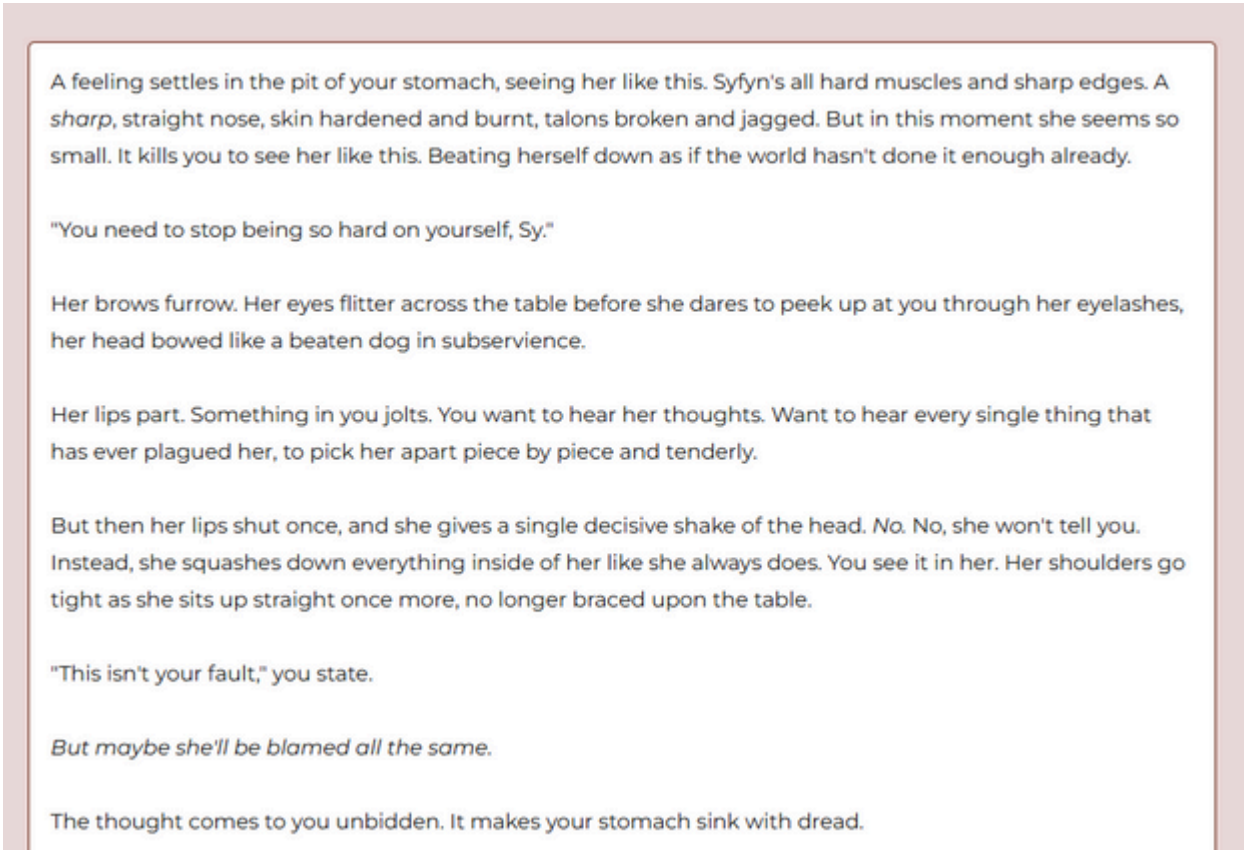
Patreon (24/February/2025 - 21/April/2021)



A feeling settles in the pit of your stomach, seeing her like this. Syfyn's all hard muscles and sharp edges. A *sharp*, straight nose, skin hardened and burnt, talons broken and jagged. But in this moment she seems so small. It kills you to see her like this. Beating herself down as if the world hasn't done it enough already.

"You need to stop being so hard on yourself, Sy."

Her brows furrow. Her eyes flitter across the table before she dares to peek up at you through her eyelashes, her head bowed like a beaten dog in subservience.

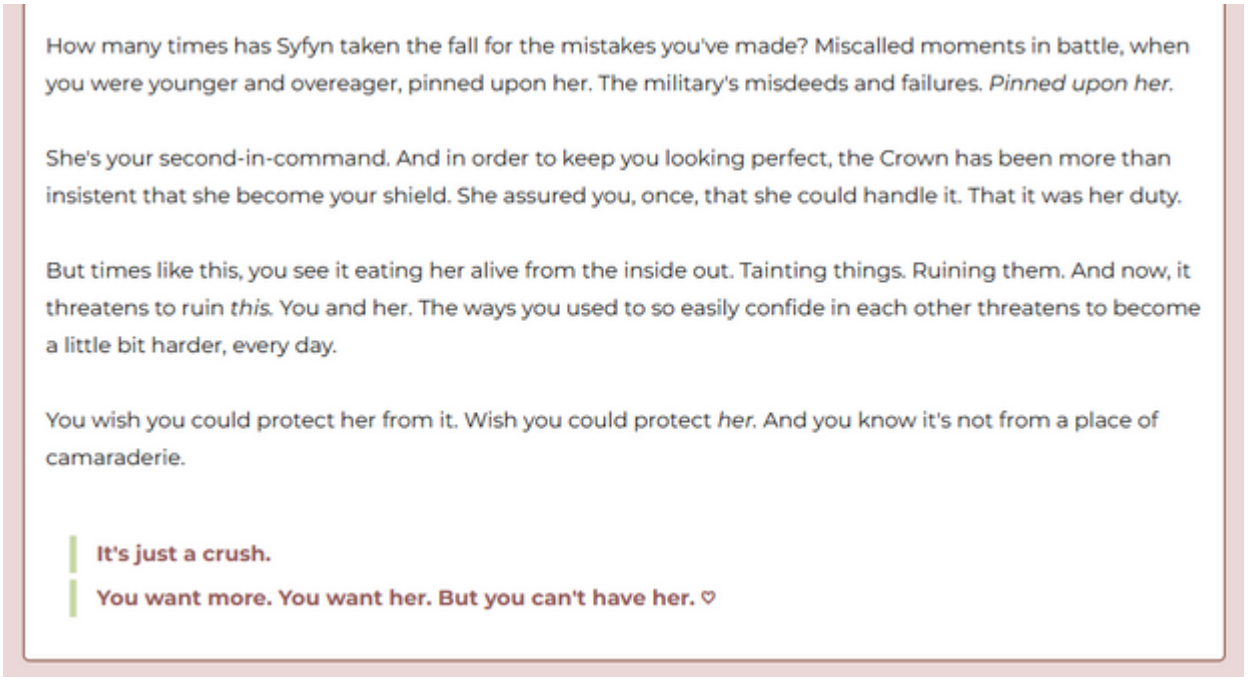
Her lips part. Something in you jolts. You want to hear her thoughts. Want to hear every single thing that has ever plagued her, to pick her apart piece by piece and tenderly.

But then her lips shut once, and she gives a single decisive shake of the head. *No.* No, she won't tell you. Instead, she squashes down everything inside of her like she always does. You see it in her. Her shoulders go tight as she sits up straight once more, no longer braced upon the table.

"This isn't your fault," you state.

But maybe she'll be blamed all the same.

The thought comes to you unbidden. It makes your stomach sink with dread.



How many times has Syfyn taken the fall for the mistakes you've made? Miscalled moments in battle, when you were younger and overeager, pinned upon her. The military's misdeeds and failures. *Pinned upon her.*

She's your second-in-command. And in order to keep you looking perfect, the Crown has been more than insistent that she become your shield. She assured you, once, that she could handle it. That it was her duty.

But times like this, you see it eating her alive from the inside out. Tainting things. Ruining them. And now, it threatens to ruin *this*. You and her. The ways you used to so easily confide in each other threatens to become a little bit harder, every day.

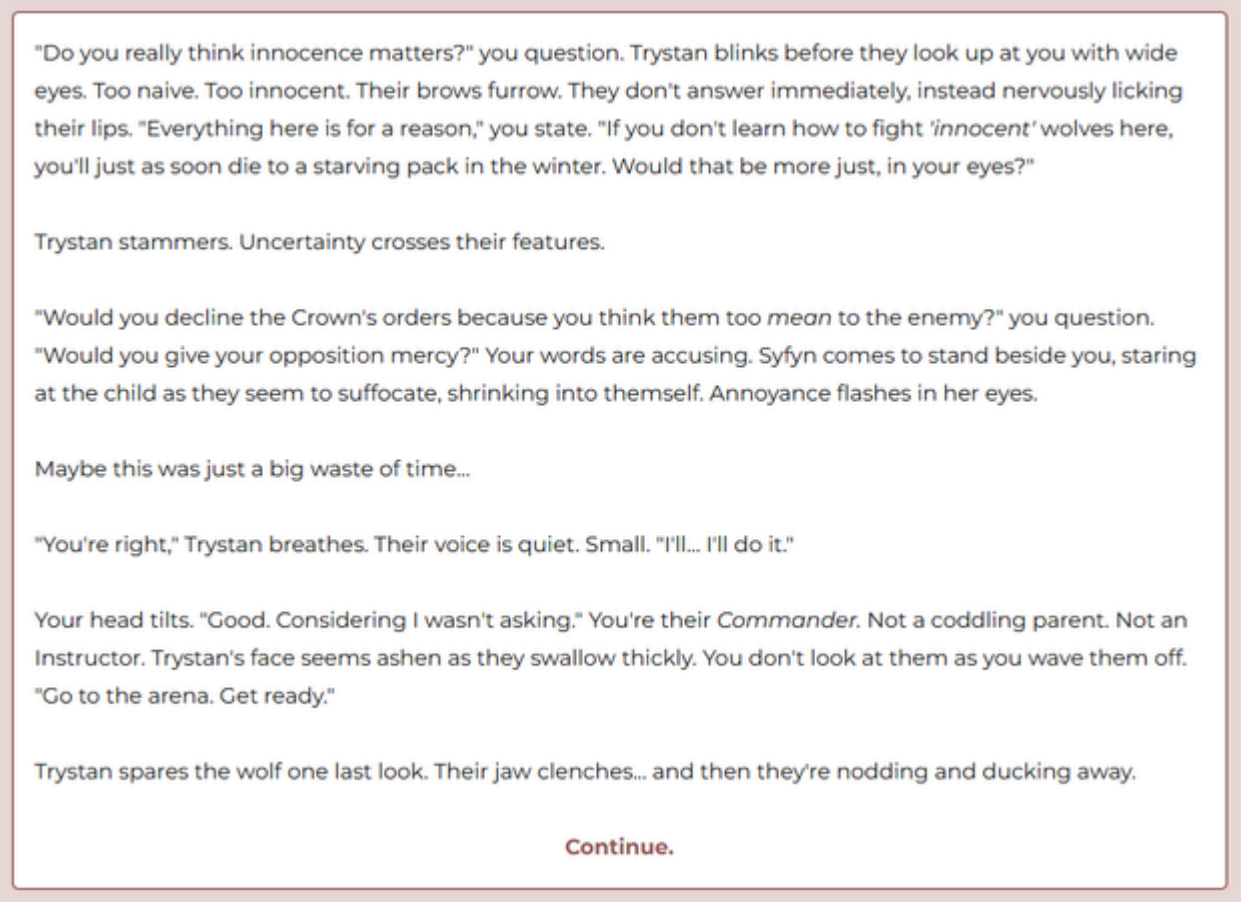
You wish you could protect her from it. Wish you could protect *her*. And you know it's not from a place of camaraderie.

> **It's just a crush.**
>
> **You want more. You want her. But you can't have her. ♡**

[Chapter 2 Sneak Peek: Syfyn's Past Romance]

[February 24]

This entire romance scene has been rewritten (and the kiss too)... I'll be very excited to share it soon!! Rewriting the early romance scenes has def been fun since I know a lot more about the characters in hindsight now 👀



"Do you really think innocence matters?" you question. Trystan blinks before they look up at you with wide eyes. Too naive. Too innocent. Their brows furrow. They don't answer immediately, instead nervously licking their lips. "Everything here is for a reason," you state. "If you don't learn how to fight *'innocent'* wolves here, you'll just as soon die to a starving pack in the winter. Would that be more just, in your eyes?"

Trystan stammers. Uncertainty crosses their features.

"Would you decline the Crown's orders because you think them too *mean* to the enemy?" you question. "Would you give your opposition mercy?" Your words are accusing. Syfyn comes to stand beside you, staring at the child as they seem to suffocate, shrinking into themself. Annoyance flashes in her eyes.

Maybe this was just a big waste of time...

"You're right," Trystan breathes. Their voice is quiet. Small. "I'll... I'll do it."

Your head tilts. "Good. Considering I wasn't asking." You're their *Commander*. Not a coddling parent. Not an Instructor. Trystan's face seems ashen as they swallow thickly. You don't look at them as you wave them off. "Go to the arena. Get ready."

Trystan spares the wolf one last look. Their jaw clenches... and then they're nodding and ducking away.

Continue.

Chapter 2 Sneak Peek: Training Trystan

February 18

The Commander can be a lot more... *intense...* this time around. Would be a shame if it were to seriously psychologically affect Trystan down the road -*cough cough*-

Writing Update: 02/03/25

February 3

Hello everyone!

Long time no see. I have some announcements to make. *First* is that Chapter 2 has been wrapped up at ~ 90k, making the Twine Demo ~190k. This is very exciting! Lots of new variation has been added re. Amilia + Vethna's relationship (it depends on the Commander now), and Amilia's character has been a bit more refined.

My goal is to fix some typos + finish the "WIP" parts of Chapter 1 in the next week, and after being proofread, Chapter 2 + patches for Chapter 1 should be good to go.

Because of that, I'm finally doing what should be my last (hopefully) call for Alpha Testers! **The deadline for submissions is Wednesday, February 12th.** All the relevant info is on the google form. The hope is that we can push to do a Chapter 2 release by the end of this month, though it might be pushed to early March. You can apply to be an alpha reader here!

Otherwise, life's been interesting. I'm wrapping up college this semester, so I've been dealing with my Senior thesis (whoop) and I had a surgery that I am just now mostly recovered from (whoop whoop). Very strange to think I went into college working on the exile, and now I graduate still working on it. That's a long time!

Thanks for reading, and as always, thank you for being patient! :)

Chapter 6 Sneak Peek | Syfyn Post-Op

Dec 29, 2024

Post-surgery, you can choose which companion you spend time with. For *some*, Syfyn may or may not be an option... 👀

You frown. For a moment, you hesitate to even speak. When Syfyn gets riled up, her temper can be a vicious thing.

"You don't really believe that, do you?" you ask.

"You don't?" Syfyn retorts. Her brows furrow then, her expression softening only marginally. She looks off to the side, frowning as she pinches her brows. "How many people did we lose after graduation? Our first battle —"

She cuts herself off. Squeezes her eyes shut and rears her head.

"We're going into a war, $name. You and I know the chances of us making it back out, *again*, get slimmer every time."

There's such shame in her gaze. An awful sort of resignment she's given herself into.

You suck in a sharp breath, steadying yourself. It's not your job to worry about these things. Not your job to even think about them. No—your job is to keep the peace, through any means necessary. If that means slaughtering countless others, so be it. If it means being torn apart by the hands of your enemies, *so be it*.

"It's out of our hands," you say, meeting Syfyn's gaze. She hears the hardness in your voice. The subtle tone to just *snap out of it*. So she does. She straightens her shoulders and swallows thick, nodding weakly.

It's out of your hands. All of it is just... beyond your control. But even so, you hate seeing that distant glaze in Sy's eyes as she tries to pull herself back together for *you*. Her friend, yes. But her superior.

Die Young | Chapter 2 Sneak Peek

Nov 1, 2024

Another new theme to be added in the rewrite is the strain MC + Syfyn have had to face as being both friends and comrades in war. The line MC's had to walk as being a superior + friend to Syfyn hasn't been an easy one... and you might find yourself facing the very same problem again with your future companions 🤭

Writing Update (10/14/24)

Oct 14, 2024

Hello everyone! We're approaching the half-way mark in October, so I thought I'd give an update on what's going on rn!

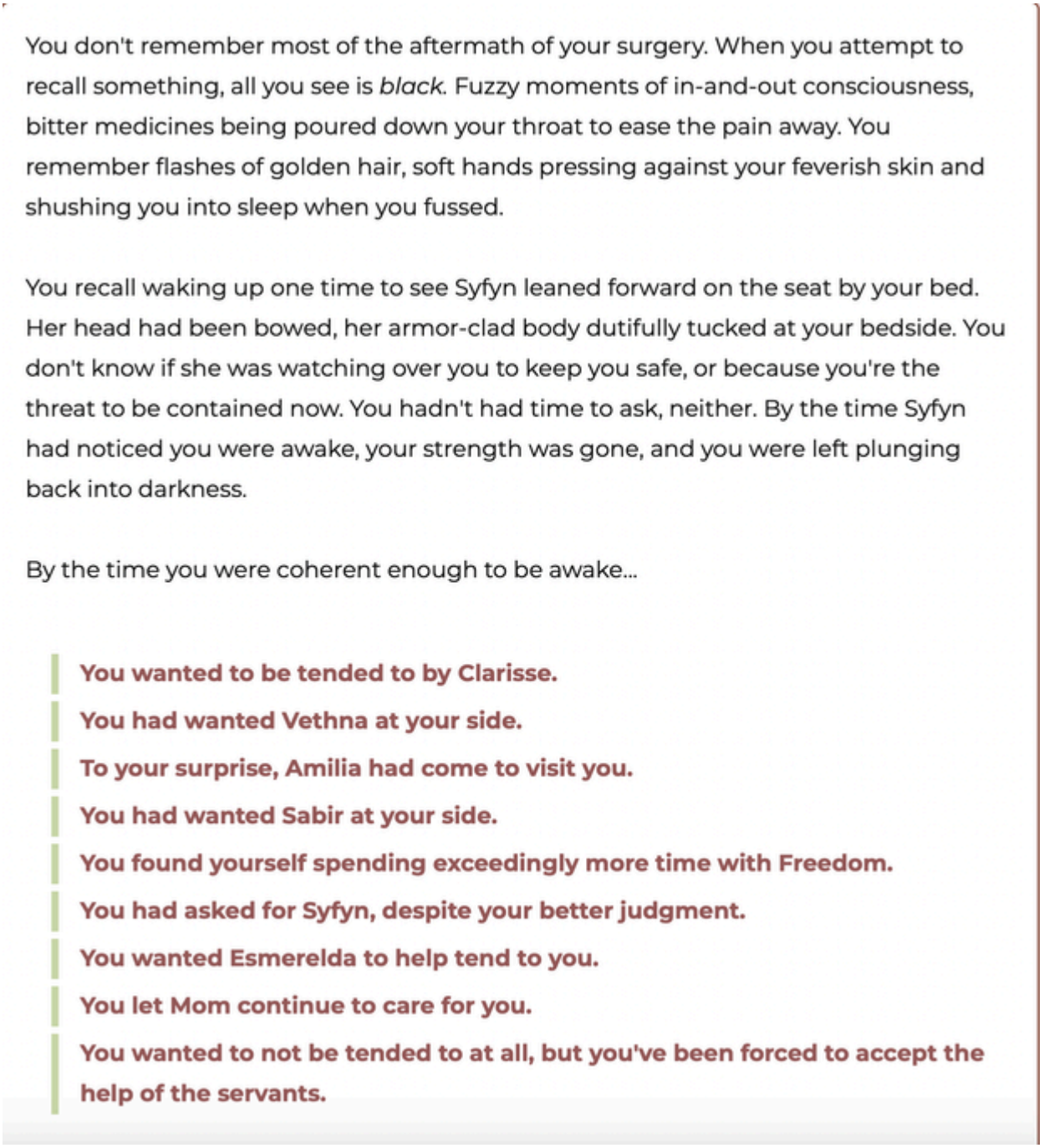
Chapter 2 is ~65% done at 55k words (the OG chapter was ~84k). Along with that, I've started working on Chapter 6 in the background. So far in Ch. 2, the intro, 1/3 versions of Amilia's introduction, the forest scene, + Sabir's flashback are done. I'm currently going through Syfyn/Trystan's flashback, which will mostly remain the same except for the Trystan fight being overhauled + parts being re-written.

After that, what's left to finish is the campfire talk w/ Vethna (I've been avoiding it b/c of how many variables there are to trim there 💀), the remaining 2/3 versions of Amilia's intro scene, and the ending where Vethna + MC decide to take Amilia with them. I don't anticipate the Amilia intro to take more than a few days to finish, considering all the versions meet together half-way through. My hope is to finish Chapter 2 by the end of this month, and launch early November, similar to last release.

Chapter 2's update will also include the choice to choose MC's subtype of *mythosi*, and contain some more fun art pieces~! I'm hoping to knock another good 10k off this week. As per usual, October is a bit busy with Halloween + midterms and things.

I'll probably be looking into adding a few more alpha readers either this month or the next. This will probably be the last time I take on alpha-readers until the game is finished, so keep an eye out for that!

That's all, + thanks for reading! :)



Chapter 6 Opening [Surgery Route]

Oct 14, 2024

There are two ways for Chapter 6 to open--and which you get depends on which *mythosi* variant you are!

All the choices here except for Esme + Emeline are locked behind a stat check... which does, in fact, mean it's possible for your companions to dislike you so much, they refuse to help your MC out after their surgery.

... talk about rough.

The Syfyn paragraph is stat-dependent as well... so... 👀

	---------- Chapter Six ----------			
	Part One	Surgery Recovery		
			Solo	
			Vethna	
			Amilia	
			Sabir	
			Syfyn	
			Freedom	
			Esmerelda	
			Emeline	
		Goodbye Scene	Syfyn	
			Trystan	
			Generic	
		Leaving Plaithus	Sabir/Syfyn/Nikke	
			Vethna/Amilia/Freedom	
		Tavern		

	Part Two	Boarding the ship/meeting crew		
		Companion Scenes (Night)	Vethna	
			Nikke	
			Amilia	
			Freeedom	
			Sabir (?)	
		Wysteria Gen		
		Wysteria (Day)	Nikke/Amilia/Captain	
			Sabir/Vethna/Rhys	
		Wysteria (Night)	Nikke	
			Syfyn	
			Amilia	
			Vethna	
			Sabir	
			Freedom	
			Rhys	
			Captain (?)	

Part Three	Mermaid Encounter	
	Battle Aftermath	Amilia
		Syfyn
		Sabir
		Nikke
	(ROM:) Vethna's date	
	(ROM:) Nikke's "date" (Cough)	

[Chapter 6 Outline]

Sep 29, 2024

Of course, this isn't the *detailed* outline, but I thought it'd be fun to give a small peak at the structure of Chapter 6! It's actually been planned for a long while now, but I plan to start working on it alongside finishing the port once Chapter 2's rewrite is done (which will be October!).

Chapter 6 will likely be its own "game" while in-development. Meaning that it'll be kept separate file-wise from the main-game so it can be played on here even while the rewrite is still happening.

As you can see, this is A.) a long chapter, and B.) Has a *lot* of branching scenes. When the time comes, you'll all be voting in what order the companion's scenes are done in, so keep an eye out for that! 🤭

The Exile [Twine Demo] [Chapter One]

Sep 22, 2024

Hello everyone! It's finally here.

I really apologize for this being late. I immediately got sick the week I was meant to finish, and then life threw multiple curve balls at me (remind me not to announce dates ever again). But it's here!

For reference, it's gone from being 53k to 95k words, and very little of it is repeating. I heavily suggest replaying a bunch, as there's a lot of birth to this even if it's "short" length-wise :)

Some very small things-- **there are a few unfinished aspects still.**

- There's a few unfinished choices. Only two choices are currently dead-ends, and they're in the battle-scene with the Ivante twins. They're marked with **X's**.
- The POV end-scene with the Ivante Twins is unfinished. (This and the choices will be fixed once I'm home from a vacation I'm currently on, which will be likely end of this week.)
- The Codex/Journal/Memory system is not implemented yet. It's in-the-works, but I intend to keep it off-limits until the re-write is done due to how many variables + moving parts there are to it.
- The UI design for the phone is still in the works. It should function fine, but smaller details might be a bit off (re. coloring as opposed to formatting). If you have any severe problems reading on the phone, let me know in a DM or comment!

- There's probably typos + small coding errors as I play tested this myself. Feel free to post any of them in the comments here, or on the #Patreon section of the Discord!

The password is: ExProDemo

Vethna flinches, hiding behind you as the door splinters inwards. Your own heart spikes in your chest, your hand instinctually unsheathing your sword as you hold it pointed toward the entrance.

You blink. Two gorgons stand in front of you, a man and a woman, matching expressions of amusement on their faces. To say they're related would be an understatement. They're twins, nearly identical, their skin pallid and eyes a light glowing green bordering on gray

"We interrupting something?" the man muses. The lopsided grin on his face widens, revealing the sharp, pointed fangs that gleam behind his lips. "Too late for a third to join?"

The woman hisses something at him, literally *hisses*, and you think it might be some animalistic language you can't quite grasp from the way the man scowls and rolls his eyes, responding in a language that makes your skin crawl.

Vrithkan. They're magic-hunters. They have to be.

You could get into it now, take them when they're off-guard... but you'd be putting Vethna in danger. It's a small room, and it's two against one. Or, you could try and buy time... get Vethna out the window first... key word being *try.*

> **Attack.**
> **"You know what they say. Three's a crowd," you retort.**
> **"Are you children?" you drawl.**
> **"It's like the fucking wonder twins over here," you mutter.**
> **Say nothing. They look ready to bicker with each other.<—**

You stay quiet as they bicker. Your eye threatens to twitch a bit, and you meet Vethna's stare when you feel them giving you a disbelieving look out of the corner of their eye. Yeah. This is really happening.

You nod for Vethna to head towards the window. They immediatley make a face, not wanting to, and you have to bite back a flair of annoyance. Scary to them or not, you don't have the privilege of fear. They need to get out the window and down into the streets, *now*.

You take steps back, slowly, eyes glued to the twins. Eventually, your back hits the window, your hand reaching for the window clasp—

Thunk.

Sharp pain shoots up your hand. You let out a pained grunt, knees threatening to buckle as your eyes widen.

A dagger. In your hand. A dagger is in your *fucking* hand, through the palm, pinning it to the window frame. A frightened yelp escapes Vethna, both of their hands covering their mouth as you both turn your heads to the twins, the man's arm still out-stretched from his perfect throw.

"You weren't trying to *sneak out* on us now, were you?" the man asks, head tilting.

"Your mother clearly didn't teach you manners," the woman adds.

Great. They even fucking quip together.

Need a hand? | Ch. 1 Sneak Peek (+ Release info)

Sep 3, 2024

Well. You can't say an effort wasn't made. It's not MC's fault Nikke has great aim 😔

Alsoooo.... Chapter One's rewrite should be coming out by this weekend! You all will have early access for a week before it goes public. It has ~20k new words, more variations, expanded scenes, and a more detailed fight scene w/ the twins... clearly :)

Some features are still in the works (Codex system, MC's "journal," some UI functions aren't as polished as they could be), but none of those things affect gameplay. I can't put into words how excited I am to finally get back to releasing official Exile content. And, as always, thank you so much for all the support and patience!

You've been infused with the blood of a Pride Demon. Though considered less *dangerous* compared to other demon types, they're infused with a level of arrogance perfectly becoming of one in your former station—as a Commander of the military.

Pride demons often come to those who are failed artists or underdogs, people with great passions but little skill. They imbue them with confidence, only to fill them with such levels of arrogance people have driven themselves to infamy and death.

You are capable of much the same. You're the best. Why else would you once have been the commander? Everyone else is beneath you, no better than the dirt beneath your feet. And if they ever forget that... Well, you don't mind reminding them. You can sniff out the insecurities and fears of others like a repulsive stench, and you know *exactly* how to manipulate their own fears against them.

Demons of Pride often have horns in the formation of a crown, and have skin-tones in various shades of blue, white, and grey. Their teeth are usually all sharpened.

You've been infused with the blood of a Lust demon, otherwise known as a sucubus or incubus. They're ambivalent demons, not too dangerous when handled by those familiar with their tactics. They're hungry, hungry beasts, cursed to starve for sexual and romantic attention.

They are known to seek out those who are lonely, offer companionship in return of adoration. They have an allure to them, a promise of comfort, of *gentleness*. They are beautiful creatures. They will steal your life force slowly, until you die, if you let them. But oh, they will *love* you until your last breath. And in that brief moment, whether it be days or months, it will have been genuine.

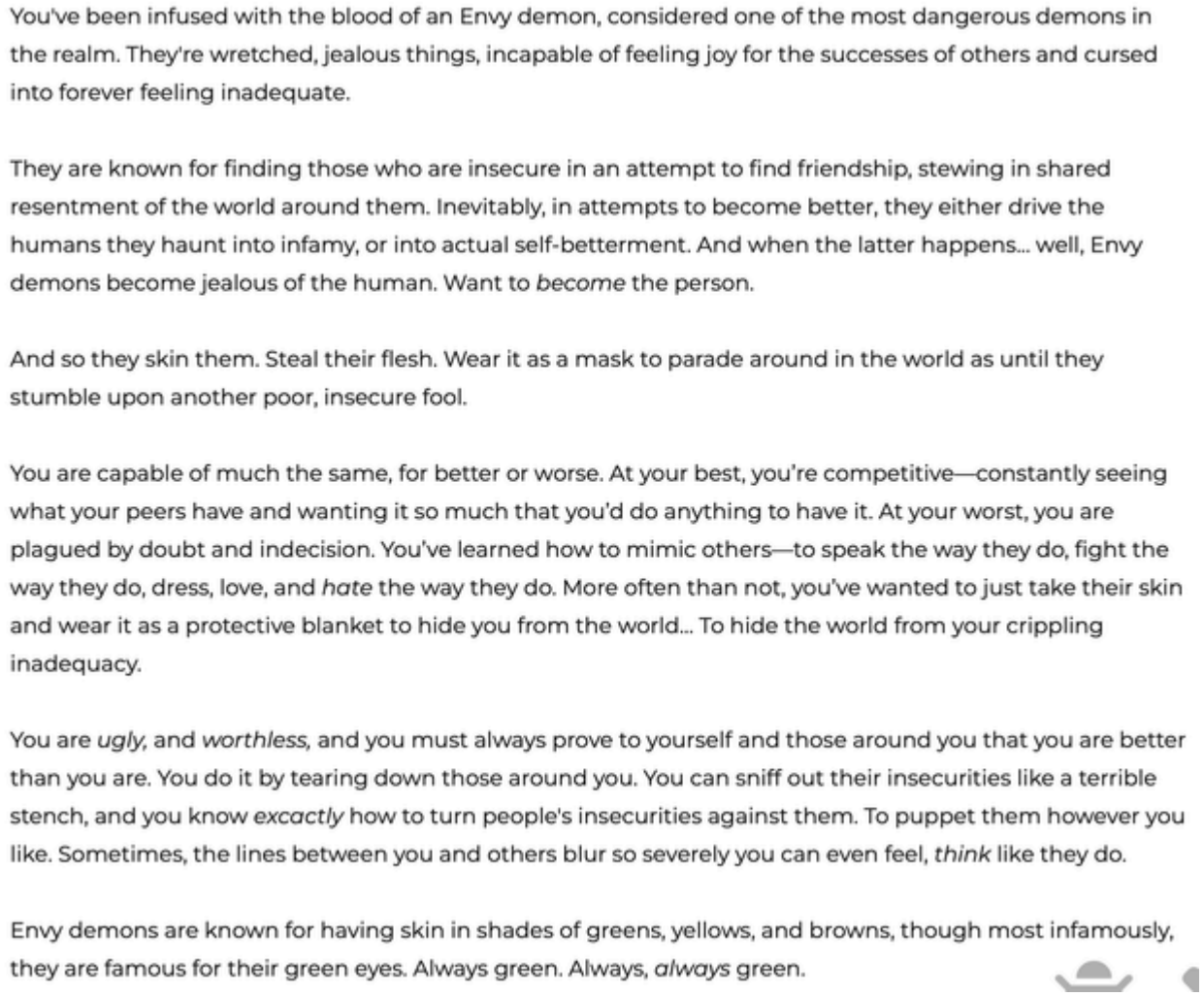
They're cursed to forever want love, and kill those that ever dare to try.

You are cursed just the same. You can bend others to your will with a smile or tilt of the head. You don't even have to *try* anymore. And yet, you are cursed to feel empty and incomplete for all of eternity. You have a hunger that runs deep—an insatiable thirst for the emotions that are want and pleasure. But you are destined to destroy that which you want, plagued constantly by paranoia and obsession. Your human side has managed to negate the effects somewhat, and while you would not die from not pursuing these things like your full-blooded counterparts would, it leaves you weak and aching.

You are capable of sensing when others around you are lonely or yearning, whether it be for you or another. And, as such, you know how to manipulate them *however* you please.

Demons of Lust are known for having skin tones in shades of pink, purple, and fuschia, and having pink eyes. Their flesh is often glittery, their hair coming in all sorts of rich, jewel-toned colors.

(TW: Sexual themes will be prevalent throughout your play through, and possibly triggering topics surrounding it.)



(Some) Demon Subtype Selection...

Aug 4, 2024

Here's a sneak peek of 3/7 Demon subtypes, all correlated with the 7 sins! So far the subtypes are MOSTLY flavor text, but you might unlock special scenes or dialogue here and there depending... 👀

A furious growl escapes your clenched jaw before the man can get another word out. You're cornered, *pinned*, the anger at being beat and the adrenaline of near-death sending your heart racing. You can feel it, the heat rising within you. A heat you cannot fully contain nor control.

He seems to realize something's off. *Wrong.* He tries to pull away, but you pull him closer, grip tightening. It burns. The heat within you *burns*, veins glowing orange, hands turning searing hot. There's the smell of burning flesh as you burn through his skin, foreign curses spilling past the man's lips as he rips himself free. He stumbles back several steps before righting himself, his knife clutched so tightly his knuckles are going white.

You feel like you can't breathe. Your vision is tunnelling, skin on fire. You feel like you want to drop to the ground and peel your skin off to be rid of this suffocating *heat*, but you press onwards instead. He scrambles back, kicking at your torso when you attempt to descend upon him. It steals the breath from your lungs—but you focus on gripping one of his legs instead, slowly dragging him dowards you as he kicks and scrambles. Your hands leave singe marks on his clothing, and soon enough, you're straddling him. Your every touch scalds, smoke bellowing from your lips that makes you cough and wheeze.

You wretch the blade from his hands. It's not hard. He practically drops it when you grip his wrist. You hold it tight, letting the metal heat up, hotter and *hotter* before you're slamming the blade right into his side, carving it in deep between his rips until you see teal bubble up from his lips.

His eyes are glued to yours the entire time, pupils slits. He doesn't flinch, doesn't cringe. Just takes the pain you gift, knowing it's futile.

You rise to stand slowly. Burn marks cover his flesh, teal blood seeping from his wound as you slowly turn to where Vethna is. One down, another to go.

MC's on Fire (Literally) [Ch. 1] | Sneak Peek

Jul 22, 2024

Thinking about phoenix MCs rn 🧍 Yet again, Nikke's getting his ass handed to him in combat.

There's another variation of this scene with werewolves that is equally delightful, methinks, but I'll leave that for when Ch 1. is released... 🥲 Lots and lots and *lots* of variation to be found now... 👀

You take in the silence, unafraid to bask in the proximity of Amilia standing so close to you. If anything, you take it as an opportunity to drink in her features—her sharp button nose, the freckles on her cheeks, the slight upwards tilt to her eyes and the way her bangs brush against her eyelashes.

"You're really pretty, you know that?"

Your words come out in a voice gentle enough to surprise even you, but you don't care. Not really. Something about this moment, the way the twilight casts light on her... why should you be embarrassed to offer her a compliment?

Amilia's eyes gleam a little at your words. You have the feeling *yes*, she's been told she's pretty countless times. Yet still, she bites at her lower lip, trying to fight back the way the corners of her mouth twitch up. Her gaze darts off to the side, unable to handle the weight of your appreciation.

"Thank you," she says. She can't bite back the smile for long, and soon enough it blossoms upon her lips in full force, your eyes drawn to the apples of her cheeks. "Come on." She nods in the direction of camp. Her cheeks flush the longer you let your gaze drink in her features, and when she speaks again, her voice is no more than a whisper. "Let's get back."

You just hum, following after her in stride as you smile to yourself.

You just might've made the little fae *nervous*.

Nervous Little Fae [Ch. 1] | Sneak Peek

Jul 9, 2024

Of course the rewrite must have updated and revamped romance scenes. *Obviously...*

You refuse to let the woman go, refuse to let your focus be torn anywhere else. You press harder and harder, attempting to drag your blade downwards, to ruin as much of her innards as you can with the brunt of your blade. The woman's teeth grit together into a stubborn snarl, your eyes glued to hers as she swallows down her screams.

It's no problem. It's hardly the first time you've faced a stubborn foe, trying to conceal the agony you inflict upon them for the sake of *appearances*. It's not like it affects you, anyhow. It all ends up the same way regardless. Them dead, bleeding at your feet.

"$name!"

You hear Vethna's raw voice shout your name, but by the time you turn to look, the man's punching you right in the face. Pain shoots through you, your own teeth chomping down on your tongue as blood fills your mouth. Your mind goes blank as your body reels back in instinct, barely bracing against the blade that swipes at your face. A furious sound erupts from the man as he looks at you. His pupils are such small slits that all you see is *glowing green*, and before you can even attempt to regain your balance his jaw is unhinging. His fangs gleam, and not a second later you're being tackled into the wall behind you. His teeth sink *deep* into your neck.

You feel the crunch of your flesh and veins being snapped by the force of his bite, feel the hot blood that rushes down your neck. His growl reverberates through your flesh, and you can feel his teeth go deeper, *deeper*, ready to rip your throat out.

You push and push and *push* at his shoulders, feeling the heat of his venom seeping into you, burning and visceral in its pain. Your vision blurs and tunnels, your hands tangling in the man's hair to try and pry his jaw off of you as your eyes lock with Vethna's over his shoulder. The woman is still knelt on the floor in pain, and you watch as Vethna slips out a dagger that's strapped beneath their dress before angling it *just* right to stab the man right beneath his ribcage.

You feel his body tense, though his jaws just sink deeper into you, like he'd rather be gutted alive while killing you than be forced to release you from his grasp.

Updated Nikke Fight... [Ch. 1] | Sneak Peek

Jun 11, 2024

The Nikke + Jost Fight from Chapter 1 has largely been redone and updated. There are two major variations of the fight... one where you fight Nikke + Jost at the same time, and one where you manage to stagger the fight enough to fight them one at a time. In general, the battle is a lot more... uh... *brutal this time (sorry Jost).*

The "woman" in question may or may not be Jost. And the man-- well. Where there's one there's bound to be the other.

✨Writing Update✨ (06/11/24)

Jun 11, 2024

Well, it's been some time, hasn't it? Hello everyone! I haven't made one of these posts in a while, and now that summer is here and I'm back to being able to put more energy into The Exile, I figured I'd post an update.

First things first-- thank you to everyone who's continued to support me on here despite the pause of content. It means the world to me, and it's helped a lot a lot amidst schooling in allowing me to work on The Exile. And, of course, thank you to those who follow along with The Exile in general, even when things go quieter on my end. Rest assured, The Exile is still my baby (and forever will be) and work is always happening, even if it's never going as quickly as I'd like it to be.

My hope is to return to posting on Patreon more in these next few months. I have a lot of rewritten scenes I'd love to share with you all as I get closer to releasing the re-write of the game, and I'm really hoping to get more into the grind of working on The Exile full-time this summer. In a perfect world, I might even be able to make The Exile my creative thesis for college, which would be exciting :)

More news will come out on the progress of the rewritten chapters once I finish my writing goals for the month, but know that **there *will* be a release this summer (~late July or August) of at the very least Chapter 1 + 2 with Chapter 3 likely to come pretty soon after.** The reason the writing has been so strange with trying to push the "revamped" release is mainly b/c **A.)** I first attempted to write purely chronologically, since I knew for the re-release I'd have to have to release the chapters chronologically. Makes sense, right? Well that killed my motivation (being unable to jump around while writing has always killed my inspiration), so **B.)** I've more recently switched to jumping around when I write. Good news, I am now writing *exponentially* faster, but Chapters 1 - 3 are still under works because I've also been finishing up 4 + 5 (which are about ~500k words combined I believe)

And, of course, there's the fact the Exile is 1.35 million words in total and that... just takes time to comb through. For transparency, here's the mode of attack (🫡). **1.)** Get Chapters 1-3 rewritten and out by this summer (3 might be near early fall-- I'll likely put out a poll to get people's preferences on how it's written). **2.)** Port over 4 + 5 *and* **only edit** scenes that are poor quality. Expanding scenes will be put off until later. **3.)** Start working on Chapter 6 along with updating 4 + 5-- that way I can *finally* do the new content I've been planning for a year 💀

Regardless, all my focus is now safely back on the book, so hopefully things can go full steam ahead! Feel free to ask any questions below or on the Tumblr :)

Sparring. | Nikke Ivante. | P.O.V. Switch

Nov 16, 2023

CW: As per usual, Nikke has a tendency to make things go sexual... always <3 This is with a "high" affinity Nikke (so 35+)

The more time Nikke spends in the dungeons, the less awful they seem. Sometimes, if he closes his eyes and finds the dampest, most repulsive corner to lay in just to torture himself (because hey, go big or go home, right?), he can even pretend he's back in Vrithka. Except *Vrithka* is warm, and muggy, and humid, and sure, the mosquitos suck, but they're a small price to pay for warmth. And down here? Down here he gets none of that.

The others-- the fae, that *gods* awful Mevnrael-- have been moved to the upper levels, bedrooms with cell bars. Little pieces of heaven, as far as Nikke is concerned. But him? He's stuck. Down here. Alone. Quite literally alone, since every other sorry bastard that's been in and out of this place has been gone by the end of twenty-four hours, likely to have his head chopped off or teeth and nails pulled.

All things considered, Nikke was lucky he wasn't one of them. He tried to kill the Princess, he reminds himself. And god, what a shitty idea that was. But when Jost got an idea in her head, there was no stopping her... and now look where that got him.

Jost... **Jost.**

He wonders what she's doing. Where she is. If she's okay. He grimaces every time he remembers the bird bitch's foot slamming down on her, the sound of cracking ribs, the blood that spilled from Jost's lips. But she was gone by the time the guards had Nikke pinned to the ground, cuffing him.

She'd always been a tough bastard. And Nikke had to hold onto that. It was the only thing that made him feel sane here. *Jost is safe, and soon enough, I'll be out of this shit hole and back in Vrithka.*

It was a mantra to him. And even though Nikke knew it was a lie, he kept repeating it.

He'd always been good at doing that.

He doesn't fight the guards when they drag him out of his cell. It stopped being fun about three beatings in, when Nikke realized they might really just kill him and call it an accident. So now, he just grits his teeth and swallows his pride, his body covered in almost-healed wounds that just keep being reopened.

He's tossed out into a field with the others like a herd animal, the four of them looking at each other with varying degrees of hatred and disdain-- except for the fae. She just keeps her head down and stares at

the dying, yellowed grass.

It starts with Nikke staring at Mevnrael. It goes down downhill from there.

They're like a chained up dog, desperate for someone to blame, and it seems Nikke's the easiest target as their argument about his staring turns into *this*-- Mevnrael claiming he's a danger, a threat, that MC should've just killed him when they had the chance.

He *is* dangerous. He *is* a threat. But not to anyone here except MC. But he doubts the others would believe it. Plaithians and Vygranders-- opposites in everything except their shared delusions of self-importance.

How long have they been arguing now? On and off for an hour, *at least.* He doesn't mind it, though. It gives him something to do-- something to occupy his mind with that isn't the way his joints ache from the cold, sharp climate of the north.

"This is pathetic," Mevnrael snarls at him. The venom in their voice would almost be impressive if Nikke weren't already so used to Vygrandian nobles with their snotty voices and incessant demands. Everything was pathetic to them. *Everything.* Even themselves. "You're like a child throwing a fit."

Nikke can't help but grin at that. *Him?* A child? Tough talk coming from the runaway prissy noble.

"Maybe I am," he retorts. He can't help but lean closer to them just to hear them scoff and recoil in disgust. They were *so* easy to work up. "Makes you look like a fuckin' idiot to still be arguing with me in that case, doesn't it?"

Their lips press together at that, cheeks flushed and brows furrowing. Their gaze flickers with something, a gleam filling their eye, and Nikke feels a buzz inside him. Hook, line, and *sinker. He could do this all day, and he has the itching feeling they could too.*

"It makes me the only person here who's willing to tell you to shut up and stay quiet." Their voice loses its venom, and any excitement Nikke felt is quickly squashed. They sound mature, *responsible,* and Nikke cringes internally at it as they shoot a pointed glare in the *Viper's* direction.

Ah, yes. *The Viper.*

Nikke struggles not to giggle just thinking of that stupid name... to not burst out laughing when he eyes the stupid fucking snake insignias on his robes. God, he had a mask, didn't he? A little snake mask? What Nikke wouldn't give to see the *Viper* put it on, even if just for a minute...

He manages to compose himself, somehow, and in the meantime peeks between the Viper and Mevnrael. The poor fucker didn't even have it in him to save MC the first time this all went down-- *or* the second. Did Mevnrael *really* think he would have the balls to stand up for them now?

"You wanna know why no one else is speaking up?" Nikke says, drawing Mevnrael's attention back onto him-- quite begrudgingly, it seems. "Because they know I'm right." He throws a hand in the fae and Viper's direction. He doesn't miss the way the little redhead flinches in response. "There ain't no way in the seven hells the *Commander* ain't in on this."

He knows he hit a sore spot the second Vethna's pupils shrink.

"They're not," they spit.

Well, now, that's not the pretty-sounding, sassy tone one would expect from someone of their station. *Someone's upset...*

"No?" Nikke prods, stepping closer. His grin widens, and his tongue slips out from his mouth to idly smell the air, a shiver running down his spine. They're distressed. Upset. Good. It's about fucking time someone else feels that way. "They tell you that? I mean, hells-- they could tell you whatever you want to hear and you'd believe it, wouldn't you?" He asks.

It's a low blow and he knows it. A part of him almost regrets saying it... but not really. It's just an *almost*, an easily dismissible pang in his gut when they cringe at his words and try to hide it behind a brave face.

It doesn't work. Either way, he can see the way their shoulders tense and lips press together.

He's about to go in for the kill, to put the poor thing out of their misery--

"You're jumping to some rather *strong* conclusions regarding MC considering how little you know about them."

The *Viper. Always with the fucking* Viper--

Nikke turns to face him, lips curled back in a snarl. This wasn't his fucking business.

"Says the one who fuckin--" Nikke can't even get his words out before the Viper's sitting up from where he lounges against the fence. His dark gaze is sharp, cold, calculative-- but it does nothing to intimidate Nikke. Not when he knows what a fucking *idiot* he really is.

"You best remember where you are, snake," the Viper states.

Oh, he remembers, all right. He can't fucking forget it. Between the missed meals, shitty power-hungry guards, and *freezing fucking weather,* he knows he's in Plaithus.

And, begrudgingly, he knows he's out of his element here.

Bullshit. All of it's bullshit. This is *exactly* his fucking point, and he doesn't understand why the hell the fae and Mevnrael can't see it. *They're not equals here.* They're entertainment to kick around before they're slaughtered, and the Plaithians? They'll get away scot-free just like they always do.

He can't help but hiss, feeling his fangs draw out, bitter venom spraying onto his tongue. He feels like a teenager again-- angry, cornered, one wrong move from killing something or getting himself killed.

He turns to the Mevnrael again. He doesn't know why. He just emotionally beat the shit out of them, and even if he didn't he knows they would never listen to the likes of someone like him. He's Vrithkan trash. A blood bag. Free magic.

"You know I'm right."

"Do we?" Mevnrael drawls. Something in their voice irks him. It's not just sass this time. No. He sees it in their eyes. That one emotion that makes his skin crawl and heart turn bitter.

Pity. Fucking pity.

For once in his life, he swallows his ego, even as he feels the urge to lash out and grab them by the shoulders-- give them a real scare. Fucking *Mevnraels.* They were more snake than he was.

He takes a deep breath-- swallows thickly-- and then, by some miracle, he manages to say one word through clenched teeth.

"Fine." Another deep breath... "Maybe *you* don't. But that doesn't change the fact I *am* right, and you're all too busy licking the Commander's boots to realize--"

That was a dumb insult.

"Licking their boots?" Mevnrael repeats. He internally cringes. Ah, shit, here we go again-- "What kind of asinine insult is that?"

"Oh, *fuck you--"*

One would honestly think to give him credit. For all the countless insults he hurls about, a solid 80% of them are good, solid, honest work. And the other 20% of the time...

Well, *still.* Majority winner. Didn't he deserve some credit there?

He goes to tell them as much, but the second his eyes meet theirs, his attention is stolen by the figure that appears just over their shoulder. And suddenly, things seem *so much* more interesting...

MC.

They stalk towards the group with the bird bitch in tow, but Nikke couldn't care less about her at the moment. No-- he has more than a few things he'd like to tell MC right to their face, and now, they're here. Serendipitous timing, really.

They take their sweet time walking over-- and Nikke doesn't mind waiting.

"And look who arrives," Nikke croons, his voice almost fond as he extends his arms out towards MC, forcing the attention onto them. He can't help it-- he's growing fond of these little spats of theirs. He'll almost miss them when they're dead and buried.

Almost.

"Before I forget to ask," Nikke chimes, "how's that feathered pillow you slept on? Comfy? I sure hope so-- really wouldn't want that neck of yours to be aching."

He sure hoped it felt better than the fucking stone floor they had him sleeping on, anyway. It wasn't the lack of a bed that bothered him-- or even the small dark space. He could make do with anything. It was the principle.

Jost would scoff at him if she were here.

"Oh, for fuck's sake," Mevnrael groans. They make a big show of rolling their eyes, acting like *he's* the childish one here as if they weren't knee-deep in an argument that made five-year-olds look like wise men a few seconds ago.

"What?" Nikke asks. "It's a genuine concern."

His eyes flicker back to MC then, and his brows raise a little, anticipation building in his chest to see their reaction. Would they try and hit him again? He knew to expect it this time... or maybe they'd just huff and go all silent on him...

Or, maybe, by some miracle, they'd have the decency to be apologetic.

Probably not, though.

"My pillow?" MC repeats slowly. Their brows furrow together... and then the smallest of smirks forms on their face. "It was fucking amazing."

Smug fucker.

"But what about you?" MC asks, stepping closer to him. "How'd *you* sleep?"

Oh, and now they're trying to turn it on *him?* Fat chance. He bites on his cheek, his fang slicing through the soft skin as he tries to keep his composure. They want to be a smartass? He'll be a smartass right back.

"By closing my eyes in staying in place, How the fuck else?" he teases... and the lopsided grin on his face is a genuine one as he sees them be just as annoyed by his quip.

"By the gods," Mevnrael mutters, pinching their brow. Nikke can feel the Viper glaring a hole through them both, but he doesn't care. The *Viper* is really in no condition to be judging anyone or anything.

"What?" MC asks, looking at the others. "I ended the argument, have I not? I mean, I was watching you guys out my window--"

"Creep," Nikke interjects, biting back a smile as MC very willfully ignores him.

"-- and that was like... an hour ago."

The Viper goes to argue, but Nikke knows MC's right. He's a savant at his craft (bullshitting). He likes to think, in another life, if he was born a prissy noble, he'd be a politician, too. Doing that fancy thing where they never shut the fuck up and ruin everyone else's day by ruining their productivity.

So... pretty much what he does now, but paid.

Man, what a life.

"Maybe we would have some peace if *you,"* Mevnrael makes a point of looking at him, "didn't keep picking fights all the time."

"Eh-- what's that saying?" Nikke asks. "It takes two to tango? And you both were *more* than eager to dance--"

"Stop talking."

Nikke makes a show of mulling over their words. "Let me think about that... no."

"If you *insist* on arguing in circles..." Nikke tunes out as the Viper speaks, his mind wandering off to less than savory places of Mevnrael and the Viper both... and then MC...

MC.

"-- what *do* you want?"

Nikke comes out of thought when he realizes MC's staring at him pointedly, and he only just barely manages to catch the tail-end of their question.

What does he want? *What does he want?*

To not be kept in a dungeon, for starters. To not have been stuck with this stupid fucking job of Fate in the first place. To be *anywhere* but out in this *freezing* goddamn fucking field--

To be *warm...*

*"*In general?" Nikke retorts, his mouth moving before his mind can think. "Well, a lot of things. Attention for one..." he begins to count on his fingers, his gaze glued on MC. And then he smiles, that little voice cooing in the back of his mind to do something stupid...

And he heeds it, stepping closer and closer to MC. He can see that little gleam in their eyes that they try, and fail miserably, at hiding.

"A good fuck is always more than welcomed, too," he purrs. MC's jaw clenches in response, and he knows he's being raunchy but he doesn't really care... not when MC's hand is pressing against his chest to keep him from coming closer to them...

He seizes the opportunity to scan them head-to-toe... the only emotion that begins to rival the vindictive lust in his veins is the insatiable urge to land a fucking dagger between their ribs and watch them bleed out. And *that* thought makes him shiver in just as much delight as the first one...

Perhaps even more so.

His eyes meet MC's again, and he loves that he can see them waiting for the other shoe to drop. This little song and dance feels so familiar now.

"And..." he teases, making them wait for it... "The only thing better than a good fuck is a good fight."

"You want me to fight you?" MC drawls, their eyes narrowing. They're already entertaining the thought, their pupils shrinking. He can feel the venom dripping from his teeth, leaving his gums feeling sore. "Why the hells would I do that?"

"Because it's boring as all hells. And besides-- we could be shipped off tomorrow, Commander," he says, lips twinging upwards at the title, "and you're really thinking of passing up the opportunity to train?" He clicks his tongue, feeling a rattle reverberate through his chest. "Naughty."

They're playing coy, and Nikke's patience has officially waned. He's tired of sitting around. He wants *fun.* By habit, his hand lands on the dagger tucked beneath the bandana tied around his thigh and pulls it out with the idle flick of a wrist, and, with practiced ease, he presses the blade against their throat.

For one millisecond, he entertains it. He could do it, right here, right now. Put an end to this. All it would take is a little more pressure and the dragging of his hand... and then that familiar feeling of hot wet blood would spill over him.

And it would be *over.*

But, for some reason, he doesn't want it to be. Not now. Not now that the chance is right here, laying in front of him.

He's being sadistic. Cruel. A voice in the back of his mind chimes he must look so much like his father right now, but he swallows it down. MC isn't worth the pity. Isn't worth the effort of self-reflection.

So he smiles. He smiles, and bares his fangs, and does the one thing he does best. *Antagonize.* It's the only thing he can think to do against the slurry of emotions building up within his chest.

"Fight me," he rasps. His eyes barely dart to Syfyn before going back to MC. "Or her," he muses, "though you might hurt my feelings if you do."

It's not a lie. Not really.

"So who'll it be?" He asks, pressing the dagger harder against their skin...

It would be so easy-- and he finds his blade nearly going to cut across, to draw blood... but instead, he drags it upwards, careful to leave only a while line where his knife trails instead of crimson. He tilts their chin up, his eyes glued to the way their lips part and their breathing quickens...

He knows that sound. It's not fear. Not anger. It's something else entirely, and when Nikke's eyes flash to meet the Commander's, he feels something warm blossom in his gut...

A smile curls on his lips the same time it does on the Commander's, and oh, this is going to be *fun.*

"Alright," MC breathes. "You want a fight?"

Nikke goes to nod, his eyes glued to their fangs that gleam in their barely parted mouth, and all he can think about is what those might feel like, embedded in his skin, biting against his hand to try and stay quiet while he--

Fuck.

Their foot slams up against his gut, kicking him hard, and Nikke finds himself completely stunned for a single moment. He should've seen that coming, he knows better-- and the fact their stupid fucking face was enough to keep him distracted has his blood boiling. Fucking hells...

MC stares at him with a smug little grin, biting their tongue to chomp down on a laugh that threatens to leave them as he regains his footing. The kick had nearly sent him sprawling right down onto his ass, and the kick to his ego hurts more than the way his stomach aches, his lungs struggling to take in another breath.

He squeezes the dagger tighter in his hand, and he feels a sliver of satisfaction at the way MC's lips press together in clear discontent. He doesn't know if he should feel a swell in pride at the fact he managed to keep a grip or feel even worse at how pathetic MC must assume him to be.

Gods, at this point he almost wants to kill them to prove something to them just as much as he wants to prove something to himself.

"Come on--" Nikke snaps, a breathless grin forming on his face-- "you didn't think it would be that easy, did you?" *Gods,* his lungs really *do* hurt right now...

"I hope you're quick," MC says... and is he lacking oxygen or did MC just scan his body? "It's more fun that way."

He pauses... then clicks his tongue. They were *definitely* looking.

MC begins to circle around him-- but their hands clasp behind their back in a gesture that's mockingly off-guard.

"I bet you've just been *dying* to be face-to-face with me, huh?" They ask. Their voice comes out like a condescending purr... and Nikke fucking hates to admit that it makes a little shiver shoot down his spine. "I mean, you were supposed to kill me, what, *weeks* ago? And yet here we are-- and, now that we *are* here..."

Here we go. Again. The talking, the yapping... Didn't he do this so they *wouldn't* have to talk?

"I can't help but wonder what a Vrithkan gorgon is doing so far from home, ya know?" MC asks. "I mean, I guess I can't blame you, not with the way that Vrithka's falling apart at the seams--"

He hates that, for as rudimentary of a tease that it is, it hits him right where it hurts most. He's used to hearing it-- Vrithka's dying, Vrithka's falling apart... but for some reason, hearing it come from MC *stings.* And maybe it's because there's that knowing look in their eyes, that lilt to their voice that implies they're not talking about surface-level politics. They're talking about something deeper. Something personal. Something that makes Nikke think they could pick him apart just by looking at him, and spit it all right back in his face.

It terrifies him.

"I bet ya think you're being *real* clever right now," Nikke says, stopping in his tracks. "But you're not."

But that's the thing. They *are* clever. And that's dangerous. MC copies him, stopping in their tracks... and Nikke bides his time in this little stalemate as he cracks his neck, a contented little rattle escaping his throat as he does. He focuses in on MC. The way they look at him like they know everything there is to know.

He *hates* it.

Because they don't know. Not really. They don't know him. Don't know shit.

Not like how he knows *them.*

So, Nikke lets MC draw close, keeping his eyes focused on their face as he grits his teeth, fighting every instinct in him that says to lunge, to attack, to put an end to this... and when they reach out slowly, their hand reaching for his throat, all he does is swallow...

And run his tongue along his fangs.

They didn't really think this would work, did they? That he'd get all puppy-dog-eyed for them...

Okay, well, admittedly, the first time, *maybe.* But this wasn't the first time... or the second... or the third, even, that Nikke's witnessed them do this-- try to take their opponents off-guard, mess with their head. He wonders when's the last time someone did the same to MC, kept them on their toes... but them in their place...

Their hand grips his chin, and their eyes flicker away from his eyes to scan his face... and Nikke almost feels a prideful purr escape his chest. Good... just like that... keep looking...

Their hand slips down to grab his neck--

And Nikke lunges.

It's instinctual, embedded into his very nature, and his mouth opens as his fangs flex, a rattle escaping him as a low rumble. Their arm flies up to protect their face, a cut-off growl escaping them, and the force of Nikke's attack sends them both sprawling onto the ground. Some dark, predatorial satisfaction fills him as his teeth sink into the flesh of their arms, digging in deeper as MC squirms and struggles beneath him. He can feel the heat of their flesh against his gums, taste their blood and sweat, salty against his tongue, as rivulets of red drip down his jaw.

He could keep going, he thinks. Bite harder. Deeper. Let the venom that's itching to flow from his fangs drip free.

But he doesn't.

And he doesn't know why.

And MC doesn't push him off.

And he knows *exactly* why.

Their eyes lock, their chests heaving, MC laying beneath him with a wild look in their eyes. He can feel their blood running down his chin and neck, and idly, he runs his tongue along his gums to lick his teeth clean. MC's eyes follow the movement, and he watches their lips part, pupils wide, their breath daring to hitch for a fraction of a second.

He could lean down right now, he thinks-- he can feel their breath coming out in warm, hot huffs that make his skin tingle, his claws digging into the dirt beneath them as his eyes dare to flicker downwards-- and then their hands twitch.

He grabs their wrists in his hands before they even get the chance to raise a fist to him-- drags them above their head and forces them down to the ground. This feels good. Better than it should. And it's not just the pride of victory.

"I win," he rasps.

He offers them one last roguish smile, not missing the way their eyes linger on his lips...

And then he stands.

Seven Forms of Love. | Nikke Ivante. (1/2)

Oct 19, 2023

Eros – Romantic, Passionate Love

1.) Is your OC romantic in the traditional sense? Do they enjoy giving or receiving gifts of flowers or confectionaries? Or are there other courtship traditions from their culture of origin that are important to them?

He hovers in the middle ground! He definitely likes to do romantic things for his partner, but he considers those romantic things to be exploring ruins, going on pirate adventures, and betting on each other in a fight ring as opposed to having a nice dinner... though Nikke *is* fond of a good picnic.

I will say, Nikke *loves* to give gifts to his partner, however. He'll often see stuff and go "hm, I really think MC would like this," and then just immediately buy it. And if MC ever points out something of his that they like, they can fully expect him to just give it to them... or make them a copy if, for sentimental reasons, Nikke isn't quite willing to part with it.

I will say Vrithkan gorgons don't really have any *general* courtship behaviors that are unique to them. But there are a few quirks to them when in a committed relationship with one. For one, family units all have "tokens" that they carry or wear that show they're part of that group. In Nikke's case, it's a coin he wears braided in his hair. So Nikke gifting a coin like that to MC would basically be his equivalent of proposing, as it's proposing the idea of either A.) inviting MC to join his family or, alternatively B.) creating a *new* family unit with MC.

Gorgons also have a little quirk regardless of where they're from, where they'll purposely bite their partner and inject them with little bouts of venom at a time. The idea is to slowly build a tolerance to each other's venom so it essentially becomes harmless. It's a symbol of trust, as it essentially robs both parties of their most instinctual and innate defense mechanism.

2.) How important is sex to them in a relationship? Do they see it as something essential to their happiness? Would they be able to remain in a monogamous relationship with someone they loved without sex?

Sex is pretty important to Nikke, but he doesn't *need* it in a relationship to survive. He does have two hands, after all. That being said, sexual satisfaction is definitely important to him, and if his partner is up for it, it would definitely make up a big part of the relationship. He has a pretty high sex drive and is definitely willing, 99% of the time, to do it whenever, wherever. He's also the type to really like experimenting with different things to keep things "interesting" or exciting. He's a rather... *versatile*... lover.

3.) How do they feel about public displays of romantic affection? Does it make them uncomfortable? How do they feel if a romantic partner kisses them in public?

Nikke does not mind PDA *at all*. He definitely likes to hold hands though. It's more of an automatic thing for him-- he's the kind of person to just always be holding MC's hand, tugging them around when they're walking together, or stroking MC's knuckles if they're sitting near each other. *Alternatively*, he'd definitely love having MC sit on his lap or otherwise sit on theirs if MC's willing. Nikke really loves physical affection when in a deep relationship, some of which *might* stem from the fact he's partially cold-blooded. He's definitely the type to be playing with MC's hair and blatantly cuddling them in public, no matter the context. I can definitely see it irking some of their travel companions, hilariously enough.

Nikke doesn't have any shame. Doesn't matter if it's a chaste cheek kiss or drunken heavy petting-- he's game.

4.) Do they believe in love at first sight? Have they ever developed a crush or romantic (or erotic) fixation upon a stranger based on their appearance alone?

I don't think he *disbelieves* it. He's not going to sit there and argue with someone over it if they claim it's real. But it's also not something he really thinks about.

Nikke doesn't have many opinions on love or romance, as he's never believed it to be something that concerns him. He has (**cough** as of now **cough**) zero interest in romance of any sort, and even in his youth, I don't know if Nikke's ever really had *genuine* crushes. He had a violent and brutal childhood, and it completely skewed his understanding of affection and love. And he's *aware* of that.

He knows what a healthy relationship is supposed to look like. He just doesn't think he's capable of having that with someone. So he limits himself to sexual relationships and flings here and there-- and he hasn't really struggled in that regard (in the sense he's never accidentally caught feelings for anyone before).

However, Nikke has had *plenty* of incidents where he's become sexually attracted to someone based on appearance alone-- and he's not afraid to act on that desire, either. He'll just make sure to keep the person shut up so they don't accidentally ruin it by talking.

5.) How closely is their opinion of their own beauty (or lack thereof) linked to their confidence? Do they see themselves as more or less worthy of love or sex based on how attractive they feel?

Nikke's objectively good-looking, and he knows it. He's more than a bit arrogant in that regard, and I don't think Nikke's ever really been physically insecure. Not in a way that was long-lasting, at least. His physical attractiveness has always played a big part in his personality. He knows it lets him get away with acting the way he does, blunt and vulgar, amongst other things. And it does give him the confidence he has to approach strangers so bluntly.

Like I said, I don't know if Nikke's ever felt *ugly.* Even if he feels off his A-game in the looks department, he still thinks he looks *good*, so he still feels confident in romance. I also don't think he views any of it as being "worthy" of love or sex so much as he just generally acknowledges he, personally, feels more confident the better he feels he looks.

That being said, even if Nikke woke up feeling like he looked awful, nothing is going to stop him from flirting with the attractive waitress. It might just be instinctual at this point.

Philia – Affectionate, Platonic Love

1.) Does your OC have a Best Friend? If they do then how long have they known each other and how did they meet? If they don't then do they have a close group of friends they love equally? Or are they more of a loner?

Not really, no! Nikke's one of those people who has a lot of people he's "friendly" with, but the depth of those relationships is usually never genuine or dependable. He works for an unsavory group of people, which means he's usually *surrounded* by unsavory people… and considering Nikke has a surprisingly strict list of moral codes, it usually means he dislikes those people. However, Nikke isn't out there picking fights. He knows he needs to be on good terms with the people he's working with, otherwise, he's going to end up with a knife in his throat in the middle of the night.

And back home, in Vrithka, he was often too busy as a kid training to ever really make "normal" friends. Now, while he has a rather "lofty" position in his village, no one really *knows* him. I've mentioned before in past lists that he's very "idolized" in a way-- he's viewed as a protector in the village which means, yes, people look up to him and "like" him, but it's in a way that puts him in a leading position. That's not friendship. It's expectation.

I'd put Nikke at a 50/50 for being a loner. He really likes going out and being rowdy, making quick "friends" with strangers to have an enjoyable evening… but he also likes sneaking away to hidden places to be by himself and just *exist*.

I will *also* say that this genuinely puts his relationship with MC + friends in an interesting place, because Nikke's never pretended to like any of them, nor *will* he. This means the context of their relationships will already be different than the ones Nikke usually has.

2.) Does your OC find it easy to make friends? Or are there barriers to them doing so? If so then are these due to issues of inclination, communication, or something else entirely?

Very easy. I don't think Nikke charms people like, say, Sabir or Amilia charm people. He doesn't go out of his way to be amicable or "blend in" with those around him. But Nikke's loud, extroverted, and makes sure no one's ever left out. He has a way of making people feel "seen," and while yes, there are a few people who are rubbed the wrong way by his vulgarity and sarcasm, most people get swept up in his performative personality.

But like I said, those are *shallow* fleeting "friendships." *Actual* friendships… Nikke has a hard time making those. I don't think it's because his guard's up, or he's against being vulnerable in a platonic sense. I just don't think Nikke's ever in the right places or situations to meet someone who he'd get along with on a genuine level, and the one place he might've really had the chance to (his village) he's been thrust into a leadership role, which really stole that chance away from him all over again.

Nikke's closed off and not receptive (as of now) to romantic intimacy-- but friendly intimacy is something he's all for.

3.) What qualities does your OC most value in a friend? Loyalty? Shared sense of humour? Or something else?

Humor is probably the biggest, followed by loyalty/genuineness. Nikke's a jester, and he makes light of pretty much *everything*. So he'd have a hard time getting along with someone who's offended by that, or finds it "distasteful." Just because Nikke's making jokes about something doesn't mean he doesn't take it seriously-- he just hates *complete* emotional vulnerability. And I don't see that changing. It doesn't matter how much he cares for a friend, he'll never be comfortable just sitting, being solemn and completely serious, while having a heart-to-heart. He needs his little jokes (terrible and weak as they may be) to keep himself from clamming up. Take that from him and you'll find him closing off completely.

And like I said-- loyalty/genuineness. He just wants someone who is unabashed about caring for him and having his back. Everything else can be filled with jokes, but when it comes down to it, he wants to know with zero doubt that he can completely rely on someone-- and he'll be the same way in turn. Nikke is the *ultimate* ride-or-die (honestly… most of the ROs are now that I think about it…)

4.) Is your OC able to build close friendships with people very different from themselves? Perhaps in terms of culture, age or personality?

It's easy for him, yes. Nikke is pretty worldly-- not like Jost, but more than most of the ROs who've never left their home country at all. I'd definitely say Nikke + Jost (and Freedom/Amilia) are among the most unbiased in the group. Vrithka as a whole doesn't really have a nationalistic identity to adhere to, and while The Taipan paints *everyone* who is not them as being awful, Nikke + Jost never really bought into that.

Nikke's traveled around quite a bit and met lots of different people, and he genuinely enjoys learning about them, their cultures, and the places they come from. Nikke's not a very judgmental person at all, so while he knows the stereotypes associated with certain people and places, he's hesitant to believe them. And even then, he'll never just assume someone is a certain way because they come from a certain place (*cough* unlike the Plaithian cast *cough*)

That being said, Nikke absolutely has beef with Plaithus + Vygrand as countries, however. But those are for reasons outside of national bias.

5.) What is their most fervent wish for their best friend(s)? How far would they go to make it happen?

To be happy? To succeed in life?

I think the first is most important. I don't see Nikke to really be the type to talk someone out of general bad or stupid ideas. In fact, he's the friend who hypes them up and is like "Let's do it! I'll help you--" and proceeds to get into weird and crazy trouble. He's very much in the camp that you should do stupid stuff while you can so you don't have regrets-- and you can focus on being mature and putting a "stick up your ass" when you're older and trying to settle down. He'll always have his friends' back in stuff like that, even if everyone else tries to talk them out of it. If a friend is in need, in any way, he's there. And while he may *tease* his friends about it, he really won't want anything in return for helping them out.

That being said, that's only for *fun* bad decisions. But if someone he really cared for suggested an idea that was just objectively bad and/or self-destructive, then Nikke would step in and try to talk them out of it. That being said, he'll never "put his foot down" or *force* the person to not do it. He won't even cut them out of his life. He'll just watch, from the sidelines, trying to help where he can while being discontent and upset about the choices his friend makes.

Nikke's by no means self-sacrificial in stuff like that. He knows it's not his responsibility, and he knows when to cut his losses.

Storge – Unconditional, Familial Love.

1.) Did your OC's parents love them unconditionally? If so then has this helped them feel confident as an adult? If not then how has this affected them? What were the conditions their family attached to their relationship?

Yes, but *loving* someone doesn't really mean anything. Nikke's parents loved him a lot, his father included-- but that didn't stop them from putting him through terrible things for the sake of "protecting him". While Nikke's father loved Nikke unconditionally, he did not *approve* of or *support* him unconditionally. When Nikke was ruthless, effective, and authoritative, he had his father's approval-- which Nikke simultaneously craved and hated. And if Nikke was anything else, he was either ignored entirely or "punished."

Nikke's mother, on the other hand, was more "doting," though that's only in comparison to his father. She was still very much a tough-love person, but she never put Nikke through the things his father did and was often the one taking care of him after long days of training-- teaching him to clean his own wounds and stitch himself, making him food, washing his clothes, etc. And that love and care was unwavering, no matter what. But when Nikke's father died, his mother became a lot more cold, more distant, and emotionally volatile in a way Nikke couldn't predict.

In a way, it both bolstered Nikke's confidence and utterly decimated it. In combat and fighting, he's arrogant and confident, because his father *ensured* he'd be one of the best fighters. There was no other option. And Nikke's *confident* he's a better person than his father, confident that he himself is a good person, which I can't say he would've strived so strongly to be if it weren't for his tumultuous childhood.

That being said, Nikke's whole sarcastic personality and use of humor as a defense mechanism also sprung up from his childhood. It's the reason he can't be vulnerable without making a joke of things. Surprisingly though, I still don't know if I would really say Nikke's emotionally closed-off or guarded, at least not in the traditional sense.

2.) Does your OC have children? If so then how fiercely do they love them? If they have more than one then do they love them all equally? If they do not have children then is this part of their future plans?

Nikke does not have kids (*cough* at least not any that he knows about? *cough*), and children are absolutely *not* in his future plan. He doesn't plan to settle down at all when it comes to forming his *own* family unit. Mostly because he doesn't want to repeat what his father did, and he doesn't really trust himself in a domestic setting, nor does he really *want* a domestic life (at least not now).

That being said, Nikke does love kids. He plays with and tends to the kids in the village pretty consistently, and they all love him-- mostly because he himself is an overgrown child. Granted, he may or may not have also accidentally taught them a few… *colorful* words.

3.) How far does parental approval (imagined or expressed) impact upon their current sense of self-worth? What might they sacrifice or attempt to achieve in order to ensure the approval of their parents?

It mattered to Nikke more than he wanted it to. He wanted to say he didn't care for his father at all, that he didn't care *what* his father thought of him, but that would be a lie-- because a part of him always craved it. And Nikke sacrificed a lot of himself to earn that approval. All of himself, really. Nikke fundamentally changed himself both to spite his father *and* to earn his approval. His humor and carefree attitude to spite, his ruthlessness to impress, and his anger a byproduct.

Now, Nikke compares himself to his father a lot. He doesn't want to be anything like him-- not on a fundamental level-- but even Nikke's been forced into acknowledging that he shares a lot more with his father than he's ever wanted to more than once.

4.) Does your OC have any siblings? If so then did their parents have a favourite growing up? Has their relationship with their sibling changed in adulthood? If they don't have any siblings then do they perhaps feel they have missed out on an important relationship? Do they have any especially close friends who go some way towards filling that role?

Nikke only has Jost as a sister, and his favorite sibling is himself <3 because he's the better one <3

On a more serious level, Nikke was the favorite child. He followed orders better, was generally just “nicer” (but Jost was only ever mean *because* she was always second favorite), and took credit for Jost’s *mistakes* which then ended up in Nikke both being punished, but praised for his “confidence” and “risk-taking” abilities. Nikke’s always loved and cared for Jost a lot, but Jost has always resented Nikke for being the favorite-- even though Jost never really did anything to try and gain her parent’s approval and often went in the opposite direction of trying to purposefully spite them.

I don’t think Jost + Nikke’s relationship has changed much since childhood. It’s always been Nikke covering Jost’s mistakes and getting credit for the good *and* the bad, Jost resenting that but only wanting credit for her good deeds and not wanting to face the consequences of her actions, and Nikke being completely *oblivious* to Jost's resentment.

Nikke’s always treated Jost like she’s fragile. Jost’s always viewed Nikke as being invincible, incapable of being hurt emotionally or physically in any way that really matters. Their dynamic + perception of each other will only begin to change now, during the main story… and maybe MC will have a hand in shaping that relationship…

Maybe…

5.) Is your OC able to love without necessarily needing or expecting reciprocation or reward? Or are all their relationships to some extent transactional? Have they ever loved another person unconditionally, whether a child or another adult?

Yes, absolutely. Nikke loves surprisingly selflessly. He’s a caregiver and protector, and he *likes* being those things. What he doesn't like is the lack of appreciation that comes with that sometimes, or how quick people are to blame him when things go wrong. So if he’s with someone who just *acknowledges* what he does, even if they can’t or don’t reciprocate it, he’ll be more than content and happy. It’s not even a thing you’d have to worry about him becoming resentful for.

Hell, he loves *Jost* and does all those things even though she actively *hates* him for it. It’s just in his nature, I think, to care for people who are close to him, regardless of whether they want him to or not. But he’s also willing to let them go if they insist. Jost has fled from Vrithka more than once and regularly goes no-contact with Nikke-- and when that happens, he lets it be. He doesn’t try to force anything. But when Jost comes back, he’s always there, willing to forgive and forget… *usually*.

Nikke doesn’t love easily, but when he loves, it’s *always* unconditional.

They're Coming For You | Rewrite [Prologue]

Sep 27, 2023

AN: The intro scene to the game is being expanded... greatly. The encounter can end with MC being turned into BBQ, killing Jamie, possibly maybe nearly being ***kidnapped****... amongst other things...* 👀

Jamie breathes quickly and heavily from beneath you, his tanned skin flushed and eyes wide with fear. His eyes glow in the darkness of the night, the light reflecting off your blade as you press it against his throat. He swallows thickly, then, his eyes finally raising to meet yours.

"You have no idea what you're doing," he whispers, his voice shaking.

Your eyes flicker over him, lingering on the blue sash that sits around his waist. It's fancy, embroidered with gold thread.

"Let me guess," you breathe, "you're important, and if I hurt you, your *family* is gonna come and get you, is that right?"

You know how Vygranders work— the nobility, anyhow. They throw around their names like they mean something, but they don't. Not here. Not *anywhere.*

"Maybe," Jamie whispers, a bead of sweat running down his temple. You guessed right, it seems. "But they're— they're looking for *you*."

Your brows furrow. Your eyes flicker between his as his own flitter over your face. *They're* looking for you? *Who?*

Your mind races with differing suggestions. You're not sure you like any of them.

[[Hear him out. You're curious.]]

"They? Who's *they?*" You whisper, your grip on him tightening. Your blade cuts into his neck, a thin line of blood dripping down his skin.

"The *Geldakris,*" he stammers. Your eyes narrow as you hear his accent thicken. *Geldakris.* That's what they call the Leading Houses in Vygrand— their little psuedo-government. There are seven of them, though you don't recall their names... except for one.

House Mevnrael.

A bout of hatred and disgust slithers down your spine at the thought of them. They were the big dogs, the name you heard screamed out by enemy soldiers as they descended upon you. *For Vygrand, for Magic, for "Mevnrael."*

"The Geldakris?" You repeat. "House Mevnrael?"

"All of them," he whispers, voice cracking. He swallows thickly again, squirming a little in your grasp as his eyes flicker down to your blade, pressed against his jugular. You're pressing down too hard, you realize.

"Why?" You whisper.

It can't be for anything good. You led the Plaithian armies against them. You single-handedly took down their most skilled fighters. You slayed the dragon that they launched upon your people, the very one they claimed to be unkillable.

You are the person they sing cautionary lullabies to their children about at night. The beast beneath the floorboards, the monster beneath the bed. But that was from *Before.* Before your exile. Before the blood within you curdled and turned weak.

And now, now that you *are* weak, they're hunting you down for revenge. That's the only plausible answer, isn't it?

"Why?" You press again, harder this time. You need answers.

The man goes to answer your question, his lips parting, but he goes silent suddenly, his gaze going unfocused.

He's not looking at you anymore. He's looking behind you.

"Vethna," he breathes.

... Vethna?

Seven Forms of Love. | Syfyn Javall. (2/2)

Sep 6, 2023

Agape – Selfless, Universal Love.

1.) Does your OC wish to make the world a better place? How far do they see that as being their responsibility? What lengths would they go to in order to help achieve this?

Syfyn wishes the world *was* a better place, but she's resigned herself to the fact it's not. Life is brutal, unforgiving, and cruel. Before, she used to use that rationale to say that it just made the good things in

life all the sweeter. How wonderful is it to have people you love, and moments of happiness, in a world so bitter?

Now it's just a hopeless fact she's resigned herself to. *Life is brutal, unforgiving, and cruel.* And it is a good soldier's duty to continue living despite that-- to keep fighting on, even if she oftentimes finds herself wanting nothing more than to just give up.

As for *making* the world a better place... Syfyn never considered that her job. The world is awful, and her job is to do her best to maintain order in the chaos that is the world. Sometimes that requires bad things to be done, but she's always believed that the ends justify the means. She's *had* to. Otherwise... otherwise, how else could she justify her own actions? Her own beliefs?

2.) Does your OC feel a spiritual connection to the world around them? Do they have a particular love for nature or living things?

... no. Not at all. Syfyn *likes* pretty places, and enjoys nature, but she doesn't feel *connected* to it at all. She feels isolated, awkward, *wrong*. That's less nature's fault and more of Syfyn's-- she feels that way everywhere these days, like a puzzle piece that just doesn't fit.

That being said, Syfyn loves nature a lot, and having wings makes it easy to fly away from the Kingdom to go for brief day trips to all sorts of beautiful places. She likes to watch the wildlife, the simple nature of things. The cycle of life is straightforward, and simple, leaving little room for moral dilemmas.

She only wishes her own life could be the same way.

As for respect for living things-- Syfyn respects all life for *animals*. She's not a hunter, at all, and she finds it unsavory business for nobles to do for sport. She'd be able to do it, take an animal's life, but she'd find it to be a waste. (Unless it's a cat. Cats are the exception-- she'd sooner break a man's spine than even raise her voice at one.)

And for humans... well, Syfyn may be a bit insensitive when it comes to human life. Killing so many people on the regular has caused her to have a hard time feeling any sort of empathy for the lives she takes, or for the families that suffer. Sometimes, she feels bad about it. Like a bad person.

But it's not like there's anything she can do about it.

3.) To what extent does your OC believe in the value (or even existence) of true altruism? Do they see an unselfish concern for the welfare of others as being naïve or foolish? Or as a moral quality to which people should aspire?

Syfyn believes it exists-- partly because some MCs have *proved* that it exists. Partly because her own mother proved it exists. And her father. *And her friends.*

And every single one of those people died, or suffered, greatly.

Syfyn views altruism as something noble-- something good-- and something utterly foolish. In that sense, she views herself as the "bad guy," often forcing those she cares about to give up on those views during certain moments. A good example would be when Syfyn forces MC to keep fighting when MC tries to stop the war. Things like that happen frequently in Syfyn's life, the people around her wanting to do good as she desperately begs them to just do what they're *supposed* to instead of what's right. She's lost so many people that she's cared for, and selfishly enough, she can't stand the thought of losing another one to martyrdom.

4.) Does your OC have a religious faith which emphasizes the importance of a love for all people? If so then do they try to follow these teachings authentically? Or do they just pay lip-service to them? If not then do they follow a more martial or mercantile faith? Or none at all?

Syfyn isn't at all religious. Most people in Navara aren't. Ever since the Great Abandonment, when the gods left the world, very few people have seen the use of worshipping dead beings. Syfyn is one of them.

Syfyn doesn't really believe in something "greater" than her in a way that's equivalent to faith. She does bad things for the sake of the Crown and the army, but that's not because she has *faith* in them. She does them because it's her duty. Her job.

Syfyn believes in loyalty to a fault. That is the *only* thing she stays true to. She reminds me of this one quote from Sylvia Plath: "I know pretty much what I like and dislike; but please, don’t ask me who I am."

There are other ideals that Syfyn loves the idea of-- protecting those who are weak and innocent, suffering for the sake of the greater good. But she knows those are just the fantasies of those who read stories about knights. No real soldier can carry out those duties without ending up in a shallow, early grave.

(Bonus Fact: However, if the gods *did* still exist, Syfyn would 110% be a follower of Light.)

5.) Does your OC find it easy to empathize with their enemies? Or do they see it as important to dehumanise them in order to combat them with sufficient determination?

Syfyn is an utter machine when it comes to violence. Throw her into a field, point her sword, and she will cut down anyone who steps in front of her without question. She is brutal, efficient, indiscriminative. It's not even dehumanization. She just doesn't *care.* Syfyn will repeat the biases that Plaithus has instilled in her-- that her own mother instilled in her-- but she doesn't truly believe them. She knows they're generalizations, focusing on the worst of the enemy.

Syfyn doesn't need to justify her killing. It's what makes her an efficient soldier. And a terrifying one.

The only person she finds herself constantly having to justify her hatred for, and her violence toward, is MC. And that's because MC is the one person Syfyn will never be able to bring herself to kill, no matter how much she tells herself she would be able to. If MC snapped again, she thinks, she would put a quick end to it. She would save those around her.

But she wouldn't. She wouldn't, and the same thing would happen all over again. And deep, deep down... she knows it.

I think, in truth, a part of Syfyn likes it. Likes violence. Likes death. It's a vicious, dark part of her. A part of her that she wished didn't exist. But it does.

Ludus – Playful, Flirtatious Love.

1.) Does your OC have any particular favourite chat up lines? If not for themselves then perhaps ones they have suggested to a friend? How effective do these tend to be?

I think Syfyn would genuinely rather eat a piece of coal than have a "line." She thinks they're corny, cheesy, and utterly painful to listen to, nonetheless *say.* Syfyn doesn't even know how to come up with them-- and if you asked her she'd just wrinkle her nose, awkwardly look off to the side, and clear her throat while trying, and failing, to recall some generic line she heard once.

That being said, Syfyn sometimes does manage to say a one-liner that can take someone's breath away. But that's either because A.) She's genuine and unaware of the fact what she's saying could be flirting or B.) she's blunt and that makes her sometimes say things *completely* out of pocket (in the best of ways.)

2.) Is your OC particularly skilled at flirting? Have they had to practice this or does it just happen naturally?

Unintentionally, yes. On purpose... no. God, no.

Syfyn can't *flirt*, but she can flirt. She won't be using any lines on you, but she will be giving you heart eyes, blushing at everything you say while trying (and failing) to hide it, and ends up complimenting you constantly. Jokingly say you're perfect? She'll nod and subtly smile, her voice genuine as she says, "You are."

And, sometimes her gaze becomes more than just heart eyes... and she finds herself leaning closer to someone without realizing it, gaze lingering on the lips of the person she's with. (And then proceed to freak the fuck out when someone actually closes the gap and kisses her, because she was completely oblivious to the fact she was inviting one).

And no. Syfyn has never viewed flirting as a skill to practice or refine!

3.) How does your OC feel about one-night stands? Have they ever enjoyed a night of passionate romance with a stranger? Is this something they are quite keen on recreationally? Or only something they might engage in under specific circumstances (such as the eve of a battle or after a difficult breakup)?

Syfyn's never had a one-night stand! Romance really isn't something she's interested in unless she's close to someone, and the same goes for sex.

While I don't see Syfyn ever doing something like Friends with Benefits, where it's consistent, I can see her *maybe* having a one-night stand with a friend after a battle. She's more animalistic and aggressive after fighting, and a *lot* more confident. So if a friend suggested something, or made a move on her, that might be one of the only times she'd indulge herself in such a thing. But it'd have to be a *good* friend-- someone who was on a similar level to MC... though then Syfyn, post said one-night stand, might behave differently...

Actually, the more I think about it, the deeper the rabbit hole goes.

4.) Who was your OC's first crush? How do they feel about it now?

Honestly... it was probably MC, regardless of if MC liked Syfyn back. But it would be one of those innocent kid crushes-- where you just think the person is super, *super* cool, and like hanging out around them.

Regardless of whether MC liked her back, that crush would "fade" in the teen years, Syfyn viewing MC as a good friend and peer in battle... and then that crush would slowly creep back in a much more mature way into adulthood (if MC liked her back), and Syfyn would have that "oh," moment.

5.) What seduction techniques are most likely to be effective when it comes to your OC? Are there some things guaranteed to get them going? Or are they immune to such things?

Seduction?

If Syfyn isn't invested in the person emotionally, she's pretty much a stone wall-- and trust me, people have tried before. She'll offer awkward laughs, and tight-lipped smiles, and politely decline, no matter how appealing the person may be.

With friends, I could definitely see Syfyn being someone who would playfully flirt with them if they both knew it wasn't romantic, making faux-raunchy comments in an attempt to make the other cringe.

Now, with a friend she *does* like, and cares for, she'd become incredibly easy to fluster. Like... comically so. I mean Syfyn literally ran away when MC first kissed her if you didn't kiss her in the barn, and even if you *do* kiss her in the barn, her brain short-circuited.

And... as for a relationship... It's a complete 180. Try to seduce her, or flirt with her heavily, and she'll twist it on you real quick. It's not like she knows she's doing it, though. She's just easy to rile up, and she can be *incredibly* impatient...

Pragma – Committed, Long-Lasting Love.

1.) Is your OC in a committed long-term relationship (or relationships)? If so then what has contributed to this relationship lasting so well? If they are not in such a relationship, then is this something that saddens them or which they regret?

The only long-term relationship Syfyn would've been in is with MC! In which case, it's not really a secret as to why it lasted so well... (if you ignore the ending, that is--). They had similar life experiences, knew each other for years, had a deep trust in one another, and were always reliable and there for each other. Plus, in a relationship, Syfyn is oddly attentive. She can be oblivious to a lot of things, but when it comes to those she cares for, she's incredibly aware. If MC was upset about something, she knew. If that thing was external, she'd know why immediately-- but if it was something *she* did... she'd probably be a bit confused and annoyed by the fact she *knows* she did something wrong, but has no idea what.

The good news is that Syfyn's a bit like a puppy and will not rest until she's figured out how to fix a problem. The only real weak spot is that Syfyn, on the other hand, will hide her emotions, even in a romance. So if something is bothering her, she won't say it, and, well... it's easy to see how that can become problematic quick. Granted, since MC has known her so long, it isn't easy for them to pick up on her discomfort and force her to spill.

