give peace a chance

by adjourn

Summary

In which Jason finds inner peace, and Vaas is very confused.

Notes

This is the fluffiest, most ridiculous thing ever. I just really like Vaas and I think him and Jason would be so sweet and also completely unrealistic, like wow. So here is nearly 8k of sweet Vaason.
Next stop, Pajay! We'll see. Maybe just for you, coatsandjumpers.

Title is the John Lennon song.
Disclaimer: I made everything about the Rakyat up. It is in no way supposed to resemble any existing philosophy or culture, and if it does, then that is pure coincidence.
"I can't come with you," says Jason.

"What the fuck," says Riley.

"I'm sorry, but I'm staying here. I need to." Jason grasps Riley's shoulder and smiles reassuringly.

"Are you still high?" Liza asks, alarmed. Which doesn't make any sense, really, since the last time he was high was at least hours ago (possibly days; time has sort of been a blur). But he can understand her concern.

Jason shakes his head. "No. You guys should leave without me."

"What the fuck," says Riley, again, and punches him in the face.

There is a long discussion. Jason tries to explain:

His time on Rook isn't a constant stream of violent motion, all stabbing people and blowing shit up. There are times when he's forced to be still: waiting for a plan to come together or his battered body to hurry the hell up and heal. He spends most of these periods at the temple or reclaimed Rakyat outposts, where there are always warriors about. Honestly, he finds most of them dull. Their capacity for devotion and bravery is admirable, but that doesn't make up for the fact that, generally, the warriors are not particularly engaging conversationalists.

So when Citra ("Crazy bitch," Riley mutters) isn't around, he talks to old people.

Listen — Rakyat senior citizens are cool, okay? They have wisdom and shit hidden in their wrinkles, which they love imparting upon him in hopes of educating the "silly little white boy."

A lot of this wisdom involves the best way to skin animals or where to aim your arrow for the quickest death or how to properly snap someone's neck. The elder Rakyat aren't too big on guns. They're an invention of the modern era, too impersonal to be weapons for men of honor. Killing, an ex-warrior tells him, is about being close to death — watching the life drain from your enemy's eyes as if you are looking into a mirror.

But they teach him other things, too. Jason isn't staying to become a psychotic, pseudo-Rakyat warrior. He's staying to find harmony.

In the old days, when the Rakyat lived (mostly) peacefully on the islands, their spiritual doctrine was quite different. The warrior goddess was not a leader so much as an idol, a figure to pay respects to and ask for blessings on a hunt, occasionally taking groups out to spend days in the jungle and become immersed in its natural balance. She did not make decisions for the tribe or
command its people. There was a small council that oversaw Rakyat affairs, composed chiefly of scholars and priests.

The way of living back then was to act with understanding. Violence is a necessity born of survival, but understanding it — its means, its purpose, its participants — would lead you to a path of least bloodshed. You must always pursue this path, and inflict harm only with reason of bringing peace to both yourself and your enemy, as a sacrifice.

Now, the elders say, shaking the heads, it is all about battle. It is about killing, winning. What the young warriors do not see is that killing is never winning. You who causes pain is always losing.

But doesn’t the killer benefit? Jason asks. He wins because he gets the most out of it. He takes everything the loser has — his possessions, his pride, his life.

He gets a smack on the shin for that, and then they tell him to remember this: Winning is not taking. Winning is giving.

The path to understanding is a tumultuous one. You must undergo great hardship before even coming close to comprehending the Rakyat definition of harmony. But when you do finally lay down your weapons and allow your soul to become one with death, with nature and with the stars, you will be on your way to reveling in the beautiful balance of things, and be joyous at last.

"You must drown in blood before you ascend to the heavens," Jason finishes. He waits calmly for his friends to process his words. Admittedly, it's a bit much to suddenly spring onto those who haven't practically lived with the Rakyat, experienced the truth of it all firsthand.

"So you're staying to become a Rakyat hermit," Riley says slowly.

"Well, I wouldn't call it that," Jason says. "I'm staying to align my spirit with the balance of world. I expect it to be a very fulfilling experience."

"Right." Riley nods. "And...you're giving up violence. How will you even survive?"

"I'm not giving up violence. I will commit only violence I understand," Jason explains patiently.

"Jason," Keith interjects, "I don't know if you can hear yourself, but you sound like a fucking whackjob. We all went through some — some fucked-up shit, but you can talk to a therapist and find inner peace back in California. Just. Just get on the goddamn boat. None of us want to be here any longer."

"I'm sorry, guys, but this is something I can only do here." Jason pauses at the sound of helicopter blades in the distance, then lets out a huff of laughter at his friends' panicked expressions. "Don't worry. That's just the CIA. They're coming to pick you up."

"Excuse me?" says Daisy.

"I mean, I had faith in your boat-fixing skills and everything, but it would suck if you just ran into more pirates on your way out and got kidnapped again. So I made a call."

"Fucking cool," says Oliver. It's the most excited Jason has seen him since they got on this island. Understandably so. "The CIA, dude."
The helicopter lands, the sand rippling beneath it. They climb in, one-by-one, until only Riley and
Jason are still standing on the beach, the force of the wind whipping their clothing around them.

"Are you really not coming with us?" Riley shouts, voice cracking, over the roar of machinery.

Jason draws him into a hug. "I'm sorry, Riley. I haven't been a great brother to you, and I know
I'm making it even worse by pulling this shit. But I have to do it. You can still get out and be
happy in the normal world, so please. Just do it for me. And if not me, then Grant. Be happy."

"I, I'll try. I will. And you too, Jason," Riley says tightly. "You be happy, too."

It's been just over a month since Jason Brody left the Rook Islands with his friends in a precious
little CIA helicopter, likely forever. Vaas has taken over now that Hoyt has been deposed, and life
is rife with violent crime and drugs and the ransoming of innocents. Things are a bit boring, really.
It's disappointing that the feared Snow White turned out to be such a pussy after all, Vaas thinks.
Jason spiced things up.

