably did, that they really needed
to take his younger brother completely out of the game.
Maybe he had a point. I barely understood what they were looking for. But Ivan Tsarevich’s lone wolf tendencies couldn’t have made him an easy ally to have for something like that.

Then again, I couldn’t let Bol’shoy Brat keep the Terrans or get any more ridiculously powerful. I just asked Cosmo to watch my back. We’d get through this.

You know how I’d been telling you I’d really been wanting to punch Tony Stark in the face? I’ll admit, I was lying.

Shocker, I know.

I was pretty mad when I’d said that, and, like usual, I didn’t know what to be mad at. It felt a little nice to be upset with someone other than myself, even if I knew it wasn’t completely justified.

Out of the other Avengers that weren’t your husband, I think I technically knew him longest. I was assigned to him first and spent weeks researching who he was, before I got to interview to become his replacement assistant as Natalie Rushman. Being an old soul like Natalie wasn’t too bad. I got to work with the world-famous Tony Stark for some days, but I don’t think I really met him until a little before that disastrous party he had. (I told you about that, right? The one that wrecked his house. Before he got his house wrecked around Christmastime?)

I think he’d asked me what I wanted to do on my last birthday, if I knew it’d be my last one.

He was dying. Acting out a little more than usual because even the infamous Iron-Man was afraid of death.

He is totally a narcissist, but he also became my friend.

The last thing he told me, before I saw him in that dusty ring on that alien planet, I think, was that maybe being a double-agent was in my DNA. It hurt, hearing that from someone I’d known and trusted for so long, but the most painful part wasn’t hearing it. The most painful part was that, deep down, I worry he’s a little right.

I’m going to have to spare you the details on the fight, Laura. I can’t tell you much about it. I’m sorry. I’ve been sent to kill and hurt friends before, and--

We talked a bit while fighting. He didn’t have his suit. I promised him it wasn’t anything personal, that if I won I’d get him and the other Terrans out; I asked him who else was here and asked how they were. The answers he gave weren’t pleasant.

But your husband wasn’t there.

I beat that first round pretty easily. Tony gave me that fight.

I spent an hour, just sitting on a very plush, green armchair. Whatshername used her abilities to heal more of my injuries. The dogs got very close to me, allowed me to pet them.

Cosmo translated Lucky’s whining for me. Apparently, he wanted to help me in the next fight. That goofy, pizza-loving dog. I had to turn him down, because I thought of you and the kids.

That was when Bol’shoy Brat approached us and made an offer. If we surrendered now, he promised I could pick half of the Terrans to take back to Earth with me.
I asked him what he’d do with the others and he had this really weird look in his eyes. The others would be kept on this planet, until they were needed for his schemes. I inquired what sort of schemes he had and all he gave was a smile. Guys like that I can’t stand.

Even if it meant skipping a fight with another friend, I couldn’t accept that offer.

With a sigh, he went the predictable route and announced he’d picked another one of my friends for me to face.

This time, someone I hadn’t seen in years.

Banner.

Like Stark, I was sent to assess what role he could play with the Initiative. He freaked me out at first. Then, I had a crush on him and I really can’t tell you how exactly it happened or when it happened. Maybe it was while we were developing the lullaby. He was sweet. Sad.

The last time I saw him, he came to my rescue. I gave him a kiss and, then, pushed him down a pit. Needless to say, seeing him again wasn’t something I was looking forward to at all.

Bol’shoy Brat gave me another grin and repeated his offer.

I turned him down again.

He shrugged, amiably walking away.

And that was about when I decided just beating him at his own game wasn’t going to be enough for me. So, that was when I turned to the chickie and asked her to make me worthy.

With a blink and a gesture, I had the hammer and a ridiculous outfit on.

Seeing Hulk again wasn’t the worst meeting I had with an Ex.

There was something cathartic about it.

Having the powers of a goddess probably helped.

I started by trying out the lullaby. Trying to appeal to Banner.

The first green sock to my jaw told me it wasn’t working.

So, I had to resort to a little magic. Thunder and lightning. Something frightening.

To recalibrate his brain.

I’m not going to brag to you, Laura, but the fight went pretty quickly.

I could hear Bol’shoy Brat sputtering a little over the PA system and porting about every Terran, monster, fighter, and security he had into the ring, calling for a free-for-all.

I quickly found Stark and gave him one look. He glanced back and, just as quickly, turned away to lead the Terrans and whatever fighters wanted their freedom. Riots broke out in the audiences. I held the hammer aloft, arose to Bol’shoy Brat’s private suite, busted through the window, and landed with both feet on the ground.
The next few minutes are kind of a blur to me.

Having that much power in your hand, Laura, it really does something to you. You know? It puts thoughts in your head that wouldn’t normally be there.

Maybe it was being forced to fight my own friends for others’ amusement. Maybe it was the constant smiling. Maybe it was that self-centered way he’d brought so many innocent people into his personal drama.

All that was really going through my head was that I had a lightning rod and all I had to do was point to have instant frying.

And that was just what I did.

Electricity surged through the broken window and the ceiling, striking at him. He was standing right by his niece, and now he wasn’t anymore. The strike pushed his body into the ground.

But he was still alive.

I charged forward.

With a gesture from the brunette, the outfit and hammer dusted from my form and I was back in my old clothes. Didn’t matter. I still had momentum and I was still pushing forward, leading with a fist. In no time, I was on top of his crumpled form. Upper cut here and there. For a guy that manages fighting like this, he really wasn’t putting up a fight. In fact, I think I remember there was still a smile on his face.

He was saying something.

Not to me.

To his niece.

Something about how she did so well for her first Contest. That he was looking forward to playing with her again maybe next century.

I think having that much power in my hands really did something to my head. Hearing him planning on doing something like this again wasn’t helping.

The niece was gesturing wildly, trying to remove me from him. Even Tsarevich had gotten up wrapped his arms around his brother’s shoulders, trying to pull him away from me. I just held tighter to my target and punched harder; I wasn’t even registering his face as a face any longer, or that I’d gotten him to bleed (blue, if you could believe it).

But I wasn’t satisfied. I knew if I didn’t finish this guy off, I just knew he’d do something like this again.

I was relentless. Sound ceased to have meaning after this point. Words became white noise.

And then, something happened.

I can’t exactly describe it.

Tsarevich glanced up at me for one second. Something sullen and angry, but unsurprised.

Next thing I knew--it was like his form broke or something, Laura.
I wasn’t making eye contact with a person any more. If you could call what he had a face with eyes.

Next thing I knew, I was up in the air. Staring down a woman and a beast kneeling and placing...if you could call it a hand on his sibling’s face. The woman wasn’t looking angry anymore; she looked to the creature, had a hand close to her face and a second one held in front of her.

She was saying something. I don’t remember what.

This...for lack of a better word, immense beast looked back at me, rolling his weight a bit forward and getting up.

I was stuck in the air. Legs dangling and not exactly registering what was going on.

The woman was stepping towards me, placing herself between me and this thing, and telling the monster something. Pleading.

The monster stood. Eyes blazing, slowly holding his hand before him.

I’d struck his brother in a fit of anger; I looked at that creature and understood he couldn’t allow me to get away with it.

I really don’t know what would have happened if Cosmo hadn’t stepped in.

The little dog jumped in between the woman and that beast, eyes glowing, and barked.

We were all pushed back, farther from one another.

I landed on the ground, but I think Cosmo cushioned my fall.

The demon landed on his back, into some furniture; at some point I’d missed, with getting thrown back by the dog, his form unbroke. He was back to the ridiculous guyliner and white hair.

I lay on the ground for a second, taking everything in.

Slowly, I could feel my senses coming back to me.

