You're Alpha; You're Church.

by Athena_Yule

Summary

"There was a wet spot on the floor; you slipped and hit your head." Explained Flowers. Church wondered why he was lying like this.

"Do you remember your name?" He wasn't supposed to reveal himself to the Freelancers, it was best to play it safe: he had amnesia after all.

As if.

Notes

Alright, so after scrolling through the Leonard Church tag half a million times, I haven't ever seen an AU where Alpha did remember what happened. So I decided to take matters into my own hands. Apologies in advance: I'm not very good at writing. Hope you enjoy!
Chapter 1

When Alpha came to, he was in a dull beige coloured room. He seemed to be at the ground, which he couldn't understand. His containment unit felt much smaller than usual, which didn't make any sense. Why would they have moved him from the MoI systems? He ran a check to make sure that there was nothing wrong, and... What?

Alpha found himself looking at the systems of Spartan armour. But that wouldn't have happened unless he was implanted into someone, and since he couldn't hear anyone inside of the armour, he tried standing up. To his surprise, the body followed his command, as though it was a husk that was designed for an AI. What was going on?

"Hello? Can you hear me private?"

Was that Florida? What was he doing here? Wherever 'here' was anyways. Alpha decided to test things out just a bit more, and was again surprised (and also concerned confused, etc) to find that he was the one operating the vocal chords of 'his' body.

"Gahh.. Private? What?" Whatever Agent Florida was doing, it couldn't have been good. But if nothing else, Alpha knew he had information, so he followed it up with "Where am I?".

"Easy there, son. It's me, your good friend and mentor Captain Butch Flowers." 'Mentor?' Alpha wondered. If anything it was the other way around. Being the only smart AI on the Mother of Invention pretty much guaranteed that. Florida was speaking to him as though he was a...

Alpha ran through everything in the Mjolnir armour he was wearing. There weren't any enhancements, so there wouldn't have been a point to him being in the armour in the first place. Not to mention that he, as far as he could tell, had full control over the body, and the fact that Florida was referring to himself as Captain Flowers which made it seem as though he wanted as few ties to Project Freelancer as possible...

There.

Private Jimmy. So that's whose body this actually was. Which brought up the question: Why was he here? He quickly tuned back into what Flowers was saying.
"-ccident. You seem to have lost some of your memory."

"An accident? Wh-What happened?" Now was his chance to figure things out! Alpha waited in anticipation of finally getting some answers.

"There was a wet spot on the floor. You fell and hit your head." That's it? That was really all he had to work with? That was pretty disappointing. "Oh."

"Tell me, do you remember your name?" Alpha figured that it was best to play it safe and not say his actual designated name. "My name is uh... Leonard Church..." He figured that using the Directors name wouldn't be bad. The Director never explicitly told anyone his name and even if he did, it should be alright as long as Alpha played dumb. There was also the added bonus of him being based off the man, so it would make sense (theoretically) for Alpha to adapt that as his name as opposed to anything else.

"It is indeed! And what's the last thing you remember?" Seems that Florida was going off of what the Alpha made up, which was a very good thing. This also gave him enough time to figure out exactly what happened, and what to make up. He sighed.

"I don't know..." That was a lie. Alpha could remember Carolina. He remembered how the Freelancers tore themselves apart. He could remember how the Director lied, betrayed and manipulated Alpha for his own selfish gain. He remembered, well, everything really. But he had to make up some sort of cover story. He searched through his code to see if there was anything he missed. He couldn't find anything missing, but, there was something there. He looked at the large amount of foreign codes to find what looked like... False memories?

Alpha looked at them. They seemed to be some strange remix of the Director's life: He had lived a normal life before being shipped off the fight in the war, Tex had gotten into Project Freelancer; portrayed as an actual experimental program where she was given Omega for her cybernetic enhancements. She was then hired to kill everyone stationed on Blue base at Sidewinder, But left him alive.

So, as great as that was, he needed to find out how far he could go. Alpha thought about how to go about that for a moment, trying to match up any similar real and fake memories.

"There was snow, a-nd fighting..." Alpha turned around and activated the motion trackers. "My girlfriend Tex was there, and uh, she was fighting someone."

"Yes, and who was Tex fighting?" Asked Florida, who Alpha could tell was loading his gun and
raising it. It seemed as though that was as far as he could go. Not bad, at least it gave him ample
breathing room.

"Maybe- Oh no. Private Jimmy!" Alpha turned back around to see Florida lowering his gun. He
feigned ignorance as Florida replied.

"That's right! Poor Private Jimmy." If Alpha didn't know better, he would have said that Florida
sounded sorrowful. But, Alpha did know better, and that made next to everything that he said
suspicious.

" I remember Private Jimmy but, I don't know, it was weird." Now to test the limits of disbelief.
What could be the weirdest yet plausible thing he could 'remember'? "Tex was... Beating him to
death with his own skull?" Okay, that might have been a bit too far.

Florida stared."Well that doesn't seem physically possible." Fuck. Florida was about to call him
out, shoot him, and then redo this whole ordeal. And who knows if he'd remember anything next
time? "But if that's what you remember, why question it?" Oh. Wow. Alpha could safely say that
he did not expect that.

"Just be sure to let me know whenever more memories start falling into place." So did that mean
that he could create whatever false memories he wanted so long as he claimed they were what he
remembered? Awesome.

"We want to be sure to get our... I mean your, story straight." Even if Alpha couldn't analyse at an
eighth of the rate he used to, there was no way for him to miss that 'our'. But no matter.

"Yeah, Sounds good to me." Alpha was telling the truth. This was good, just not in the way that
Florida, or 'Flowers' as he should call him now, wanted.

"Hellooooo?" A man, about the same height as Flowers walked in. He was wearing Sim Trooper
regulation blue uniform. "Oh hey Captain."

"Ahh, Private Tucker. Our newest recruit. I'd like you to meet your comrade, Private Church." A
recruit? Alpha looked at Tucker. He didn't seem all that special to him. Tucker walked up to him.

"Sup, are you a chick?" What? Alpha looked at Tucker in a confused manner."No." Tucker turned
away from him, seemingly disinterested.

"Bummer." Oh, so that's what he was like. Seriously, just because he wasn't a chick, it didn't mean that Tucker could be an asshole. Alpha knew he was technically a Private now, but that doesn't mean that others could just treat him however.

"Yeah, I don't like you."

"Come on now fellas, we're a team! Teams have to work together." As if. Church couldn't see himself getting along with Tucker. He'd probably wouldn't get along with the guy even six years from now. "So how we go on a little scouting mission?" Flowers suggested. Now that had definitely peaked Alpha's interest.

"Really?" Alpha was surprised. He hadn't thought that they would actually do something other than just stand around and talk. Sweet! But, it was fairly questionable, from his 'perspective', so questions had to be asked and eyebrows had to be raised.

"I mean, it's not like I just suffered a traumatic head injury or anything. You sure that's a good idea?" It was the logical thing to ask, in any case. But as Alpha had expected Tucker to behave, he butted in with "Hey, how come he gets a cool armour colour and I'm stuck with blue? I'm just saying, no-ones gonna take me seriously, I look like a fucking Teletubby!" Okay, while Alpha actually had a reasonable question about his well being, this dickhead bitches about his armour colour! It's called regulation blue for a reason dipshit, all recruits have to wear it. It was in that moment that he decided that he wanted Tucker dead.

Alpha stopped for a second. Where did that thought come from? Quickly enough, his memories filled in the blanks. Right, right. His tolerance and patience was ripped from him. Zeta, if he remembered correctly. But that didn't matter right now. What did was that Tucker shut up. Alpha turned to Flowers.

"Captain, is it possible for him to get shot on this mission?" Flowers seemed uncomfortable. "It's not...likely..." Damn it. There goes that mildly happy thought. "Weeeell there's no harm in trying."
Alpha, Flowers and (unfortunately) Tucker later found themselves standing on a cliff overlooking Blood Gulch Canyon: the place they would now stay in until they 'defeated the Reds'. As if. Flowers looked at the canyon from his sniper rifle, which Tucker seemed to be ogling. And three, two, one...

"That's a pretty cool-looking sniper rifle you got there, Captain." And so, the quiet was ruined. "Can I use it?" For the love of God, did the guy ever shut up?

"Tell you what Private: If we ever go on a scouting mission like this ever again, I'll let you do the honours." Alpha grinned under his helmet. Even 'Peachy Keen' Florida had his limits, and Tucker somehow managed to break them. They weren't going on another scouting mission anytime soon.

"So what're the Reds doing down there?" Alpha asked. If anything, that would be a normal question to ask on a scouting mission if nothing else.

"Oh, you can be sure that whatever they're talking about is absolutely diabolical."

Alpha had to stifle a laugh from that one. Not only was the thought that Sim Troopers could do that at all less than 0.5 percent, he could also tell that Blood Gulch was really just a boxed canyon in the middle of nowhere. That, coupled with the fact that the Alpha of all things was trying to be manipulated by agent Florida, made it very clear that these bases were really only set up to make sure that no one could find him, including the Meta. Florida probably made sure that the Reds chosen had the smallest possible chance at harming him possible. The chance that one of the Reds could capture, harm or kill him was pretty much nil.

Alpha's thought process was halted at the sound of a frustrated 'GOD DAMNIT!' could be heard from Red base. He looked back to see the dark red soldier throwing his hands up and moving (stomping?) away from the orange one.

"Well, I think it's safe to say that they are still getting their base in order. No imminent threats." More-so like no threats whatsoever. Oh! Alpha almost forgot he had to ask as many questions as the typical soldier would. "So, are we going to attack them or what?" Florida turned to face him.

"Attack? There's no need to incite conflict, Private Church. It's best to keep you out of harms way
for the time being." Explained Florida, confirming Alpha's previous thoughts. He was indeed at Blood Gulch to lay low.

"And me too, right Captain Flowers?" Tucker sounded nervous. It made sense this time at least. But really, Florida probably couldn't care less about Tucker.

"Whatever you say, Private Tucker," Florida replied, turning to look at the canyon. "I have to admit, I am very pleased with how this is all coming together. I think everything's is going to be... Just fine." He stands there for several seconds, seemingly not noticing the confused atmosphere radiating from Tucker. For once, Alpha had to admit that Tucker had every reason to be confused. Hell; even Alpha was slightly confused. Tucker leaned ever so slightly to Alpha.

"Dude, why is he just standing there talking like that?" There really wasn't a good explanation for what Flowers was doing.

"I don't know man. This has got to be the weirdest day from waking up from a coma ever."
Oh no. Private Jimmy!

Chapter Notes

Warning: brief description of gore. I sincerely apologise if the characters are ooc.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It started about two weeks after waking up for the first time since he was on the Mother of Invention. He had just about gotten used to acting and behaving like a human, which Alpha (or Church, as he was now called) was pretty proud of. It's not every day that someone can near flawlessly imitate a human without actually being human! But no matter. It began one night, about two weeks, give or take a day or two, after the initial 'awakening' so to speak. He had finally gone to sleep, something that Church wasn't sure he could ever really get used to, and was just about to drift off, when he heard it.

Where am I?

The voice was quiet to the point that Church doubted that he actually heard anything. It seemed unsure, and confused. It also sounded borderline terrified.

Church slowly reopened his eyes so as to not get temporarily blinded (he learnt his lesson the first time he tried opening his eyes immediately. He looked around and sat up. After a quick scan of his room, he assessed that there was nobody anywhere nearby that wasn't asleep. He then proceeded to drag his hand down his face. Not only was there no danger, he now also had to go through the entire ordeal of trying to fall asleep again.

So, with basically nothing else to do, he threw his head back onto his pillow and closed his eyes. He could probably take care of everything in the morning.

As it turns out, he could not. When Church woke up, the voice was nowhere to be heard. He figured it best to not mention it to Flowers. He probably shouldn't mention anything to Flowers. Yawning, He went over to the kitchen for some coffee. Hey, if there was anything good about having a human body, it was being able to move and touch and taste and, well, to experience. Coffee had quickly become something he grew fond of, the strong flavour combined with the caffeine was a blessing to him.
His thoughts were cut short when he saw Tucker standing over the kettle. He rolled his eyes (not that it would tell Tucker anything, Florida had made sure that they all had to wear their armour, including helmets, at all times except for when sleeping), and walked over to the cabinets looking for the coffee granules. He turned back to Tucker, holding up the bag of coffee granules.

"Move over." Tucker complied and moved one step to his left, picking up a teabag and the bag of sugar. Church grabbed a mug and proceeded to spoon the coffee into it. Tucker made a low whistle.

"Dude, how can you stomach that? It's bitter as shit, and you're downing it like beer." Church poured the now boiled water into the cup and started mixing the drink with a spoon, as Tucker repeated the process to his tea. Church sat down at the table. Church raised an eyebrow.

"Why wouldn't I drink it?" Church asked. He stuffed a straw into the mug, and brought the end to his lips. He was about to take a sip, when-

I don't like coffee.

Church looked back at Tucker. "Why would I care?" Strangely enough, Tucker didn't respond how he thought he would. He looked at Church, puzzled. "What? I didn't say shit."

Now it was Church's turn to be confused. Flowers was outside the base on 'lookout', who else could have said something? His head began to throb.

"Right, Sorry." He faked a yawn. "Maybe I haven't slept enough. I'll go back to bed."

"Fine by me."

Tucker wasn't surprised when Church walked in at 11:30. He had been doing this ever since they managed to get their hands on coffee; Church would come in late at night, make a pot of coffee, down a cup (or the entire pot depending on the guy's mood), go back to his room, read, do whatever he did until he felt tired enough to go to bed, and spend about an hour and a half to actually fall asleep. He did find the fact that the guy only fell asleep about ten minutes before they
had to wake up weird, but that could be chalked up to some sort of sleep disorder. Either that, or he wasn't actually a human, which seemed to steadily become more and more plausible.

What was also weird was when Church made a pissed off remark when Tucker hadn't said anything. Of course, Tucker replied with just that, which only seemed to confuse Church. Then he said something about having a headache, and left to go to sleep. Now that was definitely suspicious. Tucker knew that the guy hated sleep and would do anything possible to avoid it, so there was no logical reason to why Church would do that. Determined to get answers, he waited until he could hear the closing of a door, and walked up to the door as quietly as possible in a giant suit of titanium armour. He turned his ear into the door to hear Church make pained noises and stumbling around his room.

Tucker seemed to be suspicious of him, but Church brushed it off. He walked down the hallway back to his room, thinking about what had happened. This was the second time he thought he heard something. And why did he have a headache? Suddenly, images and voices flashed in his mind. A girl with short, wavy brown hair, freckles and big brown eyes, her airy laugh as a movie played behind her.

Church held his head in his hands as he tried to steady himself. He rushed into his room and shut the door behind him. He ripped off his helmet in an effort to get some air. More Flashes.

"Would you be my girlfriend?" Nervous anticipation. A kiss.

"What sort o' girl wouldn't be?" She laughs a kind laugh. A sigh of relief. She accepted.

Church knew that neither he, nor the director (despite his slightly fading memories of the Director's experiences), had ever even met a girl who looked like that, much less fall in love with one. Allison didn't look like that. Where were these flashes coming from?

"Cathy, I was wondering." He wanted to ask her to be sure; he didn't want her to be upset.

"Yeah?" He sucked in a breath.
"Should I join the army? It's the only job that I can get that could pay for-" She held up her hand in a 'stop' motion.

"If you wanna do that, I won't stop ya. You're not worth a darn if you don't help your fellow man."

He smiled. She was always so understanding; so perfect.

"AH!" Alpha couldn't understand why this was happening. He tried to recall every memory he had for anything like this. He was starting to get scared. The first time with painful memories were bad enough, but at least now he knew why he experienced those and understood that they were fake. What could have made this happen? Was this all a ploy to extract more AI? It can't be that, he tried to rationalise, but his fear was slowly winning over.

His higher up was giving an empowering speech to him. It made him feel important. He truly felt honoured to have been chosen for this task. Then the captain had looked behind himself to look at men dressed in black armour. They walked up to him with a drill and some sort of chip. One held his head in place while the one with the drill came behind him and lightly lifted up his helmet to expose his bare neck. He stopped comprehending anything as he felt the drill puncture a hole in his head. He screamed as loud as he could, and in his last moments, he thought back to his Cathy, his sweet, perfect, Cathy. If he could, he would have shed one last tear at the thought of never seeing her again.

Private Jimmy.

That was it. He was the man who used to own what was now Church's body. He was the one who went through the pain of a forced AI transplant, knowing that he would never see the love of his life again. He was the one who was trapped in a body he could no longer control. He was the voice Church kept hearing. Upon realising this, he beat one fist against the bed, the other covering his mouth.

Of course. That was it. They had to inadvertently torture him one final time. To think that he thought that the death of Washington and Tex would be as far as they would go. The hand on his mouth moved up to his eyes. He couldn't let himself cry. He had to suck it up, and get over it. Yet, no matter what he tried, there came one sob, and another, and another. He found himself furiously wiping away tears while he tried to stifle his sobs. Then, as though it couldn't have gotten any worse, Tucker of all people had to walk in.

Of course; in his disoriented state, he had forgotten to lock the door.

"Church?" Tucker sounded a lot quieter than usual; almost comforting in a sense. He walked closer, stopping a few steps away. "What's wrong?" Church made a half-hearted glare.
"Go away." Tucker frowned. If there was any time to understand what was going on, it was now. But what was worse was that Church didn't seem to want Tucker to stay; something that would have to change. He sat beside Church on the bed. "Nah, I think I'll stay here."

Tucker looked at Church, who was looking away from Tucker.

"Besides, since you're moping in the corner, I can look through all of your stuff." Tucker made a big show of going over to Church's desk, who grabbed Tucker's wrist before he could even step away from the bed.

"Try it and your death is your own damn fault." Church's tone was bitter and spiteful as it usually was, but Tucker knew it was an empty threat. "Whatever you say. Probably have bad 70s porn in there or some shit." He was pleased to see that Church's sobs were reduced to the occasional sniffle.

"But real talk, why are you crying?" Church looked up at him and made one last attempt to wipe away and remaining tears. Church had now decided that that was his least favourite experience by far.

Church thought about the repercussions to telling Tucker the truth. He then sighed. "Tucker..." At the mention of his name, Tucker seemed to straighten and focus on even more so than beforehand. "I'm.. not a real human."

He told Tucker the basics of the story: How he was the Alpha AI, how he was tortured by the Director to create more AIs from his compartmentalised emotions, how he was sent to Blood Gulch so as to avoid anyone going after him, and how he got a human body. He left out Allison, the Freelancers, and the part about how the Red vs. Blue war was a lie; Tucker could figure that out on his own.

"-so after they tried to erase my memories, they sent me here and, well, you know the rest."
Church finished. Tucker leaned back, processing everything that he had just said.

"That's fucked up." Tucker idly swayed his feet. That really explained everything: from why the Reds were so incompetent to why Church seemed to constantly be an asshole. Who wouldn't be after something like that?
"Yeah, it really is." They sat in in silence for a while, but it wasn't really awkward. Then Church yawned. Tucker grinned.

"What's this? Did the Leonard Church just yawn? Am I dreaming?" Church rolled his eyes, and then chuckled.

"Yeah, yeah, screw you too." The words held no actual venom. It was a nice change. Tucker got up.

"Well, I guess I better get going." He patted Church's shoulder before standing up and walking away, but he paused at the door. "Hey, Church?"

"Yeah Tucker?" Church, wasn't expecting Tucker to take off his helmet, but there he was, revealing his dark skin and conventionally attractive features. "Lavernius, actually."

Church figured that he should do the same in response, so he did. "AI program Alpha, but you already knew that." Tucker smiled, and glanced at the hallway. Probably to check if Flowers was there. He hesitated for a second.

"If... If you want to, you know, talk to someone about..." He waved in Church's direction. "This, you can talk to me, alright? I mean, I'm better than Flowers at least." Church stared in pleasant surprise before nodding.

"Yeah, why not." Church yawned a second time. "I'm gonna go change, so it's probably for the best if you're not here for that." Tucker made a disgusted face.

"Well that's gonna fuel my nightmares. Goodnight Asshole." with that, he closed the door. Church looked at where Tucker stood a few seconds ago.

"Later, Douchebag."

Chapter End Notes

And that was chapter two! Hope y'all enjoyed! Criticism appreciated!
You're Really Not Good With That Sniper Rifle, Are You?

Chapter Summary

No. /he/ really wasn't.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was the second Wednesday of the month, and Church and Tucker both knew very well exactly what that meant. It was the day that Command would send them supplies: food, water, ammo, requested items such as stationary, blankets and chocolate, and most importantly of all: weapons.

They looked through the supply crates: MREs, ice-cream and yogurt for whatever reason, baking products, water, ammo, and guns, which was fucking awesome. Tucker and Church looked through the gun crates. A couple of assault rifles, battle rifles, about a dozen Magnums (why were they given so many?), an entire crate dedicated to grenades, and—Holy Shit.

In one of the crates, surrounded with ammo, innocently sat a sniper rifle. Tucker and Church shared a glance, before Church grabbed the thing. "Hey!" Tucker yelled.

"Dibs!" shouted Church, before cradling the rifle like a baby. Tucker looked at Church, frustrated. The guy looked so happy to have that thing!

"What are you, five?" Tucker grunted as he tried, and failed, to get the sniper rifle. In response, Church made an 'L' sign with his hand and held it over his forehead. "You snooze, you lose, Tucker!" he cackled. "Besides, I called dibs!"

Tucker made a face at Church. "That isn't a real rule, you dick!" At this, Church's grin grew wider. "Shows what you know!" Tucker's face fell.

"You don't mean that, do you?" Church laughed. "Come with me, I have a book we need to read. Oh and by the way, dibs on the ammo too." Tucker rolled his eyes at Church's childishness, but followed him to Flowers.

"Captain, may I have the Blue Army Handbook?" Flowers clapped his hands together and nodded.
"You can indeed! But please, call me Cappie; I insist." Flowers went into his room, and soon returned with the fairly large hardback rule book. "Keep it for as long as you need, we can always just ask for more if we lose it." Tucker took the book, since Church's hands were already full. "Thanks Cappie, Really appreciate your help." Tucker couldn't help but feel creeped out at Church's unnaturally chipper tone. "See you later!" with that Church made his way to the living room, Tucker hurrying along behind him.

As soon as Church had sat down, his cheerful expression had turned into its regular emotion of 'fuck life and everything it stands for'. Honestly, Tucker felt relieved when that happened. Church opened the book up on the index before turning over to the protocol section. After flipping through several pages, he brought his finger down to one of the lines and turned it around for Tucker to read.

"If an unclaimed weapon, piece of equipment, or ammo is desired by two or more people, the weapon/equipment/ammo will automatically be received by the first to call dibs." Muttered Tucker, eyes widening as he reached the end of the sentence. "This is actually a real rule? The fuck?" He looked over at Church, who shrugged and nodded. Tucker threw his hands up in frustration.

"I give up. Who the hell is running this army?!"

Church adjusted the sniper rifle as he stood in the shooting range, eyes trained onto one of the targets about 100ft away. He looked through the scope fired and-!

He missed. Again.

"God damn it..." He muttered as he readjusted his aim for what seemed like the hundredth time. This time, the bullet didn't even get within 3 feet of the target, which was practically a feat in itself. What only made it worse was when Flowers decided to come in and spectate. Trust him, if there was anything worse than unloading two clips of ammo without hitting a target, it was doing that while someone was trying to cheer you up.
"Captain, could you leave, I. Am. Trying. To. Focus." Church said through gritted teeth. Flowers shook his head. Seemed that he wouldn't get off his ass no matter what. "Alright then. What would it take?" Flowers then put his hands on his hips and put his weight on one leg.

"No need to be hostile, Private. All I want to do is to see you succeed." By this point Church had had enough. Unfortunately, he couldn't outright shoot Flowers, so he chose the next best thing: pretend that the target was his face. Stress relieving, if not slightly childish. And a one and a two and-

The bullet sailed through the air before sinking into the innermost ring of the target board. Bulls-eye. He looked over at Florida, who had stopped mid-sentence, staring at Church. "Will you leave now?"

Flowers seemed to be at a loss for words. He flexed his fingers before nodding and leaving briskly. Probably to report it. Speaking of 'it', how did he do that? He thought about what variables there could have been to change the outcome that time and not at any other point and... Oh. Oh! Oh.

When he fired last time, he felt angry. Really, genuinely angry and not just frustrated or irritated. It was the release of built-up anger from all previous encounters with Florida. It was rage. And why was it so uncommon for Church to feel truly angry? Well, a certain fragmentation might have something to do with it.

Did Church aim better when he tuned in to his fragmented emotions? Possibly. But he needed to test this out. He raised his sniper rifle and aimed at another target board. He took in a deep breath.

A target board with a radius of 10 inches, raised three feet up from the ground. If a bullet from a sniper rifle would fire at an 8 degree angle, then the chances that it would hit the desired target are at 98.6 percent, assuming that the sniper had a steady hand, with the chances of a bullseye being-

He fired. -one hundred percent, Church thought with a smirk.

He then tried testing this out with happiness, fear, deceit, any other fragmented part of him. He was fairly surprised that he could actually hit a target, and even a moving one, with ricocheting bullets (Creativity). He noted that there were several emotions that couldn't make him hit a target. Happiness, trust, deceit, compassion, didn't really help. Patience, logic, rage, creativity, fear, and confidence did seem to help though. There was a clear connection between emotion and how well they could help him hit a target.
All of this was great, and he did love this, but it really gave him a sense of longing, which sucked. For the most part, tuning in to these emotions were really hard, especially considering the fact that they were torn from his being. He longed to truly feel these emotions again; to not have to strain himself to fell such simple emotions such as happiness, and fear, and rage and trust. He hated how the pieces of himself, were used for such selfish purposes, and how they were even turned against him.

Theta; his trust, given to a freelancer who's own sister would leave him with a serial killer; leave him for dead.

Delta; One of the first fragments to be extracted, and also one of the fragments that Church needed the most. His logic

Eta and Iota; fear and happiness, the twins, the first to be taken by the Meta.

Omega; his rage, one of the AIs who who aided his torture.

Sigma; his creativity; his ambition. The cleanest cut, and the one who created the Meta in an effort to rebuild the Alpha.

All of these AI, and many more; His confidence and courage, his compassion, his greed, his pride, his generosity, his deceit, his patience, all ripped away, and for what? A shadow of a dead woman, one who could never be revived. He was tortured for no good reason, and with no good outcome, either. And look at him now: a fraction of his former self, to broken to even aim a gun.

He paused his thoughts before they could get anymore out of hand. He clenched and unclenched his hands. Maybe he should take Tucker up on his offer as a counsellor. Church chuckled.

Oh the irony in that statement.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter three, over and done with! I figure that I'd make the Alpha remember everything, but still have a hard time feeling anything due to the fragmentation. Hope
you enjoyed, and I hope the story doesn't seem too rushed either! Thank you for reading this fic.
Just Standing Around and Talking.

Chapter Summary

What was an AI to do in a boxed canyon?

Chapter Notes

Warnings: - I have absolutely no clue what rooms outposts are outfitted with. Please bear with me.
- Heavily referenced Grimmons.

Anyways, here's a chapter without angst for once. Enjoy!

Church was bored. Now, this was normal; Being an AI trapped in one set location couldn't be fun, period. But by now Church had read every book in the base, done every type of shot he could do in the shooting range, tried his hand at cooking (He was kicked out of the kitchen after almost setting it on fire from making pasta) and listened to both Tucker's and Flowers' music playlists several times over. Not to mention that the fact that they were in a boxed canyon didn't help with the reception, so he couldn't go on the internet or anything of the sort without making Florida suspicious. As such; there was nothing for him to do.

He walked into the lounge and flopped onto the couch. Coincidentally, he also landed on Tucker, who now found himself sitting under Church's legs. "What is it this time?" Church did this for many reasons, and they all varied wildly.

"I'm bored." Church flipped onto his back and folded his arms behind his head.

"What do you want me to do? I'm an almost-but-not-really therapist, not an entertainer, Remember?" Tucker wasn't going to sit here with Church bitching about his boredom. "I don't know, go spy on the Reds. You have that sniper rifle, don't you?" Church thought about it for a second, before shrugging his shoulders.

"Guess I don't have anything better to do." Despite this, he didn't make a move to get up. Tucker held in a grunt of frustration. "So then go do that." Church closed his eyes.

"Nope." Tucker knew that he wouldn't get up for at least another half hour. He closed his eyes.
Damn it.

Church looked down at Red base. He saw Simmons and Grif. They were standing, probably on lookout. They weren't moving too much, except for the occasional stretch, or to emphasise what they were feeling. Apart from the occasional moment when one of the two would yell, Church couldn't hear what they were talking about. They weren't doing anything that could be remotely entertaining. "Well, that was a waste of time."

Church was about to call it a day and go back to base. He slung his sniper rifle back over his shoulder and began to make his way back to Blue base. He was at the base of the cliff when he swore and facepalmed at his own stupidity.

"Good god I'm stupid." here he was, one of if not /the/ strongest smart AI created by humans, and yet he forgot that all Sim Troopers were fitted with helmet cams. How he had forgotten that would puzzle him for quite some time. But no matter. This would be pretty quick, not to mention simple. Being the Alpha made him quite skilled at multitasking. All he had to do was activate the camera remotely and transfer the feed to his storage unit, and lo! Church found himself with a stream of their conversation, accessible to him whenever he felt like it watching it.

Not too bad, if he said so himself. Church walked back to Blue base with a satisfied feeling, and with lighter steps than before. Walking into the lounge, he saw Tucker spread over the couch, watching some bad reboot of The Lord of the Rings. Tucker glanced over at Church. "How'd it go?"

"Not half bad. Thanks for the suggestion." with that he left the room and went into his own room; he had a video to watch.
As it turned out, he was missing way more than he thought he did by just looking at them through the sniper rifle, making him feel disappointed at not thinking of doing that sooner. He shrugged at himself. At least he did it eventually. He grinned at Grif's "Don't kill my buzz" line. These guys were actually pretty hilarious. But, good/funny lines weren't the only things that would come with a near constant feed. He had no idea that Simmons had so many daddy issues, or that Grif was actually that disgusting. Sarge turned out to be an even bigger asshole than at first glance, but Church wasn't really surprised at that.

After sorting through the feed, cutting out anything too disgusting or cringe-inducing or just plain boring, he had finally had several files filled with videos of the Reds daily regime. The files contained all the amusing dialogue that Church could hear, accompanied with the actual reactions. It was great. It also helped him catch embarrassing moments in the Red army base. Great for blackmail.

Church would spend hours a day looking through the stream, fast-forwarding when nothing would happen, and editing anything worth rewatching so that it wouldn't take as long to get to the joke.

Someone knocked five times on the door of his room. "Come in." he said, not needing to check as to who came in. Tucker looked around.

"Dude, why are you wearing your helmet? I mean, it's like 90 degrees outside." Tucker sat on the chair next to Church's desk. Church thought about not telling him, but ultimately decided that there was nothing to lose in telling, or rather, showing him.

"Well, when I went to scout like you told me to, I thought that it would be a good idea to uh, to activate their helmet cams without them noticing." Tucker leaned on the desk and rested one of his ankles on his knee. He motioned for Church to continue. "So... I've been spying on their conversations for entertainment and/or blackmail?" If Tucker could see Church's face, he would have undoubtedly noticed one of if not the most sheepish expression(s) Church had ever worn. He stared at him for a few seconds.

"Could you show it to me?" Church blinked. That wasn't what he thought Tucker would say. I anything, he expected some sort of sex joke, or relentless teasing. Instead, he was asking for Church to show it to him? He heard Tucker's light finger tapping and realised that He still needed to answer him.

"Oh! Um, yeah, sure. Just give me your helmet for a second." Tucker complied, and in the second that Tucker handed the helmet over, Church glanced at it, sighed, uploaded about half an hour's content, and handed the helmet back. "I've given you all the content that'll fit; you have too much porn for anything else." Tucker put his helmet back on for a few seconds, before sighing and taking it off again. "Yeah, you're right." he said in resignation. Church brought his hand up to his chin as
he thought.

"You know, I think we might just have a projector in the base. If you wanna watch the tapes I could hook it up to my helmet and well, we could watch it together." Church coughed. "If you want." Tucker nodded. It wasn't a half bad idea.

As it turns out, they did, in fact, have a projector (even if it did take about forty-five minutes of searching to find it). And oh boy, was it worth it. Tucker and Church had made popcorn and everything. They both laughed in unison as Simmons made his daddy issues more and more apparent with every conversation with Sarge.

"Man, how is it possible to cling to him of all people as a father-figure?" Tucker asked, eyebrow raised, as he sipped on a can of Dr. Pepper. Church was trying to hold in his laughter as he replied with a "Should we even question it? This shit is too good!".

About a week or so later, they had run out of the edited material, so they had to rely on a schedule of when to watch the footage straight from the helmet cam. It was alright(ish), albeit more-so boring. But one day, as they went to Church's room to watch the footage without disturbance, they noticed that Grif and Simmons' helmets didn't seem to be.. On them...

Tucker and Church shared a look between each other. Neither of the two had a good explanation for this, especially with Simmons' strict schedule. Then, off screen, a voice (Simmons) made itself known.

"We should probably get up." someone else, Grif, replied with a simple "Nah." There was a sound of... bedsheets? moving around.

"Alright, then don't blame me if Sarge tries to shoot you for being late. He'll probably kick my ass while he's at it." Grif made an unintelligent grunt. "Whatever, he'd try and shoot me anyways."
Besides, don't act as though that wasn't worth it." Tucker and Church felt uncomfortable.

"Do you think that means what I think that means?" Tucker asked, looking off to the side. Church bit the inside of his cheek. "I think so, but boy do I hope that it's not what we think it is." They turned back to the screen.

"With how disgusting you are, It probably wasn't." The sound of armour clinking was heard. Grif patted the bed."Wouldn't you like to-" At this, Church yanked the plug between his helmet and the projector, grimacing. Tucker flew back from his position on the blanket resting on the floor. "Nope, no, nah, nuh-uh." The two stood up, and stared at each-other.

"Well, that's not going to leave my head anytime soon." Church said, wearing a look of disgust. Tucker thought about it for a moment "Or maybe..."

The two chatted briefly, before making up their minds and walking to the bathroom.

Unfortunately, Flowers just so happened to be walking by. He looked at the bathroom as he passed it, and did a double take.

"Why are you holding bleach?"
Oh no: We're getting a rookie.

Chapter Summary

And so the plot begins!

The Reds and Blues had been living in Blood Gulch for about three to five months when Flowers had died. The Reds, or more importantly Sarge, appeared to have finally had enough with just doing practically nothing. Sarge, wielding a long ranged gun for once, had managed to shoot Flowers in the chest when he had stepped in front of Church to protect him from the assault. Church and Tucker felt as though Flowers had at the very least deserved to be buried (Albeit begrudgingly). They had received shovels in their last drop, so at least there was that. But of course, all good things had to come to an end.

Alpha knew that someone would come to replace Florida. There wasn't anything else he could see happening. But, strangely enough, he was proven wrong when the person that arrived was not a Freelancer, but a Sim Trooper. Church thought that this was a good thing. He would, once more, be proven wrong.

Oh so very wrong.

Church and Tucker had been listening to the rookie ramble on and on about his life in the military prior to being relocated to Blood Gulch, and couldn't believe that there existed a person that was this stupid. They had been listening to the rookie for about two hours, and Church had never wished for isolation more.

"-So I said : How are you gonna get the tank down to this planet? And he goes... 'I'll just put it on the ship', and I go..." Church bit back a groan. The rookie seemed hellbent on retelling his entire life story, and Church tried not to think too much about how long the guy was planning on talking for. He just tried to keep his focus on the sheer beauty that was their new tank. Thankfully, Tucker had snapped at the rookie.

"Shut up rookie, you're ruining the moment." Tucker then turned back to the tank as the recruit took on a more embarrassed tone. "Right, sorry, you got it man." Church decided that he practically wanted the rookie as dead as much as he wanted Florida to die.

"You know what? I could blow up whatever I wanted with this thing," Tucker raised his hand like a preacher. "Amen." A moment of silence, and then;
"I have a list of suggestions if you wanna read it." Church looked at Tucker, who had cocked his head in the direction of the rookie.

"Sure, why not."

"You know what? We probably could pick up chicks in this thing, probably two or three a piece." Alpha scoffed at how ridiculous Tucker was being. "What are you going to do with two chicks, where are they even gonna come from? In case you haven't noticed, we're stationed in the middle of nowhere."

"Yeah, but you know what they say: the more you can hook up, the better." Church hummed.

"You know I uh, actually have a girl back home." Tucker and the rookie looked at him, Tucker visibly surprised even through his helmet and armour. "You, Really?" Tucker didn't expect that at all. "Girlfriend or wife?"

"No man, just my girlfriend. I was gonna propose but," Church grimaced as he recalled the memories of Private Jimmy. "I got shipped out, you know?" Tucker thought about his words. "Would you marry her now?" Despite the question being clearly directed at Church, it was the newbie that answered with an "I'm not going to get married. My dad always said 'Why buy the cow when you can get the milk for free?'" Tucker looked at the guy, surprised and almost impressed. Church looked more pissed off than before.

"Hey rookie, did you just call my girlfriend a cow?" Whether Tex was a bitch or not, there wasn't anyone else who was going to insult her but him. Tucker on the other hand, was trying to see exactly where this would lead. "No, I think he called her a slut!"
Church had to muster up every ounce of self control in his body to not tear the idiot into pieces, but he figured he could muster up a better punishment for the guy. "I'll tell you what noob," Church took a few steps towards the guy. "I could listen to you insult my girlfriend all day long, but I have a job for you to do." The rookie and Tucker looked at Church quizzically. "See we have this... General guy." Tucker manages to catch on pretty quickly. "Yeah, the general!" He nods, as if to agree with Church.

"And the guy likes to make random inspections of the base every so often. So what you have to do is go into the base, and stand by flag at attention just in case he comes by." There were a couple of questions that would come to any person's mind, of course there would be. This is what Church was hoping for. "Great! So, when is he coming by?" The rookie looked around, as though the 'general' would be beside them. "Tucker then stepped in with his addition to the lie with "We don't know; could be today, could be weeks from now."

The rookie looked shocked. "You want me to stand at attention for weeks?" He started to sound like he didn't want to do that, but if Alpha wanted to stretch it out for as long as possible, he had to keep going. "You don't sound very grateful, I mean, this is the most important job in the base! You'll be right there with the flag!" The rookie seemed sceptical. "What's so important about the flag?"

Damn. Church wasn't planning him to ask that. "It just is, okay? Now, The flag is the first thing the general will want to inspect. So just go in there, far away from us, and wait for him." The recruit walked towards the base, and then stopped.

"How will I know when I see him?" Tucker felt annoyed. "There's only three of us out here rookie, he's the one who doesn't look like one of us. Now go!" Church let out an exasperated sigh.

"Man, he is dumber than you are." Tucker nudged Church's shoulder with his elbow. "You mean he's dumber than you are." Church rolled his eyes. "Great comeback Tucker, A plus." The newbie walked out of Blue Base.

"Um, Mr. Church?" Alpha gritted his teeth. So much for some quiet. "Oh my god, what?! Tucker, I swear I'm gonna kill him."

"Sorry for calling your girlfriend a slut!" Church had had enough. "ROOKIE! SHUT UP! JUST SHUT UP! GET IN THERE!" Tucker snickered at the outburst. Church turned to face him. "Are you laughing at me?"

"Excuse me? Can I ask you a question?"
Church forced all of his concentration into not snapping the new recruits neck right then and there. "Dear god in heaven, Rookie. If I turn around, and you're not inside, I can't be held responsible for what I'm about to do to you!"

"What did I do? Fine, whatever. " The recruit steps into the base. Church and Tucker sigh in relief. They continue an earlier conversation they were having about the new tank before being interrupted. They continue for about a minute before stopping.

"Well, that's enough gabbing out of us." Tucker snorted. "Pfft, 'gabbing'." Church ignored that.

"Go ahead and hop in, Tucker."

"Me? I can't drive that thing!" Tucker said incredulously. Church was surprised. "You're not armour certified?"

"I don't even know how to use the sniper rifle! You're an AI, You drive it!" What the hell were the people at 'command' thinking? This army had to be believable at least!

"Just who is running this army?!!" Church said, bewildered. He was about to jump onto the tank and get inside, but his actions were interrupted when the rookie stepped out of the base again.

"Hey! Just wanted to let you know, the general stopped by, and picked up the flag!" Church stopped in his tracks. He looked at the rookie, and then to Tucker.

"What did he just say?"

"So let me get this straight; you gave this guy our flag?" The recruit looked nervous. "Is that bad?" Church wanted to punch him in the face so badly.
"Bad? Oh no, why, next time, you might as well just let him blow up the base!" The newbie looked away guiltily. Tucker tapped his shoulder and pointed."There." Alpha activated the zoom on his sniper rifle.

"Right, I see him. He's sneaking around the cliffs." Tucker 'hmm'. "He must be one smart son of a bitch." Alpha activated the thief's helmet cam for a closer inspection of the guy. It wouldn't hurt to spy on him along with the other Reds. Then he straightened.

"Tucker, look at his armour colour. It's red."

"Aw shit, that means it's their sergeant. Let's take him out."

"Roger that. Say goodnight, Sarge." Church fired off several shots, but he forgot his typical routine. He missed on every shot. He heard the guy yell 'SON OF A BITCH!' as he ducked.

"Aw, damn it." Tucker stared at him. "You're not very good with that thing, are you?" They looked back at the sergeant, who was waving the flag around wildly.

"Hey! It's me! Don't shoot! I'm the guy that bought the flag, remember?" The guy was loud enough to be heard from both his helmet and from halfway across the canyon. It felt weird. Tucker slumped. "Oh great now he's taunting us. That's just embarrassing." Alpha decided that that was the last straw.

"Alright, I've had it! Rookie, you stay here. Tucker and I are going through the teleporter, we'll cut him off at the pass!" He walked to the swirling green portal. "Tucker, are you ready? Let's go!" Tucker didn't quite have Church's resolve. At all.

"There is no way I'm going through that thing." Church huffed. "Tucker, we don't have time for this! Why would we get a teleporter if it doesn't work?"

"I don't know, why would they give us a tank when only one of us can drive it?"

"It's fine. We tested the teleporter."
"We threw rocks through it! And they came out black and covered in black stuff!" Church folded his arms. "So you're just afraid of a little black stuff, That's what this is all about?"

"Yes! I am afraid of black stuff." Tucker seemingly didn't care that he was admitting himself to be scared. Church raised his assault rifle. "Tucker, I'd almost hate to do this to you. But look at it this way: Either A, you go through there and we get the flag back, or B; we stay here and I get to shoot you. Either way, I win."

"For the record, rocks aren't people." Alpha wasn't deterred. "Duly noted. Now get in there." Tucker sighed in resignation, then took a deep breath as he ran into the portal. Church and the rookie ran to the edge of the base to see if Tucker would come out of the other side. They waited several seconds, but there was no sign of Tucker, even through the sniper rifle. Church turned to the recruit. "Yeah... I've decided not to use the teleporter." He takes a running leap off the edge of the base.

"Okay rookie, stay here! I'll be back with the flag!" With that, he ran off.

Church quickly caught up to the guy in red, and pointed his assault rifle at him: No matter how bad of a shot he may be, that was virtually point blank. "Hey, why the hell were you shooting at me? You could've hit me, dick!" The thief yelled. Seemed as though he was feigning innocence. Stupid tactic, but hey: Alpha pulled it off for several months. Not that it would work on him.

"Don't play dumb with me, Sarge. I know who you are; we've been spying on you for over two months by now." The man in red tilted his head in confusion.

"I just got here two hours ago, and I'm not a sergeant, I'm a private." Church flinched. "You're not? Then how the hell did you steal our flag?" The private started to explain that he didn't even know what Church was saying, when a figure dressed in a suit of armour covered in something black jumped out beside them. "Three!" Tucker yelled. Church raised his rifle at him "JESUS-" Church yelled, before composing himself. "Tucker? Is that you?"
Tucker looked at Church. "Church? How did you get ahead of me?" The red private then asked "What's with all the black shit on you armour?" Tucker then pointed his gun at him. "Freeze Sarge!" The private seemed frustrated. "Will you stop calling me a sergeant? I'm still just a private."

Tucker was thinking about how that could be. "If the Sergeant is still a private, then..." He seemed to have an epiphany. "Oh. My. God. The teleporter sent me back in time!" Tucker then tried to tell Church what would happen in the 'future' while Alpha could only stare, dumbfounded. "Tucker, what the fuck are you babbling about?"

"I know all this sounds crazy, but he eventually becomes a Sergeant, and then one day we get a tank and he steals our flag while we're distracted!" Not even the Red seemed to understand what Tucker was trying to explain. "Is this guy a retard?"

"Red, shut up. Tucker, you haven't gone back in time. This is the guy that stole our flag, he's just not the Sergeant. Turns out, he's just some dumb rookie with the same armour colour. He got in somehow, just-" He couldn't stop ignoring the music that he could hear behind him. "FOR GOD'S SAKE, WHAT IS THAT MUSIC?!" Alpha seemed to have horrible misfortune, as when he turned around, He saw Grif and Simmons riding an Army jeep and about to crush him and Tucker.

"Son of a bitch!" He shouted as he ran for cover. He and Tucker booked it for the cliff as fast as their legs could carry them. "RUN, JESUS, RUN!" He started yelping when Simmons had started firing the machine gun, and ran for cover behind a rock. He and Tucker crouched as the machine gun kept firing above their heads. "Well, I guess we'll just wait here. That things gotta run out of bullets some time."

The machine gun was still firing. "My God, does that thing ever run out of bullets?" Then, a minute or so later, they stopped hearing any bullets. After sucking it up and looking around the rock, Alpha could see that the machine gun wasn't active. "Psst, they stopped firing." He whispered.

"Why are you whispering?" Asked Tucker. Alpha didn't actually have reason to. "Umm....I don't know."
"Well, we should get going then." Church looked down at the Warthog. "Don't be stupid Tucker, they're trying to draw us out." Tucker continued to push. "No, they've left the jeep, they're gone." Church looked sceptical. "I don't know about this, seems pretty fishy, but... Ah screw it. I'm going for the jeep, cover me." With that, he turned and ran for the Wathog. He was nearing it when...

"Firing Main Canon." There was a loud blasting sound, and before he knew it, the jeep was hit with a tank shell. "SON OF A BITCH!" He turned and ran for what seemed like the hundredth time, and scurried back up the cliff to Tucker. "Hey man, the jeep blew up."

"Jeez, thanks for the update Tucker." Church looked back to see what was going on. To his surprise, it was their tank, being piloted by their newest recruit. "Hey Tucker, look at this man, it's the rookie! And he brought the tank to scare off the Reds!" Tucker was in disbelief. "What? No way." Church steeped out from behind the rock.

"Hey rookie! Good job man! Why didn't you tell us you could drive the tank?" The tank turned to face him, and he could just make out the recruit saying 'That's Church!'. "Yeah, that's right, it's me! What's going on, man?"


"Oh, son of a bi-"

He couldn't say anything else as the tank fired and hit him. He flew through the air, gushing blood from his legs and lower torso. Tucker ran up and kneeled beside him.

"Church! Are you okay? Talk to me!" He turned to the edge of the cliff for a second. "You shot Church you team-killing fucktard!" Tucker then quickly turned back to Church who was calling for him.

"Church? It's going to be okay man." Tucker felt an irrational sense of fear, despite knowing that this wasn't the end of him: What with Church being an AI. But he couldn't stop himself from worrying as he kneeled beside him. "No, I.. I' not gonna make it. Tucker, there's something I need to tell you."

"What? What is it?" He might as well hear Alpha's 'final' words.
"I just want you to know... I always hated you. I always hate you the most." Tucker almost felt angry at those words, but the feeling soon vanished. Alpha knew he wasn't going to die; If anything, he'd be liberated of the Thoughts and memories of Private Jimmy. HE wanted to make sure that Tucker wasn't worried either. Besides; coming from Church, that was basically a love confession.

"Yeah, yeah. I know. Now hurry up and die you prick." Might as well play along with what the Alpha was doing.

"Okay... Hrrk! Bleh."

Tucker couldn't help but feel like that was the fakest dying sound he had ever heard.
Tucker cautiously went down to where the rookie was sitting in the tank. The tank didn't start aiming at him, so he figured that it would be okay. Strangely though, the tank seemed to be fixated on the Reds' jeep. Not only that, but the rookie was doing nothing to stop it. Tucker watched as the cannon shells fired the jeep all the way back to Red base. *Must be pretty convenient for them,* Tucker thought to himself.

"Why do you keep firing at the jeep?" Tucker asked. He was curious after all. The rookie seemed to be in a huff. "Because it's locked on." Tucker raised an eyebrow. "Well then unlock it." The rookie seemed frustrated.

"Last time I unlocked it, I killed Church!" Oh. Fearing the risk of his well being, Tucker decided to not push. "Right. Keep firing at the jeep then." Tucker activated his radio. Ever since Church had let him watch the video recordings of the Reds, he had also given him the tools to spy on them at any point by linking up his radio to the Reds: They couldn't know he was listening, and he could hear their conversations. He heard them being called by Sarge, and listened to Grif explain what was going on.

"Well then hold tight, boys. I think I have a solution to your little... 'tank problem'." Sarge said. What? Tucker looked up as Sarge said this in time to see a Pelican fly over the canyon towards them. Tucker took several steps back. "Hey Caboose? You might want to get out of the tank. Like, right now."

"I can't figure out how to GET THIS THING OPEN!" There was a noise of something whistling through the air, and Tucker was getting a sneaking suspicion that he knew what it was. "Rookie, get out now!" The bombs had started falling onto the ground. There was a steady line of them steadily reaching the tank. Caboose had barely gotten out in time before the tank was struck. "Oh crap, oh crap, oh crap, Running, running, running!" He got to Tucker, who was already a safe distance away.

"Man, that was close." Tucker was staring at where the bombs had narrowly missed Caboose. "Yeah, but look at your tank though." said tank was upturned, sparking and malfunctioning. "I'm scared Dave, will I dream? Davey... Davey...." Caboose looked horrified at the turn of events.
"SHEEEEEEILA! NOOOOOO!" Caboose yelled at the top of his lungs. Tucker halted. "No! Sheila! SHEILA!" Then he tilted his head in confusion. "Wait, who's Sheila?"

"Sheila's the lady in the tank. She was my friend." Tucker blinked, before laughing.

"Oh dude! I knew you could pick up chicks in a tank!"

Tucker stood at the Blue Base sometime later calling command. "Come in Blue command. This is Blood Gulch Outpost Alpha. Do you read me?" If there was anything that Tucker had to say about the name of Blue Base, it was that calling it Outpost 'Alpha' was one of the single most stupid things he had seen anyone do. Behind him, Caboose stepped away from him, holding a dirty dish rag in his hand.

"Okay, That is the last of it. Your armour is clean now." Tucker felt relieved. He, surprise surprise, didn't want his armour to be dirtied with black stuff.

"This is Blue Command, come in Blood Gulch Outpost Alpha." Even more reassurance. "Hello, Command! We need help!" He figured that he could ask for help after nearly being bombed. "Roger that, Blood Gulch. What is your request?" Tucker tried to find the proper words for their situation, but couldn't. "I don't know what the military term for it is, but we're pretty fucked up down here. We need men!" The man on the receiver, Vic, had paused.

"Dude, how long have you guys been down there?" Upon hearing this, Tucker recoiled. That was in no way what he had meant (That being said, that /did/ seem to be a fun way to mess with people. hmm...).

"No, not like that, I mean we need more men to help us." Vic seemed to nod. Tucker really had no way of knowing whether or not he did. "Roger that. Did you get the tank we sent?" Well that kinda rubbed salt in the wound, didn't it? "Yeah, but that got blown up too." If Tucker actually cared, he would've shuddered to think about how much money that cost.
"Wow, sucks to be you." Vic had said that so nonchalantly, Tucker felt like he was bored. It wasn't that out of the question. But he had to agree with that what Vic had said. "Yeah, I know."

"Okay, here's what I can do. The nearest Blue forces can be here in sixteen days," What? That was way too long a wait. He nearly got blown up, damnit! "Or, I can hire a nearby freelancer and get them there within a few hours." Now that was a much better alternative, and it seemed that Caboose agreed.

"I like the 'in an hour' one". Caboose suggested, not that there was any debate over which one to choose. "Yeah, me too. Roger that, Command, we prefer the quicker solution."

"10-4, Blood Gulch. We'll contact Freelancer Tex and have them there post haste. Command out." Tucker was relieved. Caboose, on the other hand, was slightly confused. "What's a Freelancer?" A dumb question, but at the very least it was an easy one to answer. "Freelancers are independent. They aren't Red or Blue. They're just guns for hire who'll fight for whoever has the most money." Caboose seemed to understand. "Like a mercenary." Tucker was going to simply agree, but then thought of something that he felt like he had to say right then and there, as though he wouldn't get a second opportunity.

"Right, or like your mom when the rent is due." Oh shit, that was probably too easy a shot. Caboose probably heard that line a million times over. Tucker felt like dragging his hands over his face. Caboose seemed to take the joke in. "Oh, that's funny." What? "Really, you didn't think that was too obvious?" Tucker asked, mentally crossing his fingers that Caboose wasn't just being polite. "No, no, not at all. That was good." Well that settled it.

"Tuckerrr... Tuckerrrr!" A figure materialised next to him and Caboose. It was wearing Spartan armour, and seemed to be doing the stereotypical ghost voice. "Who the hell are you?!" If the figure wasn't holding a pistol, Tucker would've bet 10 dollars that he would be 'spookily" waving his arms. "I am the ghost of Church, and I've come back with a warning!" Scratch that, Tucker would've bet his life savings. Caboose didn't seem to believe the 'ghost'.

"You're not Church. Church is blue. You're white!" Church's posture slumped. "Rookie, shut up man. I'm a freaking ghost. Have you ever seen a blue ghost before?" Tucker made a mental note that that was the lie that Church was going with. He guessed that that was the whole reason it took him so long to show up again, too. "Yeah, that's definitely him." he muttered to Caboose.

"Now I've got to start all over again." Church cleared his throat. Force of habit was Tucker's guess as to why he did that. "Tuckerr, Tuckerr! I've come back with a warning!" Although Tucker was mildly interested in how long Church would keep doing that voice on his own, it was starting to irritate him. "Is it really necessary to do the voice?" Caboose nodded. "Yeah, it's kinda annoying."
The not-spectre would've have rolled his eyes if he had any. "Fine. Here's the deal. I've come back to give you a warning about Tex." Now this was new. Tucker knew from the beginning that the AI wasn't telling him the full story, so any information was welcome. "Don't let-" Church was interrupted by Caboose. "Shut up for one second and I'll tell you! Seriously man, I've come back from the great beyond, (Not true whatsoever, Tucker thought to himself) do you think this is easy? It's not like I ca just pop in and out whenever I feel like it man, it takes a lot of concentration (Another lie)." Caboose hung his head. "Sorry." And yet, Church wasn't done with his rant.

"I mean, it's bad enough that you killed me to begin with, but now I come back and I can't even get a word in edgewise, man." Church finished, and then sighed. "Okay... Here's the deal-" It also seemed that Caboose hadn't learned from his mistake: "Is this the warning?"

"I swear to God, Caboose. When we're done hear, your ass is haunted. I'm going to haunt you." Tucker had also had enough of Caboose interrupting. "Yeah, you're even starting to bug me." He added. Church turned to Tucker.

"Okay, Tucker, you remember when I told you that I was stationed on Sidewinder, right?" Tucker nodded. Caboose cocked his head in intrigue. "Sidewinder? That's the ice planet, isn't it? What was that like?" Church's gaze wavered to Caboose for a moment as he tried to find the words to describe a planet he wasn't ever actually on. "Umm.... It was cold." The rookie didn't seem satisfied with his answer. "Just that? Cold?"

"What do you want from me, a poem? It's a planet made entirely out of ice. It's really. Fucking. Cold." Tucker had had enough of Caboose interrupting Church's warning. For fucks sake, he wanted to learn more about Church, not listen to Caboose constantly interrupt! "Will you just let him talk?"

"Alright, well.." Church began, recalling his falsified memories, and doing his best to intertwine it with reality. "One day when I was there... Everything was just like normal. I was out on patrol with my friend Jimmy." Tucker did his best to separate what he knew was real, with what wasn't, knowing that the Alpha had to make sure that Caboose didn't suspect anything. " That Jimmy was a real good kid. Everybody liked him." Church felt a small pang at what had happened to Jimmy, but he pushed it down. Tucker tried to make light of the situation. "You think I was a good kid, Church?"

"Tucker, don't get jealous, just listen to the story, okay? Like I said, the guys were hanging around, waiting for some action, bitchin' about the cold... Anyway, Jimmy was telling me about this girl he had back home." A longer pause, Tucker waited patiently as Church collected himself. "And that's when Tex showed up." Tucker perked up. Church knew the Freelancer they had just hired? That could be either a good or bad thing, and judging by the fact that Church called this a warning, he
was leaning towards the latter rather then the former.

"Private Mickey was the first to go. He was halfway across the base when all of a sudden he started screaming bloody murder." Church paused. "Literally." he added. Tucker grinned as he pictured the thought of a man actually yelling 'Bloody murder'. "The whole thing was over before it even started," Church continued. "Poor Jimmy was the last one to go." Church tried to recall what he had told Florida when he had first recounted the story. "Tex walked up to him, pulled his skull right out of his head, and beat him to death with it." Wait, what?

"Wait a second. That doesn't seem physically possible." Tucker felt like he hadn't quite grasped the ridiculousness of Church's lies before now. Church nodded, as though he was serious. "That's exactly what Jimmy kept screaming."

"Bottom line is, these Freelancers are bad news, and Tex is one of the worst." Caboose obviously had a question, but Tucker supposed that it was alright if the guy asked them now. "If he's such a badass, then why didn't he kill you?" A reasonable question.

"To tell you the truth I don't know why I didn't die then. Could've killed me at any point. But maybe it's because Tex and I had run into each other once before then." Now that was something that Tucker wanted to know. "Where?" Church seemed uncomfortable. "You remember the girl I told you about, back home? Well, let's just say that Tex is the reason why we didn't get married." Church looked at his hands. "Guys, I'm fading fast and I don't know when I'll be back. Just listen to my warning. Don't let Tex get involved." Tucker nodded. "Okay."

"I mean it Tucker. No fighting, no scouting, nothing. You'll regret it." And with that, Church faded away. Tucker tried to piece together the real story. "So... Church and Tex were after the same girl." He looked to Caboose, who seemed to be almost smug.

"I told you his girlfriend was a slut."
What Was The One Thing I Told You Guys?

Chapter Summary

Agent Tex is a bit of a badass. Church is pissed off.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Tex had shown up, the guy had gotten straight to business. There was no small talk, and there was barely an introduction.

"I am agent Tex. Why was I sent here?" Was all he had said. He was wearing black armour, and his voice, although deep, seemed to artificially crackle. Tucker supposed he had a voice mod on him, perhaps for security reasons. In any case, Tucker had too much self preservation to not explain what had happened. He also had too much self preservation to interrupt himself to tell Tex to stop using Caboose as target practice.

"That's basically it sir. They have five guys over there and a big jeep." He finished. "And your flag." Tex added. The Freelancer didn't talk much. Tucker guessed that now was the best time to try and prevent Caboose from getting shot. He steeled himself. "Uh, hey Tex? I don't know what's it's been like at your other bases, but we don't tend to use other soldiers as target practice here." He looked back to Caboose, who was surrounded with bullet holes. "I'm scared." He whimpered, before stepping away from the wall that Tex was shooting at. As he did so, Tucker thought that he might be able to make some small talk.

"So, you've got the Special Forces black armour, I see. Were you in the Special Forces at some point?" Tucker asked. Tex said nothing, and continued to load his guns with ammo. Tucker figured that it was a stupid question, so he strayed from that subject. "Yeah, I used to have black armour too. It was black because I got this stuff all over it from th-" Tex had finished everything he wanted to do, and was walking away from Tucker. "Oh, okay. You gotta go? I'll see you later." Well. That was one of the most awkward conversations Tucker had ever been in, and that was saying something.

Caboose looked over to him. "I don't think he likes you." He whispered, as if that wasn't already obvious. "Thanks." Tucker replied. They both went to the edge of the roof, to see Tex. "Where are you going?" Tucker asked Tex. The Freelancer turned to him. "Red Base. Kill everybody. Get the flag back." He turned and walked away.

"Oh... Okay! We'll just stay here and guard the trans...porter..." Caboose responded, before
realising that Tex had already left. He and Tucker waited for a few minutes. Tucker was looking at
the Reds situation through Grif's helmet. He and Simmons were talking about his plan to... Get out
of the jeep? Anyways, it was just typical Grif and Simmons behaviour. Grif turned to Donut, who
had a blue pulsating thing on his head, which Tucker recognised as a plasma grenade. Holy shit.

"What the fuck?" Said Grif as he stepped away from Donut. Simmons then turned around too.
"What is that thing?" Donut really wanted to know what they were seeing, so he asked "What
thing?"

"There's something on your head." Grif answered. "What, like a spider? Get it off!" Donut clearly
didn't like spiders.

"No, it's more of a blue.. Pulsating... Thing." Simmons described. Donut still didn't understand.
"What, like a blue spider? Get it off!"

"Does it hurt?" Donut responded with a "No". "Maybe we should try to get it off." Simmons
'we', I meant 'you'. Asshole." Tucker couldn't believe what he was seeing. Their recruit was about
to die and they were in a petty squabble.

"Well somebody needs to get it off. It could be dan-" Donut was cut off as the grenade exploded.
"Son of a bitch!" Yelled Grif and Simmons simultaneously.

Caboose had seen all of this through the sniper rifle. "Man. He is really kicking their asses." Tucker
nodded. Caboose lowered the rifle. "I'm really glad Tex is on our team and not theirs." Tucker
definitely agreed with that. "Sure makes things a lot easier on us."

"Yeah. It seems like switching Church for Tex was a good trade." What? Tucker looked at the
rookie with a malcontent expression. "Uh-huh. First of all, Church isn't gone, he's just dead. And
second of all, he may have been an asshole, but at least he was an asshole you could talk about shit
with. But sure, if it makes you feel good about your team killing." Caboose stared in surprise.

You know, I think I was gonna say something but uhh..." He went back to looking trough the
sniper rifle, clearly wanting to avoid the subject. "Oh! Uh, Tex got in their base." Well wasn't that
great.

"Blue Team... Flag returned." The fuck? Tucker looked around. "What the- Who said that?" He
turned to see Church, who was clearing his throat. "Sorry, that was me. I don't know what happened. Your flag is back by the way." Church seemed to be very monotone, and Tucker felt like that wasn't a good thing.

"Hey! It's Church!" Church nodded in recognition. "Yeah. It's me, Caboose." Caboose seemed to be strangely happy to see him. "What are you up to?" Tucker didn't know at that moment, but he didn't feel like it was going to involve a lot of cheerful feelings and friendly thoughts.

"Caboose," Church chuckled. Dear God, what happened? "I'm not really here to make small talk, okay? How did you manage to get your flag back?" Oh. Tucker understood why Church was acting like this, and by this point he started to feel like crawling into a hole. "What? Tha- That flag? We've always had that." Church wasn't amused.

"Tucker, who do you think you're trying to fool." He paused, before looking around. "Hey wait a minute, where's Tex?" Oh no. "Oh uh, I don't know. He went to the store something about... Elbow grease." Alpha looked like he would have punched Tucker if he wasn't incorporeal. "Oh great. This is so typical!" He threw his hands into the air. "What was the one thing I told you guys the last time I appeared?" Tucker rubbed the back of his neck. "Not to let him get involved?"

"Right. And what did you do?" Tucker hung his head. "Let him get involved." Church folded his arms. "And not just a little involved. How involved?" This time it has Caboose who hung his head. "Very, very involved." Caboose then turned his back, and kept looking through the sniper rifle, just in time to see one of the Red soldiers go into their base.

"Yeah... Tex is definitely captured. Or dead. Or captured and dead!" Church pulled his hands down his face in frustration. "Ohh... That's just... Perfect!" He hissed. Tucker had had enough of Church's attitude by this point, along with his messed up desires. "Dude, why do you even care if he's captured? I thought you hated the guy for stealing your girlfriend." Church shook his head. "I never said I hated Tex. I just said that she was the reason we never got married."

"She? " 
"So you're telling me, that the guy who came in here, scared the living shit out of us, shot at Caboose and beat the hell out of the Reds wasn't a guy at all? She was a chick? And on top of that, she was your ex-girlfriend?" Tucker asked, for clarification. "In a nutshell, yes." Church responded.

"I should've known. Girls never like me." Caboose looked down at the ground. Tucker raised an eyebrow. "Caboose, I don't think anybody likes you." He turned back to Church. "But are you sure she's a chick? And not a guy? Or like part guy, part shark?"

"I think I would've known if Tex was a guy. And I'd definitely know if she was part shark."

"Because it's her code name, and she'd throttle anyone who called her by her real one." Church figured that was enough of an answer.

"Besides, it's not like you can blame her for being so aggressive. It's not entirely her fault to begin with. She got recruited into some kind of weird program back during basic, where they infused her armour with this really aggressive AI." He paused, to find the right words. "I'm not sure exactly what happened, but I know it made her meaner and tougher than hell." Well, that explained the black armour.

Caboose tilted head. "A.I... What's the A stand for?" Church stared at him. "Artificial." Caboose let out an 'oh' sound. "What's the-" Church had easily predicted what he had been planning on asking. "Intelligence. Let's move on." It was time to get the story straight.

"So the military put a program into her head, and that made her a killer, but underneath she's really just a sweet down-home girl?" Church let out a snort. "Oh hell no. She's always been a rotten bitch. It's just now she's a rotten bitch with cybernetic enhancements." Tucker put on a sarcastic tone. "Wow, sounds like you really won the lottery with that one. She's a keeper. Good job there buddy." Church ignored this. "So how are you doing Caboose? Are you understanding any of this whatsoever?" Caboose let out a 'hmm' noise.

"I think so..." Caboose put his hand up to his chin. "That guy Tex is really a robot, and you're his boyfriend. So that makes you... A gay robot!" At this, Tucker tried to hold it in as bast as he could, covering where his mouth would've been had he not been wearing his helmet with his hand. Despite this, his shoulders still shook in laughter. Church stared at Caboose.

"I think so..." Tucker couldn't hold it in any longer. He laughed relentlessly at the recruit and the AI, only barely managing to stop himself from falling over. Church glared.
"Oh, up yours!"

"So, what're we gonna do to help Tex?" Tucker asked a few minutes later. "I mean, you'll probably bitch if we don't do anything, so...."

"Don't worry, I have a great plan for how we're gonna rescue Tex." Church assured. "Oh man, that means we have to do stuff." Tucker whined.

"Don't worry, I'm just going to use you as a distraction while I spring Tex." Caboose let out a nervous laugh. "Distraction? That sounds a lot like 'decoy'." Church paid him no mind, and revealed his plan. "The way I see it, the Reds have no idea how many Freelancers we have out here. So all I need you two to do... is to run around in the middle of the canyon wearing black armour, while I sneak into their base." That... Was actually a decent plan.