Vaas reclines in his chair as he contemplates all the fun he had tormenting Jason, watching him
adapt to the utter chaos of Rook, watching his transformation into a murderer. Good fucking
times.

Minutes later, Carlos tears up the path to the veranda.

"Vaas! You're not gonna fucking believe this, man," Carlos says, out of breath. "Andreas just saw
Snow White near one of the northern camps."

What the fuck.

Vaas leaps out of his seat immediately, and Carlos takes a careful step back. "Are you shitting me?
You better not be messing around with me. I'm not in the mood for fucking jokes, you know
that?"

"Andreas wouldn't joke about this," Carlos says. "I think it really is Snow White."

Huh. Would you fucking look at that. Jason Brody, back to play some more.

"Well then, hermano." Vaas grins, terrible and wide. "Let's go find a princess."

They find Jason a ways off from a Rakyat outpost, being shot at by about a dozen of the assholes.
Vaas orders his men to kill everyone but the "blanquito, I got some big plans for him, my friends."
The fight (slaughter) is over in moments; the Rakyat never even see the pirates coming.

Jason, to Vaas’ delight, does not flee as he approaches. In fact, he merely stands there, holding his
STG loosely in one hand, shirtless with red warpaint and blood smeared across his chest and beads hanging from his neck. He's gotten far more muscular since Vaas last saw him, and that reminds Vaas of the last time he saw Jason and how the motherfucker stabbed him. Multiple times.

"Jason!" Vaas calls out, grinning. "It's nice to see you, hermano. Been wa-ay too long."

Up close, now, Vaas can see that Jason is entirely unperturbed. He seems almost nonchalant. It throws Vaas off his initial plan to tackle the asshole and beat him to death with his bare hands.

"It's been a while. I didn't expect to see you again," Jason says. "Did the stabbing not take?"

Fucking wow. There's something wrong with Snow White. He says the barb so placidly that Vaas doesn't even think it was meant to be rude.

"No, no," Vaas says. "As you can see, I'm very alive. What about you, eh, Jason? What have you been doing? You're acting a little strange, amigo."

"I've been in the jungle for the past month, learning to synchronize my energy flow with the world. I'm starting to understand the Rakyat's spiritual path, now. Meeting you again has really helped. I don't feel like I want to kill you at all," Jason says meditatively. "In fact, I would like to give, not take." He takes off one of his bead necklaces and places it gently in Vaas' hand. "This is for you."

Vaas stares.

"Maybe I'll see you again," Jason says. Then he walks off into the tree line.

Moments later, Carlos jogs up to Vaas. "Should we go after him?"

Vaas looks at the necklace in his hand. Each of the beads is hand-carved, with clumsy engravings on some. He spots the Chinese word for love, about the only character that a white boy (or Vaas, for that matter) would know.

Un-fucking-believable.

"No," says Vaas. "Let him go."

Snow White has obviously gone crazy. Which is just plain fucking hypocritical of him, calling Vaas insane for so long when Jason's the one who's really lost it. Vaas is not crazy. Vaas is fucking spectacular. And Vaas is going to find out who made Jason finally snap and chop them into little pieces for thinking they can come in and fuck around with his things.

He finds Jason's little hideout after some effort. He's holed away in a ramshackle cabin deep in the jungle; there's heat puffing from the chimney and the soothing sound of a stream nearby. It's disturbingly idyllic. Vaas is struck with the tremendous urge to burn it to the ground, but instead he whistles a merry tune and strolls inside.

Jason is sitting on a cushion with his eyes closed, incense and candles smoldering around him. He's shirtless again, but bare of war paint. Sweat drips from the curve of his chin and glistens on his chest. The soft wisps of smoke curl around him like he's a mystical fucking goddess.
Vaas bursts into hysterical laughter.

"What the fuck are you doing?"

Jason opens his eyes. He blinks at Vaas, as if unsure whether or not he's really there, then snuffs out the candles and incense.

"Seriously, hermano, are you trying to imitate my fucking sister or something?" Vaas suddenly remembers that Citra is dead. "Wait a minute. You killed my sister. Now you're trying to take her place? You're one sick fuck, you know that?"

"I'm not imitating her. Your sister preached the opposite of the old Rakyat ways," Jason says. He seems annoyed, Vaas notes gleefully. "What are you doing here?"

"Just wanted to check up on you, my friend. See how things are working out —the ins and outs, this and that." Vaas pats Jason's shoulder companionably. "And really, really, Jason, I wanted to know what the fuck happened to you. Why are you like this? It's fucking crazy, man. You're fucking crazy, living in the middle of the jungle like an animal. Why didn't you go back to sunny California, huh, white boy? That was your last fucking chance to leave. This place isn't a little spiritual getaway that you can just fly away from anytime you want."

"I'm not planning on leaving, Vaas," Jason says solemnly. "I'm very serious about finding balance. And when I find it, I will find happiness. The elder members of the Rakyat told me the way to harmony is through understanding bloodshed. I think that here is the best place for me to reach that understanding. Especially with you being here. I will refrain from committing violence against you unless I can comprehend the depth of it."

"Jason. Jason. No offense, hermano, but you are fucking insane," Vaas hoots. "You know why I left the Rakyat? Because they're all crazy, just like you. My fucking god."

"I'm sorry you feel that way," Jason says peaceably. Any visible irritation has been washed away by a tidal wave of calm. "I've answered your question. Did you need something else?"

Vaas smiles, razor sharp. "Yes."

He brings out a dagger and moves to stab Jason (in the shoulder, possibly in the chest later if he gets carried away, maybe slice open his belly and watch the blood well up like an ocean, watch him writhe as he holds his intestines in with his own two hands), but he's swiftly intercepted by a sticky palm and a sweep to his legs. Before he knows it, he's lying on the ground, disarmed and very bewildered as to what just happened.