Otherwise, if Syfyn was never romanced, she's never been in any relationship. And yeah, it's something that bothers her. I don't know if regret would be the right word, however. I think it's almost a sort of grief at the fact she's not someone who's "meant" to have those sorts of things-- love, companionship. She's a tool for war, and she'll die young and alone.

A fact she always knew-- but when she's alone, and *lonely*, it hurts all the same.

2.) What is the biggest challenge that your OC has had to overcome in a long-term relationship or friendship? What helped them get through this?

... MC murdering their troop and then trying to assassinate Trystan before mutilating Syfyn is, I gotta say, probably the biggest challenge in a relationship Syfyn's had to overcome 💀

But ignoring that, I'll say there is, canonically, a period of time where Syfyn + MC's friends in the military academy died later in adulthood at war, and Syfyn + MC had a clash of minds in how to cope with the loss.

I truly think most, if not all, of MC's and Syfyn's disputes in *canon* are caused by the military. However, they always got over it eventually.

3.) Are your OC's parents still together? To what degree do they look to their own parents as a model for their own ideal relationship?

... They're together in death?

Jokes aside, I don't think Syfyn holds her parent's relationship up as a model so much as Syfyn was raised to view loyalty as being a core value a person should have. Both her parents were in the military-- her mother Myxnia was the Commander and her father Vincent, was her Lieutenant/Second-in-command. Being in a military family, Syfyn was raised to view loyalty as the highest honor, and in her daily life, she saw that between her parents in more ways than one, both in and out of battle.

So she views *loyalty* as being something incredibly important to her in an ideal relationship. More than that, it's necessary. She'd never feel truly loved if she didn't have that-- which can be a problem, at times. Syfyn's willing to throw her whole life on the line for someone, and if someone isn't willing to go to the same extent for her, it can hurt her feelings, no matter if it's logical or not.

4.) After the initial fires of passion cool to some degree, what would keep your OC engaged in a relationship? Shared goals? Similar values? Or contented companionship?

Like I said-- Syfyn only falls for people after knowing and caring for them for a while, and even then, she falls in love with them quietly and slowly. I don't know if Syfyn feels that passion or spark that "swoops" people off their feet, so it's not something that she has to experience the loss of.

The way Syfyn loves is steady, reliable, and constant. She'd view love as an honor, a duty, in a sense (granted, one she enjoys, but even when there are rough patches, she'd never, *ever* think of doing anything other than putting her all in to fix it). Syfyn enjoys having a purpose, and she enjoys having someone be appreciative of that while being willing to do the same for her. So long as she has those two things, she's happy.

5.) What importance or value does your OC attach to marriage? Do they believe that it is important to make a public statement of commitment to another person (or persons)? Or are they more concerned about inheritance rights and security for their family? Or do they not see marriage as a necessary signifier of commitment and loyalty?

She doesn't find it important at all, which might be a bit surprising since she's definitely a romantic. It's one of those things where, in theory, she thinks grand weddings are a beautiful, romantic thing-- but in practice, she'd never want it for herself. But *MC* wanted that, she'd be content to do it for them (their happiness is her happiness-- yes, it's cheesy, but for Syfyn that's genuinely *true).*

Weddings and marriages are one of those things Syfyn thinks of in two categories-- A.) A way to legally bind nobles so they further solidify their power or B.) a way to declare love in a genuine, sweet way.

But the first she finds pompous, and the second she finds herself entirely undeserving of.

In truth, Syfyn finds more meaning in the exchanging of rings without legality involved, in drawing and losing blood for the person you love and pledging your life to them every day in all the subtle, quiet ways that one does when they care for someone. In terms of inheritance or wealth... Syfyn doesn't really *have* anything to her name to give, and she doesn't care to gain anything through marriage, either. Wealth has never been something she's concerned with, at all.

Regardless, Syfyn doesn't view marriage as a necessity for love-- not the legal act itself, anyway.

Philautia – Self Love. (uh oh)

1.) Does your OC have a healthy sense of their own worth and value? Or do they see themselves as failing to live up to their original potential? Perhaps they are convinced of their own sinful or

inadequate nature?

As a kid, Syfyn struggled a lot with her self-worth. Her mother was a hero to the people, and she was constantly compared to her, which made Syfyn feel like she was forever stuck living in her shadow. And, in truth, she *is.* As a child, it hurt her confidence. As a young adult, it annoyed her. And now, it genuinely upsets her. After MC's massacre, in which she both failed to help MC or protect innocents and Trystan, she feels like a failure. A complete, and utter failure, who her mother would be completely disappointed in. She's done bad things-- refused to stand up against the Crown and instead did atrocious things in the name of duty... things she knows her mother would've disapproved of. But after Syfyn's mother and father *died* trying to do a good thing, trying to be *noble*, Syfyn's found herself hating altruism, as I mentioned before.

In truth, Syfyn just... hates herself. Hates MC (or so she tells herself). Hates Sabir. Hates Plaithus, the military, the nobles. She just hates *everything.* But it's not in a rageful way. It's in a sad, slow, rotting, and agonizing way, where every day is another reminder of how cruel and relentless this world is. And she's just a cog in that machine-- another vile excuse of a person who's done things most would vomit at just the thought of.

The incident, when MC snapped, shattered Syfyn as a person. The betrayal, the scar that mars her face, the pain MC's gone through... on one hand, Syfyn is furious at what MC did, on the other she's disgusted at herself for never having the courage to figure out the truth of what happened (like Esmerelda and Sabir did). She wishes she could just *hate* MC-- then things would be simple. But she doesn't. So now she's left confused, upset, and hurting. And all of that energy is just fueling Syfyn's despair and resentment for herself.

2.) Does your OC believe that it is important to love themselves in the first instance? Perhaps in order to be able to give and receive love authentically? Or because they believe first and foremost in "looking after number one"?

Well, first things first, Syfyn's never going to *look* for love, even if she is a romantic. The only way she'd fall in love with someone is if, by some chance, she stumbles upon it.

But even then, no, Syfyn doesn't think she needs to love herself to love someone. As of now, Syfyn's very codependent, and always has been. She'd destroy herself for the one she loves-- completely drive herself into the ground if it guaranteed their enjoyment. Her love is dutiful and unbreakable, entirely unconditional (even if she wishes that wasn't the case w/ MC).

Syfyn's *never* loved herself. But right now, she utterly *loathes* herself. Which, I will say, does change the equation a bit in the sense that she now just finds herself completely undeserving of anything in love, whether it be from MC or anyone. She breaks things, hurts people, and is a complete and utter coward.

Who would love that? No one. And she knows it.

3.) Does your OC judge themselves by the same standards as they apply to others? Or are they sometimes hypocritical in condemning others for faults they also possess? Or perhaps they find

it easier to forgive others for things that they cannot abide in themselves?

Normally, I want to say yes-- Syfyn applies the same standards to everyone, herself included. I think Syfyn has very black-and-white concepts of what's right and what's wrong, but they're very personal to her. Those concepts feed into her moral code, and Syfyn tends to follow that code to a "t" every day-- and if someone falls outside of what she views as good, she files them under being a less than savory person *to her.* It's not one of those things where Syfyn genuinely thinks "Yes, they're objectively a bad person." She's more than aware it's a personal view-- but it's the only view she cares to have.

That being said, when it comes to MC, she's a hypocrite-- a huge one. And all of that stems from the fact Syfyn misses MC, and feels guilty for everything that happened while still suffering from trauma and unresolved anger for the night everything went wrong. She can't make up her own mind or decipher her own emotions when it comes to MC, which causes her "moral code" to pretty much just shatter completely.

4.) Which of your OC's qualities makes them the most proud? Do they think more people should be like them in this regard? Or do they quite like being rare in possessing it?

Her courage, loyalty, and will/stubbornness. Now, when I say courage, I am *very* explicitly referring to physical courage, and her courage when it comes to battle or confrontation. Because the second it comes to emotions or politics, Syfyn is a big old coward.

But in war, Syfyn is fearless. She's willing to get mauled and broken, which means she attacks without any reservations, easily making her one of the most efficient fighters. But her true pride comes in those rare moments she's *terrified*. Those moments she's facing a foe, and every bone in her body is telling her this is it, this is the end... and she charges in any way. The rush of adrenaline, the euphoria of coming out the other end alive... There are stories and legends of her exploits, and every time she hears them, her chest puffs out a little in pride.

Otherwise, her loyalty has been mentioned a *lot* in every post, and her stubbornness is pretty obvious (I think). Once Syfyn sets her mind to something, she will *not* change it. Now, that can both be a flaw or a virtue... Syfyn happens to view it as the latter. Mostly because she's seen how fickle the politicians and other soldiers can be, taking bribes and turning blind eyes to things they shouldn't. Because Syfyn's moral code is so rigid, her mind will *not* change or make exceptions for anyone (*cough* usually *cough*).

As for those traits, yes, Syfyn thinks more people should be like her regarding these things. She despises weakness, or those with weak backbones (Ironic, I know, *shhh.* Don't worry, she doesn't like herself, either--). But when I say *weak,* I mean people who don't try. If someone is conventionally very skittish and flighty, but Syfyn can tell that person is *trying* to make a stand, then she categorizes them as being brave, and strong. If Syfyn sees the most efficient soldier in the world, praised by all, do one thing *she* considers out of line morally, she'll file them under being "weak."

Her judgment is... merciless, to say the least. She knows it herself, but she doesn't think there's any fault to that.

5.) Has your OC always had the same opinion of themselves or has this changed over time? Have they learned to love themselves - perhaps with the help of others - as their journey progressed? Or have the consequences of their actions only served to erode their sense of self-worth?

It's definitely gotten worse. Syfyn never really *liked* herself as a person. There are traits she has that she's proud of, but cumulatively, as a whole, she knows she's not a *good* person. And because she's not a *good* person, she can't really like herself. Not truly.

But since the night MC snapped, her self-worth just... plummeted to the point it's not even in existence. In truth, Syfyn's in a *horrible*, dark, and very fragile place right now. She feels guilty for not ever looking into what happened to MC, feels weak for not being able to stop MC in the first place. She was punished by her superiors for her failure, losing every ounce of respect she truly had in the military that she earned through *years* of suffering and fighting. And now, because she's a full-blooded *mythosi*, even the people of Plaithus are turning against her, the Council doing their best to try and unseat Trystan + Syfyn from their positions of authority.

The only somewhat positive influence in her life would be Sabir and Trystan-- though she assumes Sabir is always making fun of her, or looking down on her, and she feels like she's constantly letting Trystan down by not being enough for them as a mentor and sometimes parental figure.

Syfyn's at a ledge right now, narratively, and something needs to give.

Sparring. | Sabir du Vaelas. | P.O.V. Switch

Sep 5, 2023

A/n: Welp... this got out of control and I ended up writing nearly 6k words of content for this POV Switch 💀 Ik the Patreon has pretty much been dead, but now I'm officially back in school + on my regular schedule, so things should get back to normal with posts! Thnx to those of you who supported me even in the quiet months :)

The first thing Sabir learned as a boy was how to conduct himself in a room full of strangers. First impressions were important, Father always said-- as did Lady Krysta, and just about every other major contender within the court.

The rules were simple: stand straight, hold your chin high, and observe.

Of course, these were the rules Sabir was given *before* he was exiled from his home country and given the courtesy of being informed he was to die miles from home by public humiliation in court. Oh, how the times change--

"Hells-- you're fuckin' making the Plaithian snake wannabe look good by comparison--"

Sabir's ears pick up the Ivante throwing another long-winded insult at the Mevnrael, his words a jumbled mess of curses slung in a heavy Vrithkan accent. Sabir hadn't even picked his own title-- a fact he finds himself tempted to bring up as Nikke insults the "Silven Viper" for what seems like the umpteenth time in their meek few days spent together... but he doesn't. Because, while Sabir finds himself slouched against a fence, idly tapping his fingers along the splintering wood with his gaze trained on the grass, he still reminds himself to *observe,* not argue.

And so, observe he does.

The Mevnrael stands with the poise of a noble of their station. Their posture is perfect enough to be unnerving, their fingernails covered in the chipped remnants of what used to be manicured nails. Their chin is tilted in the air as if they view the snake himself to be beneath them, their glare sharp and accusing. Sabir recalls the suffocating presence of their magic when they first met-- the way it licked and lashed at the air like lightning about to crash when the Commander had been broken and battered in front of a crowd of thousands. The absence of such magic is the most unsettling, glaringly obvious thing at all, and Sabir knows it weighs on them for as much as they hide it behind sass and insult. Their eyes lose their guarded edge in the brief moments their mind wanders, carrying some hollowed-out weight behind them, instead. The corners of their lips twitch into a subtle grimace whenever their fingers curl at their sides as if to reach out and touch a presence that is no longer there.

They point a finger in the gorgon's face-- spitting out an accusation while they're at it-- and the Ivante reels back to avoid it before his lips peel back in a monstrous, arrogant cackle.

His fangs gleam in the light of the sun, his slit pupils blown wide with the excitement of confrontation. He paces around as he speaks, unable to stay still-- a strong juxtaposition to the Mevnrael's own grounded position. He circles them like a shark in water, his focus homed in on them. Sabir's noticed that about the Ivante. He finds a target and zeroes in on them, poking and prodding until something in them breaks and gives away. And the second something does... It's like blood in the water.

The gold chain he wears around his waist jingles as he moves, covered in animal teeth and coins. Sabir hates that he recognizes most of the trinkets-- tokens from the pirate isles of Belleont and such. The Ivante's pants are covered in holes patched up with colorful fabric, the sewing too neat to be by his own hand. It's not his sister's doing-- this much Sabir knows-- so someone else back home instead?

He snaps out of the thought when he sees the Ivante grimace in his movements, putting too much weight onto his injured leg. It's subtle, easily missable. It's visible in the shrinking of his pupils and the slight twitch at the corner of his mouth, made even more obvious by the way he tries to hide the reaction by rubbing his thumb across his nose.

Stubborn and injured, and lashing out like a cornered animal, Sabir muses.

"They know I'm right," the Ivante says, throwing a hand in Sabir and the fae's direction. Sabir's brows raise at being dragged into their incessant fighting. Part of him is tired--so tired-- of all of this. "There ain't no way in the seven hells the *Commander* ain't in on this."

The other part of him is amused-- thrilled, even-- by the drama of it all.

It tastes familiar.

"They're *not,*" the Mevnrael argues, shaking their head. Their lips are pressed together tightly, their eyes filled with some desperate emotion. It's not faith that has them defending MC. It's not selflessness. It's need. They *need* to be right about MC-- need to be right that MC is a good person. Otherwise... *otherwise...*

Sabir nearly leans closer, as if doing so will allow him to taste the utter fear they hide under their stubborn demeanor, but just as quickly as it was there... It's gone again.

But it's too late. Sabir knows this song and dance. The blood is in the water, and so...

"No?" Ivante drawls. "They tell you that?"

The shark attacks.

The Ivante takes a step closer, and a cruel huff of amusement leaves him as he looks into the Vygrander's eyes. "Hells, they could tell you whatever you want to hear and you'd believe it, wouldn't you?" He asks.

He hits them where it hurts. Their body goes tense, and their fingers twitch as Sabir sees them fight the urge to ball their hands into upset fists. The Ivante doesn't dare move, watching Mevnrael threaten to break like a beast waiting to see if its prey will flee or drop.

Sabir can feel it in the air; the fragile connections of these strangers threaten to break and tangle, cross and rewire.

And before Sabir realizes it, his lips are parting, and he is speaking.

"You're jumping to some rather strong conclusions regarding MC considering how little you know about them," he drawls. He can see the Mevnrael peek at him from the corner of their gaze in a way he's not entirely sure is thankful or annoyed. Perhaps it's both. Perhaps they themself don't even know what it is. Regardless, his attention is more focused on the Ivante, and that arrogant expression of his.

It's beneath Sabir to feel such childish levels of hatred at the sight of him alone-- and yet he does. It burns deep, and bright, and has him feeling nauseous. Every night for the past two weeks Sabir has laid

awake at night, tossing and turning in his bed and fighting the overwhelming guilt that threatened to eat him alive.

Bottom line, he was responsible for this. For *all* of this. If he had paid more attention, been more vigilant, then the snake twins would've never been able to hunt down MC-- and MC would've never been forced into the limelight at the parade, wouldn't have been *broken*, and *beaten,* and--

The Ivante's saying something. Sabir doesn't know what-- he can't make out the words. His ears rush with the sound of his own blood rushing, but he figures whatever the words are that are being spoken, they're not good. He's proven right when he barely registers the way Ivante points an accusing finger his way, the back of his mind more focused on counting the seconds he breathes and breathes out lest he make an utter fool of himself amongst strangers.

"You best remember where you are, *snake*," Sabir interrupts. His voice drips with a contempt he would normally never let seep into his words. But the self-loathing runs deep, burning through his flesh like a plague as he bites it down like bile. It needs to go somewhere, *do* something, and Sabir can't help but feel an utterly selfish rush of delight at the way the Ivante's nose crinkles at the threat before he bares his fangs and hisses.

An animal, Sabir thinks dully. *A beast.*

"*Fuck you,*" Ivante snips. "You *know* I'm right--"

"Do we?" The Mevnrael drawls.

Idly, Sabir wonders how long they've been going at each other like this, chasing one another in circles and pointing fingers at one another. Idly, he wonders just how long the fae has been sitting, perched on the fence and unable to speak one word of any importance. Her lips twitch here and there, as if building the courage to intervene, but the words never come. Not fully.

Her presence is a meek one-- easily forgettable. It's precisely why Sabir reminds himself to check on her every few minutes, his dark gaze landing on where she trembles on the fence, zoning out as the fight between her fellow southerners becomes more heated. She's just like the Ivante, Sabir muses, watching her ear twitch-- fickle and volatile. Just where he chooses to gnash his teeth and attack, she seems ready to dart and flee. Her chest rises too quickly for her breathing to be steady, and Sabir can imagine the frantic rabbit-like race of her heart as her darkened eyes slowly rise to meet his.

She knows he knows. Knows that she's ready to cut and run-- knows that she might just be the least trustworthy person here. The Ivante is blunt in his hatred, the Mevnrael honest in the secrets they hide. But the fae?

Sabir doubts she'd know how to be truthful even if she tried.

A movement behind the fae's shoulder catches his attention, and his eyes flicker past her to see who it is that approaches them, praying it's not the Overseer or some other suffocating fellow noble. But it's

not.

No.

It's MC. *His* MC.

He finds himself straightening out of habit, moving to stand against the fence as opposed to leaning on it.

Their eyes are glued to the group, a dark focus in their gaze that Sabir recognizes only from their time leading the military. It's a suffocating stare-- the kind that makes armies march and enemies kneel. The kind that makes Sabir's brows furrow because he remembers the late, unrelenting nights that accompanied it-- and because he notices the sag to their shoulders, the uneven limp to their gait.

His gaze trails to Syfyn where she marches behind them, and though her face is hidden, he sees the sag to her wings. He would make a note to ask one of them what happened... perhaps even both of them. But for now, he's focused on MC as they come closer, his lips curving up into a soft smile of their own volition.

For one, piercing moment, the only thing he can see is MC-- their gaze, the subtle curve of their lips... but before he forgets himself, his eyes flicker over to where Syfyn comes to stand beside MC, at a distance. *Always* at a distance.

"MC. Syfyn."

He forces himself to bow-- eyes glued to the ground, arm tucked to the stomach, b*ack straight*-- and then when he's standing up once more, he struggles to maintain that decorum. That professional detachment.

"You slept well, I presume?" Sabir asks, his gaze returning to MC. He can see it-- see the darkness around their eyes has diminished, if even only by a little. The actual darkness that's *within* them, however, remains, firmly lodged in place.

But MC's attention doesn't stay on him for long... and he can't blame them. The arguing that had been so prevalent only seconds ago has now gone silent, and Sabir can feel the hair rise on the back of his neck *for* MC as he turns to face the rest of the group. Turns to watch the snake, with his cold eyes fixated on MC.

"What were you all arguing about?" MC asks. They ask slowly. Hesitantly. Sabir wants to answer, but he can't bring himself to-- too focused on the Ivante, instead. The snake has the audacity to act perplexed beneath Sabir's scrutiny, that revolting smirk of his slithering onto his lips.

"What?" Nikke drawls, tilting his head. He looks so at ease. So *unbothered.* It's infuriating, but Sabir doesn't let anything more than a cold disdain show in his eyes. "From how sharp and pristine our good ole' leader looks, I'd say I was right," Nikke quips.

Sabir can *feel* MC bristle at his side-- feel that subtle wave of energy that radiates off of them when they're angered, or resentful. It's a quiet thing... but suffocating, nonetheless. The fae rushes to comfort MC, but it goes in one ear right out the other.

"Right about what?" MC asks, stepping closer to Ivante. Sabir's gaze flickers between the two of them. The hate between them both is palpable, and without hesitation, Sabir would... *is*... placing his bets on MC to keep the snake from acting out like a petulant child. But even with MC's history-- even with the things they've accomplished-- the Ivante faces them without fear, sauntering right up to their face as if MC couldn't reach out and break his neck with a twist.

How stupid, Sabir muses. How *dull.*

"Everyone was worried for you," Nikke states. His voice holds that ever-present amusement. It's childish. Immature. "Practically pissing themselves over what next, horrible, terrible, thing they would do to you. I pointed out you were probably just getting the royal treatment, and *would you look at that*--" Nikke turns to address everyone else, his gaze flickering from the fae to the Mevnrael before settling on Sabir.

Sabir's eyes narrow, and Sabir wills the snake to keep his mouth shut for once in his insolent, cheap life...

"It looks like I was right," Nikke finishes. He shoots a little grin to Sabir, something personal, something *small*, and then crawls right back up on his soap box. Sabir wonders, vaguely, if this is how insufferable he sounded amongst his own peers. "No one's arguing because I'm right," Nikke declares.

And he's right. There is a silence in the field. A thick one. But not a damn person in this circle is quiet out of agreement-- of this, Sabir is certain. His lips part, and he sucks in a breath, ready to snap back, break the silence-- and yet MC is beating him to it.

He hates being cut off. It's always been a pet peeve of his. Except when it's MC.

"I think we have bigger problems than sleeping arrangements if it's this easy for the Queen to manipulate you," MC states, their voice low, firm. The same one they used to use in the courts, against Sabir's fellow pompous peers. "You don't think she did this on purpose? You don't think every move made by her is deliberate?"

Sabir's smiling. It's a subtle thing, one he does his best to contain, but he can't fight to keep it off entirely. *Yes,* he wants to applaud-- *stole the words from my very mouth.* And maybe that's why he never minded when MC was the one to interrupt him.

"Vygrand's the same. None of it is coincidence." Mevnrael supplies, nodding. They shoot MC a supporting look. One that mildly irritates Sabir-- one that has his hands wanting to squeeze into jealous fists. But he keeps himself quiet. Offers counsel instead. Offers his *own* support instead, before Mevnrael can try and find another damned way to steal the spotlight and act clueless about it afterward.

"No favoritism," Sabir says. "Just chess pieces on a board."

MC turns to smile a him when he speaks. He doesn't bother to hide the way it makes his chest swell or smile widen--

"Alright, fine," Ivante growls. "If you all want to sit around and hold hands, go help yourselves. I'll be quiet as stone, I promise, *if...*"

"What?" MC drawls, eyes narrowing.

The snake's gaze almost imperceptibly flickers to Syfyn, before returning to MC. He's scared of her, Sabir muses. He should do well to fear MC, too.

"Fight me," Ivante demands. "Or her," he says, nodding at Syfyn. Her wings bristle in response, and even Sabir feels a bit of pity for her being the one constantly dragged into the Ivante's little spats and tantrums. It wasn't an enjoyable task to babysit the Vrithkan, but someone had to do it... and necessary but unpleasant tasks were Syfyn's strong suit.

"If you all want to sit around and do nothing-- fine, I'm just saying..."

The Ivante continues to go onto some long, likely self-serving, high moral ground speech, but it all fades into the background as Sabir focuses on MC. They're different now-- so very different. And a part of him feels determined to keep track of what's changed and what's remained the same.

The subtle furrow in their brow when they're annoyed remains the same. And the way they always, quite literally, step up to a challenge is the same too-- the Commander taking a single step closer to the antagonizing snake. But the look in their eyes is different. It's not a bright look-- not filled with a sharp gleam that Sabir grew accustomed to turning to in moments of fear or doubt.

No. The look in their eyes is permanently distant. Removed. Sabir wants to call it apathetic, but that would be a lie. Because deep beneath that unreadable haze, there is a bitterness. A rage.

Quiet. Subtle. *Patient.*

The kind that has a single stroke of familiarity shooting down Sabir's spine, his gut churning and filling with dread.

He hid it from everyone. Covered it with charming, disarming smiles. Climb the ranks, shake hands, pretend to be stupid, naive, ***stupid--***

The moment presents itself. Hands grasp his shoulders. Shake him. What have you done? ***What have you done--?***

Sabir snaps back to reality, a cold sweat on the back of his neck, and by the time he does, Ivante's blade is pressed against MC's throat, and MC is kicking him back not even a second later. It's explosive,

the taut tension between the two of them finally breaking as they go after each other's throats, throwing punches and wrestling with one another. MC catches Ivante's wrist when he goes to stab them, twisting it with practiced ease...

Syfyn's wings twitch from beside where Sabir stands. He notices it quickly, more in tune than anyone to Syfyn's flighty, skittish behavior.

"Leave them be, Syfyn," he urges.

MC has it under control, just like they always do-- and he needs her to see that, too. Needs her to see that they can be trusted, even if for something as small as this. But he sees the way his words practically pass right through her, her thin pupils trained on the two of them, as her body goes taut like a rubber band pulled tight.

"This is childish," she states. Her voice comes out quiet, like a croak, and Sabir finds his conviction for her to understand MC pit against his pity for this woman he could not quite call friend, but not do the injustice of calling just an acquaintance. "MC should've never let him make demands," she continues, her voice finally coming out louder, her back straightening as her hands twitch uselessly at her sides. She's worked up, but not in the way she pretends to be.

She's not eager to fight. Not eager to hop into the fray.

She's scared.

Sabir's wise enough not to comment on it, lest she cut out his tongue or strangle him where he stands. He's wise enough not to go soft on her, either, lest she do the same things but in opposite order.

"Say what you will, but I quite enjoy watching our scaled friend here get, ah, what's the word?" Sabir asks, making a show of searching his vocabulary. She doesn't even look at him as he pinches his fingers together dramatically, nose wrinkling in faux inquisitiveness. She never did find his little stunts amusing like MC did. "*Disciplined*," he says, finally... though his shoulders sag a little at the lack of response to his jesting.

Sabir only saw Syfyn in the halls in passing before MC's exile. They spoke now and again when their paths crossed due to their mutual care for MC, most of their conversations centered around the Commander their lives both seemed to revolve around. Back then, Sabir remembers the easy posture she had, the lopsided smirk that often crawled onto her face, and the blunt, crude comments that spilled freely from her lips without care of if she offended anyone, noble or not.

Sabir had liked that version of Syfyn, shallow of an understanding of her as he had.

But now... now she's stoic. Serious. *Too* serious. And he can see it in the way she goes silent, posture rigid, as she mulls over his words as if what he said was serious, too, and not harmless ribbing.

MC knees Ivante in the stomach. Sabir wants to grin, but then he sees the way Syfyn cringes, wincing as if she was the one struck as her hand twitches, nearly going to hover over her own stomach.

"It's childish," she croaks again, as if on autopilot.

*She's **scared.***

She's terrified and frozen, but he knows better than to reach out to comfort her. Knows better than to try and offer any words of advice.

"Three years ago, you would've been doing the exact same thing," he reasons. "You were just as rowdy as the rest of them-- if not more so," he says, trying to crack a small chuckle.

He knows it wasn't the right thing to say the second her head finally turns to face him, her piercing silver eyes landing on him. The look in her eyes is dark. Predatory. And Sabir feels a chill run down his neck as she focuses her attention on him, looking like she wants to grab hold of him and shake him... or perhaps tear him to shreds.

Sabir didn't know how to comfort her or break through to her like he could everyone else.

He didn't know if *anyone* could break through to her anymore. Not after that night. Not ever since that mask has made itself a permanent fixture on her face. The only person he could think of was the very person who had Syfyn clawing at her own skin and growing rabid like a cornered beast.

And every attempt he made to try and get her to stop hating them, to stop despising them for *one* second, only left her more irritated than she was to begin with. But what choice did he have if his options were irritating Syfyn, or letting her continue to destroy herself?

She must see the conflict on his face since she does manage to growl out one word in her frenzied state-- growl it out *truly,* the word coming out in a broken, fragmented, guttural speech that reminds Sabir of the animalistic instinct that hides behind the faces of some of the people he holds dear most. The *mythosi* he holds dear most.

"*Don't,*" she hisses.

"I didn't say anything," Sabir says. And he didn't. Not yet. But this is a song and dance they've done countless times before, and maybe, at this point, it's gotten old. Predictable.

That's always been Sabir's greatest fault.

He's a creature of habit.

Syfyn lets out a shaky breath, shaking her head, and Sabir watches her eyes squeeze shut behind her mask. She's trembling slightly, and Sabir feels his stomach churn out of concern, more than fear. His hand twitches at his side, his brows furrow, his head tilts, his lips part to speak--

"Not now," Syfyn croaks. Snips. Demands, or begs, he is not sure. She is like a child hidden beneath the sheets during a thunderstorm, ears plugged and eyes squeezed shut, imagining the branches outside the window to be monsters.

So he presses onwards, still. Every time he upsets her. Every time he hopes maybe, he won't. Maybe things will go differently. Maybe, he'll be able to have something click in her brain-- have the light turn on to reveal the shadows for the innocuous things that they are, not dangerous beasts.

"You'll have to talk to them eventually, you do know that?" Sabir says. "You can't go on playing pretend forever."

He knows it's a rough word choice-- *playing pretend.* But what else is it? Syfyn tries to put on the apathetic, uncaring mask that the nobles have perfected, but she fails to wear it well. Because Syfyn is no manipulator. She is no game player. She is passionate, and emotional, and while Sabir would applaud those things, he has the twisted, gut-wrenching feeling that someone beat them out of her after the night everything went wrong.

Why else would she so vehemently push everyone away?

Maybe because they're all dead, another voice in Sabir's mind reasons. *Maybe because MC killed them all.*

He shoves the thought out of his mind. Shakes his head just barely, ignoring the way his gut sinks and twists. MC didn't do it. Not truly. That *thing* within them did.

But it was their hands, they witnessed. Their face.

No, he reasons. Not them. Not **them.**

"You mean like yourself?" Syfyn retorts.

Playing pretend. Just like him. Though where Syfyn imagines a beast to lurk in the shadows, Sabir refuses to see anything but a saint, even if he knows that cannot possibly be true.

Not really.

"What is that meant to mean?" Sabir asks, his mouth moving before he can think to stop it. Now he truly *is* being childish, acting out, and being a hypocrite when his own words are twisted against him. He hates how this happens every time between them both. Words misconstrued; intentions misinterpreted. And every time, it is reduced to *this*, Syfyn towering over him, voice taut, claws gleaming.

"You know exactly what it means," Syfyn says, invading his space-- close enough for something instinctual to awaken within Sabir, recognizing himself as *prey.*

"Entertain me, then--" he says. He goes against instinct. Goes closer-- close enough to smell the crisp scent of her metal armor in the cold winter air. She says nothing, her eyes flickering between his rapidly. She's right, even if she doesn't know she is. He knows exactly what she's referring to. And he wants her to say it out loud so he can declare it as being *wrong.* Because, if it's right...

"Say something," Sabir demands once more, his voice cold, even to his own ears.

He recognizes his mistake a second too late.

Syfyn's hand raises above her head, fingers curled and claws gleaming in the sunlight. For one, frozen moment in time, she is something immaculate-- golden and furious, pupils slits and wings unfurled and eclipsing the sun. If Sabir were any other man, he would be trembling, frozen in fear at the knowledge that all of his poking and prodding had finally pushed her *too far...*

But he knows Syfyn. She is not the beast everyone makes her out to be.

Not the beast she *thinks* herself to be.

And he is not scared. Not of her. But then there's a shadow, and MC is in front of him, standing proud, and before Sabir can take a breath, Syfyn's gauntleted claws are swiping upon their face.

There's a moment where the only thing he can hear is his own blood rushing in his ears... and then MC is being forced back and into him from the pure force behind Syfyn's swipe, and Sabir is grasping their shoulders and holding them upright. Something hot and wet drips onto his hands, and his eyes catch the dark red liquid that seeps from MC's face and--

Gods.

He's moving before he can think, grasping hold of their jaw and turning them to face him. His eyes meet theirs, stunned and dazed, withdrawn and empty. His hands threaten to tremble, but he wills them still, somehow.

For years, MC had been gone. His recklessness had come at no expense but himself, but now... *gods*, this is his fault. This is *his* fault--

"By the gods-- MC, I'm so sorry--" His words spill out before he can think to say them. He nearly calls them his love, his dear, his *beloved*, but he cannot force the words out into the air. Not when they bleed onto him, and it's *his* fault--

"I'm fine, Sabir," MC speaks, and their words sound distant. Far-fetched. They stare at him as if in awe, or perplexed by his concern, their brows pinching in the middle in that way that has Sabir wanting to press his lips to their forehead. "I'm the one who chose to get in between you both--"

"And *I'm* the one who started a fight without considering you. Without considering the others. I'm sorry. *Gods*, I'm sorry."

He wipes the blood from their face-- cringes when he sees the gruesome wounds left by Syfyn's claw. And now his hands *do* shake, and he's helpless to stop them.

How long has he wished for their return? How long has he stayed up at night, staring at the ceiling? How *long*? And now they've returned to him under the worst circumstances imaginable-- and selfishly enough, a part of him can't help but be thankful for it. They're back. They're here. They're *here*, and they're in his arms, and *god*s, how selfish of a man could he be to be thankful for this? For any of it--?

"Sabir..."

MC says his name. He hears it several moments after the fact-- several moments after he watches their lips part to speak. They're cracked, and dry, and Sabir has to fight his thumb from reaching out to trace the delicate skin...

"Sabir."

MC grabs his face. Their hands are warm and callused, covered in sweat from the aftermath of the fight-- and yet he cannot find it in him to care. His eyes lock onto their eyes, surrounded by the sea of blood that paints their flesh red. Their eyes, *gods*, their eyes. They draw him closer, and as always, he comes, his body brushing against theirs as his hands drop to gently cup their neck.

He wants to kiss them. He wants to kiss them until he can't breathe, or think straight, or *care* anymore, but something holds him back. He doesn't have that right anymore, does he? Not after what's been done to them. Not after all the ways he's managed to fail them time, and time again. But all he can think of is the smell of their hair intermingling with the scent of iron and blood. A bittersweet smell-- one that forces him to remember their circumstances much as he'd wish to reminisce about anything else.

"Sabir. It's okay. Really. I promise you-- I'm okay," they murmur. Their voice is soft, so soft, and he can feel their breath on his skin. A trembling breath escapes him, and he lets his eyes close for one, flickering second.

Lets himself bathe in the warmth of their proximity.

And then he's stating the words he knows to be true. The fact he cannot ignore, or push aside, no matter how badly they wish him to. No matter how badly it may make things easier to forget...

"You and I both know that's not true."

He forces his eyes open to meet their stare. To face their reaction.

Perhaps it is a cruel thing to say. A cruel thing to point out. But he has seen the ways MC has drudged forward in the past, pushing aside their fear, their pain, their *suffering*, for the sake of the comfort of others. And Sabir cannot... *will not*... allow them to file him as another person needing protecting.

He will not be a burden to them. He will not be their responsibility. He will not be another mark on a checklist. Not for this. Not to them.

They're silent. Their gaze is distant, haunted-- their mind is anywhere but here. And he lets it wander. He lets them ruminate, and feel, and when their eyes finally snap back to awareness, he's looking off to the side, at the dying rosebushes, and trying to gather the courage to say what he wants to say, speak what he wants to speak.

"May I... may I speak to you privately?" He asks, finally, forcing himself to meet their gaze. "It'll be quick--" he assures, terrified that they'll then find him insensitive. Rude. "I can walk you to the infirmary."

His eyes flicker back to the wounds. To the blood that glistens on their skin. How many times had they returned home to him like this? Collapsed on their bed, a heap of armor and exhaustion, sleeping on his lap and still covered in grime and blood and mud.

They were capable, strong, a figure to the masses-- but not indestructible. And each and every time they were sent away from him, Sabir would stay up night after night, a part of him forever terrified that one day, MC would not come home to him. That one day, in their stead, he'd receive a letter, or Syfyn with her head bowed at his doorstep, and his life would simply end with them.

They had come home every time, of course. The crowds would cheer, the Queen would anoint another award, and the soldiers would drink. And MC would push on, heal, and shrug off another victory just to prepare for the next one, wherever it was demanded. Sabir had been the one to beg them to stay, to rest.

But now... *now,* their eyes are empty, their spark is gone, replaced by sorrow and anger. The very same he had seen in his own gaze in the years of their exile.

And this time, he knows he must change with them. Knows he must support them, hold them up, reignite that spark that seemed like an inextinguishable flame within them in the years past.

And that starts here. Today. And when their arm hooks through his, and they're nodding their head, and allowing him to lead them to the palace as they lean against him, bleeding, he knows where he'll start.

In the hall with the mural. Where it all began-- where he stood beside MC, staring in some mix of disbelief and pride at the sight of their figure painted amongst the great names of Omaren and Myxnia. Where it all ended-- where he witnessed heads bow as they walked past the painting and pretended MC never existed at all.

They were something great once. And they'll be something great again.

Whatever that means to them; whatever it is that makes them happy...

He'll be the one to help them find it.

Patreon Q&A 5.2

Aug 13, 2023

AN: Here it is!!! :)
Edit: Added a question I forgot to answer 🤦

1.) Since Marcelle has let on that this might not exactly be the suicide mission it was initially framed as, do the ROs have any specific plans for what they want to do after this is all over? It might be too spoilery to ask what everyone will /actually/ do and where they'll end up, but any hopes and dreams at this point? And perhaps further along in the story and relationships, how might those hopes start to include MC?

Over the course of the story, **Vethna** will want to to return to Vygrand-- mainly to confront their family and come to terms with the events that spurred them into running away in the first place. They'd likely *want* a close MC to come with them, though they'd also feel nervous about bringing MC into what is nothing short of a snake pit of political deceit and violence.

Nikke also wants to go home to Vrithka-- not because he *likes* Vrithka (okay... maybe he does, in a bittersweet way), but because someone has to look out for the clan and at this point, it's him. He would admittedly need a lot of coaxing to ever want MC to be a part of that future, but once MC is able to wiggle their way into his heart and have a real relationship with him, he wouldn't be opposed to it. In fact, it would probably do him a lot of good to have MC to turn to for support.

Jost wants to travel the world. Always has, always will. She doesn't like settling down in any place for too long, and once everything's said and done, she wants to go right back to where she left off. Exploring ruins, traveling to questionable cities, finding hidden gems of nature tucked away in far-off places. If MC wants to tag along, that's cool, she guesses... she doesn't really even care... (she definitely does care please don't leave her--)

Amilia will go wherever MC goes if their relationship is romantic-- and even if it's platonic, she'll always find a way to weave her life with MC's again every now and again. She's a traveling bard, so at her heart she loves to explore and sing. But she can sing anywhere... and she can travel whenever she wants while still having a "home base" with MC, so-to-speak.

Sabir will also go wherever MC goes, if in a romance. If that means returning to Plaithus, so be it. If that means living in a little cottage away from everyone, cool. If that means traveling the world doing crazy shit... well, he's a little less enthusiastic, but he loves MC, so he'll be out there doing it all... and it'd probably even begin to grow on him. Otherwise... I think Sabir definitely would just find a nice quiet

town, buy an expensive, fancy manor on the outskirts, and live the rest of his life peacefully, without chaos or intrigue.

Syfyn is going where MC goes, period, platonic or romantic. Not even in a codependent sense-- she just likes MC, and wants to be with them. I think she'd honestly be happy anywhere, doing anything, so long as she's able to just... be herself. Start fresh. If MC were to go back to Plaithus, it would have to be if there were some serious changes there... in which case she'd be willing to return and help instill those changes, to make sure they stick.

Freedom is... so... very very tricky to say without total and complete spoilers. It's safe to say, they *expect* fully to eventually return to godhood as it was before everything went to shit, and before the Great Abandonment... which means existing in a sort of in-between state, influencing the realm and in turn being influenced by their followers, causing mayhem every now and again to keep the world on its toes... and maybe even giving MC a sign every now and again that they're still there, even if MC isn't always aware of it, through a raven showing up in times of need.

But MC might make it so they never get that chance. Whether that's because they're in love with MC and fully intend to live out a "mortal" life with them, or because of *other* reasons... I'll... leave up to interpretation...

2.) So, assuming that all goes to plan and MC's power is restored, this means that Demon and Phoenix commanders are essentially immortal again, right? Will there ever be the possibility for either of them to die and resurrect throughout the story?

Correct! And as of now, there aren't any solid outlines for that to happen, but I *really* want there to be an opportunity for it to happen. I'm hoping I'll get the chance to write it in Book 2!

3.) Does the little snake trinket MC gave Sabir have a name? If so, what is it? I NEED TO KNOW HIS NAME PHEO PLS THE WHOLE “you have to bring him, I got him just for you” MADE ME CRY and I just know in my heart that the lil dude has a name and I NEED to know it

He definitely has a name, but Sabir would've made MC choose the name and then made it more silly. MC names the snake "Bob," Sabir tacks on "Lil Bobby Bobster." MC names the snake "Snake" and Sabir insists they call it "sssnake."

4.) So a lot of people call the MC's task a suicide mission. Does Marcelle consider it to be such? More specifically, does she think there's a *realistic* chance the MC actually makes it home? Also this may be a spoiler but please throw an angst gremlin a bone and tell me if there's going to be an ending where the MC succeeds but doesn't survive and certain individuals are left to grapple with the question of whether or not Plaithus deserved that sacrifice at all.

Marcelle anticipates it to be such, but hopes it isn't, and has reason to hope. That being said, she also *hoped* Fate wouldn't rip through MC and take them over from the inside out, and look at how well that went...

So, in terms of if she thinks there's a *realistic* chance... I will answer this from an unbiased stance which is, no. No, she does not think there's a realistic chance, but she tells herself she does. There's definitely some cognitive dissonance there.

The hope she has revolving around stopping Fate is something obsessive for her, obsessive to the point of toxicity and manipulation. And if the mission doesn't go right, she won't know what to do, at all. That being said, the idea of MC dying in that mission to accomplish her goals (which by all means is the most likely option) has her feeling dread in a way that she was too foolish to have until the night MC snapped and killed people.

And, for the second half of the question, I can say *yes*, as of now I plan for there to be an ending where MC can die a martyr. But whether that makes it into the final game or not is something we'll just have to wait and see!

5.) What's one of Omaren's favorite memories of the MC?

Ooh... "favorite" leaves it up for interpretation...

I would say it's probably when MC was 18, before they became Commander and Omaren was forced out of his position. He was just watching MC fight and train in the courtyard, trying to find something to critique and failing to find anything. He just knew then that he did his job-- that MC was ready to take care of themself... of the military. He felt a bit like a proud parent on that one. Granted, he would've *never* forced MC to take over things when they were only 18 if he had any choice in the matter, regardless of if they were physically ready for it.

But he didn't have a say. Not really. The Council made sure of that.

6.) If you could give the readers non-spoilery advice for playing the game once it's fully completed, what advice would you give?

Ooh... well, the game is about bias and perception in a lot of ways, so after an initial play through, I'd experiment with reaching out to characters you usually dislike... mainly because you might find the narration + MC's perception of a character to change a *lot* based on your own choices. Ex. The narration might say a character is being condescending, and the dialogue is written in a way that emphasizes their rudeness in one route, while in another the narration will say the character is concerned about MC and is scared MC is going to do something stupid, so they're being controlling. Which one is true? Who knows. But MC's perception *literally* changes, so it's fun to kinda see the "good" and "bad" sides of every character based on how MC views them, I think.

Also, be really sure of what you want in-game. Actions have consequences, even if you don't immediately see them-- like killing Jamie in Chapter 1. That has *serious* consequences, but you won't see them until Book 2 (most likely). Be aware of the weight of taking a life, be aware that your words have consequences, and be aware that MC isn't the only one dealing with things. Characters might be hiding how they feel inside, and pushing them the wrong way could cause them to do something stupid, even if you, as the player, were unaware anything was wrong.

7.) Does Syfyn still have her half of the necklace?

She sure does...

8.) What are Esme’s hobbies? Or, well, what were her hobbies considering she now probably doesn’t have much free time?

She learned to play the harp from Emeline, and she enjoys it a lot! She also enjoys ballroom dancing and ballet. She *also* also enjoys planning parties and events-- she thinks the political aspects of it all is fun, along with the aesthetics part of it all, piecing together decorations and themes. And yes, she still greatly loves tea parties (the little sandwiches are cute, okay?)

In truth, she enjoys... or *enjoyed*... a lot of aspects of her role as heir to the throne. She enjoyed rubbing elbows with the nobility and playing "the game", so-to-speak. But when MC was exiled, she had a very sobering realization of just how dangerous that game is. She never really understood what was at stake until then. One wrong word in one conversation could completely change a life, and that wasn't something she fully respected until it came back to hurt her own family.

9.) So based other information here, Freedom is strongly influenced by what the commander thinks of them. Is this something they resent? Or do they sort of just accept that, as a wykna, being influenced by other's thoughts is just how their existence works.

The second-- Freedom is more than accepting of what their nature is as a wykna, which might be a bit surprising. They're the embodiment of freedom, and yet they'll never have complete freedom over who they are as a person. That's never really bothered them, however, and in truth, for most of the Sources (The original ten wykna) it's really not a big deal. It's just part of who they are and how they experience life. They wouldn't know what it's like to live it any differently.

That being said, the reason Freedom is currently so influenced by MC specifically is because as of now, MC is the only one who truly *believes* in Freedom's existence. While there are a few around the world who still "worship" Freedom (I use the term loosely), they're still under the impression all the gods are dead. The only one who knows of Freedom's existence and is therefor able to truly manipulate it is MC-- that, and the fact that MC + Freedom are linked in a way that hasn't truly been seen since the Old World.

10.) And in a similar vein, have any wykna (Freedom or otherwise) ever acted out in a particular way, in an effort to try exert control over what people think of them? Is that a thing all wykna tended to do or no?

The only one of the *main* wykna who ever did was Joy. She couldn't *stand* the idea of some people disliking her existence, their own hatred for her causing her to develop flaws and insecurities. She tried to manipulate people's opinions of her by posing as a human, trying to win their favor back, and things became messy *very* quickly. If you remember, Wykna need a human host to have a physical form, and Joy ended up killing several of her own followers who she possessed from overstaying her welcome in their minds. Naturally, this made people like her even *less*, which in turn corrupted her even more, and

there was a point where "Joy" wasn't really even Joy anymore, but rather some form of obsessive mania.

This didn't last for long, since the other Wykna were quick to intervene and restore balance, but Joy's little "bender" definitely became a cautionary tale after that.

The more gods try to interfere with mortals and influence *them,* the less stable things become. Wykna can't directly affect the world outside of their domain, and attempts to subvert that usually cause very, *very* bad things to happen.

11.) Does Freedom's romance change to any significant degree if you do / do not take their deal?

It changes things here and there-- they'll definitely become more and more desperate for MC to take their deal the more they come to care about MC, to the point they might even beg. The main differences will be towards the end of the story, where, depending on if you took Freedom's deal or not, and what your stats are, a happy ending with Freedom might not even be possible.

12.) IIRC, Jost's romance is set for the second game, yeah? Does that mean it only begins at all in the second book, or will there be flirting options in the first that we only the outcome of in the sequel?

Technically the second, but the flirting choices are far and few between. I plan to add a flirt option for Jost in the rewrite in Chapter 1, when you can flirt with Nikke-- but otherwise you won't see Jost again until the last two chapters of Book One. There'll be some flirt choices there to get the ball rolling, and to give you a little hint of what you're in for in Book Two, but that's about it!

13.) As a trans woman, I'm curious: do the various cultures of the setting have any particular views on transgender people? Or do most places just see it as just a normal thing that happens? Would Vethna consider themself to be trans?

It's considered normal everywhere, and there are plenty of options when it comes to physically transitioning. Plaithus, because of it's blatant dislike for magic, would have surgeries and hrt, though everywhere else tends to use magic + potions instead, which tend to give more immediate results.

However, different cultures have different ways of treating gender as a whole. For example, Vyrgand doesn't even recognize "gender" as being a thing. There aren't gendered pronouns in Mavikras (the language they speak), and gender roles don't exist. Because of that, no, Vethna wouldn't consider themself trans, nor would anyone from Vygrandian culture. That being said, they are *aware* of gender and how it functions in other parts of the world, but they don't tend to be affected by it themselves.

In Vrithka, however, gendered roles are definitely a thing, but it's not considered odd to choose a different gender role than the one you were born into. In Nikke + Jost's clan, for example, the tattoo designs they have on their necks vary based gender identity (amongst other things), along with what roles one is expected to carry out within a clan.

Then, in antiquity when the Old World existed, you'd have places like Solaria, which had gender-restricted roles and significant emphasis on gender identity. For example, Knights of Incandescence could only be men, as they were striving to become extensions of the god Light, who is considered by most to be the embodiment of masculinity. Then, on the other half, you had the Shadow Sisters, who could only be women, as they were meant to be messengers to Celestinia, the land of the god Darkness, who is what might be considered the image of the divine feminine.

14.) In regards to the deal, it's it only possible to get one outcome? Like, for example, if we choose we want all this to end, does that mean we won't be able to return home? Or is it just Freedom will only be helping with the one that was chosen but that didn't take the others off the table?

The second! You're not limited to just one thing (though, ya know... if you burn Plaithus down you won't be able to return to Plaithus since... it's... gone <3).

The choice is mainly meant to be a moment MC picks what's most important to them. Narratively you're not blocked off from the other paths, but whichever choice you make will be a defining part of MC's character in terms of what they tend to focus on as the story continues (revenge, redemption, freedom).

15.) Assuming this second part dosage works as intended with Demon and Phoenix MCs be immortal again?

Yes, in practice! Though Phoenixes can still "die" if they lose their spark in life. It's *also* important to keep in mind the more they die and come back, the less human MC will be. Phoenixes become increasingly more apathetic, and demons become increasingly more corrupt. (Coming back as a demon is... infinity more of a traumatic experience than coming back as a phoenix, considering they have to crawl through the levels of hell to return).

16.) Also, it's come up a few times that phoenixes need to have good emotional control or bad things happen, is that something Phionex MCs will have to keep in mind? Because if so, things are not looking good for the gang with my crybaby, hanging on by a thread, phoenix commander.

Phoenix MC's can still be cry/angry/etc, but there will be times where Phoenix MCs on their own will remind themselves they can't completely break down if they're at risk of hurting someone. All MC's have been conditioned to be compatible with the *mythosi* blood they've taken, so narratively, it wouldn't make sense for a Phoenix Commander to constantly be acting out and flaring up after years of being taught not to.

That being said, there *will* be an adjustment period immediately after the surgery/infusion, where emotional MCs might have an accident or two involving their emotions... and of course, Phoenix MCs will have their time to have emotional breakdowns where it counts along with the best of them <3

17.) I know she'd never actually do it, but let's imagine for a moment Marcelle put all her cards on the table, explained what she was trying to do, why she felt it had to be done this way, how

would Mom and Esmerelda take it? Would they understand her thinking? Would they even agree?

Emeline wouldn't be able to handle the truth at all. It would mentally and emotionally break her, and probably send her into some sort of panic attack. She'd become flighty and paranoid, and in truth, if it was something she had to live with forever knowing, I don't think she'd make it. She wouldn't agree with Marcelle's actions or justifications, but she wouldn't have alternatives, neither, nor be able to argue against the necessity of it all.

Esmerelda would be able to handle the weight of the truth, but it would probably slowly turn her into being Marcelle 2.0 as she got older, driving her to do the same things her mother did in a twisted sort of legacy. Upon first learning about the truth, she'd shun her mother and her choices, but as the years wear on, and her alternative suggestions are torn down one by one, Esmerelda would come to the horrific, shameful realization that maybe, just maybe, her Mother was right all along.

18.) For no particular reason whatsoever... how long does it take for the plague to kill someone and is there a certain point where they're too far gone to be cured? (You mentioned that Solaria managed to cure it and I assume that in a 'heal people from the disease' sense)

It kills pretty slowly, actually, which is the worst part. It's essentially a necrotic disease that slowly forces a person to rot while they're alive. Symptoms show pretty quickly, but when the disease first started, most people brushed them away/ignored them. It starts with things like brittle nails, bleeding gums, bruising, etc, then slowly gets worse and worse over the years. Usually, fatality comes from when people's lungs give out, or become unable to eat as opposed to when their body fully rots away, so *normally*, until a person is dead, it's never too late to be cured.

The "Solaria" cure is a magic-based one, so it's able to heal most of the wounds those inflicted with the plague might've sustained. *However*, there's a point when infected that is considered excruciatingly painful/uncomfortable, when one's nerves start to be eaten away. While these people can still be cured, they cannot regain the same sense of touch they would've had pre-plague.

Hopefully, I intend to write an IF that takes place during the plague, so perhaps you'll be able to learn even more about it then! 👀

19.) Are there any mixed breeds? Would be kinda interesting I guess. Especially with different powers

Yes! Though it's not too common to see. Artificially made *mythosi* tend to not pass *mythosi* traits onto their children, and outside of Plaithus (where most *mythosi* are now artificial) it's not common to see different kinds of *mythosi* regularly living amongst each other, usually because *mythosi* are becoming increasingly more rare as the magic in the realm fades.

Pre-Abandonment, when magic was prevalent all around the world, however, it was common to see different variations of *mythosi* emerging constantly.

20.) What's the plan for if the commander dies getting their powers back? Assuming there is no plan, what would happen next? (Feel free to be vague about that second question if it's spoiler-y.)

There isn't one! I've said it before, but MC dying would really just be it for the world as a whole, because MC is, for lack of better words, a *very, **very*** important person for reasons they themself don't even know yet. If MC dies, Fate would be freed from MC, which would allow Fate to reunite with its other half and become whole once more...

And, well... lets just say the plans Fate has aren't exactly friendly to life as we know it to the realm.

Well... not *most* life, anyway.

21.) Will we meet Niamh in game or have we met niamh in game already?

You'll meet her!

22.) !hat happens when Emeline loses all her sanity?

Answered that in the last Q&A!: "Too spoilery for even here, as I don't want people changing how they play to avoid the consequences. But it'll be nothing good, that I can assure you."

23.) So, the MC's relationship with Marcelle is a really interesting dynamic, and some of their internal monologue, couples with hints you've given about Marcelle, have caused the MC's poor perception of her to remind me of the lines of this poem, 'a servant when he reigneth': Because he served a master / Before his kingship came, / And his from all disaster / Behind that Master's name / So, when his Folly opens / The unnecessary hells, / The Servant when he Reigneth / Throws the blame on someone else. / His vows are lightly spoken, / His faith is hard to bind, / His trust is easy broken, / He fears his fellow-kind. / The nearest mob will move him / To break the pledge he gave-- / Oh, a Servant when he / Reigneth Is more than ever slave!'

The rest of the poem doesn't really fit her as well, but wonder how Marcelle would feel to have these verses attributed to her, especially by the ones she loves?

As always, I'm not sure Marcelle would care too much at this point of her life. She's definitely learned to "block out" the opinions of others, and she's come to terms with the fact she's permanently ruining her relationships with her family by continuing down the road she's on.

I think it would annoy her a bit, more than anything, mostly because Marcelle views herself as being incredibly dutiful and loyal-- just not to her family's happiness, so much as the longterm future of her kingdom, and the *safety* of her family (granted, MC has most certainly gotten the short end of the stick in that regard). I'd say the only moment she *well* and *truly* regrets, and yes, I say *regret,* is not being able to stop MC's surgery-- to which she would accept full judgment/criticism/insult for.

It would probably bristle her ego to have someone attribute those lines to her, but I don't think it would hurt her feelings or *upset* her, necessarily. If it came from Emeline or MC, I think she'd be a lot less annoyed since she thinks they have more right to be upset with her. But if it was Esmerelda who was drawing connections to those lines, she'd definitely *internally* be having a "you should be grateful for what I've gone through so you don't have to" moment, for... reasons <3

Chapter 5.2 Patreon Q&A Questions

Aug 1, 2023

Yup! It's that time of the year again... 👀

Here are the rules/expectations! They're the same as last time... granted that was, uh... (**cough** nearly a year ago **cough**).

1.) 1-5 questions per person.

2.) Questions can be about the chapter, about the characters, etc! Questions *do not* have to just be about Chapter 5!

3.) Questions can be more spoilery here than they can be on the Tumblr. Depending on how many *super* spoilery questions I get, I may make a Part 2 for the $10+ tier that answers them.

Put your questions in the comments below, or, if you'd prefer to remain anonymous, submit your questions to this google doc here! **Know that not every question is guaranteed to be answered**-- if a question is plot breakingly spoilery, or I otherwise can't think of a plausible response, then it might not be answered!

I'll try to answer everything by August 12th! :)

Seven Forms of Love. | Syfyn Javall. (1/2)

Jul 31, 2023

An: Because this headcanon list is so long, it's being broken up into two parts for every character! Three sections for the first, four for the second.

Eros – Romantic, Passionate Love

1.) Is your OC romantic in the traditional sense? Do they enjoy giving or receiving gifts of flowers or confectionaries? Or are there other courtship traditions from their culture of origin that are important to them?

Syfyn *is* romantic in the traditional sense, not that she wants to admit it. She gets embarrassed very easily when it comes to cheesy romantic things-- though she enjoys them greatly. Her favorite thing to receive is flowers and jewelry, and you'll usually be thanked with a shy, angrily flustered smile accompanied by a fond, teasing jab. Otherwise, Plaithus has no other notable courtship traditions!

2.) How important is sex to them in a relationship? Do they see it as something essential to their happiness? Would they be able to remain in a monogamous relationship with someone they loved without sex?

Sex isn't very important to her. She's definitely demi, and only really begins to think about it if she's been in a close relationship with someone for a while. Otherwise, she has next to no interest in it, and if her partner wasn't interested in it at all, I can see it never coming up in the relationship. She pretty much will just mirror her partner when it comes to sex drive.

3.) How do they feel about public displays of romantic affection? Does it make them uncomfortable? How do they feel if a romantic partner kisses them in public?

It depends on what it is. She's willing to hold hands in public, and will definitely be closer to MC if she's in a relationship with them (ex, leaning on their shoulder, or just always standing next to them in a room... granted she does that already in a close friendship). Anything past that, however, and she'll begin to get flustered. She tends to draw this line in her mind between "soft" and "casual" intimacy-- so leaning on her shoulder is fine, but hugging her might make her blush. And *no* kissing in public... though you might be able to get away with a cheek kiss here and there (she will absolutely go red like a tomato).

UNLESS... it's after a battle. Then all rules go out the window, Syfyn's embarrassment magically disappears, and her adrenaline makes her forget entirely about public decency (*cough* kissing after the Battle of Tethras before MC snaps in front of everyone *cough*).

4.) Do they believe in love at first sight? Have they ever developed a crush or romantic (or erotic) fixation upon a stranger based on their appearance alone?

No, definitely not. She's definitely someone who's in the camp of believing love requires hard work and loyalty-- it's not just some sweet, giddy feeling you get upon meeting someone. That being said, Syfyn is definitely demi-romantic as well, so getting a crush (romantic or sexual) based on first sight just... would never happen for her. The idea of one-night stands and immediate crushes is entirely foreign to her.

That being said, it's definitely brought up some amusing situations of people flirting *very* obviously with Syfyn, or otherwise having *very* obvious crushes on her while she goes about her day oblivious. She's the kind of person to be like, "Oh, damn, you're sunburned. And you're stuttering? Shit... you must be dehydrated and exhausted from training, huh? You better take care of that."

Meanwhile, the object of her *own* affection will enter a room, and suddenly her attention is on them like a hawk for the duration of the evening.

5.) How closely is their opinion of their own beauty (or lack thereof) linked to their confidence? Do they see themselves as more or less worthy of love or sex based on how attractive they feel?

Syfyn likes pretty and soft things. She likes dainty jewelry, and flowers, *loves* cats and generally small, cute, and fluffy things... but she does not consider herself to be pretty at all. It's not like she thinks she's *ugly,* I just don't see her really ever putting thought into her own appearance like that.

She's a soldier-- most of her life is spent fighting and training. There's no point in worrying about how you look when you're a month into a campaign and you're ninety percent sure you have trench foot.

That being said, if, for one reason or another Syfyn *was* given the excuse to dress up... she totally would *want* to. I just don't know if she would actually do it. She'd be worried about looking stupid, or people making stupid comments, or any other number of things. She's worried about other people's perception of her, and it's her anxiety that stops her from doing what she pleases appearance-wise-- not that she thinks she's unattractive.

That being said, no... she places absolutely zero personal value on her physical appearance when it comes to self-worth. Her self-hatred goes *much* deeper than that...

Philia – Affectionate, Platonic Love

1.) Does your OC have a Best Friend? If they do then how long have they known each other and how did they meet? If they don't then do they have a close group of friends they love equally? Or are they more of a loner?

MC is (was?) Syfyn's best friend, seeing as they've known each other since they were both ~8. They both definitely had other friends growing up, especially when in the barracks and training, but they always were each others' number one, no matter what. That, and the fact that most of their other friends died early on in their first battles before the rest followed suit.

At that point, it was just safer for them to rely on each other instead of anyone else. She got other friends over the years-- ones who proved themselves to be competent in battle. She was close to them too, though now they're gone after MC snapped and... well... murdered them.

Now, post-MC's exile, Syfyn is a loner. She spends most of her time alone, just falling into a monotonous routine. She *does* care for Trystan greatly, and the two are definitely close, but it's in more

of a familial way than just a friendly one. The person she's probably closest to next is Sabir, though their relationship is one of circumstance, more than anything else.

Should MC and her reconcile, MC goes *right* back to being her number one.

2.) Does your OC find it easy to make friends? Or are there barriers to them doing so? If so then are these due to issues of inclination, communication, or something else entirely?

When she was younger, it was very easy for Syfyn to make friends. She was loud and outgoing, her mother was the Commander... she generally found it easy to just sort of rope people into being her friends, and then her magnetic personality would keep them around. The older she got, however, and the more friends she lost, the more closed off she became. She was never mean, and she would always help out people when she could, but she definitely kept her walls up to prevent anyone else from getting too close just out of the solemn fact most of them would die soon in battle. Those who did survive would become good friends to Syfyn before they passed during the "Incident."

Now Syfyn is just... bitter. Bitter, hurt, and vengeful, with zero energy and hope left in her bones to even make the effort of ever getting close to someone again.

3.) What qualities does your OC most value in a friend? Loyalty? Shared sense of humour? Or something else?

Humor and loyalty. Growing up in the military, there was a lot of gallows humor-- so Syfyn has most *definitely* insulted a lot of people over time by making dark jokes. Granted, these dark jokes are always in direct reference to the awful things Syfyn has had to both see, and carry out, herself. Having someone who can hear that humor and join in on it (as a fellow soldier, doctor, politician, or just someone who generally deals with similarly difficult matters) is a definite requirement for her.

Other than that... Syfyn needs loyalty. Syfyn herself is *incredibly* loyal-- as in, "she'll lay down her life for yours in a heartbeat, follow you to the ends of the world, can border into a loss of sense of self" loyal. She wants that returned. Now *hopefully*, that person could return it in a healthy way, otherwise, you'll have a nasty case of codependency happening *real* quick.

4.) Is your OC able to build close friendships with people very different from themselves? Perhaps in terms of culture, age or personality?

You might've picked up on this from the answer above, but no. Syfyn, even in her youth when she *was* social, was *never* good at befriending people beyond the other kids in the barracks (along with charming a few professors + instructors here and there). Now that she's an adult who's incredibly closed off, it's gotten even worse.

Syfyn was raised by the military. Her entire youth was nationalistic, pro-militaristic propaganda. Her own parents fed into that a lot as well on accident, often simplifying things for a young Syfyn to be able to understand. And, by the time they passed, Syfyn was still too young to learn the intricacies of the

matters they dealt with. Instead, she learned of her parents' death with the knowledge that A.) Foreigners + magic users are bad, and B.) Her parents were killed by foreigners + magic users.

You can see how that grew into a pretty awful, bone-deep bias and resentment as she got older under the guidance of the military. Granted, Syfyn *has* seen, firsthand, that not all non-Plaithians are monsters. But even so, that's not enough to erase her own internal biases and blind loyalty to Plaithus.

All of this is to say, Syfyn has a horrible time understanding, or maybe I should say *empathizing with,* people who are different from her. Being bad at that is what makes her good at her job. She doesn't get caught up in emotions when she's given orders to kill an enemy town. She just does it, ignoring the cries of innocents and children caught in the crossfire, focused instead on some distant, abstract concept of justice against evil even as the blood is dripping from *her* hands, and no one else's.

Her understanding doesn't extend far beyond herself-- but her loyalty runs deep. So, when someone like MC who had a nearly identical childhood as her branches off and becomes something *different*... something she can't understand... she's torn by the natural urge to run away and call them "bad" and her internal need to stick by MC despite that.

5.) What is their most fervent wish for their best friend(s)? How far would they go to make it happen?

That they stay safe, mainly. Syfyn's life is defined by war and bloodshed. She's been trained to know she'll die young, and so will MC, and so will most people she's come to care for. So her main wish is just... that they stay safe. As safe as they can be. It's not for happiness, because happiness isn't always readily achievable for people like them.

It's why she combats MC so frequently. She views MC like Icarus the more they stray for their duty, infatuated with some moral, distant ideal that they'll never be able to reach without being struck down by the Crown and Council.

She wants her friends to stay alive-- to stay *safe.* That fact makes the pain of losing all of them to MC's "incident" all the worse for Syfyn.

Storge – Unconditional, Familial Love.

1.) Did your OC's parents love them unconditionally? If so then has this helped them feel confident as an adult? If not then how has this affected them? What were the conditions their family attached to their relationship?

Yes, Syfyn's parents loved her unconditionally. However, they were never really present given they were both high-ranking members of the military. As a result, Syfyn spent the majority of her youth alone, and began to view her parents less as parents and as just... people. People who jumped into her life every now and again who tried to boss her around despite the fact they were never really there. Then, when Syfyn was only around ten or so, both of her parents passed in a battle.

This definitely contributed to Syfyn's closed-off demeanor when it comes to relationships. She's slow to **truly** trust people, and often keeps her emotions to herself. The fact that she had no stable family life growing up has influenced her view on relationships greatly, especially when considering the fact that the most stable relationship Syfyn has ever had in her life is her friendship with MC, which ended... interestingly. And may *continue* to develop interestingly, as well.

2.) Does your OC have children? If so then how fiercely do they love them? If they have more than one then do they love them all equally? If they do not have children then is this part of their future plans?

Syfyn does not have children, nor does she plan to have them. I've mentioned this here and there, but Syfyn was raised with the knowledge she would more than likely die young. As a result, she never really had the courtesy of daydreaming about a domestic life, which includes children.

And, if you were to ask her, I don't think she'd have much interest in children either, at this point in her life. Syfyn can't view herself as a mother, or something gentle. She's been raised to maim, and kill, and ruin. Even with Trystan, she finds herself struggling to guide them down the right path. Her own parents were never in her life-- how's she supposed to know how to be one?

3.) How far does parental approval (imagined or expressed) impact upon their current sense of self-worth? What might they sacrifice or attempt to achieve in order to ensure the approval of their parents?

In her youth, Syfyn acted out a lot. She was just generally a menace, stealing her mom's daggers, running around the palace, breaking things (though that part was usually on accident). She was just constantly hoping she could maybe convince her parents to stick around for longer, since they never did when she was good either... but they never did.

When her parents passed, she was completely emotionless about the thing-- on the outside, that is. On the inside, she was just confused. So very confused. They were always gone for long periods, and it took her a long time to understand they weren't coming back.

They weren't *ever* coming back.

Now, Syfyn feels plagued by their presence, more than anything. Her mother's mural sits on the wall, beside MC's. Growing up, she was constantly compared to her parents, to her mother. She hated it. She didn't feel like she shared anything in common with them-- just that people were trying to force something onto her that didn't fit, trying to pretend that there was a relationship there that didn't exist.

4.) Does your OC have any siblings? If so then did their parents have a favourite growing up? Has their relationship with their sibling changed in adulthood? If they don't have any siblings then do they perhaps feel they have missed out on an important relationship? Do they have any especially close friends who go some way towards filling that role?

Syfyn didn't have any siblings, but she did grow up in the barracks, which was sort of the equivalent of just having *dozens* of brothers and sisters. There was teasing, arguments, and an understanding that only kids who grew up in the military could have. In her youth, it was an enjoyable childhood. She felt invincible, surrounded by friends, learning to fight.

That quickly changed once they all first saw battle. Real battle.

One by one, most of them would fall, and Syfyn would learn to stop caring or relying on most people. The only person she consistently fell back on was MC, knowing that they would only fall if she were to already perish in her attempts to save them. That being said... I don't think MC + Syfyn had a sibling relationship. They were family, absolutely, but it wasn't in the same vein as brotherhood/sisterhood. I'd compare it more to something like a soulmate-- two parts of one thing.

5.) Is your OC able to love without necessarily needing or expecting reciprocation or reward? Or are all their relationships to some extent transactional? Have they ever loved another person unconditionally, whether a child or another adult?

Yes. I think Syfyn loves *very* selflessly, most of the time. She doesn't do things to be thanked, or rewarded, she does them because she cares for the person. She was MC's scapegoat for most things (regardless of if MC wanted that), and never resented anyone for it, nor did she require compensation for it. She's just a very service-oriented person, and once she grows close enough to someone to love them, that loyalty kicks in-- meaning she will, quite literally, do whatever you ask of her without hesitation.

I *will* say, the only people she's ever loved unconditionally at this point are MC + Trystan-- regardless of any choices MC has made.

Next Headcanon List Poll

Jul 12, 2023

Hello everyone! Last month, I finished the A-Z Hurt/Comfort headcanons for all the ROs by wrapping it up with Freedom! Which means, drumroll please... it's time to vote for what the next headcanon list will be! There are three options:

- Heraldry Themed Headcanons
- Seven Forms of Love Headcanons
- Side Character Headcanons

The **Side Character Headcanons** would a culmination of headcanons + fun facts for the major side characters in-game, meaning it would include Trystan, Omaren, Marcelle, Emeline, and any others you're interested in learning about (comment below)! **I'll do all three at some point,** you're just picking which one will be done first!

Do note that the first two lists are very long, so if you pick those, it's likely you'll get *one* headcanon post a month vs. the two you'd get with the shorter side-character lists.

So, without further delay, which list are you most interested in seeing first? (Poll will close by in a week)

Heraldry Themed

13%

Seven Forms of Love Themed

59%

Side Character Lists!

28%

Poll ended Jul 19, 2023 · 54 votes total

The Dragon Story. (3/3)

Jul 11, 2023

Part One | Part Two | Part Three

A/N: Finally... after all these years... I have the final one... (Read in a Thanos voice)

It's disbelief that rattles through you with each breath, body crouched low to the ground, as you follow Omaren walking circles around the beast, hidden within the foliage.

"Weak spots," Omaren whispers. "List them."

You can't hear anything but the sound of your own blood rushing in your ears... though you try to find anything of interest anyway as the beast shakes itself, dispelling clumps of dirt and rock from its body

and sending it flying through the air and into the trees. You fight the urge to flinch as the boulders shatter upon impact, shrapnel of pebbles flying.

"Its eyes," you suggest, glancing at Omaren as he comes to a stop. He nods, once. "Its mouth?" Another nod. His eyes narrow then as he leans down low, gaze sharp and light reflecting from his pupils.

He sniffs then, wiping a thumb against his nose before pointing to its underbelly. "And there," he whispers.

Your eyes follow, and it takes several seconds of your vision focusing to spot the tiniest little spot where Omaren points to-- a spot where a single scale is missing. From afar it's miniscule-- though you're quick to realize it must be the width of your sword and then some in reality.

His blue gaze goes to you, and he makes a series of hand gestures only you would ever be capable of understanding. Both of you will flank it and try to distract it, and once there's an opening, you go for the kill, with no second thoughts or hesitations.

"How are we supposed to get close to it?" You whisper. You can feel your heart hammering against your chest so hard you feel as if you can't breathe. You already know what his answer is. You can't help but dread every second of silence before he speaks.

"Easy," he says with a shrug of the shoulders. The corner of his lips lifts into an uneven grin. "You just do it."

A single second passes, one where his words enter through one ear and go flying out the other, before he's off running. He sprints out from the underbrush with ease, his long legs carrying him across the field. The dragon seems sluggish and slow as Omaren makes his approach, though when the beast takes a step and the earth subtly rattles beneath you, you realize its slowness is a small price to pay for the absolute *strength* that resides in its bones. Omaren lets out a low whistle, and as the dragon turns its head to look at him, he leaps into the air, his wings unfurling behind him.

He's no small man, and yet compared to the beast he could be a speck of dust floating in the air, his rattling yell of an insult a small whisper in the wind as the beast's pupils shrink, zeroing in on its prey. Omaren calls it a word you're more than positive your mom wouldn't want you hearing, not that the dragon seems to know that. For one moment, you can picture Mom's horrified face at this entire endeavor. She didn't want you to go in the first place, fretting this way and that. You can already hear her going "I told you so" to Mother and you--

The beast snaps its jaws at Omaren, missing by a few feet. The sound of its bite is like a strike of thunder that echoes and sends vibrations through your bones, and before you know it, you're moving on instinct. *Focus.* Flank, distract, *attack.*

Flank.... *distract...*

Distract.

Distract?!

Your brain doesn't fully register the absurdness or horror of the situation as your legs carry you as far as they can out of the trees and into the clearing, more than visible to the dragon as it recoups from missing Omaren with its teeth. Its eyes lock on you, pupils widening in sadistic, blood-thirsty interest.

One part of your brain reassures you to stay calm-- that you're doing what you're supposed to be doing... which is being a distraction as you circle in on the opposing side of the beast. The other part of you reassures you that yes, you're an idiot, and yes, this is how you die-- by running full speed towards a dragon the size of a mountain.

You swallow down your fear with every step. You're almost successful. *Almost.* But then the dragon's jaws are opening, but no sound comes out-- just a low churring sound, like a terrifying cat's purr--

"Duck!"

Omaren's voice rings loud and clear through the clearing. It's a demand. An order. And your body reacts as any good soldier would-- by doing, not thinking-- and it's clearly the right move from the way your mind lags, filled with a mix of fear and adrenaline as you throw your body to the side right as a bright light builds up within the dragon's chest. You hit the ground at the same time the flames do, bellowing back and into the air from sheer force alone. The flames cause the ground to shake, stone and dirt melting into a molten-like substance as you continue to wriggle away, your legs feeling as if they're on fire from proximity alone.

For one moment, you're terrified you're done for. The flames will move over a few inches, and you'll be nothing but melted sinew-- dead and gone with no body to be retrieved.

Omaren doesn't seem too keen on letting that happen, however, gods be praised. He swoops onto the beast's snout, landing on it and stealing the creature's attention. His hands grab onto the countless horns on its head to keep balance as the beast shrieks, rearing its head this way and that in an attempt to kick him off. You watch for a moment, almost transfixed, as Omaren grins with a manic look in his eyes as he laughs. It's a delighted laugh-- joyful, even, like a kid having his fun. You're almost dazed by the sight of it as smoke bellows from the beast's nostrils, accompanied by embers, and a second growl from the dragon reminds you to *move.* You struggle back to your feet despite the burns that cover the back of your legs, your pants threatening to meld to your skin as you sprint closer and closer until you're beneath the dragon. You can see the barren skin where the scale is missing, though the skin that shows looks like solid stone. You know then that there's a flaw in your plan.

That-- and the fact that the beast is so large that there's no way in the hells you'd be capable of reaching the spot. Not... not unless...

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"Shut up, shut up, shut up--" Nikke shouts, waving a hand in the air as Syfyn grins into her mug. It's clear the alcohol has begun to make its way into everyone's systems, a delighted, almost friendly buzz in the air. "I ain't listenin' to all this bullshit--"

"I wanna hear!" Amilia complains, practically pleading with him to let you continue. He ignores her, shaking his head as Vethna stares at the table with a furrow in their brows, clearly trying to do the math on how big this dragon was and what your plan to deal with it was.

"You want me to believe," Nikke begins, leaning forward on the table, a tankard of beer in his hands, "that you, at the age of sixteen, fought a dragon, narrowly avoiding its fire while fuckin' Knight Omaren in his shiny stupid armor was, what? Tryin' to seduce it with intimate, close eye contact?"

Syfyn snorts-- realizes she shouldn't find it funny-- and then scowls, setting her ale down as if rejecting it and any joy it may offer her. Sabir glances at her in passing, an easy smile on his face as he looks between Nikke and you.

"Never know," Sabir muses, a teasing grin on his face, "could've been a shifter..."

"You're both disgusting," Vethna mutters, rolling their eyes.

"He was *not* seducing the-- how in the hells did you reach that conclusion?" You hiss. You know Nikke's just saying it to mess with you, but now that Sabir's hopped onto the conclusion the two of them feed off one another, their grins widening as they exchange hypotheticals of Omaren and the theoretical dragon lady.

"I gotta say," Nikke mutters, "I've been a shitty guy here and there, but I think I can say with full confidence I never seduced someone just to shank them five minutes later... Then again, I bet you Vygranders would be *all* into that, huh?" He asks, a wicked, drunken grin on his face as he turns to Vethna with an impish, implying expression.

Vethna scowls in response, their brows furrowing and clearly less than impressed by his words. They scan him head-to-toe as if to fully force him to bask in their disappointment, before taking a sip of their wine and very purposefully turning away from him. They opt to face you again, refusing to feed into his childish behavior.

"How did you kill it?" Vethna asks, redirecting the conversation back to safer waters as Amilia sidles up beside them, also curious to hear the end of the tale. Your eyes flicker around the table, Sabir and Nikke finally settling down as you suck in a big breath and sigh.

"Well... we had to get it to stand up on its hind legs, ya know? That way Omaren could go for its eyes while I..."

"You're not, *not*, going to fuckin' say you *climbed* it--" Nikke interjects, pointing a finger at you. "I'm fuckin' leavin' if you say--"

"I climbed it."

"Gods damn it!"

***

You did-- get it to stand, that is. You knew Omaren was going to do it the second you met his eyes from where you stood beneath its chest, his gaze sharp and clear in spite of the circumstances. A single nod from him was all the warning you got before he looked the dragon in the eyes, raised his brows, and shrugged. Right as it went to nip him a second time, he lifted his sword and stabbed it into its eye.

All hell breaks loose.

You run towards its front legs as it shakes and screams, the sound so loud you struggle to keep your balance as the ground shakes and trembles beneath you, stones and pebbles skipping along the surface as if they're dancing. Someone could tell you the sky is falling, and you'd *believe* them, the entire world seeming to fall apart at the seams as Omaren leaps off the beast's nose and flies above it, taunting and teasing, forcing its neck to crane higher, and higher, and *higher*--

You're clambering up one of its toes when its front legs rise off the ground. Your heart drops into your stomach as it happens, your hands slipping to grab your daggers as you stab and bury them between the slivers of its scales. The ground grows farther and farther away as you're hit by a sense of vertigo, holding onto your daggers as tightly as you can. It's a long way down. A *long* way.

By habit, you find yourself looking up at Omaren for reassurance. His eyes flicker from the dragon as it gnashes its teeth at him, roaring and growling, to yours.

Neither one of you says anything, and yet the two of you hold a conversation through furrowing brows and nodding heads alone.

*I'm not doing this.
Yes, you are.
I'm going to die if I do this--
Probably.
Why would you think that?
****It's funny.***

In reality, it's you glaring at him, him glaring back, you pouting, him shrugging with a lopsided grin, you glaring again, and him grinning wider.

His eyes narrow then as he tilts his head, his eyes filled with a challenge and reassurance.

Do it.

You look down, your eyes landing on the missing scale in the distance, sitting on the beast's belly.

And then you do-- do it, that is. Your stomach drops as you look down, your heart racing, and with one final commitment, you leap off the beast's hand, stabbing your daggers into the beast's chest as you slide downwards. The jolt on your shoulders is bad enough for you to want to let go, though you manage to hold as you yell out behind grit teeth, your legs digging against the beast to slow down more as you come closer and closer to the missing scale. The beast hardly seems to notice you, its entire body shaking and throwing you around as it continues its attack on Omaren. Every snap of its jaws towards him flings your body out just for you to slam against it again, the air being stolen from your lungs.

It's when you can't catch a full breath, your vision hazy, that you realize now is your chance. The missing spot is coming quick, your body sliding and falling quickly. You rip one of your daggers from the beast, a small shout escaping you as you fall quicker, and quicker, and, *quicker*--

Now.

Your arm lifts, and by the time you're slamming down with all your might, it's where the missing scale is on its stomach. It goes in smoother than you thought it would, given you put all your strength into it, and your entire body comes to a full stop as you hold onto the dagger where it's embedded with all your might, your feet dangling beneath you. The pain of it is enough to startle the beast, and Omaren is quick to use it to his advantage as he flies just a *little* too high for the dragon, forcing it to lose its balance and...

No. No, no, *no*--

Your heart starts racing when you realize what he just did. You can feel how precarious the dragon's stance is from where you hang off of it as it begins to fall backward and onto its spine, its entire body writhing in a last-ditch attempt to save itself from the collapse. Your stomach falls into your chest as you begin to freefall with the dragon, and your eyes go to Omaren yet again by instinct.

Fear fills you as he soars towards you, a hand extending down for you to clasp, and it's when, and *only* when, your hands clasp his as he swoops you right off the beast that you feel any semblance of relief. You both watch the dragon hit the ground hard enough for the trees shake, birds flying away several hundred meters away and into the sky in a panic.

You look up in time to see Omaren smiling at you. The pride in his eyes doesn't register for you, not fully. You simply do your best to hold on tight to him (despite the fact you know he's more than strong enough for the both of you) before he drops you onto the exposed underside of the dragon and lands beside you. He shoots a hand out and onto your shoulder to keep you steady as the beast writhes beneath you, its massive wings beating in an attempt to get upright once more.

You can see from the dark look in Omaren's eyes that he has no intention of even giving it the chance.

There's an unnerving sort of grace behind his actions as he walks toward the exposed scale. He makes violence seem easy-- simple. He always has. He does so even now, as he unsheathes his large sword and pries up one scale after the other, paving a path to cut in seconds as if he was simply pricking the leaves off a tree, not descaling an ancient, bloodthirsty creature. And, when he lifts his sword above his

head and slams it into the creature's stomach, leaving a line of red in his wake where dark blood gushes and overflows down its sides, it's quick, easy, and simple-- over before it's ever truly begun even as you threaten to fall to your knees from the way the creature shakes and roars beneath you before finally, *finally*, growing silent.

By the time Omaren stands, chest heaving and blood on his hands, he looks as if he had simply gone for a morning run, his eyes scanning the creature to guarantee its demise before he looks at you. You feel like you're going to be sick from nerves, the blood of the beast flowing over your feet in hot, steaming rivers. But then Omaren smiles at you, biting off his blood-soaked glove to reveal his callused hand as he reaches out to ruffle your hair with a laugh from between his clenched teeth. You bat him off of you with a nervous laugh, and he obliges *only* so he can sheath his sword and pluck his glove from his mouth, grinning still as he squeezes your shoulder.

"You did good," he says, shaking you for emphasis as if to drive the point home. "I'm proud of you."

You can feel a little spark of hope ignite in you at the comment as he offers you one last smile before walking past you and up the creature's chest. You follow after him, following where he steps as he leads a path up to the creature's mouth. By the time you catch up to him, it's to find him prying a large tooth out. Blood and gum cover it as he manages to do so, and the tooth, small as it is compared to the others, is easily the size of both of your heads.

"A token," he says, shoving it into your hands. It's heavy. *Very* heavy. He laughs at the face you make as you struggle to get a good grip on it.

"I'm supposed to carry this?" You balk.

"Consider it punishment for being too cocky earlier-- that, and forcing us to slaughter a formerly hibernating dragon," he says, his expression just as chastising as it is teasing. He really is the older brother you never had, and any hope you might've felt suddenly disappears as you realize yes-- you very much *are* in trouble. "I'm sure it'll be nothing compared to what your mothers will have in store for you, though..."

"You're going to *tell* them?"

He smirks. "Of course I am."

You don't get the chance to throw a fit before he's grabbing you and flying off again to the nearest village...

***

"I thought it was a ghost town," you say, pausing to take a drink, "turns out every village in the next ten miles was locked up when people heard the dragon roaring. It took an hour of coaxing before anyone would open their doors."

"You can hear it from that far?" Amilia asks. Vethna's quick to nod.

"Fuckin' hells," Nikke sighs, running a hand over his hair as you look down at the table, digging your nail at the splintering wood.

"We rented some rooms there-- it took roping together several nearby villages and merchant companies to butcher up as much of the dragon as we could. Pretty sure it kept the entire region fed for the winter," you state. You're only half-joking. Hells-- maybe it was *two* winters.

"Wait..." Nikke drawls, his eyes narrowing. "So, you *weren't* the one to kill it. What's-his-face did."

"And Omaren *didn't* crawl into the dragon's mouth and have to keep it pried open at any given point?" Sabir asks. Your brows furrow in confusion on just where that particular variation of the story came from before Sabir turns to glare at Syfyn, who makes a point of pretending not to notice.

"You *liar--"* He hisses, faux yet passionate betrayal in his voice.

"I feel bad for the dragon," Amilia comments. "He wasn't doing anything..."

"If you count trying to murder people as 'not doing anything'..." Vethna murmurs.

"Trust me, Omaren wasn't happy about it either. And my mothers..." You bite back a shiver at the memory. The first thing that happened when you got home was your Mom hugging you tight enough to choke you. You were helpless to do anything but watch in horror as Omaren spoke to Mother, her expression going from neutral to increasingly more furious. By the time her cold gray eyes landed on you, you wanted to run for the hills.

Turns out there *is* something scarier than any angry dragon.

An angry mother.

Hurt/Comfort A-Z Headcanons | Freedom.

Jun 16, 2023

AN: I had to modify a few questions to fit them, and had to skip one about childhood, but with this post, we wrap up the a-z hurt/comfort headcanons.

A: Alleviate - How do they go about relieving persistent physical pain?

They don't. Freedom finds having a physical form to be a particularly invigorating experience, as it's not something they usually have. Even in the Old World, unlike *certain* Wykna, Freedom was not fond of possessing their followers against their will-- and, considering most followers of Freedom aren't superstitious or religious in the same way many other religious followers are, there weren't exactly a lot of opportunities for rights or rituals to be carried out to grant Freedom possession of a *dead* body, like what was done in Chapter 5.

Because of this, whenever they have the opportunity to have a physical form, they enjoy *all* it can offer them. The pain, the pleasure, the pretty, the ugly. You'll find sometimes Freedom even seeks out pain just to see what it feels like.

And, considering they're a god, there wouldn't ever be a situation where their physical form has chronic pain. They don't need to worry about things like that.

B: Bedridden - How do they behave when they’re sick?

They can't get sick! But if they *could*... they would be very whiney and dramatic about it, but not in a way that is sarcastic at all. They would demand someone to take care of them and basically cater to their every whim. They're cold, bring them some blankets! And yes, some soup would be *lovely,* thank you-- and, you know what? While you're being a dear, could you just go ahead and give them a nice massage, too? Perfect...

Their demands would stem from two things... 1.) Their blatant enjoyment of bossing people around and making them do things for them and 2.) The fact they've *never* been sick before and, despite knowing they can't die, *feel* like they're dying. Let them be a Drama Queen, okay? They deserve it, as a treat.

C: Cling - Whose physical touch is considered most welcome in their minds when they are in need? Is there a specific type of touch they respond well to?

Whoever they decide, whenever they decide it. Freedom doesn't just let anyone touch them-- if someone does, who they don't approve of, they can expect a dark look and aura so foreboding that they'll be removing their hands in no time.

Freedom very much views touch as a powerful thing-- it walks the line of rhetoric and genuine connection in their mind, and in that context, they're very careful about who they touch, and how they touch them. MC, for example, is someone Freedom is *very* touchy with-- and it's mainly as a means of persuasion. MC is someone who they need, and while it goes against Freedom's nature to force MC to do something, they're not above manipulation. It's part of the reason Freedom is gender selectable, as well. They purposely adjust their appearance and demeanor to get the highest chance of MC doing what they want.

On a more personal level, however, touch is very much something that can calm Freedom and relax them, specifically in an intimate context. Soft, soothing gestures from the person they have their "eye" on, so to speak, are things that can quell them in a heartbeat, almost no matter what. Things like playing with their hair, tracing lines along their skin, cupping their face, etc. are all great examples of this. It *only*

works coming from the one person, however... otherwise it would only annoy them, and they'd likely respond with a condescending attitude.

D: Deathbed - How would they react if they realized they may not recover from their injuries?

I'm going to spin the context of this question to be: how would Freedom react if they knew they would soon be "forgotten," like the rest of the wykna, and effectively be "dead."