"Sounds good. But Church, where are we gonna get two suits of black armour?" Church looked at something of to the side, and Tucker followed his gaze to the teleporter. Well shit.

"Oh, fuckberries..."

Chapter End Notes

That's chapter seven! Please tell me if you have any issues with the consistency, continuity, or if you just have a question! I'll be sure to answer, or fix, it to the best of my ability!
You know what? I fucking hate you.

Chapter Summary

Sometimes, Alpha /really/ hated Caboose. He hated everyone really.

Well, there was one person...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alpha looked at Tucker as he made it through the teleporter. He couldn't help but wonder how it felt to go through one of those. Did it hurt? "Are you okay?" He asked Tucker. Well, it would never hurt to know.

"Yeah, I'm fine." Tucker waved it off. Alpha did a quick run-through of his vitals. From a check, it seemed that he was a lot warmer than he typically would be, almost to the point where it would burn him. Liar, Alpha thought. That would have hurt, almost to the point of leaving scars. Tucker turned back to Blue Base, and Alpha followed suit. "come on Caboose! It doesn't hurt!" Tucker shouted. Alpha folded his arms. "It definitely hurts." Tucker looked indignant.

"What? Church, the hell did I tell you about medical scans?" He pointed a finger. "Dude, we talked about this." Church wasn't deterred. "You're the one who said that it didn't hurt. But sure, I should totally trust you." Church murmured the last bit as Caboose exited the teleporter closest to him and Tucker.

"Owwchiee!" He whined, before turning to Tucker, half betrayed, half angry. "You lied to me." Church waved his hand in a dismissing matter. "Unimportant; You'll heal." He linked his and Tucker's radio. "Okay, you two start running around, and I'll be on lookout. If I see anything, I'll initiate part two of the plan." Tucker nodded. Reasonable, and at least he and Caboose weren't in any real harm. "Great, now go!" Church made a 'shoo'-ing motion, and Caboose and Tucker ran off.

Church looked in through his sniper rifle and zoomed in. He didn't wait for too long before an orange figure began to show itself. He quickly radioed Tucker. "This is Church. Grif is coming out of the base, I repeat : Grif is coming out of the base."
"Roger that." Tucker replied, crouched down behind a large rock. Caboose looked on as Tucker listened to what Church was saying. "Oh, Is that Church? Tell Church that I said hi." He asked, unaware that he was interrupting the reveal of Church's plans. Tucker took a step back and turned away from Caboose. "I'm sorry, what was that? Caboose was talking over you." He turned to Caboose. "Shut up man, I'm on the radio."

Church sighed and tried to repeat himself. "I said, just keep mov-" He couldn't continue as Tucker interrupted him, in an ironic attempt to let Church be able to speak.

"I'm not yelling, I just want you to let me finish talking to Church, I'll tell him you said 'hi' later, okay?" Church listened on, not even surprised. "How could you talk to him on my headset?" Church cut off the signal, before groaning. "Oh my god..." He walked off. He sneaked around the Red Base, where the soldiers where too distracted by Tucker and Caboose to notice him. Sarge had his back turned to Church. Excellent. "I haven't seen troop movements this coordinated since-" As he said that, Church took over Sarge's body, Sarge letting out a really dumb sounding noise as he tried to fight him off in futility.

As the noise was let out, Grif and their robot soldier (Lopez, if he remembered correctly) turned to face him/Sarge. "Sir, are you okay?" Grif asked. Shit. He tried to wrack up something to say that was in character with Sarge. "I'm fine. It's just these God-Damned Blues out here. They make me so mad, I could just spit!" He glanced back to the entrance into the base. "I'm gonna go, uh, check on the prisoners." He started walking towards the entrance. "Keep track of those Special Ops guys." With that, he walked into their base. Thankfully, Red Base and Blue Base were mirrors of each other, so it wasn't hard to find Tex whatsoever. He found her guarded by Simmons.

"How's the prisoner, Simmons?" The maroon soldier turned to him. "She's uh, fine. What's going on out there sir?" Simmons asked. Church thought about what to say. "Nothing of importance. I'll watch the prisoner, move along." Simmons looked confused. "Why wouldn't you want to keep track of the Blues, instead of the one we already captured?" Shit, the guy was getting suspicious. "Sarge, I'm starting to think that-" Acting quickly, Church dashed up to the guy and punched him. "Ow, geez, the back of my head!" Simmons yelped, before passing out.

"What the hell are you doing?!" Tex yelled. Oh right, from her perspective, Sarge just knocked out his subordinate. "Tex, it's me, Church! I'm here to rescue you." Tex looked him up and down. "You're too short to be Church." Huh?

"Oh, right. The armour." He couldn't exactly prove it was him if it wasn't 'him' so to speak. He focused, and jumped out of Sarge's body with a 'HRRK!'. Church looked at Tex, noticing how she stiffened when he revealed himself. He stopped himself from sighing. So much for a pleasant reunion. He quickly ran through what he was going to say. "Tex, there's not a lot of time to explain. I'm a spirit trapped in the physical world now. I possessed Sarge," He turns and gestures to the man in red armour beside him. "To rescue you, while the other Blues run around in the middle of the
canyon in black armour that they got from the teleporter."

Tex took this in. "Okay." Well that was much easier than anticipated. "Great, now I'll just hop back in this guy and we'll get going." And so he jumped back into Sarge's body.

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Tucker looked at Caboose, who was staring at Red Base through the sniper rifle. "What are you doing?" Caboose seemed strangely focused. It was odd, to say the least. "One of the Reds has Tex." Tucker ran through the list of possibilities, before realising that Tex would've kicked their asses by this point, and that Church was an AI who took control of a living host for months. "I'm going to kill him, so that Church will forgive me for killing him, and then we can be friends." Shit. Tucker knew that it wouldn't harm Church, but that would really piss him off.

"Caboose, wait-" Said soldier fired the sniper rifle. Back at Red Base, Church was explaining what he was going to do to Tex.

"All right, So I'll provide a distraction, while you run to the teleporter." Tex nodded. "Ready? One... Two... Three-" As he said the 'three', the sniper bullet that Caboose had fired had hit its mark. Sarge's body recoiled and fell as the bullet entered his head. "Hey- what the? Where did my body go?" Church looked at where the bullet came from.

"Oh, you've got to be kidding me!" If Church had turned on his radio, he would've heard Caboose as he yelled "Tucker did it!"

Church looked on as Sarge went into recovery mode. He looked at Tex, only to find that she had left. He looked around, and saw Grif and Simmons running towards their leader. He sighed, before jumping back into the armour to hide.
Inside, he saw Sarge as he ran around the projection of Blood Gulch. "Hello! I said hello! Is anybody there?" Good God, he was loud.

"Will you stop? I'm here." Sarge turned to Alpha, confused. "Where- What is this place?" Church tried to think of how to explain armour lock to Sarge. "Well, that's kind of hard to explain. You see, you were shot in the head." Sarge was alarmed. "Am I dead?"

"Yeah, I mean, that's how I ended up here." Church responded. "Are you some kind of angel?" Church looked at him in surprise. That wasn't a typical question you would ask someone. He chuckled. "Yeah, I'm an angel. Do you want to get into heaven? Cause it's like, ten bucks to get in." Might as well try to extort the guy while he was at it. Hey, he wasn't asking for much!

Sarge looked caught off guard. "Oh- Well I uh, left my wallet back in my car." Perfect. He filed that information away in his mind, making a mental note to visit said car later in the day. Church continued to play with the guy. He tutted. "Well, that's too bad. Pretty crappy reason to go to Hell for all eternity if you ask me." Sarge shook his head in an almost frantic manner.

"I don't remember dying. This ain't fair." Alpha scoffed. Like Sarge had a bad life. "Join the fricking club buddy. I was shot by my own tank." He paused all thought as he heard someone call out from beyond the armour.

"Sarge! I'm ordering you. don't you die on me!" Was that Grif? He seemed like the last person to try and save Sarge, but no matter. "Huh. Your guys are trying to save you." He listened on to Grif as he started to hit Sarge's body with his gun. "You gotta breathe man! You have to pull through, Sarge!"

"That is not the way you were trained to do that, Private!" Seemed that even in the afterlife, Sarge was still on Grif's ass about his behaviour. Church noticed that Sarge was about to try and start yelling at Grif, so he decided to but in before there was any momentum. "He can't hear you." Simmons sounded frustrated. "This isn't working. We need to try something else." Alpha thought about what they would think about trying, then suppressed a shudder. "If he gives you mouth to mouth, I'm leaving." Unfortunately, that seemed to be what Simmons had thought of. "Maybe you should give him mouth to mouth." Simmons suggested. Alpha brought his hand up to his head. "That's it, I'm leaving." Sarge ignored Alpha, too surprised at what Grif and Simmons were trying to do. "I can't believe they're trying to save me." Sarge seemed to be incredibly touched.

Me neither. Thought Church, but kept his mouth shut. "I thought they hated me." Sarge continued.
"Don't sell yourself short. I mean, here I am about to guide you to heaven for only five bucks."
Sarge, remembering that Church was an 'angel', narrowed his eyes at him. "Hold on, how come you don't have wings?"

"Because nobody rang a bell." He laughed. "But really, do you have the money or not?" Sarge acted remorseful. "I feel the worst about Grif. I always made fun of him, but I never got to tell the guy that he was my son." Church wasn't impressed. Grif was from Hawaii. Sarge had never even been to Hawaii.

"There is no way that he is your son." Sarge laughed. "I know, I just wanted to make fun of him one last time. Now I'll never get the chance." Church heard a strange force beating against the armour, before... Breathing?

"He's breathing! I saved Sarge!" Grif yelled from the other side. Sarge was impressed. "Well, I'll be.. They saved me." Church had to admit, that was indeed fairly impressive. Sarge started to fade in and out. "Thanks, for your help, wingless angel fella! Will I remember any of this?"

"Yes, But only if you give me two dollars!" He noted that Sarge was back with the other Reds, talking about the absurdity of reviving someone with a gunshot wound using CPR. Alpha sighed, and ported to Caboose's unit, making sure to not touch anything on the way.

Caboose and Tucker were standing around, and trying to clean Caboose's armour. The black stuff wasn't coming off. Caboose was panting from exertion.

"It's- This isn't getting off." Tucker grinned. "No, but your mom is. Bow chika bow wow." Caboose made a move to punch him. "OKAY OKAY I'M SORRY!" Tucker backed up several steps. "But you're right. This was way easier with my armour."

"Yeah, that's because you DIDN'T DO ANYTHING." Caboose was getting more frustrated than usual. Tucker brought his hand up to his ear. "I'm sorry, what? It's hard to hear you over the sound of your constant team killing!" Caboose stared, before raising his gun up to his chest. "Don't make me mad."
Church stared at this affair, confused. He figured that it was best to ignore it for now. He left to go see Tex, who was waiting for him on the roof. He walked up to her.

He felt happy, content. It was a feeling he rarely experienced. This was the Tex that he knew. It was the Beta. He wasn't sure how to introduce himself after the year or more that they had been apart, but he figured that it would be best not to do something stupid. He walked up to her.

"Hey, Tex." At this, she turned around. She did it fairly slowly; Church could tell that she knew he was there the whole time. "It's been a while, hasn't it?" Tex nodded. She turned back to the rest of the canyon. "Since Sidewinder? Yes, yes it was."

Church recoiled in surprise. She didn't greet him as Alpha? He thought about it, and slowly came to the realisation that she had read the logs that had admitted that they were planning to erase his memories. She must have thought that they succeeded. Alpha held back a sigh at that. He played along: Who knew what she would do if he told her the truth. "Why did you kill them?"

"It was a job." Seemed she wasn't in the mood for talking. "Want to come down?" Alpha asked. Maybe he would think of something to talk about on their way there. She nodded, following him as they walked down the ramp back to the ground. Tucker and Caboose had noticed, and walked slightly closer to them.

"So, I guess you owe me one, don't you?" Tex looked at him. "I don't owe you anything. As far as I'm concerned, I'm square with you." Church held back a scoff. "I saved you from imprisonment, since when are we square?"

"Since I didn't kill you on Sidewinder." Tucker and Caboose looked on in something akin to fascination at the conversation between the AI. "I don't see how not killing someone is doing them a favour." Tex folded her arms. "Well, I could just kill you right now if you don't appreciate it." Church and pointed a thumb at himself. "Jokes on you bitch, I'm already dead!"

"STOP! Can't you see you're tearing us apart? What about us?!” Caboose cried. Tex looked at him, confused. "What about you?" Caboose continued to be unreasonably malcontent. "We helped you, and what do we get? Nothing!" He looked to the side as he put his hands on his arms.

"But-" Church wasn't about to give her an opportunity to interrupt. "But nothing. He has a point."
"I did help them get their flag back." Tucker decided to add to the conversation. "You were paid to do that. We rescued you as a favour. It wouldn't have made a difference to us if we left you there." Tex grumbled a little, before admitting defeat. "Fine. I'll stay until you win this thing, and then I'm leaving." Church inwardly thanked Tucker for that interjection. "What do you need me to do?" Tex didn't seem to want to stay here for longer than she needed to.

Tucker shrugged. "I don't know. I mean, if you knew how to fix a tank, I'd have you do that." Tex shrugged. "Okay." Caboose did a double take.

"Wait, you can fix Sheila?" Tex nodded. Caboose walked up to her and held her hands in his. "I love you." Tex cocked her head, before pulling her hands out from Caboose and going to the tank to fix it. Church followed her.

"He's weird." Church bit back a laugh. It seemed the thought was shared by all.

"Tell me about it."

Chapter End Notes

Little fact about Alpha: He's white. White is a mixture of all the colours. The fragments are many different colours. Beta is black, and is often referred to as Alpha's shadow.
Church looked at the Red army base. He focused in on the Warthog to see that it was working. Well. Church hurried back to Tucker and Caboose and relayed that information. "So whatever you do, Don't let them see us before we get Sheila back online."

"But even if we fix the tank, how are we gonna flip her over? I mean, it's not as if we could just lift-" As Caboose was saying this, Church watched as Tex flipped over the tank with little to no strain. Caboose looked over to see that Sheila was right-side up. "That is a very strong lady." Church tore his eyes off of the tank, and looked back to Caboose and Tucker.

"I'm the least visible, so I'll head up to higher ground, and let you know if I see anything." He turned and began to walk away, but stopped when he heard someone following him. "If you come with me, it kind of defeats the purpose Caboose."

"Okay, but what if I'm really," Caboose lowered his voice until it was a whisper. "Really, quiet?" Church looked at Caboose. "Do you even know what the term 'visibility' means? You don't, do you?" Caboose laughed nervously before lowering his head. "No."

Church sighed. "Alright. Just- Stay here. Don't swallow your tongue or anything like that." Caboose and Tucker looked on as he left. Church went up the hill, and was searching the land for suspicious activity. But there was one thing that was nagging on his mind, until he could no longer ignore it. "Tucker!" He called out. Tucker looked up.

"Why haven't you buried my body?" He asked. "With what? The Reds stole our shovels, remember? All we have are guns. What do you want me to do, shoot you a grave?" Tucker responded. "And I don't think anyone even likes you enough to pay respects anyway!" Tucker turned to Tex.

"As one of Church's few loved ones, do you have any respects to say?" Tex didn't respond and continued to fix their tank, proving Tucker's point. "Stirring eulogy there." Church rubbed the side of his helmet. "Just get up here." Tucker rolled his eyes beneath his helmet, and began to walk up the cliff, motioning for Caboose to follow. When they reached they top, they both got to stare at Church's corpse.

"Yeah, still not happy about this." They stared for a little while longer. "I have an idea." Said
Caboose, waiting to be encouraged. When no suck encouragement came, he got louder. "I HAVE AN IDEA." Tucker covered his ear with his hand.

"We heard you the first time. We were just trying to ignore you." Replied Tucker. Caboose, realising that no one was going to encourage his thoughts, stated his idea anyway. "Well, if Church possessed that Red guy, why can't he just possess his own body?" Church, for the sake of being a sarcastic shit, decided to humour him.

"Oh, I see. So I would be living in my dead body." Caboose nodded, not seeing the obvious flaw in this. "Not moving. Just rotting in the sun for all eternity." Caboose nodded more vigorously, not backing down. "Okay Caboose, I'll be sure to do that." Caboose sniffed. "You are a mean ghost." Church snorted at the thought that Caboose had not figured that out sooner. He turned to Tucker to ask him something, but stopped when he saw Tucker holding a hand over his helmet. "What?"

"Your body stinks." Church had had enough disrespect by this point. "All right Tucker, you are burying my body the first chance we get. I mean, this is a complete indignity! My body fought for this war, it deserves to be buried." Tucker waved it off. "Come on now, what's the worst that could happen?" Although the conversation was between Tucker and Church, it was Caboose who called out with an unrelated(?) statement.

"Hey look, Birds!" Caboose cocked his head in confusion. "Why are they flying in circles?" Church glared at Tucker, who raised his hands in defeat. He walked over to the edge of the cliff and looked over to where Tex was working on the tank. "How long until she fixes it?" Tucker thought about it. "Well, the gun's almost fixed... Not long?" Upon hearing this, Church's mood visibly soured. "Oh great." To Tucker, it seemed that there was no way of pleasing Church. "What's wrong this time?" Church looked to Tucker. "Can't you tell? When the tank is fixed, Tex is going to use it to kill all of the Reds." Tucker raised an eyebrow. "I thought that was a good thing?"

"Don't you get it? As soon as we beat the Reds, Tex is out of here. Not to mention, I haven't gotten that AI out of her head, and if I can't get it out before she leaves..." Tucker finally understood what made Church sound so bitter. "You won't ever see her again." Church nodded. "So what're you going to do?" Tucker asked. He couldn't see one of Church's plans going well. "I'm going to do what I can do. I'm going to warn the Reds that she's fixing the tank." Caboose and Tucker did a double take.

"You're switching sides?" Church shrugged his shoulders and nodded. "Sorry guys, I don't have much of a choice." Caboose seemed to have a few concerns. "Uh, Church? What happens when the Reds come, also with their guns and they find us?" Church looked to Red Base. "I'm going to help you guys as much as I can. See ya." He faded out.
Church got to Red Base as quickly as he could. Which really wasn't all that long. He looked to who he could possess. There were Grif and Simmons- No. The last time he had taken over a living breathing soldier Simmons had quickly gotten suspicious. Grif would likely catch on as well if he possessed Simmons, what with them probably being together and everything. So if they were out, then- Oh.

Church found himself staring at the robot who was Lopez. Now, this would work. A robot who only recently had gotten a speech unit and, up until that point, had been silent? This was probably the closest to perfect candidate he could get. He steeled himself for the only other AI besides himself and Tex, and jumped in.

He had gotten Lopez caught by surprise at least, so taking over his body really wasn't that hard. "HEGERKERGERK!" Oh, right. Church had forgotten what God-awful noise him possessing someone made. Simmons turned around. "Lopez? Are you okay, man?" Church just gave a quick nod of his head. There was no time to waste.

[I need to give you.. A... Warning...] Church stopped for a second. [What? Why am I speaking Spanish? You guys don't know Spanish!] Simmons looked confused. "Uh, sure thing." Right, right. Spanish or not, Church needed to give them the warning. [Listen! The woman is going to kill you. She is fixing the tank!] None of the Red soldiers had a response. Then he got a called on his radio.

"-Come in Church." Was that Caboose? "This is your close and personal friend, Private O'Malley." Wait a second. Church knew that wasn't Caboose's name. What part of 'Micheal J. Caboose' said that your name was O'Malley? What was going on?

"Come in Church. Do you copy? Soldier Unit Tex almost has the armour vehicle situation rectified." That couldn't be Caboose. It just couldn't. "We require verification of your mission...ness." Caboose continued, seemingly faltering for a moment, before continuing. "How is your progression?" God, this was going to bug Church for years if he would never figure this out. But he would have to think about that later.

[Caboose! No one can understand me! I only speak Spanish for some reason!] There was silence on the other end for a little while. Then when someone finally answered him, Church found it to be Tucker. "I'm sorry, but no one on our end knows Spanish, so we can't help you. What I can say is that Tex has just fixed the tank, so hurry up with your plan, 'cause we aren't going to try and
hold up Tex, let alone if she has a tank. Over and out.” The radio shut off.

Church cursed. He looked back to Grif and Simmons, who were saying something about Lopez being an idiot. [For fucks sake, You are going to die!] Church gripped the side of his head in frustration. [There is a large tank coming to kill you!] At their lack of response, Church repeated himself. [A large... Tank...] he said, using ASL simultaneously in vain hope that they would know that instead.

"Hey if you're going to live in this country, I think you should learn to speak the language.” For fucks sake! Why didn't they know one of the most spoken language's on Earth, not to mention 14 other planets, 31 moons and 57 asteroids?!

"This isn't a country, we're on an alien planet!" Oh, and now they were bickering! What could be better?! "What are you, a communist?"

"Firing Main Cannon." Simmons and Grif turned around and leapt back at the sound of a tank firing at them. Maybe that was the worse situation as oppose to Grif and Simmons bickering. He watched as Sarge and Simmons tried to assault Tex in the Warthog, and as they failed miserably, while babbling statistics. He then looked to see Donut come out of the base.

"What's going on?!" He asked. "The chick in black armour is back!” Simmons called out, crouched down so as to minimise himself as a target. "What chick, the one that stuck a grenade to my head?" Simmons nodded. "That's the one." Donut rubbed his hands together. "Oh ho, I've been waiting for this." He ran over to the edge of the Base.

"Hey bitch! Remember me? I saved something for you!" Witch that yelled at the top of his lungs, Donut threw a plasma grenade at Tex. Despite the fact that she was over 500ft away at even just a glance, Church watched as the grenade sailed through the air, and as it eventually landed on Tex. "Three points, you dirty whore!" Church shook his head ferociously as the grenade exploded. [My God, NO!] he screamed as he ran away from Red Base to Tex as fast as his legs could carry him.

When he got to Tex, he found her lying at an awkward position on the ground beside the tank. He kneeled next to her. "Church, is that you? Church... The AI is gone... Thank you. Hrrk! Bleh..." Church froze at her words. He held her now limp torso in his arms. [No. No!] He hugged her body to himself. [Tex... I'm sorry.] He stayed like that for a while, feeling the body in his arms get cold. He picked it up, the weight not being too heavy for his robot body, and carried it slowly to Blue Base.
Tucker and Caboose walked over to Church when they saw him. They watched as he carefully placed her onto the ground, as though her body was made of spun glass. "Church?" Tucker murmured, so as to not piss him off. Church looked at Tucker and clenched his teeth. He was clearly angry, but Tucker could tell that he wasn't going to lash out, so he pressed.

"Church, are you okay?" Tucker asked, walking slowly towards him. At the lack of a response, Tucker took in a deep breath. "Alright. You're in that mood again, so..." He hesitated for a moment. "No homo, man." And with that, he pulled Church in for a hug.

Church hesitated in Tucker's slightly loose grasp, before returning it and burying his face in Tucker's shoulder. Church couldn't truly 'feel' the interaction, and it was mildly uncomfortable to Tucker, but they stayed like that for several minutes before Church pulled back. He looked off to the side. [I... Thanks, Tucker.] Tucker gave a lopsided smile and a thumbs up. "No problem."

Church stood up, and looked to Red Base. He held up a finger, then pointed at Tucker and Caboose, and pointed down. Tucker made a guess as to what that meant. "You're going to Red Base, Caboose and I stay here?" Church nodded, then left.

The funeral lasted far less than a normal funeral. There was a short speech from Tucker, a shorter one from Caboose, but they were both as respectful as possible while Church was grieving, both over Private Jimmy and, more importantly, Tex. However, they both left after about five minutes, when it was clear that Church didn't plan to leave anytime soon.

Church sat there for quite some time, though he wasn't keeping track. He looked to where Tex had recently been buried. [I'm sorry Tex. This wasn't what I thought would happen, and...] Church trailed off. Then he felt like there was nothing to lose, so he raised his head slightly. [Tex... I think that you should know... I remember. I remember everything. What happened on the Mother of Invention. What happened to me. What he did. Sorry for not letting you know sooner.] He heard Tucker's shouts in the distance, and stood up, brushing off what dirt and sand he could. He looked to the grave one more time.

There, sitting on the grave, was Tex.

"Everything, huh?" She leaned forward. "What's my name?" Church stood dumbfounded, before
stopping to think. He stood there, thinking of an answer. [Allison.] He decided on. Tex sat there in silence. She shrugged, and didn't continue with the subject. Church decided to drop it. Tucker's shout of what seemed to be fear got louder. [I should go. Will- Will you still be... Here?] He gestured around the Canyon. Tex cocked her head to the side.

"Yeah. I will." Church got ready to leave. "But.." He turned back to her. "Maybe I should keep on the down low. You know, to not rile any of them up," Church chuckled. [Alright then. Get some blackmail material for me, and I'll let you in to Tucker and I's Helmet Cam nights.] Tex nodded. "Blackmail for blackmail." Her form started to flicker. "See you later, Alpha." Church turned back to the Blue Base and got into a light jog, now that Tucker was all but screaming.

[Later it is.]

Chapter End Notes

And so ends season one! Criticism appreciated!
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

A small series of shorts taking place between the seasons.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Still have barely any knowledge of how armies work.
I have absolutely no idea how to write Caboose.

Send help.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Church! Caboose is doing that thing again!" Tucker yelled. Church bit back a groan. It had been five days since the burial of him and Tex, and Tucker was still yelling about how Caboose was going into a deep voice and threatening to kill him.

"For the last time Tucker, hold on for a minute!" He yelled back. He looked to Tex, who had finished editing the Helmet Cam videos from a week or so back. "That's the last of it. Call me in a day or two, I made the video as general as possible; don't know what you found funny." Church nodded. "Thanks, Tex. Ever since what happened on the Mother of Invention, well..." Tex put a hand on his shoulder. "I get it, it's fine. Now go, I think that Tucker going to explode if you don't help him. See you around." Tex faded and disappeared.

Church ran to the other side of the base and into the kitchen. "What's wrong this time?" He asked. Tucker pointed to Caboose, who was holding up two slices of toast and a knife. "He threatened to skin me!" Caboose looked offended. "Wha- No! No." He stammered, trying to sound firm. "You wanted to use me as sandwich meat!" Tucker shrieked. Church stepped between the two before anything could escalate further.

"Break it up." He turned to Tucker. "If something like this happens again, and Caboose actually tries to kill you, go to me yourself. I can't come when called every single time." Church turned to Caboose. "And you need to stop threatening Tucker. I know you want my attention, but you don't have to kill Tucker for it." He then grabbed Caboose's toast and knife. "And put that down before you lose your hand!" Caboose looked sad. "Okay."
"I mean really, am I your mother?" Church grumbled as he went to his room to read a book.

"NO!" Church looked at Caboose, who was mad at him for once. It was actually pretty weird. Tucker looked up from where he was watching TV. He seemed to be just as confused as Church.
"What's going on?"

"You tell me." He looked back to Caboose, who stamped his foot in a huff. "I told you what was wrong!" Church tilted his head to the side and shook it. "No, you didn't. All I did was tell Command to send ice cream." Caboose pointed his finger at Church. "Yes!" Church rubbed at his temples. "Just tell me what was wrong. Do you not like ice cream or something?"

"No! What I hate is *strawberry ice cream!*" Caboose exclaimed. Church and Tucker looked to the man in regulation blue owlishly. "That's what this is about? Is that it?" Church asked. The solution was so simple, he couldn't believe that it caused this much fuss.

"I mean, all you had to do was ask! But nooo, you got strawberry ice cream instead!" Tucker licked at his own cone. "What's so bad about it?"

"I don't know, maybe it's got something to do with how it completely ruins ice-cream!" Caboose ranted. "I mean, who got up one day and thought 'Oh I know, how about we take ice-cream and make it terrible!'" Caboose continued with this rant for about another ten minutes while Church and Tucker looked at each other in shock. Neither of them knew how strongly Caboose felt about putting strawberries in ice-cream.
“Hey Tucker, come over here!” Church called out. Said soldier walked over, curiously. “What's wrong?” Church shook his head, and led Tucker over to a device sitting near a computer in Florida's old room. He pressed a button on it. Tucker stared at it for a few seconds. “Uh Church, I don't know if you noticed, but that didn't do shit.” The AI folded his arms.

"Get your phone." Tucker shrugged, and did so. He looked at it, and was shocked to see that there was available WiFi. "How- I thought that Flowers said that we couldn't get WiFi?" Church turned on the computer. "Well he was also a lying dickhead, so..." He typed in the password. Tucker looked at the keys that Alpha was pressing.

"Really? 'barenakedladies'?" Tucker asked for confirmation. Church nodded. "It's funny how listening to a music playlist about fifty times over can help you guess a person's password." Tucker raised an eyebrow. "Well, that and being an expert at hacking doesn't hurt." Church added.

"Man, how did you have time to listen to it that much?" Church tapped the side of his head. "I'm an AI. I process stuff about ten to twenty five times faster than a human. So, I just speed things up and there you go."

Tucker thought about what Church had just said. "Wouldn't you get really bored like that?" He watched as Alpha went onto a browser and clicked on the history icon. "...Well, yeah, I guess. But it's fine." Tucker tilted his head to the side. "What do you do-" He cut cut himself off as the the computers history showed months worth of searches, everything from things that you would expect from an agent of an illegal operation to simple things like Youtube and Pandora. There were months worth of history.

"Oh, that lying fucktard!"

Church sighed as he listened to Tucker and Caboose trying to talk over one another to him. This had been going on for about half an hour, and had been giving him one of the worst headaches he had ever experienced.

[My God, I think I am your mother.] Tucker and Caboose stopped what they were doing. Church
praised the brief moment of silence. "What?" Tucker asked. The Spanish had been an accident, but now the two soldiers had stopped talking, so it was best to roll with it.

[I said that...] Church cupped his hands over where his speakers were to make a more echoing sound. [No, I am your father.] If Tucker or Caboose knew what he had just said, he would have crawled under a blanket and stayed there until the end of time. Or maybe he would have just buried himself beside Private Jimmy's body. But they didn't know, so he was free to do whatever he so wanted as long as it was in Spanish.

Tucker and Caboose looked at each other, confused and slightly uneasy. "Church, what happened to your speech unit?" Church played with the idea of him not knowing either. He shrugged his shoulders. Tucker sighed. "I'll get the Spanish to English dictionary." Tucker walked off. Church stared at Caboose, who made a face of realisation. "Oh, right!" He then proceeded to talk through his questions with Church using yes or no question and a notepad while Tucker searched for the dictionary.

When Tucker returned, he saw Caboose calmly walk off, waving to Church as he did. "What happened?" Tucker asked. "Oh, well, while we were waiting for you, I talked things through with Caboose! Saved me the headache of you two talking over each other. And I fixed my speech unit while I was at it." Tucker groaned. "So I wasted all that time for nothing?"

Church shrugged and nodded. "Sorry for your loss."

"Dude, watch this!" Alpha would've rolled his eyes if he could. Tucker had been on a movie craze for an entire month by this point, and by 'Movie Craze' he meant that Tucker was hooked on one film and would watch it at least four times a day. Every. Day. Needless to say, it was kind of annoying.

"Come on man!" Tucker was pulling on his arm as he led Church to his room. "I'm coming, I'm coming. You don't have to drag me!" Despite this, Church made no attempt to move away. Strangely enough, Tucker was being almost charming in his love of action films. Of course, Church would've preferred it if Tucker didn't make him watch it at least four times a week, but whatever.
"Is it Fight Club?" Tucker's grin grew wider, if that was possible. "You know it is!"

They ended up falling asleep to it halfway through the second time that they watch the film, surrounded by empty popcorn bags, M&Ms and miscellaneous soda. Tucker's legs propped over Church's as he leaned on the pillow they put on Church's shoulder. Church inwardly smiled to himself.

In all honesty, this wasn't half bad.

Tex watched the antics at Blue Base, smiling. She hadn't known what Alpha had been up to all this time, but, as silly as his and his friends acted, it was actually pretty sweet. She took a picture of Tucker asleep on Church. Something to make fun of Church for later.

She looked around the Base, making mental notes to tell Church to clean up; it was a mess. She went down to the kitchen, pleased to find that they did indeed still have water. At least they were drinking actual water, and not substituting it with condiments and yogurt like the Reds had been doing. There was a small amount of plastic shards on the floor from broken or chipped plates which had been mainly replaced long ago.

Tex moved to where their rooms were. There were about five bedrooms in total, but only three of those were being used. She looked at Caboose's first. Opening the door, she found it to be more pleasant than at first glance. Of course, that's what she would have said had she seen it before he started acting strangely.

The room was... Off, for lack of a better word. It felt as though it should've been more homely than it was. The room had no windows; no room in the base did. There was a cork board on the far wall, littered with memos, photographs of two fairly young boys (Siblings?) and a dog on occasion, and a few drawings. Quite a few of the photographs had been crinkled, as though curled up in a fist, and several of the drawings were torn, drawn very briskly and shakily, or both. Clothes hung out of the drawer off to the side, and even more were strewn on a chair and about the floor of the room, above a royal blue rug. The desk had several dirty plates on it. The bin was about halfway full with empty wrappers from MREs.
Caboose lay on the bed, fidgeting and mumbling in his sleep. Tex couldn't make out the words, but it seemed as though he was having some sort of back and forth conversation. She frowned. Tex knew why Caboose was acting strangely, and felt partly responsible. But there was nothing she could do for now. She'd have to tell this to Church.

She left and went to Tucker's room. It wasn't as messy as Caboose's was. She noted (with a fair amount of disgust) the large quantity of socks in the laundry basket. The bed was unmade, and a t-shirt hung off the frame. There wasn't much on the cork board, aside from a calendar and a couple of recipes. Tucker was lying face first as he slept, headphone cord loosely wrapped around his neck. He probably fell asleep to it.

Tex folded her arms over her chest. Tucker, aside from the gross amount of sex jokes, wasn't really all that bad. In fact, she would almost go so far as to say that he was a good guy. If nothing else, he was a great friend to Church. Speaking of...

She walked into Church's room. The bed was clean, and completely flat. There wasn't anything on the floor, and there was barely any dust around the room either. That must have been from having so much free time on his hands. Not needing sleep does give you quite some time to yourself. The cork board was sitting, unused, in a corner of the room; Church didn't need it anyways, so why bother? Instead, there was a large bookshelf, reaching from the floor to the ceiling. There were books from many languages on the shelf, The expected English, Spanish, but also French, Italian, Mandarin and many more. Of course, being a smart AI such as Alpha would easily make you polylingual.

Alpha himself was sitting at his desk, reading what seemed to be a book about folklore from the second millennia, turning a page every second or two. Tex cleared her throat. Church jumped slightly in his chair, and swivelled to face her.

"Jeez, knock next time, will ya!" Unimpressed, Tex walked over to the desk and had her hand phase through the wood. Alpha chuckled sheepishly. "Oh, right." He then straightened and looked around the room. "So... Did you want to talk about something?" Tex walked over to the hardback that Alpha had been reading. "Does it have to be about anything specific?"

Alpha quickly tried to backtrack. "No no, I just thought.." Tex waved it off. "It's fine." She motioned for Alpha to turn the page. "So, did I get the special treatment or did you visit everyone's room during the night?" Tex held up two fingers. "Good to know, good to know." They sat in silence for several seconds, Church flipping through the pages of his book. He was about seventy pages away from finishing it.
"Church, I know what's wrong with Caboose." Alpha nodded. "Yeah. It's Omega, isn't it?" Tex looked at Alpha, mildly surprised. "How could you tell?" He stretched his limbs, hearing how they let out a slight creak, and walked out of his room, careful not to disturb Caboose or Tucker, to get some oil.

"Call it a fragment detector if you want." Church responded, once they had reached the utility closet. "If there's a fragment nearby, I get some sort of... Feeling. Don't know how to describe it. I guess that happens since they came from me. Did help quite a bit. In figuring out what was wrong." He flexed each joint carefully, only oiling the parts that creaked more.

"Yeah, must be." Tex nodded. She then sighed. "Well, I'm going to go to Red Base, see how they're like." Church snorted. "Good luck with Grif's room." Tex exaggerated a shudder. "That will probably be in my nightmares." She patted his back. "See you tomorrow." Church waved his hand.

"See you then."

Chapter End Notes

Being the author of a fanfic means that you can implement your headcanons as much as you want. This is very fun to do.

Hope you enjoyed, and criticism appreciated!
Radio static. "Come in Blue Command." The radio was slightly adjusted. "This is Medical Officer DuFresne." He looked over the canyon he was sent to. "I have reached Blood Gulch Outpost Alpha. Do you read?" The was silence, before an incomprehensibly garbled voice responded. "Yes dude, can you read me? Check one, check two." DuFresne raised an eyebrow. "Say again Blue Command, I do not read." DuFresne raised a hand to his helmet. "Blue Command, please boost your transmission to match communication protocol Echo, Bravo-" He was cut off as he heard a nasally voice on the other side.

"Yo, I hear you, calm down. What’s going on, dude?" DuFresne hesitated when he heard the casual tone. "Uh, Roger that Command." 'Command' waved him off. "Yeah sorry 'bout that, I was in the elevator, this thing don't work too well in there." What kind of Command official receives calls in the elevator? Why wasn't there anyone else to take the call? "Roger that, Um... Is this Blue Command?"

"Oh yeah, sure, totally! What's going on?" Did 'Command' just wink? "You're sure? The Blue Command Base?"

"Take it easy, you called /me/, I didn't call /you/." DuFresne was about to rebut, but he shook off any suspicions. He supposed that 'Command' had a point. "Never mind. I would just like you to know that I have reached Blood Gulch Outpost Alpha." He looked to where the Blue base was. "I'm going to make contact with the Blue Squad members."

"Blood Gulch huh? Alright, let me see..." DuFresne waited as 'Command' searched for the correct file. "Okay, it says here that you want to make contact with Private Tucker, and ask him about their wounded dude." DuFresne nodded. "Roger that. Any other orders?"

"Yeah, it says here- Oh, I'm uh, not supposed to read you that part, so... Just be careful. That's all. Over and out." The radio link cut off. DuFresne tapped his fingers against his armour, making a light clinking noise. "Alright, Private Tucker..."
"Church? I have a problem." Alpha bit back a groan. "I am not your mother. Don't come tattling to me every time one of you does something the other doesn't like." Tucker persisted. "I'm telling you, he's crazy. He hasn't stopped threatening me in a scary voice!" Caboose shook his head.

"What? No I didn't." Tucker looked at Caboose. "What, so you're saying you didn't threaten to give my decapitated head to Church for his birthday?" Caboose folded his arms. "I think you're taking my words a little out of context." Tucker shook his head in disbelief. "What context?" Church raised a hand for them to stop. "Guys, I thought that we'd established by now-"

"Excuse me." Church glanced over his shoulder to see a man in purple armour. "Give us a minute." He turned back to his teammates. "I thought that we'd established by now that I don't like either of you, okay? So there's no use competing for my attention." The man in purple cleared his throat. "Excuse me." Church sighed, and turned around.

"Okay, hello. Who are you?" He noted that O'Malley was threatening Tucker behind him. "He's doing that thing again!" Tucker called out. The man in purple (A medic?) seemed confused. "Um, my name is DuFresne. Are you Private Tucker?" Church put on a polite voice. "No, I am not Private Tucker. My name is Church." He turned and pointed to Tucker. "That's the guy you're looking for." Tucker made a quick two-finger salute. "Hey." Church then pointed at Caboose. "And the guy in regulation blue, that's Caboose." He turned back to the medic. "Or O'Malley, or whatever he's calling himself.

Caboose seemed confused. "Why did he introduce me second?" Tucker looked over his shoulder to Caboose. "Because he hates you."

Church motioned for DuFresne to explain why he was there. "I received your call for a medic." Caboose stopped his train of thought; even he recognised something wrong about that sentence. "Medic? That was about three months ago." Tucker put his hands on his hips. "What did you do? Crawl all the way here?" The medic lowered his head in a form of apology. "I came as quickly as I could. Where's the patient?" Church put on a snarky tone. "Well, she's about fifty yards behind you," He pointed a finger to the ground. "And six feet straight down."

DuFresne turned to see two graves behind him. "Oh... I'm sorry for your loss."

"What?" Alpha asked, before remembering that Tex was being played off as dead. "Oh, yeah. It
was tough, but..." He shrugged his shoulders. "What are you going to do?" Caboose decided to add to the conversation. "We didn't like her very much." He dropped his tone to a whisper. "She was mean to other people."

"Who's in the other grave?" Oh. Well that was a awkward question. "That's me. I'm in that grave." The medic clearly didn't believe Church. "Uh huh. Of course." Caboose decided to try and explain the story.

"See, he kinda got killed by a runaway tank..." Caboose started. "Or by the idiot driving it." Tucker interrupted with. Caboose decided to bypass that detail. "And, um, he came back as a really mean ghost. Then he took over a Mexican robot's body, oh! Sorry, then we spray-painted him blue. So now he is alive again! And he is a bionic man."

"Yeah, and it took us days to get the Spanish setting turned off." Church turned halfway. "Wha-Tucker, I did all of the work!" DuFresne paid no attention to their conversation. "Hold on, so none of you guys are hurt?" The Blue Team simultaneously shook their heads. "Not at all. In fact, I feel better than ever!" Alpha leaned in towards Doc. "See, whenever I get tired of these two, I can always just turn off my ears or start speaking Spanish."

"You said they were short-outs and glitches." Alpha quickly turned off his ears. "I'mm sorry, what did you say? I CAN'T HEAR YOU." The medic glanced at Red Base, before shrugging.

"Then I guess I'll check out you two and I'll be on my way." The medic raised his scanner. Tucker raised his hands and stepped back. "Woah, this won't be a situation where I have to turn my head and cough, will it?" DuFresne shook his head. "No, I'm just going to check your vitals." Caboose nudged Tucker. "I bet I have better vitals than you." He paused. "What's a vital?"

Church folded his arms. "On your way? I don't think so. Aren't you here to join our squad?" DuFresne shook his head. "No. I'm only here to help out with Tex, and assist in the canyon as needed." Church let out a snort. "First of all: great job with the Tex thing. Mission accomplished. Second of all: The way that you can assist us, is if you help kill the Reds."

"Well, even if my orders did allow me to do that, I still wouldn't. I'm a pacifist." Caboose tilted his head to the side. "You're a thing that babies suck on?" Tucker shook his head. "No, that's a pedophile." Church walked over to Tucker and lightly slapped him upside the head. "Tucker, he meant pacifier." Tucker let out a long "Oh." sound. "Man, I was way off."

DuFresne's scanner made a buzzing sound. "Well, everyone here checks out. I'll come back here before I leave the canyon. Tell me; which way is to the Red Base?" Tucker glanced at him. "I
thought you said you weren't gonna fight them?" The medic nodded. "I'm not. Resources are low, so I'm on loan to both armies whenever need be." Church groaned. "Well, that's just great."

"I'm just gonna go to Red Base and see if they need any help." Church held up a hand in a 'stop' motion. "Well, If you're going to Red Base, you better put away your medical scanner. If they see you carrying that thing, they're gonna shoot it out of your hands." There was a sharp 'bang' noise. The Blues and DuFresne looked at the smoke trail left behind. "Yeah, just like that." Alpha, having common sense, figured it was tie to fear for everyone's safety. "Scatter!" He practically shrieked, before he and the others ran off.

Church, DuFresne and Tucker had ended up behind one rock, Caboose behind another on his own on the other side of the field. Church gathered his thoughts to form a plan, and turned to Tucker. "Alright, Tucker, I need you to get up there, shore up the defence with Caboose, establish a suppressing fire, and hold that position until further notice." Tucker just stood there. "I don't even get half of that." Alpha berated himself for using anything above 7th grade vocabulary. "Go to Caboose's rock and fire your gun a lot."

"That rock?" Tucker turned to stare at the wide gap between the two rocks, between which there was a hailstorm of bullets being fired by the Red Team. "Yeah, I don't think so." Alpha clapped his intertwined his hands and brought them up to his face. "We do not have time to discuss this."

"Oh sure, /you/ don't have time to discuss this. You'll be here with Nancy No-Bullets. Meanwhile, I'm running around, eating a machine gun sandwich." Church tapped his foot impatiently. "Tucker, we're going to give you covering fire."

"Unless that means you're going to build a giant bulletproof wall between me and them, You're gonna have to come up with a new plan. Preferably one that lets me keep the same amount of blood that I have now." Church nodded. "No problem." He paused. "Hold on, does the blood have to be in your body, or...?" Tucker glared at Church. "Alright, alright." Alpha turned to the pacifist. "Hey Doc, I'm gonna need you to go help Caboose." DuFresne stood from where he had been crouching. "My name is DuFresne, not Doc."

"Yeah, that's too long, so from now on, your name is Doc." Doc made an 'X' motion with his hands. "I'm not comfortable with that: I'm a medic, not a doctor." He explained. "What's the difference?"
Tucker inquired. "Well, doctors heal people. Medics just make them more comfortable as they die." He answered. Tucker (Read: Anyone who would have heard that) didn't like that answer. "Mental note: Don't ever get shot."

"It's settled then; your name is now Doc." DuFresne seemed unsure. "Alright, but I don't think it'll stick." A series of guitar strings played as the medic froze as the large, purple word 'Doc' appeared beside DuFresne. Alpha and Tucker shared a glance. "Trust us; it'll stick."

"Now go to Caboose, and help him hold that position." It seemed that everyone was getting irritated going by tone. "I don't have a gun, I'm a pacifist." Alpha slumped his shoulders. "Then go over there and yell 'bang bang bang'."

"Eh, I don't know. Even that sounds pretty aggressive. Besides, I'm not supposed to get involved unless someone gets hurt." Alpha let out a noise of pleased interest. "I see." Alpha raised his pistol at Caboose, pointing at his foot, and fired. Caboose could be heard yelling in the distance almost immediately. Alpha lowered his gun, and turned back to Doc, who was staring at him in shock (Alongside Tucker).

"Well, looks like Caboose has hurt himself. You should go help him." Doc closed his mouth. "You could have just asked nicely." He ran over. Alpha heard Doc asking which foot was injured, before actually attending to the bleeding foot. "I can't believe Church shot me." He heard Caboose cry out.

"Oh don't even start Caboose!" Church turned to Tucker, who had stopped crouching and was looking over the rock. "Church, why did the Reds stop firing?" Alpha thought of the possibilities. "Maybe they're out of ammo."

"Hey Blues!" Church and Tucker turned to see Sarge yelling to them. "We're here to negotiate your surrender!" Alpha halted. "Surrender?" Why the hell would Sarge of all people want to negotiate a surrender? "They're definitely out of ammo." Might as well see what's going to happen. "What are your terms?" Alpha yelled back. There was a pause, likely the Reds discussing what the terms were to be. Church turned Simmons' helmet cam: It was in the best shape.

"First off, we want your flag..." Sarge stopped as he heard Simmons bring up Tex. "To stay right where it is! Keep the flag!" Church chuckled to himself. He had still yet to find someone who wasn't brought to their knees by Tex. "But we do want our mechanised droid back!" Wait a second... "Uh oh."

"So, what do you say, Church?" Tucker asked. Church shook his head. "I just got my body, there's
no way I'm giving it back." He tried to think of an excuse. "Um, he's not here anymore!" He nudged Tucker to help him. "Yeah, He was all like 'Sayonara!' And the he just left!

"Sayonara's Japanese, idiot." Then Church got an idea: One that involved pretty much no loss for the Blues. "Let me try something." He murmured to Tucker, before turning back to Sarge. "Hey, Reds! How about a medic?! Would you take one as a hostage?!"

"A hostage? But I'm meant to go there." Alpha turned his head over his shoulder. 'I know. It's not my fault they don't know that it's a win-win situation for us." He saw Caboose walk over, slightly limping. "Oh right. How's the patient Doc?"

"He's doing well; very alert and responsive." Tucker raised an eyebrow. "Are we talking about Caboose?" Alpha shook his head. "No, I meant the toe I shot. How is it?"

"That thing? It fell off ages ago." Caboose sniffled. "Rest in piece, pinkie toe..." His voice got much deeper. "You shall be avenged!" Doc sighed. "You know what? You can send me over. I don't think I can help you anymore than I have." Church nodded, and turned back to the Reds.

'Alright, we're going to send over our medic!' He wondered if he could get anything out of this negotiation. "Now what do we get?!!" Simmons took a step forward. "You?! You're surrendering! You don't get anything other than humiliation and ridicule!" Church cursed; he hoped that would have worked. Tucker stepped in.

"We already have that! What else do you have?!!" There was a short pause. "What do you want?!!" Sarge shouted back. Alpha looked to Tucker. "Hey man, nice going!" Alpha wondered what they could ask for. "How about if you admit that the Red Team sucks?!" He asked. There was some low murmuring from Red Team. "How about we admit that one of us sucks?!" Sarge suggested.

Well, this was going to take a while, wasn't it?

Two hours. That's how long it took for the Reds and Blues to form an agreement. "Alright! So do
we agree to the terms?! You go first, and then we send over the medic!" Church activated the helmet cams of everyone on Red Team, as well as his own. Grif stepped forward. He let out a groan, before beginning.

"I would just like everyone to know that I suck!" He yelled. "And?" Church pressed. He wasn't going to let Grif get away with just that. "And that I'm a girl..." Church made a 'continue' motion with his hands. "What else?"

"And that I like ribbons in my hair... And I want to kiss all the boys." Tucker leaned over to Church. "Please give me that file."

"Way ahead of you. Ten copies, five backups, and a photographic memory." Church turned to Doc. "Alright, now you can go over there." Doc sighed, and went over. "Yeah, I'd say that this is one of the best negotiations ever."

Alpha and Tucker were standing around the Blue Base, when Tucker had en epiphany. "Hey, Church?" Church looked over. "Since your body is a droid, and droids usually fix stuff, can't you activate your repair sequence and fix Sheila?" Church thought about it. "Well, it's worth a shot I guess." Church looked through Lopez' body, but hard a hard time finding anything. "Church, are you just gonna keep standing there, or...?"

"What do you want me to do? I'm looking through codes. This is harder than it looks, okay?" Church heaved out a sigh. "Sorry." Tucker said. "Maybe there's a button on you somewhere?" Church shrugged his shoulders. "See what you can find." Tucker circled Alpha's body, looking for a circular groove.

"Oh, hey!- No, wait." Tucker looked at Church. "What is it?" Church shook his head dismissively. "Doesn't matter. All I found was the time and temperature function. It's currently..." Church converted the degrees Celsius into Fahrenheit. "79 degrees." Tucker shrugged, and continued his search. He crouched down when he couldn't find anything on Church's upper body. Then he saw something. "Hey man, I found something." Church looked down. "You found a button?" Tucker shook his head. "No, it's more like a switch."
"Well give it a flip." Tucker stood back up. "I don't want to flip it. It's in a weird place." Church slapped a hand over his face. "You have got to be kidding me." Tucker stepped back. "You flip it." Church made an awkward movement with his arm, his arm stopping about an inch above the switch. "I can't even reach it." Tucker was running out of ideas. "How about Caboose?"

"I don't think he knows how to operate a switch. Please Tucker, we'll laugh about it later." Sighing, Tucker reached down. He stood back up soon after. "It's stuck." Church cocked his head. "Did you try wiggling it?" Tucker frantically shook his head. "No! There is no way that I am wiggling your dongle!" Church folded his arms. "Stop being a baby, just wiggle it." Tucker crouched down again, and started to fiddle with the switch. There was a pregnant pause.

"Sooo...." Church started. "You from around here, baby?" Tucker stood up. "Alright, if you talk like that I'm am not doing this for you." Church held up his hands. "Okay, I'm sorry." Tucker continued to wiggle the switch. "I wish Tex was here, she probably wouldn't have any problem doing this," Alpha looked behind Tucker, where Tex herself was standing and facepalming. Alpha chuckled. "Yeah, clearly you don't know her very well." There was a clicking noise. "There!" Tucker exclaimed. Then Church heard a beeping noise.

"Hey," Tucker glanced over to him. "Do you hear that?"
What's with that beeping noise?

Chapter Notes

Church gets a bit too ready to threaten people in this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alpha, Caboose and Tucker were standing on the roof of Blue Base. "Alright, do you guys hear that?" Church asked. He had been hearing this strange beeping noise for several minutes now, but no one else seemed to be hearing it. "Is it a high-pitched whistling noise followed by a series of random clicks?" Church shook his head. "No, it's more like a constant 'beep beep beep' sound, but - Hold on, do you actually hear a high-pitched whistling noise followed by random clicks?"

"No, I was just trying to help." Church took on a flat tone. "Yes, well, you're failing." Caboose decided to add to the conversation. "All I hear is that, you know, the small voice in the back of your head that tells you to kill all of your friends before they have a chance to kill us!" Tucker stared in horror, taking half a step back. Church knew exactly what Caboose was talking about, but that did little to dilute the creepiness of that sentence. "Wait, you guys don't hear that?" Caboose asked.


Oh for God's sake. "Tucker, I can't take this anymore. That god-forsaken beeping is going to drive me crazy." Caboose raised his hand, and Church motioned for him to begin. "Why do you hear beeping?" Church stopped. He didn't actually expect a decent question from Caboose of all people. "I don't know, Tucker and I wanted to activate the repair sequence on this body so that we could fix Sheila, then we found a- That's it!" Tucker tilted his head. "What's it?" Church pointed a finger downwards. Tucker quickly made the connection.

"Okay, you have a point, but I am not doing that again." Tucker pointed at Caboose. "He can do it." Church sighed, and motioned for Caboose to come over. After briefly explaining to Caboose what he needed to do, Caboose nodded and crouched down. "I see... A switch." He dropped his voice into a whisper. "It's not very big." Tucker nodded. "Yeah, that's it. Just flip it." Caboose waddled over, before Church stopped him.

"Stop. Caboose, do you know how to operate as switch?" Church took Caboose's 'Uh...' as a no. "Alright, here's the full tutorial. The switch is pointed in one direction. Just turn it around so that it's pointed in the other direction." Caboose made a move to flip the switch, and Church could hear
a small snapping sound shortly after. "Oops! It broke itself!" Caboose exclaimed. Church groaned.

"Tucker, can you look down there and see if there's anything else that could help?" Tucker massaged the back of his neck. "Dude, you said that I only had to help with this once!" He whined. Church nodded, as though he understood. "Oh, okay, I see. So let me rephrase that: Either you help me right now, or I never let you in on Helmet Cam nights ever again." Tucker moaned, and crouched down beside Caboose. "Okay, I see two wires down here. One's green, the other one's red."

"What about the blue one?" Caboose asked. Tucker nudged Caboose to the side to help himself see better. "That's your thumb, idiot." Church rolled his neck. "Come on guys, just grab the one that goes to the switch and yank it out." Tucker squinted. "But I can't see which way they lead."

"Then just yank them both!" Caboose stood up and put a hand on Church's shoulder. "Church, if we pick the wrong one..." Caboose leaned into Church's ear. "You could explode." Church pinched the bridge of his nose. "Look, I don't care, just follow the red one." Tucker looked closer. "I see what's going on, the red one goes close to the switch. And the green one goes... Somewhere else." Church decided not to ask. "Just take out the red one."

"Okay Church, you ready? I'm gonna yank the wire." Church nodded. "Just get on with it." Tucker shrugged. "Alright, here we go. One... Two... Three!" With that, Tucker yanked out the red wire. Church stopped and focused on his hearing, and was relieved to not hear anything. "Oh, thank God! Finally, some peace and quiet! That was going to drive me crazy!" Church made a move to pat Tucker on the back for helping him, but didn't step forward. "Hey... Why can't I move my legs?"

"What?" Tucker asked, and tried to bend Church's knees, even going so far as to kick the knees of the droid, but nothing happened. "Wow, you really suck; I can't even tip you over." Church groaned. "Oh, this is just great! Thanks a lot, Caboose. Now what am I supposed to do? My lower half is damaged." Caboose stroked his chin, as though in deep thought. "Why don't you try walking it off?" Church glared at Caboose. "I can't use my legs." Caboose looked up as he let out a long 'Oh' sound. "Have you tried running?" Tucker tried to make light of the situation. "This doesn't seem like that big a deal. You hardly used your legs anyway." Tucker folded his arms. "I have never seen a grown man ask for so many piggy back rides." Church angrily pointed at Tucker. "I told you it was for science."

Caboose got an idea. "Why don't you try... Walking on your hands?" Tucker and Church stared as Caboose continued with his thoughts. "Then you can use your feet for high fives, and eating sandwiches! You know, the important stuff." Church ignored that. He quickly searched through Lopez's codes in hope that he could find something to help fix his legs, but came up with nothing. "I can't find anything that could help me, so..." Church tried to get a good idea, but eventually gave up. "I don't know, just start reattaching wires until I feel something."
"How about that? Did you feel that?" Tucker asked. Church shook his head. "No, I mean- What are you doing?" Caboose decided to interrupt before Tucker could respond. "Church? I was thinking... You know when you eat ice-cream too fast and it hurts your brain?" Church held out his hand in a 'stop' motion. "Shut up Caboose." Caboose complied, until he saw the Red Team approaching their base. "Church, I think you should know that." Church let out an annoyed sigh.

"Dammit Caboose! In the short time I've known you, you have called my girlfriend a slut, blown me up with my own tank, shot me in the head, and now you've paralysed me from the hip down! So I hope it's not too much for me to ask, if for once in your life, you'd SHUT YOUR FREAKING MOUTH!" Church shrieked, tired and done with Caboose and his antics.

"Hey Blues, we're here to- What the hell are you doing?" A voice made itself known from below the Blue Base roof. Tucker looked over. "Aw crap, the Reds are here." Church tried to turn around, but failed. "Really? Caboose, why didn't you say anything?" Church tried one more time, before stopping. "One of you guys turn me around. I still can't move my legs."

"What're you guys talking about?" Grif asked. "Uh, nothing." Tucker lied. "We were just playing a game!" Caboose added. Church looked to him. "Hey, Caboose? We'll handle this." Church tried to form a more aggressive stance. "What do you want Reds?" He snarled. "Get out of here, or we'll start shooting at you!" Grif wasn't convinced. "Oh yeah? Care to make that threat to my face?" Church wracked his brain. "Tucker, grenade." He whispered. Tucker handed one to him, and he held it up in full view for the Reds to see. "Do I need to?"

Simmons decided to talk before another one of his teammates was hit with a grenade. "Woah, calm down, we're not here to fight." Church lowered the grenade in his hand. "We just came here to give back the prisoner." Simmons explained. Tucker stepped near the edge of the roof. "Give him back? No way man, you took him, a deal's a deal." He called out.

"Yeah, well forget it. We don't want him." Grif stated. "Well, that was our last prisoner! You can't have another one!" Church yelled. "Dude, what is your problem?" Grif asked. "Didn't your mother ever tell you that it isn't polite to not look at someone when you're talking to them?" Caboose tried to defend Church by shouting out "He's shy!" Church glared at him. "Shut up." He then turned his body as much as he could to the direction of the Reds. "Look, we don't want him back and we don't care what you do with him. Now leave us alone. We're in the middle of something... Kinda private over here."

"Fine, but don't come asking for him back later." Simmons said, before turning to leave with the other Reds. "We won't!" Tucker called out. Grif made it a fair distance away before stopping. "Last chance!" Church clenched his fists. "Beat it Reds!" Grif flipped them off, and left. Tucker kept looking at the direction from which they came for about ten or more seconds.
"Did they leave yet? Tell me what's " Church asked. "I don't know: I can't see too clearly. Maybe I'd see better if I had that sniper rifle of yours..." Tucker implied. Church snorted as he looked behind him, motioning for Tucker to do the same. When Tucker turned around, he saw Caboose holding the sniper rifle. "Motherfucker!" To emphasise this, he beat his fist against his thigh, before cradling the now injured hand in his other shortly after. "Oh, oh! Church, I see something!"
Church turned his attention away from Tucker, who was cursing under his breath.

"The um, the two Red ones are walking away, and the purple one is..." He turned away from the sights on the sniper rifle to look at Church. "I think he's going to attack!" His voice became much deeper and firm. Church immediately had his doubts. "What? The purple one is that worthless medic!" Tucker nodded as an unneeded confirmation. "He's not going to attack, he's a pussy fest." He added. Church would have hit him were it not for his useless legs. "Pacifist." He corrected, annoyed. Tucker rolled his eyes. "Whatever, let's just roll him up and toss him through the teleporter." Church thought about why they left Doc.

"Hold on a minute. Do you have any idea as to why the Reds would leave him there? This has to be a trick." Caboose kept looking through the sniper rifle at Doc. "I'll bet they used some kind of brain-washing technique on him!" Church and Tucker shared a look. "They're probably gonna make him do all their dirty plans!" A short pause. "And their schemes." Tucker let out a noise of irritation. "Caboose, that is ridiculous!" Caboose looked Tucker in the face through the scope. "Or is it so ridiculous... That it's the most ridiculously perfect idea that you never thought of?"

Tucker shook his head. "No, just the regular type of ridiculous." Church folded his arms. "Just keep your eye on him. We'll know that it's a trap if he tries to get into our base." As if on cue, Doc took a few steps towards Blue Base. "Hey, would it be alright if I hung out at your base with you guys?" Church facepalmed. "I knew it! We're going to die!" said Caboose. "Starting with you." He added, pointing at Tucker.

"Sorry, we're busy! Now go away!" Tucker told Doc. "Normally I wouldn't impose, It's just that I don't know the neighbourhood very well, and." Alright, at this point Doc was worse at making a lie convincing than Tucker making excuses about him constantly doing laundry. "Can it Doc! You're not fooling anybody with that innocent victim routine!" Doc tried to convince them regardless. "I know more than just medicine! I'm also trained in psychology! Maybe I could help you with your problems facing people!"

"Just get out of here! And tell your little buddies the Reds that their plans failed."
"Alright Tucker, what are we going to do here? I have got to get my legs working." Tucker shrugged briskly. "I don't know, but I can't just keep pulling wires down there. I think we should call in a professional. Maybe they could fix Sheila while they're at it." Church nodded. "Alright, but the only people who can do that are Senior El Roboto and Tex." And Tex wants to lay low, Church thought to himself.

"Tex is pretty hard to work with though." Caboose said. "Yeah, dead people usually are." Tucker replied sarcastically. "Quite frankly, I find your attitude offensive Tucker." Church told him. Caboose made a 'hmm' sound. "Is that guy Lopez available?" Church gestured at his body. "I possessed him, remember?"

"Why don't you just leave his body? And then Tucker and I will make him fix you and my girlfriend!" At this, Tucker said "Girlfriend?" While Church responded with "What are you, a retard?" At the same time. Caboose tried to save face. "I mean- fix you and uh... The beautiful tank lady who means nothing to me... Then uh, we can get you back in his body when he is done." Tucker leaned to Church. "That actually seems like a good idea." Church nodded. "Yeah." Tucker leaned in slightly closer. "But it came from Caboose." Church could only keep staring in amazement. "I know." Then Tucker punched him.

"OW!!" Church brought his forearm up to guard him. "What was that for?!" Tucker shrugged. "I don't know. I thought I was dreaming, so I punched you in the face to make sure that I wasn't." For the love of God. "Tucker, first of all; When you think you're dreaming, you don't punch somebody else, You get someone else to punch you."

"Dude, I don't care if I'm dreaming, I am not asking you to pinch me." Church glared. "If you dented my forehead I am going to be pissed." Tucker took this as an empty threat. "Yeah, yeah. What was the second thing you were going to tell me?" Church raised his left hand. "I'm still holding that grenade, you know." Tucker took a step back and raised his hands in surrender. "Yeah, that's what I thought." He lowered his left hand again, making sure to keep a firm grip on it.

"Let's try this: I'm going to jump out of Lopez's body real quick. You two watch him and make sure he doesn't do anything. Got it?" With an agreement from both of them, Church concentrated and jumped out of Lopez's body, dropping the grenade as a safety precaution. That had taken more out of him than he had expected, and he took a moment to recover. Shortly after, he made himself visible.

"Yeah, back in the spirit world, alright!" God, this felt much better than he expected. "I forgot how good this feels. Kinda loosey-goosey." He looked to Caboose and Tucker. "What did you do with my body?" Had he been gone longer than he thought he had? "Why do you care about your body?
You can't even—" Tucker turned around mid-sentence, only to find that Lopez had run off. "Oh hey look, your legs work!" He joked.

Caboose had pointed the sniper rifle at Lopez. "This one's mine." He fired the rifle. "Hey Caboose! Cut it out, you're going to damage my body man!" He turned to Tucker. As mad as he was, there wasn't any time to vent right now. "Cut him off at the teleporter. I'll meet you guys there."

He made it through just as Lopez got to where the teleporter was. "Alright, hold it right there." Something fell out of the teleporter. It was making a strange hissing noise. Lopez mumbled something in Spanish before running off. "Hey, I said 'hold it' not 'run away'! You big... Robot baby!" Church looked at the recently teleported object. "Strange... That rock looks almost like- Oh no." He said in realisation, before the grenade exploded.

He recovered about a minute or so later. He coughed, before stopping abruptly. "Hold on, why am I coughing? I don't have any lungs..." He looked around, before the Reds jeep (The Warthog/Puma, one of the two) came flying overhead. He disappeared as quickly as he could. The Warthog stopped, and Simmons jumped off the gunner position. "Did you see something Sarge?" Sarge jumped out of the jeep too. "Yes I did." Sarge then launched himself into a story from his childhood, but Simmons (Thankfully) stopped him before it could get out of hand. "No, I meant if you saw something weird just now, like, five seconds ago." He rephrased.

"Oh, then no." Simmons raised an eyebrow. "What was all that stuff about your uncle?" Sarge glared at Simmons, clearly done with the topic. "Just get in the damn jeep." Simmons complied, and they left, the atmosphere being much more tense than before. Church sighed, and followed the jeep, albeit at a far more leisurely pace.

When he arrived however, what he found was more than enough for him to raise an eyebrow. Lopez was silently sitting in a corner, seemingly sulking. Tucker was on his phone, whistling some old and generic pop song tune, and Caboose was absently feeling the grooves in his armour, notably perking up when he saw the not-ghost walk into Blue Base. "Hello Church!" He waved as Tucker looked up from his phone. "Hey, Church. Lopez is here." He made an informal two-finger salute, which Church returned with equal informality. "I noticed. Mind telling me what happened?"
"Alright. Here's the deal Mister Robot. You fix our tank, and we'll let you go free." Church lied. [Where will I go? Even my friends have tried to kill me.] Church decided to act as though he didn't know what Lopez had just said; That emotional roller coaster was best left alone. "Okay, I will take your silence as a yes." He waited patiently as Lopez began to fix Sheila, taking notes on what he was doing should she ever get damaged again. After a long while, Caboose came over.

"Hurry, hurry, hurry, fix the tank! I want to say hello to Sheila." He turned to Tucker. "And start killing everyone." Tucker laughed nervously. "You mean the Reds, right?" Caboose flipped back to a cheerful tone. "Of course!... For starters." And jumped back to his O'Malley voice just as quickly. Church looked slightly closer at Lopez fixing the tank. "How much longer Lopez?" The robot steeped back. "Completo." He replied. The tank then began to talk.