"Holy shit, amigo," says Vaas, staring up at Jason. He's sweaty still, and his chest is heaving. White boy is even more attractive than usual, fucking Christ. "Where the fuck did you learn that? Is there a ninja camp in this jungle that I don't know about?"

"I told you — I'm finding balance with nature."

Then, Jason drops the dagger on the cabin floor and walks out the door.

"Hey! Jason! Where are you going, hermano? Aren't you gonna kill me? You stabbed me before; I'm sure you can do it again."

When Vaas goes to look outside, Jason has vanished. Fucker.
After some careful deliberation, Vaas decides that he isn't going to kill Jason. He's just going to annoy him so much that Jason tries to kill him and breaks his absurd religious creed, and then — well, we'll see where it goes from there.

(Vaas isn't fucking crazy. He's done the same goddamn thing over and over and over and over again, and it hasn't worked. Nothing — nothing! — has fucked changed. Jason Brody is still alive and well and gone off the deep end. He's not killing him again. He won't.)

It's a promise, hermano, and Vaas Montenegro does not break his fucking promises.

A week later, Vaas returns to the cabin. This time, Jason is sitting on a small wooden chair (that he probably built himself, considering how ugly and structurally unsound it looks — which is fucking ridiculous because who the hell builds their own chairs?), gritting his teeth as he prepares to pry a bullet out of arm. With his fingers.

Vaas stays in the doorway and watches. He'll give Snow White credit; he really knows how to dive right in there, no hesitation. He lets out one or two pained gasps that Vaas holds back snickers at, before getting the bullet out and dropping it to the floor.

"Very nice, Jason," Vaas says, clapping. "Very brave."

The look Jason gives him is astonishingly temperate, considering how hard he's breathing. The blood must really be pumping. Vaas figures now is an optimum time to rile him up.

"Why don't I help you patch that up?" Vaas offers. He smiles innocently when Jason hesitates.

Jason nods at the medical supplies strewn across a blanket on the floor. "Sure. Thanks," he says, a bit breathlessly.

Vaas kneels beside Jason and grabs a bottle of saline solution. "This is some nice shit you got here. Only quality medicine for the white boy, right, right. Iodine, though? The fuck did you get this from?"

He opens the bottle, then seizes Jason's arm. "Hey. I asked you a question. The fuck did you get this from?" He skirts his thumb right at the edge of the bullet wound, and Jason twitches. Hah.

"Are you going to answer me?" Vaas says. He presses down with his thumb. Jason tenses but otherwise gazes serenely at him, utterly silent.

Oh, it's fucking on.

"Okay, okay. I see that you're not interested in sharing," Vaas says. "That's fine. Maybe we'll have story time later." He digs further into the wound, relishing in the slight shudder in Jason's breathing. "I've got to clean this, hermano. It might hurt a little bit. Just know that I want the best for you. Okay, Jason?"

He gives one last hard press before removing his thumb, then tips the saline over the wound. Jason's breath stutters again.

"You alright there?" Vaas asks. "I know, I know, it hurts. But big strong white boy like you can
take it, yeah?"

Jason's stare is unflinchingly temperate. Vaas is truly impressed by the amount of willpower he possesses. And excited. It looks like Snow White really is in there, under all the hippie peace crap.

"Of course you can. You're a Rakyat warrior. It's too bad they all hate you because you killed my sister. They all want to kill you now, huh? So sad," Vaas says. "I mean, you did kill my sister, amigo. I hope you know how fucking rude that was."

"I didn't kill your sister," Jason says finally. His voice is taut with pain.

"What?" says Vaas. He caps the saline solution.

"She jumped in front of me when Dennis tried to kill me. He stabbed her on accident."

Vaas huffs. "Well, that was real fucking dumb of her, wasn't it?"

"I wouldn't have killed your sister. Even though she was wrong," Jason says grimly. "About a lot of things."

Vaas pats Jason's cheek. "It doesn't matter, my friend. She's dead. And besides, I'm sure you've killed plenty of other people's brothers and sisters by now."

"Probably," Jason admits. Vaas moves to bandage up his arm. "Maybe you can tell that to the Rakyat. I can't go to town without them attacking. It isn't helping my path of least bloodshed."

"They are the ones shooting you, then?" Vaas laughs. "That's fucking funny. Snow White, the great Rakyat warrior. Wanted dead by his own peoples."

"Yeah, well, they think I murdered Citra. And anyway," Jason grins wryly, "it was fun playing pretend while it lasted."

Vaas grins back in solidarity. He knows the feeling; he played warrior, too, way back when.

Okay. That hadn't worked at all, Vaas acknowledges when he's back at his base. Must be the hippie peace magic rubbing off on him. Fuck. The next attempts will be better.

"Jason, my friend, is that a poncho?"

"Yeah. Here, take this," Jason hands Vaas a ceramic vase. It's heavy with water and wildflowers. "It's good that you're here. You can perform the cleansing."

"What is this?" Vaas peers suspiciously at the assorted flower petals floating in the vase.

"It's water from a spring a couple miles. The petals are from the Arabian jasmine, which to the Rakyat, represent purity and honor. It's like the essence of the jungle," Jason explains patiently. "Please pour it on my head."

Vaas gives Jason a considering look. Snow White, dressed in his dark red poncho, seems
completely serious.

"Whatever you say. You're one weird fucking bitch," Vaas says.

Then he drops the vase. It shatters, ceramic shards scattering across the floor. Water seeps into Vaas' shoes.

"Oops. Sorry, hermano."

"It's alright," says Jason. He bends over to pick up the flower petals, then lays them all carefully in a patch of sunlight streaming through the window. "I'll make another trip to the spring. It'll be good to immerse myself in nature's balance a second time."