I don’t know if it was the blood rushing to my head, or something, but I got a little philosophical for a second. I don’t remember everything I was thinking, but I can recall the gist.

A lot of thoughts were running through my head.

A lot of it felt like old fear that I was recognizing.

I’ve been a little afraid, Laura, that I was going to slip back someday; I’d go back, undoing every bit of good being an Avenger and being a part of SHIELD, and I wouldn’t be able to stop myself or realize it was happening. Something in my conscience would snap. Without you or Steve or Tony or anyone else around, I’d be who I used to be. Maybe who I really am.

And I wondered for a second what it was that made me any different from the other terrible people in this room.

The Black Widow had saved the world a couple of times, but I could recall a pair of them trying to save our reality just a few hours ago.

Lower body count? I didn’t know how many these other people killed. Bol’shoy Brat could undo deaths, so, for all I knew, he could have a negative count. Mine was pretty high.
Morals? I didn’t know what exactly the other people in this room believed in and, at that time, I couldn’t remember what I believed in either.

A stubbornness to go against the grain, to stand up for what I believed in and what I needed to do? Even if it meant sacrificing myself and getting hurt? I knew these bizarre characters had demonstrated that too.

It didn’t exactly stop, until Pizza-Dog and the squirrels arrived by my side.

Cosmo--he was still standing in the middle. His little head darting between me, the woman, and the men. Not knowing where he wanted to go.

There were heavy knocks at the door, which I’d finally perceived. A sizeable amount of yelling and rioting. The world outside was going a little mad.

With a final staccato, those doors were busted open.

There were people. At least, I think they were people. There forms were something I could barely perceived.

And...what happened next happened so quickly.

Tsarevich held Bol’shoy Brat by the shoulders and, in a blink, they were gone.

The woman looked to me and, with a flick of her wrist and a point to Cosmo, we blinked out.

And we were all back on the farm. Our shapes reduced to shadows by the blues of night and given the barest definition by the moonlight.

Me. Her. Cosmo. Lucky. The Squirrels. And other forms that I could barely recognize as the Terrans. Talking in what I could barely recognize as English. They were alive. Just badly injured. Maybe there were ten other Terrans, other than the ones we went to that...place with. I’m really hoping that was it, for whoever Bol’shoy Brat took from our planet.

I was still lying on the ground, letting my sense come back to me.

The brunette...Cosmo tells me her name was Carina. She had been standing, looking around, swaying a bit and holding her arms to herself.

Cosmo was by her side, barking something to her.

I don’t know what he said.

But, very suddenly, she fell to her knees and cried. Not in a reserved way like an adult. Less self-conscious. Like one of your children.

She held her hands in the air, flicking her wrists. I don’t know what she was hoping would happen, but, whatever it was, her sobs just got louder, telling me whatever she wanted wasn’t coming.

I don’t think I thanked you yet for coming out of the farmhouse when you did, for getting me on my feet, and having me and Cosmo and Carina help everyone into the house.

You’ve always been that person, Laura. The one who held me and Clint together, after we’d come back from a mission. The one who kept your family together, when Clint was gone. Seeing you always meant, for a while, the noise of the world would turn off. After some months or days or hours, as it were, of madness, everything would start making sense again.
I was too tired to tell you all of this, Laura. Maybe it was after lugging an unconscious Blonsky on one of your couches and calling Maria to have her contacts pick him up. Maybe it was after treating Peter Parker. Maybe it was after getting Carina tucked into a guest bed or blowing up that extra inflatable mattress for Stark and Banner. Or even after finding leftovers for Mr. Castle and Hope Pym. I just realized I was running on empty. I needed sleep. I just flopped on your couch without thanking you, and I felt kind of lousy about it.

Because I know, Laura, if it wasn’t for you, always being there when I really needed you right now, I don’t know what I could have become.

Chapter End Notes

This is going to be the last chapter narrated by Black Widow. She'll still be a part of these last few chapters, of course. If you are very curious: Black Widow Thor can be found in Marvel's "What If? Age of Ultron" issue three. It is a very good read and I highly recommend.

I can't tell you how many times I've changed this ending, dear Readers; I'm still internally revising where I want to go with this because writing this has really changed how I view these characters. Cosmo and Natasha were characters I've always loved and I really wanted to give just more to Carina. I came in, loathing the Collector and not really knowing who the Grandmaster was, and, well, now I feel for them both too. (In fact, if I ever write like a semi-sequel, spiritual successor to this thing, I think I'd want to write it after watching "Thor: Ragnarok" and make it entirely about the Grandmaster. Because this dude is a really fascinating character.)

Anyway, these are characters I've written for six months and I want to give their stories a proper conclusion. I'll aim again to release the next chapter on Saturday, but it might be a little later too. The vaguest, less-than-twelve-percent-of-an-idea I have for the next chapter is that it will be about Carina.

Thank you for bearing with and see you then.
Baryer

Chapter Summary

Having lost her powers after Sakaar, Carina tries to make sense of things.

Chapter Notes

I’m sorry this was late. I signed up to do other writing things and underestimated how much time I’d really need to write this chapter. The next week also looks crazy busy for me, so I will probably not update this fic this week. The double-word count for a single chapter a week seemed easier at first, than working on getting two chapters in, but it’s made it trickier with pacing. This one is less than 4000 words, yet still pretty long. I might get fickle, go back to this, and still change wording-things though.

Maybe, the week after this, I’ll just go back to the normal word count and two chapters in a week for the final two.

I’ll figure it out when I get there.

Anyway, thank you for bearing with this and I think I’ve also finally settled on the ending that I want to use for this tale.

But first, this chapter. This one is about Carina. In any iteration, I think of Carina as a highly conflicted character that wants things she shouldn’t (i.e. Michael Korvac and the Stone) and, in pursuing these things, she winds up destroying herself. She is always young and developing, curious about things around her because of a massively sheltered childhood and I’d really love to read more stories developing her.

‘Baryer’ means ‘over’ or ‘jump’.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Mother, I’m sorry. I’m sorry it’s been awhile since I visited you and it might be longer still; I haven’t been able to use my abilities again and I don’t know how exactly it happened because I still don’t really know how my abilities work.

Who’s in charge of this sort of thing? Who gives out powers without sets of instructions?

I figure Sakaar must have overexerted them. Bringing everyone back and forth between Terra and Uncle’s planet, in addition to powering the Black Widow, must have been too much.

I can remember from the views of roughly seventy thousand Universes that Father kept your corpse on one of his Collection planets that used to be our homeworld, but I wasn’t able to find out which one it is on this Universe. Cosmo doesn’t remember; he has a warping device that could take us anywhere, but it would be pointless to use since neither of us know where we are heading. I don’t know the coordinates of the planet you’re being stored and now I can’t find you.
It took me decades to find Father. He left with Uncle abruptly (using a device with an energy signature I couldn’t identify while I still had my abilities, probably from his Collection) and I think it might take decades more to find him.

Most of the people Uncle has stolen remained here for some time. Cosmo’s been talking with them, trying to explain what’s been going on. So, they were trying to develop some sort of contingency plans to protect the Stones from threats like Uncle and bigger threats than him.

I wasn’t able to look any of them in the eye.

Mostly, since Sakaar, I’d been sleeping in the barn, waking up before anybody else has been up, heading outside, and just avoiding everyone. Going out and chopping wood, going for walks, or smoking.

A couple of times on the first day, some of the people have come out and tried to make awkward conversation with me. I ignored them.

Then, the day after, it was only Cosmo that came out to find me.

He usually told me everyone wants to talk with me. They don’t blame me for what happened to them, because they just see me as an accessory that was manipulated by her own relatives. He always invited me inside for a meal. A couple of times he’s brought out sandwiches, carefully letting me know that one of them helped make them.