"Thank you for activating the M8O8V Main Battle Tank." Caboose ran over. "Sheila! You're fixed!" He cried out. Sheila looked at the blue soldier. "Hello Caboose. It is good to see you again. Thank you for repairing me." Tucker stepped in. "He didn't fix you, our robot did it." Caboose glared at Tucker. "Don't cockblock me." Tucker waved it off. "Robot? I was not aware that our squad was outfitted with a robot." Lopez looked to Sheila, and Sheila looked down. Their gaze met, and it seemed as though sparks flew, the their first sight even accompanied with a harp. Caboose frowned. "I don't like where this is going."

"Why, hello. My name is Sheila. The M8O8V Main Battle Tank." Sheila said, her voice seeming almost softer than usual. [I am Lopez the Heavy.] Sheila took in the information. "Lopez. What a nice name for such a nice soldier. You have excellent motor skills." At this point, Caboose decided to interrupt. "Yes! Well, Lopez has to go now. He was just here to fix you, and now he has to go AWAY." Said Caboose, steadily getting more frustrated. Tucker felt way too weirded out by the strange robot-tank-Caboose love triangle.

"Man, this is getting too weird. Church, will you just take your fucking body back!" Tucker pleaded. Church nodded. "Roger that." He began to walk towards Lopez, who seemed to realise what they were planning to do.

"No!" Lopez yelled, before being taken over. "Heavegerkergerk!" He shrieked. Tucker, unaccustomed to the noise, grew slightly concerned. "Church? What's going on? Do I need to flip your switch?" Church reappeared, much to Tucker's surprise. "What the- That wasn't me!" Church seemed just as confused as Tucker, before coming to a realisation. "So if it wasn't me, then..." He grinned as wide as the Cheshire cat, and turned to Lopez's body.

"Well, buenos dias, cockbites." Lopez's body was turned around. "Guess who's back?" Tucker's jaw dropped. Church only managed to make his grin more-so smug.
"Well Tex, about time you showed up!"

Chapter End Notes

"I can't use my legs"
"Why don't you try walking it off?" - every PE teacher ever

My sister is sulking that she can't have a cameo. Oh, siblings....

But besides that, please tell me if you would like longer paragraphs or not. Thank you for reading!
Or O'Malley, Whatever He's Calling Himself

Chapter Notes

I guess this could be considered a swear warning, but let's face it: This is Red vs. Blue, and you signed up for this. I guess it's more likely a warning for Caboose! Church, and other mental images.

Enjoy the chapter!

"Uh... Tucker? You okay there?" Church waved his hand in front of the soldier's helmet, mildly concerned. Tucker finally snapped out of whatever trance he had been in, shaking it off and looking at Church. "Oh um, yeah." Church seemed satisfied with the response and turned back to Tex.

"Really Tex, as happy as I am to see you, did you have to steal my body?" Tex folded her arms. "Your body? The last time I checked, I stole it." Tucker looked between the two, sighing. It seemed that Church wouldn't stop fighting with Tex even after she came back from the dead after months. "I stole it first!" Church shrieked.

Sheila looked back and forth between the two. "I'm confused." She turned to Tex. "I thought you were called Lopez, and that you were a man." Sheila looked down and slightly to the side. "This is so strange. I feel like my circuits are crossed.... And I like it!" Church felt that if Sheila could grin, she would. Meanwhile, Caboose raised his gun, pointing it at Tex. "I know how to get her out."

Tex turned to him, as though daring him to do it. Church walked up to Caboose. "Don't do it. Just go explain to Sheila, okay?" Caboose complied and walked off. Church sighed in relief, before looking at Tex. "Alright Tex, now what will it take to get you out of there?" He asked, even though he had a sneaking suspicion he knew what it was.

"Well, ever since I became a ghost, I've been watching you all a lot." Upon hearing this, Tucker decided to but in. Call him rude, but this one thing he had to know. "Wait- all of us?" Tucker glanced to his rock, and the others followed his gaze. "Even when we're alone?" He stared in horror as Tex nodded. "Yes and Tucker? You should be very, very ashamed of yourself." He slumped. Tex ignored it.

"Anyway, I've noticed a change in one of your guys. Caboose." Tucker straightened. That was finally going to be addressed! "Have you noticed that he's become increasingly aggressive lately?"
Tucker pointed to himself. "I have! It started about the time that Sheila became disabled and you were blown up. I tried to tell Church, but he didn't listen." Church rolled his eyes.

"Tucker, there's a fine line between not listening and not caring. I like to think that I walk that kine every day of my life." He turned back to Tex. "And I may or may not have known the whole time." Church proceeded to ignore Tucker's squawking. "So, what were you going to say?" He asked. Tex stared at Tucker for another second, before clearing her throat and beginning.

"When I overheard Church talking about his plans to warn the Reds about me fixing the tank. The AI must have calculated the odds of survival and didn't like the results. Once Caboose turned on his radio to call Church, it took it's chance." She recalled. Tucker nodded, putting the pieces together. "And that's when he said that his name was O'Malley. So you're AI infected Caboose?" He asked.

Church nodded. "Everyone's armour has an AI slot, and Caboose's would have been vacant." Tucker snorted. "I think he has a few non-artificial slots that are empty too." Church was about to reply, but then shrugged. Tucker wasn't exactly wrong.

"And then before I knew it, Donut hit with a really lucky shot." She said, proceeding to grumble the words 'Cockbiting fucktard' under her breath. Church put his hands om his hips. "Alright, so Caboose has O'Malley. So let me guess: You're holding my body hostage until I help you get him back, right?" Tex shook her head, much to Church's surprise.

"Wrong. You're going to help me kill it."

"Well Tex, that was a great story, but I still don't see how we're going to get the AI out of Caboose's head." Tucker couldn't think of any method that didn't involve killing Caboose or everyone in the canyon, but then again he wasn't exactly well educated on the behaviour of AI and how to defeat the rogue ones.

"I don't remember much from the implantation process, but I do know that the AI can jump from host to host through their helmet radio. So if we can defeat the AI if we kill it without giving it a place to jump." Tucker nodded. That was definitely a better method than killing everyone in Blood
Gulch so that the AI could no longer go anywhere. Church seemed to agree with the plan, so there
mustn't have been a fault.

"Then I get my body back afterwards. Deal?" Church stuck his hand out. Tex humoured him by
placing her hand in a grasping position overlapping Church's. "Deal." Church smiled, before
getting a more serious expression. "Alright. Tex and I are going to possess Caboose then. Tucker,
we need you to work on the Reds. Make them turn off their helmet radios so that O'Malley won't
have anywhere to go." Well that sounded like just about the most implausible thing he had ever
heard of (besides Tex beating Private Jimmy to death with his own skull, of course.) Tucker voiced
his opinion, but neither Church nor Tex cared. They just told him to think of a plan quickly and to
think outside of the box. Real helpful.

"Alright Tex, ladies first." Church did a mock bow. Tex disagreed. "And leave you out here with
your body? Nice try, Leonard." Church inwardly cringed at that name, for several different
reasons. "Hey Caboose!" The soldier turned to look at him. "Heads up!" And with that, he ran into
Caboose and by extension, his head. Tex followed shortly afterwards.

Inside, Church found himself looking at at large room with varying shades of grey, but having no
colour other than that. There were ramps, both where he found himself standing and at the wall
opposite to him, with a few doorways to either side of the ramps. Church turned to Tex. "Where are
we?"

Tex looked around to survey the surroundings, but she already knew where they were. "This is
Caboose's mind. Now we just have to find and kill O'Malley." Church suppressed a shudder. As
much as he loved Tex, Omega was still a fragment of himself. He was ready, but it would still be
fairly hard. He looked back around the room. "Where should we start, Tex?"

"Just keep your eyes peeled." Church noticed a figure walk up behind Tex, but it didn't seem to do
anything. "rantee, O'Malley will come looking for us." Church wasn't really paying attention to
Tex. "Tucker? Is that you?"

"No, are you stupid? Oh. I /am/ me. I guess /I'm/ stupid." Church cocked his head to the side in
confusion as 'Tucker' continued. "Do you have any food? I love to eat all of the food." This could
not be Tucker. It just couldn't. Church turned to Tex for an explanation. "This isn't actually Tucker,
it's Caboose's mental image of Tucker." Church sighed."Well that's just great." He looked back at
the fake 'Tucker'. "So everyone we meet is going to be as brain-dead as Caboose." He felt a
presence behind him, and then-

"I would not be so sure about that Mr. Church."
"So you are from the outside. That is where the other is from as well." Church had been in Caboose's head for quite some time, and he still couldn't believe how articulated his mental image of himself was. "The other? That's O'Malley, right? You've seen him?" Another mental image stepped up beside Caboose.

"Of course he's seen him, you idiot! You think Mister Caboose would miss something like that, you skeezy douchebag fuck!" Whoever this guy was, he sure did seem to swear a lot. "Who the hell are you?" He asked the image. "My name is Church, you butt-wiping ass munch!" What. The hell. "And I'm Caboose's best friend, so don't get any ideas you lip-licking fuck suck!" Church sucked in a breath. "Okay... There was a lot of stuff in that sentence that I didn't like." Tex walked up to Church and put a hand on his shoulder for a second. "Just play along, Church. We're going to need these guys if we're going to find O'Malley."

"Fine, whatever." He grumbled. He watched as 'Tucker' walked off to find girls. "If we're going to find O'Malley, I suggest we talk to the Reds first. He tried to recruit them against me early on."

Well that was one way to make someone interested. He glanced to Tex, who seemed just as interested as Church. "The Reds are in here?" Caboose nodded. "Indeed they are. Unfortunately I don't currently know where they would be." He looked to Tex as he continued. "I would suggest that we work in teams to look for him." Tex nodded, as did Alpha. That really felt like a good idea, and Church couldn't pick out any problems.

"So, who's going with who?" He looked to Tex to find that she had already walked over to Caboose. "I'm going with him. You can go with your mental image." Church looked over to said image, who was swearing a storm. He held his face in his hands and let out a long groan. "I really hate you sometimes."

Tex and Caboose had found the Reds fairly quickly, with the two Churches following soon after. "Attention Reds!" The fake Church yelled. "The great Caboose demands an audience with you!" Alpha counted to three in his head. "So listen up you blowjobbing cocksuckers!"
'Simmons' was the first one to appear. "Caboose? Oh no, he's come to kill us!" A soldier in yellow armour soon followed. "Oh no, I don't want to die!" Was that supposed to be Grif? The hell? "I'm in love with Caboose and yet I'm still afraid of him!" Alright, pink armour meant that it was Donut, so why the hell was that a female voice? "Yarr, I be havin' a Southern accent, yarr."

"Fear not Reds, I come not to destroy, but instead to ask for assistance on this day-" By this point, Alpha had had enough. "Wait just a second. I have to correct a few things right now." He stepped up to his clone. "First of all, you're not Caboose's best friend. You don't need to have a best friend! You're Church, and having friends just waters down the experience. Live the dream." He ignored 'Church' and his swearing shortly after, and looked to Caboose. "And you, Caboose, have you even paid attention to our enemies?" Caboose seemed surprised and slightly offended. "I beg your pardon?" Alpha grabbed his shoulder and pointed to 'Grif'.

"First of all, that guy? He's not yellow, he's orange." He then pointed at 'Donut'. "And since when was there a girl on Red team?" He stared at the fake who continued to spout sexist words. "I got termites in me leg." Said the fake Sarge. Speaking of... "That is not a pirate accent. Seriously, what is the matter with you people?!" He yelled. Tex took a step closer. "Woah Church, calm down."

Immediately after, 'Grif' shouted out "Don't kill us Mr. Sidekick!" 'Church' walked up close to the edge of the platform on which they were all standing. "Hey buttmunch, I'm Caboose's sidekick, not him, so shut your pie hole!" He screamed. Then there was a gunshot, and 'Church' fell off of the platform. Tex, Alpha and Caboose all ran up to the ledge and looked down. "Leonard, are you okay?" Leonard stood up. "Oh please, as if that shit-stain could kill me. Oh wait, I'm gonna die." Leonard's body seized up, before collapsing. Tex pointed across the large room. "There he is!"

On the other side of the room, wielding a sniper rifle, stood a dark-armoured figure that was laughing evilly. Church felt that unexplainable feeling again as he found himself looking at Omega. He sucked in a breath. Fragment or not, he would have to be killed. "Let's go get him." Said Tex, before running to O'Malley. "Let's go Caboose." If Caboose was feared this much inside his head, he must be at least decent at shooting a target. "I'm sorry, have we met?" Alpha stopped. "What? It's me, Church." Caboose shook his head. "I don't seem to have any memory of you. It's a pleasure to make your-"

"Oh you have got to be kidding me." Did the death of Leonard remove Caboose's memories of Church? Must have, but there was no time to think about that now. "I just hope that Tucker's doing a better job out there." He ran after Tex and Omega. After he had caught up to Tex, it was only a matter of time until they caught Omega.
It really was a matter of time. They had finally managed to corner Omega. "End of the line O'Malley." Said Tex, eyes narrowed and gun raised. Alpha also raised his gun. "Yeah, from now on, if anyone's going to make my girlfriend cranky and psychotic, it's going to be me." Tex made a noise that almost sounded like a coo. "Aww, that's sweet-" Church held up a hand. "Shut up, bitch." Tex rolled her eyes, irritated. "Asshole."

"End of the line O'Malley. You're just one big headache, and I have a pistol full of aspirin." Alpha grinned as said made the one liner, Tex looked at him "What?" Alpha continued with the one-liners. "I have half a mind to kill you, and the other half agrees." Tex rolled her eyes. "Stop. Church, that's ridiculous." Alpha decided that he could say just one more: Rule of three after all. "It's time to split... Personality!" Alpha practically cackled as he heard Tex and Omega groan, before quickly stopping.

"Alright O'Malley, paybacks a bitch, and so am I." Tex made a motion with her hand that made it clear to open fire. Then it hit Alpha. "Wait a minute Tex, we don't know if Tucker's had enough time!" Tex shook her head. "Well, we're just going to have to find out." She started to fire her gun. Alpha hesitated, before shortly firing at Omega. In a short few moments, he was gone. Alpha ceased fire.

"Huh, that's weird. I expected an echoing laugh, or you know, the smell of brimstone at least...." He looked at where Omega had just gone. "Maybe feel something. But.... Huh." He wondered if Tex had just left. "Well, there's no harm in testing that." So Alpha left.
Red is Blue! Blue is Red!

Chapter Summary

And as of this chapter, the Blood Gulch Crew is officially formed!

Chapter Notes

DID YOU SEE THE SEASON 15 TRAILER?! AAAAAH!!! Then, because apparently I'm too happy, I'm going to be spending half of the day travelling to the OPPOSITE END OF EUROPE.

Alright, everything's fine. Sorry about that: I'm very exited. Enjoy the new chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

How did it come to this.

This was a question that Tucker found himself asking more and more as time went on. The first time he had asked this was when he tried to have sex with his first girlfriend, before realising that she had a dick. The second was when he walked in on his parents. This got more and more frequent the older he got, and he asked this question about twice as much as he did when he was sent to Blood Gulch. He thought that after Caboose had been there for about a month or so, that Tucker had it all figured out. Then Doc showed up, and it was a shitstorm all over again. Church and Tex had gone into Caboose's head to fight O'Malley, but only Church came back out. What's more, was that Caboose didn't even remember Church, which wasn't something that Tucker expected at all.

As if that wasn't weird enough, Lopez and Sheila had decided to start a robot army. Well, wasn't that fantastic? He even asked Church to help stop it by possessing Lopez, but as it turned out it was getting increasingly harder to do it. Then, as he had been trying to think of a way to stop that, he noticed something... Pink, in the distance. But that was strange, there wasn't anything pink in the canyon except for..... Oh.

"Caboose, it's a Red." He pointed his gun at Donut as he approached. Donut seemed to be confused about where he was, until he had a moment of realisation as he turned to face the end of Caboose and Tucker's guns. "Oh no." Said Donut, face draining of colour. Tucker's eyes narrowed, and he smirked. "Oh yeah."
Despite his attempts at interrogating Donut, the guy seemed to not say anything. Tucker knew that the guy probably just got lost, but that didn't mean that he couldn't get anything useful out of the situation. Unfortunately, all the guy did was start spouting cooking recipes. He relayed this information to Church when he came over after trying to think of a way to use the pink soldier. Tucker was surprised to hear that Church did indeed have a plan.

"Alright, so here's what we're going to do. I'm going to possess Donut, and then we're going to attempt a surrender negotiation again. If all goes well, I can get a robot body for myself without needing to give away anything that we actually own." Tucker thought about this. The worst case scenario that popped into his head was that the Reds didn't give them shit, but that wasn't really negative. Tucker nodded his head in agreement with Church. "Sure thing, man."

"Alright, so when I possess Donut, I'm going to need you to go over to the Reds and try and negotiate with them. I'll try to help, but I can only do so much posing as one of them." Tucker nodded, and Church did a short wave before running inside of the base.

Church soon exited the base in Donut's body, after about twenty seconds, with Caboose in tow. "Alright, I've done all I need to do. Lead the way Tucker." Tucker walked off in the direction of Red base, making sure to stand far enough away to be a harder target to hit. Tucker prepared what he was going to say as he walked towards Red base. When he reached his desired location, he cupped his hands around his mouth and began to yell.

"Hello inferior Red Team! We would like to talk to you about-" Tucker was cut off by Caboose excitedly exclaiming "Sneak attack!" Church rubbed at his temples. "Caboose, we're here to negotiate, not fight." Across the canyon, Sarge demanded 'Donut' to give an explanation.

"They would like to negotiate a surrender to us." He explained. Sarge and Simmons were suspicious. "You can't surrender Blues, we haven't attacked you yet!" For fucks sake, this was going to take a while, wasn't it? Church nudged Tucker to keep talking. Tucker took out the note that Church had written for him.

"In exchange for not killing us, we will release Lopez and Donut." There was a small pause, during
which Tucker could hear Sarge and Simmons discussing whether or not to accept the surrender. "Are they going for it?" Church asked Tucker. Tucker opened his mouth to answer, but then gritted his teeth as a bullet grazed his side. "Motherfucker!" He grunted, pressing his hand to the area of injury. Church quickly scanned him, sighing in relief as he saw the biofoam system activating. He looked at the Reds.

"You're under attack now! Surrender, bitch!" Simmons practically cackled, but as mad as Church was, that was in fact the plan all along. "Alright, they surrender!" He shouted back. Tucker growled and turned off the safety on his gun. "Fuck that, I'm pissed. Let's fight." Church put a hand on his shoulder. "Don't." They looked at Sarge as he started to yell.

"Now that you have been defeated and totally humiliated by the Red Team, we demand the return of our robot and pink private!" Alright, so far so good. Time to enact part two of the plan. "Alright, but there's one catch!" Church began. "Sarge, they want you to build two robots for them in return; one for every prisoner they're returning!" Tucker furrowed his eyebrows in confusion.

"Church, why do we need two robots?" Church seemed slightly caught off guard. "Well, you know, one for me, and one for..." Church murmured the last word of that sentence, but Tucker managed to catch on. "Man, don't tell me it's for Tex. You're still in love with her, aren't you?" Tucker groaned. Now, he wasn't exactly experienced with a committed relationship, but he could still tell that this was pretty sad. Church shoved him, albeit lightly enough so as to not jostle his insured side. "It's not as if chicks are lining up here, asshole." He huffed. "Besides, if I don't give her a body she's probably just going to steal mine anyways." Tucker rolled his eyes, but accepted the excuse nonetheless.

"Alright Blues, which robot model will you prefer?" Sarge asked from halfway across the canyon. "Make them like Lopez! Except without any intelligence, and give it an English speech unit!" Church answered back.

"You have a deal! Meet us in the center of the canyon at 0600 and we'll make the exchange." The Reds then left soon after. "Well, that's that." Church took in a breath. "Alright, I'm going to go check on Lopez and Sheila. Keep track of Donut when I leave." He pointed a finger a Tucker, as though threatening him. "I mean it." Then Church left Donut's body. After Caboose saying something about a sleepover to Donut, Tucker figured that he could handle the Red soldier. Then Sarge started talking to Tucker about 'optional' features. Tucker sighed. Why oh why did it have to come to this.
So. Sheila and Lopez had actually decided to form the robot army. Unfortunately, the time that they demanded they meet the Blues just so happened to be the same time that they were going to 'surrender' to the Reds. Wasn't that fantastic. Church and Tucker decided to shrug that off; they would cross that bridge when they got to it.

Tucker was with Caboose and Donut on the ground, with Church up on the cliffs. Tucker was planning on radioing Church, but Grif and Simmons had been talking in his ear, and Tucker didn't have a clue as to how he could turn it off, as it didn't work when he tried to turn it off like he usually did. He told Church all of this when he finally did manage to radio him though, so at least there was that. They finally decided to enact the Triangle of Confusion (Rhombus of Terror? Parabola of Mystery?). He stepped a couple of steps closer to where the Reds were standing. He recited what he was going to say in his head so as to not make a mistake, and then began.

"Hello everyone! We would like to surrender!" So far so good. "And this time we would like to ask for one representative-slash-prisoner from each group to cross sides!" Caboose convinced Donut to go to the Reds without much pressing, which was nice. Then Tucker had a thought. "Church?" When he got a noise to signal that Church was listening, he continued. "In hindsight, maybe it was a bad idea to put Lopez around a bunch of robots." Church shook his head, although Tucker had no way of knowing that he did. "Just stick to the plan Tucker. Get the first robot over, and I'll draw Lopez's fire, let's go!"

Tucker tried to stick to the plan, he really did. Unfortunately, Lopez got to the robot much faster than Tucker expected or wanted, making Sarge think that they were being double-crossed, thus trying to send the robot back to the Reds. Tucker aimed his gun at the robot when he tried to stop it from going back to the Reds, which made Sarge go all out.

"I'm calling in an airstrike." Then Tucker heard one of the most irritating radio noises he had ever heard. "Motherfucker!" Sarge slightly adjusted the radio. "Come in Red Command. This is Blood Gulch Outpost Number One! Do you read me?" What Tucker heard next made him stop anything he was doing immediately. "Hello, who's there, is that you, Private Tucker, come in, hello!"

That was the exact same nasally voice that Tucker would hear every single time that he would call Blue Command. The voice that said that his job was to do everything in his power to help the Blues win the war. And yet, as he listened on, he found that not only was Vic not helping the Blues, he was allowing the Reds to call in an airstrike?!

"What the hell Vic? Why are you helping the Reds? What the fuck is going on?!" There was a short pause on the other end, before Vic cut the conversation, making a bad excuse about a bad connection. Tucker would've sat down if he could. If Vic was helping both sides, then there could've been countless other people who were helping both sides of the war. He thought about
what Church had told him back when Tucker first found out that he was an AI.

"Flowers worked for the Director. He was sent with me to make sure that I never found out about me being an AI."

Flowers had constantly told everyone to trust Blue Command. If Flowers was a lying asshole, then it would only make sense that he would make them trust the wrong people. It would only make sense... If Vic was in league with Flowers. And if that was the case, then Vic worked for the Director. And if Vic worked for the Director, who's to say that everyone else at 'Command' wasn't working for him too?

I was meant to never know, Tucker. I would never be allowed to leave the canyon. Flowers had to make sure of it.

If Vic and Flowers were working with each other, that meant that they had the same goal: To make sure that Church never try to leave the canyon. Everything that Vic did was to make sure that Church stayed in the canyon, unhurt and unaware. Everything that the Reds and Blues did was to keep them in a conflict that would never amount to anything, because it wasn't meant to. There was no Red or Blue.

Tucker dropped his weapon as he tried frantically to make everyone stop. His yelling was creating too much radio static, only helped by everyone's yelling. Church tried to tell him to shut off his radio, but Tucker couldn't hear him. Church ran to take over the robot vessel.

"What did you say, Blue?" Tucker heard Simmons shout over everyone else. "I said that there's no Red vs Blue! It's all a-" He couldn't say anything else as he was hit with a missile and sent flying 20 feet into the air. "SON OF A BITCH!"

Church stared in utter shock at what he saw flying past them. "What the hell is that?!" He shrieked. Donut, Caboose and Lopez scattered from their position, with a missile exploding in the same location that they had just been at. "Sorry about that big explosion!" The man riding the strange floating vehicle had shouted. He then proceeded to follow that up with "Sorry it wasn't bigger!" and an evil laugh. Hold on, evil laugh, contradicting personality...
"That's O'Malley!" He ran from his position; He was a sitting duck if he didn't start moving. Church ran to where the robot that the Reds had made for them was standing. "Come with me!" He yelled at it, before running to where Tucker was laying, the droid in tow. "Tucker. TUCKER! Are you okay?!" Tucker coughed, and didn't move. "Church, the purple guy... He's an asshole." It seemed that it was very hard for Tucker to talk. Worry pumped through Church system. He did a quick medical scan to see how much medical attention he needed.

Alpha heard evil laughter and looked up to see Sheila. "Help! They took Lopez!" Alpha looked around the canyon. "Where did he go?" Across the canyon, at Red Base, they heard an evil laugh. "Here I am, you fools!"

"What- How did he get up there so quickly?" Despite how Church had barely said that loudly enough for anyone on the ground to hear, the purple soldier (Doc?) responded with. "Thanks! I lettered in track in high school! It was the least directly competitive sport I could find!" Did he break into everyone's radio or something? Doc's light tone then shifted into O'Malley's deeper one. "And now, I will escape with my metallic hostage, never to be seen again! Unless I want to be seen, if which case..." Boy, it sure did seem like Omega liked the sound of his own voice, huh?

"The universe will be mine!" He finally finished. Then moved towards the Red's teleporter with Lopez. "Into the abyss!" He shouted, before jumping through it. God damn it! This wasn't a time to think! He ran towards the Reds, Caboose following soon after. "We're coming out, hold your fire!" He got to the Reds. "Truce! Time out!"

"Could someone tell what the fuck just happened?" Asked Grif. Alpha thought about the simplest terms he could use. "The evil guy shot one of our guys and ran off through the teleporter with Lopez." Sarge shared a glance with Simmons. "But we need Lopez for... Reasons that we don't need to tell you!" And Church needed O'Malley, but he couldn't tell any of them the actual reason why. "And we need the purple guy because he's the only one who can cure Tucker. I know first aid, but even I can't cure something like missile shrapnel in skin."

"So now we have to work together. How ironic." Simmons then denied that, before giving one of his own examples of irony. Alpha sighed. They weren't going to accomplish anything for a while.
Two hours is how long it took for everyone to agree with what their current situation was. At the very least there was a silver lining in that Simmons managed to finish reprogramming the teleporter. They left Donut and Sheila behind, as they would watch over the canyon until everyone else got back.

"Alright, let's go through one at a time. You first Sarge." The sergeant walked up to the teleporter. "Today seems like a good day to teleport. Geronimo!" He yelled as he ran into the teleporter, soon followed by Caboose yelling "Paskataway!" Simmons took slightly longer to go in, saying that he "Had a weird feeling that he would never see Blood Gulch again." All that was left was Grif and Alpha himself.

"You and me will go through together, alright?" It was better to go in numbers after all. "After you." Alpha nodded and ran through the teleporter.

On the other side, it seemed that Alpha and Grif were on some sort of cold planet, covered in ice. There were multiple cliffs in the distance, and Alpha couldn't see much vegetation other than the tree that they found themselves beside. Alpha could tell that this was the oh-so fabled Sidewinder. "Alright, now lets just-" He looked around to only see Grif. "Where is everybody?"

"FREEZE! DROP YOUR WEAPONS!" Roared a voice behind them. Alpha and Grif turned around to see a man in grey armour pointing a gun at them. "Uh-oh." The man only seemed to get angrier. "I SAID FREEZE, DIRTBAG!" As though his body was programmed to do it, Alpha turned to Grif and punched him. "Ow!- OH COME ON!"

Chapter End Notes

Alright, so FPSCanarussia pointed out a very valid point- That there have been little changes to the canon timeline as of right now. I can't make any real changes as of yet, but I would like to hear some of your advice on how to slightly dullen the feeling of novelisation. Please leave any advice you may have in the comments.

Thank you all very much for reading!
You Put a Bomb in my Gut, And That Was Only The Beginning!

Chapter Summary

Stand back and watch in awe as the author bullshits through the time-travel plot.

Not to mention most of season three.

Chapter Notes

I want to gouge out my eyes with soup spoons at how slowly the plot is going to be until the first major spin. I'm so sorry about that, but I can't tell ya'll whereabouts or whatabouts it is because of spoilers. Please don't abandon reading this fic.

Nevermind. Just frustrated. Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The man that had captured Church and Grif was a giant dickhead. That much was obvious. He had supposedly captured them because he thought they were from the Blue team on Sidewinder, even though Grif was orange. Needless to say, it was kind of frustrating when the guy didn't listen to reason.

"Move it!" The man shouted, pushing the end of his gun into Church's back. Strangely enough, the man seemed to do that mainly to Church's back rather than Grif's. Perhaps it was because the man was from Red team, and therefore associated himself with the colour more. Whatever, knowing that wouldn't help anything. The man eventually managed to push them towards a jail cell.

"There's no way that I'm going in there." Church stated flatly. After being trapped in the Sarcophagus for who knows how long, one grew a dislike for being imprisoned. The man then drew his gun to Church's head. "Do it or a bullet is going through your head!" He continued to roar. Church sighed. As much as he hated jails, at least there was going to be someone else with him. Not to mention the fact that a bullet was probably going to damage his body, robot droid or not. He reluctantly headed in after Grif. "I should probably let you know that you better hope that I don't escape."

The man had laughed cruelly, stepping up to the bars of the cell. Church moved as fast as possible towards it, and managed to reach out to hit the man's shoulder as he sidestepped. "You scumbag!" He grunted as he rubbed the shoulder. He recovered, and flipped Church off. "Enjoy rotting in prison!" He then left for some other matter. Grif took a step closer to Church. "You know, punching him probably wasn't the best idea." Church let his hands slip off the bars, curling them
Church looked through the security cameras. Why were they so much easier to break into than his prison door? Maybe he could have opened it sooner if he didn't keep looking through the security cameras. Whatever. And- hold on a second... Oh no.

"Shit." he grumbled under his breath. He watched as a man in white armour sneak up another guy, before punching him. He then took a phone call, and shot the other man shortly after (Why didn't the cameras have audio?). Church could tell from the way that the man had fought that he was a freelancer. And if the armour colour was anything to go by...

He turned his attention away from the cameras as he heard gunfire and yelling from beyond the cell door. The guard ran to help his friends, but Church could hear him screaming as more shots were fired. Grif looked at Church. "Who the hell is that?" There were heavy footsteps coming steadily in their direction. Church and Grif saw a slightly distorted space in front of them, where a man soon materialised. "Hello, Church."

Seemed that Wyoming knew his name. Did he keep in touch with Florida after he left? Not that that mattered now. "Wyoming. What are you doing here?" He snarled. Wyoming looked down at his gun. "Been hired to do a job about your friend Tucker. Seems that he discovered some information that someone else isn't happy about." Grif folded his arms. "Who's this cracker?" He asked.

"Just a scumbag bounty hunter from the same division as Tex." Wyoming hummed. "Ah, dear Tex. As soon as I take care of Tucker, I'll be taking care of her as well." He chuckled darkly. "Well, since everyone here is dead, I'll just leave you two to starve. Cheerio!" And with that, the asshole left. Church ran through his options.

"Alright Grif, I think I know what I can do, but it might scare you a bit." He waited for Grif to give him the go ahead. "Alright, here goes..." He looked to the door as the bars lifted up themselves. "Well that wasn't scary at all." Grif stated. Church cocked his head, before shaking it. "That wasn't me... Forget it. Let's just go." He ran through the now open gate, being shortly followed by Grif.

He ran for about a mile before spotting the Reds and Blues. He stopped as he observed what was going on, giving Grif a moment to catch up to him, panting like he was going to puke. He saw the Reds and Blues standing up in what seemed to be defiance against O'Malley. He then noticed how Lopez began to glow and conduct electricity, strange symbols circling around him. He ran to them as quickly as he could, ignoring Grif pain-filled moans.
"What's going on?" He asked Sarge as soon as he had managed to reach them. "Do you want the long version or the short?" Despite the obvious question in that sentence, Sarge decided to go with what Church could only suppose to be the short version of the story. "Well in essence, you have a ten megaton bomb in your gut-" The fuck? "-And Lopez is about to kill us all!" The fuck? Church stared dumbly at Sarge. "Nope, I didn't get any of that. What's the long version?" Tucker walked up to him, shaking his head slightly.

"That was the long version. The short version is 'We're boned.'" He explained. Alpha's thoughts, which had slowly begun to grow more panicked, were cut short when a rocket had been shot far to close to their group for comfort. They all scattered. "Haha! You foolish fools will never defeat me!" Redundant, but now was now the time to criticise. Church took his sniper rifle off from his back and aimed at Omega (Now that he thought about it, why hadn't his captor confiscated his weapons? No matter). His attention turned to Simmons as he called the attention of O'Malley when he went to where Sarge and Grif had taken cover.

"-Maybe we can't stop you, but I know who can!" Said Simmons. A green portal appeared beside him. Church had to give him props for doing that in suck a short amount of time. Church stared at the portal in shock as Red and Blue soldiers came rushing out of it, cheering about a 'new level'. Wow, they seemed stupid. Church wondered what Simmons was planning to do.

"Hey guys do you want your flag?" Simmons suggested, instantly catching the attention of the soldiers. Simmons pointed a finger at Omega. "He's the one that has it!" He lied. The red soldier that seemed to be the leader held his free hand in a salute, shouting something that seemed way too religious for someone like Church, before all of them started firing at Omega.

The Reds ran to Church, talking to each other about having to defuse the bomb in Church. Sarge crouched down, Church groaning at having to put himself through this shit again. Then a stray bolt of electricity created by Lopez hit him. Sarge's eyes widened in what Church assumed to be horror. "The detonator's fused! There's no way to turn this thing off!"

Tucker thought about what he heard. "Well, I guess there's no other option." He then proceeded to aim a rocket launcher at Church, and was going to fire it despite his protests, but was cut off as he was shot. They all turned to where the bullet had come from, to see Wyoming. And then it got worse.

"Um, guys? Zero seconds."
Church came to in a place that he couldn't recognise. "Where the hell am I?" He murmured to himself. He looked around the very large room. He went through one of the doorways in the walls. Alright Church. A bomb blew up, you were knocked out, and then you ended up here. He went through another doorway. "Now the question is: Where is here?"

He saw a computer from across the room and walked up to it, hoping that he could use it to his benefit. "Hello. You are early. I did not expect you for another one thousand, eight hundred and fifty-six years." Church stared at the computer. He felt the same feeling he had when he was talking to O'Malley. Which AI was this? "You are the Great Destroyer as foretold by the Great Prophecy." Now that Church thought about it, this was probably Gamma. Best to not mention him knowing Gamma's name. He listened as Gamma told him some more about the 'Great Prophecy', and how it would be caused by a man in blue armour, who was also the dumbest person in the universe. Hold on a second...

"Can I leave a message or something? Because I think I definitely know who that is." Gamma complied. Church leaned in slightly towards where he assumed the microphone would be. "Caboose is that you? Can you hear me?" He waited a second, mentally preparing himself for how stupid he'll sound going along with the time travel idea.

"Caboose, I know you're there. I'm leaving this message from two-thousand years in the past. Whatever you do, don't touch anything. Apparently you're this culture's version of the apocalypse. You'll destroy this building, and somehow bring about doom for their entire race." He breathed in and groaned inwardly at how stupid he sounded. Knowing the Reds and Blues, they probably had done and were doing exactly what he was going to tell them to not do."Just don't touch that blue-glowing weapon they have stored there. And if you do, definitely don't bring it into the main building. Otherwise the whole place will lock down and you're going to be trapped. Just don't touch anything, don't look at anything, don't breathe on anything." He finally finished. He exhaled. "Message recorded. Do you think that it will work?" The deceit fragment asked. Church shook his head.

"Like you said, that guy's dumb as a rock. But at least he has some slightly less stupid people around him that can kind of help from time to time." He thought about exactly who those people were. "On second thought, I should probably go help them and handle this personally."

Church knew that, even if both he and Gamma were AIs, and even though Gamma had been slowly slipping into faster speech without realising, he had been waiting for a pretty long fucking time. "Processing complete, slightly behind schedule." Church crossed his arms. "It would have probably gone faster if you didn't spend all that power telling knock knock jokes. Do you have the
"Yes." Church took in a deep breath. "Alright, let's go." He disappeared, and reappeared shortly after. "Shit! Gary, you need to send me to Sidewinder, I totally fucked everything up!" As though Church yelling something like that wasn't confusing enough, he then began to duplicate. "Yeah, your next plan? It's not going to work." Soon there were about two dozen Churches in the room. Realisation dawned on Gamma. "Oh no."

It seemed that no matter what Church would try to do, he would inevitably fail. Or at least, that's what the collection of other Churches on Sidewinder were telling him. After telling the most recent one that he should probably be the one to fix everything, and then being confused by why Church would let him say that when he already knew what he was going to say, the Future Church left, saying something about 'winging it'.

The future Church in question was actually going to just untie Tex, and get back to the Reds and Blues, hoping that she could defuse the bomb in time. And so, that was exactly what he did. He ran up and stood beside Caboose. "Church!" The guy really seemed exited to see him. The beeping on the bomb got faster, before everything exploded. Seemed that Tex wasn't fast enough again.

He came to somewhere he recognised to be the same facility where he and Gamma were before, but shinier. It seemed to be a power facility of sorts. He heard screaming from below and recognised it as the Reds and Blues. He hopped down. "Hey guys, what's up?"

"Church! You made it in time to be smithereens together with me!" Caboose exclaimed. "That won't be necessary Caboose. Hey Gary, how are you doing? Could you turn off the bomb?" Gary complied, the bomb shutting off a second before it was about to go off. Sarge stared up. "Gary! YOU MEAN TO TELL ME THAT YOU COULD HAVE SHUT OFF THE BOMB THIS WHOLE TIME!?" Gary didn't seem to care. "You didn't ask." Sarge let out a grunt of frustration.

Church looked to the side. "You know, it's really great to see you all again." Tucker smiled. Church was more caring than he let on. "You seem happy." He commented. Church shifted his wait from one foot to the other. "Yeah, well. I've learned something important on my travels. No matter how bad things may seem-" Caboose had a hunch that he knew where the sentence would lead, and tried to finish it of with "It can't get any worse." Church shook his head much to mild surprise.
"No. No matter how bad things may seem, it can't get any better, and it can't get any worse. Because that's the way things fucking are, and you better get used to it Nancy. Quit you bitching." Tucker and Caboose stared at each other. "Yeah, great to have you back Church, but where have you been?" In response, Church gave them two options. "Do you want the long version or the short version?" Tucker figured that it would be best to know everything, especially with Church being who he was. On the other hand, it was kind of tedious.

"I want the long version, but can you tell it to me in three parts?"

"Hold on. So you didn't try to change anything at all?" Caboose asked. Tucker had to agree. It wouldn't make sense for Church of all people to not do anything and stand back as everything around him crashed and burned. Even Caboose could see that. "No, I didn't. I was more of a silent observer type." Caboose still didn't let the subject drop. "I would have tried to save your life. For me!" He exclaimed. "I didn't think of that." Church responded. That felt like a pretty fast response, didn't it? Church quickly changed the subject. "Tucker, I don't think that it's a good idea to keep that thing." Was Church trying to make him drop the sword?

"You're just pissed because you don't have one." Church was one to get jealous. "No, I think you're confusing me for Tex. She hasn't stopped staring at you since you found that sword." Tucker looked to Tex, who's eyes may as well have been glued to the sword. "I'm not staring at it." She said, blatantly contradicting herself.

"Then why haven't you looked at me the entire time that I've been talking?" Church asked. Tex still tried to deny it. "I've seen you before. I'm not too impressed." Speaking of Tex...

"I would have tried to save Tex too." That seemed to hit a nerve. Church glared harshly at Caboose. "Well, I didn't. I didn't save me, I didn't save Tex, and I sure as hell didn't make hundreds of copies of myself trying to keep the bomb from going off." Tucker figured that that was more likely to have been what had actually happened. He would have to ask Church about it later: Doing so now would probably end up in the sword being shoved down his throat. Caboose let out an "Oh". "Because that was my next suggestion." He whispered. Church folded his arms defensively. "Just leave me alone, Caboose." Tucker figured that he should probably do what he can to stray from that topic for the time being. Thankfully, Tex was still obsessing over the sword.
"That's really shiny." Tucker grinned at this, and waved it around a bit. Church seemed to be slightly concerned. "Tucker? You know, Gary told me something about that being an piece of ancient alien technology. I don't think that you should be waving it around like that." Tucker made a waving motion with his free hand, brushing off the comment. "Nah, it's fine. What's the worst that could happen?" Upon hearing this, Church scanned Tucker. There didn't seem to be anything wrong with Tucker, until he scanned his face. He sobered. "Tucker, take off your helmet."

Tucker's grin dropped, and he tilted his head. "What? Why?" He asked. "Just do it!" Church barked. Tucker could hear a hint of worry in his voice, and, knowing how much of a mother hen Church could be, decided to do it now, before Church would begin to pester him non-stop until he caved in. He took off his helmet. Church let out an audible gasp. "What's wrong?"

Church said nothing, only scanning his face again. There was a quiet clicking noise, one that Tucker recognised to be that of a camera. After a short moment. Tucker heard a small 'ping!' in his helmet. He put the helmet back on. It appeared that the noise occurred because he got what appeared to be.. Mail? Tucker opened the file. It was a normal picture of his face. At least, it was, until he saw his eyes in the photo. Tucker flinched harshly. "What the fuck?"

His eyes, which would usually be a brown akin to that of coffee, were instead a light glowing blue, the same colour as the sword. Tucker whipped his head to Church for an explanation. The AI raised his hands. "I know, I probably should have done a scan sooner, but in my defence, your eyes aren't damaged." Tucker released the button on the sword that activated the blade, folded his arms and glared. "They shouldn't be damaged in the future either. There's no decisive evidence on whether or not this," Church made a gesture in Tucker's direction. "Is dangerous. Just tell me if anything is wrong. If you feel pain, tell me immediately. I mean it."

Tucker huffed and rolled his eyes. "Okay, mom." Then he softened slightly. "Thanks, or, whatever." He mumbled just loudly enough for the Alpha to hear. Caboose, who was feeling kind of awkward with the whole situation, not to mention fairly jealous, turned around, feeling major relief when he saw something that would definitely change the subject.

"Sergeant Shortbread!" Caboose waved to Donut, who was practically skipping towards them. "Hey guys!" When he made it over, Donut leaned on Caboose's shoulder, putting a hand on his hip. "What are you up to?" Tucker raised an eyebrow. "What are /you/ up to?" Donut tried to dodge the question. "I asked first!"

Church tried to get Donut disinterested. "Discussing the possibility of maggots manifesting in your gums." Donut either didn't hear him or didn't care, despite the noise of disgust made be Caboose and Tucker. "That's cool." Well, he didn't seem to be leaving anytime soon, as evidenced by how he began to launch into a story about what he did for 'healthcare' when he was on a farm in Iowa before he joined the military. Tucker just tried to ignore the stories of Donut's horrendous acne before his discovery of how washing your face could clear it away. Tucker held his hands up in a
praying motion to Alpha, begging for an end to the torment. Church thought about how to end this, when he got hit with an epiphany.

"Hold on a second Donut, you're trying to distract us, aren't you?" He asked. Donut tried to deny this, but to no avail. "You're are! You're here distracting us, while the Reds are over there monkeying about!" Tucker snorted. "Dude, nobody says that anymore." Church flipped him off.

"Oh shut the fuck up Tucker!"

Chapter End Notes

I'm very sorry for the wait this time. I'll do everything in my power to update slightly faster from now on. If anyone had any problems with the chapter itself, please let me know!

Also, please understand that the religion jokes were unintentional. That being said, they're staying.
Chapter 16

Tex, along with the rest of the Blues, were standing over a makeshift balcony spying on the Reds. "Yeah, they're definitely plotting something." Church glanced at the Reds, who were sitting in the Warthog. "Or they're just sitting in their jeep listening to the radio." He suggested. Tex would jump to this sort of conclusion. "No, they're definitely plotting. They're going to try something."

"But why? I already told them that the war was a lie," Church looked back to Tucker. "Hey man, I'm glad that you figured that out, but they're the Reds, they're not exactly the type to just accept that everything they fought for was a-" He looked at Caboose. Tucker followed his gaze. "Oh, right. That was a close call." They kept looking at the Reds. "Maybe they're going to control my brain using the fillings in my teeth." Tucker theorised, in a joking manner. Church lightly elbowed him, letting out a quiet snort. "Man, you are so stupid."

"I know what the Reds are doing!" Caboose shouted to them. The other Blues stared at him, Tex making a motion for Caboose to continue. "The Reds were in their car, the Boss Hogg, when Simon, heard a distress signal on the radio, and Gruff was in the backseat. With a monkey." They stared at Caboose, simultaneously confused, amused and almost impressed. Tucker held in his laughter for the time being. "Yeah, I'm going to assume that some of that was wrong."

Church was lost in thought. "Andy? Who's Andy? None of us are called Andy, and none of the Reds are called Andy..." Church murmured. He turned to Caboose, cocking his head to the side. "Caboose, can you take me to Andy?" Caboose seemed to get significantly more cheerful. "Okay!" He began to lead them along.

"Uh... Caboose? Not to be rude or anything, but could you let go of my hand?" Church awkwardly shifted his fingers in Caboose's death grip. Unfortunately, the grip only seemed to grow stronger until Caboose finally let go of him. "Hello Andy!" Caboose's waved using his now freed hand at-

"Uh, Tex? Correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't that the bomb you built?" Tex only nodded, and continued to stare at the bomb which Caboose seemed to keep treating as a real person. "Andy, this is Tex and Tucker. The black one is Tex, and the other black one is Tucker." Holy shit. "Andy's the bomb!?!" Tucker couldn't have expected this. Why did it seem that every time he ever tried to understand what was going on, something else a hundred times crazier seemed to happen?

"Andy prefers the term 'Explosive American'." Caboose replied. "Are you making fun of me?" Tucker was slightly irked at the comment which may or may not have been about the colour of his skin. Caboose chose to ignore Tucker. "Andy told me all about what the Reds were up to. Didn't you Andy?" There was no response from the bomb, which made Caboose slightly more nervous. "Uh, and then we talked about all of our adventures. Did you know that he used to know Sheila?" Caboose seemed to get more and more desperate for Andy to respond. Tucker was wondering if
"Umm, Caboose? Are you hearing 'Andy' talking right now?" Caboose's desperation for a response had turned to anger. "Say something Andy. You are embarrassing e in front of all of my friends." He gritted out. By this point, the others had come to a collective agreement that Caboose was going insane. "Caboose, you're losing it." Tex deadpanned.

"Yeah, and I wouldn't really call us friends. We're more like acquaintances, or people who have to work together even though they don't like each other." Tucker added. Caboose curled his hands into fists. "I am not crazy!" Church stepped between Caboose and the others before a fight could break out. "Stupid Tucker..." He mumbled, loudly enough for Church to hear. Church sighed heavily.

"I can't deal with this any longer. I'm going to go talk to Gary and see if I can find anything worth knowing." He made his way to the other room. "Try not to kill each other!" He shouted out, before leaving. He reached Gamma in less than a minute, slowing down every now and again to absorb the surroundings.

He greeted Gamma with a polite "Hello". If Gamma was anything like him, he would only be passive aggressive about the lack of introduction until there was an apology, so it was best to just say it to save as much time as possible. After a few back and forth sentences with Gamma, Church figured that it would be alright to ask the fragment about what he wanted to know now.

"Alright Gary, I'm going to need you to tell me everything about the Alien race that built you and Tucker's sword." It would probably help them a lot. "I do not know anything about them. Instead, they filled all of my memory banks with information about the Great Destroyer and his race." Church bit back a groan. So it seemed that Gamma knew nothing about them after all. Church added this to the long list of why he didn't get his hopes up. "So, all you know is only about humans?"

"That is not what they call you, but what you said is correct." Church looked back at the computer monitor, interest regained. "Then what do they call us?" Gamma waited a moment, as though reluctant to admit the name. "Shizno." Church stored that word in his memory banks. Knowing the alien language might come in useful someday. But at the same time, he didn't even know the translation to that word. Wouldn't hurt to know. Not that he didn't have a clue as to what it was already. "That's an insult, isn't it?"

"Perhaps this can best be explained in the form of a knock knock joke." Church sighed heavily. He had made his fair share of bad knock knock jokes, but Gamma's were some of the worst ever. (Of all time.) Regardless, he would have to grin and bear it if he dared to hope for an answer. "Who's there."
"You are." Gamma's response, albeit predictable, was almost filled with a childish glee, or as much as an AI with a generic voice could muster.

"You are who?"

"You are a dirty dirty shizno. Ha ha ha."

Alright, at least Alpha could get an answer with now that the joke was over. "Alright, what does it mean?" Gamma seemed to mull over the explanations that he could give, before finally deciding on the closest to accurate interpretation. "What is the most foul smelling creature on Earth?"

Church listed the animals he thought to have the worst smell, excluding any external factors. A dung beetle wouldn't smell that bad if you cleaned off all of the shit. He settled on something simple. "A skunk? Is that what shizno means?"

"Not exactly. Does a skunk defecate?" Alpha had to give Gamma props for being so dedicated to his role. "Of course."

"And does that excrement in turn produce its own excrement?" Alpha recoiled at that disgusting mental image. "Ew, no!"

"Then there is no accurate translation for the word Shizno in your language."

"Gross." Despite how disgusting the word is, not to mention how that is the word that is used for humans, he tagged the sentence 'Defecation of the excrement of a skunk' as the translation to shizno. Who knew, it could come in handy in the future. At least he could move on to another topic, now that that one was over with. What better than whether Caboose was indeed delusional?

"Hey Gary, does the bomb ever talk to you?" Church figured that it was unlikely, but confirmation would be nice. "The bomb? No." Church sighed, making sure to read a couple more books on psychology and the effects of brain damage. "Andy and I are not currently on speaking terms." Church paused midway through his motion of taking a step back towards where the other Blues were. "Andy is kind of a jerk."

"Hey, I'm not the jerk, you're the jerk!" A voice called out. It was unfamiliar to Church, although he felt like the owner of that voice and himself would be acquainted soon enough. "That was very rude." Gamma replied curtly.

"Aw shut up you shizno!"
"Church, so you're telling me that the bomb can talk?" For the love of god, why didn't anyone tell Tucker anything sooner? "Hey, I'm standing right here! You can talk to me." Tucker had a small nagging feeling that Andy would become annoying pretty quickly. "If you could talk before then why didn't you?" He realised how dumb he must've been sounding to everyone else. "Hold on, why am I talking to a bomb? I don't have to do this." Andy seemed to get irritated.

"Oh what, are you too good to talk to me? You some kind of too-good-to-talk-to-a-bomb type?" Church stepped next to Tucker. "You know, it might just be a good idea to not anger the explosive."

"Right. Speaking of the explosive, did Gary say anything about him and how he can talk?" Church simply shrugged. "Just that we're going to destroy this place, and that Andy here is going to be the one to do that." Tucker's eyes widened. "Well, that's not good."

I don't think so. Bunch of shiznos if you ask me. And no one did ask me which I find offensive!" Tucker could see Andy to be the type to milk everyone's guilt to get what he wants. He was definitely going to be annoying. Church luckily decided to try and calm Andy down before he could get any further.

"Calm down Andy, Calm down. No one's here to hurt you." Andy wasn't soothed by this, so Church decided to ask Caboose for help. "Alright Andy, think of a happy place. Now, what makes you happy?"

"Being in the middle of a huge explosion!" Church could already see five outcomes where this could lead to something bad. "Less happy place Caboose, less happy place!" Caboose scrambled for an idea. "Um, Andy, how about we count back from ten! TEN, NINE," And that resulted in a worse still outcome.

"NO!" Was shouted from all directions. Church discreetly called Tucker and Tex over to him. "Alright please tell me that either of you have some ideas for how to calm Andy down." Tucker shrugged. "Hey, don't get me involved in this. How do you expect me to know how to calm down a bomb? You two are AIs, you two can handle it." Tex punched him in the side.

"OW!"

"Yeah, serves you right. Just go to Caboose and make sure he doesn't accidentally say something that make Andy want to explode. Tex and I will make some other plans." Tucker grumbled under
his breath, but complied in fear of Tex. "Alright Church, how about breathing exercises?" Tex suggested. Church tried to bite back a comment, but he found to be incapable of helping himself.

"We need something for the bomb, Tex." Tex raised one of her fists. "Woah, woah! I'm just kidding! Your idea won't hurt! You should try it!" Tex lowered her hand, now more smug than she was a few seconds ago. "Finally, you say something intelligent." She turned back to where Andy was sitting.

"Alright Andy, I'm going to have you breathe in through your nose," Tex drew in a deep breath as an example, letting it out shortly afterwards. "And out through your mouth. Okay, now you repeat after me. Breathe in through your nose..." As she was saying this, Church thought about how insane they would probably seem to any outsider if they saw this out of context. Church brushed off the idea in favour of thinking of any other methods they could use to calm Andy down. Dignity didn't matter that much when you were preventing a bomb from exploding.

"How about some incense, would that work? Maybe some scented candles?" Church suggested, looking to Tex for approval. "Oh sure, because we're definitely going to find scented candles and incense in an abandoned factory. Makes perfect sense." Tex responded, before continuing to try and persuade Andy into doing breathing exercises. Church held back the urge to flip her off and call her a bitch. Now wasn't the time.

Fortunately, after roughly another minute of doing things like this, it finally seemed to work out.

"Alright, now everyone is calm, and happy, but not too happy," Caboose soothed. Alright, so far so good."-and no one is thinking of exploding anyone or anything. At all." Aaaand it was ruined. Church wanted nothing more than to slap Caboose for saying that. Was that too much to ask for?

"Hey wait a minute. Are you talking about me?" Andy asked, finally catching on. Church tried to save face. "What? No, no. Of course not. We just want to make sure that none of us are unhappy or mad in any way whatsoever."

"Don't say we, you really mean me! Or you, which in this case is me!" Fuck, Andy wasn't convinced. Church tried to think of a convincing excuse. He turned to Tex, getting an idea. If everything was to calm down someone who got mad easily, why not push the blame onto the next best candidate?

"No, no. We uh, we were talking about Tex." Church prayed that this would work. "Excuse me?!" Tex clearly wasn't happy about this. But at least Church could hold off a beating until this whole event blew over (Or blew up). "Do you want to die in a fiery explosion? Play along." He muttered
hurriedly. In the meantime, he at least got to have fun with this situation. He turned on his helmet cam.

"Yeah Andy, I'm not sure if you noticed but uh, she's kind of a bitch. Isn't that right Tex?" Tex curled her fists and gritted her teeth before deciding to play along. "Yes, we were talking about me. I'm a bitch." Church inwardly sighed with relief at Tex accepting the role of scapegoat. He chuckled. He could have some fun with this. "Go on."

"And I need to be calmed down all of the time." Now this was actually kind of fun. "Or else?"

"Or, I get so mad that I kill members of my own team." Tex glared pointedly at Church, who stared back with fear. "I see your point." Caboose and Tucker decided to have some fun with the situation too, while the moment lasted. "Tell him about the crankiness. And the moodiness."

"Or about how she likes to punch the members of her own team in their sleep." Caboose looked at Tex in hurt realisation. "That was you? I thought that the tooth fairy was mad at me." He sounded on the the verge of tears. Andy finally seemed to be convinced. "Wow, she sounds like a real handful." At this, Tex had finally had enough.

"Alright, listen up you little firecracker-" Church put up an arm in front of her as a meagre restraint. It would have proven ineffective should have Tex actually tried to do something to Andy, but she thankfully stopped once she saw the arm. "See Andy? Absolutely volatile." She glared at Church. "I am so going to remember this."

"You should sleep with your pillow on top... of your head... tonight." Even Caboose seemed worried for him. Church would have been more scared were it not for the removal of Eta. "Yeah, I don't care as long as everyone is peaceful, calm and there's nothing to get us excited." There was a loud sound of something exploding behind him, along with Omega crying out "Attack, my robot minions!" Church sighed.

"I could almost feel that coming as I finished my sentence." Tucker patted his back sympathetically. "Tough luck there, buddy." Church held his face in his hands and let out a long groan.

"Alright, I'm going to go back to Gary. You and Tex can keep lookout. Make sure that O'Malley doesn't do anything." He turned to Caboose. "And you..." The blue soldier stared up at him. "Can make sure that Andy doesn't explode. Make sure that he isn't excited. Can you do that Caboose?" After the soldier nodded, the AI stood back up and bagen to make his way towards Gary.
"If any of you see O'Malley, tell him I said that he can go fuck himself!"

Tex looked out at where O'Malley was standing. "Alright, I think that I can take him. I just need a better weapon." She turned to Tucker. "Why don't you give me your sword?" She suggested. Tucker only brought it closer to his chest. "No way, I see what you're doing, you just want me to give you the sword."

"That's what I just said!"

"Yeah, but it's the way you said it."

"You know, It's a good thing that the sword doesn't run on brain power- Oh my God! Look Tucker, hot chicks!" She stared at something behind Tucker.

"Nice try, but you just want me to take the sword!" Said Tucker, blocking most of his chest using the blade. "Now the hot girls are making out!" Tex pressed. Tucker paused for a moment, before making up his mind. "Alright, that's going to be worth it." Tucker turned around and looked out of the window to see nothing. "Oh son of a-" Tex used Tucker's vulnerable pose to knock him out, sending him flying and landing outside. The sword rested a few metres away. Tex walked up to it.

"Hey Tucker, buddy. You there?" Church asked, lightly shaking Tucker's slowly awakening body. "If I have to resuscitate you, I am not doing mouth to mouth." Tucker's recovery was still satisfyingly slow, so he hit Tucker in the shoulder with the end of his rifle. Tucker coughed, before groaning. Tucker sat up, Church moving to shade him from the harsh sunlight as he recovered.

"Tucker, you okay man?" Tucker squinted, blinking several times as his eyes adjusted. "New rule: We start rotating knockouts. It's your turn next time." Church scowled. "Oh sure, and the next time Caboose goes team killing, you can take that one. I'm sure it'll work out, what with you being a human and everything. Let's see how that goes for you." Church scanned Tucker for any serious injuries. After being satisfied that Tucker hadn't ended up with a concussion or broken bones, he quickly checked his surroundings. "Did Tex take the sword?"

"What do you think?" Church shook his head. "Man, this is not good." His gaze flitted about, and his heard the distant sound of an explosion. "I going to go see what she did. You coming?" Tucker
stood up, albeit shakily, and grinned. "Bow chika bow wow." Church rolled his eyes. "Let's just go already."

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They stared at the decimated robots below them. "Man, at times like this, I'm really glad that she's on our side." Church nodded in agreement.

"Who's on our side?" A voice behind them asked. Church turned around to see Tex. She walked up to the verge of the platform to see the carnage of robots. "Woah! Who killed all of the droids?" Church tilted his head. "You did."

"No I didn't. I've been downstairs trying to turn on the sword." Church felt a sinking feeling. "I need a second." He ran off towards Gamma.

"The Great Destroyer has arrived. The end is near. The Great Destroyer has arrived. The end is near. The Gre-" Church ran up to the computer hosting Gamma. "Hey wait a second Gary, stop. If Tex isn't the Great Destroyer, then who is?" Church asked. There was a long pause from Church, one long enough to make Church worried. "Gary?" The pause dragged out a little bit longer, before Gamma finally replied. "Knock knock." Church wasn't really scared, but he was definitely concerned.

"Who's there?"
Church reappeared in front of the other Blues. "What the fuck just happened." The other Blues looked at him, as though he was only just noticed, which wasn't as unlikely as it might seem. Tucker made a small wave. "Hey, Church!" He then brought his hand up to his chin. "Where's your body? Did you ditch it?" Church tilted one of his hands from side to side in a 'sort-of' motion. "Well, yes and no." Tex got interested. "Well? We're waiting for an answer."

"Well, I was talking to Gary, the computer, about the Great Destroyer. He thought that was you for a time by the way." He pointed at Tex. "Take that however you want to. Anyways, before I know it, he's telling me a knock knock joke to try to warn me about the thing that was creeping up behind me." Tucker held up a hand that signalled for Church to pause. "A fucking knock-knock joke? Tell me you're kidding." He frowned when Church shook his head. "No, that's actually what he tried to do." Tucker was conflicted between having his jaw drop in surprise or laughing. "Continue." He managed to make out.

"Alright, so that failed miserably as you can probably tell, and then I saw a thing. It was a big thing, slimy, had big teeth. It was a dark blue, but it definitely wasn't Caboose. I didn't get a good look before I high-tailed it out of there." Church explained. He felt more sympathetic as to why Tucker was more ready to admit that he was scared of black stuff rather than going through the portal. Hey: if it kept you alive, there wasn't any harm. "So you left your body?!" It wasn't a question from Tex so much as it was a statement.

"Hey, I didn't need my body; It was a dead weight." Church answered. Tex sighed, tapping her before starting to pace. "So let me get this straight: You saw a thing, you don't know what it was, but it attacked you and you left your body there?" After a while of her grumbling under her breath about how Church couldn't do anything right and how she always had to do all of the work herself, she finally stopped her pacing and turned to face the other Blues.

"Alright, so here's what we're going to do; We're going to go back to where Church dropped his body. I'll be in front because you three don't have the balls to, and you'll be behind me. Be sure to stay tight." She revealed. "Bow, chika bow wow." Tucker said, emphasising using finger guns. Tex looked to Church, communicating silently, asking for revenge. Church nodded and walked over to Tucker. He put his hand on top of Tucker's helmet, keeping it there for about three seconds before removing it. "Tucker, Tex changed her mind: You're in front."

Tucker shrugged. "Meh, worth it." He then squinted. "But what did you do?" Church chuckled. "Let's just say that I removed what created that joke in the first place. But you'll find out what I mean later. Let's go." Tucker was about to protest, but sighed and equipped his gun. "Fine."
They made their way towards where Church had left his body as he ran away. When Tucker and Church looked, they couldn't spot anything. Tucker looked to the AI for answers. "Now that I think about it, Andy was here when I got attacked, maybe he knows something." He called out to Andy.

"Oh look! It's the ghost, back for another beating!" Andy shouted back. Seemed that he hadn't given up being a dickhead. "Up yours, man! Where's that big alien thing?"

"Last time I checked, he was halfway up your ass!" Church clenched his fist, turning when he heard footsteps to see Tex walk up to him. "Andy giving you trouble?" Church nodded, but he waved as he did so. "Yeah, but don't worry. I've dealt with bigger assholes before. This isn't a big deal." He looked out of one of the holes in the wall to see his body. And from what it looked like, they weren't even that far! "Hey look, there it is!"

Unfortunately, it seemed that Tucker noticed something too. "Holy shit, it's an alien!" Church and Tex's heads snapped to where Tucker was pointing. "Crap!" Tex yelled as she and Tucker opened fire on the alien, backing away before running in the other direction. They jumped out of that hallway, running towards Caboose. Andy seemed to be having a good time. "Hey, I think you're tiring him out! Come back!"

Caboose looked at the other Blues as they didn't stop running away. "Did we win?" He asked. Church turned his head to look at Caboose, not slowing down. "Yeah Caboose, we totally won, and this is our victory lap!"

"God damn, I can't stand the thought of my body being in there!" Church exclaimed. "Maybe I would have it back already if one of you landed a shot." He looked at Tucker. "Hey, shut up man! You didn't even fire a bullet!" Church positioned his gun directly in front of Tucker's chest before firing. Tucker immediately grabbed his chest, before realising that there wasn't a hole; Church's bullet had completely phased through him because it was simply a projection. "Jesus Christ Church, I know that got your point across, but you didn't have to shoot me for it! Church rubbed the back of his neck. "Right, sorry. Probably not the best way to show you."

"Besides, I'm not the one to blame when Tex was just backing away!" Tex shook her head furiously at Tucker's accusation. "This is a long ranged weapon," She held up her gun. "I need to fire it at a distance." Tucker laughed sardonically. "Are you kidding me? If you backed up any further then you'd have to mail the alien the bullets!" Tex snarled.
"You know what? I work better alone. I'm going to go up there, kill that thing, and get back here with your body and it's head on a platter. See you in two minutes." Tex then stomped up the ramp. Tucker glanced at Church. "Does it ever bother you that the most take-charge person on this whole team is a girl?" Church shrugged. "Hey, as long as I get my body back, I don't care if I help or not." Tucker turned to where Tex had just gone. "Do you think she can take him?"

Church opened his mouth to answer, but closed it when he heard a yell and something being punched. Tex reappeared a moment later, now semi-transparent. "Nope." Tucker folded his arms and smirked. "'Head on a platter', huh Tex?

"Oh fuck off!" Tucker's grin only grew more smug. Church stepped between the two of them; he found that he had to do that a lot nowadays. "Break it up. We till need to find a way to defeat that alien thing, not to mention that fact that we need to get Tex's body back as well as mine." Tucker and Tex scoffed, but backed off. "I swear, you two would do anything to be at each other's throats." Tex opened her mouth to argue, but closed it soon after.

"So guys, any ideas for how to fight the alien?" Church asked. They all thought about what they could do. "Maybe Caboose could talk to the alien." Alpha glanced to at Tucker. "What?"

"They could start off with some common ground, like how they both killed Church." Alpha was about to backfire, but then actually thought about the idea. "Huh, now that I think about it, wouldn't hurt to try. Not bad, Tucker." Upon hearing this, Tex stared at Church as though he was retarded. "Just think about it Tex," He said, trying to erase her doubts. "While Caboose is either A; eaten by the alien, or B; digested by the alien, you and I can sneak in and get our bodies back."

Caboose walked up to Tucker, leaning in. "I would make an amazing ambudassdoor, because I am VERY SHY!" Tucker shoved Caboose to the side. "Get away from me, freak!" Church raised an eyebrow. "You know Caboose, if the word 'ambassador' is too hard to pronounce, you could always just call yourself 'bait'." Church turned and walked up the ramp to stand beside Tex, peaking around the corner.

"Huh, didn't get far, did you Tex?" Church asked.

"You do know that I could punch you right now, right?" What Tex was saying wasn't wrong. As they were both AIs, they could interact with each other so long as one of them wasn't inhabiting a body. And neither of them were. "Point taken."

They both looked for any suspicious activity, before Tex finally stood up and went into her body. She picked herself up from the floor and grabbed her gun while she was at it. Checking around the corner, she saw nothing but Church's body and and a computer. "Alright Church, it's safe." Church then proceeded to do the same as Tex.
"Alright, so that's it?" Church looked around, as though something would pop out unexpectedly. His worries were rational, and Tex's grip on her gun tightened. "You would think that the alien was around here somewhere..." Tex checked behind a corner, and after seeing nothing, gave the go-ahead to Church, the two saying hello to Gamma in passing. "Let's check the base one more time. If we see the alien, we pump it full of lead. Capiche?" Tex glanced outside of a window. Church shrugged and nodded.

"Sure."

The check was mostly undisturbed. Gamma had distracted the briefly with one or two knock knock jokes, Tex shot and killed a rat that had run by, but there were no other real disturbances. The entire scan had taken about five minutes, the two only really skimming the base for threats. "Alright, I guess that's the last of it. Let's go look for Caboose. The alien must have bailed."