His poncho flutters as he leaves. It actually looks good on him, Vaas realizes. What a dick.

"Hermano, it's a real shame that you're out here, living the sad hermit life now," Vaas says, watching as Jason curls his knife around a small slab of wood. Pretty boy is always carving shit. Half the floor is littered with tiny wooden animals; Vaas kicks them out of the way wherever he goes just to be contrary. "It's a waste of that pretty boy mouth. Could've been put to use in much better places."

Jason — smarmy little shithead that he is — asks, "Really? Like what?"

"You know. Announcing on the radio, singing." Vaas grins. "Sucking dick. Seriously, I think that you have a lot of potential as a cocksucker. You kind of look the part, right? I bet you would really like it."

Vaas waits for some sort of outraged remark. Maybe it'll piss off Snow White enough to get up, sock him in the jaw; white boys are always so sensitive about this kind of thing, more than most men are.

Instead, Jason says: "The Rakyat do not forbid sex. Shouldn't you know this?"

"Hey, just because I grew up with those psychos doesn't mean I learned their fucked up philosophy or whatever." Vaas pouts. He's insulted that Jason even groups him together with those assholes.

"Of course," says Jason agreeably. "So now that we've established that I can suck all the dicks I want, are you done for today? I want to finish this cassowary."

Vaas goes. He's so goddamn done. Snow White will even admit to Vaas — to Vaas, the man who tried to traffick and/or kill him and his friends — that he's fine with sucking dick. What is wrong with people who find harmony?

Subsequent attempts do not go any better. In fact, as far as pissing off Jason, they go even worse.
"Why are you hanging from a tree?"

"Changing blood flow is good for clearing up my energies and allowing me to expand my mind."

"Okay. I'm going to sit here and throw rocks at you, then."

"Cool. That'll really test my concentration. Actually, we should talk, too. From here, I'll be able to see through your perspective."

"What the fuck is wrong with you, hermano? Please. Tell me."

But Vaas stays and talks, anyway.

"Isn't killing against your philosophy? You're a damned hypocrite, white boy."

"I understand the Rakyat's deaths to be in the natural order of things. Besides, they attacked me first."

"Sure, amigo, sure — holy fuck! How the fuck did you do that?"

"Align your energies with the jungle, Vaas."

Jason proceeds to dispatch of four more Rakyat in the span of thirty seconds, using only hand-to-hand combat. Vaas spends the rest of their trek through the jungle bothering Jason about where he learned how to fight like Mr-fucking-Miyagi.

"What is this supposed to be?"

"A crocodile."

"It looks like a fucking fish. What about this one? Wait, no, hermano, let me guess. A leopard? You like those pretty cats, huh? Reminds you of yourself. All big and tough."

"That one's my favorite, actually."

"Really? Oh shit. Jason. It looks like I broke it. Oh, and this one, too. And this piggy. Oh my god. I am so sorry."

"All things are destroyed in the end. You're just speeding up the cycle."

"You don't even care if I fuck up your shit? You're such a pussy."

"I'm carving more right now, anyway. You want to learn?"

"Learn? Fuck off, amigo. I can carve this shit way better than you. Just fucking watch."

Vaas ends up carving a very crude tiger. Jason makes a truly unfortunate bear. He sets both of them on the mantle of the fireplace, beside a few scented candles that make the cabin smell like
"You know, Jason, your hair is really fucking stupid. How do you even keep it standing up like that, huh? It looks like somebody electrocuted you. Shit, it's fucking embarrassing."

"That reminds me — I need to cut my hair again."

"You cut your own hair? No fucking wonder it looks so bad. Give me that, hermano, I'll cut it for you."

"Sure. Thanks, Vaas."

Jason's hair is really fucking soft. Damn it. Vaas runs his fingers through it a few more times than strictly necessary.)

So, yeah. Those are all miserable failures.

He also tries insulting Jason's warpaint ("Spiritpaint," Jason insists, "So I may be one with the jungle."). his shitty attempts at making furniture, his meditation habits, his choice in incense, his fucking homemade windchimes — all he gets are mild responses or tranquil stares. He mocks Jason's friends once and somehow they end up bonding over hunting techniques. Vaas doesn't even fucking know anymore.

At this point, it seems like Vaas has spent the better part of a month making friends with Jason. Annoyingly enough, he can't even find it within himself to be displeased at the thought.

"Hello, my friend," Vaas says cheerily as he strolls into the cabin. Another day, another dollar. Jason is seated on a pile of quilts by the fireplace, rummaging through his bag for something.

"Hey Vaas," Jason greets absently. He gestures with one hand for Vaas to sit beside him, still searching with the other.

"How are you doing, Jason? Tired of the jungle yet, hiding up here like a pussy?"

"Not really." He's fiddling with whatever he's found, now. "How are you?" Jason inquires politely. There's a slight lilt to his voice that tells Vaas he's amused by how much his passiveness pisses Vaas off.

Vaas, honest to fucking god, wants to punch him in the face.

Then Jason turns to face him, and he sees what Jason has taken out. He had been packing a bowl. Vaas is immediately interested.

"The old Rakyat bullshit tells you to light it up?" Vaas says. He takes the lighter and pipe, a fine
glass one that Jason had probably traded some pelts or carvings or maybe blowjobs for, psycho that he is, when Jason offers them to him. He smokes half the bowl as Jason replies.

"No. The elders never said anything about weed. It's just fun. Although I think one of them might have advised me to try shrooms," Jason adds thoughtfully.

Vaas laughs. "Now that shit, that shit will fuck you up. Hallucinations are like losing control of reality, hermano. All the weird things from your subconscious will come to life, like," he makes a 'whoosh' sound as he hands the pipe back, "It's fucked up. That's what happened when you stabbed me! Stabbed me. Telling you to do that — those Rakyat bastards are really crazy, huh?"