I ate the sandwiches and I never joined them.

Natasha, he’d insisted, really wanted a word with me. He’d promised that she was sorry about everything and she wanted to help me. There were ex-SHIELD therapists Laura and Maria were helping her get back in touch with, ones that worked with her before, and Natasha was going to start seeing them again. According to Cosmo, Natasha also thought they could do some good for me too.

I’d heard about therapy, Mom. It just seemed like a lot of talking and then they prescribe drugs, right? I’m an abstract being now, composed of energy. I figured that they didn’t know my biochemistry so they prescribe something that could disagree with my systems and kill me (alright, not kill me, but get me ridiculously sick), without even trying to do that. And I’d had enough of trusting people who wind up hurting me.

I’d been staying out, heading deep into the woods, trying to get my powers working again.

Were you able to do what I can, Mother? It’s been so long and I don’t really remember. I loved having powers; I loved being able to look at things in my reality, while simultaneously looking at things in others. It was wonderful, knowing things nobody else knew. I felt a lot smarter than everyone, Mom, a lot better. It felt great, just being able to look in, reach, and pull other things from these other places. I really felt like I needed them, Mom, because I didn’t really know how to be without them anymore; I didn’t want to be without them anymore.

When Cosmo caught me practicing outside for the first time, he told me it was great that I was working on getting them back so that I could help everyone again. I don’t know how a dog like that, who can look into minds, still tries to think the best of everyone. Maybe it helps that he didn’t look inside too deeply without people’s permission.

I think out of everyone, Cosmo’s the only one that I feel like I can talk to. Not because I feel like I can really trust him. I think, out of everyone, he’s the only one that can really understand me. He’s ridiculously patient, Mother. I asked him why he’d come out to find me every day, keep feeding me,
and talk with me, and he’d said it was because I had somebody he cared very deeply about inside of
me and I was just upset because of what happened on Sakaar. I just needed some time to sort out my
feelings.

It’s weird and kind of nice, being able to just talk with a dog. There isn’t really anything dark in him.
Just smiles and cheerfulness. I envied him, Mom, terribly.

He still thought Dad was coming back here again. I’ve reminded Cosmo several times that Dad was
livid about Natasha attempting to punch my Uncle to death (probably the first time I’d seen anyone
try that with an immortal and, even though I understand why she did that, I’m upset with her too),
but, anyway, Cosmo still thinks Dad will set that aside for the sake of the Universe.

Even though everyone mistrusts Dad and Dad mistrusts everyone, Cosmo told me (with his tail
wagging), Dad would still be willing to work everyone to keep the Universe safe because doing this
is the only way he really knows how to have it done. (I don’t really know how he can still believe
Dad would be capable of doing something like that.)

Then, the other day, he asked about the form Dad took on Sakaar. It wasn’t any he’d seen before,
not even in my Dad’s recollections, so I sat down by the picnic table and, over ham sandwiches, tried
to explain things to the best of my abilities.

Maybe it’s one of my earliest memories. I remember being very small. You thought I was upstairs
and asleep. I just wanted a drink of water, when I heard something outside. I went out, and that’s
when I remember seeing Dad in his true form. And the only other thing I could really remember was
screaming my head off, until you came outside and calmed me down.

That was when you gave me the talk. That Dad was of a race of tall, terrifying shapeshifters and that
was his true form we’d seen on Sakaar, the one he was born with. (You both always wanted to tell
me this when I was older, but, well, I kiboshed those plans.) Shapeshifters have a base form that
they default to, and, often, the base form can be different than the shape they were born with. When
he met you, Mom, you’d always said he switched species to be with you and that he preferred
staying that way. (It looked to be pretty true. Millenia later, his base form still appeared to be of the
same species as yours.)

I can remember Uncle telling me something a little bit different. Even though Dad had switched
species, deep down, Uncle said, there were still bits of the same beast inside. Even though he
changed and physically look the same, internally, Dad was still shifting.

I never really got what Uncle meant until I was older.

Did I ever tell you I used to have nightmares about this, Mother? That I’d wake up one day, look in
the mirror, and find some other frightening face staring back at me? That, maybe, the face I wore
wasn’t really mine, but my actual face looked like Dad’s real one?

It’s really silly and vain, I know.

I worried I was like that. I look pretty normal, but maybe I was just shifting inside too. There are
things inside of me that I don't really understand, maybe, and it scared me a little.

I don’t really like remembering Dad, Mom. It feels like for every good memory I have of him,
there’s a terrible one to balance it out.

I remember sleeping on the kitchen table, as he’d quietly cook very closeby, and, at the same time, I
can also recall when he’d lock himself in a room for days and how he’d yell at me if I knocked
because he was having a vision.

I don’t know what possessed us to be alright with his Collecting, but I felt happy then. It started off very nice. He’d made little wooden cages for the little woodland creatures that lived near our house and he used to show them to me, and tell me all about them. I liked helping with taking care of the critters, feeding them, and showing them affection. And then he’d ramble about how this was going to be a contingency plan, in the event that everything in the Universe would be killed.

It’s a terrifying thing for a small child to grow up hearing on a regular basis.

I remember the cages got more complex and Dad got a lot less nice about the whole thing; I miss you all the time, Mother, but I’m really glad you missed seeing this happen.

When I think what happened with Michael, I also think about how Dad and Uncle took their time to show me how to use my abilities. They taught me concentration, patience. They’d sit with me, hours at a time, encouraging me to reach deep inside of myself and realize everything I could be.

If it were at all possible, I wish I could have just scooped out all of the terrible memories and kept the good ones. But it isn’t. I wish he was just a better, stronger person, but he wasn’t. I’m afraid of his blood that’s in me, of what it could be doing to me. It felt almost like my blood had been poisoned and I had to live with it, but I couldn't really tell anyone about it. Maybe because they wouldn't listen or maybe because they gave really shit advice, but mostly because they don’t really get what I’m going through. I’m so afraid of taking on his worst aspects and not being able to stop myself.

I wasn’t so much in a forgiving mood anymore, Mom. I feel like those sorts of feelings just come and go. I was in the mood to forgive Dad, and I fell out of it.

Did I tell you I’d just been waking up angry, for the past few days after coming back from Sakaar? Mad, but not entirely certain who to be mad at. I’d wanted to be angry at Dad, but I know he’s been depressed and he’s dealing with things I don’t fully understand. I wanted to be upset with Uncle, but I know I can’t really find it in me to do that. I wanted to hate Natasha, even if I fully understand why she tried to punch Uncle to death (even though he’s an immortal and that sort of thing was impossible). I’d wanted to track down whatever Higher Being gave me my abilities and Dad his horrifying powerset and took you away, and I wanted to make him suffer. But I didn’t have my powers and, even if I had them, I don’t think I’d be powerful enough to do that. I’d planned to get my powers and hone them, so that I’d be strong enough to do that last one. Until that happened, I planned to just hate myself. It felt absurd and I know it doesn’t make any sense, but it felt like I regained some sort of control again. It gave my anger some sort of purpose.

By the fourth day, Cosmo had gotten a little more wary of me trying to regain my abilities. He was too polite to tell me as much, instead promising me that everyone in the farmhouse is worried about me and they still want to see me even if I don’t have my powers. I lied to him; I told him I’d come with him and see them all tomorrow.

That night, I planned on leaving. My motorcycle was still there. My stuff was there too.

I’ve been alone for years, Mother, taking care of myself. I think I’ve done a fine enough job. It was going to be trickier finding a job with my powers gone (since all I had to do was pull elements of my alternate selves from other realities to put together a decent resume), but I thought I could find something. I’d work a little harder at getting my powers again, without having people worrying about me.