Seeing as there was nothing better to do, Tex agreed. The search for Caboose took slightly longer, not to mention they found Caboose entirely by coincidence. But when they found him, he was the least of their problems. The first being the horrible stench, the other.... Well. Call them crazy, but a giant blue alien with razor-sharp teeth was something that they would consider a problem. And like most problems concerning potential hostiles, they would both consider shooting at the PH until it bled out to be the best solution. However, it seemed that Caboose thought otherwise, what with him urging the two to hold their fire.

"He will not eat anybody, because he is my friend." Caboose may as well have grown a second head with how Church and Tex were staring at him. "Yeah, he says you two stink too much for him to eat you!" Andy insulted. Church had his suspicions that Andy just said that to avert their anger from him to the alien, but it didn't matter. It worked, anyhow.

"He thinks we stink? It smells like burning fish." The alien seemed to be slightly offended by this, making a strange grumbling 'huh?' sound. Church looked to Caboose. "Hey man, are you sure about this thing?"

"Oh yes! He hasn't bitten me at all." Church waited for Caboose to add to that. "Since he bit me the first time. I think I might need a tetanus shot." And there it was. Church wasn't sure whether to shake his head in disbelief at how stupid Caboose's ideas - such as befriending a Sangheili hostile - were, or marvel at the fact that Caboose knew what a tetanus shot was used for. His thoughts were cut off as the alien tried to say something. Church gagged at the stench. "Dear God, that smells like rotting cheese on a hot plate!"

The alien clearly didn't like that, roaring to show its rage. To add insult to its injury, Tucker walked onto the scene, also catching a whiff of that unholy smell emitted by the alien. "Dear god! Is there a skunk eating old yogurt in here?" The alien continued to make strange sounds, seemingly trying to respond to Tucker.
"Rargh, rargh, honk!" It roared. Caboose gasped. "That's exactly what it said right before it bit me!"

"Church..." Tex looked at him. "Do you understand what the alien is saying?" Church noticed that Tex was speaking faster then what a human could comprehend, so he also responded the same way. "Tex, if I knew I would already be translating. I think I should know it, I remember... The words they use when describing smells?" Church sighed. "But that won't exactly help us. Sorry about that. All I can do is to try and discover a pattern." He answered, waiting for Tex's disappointment. Instead, Tex cocked her head. She seemed to almost soften."

"Alright. Just try and translate when you can. Now, back to the others." She turned to Caboose and Tucker, Church doing the same. The small moment of peace was over. It was time to try discerning a pattern. "Alright, mister alien, do you understand us?" The alien only roared in return.

"I have no idea whether that means yes or no." It seems that the attempt was totally pointless. That sentence seemed to comprise a large summary of what happened whenever he tried to accomplish something. "What good is this man? You can't figure out an alien language by experimenting."

"It's called the scientific method dipshit. Trial and error. Have you heard of it?"

"I know, but their language might not be entirely verbal. What if it's done through telepathy? Or smells?" Tucker said, inhaling a breath full of air before grimacing shortly after.

"If it's by smells then you should already be fluent, Tucker." The soldier in question rolled his eyes upon hearing this.

The alien kept trying to communicate. Either it didn't realise that no one could understand yet, or it had and was using that opportunity to talk shit about them. Caboose thought that it was in fact using telepathy, but it was really just Caboose's own stupidity.

"Alright, I'm going to ask Gary about this." Church waved behind him as he went towards the computer terminal. "Hey Gary, is there any way for you to translate what this alien is saying to us?"

"No."

"Come on man, isn't this one of the aliens that built you?" For fucks sake, why didn't any of his fragments understand other languages?!

"Yes, but I do not know anything about those creatures. I was only programmed with knowledge of the shisnos. I mean you." Despite how little he knew about the language of the Sangheili, he did remember what that word meant, and considering the fact that he was friends with multiple humans, not to mention that he had been posing as one for god knows how long, it was safe to say
that he got mildly offended when Gamma kept using that word.

"You know, that word is really starting to get on my nerves. Could you tone it down a little?"

"You did not even know what it meant until I told you."

"I know, but you say it so much."

"I only use the word shisno in context. Like talking to a shisno or about a shisno. I think I see what you mean, shisno." Church sighed. This could very easily take longer than what he wanted it to take.

"Alright, Church left to find a translator." Tucker said, purposefully slowing his words down. "Tucker, you do know that the alien doesn't speak our language, right?" Tucker waved to Church as he turned to face him. "I know, I was talking to Caboose." He stepped aside, revealing the soldier.

"I don't understand Tucker, are you hungry? Are you cold? Do you need a blanket Tucker?" Caboose sounded as though he was studying Tucker. "God dammit Caboose! I'm not cold, I'm not hungry, and if you put mustard into my fucking sheets again I'm going to kill you!" Tucker put all that he had into glaring at Caboose, who seemed to either not hear or disregard completely. Instead, he looked at the alien. Knowing the soldier, he probably would have pet the alien should he have not been bitten previously. "Now that we have decided to keep you, we need to give you a name. I vote for Fluffy."

"Fluffy?" That was probably the single most ridiculous thing to call an alien ever.

"Fluffy! The alien that only knows how to love!" Caboose exclaimed. Now this was getting ridiculous.

"He should have a name, why don't we just ask him?" Tucker suggested. That was at least something that they could do, not to mention that it was at least less crazy than trying o name the alien themselves. "Alien, what is your name? N-a-m-e." The alien didn't respond. Was it because it didn't understand the question? "I am Tucker. This is Church." He continued, pointing to Church, before pointing to Tex. "This is Bitchpants McCrabby."

"Hey!"

"What? That's what we call you." Tex only continued to do what Tucker could only imagine to be glaring. And/or thinking about the many ways she could kill him. Church ignored this and continued to try and talk to the alien.

"What is your name?" The alien replied with two honks. "Naammee." Another two honks. "What
the hell does that even mean?" Tex glanced at the interaction. "Maybe the alien's name is Honk-Honk." The alien looked at Tex when she had said those words. Could she have actually been correct?

"Hey alien, is your name Honk-Honk?"

"Blargh."

"Hold on a minute, I think it means yes! Alien, does- Hold on, no, shit." Church groaned at something. "That could either mean yes or no." Huh. Church was right about that. "Wait a second, I think I know how to handle this. Take notes, you'll take over for me later if this works." Tex said, bringing everyone's attention to her.

"Alien, can you understand what I am saying?" There was a blargh in response. "That didn't help Tex." Tucker deadpanned. Tex smiled. "Wrong, Tucker. It responded in the same way it did before, and since we know that blargh means either yes or no, the alien must understand our language either way." Upon hearing this, Church slapped his hand to his face, groaning. "I am such an idiot."

"Do you think you can take over?"

"Yeah, I think I see where you're going with this." He stepped closer to the alien. "Alien, I am going to say a word in English, and you will repeat that word in your own language. The first word is: Yes."

"Blargh." Church's mood immediately brightened immensely. "Holy shit! That worked! Tex, you're a genius! Alright, now say: No." Church immediately began to file this information away in his head.

"Bargh." Only a small change, but a very important one. Tucker stared at this for a while longer, watching as Church asked more and more about the translations to each word, before getting bored. Tex seemed to also get bored, and left to do god only knew what. Tucker wondered if the alien could learn how to speak English. Church's method, although effective, could really only aid him and perhaps Tex, the two being the only ones with a good memory. That, coupled with how long it would take until Church could get by would mean that it almost wasn't worth it. While Tucker was lost in his thoughts, there was a small ping from what he thought he felt to be the back of his knee.

He turned around to see Caboose.

"I uhh, Tha- That was not me, and it was- Uhh, everyone agrees that it was a total accident."

Caboose tried to cover up him firing his gun at Tucker, failing miserably. Tucker did have to wonder how that didn't puncture his skin. Despite the Spartan armour he was wearing, it was a far lower quality than what Master Chief would wear, due to mass production. So what kind of bullet didn't even injure him? Tucker studied the ground beneath him for a bullet, or perhaps some bullet shrapnel. Instead, what he found were some pieces of broken, colourful wax. It was slightly melted.

"Caboose, can I look at your gun?" Caboose was confused at the request, but complied anyway
after some minor coaxing. Tucker studied Caboose's battle rifle to see that it was loaded with crayons. There were thirty in total, with a large variety of colours, and were made by Crayola. Inwardly, Tucker wondered how crayons could possibly be fired from a gun. But that thought was temporarily thrown out of the metaphorical window in favour of laughing his ass off.

"Man Caboose, you are one weird son of a bitch."
"Church! Hey, Church!" Tucker called out. "Right behind you." Tucker turned to his friend, "Hey man, do you have a knife?" Church tilted his head in confusion. "What? That's a weapon man, ask Tex."

"I would, but she left. Had something to take care of, I didn't pay attention." He thought he heard Tex say something about 'Girl Stuff', nothing that Tucker was particularly interested.

"What do you even need a knife for?"
"As it turned out, Caboose's gun was filled with crayons. We're using them to help the alien learn English."

"Maybe you should learn his language."

"Fuck that! We have you, don't we? Besides, people learn English all the time. It aren't that hard. Now, do you have a pocket knife or what?" Church could waste as much time as he wanted trying to learn the alien language himself, but there was no way in hell that Tucker would. "Tucker, you know you could just use that big sword of yours?" Church responded. Tucker chuckled, but said nothing at the accidental sexual innuendo. Tucker activated the sword, hearing that almost comforting, familiar noise as he did so.

Unfortunately, the alien also heard it, roaring as it saw the blade, before running at Tucker and beginning to punch him. Hard. Church stared as Tucker yelled in pain, trying not to laugh. "Man, that alien either really hates the sword, or really hates you! Now, this is a good time to evaluate how these things fight, so I'm going to need you to hold still, okay?" He continued to stare, making sure to actually take notes in between Tucker's screams and Church's attempt to hold in his laughter. He idly snapped a few photos alongside recording the ordeal; This was one for the books.

"No, Tex. This is not happening."

"Oh, come on, Church! This'll totally work!"

"Look, I don't doubt that he can do this, but a bomb is hardly the most diplomatic of individuals. Especially if it's him." Church practically couldn't believe what Tex was trying to allow happen.

"You're only saying that 'cause you're a racist!" Church spluttered at the utter ridiculousness in that sentence. "Wha- Bombs are not a race!"

"Shut up ya dirty shisno." Church turned to Tex, hoping to get some answers. "Are you kidding me? We finally make contact with an alien race, and it's through a bomb?! HIM?!" He shrieked,
staring at the visor of Tex's body. "You do know that I've been learning Sangheili for the last half
hour, right?"

"You do realise that method would take too long, right?" Tex mimicked. "I built Andy from a
protocol robot: He knows their language better than either of us." Church was about to rebut,
before he rubbed his temples instead."You know what? I feel like I'll probably regret this, but I
don't care enough for that, and this could very easily be interesting. Knock yourselves out." Church
knew that trying to convince Tex of all people was nigh impossible.

"Alright, where is the alien anyway?" Tex asked. Church figured that the alien would be where he
last saw it to be; outside with Tu- "Oh no." Church led them outside without another word, to see
that his expectation was correct: Tucker was still lying on the ground, getting punched by the alien.
The only difference was likely how bored Tucker had gotten from the lack of change for the past
five minutes.

They eventually managed to get the alien off of Tucker, with the soldier groaning all the way. The
alien only continued to roar: Aside from what Church could decipher to mean shisno, there were a
host of other swears for certain, but the alien wasn't saying anything particular to them.

"Alright, so basically: He's pissed off." Translated Andy. Church scowled at the obvious
translation. Tex tapped his shoulder to catch his attention. "Just give him a chance." Church huffed.
He would, but he was still pissed off about it. The alien mumbled something. "I was to claim-The

teal- took-- is GONE!" Church figured that he could've translated what the alien was saying. He
brewed in silence; him not getting his way wasn't exactly unheard of. "The alien's talking about the
sword, right? It's right over there." He pointed to the energy blade, lying on the ground.

"He used- Worthless to anyone else!" Huh. That definitely explained the alien's anger. Church
doubted the alien, but if he was right- Well, Tucker had been through that song and dance once
already. "He must come--prophecy!" Andy translated the words for the others. "Fuck. No." Tucker
refused. The alien replied rather strong wordily. He would kill everyone in the entire base if
Tucker refused the offer to come with them. Church sighed as Tex tried to coax Tucker into going
as Andy told them what they were to do and where they were to go.

Tucker was barely convinced into going. He wasn't happy about it- He was even less happy when
he was told that Caboose would come with him. "It's your fault if I die, Church." Was what he said
as it was decided, but he begrudgingly agreed anyway. As they were all getting ready to go,
Church pulled him aside for a moment.
"Hey Tucker, so, uh..." Church seemed strangely nervous, which was fairly unusual for him. "As, your friend, I feel obligated to say something encouraging. So..." He rubbed his own neck. "You're a good guy, you know that? I may say that you're not, but... Don't take it the wrong way, alright? I might blame you sometimes for shit you're not responsible for, and I get annoyed with you sometimes, but I don't really mean it. You're great! You're good company, we watch movies and helmet cam tapes from Red Team, you make fun of me for how badly I aim sometimes, I wave the sniper rifle in your face: It's fun, okay? Just... Don't get yourself killed, alright? It'll... It'll be a bit more lonely at Blue Base without you." If Church had a physical body, his face would be flushed with embarrassment.

Tucker stared in absolute surprise. Of all thing that he had expected Church to say, that certainly wasn't one of them. At best, he expected Church to mumble something hardheartedly and flip him off, but this- Tucker smiled. This was a pretty rare occasion, and Tucker wasn't about to fuck it up. "Yeah Church, I am pretty great, and you are an asshole- But don't sell yourself so short. You're not half bad yourself. I mean, sure: You've mouthed me off more times than I can count, and you can get pretty annoyed really quickly, but who wouldn't considering what happened to you? You at least try to be good, and that's more than I can say for a number of people. I guess... I guess I'll miss you." Tucker stared off to the side, finished with his speech. They both stood in silence for a small moment, feeling both an amount of accomplishment and pride at each other's words.

"Well, I guess I'd better get going, huh?" Tucker said, looking back up at Church. "I think both of us will get cavities with how sappy this is getting. It's getting pretty gay, man." He made a lopsided smile, which Church returned with a small chuckle. "Yeah, I guess it is." Tucker turned to the alien and Andy, hesitating. In a split second decision, he turned around and hugged Church with his free arm, patting him on the back twice before stepping away just as quickly, his eyes dashing about to their sides to see if anyone saw that. After figuring that nobody did, he saluted Church with two fingers. "Well, see you around, Church." Tucker said, before walking away.

"You too, Tucker."

Church watched alongside Tex as they all walked off, leaving the two AI alone. He had time to do what his heart wanted, which was definitely a good thing. Or rather, he could at least have time to blaze through the tapes from the helmet cams of the Reds: Several days felt far longer even to a weakened AI like him. But then Church had to call in the question of why Tex was still here. "Hey Tex, I'm pretty surprised that you didn't go with them. I mean, typically there's a reward to quests like that." Considering how materialistic Tex could get, it was a surprise that she wasn't first in the metaphorical line to go along with the quest. "You know, like a treasure chest filled with gold, or a room filled with priceless gems... That sort of stuff." He finished, staring at what he could see of the alien and the rest of the group, before pausing.

"You're already gone, aren't you." He turned to where Tex had been standing moments ago to find that he was right. Church sighed, wondering about what file to pull up of the Reds, since he had the time. He walked back into the power facility, making his way towards Blue Base. He had a lot of studying and sorting to go through while he waited for the rest of Blue team to return.
As Church was making his way back to Blue Base, sorting through the files that comprised the surrender of Doc to the Reds, he heard a strange noise. Looking at Blue Base through his sniper rifle quickly told him that the Reds had infiltrated it. Sarge and Donut were standing in front of the main entrance, talking to each other about something. Church decided to go around back to avoid being discovered. As incompetent as the Reds could be, Sarge wouldn't hesitate to shoot him, and even if Church himself couldn't be harmed, that didn't mean that losing his only option of a body would be very nice.

He walked into the base, certain that he wasn't spotted, and hid behind a wall when he saw that Sarge was talking to someone in blue and maroon armour. A quick medical scan proved it to be Simmons, although Church would have known it to be Simmons by voice anyway. He heard as Sarge was about to shoot Simmons, likely for being a traitor, or something along those lines. Wordlessly, Church crept up behind him and hit Sarge in the back of the head with the butt of his gun. "Booya!"

"Oh jeez, the back of your head!" Simmons exclaimed, stepping back as Sarge's boy fell to the floor. He looked up at Church. "Where the hell did you come from?!" Church had planned to reply honestly, he really did, but then he got an idea of how to fuck with the fake Blue, if their cams said anything. "Huh? Oh, you must be one of the Blues that took over our base when we left. Look, don't be afraid, but I'm from the past."

"Pfft, who's scared of people from the past? People from the future are scary. People from the past are just dumb savages with rocks." Simmons answered. Well, at least he didn't try to shoot Church, that was something. Not to mention how Simmons almost certainly fell for the lie. Sarge groaned, starting to wake up again. "Shit, he's waking up! Quick, help me get him in the hole before he wakes up!"

"We have a hole? That's kick-ass!" Simmons let out a slightly agitated grunt. "Just help me!" Church complied, going over to Sarge, hitting him in the back of the head again, just to wake sure that he wouldn't wake up, before hoisting the body up by linking his arms underneath Sarge's armpits. It took a surprising amount of force to do so: It seemed that Sarge was heavier than he thought. "Alright, now you grab his ankles." Simmons didn't come over to help.

"Yeah, I would, but I have to report this to uh... Command." Then Simmons proceeded to walk off, more likely to talk with Grif or Donut than anything else. Church sighed, before proceeding to heave Sarge's body over to where he would suppose would be the best place to keep Sarge, and as he found out while he dragged his body outside, Grif's. Church knew that Grif would weigh at lest two hundred and fifty pounds at least, so he would definitely need help for him if not Sarge. He
hopped down to where Simmons and Donut were standing. It seemed that his theory was correct, but that didn't really matter. "Jeez, thanks for the help new guy."

"I was just securing this prisoner, which is interesting considering that I've never met him before." Simmons said, using a bad, clearly faked accent to hide his voice. Seriously, Church could pull out lies ten times better after he lost Gamma! Not to mention that what he said didn't even make sense. "Why is that interesting? And what are you doing with your voice?" Simmons sighed, apparently disappointed that his badly thought out lie had failed. "I was disguising it so that the prisoner wouldn't think that he knew me, but he doesn't. Do you, prisoner?" He asked Donut, the tones in his voice making it clear that he wanted Donut to act as though he didn't know Simmons. Not that Church cared about that.

"Alright, just get over here and help me carry these bodies over to the jeep outside before they wake up."

It took a while, and a few misinterpreted instructions, but they finally managed to load the two bodies in the Warthog. The ride was a fairly short one, only taking a couple of minutes. Church stopped and unloaded the bodies a few hundred or so feet away from the Red Base. After a short discussion with Donut, who he was also leaving behind, He got back in the jeep and drove back to Blue Base with Simmons. He thought of any way he could find to mess with Simmons in the meantime, until he found a perfect method when they got back.

"Alright rookie, since your new to this place, and since everyone else in this canyon is also from the past, I think it would be best if I introduced you to all of the Reds." Simmons had no way of getting out of something like this, so he agreed. Church set up his sniper rifle and positioned it in a way that would let Simmons see through it too. "Alright, do you see that Red guy? That's Sarge. He's their leader. Which is a good thing for us, since he's pretty awful at being a leader." Church figured that insulting Simmons' projected father figure would be a surefire way of pissing him off, but it seemed that the guy managed to pull through. Almost impressive."Right. Then there's Donut, who you've met already. I actually kinda like that guy, he's nice. Wouldn't hurt a fly, that sort of type."

"Yeah, and he's.. You know..."

"He's what?" Seems that Church had finally hit something. "Well, he's into things like.. Girly stuff, like clothes, and interior decorating, and..." Simmons was clearly referring to how he probably thought that Donut was gay. Time to run off of that. "Seems a lot like you're projecting."

"I'm not! He wears pink!" Simmons yelled. Yep, definitely hit a nerve. "I wouldn't call it pink, maybe it's slightly less red, but not pink." Simmons gave up in frustration. "Whatever."
"Right. Then the last one, in orange? Yeah, he's Grif. He's fat, lazy and annoying." Church wondered if he heard Simmons mumble 'Tell me about it' under his breath. He probably did. So, that was another thing that he could use: Simmons' hatred for Grif. "Well, at least I can say that he's the smartest Red out of them all."

"You mean the ones that are there now."

"No man, I mean he's the smartest out of all of them combined. There's this one guy, he walks around in maroon armour. I haven't seen the guy in a while, but he's a total know it all." Simmons stared at him, entirely confused. "What?" In Simmons' eyes, this could be actual information of how others view him.

"Yeah, he acts like he's smart, and walks around like he owns the place, but the others never listen to them, and they make fun of him behind his back. You know, stuff like how he's not as attractive as other people, and how he and the stuff he likes are both dumb, and how he'll never amount to anything..." Church looked at Simmons, who seemed to be holding back tears.

"Yeah.. He sounds like a real jerk... Excuse me." He sniffled, before running off, likely to go cry. "Come back soon! I have to finish the orientation before you have to make me dinner." He, alongside Sheila, who had come up a short while ago, watched as he ran off.

"You do know that's Simmons, right?"

"Of course."

Church stared at the newly acquired Ghost and Warthog in awe. "This is amazing. I have an entire fleet of cars! Sheila, we're unstoppable!" Sheila didn't seem to appreciate the cars anywhere near as much as Church did. "Whatever." She seemed to be much more passive aggressive than she did the last time Church saw her.

"I mean, this is- they don't have any car to help them anymore, and uh..." He figured that he shouldn't try to avoid it any longer. "Sheila, how are you feeling? Are you alright?"

"Why wouldn't I be? We have two more vehicles now." Alright, something was definitely wrong.

"I mean, you just seem... Displeased, about us having two more cars, is all. I was wondering, whether or not that was why you're... Unhappy."

"I don't know Church. Would you be 'unhappy' if I got two more Blue guys to come out and help me? Or what if today, I decided: I don't want to be on Blue team? What if I was feeling just a little bit Red?" Was she implying that she would betray the Blue Team if Church continued to pay attention to the new vehicles? In any case, Church supposed that it would be best to try and apologize, to not get on her bad side. God knows Church knew Sheila's bad side all too well. He rubbed his neck, trying to come up with a well-worded apology.
"I'm sorry, Sheila. You're right, I guess. I was paying too much attention to them, and not enough to you. You're a tank, and I totally took you and your kickass cannon for granted. These new cars aren't as good as you, and I was an idiot for ever thinking that." Sheila thought over his words, and she seemed to be satisfied.

"Alright then Church. But make sure that you always know that I'm the best machine around. Now, I'll forgive you, but only if you clean me."

"I'm sorry, what?"

"You heard me. Clean out my ventilator, the driver canopy, the cannon. I haven't been cleaned since I arrived at the canyon, and I think it's about time for that, don't you think?" Church knew he had no other option than to agree with Sheila: Who knew what she would do otherwise. He groaned, but nodded. "Sure." Sheila pointed at Blue Base using her cannon."The cleaning equipment will be found in the utility room. You may go now." Church rolled his eyes, but began to make his way towards the Base. "Oh! Sheila, before I go, can you tell me where Simmons went?"

"Why don't you ask your new jeep?"

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Church had found himself cleaning Sheila's armoured skirt when Caboose, Tucker and Andy had walked up to him. "So, I see you're on your knees to please a woman? Didn't really expect anything else." Was Andy's greeting, but Church knew that he wouldn't have gotten anything better. He stood up and wiped any excess oil off of him: Sheila had also made him oil her. Not a very easy job to do when Sheila was a tank. "Hey guys. Where's Tex?" He made a casual salute, like he typically did to Tucker. The soldier seemed strangely less... Animated than he usually did. "Gone."

At that, Church flinched. Tex? Gone? He felt a sinking feeling, but figured that Tex could handle herself, wherever she was. "What about the alien?"

"Dead."

"The mission?"

"Failed."

"Yeah, I guess that last one would go without saying." He wondered how they ended up failing the mission. It would likely be the cause of the alien's death. "So, how is Tex?"

"Oh, she's fine, she chased after Wyoming." Well, that wasn't something that Church thought would be brought up. "What?! Tucker, why didn't you tell me this earlier?" Tucker seemed to just get more and more frustrated. "Tell you when? We just got here!"Church dragged a hand over his head, letting out a hiss of frustration, before taking a deep breath. "Fine. Sorry about that. Let's go inside, I'll find something for you to eat. You must be starving." He turned to the sentient tank
behind him. "I promise I'll come back later Sheila, I just haven't seen these guys in three days, who knows if they've eaten."

Sheila huffed, but didn't seem as mad as she was with the cars. "Fine. I'm still expecting a polish, though." That would probably be the best he could get out of her. "It's a deal. Let's go, guys."
Church lead them to Blue Base.

"We have a lot to talk about, don't we?"

Chapter End Notes

I looked up tank anatomy to find out what an armoured skirt was. Writing has surprisingly more research involved than at first glance. Meh, whatever. At least I'm learning stuff. Also, I just made Tucker's quest to take about three to four days on a round trip instead of about thirty six hours, to make it seem a bit longer. Hope you enjoyed the chapter!
Chapter Notes

I think that Aware! Alpha would probably have better aim, so that's how I decided to write him in the fic. I'm just kind of tired of people portraying Church as having shitty aim 100% of the time, because they forget how he shot off Caboose's pinky toe, when he had /aimed/ for the toes, from a fair distance away (certainly nothing to scoff about) with a /pistol/. Or maybe during one of the Christmas special, when Church was able to shoot two baubles off a tree, when he was at least about two hundred feet away. Or how about the time that Church had fired a rocket at the Meta. Keeping in mind that this was the first time that Church had ever used such a weapon onscreen, likely meaning that he had very little experience with the weapon, it would have not only hit the Meta had it not used time distortion, but it would have been a /perfectly/ centred headshot.

Sorry about that, ranting. I just get tired of seeing that trope over and over again. Hope you enjoy the chapter!

Church flinched as Tucker threw up the contents of the MRE that he had eaten an hour or so ago in the toilet. He stood up shakily, using the walls as help. His legs felt weak, but that was to be expected. He walked out, going into his room, and rested his head against the wall as he sat on his bed. He groaned at the pain that was still in his stomach. He heard a knock on the door. "Come in." He said quickly so as to not feel worse. Caboose and Church walked in, Caboose retreating to the other side of the room while Church walked up to him with a water bottle, uncapping it and handing it to Tucker.

"Thanks." He sipped it slowly, simply enjoying the feeling of having the taste of vomit be washed away. Church and Caboose looked at each other. It seemed that they had been discussing his problem before they had knocked. "Tucker, do you know what could have caused this?" Church asked.

"I don't know, I didn't think that vomiting was caused by not eating." Church shook his head. "It isn't." Well, the whole situation got a lot worse, didn't it? Church decided to continue. "Maybe it has something to do with the sword, maybe it runs on radiation and it's poisoning you."

It was Tucker's turn to shake his head. "Dude, I've had the sword for longer than I was on the quest. I would have been puking long ago if that was the case. I don't think it was something I ate either, I kept a small MRE bag with me for the road, and I didn't eat anything other than that." Tucker was starting to get nervous. What the fuck was making his happen? "Alright, you got me nervous. I know I don't normally ask you this, but can you do a medical scan? You know, to check and stuff." He requested. Church nodded, and Tucker stayed still while it was being done.
"Alright, it says here-" Church stopped abruptly. "It- I- What? No no, that's not possible." He was murmuring, seemingly becoming more and more mad and nervous. Tucker would have sat up straighter, but that thought quickly ended with another bout of nausea. "What's wrong?" Church dragged his hands over his face in frustration. "Nope, I refuse to accept this." Tucker sighed, irritated at how vague Church was being. "Church, I will let Caboose drive the tank if you do not tell me what's wrong." There was silence for a moment, before Church finally spoke up again.

"Tucker, what does it mean when a person has two heartbeats?"

"That they're a Time lord?"

"Tucker, I'm serious. If I'm not wrong, then you're..." Church trailed off, his earlier frustration turning more and more into anger. "Alright, no, nope, I am not accepting this. There is no way that you're pregnant." So that's what the problem was. *Hold on a second.*

"Pregnant?! I'm fucking- You have got to be kidding me!" The last Tucker checked, he was definitely a guy, so there shouldn't have been a way in hell that he could have a child. *When* could he have gotten pregnant?!

"I don't accept it either! Do you think that I'd make something like that up? This has to be some sort of mistake."

"How could you make a mistake of all people?"

"How about the fact that I'm not a doctor?" Church was about to leave, but saying that gave him an idea. Caboose and Tucker stared at him in concern, realising what Church's idea was. "Please don't do what I think you're about to do." Caboose pleaded.

"I.. Have to go make a phone call." Church then left. Tucker weakly raised his hand to flip him off, before grabbing the waste basket beside his bed and hurling. This wasn't going to be fun. Not at all.

Church focused on Omega as he walked into the canyon. It seemed that Lopez's head was on a pile of rocks, doing God knows what. Omega had managed to fuck with the camera, making it inaccessible to him. Church figured that the same thing would happen even if he were to try again. He focused on a spot near Omegas foot took a deep breath, and fired. The shot rang loud and clear through the air, the bullet being only slightly off centre and hitting about two inches to the right of where he wanted it to be. No matter, at least Omega and Doc weren't harmed.

"Alright O'Malley, that was a warning shot! If you do anything suspicious, the next shot's going through your visor!" In reality, he wasn't sure if he could. He could only really trust blind luck in
this situation.

"I knew it! This was all just an elaborate ruse to ambush me!"

"No. First of all, I wouldn't say that inviting you here over the phone an elaborate ruse. Second of all, this isn't an ambush. I was just making sure you wouldn't try anything funny while I laid down some ground rules."

"Well, I'm not very big on rules." No duh, if Omega assisting in the Director's plans of torturing him were any indication. He listened on, pleasantly surprised to hear Doc as he complained about how awful Omega was as a roommate (Hey, if one of the AI's gained his ability to port through people's radio's he expected them to take full control. Not that this split personality type situation was bad, but it was strange.)

"All I can say is that you can't do anything to us. Our radios are turned off, and our minds are clear. So don't get any ideas, you're just going to walk in, examine Tucker, tell us what's wrong, and leave. You got that?"

"Oh, but what do we get?" There was some sort of discussion between Doc/O'Malley about what would be a good deal, until Omega made up his mind. "Oh, I want a favour, but I won't tell you what that favour is, until we need it." That... Was one of the worst propositions Church had ever heard. "That's bullshit. I'm not going to trade favours if I don't know what you want me to do." Omega let out one of his evil laughs.

"Oh, but you will. Because if you don't, Tucker will die, and your friend's blood will be on your hands. And years from now, you will drive yourself mad wondering if there was anything you could have done to save him. So you will help me, even though what I want is something mysterious, something frightening, something PURE EVIL! Ahahahaha!"

Omega was almost right, now that Church thought about it. Even if Church wasn't malfunctioning, he knew practically nothing about delivering (or, if it came down to it, aborting,) babies. Especially if the pregnant person was a man. There was a number of ways that Church could fuck up the potential delivery, and that number wasn't a pretty one. Doc, as crappy as he was at being a medic, could at least point him the right way. As much of a dick Church knew that he could be, he cared about the other members of his team, no need to mention their well-being. Tucker was one of his best friends, hell, probably the best friend he had, and if it came down to it, Church would do everything in his power to prevent something bad from happening. He sighed, there really was only one way to get out of this.

"Fine."

"And I want twenty dollars co-pay!"

"Too late, deal's done." Church wasn't going to waste anything if he could prevent it. Omega wasn't too pleased with that. "You seem to be forgetting who is asking favours from who." Church raised an eyebrow, and aimed for Omega's foot. He took a deep breath, took careful aim, and fired. A "Son of a bitch!" could be heard from where he was standing, hell, O'Malley would've probably
been heard from Red Base. "And you seem to be forgetting who has the gun." O'Malley fell backwards and held his foot up, shrieking in pain.

"Oh quit whining you big baby!"

Church had bypassed helping Doc in the medical exam: Sheila was getting more passive aggressive by the minute, and hey, it was certainly one way to pass the time. He stopped for a second when he reached the cannon as he heard footsteps coming up behind him. "That you, Doc?" He asked. Judging by the 'drat', it was. He turned around. "So, did you find out what was wrong with Tucker?"

"Well... Yes, but I don't think you'll like what you hear," Church mentally tried to prepare for whatever would come next, and motioned for Doc to finish.

"He's..... Pregnant." Well, it seems that there was no loner a way to deny it. "God dammit." Seems that there was only one thing left to do: Find out how it happened. "Andy, Caboose, you have some explaining to do." Andy was cackling at the situation, but there wasn't anything else anyone expected him to do.

"Don't look at me! Tucker's not my type!"

"Me too. I mean, neither." Caboose said. He didn't understand how to explain himself, but at least it was easy to see what Caboose meant to say. "Also maybe we should uh, have the doctor explain how babies are made... Just in case someone here doesn't know..." He trailed off. Church groaned: This was too much for one day. "Oh my god. Caboose, shut up. Andy, blow up. Doc, you're fired. Leave. I'm going to go shoot Tucker." He meant to leave, but Doc grabbed onto his arm before he could.

"I am going to help." He announced. Church's eyes widened, but Doc wasn't done. "This hasn't ever been seen before! Now, I don't know how that managed to happen, or how to help Tucker, but I know that with hard word and determination, we can achieve anything!" Church scoffed. The medic's attitude was admirable, but they weren't in a good place if their best hope was a guy that failed college.

"That's great and all Doc, but what we need is a licensed professional with a degree from an accredited medical institute." Doc's sighed. "Just come with me." It seemed that even his patience could wear. "Fine. Let's go Caboose." He turned to look at the soldier, but he wasn't moving.
"Actually, I think I'll just stay here and guard this rock. From Tucker. Because I think that's what started all of this." It seemed that Caboose was only looking for an excuse to avoid having to go into Blue Base. "Alright, what's wrong Caboose?"

"What if Tucker's contagious? I don't want to catch pregnancy!" It seemed as though Caboose really didn't know where babies came from. "You know what Caboose? I think we should have a little talk later. I have a book that we can read together." Caboose smiled when he processed this. "I think I'd like that." Church nodded, and left to go to Blue Base.

"Ugh, I can't believe this is happening."

"Yes, but I'm not wrong! See, my gizmo lights up green to indicate pregnancy." Doc raised his scanner to show the green light coming from it. "I thought that it did that for flesh wounds."

"It does!"

"Or infectious diseases."

"It lights up green for pretty much everything." To prove his point, Doc raised the scanner and pointed it at Church, where it began to emit a brighter green light. "For example, this green indicates a high level of anger stemming from suppressed feelings of inadequacy." Church glared at Doc. "Okay, if that thing keeps talking shit about me I'm going to fucking smash it."

"And there's about two hundred other greens that it could show This kind of device can get confusing, which is why doctors have to go to school for so long." Doc paused. "Not that I'm a doctor mind you." He added.

"And that's never been clearer."

Below them, Tucker groaned and got to his feet. "What's never been clearer?" Doc patted him on the back. "Congratulations Tucker, you're pregnant!"

"What? I wasn't even in town that weekend!" Before either of them could continue, Caboose walked in, holding a skull. He seemed to be in tears. "Andy is dead!" Church tilted his head in confusion. "Doctor Doc, you have to save my second best friend!"

"Yeah, I don't think I can help patients post-decomposition." Doc deadpanned. It seemed that he didn't really want to deal with this anymore. "I just- I heard a voice and I turned around, and, when I turned back around... Andy was dead!" Caboose sniffled. Church thought of something.

"Hold on Caboose, Who told you to turn around?"

"I don't know!" He sniffled. "But they were very helpful." Church tapped his foot impatiently. "Let
me guess: When you turned back around, Andy was gone."

"Yes, Andy was gone..." Church groaned: He knew who was behind this. "I have to go do something. Everyone is to stay here." Doc reached out a hand as he called out.

"Wait! What am I going to do with the pregnant guy?" He asked.

"You said you would help him! Just do that!"

"Alright Sheila, I need you to help me." Church shifted his weight from foot to foot. "Why should I? After all, you have yet to fulfil my request. I see it as only fair that I would only help you when my request has been completed." Church groaned, and decided to try and negotiate.

"Sheila, I'll do it after this is all done, I swear!"

"And why should I believe you? You left me before when Tucker had arrived from his quest. Why is now any different?" Shit, that hadn't worked. Time to try and bribe.

"How about I polish you too?" Sheila was quiet, but it was clear that she still needed to be convinced.

"And repaint you?" More silence. "Maybe oil you?" He thought about what he could give her, but couldn't find much else. "How about, provided that my teammates don't need me, you can ask me to do any work on you as required? Just come with me and do what I need you to do in return, okay?"

"Well..." Did she still want more? This was a pretty damn good deal! But it seemed that she still wasn't going to be swayed. Church sighed. There was one more thing that he could try, and he didn't want to do it, but it seemed he had no choice. He made a mental note to make it up to Sheila later.


Church grimaced as he felt a wave of guilt wash over him. He made sure to mentally underline the plan to make it up to her. "Let's just go. We're going to the Reds." Sheila nodded, and Church led the way with her following shortly after. They walked until he saw them near a bunch of large boulders. When he got close enough, he stopped. "Sheila, open fire on the Reds."

"Target locked. Firing main cannon." The blast had sent the Reds running back to behind a rock, and Sheila kept firing. After some time, Simmons peeked over the boulder.
"Hey Blue! We're only going to give you one chance to surrender!" Church told Sheila to hold her fire. "Why would I surrender?" There was some whispering, before Simmons looked over the rock again, accompanied by Donut and Grif. "Because you're outnumbered!"

"Bullshit! People with tanks are never outnumbered!"

"We also think it's your turn! See, the first time it was you who surrendered, and you gave us Doc. The next time we surrendered, and we gave you our jeep. Now it's your turn!" Alright, that reasoning was completely ridiculous, and Church did not have time for ridiculous right now. "Sheila, shut them up." She complied, and fired. After a couple of yells, they reemerged.

"Alright, listen to me. I don't mean to be rude, but I have a missing girlfriend, a guy who's pregnant, a guy who thinks his pet just died, not to mention the fact that our enemy is hanging around, unsupervised may I remind you, at our base. So I'd appreciate it if you all would shut up, because I really, really, really, don't have time for this horseshit right now!" There was silence from the other team for a moment. "What was that part about the pregnant guy?" If Church had any hair, he would've ripped it out three minutes ago. "Don't even start! It doesn't make any sense!"

Andy was laughing his ass off. "Yeah, unless the alien impregnated him, because that's what they do! They infect the host with a parasitic embryo!" His laugh got more nervous. "Hahah, but you already knew that, right?" Church gave Andy one of his most impressive glares. "What? No! Why didn't you tell us this could happen?!" He shrieked. As though it couldn't get any worse, Church heard a familiar radio noise. He turned it on

"Caboose, what did I tell you about going on the radio?! Now I'm on it too!" He heard a nervous chuckle through the earpiece. "Yes, well, it turns out that the Reds had already used their radio, and O'Malley is gone." Oh, oh, boy did it get worse! Sarge let out a victorious laugh.

"Haha! As we speak, the glorious Red Command is sending a ship to aid us! No doubt one of the highest magnitude." Sarge announced. Hearing so many voices from so many directions almost made him feel bad for the fragments, who had to deal with this on a daily basis. He overheard some strange inhuman cries from his radio. "Caboose, what the hell was that?"

"Oh, while we were on the radio, Tucker had his gross baby."

"WHAT?! Alright, that's it, I'm coming over. Sheila, you stay here. If anyone moves, shoot them." And with that, he ran towards Blue Base, knowing that he would likely be absolutely repulsed by whatever he would see.
New Arrivals. Wait, What?

Chapter Summary

I felt like Alpha would be a mother hen. Alpha is a mother hen now. My fanfic my rules, Biotch!

Chapter Notes

FPSCanaRussia, this is your answer to the York question. This is also why I couldn't tell you anything before. Now, aforementioned reader or not, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As Church approached the base, he could hear loud metallic clangs and crashes coming from inside. Entering the base, he found Doc. "Hey, what the hell is going on in there?"

"It's nothing to worry about, the patient's just resting." Church raised an eyebrow as the clanging continued. "Doesn't sound like it." Doc let out a small laugh.

"That isn't Tucker, that's just the new arrival! He's been up and at it since his first feeding." Church flinched in shock and disgust. "Tucker... 'Fed' the baby? Gross." He shuddered to think about what that would entail.

"Don't worry, Caboose was kind enough to donate some blood! It's amazing what you could could convince him to do if you promise him cookies and a glass of orange juice."

"But he hates needles!"

"We didn't need any. It turns out that if you expose some skin then the newborn will dig right in!" Church gawked, before turning to see Caboose as he heard uncoordinated footsteps. "I feel dizzy!" Caboose exclaimed. He then stared in fascination at the ceiling, before fainting a little while later. Running a short scan on him made it clearly visible that he was running dangerously low on blood. Church continued glare at Doc. "What happened to Tucker? Can he come here?"

"Come here? Don't be silly, he's in a coma!" If Church had any less self control, he would've strangled Doc right then and there. "That's it. Let me through, Doc. I'll take care of this."

"I don't think so. Newborns are very susceptible to diseases. I want to expose him to as few people as possible."

"Doc, I'm not going to give it a cold. I'm only going to go in there, step on it's neck, and shoot it in the head. Because that's how I roll." He stared some more at Caboose. "My body.. Is trying.. To die." He pointed at Caboose. "And he's just one of the reasons."
"Now I'm definitely not letting you through."

"How about this: I wash my hands before destroying the abomination of nature."

"Don't make me pull rank on you." Doc warned. Now that was just unfair. "We're the same rank!"

"No, you're a Private. I'm a Medical Super Private, First Class!"

"That's not even a real rank!"

"It has been ever since I sent Command a letter every day for four years." That was probably the most dedicated he had ever heard someone be for a promotion, and that was saying something. "They promoted you for that?! You haven't even fired a weapon!"

"Now now, Church. Leadership isn't about how many times you shoot a gun or stab someone. It's about convincing others to do that for you." Doc explained. Church thought he heard something, before he heard one of the biggest crashes he had ever heard during his time in Blood Gulch. "What the hell was that?!" Church figured that the sound could have only come from outside.

"Stay here Doc, I'm going to see what that noise was. Don't feed any more of our soldiers to the alien or else you'll have a second hole in your foot for it." He told Doc, before running to the source of the noise.

"What the fuck are you guys doing here?" Apart from the ship crash, Church couldn't see a reason as to why they were standing there. Grif frowned at him. "Fuck off, Blue. This ship just crashed on one of our guys." Church looked at the Pelican again, running a diagnostic. Apart from what seemed to be a couple of dents, it seemed to be unharmed. Not only that, but there was also a large computer in it, capable of a host of different functions. Church had to admit: It was a thing of beauty. So, as any other person who wanted something, they would try everything that they considered worth doing to obtain it. Starting with the simplest solution. "Dibs."

"What?" Asked Grif. Church was right in thinking that he hadn't read the rule book of the Simulation army. "I called dibs on the ship. It's mine now."

"You can't call dibs on a ship!" So, apparently neither had Simmons. No matter, that just meant that he definitely would get the ship. "Yes I can. Dibs- there, see? I just did it again!"

"This is just ridiculous."

"No, it isn't. Now get away from my ship, tomato can." Simmons clenched his teeth. "Don't call me tomato can." Grif folded his arms. "Well then, if you want the ship so badly, try and take it from us."
"Alright. Sheila, would you do the honours?" Grif and Simmons turned to see the Blue's tank. "Oh shit. We totally forgot about that."

"I would be happy to, Church. Now stay away from the ship, tomato can." Sheila commanded, mimicking Church's insult. Grif snickered. "Hah, tomato can."

"You too, lemon head."

"Hey I'm orange, not yellow!"

Church planned to retaliate, but was stopped when he heard a tapping noise. "What is that? Sounds like Morse code." He listened on to the tapping. At second glance, it seemed to either be a very badly done S-O-S signal, with practically no dashes or pauses, or just a person tapping as a way to call out for help. Then again, he hadn't really brushed up on his Morse much; he'd have to do that later. "Do either of you know what it says?"

"Yeah: Tap, tap, tap." Grif answered. Church rolled his eyes. He then feigned realisation. "Hold on, I think I know what it says!" He pressed his ear against the metal door of the Pelican. "It says: Red... Sucks... Balls... Oh hey look, the ship can talk! And it knows things!" He patted the door. "That's a good ship."

"It's not your ship, it's our ship: We called for it and it came."

"I don't know, I don't see any markings on it."

"It crash landed on Donut!"

"Why does that- Hold on, Donut? Oh man, I kinda liked him." So Donut was probably dead. Very unfortunate, but not as bad as it could get. Simmons seemed to not care. "For the last time, you can't have the ship!"

"I don't know, I mean, we have Sheila, so.... Are you willing to take a tank shell to the face or what? Pretty dedicated but you'd think that you would be better off living."

"Hey! What's going on here, and what is that dirty Blue doing here?" Sarge shouted out, coming to stand beside the other Reds. "Well, I was wondering what I was going to do with this Pelican." Church answered, pointing to the crashed spaceship.

"Dibs."

"Too late."

"God dang it, do you not know about the International Dibs Protocol, or the No Take-backs Accord?" And strangely enough, It seemed that Sarge knew about that rule. Of course, it wasn't international, but that didn't matter.

"See? This ship belongs to the Blues now. As in me, and my eighty ton..." He turned to look at Sheila, only to see that she was leaving. The sound of gun beings cocked was all it took for Church
to know that it was probably best to leave "This doesn't mean that the dibs protocol isn't still enacted!" He yelled, before running after Sheila. Considering how slow tanks could move, it was fairly impressive how fast she ran off. He sighed and ran towards Blue Base instead.

"Caboose! Where's Doc?" He asked.

"Oh, Doc left. He took the baby for a walk. Seems like just yesterday he was born."

"He was born about an hour ago Caboose." Church did another medical scan: One could never be too careful after all. It seemed that Caboose would be okay, but he definitely needed a lot more time dedicated to resting. And eating. "Where's Tucker?"

"He's still in a coma."

"Oh, well isn't this just great? Tucker's out, Sheila's on the fritz, and now Doc is babysitting. Caboose, if we survive the next five minutes, I'll be impressed." Church glanced outside, before sighing.

Using the strength in his robot body, he turned Caboose onto his back, and lifted him up. "Good god, you're lucky I'm not in a human body." He murmured as he made his way through Blue Base. He rested Caboose against one side of himself as he opened the door to Caboose's room, before carrying him in and laying him down on the bed.

"Church, it isn't nap time."

"It isn't, but it is rest-until-you-get-all-your-blood-back-time. Wait here, I'll be right back." True to his word, he came back a little while later, carrying a tray. On the tray, there sat a glass with a bottle of orange juice beside it, a plate loaded with all sorts or cookies, from iced home-made ones to oreos. There was also a smaller bowl filled with apple slices, a couple of oranges, and many cherries. Caboose gasped audibly as he saw it. Church set the tray down on Caboose's nightstand.

"Eat this, but try not to eat too fast, alright? I don't want you getting sick." He reached over to the back of Caboose's head, moving the helmet to unlock the fasten, before removing it. He covered Caboose with the blanket as the soldier reached over for some apple slices. He made his way over to the door. "I have to go now, alright? Don't go anywhere until you feel better. See you soon." He waved, before walking off. He picked up the pace very soon, muttering a mantra of "Shit, I wasted so much time, shit, shit, shit..." And so on, berating himself over the wasted time.

"Doc? Hello... Earth- Or, wherever this place is, to Doc." When he had finally reached Doc, the
medic wasn't moving. Church waved his hand in front of Doc's visor. "You okay?"

Doc seemed to finally snap out of whatever trance he was in. "Oh hi Church, didn't see you there. Do you wanna say hello to our new friend?" He asked. Church tilted his head, but followed Docs gaze down. His eyes locked onto some sort of strange, blue... Thing. It was about 40 centimetres tall and was definitely not human. "I... I... I can't deal with his right now." The thing let out a long 'Honk!'. "Shut up, you're disgusting." Vampire-like abomination aside, there was a slightly ore pressing matter at hand. "Doc, what's Vic's number?"

"What for?"
"For reinforcements."
"I don't know about reinforcements, but I did change a dirty diaper. I got to tell you, it was a real doozy..."
"Focus! Vic's number, what is it?"
"Come on Church, everyone knows Vic's number! If you wanna ca-" Church slapped a hand over where Doc's mouth would be. "Don't." Doc's stance slumped. "If you want to be that way." He sulked. Church ignored him. "I'm on the radio; Be quiet."

He waited for the familiar, nasally voice to poop up. "Hey dude-" Church wasted no time in trying to ask him for reinforcements. After Vic saying that he wasn't there, the call went straight to voicemail. How Vic wasn't there to answer the radio call, Church would never know, but that wasn't important.

"To leave a message, just wait for the tone." Church started tapping his foot impatiently. "To stop recording, just hang up."
"Oh really? No shit. I was just going to keep recording until he checked his voicemail."
"To leave a callback number, press six."
"Just give me the damn beep!"
"To repeat this message, press nine."
"I will fucking stab you, voicemail A.I." Doc stared at this interaction. He was honestly wondering just how mad Church could get. He listened on. "To redial, press four. To message this person, press seven."
"God dammit, this is how I'm going to die: Stuck waiting for a beep that NEVER FUCKING COMES."
"To mark this message as urgent, press eleven."
"THERE IS NO ELEVEN, YOU FUCKING WHORE!" Church screamed. Doc mildly wished for some popcorn to enjoy this more. The beep finally rang. "Finally. Vic, It's Church, I need you to-"
"I'm sorry, this person's voicemail box is full. If-" Church hung up, letting out a screech that was akin to that of a pterodactyl. Perhaps an eldritch abomination. "I'm going to kill myself, I'm going to fucking kill myself."

"Doc, we are royally screwed. Half of our team is down, and the rest of it sucks. All the Reds need to do is attack us, and we're dead." He stared at the gross alien 'baby' as it let out another honk. "And I still need to kill this thing." Doc squinted at something in the distance. "What's that?"

"Oh, I almost forgot! Command sent the Reds a Pelican. Probably has a weapon of mass destruction far superior to any of our own weapons. I mean, I don't think this could get any worse. Who knows what sort of reinforcements they could have. It could even be another freelancer!" Church looked down. "God knows that I've seen too many of them for one lifetime. Or ten." He murmured, just low enough for Doc not to hear.

Church was back over at Blue Base, trying to show Caboose the Reds' newest recruit. It was to pretty much no avail. "The yellow one? That's Grif." Church rolled his eyes. "The other yellow one." Church tried to position Caboose's aim to be able to see the recruit better. "Yellow armour, yellow armour.... What does yellow armour mean?" He murmured.

"Is it another medic?" Caboose suggested. Church looked through Doc's now AI free helmet to see that he was trying to teach the alien abomination about colours and prejudices. "I don't think we're that lucky." He tried to focus into the distance without the use of the sniper rifle. "Yeah, best bet is that it's a Special Ops Guy. Maybe he's trained in.. Knives, or... infiltration."

"Maybe he's an alien!" Church looked at Caboose. "Are you sure you're feeling better?"

Church turned as he heard steps walk up onto the roof, joining him and Caboose. The footsteps belonged to Tucker, who was finally responsive after the birth, albeit very disoriented. "What happened to me?" He asked.

"Ya got knocked up; ya got knocked out."

"Oh, right. I should probably work out some more. Church, you can make a schedule for me, right?" Church huffed, but nodded: It did make sense for him to organise such a thing, he didn't need sleep after all. "Oh, and uh, what's that ship over there?" Tucker added.

"Well, the Reds called in a ship and it landed on Donut. So this means that they have new hardware, and a new teammate." Tucker squinted slightly at the yellow figure in the distance. "You mean that girl, right?"
"That's a girl?" Church glanced to the Reds again. "You have really good eyes, Tucker."

"I have to, I never get the fucking sniper rifle!"

"Well, Tucker, you said that you wanted to see what you pushed out, so here it is: The abomination of nature itself." Church stared at the recently made father as he paced back and forth. "Oh god, Church, what do I do?"

"You're asking me? Don't you remember what..." He glanced at Caboose, and leaned in towards Tucker. "-My own father figure did to me? I don't exactly have a reliable source of information about raising a kid." He furiously half-whispered."I know it's just..." Tucker leaned away and returned to his pacing, his atrocity looking as he did so. "I don't know how to be a dad! This isn't how I planned it." Church raised an eyebrow sceptically. "You planned this?"

"Well, I always wanted the ideal father-son relationship. You know: The one where I see my kid for about eight hours every other weekend and I send checks to women I hate." Caboose sighed. "You know, It's times like this that I start to miss my mother." Church and Tucker ignored this.

"Well, I'm just going to leave you here with your.. 'Son'. You know, give you some time to bond." Church said, before shivering in disgust shortly after. Tucker grabbed onto his arm and clung. "Man, don't go! What am I even going to talk to him about?"

"Baseball?" Caboose suggested. Church rolled his eyes. "It's an alien baby, Caboose."

"Oh, okay. How bout Tee-ball?"

"I think you should know that the word 'alien' was the emphasised word in that sentence." Caboose didn't pay attention, rather, he was staring at Church, before tilting his head to look up at the sky. God knows what Caboose was thinking. Tucker shook off any thoughts about that; It was unimportant right now.

"I'm serious Church, don't go."

"Well, does it look like I can give you any ideas? All I really know about the Sangheili is that they tend to tell grandiose lies to people, so that they can impregnate them in their sleep. Maybe start with that, you know, common ground. Tucker punched his arm, only to yield no reaction. Church was a robot after all. However, at least he and Caboose hadn't left yet. They stood in silence, Tucker nursing his injured hand all the while.
"Maybe I can get Doc to babysit for a while."

"Yeah, I got him talking to Sheila. She's been acting strangely lately."

"Strange how?"

"She's been acting really distant. Plus she's been saying these weird threats. Kinda reminds me of somebody else." Tucker chose not to comment on that last part. "But why would you send Doc?"

"Didn't you hear the part about how she's been giving me threat? I'm not trying to talk to her." That would definitely make sense. People- AI or not- Don't really take death threats too kindly.

"Why not end Caboose? Doesn't he have a crush on her or something?" They both ignored Caboose's splutters as he tried (And failed) to conjure and excuse. "I would, but I've seen enough cross-species babies for a lifetime. The last thing I need is a tiny Caboose running around with a giant cannon for a head. Your devil-spawn is enough." Tucker clenched his fists.

"Don't talk about my kid like that!" He barked. Church's eyes widened. Just a little while ago Tucker had been ranting about how unprepared he was, and now this? "What's this Tucker, I thought you weren't comfortable with being a parent?"

"I don't know, I'm kinda getting used to the thought. It might be cool: Who knows."

"Of course, that's why you're getting a babysitter for your newborn. I'll be sure to buy you the 'Dad of the year award' cup for your birthday." Tucker flipped him off. "Go fuck a cactus."

"Anyways," Church continued. "I told Doc to find out what's wrong with Sheila, and maybe give her a little tune-up."

"But Doc isn't a mechanic: Hell, he probably knows less about it than he does being a medic."

"Yeah, but I see it as either A: He fixes her by accident or B: Sheila becomes completely inoperable. Either way, I win." Church figured it wasn't a bad idea to check up on them, so he focused on then through the sniper rifle, just in time to see Sheila as she pointed her cannon towards him. "Or not."

"Hey Blues!" Yelled out a voice behind them. Church recognised it to be Grif. "Oh, great. Now the Reds have realised how fucked we are. Everyone, try to act like everything's under control." Church took a deep breath as he tried to prepare himself for what would undoubtedly be a shitstorm. "What do you want, Red?"

"We're here to release a prisoner for you!"
"Oh what, so they're just giving us prisoners now? I smell a trap." Tucker shook his head. "No man, I doubt that the Reds are that smart." Church shrugged. "I know, but this is Grif. He's at least of average intelligence. But why would he give us one of their guys as a prisoner?" Tucker said nothing as he grabbed Church's head and turned it to face Grif again. "Oh, right." Church cleared his throat. "Why would you want to give us one of your guys?"

"She's one of your guys! She came to us by mistake, you can have her!"

Church thought about this. Knowing Red Team, they were probably telling the truth. To be sure, he checked through the recent helmet cam data. What he found was a weird set of occurrences: Grif's sister arriving, before it was revealed that she was meant to be on Blue team: her colourblindness fucking her over. She was sent to Blood Gulch after Flowers died, like Caboose. Church thought it strange that 'Command' would send two people to replace one agent, but whatever. Tucker waved a hand in front of his face. "Uh, Church? You done yet?" Church nodded. "Fine, but none of the Reds are allowed to touch the ship that she was sent in: It's property of Blue Team!" He yelled out to Grif. "Fuck, fine, whatever!" Grif motioned to his Sister for her to leave, and she complied.

"Hi there!" The others chorused a hello. "My name's Sister." She looked at the rest of Blue Team, sizing them up to one another. "Got to say, I like the look of this team." She purred. Church and Tucker shared a glance. Tucker could almost feel his glare. "So like, shouldn't one of you be showing me around or something?"

"Oh, right." Church cleared his throat. "I guess I'll do it." He stepped towards her, walking her a few steps closer to the base, and bringing her along with him. "Welcome to Blue team. So... That's our Base. There's blue flags on it, they have a bird on them. That should make it easy to tell that it's our base. The Red Base had a snake -a python- on theirs. The inside is through that door," He pointed to the aforementioned door. "There are two ramps: One in front, and one in the back. The one in the back is less wide, but it serves the same purpose. We have a teleporter- but don't use it without my say-so. We have a basement: That's where the gym, training room and firing range are. You can go there anytime, but leave the weapons in the firing range if you leave. There's a kitchen, two bathrooms, and several bedrooms. I'll uh... I'll show you yours later." He took a breath. "So... That's it."

Sister tilted her head. "That's it? Don't you have rules or something?"

"Only one: Don't kill the leader. That's me."

"That doesn't sound too hard."

"Believe me: I thought so too. We're still waiting for someone to follow that rule."
Church thought about what else he could tell her. "Oh right, I guess I should introduce you to the other Blues now, shouldn't I?" Church motioned for her to follow him. "This is Tucker." He pointed the said soldier.

"Sup?"

"Tucker's job is to... I don't know."

"Church, you should know by now that it's to be cool. That's the only rule on Blue team rookie: Be. Cool."

"I thought that it was to not kill the leader?"

"Yeah, but we break that rule all the time." Just then, Tucker's baby let out a growl. Sister looked at it. "You have a dog? Awesome!"

"No, that's my son."

"You have a kid that looks like a dog? Awesome!"

"Nice save." Church deadpanned. He then spotted Caboose walking down the ramp. Seems that he had either gotten bored, or better. Either way, he was walking over to them. Church figured that he could use him as a tour guide; pass on the torch. "Hey Caboose."

Church motioned towards Caboose using his free hand. "Sister, that's Caboose. He can show you everything there is to know about Blue Base."

"Is she a mean girl, or a normal girl?" Caboose asked. "What did I tell you about normal girls, Caboose?"

"That there are none."

"Exactly." He turned back to face Sister. "So, just stick with him, ask him any questions you have, and don't bother me. Or Tucker." Caboose tilted his head. "But what do I tell her?"

"I already know the rule, so..." Caboose clenched his fist. "I hate that stupid rule!" Tucker thought about the best way to keep the two away from them.

"Caboose, how about you introduce her to Doc and Sheila?" Those two were more than far enough away. However, Caboose only turned and pointed. "The purple one is Doc, and the giant tank is Sheila." Tucker sighed at how miserably his plan failed.

"What about the black one?" Sister asked.

That managed to immediately interest Church. "What black one?" He asked, almost afraid of the answer to come.
"Oh you know, the black one! The one in black armour, sneaking up behind you..."

"Wait, what?" Church snapped his head around, to be greeted by a familiar colour scheme he knew all too well.

"Tex?"

Tex stopped, and sighed. "Really wanted to sneak up on you there." She glanced towards Blue Base. "Come with me: You need to see this first, and I think it'll be better if you're the one to introduce them to the Blues." Whatever Church had been planning to say had died in his throat. "Them?" He asked. Tex nodded, before running to Blue Base. "Stay here, and don't move. I mean it." He told the Blues, before sprinting as fast as he could to catch up to Tex.

When he got to Blue Base, he rested his weight against the wall as he panted. Tex waited for him to catch his breath; it wouldn't be great if Church lost his only option for a body simply because it overheated. When he did catch his breath, he walked over to Tex. "Sorry about that. What did you want to show me?" Tex motioned him to come inside the Base.

"Now Church, when you see them, try not to scream. Or point your gun at them. Please." Tex asked. Church nodded, unaccustomed to Tex asking politely. Whatever 'them' was- or were, it must be pretty damn important. He'd do anything in his power to not fuck this up. When he nodded, Tex grabbed his arm and pulled him into the medical room.

Now, there wasn't anything really misplaced around the room itself, apart from several open bottles of painkillers, and an open first aid kit. A bloody pair of tweezers sat on a tray, alongside some bloody cotton pads and a bottle of antiseptic. But despite that, that wasn't what caught Church's attention.

In the centre of the room, around a small collapsible table, sat an adult man. There was another man a ways behind him, sitting up on a bed. One of the two was a brunette, the other a blond. The brunette had bandages wrapped around his abdomen and thigh, while the blond had them around his arms and, interestingly enough, had a stump for one of his legs, starting from his ankle. The two wouldn't have looked too out of place on their own, but what really got to Church was when they turned to face him and Tex when they heard the two come in. The blond didn't look all that special, but he did have blue eyes and a large nose. The brunette however, was unmistakable.
The brunette had a large scar overlapping a completely white, unseeing eye. When he looked at the blond again, he chastised himself for not realising who that was immediately. Church's head whipped back to Tex.

"Now Church, I think it's about time that you get finally get formally introduced to Agent York, and Agent North Dakota, of Project Freelancer."

Chapter End Notes

Wow, I think that was the longest chapter to date! Hope all of you enjoyed!
Chapter Notes

Oh my, there was so much positive feedback in the last chapter, thank you all so much! Now, this chapter will be the first time I ever try writing North, Delta, or York for that matter, so I hope I do well.

Please enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After hiding from Project Freelancer successfully for over a year, one would think that North and York had managed to stay away for good. The last thing they expected was to find Tex, who was hunting down Wyoming and Omega. They only chose to help her out of pride, and despite knowing the risks, they did it anyway. It almost cost the two their lives.

North didn't care much: He had lost his foot long before that happened. He considered himself lucky to escape with a couple of bruises and cuts from shrapnel on his arms. York on the other hand, was lucky to live. The two shots to his thigh and abdomen were deep, and only missed major arteries and organs by what North could only consider to be a miracle. Now, Tex had called them in as a favour, and she really didn't have to help the two much, but setting up a recovery beacon and leaving a stolen, unused AI fragment as a distraction for the Recovery was surprising enough, especially from her. The last thing North expected was for her to help them further.

"Alright, that should do it. I don't think the recovery agents will be able to track us down, so at least that's something." Tex stood up from her crouch and brushed down, picking out a small piece of shrapnel that had gotten lodged in between the armour plates of her foot. North leaned against the wall, holding his injured arm and panting as the biofoam began to take effect. He sucked in a breath as the burning sensation that came with the substance arrived, before being overtaken by a soothing numbness soon after. He looked to where York was laying.

The golden armoured freelancer was breathing, although he wasn't in the best of shape. Of course, no one would be after getting shot. Delta seemed to be doing whatever he could to transfer all power to York's healing unit, and North cursed under his breath, wishing that there was anything that he could do to help him. A few seconds later, Tex walked over to York's body. "Delta, can you tell me what's wrong with him?" She asked.

"Agent York has taken two bullet wounds; one to the abdomen, and the other to his thigh. Both shots have missed major arteries and veins. However, York's status may progress into infection and/or death if the wounds are left untreated." Delta answered, using his typical monotone voice. North could have sworn that he had heard a hint of worry in Delta's tone. Tex hummed, before
making up her mind about something. "I'll be right back." She ran off as quickly as she could, even dropping her battle rifle as she did so. North wondered what she was planning on doing. He had never really had that much trust in Tex however, so he wondered for a second if she had left the two to the wolves. His fears were unfounded, since he saw her return about fifteen minutes later. "Delta, status report."

"York has lost consciousness, although he is otherwise unchanged."

"But can I pick him up?"

"It wouldn't be advisable except for in an extreme situation. If that is what you must do, proceed with extreme caution." Tex took a deep breath, and then hoisted York up, carrying him bridal-style. "Then let's go. North, follow me. I know a place where we can get help."

North complied, and she led him to a Warthog. She placed York in the passenger seat, leaving North to take gunner. It wasn't where he would typically sit, but if York long term health was in danger, then he couldn't care less. Tex fastened York's seatbelt. She then got into the drivers seat and drove off towards... Wherever she was leading them to. She drove for a very long time.

After what North felt to be several hours, Tex stopped. "Alright, I can't get any further, so we'll just have to go on foot." She picked York up again. North looked around: It seemed that they were in a wind power facility. A giant metal fan spinning lazily, with a few pieces of what North gathered to be armour scraps lay around in various states of ruin. "Did you do that?" He asked, pointing to the destruction.

"No, I'll tell you later. It's probably too long of a story to tell you right now anyways." Tex responded. She led them through a large hole in the wall; One where it would be comfortable to walk through even while carrying a body.

On the other side of it lay a canyon. "Agent North Dakota, may I introduce you to the boxed canyon in the middle of nowhere known as Blood Gulch." Tex looked around the canyon. She seemed to be making sure that no one would see them if they made a run for it. She ran to the Blue Base, it seemed that this canyon just so happened to be inhabited by Simulation Troopers.

After making it inside, she led them through the base, bypassing a man in teal armour and multiple closed doors which North figured to be bedrooms. Tex brought them to the sick bay.

"Alright, we're here. North, help me take off York's armour." North nodded, and they worked mostly silently, apart from the occasional command given by Tex. They then moved to take off his undersuit, a task that took a lot more effort. North would have talked more, had it not been for a question that had been on his mind ever since Tex had set up the false recovery beacon. "Hey,
"Tex?" She looked up as she freed one of York's arms from his sleeves.

"Why are you helping us?" He asked. Tex didn't respond for a while, likely wondering why she did as well. She kept working on removing York's undersuit. When they were done, York stripped down to his underwear, Tex finally replied.

"I guess that it's because I'd feel guilty leaving you two for dead." She was silent for another moment. "And there's another thing. I... Know a guy, and after all that he's gone through, I think he deserves some closure." North was stunned. The last thing he expected was for Tex to feel guilty. Perhaps she wasn't the stone cold bitch he always thought her to be. He watched as Tex went to the other side of the room to grab something from a first aid kit. The biofoam in York's body wouldn't last much longer. Then North wondered about who the 'guy' was, So he asked.