"Not crazy," Jason corrects sedately. "Enlightened."

"You forgetting they tried to kill you?" Vaas says. "Even the ones hobbling around on their canes and shit want you dead."

"And I killed them, when they came after me. It's necessary; I realize that now." Jason shrugs. "That doesn't mean we aren't enlightened."

"...You know, Snow White, you're pretty fucking weird now."

Jason snorts. He takes a hit, and Vaas feels warmth glow in his chest as smoke fades around them."You're one to talk."

"Hey, amigo, I am not fucking weird. I don't know what sort of false impression that you got of me, but we've known each other for, what, almost three months now? How can you even think that?" Vaas says.

Jason's packing another bowl now. "Fine, fine," he says. He breathes out smoke, heavy with scent in the same way incense is.

"No, no, no," says Vaas. "You can't just mindlessly agree with everything I say. Is that really what those Rakyat fuckers taught you?"

"I don't. I disagree with you all the time, about guns and human trafficking and the Rakyat," Jason points out. Which, he's right. Whatever. Vaas takes the pipe.

"But you never fight with me, hermano. Where the fuck is the Snow White that killed me?"

"Still here." Jason taps the center of his chest and grins. He is shirtless excepting for a long, translucent piece of cloth that he drapes over his back and arms like he's a priest. He has a bit of red spirit paint on his cheek, in the shape of a star. He looks absurd.

Vaas wants to kiss him.

So, he sets the pipe aside, pushes Jason gently down onto the quilts, and does just that.
Things don't change all that much. Vaas is still incredibly fucking annoying, and Jason is also incredibly fucking annoying in a different way, but now a lot of their time together is interspersed with making out.

(Jason's a great fucking kisser. When Vaas thinks about all the practice he must have had in order to achieve such a level of technical skill, he wants to track down every single person Jason has ever kissed before and slice off their lips. But because he's a nice guy, and considerate of Jason's feelings, Vaas doesn't do that.

Also, that would mean leaving Rook — and subsequently, Jason — for an extended period of time. And that's just not fucking happening. Vaas has a goddamn empire to run, and a pretty, murderous hippie to fool around with.)

When he isn't terrorizing Rook and selling people into slavery, Vaas spends as much as time as possible with Jason. There's just something about Snow White; he's changed, he's changed a fucking lot, but he's unmistakably the same asshole who thundered around the islands months prior and fucked up Hoyt's operation and killed what must have amounted to hundreds of people. Vaas sees Snow White in the way Jason snaps Rakyat necks —cruel and methodical — and in his dogged pursuit of "harmony," an admirable, immeasurable determination that Vaas has never seen before. Well, at least not in someone he hasn't managed to kill.

Vaas has reached his own understanding about killing, in that way: He isn't meant to kill Jason. He's meant to live for him, inexorable.

They go to town sometimes. People keep their distance from Vaas out of fear now that he rules the island, sending him wary glances when they think he isn't looking. People keep even further away from Jason because he is, Vaas overheard one day, a "sociopath disguised as a peace-loving hippie," which Vaas would like to note is probably pretty accurate. He wonders how many of these people's family and friends Jason has killed — pirates, mercenaries, possibly Rakyat. They're sensible to be afraid of Jason because of that alone, and then there's the fact that he's still unflinchingly lethal when he feels it's "necessary." Vaas understands some more things about Jason now, and about himself, but he still doesn't know how Jason justifies the brutal deaths he delivers in self-defense, or why Jason didn't just finish the job when Vaas attacked him that one time.

Well, Vaas supposes it doesn't really matter. He knows why Jason won't kill him now: the fucking power of love, amigo. And also some other bullshit that is largely irrelevant, because they're not what allows Vaas to hold Jason's hand in the street and get to witness the absolutely horrified looks on people's faces.

It's even more fun to trap Jason in his seat at the bar (where he likes to distribute dreamcatchers), push both hands on his thighs, and kiss him for everyone to see, open-mouthed and enthusiastic. Jason clearly doesn't have any sense of propriety, either, because he just loops both his arms around Vaas' neck and pulls him closer, and sometimes Vaas will end up straddling Jason's lap and it's fucking hilarious, because no one dares to comment. It's also fucking awesome — gives Vaas a rush to claim Jason so publicly, and be claimed in return.
They do other things, too, besides fuck with people; they retreat to places away from civilization, where the world is just a shared secret between the two of them. Vaas takes Jason snorkeling, and afterward they tumble and smoke on the picnic blanket, watch each other instead of the sunset. Jason shows him a cavern behind a waterfall and they stay there for hours, meditating (napping, in Vaas' case) and fooling around. Vaas really fucking enjoys how the sounds echo off the rock walls, behind the rush of water.

A lot of the time they stay in Jason's cabin, which smells like incense and cinnamon candles and is now decorated with slightly less shitty animal carvings, still pretty shitty furniture, and an actual bed that Vaas had made some of his men set up when Jason was gone. Jason doesn't use it unless Vaas stays over, preferring to curl up on the pile of quilts — one of which he actually made himself. The terrible Snow White fucking makes quilts.

Vaas is, though with progressively less frequency, still fucking bewildered by Jason sometimes. But it's okay. Because Vaas likes it — being with Jason. It's a nice fucking time.

When Vaas next visits Jason, there is another man with him. They're outside by the makeshift fire pit, hugging, and Vaas feels a strange sense of cognitive dissonance. He hasn't seen Jason outside of the context of a) harassing people in town b) killing people or c) being a ludicrous hippie weirdo in...months. Does Jason have friends? Vaas realizes. Does he speak with people besides Vaas? It seems unlikely, since Vaas is around so often and he's never seen anyone else at Jason's cabin before.

Which raises the question: who the hell is this motherfucker?

"Jason!" Vaas calls as he approaches. "Who the hell is this motherfucker?"