There are very few places I feel like I really belong, Mom. I feel like I’ve been chasing after our old home, Mom, even though it’s been gone for so long. I’ve made some really poor decisions because
of it. I went along with Dad’s daft plan to kill Michael Korvac by attempting to seduce Korvac, not really caring how I felt about such a disgusting thing. I fell for Michael and didn’t feel much of anything when he killed Dad, because I believed Michael really loved me and wanted to build a new home with me (when he really didn’t). For a brief second, on Sakaar, I kind of felt happy. I really wasn’t feeling it anymore. What could I ever be to these people, other than the chick who was related to the guys that kidnapped them and had them fight against their wills? I used to have a ridiculous amount of power, Mother, and now I didn’t anymore. I knew these people on this farm had gone toe-to-toe with literal gods, saved their home planet, and protected their neighborhoods. I was less than them, now. And I didn’t really know how to deal with any of it. I didn’t want to, Mom, because I felt like I really didn’t have to.

I almost did it, too. But right when I got to my motorcycle, I found Cosmo there with the squirrels and Natasha Romanoff. Cosmo began with an apology; he’d been feeling selfish not using his powers of reading deeper into people’s minds, especially when they were in positions that could harm themselves or others, and he’d looked inside without asking. They all knew I’d been planning on leaving them and they weren’t having it, Mom.

I asked if they thought it was because I’d hurt others.

Cosmo denied this, crying to me that he was afraid I’d just hurt myself.

Natasha had her arms crossed and she’d told me they were all giving me my space, since they’d thought it was what I needed after a personal thing like what happened on Sakaar. But it looked like it was about the opposite of what I needed. I needed to talk with people again. She didn’t fully understand what I was going through, yet, Natasha promised, she’d wanted to offer support and she didn’t want me off the farm and heading off on my own.

She attempted to punch Uncle to death after Uncle had her fight her own friends, Father nearly killed her for what she did to Uncle, and I scared her out of her apartment and charged at her with an axe at some point; she was still planning things to go up against Uncle and Natasha was still saying she was worrying about me. I didn’t really know what to think, Mom; I thought there had to be some sort of ulterior motive. Maybe they were using me as bait to get Uncle and Dad to come here, so that they could trap them. Maybe they were just monitoring me closely, if they thought I was faking losing my abilities and planning on betraying everyone.

So, I just had to ask her why she was worrying about me.

Natasha sighed that it was because I may have been in her shoes years ago. People were kind to her when she didn’t deserve it and, now, she needed to pay it forward. She, Laura, and her other friends had gone through this before, with an ex-teammate named Wanda (and they’d no longer known where she was, but still worried about her). Wanda’d also been manipulated, had powers she didn’t understand, and she was also dealing with a lot of emotional baggage. Even if I never regained my powers, she claimed that the people on this farm might be better equipped to help me deal with what I was going through. Even if I wouldn’t help them plot against my Uncle, they still wanted to see me through this.

I really didn’t know what to think, Mom. I really wanted to trust what she was saying, but I couldn’t. I’ve trusted so many times, Mom, and I was sick of always being let down. I’ve always felt so stupid, like I was just making the same mistake again and again. And I was tired of it.

Cosmo just looked up at me with those huge eyes and he begged, he pleaded. They all really care about me, he whined, and they didn’t want me to go.

Mom, I really don’t remember the last time anyone genuinely worried about me. I don’t know if
Father cared about me, when I last saw him, and I can never really tell if Uncle is being genuine with me or if it’s an act to get some sort of end he wants. The person that brought me back did it on accident. The less I think about Michael, the better.

I really wanted to believe them both, Mom. I wanted to believe them so badly.

I don’t really know what it was that made me decide to stay with them. Maybe it was a combination of things. Maybe I was just tired of sleeping outside. Maybe I didn’t want to leave Cosmo behind. Maybe it was just so late and I’d had enough of running. I just decided to give it a couple of days and, if it didn’t work out, I’d find a way to sneak from them and get out.

I got to sleep in a guest bedroom again and joined everyone for breakfast the next morning. It was quiet, but nice. They left a day or so later and they weren’t cold to me the rest of the time they’d stayed there.

I don’t regret the decision, Mother; I had a talk with Natasha, and, now, I’m seeing someone once a day and trying out some therapies that focus less on prescription drugs and more on analyzing my thought patterns to correct any that are particularly damaging. The results won’t be immediate. It takes a couple of months to really make progress and I’m having trouble opening up, but I’m trying to get what I can out of this. The first few sessions have been about establishing my history, and, well, I’ve got a lot of that to go through. If this therapist doesn’t work, we’re trying someone and something else. It takes a while to find someone who works out for you, Natasha insists.

Maria, Laura, and Natasha arranged to have three people come in as a favor to Natasha’s past work. Cosmo’s stuck around with me and he’s come in for some sessions too. We’re trying to figure out how to make this arrangement work, exactly. The ex-SHIELD therapists believe in what they do and they genuinely want to help Natasha, but granting favors for so long can’t really pay bills. Either we’d have to leave this farm and head off to live close to the ones that work especially well for us, or we’d need to find some way to pay them to live here and reimburse them on jobs they’d be missing out on if they hadn’t come up here. I’ve earned money, Mom, doing odd jobs, but I’ve never really had savings; I could never open up a bank account because there’d be too many questions and I’d never wanted to stick around in an area long enough to keep one. My powers used to allow me to pop in quick cash, but they were gone. Natasha didn’t exactly have much by way of reserve money either, but, since she and Stark seemed like they’d patched things up, she’d only briefly considered asking him. Briefly, though.

It’s been maybe three weeks, now, since Sakaar. Laura’s kids had been brought back by her sister. They’re really very sweet, all of them. The looks on their faces when Natasha told them Pizza Dog had gotten new animal friends--so adorable. And they were just so cute when they started talking with Cosmo and Liho.

I’ve been helping on the farm a lot. It’s relaxing, really, just being on a farm and recuperating. We see the therapists once a day, but, mostly we all do chores and sometimes watch little movies or read books together.

Just yesterday Cosmo’s gotten a look in his eyes and turned his little nose up to the sky, but, just as quickly he turned back to look to us; we share a bed together, so, that night, I asked him how much he missed being up there.

One day, he said, he wanted to go back. It just didn’t look like the time was right yet. Liho was thrilled about having him around and he’d promised Lucky and the Barton children that they’d develop a sort of language between them so that they could communicate. That, and the Barton children were composing songs and Cosmo’d be getting a verse. It’s a sweet little song, Mom. They spell out the dogs’ names and clap. Cosmo wanted to stick around, at least, to hear the verse they’d
made for him.

I’d almost gotten used to things as they were, Mom, until, today, just before I was getting ready to chop up some more firewood for the house, I saw it. An envelope, carefully taped to the handle of the Bartons’ axe. And I recognized the handwriting, Mother. It was neat. Precise. And it had my name, written with letters I hadn’t seen in several millenia. There was also Cosmo’s name and Natasha’s, on this same envelope, but their names were written in Russian cyrillic and the Greco-Roman alphabet respectively.

It was Dad’s handwriting.

I didn’t know what to think, Mom. I’d been so happy, staying with these people and keeping far from him. And then he had to do this.

I thought about burning the envelope and telling nobody about what I’d found, but it didn’t seem fair since the message wasn’t just for me. Whatever he could have written to Cosmo and Natasha could have been important for them. Cosmo had been waiting awhile to hear from Dad too.

So, I did the right thing. I grabbed the envelope, went back inside, and told them about it.

We talked it over and came to the conclusion that the best thing to do was to read it aloud and steel ourselves a bit. Try very hard to read between the lines, to see if Dad had some sort of ulterior motive for doing this and try to tell if he was trying to work us back into a scheme of his.