To which I would say... their only response would be acceptance. Freedom has always understood their role in the universe as a god, and because of that, they're respecting of the natural power humans and mortals have over them. Death, or disappearing, isn't something they fear, though it would be a lie to say they wouldn't miss the world they're being forced to leave behind.

E: Emergency - What is their gut reaction when someone they care about is hurt?

As a god, it isn't their place to directly interfere with things. They can't personally walk up to a human and kill them as a means of revenge for their loved one— but they can use their abilities as a god to their advantage. They can strip the person of freedom, plague their life with chaos, enter their dreams, convince *others* to kill the person. But they are forever limited to that external influence.

So, if someone they care for is hurt, they'd be forced to simply wait until they are safe again— and it is then that Freedom would swoop in, comforting them and soothing them, looking after them as they are cared for, and plotting how to best get revenge.

Gods have good memories. *Very* good memories.

F: Fight - Are there circumstances under which they would not accept treatment or care? If so, what are they?

Nope! This doesn't really apply to them since there wouldn't ever really be a reason they'd need treatment for something, but if they did, they'd never refuse care. Freedom likes to be pampered, so please, feel free to fret and worry over them and put them before everyone else.

G: Ghosts - How has their past shaped the kind of comfort they respond to best?

I don't know if it has? Freedom wasn't really ever comforted in the past— not in any way that was of real importance to them. They were never a child, and while young gods can be easily influenced by other gods, they ultimately always give in to the nature they were created by.

So, while Freedom might've had interesting relationships with other gods in their youth regarding being punished or comforted, they have since come to be… well, Freedom. An uncontrollable entity that cares little for the consequences of its actions, or those in the crossfire.

H: Home - What things (objects, sensations or people) remind them they're safe after a scary situation?

Freedom doesn't get scared! Not in a way that they're shaking and need comfort for, anyway.

I: Isolation - How do they soothe themselves when no one is around to soothe them?

This basically goes off the section before this one— most gods, the key word being *most,* don't experience emotions to the extent they need to regularly be soothing themselves. They're gods, not humans, and if a god has the desire to throw a fit and a tantrum, so be it. Grantea, that's not something any of them truly have a desire to do…

J: Joy - When was the first time they were truly happy after going through something terrible?

Gods can be rather temperamental, Freedom especially, so I think their life is always filled with extreme highs and lows. As such, I don't think they're privy to stewing in their sorrow in the same way they don't try to force themself to stay happy. And, in truth, there's never been anything in Freedom's life that's really traumatized them, though there is *one* thing they do feel awfully sad about sometimes, and that often makes them reminisce— not that th*ey regret* doing it. They'd do it all over again, if given the chance.

K: Kindness - Do they believe they deserve the comfort they receive? Why or why not?

They don't view comfort as being something someone has to "earn." It's something that's given out and offered, not won. They apply that thought process to themself as well— though, as I said, there's little Freedom finds themself needing comfort from.

L: Levity - What or who helps them take their mind off of the circumstances?

Spending time with those they care for! There's little Freedom feels the compulsion to do when it comes to entertaining themself while alone, and as a result, it's difficult for them to distract themself. However, when they're surrounded by others— different people's joy and sorrow and problems— they're able to shift the focus away from themself, if even for a little while.

M: Music - Is there a song that comforts them? Why is it comforting to them?

I'll be honest, as much as this pains me to say as someone who adores music, I don't know if Freedom is that into it? I don't ever see them listening to music as a means of comfort, or to calm down. That being said, I do affiliate IAMX and Son Lux with them quite a bit, but mainly in correlation with MC!

O: Overworked - Who or what tells them to stop working and take care of themselves?

No one! Granted, Freedom has had very few moments in their existence where they were truly stressed about something and were overworked while trying to fix it.

P: Please - Have they ever begged for someone to comfort or stay with them? What was that incident like?

Yes-- multiple times. Freedom always ends up getting too attached to people, engaging in often smothering, manipulative, and toxic relationships. And when those relationships eventually always fizzle out, Freedom is left floundering, unable to understand their own mistakes as the person they care for leaves.

Most people think the idea of being loved by a god is a nice one— but that's before they understand that wykna are incapable of loving like a human. Everything they do is intense, obsessive, and all-encompassing, and love is no exception to that. The only god who has regularly proven themself an exception to that is the god of love themself.

Q: Questions - Are they eager to talk about what or why they're hurting? Why or why not?

Depends. If it's with their "person," so to speak, or someone they're very close to, yes. They'll just start talking and "venting" to the person they're with, sharing their emotions and fears and desires. They'll just sort of do it randomly, out of the blue, talking for however long as you'll let them.

Otherwise, no. Most people don't even know gods can *have* real emotions of their own beyond what they're influenced to feel, and Freedom intends to keep it that way.

R: Relief - How do they react to the realization that they will soon be fully recovered?

Apathetic! They expected to recover, anyway. Life is a lot easier it seems when death isn't something you have to fear in any way.

S: Scared - What would it take for them to admit that they're scared?

Freedom, unsurprisingly, doesn't get scared. That's not because gods don't have things to fear-- they do-- but as the embodiment of chaos and freedom, they've long ago learned to simply go with the flow of things. Things will go as they will, and people will do what they want, and that is the beauty of the world.

Sometimes, people make choices that cause terrible things, but even then, Freedom simply embraces it as much as they can. This isn't to say they haven't felt regret for things, or sorrow, or even anger and hatred, but they've never been *fearful*. They'll accept whatever is given to them, and they will do so with all the pride and grace that is to be expected of a being like them.

That being said, they don't judge fear, either-- though they will do what they can to guide their followers through it. Fear is constricting-- it keeps people from doing what they truly want in life. And, in that sense, Freedom wishes to destroy it as much as they can within those who follow them.

T: Time - How long does it take for them to feel better after an ordeal or illness? Do they tend to lie about how soon they feel better?

If Freedom were to somehow get wounded, they would not shut up about it long after their recovery. As I said before-- Freedom is a drama queen through and through, and if they have something in their

arsenal that they can use to their advantage, they're going to use it. So, you can bet for weeks, maybe even months, after an ordeal, Freedom will be bringing it up as a reason you need to be nice to them and do what they say. You wouldn't want to be mean to Freedom so soon after such a tragic event, would you?

U: Ugly - What part of their recovery process are they ashamed of, if any?

Freedom's never had to "heal" in the traditional sense. If their host's body is severely injured, it heals immediately, no matter how terrible it is. An arm is ripped off? They can construct a new one. Is it painful? Incredibly, but Freedom doesn't mind. In that sense, there's not much for Freedom to be "ashamed" of when it comes to healing. And when it comes to how normal humans heal, they're mostly fascinated.

The types of injuries that mortals can endure and survive are, quite frankly, amazing to them. Sure, it might take months for a severe wound to close, but watching how someone gets better, slowly, day by day, is something they enjoy watching. Freedom is more than aware of the grotesque, awful sides of humanity, so they try to find the good parts when they can... things like the indomitable human spirit.

What's not to be amazed by that?

V: Valiant - Has anyone told them they were brave for facing what they did? How would they react if someone did?

No. I think, if anything, Freedom has found themself in a plethora of stupid situations that has earned a many an eye-roll from their fellow gods. If anything, they probably astounded those around them with the type of problems they were able to create...

However, a fun fact, is that the holiday Daemetret, which is a Navaran equivalent of Halloween, is actually a holiday that was created by Freedom and Fear. Fear accidentally made a deal with some demons that resulted in them having access to the mortal realm for one single day (it's a long story...). This caused many a death, many a ruin, and many years of disaster where all the gods tried to fix it before finally turning to Freedom to help, because *really*, who's better to fight the chaos of demons than chaos itself?

It was then that Daemetret was born, which, just like the original origin of Halloween, is a day for mortals to dress like different demons and decorate the town with cheesy decorations that make fun of the death and destruction the demons were so proud of. They fought fear with enjoyment and fun, which slowly stole any power or sway the demons had over mortals.

So, while not a tragic event Freedom has been applauded for surviving, it is most certainly a large, national holiday that used to be celebrated in Freedom's honor. (Same thing right? *...right?)*

W: What? - What was the worst injury they've ever received?

Honestly... I'm not sure. They're thousands of years old, so I figure they've had to endure some rather bizarre, intense situations in the past. But of what's canonically filled out... I would just say being stuck in MC's head for a year was probably a rather large hiccup in their life. It was a short time for them in the grand scheme of things, but being stuck there, unable to do anything, stuck as a sort of accidental prisoner, certainly didn't please them, no matter how short of a time it was.

It doesn't help that they were rather stressed the entire time, fretting about Fate, keeping her in line and trying to figure out A.) How to get MC to realize they were there and get enough strength to communicate with them and B.) Figure out how to deal with Fate once they somehow manage to get out of MC's head.

X: Xenas - Do they see anyone as an inspiration in their recovery? Does their inspiration know about this?

Going to answer this as if it's asking if there's anyone Freedom finds to be an inspiration in general... to which I would say... no. I think of the other wykna in the past, they respected Darkness a lot, and got along well with Fear, but otherwise, there wasn't anyone they really... aspired to be like, or who they were inspired by.

Freedom is inherently... well... about independence. Chaos. Doing what you please. And abiding by another's whims or beliefs goes against that. If, for some reason, they were in a tough spot, whether it be mentally or somehow physically, they wouldn't be using anyone else as a guide to try and live up to. They won't ever be going, "What would X do in this situation?" they're much more of a "figure it out as you go" kinda person.

Y: Yearn - What gesture, person or thing do they desperately want, but would never actually ask for?

The Old World... they miss it, a lot. How could they not? The world was vibrant then, filled with magic and life and *chaos*-- but the fun kind, not the political backstabbings of crumbling government systems like how it is in the New World.

Now the world is quiet... gray... dying. The closest thing they had to a family is gone, forgotten from the minds of those in the realm. The only reminders they have of the good times are crumpling ruins that disappear more and more with every passing day, and the horrific knowledge that the realm will one day collapse in on itself, falling apart into *nothing.*

They want back what they had. What things to be how they were... but that's not their choice to make. As a wykna, it's their duty to observe and guide. It's *humans'* responsibility to carry out their will, and mortal's responsibility to decide what shall happen to the realm. For being the god of chaos and freedom, Freedom *does* respect one set of laws... and that is the set of laws from the Creator. The laws that dictate just what every being's role is within the realm.

Some Wykna rebel from this ideology, however, believing they should have more say in the state of things. Some might call these kinds of gods meddlers... and some might even claim that Fate is one of such gods.

Z: Zero - What is the best way to comfort them without touching them?

I don't think Freedom is someone who needs to really be comforted, if I'm being honest. They're a very "go with the flow" kind of person, and considering they're a god with thousands of years of existence under their belt, I feel like they've learned to not take things too personally.

I feel like trying to comfort them verbally might come off as a bit annoying to them. Unless it was another god speaking to them (which, unless it's Fate, is impossible), they'd probably get annoyed by a "lesser" lifeform trying to give them advice. Granted, there are immortal non-wykna races, such as angels, demons, and phoenixes just to name a few, but even *then*... they're so young compared to Freedom's existence. They're part of the Source, the wykna who make up the very elements of the realm as people know it.

Life is confusing, complex, painful, and so many other things, and they love it for being that, even if it means their own wants or desires are being thwarted in the process.

I *will* say though, if they were upset by something, and MC or a mortal they were fond of just sort of... *sat* with them in silence... *then* that might make Freedom a bit fond of them. It's the loyalty behind the action-- the respect that comes in the silence, of not invading their privacy and trying to give them advice or telling them how things *should* be.

"We Need to Talk..." Pt. 1 | Sneak Peek.

May 15, 2023

*AN: In Chapter 5 pt. 2, MC is given some very, **very** important, and difficult news... who MC decides to turn to after that moment, however, is up to you...*

Amilia

"Aren't you cold?" You ask.

She's wearing her usual outfit and her feet are bare-- but despite it all she looks perfectly fine. Hells-- she isn't even shivering.

"Nope," she says, speaking softly as she pops the 'p'.

"Are you tired?" You ask.

She shrugs, wrapping her arms around herself. "Maybe a little." She opens her eyes once more, and this time both of you go quiet as you watch the snowflakes gently fall to the ground. "I don't get much sleep here," she admits. "I don't even like beds to begin with, and it..." her brows furrow, "it feels like we're being watched all the time."

"Is that why you came out here?"

She hesitates before she nods once, decisive. But it's then that she turns to look at you.

"But what about you? You seemed frantic when you came out here."

Any escape you might've found from your situation quickly fades away as the anxiety comes back. The cold served a good distraction, but now that Amilia's looking at you directly...

"It's... I..." You shake your head and sigh. It's a lot to say-- and it's heavy, too. You and Amilia, amicable as you are, haven't exactly done much more beyond joke with one another and play games.

"It's something serious, huh," she says, leaning towards you almost conspiratorially. "I won't tell anyone. Promise." You watch as she crosses an 'x' over her heart, and a crooked smile forms on your face as you huff a laugh.

"It's... not pleasant."

"Nothing here ever is."

There's a weight of her own behind those words-- and you realize then she really doesn't mind you confiding in her. You relax a bit as you both settle against the tree, neither one of you facing each other as you take in a steadying breath.

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Vethna

You already know where you're going-- to the only person who ever seems to actually know what's going on here despite not having a single drop of Plaithian blood in their veins. Well... that... and the fact they're one of the only people you trust to rely on right now.

You don't entirely know where to go to find them in your frantic state. It's only after aimlessly wandering around and catching the concerned gazes of multiple people that you stop to lean against a pillar and gather your thoughts. Where, of all places, would Vethna run off to be?

...

The library.

Probably reading some obscure history novel for fun while scoffing at the outdated information.

Your heart hammers hard in your chest, and it takes you a moment to suck in a calming breath through your nose before you dare to move again, pace set swift as you make a beeline for the library. You get there faster than you should, and you can't deny you're sweating a bit from your brisk pace as you open the doors to enter. The smell of paper and parchment hits your nose, and you're thankful to find no one in there.

Well... hopefully not *no one.*

You walk through the mazes of shelving, attempting to ignore how stifling the feeling of them looming over you feels. You nearly break your neck looking around in an attempt to spot the sorcerer, but--

Poke.

You immediately turn around.

You just barely catch in your periphery a person dodging to go behind you-- and from the smell of jasmine perfume that hits you, you already know it's Vethna.

When you turn to face them again, they're smiling, a book clutched against their chest-- though their smile falls immediately upon seeing your face, their eyes flickering between yours.

"What happened?"

Syfyn's Very Bad, No Good Day <3 | Sneak Peek.

May 5, 2023

A/N: Damn, I wonder who this Vesetine fellow is... 🤔(some things have been changed to keep this from being *too* spoilery)

Your eyes flicker between him and Syfyn. She's one second from doing something awful, and from the look in Vesetine's eyes, you think he's hoping for as much.

Your gut churns, and you wonder it then-- wonder if this is all this is to him, a chance for some elaborate, martyred suicide.

CHOICE: Watch her.

"What did you say?" Syfyn asks. She almost sounds breathless. It's a familiar sound; you remember in your youth feeding her constant reminders to breathe as she clenched her jaw during stressful meetings. Her anxiety always got the best of her-- and it always turned into something foul and ugly. Something *dangerous.* You simply figured her to be stoic since your return.

You realize now, you were wrong-- and it's only as she tilts her head in a primitive manner that you're able to appreciate how much *rage* that mask of hers is able to hide.

Vesetine says something. You're unsure what-- it goes in one ear and out the other. You don't even think Syfyn heard it either with how quickly her gauntleted hand grabs hold of the front of his shirt. Her talons shred through the fabric like sharpened knives.

She was just looking for an excuse.

She steps forward. He steps back. He has to. There's nowhere else to go. Her wings spread, and flashes of the parade come to your mind.

The ground shakes when she lands. Her wings eclipse the sun. Her hand is strong, unyielding, and cold as it wraps around your neck. Her foot rises, and your mouth opens to scream, but for some reason, nothing can come out--

Vesetine hits the wall-- Syfyn's hand pulls him forward just to shove him back again. A grunt escapes him when she does, but his lips simply curl up into a wild, tilted smile as both of his hands wrap around her forearm. The force behind it had to have hurt, though the cockiness on Vesetine's face makes you wonder if he realizes how truly *small* he is to her-- how horrifically *easy* all of this is for her to do.

It's like a cat playing with a mouse.

Her grip on him tightens. One of the onlookers slips out of the room. You catch her gown moving in the periphery of your vision.

You would stop her if you weren't so transfixed on the sight before you. The others in the room are the same, watching with wide, blank stares.

"What do you intend to do?" Vesetine asks through clenched teeth. *"Kill me?* You can't. You *need* me."

Syfyn growls-- well and truly growls. The sound is low and horrific. It has the hairs on the back of your neck on end.

You watch as her free hand balls into a fist at her side.

"There'll always be more of you," she states.

Everything's slow. Her hand raises, and the sound of her armor clinking to accommodate the movement is resoundingly clear.

. . . to be continued.

Hurt/Comfort A-Z Headcanons | Sabir Du Vaelas

Apr 28, 2023

A/n: Sabir's backstory has undergone some serious rewrites, so if anything in here doesn't match up with other things on here about his past, know this one is the most up to date and accurate!

A: Alleviate - How do they go about relieving persistent physical pain?

Sabir's never really *had* to deal with persistent physical pain before. He grew up privileged and now lives a privileged life... or he did up until his own exile, that is. Because of this, Sabir doesn't know how to deal with things like chronic or severe pain.

That may or may not prove to be a problem on the journey ahead. He *is* known for his dramatics, after all. He'll likely need to rely on someone else who has more experience with "toughing it out," which means turning to MC or Syfyn for help. And, unlike the rest of the crew, Sabir has no qualms asking for that.

B: Bedridden - How do they behave when they’re sick?

He's whiney, but in a funny way. He's a jokester and a drama king, so he's quite fond of making a show of his misery, even if he's feeling *particularly* sick. He'll comedically groan out calls for help with a posh accent, hand draped over his head as he gives an intense monologue. He has about seven different dying speeches planned out. In one of them, MC is gifted his lavish estate in the middle of Vygrand that none of them can actually use, but hey, it looks good on paper, right? And to Syfyn, he leaves his large collection of wind-up trinkets. They're utterly useless to her, and he finds that funny.

That being said, he *is* a baby. The whining is for comedic effect, but he does tend to rely on people to care for him. You'll have his heart if you bring him food and just... generally check in on him to ensure he hasn't died from a fever.

If it's a *really* bad illness... he'll still be cracking jokes. He copes with humor, even if he's curled up in a ball beneath several blankets and shivering. He's similar to Vethna in the sense that he'll become more reassuring the *worse* he feels. A light cold? = Him pretending he's dying. He's dying? = Him pretending everything is fine.

C: Cling - Whose physical touch is considered most welcome in their minds when they are in need? Is there a specific type of touch they respond well to?

Sabir isn't close with many people. He spends most of his time alone, and if MC isn't close to him, then he doesn't really have any true friends in the palace. He and Syfyn might count, but their relationship is rather complicated, and other than a few fights or late nights talking, they don't spend much time together. He and Esmerelda are rather amicable with one another as well, but once again, it's not truly a relationship of much substance outside of a tied connection to the Commander.

Because of that, the only person whose touch he would really welcome at this point in time is MC's! (And Syfyn, but Syfyn isn't exactly a *touchy* person). Ironically enough, Sabir is a *very* touchy person in general. He likes hugs, holding hands, and generally being close to people, but only if they're people he knows well and gets along with. Unfortunately, Sabir doesn't take his mask off for many people, which leaves him wanting in the physical touch category.

He really responds well to any sort of physical touch, but if he's having a hard time, he'll just want a good hug. Depending on the situation, he either gets really broody and will want to be alone or very sulky, in which case it's the exact opposite and he'll want to be touching you somehow, constantly.

D: Deathbed - How would they react if they realized they may not recover from their injuries?

Oh, he'd be terrified, but he wouldn't show it at all. He'd be more concerned with trying to keep himself calm while assuring those around him it's fine. If there's one thing Sabir excels at, it's emotions. He's learned to work through things considering what he's had to do in his line of work, and upon hearing the news he might not make it, or otherwise will have an altered way of living, he'd do exactly just that.

I think, eventually, he would come to peace with it, whatever it is. That doesn't mean he won't have moments of anger or grief, but for the most part, it's something he'll come to accept. He knows what he can and can't change (*most* of the time, anyway). Better to spend his energy on things he can control than sit around and sulk.

E: Emergency - What is their gut reaction when someone they care about is hurt?

Sabir's a very gentle person, and at his heart, he's a caregiver, physically, but especially mentally + emotionally. He'd be at their side and getting them to safety, keeping a calm and reliable composure the entire time. He has the kind of demeanor that can convince someone everything will be fine, no matter how bad it is, and he has the strength to do it well.

He won't leave their side-- not if he can help it. And, if he's forced to leave, he'll just be waiting outside the door instead, or otherwise thinking of things to help them stay comfortable.

And, depending on why the person was hurt, and if it was personal... well, Sabir's no fighter, but he has contacts who are. And, safe to say, he'll guarantee what was done to his friend will *never* be done again. Not if he has any say in it (not that his friend will ever know about what unsavory things he's done to keep them safe).

F: Fight - Are there circumstances under which they would not accept treatment or care? If so, what are they?

I don't think so, no. Physical ailments aren't something he deals with regularly, so he's out of his depth in that regard. He'll just sit still and let those around him take care of him.

I think the *only* time he might refuse it is if it was blatantly obvious he wasn't going to make it. In that scenario, he would be more focused on trying to calm those around him, reassuring him that it's fine. *He's* fine. Things went bad, but hey-- the life he lived so far has been pretty good, right?

G: Ghosts - How has their past shaped the kind of comfort they respond to best?

Sabir is a very warm person at heart. He likes all sorts of affection-- hugs, holding hands, cuddling, etc. He's a very physical person like I mentioned before, though, ironically enough, his family wasn't a particularly affectionate one. It's not that they *weren't* affectionate, or that they were negligent, but he came from a noble family where there was a certain... *coldness* to things, at times. I think he tried to compensate for that, in a way, by being excessively comforting and charming. He's a performer at times in that sense, but it was a role he played frequently in his youth for his younger brother, and continues to play now, as an adult.

I think, in terms of what Sabir wants as comfort, is someone where he *doesn't* have to be that all the time. Someone he can be open with, someone who can see he's not an optimistic, charming person all the time but has flaws and is capable of ugly emotions. And someone who, upon seeing these things, accepts them.

H: Home - What things (objects, sensations or people) remind them they’re safe after a scary situation?

His pocket watch is definitely something that grounds him. For certain reasons, he is very obsessive about knowing the time and keeping track of the schedule of things-- whether that's b/c he's just a stickler for time given his occupation or for other, more personal reasons, I'll leave up for thought.

But, in truth, Sabir isn't a very skittish person. Even in very bad situations, he's surprisingly adept at keeping his head on straight and staying calm. So I'm not entirely sure he knows what makes him "calm down" after a scary event because he's always forcing himself to stay calm to begin with.

I suppose he'd be tense, regardless-- in which case, his answer is the same as it is any other time he wants to relax... wine and cheese.

I: Isolation - How do they soothe themselves when no one is around to soothe them?

He enjoys listening to music a lot-- preferably classical. In Plaithus, living in/near the palace, it was easy to find live music. Now with the adventure he's about to be sent on... it might be a *bit* more difficult (i.e. impossible) to find the kind of music that he likes. That being said, however, there *is* our resident fae bard whose music Sabir would also enjoy quite a lot.

I can definitely see the two hanging around one another after difficult moments, Sabir listening to Amilia's music as they both try to destress, but considering this question is what he would do if he's *alone*...

Well, I think he'd just ruminate, to be honest. It's not the most exciting thing, but sitting down, finding a scenic place to sit, and just *thinking*, is something that Sabir enjoys a lot.

J: Joy - When was the first time they were truly happy after going through something terrible?

When he first got his seat as a member on The Council. It was a *big* moment for him-- one that proved everything he did in the past wasn't for nothing. It also helped him be able to move on from his past-- something he claims doesn't bother him, and yet, in truth, he has a hard time *not* thinking about it.

A shame I can't elaborate on it more... 😔👀

K: Kindness - Do they believe they deserve the comfort they receive? Why or why not?

Sabir isn't the kind of person who believes in "worth." He believes that if you're in the position to, you should help those around you regardless of if you find them "worthy" of it or not, because it's the right thing to do. He takes that same view and applies it to himself. He's done bad things-- he knows he has. But he doesn't think that matters when it comes to whether or not someone is willing to put effort into him. If someone wants to comfort him and become a part of his life, then they'll do so, regardless of whether he "deserves it" or not.

And *yes*, as much as he absolutely *despises* Nikke and Vethna... he would apply his reasoning to them as well. Within reason, that is.

L: Levity - What or who helps them take their mind off of the circumstances?

Sabir's pretty good at keeping his work life and personal life separate, even when his work life is "traveling to dangerous places where your life is always on the line." He's had to get good at it to be good at his job. That being said, a glass of wine never hurt anybody...

Otherwise, if Sabir is *really* troubled, he prefers to just go over it in his head as opposed to trying to ignore it. Sabir's in tune with himself and his emotions. When things get too difficult, he knows what he needs to do to take the steps necessary to get everything back in order.

M: Music - Is there a song that comforts them? Why is it comforting to them?

In This Shirt by The Irrepressibles.

Just *listen* to it, and you'll know. The lyrics connect to him a lot, and I think it's something he'd relate to a lot. I also know Sabir is the kind of person to like classical music/elements, which this song does incorporate (at least a bit).

Also You by Keaton Henson. Once again, it just seems like the kind of song he'd like! (I think he'd listen to Keaton just in general tbh).

N: Nostalgia - What things that comforted them as a kid still work today? Does anyone know that?

His mom used to kiss him on the forehead after lecturing him when he got into trouble as a kid. Even now, the gesture calms him greatly. His father also used to just put his hand on Sabir's head as a means of affection, but that's more of something that makes Sabir feel... wistful... when he sees other parents do it with their children as opposed to wanting it to be done to him as an adult.

Otherwise... Sabir wasn't comforted much as a child. During times of hardship, Sabir was always the one providing comfort.

O: Overworked - Who or what tells them to stop working and take care of themselves?

Syfyn used to try. But that was the beginning of when things got sour between them both. Syfyn wanted Sabir to rest, Sabir *couldn't*, and they both tried to force one another to heal the way they thought was best.

Otherwise, no one's really tried. Sabir's a stubborn, *stubborn* man. It's near impossible to make him put something down that he's passionate about, even when he's working himself to the edge.

The only person who would've had some sort of success rate would be MC-- but even then, there are times MC would've failed at being able to pry Sabir away from his work.

P: Please - Have they ever begged for someone to comfort or stay with them? What was that incident like?

No. Sabir doesn't beg for people. If someone isn't willingly offering him something when it comes to his personal relationships, then he doesn't want it, period.

However, I will go ahead and add this little food for thought: he's never begged for someone to stay, but someone *has* begged for him to leave. Or rather, demanded him to.

And he did. Without question. Without doubt. And without ever looking back once (or so he says).

Q: Questions - Are they eager to talk about what or why they’re hurting? Why or why not?

If it's someone he's close to? Absolutely. If you ask, he's telling, and if you ever need the favor returned, he's there and ready to listen. Sabir places a lot of weight on his friendships, and like I'll mention later, being transparent with those he cares for is *very* important to Sabir, and he expects the same level of transparency in turn.

He likes to lean on his friends when he needs to, and he likes to be there for his friends to lean on, too.

That being said, if someone's *not* his friend, they'll never know he was hurting in the first place, no matter how bad it was.

R: Relief - How do they react to the realization that they will soon be fully recovered?

Relieved! As I said before, there's really no situation where Sabir would be severely injured, and it's therefore not something he has a lot of experience with. So, it would feel like a great weight lifted off his shoulders to hear he's on the road to recovery. He wouldn't have half as complex of an emotional response to it as some of our more *physical* or self-loathing members might...

S: Scared - What would it take for them to admit that they're scared?

The Blood Room was enough to make Sabir's mask fall pretty easily, even when surrounded by people he didn't like or trust. So, if faced with a particularly disturbing situation, Sabir will have no choice but to admit how unsettling the situation is. He has a good mask, but it's a mask designed for the intricacies of court-- not the horrors of the battlefield or death. He'll wear what he's thinking plainly on his face in those circumstances.

That doesn't mean he won't try and deny he's scared even as he's shaking or speechless, though...

T: Time - How long does it take for them to feel better after an ordeal or illness? Do they tend to lie about how soon they feel better?

Sabir's whiney when he's sick, but once he's over the brunt of it, he'll be pretty quiet. He'll take it easy for the first few days, giving his body the rest it needs to get back into the status quo, but afterward, he'll be pretty quick to get back onto his feet. He doesn't lie about how he feels, either. Sabir has no need to prove himself to anyone when it comes to his physical prowess or resilience, and as such, he feels no need to lie about silly things like whether or not he still feels sick.

U: Ugly - What part of their recovery process are they ashamed of, if any?

Sabir doesn't *do* shame. Sure, there are ugly parts to recovery in anything-- especially when it's mental. He's had times when he's been less than kind and lashed out at people due to how he's felt, and while he apologized and took accountability, he never felt *shame* for it.

Every ugly version of himself is a version that kept him alive in spite of the circumstances. He can't hold a grudge against what kept him alive. He can't. *He won't.*

V: Valiant - Has anyone told them they were brave for facing what they did? How would they react if someone did?

There's one thing Sabir's done that was daring and deserving of praise, depending on who you'd ask.

He most certainly did not receive praise for it, however.

It was the first true *evil* thing he did as a politician, though the reasoning behind it may make some claim what he did was justified. Sabir, at the very least, thought it was justified, and still does to this day.

W: What? - What was the worst injury they've ever received?

Sabir's more prone to paper cuts than serious wounds. That being said, there have been more than a few attempts on his life, and in his youth, he got into scraps all the time. He has a few scars on his chest, but they're nothing serious. The worst one he has is from when someone cut his neck and nearly killed him, though they, fortunately, missed the most important bits.

That lovely event happened during his travel to Levont to take his seat on The Council. It most certainly influenced Marcelle's decision to make MC his personal guard.

X: Xenas - Do they see anyone as an inspiration in their recovery? Does their inspiration know about this?

I'm going to place this in the context of mental recovery + strength, considering Sabir's a politician, not a fighter. And even then... Sabir's never had "idols." But he's had people he's resented and wanted to be better than. People who were skilled, talented, and powerful, and, most importantly, thought they knew everything.

Sabir's outsmarted all but one.

Sabir's a man driven by spite-- *not* inspiration, and most certainly not hope-- no matter how much he might make it seem otherwise.

Y: Yearn - What gesture, person or thing do they desperately want, but would never actually ask for?

There's nothing Sabir won't try and ask for. He's long past the point of being too scared to be true to others when it matters, nonetheless to himself.

He's rather selfish, in that sense.

Z: Zero - What is the best way to comfort them without touching them?

Touch is a really big thing for Sabir-- so his go-to is, and always will be, touch. But if that was off the table, just having a deep conversation with him is something that will help calm him. To those he's close with, Sabir opens his whole heart to them. He'll tell them his fears, his worries, his doubts, without reservation. And if that person really listens, and opens their heart in turn... well, it means a lot to him, especially because Sabir does *not* trust easily. He's picky with his friends. His *true* friends.

"You should get some rest..."👀 | Sneak Peek.

Apr 18, 2023

"And what if I don't want to be alone?" You ask.

You can't lie-- the silence has been unsettling since Freedom's departure. And maybe you're hoping their comfort could offer *other* things too...

Freedom glances at you from the corner of their eyes, and you're barely able to catch them pinching the flame out from the candle and snuffing it before you're enshrouded in complete darkness. Your eyes struggle to adjust in the dark so quickly, and one moment you can see Freedom's shadowed figure, the next you can't.

"Is that something you're afraid of?"

You nearly jump out of your skin from the sound of their voice from behind you, and before you're able to turn around, you can feel them lean in close-- close enough for their breath to ghost over the skin of your neck when they ask the question.

"I..."

They don't touch you. They don't need to. Their proximity alone has your head spinning. You can feel them creeping closer, feel their hands almost coming close enough to touch you.

You *want* them to touch you, and it's with that single desire that you feel their hands settle on your shoulders from behind. You can't help but startle a little from the suddenness of it as their right-hand slides down your arm, their fingers pressing into your skin, until they can grab hold of your wrist. They lift your hand up, their chin coming to rest on your shoulder as you both watch their hand slip into yours, their thumb pressing into your palm to keep your fingers out and extended.

You don't know how or why you're able to move so in sync with them-- why it feels as if they're still a part of you even though you're now both free from one another. But it doesn't matter. Not right now.

Their thumb traces the lines of your palm, and a low sound leaves Freedom, something akin to a purr if a human body were capable of making such a sound. And then they speak, voice barely even a whisper, lips close to your ear.

"Is this what you would want?" They ask. "Me, slipping into your room in the depths of the night, enshrouded in darkness, encased in *desire...*"

You say nothing, instead sucking in a low and shaky breath...

CHOICE: Take charge-- turn it against them.

You're quick to turn on your heel, Freedom's hand falling from your shoulder as you do. Your hand grabs hold of theirs as you turn to face them, and you use it to pull them closer. Their expression stays neutral, though you don't miss the way their eyes gleam in approval. Every time you push things further-- switch things on them-- they seem to regard you differently. With more respect? Intrigue? *Desire?* You're not entirely sure-- but you know you want more of it.

Your faces are close, and Freedom seems content to sit and watch you attempt to think of what to do next. But it's as you look into their bronze eyes that you notice something in the proximity, their chest close to yours.

They're not breathing. And the longer you stare, the more you notice. They haven't blinked, either-- not if it hasn't been for their dramatic expressions.

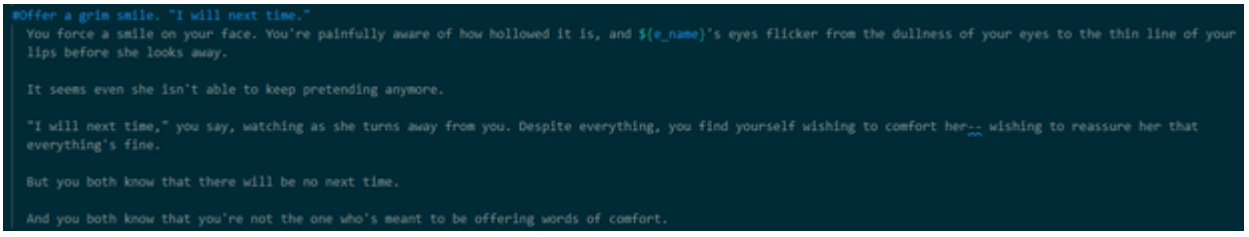
Freedom's lips quirk into a dark smile.

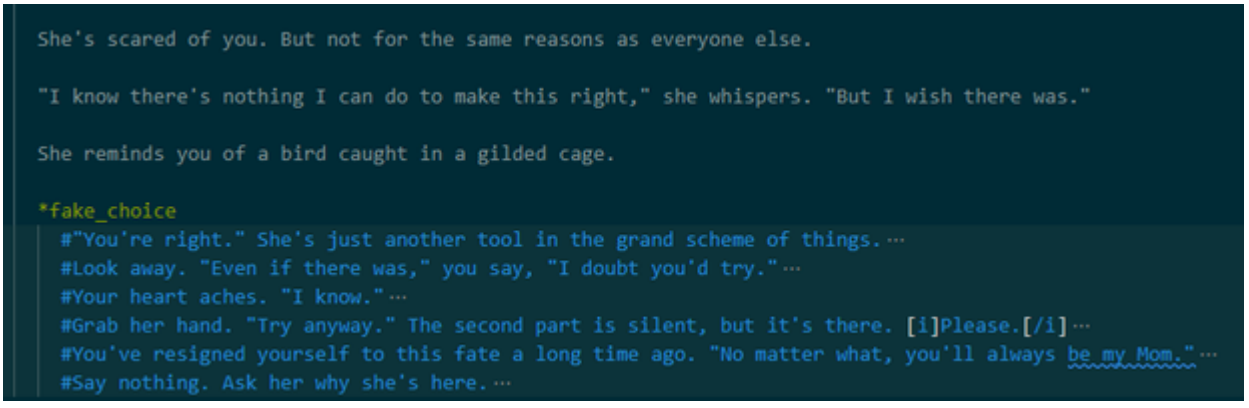
"Scared?" They coo, voice silky smooth.

You can't find the words to speak-- so instead you sit in silence, lips slightly parted, as Freedom tilts their head. Their eyes flicker to your lips before they take a step back.

"You really *should* get some rest," they murmur.

They're right.
You really should.





[Mom. | Sneak Peek.]

Apr 8, 2023

It's important to have tough conversations with those you love... even if neither one of you are particularly keen to have them... 👀

Hobbies | Sculpting

Apr 7, 2023

*AN: Pt. 2 of Chapter 5 is when hobbies are first officially introduced to the game! There are a **lot** of variations of this scene, and I'll continue to be posting them as I chip away at them all!*

You glance at the orange sky. In a few more weeks it'll fade more and more until it's nothing but a dull blue, and it's then that winter will have fully settled in. Children will be let out from school, festivities will commence, and the people will feast, content to bundle up in their homes until the snow melts once more.

You take in a deep breath, the crisp air cooling your lungs, and then turn back to what you're doing-- the same thing you used to do in your youth to pass the time:

[Creating Art.]

The palace in itself is a work of art-- you remember being in complete and utter awe when you first walked in. The murals on the ceiling, the portraits on the walls, the detailing in the pillars... None of it went unnoticed-- not to you-- and you found yourself appreciating it more than those around you. They would stop, call it beautiful, then keep walking, but you... You couldn't tear your eyes away. And it was then that you wondered if you could ever create something so magnificent yourself.

**Choice:
**#You learned to paint.
--> #You learned to sculpt.
#You learned to draw.
#Actually, you've recently picked up a fondness for woodcarving.

You loitered around the sculptures in the palace, standing in front of them and peering into their eyes. There were animals and gods and men, each one looking as if they were going to spring alive at any moment. There was a lifeforce that radiated from them-- a lifeforce that you were determined to create for yourself. Even the pottery had caught your attention (now *that* had really taken Mother off-guard), thin and delicate and *purposeful.*

It started with messy clay sculptures that resembled blobs more than anything else, but with time you got better at creating edges and shapes. With time your creations grew, and when it became apparent how dedicated you were, Mother had hired a tutor... the very artist who was responsible for half the creations you were so enthralled by in your youth.

You haven't been able to sculpt in years. Not until now.

[Next Page.]

You had been forced to leave your room to wander into your old studio. As far as you could tell, it's remained untouched since your exile, all of your materials scattered about. Within it sat a bust you never managed to complete, the face warped and just barely beginning to form, eyes hollowed and lifeless. You had spent the past hours rummaging through your creations, and any hopes you had of creating something new were quickly thwarted by the solid, dried blocks of clay that had long since shriveled up in your years gone.

[A knock on the door.]

You go still as your head snaps to stare at the door as if it offended you. You eye it for several seconds, fingers drumming on your lap, before you dare to speak.

"Come in."

The door opens, and in peeks none other than Clarisse.

"I had a feeling you'd be in here," she says, eyes flittering around the space. The setting afternoon sun paints the room in an array of purples and oranges, the unfinished eyes of the sculptures seeming to watch you as you move. Her brows furrow as she enters fully, looking down at where you crouch on the floor, a hammer in hand and shattered pieces of dried clay spanning in front of you.

"What are you doing?" She asks. You can hear the twinge of annoyance in her voice-- not at you, but the mess. When you were younger, she had to practically ban herself from ever fully entering the room lest she have a panic attack seeing how dirty you got, hands coated in layers of half-dried clay.

"I was going to recycle it," you say, wiping a hand across your face as you drop the hammer softly on the ground. "I..." You trail off, never completing the thought as your eyes narrow. *I don't know why.* You highly doubt you'll still be here at the end of the week to make any use of this, and yet...

You flex your hands before shaking your head to escape your spiral of thoughts. "Why are you here?" You ask.

Her lips purse at the question, eyes lingering on where you wiped your face. You must've gotten dust on yourself.

[To be continued...]

Sparring. | Vethna Mevnrael. | P.O.V. Switch

Mar 31, 2023

AN: MC is sarcastic! The end is also new content because I never got to finish Vethna's version of the scene the way I wanted before the demo release!

This is unbecoming of them, and they know it. Their father taught them to keep a tight leash on their emotions-- to keep a stoic demeanor and use elusive words whenever given the chance. "Let people fill in the blanks themselves," he said. "Let them paint you to be whatever they want."

Their mother taught them other things, things like leaning in close whenever they speak and only ever using a soft quiet voice when given the opportunity. She said to never break eye contact and to never let others be the ones to draw close. "Make them suffocate in your presence," she would say. "Make them learn to yearn for it, and they will give you everything you wish."

Right now, Vethna is following none of their advice except for one-- and that is that they have yet to look away from Nikke fucking Ivante lest he decides to shank them in their shoulder the second they so much as glance to the side.

"This is pathetic," Vethna snarls. "You're like a child throwing a fit."

"Maybe I am," Nikke says, tilting his head. He grins as he speaks, his pupils slits in his eyes. "Makes you look like a fuckin' idiot to still be arguing with me in that case, doesn't it?"

As much as they loathe to admit it, he's as quick on his feet as any of the others back home. They can't tell if they despise that fact or secretly enjoy it.

"It makes me the only person here who's willing to tell you to shut up and stay quiet." Vethna makes a point of glaring toward the Plaithan. Towards MC's former *friend*.

The Viper says nothing. He watches them both with only mild interest, his dark gaze jaded and distant.

"That's because they know I'm right," Nikke says, throwing a hand in Amilia and Du Vaelas's direction. "There ain't no way in the seven hells the *Commander* ain't in on this."

"They're *not*," Vethna growls.

They regret how pathetic they sound the second the words leave their mouth like a pathetic, gravelly mewl. Nikke's grin widens, and he knows. *Everyone* knows.

"No? They tell you that?" Nikke asks. He takes a step closer, and a cruel huff of amusement leaves him as he looks into their eyes. "Hells, they could tell you whatever you want to hear and you'd believe it, wouldn't you?" He asks.

Vethna says nothing. Deep down, they know he's right. They're in too deep at this point, and it's making them *stupid.* And, for once, their ego doesn't care much about that fact.

"You're jumping to some rather *strong* conclusions regarding MC considering how little you know about them," The Viper drawls. Vethna peeks at him from the corner of their eye where he lounges against the opposite fence. He looks at Nikke with a bored look on his face. Bored, and hidden beneath that, *hateful.*

"Says the one who fuckin--"

"You best remember where you are, *snake*," The Viper interrupts. His voice turns cold, his gaze goes dark, and it's not unlike the shadow of a man that Vethna first met that night in the alleyway.

Nikke's nose crinkles at the threat, face going teal as he bears his fangs. It's not fun anymore for him. It's upsetting.

"You know I'm right," he hisses.

"Do we?" Vethna asks. Whatever nonsense this is, he well and truly believes it, the pitiful fool.

"Fine-- maybe *you* don't. But that doesn't change the fact I *am* right, and you're all too busy licking the Commander's boots to realize--"

"*Licking their boots?* What kind of asinine insult is that?"

"Oh, *fuck you--"*

It's devolved into something childish. Vethna is painfully aware of the depths to which they've sunken as The Viper sucks in a breath to admonish them, most likely in some clever, passive-aggressive Plaithian manner...

But the quip never comes.

They look at him only to be met with a pleasantly surprised expression that is *not* aimed at them. They don't need to think twice then to know who it is, their head snapping to look over their shoulder. Their eyes are blinded by the golden wings of the Griffon first-- and the second their eyes adjust they see MC paving the path in front of her, expression amused as they get closer to the group. Their eyes meet Vethna's before the corners of their lips quirk upwards, expression charming as they shoot a wink at them before clapping their hands together as if to announce their arrival.

Nikke scoffs immediately. His reaction only makes MC's smile sharpen. Vethna finds themself digging their nails into the fence they sit on in an attempt to ignore how it makes their stomach flutter-- nonetheless how warm they feel when MC practically makes a beeline right towards them.

Ivante makes a show of dramatically skulking off to a corner. If Vethna didn't know better, they might truly think him to be a Vygrandian politician.

"Hey," MC greets. They hop onto the fence beside them easily, leaning forward to lean on their legs.

"Hi," Vethna murmurs. They'd be embarrassed by how blatant they are if they hadn't already made a fool of themself the day prior, turning into a blushing, stammering mess from MC brushing their hair alone. MC does the same now, reaching out to idly curl a strand of Vethna's hair around their finger before letting it fall once more.

They've had a bath, Vethna realizes. They smell floral and sweet when they lean in too close, their hair lacking the dirt and grime that was otherwise a staple for the past months they've been traveling together.

MC's eyes flicker to the collar that sits on their neck still.

They try to ignore it. Luckily, MC's attention is quickly drawn away from the near suffocating silence that has settled in the group from their intrusion, their eyes flickering from one person to the next.

Their gaze lands on Nikke.

He's the first to speak.

"It's nice of you to join us," he drawls. "Everyone was *very* worried about you. Practically pissing themselves over what next, horrible, *terrible* thing they would do to you." Vethna shoots the darkest look they can muster at him. His eyes lock with theirs, undeterred. "I pointed out you were probably just getting the royal treatment, and would you *look at that*. It looks like I was right!"

MC peeks at them from the corner of their eye, lips pressing together. Their expression, for the most part, is unreadable, but Vethna catches the smallest furrow between their brows. *Guilt.*

"No one's arguing," Nikke says, "because I'm right." He extends his arms to gesture to the group in the silence as if it's a solid point. It's made less so by the glares coming from every single person, a collective, unified sense of annoyance uniting southerner and northerner alike.

MC says nothing, their gaze going off to the side in the way it always does when they think. Their stare is sharp, and Vethna can practically see the gears that are turning within their head when they peek over at The Viper. Vethna puts it together just as quickly.

This is deliberate-- a purposeful manipulation of perception. They always heard Plaithian politics were like this-- scheming and dishonest to the point it makes one wonder what's real and what's not. A bit like

illusory magic, in that sense, they suppose.

"I think we have bigger problems than sleeping arrangements if it's this easy for the Queen to manipulate you," MC states. Everyone looks at them, eyes inquiring. Vethna attempts to ignore how warm they feel their face go as MC takes charge, voice lowering into something instructive. *Commanding.* "You don't think she did this on purpose?" They ask. "You don't think that *every* move made in here is deliberate?"

Ivante's jaw clenches so hard that Vethna thinks he might break his own teeth.

"Vygrand is similar, in a sense," Vethna says, meeting MC's stare. "None of it is a coincidence."

"No favoritism, just chess pieces on a board," The Viper agrees. But MC doesn't look at him, their stare lingering on Vethna for just a second too long. They like this, they realize. Like being on their side. Like being the one to support them when others dare to question their authority.

It feels like... it feels like an *us.*

"Alright, fine," Nikke growls. "If you all want to sit around and hold hands, go help yourselves." He makes it seem like it's the end of things-- but Vethna knows it isn't, and MC does too if the narrowing of their eyes is anything to go by.

"I'll be quiet as a stone, I promise, *if..."* Nikke trails off as he approaches MC, that awful grin of his from before coming back.

"What?" MC drawls. They sound bored, and that seems to annoy Nikke enough to get him to spit out his words.

"Fight me," he demands. MC blinks, but he doesn't give them the chance to point out the absurdity of his demand. "Or fight her," Nikke says, nodding in the Griffon's direction.

Her eyes narrow in response, the feathers of her wings ruffling.

"If you all want to sit around and do nothing, *fine.* I'm just saying, a good brawl could ease tensions, no?" Nikke says. He stalks closer and closer to them both until MC is sticking out their foot and pressing it against his chest to keep him from coming any closer still.

"And why would I do that?" MC asks.

The corner of his lip quirks upwards. "We could be shipped out next thing tomorrow for all we know, and you want to pass up the chance to practice?" He clicks his tongue, as if admonishing MC. "*Shame*," he murmurs. "Never know when someone could get the jump on you."

Vethna, at that moment, is very clearly reminded of the fact that they are *not* a fighter. They blink, catching only a passing glimpse of something gleaming before the next thing they see is Nikke's blade

pressed against MC's throat. Vethna lets out a curse, and they're not the only one as even Amilia reaches out a hand for the Commander.

MC, on the other hand, just seems... *amused.*

"Her or me?" Nikke asks. He presses the blade deeper. Vethna's eyes drop to where a single drop of red drops down their skin.

They force themself to look away.

MC says Nikke.

Vethna would love to say they're able to keep track of what happens after that-- but it would be a lie. MC strikes out quicker than Ivante was ever even able to get his knife out, and yet he somehow manages to duck beneath their fist in favor of rolling past them on the ground. It's a fight that moves quicker than Vethna can fully make sense of, and they're reminded of just how dangerous the two people in front of them are, MC not even reacting to the blade that slashes their skin and Nikke only hissing in annoyance when MC practically breaks his nose in two.

There's something dark in MC's gaze that Vethna's only noticed before in passing. It's focused, calculative, *and cruel,* in a sense. It's the stare of a predator, they realize-- the stare of something calculating the most efficient way to end another's life. Vethna supposes none of the people they've encountered on the road have so much as proven to be a challenge to MC. Nikke... well, he's no challenge-- not if MC's amused laughter is anything to go by-- but he's entertainment, in the least.

But trouble stirs elsewhere, trouble that Vethna is *much* more capable of keeping track of.

The Viper and Griffon speak to one another. Vethna can already feel the drama stirring before they can hear it, the conversation starting in hushed, murmured voices that steadily grow louder and louder until...

"You'll have to talk to them eventually, you do know that?" The Viper says. "You can't go on playing pretend forever."

"You mean like yourself?" The Griffon asks, voice low. Vethna's eyes gleam. She just prodded somewhere sensitive-- they can see as much when the mask of the Viper's breaks just momentarily. His demeanor twists into something ugly, although his exterior remains poised as ever as he marches up to the Griffon, leaning close to her face. Although they seem to be around the same height with the Griffon in her boots, her wings make it seem as though she's taller in tenfold.

"What is that meant to mean?" The Viper asks, voice low. *Threatening.*

"You know exactly what it means."

"Entertain me, then--" he says. The Griffon refuses, and Vethna can *see* his anger building until he finally snaps-- "*Say something."*

They don't bother to hide the way their lips quirk up in amusement.

"Getting MC killed isn't going to undo what they did to you," he says. You know that, right?"

Vethna's lips purse into an *'o'*, and they turn to fully watch as the Griffon's wings spread. It's a magnificent sight to witness up close, the shadow of her wingspan shadowing The Viper entirely, and Vethna only realizes what's happening as they're already watching it unfold.

The Griffon's gauntleted, clawed hand lifts above her head, talons gleaming, and before The Viper can so much as lift an arm to brace himself, a figure is throwing itself between them both.

Vethna knows it's MC before they see them. A switch flips, their stomach dropping as their heart stutters to the point there's a sharp pang in their chest as they slide off the fence. The Griffon retreats to the sky as they rush towards where MC watches, dumbstruck, their hands quickly working to untie their *te'thtri.* They reach out to grab MC's face, tilting it to face them.

They're greeted by red. Nothing but pure, and utter red.

They're quick to get to work. The movements are instinctual as they use one hand to hold MC's face steady, the other wiping away the blood that pools into their eyes. Large, deep scratch marks cover MC's eye, and they can't help but grimace a bit for them at how much it must sting.

They lift their hand, fingers splaying as--

As nothing.

There's no magic to be found. And they realize as much only after they attempt to channel it only to feel a cavernous pit of nothingness in its stead. They attempt to hide how they falter, but they know MC noticed. Their gaze is too soft. Too understanding.

They swallow down the lump it makes them feel in their throat, opting instead to croak out a few words.

"Are you alright?" They ask.

MC's gaze is distant for a moment before they manage to speak, an easy smile forming on their face despite everything. Vethna doesn't realize they're smiling back until the Commander's eyes flicker to their lips.

"I'm fine," MC murmurs.

Vethna has half the mind to jump out of their skin when MC's fingers brush against theirs before reaching out fully to hold their hands. Both of them are covered in blood, not that MC seems to mind any.

It's almost physically painful to be so close to them like this, and for once Vethna finds their mind completely devoid of any meaningful thought as they struggle to keep their breathing steady. Their mind races for something charming or witty to say, but they find nothing, lips pressing together as they struggle to not waiver beneath the intensity of the Commander's stare.

Their lips part--

"Can I speak to you?"

The Viper comes swooping in from leftfield, and Vethna's grip on MC tightens so quickly that they think it might hurt anyone who wasn't them. The Viper stands there, feigning innocence as his eyes focus on MC and only MC. He ignores Vethna as if they're nothing more than a maggot, withering and writhing in the blood beneath his boot.

"It's important," he says, taking a step closer. He peeks over at Vethna, as if he can't stand to maintain eye contact with them. "It won't take long, I promise. We can talk on the way to the infirmary.

They think it's meant to be some sort of assurance, but all it does is make something wicked leap to life within their chest. Assurances aren't enough. What they want is for him to leave MC alone, and at the very least give them the chance to breathe as they sit here, covered in their own blood. They want to bare their teeth at him, chase him away with the cruelest words they could possibly muster...

But they don't.

MC's eyes flicker between his before their grip on Vethna's hand tightens. "I can't," they say. "Not right now. I'm sorry."

The Viper's brows raise in surprise. Vethna simply lingers in the pride that blooms within their chest at the sight of it.

His eyes meet theirs again. Vethna thinks it might be the first time he acknowledges them as a threat. His brows furrow, his lips part...

"I..." He trails off before shaking his head, gaze going back to MC. He puts on his most serene, pleasant smile. It's fake, fake, *fake. "*Of course," he says. "Rest easy, then." He bows, deep and low. It only mildly makes Vethna wish to slap him (they think they might be able to get away with it if they were anywhere but here).

When he rises, he exchanges a small nod and smile with MC before turning to retreat back to the palace like the little gilded caged dove he is.

By the time MC is turning to look at them, it's too late to hide their disgusted expression.

"He's not a bad man, you know," MC says.

They suck in a sharp breath at the comment. "You're not normally the best judge of these sort of things."

They already know what MC's expression is going to be before they turn to face them. Their brows are furrowed, eyes flickering between Vethna's, before a sudden clarity fills their gaze.

"This isn't about Sabir," MC states. This time, it is Vethna's expression that falls. They're quick to look away, turning their head to the side though they keep their chin held up high.

"The way you let people treat you..." Their voice starts strong but then waivers. The Commander could gut anyone they meet navel to neck with nothing but their hands, and yet, in some instances, they just remind Vethna of *Jamie*. Of...

Hells.

Of themself.

"You're more than some... *weapon.* Some tool."

"Vethna."

Their eyes squeeze shut at how MC says their name, sweet and soft in that tone of voice they only ever reserve for them. MC's hand settles on their shoulder, and it's with a small, trembling sigh that Vethna concedes and meets their stare. The blood keeps flowing from the wounds on MC's face, caking up on the layers slowly beginning to dry beneath it.

"I know you're worried, but *this* isn't anything I can't handle," they say, pointing at their own face with a lopsided grin. They're trying to be humorous. It falls face flat in Vethna's mind.

"This, right here, right now, isn't war, MC. There's no timer clicking down. No knives held to our throats. No one doubts you can handle things like this alone, but they shouldn't be *expecting* it from you. I don't--*"* They cut themself off abruptly, expression morphing into a defiant pout aimed more at themself than anything.

They take in a steadying breath before continuing and stepping close. Close enough to where they could kiss the Commander, if they really wanted to.

"Just because you *can*, doesn't mean you should," they say.

MC's brow wrinkles. Their expression is quiet and unreadable just like it is every time they try to break down this humorous facade of theirs.

Vethna can see it in their eyes, then. They disagree. Of course, they would. MC doesn't dare voice it out loud, however, opting instead to lift their hand up to run a thumb along Vethna's cheek. It makes a sour taste rise in Vethna's mouth as they stare at them, teeth clenched as they draw near. They bow their

head, sucking in a quiet breath of MC's perfume as The Commander presses the most fleeting of kisses at their temple before stepping away once more.

MC offers a small smile.

And then they are gone.

Sometimes, Vethna can't help but wonder if the only time MC will stop to rest for themself will be when they're already dead.

Lustru'ele (Day of Love). | MC x Sabir.

Mar 26, 2023

AN: MC is the aggressive personality type in this!

"Times like this, I wish Lyechester was still on the map," Sabir muses, following after you and the path you carve through the crowd. "The oh, so beautiful 'City of Love'."

You can't help but raise a brow at him when he comes up at your side with that all-too-knowing grin of his-- the one he wears when he *knows* he's brought something up that will inevitably cause a debate.

"Yes, I'm well acquainted with it," you drawl, mind filling with at least *several* lessons Instructor Baltrice has taught you including the blasted place. "You'd really want Lyechester to still be in power just for the sake of *Lustru'ele?"*

"Why yes, yes I would, MC," he says, wrapping an arm around your shoulder to pull you close. "In fact... I would..."

"Don't you *dare* say it--"

"I would *love* it," he finishes.

You glare at him. No warning's given before you go out to smack him. His eyes widen and a panicked laugh leaves him before he ducks. You miss... *barely.*

"That was an awful joke," you state, forcing your expression to be deadpan. "And also, possibly treason."

"What can I say?" He muses, shimmying closer to you. "I like the drama."

You do your best to keep your expression unimpressed, though you know you're doing a poor job of it as Sabir invades your personal space to the point all you can smell is the pine-like scent of his cologne. Out here, in the streets of Melhrost and far from the capital, you and Sabir are allowed to be... well, *yourselves.* You're no royal or commander, just MC. And Sabir is just a pot-stirring, pun-making, troublemaker just *begging* to be recognized by a rogue, too-smart, eavesdropping council member who's having an outing in the city.

Despite that, neither one of you has ever been scolded for your outings before... though, once again, not from lack of trying on Sabir's part.

"Admit it, MC, you *like* this holiday."

"I do not," you mutter, barely dodging being smacked in the face by a child's toy that a toddler holds in his mother's arms. The streets of Melhrost are *packed.* Traders line the streets shouting out their wares as couples walk by arm-in-arm. You hate to admit that you and Sabir blend in amongst them *far* better than you'd like as he keeps his arm around your shoulder, shooting a charming smile at anyone he accidentally bumps into. He makes more than a few turn bashful-- you can only wonder if they'd still be so flustered after listening to a handful of his puns.

"You *do* know Ampston is a strange place to visit for today, right?" You ask.

"Is it? For all you know, I placed an order for a barrel of love potions..."

You let out an intrigued hum. "And what would those be used for, pray tell?"

Sabir grins. "I don't know... there are a few amusing pairings I can think of creating within the Council. Imagine it, MC, *the scandal."*

Your mind puts together several odd pairings... though once the idea of the Overseer and Omaren slips into your mind you immediately grimace. "I'd rather not..." You mutter. Sabir's grin just widens, clearly more than amused by your revulsion.

"If you insist."

"How do I know they're not for *me?"* You ask, leaning in closer to bump him with your shoulder. He stumbles a step from the impact, and when he inevitably hits someone, he's able to smile and let out a cheesy joke to keep it from escalating before turning back once more to face you. His eyes flicker across your features as you come to a stop before Ampston's Emporium, his lips ever-so-slightly pursed in mocking thought.

Then he smiles, and it's a slow and coy thing. Just the mere sight of it alone has your stomach fluttering, and when Sabir leans in close-- close enough to where you can feel his breath on your shoulder-- you're forced to suppress a shiver.

"As if I'd need a potion to earn your affections," he muses, a finger idly tracing along your jaw. "You're enamored enough by me as is. Anymore and who knows what could happen? You'd become *obsessed."*

He laughs when you slap his hand away, loud and unapologetic. People look at him when he does, his smile infectious upon them, but he doesn't take notice of *them*.

Only you.

"You're *already* obsessed with me," you taunt. Sabir's grin widens. The wittiness in his eyes morphs into something softer. *Sweet.*

"Of course I am."

He says it so unabashedly-- hells, he says it so *proudly* that you can feel your cheeks warm up, your brows shooting upwards as you fumble in search of something to say back to him. When you fail, his smile only widens as he steps closer to you. Your skin tingles, and when his hand lifts to gently run his thumb along your temple you're forced to contain a shudder. You think he'll come closer-- think he'll boldly press his lips against yours in front of the crowd-- but instead, he simply nods toward the front door.

"Shall we?" He asks.

You stare at him, stunned, for several moments. You're not sure if it's embarrassment or annoyance that fills you as you feel your face go hot, but regardless, it gives you the clarity you need to open the door for Sabir, glaring at his back as he enters.

You tell yourself it's because he's being so careless right now, and most certainly *not* because you can't think of anything but his lips on yours....

Damn it.

You take a moment to catch your breath before you step inside after him, closing the door behind you. A little bell jingles as you do, and some of the birds in the shop chirp cheerily in response.

The small room, as per usual, is devoid of any employees as Sabir walks around inspecting the countless items stacked on top of one another, hands clasped behind his back as if it's the only way he can guarantee he'll be able to contain his excitement. You never quite understood what Sabir's fascination was with magic-- especially not with the increasing regulations *against* it in recent years-- but you'd be lying if you said Ampston's didn't intrigue you at least a little bit.

You'd also be lying if you said you didn't enjoy the way Sabir's eyes light up every time you agree to visit.

"Just a second longer! Coming!"

A shrill voice shouts from the back of the shop, and you and Sabir exchange a pair of knowing looks. Not even a second later, a mass comes tumbling past a pair of hanging curtains, and by *mass,* you mean a pile of books and jars and potions stacked so high that it's a miracle it hasn't toppled over just from hitting the ceiling.

"... Ampston?" You ask.

"Yes, yes, just a moment--"

The tower of books shuffles a bit to the left... then to the right... your hands stick out on impulse as if you could catch possibly everything should it fall.

"That is quite the collection," Sabir muses.

"Yes, indeed--" Ampston manages to grit out.

Not even a moment later, you hear a snap as a dark blue cloud of magic surrounds the pile. It twinkles and twists, blinking in and out of existence before the pile of objects warps in on itself.

You blink, and then it's just *gone.*

A delighted laugh escapes Sabir as you bewilderedly look around the shop. You can see some of the items scattered about the room now, perfectly posed in every formerly available nook and cranny.

"Sabir, MC! My favorite customers," Ampston exclaims now that he can finally see you both. He spreads his arms in welcome, as if you haven't both been here countless times before. "You two are a rather pleasant pair of faces to see."

"Is that so?" You ask, crossing your arms. The elderly man shoots you an amused look from the corner of his eyes.

"*Especially* you," he says. He grins as you huff, though you're willing to allow the sly remark thanks to the rather boyish laugh that escapes Sabir from the comment.

You make way as Ampston hobbles to the wall that stands behind you, filled with countless shelves and trinkets. He points a bony finger out as he looks through everything, murmuring a small little tune to himself before he lets out a tiny gasp of achievement. "Here it is," he says.

Sabir's eyes alight the second the words leave his mouth, and you swear you've never seen him move so quickly as he strides across the room to snatch the box from Ampston's hands.

"And they--?"

"Of course," Ampston says. He almost sounds offended. "The magic was the *easy* part-- the charm is simple. Getting the *jeweler* to work with me, however, now *that* was a doozy*--"*

You tune Ampston out, eyes glued to the way Sabir grimaces when Ampston reveals whatever is in the box to be jewelry. His eyes hesitantly flitter up to meet your own, and you can't help but smirk at having caught him red-handed.

You don't look away when he does, content instead to watch as he hassles out the price with Ampston, who, as per usual, tries his best to refuse any coin Sabir offers him.

"*One* gold then, *please?"* Sabir asks.

"What am I to do with one gold?" Ampston asks.

"Buy a nice cake?"

The man hums at the idea, tapping his chin before a mischievous grin pops onto his face. You blink, and where his hands were once empty, he now holds a plate with a single, perfectly baked and iced slice of cake.

"Quite a good idea," Ampston admits, going ahead and taking a large bite. He speaks as he chews, crumbs toppling past his lips. "Alas-- it seems I already *have* the cake now."

Sabir blinks, then sighs. "Alright, fine. You win. It's free. Hurrah." The most monotone celebratory hoot leaves him, though he quickly perks up when you chuckle.

"Now, get on and get out of here before you run out of daylight," Ampston says, "I hardly imagine either of you have much time off these days--"

"*Discretion*, Ampston," Sabir chides. Ampston puts a hand over his mouth in a coy, jesting motion, and the only other thing you get from him is a dismissive wave of the hand before the very rug beneath you is moving and forcing Sabir and you right out the door.

You don't miss the way Sabir "conveniently" drops some gold coin on his way out, however, before the door slams shut immediately behind you.

"Talk about being blunt," Sabir mutters, going to tuck the box in one of his pockets.

You reach out to snatch the box away, and barely, *just barely*, Sabir manages to swing his hand behind his back to keep you from grabbing it.

"MC," he says, in mock noble horror, "how *ghastly* of you!" He makes a great show of being mortified by your behavior, even pretending to faint right into your arms. You have half a mind to let him fall, but the second he even *threatens* to topple over you find yourself lurching to catch him.

He grins up at you. You glare. He grins wider.

"Sabir--" You warn.

He ignores the hidden threat, opting instead to let out a dreamy sigh. "My hero--"

"Mmhmm."

Your unamused hum is the most warning Sabir gets before you really *do* drop him, though, through some miracle or another, he manages to catch himself. You watch as he "dusts" himself off when he suddenly pauses where his hand brushed over his side pocket.

"Wait--"

Your brows furrow, and you watch as his hand slips inside only to pull out several gold coins. The very ones he dropped inside.

"Ampston--"

Sabir whirls around to knock on the door once more. His knocks are heavy, heavier than you would ever expect to hear from him, though the only thing he gets in response from inside is the sound of the bell within jingling in a manner that almost resembles laughter.

"Gods above," Sabir mutters. "One day his magic won't be enough to get by here."

"You worry too much," you say, stepping up beside him. You allow him to sulk only a minute longer before you grab hold of his arm and pull him away. "If you wipe that sorry look off your face, we can go get that ice cream you're so obsessed with."

Sabir makes a face. "The ice cream *I'm* obsessed with? You're the one who can never stop eyeing the stands--"

"*Only* because I know how much you love it," you retort, grinning. He tries to glare at you, but it's a futile thing as he laughs.

"Alright. Fine. Ice cream it is, and I'll make sure to put on my most *charming* smile."

"Not too charming. I don't need anyone else trying to steal you away from me."

"For some reason, I highly doubt anyone is truly brave enough to try such a feat."

You let out an amused huff through your nose, and your flirtations come to a close in favor of walking in a companionable silence amidst the crowds. The later it gets, the calmer it becomes as people sneak off to eat expensive dinners and watch the parade. For you and Sabir, however, it just means all the more time to sneak off and away.

And sneak away you do.

You let him lead you through the more residential areas of Melhrost, your hand in his. He seems to know it like the back of his hand as he leads you through alleys and seemingly eroded passageways,

and, soon enough, you find yourself standing in a small, empty courtyard.

It's a sightly little place, the fountain in the center soothingly letting its water overflow into the pool below. Trees surround the entire garden, their leaves covered in blooming flowers.

"Well, would ya look at this," you muse. "Ain't you just a sap."

"Prepare yourself, my dear, for it is only going to get sappier from here on out."

Your expression becomes doubtful. "I struggle to see how that's possible."

"And *that* is why *I'm* the imaginative one," he says, smiling as he approaches you. He pulls out the box from Ampstons, and you can't help but raise a brow at the sight of it.

"You finally going to tell me what you're hiding away in there?" You ask. You know what it is, in truth-- a necklace or ring of sorts. As to why *Ampston* was involved in its procurement, however...

"No, actually," he says, "I just wanted to pull it out and taunt you with it."

You say nothing, and Sabir basks in the humor of his own joke before he sighs and steps closer.

"Alright, fine," he says. *"Yes*, I'm going to show you what's in the box." His dark eyes peek at you before he smiles, this time soft and sweet, and reaches out to open the box while holding it out to you.

You're revealed a pair of silver, matching rings, set with lapis lazuli gems.

"Ah ah ah--" He shushes you before you can even truly speak, taking out the rings and pocketing the box in favor of asking for your hand. You give it to him without question, watching as he slides one onto your finger.

It's a perfect fit.

"And now..."

You can hear the excitement crescendo in his voice as he slips on his ring, and you can't help but watch in amusement as he shoots you an excited look before tapping against the ring--

You feel it on your hand. Your own *ring*, that is.

Your eyes shoot open as you look down, the gems glowing softly. It doesn't appear to move, but just under the metal, you can feel it as if Sabir's tapping your very own hand.

"How--?"

"I figured with the *tensions* rising and all, you'll be gone for a long time, again," he says. "So, I asked Ampston about things that could help with the distance. Magical things, of course," he says with a small

smile. "I asked him to make these. So, in a way, I could stay close to you."

He says the last part with the brightest of smiles. Your cheeks ache from your own expression as some strange twist of adoration and sorrow fills your chest. Adoration for *these*, for *him*, for how confidently he offers his love to you.

And sorrow, because he's right. Deep down, you can feel it.

War is on the horizon, and, sure enough, you and Syfyn will be called to the front lines to guarantee the south stays where it belongs.

"Sabir..." You murmur. You peek at him to make sure he'll let you speak this time, and when he doesn't rush to interrupt you... "*thank you."*

You mean it. You really, *really* mean it, and you know he knows as much from the way you hold one another's gazes.

This time, you're the one to step closer, and, this time, you press your lips against his without hesitation, arms wrapping around his torso to pull him in closer. You can feel him smile into the kiss as his hands cup your face, his beard slightly rough against your skin as he tilts his head to kiss you deeper.

Right here, right now, he's yours.

Eventually, you're forced to break away, foreheads resting against each other's as you breathe, entirely unwilling to stray too far from one another. His breath warms your lips as you run a hand along his shoulder.

The silence is thick, comforting, *familiar.*

It's a haze you're not sure you want to ever break. And yet, you could not stand to have this one thought never leave your lips.

"I love you," you murmur.

He smiles, his thumb stroking the scarred skin of your cheek with such fondness that it's a wonder you don't fall apart at the seams all over again.

"And I love you," he whispers, gaze adoring. "Forever and always."

You look into his eyes, and you believe him. Believe him just as much as you believe the sun will rise and set tomorrow.

*AN: ... strongly deliberating adding the rings into the rewrite... 👀👀 (AKA I'm **totally** adding the rings to the rewrite)*

Pettiness. | Sneak Peek.

Mar 26, 2023

AN: Vethna telling you their secret in Chapter 2 isn't guaranteed... but you end up finding up the truth one way or another in the end 👀 There's also about14 variations of this very scene so who knows... maybe things will go much more smoothly in your own playthrough!

Sabir sucks on his teeth, and although Vethna sits several feet away, concealed by the rose bushes, you can tell they annoy him still.

"Honestly, what is up with you two?" You ask. "Is it because they're southern?"

Sabir raises a brow at you, eyes searching yours, but before you can make any sense of it he's shaking his head with a low huff.

"I won't deny that it's a part of it. Though, I take more issue with *who* they are."

"And who are they?" You ask, turning to face him fully.

"You don't know?" He asks. You shake your head.

"Their father is Xyleth Mevnrael." Your brows furrow more. "Archsorcerer of Vygrand," Sabir clarifies. "Leader of the Circle."

You feel something twist and lurch in your chest as you continue to listen.

"House Mevnrael is the heart of Vygrand. They've been there since the first Leading Council. They have ties that expand across the world. You don't talk to them. You don't try to outsmart them. You don't fight them. And you most certainly don't *trust* them-- not even the other Leading Houses of Vygrand would be foolish enough to do that."

"You're telling me," you breathe, "that Vethna's not nobility-- they're *royalty?*"

Sabir looks at you, gaze sympathetic. "You, dear friend, have just done to Vygrand the equivalent of a rogue, all-powerful sorcerer marching in and stealing away Her Royal Highness Esmerelda Naulvonte before marching into the depth of night with her to never be seen again. Did Vethna choose to run away on their own? From what I've heard, yes. But I highly doubt their family and the entirety of Vygrand is going to see it that way."

... he's right. He's absolutely right. You've been traipising around with the equivalent of a missing prince-- the most valuable thing to all of Vygrand.

CHOICES
--> You understand why Vethna hasn't told you. Sabir needs to get over himself.
You understand why Vethna hasn't told you... You also understand why Sabir doesn't trust them.# You're upset that Vethna hasn't told you. This chances everything.

"This doesn't change anything," you state, looking at him. "I need you to get along. Or just *pretend*. You do that every day in the court. Can't you do that here?"

"It doesn't bother you?" He asks, brows furrowing. "At all? You would trust them more than me?"

"It's not a matter of trust, Sabir. It's a matter of survival. And right now, the thing that guarantees that most is you all getting along and playing nice, so *please--"*

You already know you've lost him as he turns his head away from you, his jaw clenched.

"I can't do that," he says. "I won't. If you're not willing to acknowledge the danger of their lies, then I'll have to compensate for it." He looks at you, expression dark. "For the sake of our survival, that is."

His words are cold and petty-- and you stay silent as you both look at the ground, the tension between you both thick. You struggle to think of something else to say-- or whether to simply end the conversation in its entirety.

Hurt/Comfort A-Z Headcanons | Jost Ivante

Mar 19, 2023

A: Alleviate - How do they go about relieving persistent physical pain?

She doesn't.

Jost is a bit of an enigma. She's a bit of a coward in a lot of ways-- though this is something that will change as she's left alone while Nikke's stuck with the Commander. It's then that the fact she's a sadist will shine through.

She enjoys pain-- not because it's pleasurable but because she finds it "entertaining," in a sense. Seeing how many hits she can take, seeing how far her body can be broken just to fix itself-- it's a bizarre sort of fascination she has. The pain keeps her distracted from her rather turbulent mental state, and as a result, it's something she welcomes greatly.

B: Bedridden - How do they behave when they’re sick?

Like she normally does.

Jost isn't taking a single day off-- and she's not going to stop until her body literally gives out. Granted, being from Vrithka has given Jost a pretty impressive immune system. Most of the time, she's able to act like she's not sick at all (even though her voice is hoarse, and she looks like she should be keeling over when she walks). But there *will* be times when she gets a particularly nasty illness from pushing herself too hard.

It's then, when she's bedridden, that she's a particularly grouchy and grumpy patient. She hates feeling like a burden, and her self-loathing definitely makes her convince herself she's being one when she's not. As a result, she won't stop sulking and snipping at the person who's caring for her.

Nikke's able to put up with it (he usually just annoys her until she stops being mean). But you'll know she genuinely likes someone if she just stays quiet when they take care of her and lets them do what they need to do.

Hells-- if you're lucky, you might even get a *thank you.*

C: Cling - Whose physical touch is considered most welcome in their minds when they are in need? Is there a specific type of touch they respond well to?

Jost, like Nikke, doesn't really like to be touched much. Where Nikke is fine with casual, fleeting physical contact (slinging an arm around the shoulder), Jost isn't. She will not hesitate to slap a hand away that she doesn't want on her and has definitely pushed people away or resorted to minor physical violence when people invade her personal space.

She's fine with Nikke and her Mother entering her personal space-- they're family-- but otherwise, she's always a bit weird when it comes to personal touch. Even with someone she cares about, it's going to take her a while to get used to any physical touch that isn't violent, painful, or sexual. It's not that she doesn't *enjoy* it (that's definitely not it), it's that it's just so... *foreign*.

Like Nikke, she'd enjoy someone brushing and braiding her hair a lot as a form of physical comfort. It's a very prominent part of Vrithkan gorgon culture, so it's a very homey, comforting thing for both of them. Otherwise, with her partner, she'd be more than content with cuddling (firm pressure only!).

But the braiding and cuddling only works with a romantic partner. Otherwise, she'd much rather prefer to keep physical distance when it comes to comforting her.

D: Deathbed - How would they react if they realized they may not recover from their injuries?

Cynically amused. Jost isn't stupid-- she knows there's only one way her life ends so long as she continues to live it being cold, mean, and shut off to people. And, when that time comes with her getting a wound that's just too bad to recover from... well, to her it would be the beginning of that end. She'd

take it as a challenge to see how fast she can break herself further, doing whatever it is she wants with little to no regard for her own personal safety.

Granted, she already acts rather careless now, so...

E: Emergency - What is their gut reaction when someone they care about is hurt?

The only people she cares about are her mother and Nikke, and even then, I wouldn't claim her to be particularly loyal to those relationships. Her relationship with her mother is strained and filled with resentment on both sides, and while Jost *does* care for her brother, she's also jealous of him to a rather ridiculous degree.

In Chapter 3, you see where her loyalty lies when push comes to shove. When faced with Syfyn, Jost ran away and left Nikke behind. Her loyalty to the mission at hand with Fate was more important than sticking around with Nikke, and unfortunately, I can confirm that Jost had no plans of ever coming back to save him should things have taken a turn for the worst in Plaithus.

That being said, Jost is in a rather terrible headspace right now. She has been for years. That doesn't mean she's *stuck* that way. Should she ever decide to put her resentment behind her, you may be surprised by how that rage and dedication decide to manifest themselves instead...

F: Fight - Are there circumstances under which they would not accept treatment or care? If so, what are they?

It depends. If it's not a life-threatening injury and it's somewhere she can reach, she'll always refuse treatment. She can take care of herself, and much prefers dealing with the pain alone rather than being vulnerable around other people. However, if for one reason or another, she *can't* take care of the wound herself, then she'll always accept help if it's offered. That doesn't mean she'll necessarily be *pleasant* about it, however.

G: Ghosts - How has their past shaped the kind of comfort they respond to best?

Jost wasn't comforted too much as a child-- not because her mother neglected her but rather because she rejected it every time it was offered. She didn't want to seem weak, especially in comparison to her brother, so she got snippy and angsty whenever her mother tried to comfort her as a child. She viewed it as coddling, *always.*

Back then, her aversion to comfort was a choice. Now it's become a habit-- one that's difficult to break.

H: Home - What things (objects, sensations or people) remind them they’re safe after a scary situation?

Honestly, her best source of grounding is her journal. She writes in it a lot since she doesn't really confide in people, and it's the main way she processes her emotions. Jost isn't emotionally unaware like Nikke is-- she's painfully aware of her own beliefs, fears, and problems. She's just too self-loathing to do something about it most of the time.

Otherwise, there's a token that's braided into her hair that's worn by members of the Taipan, and she finds that to be a pretty comforting thing as well. It's not odd to see her pinching it between her fingers or running a thumb over the design whenever she's nervous or antsy.

I: Isolation - How do they soothe themselves when no one is around to soothe them?

She finds a dark, small area that's hidden from people and usually just *cries.* She *hates* crying, and she'll do everything she can to fight it, but that only lasts for so long until she eventually just breaks. When that happens, she'll be angry the whole time on top of being upset. She'll feel weak, and stupid for being sad in the first place. She takes every betrayal or momentary falter personally. It's *her* fault for messing up, *her* fault for feeling hurt by someone's cruelty. If she was only stronger, she'd be fine.

If anything, she soothes herself by solidifying the self-loathing. Her hatred and bitterness are like a scab. Every time she opens up a little and is hurt again, she grows a little more hateful each time. It just keeps getting worse and worse and *worse*, and... well, that can only keep up for so long until it'll hit a breaking point. Her hatred isn't a permanent solution to her hurt, and she knows it. But she'd be lying if she said she wasn't a little curious about what would happen should she hit her breaking point.

J: Joy - When was the first time they were truly happy after going through something terrible?

Jost's happiness is few and far between and almost always fleeting. The closest moments she has of "happiness" are usually moments of euphoria from success. Jost doesn't *enjoy* killing people, but she lives for the praise of the Taipan after a job well done. Every pat on the back, every praiseful comment of her cruelty, bolsters her ego and confidence enough for her to be distracted from her otherwise depressive thoughts.

But *true* happiness? She hasn't had that in a long time. Sometimes she feels a whisper of it on the horizon when watching the sunrise from up high, but it's not happiness so much as it's recognition that there's a possibility for her to feel it someday. Somewhere, deep down, she thinks if she runs far enough away, she'll find some secret, lost place where everything will finally just be *okay.* But even if she did find a place like that... what would she do? It's hard for her to imagine a life where she's free to be anything she wants. Hard for her to imagine how she'd find a *purpose* that way.

K: Kindness - Do they believe they deserve the comfort they receive? Why or why not?

It's not so much that Jost doesn't think she *deserves* comfort, but that she thinks she shouldn't *need* it. It's not a self-worth thing in the sense that she thinks she's unworthy of being comforted, but rather that she thinks she should be tough enough to where comfort never needs to be offered in the first place. Now, that's an impossible standard to ever reach, but that doesn't mean she's not going to try (and blame herself for the inevitable failure).

L: Levity - What or who helps them take their mind off of the circumstances?

Her mind isn't ever really taken *off* circumstances, but she can lessen her worry/angst sometimes. Depending on her mood, she'll enjoy going to a tavern and having fun (listening to loud music, watching

people dance, drinking liquor, etc, etc, etc...), or maybe she'll spend the night with someone interesting. Other times, she'll be too angsty/snippy to want to do anything that could make her feel better. When she's in those moods, she'll usually just find somewhere remote to sulk around in until she gets bored of doing nothing.

M: Music - Is there a song that comforts them? Why is it comforting to them?

Jost is def. into rock like Nikke, and I definitely see her being into goth music + dark electronic music in general as well. I think some artists she'd like are Crystal Castles, Skeletons + Sidewalks, and Crim3s. For specific songs she'd listen to, I'd say: Stay Ugly by Crim3s, Pap Smear by Crystal Castles, and Goth by Skeletons + Sidewalks! I can also see her listening to Grimes... she's definitely a Genesis girly underneath her angst ☠️

N: Nostalgia - What things that comforted them as a kid still work today? Does anyone know that?

Honestly... Jost has really yet to find a place she fits in. There's not anything from her childhood she really misses because she never felt like anyone really wanted her around, and even now she's just sort of wandering from one place to another. The most solid, caring force in Jost's life has been Nikke, and their relationship is complicated.

That being said, if there was *ever* a person who could get Jost out of the rut she's in, it's Nikke. She'll never admit it, but he really is the person she's closest to still even after all these years, and he's the only one willing to put up a strong enough fight to take care of her even when she doesn't *want* to be taken care of.

O: Overworked - Who or what tells them to stop working and take care of themselves?

Honestly... a fair amount of people. Jost is the kind of person who will take things *way* too far. Like... so far that even *Nikke* of all people is telling her to knock it down a peg. Even other Taipan members Jost has worked with have been a little unnerved by her.

Jost has *no* regard for her well-being and is desperate to prove herself. To whom? No one knows. But that urge has led her to do some pretty stupid, dangerous stuff that has those around her nervously chuckling because there's no way she could be *serious,* right?

P: Please - Have they ever begged for someone to comfort or stay with them? What was that incident like?

No. Never. Her ego makes it so she can't even accept help when offered. It would never allow her to *beg* for someone to stay with her, even if she wanted to. *Desperately.*

Q: Questions - Are they eager to talk about what or why they’re hurting? Why or why not?

Haha! *No.*

As mentioned before, Jost views needing someone as a weakness. Hells, she views emotions themselves as a weakness. She ignores her own emotions even when they've begun to take a physical toll on her. There's no way she's willingly going to tell someone why she's in pain, whether it be physical or emotional. She's not the fighter Nikke is, but it doesn't mean she's *weak* when it comes to enduring things.

That being said... if Jost *were* to open up to someone...

Well, she'd never verbally admit how she feels. But maybe, just *maybe*, she'd trust someone enough to let them read a few pages of her journal.

R: Relief - How do they react to the realization that they will soon be fully recovered?

Hesitant is the best word I can think of. She's not necessarily *happy* because a part of her will always believe that she doesn't deserve to get better. That being said, she's not angry, either, because another part of her is terrified at the concept of *not* getting better. She's a hypocrite, and as a result, she's not able to be particularly enthused about what happens to her either way.

S: Scared - What would it take for them to admit that they’re scared?

Honestly... I don't know if she ever would. It might read plain as day on her face or in her behavior, but I don't know if Jost would ever actually *admit* her fear to those around her. Her ego is big. So big, that I'm not entirely convinced that she wouldn't give up her life if it meant protecting it.

T: Time - How long does it take for them to feel better after an ordeal or illness? Do they tend to lie about how soon they feel better?

Jost is the kind of person who gets sick once a year, if even that. But when she gets sick... she gets *sick.* She'll look like death itself, will be unable to keep food down, and generally be a mess. But even so, she's so stubborn that she'll refuse to settle down until her body gives out and *forces* her to.

It takes her a while to completely get over it. She might be able to get around on her own after a week, but she won't be fully on her feet until another week passes. And even then, it takes a whole month for her to not be hacking and coughing everywhere.

And before you ask, no, she never once admits that she was not feeling well during those 28 days...

U: Ugly - What part of their recovery process are they ashamed of, if any?

I'd say her shame is a mix of embarrassment and rage. and she feels it for *every* part of her recovery process. She'll get really snippy and take her anger out on those around her as a result.

Not being able to take care of herself makes Jost feel vulnerable and weak (aka. her two least favorite things), and being forced to rely on others just makes her feel worse. She always thinks those around her are only helping her because they think she's pitiful. She has a hard time understanding sometimes

people care for others for no reason other than they do. There's not always a motive behind everyone's actions.

V: Valiant - Has anyone told them they were brave for facing what they did? How would they react if someone did?

She's heard it a few times for some of the stunts she's managed to pull off. Jost is more brains than brawn, and as a result, she's managed to capture more than a few targets that the Taipan would've otherwise never been able to get their hands on. In fact, the praise Jost gets is what she thrives off of, and it's why she's so committed to the Taipan in the first place.

But when it comes to the emotional and physical injuries she's endured... no. No one's ever really told her she's brave. And honestly, if someone did, it would probably just make her snap at them. She'd just take it as a remark made out of pity instead of respect.

W: What? - What was the worst injury they've ever received?

Syfyn's attack at the parade is by far the worst injury Jost has received. Syfyn broke several of her ribs, bruised the rest, and more than likely did some serious damage to Jost's spine-- not to mention the internal bleeding.

Every moment Jost is off-screen, she's healing. And even when we meet her again later in-game, she's not guaranteed to be completely recovered.

X: Xenas - Do they see anyone as an inspiration in their recovery? Does their inspiration know about this?

She doesn't have an inspiration, but there *is* a general standard that she follows. She compares herself to her brother and other Taipan members a lot when it comes to getting over wounds. If Nikke and her both get hurt, and Nikke seems fine the next day, she'll pretend to be fine too even if she isn't. The same goes for anyone else. She doesn't like looking weak by comparison, and she's pretty good at masking her emotions. That being said, it isn't usually good for her recovery when she's waltzing around, climbing, and fighting, all while acting like her injury is hardly even bothering her.

Y: Yearn - What gesture, person or thing do they desperately want, but would never actually ask for?

She wants something for herself. A place to belong. It's this desperate thing she's wanted ever since she was a child, but every time she asked for it, she was denied. Now that she's older, she rejects it anytime it's offered. She's self-defeating in that sense, and if she ever really wants to be happy, she's going to have to "rebreak more than a couple of bones that never healed properly," so to speak.

Z: Zero - What is the best way to comfort them without touching them?

In truth, just sitting with her in silence is the best thing to do. If she ever wants it to go past just that, she'll be the one to initiate it-- otherwise, you're likely to accidentally make her feel pressured to share

things she doesn't want to share. Once you get to a point you *are* close, just chatting is usually a pretty easy way to help her feel better. And, if that ever fails, you can probably convince her into spending a night on the town, which, a solid 7 times out of 10, will get her to stop being so angsty (even if only for a little while).

[The Offense of the Gods. | Sneak Peak.]

[Mar 5, 2023]

"What did you tell her?" You demand.

Freedom smiles. It's a condescending thing.

"Whoever gave you permission to make demands of a god?" Freedom asks. Amusement gleams in their eyes-- like they're just *waiting* for you to say the wrong thing. You press your lips together as you hold their gaze, and it's only then that they shift in their chair. "But, if you *must* know, it wasn't anything intrusive regarding yourself," they say.

"What kind of things *was* it about, then?"

Freedom's eyes narrow coyly. "I refused to speak to her of your secrets. For what reasons would I betray hers?"

For once, you realize how entirely helpless you are against them. There are no chains that keep you bound, no muzzle around your mouth, nor blade held against your throat. And, even if your very essence of being wasn't stolen by those doctors all those years ago, you know there is absolutely *nothing* you could say or do to convince Freedom into changing their mind.

Not unless you give them what they want first.

Your trail of thought has them smiling.

"Amusing thing, circumstance," they coo.

> **CHOICES:**
> **--> Absolutely not-- you refuse to make any deal with a god.**
> **# "**Care to remind me of the conditions?"
> # After everything that's happened to you since returning to Plaithus... *Make the deal.*

"No," you state.

Freedom's brows raise. Their grin widens.

"No?" They repeat the word slowly, like they can't possibly believe you refused them again. Even so, the amusement remains.

"You're such a delightfully stubborn thing," Freedom muses, resting their chin on their hand.

"Last I recall, it was one of your kind that led to this mess in the first place," you state.