The guy breaks the hug first, turns toward Vaas, and practically jumps a foot in shock and horror. Vaas doesn't bother hiding the smug smile that elicits.

"Oh my god," the little pussy says. "What the fuck?"

"Hi Vaas," says Jason.

"Hi?" The guy — who looks to be about 15 years old, Vaas notices with bemusement — squawks. "What do you mean 'hi'?"

"I'm not really sure how to respond to that?" says Jason. "Is it slang for something else now back home? Did I fuck up?"

"You're such a dick," the kid says. "Aren't hippies supposed to be nice? You know what I fucking mean."

"Hey, don't talk to Jason that way. Fucking teenagers these days," Vaas says. He shakes his head and clicks his tongue disapprovingly. "They have no respect."

"I'm nearly 21, asshole," the absolute liar protests vehemently.

"That's fucking funny, amigo," says Vaas. "Jason, can you tell me who this guy is? And why he's here lying to me?"
Jason looks to be caught between amusement and irritation. "Do you really not recognize him?"

Vaas squints at the guy, makes a considering noise — all for show, because he really has no fucking clue. He shrugs. "No. Should I?"

"It's my little brother," says Jason. "You know, the one you almost sold into slavery? You saw him less than three months ago."

"...Sure," says Vaas.

"And he actually turns 21 in three or so weeks. Happy early birthday, Riley," Jason says, jovial again.

"Thanks, but," Riley, Jason's little brother and surprisingly legal adult — whoops, but honestly, how can Vaas be bothered to remember every single person he's trafficked before? It's just unreasonable. It's not like he remembers the four, maybe five, other dickheads accompanying Jason, either — looks very pointedly in Vaas' direction. But not directly at Vaas, which, yep, is still as satisfying as usual. "Please explain him."

Jason sighs, like he's preparing to launch into a long, exhausting speech about his and Vaas' relationship. Vaas wonders what the fuck he's going to say.

"So what are you doing here, anyway?" Jason asks, completely changing the subject. Well, that's one way to deal with things.

"Uh, no, answer—"

"So what are you doing here, anyway?" Jason repeats calmly.

"Dude, you can't just—"

"So what are you doing here, anyway?"

"Fuck you, asshole. Fine. I'll tell you first, okay?" Riley snaps. "Are you fucking happy? Jesus Christ."

Jason smiles serenely. "Go on, then."

Riley grumbles for a bit, then gets on with the fucking program. "Well, after I got home I realized: 'What the fuck, I literally just left my brother to be a hermit on an island where we all nearly got human trafficked and my other brother was murdered.'" His voice becomes increasingly flat.

"It sounds so irresponsible when you put it like that," Jason says.

"Um, it's more than fucking 'irresponsible.' It's crazy — like what was I fucking thinking? I can't believe I just you left here. With, with him, too!" Riley points at Vaas in incredulous outrage.

"Fucking rude," says Vaas.

"It was not rude. You're — you're a pirate, and a murderer, and a human trafficker, and you're insane."

"Wow," says Vaas. "I take it back. That was rude."

"It was a little rude," Jason agrees sensibly.

The shithead-with-no-manners sputters. "I can't believe this. Jason, didn't this guy kill Grant?"
Jason opens his mouth, pauses, then closes it. "Ye-es," he says slowly. "This...is true."

"...Do not fucking tell me that you forgot about that."

"Hey, no," Jason says defensively. "I did not. I've just understood it. I've made peace with it."

"You have?" says Vaas.

"It's a work in progress," Jason admits.

"It's okay," Vaas says reassuringly. He takes Jason's hand and laces their fingers together. "As long as you're still here with me, cariño."

Riley makes a strangled noise. Vaas grins, triumphant, when Jason doesn't disentangle his hand. He rides the feeling out and presses a quick kiss to Jason's temple.


"Are you okay?" Jason asks. "Maybe you should sit down."

"No," hisses Riley. "How can you be — how did this? Why? What? Fucking what?"

"You should go," Jason says apologetically to Vaas. "I think he's about to have a nervous breakdown."

Vaas leaves, but only after some convincing and a very pleasant kiss from Jason. He makes sure to draw it out for little Brody to enjoy.

"I'm dead and in hell for my sins," says Riley, which, what a fucking drama queen. Honestly.

Riley stays for about a week before Jason somehow convinces him to leave. The dickhead pointedly ignores Vaas whenever they're in the same vicinity, and Vaas would stick him in the sand and teach him some basic etiquette if it wouldn't make Jason unhappy, which is, wow, when the fuck did making Jason happy become Vaas' goal?

Whatever. Goals change. If everyone just had the same fucking idea all their life, there would be a lot more failure in the world.

Vaas is tasked with ensuring that Riley makes it safely off of Rook (god fucking knows how he got here in the first place), and the only interaction he has with little Brody is on the boat, right before depositing him onto the mainland.

"Vaas," says Riley. He swallows, trepidation visible, before he steels himself and looks Vaas right in the eye. "You better not hurt him, okay? If I find out you did something — anything, to Jason, I'll kill you. Or, like, hire someone else to kill you, since I'm not completely optimistic about my own chances."

"Have you fucking looked at your brother, white boy? He can fucking handle himself."

Riley rolls his eyes. "I meant emotionally. Have you never been given the 'protective brother' speech before?" Seeing Vaas' unimpressed stare, he sighs. "Right. Of course you haven't. You've probably never had a normal relationship in your life. What I mean is: Don't break his goddamn
heart. He really likes you, though god fucking knows why. You're a lunatic."


God. Vaas hurting Snow White emotionally, like Jason is a fucking pussy or something. How absurd, he thinks, scowling at the water on the ride back to Rook.

Like, really. What is little Brody even thinking? Jason isn't a delicate fucking flower.