We’d be handling this together.

Chapter End Notes

I watched "Spider-Man: Homecoming" with the sibs; I thought of "Homecoming" as just a nice popcorn muncher, until I realized the film made me really like Spider-Man again. After the "Spectacular Spider-Man" cartoon was cancelled, it left like a huge, spider-shaped hole in my heart that wasn't really filled until probably now. Tom Holland's performance and the film itself are just so charming and wonderful.

I've also been keeping up with Comic-Con stuff and I really just want "Ragnarok" to come out already so that "Infinity War" can come out sooner. Having both sooner would be wonderful. I preordered the "Thor: Ragnarok" prelude and I'm hoping it will be a bit like the older prelude comics that don't just recall the events of the previous "Thor" installments, but, also, fill in the blanks between the second and third Thor films and maybe give more background to characters that will be making their first appearances in this film. Here's hoping.

Anyway, next chapter, the Collector's letter. See you then.
Ohranyai

Chapter Summary

So, you know that one older sibling that like steals the controller and takes over for you when they see you're struggling with a level on a game?

That's pretty much En Dwi Gast in this.

Chapter Notes

I got wiped out after my crazy busy week, but I finished the last two chapters and I'm releasing them on the same day.

I kind of hated the Collector in the first “Guardians” film because I thought he existed in that film just to give some very ham-fisted exposition about the Infinity Stones. Then, for this fic, I rewatched his scenes, read the prelude, watched the interviews with Benicio Del Toro, and read quite a bit of comics with the Collector, and I realize (even if you do not know the Collector’s comic history) his character isn't written and portrayed straight-up as a hero or a villain, but a morally complex character who makes questionable decisions out of his own free will (without being brainwashed or daddy-issued or tortured) in an amazingly short amount of screen-time. He kind of makes me think of a Hammer Horror character, in a good way. Any iteration of him is pretty fascinating to read or watch, if only because of his versatility, complexity, and obsessed personality. The Grandmaster was kind of the last character I expected to enjoy writing when I was done with this fic, but yeah. He is a really interesting character that seems kind of light but is secretly a bit dark and I am ridiculously fascinated with his relationship to his siblings. In fact, him and the Collector might have become my brotp.

I hope that the Grandmaster is written into the MCU with the same amount of complexity as his brother and, if and when Thanos and Hela probably kill one or both of these Elders of the Universe, I hope they get a good amount of development.

This chapter was a bitch to format. Like there were Â’s appearing between sentences and â€™s replacing accent marks. If I missed any, please let me know.

‘Ohranyai’ means ‘guard’.

My dearest daughter Carina,

Do not seek me out. Doing so will only result in your imminent demise.

I cannot lose you again.

I was never ready to be a father and I am sorry that I could never be the one you deserved.
Koschei the Deathless,

Although I am livid disgusted enraged by upset

Carina,

There is much that I wish I could have told you, I just never knew how to talk to you.

Carina,

I know that I wasn't the best father, or even a very good one. I wish I could have acted as your father, but

Koschei the Deathless,

Ms. Romanoff,

For the sake of your homeworld, I will not seek revenge for the attempt you made to end the immortal life of my older brother. As it stands, Terra is terribly outclassed and uninformed of threats that should wish to strike it. Many could die if we do not cooperate.

If we are to continue this alliance, however, we will need to renegotiate the terms of our contract. And if my dog is to reside in your company, I will also need to provide a list of foods you cannot feed creatures like him, lest you should wish to kill your pets you murderous bitc

Carina,

Whenever I think of you, I picture the curious, little blonde in the light sundress, always with a flower in your hand and a question coming out of that impish mouth of yours. The world that you had grown upon was the only that you had known. The sun rising and setting was the only you had ever gazed upon. My answers to your little questions were all you were truly aware of.

How innocent you were! How sweet in ignorance you were!

There were so many things I had wanted to tell you. I had longed to describe creatures long-gone, with biologies you could not possibly begin to imagine. There were many more people your mother and I wish you could have met. All that we could share of them were but memories. You were born into a world of poverty, yet you could never understand the losses we had to recover from.

You broke my hea

My dear Cosmonaut,

I will not be able to see you again and, by now, you should know very well why. It was a mistake to
involves a creature as sweet as you are with my enterprises. Remaining by my side will end fatally for you, and I refuse to watch you die once again.

My dear Cosmonaut,

I know that this will not be easy for you, but I feel it is for the best. You are an incredibly intelligent creature capable of a great many things and, I fear, I may only be holding you back.

My dear Cosmonaut,

Why did you share so many of my secrets, when I had repeatedly told you not to?

My dear Cosmonaut,

I am uncertain how to make this clear to you.

Do you remember the Long-One, my pet? How long ago it feels! You believed that everything would have been better off if I killed it, but I told you that a creature like that needed to live because we could use it to protect the other creatures in my Collection and it was possible that it would thrive in certain ecosystems.

My Cosmonaut, I am very much like the Long-One. There are certain environments that I know I am best suited for. Because of my visions and what I must do to prevent them from coming to fruition, I must live under conditions that I believe are unsuitable for a creature like yourself.

Ms. Romanoff,

Corvus oculum corvi non eruit.

Ms. Romanoff,

While I find your attempt to kill my brother both understandable and personally detestable, it has forced me out of a lethargic, self-pitying fugue. Perhaps I should thank you for that.

Ms. Romanoff,

I believe there was a point when I was like you;-

I did not choose to become the Collector. You know how kitschy little monikers like that catch on, yes? You act as you will and as you must while publics watch. As they watch, they call you many things. One of those names are bound to stick. I had only wished to preserve the Universe from an oncoming cataclysm; somewhere along the way, I lost what was dearest to me. It was after their
losses that I buried myself in my work and, in doing so, lost sight of why I began my life's work. It became less about the creatures and peoples that I protected, and more of a way to alleviate my own insecurities. I knew this, yet I would ignore it. This ignorance has cost many more lives. Do not allow your own insecurities and guilt complex to overshadow

Carina,

I know that I could never ask for your forgiveness; I would not know what to do with it, if you would present it to me, because I feel as if you've never loved me. Regardless of what has happened between us, you are still my child. I still care for you and I regret to inform you that I have several promises that I will be unable to keep.

My dear Cosmonaut,

I tried to tell you why I cannot see you again, but I could never

I believe that was the only time you had seen the shape I was born with; I cannot tell you if I had ever planned to show

I will miss you very much.

My dear little Carina,

I wish we could have talked on Sakaar a little bit longer. You look so much like your Mother now (with your dark hair) and a little like your Dad (with the dark around your light eyes). I don't remember a lot of things, but I remember when you were tiny. At least, I think I do. (There really isn't a lot that I can remember too well anymore, to be honest, but that's the sort of thing that happens with old age.) You had very light, blonde hair and your eyelashes were the same shade. You were always very quiet and polite when guests were around, but, when the other guests would leave, I remember that was when I'd pull out whatever board game I'd encountered across my travels and teach you how to play it. You were always happy when I was around, you told me, because your father and mother never played games. (They were always serious, your parents, born with faces that looked so naturally predisposed to brooding.) You'd always learned the rules very quickly and, as soon as you had gotten used to them, you'd try to break them. You made the cutest little pout when I'd catch you, but you'd give an even sweeter smile when I'd said we should continue playing anyway.

Do you still remember why I told you we'd have to continue playing? I'd always have us continue playing because I told you that there are at least two different types of players. There are the rule-breakers and the rule-followers. (The rule-makers never bother playing their own games.) You encounter both and, when you and these other players want the same things, you'll have to learn to deal with both of them to get what you want.