"Indeed," Freedoms says. "The effects of Fate's meddling have still yet to fully make themselves apparent. Though, once they *do*... I must say, I am *quite* intrigued to see how you plan to capture and defeat Fate on your own."

> **CHOICES:**
> # You don't care about Fate one bit. You don't quite care about *any* of this.
> **--> You'll cross that bridge when you get there. If it turns that out you truly have no choice *but* to take Freedom's deal, then so be it.**
> # Fate's been ripped in two. Theoretically, it means she's less dangerous. Enough for you to capture the second half of her essence, anyway.
> # You've defeated armies and dragons and all manners of mythical beasts that claimed to be unfellable. You think you can manage a washed up god.

"I never said that I intend to take Fate down on my own," you argue, but Freedom's head is already tilting in that ever-so mocking manner of theirs.

"Haven't you?"

"Anything could happen between now and *then.* If things take a turn for the worse-- if you're right-- then I'll make that choice when time comes."

Silence fills the room. Freedom hardly blinks as they watch you, eyes glowing in the darkness. It's all you can see-- their glowing amber eyes and the flickering, contorting shadows of their face.

"I admire your boldness," Freedom says, "though I do worry such ignorance has the possibility to become tiresome."

You blink. "Excuse me?"

"Whatever made you think you get to be the one to dictate when this deal is done?" They ask. Their head tilts, their long, dark hair spilling over their shoulders. Their expression is pleasant as it always is, but their voice is cold. So cold that it has your heart sinking.

You realize in the quiet that it's not a rhetorical question. Their offense lingers in the air so thickly that you can taste it, and the eyes that watch you, just begging for you to say the wrong thing, suddenly seem to be only two of many.

Hidden behind that mask of a human face is something dark, expansive-- *corrupt and broken and chaotic, a fury of disorder and chaos--*

> **CHOICE:
> **#Beg for forgiveness. *Pray for it.* ♥
> #Demand their forgiveness. *Earn it.* ♥
> #Ask for forgiveness. ♥
> #Apologize.
> #"What are you going to do? You *need* me."
> #"If you want me to make the deal, it might be best for you to learn patience."
> #"Shouldn't you be above quarrels like this?"

Sparring. | Syfyn Javall. | P.O.V. Switch

Feb 28, 2023

Most days, Syfyn can't decide if her armor is a constricting or comforting thing.

When it's comforting, she wears it long into the evening. In those hours, it almost feels like a friend, an amicable companion to make up for the one she lost as she sits and listens to Trystan's worries and fears. She basks in the heat and sweat that gather beneath the heavy iron plates. Something about it is grounding--reassuring. When she's forced to take it all off, she refuses to look in the mirror, head craned downwards and eyes flittering like her own reflection is some predator that might just lash out and attack her at a moment's notice.

She knows what the problem is, but she's forced to ignore it.

Except on other days-- days where the armor is constraining, designed to keep her silent as opposed to protected. On those days, she tears her armor off like the metalwork is the enemy the second she is in her room, tossing and throwing it away from her with ease, eyes lingering on the gathering holes in the wall from her reckless behavior.

And, on those days, she confronts the problem with ease, too-- stares at it witheringly in the mirror.

The scarring. That damned, gods-awful scarring. It travels over her jaw, down her neck, covers part of her shoulder, and slithers downward still. It's an ugly thing, but what's more hideous about it are the memories that it carries--

Laughter. Cheers. Screams. Silence.

And blood. Lots of blood.

They had claimed it to be a marker of her failure-- a reminder of how every death that day fell into her hands. A reminder of her *cowardice,* of her weakness. She figured they were right. She was never a smart one, and the words made sense. And besides-- she doesn't like to think about that night. Not more than she has to, which she figures she can make never. So, like most things, she chokes it down and locks it away before throwing out the key. And then? Then she goes on to do the one thing she can do best--

The screams, the blood, the pain. She failed, she failed, ***she failed--***

Duty.

So, she puts on the mask, puts on the armor, and goes about her day, even when that includes dragging MC to a place she knows they don't want to be-- where *she* doesn't want to be. She keeps her eyes trained on their back when they look at their armor, but even then, she can see the gleam of the metal in front of them.

Screams, blood, pain, failure.

Shaky exhales, sweating hands, she repeats the words she's been told to speak while paying no mind to what she's saying. What *they're* saying. It's a sales pitch on a decision they have no say in, and they both know it.

So, they move on.

They move on, and then they're walking through the halls once more, MC leading the way as she follows behind them from as much of a reasonable distance as she can excuse, feet dragging against the marbled flooring. She can't catch her breath-- not really. Not when she's near them. And it doesn't get better even when they step outside and make their way to the training yards, the rigid air ruffling through her feathers and slipping through the cracks of her armor.

It chases away the suffocating heat, but only barely.

"Hells," MC mutters. The word threatens to be blown away by the wind, but Syfyn hears it just barely. She hears other things too-- the sound of bickering voices. She looks up just enough to see them all, the people she's meant to shepherd to their death. It's easy enough to convince herself they deserve it in her approach. The fae's hair catches in her antlers and her claws cut through the wooden fence she sits on-- meek or not she reeks of the faewild and danger, and it burns at Syfyn's nose. The Vrithkan gorgon and Vygrander are no better, she reasons.

The gorgon spits out words, *stupid* words, for attention, his eyes manic and deranged in the same manner as a furious toddler-- not a threat. She can recall the feeling of the other gorgon's ribs beneath her foot, cracking and breaking beneath steady pressure. They were like rubber bands snapping, one by one--

Something else snapped that night-- their arm, their arm, ***their arm.***

She looks at the Vygrander, then. Their finger is pointed accusingly at the gorgon's face, and the snap of his venom-filled fangs does little to intimidate them. She recognizes their kind easily enough-- silken hair and manicured nails. They're worse for wear after their time spent in the dungeons, but the rigidness of their posture doesn't fade so easily.

They're nobility. High ranking, too. The gorgon's all bark and no bite, and they know it, face flushed as they poke fallacies into every argument that leaves the gorgon's mouth. They like it-- this is fun for them. The delighted gleam of their frantic gaze is no different than the murderous one she's seen in young recruit's eyes. It's a kind of violence-- that's the only reason Syfyn can decipher it-- but it's a kind that's far too subtle for her liking, the violence of politicians and liars.

Or, in other words, *bullshit*. Rudimentary bullshit that MC seems to be the center of as everyone's eyes land on them the second they're close enough. It's always been this way since the beginning. Whether it's been out of fascination, hatred, or fear, people have are drawn to the Commander. Syfyn would be a liar to say she was ever immune to it herself.

It was a blend of so many things. Admiration. Duty. Love. The whisper of the feelings sit there, somewhere, in the depths of her, and she's quick to shove it down and away just like she always has.

The lack of the feelings only emphasizes her emptiness.

She lingers on the sidelines as MC marches into the fray, chin held high, eyes calculative as they scan over everyone and navigate to stand beside Sabir. He smiles at them. It's a cordial thing, one of familiarity. He bows to them both, eyes flickering over Syfyn like she's an afterthought as he asks how MC slept. He's pretending-- putting on a professional facade because she's around. She's the outsider now. This, she knows with certainty.

The two look similar as they settle into a companionable silence. They watch everyone carefully, seeing things she can't hidden behind shit like 'diction' and body language. All she sees and hears is noise, but MC must find something valuable in the ruckus since by the time the Vrithkan's set his sights on MC, MC is well prepared for it, spine straight and eyes sharp. He's just another soul to be whipped into shape-- to be "catered to" and manipulated to keep things smooth sailing. MC was always good at that-- good at keeping the peace for others even when they weren't keen on securing it for themself.

He says a bunch of pot-stirring nonsense. This much she is sure she and Sabir could agree upon. It takes a predictable turn, Nikke baiting MC with a fight. "A spar," he says. "For practice," he claims. Syfyn's eyes scan him head-to-toe.

He's a dirty, slippery fucker. But all bones break the same.

The fight isn't something MC should even entertain, but she already knows they're going to agree before they do, swallowing against the blade Nikke has pressed against their neck. And yet, despite the fact she *knew* they would agree, she can't help but be surprised she was right, still.

Something arises in her again. Regret? Familiarity? *Longing?*

She shoves it right back down again.

MC leaves her side, Nikke hisses-- she can't keep track of it, too distracted by the feeling of a bead of sweat running down her spine. She can't tell if she's hot or cold. Can't tell if she can't hear anything or too much. Her head is muddled, ears ringing, and yet she can hear every hammer of her heart-- every tremor of her breath.

Her legs feel weak.

MC shouldn't be fighting. The Vrithkan shouldn't have a fucking knife--

"Leave them be, Syfyn."

Sabir's voice stops her before she even moves an inch. Her wings twitch at the sound of her own name. She tries to respond only for a pathetic crack to escape her.

She swallows and tries again.

"This is childish," she states.

You're childish. How could you let him have a knife?

"MC should've never let him make demands," she continues.

You should stop them. But no. You're glad Sabir's stopped you, aren't you? Because face it-- you're ***scared--***

She shoves the feeling down, *down, down.*

"Say what you will, but I quite enjoy watching our scaled friend here get, ah, what's the word?" Sabir asks. She doesn't look at him. She doesn't *want* to look at him. *"Disciplined,"* he says.

The word sends something cold through her.

Discipline is a simple thing. It is the language of power and submission. It is yes ser, no ser, I'm *sorry* ser. It teaches you to be right, to be rigid, to be correct. And if you're *not* correct--

MC nails Nikke in the gut with their knee.

Syfyn's hand twitches. Her stomach curls.

If you're *not correct*--

"It's childish," she repeats. Or, maybe she just thinks she said it. Or maybe someone else said it. Or maybe no one said it at all--

MC hits Nikke's face. He claws at them. Her foot twitches to move, but it doesn't. Blood spills from MC's newfound wound.

It's red. It smells of iron. She can smell it from here-- she can smell it from *here*--

If you're not correct, you are corrected.

"Three years ago, you would've been doing the exact same thing," Sabir says. His tone is jovial and carefree. Whether any of this is of consequence to him or not, he keeps it hidden. It makes her want to scream.

She looks at him. Looks at his fine robes, jewelry-adorned hair, and perfectly trimmed beard. She wants to grab hold of him and shake until for *once* he shuts up, or at the very least fucking has the decency to act human. To act like this hurts him just as much as it hurts her.

To at least *pretend* that he looks at her and sees more than what everyone else sees.

The armor feels constricting.

"You were just as rowdy as the rest of them-- if not more so," he says. There's a chuckle at the end of that sentence.

A chuckle.

Yes, she wants to say. *Yes, I was, and look at what that got me.* She wants to scream in his ear until he can't hear anymore, but she knows even if she let it out, even if she didn't-- *shove it down*-- even if she howled until her voice went shrill--

No one would listen. Because they've had this conversation at least a hundred or more times by now, and still, he presses onwards.

"Don't," she growls. It's an awful, ugly sound that leaves her. A poor excuse for language. But she's never been good with words.

"I didn't say anything," Sabir retorts. His voice has feigned amusement laced into it. He's doing it again-- proving her to be the idiot she is. She lets out a shaky pathetic breath. She would beg him to stop if she knew it would do anything.

It doesn't.

Begging didn't work against them either now, did it--?

She can see MC in the periphery of her vision.

The armor feels constricting.

"Not now," Syfyn says. There's another silent, hidden '*please'*. She knows Sabir knows it's there even if she won't say it. *Can't* say it.

He ignores it, still. He stands up straight from where he leaned against the fence-- puts on that 'better than thou' attitude that has her feathers ruffled.

"You'll have to talk to them eventually, you do know that?" Sabir says. "You can't go on playing pretend forever."

It's accusatory and *cruel* to think any of it as being purposeful. She's not smart enough to be doing things like that. There is no long game. There is no plan. There is no *malice.*

The feeling rises and her stomach churns and for a second Syfyn thinks she might vomit. Maybe she does, a little. Swallows it back down. She's not sure. Her skin is hot and wet and she can still hear her heart.

"You mean like yourself?" Syfyn retorts. He goes rigid. She struck something in him. Yet again-- she is not smart enough to know what. This kind of violence is not her own. It's something she's learned from *him*.

"What is that meant to mean?" Sabir asks.

He steps in front of her. Other than the darkness behind her own mask that spits her own breath back into her face, he is all she can see. Just barely, she can hear it in his voice-- read it on his face. The only emotion she's ever been able to read and understand and *act* on with blinding clarity.

Rage.

"You know exactly what it means," Syfyn says.

"Entertain me, then--" he says. He steps closer. The hair on the back of her neck stands on end as her wings spread. Her mouth salivates and when she presses her tongue against her gums she is met with the taste of blood. *"Say something--"*

His demand morphs into a sludge of incomprehensible gibberish.

His face changes in her vision. It's a blur of darkness. A horrible, ruined mess. A pathetic attempt of something trying to be human-- but not human.

Not human at all.

The armor is constricting. The armor is constricting. The armor is constricting.

He speaks. She hears it just barely.

"Getting MC killed isn't going to undo what they did to you. You know that, right?"

A breath.

Another--

A third.

Something breaks. Something that begs for silence and peace and *one* fucking moment to just exist without MC being shoved down her throat-- all the things she cannot have, maybe even things she does not deserve. Perhaps things that are not even *possible* from the scar that mars her face.

But she wants it. She wants it so badly. And for one, bright moment, she thinks she can almost have it, taste it, *smell it,* as she raises her hand. Her talons cut through the air, fingertips aching for the sensation of slicing flesh like wrapping paper, and she is *greeted* with it.

Bliss. Utter bliss.

Warmth seeps beneath her nails and the smell of iron is heady in the air. Something dark within her purrs in euphoria at the sensation, and she can hear her own frantic panting as she stares at the mass-- at that awful, contorting mass. Slowly, it changes. Slowly, its patterns and shapes click together. A pride fills her s red fills her vision. It's not laughing now, is it? Not pushing and prodding and *tearing her apart.*

It clicks into place once more. The shapes become a face. A marred, bleeding face.

It is MC.

She blinks-- she doesn't know how many times. She does know she's waiting for the visage to change, still, to turn into someone else. *Anyone else.*

But it doesn't.

It *is* MC, and their blood is on her hands, and it's so hot that it's burning and *she did that--?*

She didn't mean to do that. She didn't *want* to do that. *Why did she do that?*

Her head shakes but she doesn't know who she's refusing because she did-- she did do it-- and MC is watching her but she can't see their pupils because it's all just *blood,* and she's seen them like this so many times before but she had never been the one responsible for it-- except at the parade, and even then, she didn't *want* to, but she *had* to-- she *had* to or they would've--

They *would've.* Right? But that was then, and this is now, and right now she didn't *have* to do anything*.* She didn't have to do anything at all. But she wanted to.

Gods, did she want to.

She says something, but she doesn't know what. What she does know is that she runs-- a fact she only becomes aware of when her vision is contaminated by the blueness of the sky and nothing *but* the blue. She crashes on a roof somewhere-- hits it so hard on her hands and knees that it jolts her bones and rubs her skin raw through her gloves.

She stares at the ground beneath her, tries to breathe but nothing comes.

The armor is constricting, but she cannot take it off, because what lingers beneath is *her,* covered in sweat and tears and spittle and snot and *disgusting.*

Completely and utterly disgusting, and stupid, and *cowardice*--

And completely and utterly wrong.

Lustru'ele (Day of Love). | MC x Syfyn.

Feb 14, 2023

"I don't know," Trystan mumbles, fumbling with the loose fingertips of their gloves. Their nervous gaze goes off to the side as their tail curls up behind them. "What if she gets mad?"

"She won't get mad," you say, squeezing their shoulder. You hesitate. "Okay, well, she *probably* won't get mad. At you. At least."

"Ser!" Trystan cries, pulling one of their gloves clean off.

"Listen," you say, leaning down to their height. "It'll be in and out. She won't be in there, I promise you. You'll be fine. Besides, I thought you liked the whole sneaking around the palace thing if The Overseer's *multiple* reports are anything to go by--"

Trystan's brows furrow and their lips stick out in a pout as they sit and listen to you half-rant and half-chastise them. In fact, you're so caught up in trying to solve the complex mathematical equation that is Syfyn's sense of romance and Trystan's sense of adventure that you don't even notice when Trystan's gaze goes right past your head as their eyes widen.

"Uh, Ser--"

"I just want to make it nice, ya know? It's our first holiday together, so I figure why not just rip off those cheesy romance novels she always reads--"

"Ser..."

You keep going, missing Trystan's array of increasingly more frantic movements which range from a single raised finger to hush down, batting their hands aggressively, and making a giant 'X' by crossing their arms. It's not until they loudly burst into forced laughter, golden eyes wide with fear, that you shut up and realize they're not staring at you. At all.

You turn around slowly while trying to hide the roses you hold behind your back-- though you can sense the intensity of Syfyn's presence long before you're looking into her narrowed silver eyes, her pupils nothing but slits.

"Wow, Ser!" Trystan says, snapping finger guns at Syfyn. "Didn't see you there! You sure did sneak up on us!"

She doesn't even look at them. She just keeps staring at you, arms crossed, with that impossible-to-read expression on her face.

"Ryder," she says. They straighten up at the use of their name. "Go home."

"Uhm, but--"

She snaps her head to look at them. *"Go home."*

"Okay. Yeah. Yup. Absolutely, you got it, Ser." They give her a salute and you a look of pure pity intertwined with relief, and just like that, they're gone.

You watch them disappear around the corner of the hall before you dare to face Syfyn once more.

"You told Trystan I read romance novels?" Syfyn asks.

"You do!"

She sucks in a sharp breath as if you just stabbed her and squeezes her eyes closed, her nose wrinkling slightly. She sticks her hands out then as if speaking of something incredibly methodical and confidential.

"MC, that is such an incredibly dark part of my psyche that I do *not* like to so much as acknowledge the existence of, and you *know* that."

She states it so seriously and matter-of-factly that you struggle to keep a straight face as you listen intently.

"It's like some sort of disease," she whispers darkly. *Fiercely.*

"I think the word you're looking for is a guilty pleasure," you muse, though the dark look she shoots you has you going quiet. "If it makes you feel better," you say, "I wasn't just casually gossiping with Trystan

about your reading habits."

She gives you a low hum, and you can see something akin to intrigue and amusement gleam in her eyes; whether it's because she's genuinely giving you the benefit of the doubt or just entertained as you dig your own grave, however, is a different question in its entirety.

You hesitate.

"Oh, no, *please* MC," she says, taking a step closer to you. "Do go on."

You pause for a moment, peeking past Syfyn's large wings to make sure no one's around before you sigh. Most people are busy at the grand ball Esmerelda's hosting for the holiday-- not attempting to loiter around the Western Wings of the palace.

"I may or may not have been utilizing Trystan as a liaison--"

"You motherfucker, you *know* that's *my* thing," Syfyn says with a barely contained smile as she shoves you. Her expression is disbelieving, as if she can't possibly believe you could betray her trust like this.

"First of all," you say, holding a finger in her face, "that hurt." She rolls her eyes-- but she's not able to recover before you're shoving the roses in her face. "Second of all... happy early Lustru'ele."

You should've asked Trystan to steal one of those fancy cameras again because you would *pay* to have Syfyn's face on record for safekeeping. Her eyes widen as if you've just pointed a sword at her (though you think she'd be more comfortable with that than this) and her wings practically poof up twice their size as her eyes flicker from the flowers to you and back again. Her sunburn hides the way her cheeks flush, but the way her ears go red confirms yes-- you are, in fact, making the Brazen Griffin blush like a schoolgirl.

"You cheeky--" she snatches the roses from you like they're contraband (they kinda sorta *are)* and clutches them close to her chest, wings partially surrounding you both. You think she wants to curse you out but can't if the way her lips open and shut like a fish out of water is anything to go by.

"Do you like them?" You ask.

"Where did you even get them?" She asks, voice quiet in that way that tells you she's far too embarrassed to admit the answer's yes.

"The Royal Gardens," you state. When her eyes widen you shoot her a smile. "No one will be missing them. I promise."

She presses her lips together like she doesn't quite believe you before looking back down at them. You watch as she gently traces one of the petals-- like she might be able to feel it through her glove-- before she shakes her head with a small smile.

"Meet me in my room?" you murmur.

She says nothing, but her smile widens despite her best attempts to smother it as she punches your shoulder again.

"Dork," she breathes, and you watch as she tucks the flowers under her arm and hides them with her wings before marching right past you and away. You can't help but smile at where she disappeared before you make your own way to your room and open the balcony doors. The air is pleasant tonight-- not too hot or cold-- and you take a moment to breathe in the smell of the sea before disappearing to change out of your armor. It's not exactly an easy affair-- normally you'd have a servant come to assist, but considering being caught with Syfyn in your room after hours would probably *not* be the best thing for either of your reputations...

"How long have you been struggling with that?"

You nearly jump out of your skin when you hear Syfyn's voice behind you-- and she only grins in response at the startled look you give her.

"How the hells are you so quiet?" You mutter. She only shrugs, far too pleased with herself, before gesturing for you to turn around. You do as she demands. Her hands are quick and precise and *strong*, making quick work of leather buckles and metal clasps. You find yourself focusing on keeping your breathing even as you watch Syfyn's focused stare in the mirror, her brows pinched ever so slightly in the middle as she pulls off your armor piece by piece.

"Alright," she murmurs, warm breath ghosting over your neck. "Watch your face."

You help lift the front part of your chest piece as Syfyn pulls it up and off of you, setting it neatly on the display beside her. You can't help but groan a little from the loss of pressure and rub beneath the padding and chainmail at your shoulders.

"Gods, that feels good."

"Such a Primadona," Syfyn muses, though the smile she shoots you in the mirror is affectionate.

There's a moment's hesitation as you hold her stare, her pupils blown and wings curled around you both partially. It feels like breaking through a trance with the amount of willpower you need to force yourself to look away to face her once more, and once you're face-to-face it's as if neither one of you are entirely sure what to do next. Her eyes break away from yours to flicker over you, and you don't miss the way her stare lingers on your lips before she snaps back to attention.

She's sizing you up like you're an enemy to take down-- and the second she decides she can take you on she's charging forward just like she does in everything else in life, a hand grabbing you by the back of the neck before she leans forward to kiss you. It's anything but gentle, and a surprised sound escapes you when you find yourself being pushed back against the counter behind you, your hands

going to settle on her hips for some sort of purchase. You can feel her grin against your lips-- arrogant in nature and far too pleased-- fangs threatening to cut skin.

When she pulls back to take a breath you have to press a hand against her chest to keep her from going right back in. She abides by the request, though a part of you wonders if you made the wrong choice from how your heart twists and flutters from the way she's looking at you now, the corner of her lips just barely quirked upwards and chest rising and falling with heavy breaths. Her cheeks are flushed but not in the oh-so-flustered way they were before. No-- right now the way she's looking at you right now is downright predatory.

"Easy there, Javall," you tease. "You still owe me a romantic evening."

Her expression lessens in intensity then-- only by a little, but just enough to allow you to catch a full breath at the very least.

"Is that so?" She asks, taking a step back. Your hands tingle from where they sat on her waist, and you watch cluelessly, leaning against the sink, as Syfyn walks a few paces backward before slipping to walk out of the room.

"Syfyn?"

No response.

You try to force yourself to be patient, foot tapping against the floor and blowing out huffy breaths before you let out a low and long sigh. Patience was never much of your thing but rather Syfyn's-- and that seems to be emphasized now since she's taking her *sweet*, sweet time doing... whatever it is she's doing as you creep out of the bathroom.

Her back is partially turned to you, and she seems to be holding something in her hands. The second she hears your footsteps, however, she's peering at you from over her shoulders and tucking it away in her pocket.

"Needed a personal invitation to come out?" She teases.

"You ominously walking backward wasn't exactly a clear instruction for 'follow me.'"

She tilts her head a bit, lips parting to speak before she thinks the better of it and shakes her head. "Just come here," she mutters, this time directly gesturing for you to follow her onto your balcony. You don't miss the stubborn blush that turns her ears red before you follow after her, and you can't help but wonder if the romantic dim lighting is to woo you or keep her embarrassed expressions from being completely visible.

The sound of the ocean competes against the sounds of the fountains below, and the Royal Gardens subtly glow in the distance. You decide to give Syfyn a slight reprieve from your attention as you lean

against the railing and take in a deep breath, smelling the sweetness in the air before Syfyn manages to gather the courage to speak. You'd think with all those romance novels she'd be better at this, alas...

*"*I got you something, too," she says. "It's kinda... grotesquely cheesy. I was going to give it to you tomorrow."

"You mean Trystan was going to give it to me tomorrow."

She blinks. "... No."

You only shake your head in amusement as Syfyn shuffles her feet. You hear her blow out a trepid breath before she pulls out whatever she was holding before and holds one out to you.

It's... a necklace. Or part of one, you realize. There's a matching one in her other hand.

"You got us friendship necklaces," you say, a coy smile on your face. "Ya know-- because we're such *great* friends."

Syfyn punches you in the arm. You pretend that it hurts despite the fact you both know she barely touched you. Her amused grin is quick to disappear though, and the sudden vulnerability on her face that she tries to hide has you feeling dizzy... but in a nice way.

"Do you... like it?" She asks. "I know it's kinda tacky, but..."

"I like tacky," you say, taking a step closer to her. "Why do you think I like you?"

A chuckle escapes her, and though she shakes her head in annoyance her expression is anything but. "Ass," she grumbles.

You only smile in response, holding up the necklace in front of you both. "Wanna help me put it on?"

A small nod is the most of a response you get as you turn around and plop the necklace back into Syfyn's hand. Her hands reach over you to settle it on your neck before she works to snap the back together. You can hear the *'click'* when she succeeds, though she doesn't release you immediately. You stay still as stone then, struggling to fight back shivers from the feeling of her talons just barely ghosting against you, and when you feel the whisper of her breath against your skin you're barely able to croak her name out before feeling her press the softest of kisses against the back of your neck.

If it was anyone but Syfyn you'd be ashamed of the pleased sigh that escapes you-- but instead you stay put until her hands fall away. It takes you a moment to regain your composure before turning to face her once more, though you realize from the way Syfyn avoids your gaze that she might be more embarrassed than you are.

You take her distraction as the opportunity to snatch her own necklace from her grasp. "Alright," you say, undoing the clasp, "turn around, Javall." You rotate one of your fingers for emphasis. She blinks at

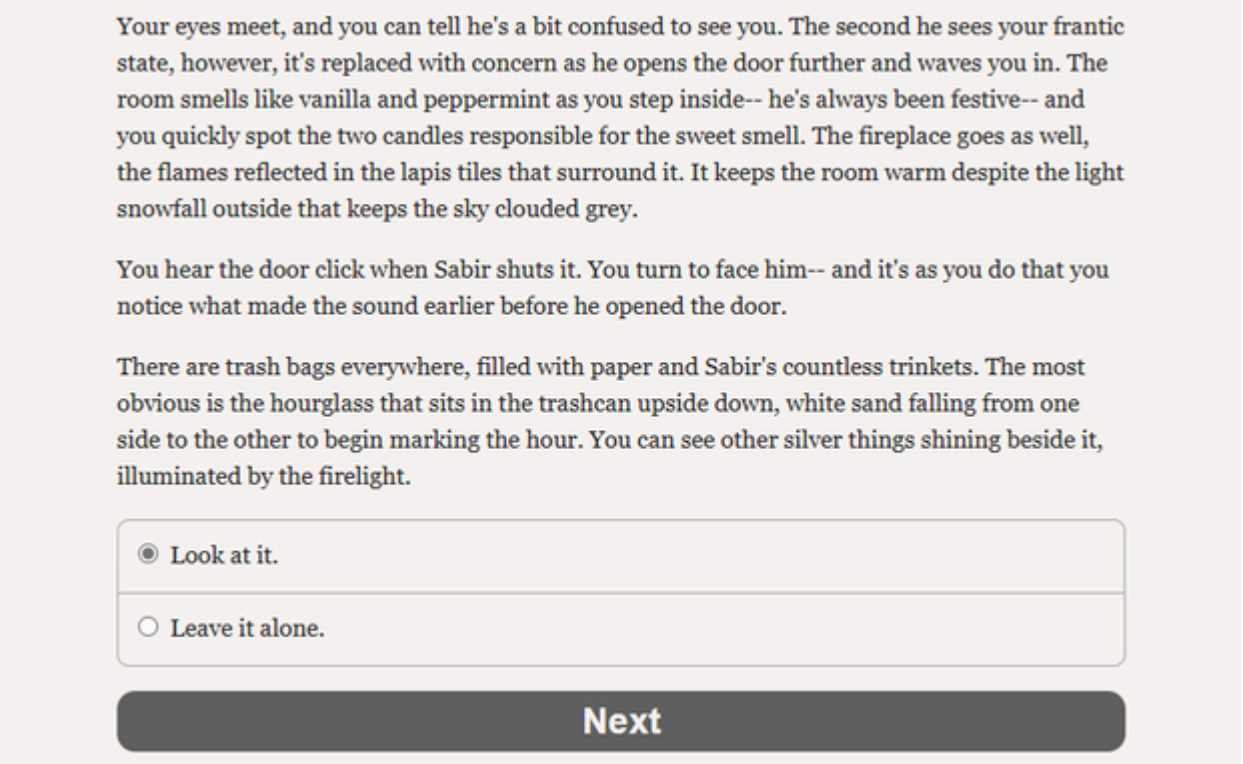
you dumbly as if she can't figure out how you moved so fast, and when your eyes flicker to look at her wings, the feathers seem to poof out a bit.

You reach out with a hand to run over the thick feathers, and she watches, almost more transfixed than you are. She can't feel anything-- not there-- but when you trail your hands inwards, she's quick to snatch her wings behind her and give you a dirty, albeit amused, look from the implication alone.

You only smile.

"Turn around," you repeat. Her eyes flicker over your face, her cheeks bright red even in the dimness of the night, and it's with one last look at your smile that she concedes--

For you, and only for you.



You can feel Sabir's eyes on you as you tentatively approach the trash can. You kneel down beside it to pick up the hourglass. It's heavy in your hands, and the silver is adorned with tiny blue gems that sparkle. He was always so precise about time. You can recall sitting in is office, watching him sign away on papers and knowing *exactly* when to flip it without having to even look up.

You peek into the trash to look at the other things. Maps of the stars, of the realm, tiny metallic wind-up animals. Seeing them like this...

Well, it hurts.

You reach in to pick up a tiny wind-up elephant and set down the hourglass on the ground to wind it up. You place it on the desk then, and both you and Sabir watch it hobble around aimlessly in circles as you rise to stand, holding the hourglass once more.

"I thought you loved these things," you say. "And your maps?"

Sabir stares at the hourglass before he looks away abruptly, like the sight of it alone burns.

"I do. Did. But it's not like I can take them all with me." He forces a small smile, opening his arms wide to gesture at the office. It's half-empty comapred to what you remember. "It's a bit of an extensive collection."

"But do you need to throw it away?"

His forced smile falls. He can't keep the act up. Not right now. His expression becomes grim as his lips press together, his gaze void and on the checkered tile.

"I don't have a choice," he says, looking to you. "They've ordered me to clean shop. Not a single thing left, they said." A bitter, quiet huff leaves him as he lifts his hands to air quote the Council. "They didn't want me to 'leave the essence of a traitor on the walls.' Whatever the hells that means."

Sabir cursing used to always be so amusing to you. You struggle to find it as such now.

Your lips press together as you try to think fo what to say. Or do. But before you can, Sabir's approaching you and gently prying the hourglass from your hands. You turn to look at him-- look at the way he turns it in his hands, expression somber-- but the abrupt sound of the elephant's mechanical whirring stopping steals your attention yet again. It look so tiny on the desk.

Next

When you glance at Sabir again he's looking at the elphant too-- and then you.

"Are you alright?" He asks. You blink. "You looked... frantic."

This time it's you avoiding his stare, and you glance around the room before going to sit in one of the chairs opposite of his desk. He sets the hourglass down on the table before going to sit in his usual chair. Something about staring at him from across the desk, surrounded in the warm light, has you feeling nostalgic. It reminds you of the simpler days of before more than anything else ever could.

The Essence of a Traitor

Feb 8, 2023

Are trash bags a thing in this world? The answer is no. However, I humbly ask you all to suspend your disbelief (for now, at least) <3

Turns out leaving Plaithus, for some, will prove to be quite difficult...

Lustru'ele (Day of Love). | MC x Nikke.

Feb 5, 2023

AN: Remember kids, if you wanna cliff dive use your best judgment and safe practices! (Aka. don't be a Nikke <3)

"Nikke..."

Your voice comes out as a low warning as Nikke leads you through the forest blinded, a piece of cloth tried around your head. It was a hassle for him to even get it on you in the first place-- he practically jumped on you out of nowhere, and it was only after several moments of wrestling with one another, and then another five minutes of arguing with one another when you threw him off you and onto the ground that he managed to persuade you into wear the damn thing. Who knew a gorgon could be capable of such damn convincing puppy dog eyes?

"MC," he coos back, voice just as low.

"Where are you taking me?"

You hear a low huff of a laugh escape him at the question, and you come to a halt when you feel him tap your shoulder twice in a signal to stop. You can hear leaves and mulch crunching beneath his feet as he seemingly navigates down a drop in front of you before he mumbles out an, "alright," your hands blinding feeling through the air until his hand swipes yours.

"It's a big drop," he says.

"Yeah, yeah," you mutter. You're able to squat down easily enough on your own until you're sitting on the ledge, but you take the excuse to hold Nikke's hand for support anyway. You'd be lying (and you always do) if you said you didn't like how protective he was of you. You've led armies and taken down beasts the size of mountains-- and yet still Nikke Ivante is worried about you tripping over some rogue tree branches on the ground.

One of your hands releases Nikke's in favor of sliding up his forearm and shoulder, and you can practically *hear* Nikke's crooked grin when he speaks.

"Trying to feel me up, huh?" He asks. You try to scoff at him, but even you can't hold back your laugh as you lean on his shoulder before hopping down. One of his hands lingers on your back as if to stabilize you when you land, and you don't need your eyes to feel how close Nikke comes to you, hands settling on your waist as he pushes you back against the ledge you just came down from.

"Sounds like you might be projecting," you murmur with a smile. Your hands come to cover his before you reach out to feel over his chest and upwards, a low rattling sound escaping him from the feeling. The vibrations of it tickle your fingers before you finally manage to reach your target of his face, your hands cupping his jaw and idly running over the smooth yet hardened scales that sit there.

You feel him move closer then, his cool breath washing over you and sending shivers down your spine. One moment he's barely a breath away-- the next his lips are on yours, chapped like they always are, and you can tell this time he's making an active effort to not accidentally nick your lower lip with his fangs. It's a soft, sweet, *gentle* thing-- one you're not used to coming from him, nonetheless with such little notice, and when he pulls away in favor of resting his forehead against yours, you find yourself more out of breath than if he would have opted to tackle you.

"What was that for?" You ask. You can still feel his breath on your lip, and the smile you know to sit on his face practically radiates off of him.

"Dunno'," he murmurs, voice rough. "Just like that dumb face of yours, I guess."

"Knew it--"

"You just *had* to ruin it," he jests, pulling away from you. You grin as you blindly reach out to grab hold of him, and the sputtered laugh that escapes Nikke when you presumably nearly slap him only has your smile widening.

"*Gods*-- tryin' to take my fuckin' eye out?"

"Maybe," you say, "if you don't tell me where we're going."

"You *are* aware of how absolutely fuckin' counterintuitive it would be to blindfold you and then immediately tell you where we're goin', right?" He asks. You keep listening carefully for his steps before swiping out for him. Each and every time you can feel him dodge beneath you and avoid your kicking feet with a muttered curse.

"But you said it yourself-- you like my dumb face, so you should tell my dumb face where we're going. I'm the exception, Nikke, not the rule."

"MC, we are *two* fuckin' minutes away. *Two."*

"So tell me."

"No."

You swing your hand out again-- and this time Nikke grabs you by the wrist mid-swing. Your brows widen in surprise, and not even a second later you find yourself on the ground with your head spinning, Nikke's claws digging beneath the blindfold before ripping it right off of you. Your eyes meet his from where he leans over you, dark hair cascading down like a privacy curtain as he gives you a dirty look.

"Hi," you murmur.

You can see him try to keep his glare pointed, but you can already see his defenses weakening second by second, gaze softening from the stupid look on your face. The second you reach out to touch his face he scoffs and shakes his head, rising to escape your touchy hands. Anyone else would think he's pissed, but you know him well enough now to know the way he bites his lip is to hide his smile. Hells, if you look close enough, you think you can even see a tinge of teal on his cheeks beneath his kohl--"

"Let's get moving before I decide to leave your ass in the woods."

"You'd never leave my ass," you say. "You like it too much."

The fact he says nothing tells you you're right.

You follow behind Nikke closely, eyes flittering around the forest as he picks out a path for you to follow that avoids snakes and hidden spiders (for the most part, anyway). He's surprisingly calm, today-- normally he's always too antsy for his own good, desperate to go out and cause trouble, but today... well, today's been the opposite. Even now-- the fact he didn't take the chance to fully spar you...

"You know," you say, ducking beneath a branch, "when you said you had something planned for Lustru'ele I can honestly say I was expecting a bar brawl-- not an excursion into the jungle."

Nikke gives you a half-offended look from over his shoulder.

"I ain't that thick," he retorts.

"Eh... you come close, some days--"

He clicks his tongue and reaches out to smack the back of your head, but you dodge it easily, turning on your foot to walk backward as you talk to him, trusting him to keep you from falling over at any given moment.

"I just never took you for the romantic sort," you say. His eyes narrow, though you can tell his stare holds no malice as he continues his advance-- and you in your retreat.

"I still maintain my position that Lustru'ele is stupid," he says, raising his brows at you in a signal to stop walking lest you actually *do* fall over and die. You listen to him right as you feel your heel come to the

edge of another drop, and let Nikke approach you once more, his hands grabbing you by the arms. "I just... I found something cool, and..."

His brows immediately furrow as his mouth clamps shut.

"And?" You press with a smile. His face is so teal that you'd laugh if you didn't know it would shut him down quicker than you could blink, so instead you take what you can get and flick his nose gently (though it still sends his head reeling back as he swats your hand away). "I know what you're trying to say," you murmur.

This time, you're the first to turn and walk away. You can only torment him so much, and it's so early in the day you think you'll let him get off easy... *for now*--

You pause in your tracks. Your ears strain as you listen carefully, and it takes you a few seconds to realize the sound you hear is, in fact, rushing water. And lots of it. You whip your head around to look at Nikke, his eyes wide in question.

"Race you," you say, grinning. You can already see his confusion, then disagreement-- but not even a second later you're running away as fast as your feet can carry you.

"MC--" You can hear him right behind you-- hear the loud thudding of his feet as he progressively manages to catch up to you. You try to run quicker, but before you can fully take off into a sprint his hand grabs the back of your shirt and yanks you back, a strangled yelp escaping you as you nearly trip and fall into the ground as Nikke goes racing right past you, a grin wide on his face.

"Cheater!" You hiss.

The only response you get is a middle finger.

You don't know if it's out of sheer spite or the power of the gods, but you do manage to catch up to Nikke in time to leap on his back right as he makes it to the waterfall, and the two of you go collapsing to the ground with a loud laugh coming from you and an even louder Vrithkan curse.

For a long moment, you both just lie on the ground-- mainly because that hurt significantly more than you're willing to admit-- as you both breathe heavily. Nikke's breath disturbs the mulch from where he lies face down, and you have to bite back a pained laugh when his hand blindly searches for your face and slaps you several times in the process before he manages to grab hold of your chin and forces you to look at him, his face turning to the side to meet your stare.

"That," he pants, "was dirty."

"I thought you *liked* dirty," you retort. The corners of his lips threaten to curl into a smile, but he manages to hide it as he lets out a low grunt and sits up, shaking his head violently to dispel the debris that's made a home in the countless tangles. The coins and trinkets in his hair jingle as he does, like he's some sort of living instrument, before he stops, his hair a poofy, wild mess.

"Only when I'm the one doing it," he counters, then. Your brows furrow in response as Nikke hops up to stand with you following suit, though any argument you might have had is quickly forgotten when you take in the sight in front of you.

You shuffle carefully towards the edge of the small cliff you find yourself standing on, and to your right sits a large waterfall that pours into a small cavern at the bottom. The water below is a clear teal color, and the ivy and moss that hangs seem to glow faintly in the shadows. You can't help but smile at the sight of it. Plaithus didn't have anything like it within its borders.

You turn to look at Nikke then, but he's already looking at you.

"You're such a sap," you tease, shoving him on the shoulder lightly. He stumbles back a step from the push, but you think that's more to hide his embarrassment at your teasing.

"If you don't quit messing with me I might just throw you right on in there," he says, tossing you some side-eye.

"That so?" You ask, coming up behind him. He tolerates you draping yourself over him, arms wrapping around his torso to pull him close to you. He's tense under your touch, though he loosens up the second you squeeze him tighter.

"Alright," he mutters, though you don't move an inch. "*MC."*

You only give him a negative hum.

"Are you fuckin' serious?" He drawls.

"You're gonna push me in," you argue. "I'm not letting go."

You're too busy nuzzling against his back to even take notice of what all his idle shifting is, and you don't even bother opening your eyes until you hear the sound of a belt unbuckling.

"What are you--?"

You don't even manage to get your sentence out before Nikke somehow manages to wiggle out of his vest even with your grasp on him, and it's when you look down that you realize he's managed to slip out of shoes, too.

"No, wait--" You're quick to let go of him, but you can see it in his eyes.

Nikke Ivante *will* be getting you into that water.

"This is *not* fair," you retort, backing away from him. You glance over your shoulder at the drop before looking back at him.

"To be fair," he says, "I wasn't even thinking about it until you brought it up."

There it is-- that shit-eating grin of his making its starring appearance. You take the chance to wiggle out of your own shoes, though you're significantly less graceful than Nikke was as his grin widens, his fangs practically gleaming with malice in the scattered sunlight.

"Bastard," you grumble before resigning yourself to your fate. Your eyes squeeze shut as Nikke practically tackles you off the cliff. You can't help but shout from the impact as your stomach does a flip, and by instinct you tuck your arms to your body and squeeze your nose before dropping into the water. The water's not half as cold as you were bracing for it to be, though your arms sting a little from the impact as you kick your way to the surface. Your clothes drag around you, and you're at least glad you managed to get your shoes off as you suck in a deep breath, your head craning upwards to look at the hole you just jumped down. The sound of the birds echoes down here, and despite being in a cavern, the water smells perfectly fresh--

Nikke.

You feel his presence behind you long before he lets out what you think is meant to be a monstrous yell and grabs you from behind. You suck in a breath before he yet again drags you underwater with him-- though this time he lets you escape his grip easily as you give him a light kick and resurface together.

"Bastard!" You repeat. He only grins in response, the kohl on his face dripping down his jaw and making a mess. Your expression must shift to one of exasperation since not even a second later Nikke's grin turns into a serious look as he glares at you.

"Don't--" he warns, but it's too late. You're already reaching out to wipe his face, and much like how the day began, it's only after several seconds of wrestling, splashing, and arguing that you manage to break down Nikke's spirit enough into letting you wipe his face clean-- though it's not without his fair share of grumbling.

"You're like a kid," you complain.

He lets out a scoff. "You sound more and more like Jost every single day."

You pause to glare at him, and he only puts his hands up in mock surrender, presumably not wanting to poke too many of your buttons while he's at your mercy. You have to scrub a bit to get all of it off, and even then, his under eyes have a bit of a tint to them. You let out a content sigh at your job well done then, hands dropping to help you swim yet again until...

"Nikke!"

"What?" He cries, feigning innocence as you look down at your now completely unbuttoned shirt. "It did that all on its own," he says, looking at you with a not-very convincing all-too-sweet smile. *"Promise."*

P.O.V. Switch Poll + Price Change

Feb 2, 2023

Hello everyone! Back before I left for my break, I put out the first installment of the next "POV Switch" series, which covers the optional scene in Chapter 5 where MC can be wounded by + scratched by Syfyn. Here's the excerpt from the original Patreon Post:

"The new series of POV switches will be centered around Chapter 5's sparring scenes! Nikke's POV switch will be around the fight you had with him while everyone else will be from the perspective of when Syfyn cuts MC's face on accident (though I might fiddle around with Nikke's to include that scene as well-- it depends on how long everything ends up being!)."

Amilia's version of the scene has already been written, and I decided it would be best if you all voted on which order the rest should be done in! **I'll complete the POV Switches in order from most votes to least votes, but they'll all be done eventually!**

Price wise POVs will later on have a change to be in the $10 tier. Originally, they were $5, which worked when they were short, but now that the POV Switches are coming out to be 1.5-2k words on average, I've decided to up the price. **This change won't happen until March.** So, for this month, everything will still be available for $5 including this month's POV switch. However, on the 1st of March, that will change + the price increase will be included. I just wanted to put that out there no, so everyone has the month to prepare.

Anyway-- that's all! **Make sure to vote! <3** 👀

Vethna

Nikke

Sabir

Syfyn

119 votes total

Hurt/Comfort A-Z Headcanons: Amilia Von Clamile

Feb 1, 2023

A: Alleviate - How do they go about relieving persistent physical pain?

Amilia knows an absurd amount of things about plants and nature-- so her go-to when she's in physical pain is to turn to the nature that surrounds her. She's usually able to create some sort of pain-relieving medicine and is more than capable of creating plenty of different poultices to prevent infections and speed up healing.

Otherwise, she's a pretty tough person. Compared to an average human, her pain tolerance is *insanely* high-- honestly, she and Syfyn have the same level of pain tolerance. Most of that simply comes from living in the woods on her own for quite some time. She didn't have the choice to sit around in pain back then-- it was either keep going or die.

And... well, she isn't exactly a fan of that whole "dying" thing.

On top of that, I don't think Amilia really minds pain. She's not afraid of it or anything. It's a natural part of life, and it's something she's capable of weathering perfectly well.

B: Bedridden - How do they behave when they're sick?

She's like a reclusive little animal. She'll get *really* tired and sleepy and incredibly cuddly-- chances are she'll be dragging a blanket (or blankets) around with her wherever she goes. In general, Amilia's a wanderer. She likes to aimlessly explore places and find random nooks and crannies to fit herself into. She still does that when she's sick-- she just finds the optimal places to curl up into a little ball and sleep with all her blankets. When she wakes up, she'll wander to a different location and do the same thing.

Unfortunately for others, she's not exactly a fan of locking herself in a room by herself. She'll alternate between sleeping in some bizarre place no one can find her and then wanting to be in the company of the others. She'll still just be sleeping-- she just wants the companionship and proximity of someone else near.

She doesn't really need to be taken care of when she's sick. Like I said-- she knows how to make a lot of different medicines, and if they're not readily available, chances are she has them stuffed away somewhere inside her bag from a few weeks ago.

That being said, she definitely wouldn't *object* to being taken care of. Honestly, all you have to do is assist her in making her medicine, getting her food, and carry her around to her different napping locations while she contentedly lounges in a little blanket burrito.

C: Cling - Whose physical touch is considered most welcome in their minds when they are in need? Is there a specific type of touch they respond well to?

Honestly, anyone's. Amilia greatly enjoys physical affection and isn't picky at all about who it comes from, nor does she mind the casual touch of friends or even strangers. She's the kind of person to offer

a hug to a stranger if they look sad, and she's willing to accept one from a stranger too (the joys of being a fae make it so she doesn't have to worry much about being stolen or robbed).

So, in a moment of need, she'll take anything from anyone-- though the best kind of affection is the one that comes from her friends. Whether it's a hug, cuddling, handholding, or a simple squeeze on the shoulder, feeling physically connected to those around her is bound to make her feel mentally and emotionally supported as well.

She's not picky-- not picky at all!

D: Deathbed - How would they react if they realized they may not recover from their injuries?

Amilia doesn't tend to get into situations that would permanently harm her body in a chronic manner, and fae are quite a hardy *mythosi* when it comes to healing. So chances are, if something like this were to happen, it would be a fatal injury that there was really no hope of healing.

In which case... she'd be absolutely horrified. If she was around other people she'd try to hide it-- swallow down her fear in favor of trying to put on a brave face in her final moments. Otherwise, she's going to be openly crying and withering away at the fact *this is it.* It's the end. Amilia's older than the rest of the major cast, but when taking into consideration how quickly fae mature due to how long they live, she's by all means quite young. That, accompanied by the fact there are a *lot* of regrets she has that she's yet to come to terms with, would leave her feeling rather unaccomplished at the point of her death.

If she were able to resolve all these things-- find closure in all these events in her past-- she'd confront death in a much more accepting manner. But as is? She doesn't want to die. She's not *ready* to die yet. And for so, *so* many reasons.

She has too many questions she needs answers to. And one question in particular that she *has* to find the answer to if she ever wants to have the chance of dying without wondering: *what if?*

E: Emergency - What is their gut reaction when someone they care about is hurt?

Take care of them, mostly. Unlike some of the others, Amilia isn't really the toughest fighter out there. Sure-- she can keep herself protected and handles herself fine in a fight-- but if *MC* or any of the others are in physical trouble... well, chances are 9/10 she'll be helpless to do anything to help them then and there.

Instead, she'll take care of them in the aftermath. Amilia is amazing at taking care of other people-- she's attentive, patient, and knows the most out of anyone in the group on traditional medicine. She'll also make sure to keep the person entertained while they're stuck being injured. You want her to make random songs about the things in your room? Done deal. Wanna hear an epic story that takes hours and multiple props to be told properly? It's gonna happen.

There's not a better person to be stuck with when you're injured and bedridden. She's the perfect mix of "fun and keeping you distracted" and "actually capable of handling and dealing with your wounds to

keep you safe and comfortable."

F: Fight - Are there circumstances under which they would not accept treatment or care? If so, what are they?

I don't think there *is* a circumstance. As I said-- unlike the rest of the cast, death is something that frightens Amilia a lot. She's not a fighter or a soldier-- she hasn't been conditioned to accept an early death. Hells, as a half-fae, she hasn't been taught to deal with death *at all*. It's an incredibly foreign thing to her.

That being said, Amilia is *very* tough because she's a fae. She can handle wounds that would kill mortals in seconds with nothing more than stubbornness and force of will. This is something she's aware of-- so she'd always make sure those who are in worse shape than her are taken care of *first*, but otherwise, she's always quite accepting of help even if she's not necessarily in need of it.

And, when it comes to situations where it's "my life or theirs"... well, she trusts the person making that decision to make the right one. She doesn't want to die-- but she isn't going to sit there and say her life is any more important than another person's. If someone decides to prioritize her over someone else, she's not going to fight that. She's no martyr-- and she knows as much.

G: Ghosts - How has their past shaped the kind of comfort they respond to best?

Amilia grew up loved but stifled by strict rules and expectations. She never doubted that she was cared for, but she *did* question if her caregivers truly knew what was best for her (spoiler alert: she blatantly thought they didn't). It was very much a manipulative, tough-love relationship that was conditional. "Do as I say and I'll adore you-- otherwise I'll cripple you with guilt." However, the main reasoning for this was that her family wanted to "protect her," and for good reason.

She's a half-fae. Not good enough for the fae. Not good enough for humans.

As a result, I think she still finds a lot of comfort in people who are protective of her, regardless of if it's healthy or not. It's part of why she gets along well with Vethna-- they're fierce and opinionated, always willing to get into a verbal fight if it means keeping Amilia safe. The same goes for any choices the MC might make that *physically* keep her safe. No matter how violent or intense things get, even if they're blatantly unhealthy and manipulative, she'll find comfort in it. Because, bottom line, it's *familiar*.

Having someone tell her she doesn't have to think and can trust in them... she knows it's not a good thing to listen to. Not always. And yet, she can't deny the fact it makes her feel at ease, deep down.

On a *less* possibly toxic note, Amilia is a musician. She spent quite a long period of her life will other bards traveling and singing, and as a result, feels quite a sense of comfort and companionship when making music with other people, or simply being surrounded by it. Listening to someone play an instrument, sing, or tell a particularly riveting story are all things that help Amilia's guard come down and feel at home.

But, at the same time, it scares her. It makes her ask the question "how long will this last before it's all just taken away?"

H: Home - What things (objects, sensations or people) remind them they're safe after a scary situation?

Music is honestly a recurring theme you'll see a lot in this post. It helps ground her a lot and makes her feel at ease-- both playing music herself and listening to other people create it. If something bad happened and she's trying to ground herself, she's likely tapping beats on her leg with her fingers, quietly humming, whistling, or going off to play her ocarina or lute.

Also just being around people she's close to and just... existing... helps her settle down a lot. If she can just hang in the same room/general space as someone as they do mundane things she'll calm down. It happens a lot slower than just playing music does (music gives her a place to *put* her nervous energy

While she *does* journal, it's not like Jost does. It's mainly to write songs or keep track of important events that are relevant to making music or stories. She doesn't use it as a destresser-- she'll never rant in her writing about how she feels.

I: Isolation - How do they soothe themselves when no one is around to soothe them?

She'll do a few things. Amilia can be pretty skittish and has lived on her own for a while, so she's gotten pretty good at taking care of herself mentally. If she's able to actually sit down, she'll likely turn to making music. Composing and writing songs are a go-to for her-- humorous upbeat retellings of harrowing experiences and soft ballads where she confronts her inner worries and doubts are all likely creations to come from her. Being so open about her life, both personal and adventurous, is what allows her to be a bard in the first place. She's willing to share pieces of her life and fears with complete strangers in a tavern, and more than that, it's something she enjoys. For her, performing a song is a lot like writing a particularly emotional letter, crumpling it up, and setting it on fire. It's letting go of all of that pain and fear into a crowd and turning it into something warmer. Kinder.

Otherwise, if Amilia's in less-than-ideal circumstances, she'll just hum to herself as a means of staying grounded, or otherwise fiddle with any of the countless things on her clothes-- the leather cord of her necklace, the flowing fabric of her shirt, the stitches of her pants. She'll find a way to keep herself distracted, since that's usually the only way she can fight off her brain from seeping back into some distant, awful memory.

J: Joy - When was the first time they were truly happy after going through something terrible?

There was an event... we'll call it "The Incident" that left Amilia rather shaken up for a while. She lived in a sort of "in-between" state for many years after it before she tried to take back up performing music... but it didn't feel right. She was missing something from the past-- something she couldn't have anymore, and that no number of songs could ever make up for.

The day she finally felt okay again was just like any other day. Just, for some reason or another, when she woke up the sun felt a little brighter and the air a little calmer, and for the first time in years, she

could breathe again. There were a lot of bad days still, but she learned to hold out for the good ones and regain the *want* to be happy again. I wish I could say what changed things, but sometimes it really is just a matter of perseverance, hope, and sheer coincidence.

K: Kindness - Do they believe they deserve the comfort they receive? Why or why not?

Mixed. Amilia's opinion of herself changes a lot and quickly. Some days she feels great and on top of the world. On other days she can be incredibly self-loathing and genuinely feel like she's a terrible person. Depending on that mood, she'll either welcomingly accept any and all comfort or reject it in its entirety while being bitter about it the entire time.

Amilia is a contradicting person. Half-fae aren't common, and her two natures are often at odds with one another. That being said-- it could also be said it's more of an issue of self-confidence and acceptance than it truly is an issue of "conflicting natures."

L: Levity - What or who helps them take their mind off of the circumstances?

Making music is always a go-to, but when it comes to other people, she finds a lot of companionship just in nature. Sitting against trees, hanging with wildlife, and generally just *existing* in the outdoors is enough to ground her no matter how dark her mind may be getting. Now that she's in the group, however, she can always find some level of comfort in Vethna. They're fierce enough to stand up for her and their presence is big enough to draw unwanted attention away from Amilia and onto them. Surprisingly enough, you may also come to find that *Nikke* of all people may prove to be quite a calming/grounding source for Amilia...

But, ya know, who's to say? 👀

M: Music - Is there a song that comforts them? Why is it comforting to them?

In a modern AU, she would *love* The Crane Wives. I, as the author, just like them for Amilia in general too. If I had to pick a single song, I'd choose Empty Page by them. I think it fits her well, and it's also a song I could see her knowing by heart and shout singing whenever she was alone.

N: Nostalgia - What things that comforted them as a kid still work today? Does anyone know that?

Music + nature! She grew up around both in her youth, and even now as an adult both are such large parts of her identity that they still bring her great comfort to be around. Music of any kind soothes her, but if she were to ever hear the old fae songs her mom and village used to sing, it would be enough to stop her in her tracks for a while. She used to know the words to the songs, but it's been so long that she'd be lying if she said she hasn't begun to forget them.

As to if anyone knows this... well, her mother would likely be able to assume as much. And, somewhere out there, are two individuals who know these things comfort her as well.

O: Overworked - Who or what tells them to stop working and take care of themselves?

Amilia isn't really at risk of overworking herself. She's a pretty balanced person in that regard and takes breaks from her work pretty regularly. Granted, she doesn't need to take them too often since she finds what she does as a bard to be genuinely enjoyable and a stress reliever most of the time.

If she *were* at risk of overworking herself, there wouldn't be anyone around who could tell her to slow down. She's been traveling solo for a while now and hasn't gotten particularly close to anyone during her time on the road. Shallow acquaintances? Sure. *Friends?* Eh... *friends* is such a strong word...

P: Please - Have they ever begged for someone to comfort or stay with them? What was that incident like?

A few times in her youth. While her Mother was incredibly doting, Amilia wasn't exactly "allowed" (read that as you will) to be with the others in the village. She was confined to the outskirts of the forest, though she did try multiple times to make friends with the other young fae. Granted, there wasn't exactly an abundance of kids her age when she was younger, and those that were there weren't exactly fond of Amilia. She wanted them to like her-- she really, really did. But no amount of effort or goodwill or desperation ever made them stick around.

Q: Questions - Are they eager to talk about what or why they're hurting? Why or why not?

In general... she's actually *not* eager to talk about how she feels. Not in any meaningful way, at least. She'll keep on a nice and happy facade to keep the conversation from going anywhere too personal, and if it *does,* she's an expert at redirecting the conversation back to a place she feels more comfortable with.

It takes a while to get Amilia to open up about her genuine fears and worries. While she can't *hide* them from those around her, she can hide the root of them. Getting to discover what those roots are would most definitely be a sign of being a close friend to her. A *true* friend to her. She hasn't had one of those in quite a long time, though there could be a reason for that...

R: Relief - How do they react to the realization that they will soon be fully recovered?

Unsurprised. As I mentioned before, fae are incredibly tough, so it would be weirder if Amilia *didn't* heal. That being said, depending on what the wound is I think Amilia would be more than happy that she can go back to getting around like normal. Wounds from natural causes don't bother her much, nor do wounds from animals, but wounds from battle? Those tend to disturb her a lot more-- so much so that she'll avoid looking at them at all if she can in favor of someone else changing the bandages and cleaning the wound until it's mostly healed over. So not having to worry about that any more would be quite a relief.

S: Scared - What would it take for them to admit that they're scared?

If it's scary, Amilia's saying she's scared. She's by no means the kind of person to try and act tough and unfazed in the face of something she finds terrifying, whether that's marching into a battle or confronting an idea she finds to be personally disturbing. It doesn't matter who she's with-- strangers or friends--

she'll be the first one pointing out what an awful situation everyone has found themselves into. Amilia is definitely the kind of person who says what everyone is thinking at any given moment, even at times it might be best to stay quiet.

T: Time - How long does it take for them to feel better after an ordeal or illness? Do they tend to lie about how soon they feel better?

Amilia gets back onto her feet pretty quickly. Instead of having a gradual "getting better" phase, she'll go from one extreme to the other in the blink of an eye. One day she's so sick she can't get anywhere without a blanket, the next day she's running around perfectly fine. Part of it I would attribute to her fae bloodline-- they're hardy creatures-- but another large part of it is she's a performer. She might not be a soldier, but she's just as good as anyone at hiding any lingering pain she might be feeling to keep on muscling throughout the day.

This applies to moments when she gets shaken up, as well. Most of the time she jumps from being in a trance to being all smiles in an attempt to make everyone stop worrying, and most of the time it does do the trick, though anyone who knows her well would be able to see right through it.

U: Ugly - What part of their recovery process are they ashamed of, if any?

She's not ashamed of any part of it. People need time to heal and recover from physically traumatizing things, and that goes for the emotional aspect of it too. Amilia isn't embarrassed by the help she might require when she's injured, nor is she embarrassed or ashamed by the emotional trauma she has.

Sure, she wishes she didn't have it because of how utterly exhausting it is, and she's aware that it's not exactly *convenient* given the intense situations she and the group are being thrust into, but she's not *ashamed* of it. I guess I would put it as she wishes she could do more, but she's not embarrassed or ashamed at the fact she can't. You can want more without hating what you have.

V: Valiant - Has anyone told them they were brave for facing what they did? How would they react if someone did?

Nope! But she's never really "faced" anything that wasn't standard for her kind. Being attacked by an animal? Pretty common for young fae as they learn to navigate the rules of nature. The only difference is that Amilia actually has scars to show for it while full fae don't!

W: What? - What was the worst injury they've ever received?

If you were to ask her, it's the scar she has on her face. It's not the most gruesome wound she's gotten, nor is it even the most physically painful. It just was accompanied by ten times as much emotional pain as it was physical... Plus, it takes over a large portion of her face and is *very* noticeable. People naturally look at it, which makes her feel insecure and forces her to remember how she got it in the first place, and... Well, it just leads to a spiral of negative thoughts.

As the *author*, I'm going to say it's the scar she shows MC in Chapter 4 (conditional) that she has on her leg. One of the dozen different fae-inspired creatures in the forest she used to live in attacked her (it was her fault-- she got too close to its den), and essentially *ripped* her leg clear in two with its teeth. It was only with the use of magic that she was able to crawl and hobble her way back to safety...

Granted, I wouldn't be surprised if she has some other, horrific wound hiding on her body somewhere that manages to be even worse than that, undoubtedly caused by another animal.

X: Xenas - Do they see anyone as an inspiration in their recovery? Does their inspiration know about this?

Honestly, not really. As I mentioned earlier, fae heal very quickly and have incredibly high pain tolerances, so the process of recovering from a wound isn't as emotionally and physically taxing on her as it might be for others.

However, I will say, she has a lot of ideas and thoughts on what her father might've been like (she never got to meet him). It happened in her youth, predominately, but I definitely think on days when she got scrapped up and injured she used to imagine what her father would've been like when *he* was hurt. The most she knows about him is that he used to be a sort of soldier, so when she was little she definitely used to take that idea and run with it, filling her head with ideas of knights in shining armor ripped from fairytales... (and failing to realize that the things those very 'knights' used to hunt down and kill were *mythosi* like her...)

Y: Yearn - What gesture, person or thing do they desperately want, but would never actually ask for?

Ooh, we're stepping into *such* spoiler territory with this one... It's like I'm stepping around landmines.

Hmm... I'm just gonna bullet point 3 and leave it at that...

1.) She wants to understand her origins and who her father was. **2.)** She very much still has a part of herself that wants to go home... though she's conflicted on *which* of two homes to return to **3.)** A part of her *hates* being a half-fae and genuinely wishes she was just completely one or the other.

Z: Zero - What is the best way to comfort them without touching them?

If she's having a panic attack, there are two big things-- 1.) If it's sight based, just standing in front of her so she can't see it anymore is a big thing, and 2.) Helping her ground herself verbally. Telling her she's okay, that you're here, and restating *who* you are, etc. All of those help her ground herself enough to be able to remove *herself* from the situation without the physical interference of someone else, which, nine times out of ten, doesn't go very well anyways.

Otherwise, if she's just sad, aching, or otherwise down in the dumps, playing music for her or offering to tell her a story are two great ways to help her calm down. Music is very much a safe place for her, and it's very easy to forget herself and immerse herself in it. Same for storytelling-- she's very creative, so

when someone is super into telling a story she usually gets just as caught up in the story as the person telling it is.

Return to Patreon!

Jan 29, 2023

Hello everyone! This is the announcement that I'll be coming back to Patreon for February, which means **billing will return as normal.** So, if you're wanting to make sure you don't get charged for that, make sure to remove your subscription before February 1st. Otherwise, you don't need to do anything!

Content will the same as it was before the hiatus, and I'm looking forward to finally getting back into the flow of things. Thank you to everyone who chooses to support me, and I'll see you all soon with some new content!

Thanks for reading! :)

Magic-User Subtypes

Dec 30, 2022

Magic-users are exclusively humans who, true to their name, are capable of exercising their will over the magic of the realm-- something otherwise delegated exclusively to wykna and *mythosi*. There are four major kinds of magic users in the realm of Navara:

- Sorcerers (Innate)
- Mages (Scientific)
- Wizards/Witches (Vessel)
- Warlocks (Borrowed)

Sorcerers are the most powerful and notable of all four categories, as they are the blood descendants of the gods themselves. Their ancestors stem back to humans granted divinity through the process of blood transfusion with the ancients-- a process that turned humans to gods. The blood becomes diluted with each transfusion until the process doesn’t make a human a god, but rather a magic-user with the *power* of a god-- limited to live a mortal existence and die like any other man.

Mages are the most precise and intellectual of the four-- they're normal humans who have managed to recreate magic through science. By studying ancient tombs and scriptures of the gods' prophets which recount tales of the miracles in which the wykna performed, they were able to learn to recreate the miracles themselves by using the blood of magic-users and *mythosi*. Originally, it would take a mage half their life to learn a single spell-- but it was through the development of what is now Vygrandian culture that it made it possible for a true, dedicated mage to learn magic just as quickly as a sorcerer.

Wizards and **Witches** act as vessels for magic-- not any normal mortal can be one (just like not any mortal can be a mage). The distinction between wizard and witch is not of sex or gender but rather of practice-- wizards draw magic from new age magic (that of which is created by mages and sorcerers) while witches draw magic from old age magic (that of which was created by the gods). *Unlike* mages, wizards and witches cannot read a book and make a spell themself with their own two hands-- instead, they must find arcane objects imbued with magic and learn to *channel* that energy into what they want. It is common for wizards to use staffs, wands, totems, and scriptures as a means of achieving this while witches tend to use things just as bones, blood, and plants. They cannot perform magic of any kind without these things.

Warlocks are those who have access to magic thanks to the blessing of a *mythosi*. Whether it be the ancient noble Knights of Incandescence who are gifted the blessing of Light or the ancient all-knowing Seers of Sylvanus. They have no magic of their own-- it is only for as long as they carry out the will of another magical being that they are personally allowed to "borrow" the magic of that creature. However, they may not use the magic as they wish-- their ability to use the magic is limited to the original creature's ability to use it. For example, the Knights of Incandescence can't cast spells of ice or manipulate the earth, but they may bring warmth and light into spaces where there is otherwise none, or smite enemies of evil with nothing but the touch of their hand. The Seers of Sylvanus may not cast any spells at *all*-- but they see every possibility in the future with a striking clarity for as long as they embrace Sylvanus's way of life.

Vygrand is the creation of Plaithian mages-- those who set out to uncover the science and truth behind the elusive thing that was magic. They learned incantations and sigils, learned every single technicality behind magic's essence and people's souls, and learned how to pull the magic straight out of blood to recreate the feats of gods. They are the ones who created the language of Mavikras and the modern day study of magic that all Vygrandians employ today, and are the ones who revolutionized the science behind Vygrandian blood magic and Plaithian blood transfusions. Sorcerers originally looked down on these things as being "beneath them" until they realized they themselves could become more powerful and in tune with magic themselves if they employed these techniques. It was this that made sorcerers take over Vygrand for themselves, forcing mages into a secondary class of people.

As the age of the New World strips magic from the realm, warlocks are now *nonexistent* with the exception of those under the influence of demons (though even that is such a rare sight to witness that it might as well be mythical), wizards + witches are practically never heard of (nor can the magical artifacts in which they seek be found save for in Vygrand or obscure, ancient parts of the world), and mages have been eliminated as Sorcerers blocked off their access to blood.

Order of creation--

- **Warlocks**
- **Wizards/Witches**
- **Sorcerers**
- **Mages**

Warlocks were the first followers of the gods-- and due to how long it took time-wise for the blood of the gods to dilute enough to create sorcerers-- they were first to come to existence. Wizards and Witches came next-- arcane objects were in abundance, and it was as they analyzed how these objects worked that they created the ancient tombs many mages would later come to use. Sorcerers would them come to existence-- many would marvel at the world changing power they had at their disposal-- and lastly, mages. Mages wanted the power of the gods but refused to submit to their will, and they weren't lucky enough to be granted with the innate gift sorcerers were given, so they learned to craft it themselves.

Sorcery + Eugenics

In the Old World, sorcerers *knew* their power would get weaker with every generation of their family. This was accepted as being a law of nature-- they held great power otherwise reserved for the gods. While the original sorcerers held close ties to these gods, their children would be more distant, as would their grandchildren and so forth. It would be impossible for the magic to be used responsibly with each generation, and so it would weaken. Their magic was also entirely limited to the realm of the original god who gifted it to them (much like warlocks). It wasn't until the rejection of the gods that sorcerers began to obsess over becoming *more* powerful with each generation and that the rules began to change.

Naturally, overtime, sorcerers came to realize having children with another sorcerer would

prolong how long magic lasted in the family blood line. When humans began to reject the gods, sorcerers realized they could become gods in their own right-- by exclusively marrying other sorcerers, perhaps they could find a way to become *more* powerful as opposed to becoming weakened. By intertwining their magic with another, they were able to make it so their children had more "flexible" fields of magic. For example, if an ice sorcerer and fire sorcerer had a child, that child would *possibly* be able to specialize in either field, or even storm magic should they so please.

Since then, sorcerers in Vygrand have obsessed over becoming the most powerful magic-users in existence, and by doing so, becoming gods in their own right.

Patreon Break!

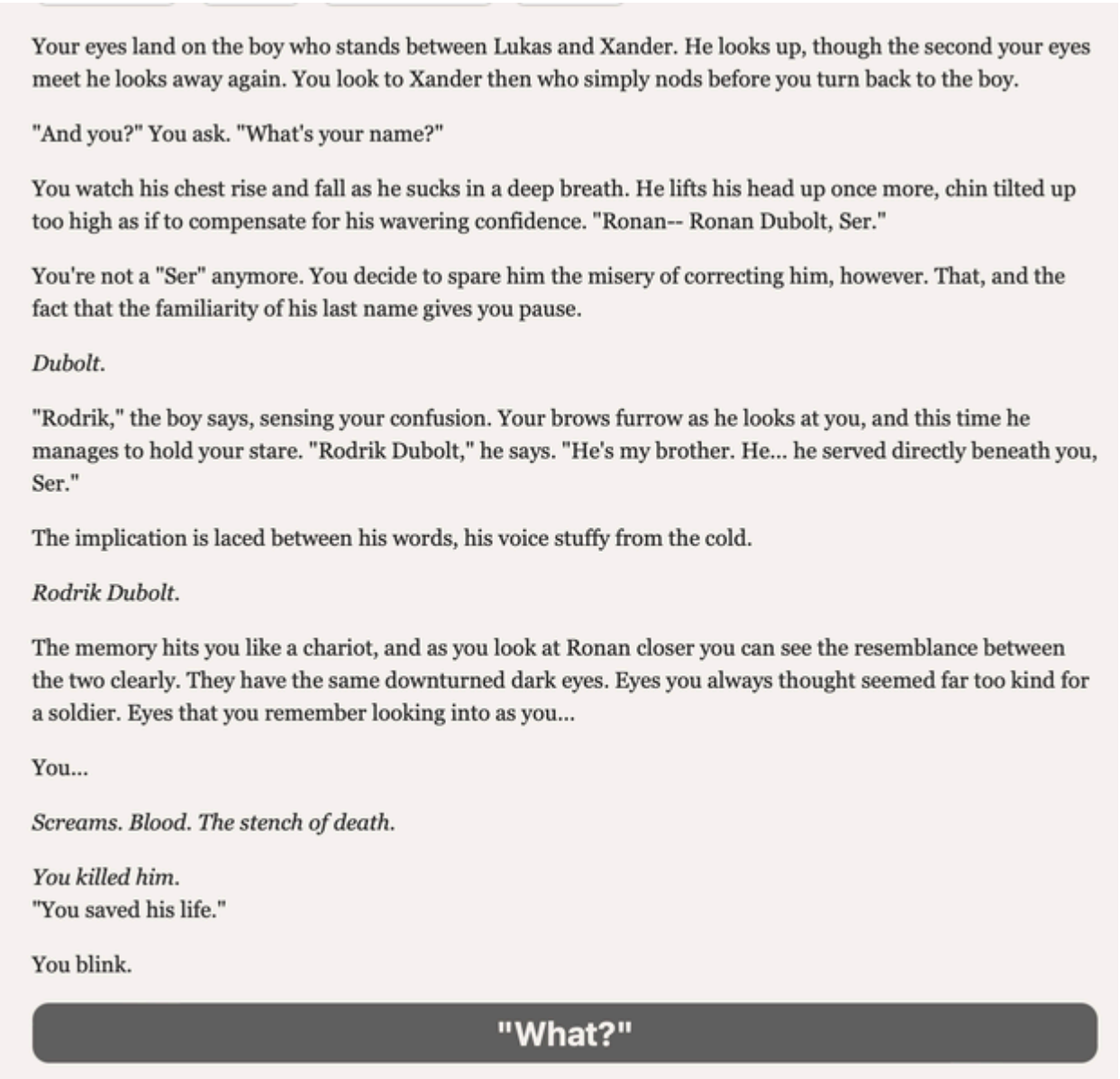
Dec 27, 2022

Hello everyone. I mentioned it over on Tumblr, but I recently have gotten injuries in both of my hands/wrists that have prevented me from being able to write properly or for any long period of time. I've still yet to figure out just what it is yet, but hopefully I'll be able to find out soon!

Because of this, **I'll be taking a break from Patreon for all of January.** Billing will be paused, which means for those of you who are already subscribed, you won't be charged for next month. For *new* Patrons, you'll still be able to sign up, but you'll have to pay the initial subscription fee to access the backlog of content that's up here.

It's possible I might need to take February off, too, but we'll cross that bridge when we get there. I'll be making a few more posts this week that are backlogged/extra content, but otherwise there'll be no new content in January.

That's all! Thanks for reading.


Your eyes land on the boy who stands between Lukas and Xander. He looks up, though the second your eyes meet he looks away again. You look to Xander then who simply nods before you turn back to the boy.

"And you?" You ask. "What's your name?"

You watch his chest rise and fall as he sucks in a deep breath. He lifts his head up once more, chin tilted up too high as if to compensate for his wavering confidence. "Ronan-- Ronan Dubolt, Ser."

You're not a "Ser" anymore. You decide to spare him the misery of correcting him, however. That, and the fact that the familiarity of his last name gives you pause.

Dubolt.

"Rodrik," the boy says, sensing your confusion. Your brows furrow as he looks at you, and this time he manages to hold your stare. "Rodrik Dubolt," he says. "He's my brother. He... he served directly beneath you, Ser."

The implication is laced between his words, his voice stuffy from the cold.

Rodrik Dubolt.

The memory hits you like a chariot, and as you look at Ronan closer you can see the resemblance between the two clearly. They have the same downturned dark eyes. Eyes you always thought seemed far too kind for a soldier. Eyes that you remember looking into as you...

You...

Screams. Blood. The stench of death.

You killed him.
"You saved his life."

You blink.

"What?"

"My brother," he says. "You saved his life in the war. He would've died if you weren't there."

If he's thanking you for the war and not hating you for the incident...

"He's still...?" *Alive?*

Ronan only nods. He parts his lips to speak before he stops and shuts his mouth to huff a heavy breath instead.

He tries again.

"He said he wanted me to tell you *if* I saw you that he knew what happened that night wasn't your fault. That he tried to fight for you but wasn't strong enough. And that he's... that he's sorry."

He speaks quickly, voice threatening to give out towards the end, and it takes several moments for his words to register as Lukas clicks his tongue and looks away.

You don't know what to say. It doesn't seem any of them expect you to as Ronan looks back down at the ground, is hands clasping and writhing together.

The Brothers Dubolt.

Dec 14, 2022

I'll be honest-- *most* of you likely won't meet the little gang of side characters that are Old Man Xander, Angsty Lukas, and Definitely-Not-Intimidated-By-The-Commander Ronan Dubolt... at least not in Chapter 5 (you'll all get the chance to see them in Chapter 6 if not!).

But it's a good scene, nonetheless. One that actually serves as the introduction to *several* side stories, one of which that involves the Dubolt brothers, Ronan and Rodrik. Safe to say, not *everyone* who served beneath the Commander hates them now, despite what the upper nobility might think.

And who knows... they might become *quite* important to the story later on!

(*Hint: Ronan knows Trystan well. He might be able to serve as an "in" to reaching them, whether that be to reconnect with them or to do something less than savory, like take revenge...)* But you didn't hear that from me!

You make your approach slowly and surely. You've been stared at ever since you've returned. Whether the eyes belong to a snooty and powerless politician or a royal guard makes no difference to you--

You could take them. Four by the door. Four opposite. You know the weak points of their armor-- the weak spot at the clavicle. You could rip a sword from the sheathe, break through the chain mail, use them as a human shield and--

You blink, heart hammering and breath fast.

It's nothing but pure instinct. And as you get closer, you realize every thought held in that split second was correct. The armor hasn't changed since the three years you've been here. And the capes-- *gods the capes*-- they're a liability more than anything. All they do is give you more to grab-- and if you're creative enough, a noose.

It occurs to you it's the first time you've been in perfect condition since the dungeons (well, as perfect as someone like you *can* be after the surgery). The first time you've noticed the malice in the guards' eyes with an acuteness you could only have when not being reduced to a frothing, starving animal, limited in its perception to food and escape paths. No-- now, your instinct behaves in the likeness it was trained to be: *a predator*. Your mind notices the escape paths most certainly-- though this time with the intention to block them, not flee through them.

The guards straighten up when you continue your approach. The two closest to the door hold spears each, more decorative than dangerous, and they hold them just a bit tighter with each step you take.

You killed their friends. You remember as much. The first ones to charge into the fray when they realized the field soldiers were dropping like flies.

Naturally, they didn't get much farther than they did.

- (●) You feel sick. *Shameful*. They have every right to hate you.
- ( ) It should serve as a reminder for them to let you pass.
- ( ) You regret that night. But if they want to treat you like a villain, you'll be one.
- ( ) You feel apathetic. What's done is done.

Next

Instinct.

Dec 7, 2022

Sometimes old habits come back at the worst of times. Or, I suppose, depending on who you ask, the best...

Stupid, Stupid Girl. (2/2) | Esmerelda Naulvonte.

Nov 29, 2022

AN: *Hello everyone! Here's the second part of Esmerelda's short story. Reminder that this is from Chapter 5, pt. 2, so it will be in the next update as well (it's literally the opening scene)! This is the scene that plays if Esmerelda gathered the courage to confront Mother and MC told her about the surgery.*

Her Royal Highness, Esmerelda Naulvonte - *The Palace of Lapis*

The office is dark-- so dark that she can do nothing but stand by the door as her eyes struggle to adjust. She can see the darkened figure of Mother move to sit behind her desk, and though her sluggish movements are speeding up, it does nothing to ease Esmerelda's concern.

She walks to stand before the desk, hands clasped and eyes going to look at the curtains that block the windows. The smallest sliver of light manages to seep in, shining across Mother's own steepled hands.

Her grey eyes gleam in the light. She says nothing.

The air feels cold.

Slowly, Esmerelda goes to sit. It feels dangerous to-- like a prey animal willingly turning over to show its underbelly to a wolf-- but she does it nonetheless, expression plain, jaw clenched. Her Mother regards her as an equal.

It's just as good as being considered an enemy.

"Did you know?" Esmerelda asks.

A question she knows the answer to.

"Yes," Mother says. She has not blinked.

"Did you order it?"

"... No."

Mother's eyes go off to the side, and the dramatic shadows only seem to amplify the tired features of her face.

"Who did?" Esmerelda asks.

Mother says nothing for a long moment. For one, wavering second, an emotion comes through.

The only word Esmerelda could find to describe it is tragic. But not even that word seems capable of holding the weight behind it as Mother tucks it away behind a mask of indifference, turning in her chair to face the wall.

"Who do you think?" Mother asks.

Esmerelda stays quiet at that. It's asked in a solemn voice-- one that's not too different from the tone Mother used when instructing Esmerelda on how to be queen. *You should know this one.*

And deep down, she does.

"The Council?"

Mother nods once.

Something twists within her: an injustice.

"And you didn't *stop* them?"

"Your sibling got away with murdering over a hundred souls with nothing more than an exile, Esmerelda. They weren't going to let that pass without getting their own justice involved."

"And that's why they did what they did to MC?" Esmerelda hisses. "That's what it was for? *Justice?"*

Mother snaps her head to look at her-- but this time Esmerelda does not recoil.

"That was not justice," Esmerelda says, voice low. "It was was revenge. Revenge for something they didn't even do--"

"Whose hands mutilated Syfyn? Whose blade nearly killed Trystan? Who carried out the murder of innocents? *Children?"*

"The thing *you* put in them!" Esmerelda cries. She lurches from her seat, hands slamming on the table, and for once she has the high ground. She realizes as much when she sees the fear in Mother's eyes. It's quick to fade, however, melting back into a pool of indifference... No-- not indifference. *Arrogance.*

"They wouldn't see it that way. *Didn't* see it that way."

"Did you tell them?" Esmerelda asks. "About Fate? About any of it?"

"I never told *you."*

"No," Esmerelda says. "No, you didn't. But I wasn't going to sit on the sidelines and pretend nothing ever happened. Pretend that MC was never here."

"Is that what you claim me to do?" Mother asks. *"Pretend they don't exist?"*

"As far as I can tell." The inner child in Esmerelda tells her to shut up-- but she can't. Not now. "You complain that everyone misjudges you-- that we're too quick to reach a conclusion. But you're cruel. And cold. And a *liar.* You're shallow and manipulative and--"

Thump.

Mother's hand slams down on the desk in the form of a fist so hard Esmerelda goes silent. A pot of ink falls right off the table and shatters on the ground below while several photos topple over and fall face flat. She rises to stand in one fluid motion, looming over Esmerelda in a shroud of darkness and *power.* Her crown shines on her head, the light of the window shines perfectly across her eyes.

"I am your *Mother."*

Esmerelda rolls her lips together.

"You were MC's mother once, too."

It's so subtle-- so minuscule of a reaction-- that any normal person would miss it. But Esmerelda sees it just barely.

Her eye twitched.

It's with a sigh that Mother pinches her nose and walks towards the window, her back to Esmerelda. She peeks out between the heavy fabric of the curtains.

"Is this what you came here for?" Mother asks. "To climb upon your high horse? To claim moral high ground?" She glances at Esmerelda from over her shoulder. "You are young. Youthful. Sheltered and naive. You have never been forced to make a hard decision a day in your life Esmerelda-- gods pray you never have to. They'd quickly come to find you being incapable of it."

Her words sting.

"I came for answers."

"For what?"

"Why are you doing this? Bringing MC home just to send them away."

Mother looks back out the window and is silent for a brief moment-- but a heavy one nonetheless.

She walks back towards the desk then. She must step in the spilled ink since she abruptly pauses, lip twitching, before she takes a slow step back. Her eyes flicker downwards, and Esmerelda's eyes glance down in unison at where the ink slithers across the divots in the tile.

"I'll tell you the same thing I told MC," Mother says. "I want Fate dead."

"You can't... you can't kill a god."

Her voice threatens to fail, but she pushes through, nonetheless. But she would be lying if she said she didn't feel a moment of doubt. A moment of *fear.* Only a madman would want to kill a god. And the repercussions...

"I didn't think I could, no," Mother says shaking her head. "It's why I did what I did all those years ago. Locked Fate inside of MC. It was..."

"Supposed to be harmless?" Esmerelda says, meeting her gaze. But Mother's eyes aren't on her. They're on the ink on the floor.

She never finishes her sentence.

"Why now?" Esmerelda presses.

"The same reason it always is."

Vygrand.

"What do they want?"

"Fate."

"Why?"

Mother meets her eyes this time. And if her posture is off and her wording is frantic, her gaze has returned to the stoic mask it usually is.

"You don't trust me enough to tell me?" Esmerelda pushes. Mother stays quiet, and something akin to bitterness arises within Esmerelda's chest--

"I don't *know* why, Esmerelda," Mother says. "If I *knew* maybe I'd be capable of stopping it in any way but this."

The words take several moments to register-- and even then, Esmerelda isn't entirely sure she believes them.

She doesn't know.

But Mother always knows. At least-- so she thought. Looking back on it, it's a childish assumption to make. But Mother's always so cold-- so wise and calculative-- that it only made sense that she *had* to know everything.

Or perhaps she was always shooting in the dark. And perhaps that's what being a good ruler is, Esmerelda thinks. Betting on yourself time and time again and praying to whatever ghost of a god is left

that you're good enough.

"Are you lying to Mom too?" Esmerelda asks. The guilty look on Mother's face speaks for itself, and Esmerelda can't contain the disgusted mutter that passes through her lips. Mother doesn't try to refute it-- doesn't try to feign offense. She never could with Mom.

Her one and only weakness... so Esmerelda thought. Clearly, she was always willing to toss Mom away with the rest of them without a second glance despite everything. Anything for... well, in truth, Esmerelda doesn't even *know* what for. Glory? Greatness? *Godhood?*

When Esmerelda sucks in another shuddering breath she already knows she's lost her composure. The weight of it all... it's too much. It's suffocating and it's *wrong*. She closes her eyes for one brief moment and curses herself for the tears she feels fall down her cheek.

"Did you ever love us?" She asks. She sniffs another breath-- rushes to continue before Mother can craft whatever excuse for an answer she has. "Did we... did we *ever* have a chance of being a family? A *real* family?"

Mother looks at her intently before she glances off to the side, hands resting on her chair as she leans against it.

"We *were* a family, for a while. Though perhaps you were too young to ever truly remember it."

"That doesn't count."

Mother's eyes flicker upwards.

"Of course you loved us when we were little. We did everything you asked. We... we *believed* in you. You were the greatest person in all of existence. But when we grew up-- when you threw MC to the wolves and turned to calling me *naive* and *insolent*-- did you love us then?" A rattling breath. "Because if you did... *if you did*... I want you to know that everything you did... everything you continue to do..." She wipes away her tears with the back of her hand, "makes you worse than the rest of them. Worse than grandfather, and worse than the man who came before him."

If this were any other circumstance, Esmerelda would know she lost. She showed emotion-- lost control. But from the heavy weight that seems to cast itself over Mother's shoulders, she knows it's not that simple. They both lost today, neither one of them proving capable.

And instead of lashing out... or instead of simply staying stoic and cold... Mother laughs. It's a low, bitter thing. One filled with such hatred that for one flickering second, Esmerelda can understand the reasoning behind every awful thing Mother's ever done. And for that one, flickering second, she prays to never have to hear it again as Mother drops herself into her seat, gaze absent as if reliving the memory all over again.

When she speaks, her voice is quiet: simple, and *matter-of-fact.*

"Perhaps I am," she muses. *"Perhaps I am."*

It's the final straw.

She can't sit here one second longer in this stifling darkness pretending to be an equal to her. She never will be, she knows that. She's not willing to be the cruel person who sits opposite her-- not even if that's what it takes to finally earn her respect. And if that means her leaving this room, head bowed and crying... so be it.

The chair groans when she rises to stand. Her hand lingers on the desk as she struggles to think of the right parting words to say-- if she should even say any words at all. And then her eyes land on her Mother's hand. Her skin is pale, her fingers manicured... and surrounding her cuticles and hidden in the cracks of her palm, *blood.*

Mother glances down at where she stares before she looks her in the eye. And maybe that's parting word enough.

The walk to the door seems farther than before. The handle is cool to the touch, and Esmerelda already knows her Mom sits outside, leaning against the wall having pretended to not listen in. But it's as the door creaks open and the light floods in that Mother speaks once more.

"All those questions, and not once did you ask me the most important one," Mother says.

It's bait. Blatant bait. But it's the truth, too.