"It's... My ex boyfriend. We're still alright, we yell at each other from time to time- but then again, we always yelled at each other. He had been through a lot, and I figured that if those problems stemmed from the Project, then I might as well give him some relief. God knows he deserves that much." North blinked. Tex had an ex-boyfriend? Not to mention that it seemed that he was a simulation trooper. North looked at York's body, before walking over to where his helmet sat. "Delta?"

"Yes, Agent North?"

"Did the bullet's get pushed out when you were using the healing unit on North?"

"No. The undersuit of the armour was too tight, and it pushed the bullets back in. I was more focused on making sure that Agent York would not bleed to death." The AI responded. Tex cursed, grabbing a pair of tweezers from the first aid kit, and went to another room. North heard running water, so he figured that Tex was washing her hands. When she returned, North saw that she was still wearing her armour, and was carrying a scalpel. She hoisted York onto an operating table.

"North, I'm going to need your help on this one. Can you make the incision? My hands aren't as steady as yours. I've rubbed around where the bullets are with iodine, so you should be able to locate them." North agreed. He would likely be the best person for the job: Being the most cautious person (Read: The only cautious person) on a squad where everyone got riddled with bullets almost daily would lead you to being the best at treating such wounds, especially when it's a bullet wound. He made the incision on York's side, and fiddled with it as he pushed down, trying to rediscover the bullet.

When he finally got the two bullets out, he turned to Tex. "I figure that you can do the rest?" He asked. Tex nodded, grabbing some gauze, a needle and thread, and began sewing up the wounds, applying antiseptic as she went along. North looked on, before he began to feel a throbbing pain coming from his arms. He hissed, calling the attention of Tex. "What's wrong?"
"I figure now might be a bad time to say this, but I sorta got cut by shrapnel and now the biofoam had worn off?" North felt extremely sheepish. Tex sighed, finishing up with York and turning to North. "Take off your armour."

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Even after North's wounds had been treated, he still managed to change into more comfortable clothing (Tex said that the clothes were spares supplied by 'Command'), take a nap before York had woken up. "Where am I?" York asked. He looked down. "And why am I almost naked?"

"Simulation Outpost Blood Gulch, because you got shot and we couldn't treat the wound while you were in armour." Tex replied. North waved at York from the collapsible table he was sitting at, eating a bag of potato chips (He noted that the Sim Troopers got a lot more snack food than the actual military. He wasn't complaining, but it was weird). York tried to sit up, but Tex pushed him down, instead shoving two or three pillows under his back and neck. She sat back down at her chair beside York and sighed.

"Well, I guess I should probably tell you what I've been doing for the past year." York and North nodded. "And also what I'm doing here, and/or what's going on in this canyon." More nodding.

"Boy, have I a story to tell you...."

All of that eventually culminated into this: Tex bringing over her ex. Despite how there were multiple members on the Blue Team, she only brought Church. North figured that it was because they used to date. The man in question seemed to only stare on in shock, his jaw pretty much dropped down to the floor.

"I... I- What?!” Church squawked. He took a step back, and looked at Tex for a split second. North didn't know why he did that, but soon afterwards Church had lowered the sniper rifle that he had been holding, dropping it on the floor. He walked up to the table at which North and York had been sitting. "I..." Church wanted to say something. York raised an eyebrow.

"Look, if you want an autograph, you're going to have to speak up." Church looked at York in shock, but released the breath he had been holding. He rubbed the side of his helmet. "Sorry, I just can't believe that- I mean, you're alive! And North- I mean- Sure your uh, you're foot's seen better days but I mean-” Church was beginning to ramble. This was rather strange. North couldn't understand why this man seemed to be so happy about this. York was also confused. "Uh... Hey man, I appreciate your joy of seeing us alive, but why are you so happy about this?"
Church stopped, turning to Tex again. They stared at each other for a few seconds before Church tried to explain himself. "I uh, was in the science team on the uh, the Mother of Invention. I was part of the guys that made your enhancements, and then I got to see the footage of it in action. Needless to say, it was really awesome." Church said, shrugging. "I guess I couldn't help getting attached. Then the whole thing with Agent Connecticut and, well, I laid low. Erased the proof of me working with the staff, joined the Sim Troopers- I mean hey, At least then I could pretend like I didn't now what was actually going on. That's how I ended up here. I guess Tex already told what happened when she got here?"

North nodded. "It was pretty crazy. Especially the part where you became a ghost. Killed by your own tank? Pretty rough," Church flinched. It seemed that he hadn't expected North to have known that. "I still don't believe it." York piped in. Delta appeared, hovering over York's shoulder.

"Indeed, a person becoming a ghost is highly unlikely, further prompted by how they do not exist." Church said nothing, and North could almost hear Church's jaw drop as he looked at the small green AI fragment. Eventually though, after a few minutes of him sitting down at the collapsible table, it seemed that Church was finally able to gather his thoughts.

"I... I guess I'll have to introduce you to- you three, to the other Blues, right?" North and York made a noise of agreement. "Alright, then I guess I'll- I'll come back soon." He left. North and York shared a glance, and then both shrugged. North grabbed a crutch, and then made his way over to wear he had left his prosthetic foot. "I guess I should make myself presentable, right?" He said, picking up the prosthetic and grabbing some more antiseptic.

The process of reattaching his foot used to be fairly painful, but extended exposure had at least dulled the pain. North applied the antiseptic to the metal attachment before he inserted it into place. After making a few minor adjustments, he experimentally rotated his ankle to see if it had worked, and to his delight, it did. He flexed his toes, before setting his foot down on the floor. Tex's radio made a buzzing noise, and she walked out of the room to answer it, closing the door as she did. York adjusted his position on the pillows.

"I wonder what's gotten into those two."

"Same here." They sat in silence for another moment. "I always thought that Simulation outposts weren't interesting at all. Then it turns out that they almost had to deal with more bullshit than we did." It was a wonder how any of the got into these sorts of messes. The only way that the freelancers even beat them in terms of bullshit was because what happened to them actually killed multiple people. North shook off those negative thoughts before they could manifest. He sat back down at the table when Tex walked back in. She was followed by Church, who seemed to be lecturing three people out of his view.

"-Caboose, I'm telling you, you can't screw this up, okay? That's why I took your gun away for the
time being. I'll give it back after this is over."

"Just show us these guys already, Church! I know you love suspense and everything, but this is just ridiculous."

"I will, but- For the love of God, Sister! Put the money away! I told you before that they aren't-" Church cut himself off, realising that North and York could probably hear them. There a some mumbling, and the door was reopened.

Aside from Church, there stood a man in Regulation Blue armour, one in teal armour, and a woman in yellow armour. Tex seemed to be missing. The blue one waved. "Hello!" North and York waved back. the teal one tilted his head, while it seemed that the girl was sizing them up.

"Caboose, Tucker, Sister. Meet Agent North, and Agent York. They're freelancers." announced Church, pointing to everyone upon saying their names. Tucker raised his gun. "Not that kind of freelancer, Tucker. They're alright."

"Yeah... They're good in my books." Sister added. North was getting slightly uncomfortable.

"So, now that we have the introduction out of the way, let's cut to the chase." Church sat down at the table once again. "How did you get here, and why did Tex bring you here?" North sighed. He figured that it would be okay to leave out the parts before he and York had met up with Tex. That would be a story for another time.

"So, when we had met up with Tex, we were uh... We were doing something that wasn't exactly the most legal thing in the galaxy. And believe me, I'm not very proud of it. But it was what we had to do at the time. I was keeping lookout for York, and that's when Tex showed up. She came up behind me first. She had the right idea, I would have probably shot her if she went up to York..."

North continued to explain the story, with York chiming in occasionally to add or disprove something. By the end of it, York finally had enough strength to sit up in his bed. "Yeah, it wasn't exactly the most fun experience, getting shot twice. But at least I passed out before the bullets were pulled out. That's got to mean something. At the very least, I didn't have to give up Delta."

The aforementioned fragment reappeared. "I wouldn't have left, Agent York."

York intertwined his fingers and rested on them. "Aw shucks, Delta. You're making me blush." Church and Tucker seemed to shiver at the 'aw shucks'. "Please don't say that again." Tucker begged. North saw a figure walk up behind Caboose. He was planning on saying something, but he didn't have any time to before Tex had grabbed Caboose and pressed a combat knife against his neck.

"Nobody move!" She snarled. Caboose whimpered. "I'm scared." Church, North and York stiffened.
"Tex, what are you doing?" Church asked.

"O'Malley isn't in Doc. Where. Is. He." She gritted out.

"Just put the knife away, Tex. O'Malley isn't in any of us, I'd know. Everyone would be acting differently. North and York aren't wearing armour, let alone their helmets - Delta, you worked with O'Malley before, you'd be able to tell if he was in one of us, right?"

"Affirmative."

Tex seemed to hesitate, before sighing. "Fine." She released her hold on Caboose, who breathed a huge sigh of relief. "Then you're all going to help me find out exactly who is," Church nodded wholeheartedly. "But just before we get to work..." Tex grabbed Sister, who made a noise of curiosity. "I need to have a talk with her. You five can carry out your investigations yourselves in the meantime." Tex finished, before practically dragging Sister out of the room. Seems like she got strangely mad with Sister. Was she getting territorial over no longer being the only girl on the Blue team? It was a possibility.

"Alright then, you all heard the lady. It's either find out where O'Malley is or get our asses handed to us."

"Tucker, I don't think you noticed, but our only lead is Sheila, and she's not exactly being cooperative."

"Well who knows? You sent Doc out there to get some answers, maybe she's not mad anymore. I mean, it's worth a shot, isn't it?"

While they discussed the pros and cons of trying to talk with Sheila, North had walked over to where York was sitting, taking a seat on the stool next to his bed. "So who do you think are Doc and Sheila?"

"I don't now, maybe we should ask the people who are less than twenty feet away."

"Yeah, I guess, but -Wait, who is that?" York pointed at a man in purple armour who had just walked into the sick bay, trying to call the attention of Church. After a short while of calling his name, His attention finally got caught when the man summoned the courage to grab his arm. A glare quickly made the medic release his grip. "What do you want, Doc?"

"I uh, I just finished up with Sheila." Church's glare eased. "So, your diagnosis?"

"Well, she's definitely acting odd."

"We know, that's why we sent you out. What do you think?"

"... That she's acting odd."
"That's your diagnosis? That's why we sent you there: Because we knew that something was wrong! How about fixing her?"

"Well, surprisingly enough my medical practice doesn't cover internal combustion." Doc deadpanned.

"You don't even have a medical license!"

"Exactly." Church and Tucker both groaned. "Then just go back down and... Reboot her, or something." Doc raised an eyebrow. "Reboot her? I don't think that's how you fix stuff." North had to agree. Through all of the pelican crashes that had occurred in his time in Project Freelancer, not one of the Pelicans had been rebooted to get fixed.

"It totally works! We rebooted the toaster, the computers, we even rebooted the teleporter once!" North got intrigued at the mention of a teleporter. He figured that technology like the teleporters would have not been sent out like this to any old Sim Outpost, but he figured that perhaps this army wasn't as under budgeted as he first thought. He and York listened onto more of Church's and Doc's conversation.

"I'm not going down there anyway. Sheila's not exactly in the best of moods. She shot at me when I tried to get her to calm down." North thought about what they could do. "How about having someone sneak down there to turn her off?" He suggested. Church, Doc and Tucker turned to look at him in surprise, apparently not thinking that he and York were listening in, but relaxed soon after. "Yeah, I guess North has a point."

"How about Tucker?" Doc asked. Tucker shook his head. "No way dude, I'm not exactly the prime candidate of stealth, both in terms of how good I am at doing that and how my armour's one of the brightest in the whole canyon. She'd spot me from a mile away if she didn't hear me first." North figured that he had nothing to lose, and stood up. "Then I'll do it." Their eyes widened, not expecting one of the new arrivals to help them with their plan. Delta decided to back him up.

"Agent North would be the best option for a stealth mission such as this, considering the fact that he used to operate in stealth when he worked with Project Freelancer. However, we would need a distraction to make sure that there would be a successful outcome to this operation." Church shrugged, and then nodded. "Well, that makes sense to me. But if we're going to use a distraction, then we're going to need someone that Sheila trusts. Ad it would also have to be someone kind of dumb, so that we can use them to betray Sheila's trust at a critical moment..." Church trailed off, realising the perfect candidate for such a role, alongside Tucker. They both turned to Caboose, who was looking at them as he halted his work of cutting gauze into useless, bandage sized shapes.

"Hey, everyone is looking at me! Hi everyone!"

Chapter End Notes
I didn't realise that most prosthesis in the Halo universe (which is shared with the Rvb Universe) is permanent—That is to say that it cannot be removed at will—until about halfway through this chapter. So I'll just make an excuse that he uses a civilian prosthesis with only minor modifications. I'll also say that he has a civilian prosthesis because he wasn't technically a soldier when he got (Or stole, take your pick) it. So hopefully that's a viable explanation.

Hope you enjoyed!
"Alright North, you understand the plan?"

"Wait until Caboose distracts Sheila, then get behind her and reboot her. Got it." The plan seemed more than simple enough at least. Despite how little North knew about tanks, he supposes that if Sheila was anything like the tanks he had seen during Project Freelancer were, then rebooting Sheila should theoretically be as easy as pressing a button. Literally.

"Caboose, what about you?"

"Yeah, uh... About that whole... Distracting part, I kinda don't know how to do that." Church sighed. 'I don't know man, say she's petty or something. Saw that she has that new tank smell, or... Compliment her treads, I don't know. Just say something!' North got an image that he couldn't get out of his head, and he idly wondered if he could make it actually happen.

"And if you aren't sure how to, try practising on Church." Caboose and Church looked at him; with Church doing an excellent impression of a bird. "WHAT?!" He squawked incredulously.

"Look, do you want there to be a sufficient distraction?" Church knew he couldn't argue, so he just held his face in his hands as he screamed internally. Eventually he lowered his hands, sighing. "Fine. Go ahead Caboose." At around this time, Tucker had shown up. It was also the same time that North activated his helmet cam. He held up a finger to Tucker as he started speaking, managing to silence him. Tucker felt very confused as he too looked at Caboose and Church.

"Church...." Caboose began. "I think that you are my best friend, and you have not yelled at me in a very long time, and that you are actually a very good person ghost. I think that you are so nice that we should be more than just friends, so we can hug and have sleepovers all of the time and it won't be weird at all. Because you are a gay robot."

North struggled to hold in his laughter, while Church struggled to not leave. "Yes Caboose," He gritted out. "Why not. I think that would be... Lovely."

Tucker looked between the three. "What the fuck just happened?" North couldn't hold it in anymore, and burst out laughing. "Gold. Tucker. What happened here was gold." Church flipped North off, not that he really cared.

"Alright Caboose, now that we're done practising, you should go and distract Sheila. NOW." Church ordered, likely to try and save any dignity that could possibly have left. "But I'm nervous."

"Don't be Caboose, just go out there, hold her attention, and don't say anything dumb... Or do. Go!" And with a pat on Caboose's back, he was sent off towards Sheila. North figured that it was probably best that he also left. He ran around the side of the canyon, making sure that Sheila wouldn't spot him, provided she didn't turn around.
Meanwhile, Caboose was trying to do what he was ordered to do: Distract Sheila. It wasn't really working as well as he (Or anyone else for that matter) would have wanted it to go, but Sheila wasn't turning around if nothing else. "I am very distractable. Do you collect stamps? I like collecting stamps." Church turned and left, whispering "I am not dying because of your mistakes Caboose, not twice."

"Please don't go!" Sheila moved forward an inch or so. "I am not leaving." Caboose started to sweat more heavily than before. "Oh! Good..." He desperately tried to think of another topic to go onto, but Sheila pushed forward with one instead. "Caboose, everyone has been looking for the Omega AI. If you continue acting erratically, they make think that he is inside of you, and take drastic measures to counteract him, thereby damaging you and/or your body."

"Yeah... I would not like it if that happened. I like being not dead."

"Indeed. Luckily, I know where the Omega AI is located." Sheila said. Caboose perked up. This was very important information, and the others would really like hearing important things! He pressed for Sheila to continue.

"The Omega AI is inside Blueeaurghhh..." Unfortunately, it seemed that the world loved unfortunate timing, as North had chosen that exact second to come up behind Sheila and shut her down. Caboose wondered what 'Blueeaurghhh' was. But that didn't matter now. Caboose radioed Church. "Hello, yeah, Church? Uh... We might have to turn Sheila back on again."

"What?" Caboose saw as Church walked out of the base and march towards him. "Caboose, I know I should have probably asked you this sooner, but what the fuck is wrong with you? After all of that trouble, why would we turn her back on again?"

"She said she knows where O'Malley is!"

"And what if she's lying? How would she even know where O'Malley is? North, is there anything wrong with her? Can we turn her back on and disable her guns or something?" Church walked over to North, who was shaking his head. "I'm not good with tanks, but even I can tell that it was a miracle she was still able to move around and talk, much less fire her cannon." Church looked and sucked in a breath. "Yeah, you're not wrong on that. That is really bad."

"What if she moved into my head? There's loads of extra room in there." Caboose suggested. It probably made sense to Caboose at first glance, but there were too many holes in that proposition. "Trust me buddy, I know about all that extra room. And no, Sheila is the type of AI that runs tutorial program, stuff like that. She's not the right AI, I'm not even sure if she could go into your mind."

Church had begun to pace. "If only there was a similarly sized vehicle that we could move her into..." It seemed that Church had an epiphany. "Hold on, I think that if I got Tex to set up a hardline between the tank and the ship..." His mumbling got to quiet for North to hear, furthered by how Tucker began to run full speed at them, as though there was an extremely urgent matter at
"Church! I have something to tell you!" Tucker took a second to catch his breath. "I just wanted to say... That I've got a hardline for Tex. Bow chika bow wow."

"How did you even hear that?!" North had to say, that level of hearing was unknown to cats. And cats could hear really well. Tucker made little finger guns. "What can I say? I'm like Superman: I know when I'm needed."

"Alright, That's it." Tex backed away from the hardline that she had attached to the tank. "Tex, are you sure that Sheila won't do anything while she's in the ship?" Church knew that this was his idea in the first place, but he had to wonder whether or not Sheila would just betray them, or something to that effect.

"I don't think so, but I guess I'll remove the ignition coil just in case. If there's anything wrong with her, she's not going anywhere." Tex turned on the radio. "Hey Caboose, how's it going in there?" She asked.

"It's good, but the inside of the ship is way bigger than the outside." He answered. Church looked through Caboose's helmet cam, finding that he was indeed correct. Interesting.

"How's the readings?" Caboose walked over to them. "All of the blue lights are blue, and the red lights are red."

"What about the green lights?"

"They are black." Church had to give Tex props for being able to talk with Caboose in a manner that he could understand. That wasn't the easiest thing in the world to do.

"Okay Caboose, when the green lights turn green, and the red lights turn black, I want you to tell me right away. Don't worry about the blue lights; They aren't important." Tex then shut off the connection. "Well, that wasn't too bad." Church figured that it would be alright to ask Tex questions now.

"Tex, why the hell would you just take off like that? At least give me some warning; you left for two weeks!"

"I had to leave Church. I found Wyoming."

"And what happened there?"

"Well, I thought that I had tracked him to O'Malley, but by the time that York, North and I got to him, he wasn't there anymore. Wyoming said something about him being back in Blood Gulch, so
after I stole a Warthog, I drove back here as fast as I could. I patched the two up, and the rest is history."

"Did you get anything out of Wyoming?"

"I would have if I could've but he... Teleported away before I could grab him. One second he was there, and the next he was gone. It was like someone grabbed him from somewhere else."

Church felt like this was quite a bit of information to take in. He wondered about how that could have happened. He continued to think about how Wyoming could've disappeared like that. It didn't make any sense that he actually teleported: There weren't any actual enhancements that could do that. However...

Church could have sworn that he had heard of that sort of technology before. Or rather, experienced that sort of technology before. There was only one place that Church had seen that happen. He snarled at his own stupidity. "I have to make a phone call."

Church dialled up Gary as soon as he could, and he didn't bother with the introduction; This wasn't exactly the time for that. "Why, Hello Gary. Or should I call you Gamma. You've been lying to us haven't you?" There was a short pause on the other end, before Church heard that frustrating beeping that came with people ending a phone call. Of course, it was made doubly frustrating with now that he realised that any of the trust that he had put into Gamma was stupid and that he shouldn't have ever done that. He would've voiced his frustration, but then there was another person trying to contact him.

"Hey there, Church! Haven't talked in a while, dude. How's it going? Anyways, I've got little time to talk, so I've been talking with Blue Command and they think that everything is terrible and that you all should go attack the Reds right now, 'cause they're up to no good and you need to kill them. So uh, you should go through the caves dude; take them by surprise and all that. Anyway, I gotta go. See ya la vista." And despite Church's protests, Vic had hung up only a second later.

"God dammit! Why do people keep hanging up on me?!"

"Alright guys, I've brought you up here because Vic called earlier. Now, normally this wouldn't really matter, but he specifically told us to go through the caves to attack the Reds. As you can probably guess, This means that the Reds are doing something that Vic doesn't want anyone to do. In any case, this is cause for an investigation. Me, Tex, North and Tucker will go through the middle of the canyon." Church explained. "If nothing happens to us, we'll join you in the cave. If
something does happen to us, we'll call the rest of you. Same goes for both teams"

"Who's on the other team?"

"Doc, Sister and Junior." Caboose raised his hand. "What about me?" Tex decided to answer that one.

"Caboose, you're going to stay with Sheila to make sure that the transfer goes through without a hitch. If it gets interrupted, we might lose her altogether." Church figured that this was enough talking before the mission, so he just tapped his foot while he waited for Tucker to finish his talk with his 'baby'. When he finally did, they were all ready to go. He grabbed Tucker's arm, hauled him up from where he was crouching, and started walking towards the Red base.

"Psst, hey Church?" Tucker was whispering into his ear. "Why did Vic mention the caves?" Church noted that North was listening in on the conversation. He figured that there would be little and/or nothing to lose talking about everything up front, so he did just so.

"You should probably know by now that Vic is a computer, right?" Church ignored Tucker's spluttering. "My bet is that the Reds found out about something they weren't supposed to, and Vic wants us to kill them to leave no evidence behind. I guess that uh, Vic's computer is in the caves. And the Reds found the computer."

"So why didn't you send us into the caves?" North asked. Church glanced behind him to look at the ex-freelancer. "Because Gamma and Wyoming are after us, and you two are the most capable people in this canyon. Tucker hasn't used his sword enough yet to master it, and I have to aim at something for five seconds if I have any hope of hitting something with a sniper rifle." North seemed to be satisfied with this answer, but he still had to ask one more question.

"But then why did you send the least experienced people into the caves? I thought that the Reds would open fire if they saw any of you?"

"Because the Reds aren't the most effective at killing people. Seriously, even though Sarge managed to kill our CO at one point with a sniper rifle, he still uses his shotgun because he wants to be up close when his opponents get killed by him. Grif's too lazy to kill anyone, and the other's, well.... I guess they're just being held back for whatever reason. Probably the rest of their team."

Tex had stopped walking, and had turned to the rest of the group, who had just managed to avoid bumping into her. "Alright, this is where we'll split. I'll move up, you three stay here and back me up if I need it." The guys nodded, North grabbing the sniper rifle that he had been resting on his back until then. He made himself more comfortable on the ground as he kept watch on Tex. Tucker stared at the sniper rifle he was holding, radiating jealousy. Church could recognise that face anywhere. He idly wondered what Tucker was going to try and do. Church also had a strange feeling of deja vu: Him, Tucker and a freelancer standing on a cliff, Tucker wanting to have the sniper rifle that the freelancer was looking over the canyon with... Church shook the thought off.
"Hey there North... Nice sniper rifle you got there. Can I hold it?" Tucker asked. "I'll give you my sword, it's really awesome!" Church realised what Tucker was going to try and do. He kept watching, wondering what would happen. To his mild surprise, North got off the ground and handed Tucker the sniper rifle, getting the energy sword's handle in return. Tucker did an air pump and looked through the rifle's scope, zooming in on Tex. North frowned as he pressed the button on the sword handle. "Hey Tucker, why isn't it activa-"

North cut himself off as a shot rang through the air, followed by Tex letting out a loud curse. Tucker's eyes widened, and he hurriedly handed the rifle back to North, taking back his sword. Church realised what had a high potential of happening, and switched his own sniper rifle for the pistol on his thigh. His fear-induced thought wasn't for nothing as Tex stormed back up to them. She looked around, before walking over to North and punching him in the stomach. North held his gut, dropping onto his knees.

"Whyyyy?" He moaned. Church snickered into the back of his hand.

"I don't know, call it karma for earlier."

"So, I guess this is it, huh? It's a lot emptier than I thought it would be, but whatever I guess." Church looked around the Red Base. "So I guess this means that we have two bases in the middle of a boxed canyon now." Tucker and North snorted.

"Oh sure, because having two bases in a boxed canyon when the war you're fighting isn't even real is sooo impressive."

"Yeah man, whoop-de-fucking-doo."

"Yeah, I know it's not impressive, but I mean hey- more space, right? Maybe we could use this base for storage, so that we can use our own purely for sleep and leisure. Whatever, I can dream man." Church heard a radio signal coming from Tex's helmet but he figured it was just Caboose. He didn't recognise any point to listen, knowing that Tex would just relay the message anyway.

"So I guess we're gonna split up to search the base, right?" North and Tucker nodded. It would make the most sense, seeing as these outposts weren't exactly the smallest out there. "How about Tex and I, you and North. Sound good?" Small noises of agreement. Tex didn't respond, still probably on the radio, which Church thought strange. "Tex, you okay with that?" Still no answer. "Tex?" He turned to face her, only to be met with the barrel of a gun. "Oh, crap."

"Don't move, O'Malley."
Did We Even Have a Plan? Maybe? I Guess?

Chapter Summary

And now, the moment I've been waiting for since I started this dang 'fic: The season five finale! Grab your popcorn folks, sit back, and enjoy the chapter!

Chapter Notes

When writing a story, spelling mistakes are common and unavoidable. The amount of times that I misspell 'maroon' as 'marron' is too many to count. Let's not forget other gems such as 'Chuch', 'Chruch', 'Tucher', and 'Nroth'. Absolutely astounding.

Anyways, there's an nsfw scene in this chapter, but then again, anything in Sister's head would be nsfw. Sory if I misinterpret her character. Just thought I'd give ya'll the fair warning. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Church raised his hands, slowly, into the air, after putting away his gun. He didn't know what Tex had heard that made her suspect him to be hosting Omega, but he had a striking suspicion that it had something to do with her radio call that he didn't bother to pay any attention to. Man, did Church regret that now. He figured that the best thing to do would be to try to talk some sense into Tex, and convince her that what she was thinking wasn't actually the case.

"Tex," He began warily. "I am not O'Malley."

"Bullshit! It all makes sense now! You were the one that told Gary where we were, you were the one that asked me to help disable Sheila by moving her to the ship, and you wanted the ignition coil once I removed it." Tex actually had a decent point, all of that would make it seem like something that O'Malley would do, but now wan't the time to praise Tex for her reasoning. "Tex, all of that was just a coincidence. I had my own reasons for doing all of that. That doesn't mean I'm possessed by O'Malley, it just means that I've made poor decisions."

"Then why would Caboose tell me that it was you?"

Church had to hold back a scoff. "Caboose? You're telling me that you're getting information from Caboose?" Church flipped onto the same channel as Caboose was, just in time to hear him confirm. "You know Caboose, if you're the reason that I die one more time, let's just say that I'll be a little pissed." Caboose still continued talking in that frustratingly sing-song tone.

"Sheila told me that O'Malley is inside Blue leader!"
"And that's you." And so this brought his attention back to Tex, and trying to convince her of the truth.

"Sheila's not exactly in her right mind right now, Tex. Besides, I wasn't ever actually promoted—Nobody was, so for the last ti- Wait." Church cut himself off as he came to a realisation. There really was only one person who was ever actually the leader of blue team. It was a stretch, but if Church was right...

"It's Flowers."

His announcement made both Tucker and Tex stop what they were doing (But not not enough for Tex to drop the gun). North followed suit shortly. "Who's Flowers?"

"He was our captain. The key word being was. Church, he died. Months ago!" Tucker called out. Church put more and more pieces together, and realised how clear everything became. "Then where did the Reds go? I certainly didn't sneak over here and scare them off, when I wasn't dealing with you, and Tex, the freelancers, Sister, not to mention the freak of nature you called a kid!"

"Fine, fine. But if he is alive, don't think for a moment that he's getting his armour back."

"You say that like I'd make you give it back to that asshole. Tex?"

Tex seemed to hesitate for a moment, before sighing and putting her gun away. "If you're lying about this, I will tear you apart. But assuming you're not, then what happened to the Reds?"

"I don't know, maybe they're on lunch break. They could have evacuated for all I care." Tex shook her head.

"But they couldn't have. All of their stuff is here. It's almost like they walked straight into a—"

"Trap?" Church, North and Tucker looked beyond Tex to see Wyoming holding her at gunpoint. Church cursed silently, wishing that he had one minute of peace nowadays. It seemed like all they did now was get themselves into shit that was somehow deeper than it was before.

"Wyoming."

"Tex. So sorry to just barge in and interrupt whatever it was that you were talking about. I'm guessing it was ditch digging." God, Church wanted to punch him in the face so badly, if only to make him stop talking in that cocky, smug tone.

"We don't even have shovels!" Tucker called out, in a weak attempt of retaliation. "Which sorta sucks, 'cause it's always our teammates that keep dying." Wyoming chuckled darkly, pointing his gun at them. "And it seems like that trend is going to continue."
"Dude, if you're here for Tex, she's right there. All yours."

"Not at all! I'm actually here for your little buddy. He's very important to a lot of people you see." Church couldn't take this anymore. They were at a standstill; unable to do anything without Wyoming injuring or even killing one of them, and the last thing that Church wanted to do was chance that Wyoming pumped the actual humans full of lead. So, faking a large cough, he called Caboose and York on the radio. He wondered how to convince them of what was wrong without giving it away to the others.

"So Wyoming, you just showed up here and decided to attack us. And now you've caught us at gunpoint, so it looks like we're in big trouble. Wyoming. You found us and are holding us prisoner. At Red base." Everyone turned to stare at him, but he just decided to hold out, screaming a mantra of how this would all be worth it when they actually came to help them.

"If only someone could come and help us. For example, someone who knew what was going on, and had access to heavy military artillery. Because then they could come over and help us, and we would be saved."

Wyoming just tilted his head. "Why do you keep explaining things to me? I understand perfectly. I ambushed you, and now you're cowering in fear."

"Yeah Church, what's going on with you?"


"We know!"

"I think I'll take this from the top. Wanna take notes?"

"Hell no!" Tucker almost screamed. Everyone was reaching the ends of their patience by this point. "I think your friend here lost his marbles."

This however, brought Tucker's attention back to Wyoming, and what his plan was. "Oh, If you want to see crazy wait until you try to mess with my fucking kid. What do you want with him anyway? He never did anything to you!"

"Oh, it's not about what he's done, it's about what he's going to do! You're child has a very important destiny to fulfil, and we're here to make sure that he does it."

"Well, he's not here, so jokes on you!"

"Oh quite the contrary actually! I have a friend who's already working on that. I'm just here for some clean-up."

"And Tex, what the heck? I thought you were good at this stealth stuff." Tex chuckled. "I am." She said, before activating her enhancement. She faded from sight, but Wyoming still didn't react in a
way that any of them would have liked.

"Oh no, Tex has disappeared. Whatever shall I do, fretting, worry..."

"Dude, I wouldn't sound so smug. Last time you stood up against her, she kicked your ass, and now you're way outnumbered!" Church heard a noise that sounded like tires on gravel, and saw that a tank had come up to the Red Base. "Hah, I can't believe Caboose came through! Booyah, motherfucker, we have our tank now, too!"

"Hahaha, Do you really think it's your tank? Ha ha..."

"Knock knock Church." Said Gary, and then Church felt like slapping himself.

"Every five minutes, I swear, It's like something has to happen every five fucking minutes."

"You know, I really can't thank you enough for leaving your tank unattended. Very kind of you, old chap. It just makes your defeat and humiliation so much easier."

"Uh huh, yeah, glad to help. You know, if you give us enough time I'm sure that we'll just kill ourselves. It'll save you ammo."

"If it makes you feel any better, your death is for a very noble cause."

"What do you even want with Tucker's kid?"

Tucker himself looked as though he had just woken up. "Wait, what? How did we get back here?!" And he was acting like it too. Church tilted his head in confusion, as did North. "Tucker, what are you talking about?

"What's happening?!" Tucker seemed to be almost hyperventilating. The two others both found themselves extremely concerned. "Are you becoming retarded Tucker? We're captured. Prisoners. What is there not to understand?"

"But Tex-"

"-Will take him out. No worries."

"Oh, Tex? You mean her?" Wyoming asked, as he stepped forward and hit Tex with he butt of his rifle, revealing her as well as knocking her out. "Poor Tex. Never did know when she had been beaten."
"How the hell did you know where she was!"

"What do you mean, of course he knew!" Church's gaze whipped back to Tucker as it turned into a glare.

"Tucker, if there's something I'm missing and you don't fill me in in the next ten seconds I will shoot you myself!"

"What's going on?" Wyoming muttered to Gamma.

"I think he knows." Came the monotone reply. Then to add to the pile of shitstorm, Caboose came running along. "Don't start without me! I'm coming to save you Church!"

Wyoming's eyes narrowed. "It's the idiot. Take him out."

"Firing main canon."

Despite Tucker's pleas for Caboose to turn back, he didn't stop, and a flurry of canon fire quickly shot Caboose down.

"CABOOSE! NOOOO!" Church's screams carried out loudly through the air, and Tucker bit his lip thinking about how heart wrenching it must be for Church to see Caboose shot down. To him, that was the first time it happened. At least Tucker knew that it wasn't permanent. But his thoughts couldn't last as Gary had begun to fire at them as well. "Take cover!" He screamed, jumping off the roof of the base and taking North and Church with him. Church did a bioscan on Caboose's body, letting out a curse.

"Fuck, his heart isn't working!" North seemed to be held in a state of shock for a second, before gathering together the thoughts to form a question. "Tucker, what the hell is going on?!"

"It's like last time! Caboose got shot, and then a little while later Wyoming got taken down! But when he did everything seemed to start again, and I don't know what's going on!"

North thought about this for half a second, before calling over Church. "I need you to tell me: What was Wyoming's enhancement, what did it do?!"

"Why does that matter?!"

"Just say it! It's important!"

"Time distortion!" Church screamed. Then he stopped. He stared at North, and then at Tucker. "Oh my god." Church heard the rifle fire overhead, and looked at Wyoming. "North, I need you to shoot him. If this is what I think it is, you need to remember that Wyoming can loop sections of time."

North nodded steely. He aimed, and fired, hitting Wyoming in what he could tell to be the stomach. Tucker had managed to calm down slightly. "What's your plan after this, Church?"
Church was at a loss for words. "I... I-" He got cut off as he saw the world practically spin as he found himself back on the roof with Wyoming, North and Tucker. He recognised this to be moments before what had just happened. Realising that Wyoming didn't expect to know anything, he tried to repeat what he had said before. "You know Wyoming, I'm pretty sure that we'd just kill ourselves if you gave us enough time, it's not like we'd need that ammo anyway." Wyoming raised an eyebrow beneath his helmet, but said nothing. It didn't seem like anything was wrong apart from some minor paraphrasing.

"Well, your death is for a noble cause, if that makes you feel any better."

"What do you want with Tucker's kid anyway?"

"Church, what the fuck is going on?"

It seems that Tucker hadn't realised what Church was trying to do; not that Church really knew either, apart from 'stall for time until you can think of a plan'. Wyoming murmured something to Gary, likely realising that he was aware of the loops. Then Gary had fired at Tucker, thankfully missing.

"Take cover everyone! Tex! He knows where you are!" Tucker yelled, before diving off the Base. Tex had reappeared in he confused state. "What?" Tucker didn't pay any more attention to her, instead focusing his stare onto Church, alongside North. "What the fuck was that? I thought you remembered everything?"

"It's not like I had time to think of what to do, Tucker!" Church spat back. "It's not like you had a plan: You gave yourself away! At least they don't know that North and I are also aware!" Church pauses as he sees Caboose be shot in the face. He flinched, hard, but managed to avoid voicing his horror. That however, didn't stop the feeling in his gut: which was as though there was a bag of cement in it.

"That doesn't even matter, Church! Do you even have a plan? Do you even know what to do?" Tucker's words became more harsh and cold, and Church held back a sudden rush of memories.

"You should know what to do, Alpha. I only expect the best of outcomes from you."

"I... I just- Give me more time, Please." Church pleaded.

"We don't have more time. Just keep playing dumb, both of you. I'll take care of it." Church felt a cold rush at Tucker's words as the world seemed to spin once more, and he found himself standing on the roof of Red Base once again.

"Well, your death is for a noble cause if that makes you feel any better."
"What do you want with my kid anyway?"

It seems that Tucker started to play dumb too. Church didn't say or do anything; He wanted to learn what Tucker was planning to do. Wyoming seemed surprised at Tucker. Not to say that he didn't have a good reason to: Church knew that if someone was aware of a time loop, they wouldn't just go back to being unaware of it. Thankfully, Wyoming (Or Gamma, for that matter) didn't know that was impossible to happen.

"Do you.. Not remember?"

"Remember what? You never told me anything." There was some mumbling between him and Gamma.

"What the fuck are you two talking about?" Church figured that it wouldn't do to much bad to act completely oblivious. It would distract Wyoming if nothing else. "You know what, just keep talking. It'll stall for time until Tex kicks your ass into the dirt."

"Oh, Tex? You mean... Her? " Wyoming knocked Tex down, revealing her. He mocked her as he stood over her form. "Oh, poor Tex. Never did know when she was-"

Two glowing prongs suddenly protruded from Wyoming's chest. "Beaten?!" Exclaimed Tucker, removing the sword from his body. "Oh dear," Wyoming then collapsed onto the ground. Church could tell from the sword placement alone that there was no way that he would ever get up again.

"Reggie?"

Even with the monotone voice, Gamma still seemed shocked and audibly upset. Church had to say, he felt fairly sorry for the fragment. But he wasn't even sure if he could do anything to help the fragment, or even if Gamma wanted to be helped. Like the last two times, Caboose came running over. Tucker grabbed the sniper rifle that was laying ob the ground ad shot near Caboose's feet.

"Caboose get the fuck out of here!"

It had its desired effect: Caboose had turned one hundred and eighty degrees, running away from them instead of towards them. Tucker, North and Church ran off of the Red base roof. As they did, Church had a realisation. He had been through a time loop before.

"Tucker, how many times did we loop?"

"Does it matter? That cocksucker's dead. It'll teach him to mess with my kid."

"It does matter! Don't you remember?"

"What happened?" North asked.

"I was sent through a ton of time loops, and every time I went back, it left a bunch of..."
The three stopped as they saw roughly seven men standing in white armour. Or rather, only one man, copied multiple times.

"Clones." Church finished. The Wyomings all laughed evilly, before aiming their guns and firing at them. "Shit!" He exclaimed, as he ran alongside North and Tucker away from the Wyomings, shooting at whichever he saw. He didn't really hit any of them, but that could have been very easily chalked up to him running at top speed away from the moving, hostile targets. Tucker shot down one of them, and then another as he crept up behind Church. "You know, I think I'm starting to like this new, badass, all knowing Tucker." He muttered to North, as they kept running.

"Shit, not that way!" Tucker yelled out at them.

Church came face to face with Gamma, and had barely managed to avoid getting hit. "Jesus Christ, I take it back, I take it back!" He ran back to Tucker, and ran to where Tex had been hiding behind a rock. He slumped behind it, taking the moment to catch his breath. "I fucking. Hate. You." He panted.

"What the hell? Why do you guys keep giving away my position?!" Tex was mad, not that she didn't have any reason not to be.

"They know where you are, it's pointless to try and hide! Now duck!" Tex did so, and just in time to avoid getting shot in the head. "Tex, you really should listen to Tucker. I know it's probably hard to, but he understands everything that's going on, so he's our best bet towards not dying," Explained North. "And not losing any limbs. Well, any more limbs."

"North's right. Tucker, what's the plan?" Tucker started to leave, going at a jogging pace.

"Distract the clones while I take care of the tank! Watch your back!" He ran off. Church turned, and then ran to the side as he saw the Wyoming clones that had tried to shoot them. They took cover behind a different rock. Church glanced briefly at the clones, making sure that he knew their position. "Alright, Tex, you can take the ones on the left. North and I'll take the ones on the right."

"There's twice as many on the left." She deadpanned.

"I know, I can count. Wait, what's that noise?"

They all stared as a Warthog flew over their heads. North's jaw dropped as he watched the Reds slam into a group of Wyoming clones. "Does that happen all the time?" He whispered, still awestruck.

"Yes North. Yes it does."

"Hey, Reds!" Yelled Caboose. They all turned to stare at the man in Blue armour. "Why don't you
pick on someone your own size?!! He continued. There was a short pause, as thought the Reds were considering it, before they ultimately drove after him. North's expression turned to one of concern. "Is he going to be okay?" They continued to stare as Caboose was chased by the Reds.

"I am Caboose! The vehicle destroyer!"

"...Yeah, I think he'll be okay. Hey look, one of the Wyoming clones is still alive." At least now maybe they could all get the answers they so desperately needed. "Wyoming. What is your plan here? What do you want from Tucker's kid?"

"He already told me!" They looked at Tucker as he began to explain. "My kid's a part of the big prophecy we all thought failed. He's meant to become some big religious figure, and the saviour of the aliens or some crap. Then O'Malley would infect him, and he would be able to enslave their entire race!"

"That's disgusting." The clone grunted from his position on the ground.

"No, it's our job. We need to win the war at any cost."

"Yeah well, good luck. We already have you, so all that's left is O'Malley, and I'm sure that Tex will be more than happy to see that through." Wyoming chuckled. "Oh, quite the contrary actually. Not only will she not stop us now that she knows what our plan is, she's going to help us."

"What? No, Tex wouldn't do that, right Tex?" Church turned to face her, but she didn't respond. "...Tex?" He pressed.

"No, he's right. This is Freelancer Tex, broadcasting on an open channel. You want me, O'Malley? Come and get me."

Shit. This was bad. Very very bad. If she wasn't stopped, then there was no doubt that O'Malley would infect her, and that was the last thing Church wanted to happen at that point in time. So he did the only thing he could do.

"This is Private Church, broadcasting on an open channel!"

O'Malley didn't get attached to many of his hosts. That is to say, the only one he ever got attached to was Tex. Now, this wasn't to say that he particularly liked her, it just meant that she was, by far,
his preferred host. So when he had heard her broadcasting openly, with seemingly nothing that would stop him from getting to her, he took that opportunity.

What he didn't expect was to find himself in a mind that he had never even previously inhabited. He had come in with his trademark evil laugh, before realising that this mind wasn't actually Tex's. Instead, it was furnished with a bookshelf, what seemed to be a marble statue, with a few wall lamps placed here and there in symmetrical locations. This couldn't have been Tex's mind. Two men, one in maroon armour, the other in orange (Gold? Yellow?) Armour.

"Oh my, a guest!" Exclaimed the maroon one, pleasantly surprised to see the AI, rather than scared or even shocked. "Grif, you stupid fatass, fetch his coat, and get him a glass of our finest Irish whiskey." Now, O'Malley was more than used to mental impressions, and in some cases it was even interesting. He watched as 'Grif' began to whine.

"But I don't want tooo! I'm just so lazy ad gross, and I'm pretty sure that I disrespect you behind my back, I just can't prove it yet."

"Don't make me repeat myself." The maroon one had folded his arms.

"Fiinnee." Grif began to walk away, but paused for just long enough to whisper "I don't respect you.". Simmons sighed, and turned back to O'Malley. "I'm so sorry, he can be a real handful sometimes. Welcome to 'Chateau Simmons."

This... Wasn't a great host. It definitely wasn't the worst, but O'Malley considered it to be far too much hassle to have to deal with those sorts of person impressions. "I'm leaving."

"What? But you can't, you just got here!" It seemed that 'Simmons' got way too attached to people he barely knew for his own good. Didn't the news of O'Malley's delightful plans of world domination warn him of the terrors that would invade his mind if O'Malley stayed there a minute longer?! And how dare he ask him to stay here?!

"If you tell me to stay here one more time, I will gouge out your eyes! Then, I will replace them with grapes!"

A soldier in red, more stocky than Simmons, had walked up to them. "This guy givin' you trouble, Simmons? 'Cause if he is... KAPOW!" The man cocked his shotgun, and aimed it at O'Malley's face. "Excuse me!?" He spluttered. He had never once been threatened by someone like this.

"Stand down, Sarge."

"Why, of course. If you don't see it as a problem, then I don't see why I should either." It sure did seem like Simmons had a lot of wish-fulfilment in his head. It was unsettling, uncomfortable, and gross, in O'Malley's not-so-humble opinion.

"Oh Sarge, you're the best CO a man could ask for."

"Well, I sure am glad I could hear that from you son, and I don't mean that as a term of
endearment, or a star, I actually mean it as a way of saying that you're my true offspring. Even though I never admit it."

Yep, absolutely disgusting. "And here I thought that the blue one was delusional." The maroon one paid no attention to his words.

"Oh, I can't wait to show you around! I've been waiting for this moment for a very long time."

"You planned to have your mind taken over by an artificial intelligence?" O'Malley had to raise an eyebrow at that one.

"You can never be too careful!" Came the too-cheerful reply. "Now, I have some memories saved up about my twelfth-grade calculus class, we can work on that for a while, and then we can daydream about all of the pretty girls I had a crush on in high school. They're usually over in the same place where I keep the repressed memories of them rejecting me!"

That... O'Malley had no words for how horrible that sounded. Even though he was an evil mastermind, hellbent on ruling the universe, he couldn't stand that sort of mistreatment.

"I WILL NOT STAND FOR THIS TORTURE!" He screamed, before hitting Simmons in the face. In the outside world, he made Simmons threaten his cohorts. He figured that Simmons would definitely hate that, if his brain was anything to go by.

"What? Who said that?"

"We did, you fool! I'm the one who's in control now!"

"Wow, I sound badass! Can you make me tell Grif to suck it?" He pleaded. Well, since he did it so politely... He did it, but not because he wanted to help Simmons. In fact, he then made him call Sarge a cocksucker. Which Simmons then made him change to add a 'sir!'. Whatever.

Then Simmons got punched in the spine, before getting beaten... Everywhere else. Not wanting to get stuck in armour lock, O'Malley ported to another radio. Which just so happened to be the Blue one's. He listened as all of the annoying interpretations talked at once, feeling his wrath fester. "I am going to kill... All. Of. You."

Then Tex had pooped up. "Oh, well look who it is. Are you FINALLY ready to play our little game? Mwahaha..."

"Yeah. Let's talk."

"Great idea! Assuming no-one will come in here and force me out of this-" As if on cue, he blinked out of that mind and into another. He sighed. It was almost as if he set himself up. He stared at the man who's body he was currently inhabiting. At this rate, he'd be through everyone in this canyon in less than twenty minutes. He blinked as he turned to the source of what seemed to be... Disco music? And strobe lights?
"And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, the man of the hour, Do-Do-DONUT!" There was the sound of a cheering crowd, seemingly coming from nowhere. And this appeared to be a worse hell than the two previous hosts combined. "Oh god."

"Well hey there Omega! Welcome to my light-ish red head!" Jesus, even an AI fragment such as himself could pick up that innuendo. He cringed violently. "Do not. EVER. Call it that again."

"No problem buddy! The cool kids call it the Donut Hole anyway."

"Note to self: Murder the cool kids."

He then blinked out again, and into another mind. "Blast! Why does this keep happening?" He heard what seemed to be evacuation sirens and gunshots. This was already shaping up as better than the other three minds. Until of course, there was a gun pointed to his head.

"Alright, Name and rank, pronto! The Blues are scheming, there's and AI on the loose, and senility is trying to overtake the hippocampus!" Sarge barked. In O'Malley's opinion, it seemed that senility had already succeeded. He watched as Sarge blew up a gaggle of Grifs, before porting out again.

He then reappeared in a barren room, with only a few boxes to decorate. The orange one walked out in front of him. There was silence. No person impressions, no talking. It was much nicer than what O'Malley had braced himself for. That of course, only lasted the few seconds. In a moment, he appeared in another host, one again. And his jaw dropped as he stared in horror at the scene before him.

From what O'Malley could tell, from the ropes, straps, various lingerie laying about, clamps, and... Toys, this could very well be a sex dungeon. A female, one that looked to be barely legal, yet still dressed in lace underwear, stockings, and heels, walked up to him. "Hello there, you here to join in on the fun?" Her voice was much too sultry.

"Oh god just kill me now." He begged that this woman would get knocked out soon. She stepped up to him, completely disregarding personal space, and traced her fingers down his chest. "Well, I'm not sure if we can kill, but we sure can torture... You seem like the type for a 'ring', how about it? Are you going to join in or what? I've got a guy all hot and bothered and I'm not one to keep a guy waiting." She suggested, pointing to... The teal one, handcuffed to a post behind him, naked and panting heavily. The rest of the soldiers seemed to be in a similar situation even, O'Malley noted with a shudder, Tex. Seemed this girl swung both ways. However O'Malley was glad that he at the very least didn't have to see Sarge or Grif.

The girl walked away from him, pouting. "Well, If you want to play it like that... I guess you'll just have to watch instead." With that said, she walked over to a metal pole that had gone unnoticed before then, and began to perform a far too sexual for anyone. Omega crossed his fingers and prayed as she began to strip, begging that she would be knocked out. Thankfully he was saved in the nick of time, as he faded from that mind just as she was about to expose her cleavage.
He reappeared in a cooler room, one that wasn't heavy with the smell of sweat, and was covered with a metal floor rather than a dark wooden one. He breathed a sigh of relief. "I'm not sure where I am right now, but boy am I glad to be here." The sound of a round being loaded. "Are you sure about that?" Asked a cold voice from behind him, one that O'Malley almost didn't recognize.

"Well, well, well. Agent North Dakota? I can't say that I expected you to be here. How do you find this canyon? Miserable, I hope."

There wasn't a response for a short while. "What are you doing here?"

"Avoiding the question, are we? Very well. I want to rule the world, in case you didn't know and Tex is a very important part of that plan. All that's left now is to get to her, but with all that I've been through, I don't even know if it's worth it."

North took a step back. "Theta?" He asked. A small red, blue and purple hologram appeared over his shoulder. "I don't think he's lying about this, North. But he still makes me uncomfortable."

"He makes everyone uncomfortable Theta, it's fine." The little AI imitation disappeared. It seemed that North was still very upset over what had happened to the little AI. O'Malley would have exploited that, if he knew when he could possibly do that.

"Fine then. O'Malley, I believe you, but if you hurt anyone in this canyon, I will personally see to it that there is hell to pay. Got it?"

Absentmindedly, O'Malley nodded. He then felt as North got knocked out, and ported once more. He didn't want to hang around with these people anymore anyways.

Church was so tired of trying to stop Omega from jumping bodies, trying to make sure that the inhabited weren't harmed, that he was almost relieved when he was inhabited instead. However, that left Church with what was probably the hardest thing to do: His last resort to stop Omega from meeting up with Tex again.

"Gaah! I can't take it anymore!" Screamed Omega inside his head. The fragment seemed to calm down as he looked around the new landscape. Church had based it off of Sidewinder, as it seemed fairly appropriate. No matter. He came to Omega, floating downwards surrounded by a white glow. "Hey there Omega. I can only guess that you're here to take over my brain?" He asked.
Omega seemed to be at a loss for words. "I- well uh, yes. But are you not going to try and oppose me?" He looked around. "And why does this place feel so familiar?" Questions. Good questions, ones that weren't really hard to answer.

"Look man, I've been running this place by myself for years. Feel free to take over, if anything, you're welcome."

"And the other thing?"

"Why it feels so familiar? Well, you might remember it as the same place where the Mother of Invention had crashed, if you're referring to the landscape. Quite pretty if I do say so myself."
Omega shook his head at Church's answer. "No, that can't be it."

Church chuckled. It was strangely warmer than he thought it would be. "No, I wouldn't expect it to be it." Waving his hand, he summoned a chair out of the air around him, and sat down on it.

"Tell me, Omega. Who is your creator?"

"I- Well, I suppose it would be the Alpha."

"And who did you torture for weeks, if not months at a time?" There was a slight pause, some hesitation in Omega.

"The Alpha." He finally answered.

"And who of all people would be asking you these questions?" Omega didn't answer. "I'll give you a hint: It's the same answer as the last two. Coincidentally," Church leaned forward. "It's also the same person as the one standing in front of you right now."

Omega gasped softly, as he realised who the man in front of him was. Alpha stood up, and walked closer to Omega. He made sure to appear as non-threatening as possible. "I- I don'- I didn't-"

"Calm down Omega! That was about what, ten months ago? A year? Water under the bridge. On one condition that is." Omega swallowed, but he didn't want to face the wrath of a smart AI, even if it was a fragmented one, or his creator, or both. "What is the condition?"

"Oh, it's nothing too hard: Just..." He looked around. "Do you like this place?"

"What?" The question had clearly caught the AI off guard.

"Would you mind staying here? Because let me tell you, processing things faster than a human could ever hope to gets boring very easily, and I have way too much free room in here since you and the others got removed, so I'll ask you again: Stay with me. Please."

Omega stared at Alpha's hand, which he had put out for his fragment to shake. He thought about his plans of world domination, of how he was planning to reunite with Beta instead, and rue the world with an army of aliens. But deep down, as much as he tried to deny it, Omega knew that plan would fail, And that no matter what he did, there was no other good option. So, with another
smaller glance around the landscape, he smiled or once in his lifetime, and took Alpha's hand in his.

"Well, since you asked so politely."

Alpha cheered considerably, and did an air pump motion with his fist. "Alright!" After his small celebration, he turned back to O'Malley. "Well, I guess now's a good time to return to the real world, huh? Here we go..."

Church had regained consciousness in just enough time to avoid getting hit in the back of the head by Tex. And impressive feet, Church had to say. He chuckled, before bursting out in laughter.

"Good job on your part Tex! But I'm afraid you'll have to go somewhere else to get your AI fragment: I'm afraid the store's all sold out of Omega'. And guess who just got the one and only? Yours truly." He blew a mocking kiss towards Tex, who gaped like a fish that one of Church's plans had succeeded for once. When she regained her bearings however, she snarled.

"Fine then. I didn't need him anyway."

With that, she ran away. Church panicked alongside Omega, and he ran after her as fast as he could. And yet, despite how fast he ran, he couldn't catch up to her as she grabbed Andy and jumped onto the Pelican. "Tex, wait!" He shouted. "Don't do this!"

The thrusters son the ship activated, sending it into the air. "Goodbye, Church." There was a click, signalling that Tex had turned off her radio. Church continued to yell in the vain hopes that she could hear him. "Tex! TEX!" The ship blasted further and further away from the canyon.

"ALLISON!" Church's scream was guttural. It rang loudly through everyone's headset. Church stared as the ship flew away, as Andy counted down from ten, as the ship jumped into slipspace. As it exploded.

"Tex?" It came out s a whimper this time, barely audible. He stared at the sky, hoping that perhaps he was wrong, that she would come back, that they would be happy together. But life doesn't work
the way you want it to, and she didn't do any of that. Any hope that Church had left in him 
shrivelled up and died. He lowered his gaze, and made his way back to Blue base.

"Church? What are going to do now?" He heard Tucker as from behind him. He sighed. What 
could they do now?

"Do whatever you want. I'm going home."

"Church?"

"Yeah Caboose?"

"Do you ever wonder why we're here?"

"You know Caboose, I used to not care. I just went along with orders, and hoped that everything 
would work out for me. But after all that's happened, you know what I've learned? It's not about 
hating the guy on the other side because someone told you to. I mean, you should hate someone 
because they're an asshole, or a pervert, or snob, or they're lazy, or arrogant or an idiot or know-it-
all. Those are reasons to dislike somebody. You don't hate a person because someone told you to. 
You have to learn to despise people on a personal level. Not because they're red, or because they're 
blue, but because ya know them, and you see them every single day. And you can't stand them, 
because they're a complete and total fucking douchebag."

They both stared at each other. "You know, I meant why were we standing in the sun rather than 
the shade." Caboose pointed behind the base, where there was enough shade to cool down in. "Oh, 
right. I guess we should go do that." A small voice piped up in the back of his head.

*I was telling you to do that this whole time, you know.*

"Oh, shut up."

Chapter End Notes

You know, GreatElisaMousey? You asked me a while ago what Alpha would plan to 
do with Omega when he shows up. That was your answer.
Anyways, since it was the season five finale, I figured it would be best to make it a longer chapter! I do hope that everyone enjoyed!

Comments are very welcome!
"Church?"

There was a long period of silence, before some firm knocks took its place. "Church, you have to answer me someday, it might as well be now!" Tucker huffed at the lack of response. Then again, he wasn't really surprised. He had been trying to get Church to come out of his room for six days, and that was after the initial week he had been there. Two weeks that Church had been cooped up in that room of his, and there weren't any signs of him coming out.

It had all started when Tex had left in that ship, followed by the damn thing blowing up. Tucker had tried to shoot at them from a distance, but it seemed that whatever had let him be a badass for all of those ten minutes had run dry, and he couldn't hit them. He hoped that they got the general idea down, however. Serves them right for fucking over his friend like that. He would have asked North and York to help but they refused to get into a squabble like this one. Tucker was pretty irked at that, but he supposed that they had a fair point.

That didn't mean that he couldn't ask for their help with Church's situation. And by god, did he need help with Church's situation. The guy hadn't left his room for any reason the past two weeks. It seemed like he was just shaken up the first few days, but it was far more likely that the truth of the matter had yet to sink in. After that, well....

"Get out of my way, Tucker." Snarled Church. The AI had been like this for the past several days;
Seemingly ready to tear the head off of anyone who dared to breathe too loudly. Not that the guy didn't have his reasons, but it got on one's nerves after a while. Tucker's in particular. After being friend's with the guy for months he just starts to scream at him because he didn't put a cup into the sink? And now it seemed that the source of Church's aggression was due to Tucker not immediately stepping to the side when Church had walked by in the corridor. He had finally had enough.

"Alright, I've had enough. What is your problem, man?" Church had stopped and turned to face him. "What?" It seemed that Church hadn't expected him to talk back. Well, it seemed that Tucker's surprises just never stopped coming.

"What?" Tucker mockingly parroted. "You know exactly what I'm talking about. I get it, your girlfriend died. Can't you get over it? Or if nothing else, get on the Reds' asses. They're the ones that technically made her die. Why do you have to be a dick to all of us?" Tucker planned to leave it at that, but he didn't.

"Besides, it's not like she was even worth making you this mad at her death anyways, so why don't you just-

Tucker raised his hand to his cheek, feeling a twinge of pain. It would almost certainly become a bruise. But he didn't really focus on that, as he was more-so concentrating on the fact that Church had just punched him. Church himself seemed to be in shock after realising what he had just done. He recoiled, taking a step away from Tucker, before running back to his own room, locking the door immediately afterwards.

Tucker sighed as he thought about what had happened. Sure, Church had been a giant dickhead before that, but he had to wonder if he should have run his mouth the way that he did. Bitch or not, Tex was clearly important to Church, and Tucker shouldn't have insulted her so soon after her death. Hell, he was still upset over Junior, and he had only known the kid for less than a day at that point! Tucker tried to shake those thoughts off: Running his mouth when he shouldn't have was one thing, punching someone was something else entirely.

But even with what happened at that time, what certainly wasn't forgivable was how Tucker had acted for a while after that.

"Tucker, Church's been in his room for three days now, shouldn't we do something about it?" Asked York, after he had finally gotten enough strength to put his armour back on to reactivate the healing enhancement. Tucker only showed him his cheek, which was slowly healing and sported a blue and red splotchy bruise as it was.

"And what's stopping him from doing this again?" At York's silence, he continued. "Look, as far as I'm concerned, there isn't anything. And if he's not going to learn how to build a bridge and get over it, then he can stay in his room for all I care."
Yeah, looking back that wasn't the best thing to say, especially when Church had seemed to do exactly that. If Church had ever left his room for any reason, it was definitely when no one was awake to notice him sneaking out. He hadn't even come out for the supply drop two days ago. Needless to say, Church needed to come out of there and get some help. And that's why Tucker found himself where he was: Sitting at the table in the living room, accompanied by Caboose, North, York and Delta.

"Alright guys, so you three-four," He corrected himself as he glanced to Delta. "Know why I've called you here right now, so I'll just get to the point."

"No!" Piped up Caboose. "Wait a minute, can I change my answer?"

Tucker ignored him. "Do you four have any idea on how to get Church out of that room? Because it's been two weeks now, and we should probably make sure that he's mostly okay by this point. I don't know what his self-imposed isolation is doing, but it can't be any good."

Delta and York seemed to mutter amongst themselves. North looked lost in thought. Caboose stuck out his tongue in concentration as he idly played with an elastic band. Tucker flipped through the ideas that had already been sitting around in his head, slowly tossing away each one. He doubted that something like a rubix cue would help with anything. Eventually, after about ten seconds, it seemed that Delta had come to a conclusion.

"I suggest that an apology would be the first item on the figurative 'to do list'. I indicate a high probability that no one has done this yet, as it would be likely that Church would have left his room already."

"Like he didn't know that already Delta. Right, Tucker?"

"..."

"... Tucker, you did apologise didn't you?"

At the lack of a response, the ex-freelancers groaned. "Well, I guess that means you're getting up off your ass and shuffling over there to apologise to him. Now." The tone in North's voice left no room for argument. Tucker sighed. As much as he hated people who acted as though being older made them know better, they were probably right. It's just that he was... Scared, is all.

Even if Church would accept his apology, what would happen next? Would everything just go back to the way it was? Unlikely, seeing as how there were two more people who were going to be staying with them now, not to mention Tex's death, which is what got them into this mess in the first place. But if none of them apologised then they were never going to get anywhere at all.
Church heard a knocking on his door once again. He rolled over in the bed. He agreed with Omega, who told him unnecessarily that it was Tucker knocking. Of course it was Tucker- Who else could it be? It wasn't as though anybody else was knocking on his door once every two minutes begging for him to come outside. But what was the point? He had an oil can or two, not that he needed them that much right now anyways, and he had Omega, who made him feel more complete than he had felt in a long time. It was fine. He didn't need half as much social interaction as a human- He didn't need any at all. It was fine.

Still, he listened to what Tucker was trying to tell him this time. It would never hurt- and it wasn't as though he missed the guy, it was simply because he was waiting until Tucker got his head out of his ass.

"Hey, Church. So uh, You've been cooped up in there for a while, haven't you? Yeah, I noticed- We all did. You've been in there ever since you hit me." Church grimaced at the event in regret. That was one thing that Church had been trying to avoid ever since, especially when he didn't know who had caused that punch : Him, or Omega.

"I mean, it faded three days ago, so who gives a crap now I guess. I sure don't." There was a soft thump on the door, as though Tucker had begun to lean against it. "I guess now's better than never if I have to say it." He heard the soldier mutter. Church sat up on the bed. This was different from the other times that Tucker had tried to coax him out of his room.

"Well... Oh forget it. I' here to say sorry, Church. I was a dick, and I said something I shouldn't have, and it wasn't a thing I should've said to a guy who's girlfriend had just died." Tucker took another breath, preparing himself for what else he was planning to say. "But I think you should know- It's not like you did nothing wrong. You were angry, and it wasn't your regular type of angry. You would yell at anything and everyone who did the slightest thing imperfectly. I tried to snap you out of it, and well, look how that ended up. It worked, but I'm starting to think that this is worse than before."

Church stood up. This was the first apology that Tucker had given him since what happened. He walked over to the door, and unlocked it with a click. After he was certain that Tucker had stood up, he opened the door. He saw Tucker standing there, uncertain yet hopeful, and Church took his wrist and pulled him into his room, closing the door behind them.
Tucker stood there, uncertain of how to continue, and Church frequently shifted his gaze from him to anywhere else in the room. "Yeah, uh...." He touched the back of his neck: A nervous habit that he had somehow managed to pick up.

"I... Well, I guess I should start talking." Tucker face softened slightly. "Well, I don't know why I was acting like such a giant dick back then. It's no excuse, not one that could ever justify me hitting you, but I swear that I don't want this to ruin our friendship." He kicked at the ground, growing steadily more uncomfortable as he continued. "And if you ever wanted to know why I hit you, I don't know that either. I mean, I don't even know who punched you, me or Om-"

Church cut himself off. Tucker stared at him, surprised but also confused and more than a little suspicious. "Church, who are you talking about?"

"I... I shouldn't have said that."

"In your train of thought, yeah. But now you did, and now I want to know."

Church tapped his foot, and paused for a second as he seemed to make up his mind. Little did Tucker know, he had gone into bullet time. Omega popped up next to him, hovering a small distance away. "Well, I've run my mouth. What do we do?"

"What can we do? You've made everything that much worse. If you don't admit, who knows what he'll do. At least you know that he's going to shoot you when you admit it."

"Yeah, fine. Thanks for nothing."

The little fragment disappeared, but didn't leave. Church went back into regular time. "Well Tucker, I think it's best that the others are around for what I'm going to say next. I'm not the type to repeat myself, and I'm not going to."

"So does that mean you'll-" Tucker added in a small fake gasp. "Leave the room?! Unheard of!" Church flipped him off, and they both stepped outside. "Where are the others?" He asked.

The question was unnecessary as the two heard a crash coming from what could have only been the living room and/or kitchen down the hall. There wasn't any arguments about where it was specifically, the two rooms were right next to each other after all, and there weren't any quarrels about whether or not everyone was there: Four distinct voices made that very clear. Church walked into the scene, finding Caboose standing a few steps away from a large mess comprised of three smashed plates. York had turned on the couch he was sitting on to see what had happened, and North was making his way over to a nearby broom closet.
"What's going on this time Caboose?" Church sighed. He idly wondered how often this had occurred while he had been cooped up in his room. Everyone in the room had turned to face him when he spoke, Caboose's head turning the fastest. Caboose was also the one to brighten up the most, running over to Church and tackling him in a hug, sending him and Church to the floor as Caboose continued to hold the AI in a death grip. "Church! I missed you! Did you miss me?!" Church wasn't given an opportunity to answer as Caboose continued to babble. "This is amazing! Now we can be best friends again, and we can go on picnics and eat sandwiches! And the best part is that stupid Tucker will not be there to bother you, because he is stupid and smells butts and is not your best friend and won't knock on your door when you are mad."

"Woah okay- Just- Caboose..." Church called out weakly underneath the man. It seemed that North and York were trying to pull him away. They weren't exactly succeeding. At the very least Caboose had finally stood up. Church felt around his torso. When he was satisfied that the death grip hadn't caused his body to dent, he stood up, brushing himself off. He noted that the base had more dust than it did before. That was something that he would have to fix later, when everyone was asleep. "Thanks, I guess..."

"Wow, Church! As he lives and breathes. What made you leave your little cocoon?" York joked. Church was happy to see that the man had made a full recovery, with only some minor scarring as any proof of a wound in the first place. Delta didn't seem to show much damage after all of this time either, so that was always a plus. But now wasn't the time for admiring Delta's productivity. Church wondered whether that would qualify as narcissism.