Do you remember any of that, Sweetie?
It was a pleasure playing a Contest of Champions against you, and I was so proud that you won it fairly. I wish the circumstances that required me to arrange that game could have been more cordial, but, sometimes, you will have to engage in some unpleasant games. Living is struggling, my sweet little niece, and learning to find pleasure in that struggle is essential.

You were the first child of long-dead races and, among my siblings, you were treasured. But you were not simply of your mother's people or your father's. You were unique and you were all of ours. We put our hopes into you and, when you were born, we wanted nothing more than to create a Universal order that would insure you would grow up safely and happily.

I was terribly upset with your father, after I'd heard about his sending you to spy on Michael Korvac, and I've been trying to work more closely with him so that I could insure he would never make a terrible choice like that again. We have a mental-link, your father and I. It was established when you were very young and I have been trying to use it more frequently these days (before your father severed it for too long).

Please don't worry about your father or I. That wasn't the first time a fighter tried to kill me, and, I can promise you, it probably won't be the last. Although, I do have to say, the Black Widow punches very hard and the lightning bolt she sent through my chest did temporary discombobulate my mental-links to the super-computers on my other home-planets. (It didn't take long to repair those, though.)

Riots break out with a fair amount of frequency on Sakaar. If my security personnel did not manage to contain that eruption to that battle-dome, and it spreads across the rest of my planet as a great political, revolutionary upheaval of some sort, I have more than adequate resources to raise an army to retake the planet. Or, I could simply hack into its systems and retake Sakaar peacefully. (You would be surprised how many planetary conquests I've made simply using knowledge of computer languages.)

We are safe. Your father used a Crystal of Conquest to warp me into one of his Collection Crafts, which was parked in a subspace. (Very difficult to detect, if you don't know what you're looking for.) I woke up in a very plush bed with my face cleaned and stitched (and make-up removed), connected to an IV filled with blue blood. (One of the many benefits of knowing a shape-shifter, my dear, is that if you should ever need an organ or tissue or what-have-you, they will always be able to make themself your perfect donor.) You father was sitting very closeby, asleep and leaning over a beautiful desk that was covered with a ridiculous amount of papers. From where I was, I could just faintly make-out some sort of inked scrawl and his personalized letterhead, so, as quietly as a man with an IV connected to him could, I got off the bed, gathered as many of those pages as I could, borrowed a pen and one of his personalized stationery sheets (actually it would be 'steal' or 'stolen' because I didn't intend to return his sheet of stationery after composing this for you), and read and wrote.

I could have simply read your father's mind, to know what exactly he'd written, but it seemed too simple and too dull a thing to do (If you cannot use your abilities to amuse yourself, what good are they?)

Your father's writing is about as annoyingly concise as I'd remembered it. I just read his letters and thought to myself that Taneleer Tivan probably doesn't remember what a properly personable post looks like. So, I've written this and left this on his desk where he can see it.
and read it, to remind him what a letter is supposed to look like.

Hello, Taneleer Tivan.

I know that you will find this letter and you will read it. You will probably be very upset that I stole one of your overpriced pens and a piece of your personalized stationery, but I had to leave this here where you could find it. Please look over the letters you'd composed and note the comments that I left. You seem to be having trouble writing them and I would like to help. After you've completed writing new letters, I want to look them over. You will be able to find me in your game-room or snacking or practicing on the small electric keyboard you installed in the kitchen. (Whatever happened to that magnificent silver piano you had?) Your Collection Craft has become terribly empty and I can't stand seeing you like this; I want to help and there is only so much that I can do if you do not let me.

Please let me help you this time.

It's understandable if you're upset about Sakaar, but I really didn't know how else I could get your attention to talk with you. (Hide-and-go-seek was always the one game you could beat me at.) I could just recall hearing about Thanos' forces reaching Terra and the incident with the Dark Elves, so I only knew that was where you'd have to be and that you would be acting on your own. I acted as I did to protect you. If I won, I could have taken over operations on this Infinity Stone game completely and it would no longer need worry you. Losing will not hurt our cause either. (I wasn't expecting Natasha to volunteer herself as Champion for your dog and daughter, but I was able to find a way to make it work for our purposes and mostly had fun doing it.)

After the incident on KNOWHERE, I created a program to analyze how we could maximize our resources in this game for the Stones and left this program running on several of the super-computers connected to my brain. The simulations that yielded the poorest results happened when you, the other siblings, and I attempted to keep the Stones among ourselves. How could this happen, you may ask, with the Power Primordial that we yield? It is because of our reliance on this ancient power that, should we collect all of the Stones and attempt to defend them ourselves, we cannot defend the Stones on our own. We lack variety of defences that we can raise, since our abilities stem from the same source, and, thus, we would be defeated easily.

I needed to tell you about a different strategy we will need to undergo.

Rather than simply us defending the Stones, I have found it would be more strategically sound for us to surreptitiously fortify the defenses of others that currently hold them. This would provide more variety in our overall defenses of the Stones and improve them, without us having to nurture business relations with the groups defending them (and, in doing the latter, free up our time for more important matters).

Upon close analysis conducted over the course of a year or so, it seemed that the heroes of Terra were ununified. Not at all adequate to serve as a grounds of housing and protecting numerous Stones. Bringing the Terran heroes to Sakaar has, hopefully, reminded the little Terrans of what threats wait for them from beyond their little planet and it should force them to set aside what petty squabbles they have to regroup, refocus, and reorient themselves.
Natasha didn't seem as focused as I'd been led to believe from reading her SHIELD file, but I believe I've pushed her into having some necessary confrontations that should start her on a path of self-recovery and restore her more than adequately for helping to defend Terra from forces that should desire the Stones.

Your blabbermouth dog and daughter could also aid in this plan without us having to ask. The kids could remain in contact with the Terrans, so that they can inform the Terrans of Thanos, the Stones, and other things that they'll need to know to defend their homeworld. Woofers was already revealing too much to Natasha and the other Terrans, and it would be helpful for our cause if he continued doing so. From scanning Natasha's mind, I knew that she trusted your dog but not your daughter (mostly because of her wonderful capabilities). I had to improvise more, to rectify this; I goaded Natasha, so that she would find me more unpleasant than Carina, and as much as I find it distasteful to use my abilities on our family, I'd placed a mental block on Carina's abilities so that, after she'd warp everyone back to Terra, she wouldn't be able to use them for the equivalent of a Terran month. A month's time seemed more than adequate for the Black Widow to get to know Carina and develop a trust with her.

If we keep a careful eye on their activities and I surreptitiously send mercenaries to defend wherever they are, we should be able to keep them safe.

Please relax and talk to me. You are my Brother and I love you, but you are prone to making poor decisions on your own and I will not allow it (especially when engaging in a game with stakes as high as this).

Thank you for the stitches and the blood.

    xoxo

    En Dwi Gast,

    The Grandmaster

PS--when was the last time we played Tic-Tac-Toe??!

I drew a grid on the other side of this sheet and started us off.

    Your turn.

---

En Dwi Gast,

I have grown tired of your games; I am only composing this letter to you because you purse your lips and point to a pen and my stationery when I try to speak aloud with you and you have also cut our mental connection. You have done enough to compromise my plans for obtaining the Infinity Stones and you did not have my permission to peruse my dispatches. After you have recovered, I will remove you from my craft and leave you on a planet of your choice.
Please do not meddle further with my personal affairs.

Yours,

Taneleer Tivan

My dearest younger Brother,

You didn't take your turn for Tic-Tac-Toe! Have you forgotten how to play it? If you have, I'd be happy to reteach you.

xoxo

En Dwi Gast,
The Grandmaster

Older Brother,

Please do not waste my stationary for games. I did not forget, I simply don't want to play.