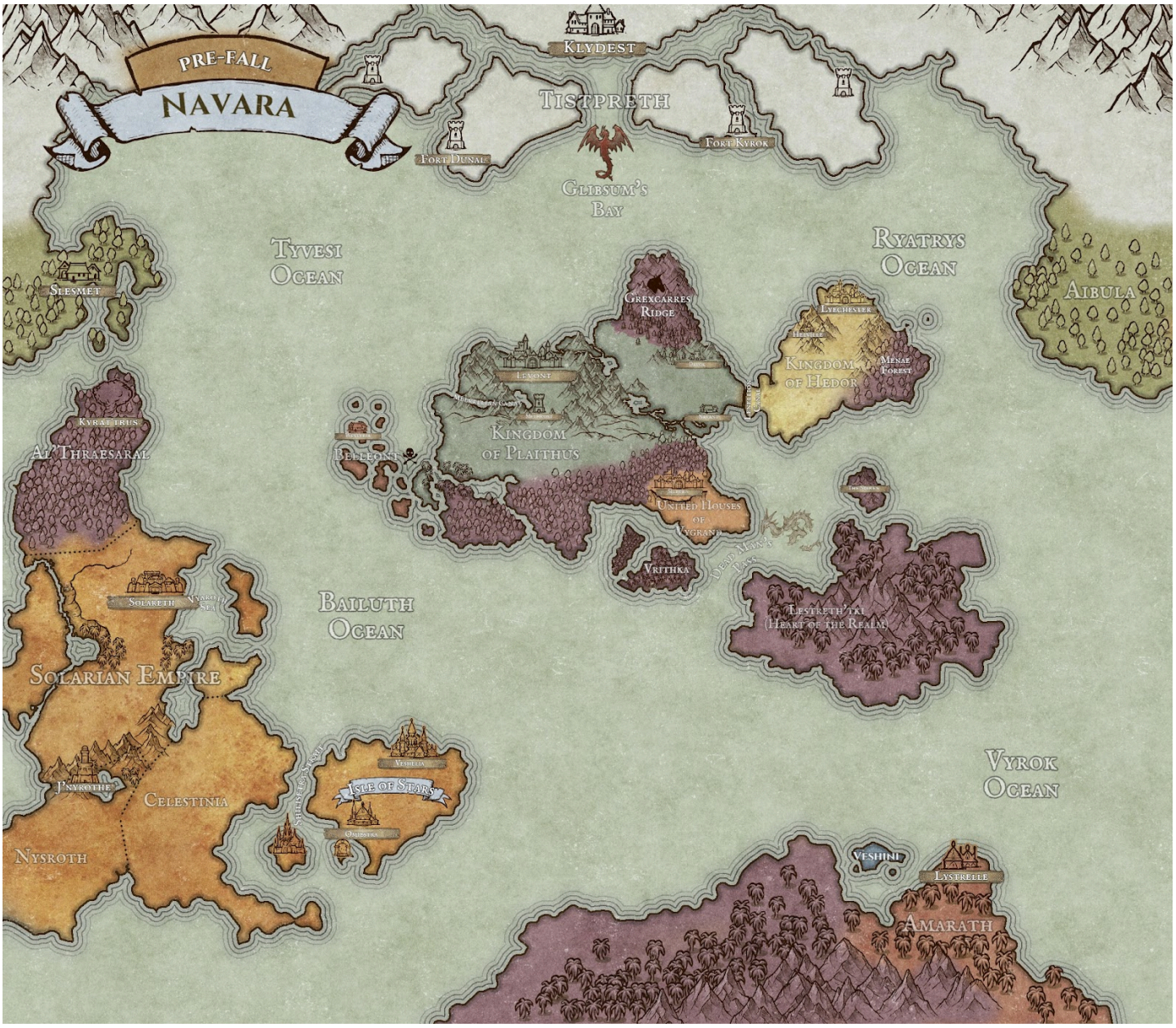
Mother only ever speaks the truth. To her, at least. It seems the only thing she ever says to MC are lies.

Esmerelda's eyes linger on the exit... on the chance to step out and away and just pretend none of this happened. Instead, she sighs, closes her eyes, sucks in a breath, and turns around.

The doors shut behind her once more.

Old World Navara + The Sources (+ The Source Quiz!)

Nov 26, 2022



The Sources

The Sources (otherwise known as the Children of the Creator) are the ten ruling Wykna (gods) of the realm. From them stem countless others. For example, Love's offspring contain the gods of Obsession and Lust, and so forth.

All gods have markings on their face. Intense followers mimic the markings with makeup or scars. Others may only take elements of the markings to replicate. Others choose not to replicate them at all.

You can learn more about the gods below-- **and take a test to see which god you (Or your Commander) might've followed all those years ago!**

Take the test here!

Content (Linked to the Google Doc)

Darkness - "The Evermore" - True Neutral

Light - "The Pioneer" - Neutral Good

Fate/Order - “The Shepherd” - True Neutral

Freedom/Chaos - “The Chainbreaker” - Chaotic Neutral

Life - “The All Mother” - Neutral Good

Love - “The Heartkeeper” - Chaotic Neutral

Joy - “The Peacekeeper” - Chaotic Good

Death - “The All Father” - True Neutral

Fear - “The Dream Eater” - True Neutral

Sorrow - “The Somber Maiden” - Neutral Good

Darkness - “The Evermoore” - True Neutral

Darkness is the first Wykna to exist-- and while it is claimed that the other gods have been “created,” there is no such implication for beloved Darkness. She always was, and always will be. Because of this, she is sometimes called **The Evermoore.** It is believed when we die, Death shepherds souls to rejoin Darkness in the night sky, mortal and god becoming one.

Followers of Darkness tend to be scholars and sorcerers, people who are concerned with learning about themselves and the world around them.

Markings:

Realm: Celestinia

Celestinia is a country known for one peculiar oddity-- that oddity being that it is forever stuck in night. Never once has the sun ever risen in Celestinia, nor *will* it ever. Celestinia, while belonging to Darkness, is considered to be created in dedication to Light and the balance between Darkness and him. Because of this, Celestina is known for its astrology and star imagery.

Those from Celestina often have astrological, heavenly-body inspired aesthetics. While they worship **Darkness**, they are also known to hold a deep respect for **Light** and their first child, the **Moon.**

Celestinia is also filled with followers of **Sylvanus,** otherwise known as **Star.** Sylvanus is the god of constellations, prophecies, and the future.

Beneath him are the **Seers**, a select group of people who can see the future and speak solely in the signed language known as “Constellation”-- a greatly metaphorical (and not widely spoken) means of communication (legend has it the beauty of their visions has left them in an awe-struck state where they cannot speak). They are considered to be hand-picked by Sylvanus and are required to have their body fully covered by white gowns. All Seers wear a silver mask, and have given up their real name to go by the title of **Sylvan, Sylvania,** or **Sylvano.**

Season: Winter

Color: Black

Animal: Bat

Core Values: Finding inner peace, finding *balance,* going with the flow, acceptance.

Followers of Darkness are known for being exceptionally welcoming and understanding individuals. They acknowledge “The Balance,” or rather the fact that there must be an opposite for everything. While followers of Darkness are exceptionally accepting individuals, this comes with the downside of being indecisive and, at times, appearing apathetic or cold-hearted due to always focusing on the “big picture.”

Aesthetic: Astrology, Heavenly Bodies, Black, Symmetry, High Contrast

Relations (these are feeling *towards* **the group, not reciprocated feelings:****Light:** Respect
Fate: Friendly

Freedom: Friendly**
Life:** Friendly

Love: Friendly**Joy:** Friendly

Death: Respect**Fear:** Respect**Sorrow:** Respect

Light - “The Pioneer” - Neutral Good

Light was the first Wykna to be created. He is often viewed as a warrior-- one who cut down Darkness to make room for the light. He is known as the **Pioneer of Creation**, for without him, life as we know it would never come to exist.

Followers of Light tend to be soldiers, paladins, and warriors-- people who are disciplined, strong-willed, and willing to endure suffering in the name of good.

Markings:

Realm: Nysroth (Nysh-ross)

Nysroth is a large country composed of large deserts and large plateaus. It holds one major lake (Lake Lumar) and two major rivers that stem from said lake (The Solant and The Eclipse). All life within Nysroth survives off of these landmarks and the few oases that dot the country.

The capital known as J'Nyrothe (Juh-nye-ross) is located in a rich jungle-like oasis on Lake Lumar. It is believed J'Nyrothe is representative of Light. It is a cool, sheltering place of respite in an otherwise hot wasteland-- a home for his followers in the midst of death. It is not unlike how Light committed acts of cruelty against Darkness in order to foster the life of mortals.

Light followers are divided into two groups of people-- those who live in the oasis and study moral philosophy and religion, and those who live in the wastelands and learn the will and strength of Light firsthand. Those in the second group are known as the **Knights of Incandessence**. They purposely go days without water, force themselves to stand in the sun rays to burn, and train through bouts of heatstroke. Once their training is done, it is said they cannot be burnt by the sun and are resistant to heat and fire. These Knights continue to serve the will of Light until they are physically unable to. It is then that they become Monks to teach the next generation of Knights.

Season: Summer

Color: Gold

Animal: Lion

Core Values: *Justice*, suffering for the greater good, protecting those who cannot protect themselves, sharing moral goodness.

While followers of Darkness respect and even worship Light, the same cannot be said for Light's followers. While it is known Light and Darkness themselves are very close, many followers of Light believe Darkness to be inherently evil. That is, so long as Darkness and fellow "Dark" gods continue to exist (Fear, Sorrow, Chaos, and Death) there will be no chance of true peace in the realm.

While followers of Light are strong-willed people, they sometimes fall risk to becoming biased or nationalistic in their worldviews.

Aesthetic: Gold, the Sun, Gladiators, Simple, Humble, Asymmetric, White

Relations (these are feeling *towards* the group, not reciprocated feelings:

Darkness: Respect/Hate**Fate:** Respect

Freedom: Apathetic/Hate**Life:** Apathetic

Love: Apathetic**Joy:** Apathetic

Death: Respect
Fear: Respect**Sorrow:** Apathetic

Fate/Order - "The Shepherd" - True Neutral

When the stars of Light were created, it is said Order was made to organize them in the sky. Fate themself created the constellations and the prophecies that are held within them. Fate created the galaxies-- kept things organized and neat. Fate is sometimes known as the **Shepherd of Destiny.**

Followers of Fate come from all backgrounds (many of which are magic-related), but they *may not* be chaotically aligned in any way. Followers of Fate believe that it is futile to change the path of things--

that everything will happen as it should, and anything that happens inherently happens for the best.

Followers of Fate hate Freedom/Chaos and all of their followers.

Markings:

Realm: Solaria

Solaria heavily resembles Ancient Greece + Rome, and similar to these places, is home to many philosophers, academics, warriors, and so forth. Solaria is very large, filled with large blue mountains, rolling green grass hills, and vibrant, flooded wetlands, where the capital **Solaria** is located.

People in Solaria live incredibly monotonous lives and believe that they are destined for one singular thing that may never change. A warrior is always a warrior, a priest is always a priest. They are part of a divine purpose that they may not deviate from, and *to* deviate is to destroy and wreak havoc.

Occasionally, select people are chosen from Fate's followers to fulfill prophecies. These people are known as **The Chosen.** They are people who go on to become heroes and villains in the realm of Navara. To be a Chosen guarantees you a spot in the history books, and it is considered a great honor to be chosen, regardless of what role you've been given. Chosen are not given the full information on their future-- only a vague, mysterious prophecy. It is believed it is *impossible* to deviate from your fate.

Season: Spring

Color: Pale Green

Animal: Dove

Core Values: *Order,* being a part of something greater than yourself, being humble, understanding one is not important.

Followers of Fate admire followers of Light for their dedication to good, spreading justice, and their god. The two groups of followers get along well. Otherwise, followers of Fate are tolerant towards everyone *except* Freedom/Chaos, who is considered to be an inherently evil entity.

Followers of Fate refuse to go against the status quo and *love* rules-- regardless of how cruel or evil they may become. They will do anything to achieve "order."

Aesthetic: Pale Green, Togas, Sandals, Wheat, Grassfield, Grapes, Marble Statues

Relations (these are feeling *towards* the group, not reciprocated feelings:

Darkness: Friendly**Light:** Admire and Respect

Freedom: Hate**Life:** Friendly

Love: Dislike**Joy:** Dislike

Death: Friendly**Fear:** Friendly**Sorrow:** Friendly

Freedom/Chaos - "The Chainbreaker" - Chaotic Neutral

There must be balance in the realm-- so naturally Chaos came into creation not too long after Order. It is said Chaos forced stars to collide and shatter and explode-- and it is because of this and *only*

because of this that Life was able to come into creation. Freedom is sometimes referred to as the **Chainbreaker of Fate**.

Anyone and anything can worship Freedom-- such is the nature of the god. And, to be atheist (reject the gods) is to inherently worship Freedom. It is thanks to Freedom that all mortals have free will and that change is possible.

Followers of Freedom have a strong dislike towards followers of Fate. However, they tend to get along with Followers of Love and Joy due to the shared ideal of “doing as you please.”

Markings:

Realm: Plaithus

All the gods' kingdoms were given a "gift" from their god-- Celestinia has its eternal night, Solaria's citizens have planned lives. Well, Freedom's gift to Plaithus was "Freedom of influence," that is, Freedom has played no direct major role in creating their kingdom. Instead of guiding their followers, they took a step back and watched them create Plaithus themselves from the ground up. As a result, Plaithus is the closest you may come to a classic medieval town.

Plaithus is known for its precious metals and close relationship with the neighboring Kingdom of Hedor. Plaithus is filled with all sorts of people from all sorts of backgrounds, though Plaithians are often considered a "hardy people '' due to the bitter winters they endure. Plaithus has a small but fierce army whose only goal is to protect Plaithus' freedom from any who may wish to take it. Those who live in Plaithus are divided into three main categories, though they're may be some overlap between the first two: Followers of Freedom, Followers of Winter, and atheists. Those in the first category know that Plaithus only exists thanks to Freedom. Those in the second category turn away from Freedom in favor of paying respects to Winter in hope of all going well. The last category are those who shun the gods completely, and view them as dictators who should be rejected. **Atheists exist nowhere except here.**

While most followers of Freedom are regular people with average lives, there is a group of extremists known as **Anarchists** who wish for the entire world to descend into chaos. These people leave Plaithus to live in the isles of **Belleont**, where they operate as pirates-- whether that be the murdering and stealing kind or the "Robin Hood" kind.

While Freedom does not control their city, they *have* been known to take a mortal form and simply live among their followers.

Season: Fall

Color: Cerulean

Animal: Raven

Core Values: *Freedom or Chaos*, Living life as you wish, Change, Giving up expectations. Adventure.

Followers of Freedom are by far the most versatile-- though they all share a mutual distrust for Fate and her followers. Some may outright hate them, others may *only* be distrustful, but no Freedom Follower is keen on the idea of being forced to follow a narrative that a god dictates.

Aesthetic: Cerulean + Navy Blue, 19th Century England + 17th century France, White, Tan, Military Outfits, Cold Weather

Relations (these are feeling *towards* the group, not reciprocated feelings:

Darkness: Friendly**Light:** Distrust

Fate: Hate/Distrust
Life: Friendly

Love: Very Close**Joy:** Very Close

Death: Friendly**Fear:** Friendly**Sorrow:** Friendly

Life - “The All Mother” - Neutral Good

Thanks to Freedom’s destruction, there was the opportunity for Life. Life is known for being the sole person to bring Chaos and Order together in the name of creating life as we know it. It was through the careful combination of the two that our world was formed, from the trees to the natural order. All in Navara are the children of Life, thus her name, the **All Mother.**

The All Mother is worshiped and beloved by all except the most cruel and evil of people. It is known that Life has a certain fondness for Death, and all followers of the two hold a deep respect for one another. The two groups gather once a year, during the transition of Fall to Spring, to worship the only time their gods may meet.

Many of Life’s followers are Druids and fae related races.

Markings:

Realm: Al’Thraesaral (Al - thresh - are - al)

Al’Thraesaral is the home nowadays to most fae creatures and many non-humans. It is the place where life was first brought to this world, and as a result is considered sacred and holy ground. It is considered a great honor to ever pass through the Gilded Gates and into the forests-- and many in the realm make an effort to make the journey at least once to visit the Home Tree, where the first seed of life was planted.

Al’Thraesaral lives a relatively secluded and peaceful existence. It is rumored there is a fountain somewhere within that grants immortality, and those who are born from the nectar of the hometree may

never die themselves.

The **Kyrat'trus** (Key - rat -truce) is the capital of the city, which resides within a large system of trees with a giant oak being the center. It is a rule of Al'Thraesaral that blood may never be spilled, and many in the city seem to get by eating solely fruit and tree nectar, and, of course, with a bit of magic that is inherent to the land.

Within the Home Tree are the **Ayatyra** (Aya-tear-ah), otherwise known as the Children or Seedlings of Life. They act as leading figures within the tree, settling disputes while maintaining the tree and the wildlife that surrounds it. It is rumored they can directly speak with Life herself.

Once a year, in the switch between spring and fall, Followers of Death come to Al'Thraesaral where a two week long festival is held known as the **Festival of Hanarayuk** ("hannah-rye-ook", the sacred transfer of a soul from life to death). During this festival, the followers celebrate Death and Life being able to meet for the two weeks (when they otherwise are unable to touch). During the second week, the followers of Death kill animals and cut down trees where there is overgrowth and overpopulation. It is a very solemn, somber, and sacred event that keeps the balance of the land and ends with a feast in thanks to the cycle of Life and Death.

Season: Spring

Color: Forest Green

Animal: Butterfly

Core Values: *Sacredness of life,* Respect For All, Balance, Kindness, Humility.

Followers of Life are sworn to never kill and resent needless violence or assertion of will. They are strong believers of "live and let live." Despite this, they understand that death is a necessary part of the natural order. They will always preach peace and understanding, and tend to be great mediators.

Aesthetic: Green, Forests, Nature, God's Rays, Treelines, Deer, Brooks

Relations (these are feeling *towards* the group, not reciprocated feelings:

Darkness: Friendly**Light:** Distrust

Fate: Apathetic**Freedom:** Apathetic

Love: Friendly**Joy:** Friendly

Death: Very Close**Fear:** Apathetic**Sorrow:** Admire

Love - "The Heartkeeper" - Chaotic Neutral

Love is said to be the first emotion felt by Life upon seeing her creations-- and it is the first emotion to be felt by mortals. It is because of this that it is said all creatures are created with love in their souls. However, Love is known for acting as both a unifier and divider between people-- it is only thanks to Love that Bitterness, Hatred, and Resentment have been born.

The one thing consistent with Love is their love for all things artistic and beautiful-- as such, all their followers tend to be bards, creatives, scholars of philosophy, students of magic, and more. Because of this, Love has come to be known as the **Virtuoso** or the **Heartkeeper.**

Some Followers of Love have been known to have a strong distaste for Fear and his followers-- though the gods themselves seem to hold no ill-will to one another. Followers of Love find fear to be a boring and sad way to live life, thus the dislike. They tend to get along with Followers of Freedom and Joy due to the shared ideal of “doing as you please.”

Markings:

Realm: Hedor

Hedor is a kingdom of excess, greed, and debauchery, though the main of it is located in its capital, **Lyechester.** It is home to the infamous Fifth Street, otherwise known as Heathen's Avenue by the aristocrats who frown upon their activities. The city is flooded, filled with cobbled roads and waterways with gondolas, and is known for suffering great floods when the city becomes too unruly. It is jokingly referred to as the **Cleansing** when this happens, as residents tend to be on good behavior in the immediate years following.

Lyechester is famously broken into three major sectors that are circular and kept within one another. Aristocrats live in the center, in the Golden District, most citizens reside in the Silver District, and those on the unfortunate side of things have been cast aside to live in the Bronze district in dilapidated houses, often working as servants to the upper echelon.

The city is ruled by a golden masked King known simply as the **Monarch**. However, the majority of political matters are handled by the **Gilded Council,** which is made up of a member from each of the 7 founding families.

Those from Hedor either have an incredibly optimistic and naive outlook on the world or are incredibly bitter and hostile. It is the home of starry-eyed dreamers and backstabbing politicians with the little people left to suffer for it. The only exception to this are the **Priests** and **Priestesses of Love.** They live in Love's Temples and are believed the be the only ones who worship Love in their true form-- and that is in the selfless, kind nature that Life loved her creations. These religious figures go around the city and world offering comfort, solace, and guidance to those who need it in exchange for nothing.

Love is known to occasionally visit Lyechester during festivals, encouraging feasts and dances only to disappear amongst the chaos.

Season: Summer

Color: Maroon/Red

Animal: Fox

Core Values: *Love,* Pleasure, Satisfaction, Hedonism, Doing As You Please, Selfishness

Followers of Love are versatile-- they can be romantic poets or power hungry sorcerers. They believe in pleasure and satisfaction-- taking care of yourself before you love others-- with the only exception being the Priest and Priestesses of Love. They're prone to twisting terrible events into a melancholic beauty, often idolizing those around them and turning them into muses.

Aesthetic: Red, Silks, Smoke, Lounges, Beauty, Provocativeness, Poets, Artists, Creativity

Relations (these are feeling *towards* the group, not reciprocated feelings:

Darkness: Apathetic**Light:** Dislike

Fate: Dislike**Freedom:** Very Close

Life: Apathetic/Friendly**Joy:** Very Close

Death: Apathetic**Fear:** Dislike/Apathetic**Sorrow:** Apathetic

Joy - "The Peacekeeper" - Chaotic Good

Love is said to be the second emotion felt by Life and her creations towards one another. Because of this, it is believed by many that mortals' natural state is to love and find joy, and that fear and sorrow are only a result of Death. They are things mortals are meant to ascend over and find freedom from. Happiness and joy are believed to be what keeps mortals from cruelty and fighting one another, and Joy itself is often viewed as a "child" compared to the other gods, who are often willing to set aside their differences for Joy. Because of this, Joy is known as the **Peacekeeper.**

Followers of Joy tend to be cheerful, innovative, and kind, though they are prone to getting so lost in their own heads that they forget what's going on around them. They tend to get along with Followers of Freedom and Love due to the shared ideal of "doing as you please" in the sake of finding joy.

Followers of Joy are *incredibly* close with Followers of Sorrow. The two live near one another, and their gods are known to treat each other as sisters-- something the followers try to emulate with one another.

Markings:

Realm: Amarath

Amarath is a mountainous region with large beaches and grasslands. Its capital, Lystrelle, is located on the coast and within close distance of Sorrow's realm and capital of Veshini. The realm is largely known for its beaches, large reefs, lax way of living, and, most importantly, its fantastical technical creations.

Joy leads the city herself as its ruler-- otherwise everyone else in the country is of equal status. Most people spend the days swimming, dancing, making music, exploring the land, or otherwise relaxing. Those who work work because they wish to-- not because they need to-- and a large number of Joy's followers are great creatives: people who create fantastical and absurd spells and create mechanical creations that defy the world.

Most people live in Lystrelle or on the coast-- many of those who live in Amarath are water creatures, are great at swimming, and rely on the ocean for a great deal of things-- not unlike its sister land of Veshini.

Season: Summer

Color: Yellow

Animal: Jumping Mouse

Core Values: *Joy,* Creativity, Laziness, Equality, Kindness

Followers of Joy are very laid back and accepting of others-- but this acceptance mainly stems from ignorance as opposed to understanding. Many of Joy's followers have never had to lift a finger in their life, nor have they ever endured hardships. Because of this, many think the world around them to either be a very daunting place, or a very exciting one filled with possibilities. Both are up for a wakeup call.

Aesthetic: Beaches, Sand, the Sun, Glitter, Seashells, Stained Glass, Rainbows, Crystals, Flowing Fabric, White Sheets

Relations (these are feeling *towards* the group, not reciprocated feelings:

Darkness: Friendly**Light:** Friendly

Fate: Friendly**Freedom:** Very Close

Life: Friendly

Love: Very close

Death: Friendly**Fear:** Friendly**Sorrow:** Friendly

Death - "The All Father" - True Neutral

Life in Navara could not be perfect and eternal forever-- and such was signified when Death first appeared in the realm riding in on his steed. Death was the sign of change in Navara, a realm that had yet to know the meaning of an "end."

When Death took his first soul, it is said a piece of Life was ripped out and killed. Every soul taken was a piece of her own heart, and yet it was a task Death was dutifully bound to regardless of the agony it caused. At first, Life felt confusion and resentment until she realized this was necessary to keep the balance of the world-- and since then her and Death have held a close relationship. While Life is fond of Death, it is known that Death adores and longs for her-- each soul he shepherds into the afterlife he does with the utmost care, knowing they are the children of the god he loves, and ultimately his children as well as he leads them into death and towards Darkness, thus his name as the **All Father.**

Death and Life may never touch except for a single hour in the entire year-- and that is at midnight during the transition from Fall to Spring. Go see Life for more information on the **Festival of Hanarayuk.**

It is said that when one dies, they may ask Death anything during their march towards **The End**. Death will respond as truthfully as he can.

Markings:

Realm: Tistpreth

Tistpreth is a cold, unforgiving wasteland where little life thrives (and the life that does is peculiar just as much as it is fantastical and violent). It is said Death purposefully did this so as to limit the lives he would need to inevitably take away from Life-- however Life has gifted his land with these strange creatures in an effort to show companionship and her acknowledgement of his purpose in the realm.

Those who live in Tispreth are hardened people-- it is the home to Goliaths, Dragons, and all manners of giants and strong blooded races. It is a land filled with towering, grim, stone towers and fortresses filled with towering, grim, stone arches and statues. It is a cold, somber, and solemn place where only the strongest survive.

However, what Tistpreth is most known for is its *dragons.* They live in the surrounding sea, they live in the mountains, some even rumor they live within the cavernous, maze-like halls of its capital of Klydest. There are legendary stories that years ago there were **Dragon Riders** in Tistpreth-- and many think them to be true if the abandoned towers are anything to go by. It was said their bonds were unbreakable and that those who rode on the back of a dragon were true warriors. But that was thousands of years ago-- so they claim, at least.

Those who live in Tistpreth live quiet lives where they focus on nothing but survival until the next day. They are a hardy people with a strong sense of community and duty-- they are always willing to look out for their own, though they tend to have a rather condescending view of other people with an exception being made for Followers of Life and the Knights of Incandessence.

Season: Winter

Color: Gray

Animal: Horse

Core Values: *Acceptance,* Patience, Thankfulness, Solitude, Quiet, Peace

Followers of Death are a very reclusive people-- they have little interest in seeing the world as they believe it to be frivolous. They have everything they need in Tistpreth-- what possible reason could they have to leave? That being said, Death's followers are very tight-knit, though they are prone to viewing other followers as weak or beneath them, incapable of carrying out the sacred duty of death as they do.

Aesthetic: Snow, Clouds, Quiet, Horses, Petrified Forests, Dark Robes, Skeletons, Rot

Relations (these are feeling *towards* the group, not reciprocated feelings:

Darkness: Respect**Light:** Respect

Fate: Apathetic**Freedom:** Apathetic

Life: Very Close

Love: Dislike**Joy:** Dislike**Fear:** Apathetic
Sorrow: Dislike

Fear - “The Dream Eater” - True Neutral

When Death came, people finally had reason to feel Fear-- and so he was born. Fear was originally the fear of death, but he has since come to control fear in all of its forms. He sews doubt into the followers of the others, reminds people that their demise is inevitable, fills their heads with thoughts of failure. He kills hope, stiffles joy, fosters sorrow, ruins love, and thus he has earned himself the name **Dream Eater.** Despite this, many in the realm are able to acknowledge that Fear is what *makes* joy and love and so many other things as wondrous as they are-- without fear, without failure, they’d be mundane and boring-- not the amazing things they are known as today.

Followers of Fear tend to be “Devil’s Advocates” or attempting to master their fear themselves. They do not hate the other gods or find them stupid, they simply wish to challenge beliefs. They believe through facing your fears and doubts, you can become stronger-- more convicted and dedicated to the things you believed so deeply.

The only people that Followers of Fear dislike are Followers of Joy-- they find them dedicated to nothing, naive, ignorant, and in need of a wakeup call.

Markings:

Realm: Aibula

Aibula is a muggy and humid country filled with large insects, fantastical and horrific creatures, and, most notably, large mushrooms that act as trees and bioluminescent fauna + wildlife. The capital is Slesmet, a large city that operates on a nocturnal schedule. Many who live in the city are rather cynical, and most who come from Aibula tend to have rather dark and dry humor.

Aibula is a place that attempts to find beauty in the bizarre and horrific-- and because of this, Followers of Fear tend to have a rather interesting and unique definition of just what beauty is. Interestingly enough, Followers of Fear find it easy to find the silver lining of situations-- usually, when they challenge

a line of thought, it's usually because they believe the thought to be strong enough to withstand their criticism. Followers of Fear learn to be okay with fear and failure-- and through this, become some of the bravest people in the land.

Many people who live in the area are dedicated to studying the horror-filled realm, learning about its dangerous secrets in order to further advance Slesmet, which is known as one of the most productive countries in the realm. Aibula is the only country other than Amarath that has the beginnings of modern widespread technology.

It's a popular practice for Followers of Fear to wear their fears on their sleeves-- whether this be in jewelry or tattoos that represent what it is they're scared of. They do not mock people for being scared, and instead encourage people to embrace fear and the darker side of life.

Season: Fall

Color: Purple

Animal: Dragonfly

Core Values: *Courage,* Exploration, Advancement, Facing Your Fears

Followers of Fear are agents of chaos and disrupting the status quo. They're disrupters-- and as a result, many tend to have rather intense conflicting views on them as a whole. While many claim them to be cruel and insensitive, the truth is actually the opposite-- they simply intend to be the necessary evil to assist in the growth of those around them.

Aesthetic: Neon, Purple, Bugs + Insects, Mushrooms, Swamps, Moss, Fungus, Undead

Relations (these are feeling *towards* the group, not reciprocated feelings:

Darkness: Respect**Light:** Respect

Fate: Apathetic**Freedom:** Apathetic

Life: Apathetic

Love: Apathetic**Joy:** Dislike

Death: Respect**Sorrow:** Apathetic

Sorrow - "The Somber Maiden" - Neutral Good

Sorrow came as the final major emotion and final major Wykna of the land-- and she too is a result of the appearance of Death.

Most Followers of Sorrow are converts-- people who have been hurt so much by the world that they could find no more pleasantness in their hearts-- only sadness. They retreat to the flooded temples of Sorrow to live out their days lamenting and struggling to come to terms with the hollowness they feel. Others, who are born under Sorrow, are said to be born with sorrow in their bones, and tend to be very gentle, forgiving, and compassionate people. Because of Sorrow's inherent sadness, she is known as the **Somber Maiden.**

Followers of Sorrow are very close to Followers of Joy. The two live near one another, and their gods are known to treat each other as sisters-- something the followers try to emulate with one another.

Markings:

Realm: Vesheni

Vesheni is a small island located off the coast of Amarath. It is a flooded city composed entirely of waterways-- the only way to get around on the surface is by swimming or boat. While the surface is filled with marketplaces and bustling life, the true Vesheni lingers under the surface, within underwater caves, castles, and temples.

Vesheni is known as a place of solace and healing-- it holds little interest in politics or power struggles. The island is run by a group of masked religious followers referred to as the **Tears**-- their masks are silver and an exact copy of Sorrow's own markings. Tears are often converts who have come and

conquered their sorrow to find acceptance and peace. They now use their inner peace to help guide others along the same journey.

Many who are born in Vesheni leave-- though they almost always come back after a few years, too heartbroken by the tragedies they witness to continue living on their own in the world. Those who are Followers of Sorrow are incredibly tight-knit, always referring to one another as “sister,” “sibling”, and “brother.” They are always willing to help someone in need, and the most intense of followers often fall prey to some form of martyrdom in their attempts to help others.

Season: Winter

Color: Teal/Light Blue

Animal: Eel

Core Values: *Sorrow,* Melancholy, Healing, Accepting Sadness, Self Improvement, Kindness

Followers of Sorrow are usually very gentle, kind, and quiet souls. Those who are converted often have rather tragic backgrounds that they are in the process of healing from-- others, such as the Tears, are emotional healing forces. Those born within the religion tend to be prone to bouts of depression and melancholia.

Aesthetic: Underwater, Water, Blue, Teal, Yellow, Caves, Lanterns, Temples, Wet Stone

Relations (these are feeling *towards* the group, not reciprocated feelings:

Darkness: Respect**Light:** Apathetic

Fate: Apathetic**Freedom:** Apathetic

Life: Apathetic

Love: Apathetic**Joy:** Very Close

Death: Apathetic**Fear:** Apathetic

"Things are bad," he says. "Falling apart. The realm keeps getting smaller and smaller and Plaithus can only hold strong for so long."

You avert your gaze at that. The realm's been dying for a long, long time. Unfortunately for you, you live at a time where you can't just plug your ears, close your eyes, and wish it away. There's no ignoring what's happening. Not anymore.

"The Council has gotten strong," he says. "Too strong. Not even the Queen can stand strong against their wishes and whims." He lets out a bark of a laugh-- though it's almost hoarse in sound and lacks any real mirth. "Perhaps her sending me with you was a mercy killing. Sweeter to die young out there than live old in here."

"Do you actually believe that?"

"I don't know what I believe anymore," he says. He looks like he wants to say more but instead pauses to glance at you. You can feel him scrutinizing you, looking into your eyes to search for some sort of hidden truth, before he sucks in a quiet breath and continues to speak. "I did some bad things a long time ago," he says. "Things I'm not proud of."

It comes as a quiet confession. One that he doesn't really want to say.

You stare at him, but he refuses to meet your gaze.

Next

Never before has be mentioned this. In fact, the idea of Sabir doing something wrong at all seems almost absurd. You half expect him to confess to something asinine and harmless, but from the somber expression on his face, you know it's not.

A part of you wants to speak, but you can see it in the heavinss of his posture...

He's not done.

"I've never really had to suffer for it," he says. "Was never punished. Never faced a day of reckoning. I've felt my own guilt-- lived with it for years. Repented and swore to never do those things again," he says, shaking his head as if reliving his conviction. He stares into the emptiness of the air in front of you, not quite seeing but most certainly looking, and rolls his lips togther. "My only regret," he says, hestitating, "well, my only regret is that I wish I did those bad things to save you. Help you. Prevent this, *all of this*, from ever happening." He looks in your direction then, but not you. "But I didn't. I was scared. And I'm sorry. I should've done more. Been more fearless. And when we get out there, wherever *there* is, I promise to be just that." He looks up then, his dark and heavy stare meeting your own confused one. "I promise to be better."

His eyes flicker between yours, and if you didn't know better, you'd say he's looking for... for *approval*. From you of all people.

Your mouth feels dry as you stare at him blankly for several moments, mind struggling to find the right words to say.

- (●) "You have nothing to be sorry for. You're kind-- you should *stay* kind."
- ( ) "You're right. Things are different out there. Survival is most important, no matter what."

Next

[Question of Kindness.]

Nov 26, 2022

I am so unbelievably happy to finally be working on a scene other than Vethna + Amilia. I love them, I really do, but the variations in their scene were killing me (not so softly).

As per usual, Sabir's friendship scenes are my favorite. I'll be starting with his friendship scenes before moving onto the romantic ones. His low affinity version of the scene will be saved for last... ya know... as a treat <3

Tensions are high in the group, and you'll find many members are going to begin questioning themselves, who they are, and what they believe in. As their leader, and in cases like this, as their *friend*, you'll find you might have more say in who they turn out to be than you originally thought... 👀

Sparring. | Amilia Von Clamile. | P.O.V. Switch

Nov 22, 2022

The cold, bitter winds of Plaithus are what Amilia remembers most from her times visiting. She and her companions always came to visit as the winter chill began to creep in, the dark seasons lurking on the horizon as the days became shorter and shorter. It was the most festive time of year in Plaithus-- a time when people worshipped Winter, praying for Plaithus to endure the stretch of freezing weather and limited food just like it had every year before.

The last time she was in Plaithus was right around this time. People were hanging up flags as decorations in the town squares and children were getting excited for school to end. Young soldiers still in school partied in the taverns as they awaited to be sent up to the Hysroth Mountains for their final months of training. There was money to be made and joy to be found-- two things bards were always hunting down.

But things have changed, Amilia thinks. For one, she is no longer accompanied by her old friends. As for the rest, there is no joy in Plaithus. Not now. The city is bitter and wary of the presence of the Commander. And from what little Amilia's been able to deduce from sitting on the sidelines and watching, Plaithus has been rotting for a long, *long* time. So long, that it might've even begun to start when she was still visiting, twenty or so odd years ago--

"You know I'm right."

"Do we?"

"Fine-- maybe you don't. But that doesn't change the fact *I'm* right, and you're all too busy licking the Commander's boots to realize--"

"*Licking their boots?* What kind of asinine insult is that?"

"Oh, *fuck you--"*

Amilia's ears twitch as Nikke and Vethna get into it... *again.* She shrinks where she sits on the fence, slowly inching further away as Nikke and Vethna get closer and closer to flat-out smacking one another. The hostility growing between everyone reminds her of a storm brewing on the horizon that turns the whole sky grey. She'd be lying if she said a part of her wasn't screaming to cut tails and run. She knows she could make it-- the only ones who would ever have a chance of hunting her down are Vethna and MC, but... they would never. And it's for that exact reason that she stays, watching discontentedly as everyone spits and squabbles with one another.

Crunch.

Amilia immediately turns to look behind her at the sound of heavy footsteps on dry grass-- and it's then that she finds herself looking directly into the eyes of the Commander. For the first time since meeting, they're fully cleaned up, face devoid of grime and clothes clean. They almost look like a different person with how stark the difference is-- then again, Amilia supposes she must look quite different herself. She can't help but clasp her hands together and tuck them between her thighs where she sits, feigning to be cold in an attempt to hide the green feathering that creeps up her arms.

The Commander doesn't seem to notice as they come closer and lean against the fence beside her, their arm coming dangerously close to touching her. She hates that she notices that. Hates that she notices that they don't seem to mind the antlers or the claws or the fangs.

No. Hate's too strong of a word. It's not hate it's... it's *confusion.*

She's quick to offer them a smile-- though from the amused quirk of their lips it must look just as awkward as it feels. Her eyes flicker across their face, threatening to linger on the concerning amounts of softness in their stare, before the instinct-- the *need*-- to make things less tense arises within her once more. It's compulsive, and before she really knows what she's doing her smile is widening as she reaches out with a single clawed finger to gently poke the Commander's nose.

It's absurd. She knows it is. And yet something within her flutters at the fact the Commander just lets it happen. The ex-Commander of Plaithus, killer of hundreds, Sword of Plaithus, letting a fae pull all the tricks on them in the world. The way their subtle smile widens does nothing to help, and Amilia is suddenly aware of how heavy her hand feels as it drops back down into her lap.

Not good. Not good at all. And before she can even truly stew in that fact the Commander's own smile turns into a grin as they lean closer. By instinct, she leans in closer too, ear twitching when they speak

in a low voice and nod towards the group.

"Have they been arguing all day?"

Amilia pulls back just enough to look them in the eye, and it's then she's forced to bite into her cheek to try and ignore the sudden heat she feels arising on her face She nods, taking the extra time to try and make sure when she speaks, she's not tongue-tied.

"Not about this though," she says, sucking in a small trembling breath. "Nikke keeps finding new things to bring up. I tried... *tried* to get them to stop, but that didn't work, so..."

In truth, all she did was try and speak up only to be completely ignored before giving up completely. Years ago, she might've actually been able to get them both to calm down and sit down but... Well, it's as she said. That was a long time ago.

The Commander only nods, though, a small huff escaping them as they watch the group argue.

"What are they arguing about now?"

She has the feeling they already know-- but that doesn't stop her from feeling awkward when they look at her again. She puffs out her cheeks as if that might make them drop the subject and ask someone else, but they don't, so...

"About you," she murmurs. It's as she thought-- they're not surprised in the least. "Nikke suggested that you were a part of this somehow. The Queen's plan," she specifies. "No one agrees with him, though." She rushes to say that last part, and her heart drops at the idea of saying the wrong thing. At making things *worse.*

And, in dawning horror, she realizes she just might've. The Commander looks at the grass, eyes glazed over. Did she just mistake their facade for true apathy? After everything that's happened she should be more careful, more deliberate with her words, she *knows that*, but--

"MC?"

She says their name softer than she meant to. *Hells*-- she hadn't meant to say their name at all. But she does, and then they're shaking their head as if having broken out of a stupor. Their eyes land on her, and she watches as their lips part hesitantly.

"But.... *you* know that I'm not a part of it... right?" They ask. For one flickering moment, the Commander is nothing more than a frightened, worried child-- an image Amilia finds herself relating to far too much for her own liking. Her tongue feels like lead in her mouth, and she twitches helplessly before her eyes drop to where MC's hand rests on the fence.

Slowly, hesitantly, she slides her hand towards theirs. A part of her fears they'll recoil-- that they'll pull back at the last minute in disgust or horror. But they don't. And deep down, she knew that they wouldn't.

And deep down, she knows what she's really afraid of *is* that-- that they'll stick around no matter what. And it's then that her fingers stop just short of touching MC's.

"We know, MC," she murmurs, eyes glued to their hands. She can't bear to look them in the eyes. Not with how their gaze burns through her skin.

"But *you* know?" They press.

Her eyes unfocus, and it's with a soft sigh, an admittance of defeat, that she looks them in the eye. It's too intimate. Too soft. And yet she finds herself saying what feels like a promise.

"I know."

She sees something switch in their gaze-- sees the relief in their shoulders-- but before MC can so much as express as much Nikke's voice cuts through the moment just like it always does. She struggles to hide her own disappointment when MC looks away from her, their attention now lost. Struggles to hide her own fear as her stomach twists and lurches while her heart hammers and flutters.

She feels sick. And stupid. She knows better--*so much better*-- but just this once she wants to be wrong.

So, she stays quiet when things get tense. Stays quiet when Nikke challenges MC to fight and the two go for each other's throats. Ignores the muted panic that rises within her at watching how gracefully the Commander moves-- how easily they deflect blows and how efficiently they deal them out. They're a tool forged by war-- and yet they had never been anything but gentle with her-- calm, and patient, and kind--

"Leave them be, Syfyn."

Sabir's voice comes out low in warning, and Amilia has half the mind to ignore him entirely... but ignoring things has never been much in her nature. So, instead, she tilts her head just enough to peek at the Viper in her periphery, arms crossed and leaning against the fence. The Brazen Griffin-- *Syfyn*-- stands on duty beside him, arms stiff at her sides. Her wings twitch and her muscles tense, and Amilia can't help but wonder what sort of death wish Sabir must have to be giving orders to *her* of all people.

"This is childish," Syfyn growls. "They never should've let him make demands."

"Say what you will, but I quite enjoy watching our scaled friend here get, ah, what's the word? *Disciplined?"*

Syfyn looks at him, and though Amilia can't see her face, the darkness in her eyes speaks for itself.

"*Childish,"* she repeats again.

"Three years ago, you would've been doing the exact same thing," Sabir says. It's the wrong thing to say-- Amilia realizes it maybe even before he does. Amilia's own muscles go tense at the same time

Syfyn's do, and her heart races as a slow, low-boiling tension begins to rise. "You were just as rowdy as the rest of them-- if not more so."

Syfyn says nothing. Sabir sucks in a breath and licks his lips-- glances over--

"Don't," she snips.

"I didn't say anything."

Amilia can hear the woman's sigh from behind her mask-- see how her shoulders rise and fall in an attempt to compose herself.

"Not now," she says.

Whatever this conversation is, it's clearly one they've been having repeatedly-- one that doesn't even fully require words to be held.

"You'll have to talk to them eventually, you do know that?" Sabir says. "You can't go on playing pretend forever."

"You mean like yourself?" Syfyn asks, voice low. Now *that* seems to have struck a nerve.

The two of them look at one another, and Amilia looks away and squeezes her eyes shut and licks her lips. She tells herself to just mind her own business for once-- to keep her nose where it belongs. But she can hear Sabir move-- can hear the sound of the dry grass crunching beneath his footsteps-- and can hear the anger barely kept contained when he speaks once more.

"What is that meant to mean?"

"You know exactly what it means," Syfyn says.

"Entertain me, then--" he says. She can hear him step closer. Syfyn refuses his demand and stays silent, and it's only then that he repeats his demand. "*Say something."*

This isn't the cool, composed, all-knowing politician that Amilia's heard about. This is just a man-- a regular man-- who from the sound of his voice is hurting. *Bad.*

And, just like any hurting, cornered animal, he lashes out.

"Getting MC killed isn't going to undo what they did to you. You know that, right?"

It's the final stone to drop, she knows as much, and she's already feeling the dread long before she sees MC notice the conflict and run full speed into the fray. Her eyes squeeze shut once more as they dash right past her and leap over the fence with ease, and all she can hear over the feeling of her anxiety and the blood rushing in her ears is the sound of flesh being cut open.

It's a quiet sound-- a sound accompanied by the sound of something sharp swinging through the air-- and a sound she knows herself far too well. Normally it would make her cringe internally even more and feel sick to the stomach, but right now... *now...*

Well, now all she can think about is MC.

When she turns around, she's vaguely aware of Syfyn retreating into the sky, the force of Syfyn's wings sending a gust of wind that makes Amilia's hair stick to her face-- but what she's most focused on is the overwhelming amount of *red* that drips from the Commander's face as Sabir holds them steady by the shoulders. And despite having always been cowardly, Amilia finds herself leaping off the fence and rushing right to the Commander's side, blurting out their name as if it were the most natural thing to do in the whole entire world.

"MC--"

They turn to look at her, removing their hands from their face-- and any bravery she might've had disappears in an instant at the sight of the wounds on MC's face. Their eyes peek out from their red-stained skin, and the scratch marks that cover their face, while shallow compared to what they could be, bleed as if there's no tomorrow.

She knows she should do something. Say something. And yet when she parts her lips her mind goes blank, vision blurred as the world spins around her. All she can focus on is the way the blood drips down their chin-- how some of it ends up running over their lips and straight into their mouth, coating their teeth and tongue.

"Your-- she..."

The Commander's gaze, which was dazed and confused only seconds before, immediately goes soft at her stuttering. And this time they're the one saying her name-- softly, *sweetly*-- despite the pain they must be in. But it doesn't register. Not really. She should be feeling stupid and giddy-- but instead, all she feels is absolute horror at the bloodied face that comes closer... a bloodied face that she can't say she even remotely recognizes as being the Commander.

Their hand reaches out, and it's as if it's in slow motion. She can count the breaths she takes in before their fingers ever even brush against her shoulder, and when they do...

A dimly lit kitchen. A forest illuminated by firelight. Your fault, your fault, your fault--

She lets out the most inhumane gasp of her life. The panic comes in tenfold as the memories come and leave so quickly that she's left scrambling and dizzy, confused by the very grass beneath her feet and the vastness of the sky above her. It takes several moments of her glancing about like a wild animal before she's able to piece together where she is-- that none of it's real-- and that the Commander is, in fact, the bloodied figure before her... one who is in need of help.

This time, when her eyes flicker across their wounds, she repeats it to herself. *It's just MC. It's just MC. It's just MC.*

It's with that reminder that their features shine out through the blood-- the curve of their nose, the edges of their lips, the way their brows are furrowed in concern. And with that recognition the fear subsides second by second as Amilia steps closer to MC, compensating for the alarmed jump back she took seconds prior.

"You're... You're bleeding," she says. This time, it is her hand that reaches out-- though she stops just short of their face, chastising herself for being brash as she eyes the reddened skin surrounding the cuts. "Are you... are you okay?"

She feels breathless despite the shortness of her sentences. She attributes some of it to how carefully the Commander watches her-- how they listen.

They don't say anything for what feels like one long minute. She worries that she's said the wrong thing somehow-- that she's messed up-- but before the panic can fully take hold the Commander's reaching out to grab her hand. Amilia realizes how stupid she must look, keeping it stuck up and in the air, but the Commander doesn't seem to mind as they gently bring it back down to her side, their hands callused and rough compared to hers.

"I'm okay," they say, eyes lingering on her hands-- on the green, light feathers that coat her fingers.

When she tries to speak, her voice catches in her throat. She has to take in a shaky breath before trying again, attempting (and failing) to ignore how the Commander looks at her as if her presence alone soothes the pain they're in.

"Are you sure?" She asks. Her voice comes out weaker than intended.

They don't seem to notice.

"I'm sure."

She doesn't know what to do with that, even though there was no other response to anticipate. So, instead, she drops her eyes to look at where their hand holds hers still, their claws just barely digging into her skin. She likes how it feels, if she's being truthful, and she knows it's getting worse if their proximity alone has her struggling to find the right words to say.

She wants to look up. *Badly.* But she knows she shouldn't. Knows she should keep her eyes trained on the ground and pull her hand back and away while she still has the chance to. But it's instinctual, impossible to ignore or fight, as she looks up to meet their stare head on--

Gentle only for her.

Gentle, and gone red from the blood that's pooled into them.

"Your eyes."

She blurts the words out before she can even fully process them.

She feels like an idiot for not noticing sooner, and more than that, *guilty*. The frantic thoughts, the panic, the *anxiety.* She can't help but feel it makes her useless. And right now... well, right now there's not much room for *uselessness* of any kind.

Her hands move quickly as she tugs father's *tefer'nie* from her waist, the fabric soft and smooth beneath her hands. It comes off in a single pull, and she's quick to shove it into the Commander's grasp. They recoil when she does-- as if the fabric itself might burn them-- before resigning themself to holding it.

"Amilia..." They trail off, brows furrowing as they stare at where their blood stains the green fabric red. "I can't use this."

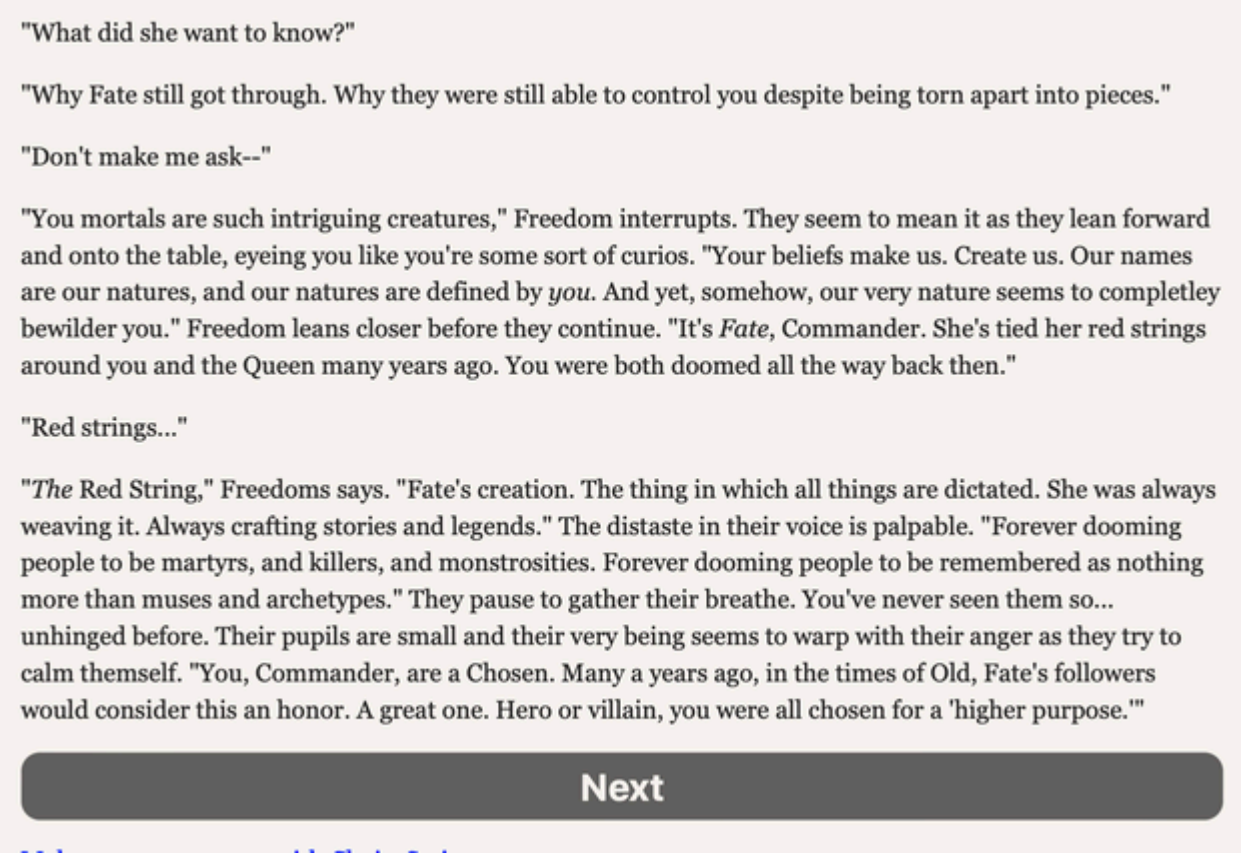
She can feel Vethna's eyes burning through her as she reaches out to close the Commander's hand around the *tefer'nie*. If she weren't so panicked and flustered, she'd be filled with anxiety at the countless implications this could have back in Vygrand-- someone else's blood spilling onto such important fabric. But right now, she's worried about *them*, and right now, not even Vethna's watchful, sharp gaze can intrude upon that.

So, instead, she meets the Commander's eyes and gives them the most self-assured nod she can muster, watching in some vague sense of satisfaction as the Commander slowly lifts the fabric up to wipe their eyes. She can't stop the smile that crawls onto their face when they blink quickly afterward and look around as if seeing the world in a new light.

"Better?" She asks.

They look at her from the corner of their eyes-- and she tries to ignore how her stomach flutters when the corner of their lip just barely lifts up.

"Much."



The Red String.

Nov 10, 2022

MC will get some helpful information from Freedom in the later half of Chapter 5... safe to say, most things are most definitely not what they seem.

Also, for those of you who are interested in *romancing* our beloved chaos god... well, there's something special in store for you guys in this scene, too... 👀

Hurt/Comfort A-Z Headcanons: Vethna Mevnrael

Oct 22, 2022

A: Alleviate - How do they go about relieving persistent physical pain?

Tea. Vethna loves tea-- and on top of that, is actually fairly knowledgeable about how to make certain brews with certain health benefits, some of which can help with chronic pains or other sources of

discomfort. If they can buy the supplies necessary, you'll likely see them taking breaks throughout the day the sip a cup.

If that's *not* an option... it's not ideal, but Vethna can actually use their own magic to make themselves "not feel" pain. Illusion magic tricks the senses, and if they need to, they can trick their own. It's not something they'd be keen to do, however, and depending on how bad the pain is they might not be able to focus enough to do the spell properly.

B: Bedridden - How do they behave when they're sick?

Cuddly. Vethna gets super sleepy, lethargic, and cuddly when they're sick. They'll spend their days in their room just napping, and they're honestly a bit of a diva when it comes to how they expect to be taken care of when they're feeling under the weather. They're so used to being doted upon by their family and servants that they're a bit taken aback when they have to take care of themselves-- so they'd be *super* thankful and content if someone were to go out of their way to give them their meals and medicine.

Chances are you'll probably see them walking about wrapped up in a blanket or reading under several different soft blankets. They have a way of making even their illnesses look aesthetically pleasing and cozy-- and you're more than welcome to join them. They're 10x more affectionate when they don't feel good, and they might even get a bit clingy when they're in that sort of haze between awake and not awake.

C: Cling - Whose physical touch is considered most welcome in their minds when they are in need? Is there a specific type of touch they respond well to?

Both of their parents-- though their Mom more specifically. Trelyx and Vethna were *super* close, and their mom would look after them a lot *always*, especially when they were sick as a child. She would read to them, perform spells to entertain them, make them food, and otherwise dote on them a lot. Even when Vethna got older she was still super attentive.

Their father was a little less outwardly affectionate, but even he made sure to frequently check up on them. His big sign of affection was just pressing his hand against their forehead or putting a hand on their head. Otherwise, he was always watching over the doctors to make sure they were doing their best to take care of his child (and heir). There'd be... *repercussions*... if they weren't.

D: Deathbed - How would they react if they realized they may not recover from their injuries?

If it was physical... I'm not quite sure Vethna would be as upset as some may be about it. Vethna's not a physical person, and Vygrandian culture places less emphasis on physical ableness and more on magic, emotions, and spiritual connection.

Now, if their magic itself was to be injured somehow, and that damage was permanent... it wouldn't be pretty. It would send Vethna into a spiral of self-pity and hatred that may just be impossible to get them out of. Their magic is a big part of who they are and their cultural identity. To lose that is the equivalent

of killing them emotionally and spiritually. I don't really know if it's something they'd truly ever be able to get over.

It would just be a constant state of hurt and apathy. A fundamental piece of their soul will have been ripped out and ruined. At some point... one might have to wonder what's the point of continuing like that.

E: Emergency - What is their gut reaction when someone they care about is hurt?

Vethna is definitely a panicker when someone they care for is hurt. Normally they're cool and collected and able to act logically... but that all goes flying out the window when someone close to them is injured. They'll want to go straight to them regardless of the dangers and are prone to falling into a tunnel vision where nothing else matters, which, more often than not, tends to do more harm than good.

On top of that, if Vethna gets too emotional they are prone to losing control of their magic or otherwise lashing out, which can get real dangerous real quick. They're not above using their abilities to manipulate others into doing what they want, even if it's more than immoral to do so. Oh, what's that? You were arguing that it's too dangerous to go after their friend right now? Hmmm, interesting... well, *what about now?*

The good news is that Vethna's definition of "being bad at healing magic" isn't the same as actually being bad at healing magic, so once they *do* get to the person they're able to patch them up with relative ease provided they have the strength/stamina to do so still. The downside, however, is that there's a high chance Vethna will do everything they can to make sure the person they care about won't ever know what Vethna did to get to them. They wouldn't be able to stand the person they care for looking at them like a villain. They did what they had to, okay?

F: Fight - Are there circumstances under which they would not accept treatment or care? If so, what are they?

If they weren't seriously injured, they'd absolutely refuse treatment just to be petty. If you got into a fight earlier they're going to avoid you so much as touching them, nonetheless stitching up one of their wounds. Besides, chances are they'll be able to heal it themself anyway-- a fact they'll only emphasize to further prove they don't *need* help from anyone.

That being said, if Vethna for one reason or another couldn't heal themself, then no. They wouldn't refuse treatment, even if to be selfless. Unless it's a situation of "this person is literally dying right now but you have a paper cut" they're going to let themself be prioritized over others.

G: Ghosts - How has their past shaped the kind of comfort they respond to best?

Vethna's own parental situation was quite similar to MC's, except for the fact that Vethna was an only child and was *the* golden child. They got whatever they wanted whenever they wanted it, they spent most of their free time with their mother or otherwise studying magic with Javier + Jamie, or shadowing their father in his position as Archmage.

Their mom was a very doting woman-- she'd fuss over Vethna a lot and was always worrying about their mental health given the stress of their position. They would have a lot of self-care days together. Meanwhile, Vethna's father was more of a distant man, but his love for Vethna was very obvious. Vethna didn't see it personally, but he did everything he could to make Vethna's life easy (which Vethna knew). However, things all changed in the few years leading up to when Vethna ran away, in which they were heavily "encouraged" (ie. forced) to marry Javier. They actually did like him romantically to begin with, but things got weird and toxic fast.

Because of this, Vethna has a very mixed reaction to comfort. They *like* to be comforted and looked after but at the same time heavily value their independence. Their immediate reaction to most things is to seek out comfort and affection, but they always pull back before things can get too deep or intimate out of fear of something going wrong at the last second. Vethna's on the defensive most of the time, even when they know they shouldn't be, and it prevents them from getting as close to people as they might otherwise like to be.

That being said, the comfort they respond to best is anything physical-- specifically just cuddling or doing self-care stuff like they used to do with their mom.

H: Home - What things (objects, sensations or people) remind them they’re safe after a scary situation?

MC + Amilia and tea + chocolate.

Vethna is far from home. Everything they wear is just a reminder of the people who are no longer with them and the place they can no longer return to. They wear these things as a reminder-- as a way to sort of "stay close" to things-- but it does nothing to actually bring them comfort. It's more of a burden if anything.

Because of that, they tend to rely on people for comfort first.

Amilia is Vethna's closest friend as of now. The two get along well, though they're both hiding plenty of secrets from each other. I think that's *why* they get along well. They don't try and dig into each others' pasts. Amilia is a reminder of the south that's actually a person and someone who can Vethna rely on, and on top of that, Vethna likes to look out for Amilia. Taking care of Amilia distracts Vethna from worrying about themself even in the most intense of situations.

And MC... well, MC is Vethna's *bestest* friend depending on your affinity, or they're possibly even Vethna's significant other. MC is one of the only stable things in Vethna's life, and more than likely one of the only people Vethna tries to be fully honest with (which is a *big* deal). MC's always looked out for Vethna even when they didn't get along and comes from a similar background as them. There's a lot of comfort to be found there. Plus, they're *literally* one of the strongest people in the realm. Who's better to turn to for security?

On top of all this, tea + chocolate are things Vethna likes a lot, and they most definitely will snack on them to try and get themselves to relax after particularly upsetting missions or situations.

I: Isolation - How do they soothe themselves when no one is around to soothe them?

Drumroll, please... They'll actually just cry. That's it. They'll cry, and cry, and cry, and they'll continue to do so until they can't anymore. That's usually the end of it then-- they'll feel a lot lighter afterward and will just spend some time sulking in bed for a while until they get bored of doing that and are eventually forced to go out and face the world again.

Vethna isn't really a repressed or destructive person. Their true problem lies in opening up for others, but when they're on their own they're actually pretty capable of soothing themself and keeping track of their emotions.

J: Joy - When was the first time they were truly happy after going through something terrible?

Hmm... this is kind of difficult to answer and I think I'm going to say... *never?*

Vethna's had a rather easy life for the most part. They were living comfortably, they were respected, and they were essentially secured for life until things started going downhill with Javier being given their position as next in line for Archmage. Everything just got worse and worse, and Vethna was stuck living miserably for a good two years or so.

Since then, they ran away from the only place they've called home, sought protection with the enemy of their nation, have spent weeks on the road going from dingy village to dingy village, before being captured by the Plaithian military and being sent on a suicide mission.

So, this *is* Vethna's low point. They've yet to get out of it. Meeting MC + Amilia are definite highlights-- and both of them are considered the "good" in Vethna's low, but as if Vethna has yet to really reach a point of complete happiness and satisfaction, the answer is no.

I'm sure you'll all be able to help them get there in-game, however... 👀

K: Kindness - Do they believe they deserve the comfort they receive? Why or why not?

Yes-- they think they deserve any comfort they receive (for the most part, anyway). The only thing is that Vethna is almost scared to accept it. They're terrified to rely on people because they might betray them or otherwise just grow tired or bored of them.

It's not a fear Vethna outwardly expresses, and they try their best to ignore it, but it's inevitable that those close to them will eventually witness Vethna retreat into themselves because they don't trust anyone around them to turn to for support on certain *personal* things.

That being said, Vethna *can* enter self-loathing episodes. They're not too common, and they usually only occur if Vethna's mental state is already doing poorly, but in those situations, Vethna will utterly reject any and all comfort because they think they're a terrible person undeserving of it. That's not how they *really* think or feel, but it *is* a nasty thought that can slip into their head when they're at their low points. When they get like that, the best thing you can do is just push through it and force them to

accept help. They'll *always* break down and crumble eventually, and it's only then that you can begin to help them get back onto their feet and regain confidence in their self-esteem.

L: Levity - What or who helps them take their mind off of the circumstances?

I don't really know if Vethna is a person who can be "distracted." They have a tendency to fret over things and overthink a *lot*-- so even if they try to do activities that may normally be relaxing it'll be ruined by their thoughts racing. And they don't really *want* to be distracted. The idea of not worrying only makes them worry more.

If there's anything that might be able to get them to calm down, it would be a nice hot bath and then a night of just total comfort. Dim lighting, soft clothes, sweet and savory snacks, and wine. But they're never going to do something like that for themselves-- so unless someone goes out of their way to do something like that for them, they're going to continue worrying.

I also think if Vethna *were* to try and take their mind off something themself, they may turn to distracting themself with their partner physically, if applicable. Whether or not that's healthy, however, is a completely different can of worms.

M: Music - Is there a song that comforts them? Why is it comforting to them?

This was hard to answer from an abundance of answers...

I would say "Burn It Down" by Daughter. As an author, it makes me think of them a *lot.* I listen to it a lot when I'm writing their scenes. But for Vethna personally, think it's one of those songs that they'd silently brood to while dramatically looking outside. Like I mentioned before, they like to sort of "wallow" in their sadness (and bitterness) in order to just get through it, so listening to sad songs to find comfort is something they do a lot.

N: Nostalgia - What things that comforted them as a kid still work today? Does anyone know that?

Their mom used to read to them a lot and always brought them little snacks as signs of affection, and I think both of those are things that bring Vethna a lot of joy and comfort today, still. It's something all of their friends and family back in Vygrand know, but I don't think their little quirks are anything those they know today would be aware of.

I think they're also quite fond of just being able to sit in silence with someone they care for while they both do their own things. It's something Vethna and their dad did a lot. Their father was never a particularly affectionate man, and he was impatient and short with many. So, if he was willing to allow someone into his personal space or, dare I say it, his *office,* it was a sure-tell sign he cared for them. That's something that sticks with Vethna, even today.

O: Overworked - Who or what tells them to stop working and take care of themselves?

When they were younger, everyone told them to take it easy. Javier, Jamie, their parents, their instructors. Everyone told them they worked too hard, approached things too strictly, and that they needed to relax and take a step back from things. But Vethna is *stubborn*, and all the chiding and begging of their friends and family did nothing to stop them. And, in truth, if Vethna had listened to them and relaxed, they would likely then be punished for being lazy. All of the chiding to "stop putting pressure on themself" was just white noise-- stuff people said because they knew they were supposed to say it. But they didn't *mean* it.

Once their position as a competitor for Archmage was stolen, however, they just dropped everything. They stopped studying, stopped using their magic, and became rather lazy-- so at that point no one needed to tell them to calm down. And no one was too upset about it either because Vethna was no longer important to them politically.

Nowadays, Vethna's right back to how they were before: frantic, jittery, and nervous. However, back then they were aspiring to be the greatest sorcerer in the world. Now they're just trying to use their magic in a manner that's "passable" and not completely weak and embarrassing. Amilia might try and tentatively get Vethna to take a break, but she'll never actually force Vethna to stop. The only other person who might have a chance of getting Vethna to take a breath and calm down is MC.

P: Please - Have they ever begged for someone to comfort or stay with them? What was that incident like?

No-- not out of stubbornness or pride but because they've never had to. Most people in their life were more than willing to spoil Vethna with affection and comfort, so they've never had to beg or ask for it in the first place. In fact, they felt so stifled and looked down upon by all of it that they even became annoyed and agitated by it all at some point (ie. in the months leading up to them running away).

Q: Questions - Are they eager to talk about what or why they’re hurting? Why or why not?

Not particularly. Vethna's rather closed off when it comes to actually talking about their pains, whether they be emotional, mental, or physical. They were treated as being incredibly weak and fragile by those around them before running away, and that treatment made them *incredibly* anxious and generally aggressive because everyone treated them as if they were helpless and less than for having any sort of moment of weakness.

While they know the people they know today *wouldn't* do that, it doesn't automatically get rid of the fear. They are horrified to be treated that way again, and as a result, they tend to bottle it all up and try to deal with it themselves. They'll still seek out *comfort*, but they'll never actually open up about what the problem is or allow the other person to help/share the burden.

R: Relief - How do they react to the realization that they will soon be fully recovered?

Yet again applying this to magic--

They'd be incredibly relieved. They have a deep anxiety that they'll lose their magic completely due to them hardly using it and not knowing how to completely control it *without* blood, so if something were to happen that affected their magic in the first place they'd be horrified. They'd try to hide it but their anxiety would be palpable.

To hear that they wouldn't lose that integral part of themselves might be enough for them to even cry a little. Their magic is a deep-rooted part of them. To lose that would be to lose a piece of themself, *literally.*

S: Scared - What would it take for them to admit that they're scared?

It depends on who they're with.

If they're in a group of friends or otherwise, they're not saying it no matter the circumstance. They might *look* horrified, and they might say a few choice words about the situation, but they'll never admit fear no matter how bad it gets. If it's family or their significant other, *then* they'll admit fear, but *only* with those two groups of people.

Vethna feels the need to put on a sarcastic and sassy facade. Sometimes it's just how they are, and other times it's a defense to keep from looking weak. The only times they feel truly safe removing that mask is with family + their s/o-- which, in truth, is pretty standard for Vygrandian culture, too. Your lover and family tend to be the only people you can be emotionally vulnerable and honest around. Not even the closest of friends should be trusted.

T: Time - How long does it take for them to feel better after an ordeal or illness? Do they tend to lie about how soon they feel better?

Physical problems? Vethna can heal any wounds pretty quickly and feel fine and like nothing happened after a few hours. With illnesses, it's a different story. They're a bit sickly in that regard, and while they don't get sick often, when they do, they're knocked flat on their ass. It takes them a good week, maybe even two, to really start feeling better. And that's not something they try to lie about.

Mental + magical problems? Vethna recovers from stuff *very* quickly, though they'll also lie about feeling better quicker than they are too (it's the difference of an hour vs. thirty minutes). Yet again, a habit from Vygrand. And if they were *severely* hurting magically, they'd be able to hide it to the point the other person would be none the wiser that Vethna's on their last legs.

There *is* a reason they were going to be Archmage, after all...

U: Ugly - What part of their recovery process are they ashamed of, if any?

Needing to "recover" from anything at all magic-wise is embarrassing and shameful-- and that's not just something Vethna feels but is a common belief in Vygrand. What makes someone strong is their ability to *not* need to rest or recover from grand, taxing spells. As a result, Vethna greatly tries to ignore any pains they may be feeling.

When they *can't* do that, they'll hole themself up in their room and refuse to see or be seen by most people. They think *themselves* weak when their magic fails them, and *their* definition of "failure" is *not* the same as what most people think it is. It's like the kid who gets 100s crying because they got a 95% on their test while the other kid got a 50%.

Physically, Vethna doesn't find any part of it shameful. Yet again, they're not a particularly strong person in that regard, so why would they be embarrassed about needing time to heal? And like I mentioned before-- Vygrand *really* does not place emphasis on the body. There's no pressure in that society to be "tough" physically.

V: Valiant - Has anyone told them they were brave for facing what they did? How would they react if someone did?

No. Vethna was always held to high standards, so anytime they achieved something of particular excellence at the cost of their health, it was just... expected. There was a quiet and subtle pride that radiated off of their parents and instructors at their success, and they would be praised on the regular, but the dark side of them studying constantly and performing spells that took a physical toll on them was just... ignored. There was no comfort offered. No one told them they were brave.

It was just... normal. Standard. *Expected.*

But in truth, Vethna can't really complain. They liked the rush and thrill just as much as everyone else, and they too ignored the downside of their magic in favor of the praise and glory... until the horrors of what they'd done were impossible to ignore any longer.

If, today, someone were to tell Vethna they were brave for what they've done, running away from home... it would probably start with disbelief before they fall into tears. It would be the release of months of doubt and uncertainty and fear, and the astonishment of just being... *seen*... for once in their life. Acknowledged for who they really are, and not for the symbol of what they are as a sorcerer or Mevnrael.

W: What? - What was the worst injury they've ever received?

All magic-users in Vygrand that are enrolled in any sort of education must go through a series of trials before graduation to prove their aptitude in magic. It's an incredibly important (and daunting) exam that varies in difficulty and danger based on where the sorcerer is getting their education and what their power level is.

One of these many trials involves surviving an encounter with one of every kind of demon-- something that strikes terror into most people across the entire realm of Navara. It is considered a requirement as Vygrand is one of the few places (if not the *only* place) still prone to demon occurrences due to their strong use of magic in daily life.

Those who fail any given part of this and are at any time possessed are known as *Hylest* or *Hylestra*, which roughly translates into "puppet of flesh," or "one who is a puppet." They are tattooed with colored

lines that correlate with which sin they have a weakness for so all around them are aware of it.

Vethna passed their exam with flying colors. That didn't erase the utter trauma they endured to get it, however. And, because this event is such a common occurrence in Vygrand, it's not even something that warrants comfort or support afterward.

As a result, Vethna, like many Vygranders, is rather uneasy around half-demons of any kind (sorry MC) and has a lot of trauma surrounding them. They've seen and dealt with mental and emotional turmoils most people can't even fathom, but as a result, they can face off with even the most aggressive of demons.

X: Xenas - Do they see anyone as an inspiration in their recovery? Does their inspiration know about this?

I'm going to switch up the context of this question a bit considering Vethna's never been seriously physically injured and instead simply answer this as who is their general inspiration.

The answer to that is their father, hands-down. He's one of the longest-running Archmages in Vygrand and is an *incredibly* wise man. He's clever, quick to act, and a powerful sorcerer-- all things Vethna has aspired to be. *However*, they do think their father is too cold and callus-- too removed from his emotions for his own good.

Their father knows Vethna feels all these things about him. He knows they look up to him-- knew it since they trailed after him since they were four gushing about how they were going to be Archmage just like him, someday. And he knows he's hurt them and let them down as he's watched the light in their eyes fade away with every passing year. What he doesn't know is that even now, Vethna doesn't hate him. And even now, after what he's done, they still look up to him.

Y: Yearn - What gesture, person or thing do they desperately want, but would never actually ask for?

Honestly... Vethna really, *really* wants to go home again. They miss their family and home and have a *lot* of conflicting and incredibly complicated feelings regarding certain people from their past. A part of them wants to reconcile with everyone while also confronting them, and is angry that they used "running away" as an excuse to get away from everything. But there's the other part of them that knows if they went back today by themself.... nothing would change. It doesn't matter how much they beg, how much they yell, how much they break, or much they try to argue and rationalize-- they will simply be ignored and patronized.

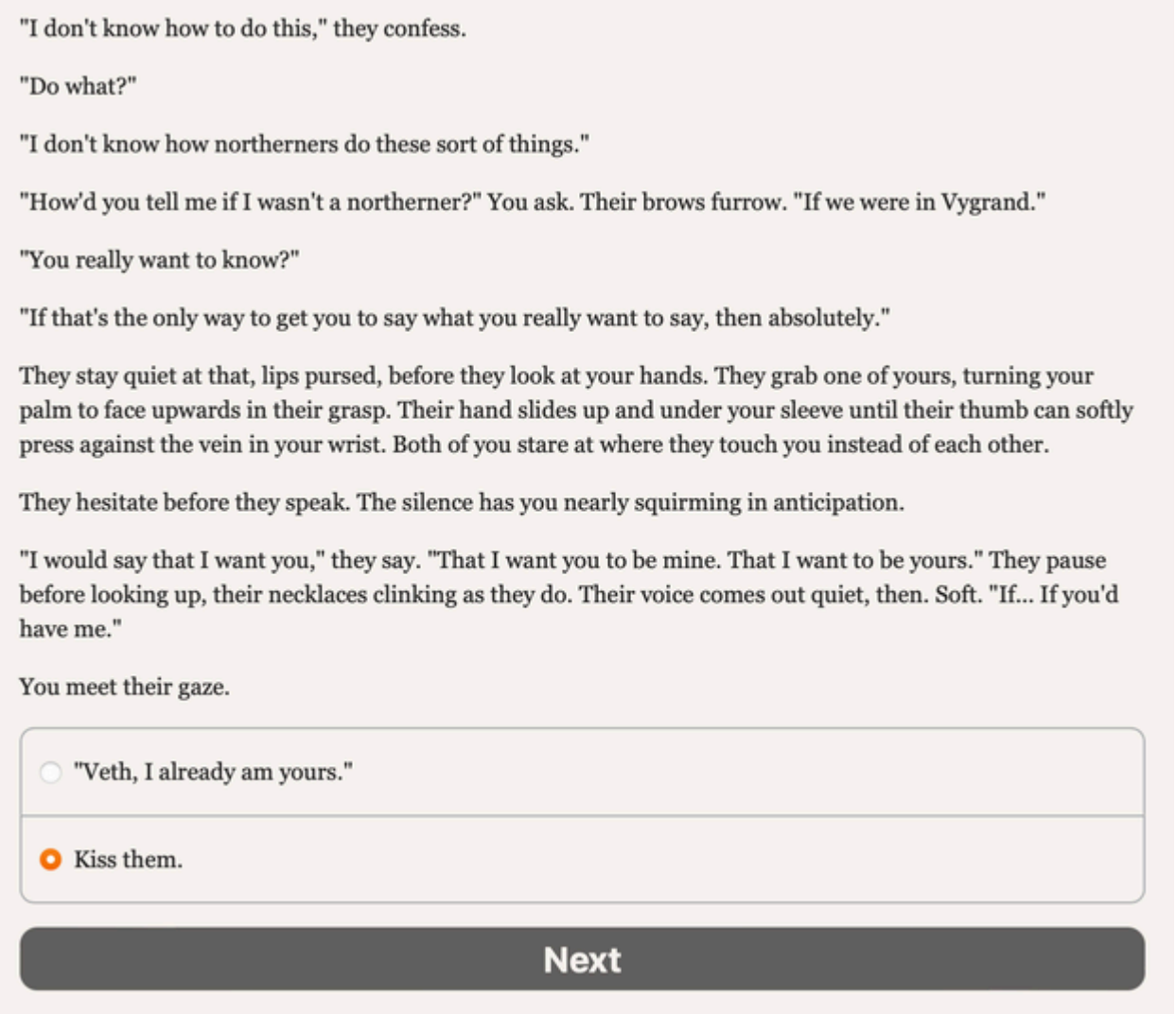
That is a fact that hurts them greatly. They remember and miss a home that was never there to exist in the first place.

Z: Zero - What is the best way to comfort them without touching them?

Honestly, touch is a big part of comfort for Vethna, but if it was off the table I think they'd greatly enjoy just confiding in someone. They need to be told that they're not weak for being empathetic-- that a

reluctance to be ruthless isn't something that's "wrong" despite what Vygrand may say.

On top of that, I also think they'd enjoy being read to a lot. Their mom used to read to them when they didn't feel good, so I think it would remind them of their childhood a lot, which would comfort them (if not make them a little sad). They're a big fan of gothic horror and romance as a genre.



Confession... 👀 (Vethna)

Oct 21, 2022

I told myself I wasn't going to post this but I just *had* to. I have no self-control 😔 Still gonna make you guys wait for the actual *kiss* scene though. Have to keep some things hidden after all...

There's going to be three variations of the Vethna confession scene based on MC's confidence levels in the relationship. This scene (and the knuckle kissing one) are all variations of a more dominant MC. MCs who are more in the middle or more submissive will see completely different confession scenes!

You move behind them to sit down at the fountain. The coldness of the water can be felt radiating from it, a few rogue splashes landing on your arm as you settle on the stone. Vethna turns to look at you, expression curious yet uncertain before you raise a hand to beckon them closer. You can see the stubbornness in their eyes even for a request as simple as that, and yet they take the steps required to stand in front of you, one of their hands sliding into yours and the other quickly following suit.

They're cold.

You give their hands a squeeze, thumbs runnng over the countless rings that cover their fingers. You haven't gotten to see them upclose before, though they seem to be made of a mix of bronze and gold and countless expensive gems. You bet just one of them would be enough to buy a wing of the palace.

- ○ Blow air on their hands.
- ○ Cover their hands with yours.
- ◉ Kiss their knuckles.

Next

You feel tightness in your chest as you pull their hands closer. They oblige the request, taking a step forward to stand between your legs as you squeeze their hands within your grasp. You keep your eyes trained on theirs as you lean forward, and you can feel the way Vethna's hands go tense before you brush your lips against their knuckles. The skin of even their hands is soft, and you can hear the quiet gasp that escapes them when you fully press your lips against their skin.

"MC." They whisper your name quietly. So quietly you almost don't hear it beyond the sound of the fountain. You know they've said it for no other purpose than just saying it, and when you pull back from the kiss you find yourself resting your forehead against their hands, eyes closed: pledging yourself to them in a way. When you pull away you find them watching you like a hawke, their grip on you like an iron vice before they turn to the side and suck in a breath.

"Vethna." You coo out their name the same way they said yours, and their brows pinch together at the sound. "What did you want to tell me?" You whisper.

"I think you already know what it is."

"So remind me."

Kiss their knuckles.

Oct 15, 2022

This month is dedicated to finishing Vethna + Amilia's dialogue branches along with Vethna's romance lock-in (for the Nikke poly or Vethna solo route only), so expect more than a few looks at this scene... 👀

Hurt/Comfort A-Z Headcanons: Nikke Ivante

Oct 6, 2022

A: Alleviate - How do they go about relieving persistent physical pain?

Nikke tends to just wither it out from pure stubbornness, and, most of the time, no one around him will really notice his discomfort unless they make a point of watching him closely. Nikke's good at masking any pain he feels, and even more used to having to get on with life while being hurt. Most who come from Vrithka are similar. They don't have access to fancy drugs or maesters or *magic*-- they only have what grows around them. And if you can't find one of the rare plants that *do* help with pain, then you're shit out of luck.

... with that being said... he's not above taking swigs of liquor from a flask throughout the day when the pain's bad.

B: Bedridden - How do they behave when they're sick?

He'll put on a brave face and go on about life as if he's feeling completely normal, but he'll be sniffling more than normal and will be more lethargic and slow. You know Nikke's sick when you toss him something to catch and end up accidentally hitting him in the face because he couldn't raise his hands in time. *Or* because he'll just end up completely falling asleep in the middle of the day in the weirdest places (weird for even him).

He'll always complain that he's fine and doesn't need to rest, and he *will* put up a fight if you try to get him to go on bed rest. That being said, once he's down... he's down. When he's sick is one of the few times he'll actually prefer sleeping in a bed rather than outside, and he'll just curl up in a little ball and *sleep*. If you go out of your way to care for him to any extent he'll get all crabby in a flustered way, mainly because he's not used to being taken care of *at all.* He's always been the one caring for others, so for someone else to care for him means a *lot.*

Plus... when he's sick he's always willing to cuddle. Take advantage of it while you can (don't worry-- when you get sick from proximity he'll take care of you too).

C: Cling - Whose physical touch is considered most welcome in their minds when they are in need? Is there a specific type of touch they respond well to?

Nikke's hot and cold when it comes to touch. A general rule is that he's fine with abrasive, rough, or firm touch regardless of who it comes from (a complete stranger could squeeze his shoulder and lean in close to ask him something and he couldn't care less). But if someone touches him softly or lightly, he

tends to get pretty uncomfortable and annoyed regardless of who it is with a few exceptions here and there.

When it comes to whose touch Nikke wants when he's in "need" however... it'll likely be no one at all or the Commander. Jost isn't a caring person, and, quite frankly, if she were to get all touchy-feely out of concern Nikke would be concerned someone kidnapped the real Jost and replaced her with a shitty clone. His dad was never affectionate in any way that kind or gentle, and his mom can't even stand to look Nikke in the face nonetheless offer maternal care or comfort.

So, there's no one for Nikke to rely on when it comes to physical comfort at all unless he's with the Commander, and even then, he's too scared to ever actually *ask* for it. He'll likely seek it out of his own volition, but it might be easy to accidentally push him away when he needs you. It's hard to tell when Nikke's being super touchy-feely because he wants to annoy you vs. when Nikke's being super touchy-feely because he feels lonely and needs company.

When it comes to touch, Nikke's a fan of having his hair braided and otherwise just being the big spoon with MC and squeezing them tight-- it's an action he finds comforting (an action *most* gorgons find comforting).

D: Deathbed - How would they react if they realized they may not recover from their injuries?

Disbelief and anger. He's so used to being able to get over anything that receiving the news he's *not* going to get better this time would just completely take him off-guard. He'd have a hard time processing it and an even harder time accepting it. So much of his identity is built off of being headstrong and charging into anything without having to double think it-- not being able to do that anymore would be a big change for sure, one he wouldn't take to too easily.

E: Emergency - What is their gut reaction when someone they care about is hurt?

Rage. You can see how mean Nikke gets if you attack Jost during the parade or otherwise insult her while attempting to mess with Nikke's head in Chapter 5 during the spar. In both instances, Nikke gets incredibly aggressive to the point he wins against the Commander with relative ease in a situation where he otherwise wouldn't.

Family means everything to Nikke. When they're under threat or attack, he goes into a mode where all he sees is red. He's a protector through and through, and he's great at balancing "anger at those who hurt you" with "care and concern for you because you got hurt."

And gods help anyone who tries to stand between him and those he cares for. Even if the person is using logic and is 100% in the right, Nikke's willing to hurt them if necessary to get to the person he cares about. Nikke's stubborn and loyal. It's a dangerous combination-- both his biggest strength and greatest weakness.

F: Fight - Are there circumstances under which they would not accept treatment or care? If so, what are they?

If for one reason or another there weren't enough supplies to take care of everyone, then Nikke would reject treatment in favor of those he cares about being taken care of first. *Otherwise*... no, Nikke would never refuse treatment. He's stubborn, but not stupid (okay, well... not *always* stupid), and he's not going to turn away the chance to feel better just to prove a point.

For example, if Nikke and a Commander he hated were both in the middle of a battle and he got hurt and MC offered to help, he'd take it, even if he literally despises everything MC does. He wants to live another day, and sometimes that means working with people you really don't wanna work with.

G: Ghosts - How has their past shaped the kind of comfort they respond to best?

Nikke's father was abusive. He didn't *want* to hurt his kids, he didn't dislike them or blame them for anything, but he became so focused on them being perfect fighters to survive the Taipan that he ignored the fact they were *children.* When the twins messed up, they'd have to pay for it, and as a result Nikke often took the blame for Jost's ambitious stunts when they failed, meaning he took the brunt of Arman's rage. However, the other thing about Arman is that he's an "all or nothing" man-- as in, you have to endure his anger to also get any sort of affection from him, or he otherwise ends up ignoring you entirely. So, while Nikke often withstood abuse from Arman, he was also much closer to Arman than Jost was emotionally.

Jost was jealous because of this, as she was second place to both her parents. It made her resent Nikke, and as the twins got older Jost left the island and was, long story short, a major dick to Nikke for seemingly no reason. When Arman died in the Battle of Tethras, Nikke's mom went into a deep horrible depression she's yet to get out of. She partially blames Nikke for Arman's death, and can barely stand to even look at Nikke most days due to his resemblance to Arman.

So, long story short, the closest thing Nikke had to affection growing up was sharing whiskey with his father after gruesome fights on the rooftop of his house and eating meals his mom made for him. As a result, he finds both of those scenarios comforting-- making Nikke a meal is bound to make him genuinely happy, and if you ever piss him off a good way to reconcile is over a shared bottle of some cheap alcohol. Nikke's a simple man. Showing up at all, being around him and sharing in his company, is a comfort in itself most days.

H: Home - What things (objects, sensations or people) remind them they’re safe after a scary situation?

His blade.

There's one dagger that Nikke always carries on him-- and it's the one he took from his dad when he died. He always has it, and often fiddles with it when he's nervous or bored. When he's panicked and anxious, however, he'll sometimes prick his finger or otherwise nick himself. The pain of it usually snaps him back into reality, and just the engravings and texture of the hilt of the blade itself provide a great amount of comfort to him. You'll know he's scared about something if his thumb keeps running over the leather hilt-- chances are he's trying to calm himself and doesn't even realize he's doing it.

Otherwise, Nikke has a little quirk in battle where he'll double pat someone on the back quickly as a little hello and to let the person know that he's there. It's a little way he shows support, and if MC did it back to him he'd enjoy it greatly. It's a quick way to reassure one another without having to stop the actual fight, and it lets him know that you're still alive. After battles, Nikke tends to squeeze the shoulders of his companions and the people he cares about. If he ever does it to you, you'll know you're on his good side.

I: Isolation - How do they soothe themselves when no one is around to soothe them?

Nikke's default emotion is anger, most of the time. Anytime he's nervous, upset, or sad, he gets aggressive, and when left to deal with it himself it usually manifests itself as destruction, whether that be of himself or the things around him. And then, 9 times out of 10, he's left feeling sad and bitter about what he did and regretting it heavily only to repeat the cycle all over again.

He's a very confrontational person. He's used to being able to *hit* the thing or person he doesn't like. When he can't... he doesn't respond well. He wasn't taught to be mindful or emotionally healthy-- he was taught to weaponize his emotions to survive a fight.

J: Joy - When was the first time they were truly happy after going through something terrible?

Nikke was 17 when he joined the Taipan. The months leading up to the initiation were brutal-- his dad was ten times worse than usual and Nikke and Jost were both left suffering for it. Nikke's emotional state was deteriorating quickly and tensions were thick in the family to the point neither Jost nor Nikke were coming home at night (nor could they stand to be around each other).

The initiation itself was brutal, bloodthirsty, and cruel-- a series of fights to the death until only a few remained. Nikke was backed into hurting people he grew up with-- people he knew for years. The hazing that followed was worse, however, and Nikke found himself being tortured and terrorized for a week before he earned the beginning of the many tattoos he has now (fun fact-- every scale in a Taipan tattoo is a person killed and/or a job finished).

It was a time in his life when he felt *really* isolated-- and it didn't help that Jost seemed completely unfazed by the killings and seemed happy just to have the attention + approval of the others. He went through a pretty bad rut for nearly three years just working jobs and trying to make a name for himself/run away from his situation. And then, three years later, he came to a standstill. He had nothing left to prove. He was a sort of prodigy to most on the island and was respected by the Taipan and it meant absolutely *nothing* to him.

So he went back home (there was nowhere else left to go) and it was only after three years away on a search for glory that Nikke realized how much his home meant to him. He was forced to grow up a lot in those years, forced to learn to find joy in the small things (or find joy in nothing left at all). So, I guess I would say the first time he felt happy after all this would be when he went home and was actually able to see how all the shitty things he did actually *did* help his clan-- how it kept them under the protection of the Taipan, how it kept them fed and safe, things Nikke himself wasn't guaranteed growing up. Seeing

his community and how they relied on him gave him a purpose, and Nikke found (and still continues to find) joy in taking care of them all both directly + indirectly.

K: Kindness - Do they believe they deserve the comfort they receive? Why or why not?

Most of the comfort Nikke's received has been a toxic sort of "brotherly" bond way with other criminals + Taipan members. It's the "shake it off and get over it" mentality paired with the "we're all bonded by our shitty circumstances in life." It's not a mentality Nikke genuinely enjoys, but one takes what one can get. As for if he thinks he deserves it all... I think his honest answer would be he doesn't know. It feels selfish and wrong to want more in life-- like he's stupid for thinking more is even *achievable*. But at the same time, life as it is now just feels... *wrong*. It's all gonna have to collapse eventually, he knows that, but he can't imagine what the hell his life is gonna look like when it does.