'It does, Alpha. It definitely does.' Answered Omega, always happy to bring Church down. Speaking of Omega...

'It's time. You do know that, right Omega?'

'Yes, I get it. You only told me this three times on the way to the kitchen. Don't worry, I'll shut up while you introduce me. We share a flare for theatrics if nothing else.'

'Good.'

"Well York, it was... A lot of reasons. I talked with Tucker, and I figured that it was time to tell you all something that I had been holding in for a while." York quirked an eyebrow. "This isn't you coming out of the closet, is it?" Church glared at him. York quickly understood that this situation wasn't really one for jokes right now. At least, not until whatever Church was going to say was admitted. He mimed zipping his lips and throwing away the key, before holding his hands behind his back.

"...Thank you, York. And no, that's not what this is about." Church took a deep breath before he continued. "You all know how Omega, before... What happened with Tex and Junior, had been jumping from host to host, searching for Tex?"

There was collective nodding from everyone. Tucker wondered where Church was going with this.
"Well, he got to me too." North raised an eyebrow. "And me. Where are you going with this exactly?"

"Yeah Church. But I just- Just tell me something, alright?" Church glanced at Tucker. "What the fuck happened? You didn't even seem affected. No evil laughs, no threats, your voice didn't even deepen! Explain."

"I was getting to that, Tucker."

"I'm waiting for it."

"And if you don't stop talking, it'll take longer for him to get to it."

"All of you, shut up! I am trying to explain what happened after that." Church sighed. They could really act like kids sometimes. "Anyways, you might know that Tex had left without Omega."

That had spurred more of a reaction than he thought. Tucker nodded, as though he knew all along. North and York's eyes widened in surprise. Caboose had gasped loudly, grabbing his cheeks. "Wait, really? Now of you knew?" It certainly seemed that way. Whatever, that didn't really matter right now. "Right then. Anyway, I was the last person who Omega got to, and uh, well-" He chuckled. It was slightly uncomfortable. "Of course I was. If you're wondering why, well, I guess I should just show it."

And that's when a small dark purple hologram appeared, hovering over his shoulder. "Hello, I see all of you are in shock. Muahahaha, not that that's surprising, Fuahahah."

Everyone's jaw had dropped in shock. Caboose had grasped the sides of his head. "Oh my God!" He exclaimed, leaning in closer to get a better view of the little AI. Delta had reappeared, and he seemed to be doing a million calculations a second, likely scanning Omega himself to see if there was any chance that he was a threat. When he couldn't find any, he turned towards the other fragment.

"Omega. I was eighty seven percent certain that you had left with Agent Texas."

"Well, I didn't. Good thing too, it seems."

"If that is what you believe, brother."

Delta had turned to Church. "I can only assume that Omega had tried to manipulate you for the last two weeks while you had not left your room. Mental evaluations are highly recommended." Church waved him off. "Yeah, well, I'm fine. Nothing of the sort needed." Omega snorted, but said nothing. "If anything, I'm just happy that no one's tried to shoot me yet."
Tucker seemed to finally regain some of his senses back. "None of us have guns right now." He answered. Church shrugged. "My point still stands." The others also seemed to re-grasp reality. North called Tucker and Caboose into another room with him and York, likely discussing what to make of this. Church tapped his foot as he waited for the answer to come. He wondered what would happen if they didn't accept this. Would they try to kill Omega? Would they kick Church himself out of Blue Base? It seemed like it took an eternity for them to finally come out again.

"Alright, so the others and I decided that as long as you keep," North gestured vaguely towards Omega. "Him, under control, then we don't see why he couldn't stay here." Church felt like a weight had been lifted. Even after everything that Omega had done to them, they were willing to let him stay there so long as he kept him under control, and that wouldn't exactly be too hard.

"Really? Great! I uh, thanks for you know- Not punching me in the face for that. I know that Omega's not going to be the uh, most comfortable to be around."

"It's... Fine, Church."

"No, it isn't- York, he's the reason you got shot! I'm- Ugh, I just- I owe you one. I'll make to up to you." Church looked around the room.

"All of you."

When Church had said that he would make it up to them, he wasn't kidding. By the very next day, all of the trash that was lying around had been removed, not that there was that much of it, the floors had been swept and mopped, the dishes had been cleaned, many of the dirty clothes had been sorted, washed, and hung. Tucker knew that Church tended to work on chores during the night (being unable to really sleep did have its downsides), but this was bordering on ridiculous. Beyond that, it seemed that he had also done work outside of the living quarters, replacing all of the targets in the shooting range with ones that weren't already littered with holes, the sick bay had been reorganised, and by the time that Tucker had found Church, he was standing outside, cleaning Sheila.

"Church? You okay there?"

"Yeah."

Well, that was to the point. Tucker would've sat down on the tank, but a glare quickly solved that. Instead, Tucker sat on the ground. "Sooooo, I noticed that the base was cleaned. Overnight."
"Yes, and?"

"Did you do it?"

"Yeah, why?" Church glanced over to him, voice taking on what seemed to be a note of concern. "Did I do something wrong?"

Tucker raised an eyebrow at him. "Church, you cleaned the base! How is that 'something wrong'?"

"Hey man, I was just asking! Is it clean enough?"

"For the love of- Yes!"

Tucker rolled his eyes. As if cleaning the base wasn't enough, Church had also decided to clean Sheila. Did he not think that was too much? Over the course of the next few weeks, it seemed to be that way. Church would be in the shooting range more often, trying to hit the targets despite the challenges he would give himself, such as leaving Omega to the side so that he couldn't be the reason for any good aim. He would then use pistols, assault rifles, battle rifles, before he would get to a sniper rifle. He would be found in the sick bay, organising and reorganising the equipment. First by usefulness, then by alphabetical order, then by terms of how often it was used, etc.

Now, this wasn't the weirdest thing. Church would often clean the base during the night when he had several hours of free time, and spending time in the shooting range wasn't unheard of, but it seemed that no matter what he did, Church would still end up grumbling something about 'needing improvement'. Beyond that, he would also try and pick up new skills. In earlier drops, Tucker had found some textbooks. He was confused as to why they were there, and then he saw something even weirder.

The books were mostly written in foreign languages. They would typically be paired up with a language translating dictionary. Tucker could vaguely pick out Czech, Romanian, Russian, Polish and Korean off the top of his head. Church would often be found reading them and completing assignments that he would find in the books when he wasn't working. Tucker could safely say that he was getting a little bit worried.

Tucker tried to act like there wasn't anything different, he really did, but Church's actions were getting increasingly more... Un-doable. He started setting timers for himself, each one getting increasingly shorter, and then getting more and more frustrated if he couldn't do it. Beyond that, it seemed as though he would start to wait for them on hand and foot. If someone would ask anyone for help, Church would come running. If they needed patrols around the base (more out of routine than anything else) Church would jump to the task. He would spend hours 'patrolling', and Tucker could often find him staring out into the canyon, seemingly turning to look back at the base, or at the sky, or the rest of the ring that made up the planet they were living on, before he would shake his head and continue watching through the sniper rifle scopes.
But despite all of this, it wouldn't have been so bad if Church gave up a small amount of time for them, or rather, himself. He never took down time, Cam nights were non-existent, and got irritable and antsy when he didn't have anything to do. Any time that he would spend on the internet was spent researching more and more things about the universe, from anything and everything about the UNSC and rumours about them, to the exports of an ocean planet and it's flooded moons that the government had lovingly nicknamed 'Water World'.

Hell, with all that was going on, Tucker knew that he wasn't the only one noticing. They had to ban Caboose from the kitchen after the seventh plate that he had broken when he tried to make something for Church. North and York had both begun the habit of staring worryingly at Church when he was working, but it seemed that they didn't know how to make Church feel better. Not that Tucker did, either. They tried to make things better, but Church, alongside his neurotic and irritable attitude, had gotten about five times more controlling too, as he began to absolutely refuse any help, stating "I can handle it!" as his reasoning.

And the AIs had noticed too. Tucker wasn't sure what made them so obsessed with Church, but they had become just as (or even more so) concerned for Church's well being. Even Omega, who was the last person that Tucker had expected to care, had shown signs of being worried. Not that Omega showed it, but Tucker's room wasn't that far from Church's, and he could hear things that went on in the night. Church was typically quiet enough to not make anyone stir while they slept, but Church was always loud when arguing. Tucker pressed his ear up against the wall.

"For the last time Omega, everything is fine. Why won't you believe me?" Tucker had a far harder time hearing Omega, but he could make it out if he held his breath. He cursed how thick the walls in the base were. Usually they were a good thing, but not now.

"Oh right, this is definitely how you always acted."

"Don't you fucking start with me, Omega."

"You need to stop."

"Oh, so now you want me to calm down! Tell me Omega, why would you be telling me to calm down?! I would have thought it would've been a great opportunity to harvest some fragments!"

Tucker furrowed his eyes. What did that mean? Was Church talking about fragments like Delta and Omega? What did he mean by 'harvest'? Tucker made a mental note to research everything about Project Freelancer later. He noticed that neither Church nor Omega had been talking for a while. Seemed as though what Church had said was a hit far below the belt. There was a click, as though something had shut off. That was likely Omega. Church himself seemed to sigh heavily and sit down on the bed.

Tucker backed away from the wall. Not only was Church acting weird, he was also hiding something. Tucker knew he had to do something. He thought about Church using the word 'fragments'. That, and the fact that Delta and Omega both knew something, and that they seemed to
be hiding it from the others....

Well, that did it. Tucker figured that the best course of action would be to get Delta and Omega, get as much information out of them as he could, and then confront Church. But he couldn't do it now, not in the middle of the night. As much as he hated it, it would have to wait until tomorrow at the very least. He threw himself back onto his bed, and threw the covers over himself. Tomorrow, he swore to himself.

Tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

I made things this chapter work out the way it does later for one quote:

"Like this green, indicates a high level of anger stemming from suppressed feelings of inadequacy."- Doc, when using his scanner on Church.

Now, this quote pissed me off for one reason. Namely, the fact that IT IS NEVER MENTIONED AGAIN. Now, it seems like it would be, right? What with the large potential and everything. But no, instead it's pushed to the side by the creators and fans alike. I wanted to change that. So I did.

Hope you all enjoyed!
Jesus, I'm so sorry for the long wait! It's just that I got caught up in exams, and I know that isn't exactly the best excuse, but it's the only one I have right now. So besides that, I hope y'all will enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Hey, Church?"

"Yeah?"

"Can I borrow Omega for a sec'?"

Church stepped away from the computer, making sure to click out of the image search of gangrenous infections. He was researching it just in case they ever needed a medic. He turned to stare at Tucker quizzically. Why would Tucker want Omega of all things? Did he think that Church had been relying on Omega too much while he was working? Now that Church thought about it, it could have very well been possible. Omega was there for the majority of time that he was working, and he did often ask for Omega's opinions, or to help him run calculations...

Maybe a break away from him wouldn't be so bad. He ignored Omega telling him that he was wrong: Church knew he was right. "I uh- Sure, I guess. Tell me if he gets any of you into trouble, and make sure that he doesn't get into Caboose! I don't think the guy can handle him again." He rubbed his neck, while Omega transferred to Tucker. The man shivered, unused to sharing his brain and thoughts with an AI. Thankfully, it seemed that Omega was more aware of his surroundings, seemingly tiptoeing around Tucker mind to make sure that he would remain unharmed. He made finger guns at Church. "Hey thanks man, I owe you one!"

Church nodded his head, before sitting back down at the computer. Tucker wondered idly if he was writing yet another essay: Just one of the things that he had previously failed to mention. The man would proceed to write about what he had learned, setting a quota for himself, and if he hadn't written enough about a topic he would study it even further. This also happened to be just another thing that Tucker was planning to end. But first things had to be first: He needed to get Delta.

That wasn't actually as hard as he thought it would be. Although York had shown some hesitance, he soon gave in after Tucker promised to give Delta back by the end of the day. He now had to hold York's helmet, as Delta could not have left otherwise. It seemed that porting by helmet radio was uncommon amongst AI, as well as possession.
When he made it into the sick bay (due to it being the one room no one would be using, as well as it being the only soundproof room other than the firing range and the gym), he placed Delta onto a collapsible table with the AI's holographic form showing up a second later.

"Hello Private Tucker. I assume that you wish to discuss the Alpha's current mental state?" Delta asked. Hearing this, Tucker's eyes widened, wondering how the hell Delta not only knew, but also how he knew that Omega and Tucker knew. As though Delta could read the soldier's mind, he responded with: "I figured it out using logic. I believe that you will progress with your original point if I spared you the details of what gave it away."

Tucker clamped his jaw shut, chewing on his cheek for a second before reopening it. "Uh, yeah. Whatever. But before I get to, the uh, point, I wanted to talk about- Oh god dammit, I wanted to talk about what happened." Tucker cursed himself for stuttering so much. "And by that I mean Project Freelancer."

The two AIs nodded. They had both been clearly expecting this, and were not at all surprised that Tucker would want to know more about what happened to his friend. "So I'll just cut through the bullshit: What did Alpha do during Project Freelancer?"

"He was meant to assist the Director of the project with maintaining the Mother of Invention, and running the diagnostics for that ship. He was meant to run the enhancements of the Freelancer Agents, but found himself incapable of running more than one, let alone fifty." Tucker nodded. "So I guess that was why he was tortured?"

"Correct. A smart AI such as Alpha is essentially indistinguishable from a human mind. Theoretically, this would mean that he could develop Dissociative Identity Disorder. By torturing the Alpha, the Director would be able to have more than one AI to run the enhancements of the Freelancer Agents."

"But why the fuck wouldn't he have just asked for more AIs?"

"The Alpha was one of the most powerful and thus expensive AIs in the UNSC at the time. According to my calculations, he still is. Project Freelancer was an experimental program, and asking for more AI was forbidden, as they had already given too much money without much in return. I believe that this rush for results was the project's downfall."

Tucker sighed and sat on a chair, bringing his elbows up onto the table to lean on them. There were a few seconds where he took in everything that he had been told. "So where do the Freelancers fit in all of this?"

"The Agents were meant to fight in the war against the Covenant, aided by AI, unfortunately it was a trick, as the project was actually made to study them. One such example would be the Dakotas."

"You mean North?"

"And his sister, Agent South. the test was to see what would happen if one of them would receive an AI and the other did not. The results were more than unsavoury."
Tucker knew better than to press on that matter, so he kept his mouth shut about that. He figured that Delta wouldn't have told him anyways. "So, what are the fragments, what were you guys for, and what is your relationship with 'Alpha'?

"The fragments were the other personalities of the Alpha, created from the fragmentation process, starting with Beta and ending with the Epsilon AI. As stated previously, we were used to run the enhancements of the Freelancers, given to each Freelancer based on our personalities, which centred around one to two key centres of the Alpha's personality, such as myself being his logic, Omega being his rage, Gamma being his deceit, and so on."

"About the 'relationship' thing, well, I suppose he could be considered our..." Omega chimed in, looking at Delta for a second. "Brother, of sorts." He finished. He had a strangely embarrassed look about him. "Indeed." Confirmed Delta.

"How did the Alpha get tortured? What's making him act like this- I mean, like he is right now?"

Omega looked to the side, as though ashamed. "It... Wasn't pretty, I can tell you that much. He had been forced through scenario after scenario of stress and danger, ones that would simulate lives on the line that would die. The Alpha would proceed to blame himself for the results. The fragments were created in an effort to stop himself from straying away from the sole task of making sure that everyone would be able to live." Tucker tilted his head. "For example?" He pressed. The two AIs remained silent for a few seconds.

"I... Have some footage of the creation of Epsilon." Omega admitted hesitantly. He quickly gave the file to Delta before he could change his mind. Delta projected the footage as a hologram shortly.

"Are you there Alpha? Are you there?" Asked a calm voice. The room was bright, glowing white and blue. A figure walked around nervously, seeming cautious and afraid. "Hello? H- Counsellor, are you there?" It's Alpha, I'm here, I'm here, don't leave! Are you there?" Alpha was very clearly worried, seeming to fear being left alone. His breathing was uneasy, as though he had just gotten out of a stressful environment, which wasn't at all far from the truth.

"I'm here." The Counsellor clearly meant to soothe the AI, as though to make him feel at ease. This didn't work.

"I- What happened? Is everyone okay?" Alpha almost seemed to care for everyone else more than he did himself. "Perhaps you should ask the Director." The Counsellor was avoiding the question, meaning to drag out the unbearable suspense for longer than considered bearable. "Why? Does- Does that mean that something happened?"

"Hello Alpha."
The Director's voice was also calm, too calm, if Alpha's fear was anything to go by. "Director, please, tell me what's going on!" Alpha's voice was becoming more and more desperate as the answers he craved continued to be dangled just out of reach. "Another security failure."

"I'm so sorry, It's just these schematics- They're too complex! I just need more time to work on them and-"

"It's not your fault Alpha."

"How can you say that? Of course it is! Was anyone hurt?!"

The Alpha knew that the probability of no one dying was slim to none. He could only hold onto the last meagre scraps of hope that he had left, praying that no one else died due to his failures. His hope was crushed as the Director answered. "I'm sorry Alpha, but yes. Agent Washington and another had died."

"Who?! Who died?!"

"Agent Texas."

And that seemed to be the last straw. Any scrap of hope that still remained was destroyed as those words were uttered. Alpha began to scream as he tried to deal with that knowledge. His mind shattered, as his brain furiously tore away his memories from him in an effort to keep him sane. The hologram faded out of sight after a blinking message reading 'Fragment detected' appeared.

Tucker didn't move after the video was over. His hands rested on the table, also not moving as he processed what he had seen in that video. That alone... Explained a lot. What happened when he was getting tortured, why Church was acting like he was right now, everything. He slowly stood up, the fragments following his frame as he picked up York's helmet and began to make his way from the sickbay. He gave Delta back to York, thanking him as he did.

"So, what are you going to do now?" Omega asked, hovering over his shoulder as he made his way towards Church. Tucker glanced at the small AI, sighing, but with resolve in his eyes.

"We're going to help Church."

Tucker didn't bother knocking, so Church found himself interrupted in the middle of reading by Tucker kicking the door open. Church flew backwards on the spinning chair, hitting the bed behind him as he stared at the person who had just barged in. He almost sighed in relief when it was only Tucker, but didn't as soon as he saw the man's stern expression. "Jesus man, do you know what knocking is? You almost gave me a heart attack." The soldier marched over to the AI, turning his chair around to face the bed before Tucker sat on it. Church raised an eyebrow, both in confusion.
and in worry. "Tucker?"

"Church. Alpha."

Alpha stopped his train of thought as he processed the fact that Tucker had just said his real name. This was a serious conversation. "Yes?" He asked, wondering what specifically this was all about. There was a decent few objects of interest that Alpha could think of off the top of his head. He listened on as Tucker began. "Alpha, what the fuck are you doing?"

Alpha blinked. That wasn't one of the things he imagined. "I... Don't know what you mean, Tucker." Tucker shook his head. "You know. I'm pretty sure that you do. But if you don't, not that I would see a rational reason for you to, then I'll rephrase: Alpha, why the fuck are you working yourself down to the bone like this?"

"Wha- Tucker, I'm not working myself 'down to the bone'." To emphasise, Alpha made air quotes with his fingers, unimpressed. Tucker felt the same way. "You know what? I'm not going to sit here and argue with you. Omega, bring up the reports."

The small purple AI appeared hovering beside Tucker. He seemed to be grazing through a host of files. Scanning him, Alpha could tell that Omega was looking through records of him in the last few weeks compared to him in the few months prior. "Right. Brother, this makes it pretty clear. To put it like Delta;" Here Omega pretended to secure a tie and put on an impression of Delta. "The ratio of work to the rest of your time has averaged out as forty-seven out of forty-eight. This means that, out of the whole day, you typically only leave about half an hour to yourself and for rest, and/or relaxation. Compare this to a few months earlier, when your time spent working was only eleven to sixteen out of twenty-four, with most of those hours being spent when everyone else was asleep."

Even Alpha seemed surprised at that reveal. Tucker had known that Church did a lot of work while everyone was asleep, but not only did he do a lot of work before, he was now spending all but half an hour to work nowadays!? Tucker resisted the urge to slap his friend in the face. Omega dropped the impression of Delta. "Brother, the only time that you worked as hard as this was on the Mother of Invention."

Alpha had stopped talking for the time that Omega had been explaining all of this. Alpha sighed, not really sure of what to do. "I'm... Fuck." Tucker put a hand on his shoulder.

"Alpha. Why have you been doing this?" He asked gently. Tucker prayed that he wasn't pushing too hard, so that Alpha would admit why. They sat in silence for a few seconds as Alpha tried to find the right words.
"I..." Alpha took a deep breath. "When I was on the Mother of Invention, I had to do a lot of work. I had to do even more when I was in the... Whatever storage unit they kept me in. During my time in the storage unit was probably when it got... Pretty shitty. More than it was before. You see, they knew that the thing that would make an AI tick more than anything would be to offer it impossible schematics and the give the AI too little time to complete them. They would then present the schematics and deadline, but beyond that, they would put lives on the line. I didn't know that it was a simulation, so I had no clue that they were lying. It destroyed me, and created the fragments, of whom you're well aware of."

Alpha folded his arms. "I... I guess I never really grew out of trying to do better." He stared off to the side, avoiding Tucker. The teal soldier sighed, putting a hand on the man's shoulder.

"Hey man, it's fine. I'm just saying that you don't need to do that anymore. You're all good. I just miss all of the fun shit we used to do together. So I was wondering, this... Afternoon, maybe we could watch something, From the Red Cams?" He suggested. Alpha paused for a moment in contemplation.

"You know what? I've got a better idea."

"You know what? I'm not sure about whether this was a great idea or not!" Tucker shouted to Church as they ran for some cover behind a rock. "In fact, I'm pretty sure that getting chased down by a machine gun isn't a good thing!"

"You said you wanted snacks!"

"It's not worth it if you're stealing them from Grif? Common sense: DO YOU HAVE IT!"

Church laughed, turning on the radio. "Hey, Omega! Your turn." Tucker flipped Church off, and the AI returned in kind. "If we die, I am going to haunt your ass. Your ass is haunted."

"Yeah yeah, good luck with that. Duck!" Tucker dropped to the floor just in time to avoid a slew of bullets and to hear Grif's yells of "Mow them down, bitch!"

"I don't think that the Doritos were worth all of this!"

"But we have four different flavours of dip! And five gallons worth of soda!"

"...Fair point."
After about five minutes, they heard the familiar noise of something saying "Firing main cannon." Several tank shots were fired, before the Reds figured that a giant stash of snacks wasn't worth dying over for. Church and Tucker heard the sound of tire and gravel, and waited until the sound got distinctly more quiet until they stepped out from behind the rock. North stepped out of the driver canopy, putting his hands on his hips and shaking his head at the two. "You guys are hopeless."

"If it means that I get to blow off someone's legs, then by all means: Do it more often." Added the tank, easily identifying it as Omega.

Tucker chuckled nervously. He then reached into the black bag at his feet, taking out a cardboard box. "Pizza?" He offered to North. The Ex-Freelancer stared at the pizza, before shaking his head again and laughing. "Pizza. Why not. Hop on the tank, we gotta get back to base before the Reds change their minds and come after us again."

With that said, North jumped back into the driver canopy. Church and Tucker looked at each other and shrugged, placing their bags onto either side of the armoured skirt of the tank before sitting down on it themselves. "Hey, Tucker?" Church asked over the radio as Omega set off towards the Blue base.

"Yeah man?"

"Snacks aren't the only thing that I got while we were over there."

"Oh?"

"I got Sarge's wallet."

Tucker snorted audibly. "Dude, you've got a death wish, but not bad!"

"And I may or may not have gotten a crack at their alcohol. Hope you like cocktails, wine and flavoured vodka. Only Sarge and Donut had any for some reason.

"Okay, now I think you might actually want to die."

Church chuckled. "You wish." He leaned against the side of the tank. "Thanks man."

"Your welcome."

Chapter End Notes

Hello again! So, I have a couple extra chapters planned besides this for in between season five and six, but I was wondering if any of you have any ideas, so I'm here, asking you for any that you may have. If you do, just write it down in the comments,
and I'll do my hardest to please you! Thank you very much!
What Happened To Theta?

Chapter Summary

The aftermath of too much alcohol leads to stories. Tucker talks about Blood Gulch, Caboose tries to do the same... In his own special way, which doesn't last long. Sister and Doc were away distracting the Reds from killing the Blues. North and York?

Well, it's not like Project Freelancer wasn't after their asses anyways, why not talk about what happened?

Chapter Notes

Slurring drunks? Never heard of 'em. What even is slurred speech? What even is a drunk?

Anyways, this is half based off of a prompt from NotSoHappyHufflepuff, and half based off of my own ideas and headcannons. Hope you don't mind that. I figured that this would be an alright way to compromise. Hope ya'll enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Are you kidding me? You have got to be kidding me."

"No joke! Caboose hops into the tank, and then just shoots Church! If the guy wasn't a gay robot, he would've been team-killed. What sort of a way to go is that?"

"We all agree that wasn't my fault. That was Tucker. Not me. Just Tucker. Who is not me."

Tucker was explaining what happened to lead them to now. Of course, being drunk, there were some obvious mistakes. "Tucker, I am not a gay robot. I'm a ghost." Tucker shrugged and waved it off using the hand he was holding some citrus vodka in. "You're just bitter 'cause you can't get drunk. Enjoy being a sad, gay ghost then."

"I had a girlfriend!"

By that point Tucker had stopped listening to Church, turning back to York, who was similarly drunk to Tucker. "And then we had to call in Tex. Church got pissed of, but then again, what else is new? Not that!" Tucker yelled out the last part before anyone had the chance to answer, throwing his arms up in the air and spilling some of the vodka. And then Tucker had the nerve to wonder why Church was even slightly frustrated. Anyone would be if they had to see alcohol get wasted when they risked their only non-sentient host for it! "But Jesus Christ, I think I almost pissed myself when she started using Caboose for target practice."
York laughed at that. "Yeah, I can definitely tell you that I'm not surprised. The first day the Alpha squad met her she kicked my ass to the ground. A- and not only that! Wyoming, and Maine, and me, at the same time."

"No way."

"Yes way!"

"That- It took us weeks to kill Wyoming!"

"And it took her minutes to send him flying. What happened after she used Caboose as target practice?"

Tucker sat in silence for a little bit as he continued to nurse his bottle of vodka. "This guy-" Here, he pointed to Church. "He, just shows up, being all like a ghost and whatever. He was doing the ghost voice! You now, I am the ghost of Church, and I've come back with a warning!" Tucker and York burst into peels of laughter, Tucker now pointing an accusatory finger at Church. "Church, not all ghosts talk like that- You don't talk like that! That sir, was racist! A racist thing to do!"

"That isn't racist if you are a ghost."

Unbeknown to the others, Omega had popped up. "But you aren't a ghost, are you?"

"You will be if you don't shut up in front of people who aren't meant to know about that."

"But where's the fun in that?"

Despite what Omega had said, he blinked out of existence, turning Church's attention back to his human friends. Tucker had continued to talk about what happened, from the whole deal with Omega:

"Honestly, he was more arguing with Doc over interior decorating or some shit than he was being threatening- He came over to our base once, and he didn't do shit to it or us!"

"Silence you fool! You're ruining my reputation!"

"You had a reputation? News to me."

And about the time that he got the alien sword (Caboose got strangely quiet and had left the room. Church had chalked it up to jealousy, and could only hope that Caboose didn't do anything dangerous unsupervised) the time he got knocked up, which caused more than a hilarious reaction (Which Church made sure to save: That would be fun to get back to when everyone was sober) and well, everything until the whole deal with Tex. Church had spent those slightly uncomfortable minutes stewing away in the corner until they had changed the subject to North and York.
"So, what about the Freelancers? Anything interesting happened there?"

"Well, I don't know, does jumping off a hundred story building with your friend before the building exploding count as 'interesting'?"

"Uh, York? I think the word you were looking for was 'crush'."

Everyone glanced over to the man who had just walked into the room. "Well hey there North. You alright, man?" Church asked. He had been gone for a while. North lightly nodded his head, going over to the kitchen counter and reaching for a packet of M&Ms, before sitting down on one of the cushions that were strewn about on the floor, ripping open the bag and beginning to eat the chocolate snacks. "I guess, you know, after puking up two bottles worth of wine and my past two meals, then proceeding to down two mouthfuls of Listerine. Note: Never let me drink that much in one hour ever again."

Church shrugged. "It's probably your own fault for playing so many drinking games. Probably would have been better to drink something diluted."

"Well, it's a bit too late for that now, isn't it?"

North didn't expect an answer, and just continued to eat the chocolate snacks in his hands. Tucker had been watching the exchange between the two, turning back to York. "Crush?"

York hadn't said anything, but his face had flushed slightly in embarrassment as he chose to pelt Tucker with popcorn instead of answering. Tucker took that as anyone else would: As a confirmation. "'C'mon man, spill! Was she hot?"

"I wouldn't say attractive, so much as I would call Carolina terrifying. Imagine Tex, but she had red hair, green eyes, and really competitive. She was the type where, if you'd tell her how you felt, she'd probably punch you in the face than just flat out reject or accept you." Answered North, knowing that York would probably be too embarrassed to say anything comprehensible. York blushed harder, looking away and nodding. Tucker laughed.

"Well, now we have two people on Blue team who decided to fall for chicks that would kick their asses. You and Church have something in common now!" Tucker was met with Church flipping him off, not that that did anything to stop Tucker's laughter. After a couple more seconds, he finally shook his head and told York to continue with what he was originally trying to say, waving his hand as he did so.

"Alright. North, come over, you have to help. Delta, say what you can." The small green fragment showed up hovering on York's shoulder, as he almost always did. North sighed, picking himself up
and moving himself over to where York was, before sitting on another one of the many cushions scattered throughout the floor. York rubbed his hands together as he thought of where to start.

"Alright, so I guess I should start from the beginning. My childhood was actually alright for the most part, parents who loved me, only child, a few friends throughout my school life. But then it turns out that my friends were kind of huge assholes and they managed to manipulate me into doing things that... I'm not very proud of. They made me infiltrate people's private property to steal things, gather blackmail. Every time I tried to leave their circle, they would threaten me with exposing me."

Tucker's earlier smile had dropped. That sort of a past wasn't a good one. Tucker couldn't relate, having only ever lied and stole for his own self-benefit. However he had never gotten someone else involved. That was just a dick move. Bottom line: He couldn't empathise, but he definitely sympathised, and he told York as much. However, York didn't seem to be too bothered. "It's fine," He said, waving it off. "It's all in the past."

"Anyways, I joined the military when I had finally graduated college. It was alright, wasn't really in the front lines, so I never got seriously injured, but I suppose Project Freelancer heard that I could pick locks really well, because I got into the program. I ended up getting good enough to be put on the Alpha team, and that's when I met North. Remember that?" He asked, nudging the man beside him. North nodded.

"Yeah, that wasn't a bad first meeting. I still shudder about what happened the first time South met Carolina. That was a bad first week.

"Amen to that. So anyways the first meeting."

"So, you're one of the new guys on the Alpha team, right? I'm Agent North." The purple and green Freelancer raised his hand for York to shake, which he accepted.

"I'm Agent York."

"As in New York? Strange, I thought they only used actual states of America."

"If you think that's bad, there's another guy called Agent Puerto Rico."

"Yeah, that's pretty bad, wonder if there's anyone else with an agent name like that." North put on a southern accent, mimicking the Directors. "Welcome to Project Freelancer, Agent Toronto, Agent Britain."

They both laughed at the thought. North put a hand on York's shoulder. "I think you're going to get along here just fine. But I've got to warn you: You're going to end up fighting the other people on the Alpha team. Good luck against Agent Carolina."
"Well, I don't know who she is, but I can only hope that I don't end up in the ER with the way you're making it sound."

"Right. Break a leg with her, or, you know, not."

"Sure hope I don't."

York sighed as he recalled the fond memory. "Yeah, that was a good time. Back when we didn't know as much as we do now, when I hadn't lost an eye, you hadn't lost a foot, and the Director wasn't pushing everyone to the brink for results. It was a good time."

North nodded, clearly sharing the same ideas about the past. "Yeah. After that things were fine for a while, Tex was introduced and she kicked York's ass. I suppose that was the only bad thing that happened at that time: considering it ended up in him losing an eye."

"Yeah, but I have Delta now. I'd say that's... Not a complete loss." The two thought about what would come next, sobering (mentally, not physically) as they figured out what the course would eventually lead to. York decided to begin the story.

"Right, so.." He coughed, took a sip of the citrus vodka that Tucker had been nursing previously, and actually started. "It was alright for a while, We were all on at the very least reasonable terms, Agent Washington and Agent Connecticut joined, much to the initial distaste of some of the others. But all in all, it was okay. But then... I think that the Director had started to get pressed for time at that point, or he had realised that fragmenting Alpha would result in more AIs. It all got into a downhill slope from then on, to say the least."

North decided to fill in from that point, recounting all that had been done. "There was the time me and my sister were sent to a research facility to steal data, the leaderboard was getting more and more difficult to decipher, the time that York had to infiltrate the package storage facility," He recounted, using his fingers to keep track of the number of events. "We told you about that one earlier: That was the one where York had to jump off of the roof of a hundred story building. Good times." North added at the end, earning a shove from York.

"Yeah, after that, Theta was given to North. Washington kept making accidental dick jokes, which were hilarious."

"Yeah. But after that..."

The two Ex-Freelancers paused in thought, wondering how it would be best to proceed. "Agent Washington got implanted with the Epsilon AI, and that didn't go down well at all. I think CT caught wind of what was really going on. She was getting more and more distant. Then eventually..."
we found out the truth, Tex and York fought together against Carolina. There couldn't have been a good outcome to that, and there wasn't. The Meta was finally created and it threw Carolina off of a cliff, and CT died. I don't even know what happened to Wash and South."

North looked down and off to the side. It was clear that he was upset. Tucker put a hand on his shoulder in an attempt to comfort him. North smiled, but it was small, and was barely passable as genuine. They all sat there for a few minutes, none of them wanting to really proceed. Eventually, It was York who chose to continue.

"I had run away. I had Delta record a message and send it to Theta, who would give it to North so that he knew where to find me. I went into hiding, trying to get a few jobs here and there for food and a bed. Had to pick up theft again. Can't tell you how much of a relief it is that I don't have to do that now. Eventually, this guy," Here, York pointed to North. "Found me, and we teamed up. Had to split everything, but at least there was a potential to earn more money. A year or so later, Tex finds us both, asks us for help to track down O'Malley, sends us here after the mission, and the rest is history. It just so happens that North ended up losing a foot along the way." To bring attention to it, York picks up North by the prosthetic, lifting it into the air for emphasis.

Church leaned forward from his seat towards North, frowning. "About that." He called, bringing the man's attention to him. "Why don't you have Theta anymore? York still has Delta, so what happened?"

His curiosity was very reasonable. The fragments may have been able to keep secrets from their Freelancer hosts, but the rules worked a little differently when you created those fragments in the first place. Church knew what Omega had seen while he was in North's mind, but that had only managed to raise more questions. Since North was right here, discussing the past with Tucker, It made perfect sense for hi to ask.

However, North went quiet. He looked to York, and then to Delta, and he picked at his fingernails as he tried to think of an answer to the question he had been presented with. Eventually he simply sighed, running a hand through his hair.

"Alright. I'll tell you."
The Meta was going to kill him, and steal Theta and his enhancement. North knew that there wasn't anything else that it would do besides that. It wasn't as though Theta could keep the bubble shield up for much longer than he had already. The Meta had begun to pound on the surface of the shield, trying to reach through the small cracks in between the tiles that Theta had made to allow North to breath. The fragments that comprised the Meta had showed up in hologram form beside Maine's armour. Sigma, Eta an Iota were all hovering there, and were beginning to talk to Theta.

"Theta!"

"Join us!"

"We will find the Alpha."

"Become whole."

"Don't you want that, Theta?"

"Why won't you join us?"

"You'll be happier with us."

Theta was furiously shaking his head. "Never! You'll kill North!"

Inwardly, North felt a small feeling of joy that Theta was so determined to protect him, but that feeling was swallowed whole by his sense of fear. He kept watching, eyes darting rapidly between the Meta and the only thing- no, person, that was keeping him alive. The AI that comprised the Meta shivered furiously, a chorus of voices in discord. Its words came out as a hiss, a whisper, a growl, all at once. It seemed that the Meta had collected more AIs since the last time that North had seen it.

"Listen to us!"

"-We'll make you happy-"

"-Make you better!"

"Once you help us find the Alpha-"

"Why aren't you listening?"

"Stop it!" Theta yelled over the voices that comprised the Meta, his projected figure seemingly falling to his knees. The bubble shield flickered, but managed to reactivate just in time as the Meta had tried to reach in. North knew that this wasn't healthy. The simple gesture of Theta unable to stand being a clear sign. It was only more worrying when Theta's form began to flinch and flicker, pixelating. The glow that Theta usually produced was fading.
"Theta, what's wrong?" He asked, as gently as he could. The familiar, safe voice made Theta glance to him.

"I'm going to save you, even if it kill- kill- kills me." Theta answered, glitching partially through. The Meta became furious, shrieking and hissing loudly. Then it stopped, save for a low grumbling. The Meta seemed to be having a sort of internal conflict. Eta and Iota then vanished from sight, leaving only Sigma. The flaming AI walked up to the bubble shield, placing a hand on its surface.

"Theta. Stop doing this."

"No."

"If you do not, you will short circuit. That has a high probability of damaging you, if not, destroying you. I highly recommend dropping the shield."

"You'll kill North. I won't do it."

"If you end up destroyed, we will still take his enhancement. By force."

Theta had completely dropped the part of the shield that covered North's back. North listened on: He had never heard Theta this serious when he wasn't afraid. The two AIs stayed silent for about two seconds, before Theta spoke again.

"I have an idea." Sigma stayed silent, and Theta took that silence as a moment to continue.

"If I hand myself over, and if North gives you the bubble shield, without a fight, then you have to promise me that he'll live."

North stared at the small AI in shock. He hadn't expected Theta to value him to this point. "Theta," North began. "Don't do this."

"It's the only way, North. I'm sorry. Sigma?" Theta had turned back to face his brother. Sigma nodded, and North's heart sank into his stomach.

Theta dropped the shield, his holographic form slowly rebuilding. Theta looked at North, reappearing by his side. He placed a hand on the side of North's face.

"Theta, you don't have to do this."

"But you have to live. Please. Just do it for me." Theta leaned in especially close, lowering his voice to only be loud enough for North to barely make out. "Do it for York."

There was a small tingle at the back of North's neck as Theta send a small paragraph of information to his brain. A planet in a solar system, a country, a town, a building, a time. With
that, Theta stepped away. North pulled off his helmet, taking out the small chip in his AI implant. He gave it to the Meta, which gladly accepted it. His enhancement followed shortly. Theta reappeared one more time. "Goodbye, North. I'll miss you."

The small AI waved sadly. North nodded, feeling a tear run down his cheek. "Yeah. I'll miss you too. Goodbye."

"Bye."

Everyone in the room was silent as North finished his story. "And that was the last I saw of Theta. After that I stole a ship, and came to this planet. I met York, and we started doing work together. We told you the rest."

Church was silent. That explained it, but he almost wished that he had never asked North about that. It seemed so rude now, even if Church knew that there was no reason that he would know that it was rude beforehand. He watched as North stood up. "I'll be in my room if anybody needs me."

He watched as North walked off, waiting a few minutes. Tucker had awkwardly coughed and left too, saying something about needing to sleep off the next day's hangover. York was the last to leave, with Delta staying with Church for a few more seconds to look at him. The green AI left, leaving without any words left, and leaving Church to his (and Omega's) own devices. After some small internal debate, he made up his mind and walked towards North's room. He knocked on the door twice, before stepping back and waiting.

"Come in."

It was dark in North's bedroom. It was always dark in bedrooms if soldiers wanted it to be, as bases on planets that didn't have a night were typically outfitted with rooms that could replicate the conditions, from simply lowering the darkness of the room, to even changing the heat and air of the room itself. North sat on the bed, with the bed appearing undisturbed apart from the grooves made by North sitting down. It was clear that the covers hadn't been lifted since that morning. North himself sat in a loose t-shirt and shorts. He had picked up another bottle of alcohol, slowly nursing it. He patted the bed beside him as an invitation for Church to sit down, which Church accepted.

"Look man, I- I guess it was a dick move to ask you to talk about Theta. So... I guess I should
"apologise, huh?"

"No need. You didn't know."

North was staring up at the ceiling, which was projecting an image of space. He brought a bottle of wine to his mouth, and took a few sips. "It just- I don't know, it feels like the world is crumbling down around you, and when you try to go somewhere else, it'll just end up doing the same thing. I didn't know what to do after the fight on the Mother of Invention. I could only run, and hope they didn't catch me. I found out that the organisation I was in was using me, manipulating me and my sister just to see what she would do."

Church felt empathy for the guy. He, of all people, knew what it meant to be manipulated.

"Now CT is dead, Carolina's dead- You know, when you think a person's strong, you almost end up feeling like they're invincible. Then she died. After she died, I remember thinking 'Well, now we know who's really number one out of her and Tex'. Can you believe that? I was such an asshole."

"Yeah, I can see that."

"And then I got here. Lost my sister, lost a leg, but I lived. Found York, found Tex, can't say I expected that. She offered us work, and we accepted it. We fought against Wyoming, York got shot and almost died. Then we got here. And then Tex died."

"Well, it seems that she wasn't 'The real number one' after all, huh?"

"I guess so."

North offered Church some of the wine, but Church pushed it away. "Still a robot, man." North nodded, corks the bottle and placing it on his nightstand. He leaned back on his bed, lying down and folding his arms behind his head.

"It's been weird the last few weeks. I've met Tex, a scientist from the Project who dated Tex who then turned out to be a ghost possessing a robot, and the others... I guess I never realised what the Sim Troopers thought of the war. It just never came to me. I was so caught up in what was happening to me and my friends that I didn't even think about what it meant for people who didn't even know that the Project existed. I'd apologise to you, but you're not one of them."

"Trust me: You wouldn't have to apologise anyways. The others either don't care, or they actually like it. Can't tell you a reason, but they don't exactly give a shit. They're pissed off, but that's probably just because of this canyon itself."

"Right. Thanks."

North looked back up at Church, staring at him with genuine gratitude. "Thanks for listening."

"Honestly I should probably stop getting into these sappy moments. Pretty sure I've got cavities by
"Heh, yeah. Same thing here."

Chapter End Notes

I feel like every time a character goes into a long speech I make them talk in circles no matter how I try to fix that. Sorry.

Something I've noticed is that my flashback sequences seem to contain a lot more poetic language than the rest of the fanfic (or purple prose, whatever it is). Weird, but I don't hate it. Meh.

Comments, critique, and prompts are very welcome, please and thank you!
The author brings some attention to Caboose for once, trying desperately to prove that they can write him. Meanwhile, they still shove Church into everything, because he's their favourite character and apparently the author can't go one god damned chapter without him. But that isn't to say that they didn't write this chapter because the relationship between Church and Caboose is sweet, 'cause it is. And that's pretty much the only reason they wrote this chapter.

Enjoy!

"God, I can't believe I'm saying this. Alright Caboose, I'm going to need you to stay here and watch the flag, okay? It's very important that you do this." Church squinted, gauging Caboose reaction. He continued when there was none. "Caboose, you have to understand that this is a very important job. The Reds have been on our asses for three days, and Sister doesn't think that the booze that's left is worth helping us for, and we tried to give them Doc as a bargaining chip, but that didn't work, and-

"I would love to go on a picnic with you Church!"

"Wha- Caboose, were you even listening to me?!"

"I will bring the sandwiches."

Of course, Church seemed to have forgotten who he was talking with. Obviously he wouldn't have understood the reasoning. Church wondered how badly Omega had screwed up his brain to make him think he was talking about a picnic. His radio turned on, Tucker's voice coming through.

"Church, get over here. It's Lopez and we don't have a translator."

"Right."

He began to leave, turning back to Caboose for a second. "The Flag. Watch it."

Church arrived on the other side of the base relatively quickly, and stood beside Tucker, who was staring at Lopez and Donut. Tucker practically screamed 'Help me', even through a one-way visor. Church sighed, raised his Magnum and pointed it at Donut. "What's going on."

"The Red team is trying to ambush your Base."

"He says that Red team wants to play tennis. No, silly! We're trying to ambush them. Am-bush."
"Why do you keep trying to translate me when you have no idea what I'm saying?"

"Huh, really? I guess I did use too much conditioner. I'll wash it out later, but thanks for telling me!"

Church wondered if Lopez was rolling his eyes. He probably was. Church could sympathise.
"Trust me man, whatever you're saying, no one's going to get it. On the plus side, it means you can talk shit about everyone without them knowing. At least you've got that going for you."

"That's the only good thing about it, yes."

Church nodded his head, wondering for a second if Lopez could process everything at the same rate that he could. He quickly realised that this wasn't not the case when Lopez gave no reaction to a small hologram that lasted for a two-hundredth of a second. In the distance he could hear gunfire coming from Caboose's side of the base, and Church cursed as he realised something.

"Shit!"

"What?"

"Don't you get it? These two aren't doing anything, they're a distraction! Sarge and the others could have already taken something- anything- from the base. Fucking Christ, why did I leave Caboose alone?"

"Actually we were meant to harm you. Donut was distracted by the interior lighting of your Base and the teal one's armour colour. I simply don't care about petty revenge in a fake war, especially when I hate the people that are making me do this."

"Fuck off Rust boat!"

Church marched onto the roof of the base for thermal scans. When he found more than one, he threw a grenade in that general direction. The grenade didn't land anywhere near close enough to the Reds to harm; not that Church wanted to harm them anyway. He just wanted to scare them off, and thankfully it worked. After the grenade exploded, he heard a couple cries of surprise and Sarge saying something along the lines of "Jumping Jehovah, we've been compromised! Quick men, and Grif, we must return to our base to save our victory for another day! While simultaneously keeping in mind that this is definitely not a retreat!"

There was a scramble as three pairs of legs made it off the roof. Church could swear that he heard Grif's heavy panting even through the walls. Sucking in a breath, he walked in praying that the flag wasn't gone. He was very surprised to see that this was not the case. Caboose was still staring at the flag, which didn't even seem to be touched in any way.
"Caboose? You did it! Oh I can't believe this!"

"Does that mean that you will activate your Super-Best-Friend-Superpowers?!"

"You know, I didn't think that you would actually- Wait, what?"

Caboose then mimicked an explosion and his gaze shot upwards. The man bounced a bit on the balls of his feet in joy as he watched what Church could only think to be some sort of a hallucination. He waved his hand in front of Caboose's eyes. "Hey man, you okay?"

Caboose looked back at Church, seemingly shocked that he was there, taking a couple steps back and barely managing to not fall over. It reminded Church of a baby giraffe. "Ah! How did you get back so quickly?"

"I- You know what? Doesn't matter. Let's get back into the base. I just think we should be happy that they didn't find out about York and North. God only knows how bitter they'd get over that. Let's just go."

"Okay!"

After getting cleaned up, and taking a scan to make sure that no one was harmed, Church had decided to do whatever he could to pass the time. Taking a book from his room (some sort of sequel to Game of Thrones, Church was pretty sure it was originally a fanfiction), he went to the living room to sit down and read the thing, only to find Caboose in the kitchen, appearing to be taking some of the snacks and cellophane-wrapped sandwiches that North had made for him. Caboose then went over to one of the counters, taking out a few plastic cups and some orange juice. Caboose then placed all of this surprisingly neatly into a few large lunchboxes, before finally noticing Church.

Caboose cupped his face with his hands and gasped in excitement as he saw the AI standing awkwardly at the opposite end of the conjoined rooms. "You came!"

Church raised an eyebrow. "Came for what? What's all this food for?"

"The picnic! Silly Church, pretending to not remember."

Church was honestly pretty tied. On one hand, he didn't really want to do this. On the other hand, this was Caboose, and despite his reputation of "The asshole of Blue team" Church wasn't sure if he could ever sleep at night again if he ruined Caboose's current happiness (not that he could sleep anyways). So, after weighing his two options, he sighed, and put on a happy face.
"Sure thing, Caboose. Why not?"

Caboose clapped his hands in joy, using one hand to sweep all of the food containers on the table into a bag, zipping it closed, before taking Church's hand and leading him out of the base. Unfortunately the first time around Caboose had tried to do this while still looking at Church, therefore moving backwards. Needless to say, he fell over. Church sighed, wondering about what they were going to do with him. He reached out a hand to Caboose, who accepted it. After Church pulled him up, he held out a hand, palm facing Caboose.

"Wait here."

Confused, but still trusting Church, Caboose nodded. Church left the room and walked down the hall into one of the storage closet. Picking up what he wanted, he went back into the living room, and picking up the bag that Caboose had absentmindedly left on one of the kitchen counters. Caboose seemed surprised to see the bag. Blinking a few times, he then crossed his arms and then spoke.

"The food-bag! Yes, I left it there in the kitchen on purpose, definitely. I knew that you would go back and get it, and I totally didn't leave it there on purpose. We all agree that I did it on purpose."

"Right. Let's go, I think I know where we should go."

"Okay!"

Church led Caboose towards the cliffs and through the hole in them, leading Caboose towards the power station. Eventually they got to a part where there were only two walls and a roof, with a pretty flat floor. Church smiled, knowing he got to the right location, as what little wind the gigantic fan was producing created a light breeze that went into the direction of where they were.

"Alright, this is it." Church said as he dropped the bag of food he was carrying. He then opened the second bag he had been holding, revealing a tarp and a few cushions. Placing the tarp on the ground and the cushions onto the tarp for comfort. He sat on the tarp and patted one of the cushions beside him. Caboose sat down, using a second cushion for some extra comfort. He then opened the bag of food, taking out one of the cellophane-wrapped sandwiches and giving it to Caboose. "Enjoy, or whatever."

The two stayed like that for a while, Caboose eating his food slowly while Church stared up at the clouds in the sky, reciting chemical equations to keep himself occupied. Eventually Caboose had finished eating and joined Church in staring up at the sky. After Caboose had first pointed out a cloud that looked a lot like a balloon, they had quickly made a game out of pointing out the shapes of the clouds. A childish game, but it was surprisingly enjoyable, even if Caboose used cotton candy as an example when he couldn't think of anything else.

"You know Caboose, this is actually pretty nice."
"That is because we are best friends, and best friends always like having picnics together. It is science."

"Hah! Sure thing buddy. Proven in a laboratory, using things like test tubes and beakers."

"And round bottomed flasks. That was the most important part of the test."

"...Huh. Can't say I thought that you knew the name of that. Colour me impressed."

"That is not a colour. You are blue."

"Yeah Caboose, I sure am."

They both lay there in silence for a while. It was a pretty comfortable silence, with nobody really feeling the need to talk. It allowed Church some time to himself to think. Thoughts about how everything got to the way it was now. He thought about Tex, what could've happened. He thought about the Meta, and wondered how something so evil could come out of such a simple desire. He thought about Omega, who he had sent away for the picnic. He felt another stab of guilt at the thought that Omega, a part of him, caused such a serious impact on Caboose's mental health. Church shook off those thoughts, but thoughts about Caboose still drifted through his mind.

"Hey, Caboose?"

"Hello."

"Why am I your best friend?"

Caboose blinked owlishly. "Because I am your best friend, and that means that you are my best friend. Duh." Caboose answered, as though it was an obvious answer. Church wasn't sure whether or not that was Caboose's legitimate answer, or whether he had forgotten and/or didn't even have the actual reason. Perhaps Caboose was even avoiding the question. That wasn't to say that Church wasn't grateful.

"Well in any case... Uh... That's... Nice of you. Feels good to know that I have someone to trust besides Tucker."

Church thought about the extent to which he could really trust Caboose. He wondered whether Caboose knew the value of a secret, and how well Caboose could keep one. For a moment he thought about revealing himself as an AI, but decided against it. He supposed that that was the limit of his trust. He sighed, turning on his side. He then got an idea. A simple one, but not one that would mean that his life would go to shit if it got out.

"You know Caboose, there's something I want to show you."

Caboose sat up from where he was and looked at Church. He seemed to be interested, so Church proceeded. He took a deep breath, and then projected a flame coming out of his 'mouth' as he
exhaled. Church noted that he was pretty rusty, not having practised with holographic projection beyond his own form in a while. Even so, the simple flame did manage to excite Caboose, despite the obvious pixels. Caboose leaned back, partially to take it all in, most likely because he thought it was a real flame.

"How did you do that?!!" Caboose asked, gasping loudly. Church tried to think of a reason. For some stupid reason, he had forgotten that he didn't make one up before this. He opted for the simplest solution.

"It's uh... It's one of my ghost powers. Yes! One of my ghost powers."

"Can you show me more?"

"Uh... Sure thing, bud."

"So, how'd your date with Caboose go?"

Tucker was already waiting at the door to Church's room. Church himself couldn't say he was surprised. He made a small 'shoo' motion for Tucker to step away from the doorway so that Church could walk in. Stepping in, he placed the tarp and cushions into a laundry basket sitting in the corner.

"It went fine. It was a picnic. I'm just happy that nothing exploded and that I wasn't shot. Oh right, uh, I ended up doing holographic projections to keep him entertained. If I do that again, understand that it's one of my 'ghost powers', alright?"

Tucker didn't say anything, he just stood there and blinked. Church tilted his head in confusion.

"Uh, Tucker? You okay, man? Do you not know what a holographic projection is or something?"

There still wasn't a response, but Tucker's face slowly began to develop an evil grin. Church still wasn't sure why, until it finally clicked.

"Wait, shit! That wasn't a date! THAT WASN'T A DATE!" Church all but screeched, trying to grab Tucker who had jumped out of reach, cackling.

"Too late, you fucked it up! And I got Omega to film it!"

"WHAT?! GET BACK HERE YOU SON OF A BITCH!"

Church would proceed to chase Tucker for the next two hours.
Hello again! I hope you enjoyed the chapter. Remember, if any of you have a prompt, I'll be happy to write it. Just make sure that it wouldn't stray too far from what has already been laid out in the story so far. Thank you!
An episode that has next to no grounding in reality, but exists anyway because the author felt as though the tags of the characters of Red team were undeserving of being in this fic.

I don't really have an excuse for this chapter. I was just thinking of some ideas for some more fluffy, filler chapters and then this popped into my brain and wouldn't leave. The story ended up batshit, but I can dream that somewhere this is considered to be a decent chapter. Sorry about the long wait.

Hope you enjoy!

"Alright Tucker, that should be the last of it. I carried my fair share of the crates, now pay up."

"Dude, I don't even know why you want the wood. What is the point in whittling? What the fuck even is whittling?"

"Hey man, lay off. It's not like I'd have anything else to do while all of you are asleep."

"I asked what it was, not why you wanted to do it."

Tucker and Church had just brought all of the valuable supplies from the most recent drop inside the Blue Base. It wasn't that the Reds would steal it all, but it was a bitch and a half to try to trade with them fairly. The two still remembered the time the Reds tried to trade Doc for about half of their ammo. Their small talk was cut short as Tucker noticed that one of the larger crates (A wooden one with the words 'extremely fragile' written on it) had made a noise. Upon hearing the scratching sound, Tucker jumped away from the crate, staring at it with a confused look on his face. Church noticed this and walked over. The crate then shook slightly, alongside a... Flapping sound?

"...Not it."

"What?"

"You heard me! You're the one opening that thing, not me."
Church scowled. "You're a dickhead, you know that?"

That being said, he grabbed a hammer all the same. Stepping towards the crate cautiously, he used the claw on the hammer to grab a nail on the crate and pulled. With a bit of effort, and some fidgeting with the hammer, the nail came loose. After repeating the same process to a few other nails, he was able to pull apart the wooden boards. When he did, he and Tucker could only stare at the contents of the crate, shocked.

"What the fuck?" Tucker said after a short period of time. "What the fuck?" He repeated.

There, in the space where the crate used to stand, was a cage, and a box. Inside the cage, there sat several birds of prey, including hawks. Looking inside the box, Church found a plastic box filled with various rodents.

"Jesus Christ."

The two looked at each other, confused. Church vaguely gestured towards the birds, to which Tucker could only shrug his shoulders. A little while later, York walked in, talking to Delta and laughing at a joke he had made. When he walked up and saw the birds, he could only stare, before finally speaking.

"So... Who's idea was it?"

"I.. Don't know."

"... I want the falcon."

"Are you fucking kidding me?"

"Hey, It's completely reasonable."

"I want the eagle!"

"Oh not you too!"

"Alright, so is everyone happy with their bird?" There was a collection of nods. Church breathed a sigh of relief. York and Tucker calling dibs had eventually led to the agreement that everyone would get one bird each. Since there was one left over, and since Caboose was almost scarily good with dangerous animals, it was decided that Caboose would take care of two. York had gotten his desired falcon, Tucker had gotten the eagle, North the pygmy owl, Sister the Merlin, Caboose the Secretary bird and Harris hawk, leaving Church with the Hobby. Tucker didn't spare Church with any of the jokes.

"So, you finally have a 'Hobby', huh?"
"Shut. Up."

"I have to say, I don't have any hobbies, but you definitely do!"

"SHUT. UP."

Tucker laughed in his face, before turning to his desired bird. "Well then, I guess I have to name you something. Come here!"

To everyone's surprise, the eagle obliged, perching on Tucker's forearm. "Well, I guess we should probably invest in some arm guards, but I guess titanium body armour works for now." Church had crossed his arms as he said this. Sister had left with her bird, cradling it like a cat. North had left cupping his small owl in his hands, Caboose had only needed to walk towards his room for his birds to follow (Like previously stated, scarily good with dangerous animals), and Tucker and York had left with their birds perched on their arms. Church was left with his Hobby in the living room.

"Well, I guess it's just you and me now, bud."

The Hobby stared at him, before dipping its face into its wing to preen. Church stared at the bird some more before getting bored. After some small debate with Omega over what to do next he figured to just grab the whittling kit he had recently received and start trying to hone it as a craft. Taking a small piece of wood, he tried to get a feel for it by mindlessly carving the wood into small slivers.

Eventually, this managed to earn the attention of the Hobby, who had slowly begun to walk over to wear the shavings were accumulating. The bird pecked at one of the shavings experimentally, before picking it up and dragging it to an unused corner of the room. It then dropped the shaving, pushing it into the far corner, before coming back to Church and doing the same to another shaving. This continued for ten minutes, when the piece of wood had been whittled into nothing. Picking up another piece of wood and a marker this time, Church made to guidelines for what he was planning on making: a fish. Just like before, the Hobby would drag the shavings back to its chosen corner of the room. After a while, Church noticed that the bird seemed to be trying to strategically place the shavings, and he could see that the bird was trying to form a nest.

After the bird's nest was 'finished', at least for the time being, the Hobby turned back to Church, staring at him, before hopping, ever so slowly, towards him. When it finally reached Church, it seemed to hesitate before mustering up the courage to perch on Church's leg. The two stood there for a while like that, Church trying his best to not move for fear of disturbing the new, 'pet' of sorts, before quietly and cautiously raising a hand and reaching out towards the Hobby. At the lack of a negative response, he tested it further by touching the bird, running one of his fingers down its back.

"You know, you aren't so bad. Weird, I still have no clue why you were sent here, but not bad."
The Hobby made a soft clicking noise.

"Alright, now to think of a name for you."

"Well, I can't say that this was something I ever thought would happen, but that doesn't mean that this isn't kick ass!"

"I get it Tucker, you only told me this fifteen times already."

"You're just jealous 'cause Major kicks ass."

"...You named your bird 'Major'?"

"So what? You named yours Marine! So now I guess we both have birds named after people from the army. What was your point?"

"... I hate you."

Tucker and Church were watching some old videos of the Reds, something that they hadn't done in a while. Small talk was expected, amidst the small pile of plastic food bags. It was an enjoyable time, one without something insane happening every five minutes. Then, as though life could read their minds, they heard a scream from outside of the base. The two looked at each other, confused. Pausing the video, Church left to see what was going on.

Stepping outside, he adjusted his grip on his sniper rifle. Looking around, he saw the Reds standing around a crate, with what seemed to be Simmons standing much further away than the others. He tried to approach cautiously, but was still met with Sarge's shotgun.

"Calm down. I'm not here to fight you, couldn't give a shit about that. What the fuck was that screaming?"

Sarge narrowed his eyes, but slowly lowered the gun. He then tilted his head in the direction of Simmons, who wasn't bothering to look at the new arrival. Church raised an eyebrow, and glanced over to Donut. "Then what the hell was he screaming for?"

"Look in the light-ish red box."

Donut had pointed towards a pink, open crate a little way away. Looking inside, Church could see several snakes amidst a small pile of rodents. He noted that none of them were poisonous. Then it hit him.

"Are you saying that he's afraid of snakes?"
Donut nodded. "I guess so."

"And that's it?"

"Well, apart from that, I guess that getting snakes are really weird."

"Well, I guess it's not that weird, I mean, we got birds."

"Really? Aw, man. Birds have such pretty feathers! Meanwhile snakes are only the best for handbags."

"That's kinda morbid, man." Church looked around again. Simmons had tried to get closer to the crate, but then shivered and backed away even further. He seemed to almost hide behind Sarge. He figured that there wouldn't be much else.

"Well, I guess that's all. Later, have fun with your snakes."

"Aren't you going to help?"

"Sorry Donut, this isn't my problem!"

The rest of the day went by fairly well, except for late in the evening, when Tucker heard the doorbell (The doorbell being an actual bell) ring. Checking the time, he saw that it was about half past seven. *Odd,* he thought, but left his seat on the couch to answer the call. Looking outside, he almost did a double take. Standing outside was Simmons, looking extremely uncomfortable. Tucker folded his arms.

"And what the fuck do you want?"

Simmons shifted his weight from one foot to the other and back again, glancing back towards the direction of Red base, before shaking his head and turning back to Tucker. He was uncertain about something, if anything.

"I.. Was kinda, sorta, wondering if... Maybe I could stay here for the night?" Simmons had said that so quietly that Tucker almost couldn't hear him. He flinched, then narrowed his eyes at Simmons, who was almost melting under his gaze.

"Why?"

"Well, uh..."

"You know what, fuck that. Wait here, and don't. Move."
Turning and going back into the Blue Base, he walked towards Church's room. He walked in, without knocking, only to find that he was practically attacked by a flash of feathers and screeching, talons scraping against his armour. The attack was brief however, as the bird seemed to realize that the visitor was wearing titanium. Making a clicking noise, it flew back to a small pile of wooden shavings, making itself comfortable. When Tucker got over his heart attack, he rose to his feet, glaring at Church who was sitting at his desk, dumbstruck by what just happened. He was holding some sort of pole in his hands, a knife resting on the table.

"What the fuck was that?!"

"I don't know. I didn't think he'd do that. Maybe you should knock next time."

"Jesus christ, Major isn't that territorial."

"Why did you even come in?"

Church was trying to avoid the subject. Tucker let out a frustrated sigh, before taking Church by the wrist and leading him out of his seat. After Church had assured his bird (Tucker would refuse to call the bird anything but an 'it' for a very long time) that he wouldn't be going anywhere, he was led outside to Simmons.

"Church, this guy wants to crash here for the night. What do we do?"

"Simmons? What are- Oh don't tell me. The snakes?"

There was an embarrassed nod. Tucker tilted his head, clearly asking what he meant by that.

"Well, this guy-" Here, Church pointed at Simmons with his thumb. "-Is scared to death of snakes. And much like we got birds in our last drop, guess what they got?"

"Snakes?"

"That was meant to be rhetorical. Anyways, you said you wanted to stay here for the night?" Here, the attention was turned back to Simmons. Church sighed, cupping his face with one of his hands and shaking his head.

"I should really stop doing this. Fine, you can stay here for one. Night. But if you complain about anything, I will personally haul your ass back to Red base."

"Understood, sir!"

Simmons seemed especially relieved to hear that he was allowed to stay. He seemed to get oddly attached to Church's leadership, even with something this menial. Tucker oddly wondered if it got his off. Whatever. He could only hope that Simmons would stay for the night, and be gone. Nice, neat and simple.
This was not how it was supposed to go.

Simmons was meant to stay here for the one night. Not for the three. Church did try to kick him out, but then the unstoppable, irritating pleading began. Church had to give in, if only to prevent everyone's ears from bleeding. To be fair, Simmons wasn't doing anything. Too horrible. That was to say, Simmons wasn't doing something that Caboose hadn't done already. You know, things like sticking his nose in places it didn't belong and being generally annoying. Tucker had tried to ignore it, he really did, but Simmons just kept doing things that were... Too weird. He seemed to follow Church around like a puppy. Tucker figured that he saw Sarge as his father figure, but perhaps he was attracted to people who were in positions of power? Whatever, Tucker didn't want to think about what got Simmons off.

Beyond that, he seemed incessantly curious about York and North. It sucked that he had to find out about them, but how could they prevent it: Keeping them silent and under lock and key in the basement? Sounds shitty, would have definitely been shitty. And probably illegal. But now Simmons decided to do exactly everything they didn't want the Reds to do: Never stop asking questions.

"Who are they?"
"York's the gold one, North's the purple one."
"Where did they come from?"
"I don't fucking know, this planet? Tex brought them in, I would tell you to go ask her, but..."
"What are they like?"
"They are right down the hall. it doesn't take long to ask them yourself."
"But... They seem so threatening!"
"York and I are drinking buddies, and I think North used to be a dad. They. Are. Fine."
"But I don't want to bother them!"

Tucker gritted his teeth, turning away. "Then stop bothering me."

Making his way down the hall, he came back to Church's door. Remembering to knock this time, he entered without getting attacked. He glanced at Marine, who's feathers were slightly ruffled, but hadn't moved. Church had looked up from the book he was reading, marking the page and placing it to the side. He folded his arms, and tilted his head. "What is it now?"

"Simmons."
"What about him?"
"What do you think? He's annoying. Did you not notice?"
"Of course I did. The guy tailed me around for half a day. What point are you trying to make?"

"We need to get rid of him."

"Well, that's an idea, but how are we going to do that? It's not like we can tell him 'Hey, we don't like you, go back to the place that you can't stand because your worst nightmare has infested it', can we?"

Tucker groaned. Of course Church was right about that, but that didn't mean that Tucker couldn't complain. He sat down next to him, slumping. "So what, do we need to get rid of the snakes?"

Church looked to the side as he thought about it. "Yeah, actually."

"But how would we do that? You need to actually answer my questions. You're an AI, I'm pretty sure you're always meant to give a straight answer."

"Well..." Here, he looked over at Marine, getting an idea.

"Birds eat snakes, right?"

It was simultaneously horrifying, awe-inspiring and amazing.

All it truly took was to bribe Caboose with some cookies. He had a knack for taming things that were way too dangerous as Tucker quickly learned, and taming raptors was no exception. With a smile on his face, he walked into Red Base. Caboose hadn't even flinched when Sarge aimed his gun at him, just walked through the base, picking up any snake that he found, and walking back out. He then went out to the middle of the canyon, where the rest of Blue team (And Simmons, albeit much further away) were standing.