Have you chosen upon which of your planets I should leave you?

Yours,

Taneleer Tivan

Taneleer,

I'm not going anywhere. You are my brother and I refuse to lose you to your 'personal affairs' that could endanger at least half of the lives in this Universe (and, yes, I calculated that if you continue acting as you are, there is a 97.6348% chance that you could accelerate this massive Universal destruction). Plus, you lack the resources to house and protect all six Stones on your own. Don't shut me out. I am not your enemy; I am doing this for your own good.

xoxo,

En Dwi Gast,
En Dwi Gast,

Why can't you leave me alone?

--Taneleer Tivan

Taneleer Tivan,

Please give me time to consider this.

xoxo,

En Dwi Gast,

The Grandmaster

You have until after breakfast.

--Taneleer Tivan

Taneleer Tivan,

Thank you for dinner, the guest room, and breakfast.

I apologize for the lateness of this response; I needed to take time to consider how I wanted to respond to your question. You don't seem responsive to my assertion that you are my brother and only idiots repeat themselves.

I can't leave you alone because you make poor decisions on your own and it could cost this Universe, the very same one that you seem to forget you had devoted much of your own life to preserving. You have become very difficult to work with and it would be reckless for me to let you continue acting like this. I don't remember you always being like this.

Do you know why I agreed to help you train that weird talking dog of yours? (I don't remember what you named him. Coronet? Doggelstein?)
I am uncertain if you remember this, but, when I'd visited some time before, you spent more time talking to your weird little creatures than to me. I didn't believe you when you first told me about the dog you made in the lab, but, when I met the little Puppers, I was delighted and deloved. I thought that if I could help you train this beast properly, maybe, it could save you. This was a little beastie you talk to and it would talk back. It would love you unconditionally, and all you would need to do was to feed it, give it a little space, give it some toys, and give it some compliments. It looked compact enough to take with you, wherever you went. With time, I had hoped it would get out of your shell and help you open up to other people.

For a time, it seemed to work. (You even listened back to the little creature and made it an adorable suit of its own!) I know that little creature never liked me, because it told me I smelled bad, but I was glad to have it around because I thought it was good for you to have it around.

I don't know what happened; I thought that you were doing alright, I don't know why you are trying to leave this creature on backwater little Terra, and I don't know why it didn't work out. Looking in your head for the answers would not provide me with the answers I seek because many often distort their memories (and I know you are no exception in this regard). You could omit something absolutely vital by forgetting it. Hearing from you would tell me more than me digging it out of your head.

Maybe I should have been around for you more, instead of believing you were fine on your own. Maybe I should have checked in more regularly and relied less on the dog to do what I should have done.

You feel unreachable sometimes, Brother, and, although I have known you longer than some empires have been around, I don't know how to talk to you sometimes.

I'm frustrated, but this doesn't mean that I would ever want to leave you completely on your own.

You and the other siblings are the only family that I have.

Even if you sometimes make poor decisions with high-stakes games or you make terrible mistakes, I would miss you too much if you were gone.

Who else remembers how to play the games of long-dead civilizations? Who else painstakingly studies every culture's writing systems and masters writing in them? Who else would gather little creatures and custom-make containment units for each and every one of them? Who else would change their own biology to give me a blood transfusion?

I don't want to leave you this time, because I'm afraid if I do I may never see you again.

xoxo,

En Dwi Gast,
En Dwi Gast,

I am fairly certain that I never needed rescuing and I doubt your being around more often would have affected anything. You are my brother and I would not want to deprive you of your own livelihood. I also don’t feel comfortable having you hover over my personal affairs.

The dog is named Cosmo. While I can appreciate your concern for me, I cannot appreciate your roundabout scheme to train my dog into making me more sociable. You are a strategist, at heart, and I’ve accepted you for that. Your ability, to improvise and implement convoluted plans over varying lengths of time, has proven incredibly useful. Machinations like this, however, make me hesitate to trust you.

I have a sensible reason for leaving Cosmo behind.

I had a very vivid vision on KNOWHERE. You know how my visions work. I am not always privy to learning the full circumstances that bring those happenings about, but I am forced to watch terrible events take place. My vision on KNOWHERE featured Natasha’s attempt to kill you and it ended after this attack, when I visit their farm. It does not end well for them.

I cannot risk being right this time and I don’t know if there’s anything you can do to help me. Please don’t tell me this may not happen if I see them again and please don’t downplay the seriousness of my vision by insisting something like ‘things always have a chance of dying, please lighten up’. Whenever you talk down to me like that, I feel that you are invalidating my fears and I must prove that I am not lying or making things up. It is exhausting and insulting. I am trying all that I am able to, to handle these visions, and it is never enough.

Yours,

Taneleer Tivan

Brother,

I’m sorry that I made you feel that way; even if I can read your mind and see what you see, I really don’t know what you’re going through unless you tell me.

You are my brother and I’m afraid of losing you.

You've been at this for a very long time, haven't you? You've sacrificed much for this and your work has saved countless civilizations. Yet, nobody recognizes its significance or necessity.

I tell you this because I care about you and I know others will not repeat what I will tell you as kindly:

I think you've taken on more than you can handle on your own and it is time for you to pass off these duties. Having lived as long as we have, we both know nothing lasts and you may as
well leave this while you still have a head on your shoulders. The way you are going about handling this cause could kill you or everyone around you, and I can't stand by anymore.

I've been thinking about this for some time, and I believe that a telepath of my caliber would be capable of granting you a reprieve. I have done this sort of thing with my fighters before and I've only hesitated using something like this on you, because you are my brother. I am uncertain about what else we can do with you; I know that your visions have been troubling you since they began and I know it is because you have them that you feel most obligated to act on them.

It doesn't have to be you anymore. I could wipe them from your mind and use my resources to act on them, in your stead. If any more should appear, we could use our mental link so that I may see them and act to prevent them. Then, I could wipe those from your head as well.

You could retire peaceably and live freely, unburdened by these visions of other worlds.

Please put serious consideration into this option. If you turn this down, we must think of an alternate solution. I may not have the gift of prophecy, but, I can promise you, if we continue to act as we are, with you going off on your own and taking on more than you can handle, I can't calculate a high rate of success.

Something needs to change.

xoxo,

En Dwi Gast,

The Grandmaster

Brother,

It's been a day since my previous correspondence. As much as I enjoy playing the quiet game with you, I want to know what you've considered about the choice I'd presented to you.

xoxo,

En Dwi Gast,

The Grandmaster

Brother,

I need time to think about this. You are essentially asking permission to perform a lobotomy.

There are other responsibilities I'd need to pass off, which I feel you are unsuited to take over. (To name a few: there is the management of KNOWHERE and ascertaining the properties of the Aether.)
Yours,

Taneleer Tivan

Younger Brother,

Of course.

Take the time that you need.

The process would be completely painless. It would be less scalpels going into your head and more like selective memory. You wouldn't remember what you'd forgotten (haha) or that I'd even taken it out.

If you chose to go through with it, we would talk about those other tasks before I operate.

xoxo,

En Dwi Gast,
The Grandmaster

Taneleer,

You always know this kind of stuff: do you remember how we met? I'm pretty certain you were trying to stop me from taking over a planet. Or maybe I was stopping you from collecting things on one of my planets, and I only spared your life because you told me you had a family. Or maybe we were both in prison?

xoxo,

En Dwi Gast,
The Grandmaster

En Dwi Gast,

I'm sorry; I don't remember anymore.
Yours,

Taneleer Tivan.

Brother,

What a pity.

Well, I'm still glad it happened.