Otherwise, Nikke is sort of idolized back in his village. The kids love him a *lot* and he's like the communal big brother to everyone. However, because Nikke's a leading figure to a small, vulnerable village, it's a mix of "support" and "relentless scrutiny" by the other adults. Despite the pressure that comes with the job, I think it's something Nikke enjoys a lot. I don't think *he* realizes it, but it's an incredibly similar dynamic to the one he had with his dad.

And if someone were to show Nikke genuine, non-conditional comfort and support? I'm not sure he'd know how to react. He'd be like a sketched-out animal that's waiting for the other shoe to drop. What's the catch? What do you want? How long is it until you get bored by the whole "caring" charade? It's not that he doesn't think he *deserves* it, it's just that he's never had someone actually stick around before.

L: Levity - What or who helps them take their mind off of the circumstances?

Joking around. Nikke uses humor as a coping mechanism 99% of the time. The 1% he doesn't, it's because he's so pissed or worried that there's no chance of coping with anything.

Nikke likes to make light of serious situations because he can address just how terrible everything is without getting too depressed by it. He's not ignoring it, he's not shoving his emotions down, he's just channeling them in a way that allows him to still be productive (and a bit vindictive). A lot of the time he ends up offending the people around him, but as Nikke says-- "if you weren't busy sticking your nose in other people's shit, you wouldn't be crying about the stench."

Nikke's kind of funny because his dark humor is taken personally almost *all* the time-- and I'd say only 50% of the time is he actually doing it because he dislikes the person. For example, a lot of the jokes Nikke makes in Chapter 4/5 aren't genuinely malicious. He doesn't hate Sabir or Vethna at all. He just finds the situation fucked, and he copes with it by making not-so-great pointed jokes that others don't find too funny.

M: Music - Is there a song that comforts them? Why is it comforting to them?

Yet again answering this in a "modern AU" sort of way. I think Nikke's favorite music genre would probably be Midwest Emo (though general alt/indie rock works too). If I had to pick specific songs...

Father by The Front Bottoms and Seventeen Going Under by Sam Fender. They're just songs I can imagine him jamming to with headphones on.

N: Nostalgia - What things that comforted them as a kid still work today? Does anyone know that?

Patting his back, squeezing his shoulder, ruffling his hair, knocking bodies playfully, etc. Anything that's a sort of "rough" form of affection. It's how his dad showed affection and, once upon a time, Jost too. It's not just a "Nikke's family" thing either, though-- roughhousing as a form of affection is more than a common thing in Vrithka. *Because* it's so common in Vrithka, I wouldn't necessarily say it's just a thing that comforts him because it was done when he was young but also because it reminds him of home. And it's not a secret either-- anyone in the village who's somewhat close to him knows that it comforts him. It's like how we know hugs are often seen as a source of comfort to most people-- it's just a cultural thing.

However, another thing that comforts him *big* time is braiding his hair. He can do it himself easily, but his mom used to braid his hair when he was growing up, and even as an adult before his dad's death. *That* reminds him of his youth a lot. Of his mom. It gives him that nostalgic feeling of something you loved dearly but can't quite get back in the exact same way it was before.

O: Overworked - Who or what tells them to stop working and take care of themselves?

Prior to the Circle but after he joined the Taipan his mom was the one who knocked some sense into him when he was getting a little too "martyr in waiting" for her tastes. She'd force him to sit down and eat a meal. He'd always say he was going to go back out and work right after... except each and every time he'd get all sleepy from eating too much and end up passing out and napping for a good hour or so.

Nowadays... I think the people in his clan generally look out for him and try to take care of him, but no one is really able to *force* him to take a break like his mom used to. Gods know it would take a truly brave soul with how stubborn Nikke is to even try.

Otherwise... Nikke won't stop working until he physically *can't.* And even then, I'm sure he'd still find a way. That being said... he only works for people and things he cares for. I'm sure the Commander will see plenty of Nikke lazing about and being generally unhelpful during their mission...

P: Please - Have they ever begged for someone to comfort or stay with them? What was that incident like?

Yes.

After the war, Nikke was in a pretty fragile state following the death of his dad and Jost being injured. Naturally, he turned to his mom for some comfort only for her to completely reject him for the first time.

He begged her to not push him away. Begged her to just look at him. And I mean beg in the most literal sense. She refused his every request. Things have gotten better since then, but that first rejection...

Thinking about the months after his dad's death leaves a bitter taste in Nikke's mouth. It's something he's sensitive about even now, years later.

Q: Questions - Are they eager to talk about what or why they're hurting? Why or why not?

Depends...

In general, he's not half as angsty as the others when it comes to the "mysterious" factor. If someone he doesn't like or is a stranger with tries to pry into his personal life he's gonna deflect with a sarcastic quip-- otherwise, if it's a friend... he'll *still* give a sarcastic quip but is also pretty willing to open up about how he's feeling and where his head is at.

He's surprisingly candid when it comes to that stuff and is an odd sort of mix of "fatalistic" and "optimistic." Like... he believes everything is going to end terribly but somehow everything's also going to somehow be okay in the end. I think in general in tries to keep things light-hearted, but if it's something *super* serious then he'll be serious too. Having a genuine late-night heart-to-heart with him is probably a pretty common and achievable thing to have. He also won't reject help either... if he's worried about something or physically recovering from an ailment and you offer support, he's not gonna push it away to try and appear strong.

But when it comes to romantic ailments... all that goes flying right out the fucking window. Damn hypocrite.

R: Relief - How do they react to the realization that they will soon be fully recovered?

Excited. Nikke's like an antsy preteen when he's wounded-- he keeps trying to get out of bed, somehow ends up doing the exact things you tell him *not* to do, and insists he's fine and that he totally feels good enough to get back up and out of bed again. So once he's *actually* healed enough to get out of bed and hobble around he's thrilled, even if he's aching or moving the speed of a snail.

S: Scared - What would it take for them to admit that they're scared?

Anything. If he's scared, he's gonna say he's scared regardless of who's around. If something's scary... it's scary. And chances are, the people around him are scared too. Might as well point out the obvious, yeah? Nikke was blatantly freaked out by the blood room and the whole "god speech" Marcelle gave, and he didn't make much of a point to hide it even when surrounded by enemies because of that exact reasoning.

However... 75% of the time he's not going to be serious about it. He's not gonna mutter a low, dramatic admission of fear but rather deliver an upbeat, smart-ass comment about how fucked the situation is. He's gotta stick to his brand. *But...* an exception might be made for people he's *really* close with. People he considers family. *They* might have a chance of hearing Nikke candidly and honestly admit his fears about life.

However, there's one situation in which Nikke would purposely hide his fear, and that's if his fear would scare those around him. For example, if he knew people were relying on him to keep his cool, then he'd keep his cool and stay quiet. MC's hurt and frightened? Nikke's gonna downplay his fright. Nikke's hurt bad and those around him are worried? He's gonna downplay his fright, etc, etc, etc.

T: Time - How long does it take for them to feel better after an ordeal or illness? Do they tend to lie about how soon they feel better?

He bounces back pretty quick from things. He's had a rough childhood and living in Vrithka alone requires someone to be thick-skinned. If you're not... well, you die. And trust me when I say there's plenty to be traumatized by as a kid growing up on that island, whether it be the horrible weather or terrifying monsters that lurk in the jungles and bogs. Because of that, Nikke's able to get over stuff like that pretty easily-- though he tends to do that by using humor.

Otherwise, he gets over sicknesses quick too, and it's pretty hard for him to get sick to begin with. Give him three days-- maybe four-- and he'll be completely back on his feet no matter the sickness. He may or may not be prone to saying he's fine earlier than he should be, but not to the point it's dangerous. He'll just deny that he's still feeling the effects of his illness.

U: Ugly - What part of their recovery process are they ashamed of, if any?

I don't think he's a fan of the whole "being vulnerable" thing. He puts on such a large, aggressive, big persona, and that only works because he's able to back it up with his physical nature. But when he's bed bound and in pain he isn't able to truly be himself. He needs to rely on others, and in his vulnerable state other people can see him as who he really is... which isn't just some sarcastic asshole but also just... a person. Nikke. He's Nikke.

It's not that he's *ashamed* of relying on others-- I don't think he's ashamed of any part of the healing process-- but I do think the sudden forced intimacy of the situation takes him off-guard. It's just so... domestic? Good news is that even when he's hurt he's a good sport and is able to make light of otherwise awkward situations.

V: Valiant - Has anyone told them they were brave for facing what they did? How would they react if someone did?

Nikke gets praised pretty regularly, whether that be by his clan or whatever group of traveling companions he's been thrown with (other Taipan, complete strangers). MC meets Nikke under incredibly terrible circumstances, but *normally* Nikke's a pretty funny and pleasant person to be around. A little less so when he hates your guts and you're inadvertently responsible for the death of his family.

However, I think Nikke isn't told "you're so brave" so much as people say "you're such a dumbass" in a bewildered and amazed way... which is kinda the same thing, no?

Point is, Nikke's so brave that he's just stupid. He gets hurt pretty badly on the regular, so it's not really something emotional for him or worth being told "he's brave" for. He pulls stupid stunts and doesn't take

his own life seriously-- he's dumb. He knows that, and if anyone tries to twist it any other way he'll be quick to correct them. He didn't do anything to be noble-- he did it because there was no way he *wasn't* going to.

W: What? - What was the worst injury they've ever received?

When Nikke and Jost were teens they were sent out to the forest to hunt a lot to hone their skills. They encountered some pretty terrifying beasts, but one time they made the mistake of wandering into a bunyip's territory.

Both Nikke and Jost got hurt badly-- though Nikke ended up getting grabbed by the thing and dragged underwater. He ended up in its mouth and got skewered in the hip by its tusk. Now *that* was awful. He was effectively used as a chew toy before he managed to get away with Jost's help. He wound up with a broken hip paired with a terrifyingly large hole in his abdomen and several more open wounds from its claws and other teeth.

It took way longer than he would've liked to heal up properly, mostly due to the broken hip which had to heal *just* right. However he got some super sick scars out of it and one *hell* of a story-- so that's a plus, right?

He'll never go back to that part of the island again though. Ten years have passed since the event and he *still* hasn't been back.

X: Xenas - Do they see anyone as an inspiration in their recovery? Does their inspiration know about this?

Yet again, I wouldn't use the word "inspiration" so much as I'd say he has this pressure to live up to his Father's expectations of him (much like Syfyn and her own mother). Nikke has this strange mix of hatred and love for his Dad, and for as much as he wants to be nothing like him he finds himself comparing himself to him constantly.

His dad was tough and stubborn and quick to ire... all traits Nikke can't deny having. As a result, he copies his dad in recovery in a lot of ways both intentionally and unintentionally. He wants to be as tough as his dad was-- wants to be a protector for the clan-- but at the same time, Nikke's not willing to break his body apart just to prove his strength like his dad was.

I don't think Arman (his dad) was ever aware of this, though. He just assumed both Jost + Nikke hated him completely and that was that-- clear-cut and simple. I don't think he'd even believe you if you told him about it directly.

Y: Yearn - What gesture, person or thing do they desperately want, but would never actually ask for?

Nikke's upfront about everything except *one* thing. He outwardly wants his mom's affection even though he's not getting it anytime soon. He's not ashamed of that. He hates and misses Jost at the same time, and he's candid about that. Hells, there's even an old quilt from his childhood that he's oddly protective

about and even *that* is something he's fine admitting (it reminds him of the sweet innocence of childhood, okay?). But *romance?*

It's a sore spot for him, and he'd absolutely be too stubborn to ask for the company/support of someone he was longing for while injured. It would be a dead giveaway about his emotions-- not just to the other person, but *to himself*. If he admits he relies on this person, admits that he doesn't just need this person but *wants* them, then he won't be able to hide his emotions anymore. Won't be able to ignore them.

Z: Zero - What is the best way to comfort them without touching them?

Sharing a drink and just talking is always a guaranteed way to get him to calm down and stop worrying, but otherwise, he's also a big fan of games. Darts, checkers, Blackjack, you name it, he'll play it. He's a genuine fan of most games he can play with other people and he finds it a fun way to spend the time. Plus, he's competitive but in a *fun* way-- not the "if I lose I'm going to pout and make passive-aggressive comments for the next hour" way*(*cough* like Vethna *cough*).*

October 2022

Oct 1, 2022

Hello everyone, and happy October! It finally feels like fall and I'm more than ready to get into Spooky Season. Here's some important info!

I've made the switch for Patreon billing so that you're charged on a subscription basis, which means that you'll be charged every month on the day you joined instead of the first of the month. For those of you who have already been long-term Patrons, nothing changes. You'll continue to be billed on the 1st.

Onto content...

The Trial POV switches have reached an end with Nikke's installment-- I considered doing Trystan + Syfyn but realized their POV of the situation wouldn't be interesting enough to write an entire "piece" for. But if anyone has any questions about what's going through their heads during the trial, feel free to put your questions in the comments and I'll do my best to answer them!

The new series of POV switches will be centered around Chapter 5's sparring scenes! Nikke's POV switch will be around the fight you had with him while everyone else will be from the perspective of when Syfyn cuts MC's face on accident (though I might fiddle around with Nikke's to include that scene as well-- it depends on how long everything ends up being!).

Otherwise, I plan to write the third and final part of the Dragon Story this month along with doing **two** headcanon lists. So, all in all, this is what's planned or October:

- Nikke Hurt/Comfort Headcanons
- Vethna Hurt/Comfort Headcanons
- Amilia POV Switch (The Scratch)
- The Dragon Story Pt. 3

There might be some sneak peeks of Chapter 5 pt. 2 as I begin to work on it more. Also... I may or may not be working on a little festive Patron exclusive side story to be released during the more festive seasons... There'll be more about that in the future 😉👀

The Trial | Nikke Ivante | P.O.V. Switch

Sep 30, 2022

AN: MC has an aggressive personality in this!

Well... *shit.*

Nikke's never been good with words-- that was always Jost's forte as she wrote away in that little red notebook of hers. But Nikke? He's always been blunt. Best to get straight to the point, right? And the point, as of now, is that he's waddling around in knee-deep shit.

He *knew* this was a bad idea from the beginning, and so did Jost. He just can't figure out why she came back to Vrithka to do it anyway. Jost was more than happy to cut tail and run regardless of who it was she was leaving behind, but for some Gods awful reason this time she decided to stick it through, to come back from whatever ruins she'd been exploring and risk her life for Vygrand of all the gods-forsaken places.

And now she has a set of broken ribs, Nikke thinks bitterly. All he can hope is that she's alive and not rotting away on some rooftop somewhere, an idea that he attempts to make light of but finds his stomach twisting at.

He can't lose her. He hates that he can't, wishes that he could just forget her and never turn back. She's selfish, and mean, and *cruel*. But she's his sister. And somehow all of the terrible things she's done get outweighed by the few moments they can stand to tolerate one another. The few moments she's not running away to see the world as if that'll fix the pathetic, shattered thing that they call their family.

And it's because of this fact, and the fact that Nikke would rather be boiled alive than risk his clan, that he keeps his mouth shut during the interrogation on where Jost went and where he came from. It lasts days, he thinks, but he can't be for certain. The time goes slow as his nails are ripped out and sections of his skin and scales are flayed like they plan on turning him into a handbag. Even so, he finds Plaithus's "torture" methods to be child's play, and he makes sure to let them know it.

He hisses and snaps his jaws when they get too close. Even with the muzzle on they still recoil like frightened prey, recoiling in disgust at the drool and venom that drips down Nikke's chin. He laughs at their fear-- laughs at the fact they're more afraid than he is-- and makes a mockery of their knives and masks. They get more ballsy at the insults, he notes-- and if Jost were here she'd tell him to shut the fuck up because what kind of sadistic ass *wants* to be tortured worse? She'd be right, of course-- what he's doing is stupid. But at some point, he did so many stupid things he passed a threshold of some sort, one that meant he'd made so many terrible decisions that one more bad one couldn't possibly make things any worse. So, he commits to the role. Not because he *likes* the pain, but rather because he likes to make humans squirm despite it. Everyone has their guilty pleasures... right?

At some point, they realize he's not going to spill. One of them recommends cutting out his tongue then, standing all tall, shoulders back and voice lowering in a way Nikke thinks is meant to be intimidating. Nikke invites them to try, opens his mouth all wide and runs his tongue over his fangs. They threaten to sedate him to do it.

At that point, Nikke thinks maybe he really should just shut the fuck up. And when that happens, nine times out of ten, it's already too late. He watches them fiddle with needles as he writhes where he's strapped to a table, and though he tries to look nonchalant he knows he's failing spectacularly at it. His tongue? Really? There are only two things that are *worse* than losing his tongue, and that'd be his head and his dick.

Unfortunately, cutting off his tongue or not, Nikke has never been one to beg for anything. So-- losing the tongue it is.

"What do you think you're doing?"

A woman walks into the room-- or maybe she's always been there. Nikke's not entirely sure. She's tall, hands clasped in front of her, and wearing a black and purple gown with an expression cruel enough to rival Jost's.

"Shutting the damn snake up," one of the men growls. The woman watches him unimpressed as he uncaps the needle and flicks it. She doesn't say anything, she doesn't have to. The weight of her stare is enough. Slowly, the man turns to face her.

"Do you recall the Queen ever giving instruction to remove limbs and tongues?"

"But he--"

"I swear to the gods-- I ask you all simple questions and yet your minds struggle to comprehend even those. 'Tis a simple question, Connel, *yes or no?"*

The man swallows. Nikke grins.

"No."

"Good boy," the woman praises. Her attention turns to Nikke then, her grey gaze hidden behind a feathered mask. She walks slowly, deliberately, and *pompously,* and once she gets close the only thing Nikke can smell is floral powder. She leans forward to look at him, eyes narrowing in scrutiny before she abruptly pulls back, expression cold.

"Take him to dungeons. He can be useful to us yet."

The disappointment of the men is palpable, and Nikke doesn't bother to hide the wind grin on his face. Saved by the bell, it seems. And, whatever the Queen and her cronies demand, the people must do.

Slowly, the men look at Nikke. Even with the masks on, Nikke feels like he can see their expressions fall at the shit-eating smile on his face. He's going to make their lives miserable, and they know it.

The walk to the cells is brief, but Nikke can work with that. He cusses and writhes and twists, makes sure his blood smears on his captors and his elbow smashes into their ribs. It takes nearly six of the bastards just to keep him walking, and when they finally manage to keep his limbs from flailing Nikke resorts to howling and yelling just to make sure everyone knows who the new kid is on the block.

And also because, in all admittance... he is in *great* fucking amounts of pain, and even he needs a stress reliever sometimes. Only sometimes, though.

They throw him into the cell and rush to lock the door, and Nikke's hands grab hold of the bars and shake as they walk away. The thought of them never feeding him vaguely enters his mind, and his lips twist in response. He *knew* he and Jost should've eaten before the parade. Something of more sustenance than his pocket jerky, at least.

The days are uneventful, and it doesn't take a genius for Nikke to realize the Commander's only a few cells down. He tried calling to them to no avail, and when he settled to crouching near the corner of his cell where he could peek at their feet, he realized they'd practically been out cold for days. The only time they're even somewhat coherent is when they wake from their sleep panting and groaning only to collapse back into their dreams where they writhe and whine like some sort of broken beast.

It's pathetic, in all honesty. Nikke considers launching the dagger he managed to smuggle inside his pants at the Commander through the bars when their neck comes into view. Sure, he'd totally be killed for killing the Commander, but Jost would be successful, and hell, looking at the sorry state the Commander's in now, Nikke thinks it might be a mercy killing.

But he doesn't do it. Mainly because the Commander shifts right out of view before he can commit.

The Commander's groans of agony continue. At first, it was almost delightful to listen to. Then it became a weird sort of white noise. But then they got louder, and ten times more annoying, and now Nikke's constantly fighting the urge to rip his hair out or stab himself and--

A sharp gasp from the Commander's cell. Nikke listens carefully as they even out their breathing, listens to the way they shift on the floor. They're up. Actually awake.

And then they let out an annoyed huff and groan-- the fiftieth in the past hour, Nikke thinks.

"Could you *please* for the love of the Gods shut the hell up?" Nikke spits. Okay, maybe Nikke does beg for some things, but only after a week of the psychological torture that is listening to the Commander's huff and puffs. Besides-- he needs info, they've got it. They need info... he's sure he's got some.

At least, that's what he thinks until he watches the Commander scramble about as if Envy* itself had slipped into their cell and was trying to rip their face off. For one moment, Nikke is well and truly speechless, his grin turning into a blatant grimace.

"Holy fuck you're stupid," Nikke mutters.

Their head snaps in his direction then, pupils reflective in the darkness of the cell. He's got them hooked. Now he just needs to reel them in.

Their discussion doesn't last long before there's the sound of jingling keys and the smell of *food.* More than food, *meat.* It has Nikke's mouth drooling, tongue slipping past his lips to smell better, though he knows it's not for him long before the man carrying it marches right past his cell and gives it to the Commander. He eyes it like a predator hidden in bushes though he more resembles a pathetic starving idiot in a shitty cell. The tray makes a low sound as it's dragged over the stone floor by the Commander and into their cell, the man who brought it in marching right back out again.

A moment of silence where Nikke does nothing but sniff the air. And then he sees it-- the Commander's hand shooting out to roll an apple across the floor. Nikke's surprised it makes it to his cell, and out of stubbornness, he considers letting it roll right past. Make the Commander feel a fool, keep himself from admitting to his hunger. But even Nikke Ivante has limits (much to his own annoyance) and his hand shoots out to grab the fruit before his fangs sink into the skin.

He hates fruit. So. Damn. Much. Always hurts his stomach. But beggars can't be choosers.

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Nikke sleeps in fits in the corner of his cell. In truth, he's willing to admit he's losing his patience. Hells, he's never been patient outside of a cell with the world at his fingertips, how the hell was he supposed to be patient in here? Maybe that's why he's so quick to pick up on the new scent in the halls-- the smell of too fancy cologne. His tongue darts out as he sits up in his cell, body crouched low at the sound of approaching footsteps. A door creeks open. Hesitant steps approach, and an expensively clad figure walks past and goes right to the Commander's cell.

It happens like clockwork-- the Commander waking up and questioningly calling out the man's name.

Sabir.

Nikke's been listening a lot.

Sabir du Vaelas. Silven fucking Viper. The man Jost seemed insistent on double-crossing.

Fuck, fuck and *double-fuckin-shit-fuck.* Nikke preferred to make friends on the field-- that way when shit like this happened, he'd have someone in his corner to count on. But Jost? She seemed hell-bent on making enemies everywhere she went, and *now*, now Nikke is stuck sitting around as he shuffles closer to the bars to listen to the two Plaithians speak to one another in low voices, conspiring in a plan he is clearly not a part of.

Vethna-- the Archmage's kid-- and Amilia (that one Nikke doesn't know) are here. Friends of the Commander, Sabir claims. Nikke bites back a huff. Of course that arrogant fuck somehow has a larger circle than him. *Fuckin' Jost.*

A prison break. Of fucking course. How so incredibly convenient. He glares through the bars at the "Viper" (stupid name) as he walks back out, and like flies on shit, he's bugging the Commander. He knows it's desperate. Knows it's stupid. But he's cornered.

He lets out a low whistle. The Commander tilts their head in his direction, expression already annoyed. Kinda sweet, really. They already know him so well.

"Well, shit-- now that didn't sound all that legal, Commander." He forces a laugh, forces a grin onto his face that he knows infuriates everyone around him. "Look at you and your little prison escape."

"What's it to you?" The Commander mutters. Nikke waits for a moment, actually takes the time to think through what he's going to say for once.

"Hurts my feelings, is all-- the fact you didn't plan on bringing me along." His voice dips low and he scoots closer to the bars to look at them-- make eye contact. The Commander's eyes narrow like they always do, in a way that screams out danger and has every one of Nikke's senses on high alert.

"Why in the hells would I be dragging you along?" The Commander asks.

"Easy-- because if you don't..." Nikke tilts his head slightly, the corners of his lips quirking upwards as his fang catches on his lip. "I'll squeal like a stuck pig."

They don't look remotely convinced. "No one's been down here in days," they drawl, idly looking at their hands. "There's no one to squeal to."

Nikke bites down on his lip to stop the frown that threatens to form. "Either I get out of here with you," he says, "or I get out of here when they come down to collect your ass and see you're gone. They'll need

someone to hunt you down, and the only one good enough is me."

Nikke knows that's bullshit as he's talking. And so does the Commander. They'd just cut off his head before launching the golden Bird Bitch after them. A shiver threatens to wrack Nikke's spine when he thinks of her boots, how she slammed her foot down onto Jost--

He sucks in a breath. Forces an easy smile. An arrogant one.

"Right," the Commander says. They idly look at their hands. "That's why you're in a cell at the moment right next to me," they cast a glance his way-- "because you're *so* dangerous."

Nikke whistles-- mainly because there's nothing else to do. "Whether you believe me or not doesn't matter. You just got me my free ticket out of here."

The Commander stares him down-- he looks back-- and then they turn away with a huff to crawl deeper into the cell where he can't see them. He bites down on his lip again, this time hard enough to draw blood, before he fiddles with his dagger like he always does, thumb running along its blade.

He never wanted to do this stupid fucking mission in the first place. Never wanted to leave Vrithka, never wanted to listen to *stupid* fucking Xenathris and his stupid fucking ideas. And yet, here he is. *Gods be damned.*

He buries his face into his arms and gnaws at his own skin, staring at the reflection of his eyes in the blade. This is how he goes-- far from home and completely fucking alone, not even knowing if his own sister is alive. The clan will fall, the Taipan will take over, and he'll be too busy rotting to do anything about it.

Nikke hasn't come close to crying much in his life. His father would beat the tears right out of him to guarantee it. But this night, he comes close.

***

Nikke likes to think of himself as an actor. He's had to be.

When he got scared, his dad promised him he'd give him something to be sad about. If he cried, he'd say the same.

His dad never broke his promises.

The day dad died Nikke had to step up-- become a father, a fighter, a healer, a *leader*. But he didn't know how to do much other than kill and throw on a grin in the face of death. It was a skill his father instilled in him by accident. It was the one reaction Nikke could have towards his dad that took him off guard.

His dad threatened him? He'd grin. He'd hit him? He'd laugh. Control. It gave him control even as he was torn into shreds and beaten into the ground. He refused to let the will of others (especially fucking Dad) bring him down. Refused to give them the satisfaction.

So as the guards march in and grab hold of him while he's in the depth of sleep, Nikke pretends to give a shit. He fights and he hisses and he bites (manages to draw blood on one) and he laughs. But deep down, the fight is gone. It's the performance of his life, as far as Nikke's concerned, bellowing down the halls despite the fact his chest feels like an empty fuckin' hole.

His blood stains the tile as he's dragged. Dirt falls from his patched-up pants as the nobles stare at him in disdain, dressed in gowns and suits that are worth more than Nikke's own life. Bitterness twists up within him. Their hatred was easy to refute when he still had some ounce of ego left, but now that he's shackled like a dog it's hard to sing the same tune. Hard to face their malice when he's so clearly outnumbered and vulnerable.

Anger and shame. *Anger and shame.* ***Anger and shame.***

And even in his anger and shame he hears it. Hears one sentence that echoes from the throne room and into the hall, spoken by the Queen herself. *We shall send a small group--*

A flicker of hope-- a resurgence of stubbornness-- and Nikke's suspicions are only further confirmed as he's forced to wait in the hall as the others are brought in one by one into the throne room for punishment: the Sorcerer, coated in blood and filled with enough rage to raze a city, the Fae-- no, the *Vyxl'a*-- with her head bowed and shaking like a leaf.

They're not dying. Not today.

The guards exchange looks with one another and Nikke knows it's time for his own grand entrance-- and an entrance he'll give. He steps forward and yanks on the chains, dragging the guards after him and laughing as they struggle to keep up. A grin crawls onto his face that he doesn't bother to try and stifle, and when one of the guards calls him a "scaly fuck" Nikke only grins wider and barks a laugh.

The room, formerly so eager to spit and yell at the Fae, is silent at his own entry. All the heads turn to look at him-- even the Commander's-- and he basks in the attention. They seem unsure of what to make of him, just like Dad was in the face of his disrespect. Nikke Ivante isn't dying. Not today. And he's going to rub it in everyone's faces.

He'd led to sit by the fae-- and the guards try to yank him down. He refuses to budge-- though when they kick him behind the knee he's forced to collapse. He keeps fighting, of course, until a blade is held against his throat to keep him still. "Woah," Nikke gasps, looking over his shoulder at the guard in mock shock ad fear. "Careful there, flower--"

Nikke barely gets the chance to squeeze his eyes shut before the butt of the blade is slammed against the side of his face. His head spins, his vision momentarily goes black, and his teeth smash against his

tongue. If he was physically capable of it, he'd keep probing-- but much to his dismay (and probably best interest) he can't, tongue swelling in his mouth.

He hears the guard take a step back and away and takes the opportunity to keel over and suck in a shaky breath. Too far, he notes. Yet again-- something he seems incapable of recognizing until after the fact.

Then he feels it. A tentative, hesitant gaze.

He opens a single eye.

The Fae watches him-- and upon being caught freezes. Every muscle in her body goes taut, her expression fearful. He surveys her carefully if not just to watch her squirm in fear. Fae like her are meant to be rulers-- pillars of power and intimidation laced with a malicious lust for joy. But this one... she trembles and shakes like a leaf on a tree. Or at least, she was doing that before now. Now she stands on guard, on full attention. And that's her mistake-- not looking away in fear when she had the chance.

Because Nikke sees it now. Sees the facade, the mask, the *lie*. And she knows he knows.

His lips quirk upwards.

She and him? They're one and the same. *Mythosi*. She can play pretend all she wants-- he doesn't give a fuck. He already knows when push comes to pull she'll be on his side. Undesirables have to stick together and all that.

This isn't the end. No, it's just the beginning-- and Nikke's going to make sure things end his way this time.

Chapter 5 Q&A Answers

Sep 17, 2022

Here it is! I answered as many questions as I could.

If I skipped a question, it's probably because it's **A.)** too spoilery (ex. asking for a major plot point to be revealed) or **B.)** I couldn't figure out a logical answer to it.

Enjoy! :)

Game-Related

1.) Would Amilia know anything about who Mallory is?

Yes.

2.) Has Omaren heard about MC's Exile? What are his thoughts?

He *has* heard about it, but he heard about it a lot later than most due to the remote places he's been traveling. He knows the same details as everyone else, which is that one night the Commander mysteriously "snapped" and killed all their soldiers.

He does *not* believe it's something MC would do, however, and is definitely in a state of denial/disbelief. He's most *definitely* gotten into a few fights with people about the matter.

Rumors have it in the past year or so he's been trying to find the Commander himself-- not that he's been successful in attempting to track down the Commander on his lonesome.

3.) Under the assumption that Marcelle has some sort of sickness, is that something that happened naturally, or does it have a more magical cause?

It's the plague, a magical disease that came from the city of Veshelia in the Solarian Empire. It's origin is said to stem from blood magic intertwined with necromancy. There's a lot of history tied to the disease, but long story short, Plaithus became infected with the disease while Solaria managed to cure it in their own empire while leaving Plaithus to rot.

So far, four members of the royal family have died from the disease upon reaching their later years in life. This includes King Manison + Queen Leliana (Marcelle's grandparents) and King Aridivus + Queen Viola (Marcelle's parents).

4.) Is Marcelle's end goal something she decided to pursue, or is it more of a thing she inherited?

Hm... her end goal is her own, but the situation that has forced her to set such a goal is very much inherited.

5.) Did Freedom play a role in fracturing Fate? I'm guessing they didn't exactly plan to have their essence split in two

No, Freedom held no role in fracturing Fate into pieces. Plaithus + Marcelle were the ones responsible for it.

6.) Are we going to get a chance to talk with Trystan more soon? I really want to know more about their thoughts on...well, Everything that's happening.

You'll see them very briefly in Pt. 2 based on what your hobby is. In Chapter 6, which will be made available on the Patreon, you'll also get one last scene with them before MC heads off on the suicide

mission-- this is the closest to a "goodbye" you get with them.

You'll *then* see them again at the end of Book One depending on your choices, and from there on it's a big blob of "To be decided."

7.) Is there going to be a moment soon(ish) where we actually get to talk with Syfyn? She seems very adamant on not talking at the moment and it is breaking my heart!

Yes-- in Chapter 5, pt. 2!

8.) Can we know a little bit of whats going on in everyone's heads w the commander being back? We get some of it from them but I'm always curious to know, esp w those who don't talk much ~~Syfyn, Marcelle~~ lol

Syfyn is going through a lot of complicated emotions. For the past three years she's put off healing in favor of completely ignoring everything that happened-- and that's not an option anymore. There's also a lot of new facts that have been given to her about what happened that she's struggling to come to terms with-- mainly that MC's massacre was caused by Fate. That being said, it's not easy for her to just forgive MC because it wasn't technically them. Not easy at all.

Trystan is in a similar place. Bottom line-- Trystan is scared of the Commander, both hardened and not hardened. They were ~15 when their closest parental/mentor figure nearly killed them and Syfyn (their *other* closet parental figure). There's a lot of trauma behind that, and the two versions of Trystan are dealing with it in two very different ways. So, mainly, Trystan is just an 18 year old kid struggling to figure out what to do now they're forced to be in close proximity to MC again.

Marcelle feels bad. Really bad. That's all I'm going to say because she's very much *meant* to be an ominous, hard-to-read character. Such is required for the plot.

The Overseer is *incredibly* displeased for several reasons, and in truth MC actually being *back* is probably one of the least important ones. However, all of it ties *back* to MC too, if that makes sense? All of her problems root cause is... well, MC.

9.) How much choice are we going to get in how MC leads? The choice in game currently has categories but I was curious to know if we might still sometimes get a choice in the moment as well :)

Leadership styles work just like the personality stat-- you get complete control over the scenes where you lead, just the leadership style controls what MC's general tone is while doing those things.

For example, all MCs can command the same thing, but based on what your leadership style is you'll go about actually commanding it in a different way, and characters will *react* in a different way. Sometimes you might get a special option based on what MC's leadership style is (ex. Stoic Leader MC being able to pull the group together in a scene where another MC wouldn't be able to).

10.) Just, anything u can share ab Nikke bc I’m a lil obsessed atm and can’t wait to get more interactions

Hmm... People tease him about the whole "tucking his pants into his socks" thing from the art I made of him. However, the reason he does it is because Vrithka is a very swampy area with a *lot* of creepy crawlies, and anyone who's lived in a similar environment *knows* tucking your pants into your socks is a literal life saver. It might look goofy to some, but it definitely serves a purpose!

11.) Sabirs pov seeing the commander in the body basement - it seemed like they were scared of the commander. Will that come up? Or will it take more for him to confront the commander?

There's nothing to confront! Sabir felt unsettled because the Commander was waltzing around with glazed over eyes, rummaging through piles of bodies like it was a regular Tuesday. It is, by all means, a terrifying situation to be in.

His fear had nothing to do with the Commander themself and everything to do with the situation.

12.) My MC hates just about everyone from their previous life (as a commander) apart from Esmerelda. So my question is, given that she is supposed to take over as queen, how would she react/feel if our chosen conviction is burning Plaithus to the ground?

Well... the answer is sort of in the question itself, is it not? She's the soon-to-be Queen of Plaithus, a country she's been raised to respect and self-sacrifice for. While I'm sure the heir would shed no tears over the Council collapsing, or the nobles of the city being humbled, that would be the extent of her apathy.

While Esmerelda is capable of empathizing with MC, she won't ever be truly capable of understanding MC and what they went through just like MC won't ever be able to truly understand what expectations have been placed upon Esmerelda in recent years. The two live on two very different sides of the royal life.

So, if MC went about destroying Plaithus by killing the Royal Family (other than Esmerelda) and actually razing the country...She would not be happy. Not one bit. And I don't think anyone in her position *should* be.

She will *not* be on MC's side if you chose to literally destroy Plaithus. You'll essentially be forcing her hand and pushing her into a corner she most definitely does not want to be in. Things will get real tragic real quick for everyone involved.

13.)Will we get to have a highly satisfying trauma-reveal moment to Syfyn while reveling in her discomfort/anguish of hearing what happened to MC?

Mmm... yes and no. Yes, you'll get the chance to reveal everything to Syfyn (or most things, at the very least), but depending on how you treat Syfyn she's not liable to just sit there and let MC yell at her.

Yes, she'll feel upset about what's been done to MC, yes she might feel guilty, but depending on what you say to her she *will* lash back. Remember, MC is only one perspective of the things that have happened.

If MC can unleash heavy, painful secrets onto characters, it's more than likely the characters can do the same to MC.

14.)If/when we reveal the extent of the trauma MC suffered, would we get to see Nikke express sympathy for MC?

Yes/No. It depends on when he finds out, what MC's relationship to him is, and what MC has done in the past. He's not gonna suddenly switch sides or change all of his views just from hearing what's been done to MC.

In some variations he might think MC deserved it. In some variations, he might admit what was done to them is fucked up, but that's about it. In some variations, he might get furious at what's been done to MC. It's all relative!

Long story short, MC's trauma isn't going to completely change the other characters' opinions of MC just like the other characters' trauma isn't going to completely change how you feel about them.

15.) For past-romanced Sabir (and Syfyn, but mostly Sabir since there was some tasty tasty flavour text about it in his POV), which change in the Commander's personality upset them the most to see? Seeing a sarcastic Commander go all cold and stoic? A genuine and kind Commander becoming angry and aggressive? I need know so I can ensure maximum amount of theoretical angst for my future playthroughs

I think for Sabir, the most painful changes would be Sarcastic + Genuine going to Aggressive + Stoic. To him, he sees that as the light in MC going out, and that is something that pains him deeply. Especially since Sabir is such a jokester and optimist himself, he'd go from regularly bantering with MC to just having to fill the silence with a cynical, jaded Commander. It would take some getting used to for sure, and it's a sure-fire way to hurt his heart if angst is what you're looking for.

As for Syfyn... I don't think she'd care how MC changes. MC + Syfyn have been through a lot-- if you examine the mirror in MC's room it talks about how MC changed after their first war and, in some variations, how Syfyn was there for them.

Syfyn has seen MC change a lot. They grew up together. Syfyn has seen how MC has changed in being pushed away by their mother, seen how MC has changed when becoming Commander, has seen how MC changed during the war. She sees those changes, and adapts. She's MC's second-in-command. It's her job to care for them no matter what without judgement.

16.) For completely theoretical, hypothetical purposes... are the medics who performed the Commander's surgery still at the palace?

Theoretical you say? Hypothetical you claim? Mmhmm.

Some of them are. Some of them aren't. I've been debating squeezing in a scene involving them all at some point in the book, but we'll see when we get there.

17.) I completely understand that the actual reactions will happen in game, so I'm not really asking for specifics, more so in general (because the curiosity is KILLING me), which of the ROs will react the worst/be the most upset seeing the Commander's scars and learning about the surgery? Like on a scale of "okay sorry that sucks but you're alive, moving on" and "It Is Big Angst Time", where would they be?

They're all going to be upset-- no one is going to just move past it all casually, though some may try to cheer MC up about it depending on the situation. Here's a little "blurb" on their general reactions to actually seeing MC bare + vulnerable for the first time (whether that be metaphorical or literal).

Vethna: Vethna is probably the least shocked. While they haven't seen the scarring in its entirety, they've seen glimpses. And while they don't know the specifics of MC's surgery, they *are* aware of the basic details. They'll be good at concealing their initial shock, and will mainly operate as a sort of "mirror" to guide MC through their own emotions + reflect that back to them.

Nikke: His first instinct is to get angry-- but his first reaction is to look after MC. So you might see a flicker of absolute rage on his face that's replaced by pure concern for MC. He's very casual but caring about it-- he won't make MC feel judged at all nor will he make a huge fuss about it, but he'll definitely do his best to comfort MC if he feels they need it.

Jost: Jost will inevitably be *super* late to the party, *however*-- Upon seeing MC's scars she'll be *very* unbiased. No shock, no anger, no sadness. Just acceptance, and an urge to get justice on MC's behalf.

Amilia: Horrified. Honestly, it's going to bother her a lot to look at the scars at first (not because she's repulsed by them, but rather because they remind her of bad things too). It'll be a moment of discovery for both of them. "You showed me all your secrets, I'll show you all of mine."

Sabir: I'm warning you now he *is* going to cry. He has a lot of empathy to give, and seeing how bad MC has been hurt due to him failing the trial is going to be a hard pill to swallow. He won't make it about himself, but he *is* going to have a lot of guilt.

Syfyn: ... :) [Redacted]

Freedom: Freedom already has experienced MC's memories. They've *felt* the pain MC went through. The anger. The confusion. The fear. There's nothing to reveal to them because they already know, but they'll be just as soothing and all-encompassing as they always are.

18.) Okay i absolutely ADORE Marcelle she's my fav character of the exile so i do wonder what was the inspiration behind her ? What made you chose the goth vibe ? Is it Plaithus's Vibe to have a goth ruler or did Marcelle just chose to be an absolute goth queen (quite literally)

Plaithus's rulers have all been pretty stoic in demeanor and dark in how they dress. Plaithus is based off of gothic architecture mixed with baroque, which is interesting since they're pretty different yet compatible vibes.

So the way she dresses is pretty in line for everyone who's come before her. If you're referring to her makeup, there's actually some fun lore behind that!

I've mentioned on tumblr there are the 10 starting Wykna of the realm (the Sources). All of them have specific facial patterns on their skin. Well, rulers in the Old World would often wear face paint that copied certain members of the Source that they followed/wanted to embody the will of.

So, the makeup that Marcelle is wearing is actually a replication of Darkness's patterns-- the first being of creation that ever was.

Long story short, Marcelle dresses pretty standard for where she lives and her family. If you want the out-of-game answer to why she looks the way she does... it was an on the whim thing, if I'm being honest. I knew I wanted her to have a very dark and sleek look since she was a sort of antagonist, so I would say I designed her based on vibes and vibes alone.

19.) I think i remember you mentioning something about how Marcelle started to change when she had that conversation with her father on his deathbed. So without entering too much detail because of spoilers, was the change for her an affirmation that she had to go deeper in her feeling (ex: she knew she had to be ruthless and became even more ruthless after that point) or was it for her a change (totally opposed to that until she saw no better way?)

The latter. This isn't a route Marcelle has ever wanted to go down, but something in her exchange with her Father on the day of his death made her realize she had no choice on the matter. Even the Queen of Plaithus isn't above certain things.

20.) What will happen when Emeline's sanity gets extremely low?

Too spoilery for even here, as I don't want people changing how they play to avoid the consequences. But it'll be nothing good, that I can assure you.

21.) Not me being hungry for Omaren scraps 😳😳, but i wonder. Was he a mythosi, and if so what kind? Alternatively, how did he feel about the MC? I know in some spots MC feels like hes an older brother to annoy, but did he like them? Would it depend on MCs personality at all?

He *is* a *mythosi*, but if I'm being perfectly candid I've yet to decide on what he is. My first goto is that he's a werewolf, but I've since been debating making him something related to thunder/lightning.

And Omaren likes MC! Omaren's relationship is the one thing no one can change (like Syfyn always being best friends with MC at minimum). He'll always have a close, older-brother/dad sort of relationship with MC regardless of MCs personality.

That being said, it's possible he'll disapprove of some of the choices MC made before their exile when he wasn't present anymore (ex. Commanders who forced the magic-users out of Plaithus).

22.) What made esme talk about MC in one playthrough and not in another?

It's just based on if MC got hit by Syfyn (is injured) or if they missed the Fate clue back in Chapter 4 (to fill as a narrative replacement for the "realization" scene that happens in Chapter 5).

However, there's been a bug with the scene that I've been trying to replicate/fix that might be changing that.

23.) What does Marcelle make of the fact that both her children seem to view her as a danger to them? What about the fact that in the case of a good relationship with each other, both her children see the other as a kind of ally against the threat she poses? Is Marcelle more glad that her children's relationship remains strong and that they're willing to work together or disturbed that the thing they feel the need to protect each other from is her?

She feels somber but accepting about it. She always knew it was going to lead to this, though she feels upset now that it's actually happening.

She's more than glad if MC + Esmerelda are close, however, and she'll be very proud/happy if they're both teaming up against her. They'll need to, after all.

Marcelle isn't going to stop what she's doing. She *can't.* MC + Esmerelda will need to rely on one another to one extent or another if things are ever going to end on an even *remotely* happy note.

24.) How did Marcelle react to MC self harming in the dungeon in chap 4? did she know?

Self-harm in Navara isn't the same as self-harm in our world. MC is a *mythosi,* and while MC doesn't have the same super-healing abilities as they did before their exile, they're not as weak as an average person. So, for one, self harm to MC doesn't necessarily cary the same physical risk as it does for us.

Second-- self-harm isn't a shocking, taboo thing in Navara, *especially* for *mythsoi*. Any of the *mythosi* characters in-game have likely engaged in physical harm of some sort or another because, as I said before, it simply doesn't carry as much consequences for them as it does others.

While I imagine Marcelle noticed MC's self-harm, and it's something that would distress her, it's not the same as if such a thing were to be done in our world. You also have to think, this is the same woman who subjected MC to *mythosi* infusions + wykna essence. She's seen MC in pain. She's *put* MC in pain. This isn't anything new.

25.) Is Mallory's daughter the child that must be killed by the MC to "tip the world off it's balance?"

🤷

26.) Is the Overseer hating the MC because they already know the MC's role and prophecy in killing the child and has personal involvement in deterring that?

No. She knows of the prophecy, and she knows what MC's role is within it, but that's not the source of her hatred.

27.) Will FATE take over the MC or merge with their thoughts now that FREEDOM is gone and in another body?

Yes-- and it's something Freedom will take to MC about in part 2! Freedom "possessed" MC while Fate's literal essence has been interweaved with MC. So, as a result, the way they interact with MC is very different. Freedom functions as their own separate entity within MC's mind while Fate is very slowly merging to become one and the same as MC.

The only thing preventing this "merging" from getting worse was Freedom, and now that Freedom's gone, MC is essentially a ticking time bomb. That's why it's imperative they find the second half of Fate, as it's one of the only ways to actually remove them from MC.

28.) Why is FATE weaker than FREEDOM and suppressed at every turn?

Fate's very being has been fractured into two pieces-- they're no threat at all at the moment. By having Fate be broken into pieces, it's sort of like a "prison" where they can do no harm. The second those pieces are reunited, however, and Fate heals, they will be just as powerful as Freedom is.

29.) Who put the red string on Queen and MC?

In eastern culture there's the idea of the "Red Strings of Fate." It's visualized as a single red thread that ties around the pinky of two people who are destined to be soulmates. The red string in The Exile is a different, but very similar, interpretation of that.

So, the strings were put there by Fate a long time ago.

30.) Can you explain what each stat for the character (amelia empathy, vethna harden) can be manipulated and its impact? does syfyn have any of those stats?

You can actually find a post explaining the first half of the cast and their respective stats here on Patreon under the tag "behind the scenes." But for a brief overview...

Vethna's stat is blood magic + empathy.

Nikke's stat is ruthlessness.

Amilia's stat is fae magic + sympathy.

Sabir's stat is also ruthlessness.

Syfyn's stat is independence + resentment.

Freedom's stats are all in relation to MC themselves and how they operate in the world as opposed to any singular stat.

Keep in mind these are all subject to change! As for how these change the characters, I imagine the implications are pretty straight forward. I don't want to get into specifics since I don't want people choosing how to play based on the end they want for the characters.

31.) During the ritual to remove Freedom if they decided not to cooperate for whatever reason, what would have happened?

Marcelle mentions in-game they would do an evocation-- so they'd essentially *force* Freedom to come to the forefront of MC's psyche and rip them out from MC's soul that way. However, that process would be even worse than what MC went through, and would take a *lot* more prep work (blood).

So, the end result would've been same... it just would suck more for MC.

32.)What causes some people to seemingly be more compatible with wykna than others? Why has the MC survived with Fate inside them for three years while the other test subjects died?

Hmm... too spoilery to answer even here, but there's hints in-game to the answer to both of those questions.

33.) Was there ever a time when Freedom and Fate got along?

... kinda.

Most of the Source got along (Darkness + Light, Death + Life, Joy + Sorrow), but for some reason Fate and Freedom have never been able to see the good in the other. Most of this stems from Fate, however-- they're a control freak (shocking) and are actually the least liked among all the Source.

But there *was* one point in time where they were able to tolerate one another, and that was when Life appeared and filled the realm of Navara with her creations. It was a collaborative process between her, Freedom, and Fate to create life as the realm knows it. She played mediator between Freedom + Fate when it came to creating the natural order.

However, this "peace" quickly fell apart once the novelty of the new world wore off.

34.) Do Mallory and The Mother know each other? If Marcelle was expecting the Commander to survive the exile, I imagine she would not let him to rot alone. So I think the question is, did she do it?

No, Mallory + Marcelle do not know each other.

Marcelle wasn't involved in any part of MC's surgery at all. So, while it's true she expected MC to survive exile, it wasn't because she gave them a caregiver for their wounds but rather because she didn't anticipate the surgery to be carried out the way it was.

35.) Can you explain a bit further about the Other Relationships' stats and how they are related between themselves and what will they affect? Mostly focusing on the family (The Queen one is the most intriguing to me)

The lower the Queen stat, the more Marcelle regards MC as an enemy. The higher it is, the more familial she'll begin to act with MC. It's basically how the game keeps track of which direction you want to take MC's relationship with her-- revenge or reconciliation.

Emeline's sanity stat is a big ole' walking spoiler. But I mean... it's general use is pretty straightforward. Higher it is, the more "normal" she is, the lower it is, the more she'll descend into madness.

Esmerelda's anxiety stat has to do with how supported and prepared she feels for her role as heir to the throne. The higher it is, the more confident and independent she'll be. The lower it is, the more anxious and insecure she'll become.

Trystan's fear stat works pretty similar to Marcelle's but inverse. The lower their fear, the more they trust MC and are willing to reconcile. The higher it is, the more they'll view MC as a threat and feel less sympathy towards them.

36.) Will there be a way for a Commander that craves the approval of the Mothers to achieve that?

Absolutely.

37.) Esmerelda, Emeline, and Marcelle: if they could undo one of their previous choices, would they change anything? If so, what?

Esmerelda wouldn't change anything.

Marcelle doesn't believe in regret. Whether or not she feels it is a different story. She's wondered at times if she should've never took MC in as her own and should have instead kept them at a distance.

Emeline would protect MC from Marcelle.

38.) I may be overlooking something but what's up with the knife that Jost cuts MC with during the escape?

I'm not sure if there's a specific line you're referencing but it's just a regular knife. There's nothing up with it at all.

39.) Is there a reason Freedom didn't intervene during the massacre until after it was over? Were they unable to?

They just weren't there yet. They didn't arrive until around the end, in which case they acted as quick as they could.

40.) One of my favorite parts of Ch. 5 is the Sabir POV in the blood room where he notes the various personality changes of the MC. I appreciate all the variations. Will we get similar POV reactions from Esme and Trystan?

As of now, it's not planned-- though that's not to say it won't ever be brought up.

41.) Will there be future scenes with the ROs seeing MC's surgery scars for the first time?

Yes.

42.) Does Amilia know that the Wykna in MC's head is Fate before it is revealed? Her frowning when Rhys mentions "fate" is... curious.

No-- she didn't know. But she knows *of* the god Fate, and she doesn't like them at all, thus her negative reaction. She's had bad experiences with people who were followers of them.

43.) Is the only way for a prior-romanced Syfyn to show any softness towards the MC in Chapter 5 for them to let themselves get pummeled blocking her attempted murder of Sabir? Because I have been trying variation after variation to see if there's any way to get Syfyn to show even a hint of lingering care for the Commander, and I feel like the biggest way it's shown is her reaction to realizing that she's injured them without provocation.

Yes-- that's the only way for Syfyn to show softness, though she does also show concern for MC if you reveal to her that there was a surgery done on MC.

Syfyn doesn't *want* to hurt MC. She just has a lot of trauma from the incident and the punishments she endured at the hands of the Council. As a result, she's *very* on-edge and paranoid all the time, which has taken a serious toll on her mental health for a handful of reasons.

The fact she's lost control of herself to the point she's reactive enough to hurt MC against her own will terrifies her, and the guilt/regret she feels from it is *deep.*

45.) Will we have an opportunity to change our leadership style later on?

Probably not.

46.) Does leadership style get affected by stats--like, if my genuine Commander goes the sarcastic route, or the non-aggressive commander goes the aggressive route--will that have

bearing on things in the future and potentially lead to people calling them out or not following their commands because they don't have the personality to back their chosen style?

No-- the point of having leadership style be separate from personality is to allow for a "personality switch" in MC. I wanted to allow room for a super sarcastic MC to become super stoic and calculative when leading their troops-- and vice versa-- since I love those sort of switches in dynamics.

MC will always be viewed as a competent leader. They were the Commander of Plaithus and the most feared person in the realm for a while. It wouldn't make sense lore-wise for MC to not be able to carry out a certain leading style.

47.) Will we get to see Plaithus react to the former commander wearing the Mevnrael sash? I'm so eager to see the uproar that will ensure, and given Marcelle's attitude to Vethna and The South, I'd imagine it'd at least make her eye twitch to watch her child make such a public declaration of allegiance to The Enemy.

Too much changes between now and the point in-game where something like this could happen to be able to answer this... Just know a lot changes politically in-game, and MC will have direct control in just *how* things change.

48.) Depending on our choices and fights (and despite whatever our conviction is from wanting everything to end to sth else) can there be a bad end (for the MC?) where Marcelle or Overseer or someone else achieves their goals and victory?

You can get a good *or* a bad ending based on your choices.

However, Marcelle achieving her goal is the opposite of a bad ending.

49.) Why did Freedom choose that particular corpse?

The "memories" MC gets when they touch the corpse are the corpse's memories before it died.

The corpse used to be Freedom's prophet before being let down by them. This led to them switching sides to become a follower of Fate, which then led to their execution by Marcelle's order (it wasn't a personal order-- Marcelle didn't know the man).

50.) Is The Commander's leadership style meant to be the same as it was in the past?

Yes.

51.) Now that they know it was Fate who caused MC to snap, how do Trystan and Syfyn feel about that?

Complicated.

Neither one is ready to completely forgive MC or apologize. Years of mourning aren't undone in days. Regardless of if it was MC's intent to cause harm, it was MC's hands that killed those people.

It's an unfortunate situation where everyone is a victim. It's going to take a lot of time and communication for MC + Trystan/Syfyn's relationship to heal-- and the knowledge that Fate was the one ultimately responsible is the key to first unlock that door to allow it to be pushed open.

52.) Of the elites of Plaithus, those who Marcelle lied to/told that Freedom was responsible for making MC snap....how has their opinion on MC changed, broadly speaking? Do they expect them to return to serving the country?

No one expects MC to go back to serving the country, nor do they want them to. Regardless of if MC is "safe" now, the pain of the incident is too strong for any of the nobility to want MC back in a position of authority like that.

Otherwise, reactions have been pretty varied. I think on the most *positive* side of things, some people are genuinely happy to have an answer for what happened that night. A very small amount of people might be capable of pity, maybe even sympathy, towards the Commander for what happened. But ultimately, people are still very wary of the Commander. There's always the risk that something bad could happen again, and no one wants that.

And then, of course, there's the other extreme-- those who continue to despise MC despite being told it wasn't technically MC's fault. They still very much want MC's head on a spike.

So, all in all, it's a very large range of emotions.

53.) What if the Commander had chosen to rename themself after a traumatic event like their Exile? Would their family and associates who knew them before the Incident have any strong feelings about the name change? Would any of them be unwilling or just plain forgetful about using the Commander's new name?

Marcelle would find it rather dumb-- it's one of those things she would file under being "unnecessary" and she wouldn't bother to hide her displeasure at the situation. Nonetheless, she would still use MC's new name because she also views it as being childish to bicker about something as mundane as a name.

Emeline, Esmerelda, + Sabir would all adjust to using MC's new name with relative ease and minor slip-ups.

Syfyn would just be more confused. A lot has changed very quickly, and I think it's very difficult for her to face MC after the exile because she's essentially a stranger with someone who used to be like family to her. The name change would only add to her conflicting feelings on just how to feel about MC, and who MC even is in her eyes.

Trystan's reaction would depend on if they're hardened or not.

A normal Trystan would make an effort to use MC's new name, but just like how they slip up in calling MC commander still, they'd slip up in calling MC their old name. They'd get used to it eventually-- but it might take a bit longer than the others.

Otherwise, a hardened Trystan would purposely use MC's old name just to spite MC.

The Overseer would do the same.

54.) Since we don’t encounter Emeline later, what were her thoughts if during the trial we told her we would burn the city to the ground? For Marcelle it said she took us seriously but we don’t see Emeline’s thoughts.

Emeline would take the threat seriously in that she believes MC means it, and that the hurt and anger behind those words is all real and genuine. However, she doesn't really believe that Plaithus can fall to anyone or anything at the moment, nonetheless MC of all people.

One person army or not, they're just a person. How would it even be possible for them to destroy an entire kingdom?

Other

1.) What kind of player/reader you are when it comes to IFs (or rpgs or whatever is relevant here)? Do you do a lot of different playthroughs or do you find yourself making the same choices over and over, do you play more self-insert or "in-character", do you have specific OCs that you repurpose and use over and over in different settings or do you make new ones etc.?

Oooh.

For IF and RPGS, I have two ways of playing. One is that I go in with a self-insert, the other is that I create a character for the game as I play. The first one is pretty obvious, but for the second I sort of carve out the character personality as I play based on what the book/game gives me. So I don't make a super sarcastic character and then go into a game trying to look for sarcastic options, but rather play with a blank slate and start picking the sarcastic options as they show up, if that makes sense?

Because of that, I find it impossible to reuse a single OC for multiple games since I usually create them based *on* the game in every sense of the word.

Also, when I get super into media, I get obsessed with the lore and will figure out *everything* there is to know about the world and incorporate it into my character.

I really like to replay games though-- it's why I myself am such a stickler for replayability. I remember replaying some of my favorite games and making new choices that I thought for sure were going to cause an impact only for like... one line of dialogue to change lol.

But *usually*, I have one true OC per game that I play, and then anyone else I played as is sort of just like... a little experiment. I usually also stash all of my OCs into a lil box to use for future IF projects so...

👀

2.) If you were NOT the author, how do you think that your (first, going in blind) playthrough of The Exile would look like? What mythosi-type would you be most drawn to, is there a romance you think you'd be most inclined to go for etc.?

Hold on... lemme get into character...

Mythosi would be hard for me since I feel connected to all the options (that's why I chose them when making the game). I was a total wolf kid growing up, so werewolf would be a strong contender, and Phoenix is literally my name so I'd definitely feel compelled to choose that... but ultimately I think I would choose gorgon because I love scales and venom and I just think they're super cool lol.

Going in completely blind, I think I would pick Syfyn as my RO. The angst is too good to give up, and I love routes where you have to like... sniff out the romantic tension/read for the romance in the little moments.

I would *definitely* play a sarcastic Commander because of my love for Purple Hawke in DA2, and would have daggers as my weapons because daggers are sexy. And I would be best friends with *everyone* because I am a people pleaser in video games 😔

Also I would go for a "break the cycle" route as opposed to a "return home" or "destroy Plaithus" one. I have a hard time staying angry in any video game and usually *always* end up forgiving people no matter what. Tis' my fault, I'm afraid.

Chapter 5 Patreon Q&A Questions

Sep 10, 2022

Hello everyone! The time has finally come for the Patreon Q&A 👀

Here are the rules/expectations!

1.) 1-5 questions per person.

2.) Questions can be about the chapter, about the characters, etc! Questions *do not* have to just be about Chapter 5!

3.) Questions can be more spoilery here than they can be on the Tumblr. Depending on how many *super* spoilery questions I get, I may make a Part 2 for the $10+ tier that answers them.

Put your questions in the comments below, or, if you'd prefer to remain anonymous, submit your questions to this google doc here!

I'll try to answer everything next weekend!

Hurt/Comfort A-Z Headcanons: Syfyn Javall

Sep 6, 2022

Note-- I've changed the "W" on this to be about what the worst injury the character has received as opposed to the original "Why?" question, as it wasn't fitting to how I was using it!

TW: Mentions of self-harm.

A: Alleviate - How do they go about relieving persistent physical pain?

In general? She doesn't.

In her youth, she would do her best to keep her body in top shape-- it was her main weapon, after all. That would mainly entail massages, regular visits to the infirmary, stretches, and various forms of physical therapy for the countless wounds she's received, and the occasional use of pain medication.

At some point, however, she stopped caring. It happened slowly-- things just got so busy so fast with the war that she didn't have the time to properly take care of herself. Eventually, the aches and the pains became normal, and in her mind, well-deserved. A punishment of sorts, karmic in its nature.

B: Bedridden - How do they behave when they're sick?

If she has it her way, you won't even know she's sick other than her skin being a little more pale than usual or her nose being red.

Syfyn is *stubborn*, and she does *not* like to be perceived as weak. Being stuck in bed, whining about shivers and fevers, or how her head hurts, is not something you're going to find her doing. Instead, she'll push through it all to try and act fine even when her head is spinning or her body is aching. Nine times out of ten she'll succeed without anyone really noticing anything is wrong. The one time she doesn't is usually the one time she takes things too far and, against her own will, ends up being bedridden for a week at least.

No matter how bad the illness is, she'll try to hide it. Even when it's painfully obvious something is wrong, *she'll hide it*. Even if you know she's not feeling great, she doesn't need to weigh you down with

her discomfort. It's dumb.

C: Cling - Whose physical touch is considered most welcome in their minds when they are in need? Is there a specific type of touch they respond well to?

The Commander's.

Long story short, there's no one in Syfyn's life *except* them-- her parents both died when she was young, she has no siblings or extended family to speak of, and the closest thing she had to a family was... well... *killed*, by MC during their rage.

Now, there's nothing left but them. And, granted things repair themselves between those two, MC is the only real tether Syfyn has left to the world. Sabir, despite his good nature, is too distant from Syfyn to offer any real comfort.

When Syfyn's having a hard time, she needs to feel grounded. That can span from small gestures, like squeezing her shoulder or patting her back in the little in-between moments, to large gestures like an all-consuming, tight hug that's so strong it hurts a little.

It's something to remind her she's here, she's still alive, all the possibilities in her head are just possibilities, not real threats, and that, most importantly, there's a camaraderie to be found among her friends.

D: Deathbed - How would they react if they realized they may not recover from their injuries?

It would be a whole flurry of emotions... but mainly anger, bitterness, resentment, and plain old acceptance.

Syfyn's job is not kind to her physically. In reality, she probably should've already died a long time ago in some gruesome battle, so the fact she's alive at all is nothing short of a miracle. In truth, she always knew it would end like this deep down-- every soldier does. You're left with scars and memories that break you down day by day until you're nothing like the person you were at the start-- until you can't do the things you used to do.

There'd be a lot of destruction, and yelling, and, at the end of it, crying. Lots of crying. Years of pent-up frustrations would come spilling out-- frustrations at being a child soldier, frustrations at how the military has treated her and her family, frustrations at how *she* could've prevented this if she just cared more about herself.

But she didn't. And now, it's just another thing to throw onto the pile of reasons not to care. The damage has already been done, hasn't it?

E: Emergency - What is their gut reaction when someone they care about is hurt?

Oh boy.

Well, in her gut, her reaction is to charge into the fray and do *anything* to get that person to safety. In-game, we've yet to see Syfyn *or* MC truly act out/use their full power, and trust me when I say Syfyn is downright *terrifying* when she wants to be. Syfyn is definitely a self-sacrificing person, so she's 100% willing to use herself as a distraction to get the person she cares about to safety, though if she was in a good place mentally that would be a last resort.

However, Syfyn isn't like most people in that she's a soldier first and foremost... and that means she's long learned to stifle her gut feelings and instead rely on logic and duty.

Because of this, her actual reactions can vary based on A.) How bad the wound is, B.) How bad the situation itself is, and C.) How skilled of a fighter the person in question is. And... well, there's sometimes even a fourth variable in that, and that is **D.) What are her orders?**

Take that as you will.

F: Fight - Are there circumstances under which they would not accept treatment or care? If so, what are they?

See, there's a bit of a juxtaposition when it comes to her (or even the Commander) and healing-- she's tougher than 90% of people and as a result, can weather out things others can't, but she's also such a valuable asset that letting her wounds fester or get worse, even for selfless reasons, just isn't something that can happen.

If Syfyn had it her way, she would *always* refuse treatment until she knew everyone in her charge was taken care of first. In reality, however, it often tends to be the opposite-- let the lower rank guards die for the sake of keeping the Griffin in comfort.

Otherwise, I don't think Syfyn would downright refuse treatment unless she knew she was already dying and any attempts to prevent it would just be futile. She very much views herself as a tool-- she gets patched up time and time again to be sent out to be broken, time and time again. And, someday, she'll be broken permanently. No use in trying to fight against that.

G: Ghosts - How has their past shaped the kind of comfort they respond to best?

There's a lot to unpack here.

Growing up, Syfyn's dad was always the affectionate one while her mother was very much a rough, tough-love woman, though such mannerisms are quite common in most mythosi cultures. Both of her parents would be gone for long stretches of time considering they were leading the army, which meant she was left completely alone a lot of the time, which meant she was forced to learn to self-soothe from a young age.

When they *were* home, and that was usually for very short stretches of time, comfort would come in shoulder squeezes, back pats, ruffling hair, and from her father, occasionally just talking-- mainly because as Syfyn got older she learned to completely reject any close affection her parents were trying

to give because she knew they would just leave again. Syfyn also started to act out a lot around the time MC met her because it was the only way she could reliably get her parents' attention most of the time, though more often than not, her plans always backfired on her and just resulted in her being chastised and put in time out.

So, that brings us to the current day! And it's safe to say Syfyn rejects 90% of all comfort now (shocking!). Yet again, she very much views being comforted as being weak, though that's never something she would apply to other people. It's just that Syfyn doesn't want people to pity her, because in truth, there's a *lot* to pity about her, and because of that she makes sure there's no sign of her emotional or physical pain at all.

Your best bet of "offering comfort" depends on the situation. If she's in physical or emotional pain, ignore it completely, and opt to do things that help *incredibly* subtly, or in such a way that no one else would know you were specifically trying to aid her. *She'll know*, of course, but it'll keep her from feeling defensive. Otherwise, if she's scared, or worried, offering camaraderie is your best bet-- make it feel like you're a team, and you're both going to utterly destroy whatever it is that's freaking her out. She prefers anger, destruction, and a clear goal over sitting around talking about feelings.

H: Home - What things (objects, sensations or people) remind them they’re safe after a scary situation?

Hmm... this question is sort of interesting because I don't think Syfyn really *needs* to feel safe? She's very much used to constant turbulence in her life, and while that has absolutely left a psychological mark on her, it's not something she herself cares about anymore. She can still go about her life being shaken up, worried, freaked out by something, and operate normally.

That being said, other than MC's snapping, I don't think there's much that could leave her shaken up for a long period of time. She's used to war, used to losing people, used to being in pain, used to doing things she doesn't want to do, etc. At some point, you grow numb to that.

That is to say, Syfyn puts on her mask, goes out and does her job, and comes back, takes off that mask, and takes all the emotional and physical pain that comes with her job and hangs it on the wall. She doesn't need something or someone to help her back to the real world-- she'll do it herself out of sheer spite and willpower alone. She's done it her entire life, anyhow.

I: Isolation - How do they soothe themselves when no one is around to soothe them?

She takes all of her emotions, shoves them into a tiny bag, and digs a hole in the ground to throw it into. That is to say, she shoves everything away and forces herself to not think about it/not care. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, and on the days it doesn't, things fall apart quick.

She'll have breakdowns-- though they tend to be quiet. She'll cry against her will and violently wipe away the tears while internally cursing herself out for being so weak. She's suffered things worse than this, and *now* is when she chooses to break down and act like a child? *No.* She won't accept that.

She'll essentially insult herself, or even physically hurt herself, until she can get her emotions to shut off entirely. And then here you go! Back to normal and good to go! Right?

... *Right???*

J: Joy - When was the first time they were truly happy after going through something terrible?

The first truly painful experience Syfyn ever went through was when her wings grew in. The main process lasted a week, and even for a while after that, her back was sore, itchy, and prone to infections. It was a bloody, frustrating, and painful ordeal that she was left to go through almost entirely alone except for an MC who was desperately trying to help.

After that entire ordeal, Syfyn had little interest in trying to learn to fly-- though MC did eventually manage to convince her to. That quickly turned to MC trying to rally Syfyn into flying despite the *numerous* attempts she just fell and landed right on her face.

It was the first time she really got to have fun after the ordeal, and it was also what made her stop hating her wings and start embracing them. It's also an incredibly pivotal moment in MC + Syfyn's relationship-- a terrible, awful event turned into something fun and enjoyable thanks to the faith MC had in her.

K: Kindness - Do they believe they deserve the comfort they receive? Why or why not?

Syfyn does not receive comfort... and that *is* what she thinks she deserves.

At the moment, she's an incredibly self-loathing person with little purpose other than taking care of Trystan, and even then, she's becoming obsolete. She's a soldier following orders she doesn't believe, killing people she doesn't believe should be killed, and destroying things she doesn't really want to destroy. Being left alone to suffer in silence for those things is pretty fitting to her.

Safe to say, she's in a bit of a rut at the moment with a very "woe-is-me" and helpless mindset. Though, that's likely to change in future chapters...

L: Levity - What or who helps them take their mind off of the circumstances?

Pre-exile, it was MC and her fellow soldiers. There was a lot of goofing off and inside jokes-- things that only they could understand or laugh at. It was a lot of nihilistic, dark humor to cope with the things they were forced to do.

Nowadays, it's Trystan. Syfyn has a relationship with them that's very much a mix of being an older sibling and a parent, and she really tries her best to help them navigate their role as the commander. When she's with Trystan, she's able to put all of her own feelings on the back burner for the sake of completely focusing on them.

But they're getting older, and she's becoming less and less needed with every coming day. That's forcing her to look back at herself more and more, and she can't say she's very fond of that.

M: Music - Is there a song that comforts them? Why is it comforting to them?

I don't quite know what music is like in the realm of Navara yet, but if it was modern day, I see Syfyn really liking Bon Iver. It's the kind of music she'd like, and I think she'd genuinely like the lyrics and imagery it as well.

N: Nostalgia - What things that comforted them as a kid still work today? Does anyone know that?

When Syfyn was very little, she had a stuffed lion that was given to her by her mom. When she was left alone (and after the passing of her parents), she'd take it and a blanket, and crawl into some hidden corner to sleep curled around the stuffed animal.

Of course, Syfyn's an adult now, but she still has her stuffed animal (worn and well-loved as it is), and she still retreats to hidden, tight areas to sneak away to where she can fall asleep and not be found. It's a thing she does only when she's upset in a sulky and sad way, and even now, you might find her stealing stuff from people she cares about just to have as a reminder of them. I think, deep down, after losing so many people she's cared about, she's terrified anyone she grows attached to is just going to leave or drop dead someday, and so she's desperate to just have something to remember them by.

I don't think anyone would know of Syfyn's hiding habits except MC-- and even then, it's a 50/50 chance that MC will know where to look for Syfyn. Despite being tall, she's surprisingly limber and *very* good at finding weird little hidden nooks and crannies.

(Honestly, Amilia or Nikke are more likely to accidentally stumble across her in their own attempts to find a hidden place to hang out.)

O: Overworked - Who or what tells them to stop working and take care of themselves?

Trystan *tries*, but they're not yet on equal footing with Syfyn to really *tell* her to stop. They ask, and they list all the reasons she should stop (look at those eye bags!) but she just doesn't listen and always dismisses them. Syfyn needs work to stay busy, and staying busy keeps her mind from running off and thinking about bad things.

So, at the end of the day, no one *tells* her to stop. Why would they? Her overworking only serves to benefit those who work above her.

P: Please - Have they ever begged for someone to comfort or stay with them? What was that incident like?

She used to beg to the point of tears for her parents to not go off on campaigns. Every time was the same with Syfyn latching onto their hands and trying to keep them from going out the door and crying the entire time long.

Of course, they never did stay, and since then, she's never begged for anyone or anything else to.

Q: Questions - Are they eager to talk about what or why they're hurting? Why or why not?

No-- absolutely not. As I've said before, Syfyn views emotions as being weak, and she views *stewing* in said emotions as even worse and pitiful. Sometimes you can only get the truth about what's wrong when you've cornered her or beaten the truth from her (verbally *or* physically in a spar), and even then, she's not going to be nice when it all comes spilling out.

There is a *lot* that Syfyn has been through-- and even more since the Commander has left. She doesn't need pity. She doesn't *want* it. And trust me... when... *if*... the truth were to come out, pity would be the first thing offered to her by most.

R: Relief - How do they react to the realization that they will soon be fully recovered?

Hmm... I don't think it would be a very big reaction. Syfyn gets seriously injured all the time, and every time she recovers.

I think it would be a sort of solemn "time to get back to work" sort of reaction, if anything. Her body is healed, and now she's expected to go marching right on back into the battlefield to get it torn up to shreds again. It's a cycle of destruction-- one she's not at the liberty to escape from.

S: Scared - What would it take for them to admit that they're scared?

As of now, I really can't imagine Syfyn *ever* in a million years saying that. The words "I'm scared," or "that's scary," etc, aren't things she'd say. She's stubborn to a fault-- always has been. And she's brave as all hells. So even if she's shaking in her boots and can hardly breathe, she's going to keep on marching forward. It's all she knows.

There's no point in telling people you're scared. If a situation's scary, everyone knows. There's no use in dwelling in it. You just have to get over it and move on.

T: Time - How long does it take for them to feel better after an ordeal or illness? Do they tend to lie about how soon they feel better?

99% of the time she gets over things quick, both mentally and physically. Even then though, she's still too impatient to just sit and rest.

There's a weird sort of relationship between Syfyn and her body. On one hand, she pretends to always be fine because the idea of *not* being fine is incredibly embarrassing to her and something to be ashamed of. She's the Brazen Griffin for fuck's sake-- she can take a stab wound.

On the *other* hand, I think some dark, desperate part of her hopes she *doesn't* recover. It's her only way out from the military. The only way out of her role. I don't think this side of her has existed for long-- she only started thinking this way after the Commander's exile. And even then, she's ashamed to have these thoughts. I don't think it's something she *truly* wants (you can see as much by my response to Letter D),

but each day she's getting closer and closer to resembling a cornered animal over a fierce military commander.

U: Ugly - What part of their recovery process are they ashamed of, if any?

All of it. As I said, she doesn't feel very fond of the fact she has to sit down and be taken care of in order to heal properly. It feels lazy, and wrong, and *weak.* She'd never think that of anyone else if they had life-threatening injuries, but for *herself?*

It's a disgrace.

V: Valiant - Has anyone told them they were brave for facing what they did? How would they react if someone did?

Syfyn has always been praised for her bravery. I mean, it's literally in her title-- *Brazen* Griffin. There were high expectations set for her within the military thanks to her mother, and she lived up to each and every one of them (for a while, at least). She's fierce, headstrong, *dangerous*.

At the Commander's side, there was a time she would march into the end of the world with pride and a head held high. She thrived on danger, enjoyed violence.

But those were the glory days-- days that have long since faded. Now she's had too much time to think about circumstances, and that's no good for anyone involved.

That being said, nowadays if someone praises Syfyn for being brave she just sort of smiles and nods. It's clear it's not a genuine response-- clear that those are words she's heard millions of times and that they've clearly lost their meaning to her. Years ago there was a time when hearing that praise made her ego soar and pride grow. Now it's just expected, and at it's worse, it's a reminder of all the things she's had to do.

W: What? - What was the worst injury they've ever received?

In truth, I think it's what the Commander did to her during the incident.

She was either poisoned by gorgon venom (which is no small thing), torn open by demons, torn open by the Commander themself, or severely burnt. I can promise you the physical aftermath of all of those things was horrific, and easily one of the most painful experiences of Syfyn's life.

But worse than all of that is the emotional toll it left on her. The person she trusted most, the person she possibly *loved*, turned on her. At the time, she was willing to die, but the aftermath that followed the incident has left her paranoid, anxious, and suffering from *severe* PTSD.

It's the one accident she hasn't been able to recover from. Not really. Maybe not ever.

X: Xenas - Do they see anyone as an inspiration in their recovery? Does their inspiration know about this?

Inspiration is an encouraging word-- a word that describes someone you look up to and admire. I wouldn't use that word for anything Syfyn does anymore. But I will say there's a pressure, an *expectation*, to be as strong as her mother was.

She doesn't know if she can ever live up to the expectations. In truth, she probably never will. Not unless she happens to go out just as much of a martyr as she was.

Y: Yearn - What gesture, person or thing do they desperately want, but would never actually ask for?

The Commander. Her Mom. Her Dad. Everyone who the Commander killed that she considered family.

Syfyn, as of present, has nearly no support system. Sure, there's Trystan, but she feels like it's unfair to burden them with her emotions.

She knows she can't get any of those people back. Not now. But there'll *always* be a part of her that prays with all her might that it's possible. That prays all of this is just a bad, bad dream and she'll wake up someday to everything being normal again.

She'd never admit these things, of course. They're stupid when said out loud.

Z: Zero - What is the best way to comfort them without touching them?

Sit with her. Treat her like normal. Maybe share a drink or bring her her favorite snacks.

She doesn't want to be coddled, she just wants to be able to forget about everything for a moment. That doesn't mean you can't help her when she's hurt, of course, but it's important to know the difference between "helping her walk when she physically can't put weight on her leg" and "here, let me hold the cup so you can drink out of it."

One she'll be appreciative of. The other, she won't be. And she can get pretty snippy when she's hurt, so she might not inform you of that in the *nicest* way. Though she'll always apologize later on once she's all healed up about her grumpy behavior-- and of course thank you for trying to help her to the best of your ability.

September 2022

Sep 2, 2022

Hello everyone! I thought I would start creating beginning of the month posts like a responsible Patreon creator, so here we are!

College has officially up and started for me. I'm not 100% how this will impact my productivity, though it is likely things will be a bit hectic on my end for the next month or so as I regain my footing.

Anyway-- here are the main things I hope to release this month!

- Nikke Trial POV Switch **(Initiate)**
- Patreon Q&A **(Initiate)** 👀
- Syfyn Hurt + Comfort Headcanons **(Soldier)**

Also, some information re. the Esmerelda + Marcelle short story. Before it was broken up into two parts, both of which were going to be posted on here as a short story. *However*, Part 2 has officially earned its way into the actual game.

Everyone in the **Soldier** tier will still be able to read it in full, but it's going to take me longer than anticipated to write seeing as I need to make it fit into the flow of the actual demo.

I also still hope to finish the **Dragon Story (Soldier)** soon-- but it's not as high of a priority as those on the actual list!

That's all for now-- thanks for reading! :)

The Trial | Amilia Von Clamile | P.O.V. Switch

Aug 31, 2022

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

The word banged through Amilia's head like a loud, incessant drum. And maybe, some time ago, she would've tried to push it away-- to say that it was wrong, intrusive, cruel. But she's learned better since then. Learned that it's right.

It's *always* right.

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

She lets the word reverberate through her, echo in her lungs and vibrate in her bones. It's in silent resignation that she accepts the word as more than a fact-- it is a thread of her very being. There are

other words it interweaves with, of course: indecisive, cruel, selfish, *naive.* Then again, she's always considered the last word synonymous with the first. *Stupid.*

And, in truth, she should be thankful for the pain the word brings. It's the only thing keeping the fear at bay. The only thing keeping panic from taking hold of her when she looks down too far at her own body.

She hadn't bothered to fight the guards when the collar was locked in place-- not like Vethna. It was inevitable. She knew as much. But that didn't make the pain of wearing it any less, nor did it rid of the shame as her glamor faded away like a cheap perfume. It left her naked to be gawked at and feared. Their whispers surrounded her like a net, slipping into her skull to echo back and forth on repeat.

A fae. A liar. A cheater. A killer. A thief.

She never minded the other accusations. They weren't wrong. But Amilia was *not* a thief. She wouldn't... she'd *never...*

She squeezes her eyes shut and burrows her face into her knees. How long has she been stuck in this cell? A week? It doesn't feel right to be so far from the outside-- to have her feet rub against the grimy, stone surface of the cell and not the warm, soft grass of the outside. But she deserves it. She *deserves* to rot away in here. Because if it weren't for her, Vethna wouldn't be locked up screaming and howling like a furious beast. She had no idea where they were imprisoned, but their agony echoed all the same.

And MC...

A withering sob escapes her at the thought. She did this to them. *She* brought them here, forced them back into the chains they had been so desperate to be free of. Her mother was right. She destroyed everything she touched. Everything she loved. She was never meant to exist, stuck in the between, forever an enigma. She simply did not *belong*.

She didn't mind the dark glares of the guards. She didn't mind the meals left too far for her to grab, or the aching pains that took over her stomach in the night. She didn't mind the spitting, or the kicking, or the gash that was left on her arm from an armored fist. It was the shame that was eating her alive. The guilt. She can't stand to face MC or Vethna-- to look either of them in the eyes. She doesn't know how she could even begin to try.

And yet, she must.

That much is made clear when the guards come marching down the halls with an extra pep in their step-- something that makes Amilia's stomach sink as they come to a halt outside her cell. They loom over her, faces concealed by cold, unfeeling, and extravagant masks. She would rather witness their sneering faces firsthand-- but no. They hide. They *must* hide.

For the first time they enter her cell with no fear, and why would they? She feels it deep within her, an instinct that's honed to sniff out cruelty: their queen has called for blood, and blood they shall spill. Her

antlers can be sawed off like all the others, pinned up on a plaque to hang over a fireplace. Her feathers can be plucked and used for trophy arrows. Her blood can be churned into paint.

A conquest, ready for the taking.

The guards grab hold of her arms. She shakes within their grasp as they drag her along, head bowed, eyes glued to the dirty stone beneath her feet. Her heart races like a rabbit's. It was always going to end this way, wasn't it? She was always going to get caught. Mother warned her, and she didn't listen.

Why didn't she just listen?

She's too lost in her own grief to realize they've left the dungeon-- lost too deep within her regrets to realize they're approaching the throne room. And it's not until the withering shouts against a blood mage reach Amilia's ears that she snaps her head up.

She wishes she didn't.

The room is filled with sneering Plaithians who go silent at her arrival. Any rage they felt for Vethna, for the Commander, is quickly snuffed out and replaced with something different: something quiet, something inquisitive, something *sinister.*

It has Amilia quivering like a leaf in the wind.

Her eyes flick about the room frantically, trying to find a safe place to stare, but there isn't one. It's either the eyes of the people, the masked faces of the queens, Vethna's gaze filled with pity, or The *Commander--*

She winces. She can't look at them. Not for a second.

She can't, she can't, she can't.

And luckily, she doesn't have to. Instead, she's forced to her knees beside Vethna. She thinks some part of her would've preferred to be thrown beside the Viper-- at least he already looks down at her-- but Vethna grants her the mercy of not staring at her for long, at least.

The Commander, however... they're not as merciful. She can feel their stare on her-- and that's all she needs to know to shrink into herself further, eyes focused on the floor as she trembles. She can't get herself to stop no matter how hard she tries. How could she? She's a rabbit in a hunter's trap. Even if she gets out of this trial alive, who's to say she won't get shot through the spine moments later out of nothing but sadistic amusement?

She knows humans. And she knows the answer to that question is *no one.*

And then, despite her will, her eyes peek over to the Commander. It's a glance that lasts a second and yet has her feeling sick. They don't notice, not really, instead turning over to listen to the Shadow as he's

dragged in kicking and laughing. His insults fade in and out through Amilia's ears like white noise as she struggles to breathe.

She can't stop her mind from racing. Memories of fires and screams. Memories of *them.* This was a bad idea. She knew that when she first set out on this stupid journey. Jerome and Melissa had taught her the lesson once, years ago, and she was too stupid to listen, too *stupid* to quit while she was ahead.

She has the feeling Plaithus is going to teach her the same lesson they did-- that after all the pretend, and all the niceties, there's one fact that shall forever remain unchanged. And that fact is that she's not one of *them*. And anyone who's not one of them...

She frowns.

They're not deserving of life.

No one says that directly, of course, but they say to stay quiet. To look down. To count the blessings and ignore everything else. She managed to do as much for a few years. For a while, it worked. But even *that* wasn't enough, because, at the end of the day, *she wasn't one of them*--

Nikke's thrown onto the ground beside her. She barely lifts her head high enough to watch him from the corner of her eyes as he fights against the guards. He's covered in bruises and cuts, even more than her, not that he lets the pain of them show as he snaps his jaw from behind the muzzle on his face.

He doesn't quit his writhing until a blade is pressed against his throat-- and even then, he doesn't quit his *whining* until they hit him on the head with the blade's pommel hard enough for his scales to crack open. Amilia winces for him.

He leans forward, eyes shut, nose wrinkled and blood dripping, but he stays quiet.

A part of her wishes she was more like him. Wishes she was less timid, more fierce, not apologetic. Another part of her quivers at the thought. Bad things happen when she's herself. Then again-- bad things happen when she pretends, too. Maybe she's just cursed. Maybe mother was right. Some things just aren't meant to exist. Not really--

The gorgon's eyes open. They meet hers.

She doesn't know why she doesn't look away. Doesn't know why she *can't*. His eyes flicker over her wounds, expression ambivalent, but when his eyes meet hers again her posture eases despite the lump in her throat.

She's heard stories about him-- about his sister. Jost travels the world cutting throats for fun, though she hasn't earned respect so much as she has the ire and annoyance of countless figureheads throughout the realm. And Nikke? He lurks in the shadows of Vrithka, killing any human who's stupid enough to try and sneak in.

Seems Nikke's finally been drawn out from home... but she can't help but wonder *why* as they watch one another like two wolves in no man's land.

The tension remains.

And then fades.

An understanding is reached, and they both look away, Nikke up to glare at the queen, Amilia down to look at the ground. It is the understanding of doomed men and unwanted things; the understanding of a predator and prey when both are ensnared.

It is the understanding of beasts.
Of *survival.*

[Old Scene] Nikke + MC | Chapter 7

Aug 25, 2022

AN: Here's another small scene that's been lurking in my files. It's old and was just a quick writing I did to get the scene out and onto paper and capture the ideas/feelings I pictured for it.

The scene was originally going to be in Chapter 6-- but I've since added a new chapter, meaning it will now be in Chapter 7. That being said, a lot of things will be changed in the *real* version... Both lore wise, and relationship-wise.

==========

You find Nikke sitting near the figurehead precariously close to the edge, playing with one of the countless knives strapped to his belt. He doesn't look at you as you approach, nor when you clamber to sit beside him.

For a while you sit in silence, accompanied by nothing but the cool wind and the smell of the sea. Nikke's skin is frigid against your own, but if the weather is bothering him he doesn't say anything, pupils slits as he focuses on his knife. With one final toss into the air he catches it-- stopping his fiddling to look at its engravings.

"Thanks," he says.

"For what?"

“Trusting me. I mean-- you probably shouldn’t have. I know I wouldn’t, but…” he looks at you. “Just... thanks.”

You realize then that he’s referring to the Taipan.

“I’ll always trust you.”

You immediately regret saying those words, terrified that he’ll leave right then and there… but he doesn’t. He just looks at you, eyes scanning your face, before he scoffs in amusement and looks to the horizon. “Ya know, my mom is gonna be so pissed we left without saying goodbye.”

“Surely you left her a goodbye note.”

“No, but I left a really cool rock I found on the dining table."

"I’m pretty sure that’s the same thing.”

He laughs… another huffed chuckle. It’s nothing spectacular, but for some reason being able to make him laugh at all has you feeling… *good*.

“Do you not see her often?” You ask, daring to push things further. “Your mom?”

He pauses, smile fading quicker than you can blink.

“I… before The Circle, me and Jost still lived with her.” He pauses, brows furrowing. “Things changed after that.”

“Do you regret joining it?”

“I don’t know what I think anymore,” he sighs, dropping his head. He sheathes his dagger, and your heart sinks-- but he doesn’t go to leave, instead rubbing his hands together before cracking his knuckles. “You… you ruined everything. Do you know that?” He looks at you. It’s a genuine question.

“...*thanks.”*

“I’m serious,” he says. “Every single thing I believed in you threw out the window. You-- everything that’s happened has stemmed from *you*.” He doesn’t sound angry-- just passionate. You’ve grown to be able to make that distinction by now as his voice raises.

“What do you want me to say?”

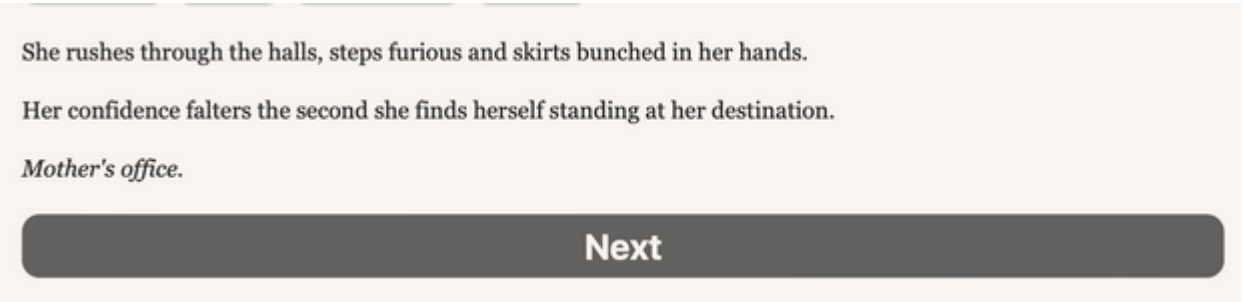
He pauses at that, and your stomach flutters when his eyes flicker to your lips. “I don’t know how to do stuff like this,” he says, then. You lean closer to him.