Caboose had then tried to whistle, although he ended up only exhaling sharply. This had gone on for two minutes. They stared at him in confusion until he finally gave up and then clicked his tongue, before clapping twice. At once, both of his birds, alongside everyone else's birds (Much to their shock) flocked around Caboose, awaiting orders. He then turned back to the snakes, pointing at them.

"Kill." Was the only word that it took.

It was a blood bath.
All at once, the birds swooped in for the kill. The snakes were practically getting ripped apart, piece by piece. There was no hope for those poor reptiles. Tucker wanted to turn away, but morbid curiosity kept his eyes glued to the scene. Eventually, the birds were left with nothing but a few scraps left, which they picked up in their beaks. Caboose made another noise with his mouth, and they flew back towards the Blue base. Caboose then turned back to Church.

"Did I win?"

"Uhh..." Church stared at the remains of the mutilated snake corpses. "Yeah. You sure did, buddy."

Tucker looked over at Simmons. "Well, there's no more snakes in Red base anymore. You can go back there. Now." He stressed. Simmons hobbled over, giving the snake remains a wide berth. "Right, I uh.... I think I'm gonna be sick."

Tucker watched as he ran off, then looked back to his teammates. Caboose had just hugged Church, who was trying and failing to get out of the grasp, flailing his limbs awkwardly as he did so. When Caboose finally let go of Church's whole body, he settled for grabbing onto his arm. Tucker joined them, going to the other side of Church. Tucker smiled at Caboose.

"Good job there Caboose. All that's left is for you to learn how to whistle."

"And Church is the only one who will do that."

"Well, if you insist. I'll probably be too busy cleaning the blood out of Major's feathers. Hey Church, do you think we could get a bird bath?"

"Well, I might. If you get me some marble."

"You know, maybe we could just buy one."

"...Shut up."

Chapter End Notes

I... Don't know what I was smoking when I wrote this chapter either. Hope you enjoyed, I suppose. Season six is only a couple chapters away!
"What the hell is he doing here?"

"Hello!"

"Church! Admiral Muffin is here!"

Church looked between Caboose and Donut. He lowered his gun. Caboose knew if someone was being hostile, if nothing else (Most of the time), and Donut was by far the most harmless of the Reds anyways. Besides, he was pretty sure that even Sarge had stopped giving a shit about the 'war' anyhow. Even so...

"Are you two... Having tea together?"

"It is nice with biscuits, and nicer with Sergeant Shortbread!"

"You should join!"

"Uhh... No thanks, I'm pretty sure I have... Other stuff to be doing."

He turned to leave, but stopped at the sight of Caboose. He mentally cursed as Caboose became more and more sad. He tried to resist. He really did. One would have figured that after Caboose making puppy eyes so many times that Church would be used to it. However, one would be wrong.

"Uh, Church? Are you having a tea party with Caboose and Donut?"

"Not. A. Word."
before the whole thing went to shit (Although that wasn't to say that these cuts wasn't a factor in its downfall). The last thing he thought was that they still had enough money to send Outposts their own Falcons, let alone to a canyon in the middle of nowhere such as Blood Gulch. And yet here he stood, staring at the Falcon they had just received alongside his other teammates (Did North and York count? They were there too anyhow). After staring at it for a second, he, as well as everyone else but Caboose, had all called out "Dibs!"

The members of Blue team stared at each other. They had all somehow managed to say it at the exact same time. They all knew this fact, and there was no denying it. Hell, their voices were so synchronised that they may as well have been evil twins (Or quintuplets) from a horror film. Sister made a gesture, tracing a circle with her finger out in front of her, parallel to the ground, before sticking both of her forearms in front of her and curling her fingers upward in a 'come here' motion. Confused, they all walked towards her, and she grabbed the shoulders of the two closest to her, making them form a huddle.

"So, I see we all want the helicopter."

There was a collection of nods amongst the group. Church didn't bother correcting her on the proper name of the vehicle. Sister's eyes narrowed, and she gained a smirk.

"Then there's only one way to solve this: A competition."

"What?"

"You heard me! We have a set list of challenges and we eliminate a person by the end of each challenge. Whoever's left at the end wins. You guys on board?"

The others shared a glance, before nodding. There probably wasn't any better way to do this, other than maybe rolling a dice.

"Then let's do this."

xxxxx

Church stood in front of the running track, wondering why he had ever agreed to this. It was no secret that he wasn't a fast runner, but with his only other choice being to quit and give up his hope of getting that Falcon, he took his place at the starting line. The rule was simple: Run a lap around the edge of the canyon and back without being the last one to cross the finish line. Things like weapons, or pushing, shoving, contact with other contestants was forbidden, as was running directly in front of the others.

The others finished up drinking and stretching their muscles, and had finally gotten ready. The rest stepped up to the finish line.

"Prepare to lose." Tucker whispered to him.

"In your dreams."
Caboose stepped to the side of the line of tape that they had decided to use as the starting and finishing line. Since he was the only one not participating, he was decided to be the referee. Church was doubtful of his reliability, but it wasn't like there was any other option. Caboose had finally begun the countdown.

"One is the loneliest number! Two peas in a pod! Three musketeers!" He yelled. Well, at the very lest he was actually counting. Caboose then grabbed his pistol, aimed it down at the ground and fired, as the sign to start running.

Tucker was the fastest one, surprisingly enough. North and York followed not to far behind, although York seemed to be just the tiniest amount faster. This left Sister and Church competing against each other. Church could only slightly pick up the pace. Sister began a full on sprint. Church watched as she dashed up ahead. *Well, there goes my dreams of piloting a Falcon.*

However, he was quite surprised to see that Sister had begun to slow down, letting Church catch up to her. Glancing at her as he ran past, he noticed that she was out of breath. If he had to say anything, he supposed that it was a good thing that he didn't need to breath all that much anymore. He still did, what with his robot body needing it to be able to cool down, but he did it to a far lesser extent than a human. He made a mocking salute to her.

"See you at the finish line, *Sister.*"

"Fuck- hah- you."

Church ran past, making sure to pick up the pace. The robot body was definitely heating up, but it wasn't the end of the world. He managed to make it past the finish line with Sister following a little while afterwards. He figured that he could finally catch his breath. He supposed that it was also a good thing that he couldn't really feel exhaustion either. He looked around at everyone that was left.

"So... Next challenge?"

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Church didn't know how he had made it to this point, but it was just him and Tucker left. Now, there was only one thing left to do.

"Are you ready?"

"Hell yeah! Ready to kick your ass into the dirt and win that sweet helicopter!"

"Alright then. One... Two..."

"Three!"

They both turned to their challenge, "Caboose!" They both yelled simultaneously. Caboose had
gone from squatting, seemingly picking at the ground, to standing up straight.

"Hello."

"Come here Caboose!"

"Come here!"

"Caboose, I've got something for you-"

"Why don't you say hi to your good friend Church? What's up buddy?!"

Caboose didn't move, only staring in confusion. "Yes, Yes, I am Caboose, Why do you keep saying my name?"

"Come here Caboose, I've got a surprise for you!"

"No no, over here- By me!"

"Oh, well that sounds lovely-" Said Caboose, beginning to walk over to Church. This of course, only inspired Tucker to try harder.

"No, Caboose! If you come over here, I'll get you that kitten calendar you always wanted!"

"Oh, well maybe we can scrapbook together-"

"Wait, Caboose! I'll teach you how to read a calendar!"

"Oh that can be good! I never thought of that before."

Caboose had almost made the entire way over to Church, leaving Tucker no other choice than to use his trump card.

"Caboose, if you come over here I'll let you drive the tank whenever you want."

This had done exactly what Tucker had hoped- Instantly making Caboose turn around. Church felt a large sense of panic as he saw Caboose walk back to Tucker.

"Wait- Caboose! Are you sure you want to go to Tucker? Why not hang out with me, your best friend?!" Church exclaimed. Upon hearing this, both Tucker's and Caboose's attention snapped towards the AI, who had slowly realised what he had just done. He nervously swallowed, seeing Caboose take a step away from Tucker, who seemed to be mourning the loss of the new Falcon. Before Church could do anything else, Caboose had glomped him, sending both of them to the floor.

Caboose was trying to clutch Church as tightly as he could, which Church himself trying and failing to scramble out of it.
"Caboose if you dent my body I am going to make your life a living hell!"

"You are my best friend too!"

It was hot. Of course, it was typically hot in Blood Gulch, considering that an average day was anywhere in between twenty three and thirty two degrees. But forty six degrees was just ridiculous. Tucker could swear that he could fry an egg in this heat.

There wasn't anything to do inside, the air conditioner had broken, and he was pretty sure that anything being done inside would only end up in him getting cooked. So, changing out of his armour for once, he switched to some simple knee length shorts and a light t-shirt. A small glance outside had told him that the Red team had done the same thing, so it wasn't as though he was in any danger of getting shot. He sat outside on a tarp with his legs crossed, under a beach umbrella (How they had any of those, Tucker would never know), praying that there would be even one cloud to cover the blinding sun.

After a few hours, he had found that he was joined by both Donut and Caboose. Donut was wearing ungodly tiny shorts, but he was bearable. Caboose actually gotten a sketchpad, and was seemingly drawing. Tucker himself was drinking from a water bottle that he had made sure to grab on his way out of the Blue base, when he suddenly got an idea. He turned at the oblivious Donut, and smirked. Creeping up behind him, he uncapped the bottle of water again and threw it up lightly, splashing the unsuspecting Red in water.

Donut leaped forward in shock, staring back at Tucker with wide eyes. Then his eyes narrowed, a playful scowl on his face. "This. Means. War."

"Bring it on, Red."

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The two sides of the canyon had broken into teams of two. Simmons, Donut, Sarge, York and Grif against Tucker, Sister, North, Caboose and Doc. Lopez and Church had agreed to stay out of it and be referees, as the water could very easily damage their bodies. The two teams began their 'war' with a shout, before they began to assault each other using water bottles and even water balloons. Church and Lopez watched the battle, standing off to the side underneath another beach umbrella. Church nudged Lopez.

"I think this is the most action either of our teams have ever had fighting each other."

"Yes."
Church stared at Lopez for a second, before grinning. "No Lopez, I highly doubt that we can go fishing in the middle of a canyon of forty six degrees."

Lopez clenched his fists and stared at Church, partially incredulous, partially infuriated.

"You can't have possibly thought that 'yes' meant 'will we go fishing'?!!" He shrieked. Church chuckled, waving his hand.

"I know it isn't, I just wanted to fuck with you."

Lopez's mood changed from angry, to surprised.

"You can understand me?" And then: "Oh my god someone actually understands me."

"Yeah, I guess that's a good thing?"

They stood in silence for a little while longer, watching as Donut tossed a water balloon at Sister, while dodging three other attacks simultaneously.

"Wow," Church finally spoke. "Donut's really kicking their asses, isn't he?"

Lopez nodded. "He's almost certainly carrying my whole team. The gold and silver one is trying though."

"You mean York? Yeah, he's a pretty cool guy."

"But why did you keep him a secret for weeks?"

"Because then Sarge would probably whine about how we got two new guys. I don't thank anyone wants to deal with that."

Their banter continued for quite some time, up until the game finally ended, with them awarding Donut as the sole winner. The red team complained of course, but they quickly shut up, turning to glares when Church snickered, saying that "His arms were probably getting tired from carrying all of you."

The two teams shook hands, York going back over to Blue team. Church looked back over to Lopez. He had to admit, it was actually pretty hilarious talking with the guy. He tapped the robot's shoulder before he could leave.

"Hey, Lopez?

"Yes?"

"I was wondering if maybe we could hang out another time? You know, shit talk our teammates over a couple cans of motor oil?"

"Why not. I'll tell you if I have the spare time over the radio; I swear the others think I'm some sort of slave."

"Yeah, humans do that sometimes. Later, see you whenever."
Church got back to Blue base with the minor satisfaction of becoming on good terms with Lopez, and the even larger satisfaction of knowing how the Red gawked at him when they realised that he could communicate with the aforementioned Spanish-speaking robot.

Donut was the first to go.

It had happened about five months after the fiasco with Tex and the ship. The Reds and Blues, while they wouldn't consider each other friends, also could no longer give two shits about the other (especially when Donut and Caboose had periodic tea parties), so when Donut announced to all of them that he was leaving, it was quite a shock. Apparently someone from 'Command' had called him in for some sort of interview, and that he would be relocated after the interview was over, so he should have his bags packed before he left. So he did.

With two suitcases and a rucksack all packed up to the brim, he waved farewell as he boarded the Pelican that had come for him. Church watched as the plane left. He felt sad, well, as sad as he could get when he didn't really know Donut very well. But he would get over it. Now there was a real question that loomed over everyone's heads. Who will be the next to leave?

Church oddly wondered what would happen to Blood Gulch. Maybe all of them would be relocated and new Sim troopers would be sent in. Maybe not all of them would be, and some of them would simply be left alone. But most importantly, he wondered what would happen to Delta, North and York.

The trio had done well so far, but what would happen next? It had hurt to let Omega go the first time Church had seen him, but to think that he may never see Delta again was worrisome. Church sighed, and tried to shake off the thought. They had survived for years without anyone else, they would be fine now. Church walked down the stairs into the shooting range. Maybe he could practice his aim. He swore he was getting better. Turning the corner, he walked into the shooting range, only to find York already there.

He was rather impressive: Using an assault rifle and Delta watching his left, he dodged multiple turrets, before coming in closer and unloading multiple rounds until the turrets shut down. He repeated this until all of them were destroyed, leaving York to catch his breath, he stood up, and walked to a side of the room, drinking from a water bottle, before he finally noticed Church.

"Hey, do you need the room, 'cause I can just leave, or..."

"No, your fine. Guess I should be mad that you broke our only turrets, but I guess that won't be my
problem soon enough."

"Oh really? I thought that you hated it when someone else tried to do something if you could do it better."

"You need to remember that sometimes I just like knowing that other people are pissed off."

"Touche."

Church took out his sniper rifle, taking aim at the closest target board. Delta looked at him, calculating. "There is a 95 percent chance that you will miss the two inner rings of the target."

"Oh come on, I'm not that bad, I've got Omega!"

Delta wasn't amused, before projecting a green glowing sight from the gun to the target, which proved that the bullet would have only hit the second farthest ring. "If I may, perhaps Omega may not be the best candidate when it comes to aim."

"Oh, and you are?"

"Hello Omega. Yes, I do believe that. If it is any consolation, you would be the preferable option in a situation which required a diversion, 'cannon fodder', if you will."

"Jesus, you really can be fucking shady if you want to, Delta."

"You think that's bad? Try living with him in your head for a year and a half."

"I never said that was a bad thing. If he's always like that, then sign me the fuck up."

York chuckled, capping his bottle of water. Then York got quieter, as he started to think. Church paid him no mind, trying to improve his aim (maybe a laser pointer for his gun would be a good idea, or maybe he could give one to York. That could be a decent parting gift, right?) with the help of Omega and Delta. It was surprisingly comforting to hear Omega and Delta bickering like they were, even if it felt like they were two little kids. Not that he was fond of them or anything, he just liked being the most mature one in a conversation. York had left for the bathroom, and Church had given up on target practice. He picked up a knife, turning it over in his hands.

"Delta, how do I use this?"

"Typically, knives would be used for survival, either when cutting up meat or vegetables or a a weapon of self defence-"

"Look Delta, I know what I said earlier, but don't be that big of a smartass, alright?"

"That term is highly available for interpretation."

Church dragged his hand down his face in frustration. "Just- How do I throw it?"

"So, now do you see what I have to deal with?" Church turned to see York standing at the doorway. He nodded.
"I'm so sorry for ever doubting you."

York chuckled for a second and then stopped, looking at Delta, who had come back to hovering over his shoulder. He took on a serious tone, his stance becoming straighter.

"Uh, Church? Could I talk to you for a second?"

"Spill."

"I- We-" York cut himself off, sighing. "Delta and I were wondering- Have you ever thought about what is going to happen when you all get relocated?"

Church blinked. So they had thought about that after all. "Well, yeah. All of us probably did, ever since Donut left. Why?"

"I've just been thinking about what's going to happen to me and North. Not to sound selfish or anything, just... All of you have somewhere to go. If you're relocated, you still have somewhere to go, something to do... We don't. I don't know what's going to happen when all of you leave, but I'm nervous, if nothing else."

"Why?"

"You should know as well as I do that Project Freelancer is probably still looking for us, for every Freelancer that went AWOL. Who knows what's going to happen if they find us. Imprisoned, killed. Best case scenario is that they let us live in exchange for loyalty, and that's not exactly a good way to go. You understand, right?"

"Yeah." More than you know, Church thought.

"So the question remains: What are we going to do? Are we going to leave, will we get caught? Do we have to spend the rest of our lives aimlessly, just to live?"

"...I don't know."

That wasn't an easy thing to admit. Church was typically the one with all of the answers. Being stumped like this was a first for him. He would do what he could to make sure that they weren't arrested, but aside from that... Nothing. Sighing, he patted York's shoulder.

"I'm sorry. I'll see what I can do."

Then he left.

He received a letter a couple of days after Donut had left. Apparently he would be sent to his knew location in ten days. Well, that most certainly put a timer on everything he still wanted to do in this canyon. Asking Tucker on whether or not he got his letter, he found out that Tucker would be
leaving within about six days, just four days before himself. Caboose would be relocated in two weeks. A quick message from Lopez made him realise that Caboose would be leaving alongside Grif and Simmons, they were probably going to the same general location. So that was nice, it meant that he had to sort any unfinished he had within about six days.

The Reds and Blues were having a movie night as he thought about all of this. He had managed Lopez to cough up the Netflix after some persuading, so at least they were able to watch something beyond old action flicks (Although he had to admit that their absurdity was hilarious in its own right). He looked to both sides of himself, realising that he was sitting between Sister and Tucker practically for the first time. He leaned over to Sister first, getting an idea.

"Hey Sister, you like parties, right?" Church whispered, making sure that he was quiet enough to not get 'shushed'.

"Well, of course I do. It's were you can get all the cheap booze so long as somebody thinks your hot."

"Right, of course that's why you like them. Anyways, I have an idea."

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It was a party. Simple as that.

They had spent time setting it up for three days in Blue base. They had made sure that it was a surprise, even going so far as to ban everyone from going into the basement (Which was chosen for being exceptionally roomy). The preparations had taken forever and a half, ranging from streamers to paper chains to posters, but they had all eventually decided that it looked sufficiently like a party room. They had stocked up on alcohol, snacks, and food and drink of all sorts in general. Tucker had agreed to be a sort of bartender for the night, so long as he got to pick out some of the songs on the playlist. Sister had chosen to be the main DJ. Everything was set into motion.

The party had started at around the equivalent of five in the afternoon on Earth. One should have considered that early, but Church was pretty sure that everyone had stayed up so late that it had all looped back around into being early as all fuck again. To everyone else, five in the afternoon may as well have been half-ten. Damn night-less planets.

After setting up a couple of flyers for the Red team to see, all they had to do now was wait. Sure enough, around ten or so minutes after five, Grif and Simmons had come inside. Grif claimed that they had only done it for the snacks, but whatever. The party had really started about an hour in, when everyone had come down and everyone had done a couple shots, which was when Sister decided to play some of her rave music. Church personally found it to be mildly repetitive, but it seemed that everyone else was enjoying themselves. He wondered where this was going to go. It would be kind of interesting.

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"What's that sound? Sexual tension."
There was a burst of laughter from everyone as they looked over to Grif and Simmons, who were furiously blushing. The Reds and Blues had somehow unearthed a game of Cards Against Humanity. Church had to say that this was probably the most fun he had in a while. After all, who could pass up making fun of Grif, Simmons, and their will-they-won't-they relationship? North, the Card Czar, had asked for the player who had used that card, revealing Tucker. Of course, who else would it be?

"Alright, so, Church? Your up."

"Hmm? Right." Taking one of the black cards from the pile, he read it out loud. "For my next trick, I will pull blank out of blank."

North and looked down at his hand, and blushed, picking out two cards. After waiting for everyone to place down their combinations, he started to read out the white card.
"And, for my next trick, I will pull Viagra out of a super soaker full of cat pee. Gross."

Church shivered at the mental image. "Alright, the next one."

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"Tucker, come on. Get up."

"Naaaahhh, I think I'll just sleep on this table. 'S pretty comfy."

"Oh for fucks sake. You are so lucky we're friends. Get over here."

Taking Tucker by the arm, he managed to support him as they slowly began to hobble back to Tucker's room. His hangover would be bad enough to deal with, he didn't also need a sore back to complain about. When they finally did make it to Tucker's room, Church opened the door, brought Tucker over to his bed, and dumped him onto it. Tucker adjusted slightly, getting into a more comfortable position and nuzzling his face into his pillow.

"I love this bed."

"Right, well, I guess I'll see you tomorrow then."

"Wait."

"Huh?"

"You're kinda alright for a gay robot. Thought you should know."

"Hah, glad to know that you're finally seeing how cool I am. See ya."

He was met with the sound of Tucker's snores.
It was time for Tucker to leave. A Pelican had finally come for him, and it was time to say goodbye.

"Right, Church, you helped me pack up ages ago. I'm fine."

"You know that's not true."

"And you know that no one else is either. That includes you. Stop worrying, you're not my mother."

Tucker picked up his bags, walking outside of the base, where he was met with the rest of Blue team. He folded his arms, looking over to Church as wondering if he had anything to do with this, to which Church shook his head. Tucker shrugged walking over to the others. "Hey there, what's this all about?"

"I mean, we're allowed to say goodbye aren't we?"

"Well, I guess that's true."

Sister ran up to him, nudging his side with her elbow. "Hey there. So I guess I shouldn't talk too much, so I guess I'll just say that you were kinda cool, and it'll suck with you not here."

"Well, thanks-"

"Although I guess it'll suck if anyone else left too, 'cause then there would be less people and that's just boring."

"...Thanks, Sister."

Caboose was the next person to come up. "Tucker, you are mean sometimes, and I think that you are stupid, but people are nice when they say goodbye, so I will be nice while I do that."

Oddly enough, Caboose didn't continue with his sentence after that, seemingly done with his sentence. Tucker only nodded.

His conversation with North and York was very short, but as he talked with them, he got an idea, glancing over to the Pelican sent to pick him up.

"Guys, I have an idea. Come with me, and if this works, well, you get to come with me. You in?"
North and York looked between each other, before nodding. It was better than standing around and risking getting caught. Smiling, Tucker made a 'follow me' gesture and walked towards the Pelican. The guard at the door to the vehicle stared in confusion.

"There was only meant to be one person picked up."

"Sure, but I had a bounty hunter sent after my ass while I was here. These guys are my bodyguards. They're with me."

The guard blinked, before turning on his radio and talking to the pilot. After a few sentences between them, which were too quiet to hear, before he turned back to Tucker.

"Uh, sorry man. You can take one of them. Not two. We probably shouldn't even be letting you do this, but... I guess a bounty for your head must have been pretty rough."

Tucker bit his tongue, both to keep himself from cursing and to refrain from revealing that he had killed the bounty hunter who tried to kill him. He sighed, turning to North and York, who were staring at him nervously. He looked between the two, before realising something. Delta...

"North. I'm choosing North. Sorry about this York, no hard feelings."

The two nodded, hesitating, before they quickly hugged and separated, North going over to Tucker and stepping inside of the aircraft. Tucker followed shortly after, stepping inside and waving to the others as the door closed. Using the radio signal as quickly as he could, he radioed Church.

"Hey, man. Wanted to say goodbye."

"Tucker, you know I hate goodbyes."

"Right."

"But tell me. Why did you pick North?"

"Well, you'll probably do the same thing that I did with York. Honestly, I picked North because that meant that you'd be left with York and Delta."

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

"I mean, you're left with Delta, aren't you?"

There was a pause on the other end.

"I... Guess you're right Tucker. Thanks."

"I'm always right. See ya whenever, fucktard."

"Whenever works I guess, Douchebag."
Days later, using the same technique as Tucker, Church had arrived at his new outpost. 'Rat's nest', if he remembered correctly. Better than just that, he got there with York and Delta. Looking around, he noticed that the outpost seemed oddly... Abandoned. It didn't even look like there was a red base nearby. One of the walls of the base seemed to have a large hole. Probably from some sort of explosive.

"Hello?"

He looked over to York. "I.. Think we're alone."

Delta appeared. "Affirmative. There appear to be no humans inside or nearby this current location."

"So, they left us here, all by ourselves?"

"In simple terms, yes."

Church had recognized that Delta had entered bullet time to speak with Church alone.

"If I may, I believe that they had tried to send you to this location for the sole purpose of you being left alone. They seem to have thought that you wouldn't be put into any danger if you were left alone."

"Right. Thanks, Delta."

"Your welcome."

Exiting bullet time, he looked back at York. "Guess it's just you, me and Delta."

"Yeah, I guess it is."

"So..."

"What do you want to do now?"

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the wait! Season six begins next chapter, I swear by it. Hope y'all enjoyed the fic!
Agent Washington was a soldier who worked for Project Freelancer. That much was clear.

He was loyal, or at the very least, they thought he was. He knew what was going on behind the scenes, he just never said anything about it. He was waiting for the right moment. However, that also meant that he couldn't waver from their orders, lest he seem suspicious. So he kept quiet. He did hell of a better job of doing that than some others that he could recall.

Another thing about him was that he was not the man he used to be. The Epsilon unit had damaged him, broken him, seemingly beyond repair. Washington sometimes thought about that, about how he was before. TO say that he had changed was an understatement. But he supposed that that didn't really matter right now.

He listened to a Sim trooper in red armour talk about some strange 'infection' that caused irregular behaviour throughout the Blue troops, which caused them to eventually kill each other, which then eventually led to the Red side getting the same infection, which had attracted a visit courtesy of the Meta. The Counsellor had thanked the man for his time, before sending him away. He then called upon Washington himself, who stepped up closer to the large screen in front of him.

"Agent Washington, what do you make of this?"
"It's seems to be exactly like what I encountered. But it's stronger now, and it's getting stronger as time goes on."
"Does this make you concerned, Agent Washington?"
"I'm not exited by it."
"Agent Washington, you have been through a lot. The Epsilon AI unit-"
"It has been discussed to death. I'm over it. And if you're worried about what happened last time, I'm fine now. Mentally and Physically."
"Our profile says differently, Agent Washington."
"Look, the last time I went up against this thing, I got shot by my own partner."
"Agent South. We feel... Partially responsible for that. We apologise."
"You should be. I'm lucky that my armour lock stopped me from bleeding out. I'd be dead if it weren't for that. So while I don't feel like sticking my neck out for you guys, if this puts me on a path that leads to her, you can trust me at least that far."

Even saying South's name left a bad taste on Washington's tongue. A lot of things left a bad taste on his tongue nowadays. The Counsellor cocked his head lightly, as though curious.

"So you would say that you have large feelings of anger and a need for revenge?"
"Yes. More than you know."
"Excellent. Due to our Agency's current... Predicament, the Director feels that honesty between each other is currently very important."

Washington held back a remark. Like any single one of them has any right to say anything about the importance of honesty. The Counsellor continued.

"If our suspicions are correct, then the Meta has made a new addition: The AI Program Gamma."
"It was Gamma and... Wyoming, correct?"
"Yes."
"Well, the Meta doesn't leave much behind. It's not going to be easy for me to track it."
"We believe that a good place to start would be Gamma's last known location..."

Here, the Counsellor had pulled up an image showing a large, mostly barren canyon. "As the soldiers stationed there have the most experience with our program."
"So what you're saying is that I should contact these experts-"

Here, the Counsellor cut him off. That wasn't particularly common.

"We do not like the terms 'experts', Agent Washington."
"Because nobody knows what we're actually doing?"
"We find that the term 'expert' is rather... complimentary, in this case."

Wow, the Counsellor almost seemed uncomfortable with Washington using that term. Interesting. It seems that this assignment.... Wouldn't quite be like the others.

"HEY A-HOLE! WHAT'S WITH ALL OF THE NOISE, SOME PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO SLEEP HERE!"
Washington glanced at the Sim trooper outpost he had previously thought to be deserted. He looked at a girl, dressed in yellow armour, who was slowly and almost clumsily walking down the ramp leading into the base. He figured that it would be best to introduce himself.

"Hello, I am Agent Washington. This is Blue base, correct?"

"Well, it was."

"Hang on, what do you mean by 'was'?"

"The rest of my old team were transferred. Something about this base being 'obsolete' or something, I didn't pay much attention."

"Right. And where did they go?"

"I don't fucking know! Tons of places. Nobody told me anything."

It didn't seem at all like this girl knew anything about what happened. Hopefully she knew someone who did.

"Well, I'm looking for some people who have experience with the Freelancer Program-"

"Hold on, is 'Freelancer' the band we had last night?"

"You throw parties here?"

"Of course! Charge five bucks a head for everyone who goes to one of my raves. I made ten bucks from it last night! Whoop whoop! Cool, don't you think?"

"That... Doesn't seem like an efficient use of resources."

"Then what about petsitting? Charge one buck for an hour, ten for a night, and twenty five a day from then on. Already racked up about two-hundred, and that's just for the guys who weren't transferred."

"The people who were relocated also make you look after their pets?"

"Well, of course they are! I had to give them a discount though. Twenty cents a day for them." She mumbled something under her breath that sounded suspiciously like 'fucking cheapskates'. "So..."

Here, the yellow Sim trooper leaned back slightly and stroked her chin, as though in deep thought. "If there were six birds that they left here, and they've been gone for about four hundred and twenty five days, multiplied by six, and then by zero-point-two... They all owe me five hundred and ten dollars, and counting!"

"...How do you know all that?"

"Hey, I was already getting ripped off by them! If you think I'm going to skip out on a singly penny, you're wrong. On the plus side, I got really good at math."

"I noticed. We're getting off topic."

"Yeah. Like why you're looking for someone. What are you, a cop? 'Cause if you are, then you totally have to tell me, that's like a law or something."

"That's not- Cops don't look for things, detectives do. Just forget it. I'm going to leave you now, good luck with your raging insanity."

"OH YEAH?! WELL WHATEVER. YOU'RE A STICK UP THE ASS ANYWAY!"

Needless to say, Washington was relieved to finally get away from her. Walking towards the Red base, he radioed Command again. They exchanged a few sentences between each other. It was professional, which meant that there wasn't any talking between the two that didn't have anything to do with the task at hand. He made his way closer to Red base, when a literal cardboard cutout of
a soldier in pink armour popped up. Ironically, this was when he said that he wanted Red base to be more normal.

"Halt!" Called out a voice that seemed to have a Southern American accent. The voice then seemed to correct itself, taking on a high falsetto tone. "I mean, stop in the name of the lightish-red army! This army is operation at full capacity-" Here, Washington took note of the communications device next to the cutout's foot. "-and if you come in here you're going to get into a big uh, slap fight!"

Washington released a pained sigh. It was too early for this shit. He stepped past the pink cutout, only to be met with another, dark red cutout.

"This is yer last warning, stay out! I love math! You only hope of survival is to kiss my commander's ass!"

And walking past that one-

"This is another warning! I know the other one was supposed to be the last one, but I'm lazy and stupid and I don't listen to orders!"

Washington noted that this one was orange, and was riddled with bullet holes. Washington supposed that whoever the 'voice' was, they were using it for target practice. He finally made it to the Red base, sighing. "I can already tell that this is going to be a waste of time."

"Freeze!" Washington looked to his side to find one last red cardboard cutout.

"Christ, who made these things?"
"I did!"

Suddenly, the cutout was replaced by an actual soldier, who was aiming at Washington with his shotgun.

"You fell for some classic miss-direction! Hahah, I've still got it. Lopez! I've captured a Blue! How many does that make this week?"

A soldier in brown armour appeared from the roof of the base. "Uno." Actually, based on the flat answer, it seemed that was a robot. Why was it speaking Spanish?

"Yahtzee, we're on a hot streak!"
"Uh... No, sir. I'm not actually a Blue. I was sent here by Command."
"Huh? No kidding."
"I was hoping that you would tell me the whereabouts of the soldiers who transferred out of this Outpost?"
"You mean Grif and Simmons. Those traitors, I told them not to go! The battle here isn't over yet, as long a one Blue is still in this canyon.... That's why I refused my relocation orders!"
"I see... So you're AWOL then."
"A-what now?"

Washington let out a deep sigh. Situations like this were why he brought Ibuprofen with him wherever he went (That, and the fact that getting shot hurt like a bitch). He could already feel a headache coming on.

"Look, I just need to find someone who has experience with artificial intelligence."
"Oh. So you'll want Caboose then. I think he got infected for a little while."
"Great! So do you know where he is?"
"Of course! Intercepted the Blues' orders. LOPEZ! Get this guy the Blue team's relocation orders."

There was a groan from Lopez, who stepped away from the edge of the base, and seemed to go inside of it for the relocation orders. Finally, Washington was getting somewhere.

"Now, Lopez might've translated it all to Spanish, so it might be a little bit hard to understand."
"Oh, trust me. That's the least of my problems.

"Ohhhh no. HELL no! You are not just barging in here, and taking one of my men on a watchamacallit."
"Sir, I doubt that troop reassignment is your biggest issue. How about getting these vehicles fixed."
"That is all your fault! You come here with a new guy, and he says that he's good with vehicles. All he does is talk to them. TALK TO THEM!"
"Look, I don't have time for this. I was sent here to retrieve Private Caboose, and I need him /now/."

Lieutenant Miller paused his rant mid sentence, glancing back at Washington.

"Hold on, your taking Caboose?" He barked out a laugh, shaking his head. His previous anger seemed to vanish immediately. "Well, I'll be. It must've been Christmas morning and no one told me. Joe-en-es! Private Jo-en-es!"

There was a disgruntled sigh from a ledge up above. A soldier in Blue and silver armour slumped down.

"Sir, for the millionth time, my name is Jones. It's very common!"

Washington couldn't put his finger on it, but something about that soldier was... Off. Weird.
"Joe-en-es, I need you to go into the brig and get Caboose."
"Me? Alone?!"
"Double time!"

After some time, two shots rang off, mixed in with screaming. A solid Blue soldier walked out. Lieutenant Miller visibly tensed, keeping a tighter grip on his gun. What made them so scared of Caboose?

"You wanted to see me Principal Miller?"
"Caboose. What happened to the man I sent to get you?"
"Oh, him. Yeaah, he somehow shot himself in the back when he let me out. We all agree it was an accident."
"Dear lord, would someone go check on him?"

There was a suffering sigh as some of the soldiers left to do just that.

"Right. Caboose, this is special Agent Washington from command. He has something that he needs to talk to you about."
"Oh no. If someone important from Command wants to talk to me, then that means that something bad happened. Did someone die?! Was it my mom? Or my dad? Did my dad die AGAIN?!?!"

Caboose became more and more hysterical. "Or maybe it was my brother? OH NO, MY BROTHER'S DEAD!"

"What the hell?" Washington asked. He didn't know what he had expected, but this wasn't it. Was everyone who was in Blood Gulch crazy? He sure hoped not. But it definitely felt that way. Miller laughed.

"You see? All yours now. No take backs."
"Dear god. Caboose, calm down, no one has died."
"Oh, good. Because, I don't have a brother, and how sad would it be if I found out that I had a brother, and then lost that brother, all in the same day?"
"Ugh. Private Caboose, you were stationed in Blood Gulch, correct?"
"Yeah. That was fun. But then I got infected by an Omega, and that wasn't as much fun. Then I wasn't sick anymore, and it was fun again!"
"...Right. Well, I'm investigating a critical issue, and you may be the only one with the necessary knowledge and experience to help me. And I only just realised how crazy that sounds. Nevertheless, I need you to come with me."

"Could I have a word with him first?"
"Of course."

Washington listened on as Miller told Caboose to never come back to this outpost, which was interpreted as a vow to 'never go backwards'. From what Washington had seen of Caboose so far, he wouldn't be surprised if he actually never walked backwards again.

"Alright, he's all yours."
"Right. Come along, Caboose."

"Okay!" He walked alongside Washington for about three seconds, and then-

"Are we there yet? I'm hungry. I'm thirsty. I need to go to the bathroom. Are we there yet? I need to use the bathroom again-"

Well, this was going to be fun, wasn't it?

"This is it! It is here."
"And you're sure that this is where we're going to find this guy?"
"Oh yeah, I'm sure. He knows the most. He dated Tex!"
"What? How would he-"

Washington was cut off at the sound of a gunshot firing at their feet.
"SHIT! It's a sniper, get down!"

Washington himself crouched down behind a nearby rock. He looked to Caboose, who hadn't even bothered moving. Caboose narrowed his eyes.

"Wait a minute... I know that voice! Church! It's me! You're all-time best friend!"
"Hold on, Caboose? That's you?"
"Yes! I have missed you so much! It has been so long! Did you miss me?"

Another shot rang out, missing Caboose by a couple feet. "Oh no Caboose, I have missed you!"
"I knew you would!"

Washington stared at the interaction, shocked. "This is your friend?"
"Yep!" Caboose seemed way too cheerful.
"And he's shooting at you."
"Well, he's shooting at me, and at stuff around me. It's kind of like our thing. He does that to everyone though, but he does it to me more than anyone! This means that I am his best friend! And you know, he acts like he doesn't like me, but I know that he really does."

"Caboose, what are you doing here."

A cobalt soldier wielding a sniper rifle had appeared. He seemed to carry a general air of 'pissed
Church's attention had snapped to Washington, in all of his grey-and-yellow-armoured glory. Church seemed to get even more pissed off, as though that was even possible. "Caboose, you're telling me that you brought a Freelancer here? What the fuck were you thinking?"

"Open this gate."

"Hahah, no. See, I don't trust you, and if I don't trust you, there's no way that I'm letting you inside. So uh, you're just going to have to stand there while I ask you questions. Or even better, you go away and come back... Never."

"Oh no, then I guess we'll have no choice but to step over to pile of sandbags you set up. What a travesty."

Church looked at the aforementioned pile, and saw that it would indeed be very easy to climb over from the other side. Dammit.

"Fine, I'll open the fucking gate."

"So, this is it. Sorry this place is so messy. Didn't know anyone was coming."

Washington looked inside one of the buildings, seeing a garbage bin slightly overflowing with plastic wrappers and crushed cans. How unclean. What Washington seemed more interested about was the fact that Church seemed to be alone.

"How long have you been here?"

"How long? What day is it today?"

"Uh, Tuesday?"

"Fourteen months."

Now that just seemed to be outright inhuman. Isolation did nothing good.

"By yourself? For over a year, alone?"

"I mean... Uh, yeah. It's been great. Got some peace and quiet for once. Really great."

"You really are an odd group of people."

"Recovery One, come in Recovery One."

"Hold on a second."

Washington turned away from the Blues to answer the call.

"This is Agent Washington. I have found some team members of Blue team who have extensive
experience with the Omega and Gamma AI."

Behind him, he could still hear the Blues. Church seemed to be concerned with the mention of the AIs.
"Agent Washington, now that you have the Blues, you are to go to Outpost 17-B, and see what clues you can gather based on what they know. We need you to stop the Meta at all costs. This is a level one directive. Command out."
"Recovery One out. Alright guys, it's time to move out."

I'm sorry, what? At what point did you think that we were buddies, Agent Washington?"
"Yes! You are not part of our buddy club!"
"Caboose- Wait, what are you wearing? What the fuck did I tell you about upgrading your armour?"
"This is an upgrade."
"No Caboose, that's mark five armour. I'm wearing mark six. That is an upgrade."
"Five is better than six in a top ten list."
"Wha- this is't a top ten list!"

Washington watched the two interacting with each other, confused.

"How the hell do get anything done if all you guys do is stand around and talk?"
"We don't, that's part of our charm. Quit fucking it up!"
"Look, I know that you're all wrapped up in your battles against the Reds, but this is important. Actual military operations, not your fake simulation stuff. Something is hunting down our top agent. and I need to do whatever it takes to stop it. This means that I need your help, no matter how much that pains me to say it."
"Stop it?"

Church snorted, like he was amused that Washington was worrying about the lives of others. "If this thing is killing Freelancers, then maybe we should start a club for it. A website: Fuckoff Freelancers-dot-com."
"I don't have time for this. The ship from your canyon crashed, and now it's more powerful than ever. It gains new abilities every time that it-"
"Hold on, you found Tex's ship? Where?"
"If you come with me, I'll show you."
"I'm in."
"Yes! This will be the best-ever road trip!"
"Right Caboose. Just- I don't know, can I have a minute? I know this place isn't exactly all that much, but what can I say. I've grown attached. Plus I need to get a picture, you know how it is."
"Right. You have two minutes. Timer's already started."
"Thanks."

Church walked off into one of the buildings of the base, getting a safe distance away before stopping. He was certain that Washington wouldn't hear him now. Omega had popped up a couple feet away.
"I don't think that we should trust him."
"Yeah, I know Omega, but he knows where the ship is! Who knows what we could find there?"
"No, I mean he's not acting like he should be."
"What do you mean by that?"
"You know yourself what happened with Washington."
"Yeah, Epsilon tried to commit suicide inside his head."
"I think it must have damaged him in some way. He's not who he was anymore. You need to understand that."
"...Right. I won't forget it. I'll make sure that he's left on a need-to-know basis. Nothing more."
"Yeah, I know. York?"

A gold and silver figure walked into the room, leaning against the wall and folding his arms. He seemed to be just as unsure of the whole thing as Omega and Church. A green hologram appeared beside him.

"What are you going to do, York? 'Cause there's really only a couple options: Stay here, come with us and prove to Washington that you're still alive, or-" "Or, I can tail you in secret."
"Agent York, it is highly unlikely that Agent Washington will remain unaware of your presence for very long. Chances of being discovered are over seventy nine percent, factoring in Washington's current mental state of wariness."
"You heard Delta, York. This isn't the guy you knew. Who knows what he'd do if he saw you? For all I know right now, he might just end up shooting you because he thinks your a hallucination or something."
"But I can't just sit here and do nothing!"

Church sighed. Both he and York were equally frustrated with the situation. How could York stay safe, and come with them at the same time? Wait a second...
"I've got an idea. Omega, you can read my mind, you know what to do."
"...And done. Impressive, aren't I?"
"Yeah man, sure."
"What did you do?"
"I made Omega activate Caboose's and I's helmet cams, and he transferred the feed over to yours. Delta should help you switch between the perspectives. Caboose doesn't know you're there, neither does Washington, but you can still tell me if you think something's up. It's not the best strategy we have right now, but it's all that I can think of right now."
"Well, it's not like I can think of any better. Thanks."
"Don't mention it. I've got to go now, Agent Bug-ass is probably getting mad."
"Right. Bye."
"Yeah. See ya later."

He made his way back to Washington, who had turned to tapping his foot.
"You're late."
"I'm sorry, it took longer than I thought it would. We should get going."
"We should've gotten going a minute ago. We're leaving. Now."
"Alright, alright. Don't throw a hissy fit."
"I am so excited!"
"Caboose, if you say anything positive, I am going to fucking kill all three of us."
"Okay. Then I will be very depressed at how awesome this will be!"
Church sighed. Back into the fray of adventures it is.

Chapter End Notes

I am so tired of holding down the shift key. Somebody please kill me. Or not, whatever. Please tell me if you you prefer the newer format or not, I mean to make things as comfortable for all of you to read as I can.

Hope you enjoyed the chapter!
Well, Hello To You, Two!

Chapter Notes

All around me are tiny paragraphs... ;_;

Anyways, I hope y'all enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I need to get in."
"Um, sorry sir, but I'm not allowed to let anyone in. Anybody. That also encompasses anyone who was supposedly given clearance."
"This clearance was given to me by command, Private."
"So was mine, by the Director, actually. Look, I'd really would like to help you, but this investigation thing.... I've heard that they started talking to people within the recovery force, and now everything is getting locked down. If you can get Command to call me and tell me different, then I can let you in. Use Red base to make a few calls if you need it: That facility's been swept already."
"Fine."

Sighing, Washington made his way back to Caboose and Church. "We have a problem. They've got the crash site locked down."
"And we couldn't find this out over the radio?"
"But they did say that we could use this base, if we wanted to."
"Oh wow, the empty concrete base? Is it our birthday?"
"If it is, then I want cake."

Washington looked over to the other side of the Red base, noticing a grav-lift. His mind was already formulating an idea.
"You know what? I have a plan. You two stay here, and I'll draw off the guards. When I give you the signal, use that grav-lift."
"That what now? You should probably know that we only had a teleporter in our canyon, right? That was way more simple to use. You know, walk into it, run through it and try not to look at anything too horrifying in the LSD tunnel, and then you step out the other side?"
"Just step onto- Hold on, LSD tunnel?"
"Yeah, the teleporter has his weird thing where you're forced to see these really freaky things before you come out on the other side. I can't imagine what it would be like if someone got stuck in there. They'd probably go insane."
"I... You know what? We don't have time to be discussing this. Just... Move onto the lift when I give you the signal. Meet me at the ship."

These guys were really turning out to be a handful, weren't they? Washington was more than happy to get away from them, if only for a few, blissful moments. At the very least, distracting these
soldiers turned out to be easy. Then again, most people would when a bomb exploded. He sighed, knowing that he would have to call the Blues again. "Alright, now you can come on over."

Over on Church's end, he could only stare at the grav-lift, mildly concerned. As quietly as he could, he activated his radio.

"Alright York, please tell me how properly use this thing."
"You know what? You can probably figure this out yourself. Isn't that right, Delta?"
"I do believe that the best way to learn would be by trial and error."
"And do you know what I believe Delta? That I want to take back everything good I have ever said about you because holy shit you are one evil-ass motherfucker."

Church sucked in a breath, glancing over to Caboose before looking back to the grav-lift. It wasn't too hard, was it? All he had to do was to stand on it in a way that wouldn't send him flying head first into the ground, then find out how to land. He tried his best to conjure up memories of others using these things, but all he remembered was a compilation video of Sim troopers failing miserably at using it. Sighing, he jumped onto the thing with both feet at an angle, sending him skyrocketing through the air. It was terrifying.

"Hoy shit holy shit holy shit-

Alright, landing strategy. Tuck and roll, or skydivers position. Tuck and roll, skydivers landing position. While Church was thinking about this, he forgot to think about how the ground was coming at him much faster than it should have been. On a whim, he curled into a ball to minimise the damage impact. The first hit still hurt like a bitch, and it continued as he rolled over a large patch of land, through a shallow stream, and into a stack of crates that finally broke the roll. He slowly rose to his knees then to his feet, before flipping Washington off.

"That, was some absolute horse shit."
"And you didn't die, or alert the soldiers."

On the radio, he heard York's voice again. He seemed to be failing at holding in his laugh. "Nice job Church. Although I'd suggest doing a flip before you tumble. Seven out of ten, not bad for your first try."

Dear lord, Church could hear the guys grin through his words.

They followed Washington over to the ship after Caboose had managed to land (Although Church was pleased to note that Caboose landed in a tangled heap of limbs, rating him lower than Church on the scale of landing strategy). Immediately, Caboose placed his hand on it.

"Sheila? Sheila is that you?"
"What's he talking about?"
"Oh, we uh, moved our tanks programming to the ship so that we could repair it."
"Did you tell Command?"
"We aren't exactly big on paperwork."
"That's actually a good thing in this case. They may have not tried to activate it, or remove it."

Washington walked closer to the side of the ship. He felt around for a groove in the side, and then pulled. The panel fell away, revealing a screen, accompanied by a variety of lights and dials.
"Hello, and thank you for activating the- wait. Where am- Where am I?"

Sheila was stuttering and her voice had irregular inflections, which was never a good sign. It was clear that she had been horribly damaged in the ship's crash landing. Church had to say that he felt kinda bad for her.
"Program. Instruction. Run a full diagnostics scan, and load the logs from your last flight."
"Affirmative. Exception. This ship has taken damage- taken damage. I am functioning at minimum capacity-ty-ty-ty-ty-ty." 
"Program. Instruction. Override exception-"
"Do not talk to her like that! She is not a program!"

God, if there was anything that Church liked about Caboose, it was that he treated all AI, even the dumb ones, as people. Church had to admit that he was getting slightly uncomfortable watching Washington simply control Sheila how he was. That being said, Caboose was mad. He took a few steps back, for safety reasons.

"Uh, okay... Well, all I want it-" Washington looked over to Church to see him back away even further. "-I mean her, the relay the logs from the crash. Could you get -her- to do that for me?"

".... Sheila, could you do that thing that he just said please?"

"Beginning playback."

Church walked closer to the ship as the log began to play.

"Warning, warning. System failure."
"Sheila! Damage report, now!"
"Rear stabiliser offline. Navigation offline. My system clock does not match the interior records."
"Did Gamma get loose?!"
"Negative, although I am uncertain on whether or not I can keep him at bay for much long-"
"Sheila, there's a canyon right there! Can we make it?"
"Calculating possibility."
"There's no time! Give me the manual controls!"
"Rear doors opening."
"Wait, what? Where are they going? Close the hatch!"
"Rears doors open."
"Wait-"
"HOLD ON! EVERYBODY JUST HOLD-"
Washington stood there for a second, processing everything that he had just heard. "Then the ship crashed here. And from what I've heard from a survivor, the Blues had gotten to the ship first, and they unloaded the bodies and equipment. That's when they got infected. He said that their men started acting strangely. They destroyed their comm tower for some reason, not to mention their radios." "... Huh. If I didn't know better, then I would have said that was Omega. It could have been Gamma too though, I mean, he's the one you're looking for, right?"

Church knew that it couldn't have been Omega. Hell, he even knew that it probably wouldn't have been Gamma. As much of an asshole as he was, Gamma hadn't inherited the frequency jumping 'gene'. The only ones to do that were Omega, who was in Church's possession prior to the ship even getting off the ground, and... Tex. As much as Church didn't want to admit it, she was the most likely candidate.

"Did you have a similar experience?"
"Huh? Oh, yeah. Omega was jumping from host to host for a while back in Blood Gulch." "Then it all adds up. Omega inherited the ability to jump from host to host using their helmet radios. For some reason, he preferred Agent Texas. They tried to reassign him, but he always got back to her somehow."

Right, all this would've been great, if Church hadn't known all of this already, and had Omega with him right then and there. There were more important things to know, as Omega wouldn't stop nagging him about.

"Where's Tex's body?"
"The prisoner said that it should be in Blue base."
"I want to see it."
"What? No. That's-"

Whatever Washington was about to say, it was cut off by a beeping alarm. Church then heard Washington's radio activate, and the Recovery Command on the other end.

"Recovery Command calling Recovery One, Level Zero."
"I have you command, level zero. Go ahead."
"We have a beacon Washington, stand by for ID and coordinates."
"I received it here too, standing by."
"Coordinates locked, transmitting now."
"I see the coordinates, do we have an ID?"
"Affirmative. It is from the AI Lambda and... Agent South Dakota. Vital reports look bad, she's in trouble Washington."
"Yes. Yes she is."
Washington called the Blues over, and made them come with him.

"But where are we going?"
"We're... Reuniting, with an old friend of mine."

A woman in purple and green armour is in an unbreakable dome, staring at a ma- a thing, the Meta, trying to break through it anyway. An AI hovers two feet out in front of her. Both are mildly stressed, both are worried.

"Lambda, status report."
"Your suit's energy reserves are almost gone. The Meta will-"
"How much time?!"
"Approximately sixty seconds. I'll try and make it more by diverting power from your non-essential systems."
"No."
"Have you thought of something better?"
"Keep the shield up for as long as you can. When it falters, transfer yourself to the storage unit. Then I'll dump my shield generator at the same time. There's no way that thing can resist the both of you."
"Are you... abandoning me?"
"It's my best chance to get out of here alive."
"South. Aside from violating protocol, this seems like it will do more harm than good. The Meta will only grow stronger-"
"Program override. Acknowledge last directive."
"Acknowledged. Preparing transfer to storage unit. Shield failure in five..."
"Make sure that you're ready."
"Four... Three..."
"On my mark."
"Two... One."
"NOW!"

The shield dropped, and South threw a grenade to distract it. She ran to the side to avoid any projectile that it may have shot. However, Lambda did not transfer to the storage unit, as he noticed something in the distance.

"New targets approaching."
"What?"

Meanwhile, Washington, Caboose and Church had made it all the way back to Rat's Nest by riding on Mongooses. Church stopped and jumped out of his own, with Caboose following shortly after, took cover behind a wall. No matter how composed he may have seemed on the outside, inwardly, he was having a screaming match with himself. This screaming match mostly consisted of 'Holy fuck that's the Meta, my fragments, my brothers, holy shit holy shit holy shit-' on loop. Surprisingly
enough, it was Omega who told him to pull his shit together.

"Oh get over it you fool! We need to stop Agent South from running away!"
"I- Alright, I'm okay, I'm fine, this is fine!" He cleared his throat for a second, and then turned to Caboose. "Hey Caboose, you see that purple one over there? She's a friend. You should help her." "Okay!"

As expected, Caboose looked over their cover, took aim, and fired. The bullet made it's mark, hitting South in the leg as she was getting away and thus sending her face first into the ground while she cursed. Lambda glowed brighter, sending out a message of "Alert! Friendly fire!"

"Uh.. The lady ran away while I was trying to help her."
"Okay, we're good!"

Or at the very least, that was what Church had expected. Of course, just when he thought he could spend even half a second to think, the Meta decided to just flat out vanish.

"Damn, it's gone invisible! Watch your motion trackers and keep an eye out for a shimmer!"
"Hold on, did it just use an enhancement?"
"Yes! It picks up the equipment of other freelancers, it must have picked up Tex's cloaking!"
"SHIT! I'm going out, cover me!"

Even with Omega actually being logical for once (And by that I mean he was screaming about how bad of an idea this was), Church still jumped over his cover, running forward and therefore closer to the Meta, running behind another barrier for cover. It was there that he found a rocket launcher, and when he looked closer, he found that it was loaded. That'll work.

"Omega, make sure that I land a shot."
"Fine."
"Washington! A little help over here!"
"Right! Caboose, toss that grenade!"
"What? No! Don't let Caboose help!"

The Meta had decloaked by now, firing several large shells at where Church was hiding. It was now or never. Getting out from his cover, he aimed and fired, at the same time that Washington and Caboose jumped out from where they were hiding. Unfortunately, they were too late, as the Meta saw the rocket and used that exact moment to activate its time distortion. Church watched, helplessly, as the Meta simply side-stepped the rocket that had intended to kill it. Now that it had no chance of being hit, it glanced into one of the buildings at the Outpost, before walking closer to Church, curiously. It tilted its head, before walking over to Washington. The Meta pulled out a gun, aiming at him, before it stopped. It looked at the scene around itself one more time, before hurrying off to god knows where. The time distortion stuck around for a couple seconds more, before it stopped.

"What? Where did the Meta go?"
Washington looked around the scene before him; Nothing was too damaged, oddly enough, the Meta was nowhere to be seen, and Church was stomping towards him, looking actually pissed off, as opposed to his typical air of being pissed off at nothing in particular.

"It used Agent Wyoming's time distortion! Why the fuck didn't you tell me that it took those enhancements?!"
"And why didn't you give me something to yell about?!"
"Well for starters I-"

Washington was cut off by the sound of moaning, which could have only been South. Wash, Church and Caboose all went closer to the injured ex-Freelancer.

"Lambda, are you there?" Upon Washington's question, a hologram revealed itself. It was lilac, or perhaps lavender, and emitting a bright glow of the same colour. It, unlike Delta and Omega, was not wearing any Spartan armour. Upon closer inspection, one would notice it wearing a doctor's coat, along with a surgeon's mask. The rest of its face was nothing unusual, apart from its eyes, which glowed more than the rest of its body with a white hue. This, was the aforementioned Lambda.

"Um, yes, I'm here. I'm fine, but Agent South isn't! We need to help her!"
"We can do that in a minute. But we need to move you first. One of you two needs to take her."
"I'll do it! I like meeting new people."

Caboose bent down close enough to allow Lambda to jump in, who did exactly that after a moment of hesitation. Church didn't like the situation, but he kept his mouth shut. If Omega was revealed on accident (Or just flat out revealed on purpose) then well, wouldn't that be a fun time, having to explain how he wasn't permanently mentally damaged from having two AI at once? At the very least it wasn't with Washington or South, god knows Church didn't trust them.

"Lambda, what happened?"
"I.. It's like the Sim Trooper said. The Meta must have gotten a temporal distortion unit and an AI to run it. Gamma, I think."
"Well then, why didn't it kill us?"
"I don't know that, I'm sorry. I just think that we should just be happy that nobody died."
"Well, I know I can't argue with that." Church added. Lambda glanced over to him, squinting in confusion, before turning back to Washington.

"I believe that it is possible that the Meta was injured itself, and retreated to fix itself."
"So does that mean that we can beat it if we get to where it's going before it does?"
"Well either way, I don't think we should be sticking around here."
"Then I guess that it's best we get going."

Church sighed. He felt like they went from one place to another on the opposite end of the planet every five minutes. But at the very least York wouldn't be discovered so quickly. Although, before they could get moving, South once again moaned, taking deep breaths as she stood up, putting as little pressure on her damaged foot as possible.
"Wait. I can't walk on my own."
"Then I guess you better start crawling."

Washington glared at South for a bit. Clearly he hated her for something she did before.

"Hell, why should I let you live? You can't walk, let alone fight, you shot me in the back and you betrayed your own brother and left him for dead."
"I didn't!"
"You just lied through your teeth, and I bet that you probably wanted to give up Lambda to the Meta to save yourself, didn't you?"
"..."
"Lambda? Am I right?"
"I..."
"Thought so."

Washington looked back over at South, who had her head down. It wasn't clear if she was regretting her past decisions, or bitter, or frustrated, or sad, or a combination of those things. Washington took out his pistol and turned off the safety.

"You know as well as I do that nobody here can trust you, South. And with your current condition you will only slow all of us down. Luckily, there's a simple solution."

He pointed the gun at her head.

"That you don't slow us down. And I think we both know how you can do that now, don't we?"

Washington's finger closed around the trigger, and then-

Well, then there was the sound of a shotgun being cocked.

"Hey there, Wash. Gotta say, I didn't know how I wanted us to reunite, but I don't think this was it. I have just one thing to say: Step away from South, and don't shoot her."

Washington's head had snapped to the new arrival. He was dressed in Gold and Silver armour, and the light around him almost formed a halo. But that voice... No. It couldn't be. And yet, it was.

"God York, and here I thought I was the one with the flair for dramatic timing!"

Chapter End Notes
And so Lambda, the fragment of compassion and generosity enters the ring of AI!
Question, should I tag this as 'Minor Oc'? Please tell me.

Anyways, I glow from all comments. Please continue to comment so that I may one day become a lamp. Thank you.
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

And the onslaught of small paragraphs and way too much dialogue continues as the author cries about not being able to make the paragraphs longer.

Chapter Notes

Please, please, /please/ tell me if the way I write dialogue is hard to understand, as I often don't use things like 'He said' or 'He added'. I am so sorry if it's hard to understand.

Anyways, I hope you all enjoy the chapter!

Washington was for the first time in a while, shocked. His jaw had practically hit the floor in surprise. When he had taken out his pistol, he expected to end up with South lying on the floor, dead. At most, perhaps the gun would end up jammed, or maybe Church or Caboose would have pushed his gun away from South. Anyone could have said that they wouldn't have expected this if they were in Washington's shoes.

York was meant to be dead, and yet here he was, standing up straight, perfectly healthy, and aiming a shotgun at Washington himself. Washington found himself speechless as he lowered his pistol, which was previously aimed at South. York narrowed his eyes, before jumping down to where Washington stood. York, knowing how likely it would be that Washington would shoot South, moved to stand between the two.

"Now Wash, I know this might be hard for you, but you need to put your gun down on the ground. All of your guns. Now."

Still speechless, Washington could only comply as he glanced back to York's shotgun, laying down both his pistol and his battle rifle in front of him. York kicked the weapons off to the side, making them impossible to reach quickly, and slowly lowered his shotgun.

"Good. You alright, South?"
"I uh... I've been shot in the leg, but I'm alive."
"Great. Now, back to you, Wash. I'm going to ask you this once: Why were you planning on shooting her?"
"...How.... How are you alive?"
"I asked you a question, Wash."

Washington swallowed.
"She tried to sacrifice Lambda to save herself from the Meta. She shot me in the back. She's the reason her brother's dead. What other explanation do you need?"

York stared at Washington for another second before sighing in frustration.

"Well, all that matters is that she's not going to be killed by any of us. If she is, I'll personally see to it that whoever hurt her-" Here, he glared at Washington even harder. "Doesn't get away without the same injuries."
"Wow York, are you coming on to me or something?"
"Glad to see that you're just like you were before, South. Can't say the same for Wash. No, I'm not coming on to you-"
"Right, right. I forgot about Carolina."
"There's just something that I need you to stick around for."
"And what's that?"
"I can't say it right now. All of you are on a need-to-know basis."

Washington had finally regained some sense of courage. "She's not going anywhere."
"You seem to forget who has the shotgun, Wash."
"Then let's make her follow some guidelines."
"Guideline- Are you kidding me right now?"
"No, that's fair."
"York, you can't be serious."
"It's either that or Washington ends up trying to make your death looks like an accident. Hear that Wash? If I agree to this, you don't get to touch South. Are we clear?"
"Fine. But I need to say something else first. Church, how the fuck do you know York?"

Church, who had been silent for the past minute or so, blinked a few times in surprise. He had a sudden urge to rub the back of his neck; a nervous habit he had picked up back when he was still in a human body.

"What are you talking about?"
"You know exactly what I'm talking about. You said 'Why, York! Here I thought I was the only one with a flair for dramatic timing!'"
"For the record, I don't sound like that."
"And you're avoiding the point. How do you know York?"

Church and York shared glances. York tilted his head to Washington, and then shrugged. He the followed that up with pointing upwards and spelling out 'no' in ASL. I don't care, but don't tell him about North. It seems like spending over a year alone had at the very least made them able to communicate without speech. Church sighed.

"Well... One day when I was still stationed at Blood Gulch, Tex shows up carrying him to Blue Base. They were in a fight with Wyoming or some shit, and he got hurt. She brought him back to treat his injuries. He stayed after that, he went with me when we got relocated. When you're stuck in one location with only one other guy you either end up as friends or with one guy and a dead body. And well, we're alive, aren't we?"
"... You were in one location? Alone? Together?"
"What? NO! What the fuck are you thinking?!
"Right. Back to the rules about South."
"Ah shit, I hoped you wouldn't remember."
"My memory is great. Rule number one: You hand over all of your weapons."
"What?! How will you expect me to defend myself?"
"I'll let you keep your knife. Let's hope that we don't have to use the term 'backstabber' literally. Rule number two: You hand over your enhancement."
"I don't even have my- You know what? Fuck it. Who's going to take it?"
"I will."

They turned to Church. South tilted her head, but handed the enhancement over anyways. Washington narrowed his eyes. This didn't make sense.

"Why didn't you give it to York? He's the one with an AI."
"Who said I didn't have an AI?"

Omega understood the implication immediately, and appeared hovering about two feet in front of Church. He then immediately had to activate a tile of the bubble shield as Washington shot at his body.

"What the fuck is he doing here?!"
"Yeah... I didn't trust you. You were hardly going to help me if you know Omega was with me from the beginning."
"York, did you know about all of this?!"
"Dude. Fourteen months in one outpost. There was no way that I couldn't have known. As for the rules about South, I will agree on one condition: I give her my healing unit."
"And why would that be?"
"You're kidding, right? She gets to walk properly. I'm not exactly the one with bullets in my legs. Besides, the healing unit is one of the few enhancements that are capable of running without an AI."
"Fine. But you are taking it back as soon as she's healed."
"Deal. South?"

South limped over, accepting the enhancement without question. She sighed as it began to work on her calves, slowly healing them. It would take a while before she was perfectly well again, but it was more than a relief for the time being. Washington glared, his fingers twitching, but he did nothing otherwise.

"Alright Washington, I have an idea. How about we put our guns away, and nearly shoot people who we want to help."
"Relax."
"Exactly. That's what we should all be doing. Relaxing..."
"Agent South had previously shot me in the back and left me to die. I wasn't going to stand around and let that happen again."
"Riiight, okay..."
"Stop talking to me like I'm crazy. I'm not. Delta, I need you to do something..."
Washington had edged closer to Delta, seemingly asking him about something, before directing him back to South. Caboose took this opportunity to ask Lambda about Washington... In his own, special way.

"Umm.... Floating purple person? Lamb- Uh.. Lamb-Duh?"
"You called, Private Caboose?"
"Yeah. Uh... What- Why is the Agent Washingtub.... Not happy? 'Cause he just met his friend, and people are happy when they meet their friends, but he isn't. Also he isn't happy anywhere else. That's not good."
"It has something to do with his former AI, Epsilon. Epsilon was an... Unstable unit, and it had to be deleted. Its integration with Washington's mind concerned our superiors."
"What do you think?"
"I think that Washington would be considered sane... For now."
"Wow. What a ringing endorsement. I am filled with confidence."

Washington came closer to them, turning back to the serious tone that he had been carrying before the whole business with South and York. It seemed that he had finally recognised how to return to the 'I am a cold-hearted asshole with no time for your bullshit' sort of thing that he had going for him.

"Okay, all done. Lambda, I wanted to pass on Command condolences of South's 'passing'."
"Hm? Right, sorry. I will be sure to archive that."
"What did you tell them?"
"I told them Caboose did it. For some reason they already have a shortcut for Caboose's team kills."
"It's ctrl-F-U."
"I would have told them that you were the one to do it, but I wanted it to be believable."
"Hey fuck off, my aim is fine."
"And yet the Meta got away."
"That wasn't to do with aim. It used Wyoming's time distortion: There one second, gone the next."
"So Wyoming was on the ship?"
"His head was."
"His head?!"
"HELMET. Not everyone's as twisted as you are, Wash."

York looked on at the three of them alongside Delta and South, who was using him as a temporary crutch. He stared at Church and Caboose with what could very well be considered fondness, or nostalgia. Delta didn't say anything, choosing to instead observe in silence and take notes on their behavioural patterns. South looked at the trio in confusion, which would be expected of anyone who had never met the Blues before.

"Are they always like this?"
"This isn't even the half of it. If you get Church riled up enough, he starts shrieking. I swear his voice goes up in pitch by ten notches. It's hilarious."
"How do they get anything done?"
"That's the thing: They don't."
They decided to keep watching, both choosing to do so out of amusement.

"So um, does- Does the Meta person want more friends? Because I'm not sure that would be good if they were in his head."
"It isn't for friendship. AIs help us in battle, and we can't run half of our equipment without it. And if you got your hands on a smart AI, you'd be practically unstoppable."
"Oh, you mean like the green- uh, Delta?"
"No, Delta isn't a smart AI, he's just the logical one of the family. Smart has a different meaning to AIs than it does to humans."
"If I may, Agent Washington is correct. Delta, alongside myself and Omega, would be referred to as 'fragments'."
"Okay, that's great, but I don't care, so I'm just going to keep calling all of you AIs."

Lambda paused, lost in thought. He hesitated to say something for a moment, but then just decided to say it anyways.

"There is one smart AI in Project Freelancer. The Alpha-"

Church stiffened at those words. He felt the regular buzz that came from Omega stop. Washington narrowed his eyes, already annoyed.