Plus, it's so fucking rude to assume that Vaas is that much of an asshole. Vaas is great, thank you very much. Vaas is considerate. Vaas is not one to fuck up his things. Vaas Montenegro would not fucking do that to Jason, he fucking promises.

And Vaas Montenegro does not break his — wait. Shit. That sounds fucking familiar. Didn't he promise, months ago, to make Jason break his hippie oath and try to kill Vaas?

...Right. That was a thing.

But Vaas thinks about Jason, and kissing him, and taking naps together in the warmth of the jungle, and pressing the imprint of his fingers onto Jason's hips, and decides that maybe, maybe this requires some reconsideration.

When Vaas returns, Jason is in the shade a ways off from the cabin. There's an assortment of wood pieces and string arranged around him in a careful circle. He looks so peaceful making his dumbass jewelry that it makes Vaas want to kill something. Or smile. Vaas brushes Jason's stuff aside and drops down in front of him.

"I got your brother back to civilization safely. In one piece, too. That took some fucking effort, you know. He's a rude motherfucker."

Jason doesn't respond; he's intently stringing together a necklace. Vaas kicks him in the leg, annoyed.

"Hey," Vaas whistles sharply, "You listening to me? You see me here? Am I fucking invisible now, Jason?"

"Please be quiet while I finish this. It's hard to infuse my energies into a creation when there are distractions."

"If you won't be quiet, I'm just going to leave," says Jason.

It's a valid threat — Snow White knows this part of the jungle like it's his own design. Vaas had tried to follow once and ended up losing his trail after about 10 minutes. It was kind of fucking embarrassing. I mean, Vaas couldn't find the guy who wraps scarves around his head to "keep in my thought energy, Vaas" and tried to make a "sandless zen garden" next to the cabin and says things like "I won't kill you, Vaas, because you've given so much to me, now, and I won't take from you."

Yeah, that guy. What a shithead.

"Just chill for a few minutes," says Jason. He looks up at Vaas, finally, and the corners of his mouth quirk up. Like he can't help but wanting to smile. Vaas hates his stupid fucking face.

"Okay, hermano," Vaas says. He flops down on his back in the cool grass and thinks about what a little bitch he is. "Just for you."

Somehow, laying there staring at the tangle of green above him, listening to Jason work, Vaas falls asleep. He ends up jolting awake when Jason flicks him on the forehead not too much later.

"You're completely silent when you sleep. It's a nice change," Jason says.

"Fuck you." Vaas takes a drink from the (absolutely unnecessary, unreasonable) waterskin Jason hands him, then screws up his face at the taste. "What the fuck is in this?"

"It's ice tea. I added some herbs and flowers that are good for your spirit."

"It's fucking gross, hermano. I can't believe you drink tea. That's some pussy bullshit."

Vaas sets the waterskin aside. Jason takes it and dumps out the entire thing into the grass.

"Did you poison it or something?" says Vaas, nonplussed.

"Of course not," Jason says. "You just didn't like it." He shrugs, then averts his gaze, almost shyly. "Hopefully you like this better."

Jason holds up the necklace he'd been working on.

"I made this for you. To thank you, for Riley and — everything else. For being here," Jason says. "I'm not sure what you did with the first one I gave you, but it wasn't infused with my positive energies like this one. So."

Vaas takes it. There's a miniature, impressively detailed submachine gun in the center, next to a bullet — the one he'd had dug out of Jason's arm, he realizes. There's also various carvings of flowers, some of which are painted in Vaas' colors.

Holy shit. Vaas is going to fucking blush.

"Jason. You, are fucking adorable. Do you know that?" Vaas loops the necklace over his head and beams. "God. You are so fucking cute. Unbelievable." He shakes his head, then shifts onto his knees.

"Un-fucking-believable," Vaas murmurs, before he cups Jason's face with both hands and kisses him, achingly sweet.

Jason pulls back after a few moments, biting down a smile. He moves his legs so that Vaas can
kneel between them. "Glad you like it."

"You're such a fucker," Vaas says. "You made me into a little pussy. What sort of Rakyat voodoo bullshit are you doing, huh?"

"I've just found—"

"Balance, yes, I know, Jason. You've found ba-lance." Vaas kisses him again, more fervently. "Maybe you're at peace and shit, but I'm fucking crazy now. I keep kissing you, expecting shit to change, but every time — every fucking time — I still don't want to let you go. Fucking ever, Jason."

"You don't have to," says Jason, serene and earnest and slightly flushed. Fucking beautiful.

Vaas draws him closer. "Okay, cariño. Whatever you say."

And he doesn't let him go for a very long time.

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VaaS doesn't waste any time with his "reconsideration." Breaking his promise is easy, as easy as killing, or living, or kissing Jason in the glow of the sun.

So sometimes, Vaas Montenegro breaks his promises. But fuck it — you gotta find peace any way you can.

Chapter End Notes

This fic is done; next chapter is an alternate ending.
Chapter Notes

This was actually the original ending, but then I realized that it didn't match the tone of the story at all, and I need to like add a ton of shit if it wasn't going to be super rushed. I was too lazy to go back and turn this into a dark fic about Jason going insane (because if you think about it, he's pretty fucking loony) and Vaas' unreliable narration, so I just kept the story as total fluff/crack. But I liked the ending scene I wrote since it tied back and wrapped things up? I guess you could say that in this ending, Jason finds peace, while in the other one, Vaas does. And god knows that I'm biased toward Vaas....

Anyway, I just thought I'd share it. Tell me what you think!

Warning: Major Character Death

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Things don't change all that much. Vaas is still incredibly fucking annoying, and Jason is also incredibly fucking annoying in a different way, but now a lot of their time together is interspersed with making out.

(Jason's a great fucking kisser. When Vaas thinks about all the practice he must have had in order to achieve such a level of technical skill, he wants to track down every single person Jason has ever kissed before and slice off their lips. But because he's a nice guy, and considerate of Jason's feelings, Vaas doesn't do that.