“Try.”

He averts his gaze but doesn't pull away, his breath washing over your face, so close that you can feel the coldness of his skin. "I… I want you to say that I did the same thing," he says, looking back at you. "I want you to tell me that I ruined your life."

A pause, and then you lift a hand up to cup his face. "Nikke Ivante-- you are the worst fucking thing to ever happen to me," you whisper.

He smiles softly, leaning over you before one of his hands comes up in your hair, guiding you closer and into a kiss. You've never kissed him before. Not like this. It's electrifying and in a completely different way-- dizzying and inebriating-- the fact that you can *tell* he wants you as much as you want him.



The Dove and the Raven. (+ Writing Update)

Aug 19, 2022

This is the final scene in Chapter 5, pt. 1... You could say I'm more than a bit curious to see what the general reception is to it, along with whatever theories may pop up.

With each chapter I write, the underlying story becomes more and more revealed. It's just as daunting as it is exciting (just like new chapter releases in general).

Now, onto that writing update-- I have some thoughts re. Chapter 5 logistically that I want to share.

With this final scene, Chapter 5, pt. 1 feels more like a Chapter 5 than a Part One-- as in, it feels complete. **I've been toying with marking this as a complete chapter, and then marking what was intended to be pt. 2 as Chapter 6.** The only problem with that is that I'm worried Chapter 6 will then feel too short, or incomplete, as it's 99% companion content as opposed to plot-related content.

In the same vein, **I'm also debating making The Exile multiple books.** It was my original intention to have it all be one, single, large book. But there's a few problems with that (once again logistical).

A.) The Exile would, as a file, be incredibly difficult to work with. It would be a big game regardless of it it's broken into parts or not (I expect Act I to be 1 million words once I finish it), so imagine that... x3... in one file.

Yeah. That's a lot. It would be manageable if I wasn't planning to sell the game/allow it to be downloadable, but considering that I do plan to sell it (and ideally would like to find a way to get it on mobile apps + Steam some day) it's important that I keep the seemingly far away logistical details in mind now.

B.) It doesn't work out waiting-wise. It takes me ~6 months to write a chapter now with how much variety there is, which works now when you all get to read the update when it comes out, but that'll quickly become a long wait when I enter private development for the final acts.

Breaking the book down into multiple ones means shorter waits and more regular content, which is good for me keeping inspiration, and giving you all content to enjoy.

Of course, this is all up in the air right now and I'm not committing any one way or the other, but I wanted to keep you all updated in what's going on behind the scenes (because there's a lot).

I still have two scenes to wrap up, but I should finish the chapter tomorrow along with sending it off to Alpha Readers. **I anticipate a release in the later-half of the week of the 4th in September if everything stays on track,** but I want to make sure the Alpha Readers have enough time to thoroughly read everything. I also anticipate the chapter to be right around 300k words, which is a lot to comb through.

That's all, and thanks for reading! :)

Nikke's Combat Scene (Ch. 5)

Aug 16, 2022

Hello everyone! I thought I'd delve into the format and game design that's going into Nikke's fight scene in Chapter 5. I was going to talk about it in the general writing update before realizing it would be too spoilery to post, so instead, I'm moving it over here!

That being said, **spoilers for Nikke's sparring scene!**

Some of you might have seen that this entire fight scene has been cut short for my own sanity, but trust me when I say there's still a lot going on in terms of variety and ways to win/lose the fight.

There are four main variations of Nikke's fight: - Sexual Route - Romantic Route - Normal Route - Aggressive Route

You, yourself, get to pick which one you're on when you go into the combat with Nikke, as they're directly based off of what MC's feelings are towards Nikke.

The **Sexual Route** is based on The Commander being sexually attracted to Nikke, which means there's some spicy flavor text, along with a few unique combat options re. MC manipulating Nikke with some well-timed flirtations...

The **Romantic Route** is for those of you who plan to have a non-sexual romance route with him, whether that be avoiding the friends with benefits situation or not feeling sexual attraction at all throughout the entire developing romance. At the moment, it's based on the Commander being "intrigued" by him-- that is, feeling frustrated at Nikke's outrageous and unpredictable behavior but feeling too intrigued to mark him down as just being an annoyance.

Flirting combat options will still be available to these MCs-- but they'll be carried out in a manner that is pure manipulation as opposed to MC doing it for their own satisfaction/pleasure.

The **Normal Route** is... well, normal, and...

The **Aggressive Route** is for those of you that want to seriously cause Nikke harm or want to fight dirty against him-- ex. throwing dirt in his eyes. The options presented here are separate from all the other routes as MC will be able to perform *significantly* more violent moves against Nikke.

In the aggressive route, there are two completely different branches-- one based on if MC managed to swipe Nikke's knife away from him, and one based on if MC was either A.) Unable to grab it, or B.) Threw it to the side.

All routes have the same starting portion, before delving into completely different sections based on A.) The combat option MC picked and B.) What route you were on. Originally, every single one of those portions was going to have completely (or mostly) original variations, which means every choice picked would be *completely* different.

Yes. That means, for some reason, I fully thought writing sixteen completely different combat branches would be a sane, achievable goal for the first draft of the chapter.

... it's not. Not only because sixteen by itself is a lot, but because *within* those sixteen planned branches, there was going to then be another combat choice (with four options for each main combat stat), within that, *another* combat choice, and depending on the situation, *another* combat choice.

If you do the math on that, that's another 64 completely unique endings to the combat. Which is... not achievable. At least not now, and most certainly not in one go.

Now, with that being said, all of this variation is still present but has instead been cut down in terms of routes. The original plan was to have sixteen main routes-- this has been cut down to four main routes that stick to the original ones you picked instead of branching off. The sexual, romantic, and normal combat all share the same script but contain different variations re. what choices are available and general flavor text. The aggressive combat will be its own separate route, but be heavily cut down for the sake of saving time and also because, naturally, a more intense/violent fight would end a lot sooner than otherwise.

Within these branches, there are a lot of behind-the-scenes things happening. For example, almost every choice you make has two outcomes based on what the Commander's skill proficiencies are, along with some extra social choices based on if Nikke is attracted to the Commander and what mythosi type you play as, and some special outcomes based on mythosi-type and what clothes you're wearing during combat.

On top of all that, there's even some randomization happening-- meaning if you match with Nikke in terms of skill level and are thrown into a situation where you're on equal footing, the game will randomize which one of you happens to win...

All-in-all, even though I've had to cut the scene short from my original plans, I'm still incredibly proud of what's being written, and shall soon come to an end. I think it's fun, exciting, personal to each commander, and most importantly, it has been a *huge* learning experience in terms of what I can write.

I now have a better idea of how to contain future combat scenes, what's essential in being a "real" choice vs. a fake choice, and how to pace the fight scenes to feel wide and personal without completely biting off more than I can chew.

I'd be more than happy to try and make a guide for his combat scene along with discussing the specific mechanics of the scene. If that's something you all would be interested in seeing in the future as well, let me know!

And now, for my little piece of insider information for Patrons, you will *also* have the choice to try and fight Syfyn instead of Nikke in a spar, though she will not be even *half* as receptive...

[September Headcanon Poll]

[Aug 16, 2022]

Hello everyone! Jost was the last companion for the A-Z Relationship headcanons, which means it's time for a new set of headcanons for our beloved ROs for the next few months!

There are four options-- the links go to the attached source Tumblr's + questions!

Note: More questions = less posts per month, but more info per character. For example, I could post 2+ headcanon lists a month w/ the 15 question lists while I usually only have the time to write 1 list per month w/ the alphabet posts.

- A-Z Hurt/Comfort (26 Headcanons)
- Social Interactions (15 Headcanons)
- Childhood (14 Headcanons)
- Video Game Themed (15 Headcanons)

A-Z Hurt/Comfort

Social Interactions

Childhood

Video Game Themed

84 votes total

"See something you like?"

Aug 13, 2022

Yet another Nikke combat sneak peek... because it is single-handedly going to be the largest scene in the entire chapter. There's a *lot*, and I mean a *lot* of variations in here. Enough to satiate Nikke lovers and haters alike (don't you worry).

Relationship A-Z Headcanons: Jost

Aug 12, 2022

A = Affection (How affectionate are they? How do they show affection?)

Jost's affection is always a bit jagged and rough around the edges, but that's not to say it's anything other than genuine. There's also a pretty big discrepancy in how she behaves in public as opposed to how she acts behind closed doors.

In public? She shows next to no emotion. The most outward affection you'll be receiving is her choosing to stand or sit by you, or her offering you snacks. Otherwise, well... it's easy to fluster her in a close relationship, and flustering her goes hand-in-hand with annoying her sometimes with how riled up she can get.

Behind closed doors? She'll never *say* it, but she *will* angrily pout until you give her the attention she desires. Cuddling, kissing, teasing and play fighting, whatever it is, if it's genuine one-on-one attention she'll be happy. She'll also love to brush and braid your hair, if applicable. It's a big part of her culture and a *huge* sign of affection from where she comes from-- it's basically akin to calling someone family.

But Jost's affection hides in other things, too-- somehow always having your favorite snack on hand, forcing you to eat when you forget to, subtly helping you or backing you up when you need it, etc. She's a strong supporting presence, but only to those she cares about.

B = Best friend (What would they be like as a best friend? How would the friendship start?)

Jost has a few friends around the world, but none that she's bothered to stick around long enough to call a "best friend"-- and she'd like to keep it that way. Jost isn't keen on getting too close to people. She has to travel a lot for work, and something always ruins her friendships anyway. It hurts less to be less invested so... that's exactly what she does.

However, if someone *did* manage to befriend her (and trust me, it would *not* be easy) it would be well worth it. She's incredibly loyal to those she trusts... at least she would be if she trusted anyone. She's always willing up to stand for people who can't or refuse to stand up for themself, and in general, is very much a go-getter for herself and those she cares for. She has enough ambition to take care of everyone.

C = Cuddles (Do they like to cuddle? How would they cuddle?)

Jost *loves* cuddles-- but gods be damned, if you tell anyone that she will *not* hesitate to try and strangle you.

Jost in general is pretty touch-averse until she really grows close with someone. Growing up, she wasn't given much attention. There were no hugs, or cuddles, or *anything*. As a result, she's simply resorted to refusing affection of any and all kinds. She doesn't need it, okay? Only weak, needy people do, and she's not weak *or* needy... unless it comes to you.

The second you break down those walls, she's going to want, *need,* that intimacy very, *very* badly. It was something she was never given-- was never *offered*-- and has since always rejected. Any chance she has now to relish in it, she's going to take.

That being said, Jost likes to just burrow into you. Honestly, if you were to just lay on top of her and crush her she'd be more than happy with life-- it's warm, and she likes the pressure. Otherwise, she most *definitely* likes to be the little spoon.

D = Domestic (Do they want to settle down? How are they at cooking and cleaning?)

Jost doesn't plan on settling down any time soon (though that's not to say never). While Nikke is completely averse to it, Jost is just aware that she's young and has plenty of time to focus on other things for the time being. Similar to Nikke, however, even if she settled down in terms of family, I don't think she'd ever want to stop traveling. She likes to see the world, and if she can share the knowledge she has with her friends and family while taking them to magnificent cities far and wide, she's going to.

When it comes to cooking, she's actually a pretty good chef. She's picked up recipes from all across the world and as a result, she can pretty much make anything out of something. As for cleaning, well... I don't know. She's never really had to clean before-- Vrithka isn't exactly a place you "clean" and otherwise she owns such little personal things that there's never really a reason for her to have to tidy up. I think in general she's the kind of person to just clean *as* she does something, so take that as you will.

E = Ending (If they had to break up with their partner, how would they do it?)

Jost is great at turning off her emotions-- so she'd do just that: shove away any feelings she has towards them, tell them they need to talk, and (incredibly bluntly) tell them that it's over. There's no explanation, no words of comfort. It's straight to the point, and she won't stick around to hear any pleas or partake in any arguments.

Cold-hearted? Maybe. Effective? Most certainly.

F = Fiance(e) (How do they feel about commitment? How quick would they want to get married?)

Do not mention marriage around Jost unless you actually want to send her into cardiac arrest. Marriage isn't really a thing within Vrithkan gorgon culture-- at least, not in the traditional legal sense-- but she *does* have a reference for a relationship akin to one... and that would be the relationship between her mother and father.

Nikke was able to acknowledge the love between them both, even if it didn't always extend to him and Jost. Jost, on the other hand, only saw something toxic and manipulative. Which one of them is right is up for debate, but Jost's parents' relationship has left a lasting (and very negative) impact on how she approaches relationships.

She doesn't like promises. They're keen on being broken. Let's just leave it at that.

G = Gentle (How gentle are they, both physically and emotionally?)

Jost and the word "gentle" aren't exactly synonymous with one another-- though that's not to say her guarded edge *never* comes down. She likes cuddling, and she is more than capable of quiet moments of emotional intimacy, but more often than not Jost hides behind sardonic quips and aggression.

She'll only be "gentle" when it's behind closed doors and in the quiet of night when she's far too exhausted to keep the facade going-- and only ever with you. It's in those quiet hours that you see the real Jost, the woman she's so desperate to keep hidden and tucked away.

H = Hugs (Do they like hugs? How often do they do it? What are their hugs like?)

Yes, yes, and *yes*, but if you tell anyone she'll also kill you. She likes big bear hugs more than anything in the world-- they're the one thing that genuinely makes her feel safe and loved. Because of that, she's not libel to just hug anyone and is *very* picky about who she lets into her personal space.

That being said, she'd hug you all the time behind closed doors-- and she's great at hugs, too. She's strong and tall, so they're a perfect pressure and are all-encompassing. That being said, she *is* cold, so make sure to keep that in mind, or else you'll be startled by the cold hand that sneaks up your back.

I = I love you (How fast do they say the L-word?)

She would almost *never* say those words and instead use a different phrase to tell you how much she cares for you. It's a phrase she'd use early on in the relationship, and she'd say it so casually that it would likely take you a while to truly understand the weight of what she's been saying all this time.

If Jost is in a relationship with you, she's in love with you. You've earned it, especially with all the walls you've had to tear down in the process. But she won't let you know that-- she doesn't want to burden you with that.

J = Jealousy (How jealous do they get? What do they do when they’re jealous?)

Very. Jost has some inferiority problems that she needs to deal with, and she really does do her best to keep herself in check. But if someone is blatantly flirting with you and getting into your face, she'll be like a furious bull waiting to charge at someone.

She has a terrible fear of never being enough-- and you're the first person who's treated her like she is. There's no way in the *hells* she's risking losing that.

That being said-- whoever's made the mistake of ignoring the warning signs of a worried MC and a furious Jost is in for a ride... and by that, I mean a straight-up fist fight or full-on yelling argument.

And Jost *will* win.

K = Kisses (What are their kisses like? Where do they like to kiss you? Where do they like to be kissed?)

In general, she kisses very rough and aggressively-- some may find it pleasant, some may find it disorienting. She mainly does it to keep people distracted whilst she gets straight to point of things. She doesn't have time for sentimentality and all that boring shit.

But in a relationship? Softly. *Very* softly. It's something she'd honestly be embarrassed by-- she's not great with intimacy of any kind that's not blatantly aggressive and sexual-- but it's something she's internally longed for a long time. Not that she's let anyone, let alone herself, know that.

L = Little ones (How are they around children?)

Incredibly awkward. Nikke's the one who deals with the kids in the clan, Jost avoids them like the plague and hisses at any that tread too close to her. It's not that she doesn't *like* kids, just she never really got the chance to be one, and as such, doesn't really even know how to interact with them in the first place.

That being said, even though Jost doesn't like kids, they usually tend to like her. She's like the big bad scary lady that everyone gets dared to go poke with a stick, and when she gets annoyed they all laugh and giggle.

Children are probably the *only* group of people who are almost entirely safe from Jost's ire... most of the time, at least.

M = Morning (How are mornings spent with them?)

Jost's an early bird... or snake? Point is, she'll wake up at sunrise and be ready to go. She's a practical person and likes to get a head start on the day and her chores, and even though she gets up so early, she'll still find a way to stay busy all day.

If you're also an early riser, chances are you're out and about and doing the same thing. If not, Jost *will* greet you with coffee/tea in bed, and if she's in a particularly good mood, she might even go and ahead and make you an entire breakfast.

Also, everyday morning kisses are *required*.

N = Night (How are nights spent with them?)

It's *hard* to get Jost to stop working, and if it weren't for you, chances are she'd just keep working until she was too exhausted to, and then crawl into bed and pass out.

Occasionally, however, she'll quite literally have *nothing* left to do. In those cases, her first preference is to climb somewhere high and look at the stars and the sky. It makes her feel small to be so high up-- and she likes to feel small. Likes to feel insignificant. It makes life feel unimportant. Cynical and daunting to some-- comforting to her.

If *you* were available, however, she'd much prefer to be with you, whatever it is that you may be doing. Just hanging out and talking, hanging out with the others, watching you do stupid stunts, etc.

O = Open (When would they start revealing things about themselves? Do they say everything all at once or wait a while to reveal things slowly?)

She'll reveal anything you ask-- but she'll *only* answer what you ask. You ask how her childhood was? She'd say hard and lonely and nothing more. You want the specifics? You'll have to ask the right questions.

It's not that she doesn't *want* to tell you. It's that she doesn't want to come off as a burden or throw too much at you at once. She's terrified of scaring you away-- terrified that once you see her for what she is, you'll be disgusted by what you see.

Or, worst of all, you'll find her pitiful.

P = Patience (How easily angered are they?)

I feel like we all know the answer to this one.

It's low. Very, *very* low. Jost is prone to snipping and yelling and growing angered and annoyed *very* quickly. That being said, her anger is very rarely deep nor is it personal, and she *does* always apologize... at least, she usually does.

Q = Quizzes (How much would they remember about you? Do they remember every little detail you mention in passing, or do they kind of forget everything?)

She remembers a lot... like, a weird amount. But that's a good mix of her just remembering stuff about you regularly and her writing stuff about you in her journal for later. Every obscure, but interesting, thing you say *will* be written down and brought up at a later date somehow, whether that be in a gift or date or something else entirely.

She likes to keep tabs on people... and you're the only person she keeps tabs on for no reason other than that she cares about you. Consider yourself one of the lucky ones.

S = Security (How protective are they? How would they protect you? How would they like to be protected?)

Jost is *very* protective of people she deems as loyal or part of her inner circle. Interestingly enough, Nikke is *not* one of those people, but you most definitely are. Granted, the Commander is one of the most skilled people in the entire realm, but that doesn't mean she isn't going to do her best to aid them when they need it.

If Jost can't help in a battle or physical sense, she most definitely can help the Commander when it comes to getting them what they want. Jost is good at twisting truths and playing dirty, and she's more

than willing to go and pull the strings necessary to guarantee The Commander's success in whatever it is they're doing.

However-- Jost also *loves* to be protected, not that she'll ever admit it. Not many people have ever tried to protect her in a way that wasn't blatantly out of pity (**cough** Nikke **cough**), so you protected her just because you cared about her... yeah, that would get her heart thumping. Believe it or not, she maybe *does* want to be the princess who is rescued in the end... just don't be too sappy about it or it ruins the magic.

T = Try (How much effort would they put into dates, anniversaries, gifts, everyday tasks?)

She'd put in a lot of effort. Yet again, that journal she keeps is helpful-- anything you've mentioned you wanted, or wanted to do, she has written down somewhere. She also may or may not brainstorm ideas of things to do with you in her free time...

As for anniversaries, they'd be a pretty big thing for her. She'd definitely want to carve out time to spend the entire day together and go out and do something nice, like go out and get dinner. For the big celebrations, she'd want to take you on trips to some of the places she's explored and take you out for a night on the town.

What can I say-- she likes to get out and about.

U = Ugly (What would be some bad habits of theirs?)

She keeps how she feels bottled up until it's too late and all her emotions come spilling out in what is usually an unhealthy, and at times toxic, explosion. It's something she can get better with time, but she can get mean quick and with little to no warning when it happens. This, combined with how closed off she is, is largely why she's spent most of her life alone.

On top of that, she can be shockingly selfish when it comes down to it. Give her the promise of power and success at the expense of her family? Well... she can't guarantee she's going to say no, that's for sure.

V = Vanity (How concerned are they with their looks?)

She cares an average amount. She likes to be professional, which usually just means throwing on some black lipstick and kohl, which is pretty quick and easy to do, and she likes her outfits to be at least somewhat put together if she can help it. But otherwise, she doesn't care much about her appearance. Her makeup smears in a fight? Something gets torn? She's stuck trudging around in rain and mud?

Eh, so be it. Growing up in Vrithka doesn't leave much room for vanity.

W = Whole (Would they feel incomplete without you?)

Honestly, this is a bit of a tough one, but I'm inclined to say yes.

To Jost, in order to feel like you're a piece of her, she'd need to feel like a required piece to you, too. But if you left her, or weren't around, then clearly you don't need her, and therefore you were never two halves of a hole to begin with. You were always just one, fulfilled person, and she's still left incomplete, lonely, and incapable of functioning in the world happily.

So yes... she'd feel incomplete without you, and also look back at the relationship like she was a burden the entire time.

X = Xtra (A random headcanon for them.)

Jost keeps notes on everyone she finds interesting in her journal... meaning that there are most *definitely* plenty of notes on you in there. If you're lucky, you might even be able to steal it and sneak a look at what she thinks about you, someday...

Y = Yuck (What are some things they wouldn’t like, either in general or in a partner?)

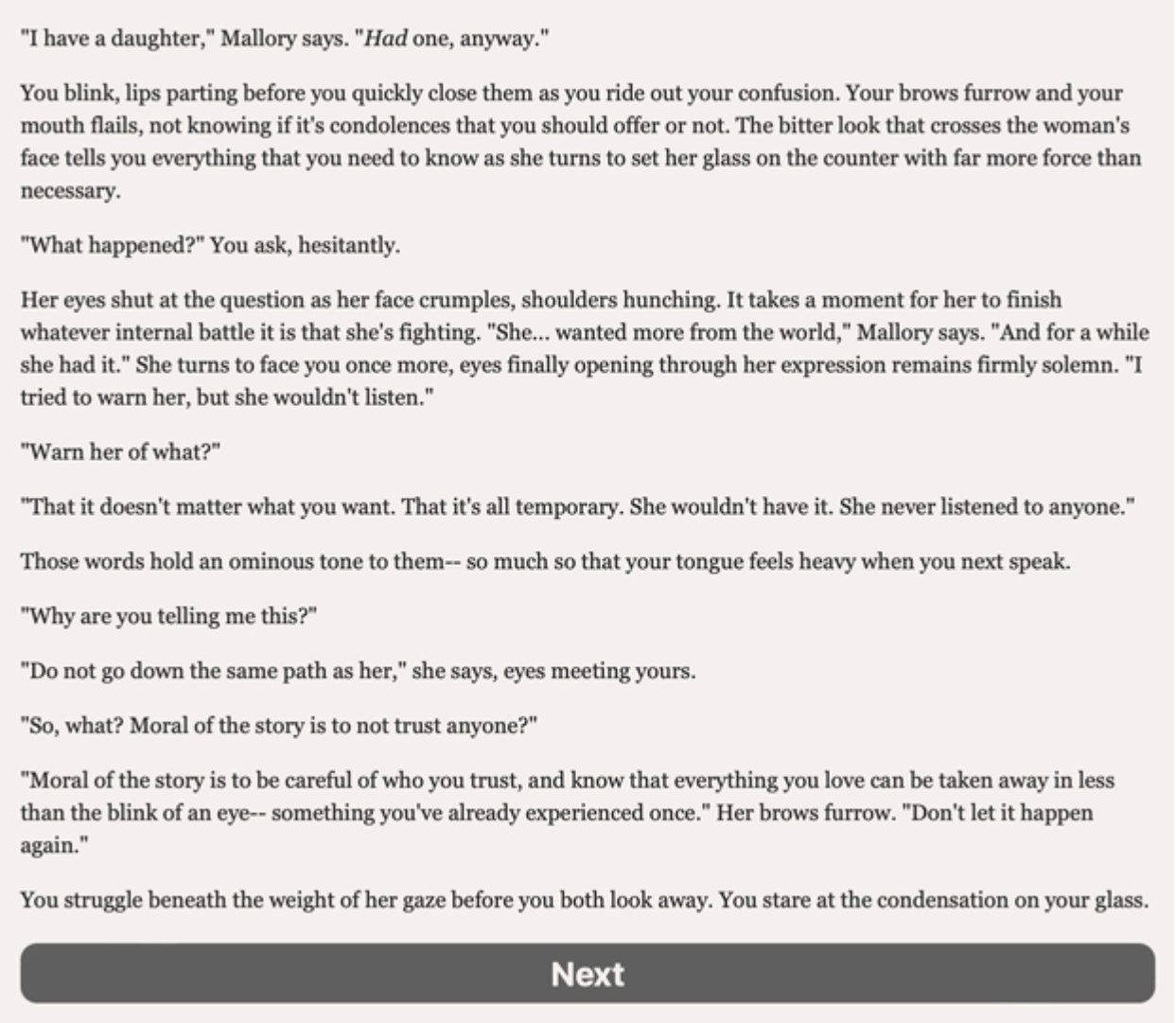
Clinginess. It's something that genuinely frustrates and annoys her, and it's a pretty surefire to end the relationship. If you're always fussing over where she is and where she's going, she's most surely going to be in a sour mood and then some.

She also hates judgmental morally-upstanding types of people-- partially because she doesn't think they know what hardship is, partially because she doesn't like any form of self-reflection, and being judgmental towards her is most certainly not going to be what gets her to do it.

Z = Zzz (What is a sleep habit of theirs?)

She likes to burrow in thinks-- and by that, I mean she'll wrap herself up in blankets and press her face into piles of pillows or *other* blankets, etc. Her bed is a complete mess wherever she goes and likely more resembles a nest than it does an actual bed.

Also... she may or may not drool in her sleep.



Mallory's Daughter.

Aug 5, 2022

For reference-- Mallory is the lovely old lady who helps MC at the beginning of their exile, as shown in one of the previous sneak peeks from May!

It's safe to say Mallory sees a piece of her daughter in MC. And who knows-- maybe MC will even be able to meet her someday... 👀

Not Going Anywhere. | MC x Jost.

Aug 2, 2022

AN: Was fleshing out Jost since this month I'll be writing her A-Z headcanon list and I ended up writing this beautiful, angsty little thing <3 I can def. see a scene similar to this ending up in the final game!

You grab hold of Jost's chin and force her to look at you. Her eyes are teal, pupils thin and face blotchy. By all means, she looks miserable, and you know she must feel as much since she doesn't even bother to fight back against you. For once, there is no scrambling to back away or defend herself. She's down for the count-- helpless and defenseless.

Your thumb traces her chin before sliding up along her cheek. Her scales are rough against your fingers as you brush a strand of her hair back and behind her ear. The action has her immediately breaking eye contact with you, a small sniffle escaping her as your fingers toy with the countless beads woven into her hair. There are Vrithkan symbols and feathers, and a few that seem to match the beads that sit in Nikke's own hair.

"Jost…" You say her name softly. Her ear twitches, but she refuses to meet your gaze still. "I'm here if you want me. I'm not… I'm not going anywhere."

Those words only seem to make her feel worse, if even possible. Her expression crumbles and her eyes squeeze shut, and she shakes her head as if you're lying. You're helpless to do anything but watch as more tears fall from her eyes, a withering, choked sob slithering out from the depths of her chest as she curls more into herself.

"It's true--"

She shakes her head even more until the beads in her hair clink. "No," she whispers darkly, *bitterly:* "No."

She repeats the word to herself, and you watch as second by second she falls deeper and deeper into a frenzy. You don't know why you do it-- maybe it's just instinct, or maybe it's just stupidity-- but soon enough you're reaching out and grabbing her, pulling her towards you. She tries to shove you away, to push and hit, and it's a scrambling fight all the way until you manage to tuck her head into your shoulder.

A moment of peace. Of silence. Of confusion-- like a beast that's been slain and cannot possibly comprehend its own defeat.

And then she shatters.

She all but crumples in your arms, curling into a ball against your chest. Her breath is cool on your skin as she burrows into you as if close isn't close enough, frantic, anxiety-filled pants escaping her as she struggles to catch her breath. Her body shakes and trembles, and sobs would be too simple a word to describe the agonizing sounds that escape her.

She screams. It is angry, filled with hatred, and vengeful. You can feel her fangs pressed against your skin, can hear the sound echo in your mind over and over and *over* again. She's being torn apart from

the inside out by this rage, you know it, and she does too. But there's no escaping it. You understand that, now. She's tried-- she's tried *so hard*. And she just can't.

Despite it all, she doesn't hurt you during her outburst. No claws dig into your skin, no fangs rip open flesh. By the end, all that is left is a shaking withering mess, scratch marks covering her own forearms from where she lashed out. You grab hold of her wrists as she trembles, keeping herself from doing worse as you press your lips against her forehead. The hand that you hold slips from your grasp to instead clutch at your shoulder, her grip tight and desperate, terrified that you could slip away at any moment.

You don't know how long you sit there in the darkness of the room, illuminated only by the shaking, wavering candlelight of the hanging lantern, listening to the sounds of the waves crashing against the hull of the ship. But you sit until she can breathe without choking, and her shakes fade to the occasional shiver. And for the first time, you know you have seen her for what she really is. And what she is, is something far too similar to yourself: hurt, lonely, *afraid.* You look at her and see a mirror of some of the worst parts of yourself-- but you see something else, too. A hand, outstretched, buried beneath layers of resentment. A hope that has not been snuffed out still.

Your hand rubs circles on her back, your fingers curl stands of her hair around them. You think of small moments-- moments she's tried to hide. The way her eyes would linger when you both knew they shouldn't. Her willingness to be in your presence when you should've been enemies. The way she offered you snacks, watching you like you were a wild animal. Each movement you made was watched, calculated, and analyzed-- each acceptance and each rejection an acceptance and rejection of something else, something deeper, something internal. All these moments, and yet it is only now that you understand what they mean.

"I'm not going anywhere," you whisper again-- fiercer this time.

She doesn't try to argue. You don't know if she really even knows what those words mean-- don't know if she's ever truly been shown. Don't know if she can even truly believe them. But hells-- if there was ever a soul who was willing to try to show her, it's you.

The Dragon Story. (2/3) | MC

Jul 29, 2022

Part One | Part Two | Part Three

"Wait," Vethna says, brows furrowing. "You were *inside* its mouth?"

You shrug. “For a very brief period of time, yes.”

Vethna blinks dumbly at that, gaze going off to the side, and you can’t help but grin a little from the emotions that streak across their face: confusion, repulsion, horror, amazement, and then curiosity-- a burning itch to know more.

Their lips part to speak, a gleam in their eyes, but before they can even take a breath they’re half jolting out of their chair in fear, twisting to thwack whatever it is that scared them. Nikke’s hand quickly shoots back into his lap from when he squeezed their shoulder when they land a hit on him with their rings, a Vrtihkan expletive slipping past his tongue as he rubs at his knuckles. Syfyn snorts a low laugh into her ale at the action, though she’s quick to hide the smile that creeps onto her face, opting instead to take the longest drink possible right as Vethna glares at her.

“Gods,” Nikke hisses-- “what the hells?”

Vethna doesn’t respond-- instead opting to hit him a second time but harder on the arm before scooting their chair to be closer to Amilia.

“It was just a joke,” Nikke mutters.

“No one’s laughing,” Vethna snips.

Syfyn drinks deeper.

“Why are you even freaked out?” He drawls. “You should know all about this.”

Vethna’s brows lower still, the beginning of a frown crawling onto their lips as they look away. Without even trying, Nikke’s yet again hit a sore spot as Amilia glowers at him, and it’s with an annoyed huff that he puts his hands up in surrender.

“Just continue the stupid fuckin’ story,” he mutters, throwing a haphazard hand in your direction. You roll your eyes, though you heed the command nonetheless, if not for Vethna’s sake.

***

“Run,” Omaren breathes. You look at him wide-eyed. *“Run!”*

He grabs you by the collar and throws you back to get your feet moving-- and it’s half-falling down a hill that you finally manage to heed his instructions. Your heart beats heavily against your chest, your lungs on fire with each and every inhale, as you sprint down the decline with Omaren hot on your heels. You can hear the sound of earth ripping open and boulders lurching, and without warning, a cloud of dust descends on you both. It crawls up your nose and coats the inside of your mouth, forcing you to cough and hack as you struggle not to stumble. You can’t see-- can’t *breathe*-- and terror threatens to seize you as your foot catches on a root and sends you sprawling.

You go careening with the surrounding boulders, becoming one with the landslide as rocks twice the size of your body go tumbling past you and over your head. Pebbles pelt at your face as you futilely try to stop your descent, nails ripping from nail beds as you claw at anything you can grab.

And then, purchase. *Relief.* Your hand catches another large tree root, and you grab onto it with all your strength. Your eyes burn from the dust, and you're quick to close them once more as more of it showers down on you.

Even so-- the image you saw for one flickering second burns in your mind as your head aches from the raucous noise that surrounds you: *wings eclipsing the sun.*

Screech.

The most terrible, loudest sound you've ever heard in your entire life leaves the mountain-- so loud that you let out a screaming cry of your own as you feel something pop in your ears. It's a struggle to ignore your instincts-- to not let go and immediately try to cover your ears as the ringing takes over your head-- but you manage to do as much to avoid falling to your imminent demise.

Now, you can no longer deny it. You *are* terrified. The entire tree you hold onto shakes from the sound before lurching, the dirt that keeps it firmly rooted beginning to slide down the mountain. It begins to lose purchase as it leans diagonal and *diagonal and-- no,* downright *horizontal--*

Stop moving.

Your instincts scream at you, and though the tree continues in its soon-to-be descent, you don't dare to move-- to try and stop it or find something else to hold onto. You *can't.* Your muscles are frozen and your blood has gone cold, and you realize the horrible roaring has stopped, though the ringing has not.

You try to keep your breathing quiet at the risk of not getting enough air, and it's then that you steel your nerves.

Slowly, so, *so,* slowly, you look over.

Two thin, small pupils sit directly on you. It does not blink. It does not *move.*

A dragon the size of mountains and kingdoms.

You choke back on a sob, muscles burning in your arms. The tree lets out the smallest groaning noise, and you close your eyes and bite down on your lip hard enough to draw blood as you curse yourself. Curse the tree. Curse your entire gods-damned life and every moment that's ever led you here. You are going to die today-- there's no doubt in your mind about it. Omaren was right, and you should've listened, but you *didn't*-- why didn't you--?

Creek.

Snap.

Crack.

The branch breaks.

You scream as you fall, and the descent is simultaneously longer and shorter than you expected before you hit the ground. The ringing grows louder, and there's a split-second delay in your body hitting the ground and the pain that comes with it. The air is forced from your lungs as you choke, mouth open but no air coming in, and it's as you writhe and beat at the ground that you hear the mountain rumbling once more. Each step the beast makes forces the ground to shake and the trees to rattle, but right before the dragon can lean over the ledge to see you once more, something is grabbing you and yanking you into the nearby foliage.

Fear takes hold, and you attempt to lash out at whatever it is only to fall flat and gasp for air still. Panicked noises escape you as you try to wriggle out of the grasp that has you, and you'd be sobbing if you had the energy to do so--

"MC-- it's me, just--"

You snap your head over to look at the figure, face blurry, and though you know in the back of your mind it's Omaren, you can't get yourself to calm down. He leans over you as your vision becomes faded, and though you see his hand reach out for your face, you cannot feel its presence when it's presumably pressed against your cheek. It moves upwards to press hair away from your face, and though he's speaking in low, quiet commands to you, it enters one ear and leaves the other.

You can't understand anything he's saying at all.

He looks off to the side-- uneasiness on his features-- and you can sense something is wrong. Either way, he continues to focus on you, moving so he's the only thing you can see as he takes your face in his hands. Your vision focuses in and out, dizzying just as much as it's nauseating, but you can make out Omaren taking in a deep breath and letting it out, repeating the action for you to copy.

Your mouth opens-- nothing happens. He continues, expression calm, and for a split second, you're able to forget the danger that surrounds you.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in--

A rush of cool, crisp air floods your lungs, and it's with a gasp that you lurch up-- and Omaren grabs you, yanking your back into his chest as he presses a gloved hand against your mouth to keep you quiet. You don't bother to fight him, instead taking in deep, steady breaths through your nose as your heart struggles to keep calm. Omaren's presence alone is soothing, his own calmness spreading out and into you, and the two of you sit in silence as the dragon finishes its descent down the hill.

It sniffs the air once, twice-- then lowers its head to the ground and sniffs, once, twice. Its eyes flicker into the foliage and land directly on you.

You stiffen-- but Omaren keeps you in place.

It stares and it stares--

And then it looks away. You want to sob in relief-- but you can't. Not yet. It isn't over, not even as Omaren releases you, and as you watch him creep through the underbrush, pressed low to the ground to watch the dragon like it's *his* prey, you know there's only one way this can end.

You glare daggers into the back of Omaren's head. You don't know how in the hells the two of you are meant to kill something this big, this *strong*, and you can already feel your body threatening to give out on you from your fall alone. Doubt creeps into you-- strong, *sickening*-- a doubt that you once thought yourself too old for, too *mature.*

This is your fault-- and you need to fix it. Prove to Omaren that he can trust you. Prove to him that you have what it takes. Do whatever you can to make him proud.

Make him proud.

It's that thought alone that pushes you to get onto your knees and follow right after him. He slips between two bushes, and you're careful to make as little noise as possible as you lay beside him, both of you on your elbows in the dirt. Your body throbs and aches, but you ignore it in favor of focusing on your breathing, already hanging off of every word Omaren has yet to say.

He leans in towards you. You do the same. He nods towards the dragon.

"What do you think?" He whispers.

You snap your head to look at him as if he's insane.

"What?" You ask.

He turns to look at you. His expression is intense-- enough to make you freeze under his attention. "What do you think?" He repeats. You stare at him dumbly. "About the situation," he clarifies. "What are we going to do?"

"... what?" You repeat again. You can't tell if Omaren's serious or not-- angry or not-- and you feel panic rising up within you yet again.

"You woke it up," he says. "So how do you plan to put it down?"

"I--" Your voice threatens to rise in volume, and you're quick to cut yourself off when Omaren's stare turns dark. You're scared-- he's *scaring* you-- and you've barely done anything but you've already disappointed him. Already let him down--

“I don’t know,” you blurt. It comes out as a pathetic and shameful admission, and you’re quick to look away from Omaren to ignore the inevitable fury and disappointment that will be there on his face. Instead, you choose to look at a nearby rock-- look at the way the dirt surrounds it.

You’re scared, *you’re scared,* ***you’re scared.***

“You’re right,” he says. “You don’t know.” Your frown deepens-- but then you feel him elbowing you in the side. You glance at him-- and it’s then that you find his expression isn’t angry *or* disappointed.

It’s proud.

His voice lowers then, tone almost… almost *playful.*

“Want me to show you how?”

“How to…?”

“How to kill a dragon?” He goads. Your brows furrow more.

“How are you going to do that? You’re not even the size of its toe.”

He grins, then-- and it’s a side of him few ever see. You suppose you should feel honored by his laxness around you, but right now, it only makes you feel worse for your own lack of composure. He was worried just as much as you were not even a few seconds ago, and now he’s grinning and joking as if your lives aren’t dangling by a thread.

You part your mouth to speak-- to argue-- but he’s already clapping you on the back before you can even croak out a syllable.

“Watch and learn kid,” he says, turning to look at the dragon. *“Watch and learn.”*

And so you do. Any confidence (or arrogance) you had a few minutes ago has already been aptly turned to ash, leaving you in the same mindset you were when first taken under Omaren’s wing-- eager to see, eager to learn, eager to simply *survive.* But you have no room to doubt him-- not really. And it’s with that fact that the tiniest burst of excitement flickers to life within you as well.

He’s Commander Omaren, Peacekeeper of Plaithus, slayer of beasts and dragons alike (you think), and you’re about to watch him kill a dragon in real life.

Or perhaps you shall watch him die--

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“From coast to coast they tell stories about how the Commander of Plaithus slew one of the last dragons at the age of sixteen-- and you’re telling me you weren’t even the one to kill the damned thing?”

Nikke interrupts. “You might want to keep that one to yourself-- probably won’t earn you much street cred.”

“We haven’t even gotten to the end yet,” Amilia argues. “Anything could happen.”

“Right,” Nikke huffs, kicking his chair back so he can balance on the back two legs. His eyes meet yours. *“Anything.”*

“Does enough happen to even remotely make this story resemble the legend that’s spread oh, so far and so very wide?” Vethna asks, looking at you. A knowing, almost sly smile crawls onto their face as you scowl at them. “What?” They ask, running a finger along the rim of their glass. They shrug slightly as their gaze flickers to the dark wine within it. “It’s a genuine question.”

“Well *I,* for one, am glad the real story *isn’t* like the legend,” Amilia declares, chin held high though she threatens to waiver beneath Nikke’s questionable stare. She turns to look at you, her expression becoming sympathetic as she leans towards you over the table as if to share a secret. “You sounded kinda mean in the original story,” she stage-whispers.

“Being an asshole is what keeps people alive,” Nikke says, pointing a finger at Amilia.

“And what keeps dragons dead, apparently,” Vethna mutters. A snicker leaves Nikke at the quip-- though that only seems to annoy Vethna more than anything.

“I thought you were all ‘save the dragons’ a minute ago,” Syfyn says. “The hells happened to that?’

Nikke gives a noncommittal shrug. The motion is careless-- though when you see the way he meets Sabir’s glare you know it’s anything but. “What can I say?” Nikke says, the beginnings of a grin forming on his face. “I’m a liar.”

Sabir’s frown deepens, gaze turning dark, expression turning mean-- and it only seems to make Nikke sit up straighter in amusement, grin growing so wide that his teeth practically gleam in the candlelight.

“Not as much of a liar as the entirety of Plaithus, however,” he says. “Because at the rate this story is going, I would bet sixteen-year-old me could beat sixteen-year-old you’s ass.”

“Try twenty-six-year-old you and sixteen-year-old me,” you retort. "Even then..."

“Oh?” He says, kicking his feet off from the desk as he leans forward. “How ‘bout we fight right here and *right* now and--”

“How about--” Vethna loudly interrupts, “we finish the gods-damned story, *hm?”*

You and Nikke don’t turn to look at Vethna, instead choosing to glare at the other like your stares alone could kill each other. It’s only after Sabir clears his throat that the two of you sit down slowly, hackles raised still and truce tumultuous at best.

“Fine,” you grumble. “But I’m warning you now-- it’s not very pretty.”

The Trial. | Vethna Mevnrael | P.O.V. Switch

Jul 24, 2022

AN: I'm writing all of these as if the characters have good affinity w/ MC but aren't being romanced-- Vethna's final thought process here would be quite a bit different with a romanced MC!

Vethna's never been a fighter. They're tall, but not particularly strong, and besides-- such physical activities have never been befitting of a high-ranking sorcerer. Their battles are based on wits and magic-- how quickly one can outthink their enemy and how powerful one's will is in order to carry out magical feats on such a scale that one could be considered a god.

But the second that Vethna was being dragged through grimy halls, they fought like hell: like an *animal*.

They were thrashing and scratching and biting-- the taste of blood was heavy on their tongue and threatened to make them nauseous each and every time they swallowed. Some of their nails had been ripped right from their nailbeds from the ferocity of their attacks, and though they had been beaten and hit with each outburst, the pain had only fueled them to act out more.

And when the collar was locked on their neck and snapped into place?

They screamed. They howled. They yelled and they wailed and they paced and they tore at their hair and bit at their knuckles. The world had gone quiet, and never before in Vethna's life had they ever felt more alone. A piece of themself was ripped right out from their chest, torn with little to no mercy, and the aching cavern it left within them was eating them away from the inside out.

They were nothing without their magic. Just a husk-- an empty shell deprived of its contents. So who were they to be bothered by the way their body tore itself apart in their attempts to use their powers? The relentless headaches, the endless nosebleeds, the throbbing pain that took over their entire body: all of it was worth it for just a flickering wisp of purple energy; for the simple reassurance that their magic was still there and not stripped away completely. And they felt the need to remind themself again and *again and* ***again.***

They could not afford to lose their magic. They refused to.

The pain made the time go by quicker-- so much so that Vethna couldn't even begin to estimate how long they'd been stuck in that grimy, repulsive cell. The guards refused to make eye contact with them when they came and went, as if terrified a single glance alone would give Vethna the ability to slip into their minds and manipulate them. They slid trays of food towards Vethna with swords and weaponry as if they were a monster, and despite the way Vethna nearly killed themself time and time again with that *stupid fucking collar*, none had the guts to so much as enter the cell-- not unless demanded by the Queen.

Why would they? Vethna was more than aware of the sorry state they were in. They nearly suffocated themself with the stench of their own blood, and there's something so very, *very* ironic in the way that the northerners cringe at the sight of it and hold their breath. In the south-- *oh,* in the south? Vethna's a walking, talking goldmine of blood: powerful blood, *potent* blood. The guards would be on Vethna like flies on shit at the sight of it, old as it may be, picking off dried pieces to drop into potions and crush into powdered dust.

Northerners can't even smell power when it's right beneath their noses.

And then, one day, the guards come like scared and cornered huntsman trying to wrangle in a particularly rowdy beast-- only, they're a bunch of armored men kicking and poking and prodding at a bruised, battered, and ruined (poor excuse of a) sorcerer. Vethna had been woken from the dead of sleep to be dragged out from their cell, and by then, they hadn't had the power to fight back. Hells-- they didn't even have the power to stand up fully.

And that led them to the here and now, tripping over their own feet as they struggle to swallow from how dry their throat is. They're a weapon just as much in Plaithus as they are in Vygrand-- the only difference is that here, they're an enemy. A *threat.*

And Vethna's heard about what Plaithus does to threats.

It's not good. So much so, that it makes Vygrand look like a utopia by comparison. But even then, Vethna knows one thing that must be the same here, because it's the same everywhere: *nobility.*

Snobby, stuck-up, pretending to be tougher than they actually are. And Plaithian nobles are a sad and sorry little breed from what little Vethna can deduce as they're dragged through the halls. Their masks are easy to read through, and their fear is strong. For as much as they speak of being "hardy northerners," they sure act like frightened children, nothing at all like the courtiers at home. A bitter smile crawls onto Vethna's face at the thought of them-- of people like Xavier and their parents. Cruel. Dangerous. *Sadistic*. And just as much enthralled by being in pain as they are by causing it.

Balanced, at the very least.

Even the Silven Viper hadn't been a true exception to his peers. Well-spoken? Sure. Quick on his feet? Admittedly. But *tough?* No. And something in that makes Vethna feel better-- *stronger*, somehow-- as the doors to the throne room appear before them. If Du Vaelas is Plaithus's best (and they know he is),

then all they have to do is walk into that room and survive. Their heritage will do all the rest-- they've been assured of that much.

Their eyes focus on the throne-room doors so intently that they fear they may go cross-eyed, struggling to piece together the elaborate image that sits on the expensive wood. It's an image Vethna had seen before whilst traveling through Melhrost. They hadn't been able to give it much thought, and they really can't say they can give it much now, either, but something in it makes their stomach churn uneasily. And, in truth, they might've missed it entirely if it weren't for the eyes-- for those terrible, sickly, green jeweled eyes--

Hands cupped together with multiple sets of wings-- head bowed, eyes shut, expression peaceful--

By the time Vethna's stomach drops in realization the doors are already parting, the face ripped in two, and they are greeted by the sounds of an angry crowd. Trials such as these are private affairs in Vygrand, held in front of the council with no one but the head members and a transcribe present. And now that Vethna sees what the alternative option is, they can't say they prefer it much.

People scream and shout a whole plethora of things-- killer, murderer, terrorist, blood drinker, and a few other titles so abominable Vethna doesn't try to remember them so much as they try to swallow and ignore them entirely. It's hard to when an entire room is demanding for you to be killed, tortured, and maimed, however.

Their eyes go to scan the crowd, nobility and commoners alike sitting and behaving like spoiled, angry children. Vethna wonders if they'd be half as bold if the collar on their neck wasn't present. And maybe it's wrong to imagine, to *fantasize* about, but they can't help but find bone-deep satisfaction in the idea of cutting and draining that crowd dry. They could kill every person in this room if given the chance.

No... more than that. The entire city. The entire *kingdom*--

Their jaw clenches together.

They sound like Xavier. Even so, they can't help but wonder just what kind of people the blood given to them in their youth had been stolen from. Good people? Kind people? Or people like... people like *this?* Because then-- *then,* Vethna tells themself-- *maybe it wasn't so bad.*

They shove the thoughts away-- ignore the bloodlust and the rage-- to instead look at the only important person in this room. It feels instinctual-- like they're some sort of safety blanket. And maybe they are, Vethna realizes, because the second their eyes meet The Commander's, they feel comfort. *Safety*. This is MC's territory, a viper pit only they truly know how to navigate, and Vethna can see as much in their steady gaze.

This isn't new, no. This is is just routine. And Vethna is thankful for that anchor every step of the way, even as they're being shoved down onto the ground so roughly that they nearly bite through their tongue.

"You're alive," they breathe. They can't fight the smile that crawls onto their face.

The Commander nods, the corner of their lips quirking up so subtly that Vethna might have missed it if they weren't focusing so hard. The crowd is raucous still, and Vethna struggles to tune out their plethora of ideas on just how they should be murdered: stoning, burnt alive, picked apart by birds, left to rot with bugs. Each idea has their muscles going taut, eyes squeezing shut as they drop their head for their hair to cover their face.

They like to think they're a tough person. A strong person. A *smart* person. But they're young and inexperienced-- something they've tried to hide as much as they possibly could their entire life. But now... they can't hide it. They're completely and utterly terrified, right down to their core. Their hands tremble and their teeth chatter and their composure is beginning to fall quicker than they can rebuild it.

"Look at what the cat's dragged in," Sabir drawls, leaning forward to get a better look at them. It's not entirely hostile, though it *is* entirely mocking, and bitterness alone has Vethna gathering their strength to turn and glare at him. But it is a child's glare, filled with terror and sadness just as much as it is rage, and the way the Viper's furrowed brows falter tells them he notices.

They look away quickly before his pity has the chance to set on his face. They refuse to see it-- refuse to accept it. They were an equal to him a week ago, and now they are a "child"-- fearful and unsure just like everyone claims them to be back home. And, the more and more they sit and listen to these insults, these *threats,* the more and more they feel like home was right. Xavier was right. *Father was right--*

The insults stop. A unanimous gasp of awe and confusion and fear.

Vethna's heart sinks, their stomach lurches, and they are turning quicker than they can process, hair flipping into their face as their wide eyes land on the doors. Amilia. The *real* Amilia. They had barely been able to glimpse it before when the collars were first shoved on, but even then, what they saw then pales in comparison to now.

They try to get her attention, but it's a futile task-- her gaze skitters over them and the others before she's dropping her head again, shaking like a leaf before she's tossed to her knees beside them. They look at her, but she doesn't look back.

If Amilia's truly an ancient fae... well, they're sure as shit going to have more problems on their hands if they survive this trial. Amilia's hiding stuff-- they've always known that-- but she's a golden blood *and* hiding stuff. And, with that, Vethna can't help but draw conclusions. Draw conclusions that *maybe*, someone is looking for her. *Maybe* someone wants her back. And if news comes out that they're together, *maybe* that person will find Xavier. Or Xavier will find them. And then...

Gods. They are so in over their head. Or, in other words-- *fucked.* They are all so incredibly fucked that it almost has Vethna in tears. Or laughter. Or both, all at once.

Though it seems someone else already beat them to the punch as a single, large, robust laugh echoes throughout the hall. But it is not a stressed laugh, or a sad laugh, or even a regretful one. It is manic,

and amused, and carefree. And something in that alone is terrifying. *Unhinged.* Vethna can't help but cringe as they hear it, body going tense as they hear the limping footsteps of a gorgon they can only just barely remember from a month ago.

They don't-- *can't*-- deal with someone like him right now. And it is because of that they release the tiniest relieved sigh when he is sat as far away from them as possible.

Nikke (was that his name?) has a grin on his face so wide that Vethna thinks his face might split in two-- and unlike how the crowd was with them, they're completely and utterly silent towards him. Nikke stares at all of them brazenly, gaze wild as he goads them. None of them dare to meet his stare head-on. He isn't like the rest of them-- not human enough to be ostracized and have it mean anything, not helpless enough like Amilia or Vethna to mock without fear of retaliation. His choices of weaponry are his blades, his fangs, and his own two hands.

And, when it comes to Vrithkan mythosi, no amount of guards can truly guarantee safety against that. Not really. It bolsters Vethna's resentment towards the crowd and their cowardice. Bolsters their annoyance towards Nikke and his ability to get away scot-free (even as he gets smacked in the side of the head with a dagger, because really, that should've already been done a long time ago). The only person they can get an ounce of comfort and steadiness from is MC, but that's not much help when Amilia's anxiety is like an infectious disease. It makes their fingers twitch and heart race, and it shames Vethna that they're incapable of doing anything to help themself, nonetheless Amilia.

And it fosters something else, too. Resentment. Anger. Bitterness. They're not calm and collected like MC, or Sabir, or Nikke. All three of them stand tall in their own respective ways, indifferent to the hatred of those that surround them. They don't care-- not at all, regardless of the risk.

They're not... they can't compete. Can't hold their own. They're a liability-- a nuisance who's bound to get in the way and get everyone killed. That thought alone has their eye twitching, body lurching this way and that against their will every few seconds despite their best attempts to calm themself. They want to bury their face in their hands and scream-- but they don't. Instead, they clench their teeth as hard as they can, hands clasped together and expression as blank as they can make it.

No one can know that they're in over their head, or scared, or panicked, or any other number of things. They dug this grave. They *made* this choice to run away. They thought they were strong enough to survive it-- strong enough to prove everyone at home and their cynical, cruel ways of thinking wrong. To prove that they were stronger than what everyone thought they were.

But it turns out *they* were the over-confident one. The one who was cocky, arrogant, and too self-assured.

And, as horrifying as the sentiment is, they can't help but miss Xavier. Miss home. Miss the ignorance.

Things were easier... *safer,* that way.

Esmerelda looks at you intently for a moment before her gaze goes off to the side. The way she thinks now is slow-- calculated-- but she has not nearly perfected the same stoic, unfeeling mask that Mother has.

"Juniper," she says your name slowly. You don't look at her. "Why have you never liked me?"

The question makes your muscles freeze. You thought whatever tension between you and her was a never to be addressed. An unspoken rule-- something that was simply understood.

Apparently not.

Your eyes flicker to the doctor who stitches the wound shut-- though he diligently acts as if he can't hear a single word that's being said.

"Why do you care?" You ask.

She pauses, as if taken aback. Her head shakes slightly, her long earrings jangling as she struggles to find an answer. Her mouth opens and shuts dumbly as she stutters.

"I... I..." She looks away yet again. "I never..." Her eyes close then-- and it's with a deep breath that has her shoulders rising and falling that she settles on an answer. "I never had anyone." She speaks slowly-- each word deliberate and chosen carefully. "I was... *am*... completely alone."

You frown.
She continues.

"You had Syfyn. And the kids in the barracks. Everyone always looked up to you. *I* looked up to you." As she continues, you see flickers of the girl she was in your childhood. She fiddles with the gloves on her hands, and her gaze stays glued to the floor as she struggles to rein in her thoughts. And then she lets out a huff of a laugh, a ghost of a smile crawling onto her face as if her pain is amusing. "I've always wanted you to like me *so*, so badly.

- (•) You can read through her act clear as day.
- ( ) You resent her still-- but you feel bad about it, now.
- ( ) You're stunned.

Next

Esmerelda's always been so keen to be your best friend. She would talk nonstop about how she was your big sister, and how this was your *family*, and how she was going to *'look out'* for you. But as you grew older, it only became more and more apparent how much of that was a lie. You didn't fit in here-- nonetheless *belong*. But Esmerelda never seemed to care much about that. She had an image in her head of what you were supposed to be, and she didn't care whether or not it was what you wanted or not.

You were never anything other than an accessory to her-- some sort of trinket to play with and do with as she pleases.

- (•) Tell her.
- ( ) Don't.

Next

Why have you never liked me?

Jul 13, 2022

This scene with Esmerelda is actually statistically kinda hard to get? It's based on one decision you make a bit earlier that spirals into you running into her... maybe one of the lines of text in this little sneak peek will give you a hint in how to get it 👀

That last line there, too, about Mother changing... the bit that follows after it is *quite* important if I do say so, myself. You'll just have to wait to find out what it says, though...

Relationship A-Z Headcanons: Freedom

Jul 9, 2022

A = Affection (How affectionate are they? How do they show affection?)

Freedom is very, *very* affectionate and has next to no concept of personal space when it comes to you. They've already been inside your very soul, and that's about as intimate as it gets, no? They're fond of running their fingers through your hair or caressing your skin, and they'll always be at your side if they can help it.

Besides-- physical contact is simple: *easy.* Emotions, on the other hand, are not. They're confusing, and strange, and they seem to be a lot more important to you mortals than they are to themself. In general, they tend to dismiss them entirely. But for you... For *you*, they will struggle to understand the nuances, and might even go so far as to... Dare I say it? *Change their behavior?*

In all truth, Freedom shows affection by treating you as an equal-- not as a lesser lifeform as they tend to do with just about everyone else.

B = Best friend (What would they be like as a best friend? How would the friendship start?)

Freedom doesn't do friends. They're an immortal being, and any relationship they have with a mortal is guaranteed to be short-lived in their eyes. Other than that, Freedom tends to view people as playthings. They greatly enjoy meddling in personal affairs and putting less than smart ideas into people's heads. They don't care much for the consequences-- why should they? The person will be dead in the blink of an eye, anyway.

C = Cuddles (Do they like to cuddle? How would they cuddle?)

As you could probably infer by the first headcanon, they *love* to cuddle. They also love skin-to-skin contact and pressure. They're all physical experiences that they can't feel unless they're within a human form-- and as such, some part of them will always be fascinated with the experience that is touch: the goosebumps and pleasant shivers-- the softness that can be held behind a gentle caress.

When they cuddle, they want to be completely intertwined. It's a form of intimacy they're not often granted the pleasure of having, and they always plan to take full advantage of it when given the opportunity to.

D = Domestic (Do they want to settle down? How are they at cooking and cleaning?)

A silly question to ask a god, no? There is no such thing as "settling down." Change is always imminent, and change is always unavoidable. They have seen civilizations rise and fall-- have seen once undefeatable creatures of myth be turned to stone. They themself are constantly changing, forever defined by the eyes of the people who worship them.

On a less foreboding note-- they cannot cook and the concept of cleaning is a foreign one. They do not experience hunger, and there's not much need for cleaning when you quite literally own nothing at all. Not anything physical, that is.

E = Ending (If they had to break up with their partner, how would they do it?)

Unfortunately for Freedom, they're usually (ie. *always)* the one being broken up with. And, even more unfortunately, all of those have somehow inevitably ended in the death (ie. *murder)* of their once significant other. At least, that's the case with mortals.

When it comes to other gods... well, relationships are significantly more fluid. They're never specifically "started" or "ended", they just *are*. As such, if Freedom wanted to break up with someone... Well, they'd probably just disappear.

... They never were the most tactful of people.

F = Fiance(e) (How do they feel about commitment? How quick would they want to get married?)

Commitment is a strange word. Besides-- isn't commitment temporary? And conditional? That's not real commitment-- just a sort of lie that people tell one another to make themselves feel wanted. *Loved*.

At least, that's what they think until they fall for someone. Freedom is the embodiment of emotion, and as such, when they love, it is fiercely and completely and entirely unconditional. They'll pledge themself to you in their entirety the second it happens-- and if you call, they'll come.

As for marriage-- well... It doesn't really mean anything to them. It's a mortal concept-- any immortals tend to avoid ordeals like that entirely. That being said, they'd get married if that was something you wanted-- and they'd do it the day you ask if that's what you want.

G = Gentle (How gentle are they, both physically and emotionally?)

They're always gentle. Manipulative, even, and that always requires a gentle touch, no? They don't manipulate to be cruel, however-- they just want to help... And usually, it works. They get people what they want almost *always.* The problem? Most people don't realize they asked for the wrong thing until it's already too late.

Cruelty and brute force are beneath Freedom. There's no need for physical force when you're a god-- and even then, cruelty is often unwarranted and unnecessary. Why shed blood and waste energy when you can sprinkle a few persuasive words here and there?

H = Hugs (Do they like hugs? How often do they do it? What are their hugs like?)

They love hugs... From you. If anyone else tries, they'll put a curse on them and their entire bloodline. While Freedom loves physical touch, they don't just let anyone into their personal space. They're a god after all-- they have to maintain *some* sort of image.

They'll hug you frequently-- and their hugs can range from them simply draping themself over you whenever they're near to them squeezing you as tightly as they can and refusing to let you go. That being said, their hugs are always incredibly comfortable, and, more than that, *safe.* There's security to be found in having the protection of a being as old as time.

I = I love you (How fast do they say the L-word?)

They'd say it the second they felt it-- at least, they would if they knew it wouldn't scare you off. Otherwise, they'd keep it to themself until you yourself admit it.

Once that's done... Well, you've opened the floodgates. They'll make sure to let you know just how adored you are. You'll never be left questioning your importance to them.

However, I don't think they'd say I love you specifically as a phase. They're more likely to say things poetic, or "I adore you," in its stead. The meaning, however, remains just the same.

J = Jealousy (How jealous do they get? What do they do when they’re jealous?)

The *only* time they'd feel jealous is if someone was actively trying to coax MC away from them. And in that case, there's one *very* simple and *very* permanent solution to put an end to it all (*cough* death *cough*). An even worse (but high unlikely scenario) would be if another wykna tried to flirt with MC for the same purpose... Luckily, wykna don't tend to interfere or mess with mortals in that way unless they just so happen to be the literal god of love themself.

Otherwise, Freedom doesn't mind what else MC does in their romantic life as long as they remain their Number One.

K = Kisses (What are their kisses like? Where do they like to kiss you? Where do they like to be kissed?)

Everywhere, anywhere, constantly. They *love* kissing just for the sake of kissing. They love the feeling, love the intimacy, love the experience. Their kisses are *always* long and drawn out and so very, incredibly passionate. Each one will leave you breathless and intoxicated, *just as it should be.*

If you truly want to make Freedom melt, taking the time to sit them down and just kiss them all over will drive them crazy in turn. Sure, they get truly worshipped on the daily, but sometimes the smaller, more intimate worships are the better ones.

L = Little ones (How are they around children?)

Terrible. Just awful. Why is it crying? Why is that one covered in its own fecal matter? That one just ate its own snot. If Freedom wasn't a god, they'd be calling upon them for mercy.

Not only do they gross Freedom out, but they're so *needy* for not being able to speak in fluent sentences. And did they forget to mention they're loud? And generally annoying and intolerable?

M = Morning (How are mornings spent with them?)

Lounging, if you'll let them. Freedom has all the time in the world, and if there's nothing of any importance to be done, they want to spend that time with you-- whether that's snuggling or talking or doing *other* things.

Otherwise, they like to bask in the sun a lot. You're likely to find them sunbathing like a cat and generally refusing to be helpful to anyone unless it's you.

N = Night (How are nights spent with them?)

I'll give you a hint... *it's no different than the daytime.*

However, at night time they may be privy to sharing a glass of wine as they tell you stories. Ancient stories-- stories lost to time and forgotten by even the most ancient of immortal beings. Stories of the *Old World.*

They speak of that time fondly-- and while they don't often admit to missing things, you know they miss it dearly.

O = Open (When would they start revealing things about themselves? Do they say everything all at once or wait a while to reveal things slowly?)

The problem with this is that there isn't much for Freedom to share about themself. They're always changing, and as a result, it's difficult for them to feel defined by any one part of their personality or past.

Other than that, their entire existence has been defined by followers and priests and temples that tower in the sky. Take all that away, and they may simply cease to exist in their entirety.

That's not to say they wouldn't answer MC's questions, should they ask the right ones. And they were willing to answer those questions from the day they first appeared in MC's head.

P = Patience (How easily angered are they?)

There are only two things in the entire world that anger Freedom.

1.) Threatening their domain-- that is, threatening to take away the concept of freedom in its entirety.

2.) Hurting MC.

And that rage is dangerous. Deep. *Ancient.* All-encompassing and with lasting consequences-- consequences that affect the entire world and every mortal who serves beneath them and then some.

Q = Quizzes (How much would they remember about you? Do they remember every little detail you mention in passing, or do they kind of forget everything?)

They'd forget the small stuff that they don't deem as "important"-- mostly because they're not things that Freedom knows to think about. Your favorite food for example. Wykna don't need to eat, so the entire idea of having a favorite food at all is bizarre to them. There's also a solid chance they'll forget your birthday-- but once again, I wouldn't take that as being personal. The years seem more like seconds to them, and the measurement of time in itself is strange.

That being said-- they'll remember all the other things you say, even if you say them in passing, or don't fully realize or understand them yourself. Your dreams, your aspirations, your hopes, your fears. Freedom will be well acquainted with those things, and when it comes to knowing you, *really* knowing you, they will understand you completely.

S = Security (How protective are they? How would they protect you? How would they like to be protected?)

In general, Freedom isn't a very protective person. Not of individuals, at least. When it comes to their followers, or the idea of depriving the world of freedom, however, they can become *quite* protective, if not borderline possessive.

As for *you*-- well, you're The Commander. You can handle yourself, no? They'll just... cheer from the sidelines, if that's okay with you. If shit hits the fan, and everything goes wrong, of course they'll interfere and protect you, but otherwise, Freedom is more than aware that MC is one of the most powerful people in the realm at this current point in time. That's something to be respected-- not underestimated.

As for *being* protected? Freedom doesn't *need* it-- no, not at all... but the idea of anyone actually caring for their well-being despite that fact? Well, it might just be enough to get that old heart of theirs racing.

T = Try (How much effort would they put into dates, anniversaries, gifts, everyday tasks?)

They can honestly be a hit overbearing when it comes to this. I compare the MC x Freedom relationship a lot to a Morticia + Gomez Addams relationship where Freedom is Gomez. They'll shower you with affection and always be doing things to keep the relationship lively and new.

Despite their standoffish demeanor to others, they're more than willing to work through the ups and downs of a relationship... just... keep in mind the ups and downs of a relationship with a god are a little more extreme than otherwise...

U = Ugly (What would be some bad habits of theirs?)

Their general view of mortals could become problematic depending on the person. They have a hard time caring about problems that would otherwise be big/life-changing for a mortal since to them it's rather uneventful. They would never treat MC that way of course-- but you can only wonder how much of an exception you are the longer you watch their behavior with others.

V = Vanity (How concerned are they with their looks?)

They're very concerned about looking good-- but the thing is, they don't ever *not* look good. And they know that. So yes, they're vain, but they don't have to go out of their way to look good/don't waste time constantly trying to be put together. They can use magic to change their entire appearance in the blink of an eye, whether that's their hairstyle, their outfit, their makeup, etc.

W = Whole (Would they feel incomplete without you?)

Depends. The answer's always yes, but what varies is how quickly they'd get over it. For example, if your MC is also immortal and you've spent centuries, possibly even millennia together, and then you leave? Yeah, they're going to be pretty upset for a very, very, *very* long time. Otherwise, if it was only for an average lifespan, they'd likely grow to have accepted the fact that you're gone a lot quicker-- mostly because the fact that you were mortal at all meant that you had limited time together regardless.

X = Xtra (A random headcanon for them.)

Freedom was one of the very few wykna who actually cared for humans and mythosi and regularly lived among them as a "normal" beingt, once upon a ime. They hated the idea of thinking they were any better than the others, nonetheless viewing themself as being "above" the rest of the world. In fact, you could even go so far as to say that Freedom admired the other races for their ability to feel things so deeply, to care so fiercely, to be so in control of their own destiny.

Such is not the case now. Something... Something made that change.

Y = Yuck (What are some things they wouldn’t like, either in general or in a partner?)

Stripping freedom away from others-- but not necessarily in the way you might inherently think.

Otherwise, I think there's a lot, and I mean a *lot*, that Freedom is willing to overlook when it comes to their partner. In general, a lot of things don't bother them, and that apathy only gets worse when it's their partner in question. You're *you*. Everyone else is irrelevant.

Z = Zzz (What is a sleep habit of theirs?)

They don't need to sleep, but sometimes they pretend to/try to force themself to just for the sake of sleeping with super soft blankets and sheets. I mean, who *doesn't* like to be comfortable? Snuggling with you is a great plus, too.

The argument seems to have reached some sort of standstill, though the silence is just as thick and tension filled as Sabir's yelling was. He stares at her accusingly, eyes wide.

"Say something," he demands.

She says nothing. *Does* nothing.

It infuriates him.

You can't say you blame him-- Syfyn's cold shoulder has even you waning thin on patience. You've never known her to be like this before-- so stoic and cold. She used to be impatient, loud, quick to confront.

Now... Now she's like a statue. A husk of what once was.

Sabir lets out a low huff at her response, or lack of one, as he shakes his head. Whatever this little dance is, it's clear this isn't the first time it's been done. His hands go to rest on his hips, and he almost reminds you of a chastising parent.

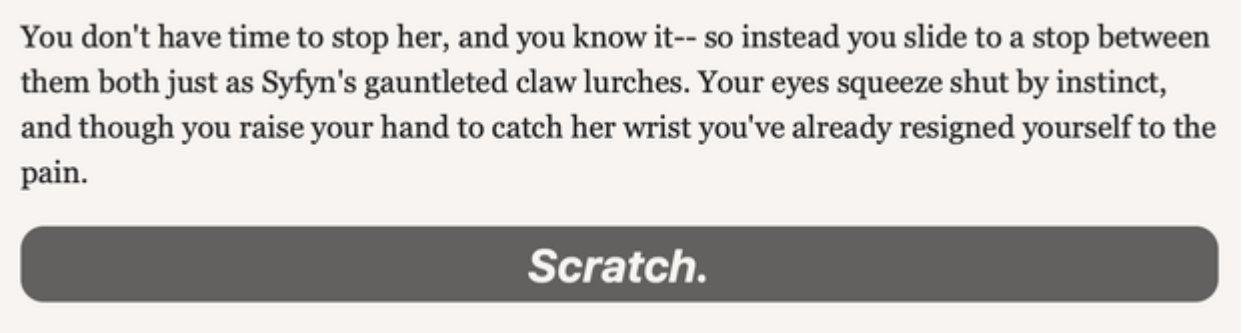
But then you look closer-- and you realize it's not disappointment on his features but hesitancy. His expression is the same one someone pulls before they say something they're going to regret, and it seems even Nikke knows that from the way he moves to sit on the fence.

When Sabir speaks, his voice is low. So much so that you almost miss what he says entirely.

"Getting MC killed isn't going to undo what they did to you. You know that, right?"

Silence. A breath of anticipation--

Syfyn moves like a lion about to strike.



The Argument.

Jul 3, 2022

In Chapter 5, Sabir + Syfyn enter an argument. Now, there's a few ways it starts, and a *lot* of ways it can end depending on what MC does.

Safe to say... this is one of the worst case scenarios.

Stupid, Stupid Girl. (1/2) | Esmerelda Naulvonte.

Jul 3, 2022

Did I just accidentally delete my own post b/c of the Patreon UI update?

... maybe. 🤦‍♀️Sorry for spamming the inbox.

*A*N: Takes place when Esmerelda ~18 and MC is ~17

Esmerelda never liked her mother.

She didn't like her when she was little-- when she told her to toughen up and quit crying when she fell once. So instead, she ran to Mom with a barely scuffed-up knee to sob as loudly as she could, green eyes glued to where Mother sat kneeled in the grass still. Mom would coo and dote and whisper-- and it was only after the promise of sweets that her tears would stop.

And she continued to do that-- until MC climbed a tree once, and fell and nearly broke their arm. They barely cried at all, and when Mother told them the same thing she had told Esmerelda, MC sniffled, took in a deep breath, and did as she said.

And then something weird happened. Something different. Mother helped them stand, and dusted the grass from their clothes. And Mother looked proud. Like really, *really* proud.

And Esmerelda realized then she would *kill* to have her look at her that way.

But Esmerelda wasn't MC. She wasn't fast, or tough, or strong, or even that smart. Syfyn and MC would run amok the palace, pulling pranks this way and that, laughing the whole time long between practices. They would roughhouse in the yard, taking turns punching the other until it hurt too bad to continue. And there was always a fondness in Mother's eyes when they did those things-- something akin to reminiscence. It didn't matter if they broke a vase or ran into a servant-- they were MC and Syfyn. And MC and Syfyn did what they wanted when they wanted.

And for as much as Esmerelda wanted to resent them for it-- she couldn't. Because MC was MC. They fell from trees and fought with swords and battled beasts and did it all without breaking a sweat. And any time Esmerelda might've had the chance to prove herself, *really* prove herself to Mother-- she always failed and came short. Because, the simple matter of the fact was, every time those chances came, Esmerelda was reminded of the very simple fact that *she did not like her Mother.*

Like the time Mother grabbed hold of her wrist and dragged her kicking and whining down the hall to her lessons. Or the time she broke a miniature on Mother's war table and she *freaked*. Or the time she spilled wine over her newly made gown and Mother nearly beheaded her then and there (why couldn't they just make a new one?)

And maybe, at some point along the way, it became purposeful. It wasn't fair that MC had her attention without asking-- that they could simply breathe and Mother would hang yet another medal of theirs on the wall. And yet, still-- Esmerelda could not find it in herself to resent them. Not truly. So she broke her harps that Mom bought-- they could just buy another-- but it was always Mom who chastised her. Not Mother. And she partied, late and long-- but it was always Mom who sat, waiting for her when she returned to the private quarters. Not Mother. And when she first had her heart broken by a noble (it never could've worked out-- not really) it was Mom who was wiping her tears.

Not Mother.

So... she supposes, right now she should be thrilled. Here she sits, slouched in a gown worth at least a single room of the palace, across from her mother. MC is nowhere to be found for the month, instead out with the rest of their class to train in the mountains before winter well and truly comes. Mother's attention is nowhere but on her.

And what attention it is. Dull. Cold. *Boring.*

And she's speaking-- but Esmerelda is not listening. She doesn't care for logistics or politics: not the boring ones, anyway.

"Repeat what I said."

And, just like that, Esmerelda is snapping from her trance. Dumbly, she blinks at her mother.

"... What?"

If looks could kill, Esmerelda would be hanging outside the front gates of the palace. It's with a sigh that Mother's head falls, her long dark hair cascading over her shoulders as she pinches her nose. Her annoyance radiates from her in waves-- and half of Esmerelda is left writhing from the weight of it. The other half of her sneers in her own teenage sense of injustice.

"One thing," Mother rasps. "Just *one* thing that you remember from today." She looks up slowly at her, and for once Esmerelda notices the bags beneath her eyes.

Esmerelda stays silent, her gaze fluttering to the side as she presses her lips together. Something about the economy? And winter? And the laws... needed... to change... because of the... no-- wait, it was *based* on the... *the...*

"Winter... and the production of food..." Esmerelda drawls, eyes still narrowed with thought. Mother watches her like a woman accepting death, and abruptly she stands to pace about the room. Even then, Esmerelda's focus is impossible to rein in.

But when she does, it is right as Mother comes to a stop in front of the balcony of her office, her hands clasped behind her back. Another sigh-- such a large one, in fact, that Esmerelda can watch as Mother's shoulders rise and fall.

"Your sibling had a test before they left," she says. She doesn't so much as turn to glance at Esmerelda as she speaks.

"... Okay?"

"They aced it. One-hundred percent."

"... That's good."

"Do you know what it was on?"

Esmerelda shakes her head before realizing Mother can't see her-- but even then, she knows it to be rhetorical.

"*Logistics.* Food. Artillery. Environment. Geography, psychology, mythology. Everything I try to teach you and with teachers twice as strict and unforgiving. And now, they're up in the mountains-- *training.* Fighting. It is cold, and difficult, and I *highly* doubt they are out there because they simply enjoy it."

Esmerelda's mouth feels dry. As she shifts in her dress, it suddenly feels ten sizes too small. And Mother's silence lingers-- it is heavy and suffocating and there is no reprieve.

"Why are you telling me this?" Esmerelda asks. Her voice comes out quiet. It's the wrong question to ask, but there was never a right one. And suddenly, she is wishing she was paying more attention.

"MC makes sacrifices," Mother says then, finally turning to look her in the eyes. Esmerelda wishes she didn't. "For this *country.* For their soldiers. For *us.* And it is not because it is easy-- but because it is required. It is our *duty.* A fact that you seemingly choose to ignore repeatedly."

Esmerelda's brows furrow. Less than kind thoughts fill her mind.

"And yet you insist on wearing your gowns," Mother says, her displeased glare slinking down to the expensive fabric. "And drinking enough wine to kill a horse. *And* breaking things carelessly. And yet you are to be queen whether you wish to be or not-- and if you insist on being as careless as you are, then you will have twice as much blood on your hands as your sibling-- and at least they have the decency to mourn their own fellow soldiers."

"Maybe," Esmerelda says, and she knows it's a mistake before she's so much as gotten the first syllable out, "I would be more like MC if you ever *once* tried to raise me."

The words don't cut Mother like she hoped they would.

Instead, Mother walks toward her. Slowly. Carefully. *Deliberately.* And then, she kneels before her, the dark fabric of her gown spreading across the floor. A cold hand reaches for her face-- and when it makes contact with Esmerelda's cheek, she finds no comfort.

"Is it love you seek?" Mother asks. Esmerelda does not respond-- not until Mother's hand drops and grabs hers. "I asked you a question."

It is spoken softly, but Esmerelda knows it's a trap all the same. And still-- she signs her death warrant with a nod so small she prays it might just escape Mother's attention. But it doesn't. Nothing ever does.

Mother smiles then, but it is cruel and mocking. "No," she says, shaking her head as she rises to stand once more. She towers over Esmerelda, and as the rays of sunlight from the window silhouette the thorny outline of Mother's crown, Esmerelda is made aware for once of the demanding authority of the woman who stands in front of her.

"What you want is not love," Mother states. "What you want is obsession. *Devotion*. You wish to take and never once return."

Something lurches in Esmerelda at those words-- nausea's sick grasp taking hold of her shoulders as she scowls. "That's not true."

It's instinct to say. But is it wrong? The words don't feel wrong.

"You are selfish," Mother states. Esmerelda's fear only fuels her. "You are arrogant, and rude, and *demanding."*

So no. No, this is not Mother. Because suddenly, Mother seems kind. Soft. *Gentle*. And whoever this is, is cruel. Jaded. The very same person who led armies and destroyed countless kingdoms until none were left standing but her own.

The woman who stands before Esmerelda is the Raven Queen-- Destroyer of Kingdoms and Champion of the Fall.

Not Mother.

"That's not true," Esmerelda repeats.

"No?" Mother asks. Her smile is vindictive and bitter. She nods at Esmerelda. "Whose dress do you wear?" She asks. Esmerelda's brows furrow. "Who fixes the harps you seem so insistent on breaking?" Esmerelda frowns. "Who arranges these balls you enjoy hosting? Who imports your fine wines from obscure islands?"

The answer to all of those, of course, is no other than the woman who stands across from her.

"You," Esmerelda mutters. But Mother shakes her head, and with one stern look points directly out the window to the city. Esmerelda's eyes follow.

"Them," Mother states. *The people.* "And when I'm gone, it will not be my disappointment that you have to fear. It will be theirs. And it will be their anger, and their rage, and *their* pain when their families die beneath your rule. And it will be their swords pressed against your neck when you continue to look down at them like dogs at your feet."

Esmerelda averts her gaze, instead focusing on the patterned marble floor. She tries to think of all the titles that Mother has-- Conqueror and Destroyer and Champion and Healer and so many, many more. Each one gifted to her by the people. Each one worn like a heavy burden and not a crown.

The inevitability of it all leaves a bitter taste in her mouth. So, Esmerelda fires her last punch, knowing it will inevitably be twisted upon her. But it is true, and it is fierce, and it is all she can possibly think to say most nights.

"I hate you."

Mother's eyes flicker downwards then. A sign of some success, at least. A sign that it *hurt*.

"And I love you," Mother says, before meeting her gaze.

Esmerelda's heart aches.

"But you are one stupid, *stupid* girl."

And then shatters completely.

Other Side of the Coin. | Trystan Ryder.

Jun 25, 2022

I originally wrote this for the prompts on my tumblr, but this one turned out too spoilery. I didn't want to not post it at all, though, since I think it holds some rather... *interesting* information. It's a hardened Trystan in this one, though a softened Trystan isn't much different internally...

Prompt: What you've been through is nothing to what I've been through.

Everyone thought they were going to die.

Trystan thought they were going to die. And truthfully, that would've been fine. They couldn't stop sobbing-- couldn't get their breath to even out. They were stuck in some permanent state of fight or flight, and no amount of coaxing or reassured safety changed that. Sandra? Toby? Scott? *Everyone?*

Trystan's seen war. The possibility of any of them dying was more than a possibility-- it was a promise. But that wasn't a war. It was a massacre-- and now everyone they know… *knew*… is dead.

So yeah, if they're being truthful, as rough, medical hands struggled to deal with the damaged artery Trystan came to the conclusion they were fine with them failing. They remember being cold. *Freezing.* And they remember seeing so much blood that it looked like all the medics took a dunk in a pool of it.

One of their feet was already in the grave, vision hazy as flickers of The Commander's face came to their mind: a wild grin, *laughter*. Their pain was hilarious, they supposed. The death of their friends and family was even more hilarious. Just one *big fucking joke.*

They had no idea where Syfyn was. No idea if she was even alive. They could hear her screams echo in their head still-- and something within them that night snapped and filled with emotions so deep that it had them struggling to breathe or think properly.

Bitterness and sadness.

But mostly rage. Rage at how much of a *coward* she was. If they were older, bigger, *stronger, any* of the things Syfyn was, then maybe they could've put a stop to it. But they weren't-- and Syfyn allowed them to all be slaughtered.

She was just as bad as The Commander, and everyone knew it.

Months passed. Syfyn was punished-- tortured, really-- by the command of The Overseer and majority council vote. Trystan remembers a lot of things from that period of life-- broken jaws and broken noses and burn marks and torn wings. It was hard to hold onto the hatred. Hard to keep the resentment. As a kid, they thought her invincible-- as something other than and impossible to take down.

They knew that was wrong when they heard her withering sobs in her room at night-- the screams that escaped her that reminded Trystan of their own pitiful nightmares. Until one night… one night she just came home, beaten and battered and completely silent.

And that seemed to be the end of it. The end of her, too, because she didn't laugh or smile or make those raunchy jokes that had The Commander elbowing her to be quiet during meetings. She was just… *gone.*

And Trystan was alone.

People tried to convince them that they weren't. They had enough condolences to build a fucking castle out of, and if they were told one more time just how *strong* of a kid they were, they were going to break someone's fucking arm. The Overseer reassured them that they would have the full support of the council-- that they would be provided guidance in their early days of being commander. Marcelle refused to look at them or speak to them unless absolutely necessary, as if their face alone reminded her of The Commander-- of some failure that not even she could remedy.

They remember the weight of their new armor: the weight of hundreds of thousands of eyes on them. The struggle to spit out their words as they led meetings where everyone in the room was three times their age. They were an imposter within the castle walls, and each reminder of *how supported* they were reminded them of that. Eyes watched them constantly-- watched them train, watched them struggle to speak to Syfyn, watched them make battle plans just to take them and rewrite them the *right* way (the way that wipes out every enemy. *Every last one.)*

And they fought. They really did. But it didn't matter. Syfyn's head was bowed and she was silent-- and they couldn't even hate her for it. Anyone in the military who would've supported them was gone. *Dead*. Murdered by the very person who raised them. And Omaren was simply *missing*. They tried to find him-- to figure out where he was-- but it was futile.

So eventually, they became compliant. Silent. Hateful. The collar around their neck, metaphorical and literal, was impossible to remove. The eyes of Platihus were ever-seeing. So if they wanted some angry, pissed, violent commander on a leash, well, then they'd provide one. *Become one.* And honestly, what choice did they have?

Vygrand was coming back. Spies were in the country. People were anxious. Scared. *Paranoid.* Four years ago, it was the magic-users they feared. But they were all gone-- kicked from the city and abandoned by the monarchy. No one was left to blame but natural-born mythosi.

People like *them*. Like Syfyn.

Protests began-- chaos erupted. The Queen was nowhere to be found-- and her wife was left struggling to calm the public and failing. Who was *she* to speak? She was a foreigner-- just as bad as the rest of them. The Council fueled the fear-- led anti-mythosi campaigns, placed bets on if Trystan would be removed from their position or not-- and if so, how so? Publicly killed? Tortured? Exiled, just like their mentor?

How many nights has Syfyn sat beside them in silence, both of them helpless to save themselves or those around them? And that leads to them now, standing in front of the person who left them here-- *abandoned them*.

The Commander approaches them slowly, and though Trystan's gaze remains hateful they feel as if they may get sick. The scar on their thigh burns at The Commander's proximity, and something akin to complete and utter terror raises in their throat.

"You think you've had it rough?" The Commander asks. "That you had it hard these past three years?"

Trystan stays silent.

"What you've been through is nothing to what I've been through."

The Commander practically growls out the words, and a bitter taste lingers in Trystan's mouth as they stare down the person who was once their idol.

"No?" They ask. A part of them wants to lash out and hit them as hard as they can. Another part of them withers away and dies. The Commander shakes their head slowly, their dark gaze flickering to where Syfyn stands beside them.

"You don't know the hell they put me through. What they did to me."

"Curious thing--" Trystan says, moving to block Syfyn from their gaze. Their voice comes out low. *Cruel.* "You don't know jack shit about what they did to us, either."

The Dragon Story. (1/3) | MC

Jun 21, 2022

Part One | Part Two | Part Three

"You haven't told them the dragon story?" Sabir asks. A snort escapes Syfyn, though she's quick to slip back into her stoic facade the second your gaze flickers toward her, half-choking on her ale in the

process.

"No," you drawl. "And I really don't intend to. *You* wouldn't even know if it weren't..." your sentence trails off, annoyed expression turning regretful. *If it weren't for Syfyn and her big mouth*.

You thought you could be done with her-- thought that you could use the distance to be free of each other completely. But you can't. Even if she refuses to look you in the eye and you refuse to speak to her, you can't escape her. Not when your pasts are this tied together. Not when her name slips into every story that you think to tell.

"What's the dragon story?" Amilia asks. Vethna lets out a low hum as they sip their wine, giving her their famous side-eye.

"You don't know it?" They ask. "Our beloved companion here slew an ancient elemental dragon at the ripe age of sixteen."

"Sixteen? I was told fourteen," Sabir says, nose scrunching.

"I might've exaggerated," Syfyn grumbles into her cup, gaze still cast downwards as you struggle to hold back a sigh.

"Why?" Amilia asks. Her wide eyes turn to look at you, her brows slightly furrowed as her ears twitch. Her gaze makes you feel nauseous. "Was it a mean dragon?"

"No, it was a super nice one, I'm sure," Nikke drawls. The sound of a communal annoyed huff fills the room when he speaks, though it only makes a lopsided grin crawl onto his face as he balances the tip of his dagger on his finger. "What's with you and dragons anyway? First the one at the Battle of Tethras, and now I'm hearing about this one?"

"You've killed *two* dragons?" Amilia balks as Vethna squeezes her shoulder. You don't think it does anything to ground her at the realization.

"The dragon at the Battle of Tethras deserved to die and you know it," Syfyn growls.

Nikke's nose scrunches. "Oh, yes, right, of course-- let's kill the overgrown reptile that's been mind-controlled and manipulated and abused into doing the bidding of Vygrand. Ain't you just peachy?"

"You had me thinking you were talking about yourself at that first half," she retorts. A shit-eating grin crawls onto her face as Nikke leaps to his feet, fangs bared as he flips his dagger into his palm.

"You fucking--"

"Oh, here we go again," Sabir mutters, pinching his nose as Vethna takes another sip of wine while very poorly feigning disinterest. His gaze quickly goes to you, his eyes filled with a silent plea. You can't help

but scowl at him-- but it's no match against his puppy-dog eyes before you squeeze your eyes shut and sigh.

"If you'll both shut up, I'll tell the story."

At first, it does nothing-- but then you see Nikke's ear flicker as he comes to a halt, slowly turning to look at you. You can see him weighing his choices-- either annoy the hell out of everyone here or... well, not-- but at least then he might get a good story out of it. His green eyes flicker towards Syfyn for a moment, and for a second you think all hope is lost... but then he drags out a chair by the table and sits down, arms crossed as he leans forward.

Syfyn's glare remains on him still-- but he only watches you expectantly, his patience already weighing thin. The ghost of a soon-to-form smirk is already sitting on his face, and with a sigh that you mimic him by leaning on the table.

"It was a long time ago-- I was only sixteen years old and Omaren and I were tasked with scouting the woods for a *mythosi* that had been destroying the area. Rumors had it, it was something big. Something *dangerous*."

"... A dragon?" Nikke drawls, seemingly unimpressed. Everyone's expressions around the table vary-- Vethna and Amilia's eyes shine with interest, Syfyn looks like she's trying not to laugh at Nikke's suggestion, and Sabir glances between Syfyn and you with confusion on his features.