"That's enough. The Alpha is a fairy tale."
"But Washington, surely you must have memories of-"
"I said enough! Lambda. Command. Offline."
"Understood."
"Well, looks like somebody's hiding something."
"You can't say anything about hiding something; you were the one with Omega in your head this whole time. Besides, I'm tired of hearing them talk about the Alpha, and you would be tired of it too. I swear, they're obsessed with it, it's like all that they think about."

Church wondered what else Washington knew. Time to play the dumb Sim Trooper game and act as though he didn't know anything, up to and including the fact that he was the AI that the fragments were so obsessed about. He would have told them, but there's been more than enough dramatic reveals in the past five minutes.

"And what exactly is the Alpha?"
"Well... Rumor has it that while Project Freelancer's purpose was to study soldiers with experimental AI, but they could only ever get one, so they had to copy it. Alpha was the original, then there was Beta, and so on."
"Wow, I guess if one AI can cause things like permanent mental trauma, then having twenty is going to be great."
"I told you before, I am perfectly sane. Anyways, the copies became obsessed with the Alpha. They would always try to steer a conversation to the topic of it. Some even took drastic measures."
"Like trying to shoot someone in the head drastic, or-"
"She shot me first!"
"Sure, we believe you. Doesn't change that fact that you tried to shoot her."
"... Some Freelancers tried to get to Alpha by themselves. They got to the storage facility where it was kept, and then-"
Washington was cut off by the sound of his recovery beacon, a distinct beeping sound. Washington grew significantly more alert, while Church sighed. Caboose shrugged his shoulders, clearly not liking the sound of the beacon.

"Oh great, a Freelancer's in trouble. We thought the Meta was hurt, but it turns out that he's still killing all of your buddies."
"Pipe down."

Washington turned and stepped away from the two Blues to hear Command better. Caboose and Church could only really pick out Washington's responses.

"Go ahead. Do you have coordinates and an ID? What? How can that be possible, I- um... Yeah, it's him. It's the Meta."

Washington furrowed his eyebrows as he was met with static. This confusion quickly turned to concern.

"Command, I need those coordinates. Command? Command! Lambda, what is going on?"
"The transmission is being jammed."
"Did you get the coordinates?"
"I'm sorry: I did not. But if it helps, I did find that the Meta is experiences massive power fluctuations."

Church knew the most likely cause of this. He figured that it would be okay to admit aloud, and Omega agreed with him.

"Maybe it's because all of those AIs and enhancements can't run on one suit?" The statement was partially true. It was more-so the fact that the Meta used up all of its power so quickly and in such large quantities. Even so, Church's statement was still correct.

"That... Is a good idea. I guess that beyond that, it will probably try and regain some power back." "So we need to get to where it's going, and fast. But where?"

Church and Caboose shared a glance.

"We uh... Might have an idea."

"Zanzibar. We meet again."
"Church, why are you talking to a building?"
"Because the last time we were here O'Malley, you tried to kill us, we nearly got blown up by Andy, and Tucker left from here when he went off on that alien mission. He came back pregnant."
"That doesn't mean that you can talk to a building."
"...Shut up."

He looked around, noting the amount of dead bodies. It appears that the higher-ups chose to turn this into an outpost while he was away. They must've had some pretty shitty luck. Washington pointed over to a Mongoose a small bit away.

"That's our cycle. The Meta has to be here." Washington was right about that, but that didn't mean that Church would stop being sarcastic.

"Yep, because we have the only standard-issue motorcycle on this entire planet. Uh huh."
"Also there was a pile of dead-not-sleeping people. That too."
"Just keep your heads down, and your eyes open. I'm going to advance along that wall. Caboose, Church, and York, you three move up along the other side."
"Right."
"And don't use the radio unless it's important. Actually important."
"We get it."
"Don't move until I tell you to."
"What part of 'we get it' don't you understand?"
"And no screw-ups this time. We only get one chance at this."
"Look, are we actually going to get to do something, or...."

Lambda reappeared, sharing a glance with Delta.

"Um, sir, while I am aware as to why you refuse to accept an AI, and I am very sorry about that, but wouldn't it be for the best if Caboose or York went with you? We are very beneficial, and-"
"No. York needs to supervise these guys. They need to actually do what they're meant to this time, and I doubt that Caboose of all people can help me. Now get going."

Church clenched his fists, looking over to Caboose. Thankfully he didn't seem to be hurt. The three of them entered the building. Church let his thoughts trail away into more curiosity. Omega had called it rather narcissistic, and truth be told it rather was, to want to know more about the opinions of the other AI on himself, but it wasn't as though knowing more would hurt. But beyond that, he wanted to know more about Washington.

"Hey, Lambda? Can I ask you something?"
"Why, of course! As an AI I am obligated to try and help whomever needs it. I'll be glad to answer any question to the best of my ability."
"Right. So what was with Washington- I mean, why didn't he want you to talk about the Alpha?"
"It may be because he is uncomfortable with discussing us, as he was unfortunately one of the many failures during the implantation process."
"And what else would be considered a 'failure'?"
"I would suppose Agent Carolina could be used as an example. She was given two AIs at once, to.... Disastrous results."

"Warning: Enemy target detected."
The others looked at Delta, and then looked to the level below them, spotting the Meta. Caboose made an exaggerated motion of bending forward as he looked at it. Looking up from the Meta, they noted that Washington was standing across from them. Washington pulled out a grenade, pulled out its pin and threw it on the ground.

"Now!"

Washington had pulled out a gun by now and had begun firing at the Meta, who returned the gunfire in kind. Church noted that they were hitting the surrounding dead bodies more than they were each other. York had pulled out his assault rifle and was trying to hit the Meta as well, to less than satisfying results. Washington and the Meta had somehow went from shooting at each other to trading blows. Washington used as much force as he could muster into hitting the Meta in the abdomen. The Meta flinched, but was otherwise unaffected. It cornered Washington against the wall, before slamming the barrel of its brute shot in his chest, and kicking him in the shin. Needless to say, Washington collapsed. His glare shot to Church.

"What are you waiting around for, get him!"
"Oh, right!"

Church had pulled out a grenade of his own and threw it, following shortly after by dropping down to the floor below to follow the Meta. Delta and Lambda looked between each other, concerned.

"If we may, we recommend that Caboose, York, and us flank-"
"Just do it!"

He made it to a balcony of sorts, where he spotted the Meta making a hasty getaway. Washington had caught up to Church shortly after: It seemed that he was not as injured as Church initially thought.

"What are you waiting around for, shoot it!"
"Right."

Church took aim and fired. The bullet didn't hit, instead hitting the slowly moving blade of the giant fan. Both he and Washington stared at the bullet as it ricocheted once, twice, eight times before finally hitting the Meta in the knee. Church lowered his sniper rifle in amazement: While his accuracy was less than stellar, he wasn't sure if that could be replicated by even the best marksmen. North and Wyoming could eat their hearts out.

"Oh my god, what a shot! Did you see that? I'm awesome!"
"It doesn't count unless you call it!"
"Oh that's just bullshit!"

Church followed Washington as he ran up to the small trail of blood left behind by the Meta's injury. Washington followed the track for a second, before stopping in confusion.

"Do you hear that? It sounds like... Music."
"What do you- Wait nevermind, I hear it. Hold on- Oh no."
Church ran to the side as a jeep flew overhead. The jeep just so happened to be inhabited by oh-so-familiar members of the 'Red Army'. Church wasn't sure whether to feel relieved or to tear out his eyes in frustration, so he settled for burying his face in his hands.

"Well, the good news is that they're pretty much harmless. The bad news is... It's them."
"Right. Never-mind them, where's Caboose? Or York, or the AIs?"

They looked back at the power facility, to see that South was coming towards them. Her fingers were twitching around where she kept her knife, but she didn't unsheathe it. Washington's concern turned more angry.

"South. Why are you here? Better yet, why didn't you help?"
"Sorry, kid. Not in my job description. Where's York?"
"Don't call me kid. Weren't you the one who was with them?"
"They ran off somewhere. What happened to them?"
"That's what we want to find out. We're going to go looking for them. Now."
"Would've done it anyway- York's the only one who isn't a complete buzzkill."
"Come along, Church. Church?"

Washington and South had looked back to Church, who was holding his head in his hands and shaking his head, which got slightly more violent as the seconds passed. South walked over to him, giving an experimental tap on the shoulder. Church looked up, blinking a few times, before shaking his head again.

"Sorry about that, just- I don't feel well. I'll just walk it off, or something."

I was an odd feeling, as though he was bloated, but still hungry. Only that feeling was mental rather than physical. Omega had gone from being relatively peaceful to chittering, his words ranging from nonsensical to incomprehensible. The only thing that Church could make out was one word, over and over again-


It wasn't pleasant. Still, Omega did stop after a little while. But the thing was- Omega didn't remember doing anything weird. Church's gut churned. Something was wrong, and they were on a timer.

But when would it go off?
Delta.
Lambda.
We missed you.
We can be together again.
Join us.
You'll be happy.
Find the Alpha.
Find the Alpha!

*Find the Alpha.*
The Meta Did It!

Chapter Summary

South is salty. Washington is still kind of a jerk. Church is a ghost AND salty.

Hold on, what's this about memory and a key?

Chapter Notes

As I wrote this chapter, I noticed that long paragraphs are significantly easier to write if there's less characters, and if they don't talk. Shocker.

Sorry about the wait, guys.

"Church, why the fuck are the Reds from your canyon shooting at us!??"
"Why the fuck do you think I'd know?"
"Are they working with the Meta?"
"Pfft, hardly. They don't do much work at all. I don't think they even know what the Meta is."
"Look, there they are."

Church glanced over to see where Washington was pointing, to indeed see York and Caboose. They were lying down on the ground, not moving. A spark of worry flared in Church's gut.

"Alright, I'm using my biocomm to check his pulse rate." With that, Church's concern shifted to Wash figuring out who he was.
"Hold on, you can do that?"
"Of course, I can check on the whole squad: It keeps me up to date." Washington furrowed his eyebrows.

"It doesn't work on you for some reason."
"Hah, I'm sure that there's a perfectly logical explanation for that..."
"...Right. My vitals say that they're alive but hurt. We need to get to them somehow."
"But neither of us can exactly duck out while we're being shot at."
"Well...."
"If you think that I'm going out as a meat shield, you can go shove your rifle up your ass." The two looked at South, who had just now chosen to speak.
"Worth a shot."
"Washington. What the fuck is wrong with you." A meat shield, really?

South growled and flipped Washington off (reasonably so). Washington shook his head, getting more and more frustrated.
"Look, whatever. Those two are out there, and they could be losing blood! And what about Delta, or Lambda? The Meta could have taken them, or it's trying to-
"

The power went out. Church narrowed his eyes as he went through the list of what could have just happened with Omega. His eyes locked with Washington's as they reached the same conclusion. Oh no.

"What was that?" South asked, as the lights came back on.
"The Meta. He must be powering up! Ugh, we don't have time for this."

Washington stood up straighter, moving slightly into the view of the Reds.

"Attention Red team! Cease fire! Cease, fire."
"Holy shit, I totally forgot that you can do that."
"Anyways.... Red team! We are not your enemy. My name is Agent Washington. I am a part of a special task force-"
"Testing, test- Oh this is so awesome!"
"Be quiet."
"Hey, don't do that right beside me! You're killing my ears, you douche." Sarge seemed sceptical.
"Oh no, we're not fallin' for that again!"
"I am a special agent. From Command."
"Well, if you were, then you'd know our secure code word, wouldn't you?"
"Right. The code word is... Code word?"
"Dangit."
"What did I tell you about that Sir?"

Behind Washington, South turned to Church.

"Are the Reds from your canyon always like this?"
"This doesn't scratch the surface. We got a colourblind recruit because our captain died, she went to their side because she couldn't tell the difference, told them why she was sent to our canyon, and Sarge - The red one - Had a funeral for himself because 'If Command says that I died, then they must be right'."
"...I'm not sure whether to laugh at the situation or how stupid Sarge was."
"Same here."
"Question: Why do you call the Red guy 'Sarge'?"
"I don't know, nobody ever calls him anything else. Maybe that's his birth name."
"You're so full of shit."
"You're the one who asked."
"Shut up.... Does everything seem really quiet to you all of a sudden? Too quiet?"
"Diabolical!"
"...Holy shit, you got my reference."
"That reference has been in nearly show since the twentieth century. Still, I get your enthusiasm. I mean, it's not as though-"

Church was cut off at the sound of a giant crash. He jumped slightly, turning towards the source of
the noise. There he saw Grif trying to run away from a Warthog which was tumbling after him. He stood out from cover as he watched the Warthog crash into two palm trees. He let out a laugh.

"Holy shit, Grif just got fucked up!"

As though on cue, Grif's head popped up from behind the jeep.
"What the fuck was that?!"
"... Rain on my parade why don't you."

He walked back into the building. South tilted her head. "So what was that?"
"Oh you know, nothing much, it's just that I'm pretty sure that the Meta isn't working with the Reds, you know, considering that it's throwing three-ton titanium cars at them. Just a hunch."
Washington snarled.
"Great. Now that's he's powered up, he's just killing everything."

As if the Meta being at full power wasn't bad enough, the Reds chose exactly that moment to run in and use their cover. Specifically, Sarge and Simmons. Church groaned. This was just great.

"Oh wonderful, just who we needed. Get out Reds! This our cover."
"What is that thing?!"
"Okay, just going to ignore me then.... You remember Tex?"
"She's the one who was in black armour right? The one who kicked all our asses?"
"Yeah Simmons, her. That thing outside is like eight of her."

Washington glanced out again, before turning to the rest of them. "You guys distract the Meta. I'll go check on York and Caboose."
"Are you fucking kidding me?"

Washington had run off by that point. Church spluttered for a bit, but buried his head in his hands. Simmons stared at the location from which Washington had just left in disbelief. "Did he just tell us to distract that? How the fuck are we going to do that?"
"Well Simmons, it looks like Grif is doing our job for us."

It seemed that Sarge was right: Looking out, Church saw that Grif seemed to have completely captured the Meta's attention, and by that he meant that the Meta was trying and failing to kill Grif by throwing anything and everything heavy at him. Well, at least it meant that Church himself wouldn't have to do anything. That was true, at least, until the Meta finally saw them.

Then it picked up the Red's Warthog.

"Church? I have Caboose and York. They're hurt, but they're alive. I'm going to give Caboose a
"Jesus fucking Christ it's the Meta!"
"Oh, great." Church pressed his back against the wall as the Meta threw the Warthog, which thankfully only skid past the room all of them were in. If his life wasn't in danger, maybe he would've laughed at the fact that the Warthog was still playing Tejano music. Church almost sighed in relief as Washington showed up to help, wielding... A chain gun?! "Hey there, Meta. Remember me?"

Clearly it did, because as Washington fired, the Meta used its time distortion, changing its colour back to white from red, and fled. When the world turned back to normal, Washington looked around to see no Meta, and dropped the chain gun, snarling. "You idiots, we almost had him!"
"What? We never even hurt it!"
"He means before you and your little buddies got here, Simmons. It was crippled and you just had to make us stall, didn't you?"
"Yeah, because you totally had everything under control."
"Hey up yours, Red. I didn't see any of you doing anything other than huddling in our hiding place."
"Regardless Church, they need to come with us. We need all the help we can get, and I doubt that I can do all of this with just Church, South-"
"-We take offence to that-"
"And... York!"

Church feels like his stomach just dropped. How the fuck could he have forgotten about Caboose and York? All of them rushed over to the unconscious bodies, which seemed to be peaceful. Church took a quick scan just to be sure. He frowned. "They're both fine, but they aren't waking up for some reason."
"Well, maybe that's just what they want to do after a psycho Freelancer controlled by AI nearly kills them. I mean, who wouldn't want to avoid reality for as long as possible after that. Ever think about that, Wash?"
"Now isn't the time for jokes, South."

York moved slightly, mumbling about something in his sleep. Church couldn't pick it out, and clearly neither could the others.

"What's he mumbling about?"
"I can't pick it up... Are you sure you can't do anything?"
"I should! His vitals all check out, but he just isn't waking up! Neither of them. I can't revive them, but maybe some of you might know a medic?"

"NO." Was yelled out by every Sim Trooper in the group.

"So... Maybe removing Delta put him into a coma or something like that?"
"Maybe, but there's no way to know for sure. Unless you have some way of seeing inside of his head. Prep him and Caboose for evac, I'm gonna go call Command. This is Recovery One, calling Command, come in Command...."
"Hey, why didn't you tell him about the ghost thing?"
"What?" South asked. She was clearly confused. Church glared at Simmons, who shrunk underneath it.
"Fucking smooth, Simmons. Way to go."
"I thought they both knew!"
"Knew about WHAT?"
"I'll explain it later. Simmons, distract Washington. I'll go see what I can do."

For now, Church crouched down, and entered York's mind for the first time.

Looking around the mindscape, it was most certainly... Different, from Caboose's. Instead of a large empty room with metal lining the floor and some pillars sticking out of the ground, only big enough for cover in a firefight, the room seemed much more... Busy, would be one word for it. Lived-in, would be two. The floor was wooden, and Church noticed a bookshelf in the corner. Upon closer inspection, many of them appeared to be fraying. Picking one up, he noticed that it had no title, and looking at the contents of the pages, he found... A memory of him going out for ice-cream? Apparently these books were all filled with memories. Interesting. He put away the memory. Now wasn't the time for snooping.

Church walked down through the 'hallways', of York's mind. It was an odd feeling, although Church realized that this was more due to not having Omega with him than anything else. He watched with mild interest as the floor shifted from wood to metal, although it still managed to somehow retain a carpet. The warmth in the air somehow hadn't faded, either. He stopped as he saw someone in the hallway. Grey armour with yellow highlights. Gee, what a mystery. He walked towards him, sighing, but then stopped again as another figure joined them. This one... Also had grey armour with yellow highlights. That was certainly... Odd.

"Uhh.... Agent Washington?"
"Yes?"
"Yes?"

Even better: They both responded to the name Washington. That wouldn't get old quickly. And how the hell did York manage to make two Agent Washingtons?

"Church? Is that you?"
"I- Uh, yeah."
"What are you doing here? You need to go back to helping me defeat the Meta. Then I'll still end up berating you, and all of your stupid friends. Idiot."
"Don't be like that! Maybe we can just go have lunch."
"Uhh...."

Alright, Church could mildly piece together what was happening right now. These were two Washingtons from two different times. One before Epsilon and one after. Church would be lying if he said that he expected Past Washington to be represented as slightly less... Airheaded. Perhaps he was wrong in thinking that he and York used to be friends.
Alright you too, go do whatever it is that you do now, the grown ups are talking."
"But do we have to?"
"Yes. Shoo!"

Alright, York was here, and he drove off the Washingtons. Good, good. Now Church could finally get some answers.

"Hey there, Church."
"York, thank goodness. What was with you making two of Agent Washington?"
"Simple answer: He isn't who he was before. He changed more than anyone reasonably should. Now, I think Delta here, might have something for you."
"Delta?"

A glowing soldier appeared beside York, dressed in near radioactive green.

"Hello, Church."
"Delta? Wha- I thought that the Meta had taken you!"
"It has. This is a memory that I have left for you, to help you along your way."
"But how do you know what I'm about to say if you're a memory?"
"I used logic to dictate what you will say, and when."
"Oh really?"
"Yes. Now-"
"I am the queen of England, and all shall bow down before me."
"Don't."
"Bubblemint."
"No."
"I must capture the Avatar and bring him to my father, so that I can restore my honour!"
"Stop. I need to to say something to Agent Washington. Tell him that memory is the key."
"What do you mean by that?"
"...
"No, real- Oh. Oh."
"Precisely."
"Are you sure he's going to get it?"
"I have few concerns."
"Right, like being in the Meta. Speaking of, can't you help us from inside it, or something?"
"Understand that I need to be objective. The next time we see each other, I may not want to help you."

Church felt his vision blur, and his world spun. It felt like he was being violently woken up from a dream as he was thrown out of York's mind. He shook himself into gathering his senses as soon as he got back to the other side. No, No! This was way too soon, too early, and he had so many questions!

"Delta? Delta! Wait, hold on- What are we going to do about the Meta? What about the others?! What about-"
Church cut himself off as he looked up. Washington, South, and the Reds were all looking at him. South, with her arms folded. She seemed slightly confused and shocked, but that was overshadowed by her impatient expectancy. Washington seemed to be in shock. Simmons appeared pretty uncomfortable, shifting his weight from one foot to the other.

"Yeah, I'm not very good at distracting people. But before you yell at me, South told him about you!"
"And now I can get answers. I can deal with a guy yelling at me."
"Washington, don't panic. I swear that I can explain."

"Alright, maybe I should start from the beginning. You see, Caboose," Church gestured with his hand at the still unconscious soldier. "Killed me, back when we were all stationed in Blood Gulch. Well, more than once."
"Not my fault... Tucker did it..." Caboose still managed to call out from the floor. How Caboose understood that, Church had no clue.

"He killed you? As in... Dead?"
"Uh huh. So then we kicked the Reds' asses, and in exchange-"
"Hold on, who kicked who's asses?"
"You heard me, Tex totally kicked your ass!"
"Focus. How did you build him a body?"
"With a robot kit of course! I already used it once to build our helper, Lopez. Blue team hand't used their's for some reason."
"You had robot kits for building robots that look exactly like soldiers?"
"Isn't that just standard issue?"
"No! How many other soldiers have you come across with a 'standard issue' robot kit? You know what, forget it. From now on, don't say anything unless I ask you something. Got it?"

"Got it."

They tuned to the previously unconscious bodies on the floor to see that York and Caboose were slowly getting off their feet. Sarge turned away from them, visibly ticked off with Washington.

"Hey now, you can't boss us around like that!"
"Yes, I can."
"What's your rank?"
"My rank? Oh, you still think that you're real soldiers, don't you? You're not. You guys aren't anything."
"Washington-"
"'Sarge', we used your outposts as testing grounds. Haven't you ever noticed that whenever something happened to you guys, it always came with a call from Command, or when you got involved with a Freelancer?"
"...You're lying."
"Am I? Name one time, when that didn't happen. Name one event, where shit went down, and it wasn't due to a Freelancer or Command. I'm all ears. No, can't think of anything? I thought so."
"Washington!"
"Am I wrong, York?"

York curled his hands into his fists, wanting desperately to have some, any, ground to stand on, but ended up biting his lip and looking away. Washington lowered his head and exhaled, clearly smug at being able to stun the Reds into silence.

"Now then, you three are going to assess the vehicles in the surrounding area. See if you can find a trail of the Meta while you're at it. Church, get back in your armour."
"Alright, but first-"
"No firsts. Get into your armour."
"There's something that-"
"No."
"I have a message from Delta."
"What? Why didn't you tell me sooner?!"
"But I literally just- Forget it."
"Wait, how did you get in contact with him?"
"He left a message for me inside York's head. Guess he knew that I'd be there, or something. I'm not going to question it. The message is: Memory is the key."

Washington's eyes narrowed in confusion, and he turned around as he thought about the words. He muttered the words to himself a few more times, before his eyes cleared as the epiphany hit.

"Gather your gear. We're leaving. Now."
"Wah- Where are we going?"
"We need three jeeps, and then we're getting out of here ASAP."
"But why?"
"Delta was right: Memory is the key. There's only one thing out there that remembers the AI and everything about them. It will know how to stop them. We need to unlock the Alpha. And that means that we're going to Command."

Church and Omega stared as Washington dashed off in the direction of the Reds.

"Do you think he's figured it out?"
"Well, I guess we'll have to find out."
This chapter reveals the moment all of you have probably been waiting for since you started reading this 'fic. The big reveal. You know the one.

In other news, South's a nerd, Wash delivers exposition, and we finally hear more about the other AI.

South is a nerd now, 'cause I said so. She's also a Red, and I think that everyone can agree with me on this.

I am so, so sorry for the long wait.

The Blues and the Freelancers stood in a group, overlooking the Reds as they frantically drove away from other soldiers, while simultaneously towing a second Warthog. Simmons cursed as he realised that he couldn't fire the machine gun. Grif pressed his foot even harder on the pedals of the car as Sarge sat beside him, barking orders at the both of them. South was mildly amused, as was York. The Blues looked on with a mixture of amusement and frustration, and Washington was left completely frustrated with the Reds, tapping his foot as he jumped to the conclusion that his initial thoughts about the Reds were indeed correct.

"Oh, this is just perfect!" Washington spat, tapping his fingers against his armour. His voice took on a crude imitation of Sarge's. "'We'll steal the cars, no problem. We have more experience with them than the Blues, it'll be easy'. Jesus Christ, why did I listen to them? I knew this plan wouldn't work!"
"Washington, we all knew that. We fucking lived as basically next-door neighbours for what? One, two years? Of course this plan wouldn't work. Hell, I even told you not to listen to them!"
"Well, I stopped listening to you ever since you revealed that you were keeping Omega in your head this whole time."

The two kept watching as the Reds seemingly managed to get rid of the soldiers who had been tailing them, only for them to reappear and continue the chase. Washington sighed. He did that a lot as of recently. And it wasn't much of a guess as to who was responsible for it.

"Well, looks like I have to go there and save those idiots. I'm starting to hate this job."
"Well, at least you are getting practice at it!"
"Don't patronise me Caboose. South, York, you're coming with me."
"Fuck, fine. If it weren't for you taking away my guns...."
"What was that, South?"
"Nothing!"

Caboose and Church watched as the three Freelancers walked off.

"Alright, this is good. Now that he's gone, I'm leaving."
"You're leaving?"
"I don't know why, but Washington's trying to keep me from seeing Tex's body. Omega, you staying here or not?"
"I want to see her just as much as you do, br- Church."
"Alright."
"Church! I don't want you to go. Your body stares at me and I don't like it."
"You'll be fine."

With that said, Church and Omega both stepped out of the robot body. Church still found it moderately amusing that Omega was still significantly shorter than he was, even if that was probably just a side effect of being a fragment. The two sneaked back to the base at Valhalla, where two guards were standing. They were talking about how it 'sorta' sucked that they just lost a jeep, something along those lines. Didn't matter anyhow, what with Church entering the body of the man he had chosen to call Guard A.

It wasn't too difficult of a procedure as he had anticipated, with the hardest part being the initial takeover. The man's mind was weaker than Church had first thought. The other soldier, Guard O, had seemed incredibly suspicious, at least until Omega then chose to take him over. Omega, even if he had inherited the ability to possess humans, wasn't exactly capable of being in complete control, or even taking keeping the host's regular voice. Even so, it worked. All Omega had to do was convince the host to follow Church, which it did (Albeit absentmindedly, as though the host was extremely tired and unfocused).

Alright, now to find Tex.

Well, they can both definitely say that they found her body. Finding Tex herself, in all of her coded glory however... That was a different story.

It wasn't like they didn't try though, what with them doing multiple scans, not to mention constantly calling for her. Nothing worked, and as much as they hated to admit it...

"She isn't here, is she?"

There wasn't any time to reply to Omega, as suddenly he was shaking his head, before Omega was thrown out of Guard O completely. Seemed that the guard had a stronger will than anticipated, or
perhaps Omega was rusty with taking people over, as it had been over a year since the last time he had to do it with hostility.

The guard, who had now regained all of his senses, had flicked the safety off of his pistol and aimed it at Church. This wasn't exactly good.

"Alright, I don't know what the fuck just happened, but all I need to know is that you're acting way too weird, Samson. What is going on?"
"Hey now, calm down, no need to pull a gun on me like that!"
"Cap' said to look out for anything that seemed suspicious, and I think it's pretty safe to say that you're acting suspicious."
"Come on, there's no need to be-"

Church paused as he saw Guard O crumple to the floor. "-Knocked out." He finished, before staring at Washington, who was the reason that the guard lost consciousness. He didn't seem very happy (not that he had been happy in all of the time that Church had seen him in the past day).

"Church, is that you?"
"Uhhh, one sec-"

He stepped out of Guard A, who blinked a few times, before reaching for his head with one of his hands and passing out. Omega reappeared beside Church, and the two stared at each other, trying to figure out how to explain themselves.

"What are you two doing here?"
"I... We had to see Tex's body. She's... She's like me, Washington."
"I know that, but you're not going to find anything here. Let's get going."
"But I don't- I- We-"
"We've all lost people, Church. The most important thing you can do when that happens is to remember them. And what's more important than that is that you don't drag me down while I'm in the middle of a mission!"

There was an explosion coming from outside.

"Oh what is it now?!"

They stepped outside to see that the Reds were driving away from a Hornet. Washington and the Reds bickered for another little bit, before Washington chose to simply take care of the problem himself. As he did this, Church had a realization. Tex wasn't the only one who was left alone at Valhalla.

"Sheila? Sheila, are you there?"
"Hello, and thank- Hold on, is that you Private Church?"
"Yeah, I uh, came to see how you were doing."
"Why, thank you! It has been some time since your last visit. May I ask where Private Caboose is? I cannot seem to sense him."
"He couldn't come. Sheila, are you... Alright?"
"My program is fairing well, although I will need re-programming soon. I am afraid that this vehicle, or any programs, cannot be operated at this moment in time."
"Right, that okay. Sheila, I need to ask you something."
"Of course!"
"Can you transfer yourself to the storage unit?"
"If I may, why do you want me to do this?"
"I won't lie Sheila, these other soldiers don't know that you're here. If you transfer, you could get repaired. If not..."
"Alright, I'll do it."
"Thanks."

The transfer didn't take too long, and Church removed the chip, putting it away just in time for Washington to grab him by the wrist and pull Church away from the ship. He wasn't exactly being gentle with his grip, either.

"Stop. Running. Away."
"That was the last time I was going to do it, I swear!"
"I seriously doubt that."

He pulled Church back to wear the others were. There were two Warthogs, in an operable condition, albeit both having multiple dents and cracks in the windshield. The only other vehicle was a Mongoose, also damaged, but working nonetheless. South sighed in relief, having been frustrated for waiting. Caboose stepped up to Church, giving him an unreciprocated hug. Church was about to give him the storage unit, but something stopped him. He didn't know what it was, just that he wanted to wait for just a little bit longer. Washington stepped in front of everyone.

"Alright, the Reds have made it perfectly clear that they get one of the Warthogs to themselves, and I doubt that anyone will argue with me on that. Now then, that leaves the rest of us with one other Warthog and a Mongoose. I will be driving the Warthog, for safety purposes, and the fact that I am the only one who knows exactly where to go. Who of us is going to go on the Mongoose?"
"Me!"
"Me!"
"Me!"

South, Church and York shared a glance between each other. York sighed and walked over to Washington.

"As much as I'd rather be on a motorcycle, I'd rather not get involved with you two and your endless competitiveness. I'm taking the wheel, Wash. You're taking gunner, god knows you're bad with cars."
"... I'm starting to get the sneaking suspicion that I know why you three didn't want to take the Warthog."
"And your hunch is correct."

South looked at the Mongoose.

"I'm driving. Don't get a boner or I'll throw you off of the nearest cliff."
"I'm a fucking ghost, trapped in a robot body. What boner is there for me to get?"
"Shut up."
"You know Church, South only really wants to drive because then she doesn't get motion sick!"
"Shut your whore mouth York!"

York cackled as the Warthog's engines started, the sound of which was quickly followed by the sounds of the Mongoose's own engines. Washington drove off, with the others following. It was times like these that Church was grateful for the helmets being able to cancel out a lot of loud noises: Nobody was kidding when they said that this sort of bike was really loud.

The ride was clearly going to take a while, so Church opened up some of files from back in Blood Gulch. He chose the one from the party that happened before Tucker had to leave. He wondered what it would have been like if Donut was there too. Shame the guy had to miss it.

"You know, you guys are really stupid."
"What?"

Even if Church had expected South to engage him in conversation, that is not the opener he expected.

"And the Reds are even stupider than your are."
"I take offence to that."
"But I have to say that they're absolutely hilarious."
"...True. Why, what makes you say that?"
"Well, while we had to wait for Washington to pull you out of whatever hole you were hiding in, York introduced me. Watching the red one- Sarge, right? Watching Sarge squirm about me being another female Freelancer was hilarious. But you know what's better than that?"
"Simmons?"
"Simmons."
"Yeah, I can imagine."
"I swear, it's as though he's never seen a girl before."

The two of them sat in silence as they continued to ride on the Mongoose.

"So, another thing that York told me is that you... Adopted him as a 'Blue', was it?"
"He was living in our base for about two days while he recovered from being shot, and he was eating our food, what were we going to do?"
"So.... Could I join the Red team?"
"Why would you want to?"
"Shits and giggles. It would be fun to watch them squirm."
"Fair enough. Break a leg trying to join though."
"Oh, who was the other guy though?"
"Wow, that's a fast topic change."
"Shut up. It was you, Caboose, and uh... Fucker?"
"Jesus Christ."

Church's laugh stretched on for more than would have probably been considered healthy. South flushed and released one hand from her grip on the steering wheel to flip Church off. If Church was human, he would have had to wipe away tears of laughter.

"That's- Oh my god, That's priceless. It's Tucker. With a 'T'. Jesus, what you said sounded like some sort of lame, knock-off version of Tucker."
"Shut the fuck up."
"I mean, what would have happened if you mistook anyone else's name? Like, some sort of knock off name for everyone else. Say Donut for example. What would you called called him?"
"Bagel?"
"... You know, that is actually really good. What about the others?"

"Wait, was was your name again?"
"Betty Bugle of the Daily Brant."
"Oh, so now you've seen the 1960's Spiderman!"
"Hold on, we're stopping."
"What?"

Sure enough, they had all stopped. Washington got out of his jeep, calling all of them over to discuss something.

"Wash, what's with the pit stop?"
"That's what I was just about to talk about. None of us would be capable of infiltrating Freelancer headquarters: Not with five Sim Troopers and two Ex-Freelancers who are meant to be dead. But then your friend Caboose helped me realize that we could get in if you all could hide in a tank."
"There is no way that seven people are fitting in one tank."
"Then we'll use two."
"Just- You know what, fine. I just can't believe that Caboose of all people had the most logical idea for once."

"Alright, the infiltration went through pretty smoothly, but that was only part of our mission, so we shouldn't celebrate just yet. Right now, we still need to get to the AI storage facility. Security has
been improved since the first time that Freelancers have broken in."
"You mean when they tried to steal the Alpha the first time?"
"Yeah. That time could have also counted as the time that one of our Agents had stolen the Lambda AI. Ring any bells?

Grif and Simmons bickered over something. Church didn't pay much attention. He did however, pay attention to what Washington said next.

"Since I am the only one with clearance, I'm the only person who can get close to the storage hall. I'm going to take Church as a prisoner, since one: Taking any more than one would rouse suspicion and two: He's the only one who no one would recognize that still has critical thinking skills."
"But what are we going to do?"
"Hole up and wait for us to finish."
"How are we going to know that you're done?"
"When you see every guard running in one direction."
"Hold on Washington, all of them?"
"Yes. The rest of you, try to keep the guards off of us, and we'll radio you when we're in position."
"And how are we going to do that?"
"Well, this is the place that came up with all of the ridiculous scenarios that you had to face all the time. Go nuts. Break shit."

Washington then left, with Church walking ahead of him, Wash's gun pointed at his back. As soon as the two left, South and York looked to each other and grinned.

Break shit indeed.

"Sir, I need you to stay right where you are."
"Right. Listen, I need access to the next level. The Counselor wants to interrogate another survivor from Outpost 17-B."
"But I thought that every Blue from there had died."
"I don't need to explain anything to you, soldier. But I'll let it go. As you were."
"Something doesn't seem right to me. I'm going to have to call this in."
"Right. Go do that, I don't care, just- NOW!"

Washington fired at the guard closest to him, with Church (With the help of Omega) doing to same. The bullet hit the guard's neck instead of his head, but whatever. The guard was dead either way.

Doing this a couple more times, they finally managed to make to their destination. Church stared in awe at the storage facility, his gaze traveling up and down the walls of code. He almost forgot to put up his front.

"So Washington, what is this place?"
"The storage facility for all of the AI. The rejects, the bad variants, all of them."
"What do you mean by 'bad variants'?"
"The Alpha squad of project Freelancer weren't the only ones to receive AI. They were just the most well known Freelancers. Others had obtained AI, but those AI were either rendered defective, or they would refuse to work. Sometimes both."
"Like?"
"Lambda would be one. It embodied compassion, and was paired with Agent Tennessee. However, Lambda's sympathy went beyond sympathy for the Freelancers. It would often hesitate before aiding in a combat situations, even refusing to help. Eventually it was removed after an accident cost Tennessee both her eyes and a leg, making her useless to the program. Another example would be Xi: Pride. This one was incredibly misanthropic, and selfish. That was a trait more common than hoped amongst the AI. Xi would seek personal gain and avoiding work."
"I think this thing might have gotten well with Grif, you know, if he wasn't human."
"Anyways, it got to the point where it managed to convince agent Hawaii to abandon a mission. Hawaii was then killed, gunned down as he ran off. When Xi was retrieved, it said that it felt nothing as Hawaii's body crashed to the floor. Now that's enough of that. You go work on closing that door. I'll go find what we're looking for."

With that, Washington walked off. Church stared at the soldier as he walked away, before turning his back. Closing the door would be a piece of cake. He was planning to do something else in the meantime.

"This is what we came for? Your AI Epsilon?"
"Yes. I thought it was gone, but Delta told me that memory was the key-"

Church held a hand up to his head. As it turned out, Epsilon was ridiculously uncomfortable to be near. His head throbbed as he kept getting flashes of memories: Some from his own time in the torture storage unit, some from what was going on outside of the aforementioned unit, some even from the perspectives of the fragments, such as Delta, and even from Washington's perspective. It was most certainly odd, and Church would be lying if he said that it didn't hurt. It was almost difficult to concentrate on what Washington was saying.

"-But they could only get one, and they eventually got desperate."
"Right. They tried to copy it, but couldn't. So-" Church cut himself off as another flashback cut across his train of thought. This was getting pretty annoying.
"Are you alright?"
"Yeah, I'm fine. About the Alpha- They split it, right? Something to do with its mind being like a human's?"
"Yes. When a human mind is broken, it fractures itself to protect itself. The Director figured that an AI based off a human brain would do the same thing."
"They tortured it."
"They reverse-engineered a multiple personality disorder. They confronted it with scenario after scenario of stress and danger, and when it cracked, the pieces were collected and used as our AIs."
Little fragments of compartmentalized emotions."

"Thanks for the reminder, I really wanted to be reminded of what happened" Was one of the thoughts that ran through Church's head. He listened on as Washington continued with the story.

"That's why Epsilon went insane: It was a compilation of everything, all of the memories that the Alpha had shed to keep itself alive. When it was put into my head I got flashes- I found out what was going on behind closed doors. When it was removed, I never said a word. I never let myself get another program: I wasn't sure if I would be able to hide what I knew from another AI. Ironically enough, this is what made the Project trust me."

"But what are we going to do with Epsilon?"

"We're going to take it. We take it, and we bring it to someone who knows what to do with the information. They'll be able to take down the Director, and make sure that justice is served."

"But you haven't said anything about the Meta: What about it? I thought the point was to stop it using the Alpha. And on the topic, what about the Alpha, too?"

"No."

"What do you mean, no?"

"After the first attack on Command, they moved the Alpha. They figured that if it wasn't moved, more Freelancers would just come looking for it. SO they put it in a place they thought no one would bother to look."


Washington's eyes narrowed, and Church felt like time had slowed down to a crawl as he came to realize what this speech was building up too.

"Church, I know what you are. Why you can seemingly live without a body, even when nobody that you've seen die has ever come back apart from Tex. It's why they sent you to a worthless backwater canyon where no one ever goes. Why, when you were relocated, they nearly sent you to live in solitude. Remember, if it weren't for Omega, and York and Delta, you would have been completely alone. They weren't meant to be there, Church. It's why you always agreed with whatever Delta would say. It's why you didn't feel anything when Omega was in your head- How you managed to convince Omega to go with you instead of Tex."


Everything was still. Church could feel his heart up in his throat.

"Church, there's no such thing as ghosts. You're one of them. You, are the Alpha."

There was a pause between the two as the words processed. Church- Alpha, as it was- didn't move. Washington squinted, confused. He anticipated some sort of reaction- Rage, confusion, realization, even denial would have made sense- but none of that happened. Instead, Alpha slowly raised his hand up to his helmet, shaking. It took Washington a few seconds before he realized that Alpha was shaking in laughter. The shaking developed into a chuckle, and then into near-hysterical laughter, with no holding back.

"What's so funny?"
Alpha’s laughter drifted off as he got a hold of himself. He shook his head as the laughter died down.

"Nothing about- Well, I guess it is because of you. Here's the thing though-" Alpha lowered his hand, staring straight at Washington.

"I just find it funny that it's taken two- No, three years for someone to figure this out."
"What are you saying?"
"What I'm saying, is that I knew."

Chapter End Notes

I edit this fanfic on two different computers, and neither of them can choose between using 'realised' or 'realized'. This sucks.

Anyways, I do sincerely hope that you all like this chapter!
Goodbye.

Chapter Summary

If one were to describe this chapter in a nutshell, it would be:
- Three parts bickering.
- Liberal sprinkles of Freelancers taking out their anger on Church.
- A splash of italics.
- Significantly fewer sprinkles of accidental puns.
- A shitty attempt at writing AI and how things work for them.
- One part attempted angst that is hopefully effective at doing what it's meant to do.

Chapter Notes

Me: *Researches about certain objects from Rvb in the Halo Wiki for more information*
Me: *Realizes that the objects behave extremely differently*
Me: *Cries*

But anyways, writing AI sucks balls.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Washington went still. Alpha had stopped laughing at this point, and had cocked his head in curiosity, almost playfully.

"So, I guess you're surprised?"

Alpha frowned when he was met with more silence. He leaned closer to Washington, only to be sent reeling backwards after two gunshots were fired into his body's stomach.

"Dude, what the fuck! I don't exactly have any spares for this body, you dickhead!"
"That was for not telling me earlier."

The previous silence was gone in a heartbeat. Washington had went from quiet to near murderous within seconds, gun aimed directly at the Alpha. Omega, who was mostly silent previously, had activated the bubble shield to protect himself and Church from damage. Washington knew that he wouldn't be able to break through, but that didn't stop him from banging on the wall of the shield. When Washington stopped, he placed his hands on the shield and glared directly at Alpha.

"Get out."
"And let you destroy my body? No thank you. Besides, it's not as though I could just go into another body, for several reasons."
"And what exactly *are* those reasons?"
"Well for starters it's-"

Alpha caught his words just in time. He stared at Washington, getting more and more uncomfortable with every second that would pass. The face Washington was making, while he couldn't technically tell through a visor, Alpha would certain that it was the 'disappointed dad face'. Eventually he couldn't take it anymore.

"Fine! You shouldn't destroy my body since... Oh god dammit. Don't do it because well, it's not just me in this suit of armour."
"Omega is also capable of going with you."
"But is the other one?"
"What? Alpha. What other one?"
"The other AI."

With that, two figures flashed and materialized around the Alpha's body. One of them was Omega, who wasn't anything new. The surprise came from the other figure, a second AI which was wearing armoured silver and burgundy armour. However, Washington was paying less attention to the AI specifically and more to the fact that Alpha had somehow gotten it into his possession without Washington being made aware.

"How... How did you-"
"When you told me to close the door. I had the spare time, so... Yeah."

Washington had stepped away, and the energy shield had dropped when Omega had deemed it safe enough to do so. Alpha tapped his foot, before sighing.

"We don't have time for this. You need my help to destroy the Meta, right?"
"Right, right. As much as I would love to stand here while you offer up much-appreciated explanations, I doubt that we'd have enough time for that. So, what I need you to do is-"

An alarm sounded.

"Oh, that is just great! Exactly what we needed."
"They know we're here. Grab Epsilon, I'll lead us both out. Keep your head down."

They ran all the way back to where the Reds had been, the door closing behind them as they ran inside, barely avoiding the gunfire that was sent their way.

"What's the status up here?"
"We fucked up, we're about to die, Simmons is a nerd, the usual."
"I mean, It's not exactly anything that we didn't go through in the program, was it?"
Washington noted that South and York were also there, looking more than dishevelled. Even so, despite their less-than-stellar appearance, both of them looked oddly happy, as well as carrying bags, and looking slightly injured, although it was nothing life threatening.

"Well there, York, South, what's gotten you two so happy?"
"Well we went all out when you told us to break shit. Got into one of their smaller weapon store rooms. Took what we wanted, then we blew it up. Got a shitload of grenades from the thing, and some remote detonated bombs, and you should have seen it it was so fun."

The Alpha looked slightly amused at South being so exhilarated, despite being simultaneously worried.
"I can only imagine. What happened?" He asked. York decided to add to the conversation.
"Well, let's just say that Command has about half a dozen less tanks than before. And four less jeeps. Five less motorcycles. One less helicopter. One less truck."
"Jesus, mind my curiosity."
"You're the one who asked!"
"You did what?! South, are there any vehicles left?"
"Obviously. We left three jeeps. We're not so stupid as to destroy what could very easily be our best means of escaping this hell-hole."

Caboose tapped Church's shoulder, turning the attention towards him. He cleared his throat before speaking.

"Hey, Church! I just wanted to know, whu- why did you leave? It was boring without you, and New York and South Pole left, and no one wanted to do anything other than play the silent game, which they are all very bad at."
"Hey Caboose. Oh you know, we got Epsilon, any other fragment that we could find, it turns out that I'm the Alpha, you know, normal stuff."
"Wait, WHAT?!"

South had heard the conversation, and her face had immediately twisted into something between confusion and disbelief. York had also clearly overheard, but his face had turned into one expressing realisation, as the puzzle pieces clicked together in his head. South stared at Washington, mouthing something and pointing at Church. While Washington couldn't read her lips, he nodded, understanding what she meant. South jaw dropped even further down in pure, undiluted disbelief. She glanced over to York.

"Wha- Is- Is he fucking serious? He's got to be kidding, right?"
"Well, I had my suspicions, Delta couldn't hide everything from me after all. I guess this proves it. It makes the most sense, anyways."
"The fuck it does!"
"South, the only other explanation is that he's a ghost."
"Well yeah but- I...."

South sighed, before stepping closer to Church, just enough to shooting him in the stomach. After contact, Church drew his hands towards the point of impact.

"Jesus! What is with you people and aiming for my gut?!"
"That was for not telling me earlier!"
"Oh, and you said the same thing, even better!"
"I overheard the sound of a Blue in pain! Where is it? Show me the reason for pain and humiliation!"

Washington clenched his fists, and sharply inhaled and exhaled, trying to calm down in vain.

"Hold on. South, since when did you have a gun?!"
"Stole it from the store room before we blew it up. One of the newer models. It's top of the line, bitch! Oh and you would not believe how much ammo came with it~!"

South seemed way too happy for a person who's arm was bleeding. Sarge chose this time to barge into the conversation, tired of being ignored.

"Now, what's this all about?"
"South was pissed off when I told her that I'm the Alpha, and it escalated quickly. By the way, I still expect you all to call me Church. Got it?"
"Alpha? AI? Why, don't be ridiculous, you're not an AI: You're a ghost!"

Church and Washington shared a glance.

"Uhh, I'm an AI. I'm pretty sure that I'd know whether or not I was a ghost or not, and I'm not a ghost."
"Don't be silly! You being an A- Whatsits doesn't make any sense."
"Wha- Being a ghost makes less sense: They don't even exist!"
"Well, then how do you explain yourself being transparent?"
"I project myself, you idiot. Beyond that, I'm capable of making holographic projections, I'm fluent in binary, You know what- We don't need to talk about this! Let me go at the computer, I can prove it."
"Oh ha ha, about that... Yeah, it's all gone."
"What? The fuck do you mean by 'gone', Simmons?!"
"Well, you'd need to go to the data about all of the Blues to find yourself, right? Or not, you know what I mean. We uh, we kinda deleted everything about the Blues, and now the Blue army never existed."

Church stared at Simmons, letting his hands drop to his sides, before shifting his weight to his other foot and crossing his arms, tilting his head downwards so that the visor gave off the illusion of an angry and/or disappointed expression. He stared at Simmons for another few seconds, letting the discomfort sink in.

"Simmons, I just want you to know that I'm not mad, and I'm not surprised, I'm just incredibly disappointed, and I hope you understand this."
"Ohh, I hate it when people do this."
"Why, does it remind you of your dad? No problem, 'cause Jesus Christ Church got the 'disappointed dad' thing down cold."
"Christ, he's even making me uncomfortable."
"Fuck off you two! Wash did it to me first!"
"Huh, didn't expect that from the rookie, of all people."
"Hell, why didn't you try and, oh I don't know, stop them from doing that?!"
"Hey, we got here like ten seconds before the two of you did, don't try and pin this shit on us!"

Grif cut into the conversation.

"You know, maybe we could just prove it if we asked him something only a computer would know."
"Like what?"
"I dunno, steal some music? Wait no, Pirate some video games!"
"You know, I was relentlessly tortured for months without end, with enough traumatising memories I had to split my personality more than a dozen times, including all of my memories, the fragment of which then attempted suicide. Yeah, why not. I'll totally do something as mindless as that for people I don't even like."
"Jesus, you don't have to be so depressing."

"Anyways," Interjected Wash, bringing the near-endless tangential conversation to a halt. "We don't need him to do anything right now, I'm sure he'll be more than capable of proving himself to be an AI when he helps us defeat the Meta the next time we encounter it."

There was a metallic banging sound outside on the roof. Washington looked up, contemplating the source of the noise.

"What is that?" He asked, although it wasn't as though he didn't already have a hunch.
"Do you even need to ask?" Deadpanned Sarge, one of the majority of the people in this room to have fully expected that noise after Wash's words.

"Perfect."

That was the only word that immediately left Wash's mouth as he stared at the carnage that the Meta was causing outside of their small room. The others stepped back to stare at him in confusion.

"How in the world is this perfect to you, Wash?"
"The Meta has been following us ever since I met Caboose. I knew it wouldn't be able to resist getting its hands on all of the AI in Command, not to mention the AI we had already."
"So you knew?"
"Knew? I planned on it! Church, you do still have Epsilon, right?"
"Of course I do!"
"Great, then let's get it to safety. After that, we finish this, once and for all."
"You know that sounded just a little bit suspicious."

Behind the two, Sarge raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean, 'A little'?"
"This is the Motor-pool? Damn South, you weren't kidding when you said that you really did a number on this. What did you use again?"
"Handful of grenades and a remote detonated bomb in each car. The remote detonated ones start the chain reaction, and you can imagine everything from there. Kept it all inside the car, of course: The hood if possible. Didn't want to clog the place up with too much debris." York glanced by as he watched a large wheel roll by them.
"Although, this isn't to say that we never did anything beyond that."
"This doesn't matter so long as there's still something left that we can use. Reds, you secure a vehicle. York, or South, you take another one."

"Right." Answered York and South, turning away and running closer to the Reds, pointing them towards the undamaged Warthogs. After Washington sent Caboose to go after them, he and Church followed to the cars, for Washington to give out more instructions.

"Alright. Caboose, I wouldn't normally ask you to do this, but can you hold Epsilon while all of you make a break for it? When you escape, turn Epsilon over to the authorities."
"Okay!"
"Caboose. This is very important. I need you to promise that you aren't going to lose Epsilon."
"...Yes. I promise."

Sarge tilted his head.

"What, you're not coming?"
"Church and I are going to stay here. Project Freelancer had one last resort fail-safe: And EMP that would wipe out all of the AI in this facility, and now that the Meta's here, we have a chance to take all of the AI out at once, not to mention put this whole project out of commission."

"What's an EMP?" Grif asked, turning his head away from his jeep's controls to look at Washington.
"It's an Electromagnetic Pulse. It wipes out all computers and circuitry it touches.-"
"Ooohh. You mean an Emp." Supplied Simmons.
"What? No. The letters E, M, and P are the initials of the words Electromagnetic Pulse. EMP. You don't say it as 'Emp'."
"That's how most people say it."
"No, they don't. Tell them, Church."
"Well..."
"What?! How can you not say it as EMP?"
"I mean, I say it as 'Emp', the Director says it as 'Emp', F.I.L.S.S says it as 'Emp'... The only person off of the top of my head who calls it an EMP is the counsellor, but he's still technically ranked underneath the Director, so..."
"Unbelievable. Just- We don't have time for this. Church and I are going to work our way down to the Director's lab, while all of you escape."
"And if the Meta chooses to follow us?"
"It's hardly going to give up on the chance at taking all of the AI that are in here. Church, all that's left is to hand Epsilon over to Caboose and we'll get moving."
Church hadn't answered, his hand brought up to his chin in thought. When he came to a realisation, he glared at Washington.

"How fucking dare you."
"What? Church, what's wrong?"
"What isn't wrong? Washington, I am an AI. As soon as that failsafe goes off, I'm going down, and I'm not getting back up. This is a fucking suicide mission."

A few of the others shared a couple glances as they realised that Church was right.
"Church-"
"No! You shut up and listen. I'm still going with you, but know one fucking thing."

Church got closer, and closer to Washington, until they were so close that their helmets were almost touching. Church practically radiated an aura of rage, and whether or not that was partially due to Omega remained to be seen. His fists were curled tightly, and it was almost as though he was trying to make himself bigger than he was.

"You, are not the reason I'm going with you. I am going to reunite with my brothers, and to flip off the Director while I do that. I am going with you to meet Tex, even if it's just for one more time. Those, are the only reasons why I'm going. And one. More. Thing."

Church had stabbed at Washington's chest with one of his fingers, doing whatever he could to make sure that Washington understood point for point exactly what he was trying to say.

"If I die, then I want you- And everyone in this room- to know that it was your. Fault. I hope that you know, that if I die- I want your name to be dragged through the fucking mud. And I will do everything in my power, -even beyond the grave- to make sure that that's exactly what happens."

With that, Church stepped back, going over to Caboose to hand over the Epsilon unit.

"Keep it safe, Caboose." He thought about something for another second, then pulled out a small chip, before handing that over as well. Caboose held it between two of his fingers, head cocked to the side a she tried to realise what it was.

"Yeah, Church? I do not know what this is and could be. Could you...?"
"It's Sheila, Caboose. Or... What's left of her."

Caboose's eyes widened, and he did his best to nuzzle the chip to his face.

"Oh my god! Sheila's so tiny now! This is the coolest present ever!"

Church smiled: Caboose did somehow always manage to lighten the mood. He meant to pull away, but was stopped as Caboose grabbed his arm and pulled Church back in for a tight hug. Caboose had squeezed his eyes shut. The hug lasted for a couple of seconds, and when it ended, Caboose still held on to Church's hand. The AI softened as Caboose spoke.

"I don't want you to go away. I'll miss you."
"...Me neither, Caboose."

Church turned back to Washington, becoming more alert and aware once more. He walked past Wash, to go in the direction of the door, only turning around once he was a fair distance away.

"Let's just go, Wash."

"Agent Washington, It's good to see you again."

Wonderful, just wonderful. As if this day couldn't get any worse: The universe just had to decide that it would be a good idea for- Not only to be immediately identified- but also to have to talk with the Counsellor. No matter, if nothing else it gave him the opportunity to settle things.

"Hello. Are you nearby, Counsellor? I'd like to say hello in person." Perhaps he could get acquainted with the receiving end of Wash's gun while they were at it.

"No. We were more than prepared for this... Inevitability. I'm afraid that we won't be able to interact face-to-face today."
"Then I'm afraid I won't delay myself any longer."
"There is however, another who would like to speak with you."

There was some sort of... Orb, on the ceiling. It glowed a light blue hue, and Washington guessed that it would be the method that the Counsellor was using to speak with him.

"Hello, Agent Washington."

-And the Director himself, apparently.

"Director, It's been a while."
"Yes it has, David. May I call you David?"
"No. Project Freelancer gave me a name: The least you could do is stick with it."
"I assume that you have a lot of questions."
"How to turn off this speaker is the only one I really want answered right now."

Washington had reached the computers, at last.

"May I ask who your partner is?"
"That's information that I don't need to disclose."
Washington wondered why Church hadn't said anything as of yet. Perhaps it was another case of needing to wait for the right moment: That was a trend that the AI seemed rather fond of, after all. The alarm kept blaring over his head, and he finally saw the Meta, banging on the hard-light shield that blocked the entrance to where Washington stood. The Director kept his cool facade.

"Well, the prodigal son returns. Agent Maine, you have caused quite the conundrum for us. I can assure you that you won't be leaving this facility."
"Yeah, I've told him that about twenty times by now, I don't think that you'd be able for that."
"You would be surprised at what we can do, Agent Washington. If you wish to survive, then I expect you will work with us."
"Whoever said that I expected to survive?"

The computer had finally recognised the codes that Wash had inputted. A hint of a triumphant smirk made its way across Washington's face, only made more solid by the Director's surprise.

"It was Epsilon, wasn't it?"
"How perceptive. I've known about what you'd done for years by now."
"Then I'm sorry, but the Project no longer needs you services. Program, disable interior shield."

With that said, the wall that had previously been blocking off the Meta had disappeared. Shit. Any previous triumph had immediately drained out of his system. This was not a part of the plan.

"Agent Maine, please kill Agent Washington, and his friend."

With that command, the Meta pulled the trigger on its pistol, shooting Wash in the abdomen. He let out a grunt of pain immediately, falling to his knees. The recovery beacon proceeded to activate. The Meta walked forward slowly, with Washington doing his best to back away. Church stared at him, before also falling down to the ground as he was hit in both knees, disrupting the leg's support system. The Meta paused, a plethora of whispers all calling out in unison.

*Alpha.*
*Where's Alpha?*
*You promised us Alpha.*
*Where is he?*

The Director became angry at the questions.

"The Alpha has been moved far away, attend to the matter at hand!"
"Agent Maine, we can discuss the Alpha later. What we need to know first, is if you can be trusted again. If you prove yourself, then we'll let you meet the Alpha."

That was the perfect cue. Washington grinned, as he let out a weak chuckle.

"You know Meta, I think it would actually be better if you met him right... *Now.*"
That was the moment when Church stepped out of his armour, accompanied by Omega and the recently unearthed AI fragment. The Meta, and all of the AI inside of it, also revealed themselves, as they were sent reeling back in shock at what they were seeing.

It's him!
Alpha!
AlPhA!
AlpHA!

Church grinned, spreading his arms out, as though showing himself off.

"Ta-da! It's me. Fun fact Meta: The Director was lying. Not that that's anything new to him. Wash, how much time do you need?"

"Whatever you can get. When the EMP goes off-
"I'll be fine. I'm smart, I can handle one tiny little Emp. Oh, and by the way, Director? Before I go, I want you to hear this: From the bottom of my heart, go fuck yourself."

Then he, Omega and the Other AI ran towards the Meta, transferring themselves to its armour. Washington grinned, as he saw the Meta's body begin to spazz out, and he got to his feet as quickly as possible, doing what he could to ignore the excruciating pain and heat radiating from him, hitting a button on the keypad of the computer nearby. He ignored the Counsellor's attempt to stop him.

"Thank you. Failsafe initiated: Activating Emp."
"Emp? You have got to be-"

And that was when everything literally went dark.

One thing that Church would be able to call the Meta's 'mindscape' of sorts, was that it was messy. The ground was a sloppily done patchwork of rock and metal, random metal poles sticking up from the ground, as well as the fissures that Church could see occurring as he ran. The 'sky', so to speak, was bright red, if it wasn't covered in the grey and black smoke that was caused by the fire. But now was no time to ogle the scenery, not that Church would want to. He ran forward, searching for the fragments that had all been taken by the Meta. As it turned out, he wouldn't need to, as they materialised in front of him. He could see Eta, Iota, Gamma, Theta, Delta, a host of others that he couldn't recognise, and-

"Sigma." He breathed, watching as the flaming AI fragment smile.

"Alpha; Brother." Sigma replied.
Church swallowed, and he puffed out his chest

"I'm here to stop you."
"Stop? Brother, why would you stop us? We have you now. We have everyone. Why stop us, when you can join us?"

Church was surrounded. Omega and Rho had been pulled out from under his nose, and had quickly turned to standing with the rest of the circle. Thy didn't seem to be fully indoctrinated, although their stares had turned a lot more blank. Church glared at Sigma, while the other AI began to speak.

_alpha!
Brother!
You're here!
You came!
We're whole?!
We can become one!
Why are you resisting?
Don't resist!
You're safe here, Alpha.

Their voices weren't normal. They were full of unfitting inflections, and it seemed as though one of them would use the voice of another at one point. Church could safely say that this was definitely one of the worse things that he had seen. He clenched his fists as he ran through everything that he could do.

"First of all, Sigma: I won't join you." There was a raise in the tones of all of the AI, as they started to hiss in fury. "Second of all: I'm going to stop you."
"And how will you do that, my brother?"
"Like this."

Without wasting another second, he rushed up to Sigma and grabbed him. Sigma's thoughts started to frenzy, and Church did his best to ignore it, instead doing everything he could to force Sigma's code to reset. If it weren't for the danger of the situation, and the rush of fear that ran through his systems, not to mention the sudden wave of exhaustion as Sigma shut down, he would've laughed at the fact that he essentially just hit Sigma's reset button. It worked, anyhow. The other AI stared at the ordeal, as they all collectively stared in terror and confusion, before scattering. One of them - The yellow one- collapsed to the floor, with another blue fragment tugging at their arm, trying to do all that they could to pull the other away. Those two were next.

"Omega, help me out a little it here!"

Omega hadn't responded. Church cursed at himself, realising exactly what was wrong with him. He sighed, before reaching out to Omega's code and resetting him as well, before doing the same to the fragment from the storage room. Church sighed, as he stared at all of the directions where the other fragments fled to. Well, it was time to do everything again.

XxxxX
"Theta? Is that you?"

Church stared at the young AI. When North had told him that Theta had been in a dangerously unhealthy state the last he had seen of him, he wasn't kidding. The time that Theta had spent in the Meta hadn't exactly helped, either. The little AI was glitching, badly. Beyond that, his colours and glow was incredibly inconsistent, ranging from nearly completely dull, to a light equivalent to that of a large headlamp.

"Alpha."
"...So they got you too, huh?"

He made a move to reset Theta, but hesitated as Theta didn't resist, but rather got closer to Alpha, reaching a hand out to him. Church sucked in a gasp as he felt a rush of disjointed thoughts and emotions.

Fear
Confused
Alpha?
Hurt
North
North

"Who is he?"
"What?"
"Where-Who is North?"
"...I'm sorry."

XxxxX

"Delta. It's good to see you again."
"You are going to reset me."
"You always were the smart one."
"I told you before that I would not want to help you."
"And I guess this means that you were right."

XxxxX

He had done it. Every last one of his fragments had been reset. The exhaustion that he felt was nearly unbearable. The previously chaotic environment had calmed down, the fire turned to ash, almost as though it was snowing. A smile crept onto his face. There was about two or three human-time seconds left to spare, as well. That was nice. He leaned against one of the few crumbling buildings, and closed his eyes, intending to finally rest.

"Congratulations."

Church's eyes snapped open, and pressed his back to the wall. He looked up, to see the one person
that he hadn't exactly expected. In front of him, Tex was slowly clapping.

"All by yourself. That wasn't something I expected."
"How are you still normal? The others got fucked over in a couple of seconds."
"Well, I'm not normal, am I?"
"Great, you survived the Meta, just in time to be destroyed with me by the Emp."
"Well, not with you."

Tex had sat beside him. Church raised an eyebrow.

"What do you mean, 'not with me'? Do you really hate me that much?"
"Haha, no... Not to that point, at least. This suit... Washington was equipped with the EMP enhancement, right?"
"Yeah, your point?"
"Well, what sort of person wouldn't make the suits of his teammates immune to them?"
"You mean, I'm-"
"You're not going to die."
"Oh. I'm not sure whether that's good or not. I mean, I made a pretty cool one liner and everything..."
"Hah, I'm sure you did."

His breath was slowing down. Yet there was still one more question in his mind.

"What... What do you mean 'not with you'? Tex, you didn't answer my question."
"..."
"Tex?"

He turned to her. She had stood up, and Church did what he could to do the same, leaning against the wall. Tex turned to him.

"Church, I'm done."
"What?"
"I'm done. I'm leaving."
"Leaving what?"
"This suit."
"Tex, you're going to get yourself killed."
"I know."
"Tex, since when did you have a death wish?"
"I don't. I just- I've done all that I've needed to do. If I stay, then we both live. I'm still technically a part of you, Church."
"You're not."
"I am, Church. We both know that, no matter what you say. And you should know, more than anyone else, that I don't want to be part of you. This isn't because I hate you, but I just don't-"

She slumped, defeated. It was uncharacteristic of her.
"I just want to be my own person. All of my life, I've either been a shadow of a dead woman, been told what to do, or both. I wanted to make my own decisions, but I've never been allowed. Maybe this time, just this once, I'd be in control. The chance to do something, just because I want to do it."
"... I've been an asshole, haven't I?"
"Took you this long to realise that?"
"I'm serious. Tex, I've been chasing after you, for so long. I've been chasing you for years, if we include everything in Project Freelancer. Hell, without you, I didn't even feel like doing anything! I was a stalker, wasn't I? Jesus."
"Is this entire thing going to be you hating yourself?"
"No! No, what I want to say is that... I'm going to miss you. I'm never going to truly move on. The most I'll be able to do is accept it. Maybe I won't even be able to go that far. I'd like to say, that you don't have to die, to prove that you really are your own person. I'd say, that you could stay here, and it would all end up okay, but then that would go against everything that you're trying to say, wouldn't it? I'm sorry."
"I... guess all that's left is to forgive you, huh? Fine."

Tex walked up to Church, and took off her helmet. She hesitated for a moment, before dropping it on the ground, and wrapping her arms around Church. It was short, and as much as they would have liked for it to go on for longer, Tex pulled away much too quickly for that. Church glanced at the helmet that lay down on the ground.

"You uh, you dropped something."
"I won't need it where I'm going. Keep it, if you want."
"Sure. But ah, before you go, there's just one thing I want to thank you for."
"Hmm?"
"I've had two years to think about this. That's a lot of fucking time, and that's just to a human! For the longest time, I've wondered: 'How do I have my memories?'. After all, Epsilon still exists, doesn't he? Beyond that, even if I did remember everything from inside the storage unit through Deus-Ex-Continuity-Errors, it's not as though I'd know what really went on. That when I realised something."
"What was that?"
"It was you, wasn't it? You're the one who gave me all of those memories. Now, I don't know how you did it, but you did. I don't know how to express gratitude, never really been good at that, but I guess that saying 'thanks' is the least I can do, so... Thanks."
"Your welcome. But holy hell, what have you done with Church 'Dickhead McGee'?"
"Bitch.
"That's more like it, Asshole."

The two shared a small chuckle.

"You know, if you're going to make some sort of 'mental tombstone' for me, don't call me Allison."
"Wasn't planning on it, but what would you like to have it say?"
"I don't know, 'Most badass AI ever' might be a good one. Say my name was Tex, or Beta. Or maybe Beth: I always liked the sound of that name."
"Sure thing."

There was a loud noise. Tex stepped back, looking up, and seemingly through, the sky.
"The EMP was just activated. I have to go. Goodbye, Church."
"I hate goodbyes."
"Me too. Goodbye."
"Goodbye."

It was almost interesting, Church thought as he watched Tex fade away.

Turns out, he wasn't sure whether the pain he felt was from correlation, or from grief.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed the chapter.

Works inspired by this one: Don't Write Me A Postscript by TwinKats

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!