Also, that would mean leaving Rook — and subsequently, Jason — for an extended period of time. And that's just not fucking happening. Vaas has a goddamn empire to run, and a pretty, murderous hippie to fool around with.)

When he isn't terrorizing Rook and selling people into slavery, Vaas spends as much as time as possible with Jason. There's just something about Snow White; he's changed, he's changed a fucking lot, but he's unmistakably the same asshole who thundered around the islands months prior and fucked up Hoyt's operation and killed what must have amounted to hundreds of people. Vaas sees Snow White in the way Jason snaps Rakyat necks —cruel and methodical — and in his dogged pursuit of "harmony" and, most of all, in the indubitable glint of savage desire in his eyes when he looks at Vaas, sometimes, like he wants to tear Vaas asunder with his bare hands and stick his head on a pike.

It's all very exciting. Vaas is fairly certain he wouldn't mind if Jason did it. It would be glorious to see murder ablaze in Jason's stare, unrestrained and beautiful, in the final moments of his life.
"Hi," Jason says, smiling faintly, when Vaas comes into sight. He's lounging outside on the sloppy, hand-crafted bench, warming himself in the sunlight. He's fucking gorgeous.

"Did you know, Jason, that it's been about three months since I shot your brother?" Vaas says pleasantly.

The smile instantly drops from Jason's face.

"Excuse me," says Jason.

It's the most reaction he's ever gotten from Snow White. Vaas can't believe he didn't do this sooner, didn't remember killing Jason's brother in front of him. He has a selective memory, he supposes. The things that don't interest him don't really hold, but now, in the face of the threat evident in the clipped tone of Jason's voice, it's all coming back.

"The mourning period is three months, right? Your brother's spirit has officially ascended to heaven, wa-ay up in the skies," Vaas pauses, thinking on the best manner in which to proceed. "So I just thought maybe we would celebrate that. You know, like friends do. Maybe I can tell you the story of how your brother died, but from my point of view. Isn't that what you want? To understand bloodshed?"

"Please stop talking," says Jason. He stands up. Vaas saunters over to him, a slight spring in his step.

"That's a tall order, amigo. I'm not really sure I can do that for you. I just think that you deserve to know what I was thinking, yes?" Vaas places his hand on Jason's shoulder and squeezes. "Let me tell you. I was thinking what a bitch your brother was. Disrespecting me like that? He was just asking for it, you know."

Jason remains silent. But his expression is far from peaceful, and that makes glee bubble up in Vaas' stomach.

"Man, I don't even remember your brother's name. But if I close my eyes, I can see it perfectly: him choking on his own blood, you running away like a little pussy. Couldn't even save him, huh, Jason? So sad. Poor little white boy, with his dead, dead brother."

"Vaas," says Jason. "Shut up."

"You know what we did with his body after? We chopped it up into little tiny pieces, so we could feed it to the sharks. It's fun, you know, seeing them all swarm around, eating up brother Brody like it's the best meal of their lives. Your brother, now — he must've been delicious."

"Shut the fuck up. Right now."

"It felt pretty good killing him." Vaas smiles. "It always feels pretty good."

There is a blur of motion. Vaas finds himself slammed against a tree, hard enough to make his head snap back and his skull go crack against the trunk.

(On some level, Vaas probably wants it to happen. It's why he continuously tests Jason, prods at the fresh wounds and rips open old scars. It's why, one day, he takes it to the tipping point.)
"If you say one more word about Grant, I'm going to fucking kill you," Jason says, voice dangerous and low. The barrel of a pistol presses cold and wonderful to Vaas' forehead.

Fucking perfect.

"Are you going to shoot me, Jason? Kill me? Do you understand why now? You must have a deep, deep comprehension of violence. You must get why, exactly, you're going to fucking kill me."

"I won't kill you," Jason says coldly, but he doesn't move.

"Why the fuck not? I killed your big brother, Jason. Come on. Do it."

Vaas grabs Jason's hands, holding the gun in place. His heart is pumping wildly with excitement — the ground is shuddering beneath him, the air alight with madness.

"Come on, motherfucker. Pull the trigger." Vaas grins at the tremble he feels from Jason. "Let's go, shoot me!"

And suddenly, very suddenly and with immense force, Jason tears himself away from Vaas, looking like he's seen the fucking devil. He takes a few stuttering steps back and begins, very quietly, to laugh.

"Holy shit," Jason says. He glances at the gun in his hand, then looks back at Vaas."Holy fucking shit."

"What is it, hermano? Are you afraid to kill me?"

"You said it. You said the exact same fucking thing," Jason says, wheezing with laughter. There is a peculiar note of wonder to his tone that Vaas doesn't understand.

"Jason. What are you talking about?"

"In the hallucination. Right before I stabbed you, I saw — I saw this. I was going to shoot you, you grabbed the gun, and you said. You said the same thing, word-for-fucking-word." Jason shakes his head. "I get it now. I understand."

Vaas looks at Jason. Really looks at him. This crazy Rakyat hippie who made Vaas a necklace. The man who killed half of Rook, and terrified the rest. Snow White, who took down Hoyt and took apart Vaas without a single glance back. He sees the steel in his eyes, the ruthless idea.

Knowing the answer, Vaas asks: "What do you understand, hermano?"

"Killing," Jason says.

And then he shoots Vaas in the chest.
Killing is losing. Jason gets it now. When you kill someone, you lose many things. You lose everything that they once were, everything that they could be. You lose what they could have given you, what you could have given them. You take it all away — from them, from yourself. You never fucking win.

But Jason understands. Sometimes, it isn't about winning.

Sometimes, it's about being fucking selfish, and finding peace any way you can.

Chapter End Notes

Did I ever tell you the definition of insanity?

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