You are going to be alright.

xoxo,

En Dwi Gast,

The Grandmaster
Chapter Notes

There were stretches of this fic where I thought I really didn't want this to end, because it was enjoyable to write. Then, there were other times when I thought I really had to end this.
So, this is it.
I think I'll miss these characters.

One of these days, I might get fickle and change bits of this fic but, for now, I really want a break from fic-writing.

Sinikettu - I mulled over how to incorporate your suggestion from way back when, and it's kind of in here. Thank you for it.

And thank you, readers, for sticking until the end.

‘Domoy’ means ‘go home’.

There are many ways that Cosmo could have told Cosmos story. Cosmo could have simply kept quiet about the whole think, and, sometimes, Cosmo wonders if we would have all been better off that way. Cosmo could have changed the story so that it wasn't about two peoples (that Cosmo loves) not getting along because of their own hang-ups. Cosmo could have just said one is good, one is bad, so that you would feel good about the good one beating the bad ones. And then think could have ended with all promises kept, all peoples better and getting along, and Cosmo making choice of being in space with you or stayink on farm. But none of it would have been true.

What is true? Cosmo go to find truth of where Tivan is, but Cosmo only come back with more questions. Natasha and Tivan, both are mixes of good and evil. Not pure-bred. You are both troubled and find peace in their own ways. They have their own stories, with their own truths. Cosmo have to learn to do this.

Lucky's kids, they ask me how I know I am grown-up. Cosmo never really hear this term 'grown-up'. (Not before coming to Terra.) So, Cosmo ask them what they mean. They tell Cosmo that Cosmo seems to know much that Cosmo doesn't have to go to school anymore, that Cosmo knows what Cosmo is doink now. So Cosmo has to tell them that Cosmo is still learnink and Cosmo doesn't really know what Cosmo is doink.

Cosmo still think sometimes if Cosmo could have done anything differently, if it meant Cosmo could see you again. Sometimes Cosmo thinks about if there was way Cosmo could have helped you and Natasha get over trust issues and work together. Cosmo thinks about if Cosmo stopped Natasha from volunteerink to fight for Carina and I, if thinks would have been better if En Dwi Gast just take over lookink for Stones. Cosmo wonders if there was way to stop you from what you were about to do in that terrible shape, from killink Natasha, that wouldn't have had me push you away.

But Cosmo does not regret helpink Natasha save her friends from En Dwi Gast and Cosmo does not regret savink Natasha, because she is good person who is workink hard to repair friendships to save her homeworld.
You were right in a way, Taneleer, because Cosmo have to do thinks Cosmo regrets. Cosmo have
to break code of not lookink in mind without askink permission to help Carina, but Cosmo didn't
know how else to reach her. Cosmo wonder if Cosmo do this sooner, if it could have helped
Maverdevia.

Cosmo knows after some days at therapy with Carina that what you did was wrong, that it do
somethink to us that we cannot express fully. You have made us sad, Tivan. You have made it hard
for us to trust people. You have made many terrible thinks normal, so that, if other people mistreat
us, we think is normal. Sometimes Carina is okay, but other times she is angry and sad. Sometimes
she thinks of trackink you down and killink you. Other times, she cries that her father couldn't have
been a normal person. She really can't find it in her to forgive you. She has been tryink to learn to
accept you were her father, but is hard for her. She believe she could have been better off without
you. And Cosmo doesn't like watchink her suffer like this.

But Cosmo also remembers how kind you were to Cosmo, Tivan. Cosmo remembers watchink how
you struggle with your responsibility of visions. Cosmo wishes that you could have listened to
Cosmo, when Cosmo try to talk with you. Cosmo doesn't wish you dead or not a part of Cosmo's
life; Cosmo still wishes you were alright. You are good person and you are beast. For sake of good
person you forget about, Cosmo wishes you are well and you are not dead.

Cosmo was a good dog.

Wasn't Cosmo?

Why did you leave Cosmo with a letter? Why couldn't you have come in-person to say goodbye?
Cosmo is happy you leave Cosmo with ownership of KNOWHERE and Carina with businesses and
coordinates to Collection planets (includink your first Collection planet, where you had wife's body
preserved), but Cosmo had crossed stars to find you. Was it bad think that Cosmo go to find you?

Cosmo is tryink to learn to live without thinkink so much of you, but you are so much a part of
Cosmo that Cosmo struggle to do that. Cosmo cannot forget all that you teach Cosmo or years that
Cosmo spend with you, Tivan. Cosmo cannot forget how beautiful life is and how lovely all livink
thinks are.

It has been a week since Carina's powers came back to her. Even with her abilities comink back, she
tell Cosmo that she want to stay on Terra. There is change with Carina. First think she do with her
abilities is to fulfill promise of keepink Barton family off of internet. Next think she do is make life
for herself, so that she move out and can hold job near one of the therapists. To pay back Natasha
for hair-bleach she remove and therapists for seeink her. She wants to wait a little longer to see her
mother and handle the businesses you give her. She even thinks of sellink off those businesses.

Cosmo has been feelink sick. Cosmo wasn't eatink. Cosmo has been lyink down more. That was
when Carina use her abilities to check Cosmo, and she tell Cosmo that Cosmo was pregnant.

Da, they are Lucky's. (Cosmo is in love with Lucky, and Cosmo remembers when this could have
happened.) The kids were so happy. Natasha and Laura were happy for me. Carina was happy.
Lucky was bashful but happy. Liho was happy. Belkas were happy.

But Cosmo was so afraid for children inside Cosmo. Cosmo is cosmonaut and Cosmo have to return
to space one day. Children would have to be born and older before Cosmo could go back and take
them with Cosmo.

Lucky says we can wait. Maybe have kids on farm and Cosmo can go to space. Cosmo could visit
again often. But Cosmo want to stay with Cosmo's kids. Cosmo remember from one of lifetimes of
how hard it is to be without both parents.

Cosmo has been thinkink of what Cosmo want to do with KNOWHERE, Tivan. It has been long time since Cosmo has been on KNOWHERE again. Cosmo wishes Cosmo could go back and act as Head of Security. But Cosmo doesn't want to run all operations on godhead. Cosmo want to give ownership to the workers' unions with caveat that they allow Celestial's head to become haven for those without homes. So that they can always have place to call home. And Cosmo will do what you ask and give data you provide to scientists, so that they will be able to construct multidimensional portals in event somethink terrible should happen to this Universe. Not because you ask it, but because Cosmo agrees a lot of good could come from it.

There is so much still that Cosmo want to tell you, Tivan, even if you forget to be good person and you hurt Cosmo and Cosmo have to heal from it. The belkas tell Cosmo that they are family, that they are what matters most to each other. Lucky is my love and father to my kids. His family is the Bartons and Natasha. Liho says that we are all a part of her family, because she is young and she doesn't want to see us go. Carina consider Cosmo and Gast and mother to be family, and she does not want to think of you as a part of her life. A home should be where a family can be found.

Even if you were not always good to Cosmo, Cosmo still think of you as family.

You are Cosmo's batya. Even if you were not always good one. Cosmo hates and loves you, but Cosmo is learnink to accept that you are a part of Cosmo's life.

Cosmo listens to kids in Cosmo, their undeveloped thoughts that are more concepts than anythink. Everyone on the farm is nicer to Cosmo. They let Cosmo lie down more, help Cosmo try to think of names for puppies. And Cosmo just want to raise them right.

Cosmo think about what Cosmo will tell them about you, Tivan, about sad immortal who forget he is good boy sometimes, and show them suit you make for Cosmo. Cosmo only want to tell them happy thinks. But Cosmo also want to tell them truth.

Cosmo still love you, even if you cannot love Cosmo, and Cosmo will learn to be without you. Cosmo will build home for puppies.

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