"No," you say. "Not a dragon. But now that you said it was a dragon, it's going to make the original thing we were hunting sound stupid in comparison--"

"Well, what was it then?" He interrupts. He's messing with you-- but even you can see the curiosity hidden deep within his gaze.

You pause for a long moment, eyes narrowing as you stretch the silence on for longer than needed. "That's the problem," you say, taking a sip of your ale. "We didn't know. No one did. They said it was giant-- covered in fur and countless eyes. It was like nothing anyone had seen before-- a hybrid of some sorts. No one else was qualified to hunt it but Omaren, and I was tasked with following and watching as his apprentice. So we chased it-- followed it-- miles and miles and *miles* away, and deep into the mountains..."

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"Watch your step," Omaren warns. "There are traps out here--" he glances at you from over his shoulder. "Lots of them."

You nod, but you can't help but roll your eyes. You're not some new recruit anymore-- you're the most promising soldier in all the barracks. Surely you know better than to step on some rogue manticore trap.

"What if it's not even a *mythosi?"* You ask. "It's not like half the citizens here would know one if they saw one, anyway."

"Not just citizens. *Hunters."*

You think that's supposed to mean something. They trek the wilderness, so *surely* if something scares them, it must be something truly monstrous. But Plaithus has about as much magic as a rock-- which isn't a lot, if you're being honest. Other than Syfyn's mom, you'd never met a full-blood *mythosi* in Plaithus. Wherever they were, Plaithus seemingly wasn't very high on their lists of places to visit.

"You know, you could stand to be humbled a bit," Omaren says. He raises a hand for you to stop walking, the two of you crouching in the overgrowth of the forest. Winter creeps closer, leaving the trees to die slowly. Only the pines stand sturdy around you, your breath fogging the air as you glance at Omaren. He's watching for something-- but for what, you don't know. His eyes narrow on the horizon.

"Why do I need to be humbled?" You ask after a moment of silence. "I'm good. I know I'm good. What's wrong with that?"

"You're still a kid," he retorts quickly, glaring at you slightly out of the corner of his eye. "And you're going to make a stupid mistake someday and be completely taken off-guard once it happens."

"Will not."

"Yes, you will."

"No, I will not."

"*Yes,* you will--" He stops himself as he turns to face you directly, face crumpling in annoyance as he catches himself arguing with you... *yet again.* "Stop making me do that," he grumbles.

"I am, quite literally, not making you do anything. *You're* the one choosing to not believe me. I can't help that."

He doesn't even dignify that with a response, instead opting to pinch his nose slightly before huffing and looking off into the distance.

Omaren's a stern man-- a scary man, to most. To you, he's nothing more than an older brother to annoy as much as humanly possible. It's just too fun not to-- and it doesn't help his case that he seems to doubt you at every possible turn. You're capable, and it's time he treats you as such.

"So you think you know everything, then?" He asks, still not looking at you. "That you've learned *everything* there is to learn after one war you were on the sidelines for the majority of, and a long, hard, sixteen years of life?"

"It's been a very hard sixteen years."

"It's been a hard twenty-six," he retorts with a humorless laugh. Your eyes narrow at him, his mind clearly somewhere else still, and it's then that he turns to face you, leaning in close in an almost conspiratorial manner. "You see those caves?" He asks. You turn to look at them-- there're three, though two of them look to be two entrances to the same one. "I think we should check them out."

"And what if I don't?" You ask.

"I don't know. Freeze out here?"

He doesn't give you the chance to retort before he's already marching off towards them, shooting you a shit-eating grin when you let out an annoyed scoff. You sulk for only a second longer until you panic about missing out, quickly chasing after him as discreetly as you can.

If you're being honest, you still doubt that this thing is real. Half-bear, some said-- but with antlers and quills and *big*. How big? No fucking idea. Ranged from normal bear-sized to "the size of a mountain," and that seems like a pretty fucking big discrepancy.

Omaren climbs up the side of the mountain easily, and you follow suit. He sniffs the air as you both approach the first cave entrance, and you try to mimic him... And all you smell is wet rock. A small stream runs through the cave, and you move to perch by it as Omaren uses the leverage of the cave to scout the area. Maybe you'd feel more incentive to help if you'd at least *seen* this thing, but *no.*

Oh! Here's an idea-- maybe it's an *invisible* bear!

You can't help but let out a scoff to yourself before you pause. You smell something.

Something... *musky.*

Something gods damned *gross.*

You glance back at Omaren but he doesn't seem that affected, presumably chalking it off as just another repulsive smell in the woods. But it's not-- no, it's... it's *close*.

You glance down at the stream. Your eyes narrow, and the closer you look the more you realize it's not water. Water-*like,* sure, but not water-- it's almost, dare you say it, *slimy*.

"Omaren?" You call.

"Hm?"

"This stream is... *wrong*."

You don't get a response, but you hear him turn to look at you, so you turn to look at him too. His expression is incredulous. "What the hells does that even mean?" He asks, eyes flickering to the not-water water. "Are you messing with me again?"

His expression immediately hardens, a frown pulling on his mouth.

"I'm not--"

He doesn't even listen to you before he turns his back to you once more. Annoyance bubbles up within you-- he keeps doing this. Keeps writing you off, acting like everything you say is ludicrous. But it's not-- *you're* not. And if he doesn't want to find out what's wrong with this situation, then *you* will.

Your eyes follow the stream to where it starts, but it's not much. A crack runs along the entire bottom part of the cave, and from there the water... you struggle to find a verb. *Seeps* out? You shrug it off, continuing to scan for some sort of source. You move towards where Omaren stands at the mouth of the cave, following the crack and where it leads outside.

And then you see it: a crevice. You think you could fit in it if you really tried. A strange smell emits from it-- something like rot and *meat.*

You can't fight the excitement. You don't know what it is, but you sure want to, if not just for the sake of knowing. Your eyes flicker to where Omaren stands, distracted still though you don't know by what, and you take the opportunity to crouch low to the ground. Your armor is nothing but leather, hugging you tight on your body, and you're thankful for as much as you reach an arm into the crevice to feel around it. The rock feels like sandstone or something similar, and the dust falls from it to coat your fingers.

"Recruit," Omaren says. You feel his eyes land on you, though you don't bother to look at him. "What are you doing?"

"I told you," you grunt. "Something was wrong with the stream."

"And that has to do with that crevice... How?"

"Shut up and let me have this, okay?" You grumble. You're either about to find something super cool right now, or something incredibly stupid and make such a fool of yourself that Omaren is going to refuse to take you anywhere for the next month.

At least it'll be a funny story, you figure, relief filling you when Omaren disappears from view to go deeper into the cave.

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"Wait, I'm sorry," Vethna interrupts. "You saw a tiny crevice and your first instinct was to climb inside of it?"

"I was sixteen and stupid, what do you expect?"

"To not crawl into random crevices."

"A Vrithkan would *never* make a stupid mistake like that," Nikke says.

"No *sane* person would do that, point blank," Vethna argues.

"Sure-- but they wouldn't know *why* not to do it," Nikke says, a grin on his face. You can see Vethna's annoyance grow from not picking up on whatever unsaid hint he's trying to give them. "Do you know why?" He asks.

You watch as Vethna's eyebrow twitches. They purse their lips, and they don't *want* to ask, but they so desperately *need* to.

"Why?" They drawl.

He meets your eye, then. "Because we know the myths aren't myths. They're warnings."

Vethna's brows furrow, seemingly just as confused as before, but Amilia's eyes glaze over in thought... and then realization. Her ears twitch, her eyes widen. She straightens up in her seat.

"What myths?" Syfyn asks.

"The ones about the oceans," Amilia says. "And the skies and the mountains."

The stories of the mythosi of old.

You do nothing but nod, and everyone's attention is on you again. "I had a cut on my arm, so maybe that's what did it-- I don't know. But what I *do* know is that neither of us realized the problem until too late.

***

You manage to wriggle into the crevice-- and once you do, you find a larger cavern inside leading into yet another cave. Your eyes struggle to adjust in the darkness, and you can hear your heart hammering in your ears. It must be a den of some sort. And, if your frightened instincts are correct, whatever beast resides here is still there, lurking within its depths.

You swallow.

Grumble.

Something deep rumbles from deeper within the cave-- something akin to a distant roar. Your hands ball into fists at your side as rocks fall from the ceiling, more dust showering down and coating you. Your eyes flicker up to the stalactites that hang in an arc above you.

"Recruit."

Omaren's voice comes from out of the cave. It sounds serious, stern, and you already know you're in trouble without needing to see his face.

"Did you hear that?" You ask, kneeling down by the entrance to peek out at him. He scowls, but the anger in his eyes isn't the kind you're familiar with. Something else lurks in there. Something akin to fear. "Omaren--?"

He hushes you immediately, and it's then that nerves pool within you.

Something's wrong-- and you can't even piece together what until you notice the quiet. The horrible, deafening silence that followed that groaning sound. The birds are silent. The chittering squirrels are silent. The forest is *silent*.

A predator is near.

The smell grows stronger--

Crack.

The sound of rock ripping open. A horrified yelp leaves you when the crevice rips open by a foot as if pried open by some invisible force. The smell hits you just as hard, accompanied by a warm breeze. Your eyes widen.

Not a breeze.

Breath.

Omaren grabs you by the collar of your armor and yanks you out from the cave faster than you can blink, and you'd go falling right off the side of the cliff from the momentum if his iron grip didn't remain on you. Your brain races, and you can't even begin to piece together what stands in front of you.

Crack.

The ground trembles beneath your feet.

Grumble.

The ground of the cave cracks open, and what you thought to be soft stone reveals to be layers of dirt on something dark and red and *fleshy*.

A tongue.

You're young. You'll still make stupid mistakes.

Or maybe you'll just make one, very large, insurmountable, one.

Nikke Spar (Flirt)

Jun 20, 2022

There's *five* versions of the Nikke fight-- two of which are romance variations, and the other three are variations of just how dirty The Commander is willing to play during the fight 👀

Relationship A-Z Headcanons: Sabir Du Vaelas

Jun 18, 2022

A = Affection (How affectionate are they? How do they show affection?)

Sabir likes to appear like a united front, so he'll always make sure to be on your side both literally and figuratively. Sabir's quick-witted and persuasive, and he's always happy to use those things to your advantage when people doubt you/pick fights with you. The two of you are two peas in a pod, and his dedication to that in itself is a large display of his affection.

Otherwise, Sabir will never really stop courting you-- he continuously gifts you love letters, snacks, jewelry, trinkets, etc. He's always thinking about you, so anytime he finds something he thinks you'll like he's quick to grab it and give it to you. His affection can also be felt in smaller, physical things-- his arm looping through yours, holding hands, kissing your knuckles. Sabir is chivalrous, if anything.

B = Best friend (What would they be like as a best friend? How would the friendship start?)

It's hard to befriend Sabir nowadays. It wasn't always that way, but he's become incredibly closed off. He's had to-- it's the only way one survives in the hell hole that is Plaithian politics.

Similar to Amilia, Sabir is great at making people *think* they're friends with him. He knows how to be charming and tasteful, knows how to get someone to lower their guard, knows how to make up lies about himself right on the spot yet make them feel as if he's baring pieces of his soul.

The only real trick to befriending Sabir is being a good person and not laying it on too thick when you meet him. The more you *actively* try to befriend him, the more suspicious he gets that you want something from him. Chances are, it's better to let him approach you as he pleases and, with time, the

two of you will become friends... which mostly constitutes of discreet, witty jokes, dinners talking about recent events, and a whole list of other fancy things nobles tend to do.

C = Cuddles (Do they like to cuddle? How would they cuddle?)

Sabir *loves* to cuddle. You're working at your desk? Sabir is behind you with his arms hooked around your neck. You're walking to the barracks? Sabir is beside you, arm looped and leaning against you. You got home from training? He's already forced you to sit down and be messaged by yours truly before lounging around and eating fancy cheeses.

Sabir is a man of comfort, and what's better than combining comfort *with* intimacy, aka. cuddling?

D = Domestic (Do they want to settle down? How are they at cooking and cleaning?)

Before MC's exile, provided Sabir + MC were together, he was already planning on settling down-- both of their lives matched up well and The Queens could ensure the public would respond well to their union by posing it as a sort of political match up (why not have the strongest soldier match up with the sharpest politician?). And in every way other than romance, Sabir already was settled down. He was established in his career, lived within the palace, and had a place to call home.

However, all of that has been undone by the trial, and now Sabir is at square one. And, right now, Sabir is *way* too bitter to really imagine a nice future ahead of him. Right now, he wants to live, and that's about his only goal at the moment.

As for cooking and cleaning, Sabir is great at both though he only enjoys one. He loves to cook-- his mother taught him how and he often had to prepare meals for his younger siblings as she got sicker. Nowadays he does it as a sort of meditation, though he also enjoys cooking with people he cares about as a means of connecting. As for cleaning... He hates it, but he hates living in a messy environment even more.

E = Ending (If they had to break up with their partner, how would they do it?)

Honestly, it would be a pretty average break up-- meet up, sit down, explain your emotions and that you're ending the relationship, etc. Sabir's a very emotionally healthy person, so if he's breaking up with someone he's already tried to discuss the problem at heart beforehand and made comprises to no effect.

You're not going to be friends after you break up, but you're not going to be enemies either, and should you ever need him for something he'll be more than happy to lend a helping hand.

F = Fiance(e) (How do they feel about commitment? How quick would they want to get married?)

Sabir isn't afraid of commitment, but he's not eager to jump into it, either. He's always been serious regarding romantic relationships-- he's never slept around and has no interest in emotionally light, short-

term things. He wants to get to know someone's body and soul before truly committing to them, and that takes time... however, once he *does* commit, he will love said person with all his heart and soul.

He follows a similar mindset with marriage. He'll wait until he can't imagine a life without his significant other, and when that moment comes, he'll propose. A wedding with The Commander would've originally had to have been extravagant-- it would've been a royal wedding and as such the entire capital would've been involved in festivals and celebrations regarding the union. After that trial, however... Sabir needs time. A lot of it.

G = Gentle (How gentle are they, both physically and emotionally?)

Sabir is normally very gentle regarding everything, though he's also firm. It's the sort of thing where it's like "don't mistake my niceness for weakness."

Sabir is, as I've mentioned, a pretty stable person. He doesn't have anything to prove to others (or so he says), and with those he trusts, is more than open with how he feels. He's a big believer in open communication, so he'd have a hard time getting along with someone who constantly lies and is on the defense. He's also a sort of pseudo-therapist in that he's good at getting people to open up about themselves, and he's also very good at boosting people's confidence/self-worth and making them feel better about themself. Though, this does come at the cost of his own mental health sometimes.

As for physicality, nothing about Sabir is aggressive. Mentally, he can be sharp like a blade and make people make a fool out of themselves. The second it comes to fist fights or just being rowdy in general, however, he's out. Sabir's a noble, and just like most noble's, he's rather soft and squishy when it comes to physical things...

Except for handshakes. He can give a mean handshake.

H = Hugs (Do they like hugs? How often do they do it? What are their hugs like?)

Sabir loves hugs with those in his inner circle-- otherwise, he will not hesitate to tell someone to back the hell up. He views them as being pretty intimate and a means of affection, so he reserves them for his close friends and significant others.

They're a real treat, too-- they're always long and drawn out and he squeezes just enough to make you feel secure but not suffocated. He also tends to smell really good. Overall, his hugs are like a little power-up-- +10 health per hug, and you best believe they're limitless.

I = I love you (How fast do they say the L-word?)

While the build-up for Sabir to actually love someone takes a while, the second he *does* feel it, he's not afraid to say I love you. In fact, he'd think it a bigger injustice to *not* tell you. He pretty much just says it whenever he really feels it and *always* says it at night before you go to sleep.

J = Jealousy (How jealous do they get? What do they do when they’re jealous?)

Sabir is like... a 50 out of 100 on the jealousy scale. He doesn't like when other people flirt with MC. He'll tolerate it for a bit, but after a while, he *will* make his displeasure known, usually through disapproving looks at the suitor in question and a whole lotta passive-aggressive comments.

He also won't like it if MC flirts too much-- it's different if they're using it as a manipulation tactic, but if they're just playfully flirty as a personality trait... yeah, that won't work well with him. He doesn't like MC showing their affection to other people so freely, especially because he's so careful about who he decides to give his own affection to. It can make him feel a bit insecure, and that's no fun for anyone.

K = Kisses (What are their kisses like? Where do they like to kiss you? Where do they like to be kissed?)

Sabir often tends to kiss your hands-- it's the chivalrous thing to do, after all, and he certainly wouldn't be complaining if you returned the favor. He's also a fan of cheek kisses all around, and if he's feeling *particularly* affectionate, he may even pull off a Gomez Addams arm kiss.

In general, Sabir's kisses are soft and filled with emotion-- he likes to take his time and is more than patient enough to do so (even if it may come at your expense). Trust me when I say the build-up is well worth it, however-- passion is all the better when one is forced to wait for it.

L = Little ones (How are they around children?)

Sabir's great with kids! He's basically just a dad with them-- he lets them do their own thing, is always there to save them if they're about to get hurt (he's got that sixth parent sense), knows how to calm them down from a fit, and is *very* persuasive when it comes to eating vegetables and going to bed on time.

However, I don't know if I can say he *enjoys* being around kids. I don't think he dislikes it, but it probably feels more like a job than anything.

M = Morning (How are mornings spent with them?)

Sabir usually wakes up at six in the morning pretty consistently. He used to be up by then to take care of his council duties, and he's always been an early worm even in his youth-- he *had* to be to help with his family and around the house.

However... now that he's no longer a politician... I think that's completely changed. I don't mean to say he sleeps all day, but he probably snags an extra three hours or so nowadays. He's always a bit lethargic when he wakes, but in a good mood too. This combination often results in a good amount of snuggling and goofy smiles.

N = Night (How are nights spent with them?)

Hmm, it depends. Evenings with Sabir can go three ways. A domestic evening in, where you both just go about your own things but stay in the same room together (he enjoys the proximity). Or, if he's feeling

fancy, maybe he'll make up a charcuterie board for you both to indulge in as you drink and chat away (it's important to continue courting someone throughout the relationship, no?). And lastly, if he's feeling mischievous, Sabir is more than happy to drag you into the streets for a night on the town, drinking and dancing and laughing the night away.

O = Open (When would they start revealing things about themselves? Do they say everything all at once or wait a while to reveal things slowly?)

Sabir is a very elusive person. If he doesn't want someone to know about him, they won't, whether that be literally or figuratively. He has a way of just disappearing when you turn to talk to him, and even if you manage to somehow corner him, he's great at dodging questions and twisting them on you.

With people he trusts, however, I'd say he's pretty upfront. He's not gonna sit down and give you a history lesson on his life, but the details will slip through in the tiny details-- the mentions of his mother, of his lessons in the countryside, of how he never really felt like he belonged at the palace. If you listen closely enough, chances are you'll be able to piece together his life long before he ever tells you about it.

P = Patience (How easily angered are they?)

Sabir is incredibly patient, mostly because he views a lot of people as being beneath him and therefore not being worth his ire, or he views them as being so incredibly stupid that it's not worth spending time on them. He's good with words, so a lot of the time he can make people do what he wants even if they don't know they're doing it-- as a result, he never has to really get angry or upset about people opposing him.

Even in fights, he stays very cool and collected... *mostly.* No matter how nasty of an insult you throw at him, he'll take it with dignity and grace because he cares for you and knows you're just lashing out. It would take a *very* calculated insult to really hurt his feelings, and even then, it's not going to be a rageful outburst on his end but a quiet, hurt one.

The only time Sabir truly gets angry is when he A.) Feels helpless or B.) Is faced with the injustices of the world. Nothing frustrates him more than the fact that the world is corrupt and will always *be* corrupt, no matter how much he tries to change that. It's the one thing that can cause him to lash out and be aggressive.

Q = Quizzes (How much would they remember about you? Do they remember every little detail you mention in passing, or do they kind of forget everything?)

Sabir remembers everything, and I mean *everything.* It's required in his line of work to remember exactly how every sentence is phrased, to constantly be looking for any and all discrepancies. This carries into his personal life as well, and as a result, Sabir will remember just about anything you've ever told him, even if you yourself don't.

As a result, he is *very* difficult to lie to. He knows all your habits, how you act when you're nervous, happy, sad, and probably even takes note of your regular manner of speaking. He's an observant guy-- definitely a helpful person to have on your side at the end of the day.

S = Security (How protective are they? How would they protect you? How would they like to be protected?)

Sabir is definitely protective, but more so of your emotions and mind than of your physical body. And even then, I might say he's more *supportive* than he is *protective.* He's not going to speak over you or act as a "shield" between you and others, but he'll always be in your corner and be more than willing to verbally support you.

The only exception to that would be if The Commander well and truly broke down-- if that were the case, Sabir is going to be acting like a mother hen. He'll keep the others away, take care of you 24/7, and be more than willing to take on some of your chores if it helps you mentally recover faster.

As for himself... I think Sabir really needs support over protectiveness as well. Yes, The Commander was his guard once upon a time, but he doesn't particularly revel in the sense of being protected so much as he recognizes he's not a very good fighter and should *probably* have some sort of protection around. Otherwise, he just wants someone to listen to him and tell him how it is. He wants a partner in the truest sense of the word.

T = Try (How much effort would they put into dates, anniversaries, gifts, everyday tasks?)

Sabir likes to spoil you... *a lot.* Picnics in fields? Check. Starlit dinners by candlelight? Check. An excursion to a secluded hot springs? Check. A ball where you both dress up to the nines? Check.

And, if none of those are your jam, Sabir is more than happy to do whatever it is you *do* like, whether that be playing games together or doing nothing other than lounge about. He's an adaptable person, and more than anything wants to make The Commander happy and cared for. He also *loves* to give gifts, so expect to receive them frequently. They can range from anything to a pretty flower he picked to expensive jewelry from the finest craftsman. If it reminds him of you, he's getting it (and you're on his mind a lot).

U = Ugly (What would be some bad habits of theirs?)

He can take on a very "better than thou" mindset. He has a habit of looking down on people who he views as scheming or rude (*cough* Nikke *cough* Vethna *cough*) and isn't afraid to show it. This can cause him to judge people prematurely, or blame them for not "working hard enough" to be farther along in life. It's not a solid mindset of his so much as it is a mood he can slip into if he feels stressed or cornered somehow.

He can also fall into becoming a workaholic, which then causes him to be snippy, prone to mood swings, and never be around or be "too busy" to hang out. Yet again, this is more a mood you need to snap him

out of than a constant state of being, but having to consistently remind Sabir to "not be a dick" can become a very tiring, annoying thing.

V = Vanity (How concerned are they with their looks?)

I'd say he and Vethna are pretty tied. Vethna can accept that the road is a pretty gross place, so they'll also look pretty disheveled at times as a result, but Sabir absolutely refuses that fact. He *will* find a way to look put together, even if he's sweating as you all march through a marshland.

He also *hates* to be dirty. It'll literally drive him insane and up the wall.

Otherwise, in general, Sabir just likes to be put together. He doesn't find the experience of getting ready to be therapeutic like Vethna does, but he's a firm believer that your appearance deems how others treat you and a reflection of how you treat yourself. He respects himself and demands respect from others, so he'll be taking that extra minute to rid of any wrinkles in his shirt and put on all his jewelry, thank you very much.

W = Whole (Would they feel incomplete without you?)

I think he would-- yes. Not necessarily that he lost a piece of *himself*, but like he's a half a whole, and now the other half is missing. He enjoys being in a relationship a lot-- having a companion around and a partner to rely on. Losing that would definitely leave him confused and floundering for a bit-- he's the kind of person who has to relearn what it's like to be single and alone all over again each and every time he gets out of a relationship.

X = Xtra (A random headcanon for them.)

Sabir likes glitter and shiny things a *lot*. All of his robes have some kind of shimmery or glittery detailing to them, he wears glittery silver/gold eyeliner all the time, and *loves* to wear highlighter on his cheeks. And his rings? Covered in gems. He's like a crow, going around and collecting more and more shiny things to wear until he can blind his enemies by simply standing in the sun.

Y = Yuck (What are some things they wouldn’t like, either in general or in a partner?)

Selfishness and sadism. Sabir wouldn't be able to stand being around someone who actively enjoys bringing harm to others, especially because he's spent so much of his career trying to protect people from politicians like that. It goes hand in hand with the selfishness aspect-- Sabir loathes people who don't think outside of themselves. His own life was defined by self-sacrifice, so to watch people go around and do whatever they please/find most fulfilling with no regard for others is a surefire way to make him angry... And, in truth, *bitter.*

Z = Zzz (What is a sleep habit of theirs?)

Sabir's a stomach sleeper and a big ole' cuddler. I think I said once he'll grab anything in his sleep, and I firmly stand by that. Normally he just hugs a pillow to his chest, but if you keep giving him things he'll

keep adding them to his cuddle pile regardless of what it is. A fork? A pen? A hairbrush? He's cuddling it.

You look over your body. The scars from the "surgery" are visible still, built up with scar tissue as you turn this way and that to look at them. Their repulsive still, and though the skin above is sealed shut, you the damage that lurks beneath them still.

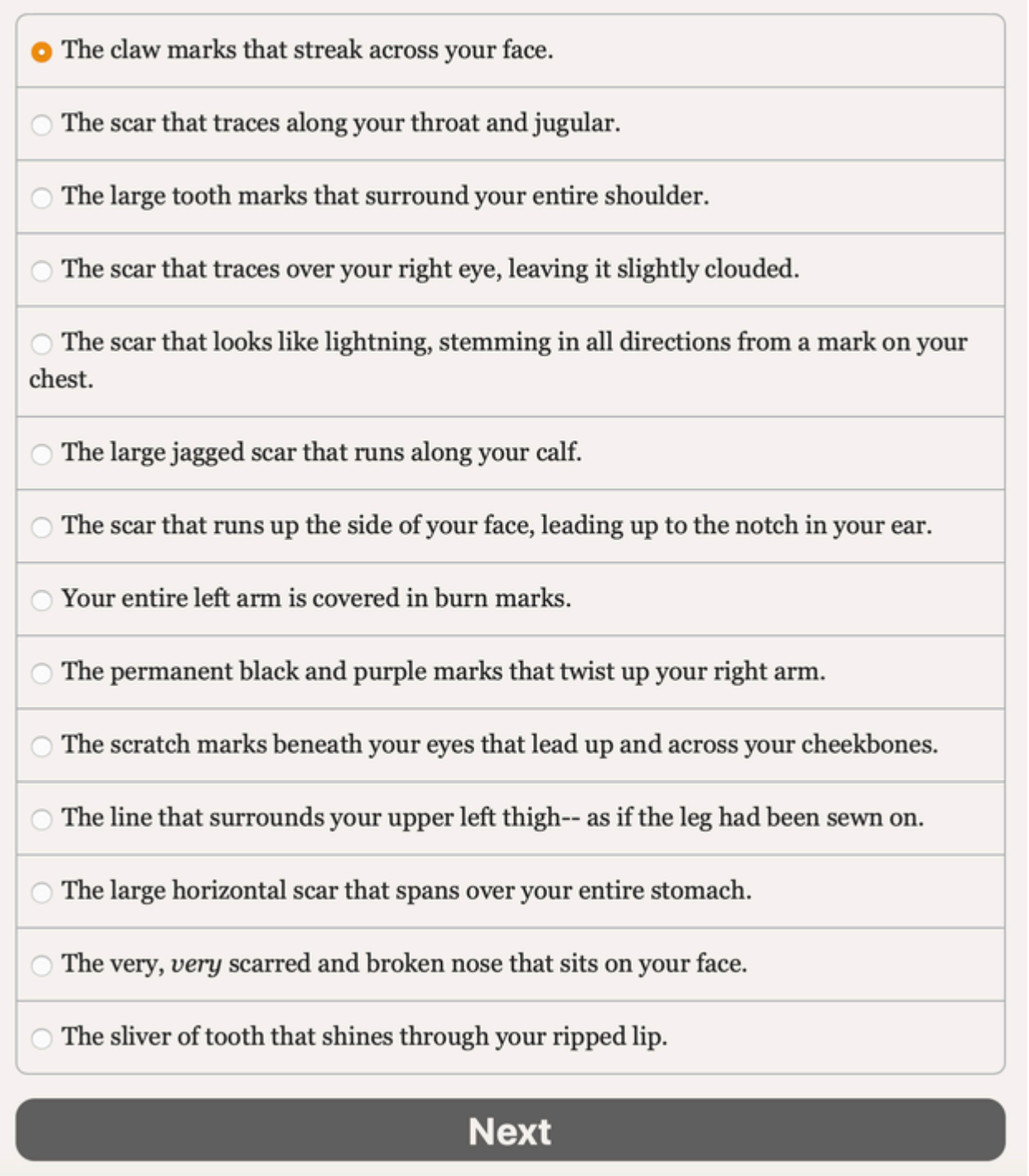
You can't help the disgust that bubbles up within you when you look at them for too long. Disgust and shame. Disgust and sadness. Disgust and *anger*.

But they're not the only scars on your body.

A fresh scar sits across your forearm where Vethna stabbed you. It's long and large, sitting on both sides of your arm. You run a finger over the long line, but it's smooth to the touch.

There's scars from arrows, from blades, from teeth and claws. You can't begin to remember how you've gotten half of them, though there are a two that stick out fresh in your memory.

You look at...



The Bath.

Jun 13, 2022

Hmm... Dynamics change *very* quickly in Chapter 5 for a lot of reasons... some are manipulative, others are desperate, others serve as political ploys. All I can say is MC should enjoy their *royal* treatment while they can... it'll be very short-lived, anyway.

There's a *lot* of scars to choose from at the moment. I might cut it down if it proves to become too much. However... every single scar has a story that comes behind it-- and who knows... maybe you'll even encounter the very same people who left them on you in the first place 👀

One of these scars has even been given to MC by a future antagonist that has mentioned *plenty* of times here on the Patreon back during the Battle of Tethras... I'm sure they'll have plenty to say about it should they ever encounter MC again.

Patreon Q&A

Jun 10, 2022

The first Q&A is here! I only ended up receiving ~10 separate asks, but that ended up being okay due to how long my responses got to some of them and how in-detail the questions are.

I really enjoyed answering these, and may we look forward to the next q&a!

In-Game Asks

1.) If the Commander had started a family during their Exile and begun to construct a new life for themselves with roots of its own, how would The Queens, and, in certain cases, Syfyn/Sabir, handle those circumstances? Would Marcelle and Emeline view the MC's kid(s) as their own grandchildren, or at least see to it that their family was provided for while they were gone? Would the Commander's old flame feel angry or betrayed that they moved on?

Hmmm… starting with The Queens: Yes, they both would view any children MC has as their own and would consider them their grandchildren. However, provided that the main plot of The Exile remained the same (having a planned return for MC), they would never go out of their way to see or come into contact with MC. This would largely be for protection reasons— The Queens wouldn't be able to leave the public eye discreetly and it would inevitably lead to the Plaithian public and others to finding out where The Commander lives and about their family, all of which could lead to dangerous things.

When MC is forced to inevitably return, however, they would definitely look out for MC's spouse and children and invite them to live in the palace. I could see that being an awkward set up all things considered, but I guess it's better than living in the streets of Plaithus where everyone (probably) hates you.

As for Sabir and Syfyn, neither one would feel betrayed or angry, but there'd definitely be some minor jealousy and just complicated emotions in general. They wouldn't feel betrayed/angry just because they understand that MC moving on is a perfectly normal thing to do. MC didn't owe either of them loyalty, especially with Syfyn's treatment of them and the fact that as far as anyone was aware, MC's exile was permanent.

Of course, there'd still be some bitterness and, as I said, jealously, but both Sabir and Syfyn would keep those emotions in check and do everything they could to try and keep MC's family comfortable. Sabir would be significantly better at that than Syfyn— though Syfyn would likely act as a sort of watchdog for MC's family. Both of them would care deeply for the family. MC's family would've been there for them when no one else was, and they *both* have a deep respect for that.

2.) What was the Commander's youth like after they started at the military academy? Did they get to go home as though it was boarding school, were they there full time for the most part, or was it more like a day school? And tangentially related, how often did they get to have meals or events as a family?

The academy is broken up into levels-- Entry Academies, Training Academies, and Specialization Academies.

The youngest children (6 - 11) are all in the entry academy, which essentially just functions as a normal school with a bit of extra emphasis on the "amazing prowess of the Plathian military" in their lessons. Ages 12 - 15 go to Training Academies, which are where kids are first taught to fight and then trained to see what their strengths/weaknesses are. It's a period of sorting, so Instructors are trying to see which kids are suited for what kinds of training (as officers, as soldiers, as guards, etc.) along with which kids are fit to be infused with *mythosi* blood (and if so, what type?) Ages 16 - 18 are when kids are divided into different groups based on observations made in previous years, thus Specialization Academies. These are all broken down further based on what the school trains (Mythosi Camps, Guard Camps, etc.)

The entry academy is a day school, the training academy is like... boarding school lite. I mean that in the sense that students live on campus for the weekdays, but can go home if they want on all weekends and holidays big and small. The final is a regular boarding school, though there are a few weekends sprinkled throughout the year where students can choose to go home, and students go home for major holidays.

There's no major summer break, but there is a winter break which is pretty much the inverse equivalent. Winters in Plaithus are a big deal-- both because they have a lot of religious and historical meaning and because it snows... a lot. The winters are incredibly harsh, and the entire northern part of the country shuts down during it. *Miraculously*, this has never proved to be a problem in recent years.

The specialization academies are the only schools that don't partake in winter break. The youngest students get to go home, but the older ones (17 and 18) are expected to train throughout the winter.

Because of this, MC would still see their family a decent bit, especially in the winters with the exception of their final two years of schooling. They'd also be able to convince their instructors to let them go home for dinner if they really wanted to, even on the weekdays, just because they live so close to the palace. Honestly, I'd say a lot of it depends on the individual Commander and how much they wanted to put aside to see their family.

3.) Why did Plaithus/Marcelle wait so long to heal the Commander's arm after the parade? Was it a calculated move to let it fester?

I also don't really know if even Marcelle understands how weak MC is now due to their surgery-- I think she might've expected their arm to be fine/heal on its own like it normally would, and the moment it became clear that was *not* going to happen, she sent people down.

Other than that, none of the healers were particularly eager to crawl into a small prison cell with who they thought to be a crazed murderer, so trying to force them to... do exactly just that... might've proven a bit difficult to do.

4.) In the Emeline POV scene, when the Commander tells the Queens that involving their friends was a mistake, what was Marcelle's reaction? In every other variation of the scene, Emeline looks to her wife to see how she responds, but she doesn't in that one case. Is there any special reason for that?

This ask spiraled out of control b/c I read it wrong at first. To *immediately* answer the first part of the question, it was still very apathetic/stony, but there was a definite furrow in her brows, an *almost* imperceptible scowl, and her hands were most definitely clenching the arms of her throne.

So... she wasn't very happy.

As for why Emeline didn't look at Marcelle in that variation...

There are four dialogue options in that scene: MC promising to destroy Plaithus, MC telling Mother that she won, MC telling their parents that all they wanted was for them to be proud of them, and the one you mentioned.

I think out of those, "You made a mistake bringing my friends into this," is the one that most impacts Emeline-- so much so that she can't even come to worry about what Marcelle is thinking at that moment.

The first choice, Emeline looks to Marcelle because she's worried Marcelle will get angry and hurt MC. The second Emeline looks at Marcelle because this ugly side of MC + Marcelle's relationship had never really been seen by Emeline before. And the third one, Emeline is looking at Marcelle because she views the scene as a shared parenting moment and wants Marcelle to say something nice or reassuring or just do anything other than sit there, really.

But once MC says "you made a mistake," it hits Emeline hard enough to where she doesn't even think to look to Marcelle first. The reasoning for that is that she realizes MC *isn't* on the same side as them anymore. They have other people they care for-- people who care for MC, too. MC has a life outside of them and Plaithus now, and now Plaithus is MC's enemy.

That's something that horrifies Emeline because it means MC has something worth fighting for. Something to *die* for. And the last thing she wants is MC to die on the blade of a Plaithian sword while

fighting for Plaithus's enemies. Not because of prejudice, but because it rips the sheet right off from Emeline's head at just how horrible of a parent she was.

And more than that-- it shows that Plaithus wasn't right. Marcelle wasn't right. *None of it was right*. The most horrifying realization that will stem from that is the fact that Marcelle already knew all this. That Marcelle lied. And if Marcelle lied about this not just to Emeline but to all of Plaithus... what else has Marcelle lied about? *And why?*

5.) If the MC chooses to hold their cards close to their chest (i.e chooses to remain silent at every opportunity so as not to give their thoughts or intentions away) while they are in the palace because they don't trust anyone from their old life, will other characters remark on it? If they won't, can you tell us how they feel about it?

It depends. If you mean will the ROs notice if MC is distant to those other than them (ex. Emeline), then the answer is no. If you're asking if characters (like Syfyn and Sabir) will notice if MC is suddenly incredibly distant and stoic to them directly, the answer is yes. Emeline will notice as well, and her sanity stat that I showed over on my Tumblr is partially tied to that.

Marcelle will never react to MC's stoicism, largely because she sees no problem with it and doesn't take it to heart too much.

However, if you were asking the first one, here are the ROs reactions to MC being distant/stoic in the palace to others if you have good affinity with them! (No Jost since she's... not there)

Vethna: Feels bad. They know MC is going through a lot emotionally and they know *exactly* how MC feels. They won't ever comment on it though-- it's not their place to.

Nikke: Definitely takes note of it. I don't think it would largely change his opinion of the MC at all, but he'd notice that MC clearly doesn't trust Plaithus anymore and deduct a whole bunch of other things as well about MC as a person, their current mentality, etc.

Amilia: I honestly don't think Amilia would even notice. She's already stressed out of her mind and worrying about her own shit. I don't think she has the energy to take note of The Commander's mindset.

Sabir: He's honestly doing the same thing after the trial. He doesn't believe a single word that leaves anyone's mouth and only speaks to those in the palace if it's to be passive-aggressive. I think he'd probably just feel like... companionship with MC in their mutual hatred of their situation and those around them. Nothing better to bond over than distrusting the same people, right?

Syfyn: Syfyn is in the same boat as Amilia-- she has so much going on in her head about MC that she can't even begin to take notice of if MC is being stoic/distant or not.

Freedom: ... as you'll discover in Chapter 5, they're a little busy being tortured to really pick up on MC's emotional cues.

6.) I’m not sure if this was answered already, but do you think that there will be mentions of the MC’s past life? More specifically, why they strongly deny having parents, like what happened with that situation to give them that strong of a reaction/make them be on their own? I mean like..I feel like anyone is better than a queen forcing the MC into stuff for what appears to be somewhat personal gain.

MC's background will be more than mentioned-- it's a key part of the plot and will be fully explored in later chapters.

However, I can share that MC's parents died when MC was 5 in an incident-- an incident that MC was forced to flee from. The entire event was horrible and due to trauma was heavily blocked out of MC's memory-- thus why MC is so adamant that they have no parents. That, and the fact that MC was on their own in the streets for 3 years.

You can either view MC's response as one of three things: **A.)** Young MC *literally* doesn't remember having parents so that obviously means they have no parents at all, **B.)** Young MC vaguely remembers their parents but due to trauma doesn't want to talk about them/remember what happened or **C.)** Young MC somehow blames their parents for their deaths/not trying harder to live, and as a result, being forced into living on the streets as a consequence.

It's really up to you and what best fits your Commanders!

I shall also ominously say that had MC *stayed* with their parents... I can't say it would be much better so much as it would be *different* than having been raised by Marcelle...

Take that as you will :)

7.) Very likely this will be answered in the story, but I’m super curious lol. You’ve told us which people know about the surgery (moms, Overseer, Esme if I remember correctly). Do all of them know it was performed while the Commander was awake? If not, who knows and who thinks it was just a “normal” (sedated) surgery? Who ordered it to be performed on a conscious Commander, or is that standard practice? There needs to be a reason, right, because the Commander being awake and writhing/thrashing/tensing would make it more annoying/difficult for the “surgeons”, so wouldn’t it have been easier if the Commander was sedated?

It is very much *not* a normal thing to perform surgery on people without anesthesia, however, there is some general bias from humans towards *mythosi* that they don't "really" need it granted their higher pain threshold and tolerance.

Those who know of the surgery are Marcelle, Emeline, Esmerelda, and The Overseer. Esmerelda was never meant to know about it, but she's sneaky and good at listening, so she managed to get a vague idea of what happened to The Commander. However, of those characters, none of them except The Overseer knew the details of how it was carried out-- but The Overseer is *not* the person who ordered for it to be done in such a manner.

MC was left to the mercy of the medics who were in charge of the surgery-- and they saw no reason for a murderer who killed hundreds of people to be put under anesthetic. They didn't care if The Commander thrashing around made things more difficult because they didn't care if The Commander lived. What's that? The Commander twitched a bit too much and one of the nurses accidentally stabbed them in a vital area? *What a shame.*

The Commander is hated by most of the country. Most people who are a part of the court lost people they cared about. What happened on that night was a national tragedy. People lost their partners and children to The Commander's outrage. As you can imagine, the public opinion is not very high.

8.) What made Emeline so quick to agree to adopting the Commander? (if it isn't too spoilery!)

The scene where you first meet Emeline and Esmerelda isn't actually when they decide to adopt MC-- the plan was for MC to stay with them as they tried to find MC's family (because at the end of the day, a child declaring they have no parents isn't too solid of a base to work off of). However, when they *couldn't*, which was after a good few months of searching I imagine, MC had already become a part of their family.

So that little invitation sort of just became... permanent!

9.) Are gorgons nocturnal?

Nope!

10.) How exactly does the full moon impact half werewolf Commanders?

It won't be enough to force them into shifting, but it *does* make them act out more. It's sort of like a horrible mood swing that lasts throughout the day and gets significantly worse at night-- it can lead towards being aggressive, destructive, and generally behaving more animalistic. However, there are herbal remedies that can negate some of these effects!

11.) What are some of the little daily annoyances that each mythosi type faces as a result of their type? (eg. shedding)

Gorgons shed a couple times a year, and when they do, it's utter misery. They'll be itchy, limited in movement, and generally be very sleepy and lethargic. It can take a week for it to be over, and it's generally the period where a gorgon is at their weakest. It's because of this and how frequently it happens that it's a very large part of gorgon culture and there's usually certain customs revolving around it depending on what clan a gorgon comes from.

Werewolves do shed a lot, yes, but their biggest thing is that they tend to be more temperamental. They tend to follow pack behavior and try to apply it to human relationships, which doesn't tend to work out very well. You can also expect to imagine werewolves resource guarding and getting *very* upset if they think someone is "trespassing"...

Phoenix's would always need to keep an eye out on their emotions. If they get too excited or angry or passionate, they may erupt into flames which could be a fire hazard. They also will have to deal with the cultural repercussions of being a half-*mythosi* when they get older and tire of living amongst mortals. Phoenixes are incredibly reclusive and have a giant superiority complex, often ostracizing half-Phoenixes due to their human origins.

And demons... demons just have to deal with voices in their head all the god damn time and watching premonitions of imps do inappropriate shit all the time that no one else can see. I view that as being enough of a punishment as is lol.

Out of Game Asks

1.) What first inspired you to begin writing The Exile as a work of interactive fiction?

I always wanted to write an IF book. I grew up on CYOA novellas and then read CYOA stories on Archive Of Our Own. I even wrote a little Harry Potter CYOA that I sort of... maybe... forgot about.

The Exile was a project I made with the intention of being the first story I would complete, and the first fully coded story I would make on ChoiceScript (and now Twine). It was never intended to be as big as it is now, but I have no impulse control and now it's definitely going to be over a million words.

I developed the game as I wrote. MC was originally a royal guard (not royalty) and grew up in Plaithus from birth. They came from a peasant family and worked hard to earn their status before they snapped and killed everyone, earning them their exile. Amilia originally wasn't even a fae, either. She was just a poet from a small village that was raided in her youth. Honestly, like 90% of The Exile's plot started off as bullshit that I jumped through hoops to explain, but now I actually have a solid plot to work off of.

2.) What are some of the major themes or concepts that you find compelling to explore through the game?

There are the obvious ones of Fate and Freedom. I started writing The Exile in a less than fantastic period of my life, and a thing you hear a *lot* when you're in a bad mental place are things along the lines of: "If you want something to change, go out and change it," and "it's a matter of perspective."

It's interesting because when someone's *not* actively in a bad mental state, they can usually see the big picture and that there *is* complete freedom in who we become and what we do. Meanwhile, if you're on the other side of that, all you can think of is how you're going to feel terrible forever and life will forever be horrible and there's absolutely nothing you can do about it. For some reason, my brain translated that into Freedom vs. Fate, and that became a theme I wanted to explore in more detail.

Other than that, I really like to explore complicated relationships in platonic and familial relations. I think it's interesting how much we're willing to put up with for the sake of those we love, or maybe just out of a feeling of duty to stay by those who raised us.

I also like exploring the human psyche. The Commander has gone through a lot, and I purposely do everything I can to make people feel tied to the Commander and their pain so they take it personally. It's interesting because of the very real emotions the story invokes in readers, and that emotion will then influence how you all make your choices in-game just like it would in real life. Exploring emotions and their consequences is intriguing to me, as is exploring the "corruption" of morals...

The evil route of The Commander is definitely going to be an interesting/complex thing to write, that's for sure.

Patreon Q&A - Collecting Questions!

Jun 6, 2022

Hello everyone! In the polls there was an overwhelming majority of you who wanted to see Patreon Q&A's and, true to my word, I'll be posting one between now and the release of Chapter Five.

You can either just drop your questions below in the comments ***OR*** if you'd prefer to remain anonymous, you can put your questions in this google form!

I'll get to answering as many of your questions as I can **this Friday!**

The Trial. | Sabir Du Vaelas | P.O.V. Switch

Jun 4, 2022

Somewhere, deep down, Sabir always knew it was going to end like this. It was all too fitting of a finale-- the wannabe politician forced into chains and paraded around to be humiliated by the very people who were once his peers. He was never fond of them, that's true, but something about the familiarity makes their jabs and sneers sting more than they should.

But he deserves it. He knows he does. He failed the Commander-- and it was because of his failure that they endured *this* and so much worse. It was because of him that they lost their home. It was because of him that Trystan feared them. It was because of him that everything was ruined, and if he had only been smarter, faster, *better*, none of this would've happened.

He deserves it.

He walks behind the Commander, his hands bound by chains and his eyes glued to the royal blue carpet. It's so pristine-- so vibrant and bright. If he stares at it for long enough, maybe he can pretend this isn't real: pretend that this is all just a bad dream-- a *nightmare*. But the Commander's blood is dripping onto the floor in front of him and leaving scattered marks for him to step over, and though they are quiet he can't help but notice their raw skin beneath their too-tight shackles and collar-- see the way that their muzzle catches and rips at their hair.

They might be on the same level now. He might be viewed as a traitor just as much as they are. But at the end of the day, the people sitting above them still view him as a person and the Commander as little more than a beast. No matter how bad it gets, it could never be worse than what it is for them, and it is in this that he reaffirms it: *he deserves this*. He deserves this ten times over again, and then maybe, *maybe*, he could atone. Repent. Be free of this shame and guilt and--

They're looking.

He can feel The Commander's gaze on him like fire, and he can hardly bring himself to lift his head to face them. He expects their ire-- their hatred-- and is instead met with an expression of gratitude and thankfulness. Despite everything, they still look solid as ever, unswayed by the hateful eyes that watch them walk towards the Queen, uncaring of the insults that are thrown their way.

He smiles, and he doesn't even realize he's doing it until it falls from his face.

He stands in front of the Queen. The *Queens.* He's not given the chance to kneel before the back of his knees are kicked and he collapses forward, The Commander doing the same. Their expression is impossible to read, and for some reason, that's reassuring to Sabir. If they're here, if they're with him... things seem a little less impossible.

It's no wonder they were a Commander. *The* Commander, leader of thousands.

The Queen speaks, but it enters one ear and leaves out the other. Sabir can hardly keep track of his own breathing, nonetheless the threats and decrees of the Mother of Plaithus, The Raven Queen, Destroyer of Kingdoms and Peacekeeper; bitter irony to be found, there.

But then he hears his own name-- his own title-- and the guards are on him like moths to a flame. The crowd erupts into yells and shouts, and Sabir is barely able to meet the disdain-filled eyes of his former peers before a guard grabs hold of the back of his neck and yanks him upright with enough force to snap his spine in two. He can't stop his grimace-- can't stop the blatant expression of pain on his face.

This is The Commander's home field now-- not his. They're the one who can shake off agony like it's a fly-- wield terror and pain like a blade. He is accustomed to politics and insults, nothing more than idle insults and tiny men with big mouths. This... this is entirely different and entirely horrifying.

Every single person in this room wants him dead. But not just that-- beaten and humiliated, dragged through the mud and spit upon. Only then would they grant him death, and by then...

Well, by then it would be a mercy.

He closes his eyes as the guards squeeze his skin too tightly-- sucks in a breath when he hears metal swords being dragged from sheaths in a display of sadistic power. And when he opens his eyes again, they go The Commander.

Their eyes are wild.

No.

He has earned this-- this pain, this *humiliation*. He has earned all of it, and it is his to bear. The Commander never deserved any of what happened to them, and he was helpless to stop it. He can't... he *won't* let them take the brunt of this too.

But he's helpless to stop this. Helpless to stop anything and everything, really, and before he knows it, The Commander is rising onto their feet. A collective breath is held by all in the room, and the brutal enjoyment of the jury is immediately replaced with a quiet fear for what happens next-- for what happens when The Commander grows tired of their pokes and their jabs, and for if the chains that keep The Commander in line are even strong enough to do that.

They're not.

The Commander's elbow slams into the ribs of the guard behind them-- bare skin again armor-- and yet The Commander is completely unfazed as the guard crumples and gasps. The fool reaches out for The Commander again only for The Commander to lash out, their long claws bared like weapons in their own right, and the guard barely rears back in time to avoid a mauled face. Instead, the claws rip through the defensive hand that raises to protect himself, ripping through it like scissors through fabric.

And even then, Sabir knows The Commander is playing nice.

The second guard abandons Sabir's side to leap on The Commander, and it is without mercy that she grabs hold of The Commander's barely healed arm and yanks it back-- farther than it ever should whether it be healed or not. It takes every ounce of the guard's strength to force The Commander to their knees, the guard with the bleeding hand having to help them before The Commander collapses, grunting and growling in agony the entire time as cruel hands dig into scar tissue.

Sabir doesn't know how long they hold The Commander down, their bruised cheek pressed against the royal carpet. All he knows is that he can feel The Commander's rage like a palpable thing, their pupils small and their expression unreadable. They're like a cornered and caged animal... and Sabir hates to imagine what should happen if they ever escape their imprisonment.

The guards let The Commander rise, the Commander's chest heaving still as they look at their own mothers.

When did things go so wrong? When did everything become... become *this?* There used to be a time when things were okay-- good, even. And now... now they've been marched right down to the gallows by the very place they used to call home.

The Queen looks between The Commander and Sabir, her expression stony and impossible to read, and Sabir's blood runs cold when her gaze settles on him.

"Our very own Silven Viper has betrayed the country--" she repeats the same sentence that started this whole mess as if it were Sabir's fault for the disarray. He would laugh if he had the energy to do so-- laugh if he wasn't so gods damn scared. "Yet again-- I'm sure you are all familiar with the proper punishment for this crime," The Queen says.

Sabir sees himself kneeled before a faceless man wielding a sword-- feels his blood splattering from his neck as his head falls to the ground and rolls and rolls and *rolls*. It would be thrown on a pike, his body hanging from a wall as his belongings are burned in a pile in front of him. His memory would never die-- not really-- forever would the name Silven Viper linger on the people's lips in warning, or perhaps it would rest behind the lilted smiles of his competitors as they speak of having *won* whatever political game it is that they've all found themselves playing.

But he's not going to die. Not today. He doesn't know why he knows, but he does. He feels it in his bones, feels it in his very blood as he meets The Queen's calculative gaze. The room is shockingly quiet as everyone listens with bated breath for whatever hellish punishment it is that The Queen's chalked up for him.

When she speaks, she speaks with hardly hidden amusement, the corners of her black-painted lips twisting upwards. "Death is a rather wasteful thing, I've found," she drawls. She has all the time in the world, and she intends to use it, to remind Sabir of his own, rather limited time. "It takes away any use our former Plathian citizens might have for us-- and I know what you're thinking," she says, "what use could such criminals possibly have for us?"

The Queen has always been charismatic. When she is not speaking, or angered, or surrounded by the nobility, she is stoic and impossible to read. When she is *speaking*, however-- *performing*, if you will-- she transforms. Her smile is dazzling, her eyes are bright, and her tone can fluctuate between that of a threat to that of a joke within seconds. The crowd is enraptured, and Sabir is trapped.

There is no escaping this-- not when The Queen is the herder and wolf in one. They've already been shepherded to their demise-- and now they must simply *wait.*

The Queen speaks of many things for the next few minutes. She speaks of traitors and bloodshed-- of how Sabir and The Commander are really nothing more than tools to work to death. The people shout and agree and laugh at the idea of Sabir and The Commander suffering until there is nothing left of them to suffer, and suddenly, Sabir is back on the patio of the palace, listening to the grim and cynical words that left The Commander all those years ago.

Maybe they don't deserve to be saved.

He had thought the commoners to be enslaved to those above them. A chance-- that was all they needed. A chance to crawl upwards, a chance to prove themselves. But here they are now, in this room, tasting power for the first time as they sit amongst the jury.

They look just as cruel as the masked Council.

No. They look crueler.

The Queen speaks of Vygrand. Of infiltrating it from the inside out. Of *destroying it*.

And by then, Sabir knows what he needs to. They won't be coming back from this mission. They'll die miles away from home and alone in enemy territory. No one will come for their bodies. They will rot away being known as killers and murderers by the citizens of The South, and nothing more than traitors and deserters to the north.

He will become a killer. A murderer. A *soldier*.

And, if he's being honest... he would rather die-- cut his own throat before being forced into cutting someone else's. And maybe he will.

Or maybe he'll cut hers--

The sound of the doors opening distracts him-- as does the sharp scent of blood-- and before Sabir knows it the Mevnrael is being forced onto their knees beside him. They are coated head to toe in blood, the anti-magic collar that's locked around their neck humming lightly.

The night Sabir had first met them, their magic was stifling to be around. It was thick and intoxicating, like the smoke from a nice pipe, and it had been a struggle to keep his head straight whilst being surrounded by it. He knew they were dangerous. Their last name most certainly played a part in that, but even without it...

He could almost be driven to feel pity for them. But he can't. Not when he knows what they've done. What their father's done-- their *fiancé.*

"Look what the cat's dragged in," he huffs, voice low, *quiet.* The Mevnrael glares at him hard out of the corner of their eyes. They say nothing.

Smart.

And if the Menvrael's here, then that means the fae...

Gasps of shock.

Is there.

Sabir has to twist in his chains to see her-- her head is bowed and her hands shake with each step. He remembers when the collar was first forced on her-- the panicked yell that escaped her before she was forced to sit still. He couldn't say he was surprised much by the transformation.

Don't trust fae. It's a simple rule, though hard to follow at times. He's yet to meet one of her kind that didn't fall into the stereotype of being a liar-- of being *cruel*, whether it be intentionally or not. And now, even as she whimpers and shakes as she's forced to kneel, he knows it to be an act. He can read through it clear as day, and yet... well, a part of him can't help but wonder if *she* knows it's an act.

Lie to yourself enough times, and it becomes hard to discern the truth.

Her eyes barely meet his when she scans the room, but they meet nonetheless before she collapses where she sits, form hunched over like a fearful child.

She is a liar, yes, but he is too. And something about her terror, something in her naivety... it reminds him of himself when he first entered this hellish place; desperate to prove himself, yet entirely incapable of doing so.

Such a shame they're going to die so soon. But he has no doubt her life has been longer than his-- perhaps even by twice as much. *Don't trust fae.*

Not even her.

A laugh.

It has his jaw clenching. There is no way in this gods damned world that he's coming with them-- and yet there the bastard is, marching down the hall with a big ole' grin, fangs catching on his lips as he laughs and laughs and *laughs*. The guards can rough-handle him all they want, it only serves to spur him on as he wildly looks from person to person. The people retreat from his eyes like frightened animals, helpless and powerless once the respect of decorum is ignored.

They are nothing. Nobodies. And he is a Vrithkan mythosi, born and bred to kill and hunt and eat humans alive whole.

Or so they say-- because as far as Sabir's concerned, he's an incompetent little shit dressed like an angsty farm boy... which isn't saying much.

It takes some wrangling on the behalf of the guards to get Nikke down, and even then, he doesn't *stay* down, not even when the guards thwack him on the head or twist his harms or kick and kick and *kick*. It isn't until a blade is pressed against his jugular that he stops fighting and laughs, hands raised in such mocking surrender that it has Sabir feeling sick.

"Woah--" Nikke breaths, grin wide. "Careful there, flower--" the comment earns him a hit on the side of the head with the pommel of the blade, and *that* has him going quiet as he leans forward and squeezes his eyes shut.

Sabir has to hold back his laugh, though his grin is wide, and when Nikke opens his eyes once more he is greeted by the politician's malicious grin.

He grins right back.

Shameless, Sabir notes. He knew this before, sure, but he didn't quite understand the extent of it-- and at this point... well, perhaps shameless is too lofty of a word to use. Perhaps *stupid* is better. *Stupid and arrogant.*

Bottom line-- Sabir trusts no one in this room except The Commander. The sorcerer's blood is filled with corruption and manipulation, the fae is so delusional that not even she can keep her lies straight, and the snake...

Maybe there *is* a throat he wouldn't mind cutting. It's not like anyone would expect it-- he could do it at the most unsuspecting moment and cut Nikke right out of the picture before anyone could blink. The Commander would be safe. The *mission* would be safe. And if the mission was safe... well, Sabir's smart. He knows that.

And maybe there's a way to get out of this after all-- especially when the force and iron-will of The Commander are at his back.

It's not until Sabir is forced back onto his feet after another long rant from the Queen that things seem a little less impossible. They have time between now and their deaths-- and that's more than what most can say. It doesn't matter if it's months, weeks, or even days.

It's all the time that he needs.

He makes a list in his head as he's dragged out from the throne room: a list of names and debts and deals with less than savory characters. A list that just might be enough to sneak them out from right beneath the Crown's nose. Sure, it might require some backstabbings and backroom deals, but it doesn't matter. None of it matters... *mattered.*

He's a politician. A viper. A *snake*.

A vermin that does what it takes to survive.

The shame of his thoughts wouldn't hit him until later, and even then, he does not dispel them so much as he keeps them locked safe in the back of his mind for later.

June Intro Posts + Questions

Jun 1, 2022

Hello everyone! I don't normally do intro posts for the month but I have a few questions for everyone that I'd like to ask, and figured here would be the best place to put them!

For this month I plan to upload sneak peeks as per usual, finish the A-Z headcanons for Sabir and Freedom, and upload a POV Switch for Sabir (which will be one part of a series for all the ROs who were present at the trial in Chapter 4). **That's the general plan right now, but I'm also curious if there are any short-stories or headcanons that *you* all would like to see/read!** I have a few ideas on the back burner, but at the end of the day I always want to put out content that you all want to see, so any ideas are helpful!

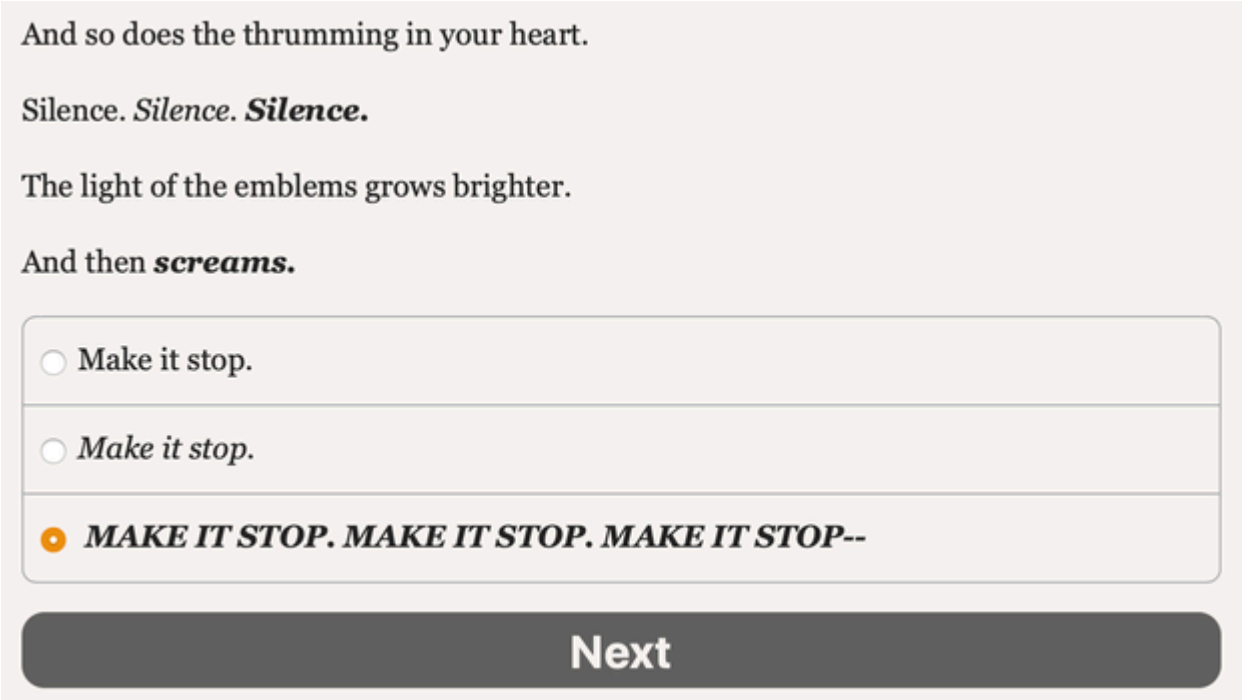
I'm also curious if Patreon Q&A's are a thing people would be interested in-- I'd likely do them after every chapter release so long as they're are enough questions, and would also do one between now and the release of Chapter Five just for fun! The questions asked there can be significantly more spoilery than anything on Tumblr, and questions here have a higher chance of being answered than questions on my Tumblr just due to how I balance everything out over social medias and with writing.

That's all-- thanks for reading!

Yes-- I'd like to see Patreon Q&As

No-- I'm not interested in Patreon Q&As

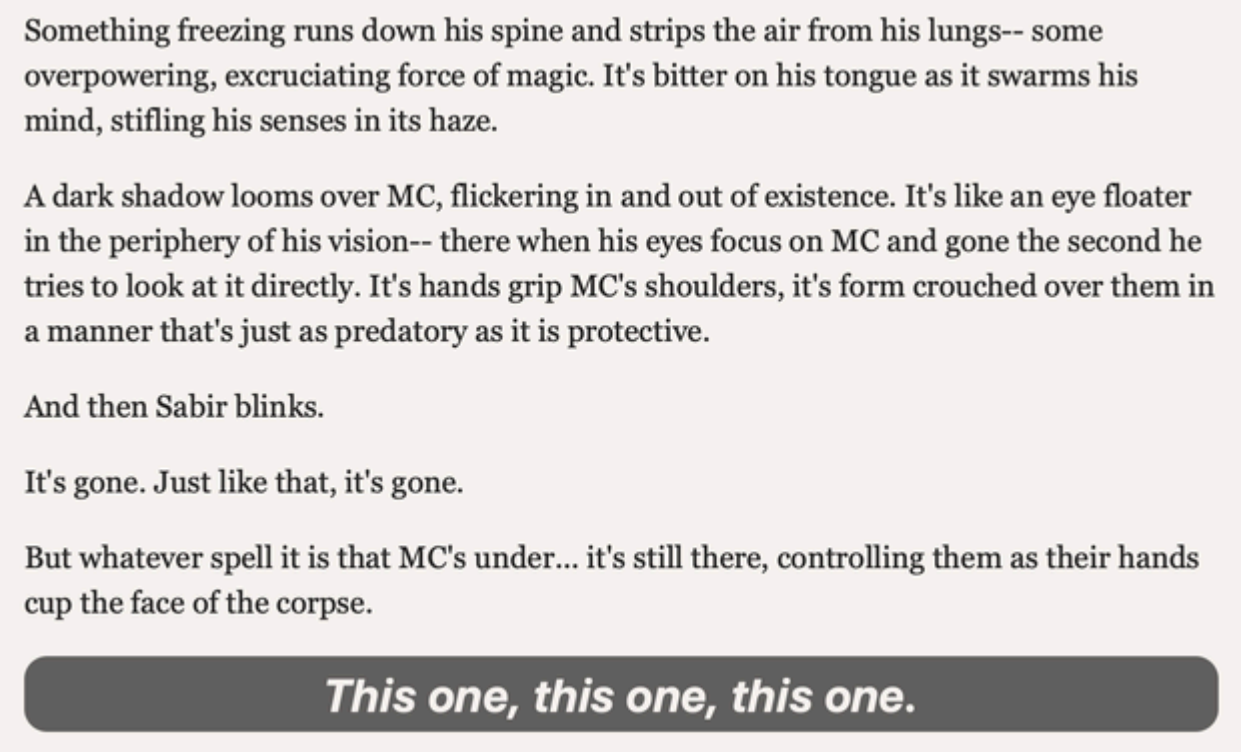
67 votes total



Freedom's Ritual

Jun 1, 2022

I've finally finished (for the most part) the scene involving the ritual that separates Freedom from MC-- so this is the last sneak peek from that part of the game that you'll see! I would say it's tied for first place as " the most intense scene" for this chapter...



This One. This One. This One.

May 30, 2022

Things get real weird in Chapter Five. The line between reality and fiction continues to blur not just for the Commander this time, but all of their companions as well... some may handle it better than others.

Each step you feel as if you may vomit, or fall, or sob, but you keep going with nothing but the odd woman to keep you upright. Her grip is firm yet gentle as you hobble along, your feet wobbling as you make your way forwards.

You don't know how long it takes you to get to the house-- it's too foggy to see the sun and the woman's patience does nothing to indicate how long you're taking, either. But soon enough you find yourself clambering up the steps of the patio to the small cottage.

The house is made entirely of shingled, peeling wood, though the front door is bright teal in color, its handle seemingly made of pure gold and, if you weren't losing so much blood, you'd swear it was glowing.

The woman pushes it open and ushers you inside, and immediately you're greeted by the smell of herbs and warmth as the door shuts behind you. Together, you shuffle towards the floral-print couch where she lowers you gently onto the plush cushions. "There we go," the woman murmurs, ignoring the way your blood seeps into the fabric. "Now stay there," she mutters before scurrying away. You don't bother to try and figure out where she goes, instead focusing on the crackling fire before you.

You can't help but wonder if they dropped you off this close to this woman on purpose-- and dread rises within you as you wonder if she's some affiliate of Plaithus-- of *The Overseer*.

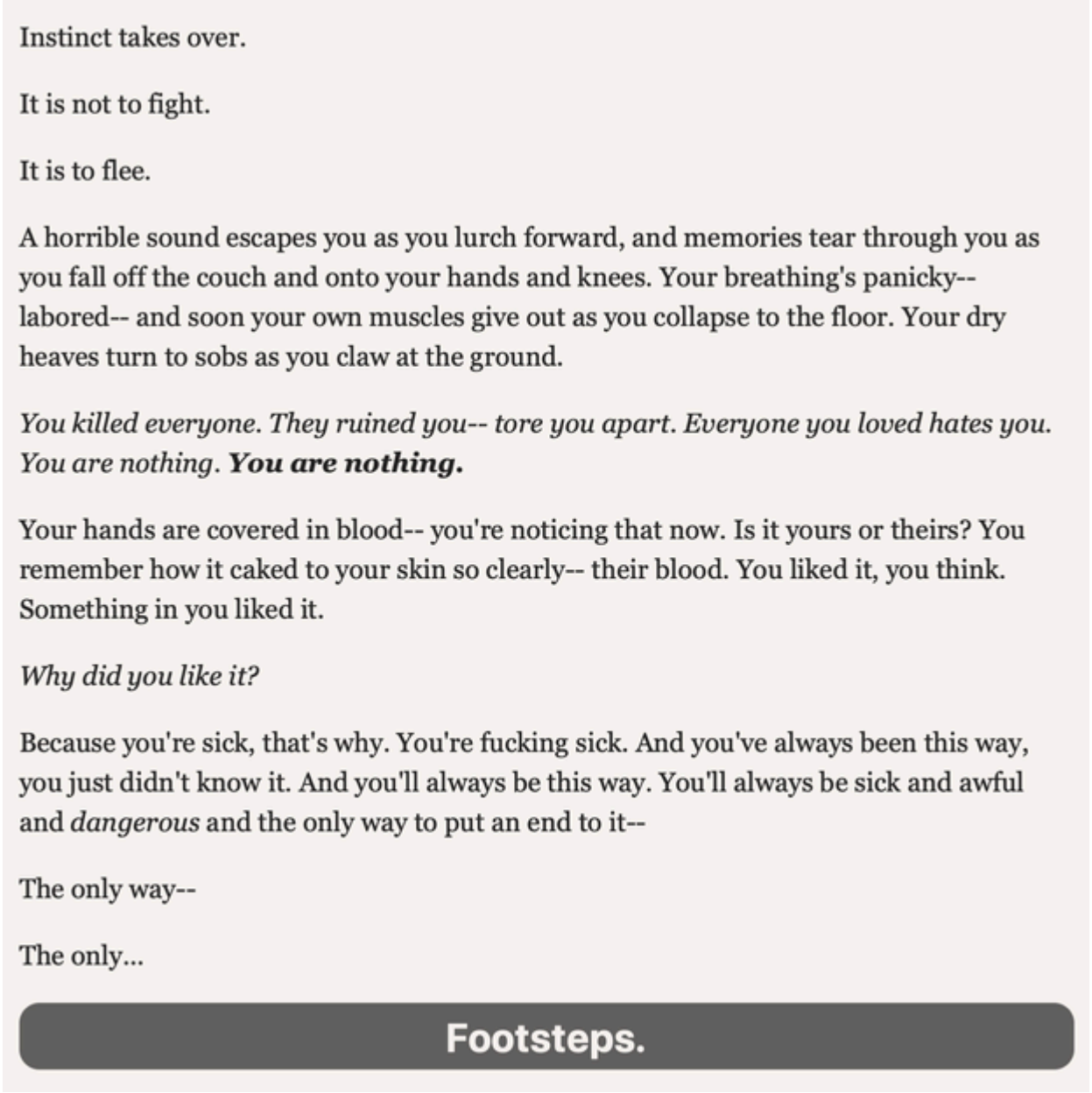
... hell, even if she is, it's not like there's much you can do to keep her from hurting you. You can barely breathe and keep forgetting to blink and swallow. You're no threat to anyone or anything.

You hear clanging and water, but it's nothing considered to the sound of burning wood and the smell of ash.

Bone dust-- you taste it on your tongue. They cut nerves and watch you writhe with medical, apathetic gazes. Your screams are drowned out by the sound of their saws.

You are crying.

A hand on your shoulder.



Woman in the Woods. (TW: PTSD, Suicidal Thoughts)

May 22, 2022

In Chapter 5, you'll get to see more of MC's exile in detail... and, more specifically, see the first few hours of MC's exile. It's traumatic and painful, but an important part of MC's past. Thankfully, this woman, *Mallory*, is here to help MC get through it, and you'll be able to see MC begin their journey in healing, even if they fall back down a few more times along the way.

As I've been writing more and more flashbacks, a part of me is curious what it would be like to change the ordering of the story. That is, making it chronological as opposed to filled with flashbacks. There's pros and cons to both versions, and I'll likely put a poll up on my tumblr in the coming weeks-- but I'm always interested in hearing opinions here!

Relationship A-Z Headcanons: Amilia Von Clamile

May 19, 2022

Note: Considering Amilia's rather secretive nature in-game, this may end up being more spoilery than the others!

A = Affection (How affectionate are they? How do they show affection?)

Amilia isn't overbearing in her affection in the sense that she's showering you in it 110% of the time, but she is rather playful when showing it, which may be over-the-top to some. Expect her to steal your clothes until you have nothing left, randomly jump onto your back in demand of piggy-back rides, or randomly try to pick you up (and somehow succeed to the shock of everyone around).

It's very rare for her to show her affection in a way that *isn't* mischievous, and when she does it never lasts for long. Those moments are always private and include her tracing the lines of your face or playing with your hair. You always have to be quiet-- if you comment on it, it's a surefire way to get her to start teasing you and not stop.

B = Best friend (What would they be like as a best friend? How would the friendship start?)

Amilia's simultaneously easy and not easy to befriend. On the outside, she's a very friendly and outgoing person who can get along with most people-- she has a way of getting past people's walls and through their armor. However, a lot of that is her simply changing her personality to be most suitable to whoever she's with, and as a result, while the person in question may *think* they're friends, the truth is anything but.

In truth, there's no way to tell if you're actually Amilia's friend or not. You just have to have faith that she's not lying or deceiving you, and maybe, *maybe*, over time her real personality will come out (or is it another facade to make you think it's real?)

Either way, whether it's genuine or not, Amilia does her best to care for others and is quite resourceful, but only in a pinch. Otherwise, she sticks to the sidelines and watches... a lot. She's also fond of playing games and messing around, but it can get to the point where she won't take things seriously. At other times, it's the complete opposite where Amilia will enter states of complete panic and shut down. She's unreadable and has two very different extremes to her, which makes it rather hard to put faith in her at the end of the day.

C = Cuddles (Do they like to cuddle? How would they cuddle?)

Amilia is a bit hot and cold when it comes to cuddling-- during the daytime, she can be pretty restless, and even more so in the early mornings. She's a person who likes to be on the go, and cuddling is, well... the opposite of that. She'll try really *really* hard to sit still, but at some point, it'll become obvious that she's just itching to get up and do something when she starts practically buzzing in your arms.

At night time, however, she loves to cuddle. She's a lot calmer in the evenings and has a tendency to actively seek you out *just* for the sake of being near you, whether that be cuddling or just leaning against you as you work. She can be a bit forceful when she cuddles-- she likes to squeeze-- but she's not too picky on where or how you cuddle so long as you're together!

D = Domestic (Do they want to settle down? How are they at cooking and cleaning?)

Settling down is nowhere in the near future for Amilia. She's a traveler through and through and finds great joy in exploring the world. And, considering she's practically immortal, settling down for her might not look like what it would for other people. For example, she's totally down for living in Vygrand for an odd couple of decades before packing it up and checking out the Isles of Belleont and living there for a bit. But the idea of really settling down to make a family, or, even worse, returning to the Faewilds... yeah, you're gonna have to give her a bit of time for those things.

Amilia's a great cook. She can take any couple of things and throw them together to make them taste delicious-- it definitely helps that she regularly carries all manners of herbs together, too. She knows her way around the forests well, and has an eye for foraging.... so... take that as you will... 👀

As for cleaning, she's cluttered, but not dirty. She tends to just set stuff down and forget it exists, and then stuff just piles up and piles up. She'll tidy up once it becomes ridiculous, and when she does, it tends to be like a holiday with all the cool stuff she ends up finding (and forgot she owned).

E = Ending (If they had to break up with their partner, how would they do it?)

It depends on why she's leaving them. It could be something as crude as a scribbled letter saying she's leaving you once she's already left and packed her bags, it could be in the form of a song where she doesn't take anything about your relationship seriously, or it could be a very awkward, one-on-one conversation that includes a lot of fidgeting on her end and avoidance of eye contact.

Amilia isn't very good at hard conversations, and she's even worse at commitment. In the early days of the relationship, you could sneeze wrong and it might be reason enough for her to leave. Of course, it's not actually about the sneeze, but still...

F = Fiance(e) (How do they feel about commitment? How quick would they want to get married?)

Amilia hates commitment... a lot. Some of that is just from being a Fae, and the rest of it is just from her being... well, her. The world is a big, quick-moving place, and committing to just one group of people or one world-view isn't really her style. She's also gone through a few things in her time of being alive, including losing the people and things most important to her. Since that... well, since that, she's found

it's easier to just not care about anything or anyone at all than it is to risk losing them and being hurt by it.

Marriage is a foreign idea to the Fae-- they quite literally have no equivalent to it. Couples stick together, and then they don't, and sometimes they return to each other or find other partners or stay alone. The idea of having a formal ceremony to declare a relationship isn't something Amilia is too familiar with, and despite being around humans for a while, she still finds it strange. If it was something her partner really *really* wanted, she might do it, but at the end of the day, it's not going to mean much to Amilia herself.

G = Gentle (How gentle are they, both physically and emotionally?)

Amilia is rough, but she tries not to be. She wants to be understanding, and soft, and kind, but sometimes her excitability gets the best of her. She might say something without thinking and end up hurting feelings, or let something rude slip out, or accidentally hit you in the face from trying to hug you too quickly. In general, she's a clumsy person, and it doesn't help that she always somehow manages to hit you where it hurts, whether that comes from being an instinctual and witty person or from being a very strong Fae.

H = Hugs (Do they like hugs? How often do they do it? What are their hugs like?)

Amilia's hugs are tight-- so tight that they knock the breath out of your lungs a little. But they always come from a place of love or excitement, and you can always feel it-- especially if she manages to lift you off the ground.

She hugs people she's close to, though her standards of being close to someone aren't very high-- if she knows you and you've been relatively friendly towards her, then bam! You're a friend, and you're getting a bunch of bear hugs. Amilia *loves* to hug people, though she's can go either way when it comes to receiving them!

I = I love you (How fast do they say the L-word?)

Not quick-- not quick at all. In fact, it's likely she'll find a way to indirectly say it to you instead of actually *saying* it to you, and chances are it's a very silly, nonsensical phrase that only you two know the secret meaning of... though it'll probably take you a while to realize the meaning of it, too.

Amilia can get flighty herself if she hears the word no matter how long you stay together-- but that's something for her to work out and work on... and trust me, if she *really* cares for you... she will if you give her the time and patience.

J = Jealousy (How jealous do they get? What do they do when they’re jealous?)

Amilia isn't jealous at all. As I said, Fae are very open with relationships. So long as you still make sure to spend time with her and are openly communicating (aka. having a healthy relationship), she doesn't mind if you're with anyone else. As for her side of things, she's fine with whatever you're comfortable with, whether that be monogamy, closed polygamy, an open relationship, etc!

K = Kisses (What are their kisses like? Where do they like to kiss you? Where do they like to be kissed?)

Amilia's kisses tend to be quick and frantic-- like she can't quite get enough of you. However, it's pretty easy to get her to slow down and enjoy the moment so long as you take the lead on things. Expect to receive just as many kisses on your cheeks as you do on your lips-- a favor that Amilia would very much enjoy having reciprocated.

L = Little ones (How are they around children?)

She's great with kids in the 5 - 9 age range-- she has enough energy to keep up with them and is just as excited to play playground games as the kids are. She's great with babies for a limited time, but in general, babies are more work than fun in her opinion. Sure, they're cute, but she's not all that eager to watch a baby try to navigate crawling before changing its diaper, feeding it, and burping it.

M = Morning (How are mornings spent with them?)

Amilia likes to spend her mornings alone and likes to get up *very* early-- usually around five, if not a bit before. She likes to spend the time watching the sunrise and in general just running around and getting into trouble/doing random things. It's also when she's her most productive, so chances are she'll try and get all her chores done when she first wakes up so she can spend the rest of the day doing as she pleases. Don't worry, though-- she'll always make sure to swing by to greet you with a good morning kiss, a cup of your preferred drink, and a good breakfast before going back to her day!

N = Night (How are nights spent with them?)

Amilia's days are the exact opposite of her nights. Physically, she's very lazy, but it's also when she's at her creative best. Once the sun sets, she'll be working on poems, songs, and stories, and if it's up to her, it'll be somewhere near you or where she can see you should she need some inspiration. You'll be able to tear her away from her creative things to spend more one-on-one time together so long as you make sure to not do it too frequently-- a creative needs to create, ya know!

O = Open (When would they start revealing things about themselves? Do they say everything all at once or wait a while to reveal things slowly?)

Amilia doesn't reveal things until she's well and truly cornered, and by then, it tends to be a pretty messy ordeal. She's used to lying about who she is and dodging questions she doesn't like, even to people she cares about a lot. If she's telling you something about herself, chances are, it's something you already knew and she's only confirming it. It's not a trend that she's keen on breaking, and as a result, people tend to only learn the bad things about her, as the good things are never leaked out as "secrets" to be discovered from outside sources.

P = Patience (How easily angered are they?)

Amilia pretends to be a lot more patient than she is. She's not quick to anger or anything, but she definitely masks what anger she does feel with feigned embarrassment or shyness to try and get out of confrontation. When she *does* express her anger, things tend to get out of hand pretty quickly.

The bad part of this is that she tends to avoid conflict like the plague, which usually results in a lot of pent-up negative emotions which then lead to even worse emotional breakdowns. The *good* part is that she spends so much time managing her own anger that she's great at de-escalating arguments when the need arises... though she only tends to do such a thing when the people arguing are people she cares about. Otherwise, she's more than content to sit on the sidelines and watch the drama unfold.

Q = Quizzes (How much would they remember about you? Do they remember every little detail you mention in passing, or do they kind of forget everything?)

Amilia's pretty scatter-brained and remembers things in a very abstract way. She might forget your birthday or middle name, but she'll be able to describe the *exact* color of your eyes, all of your nervous habits, and what your favorite song lyric is and why. Amilia remembers things that *she* deems as being particularly important, for better or worse.

S = Security (How protective are they? How would they protect you? How would they like to be protected?)

Amilia's not too protective. The only time you'll see Amilia act defensively is if you're dealing with other Fae, who she herself doesn't exactly have a good relationship with. If any rogue Fae try to steal your name or otherwise rope you into a deal, you can bet that Amilia's going to be intercepting with a demeanor that's so cheery and go-lucky it's uncanny.

Amilia, however, would *love* to be protected. She craves security, and someone who can offer that both emotionally and physically is someone she'd value greatly. In fact, it's probably the easiest way to make her feel loved.

If you're ever verbally cornered, however, and it's clear that you're emotionally hurt from the words that are being thrown about... well, let's just say having a bard as a companion can be beneficial in more ways than one.

T = Try (How much effort would they put into dates, anniversaries, gifts, everyday tasks?)

Amilia can be forgetful, so it's very possible she'll forget about your anniversary entirely. It's not because she doesn't care, but because A.) Fae don't have them B.) She views her life similar to other immortals and doesn't tend to really measure things through years.

Should Vethna be a shared friend of yours, they'll be kind enough to step in and remind Amilia before it's too late to set up something if it's important to you-- otherwise, she'll probably realize herself *right* before it's too late when you mention it and somehow manage to pull off a beautiful and romantic date so smoothly that you'll think it was planned all along.

To make up for this, Amilia's pretty affectionate outside of important dates. She'll regularly write you songs and poetry, braid your hair, set up fun random dates whenever an idea strikes her, etc. You'll never doubt that she loves you... though you might doubt that she's ever actually seen a calendar in her life before.

U = Ugly (What would be some bad habits of theirs?)

Amilia's a liar. A bad one. Her lies can be as big as lying about her entire past or as small as lying about what she ate for breakfast. Half the time it isn't even on purpose-- it just sort of happens, and then she's left wondering why she lied and gets worked up into a stressful tizzy about it, which only makes her even *more* likely to lie.

She also can be manipulative, but not on purpose. She gets frightened easily by yelling and rage, so if you get worked up at *all* about one of her lies when she comes clean, she'll freak out and make a big deal out of it. The best thing to do in those moments is walk away and let her deal with her own problems. Like I said before-- if she really cares, she'll work on herself, but even then, she doesn't blame you if you decide to leave.

V = Vanity (How concerned are they with their looks?)

Amilia doesn't care for her looks... at all. She's not a mess or a slob, but if you were to ask her the last time she looked at her own reflection... well, she wouldn't be able to give you an answer. She throws on whatever clothes happen to be clean and from there just sorta.... goes. Luckily for her, everything she owns tends to go together, and even if it doesn't, she has the sort of quirky personality that makes power clashing look good on her.

W = Whole (Would they feel incomplete without you?)

If Amilia really fell for you... then yes, she would. Amilia's never really had a true place to belong, and the one time she did... well, she lost it. Losing you after everything would be a damaging blow to Amilia-- so much so that she'd need a few years to get back on her feet again, and even longer still to get back to being who she was before she met you (if she ever truly manages to do so). Amilia's closed off despite appearances, so if you truly got her to let her guard down just to leave... it would hurt. *Bad.*

Y = Yuck (What are some things they wouldn't like, either in general or in a partner?)

Amilia's a pretty simple woman-- so long as you're not vehemently against Fae or *mythosi* and are a nice person, she'll like you. The biggest thing is probably that you have a sense of humor, whether that's expressed in an outward, sarcastic way or in a quiet, subtle, and stoic way. She just can't stand to be with someone who doesn't understand her jokes or goes along with her strange antics, whether or not they choose to partake in them themself.

Z = Zzz (What is a sleep habit of theirs?)

Amilia avoids beds like the plague. It's not that she doesn't like them, but she, similar to Nikke, prefers to sleep outside if she can. She tends to sleep high up-- usually in trees and other things. She always has a hammock with her so it's usually not much of an issue, but if the need really arises, she can sleep on a branch leaning right against the tree itself.

She also tends to just fall asleep wherever she happens to be if she's working on something creative. Spotting Amilia passed out in an odd corner bent at odd angles with a lute on her lap is definitely not an odd thing to see.

Companions Power/Morality Stats (1/2)

May 16, 2022

Hello everyone! I get a lot of questions about the stats and variables behind the game, so I figured I would go through and explain some of the most important ones and how I plan for them to function in the future/how they'll impact the game. Because of this, **this post will contain spoilers about the character's future development and possible narrative branches of the game!**

This post will be talking about power stats, which if you've dived through the code before, you might be aware of. Each character in the game has a respective morality/power stat (sometimes even multiple) that influences the strength of the character, their moral outlook, and their general personality. These stats can be influenced by The Commander both directly and indirectly, and how you encourage/influence each character to act will change how fights go, the general group dynamic, and your relationship with the characters!

To break it down, these are each ROs power stats as of now, though it's possible they'll change/more will be added as time goes on!

Vethna

Blood magic: Whether or not MC approves of Vethna's use of blood magic can change throughout the game as the circumstances will change... a lot. As of now, MC can choose to either completely shun Vethna's use of blood magic or support it so long as Vethna uses it with consent-- whether that be from MC themself or Amilia, or possibly even other *mythosi* group members.

Speaking of other group members... it's possible that even if MC completely *hates* blood magic, another member will condone it and even offer up their blood for Vethna to use. If MC and Vethna have a good or at the very least respectful relationship, Vethna will respect The Commander's wishes even if they're

not there to enforce them. Otherwise... well, it's possible your crew members will go behind your back to do what they think is best.

The circumstances of when and how Vethna can use blood magic will be something that you will fine-tune as the game continues-- and trust me when I say it will bring up some moral dilemmas. Other characters will also have plenty of opinions on how you decide to instruct Vethna-- Syfyn and Sabir won't be very happy about a blood sorcerer running around with free rein, but others might not like MC keeping too tight of a leash on Vethna's magic.

Whether to not Vethna uses blood magic in itself will influence Vethna's power and how it functions... I'm not going to spoil how, as it will be a big part of the "team management" aspect of the game, but both using and not using blood magic will have their benefits and problems...

Empathy: Vethna left their home because they were disgusted by how it operated. At their heart, they're a very empathetic person and have a hard time actually holding people accountable for their actions if it's someone they care about. This is something you'll be able to influence in Vethna in a *lot* of ways, whether it be as a lover, friend, or enemy.

This stat will influence how Vethna interacts with others and the world around them, and even The Commander themself. It's also **cough** very likely **cough** you will encounter people from Vethna's past again... and based on how you've treated them and how much you've taught them to stand up for themself... well, whoever said alliances are always set in stone?

Vethna's story will have a few endings to it based on these stats and their relationship. In fact, Vethna's stats will influence a *very large* portion of the game, and possibly may influence the entire future of Vygrand... and possibly even Plaithus... 👀

Amilia

Fae magic: You've already been introduced to this stat-- in Chapter Three, MC can choose whether or not Amilia can use her fae magic or not. As the game continues as you get closer to her, you'll be able to be more specific in just how you approve of her magic usage. Maybe her glamour is useful, but the mind games and charms are off the table completely. Maybe she can manipulate people, but only if it's done in a harmless way, or to enemies. *Maybe*, if you're super close, you can even convince her to charm and manipulate others in the group to agree with you...

Amilia's usage of magic won't affect combat but instead affect what choices are available to you as you progress the game. The main point of the stat is to influence Amilia's own personal journey with herself. Being a half-fae, one of the rarest half-*mythosi* variants next to demons, she finds herself struggling to figure out her identity. The more you accept and encourage her usage of magic, the more she'll accept her fae identity. The more you tell her to stop using it, the more she'll accept her human identity.

Maybe a balance can be found. Maybe not. Maybe a balance isn't even the best option...

Sympathy: Amilia can be shockingly cold at times. The Fae are known for taking their pranks and jokes too far, finding amusement in even the cruelest, more horrific of incidents, and not even Amilia is immune to this part of her identity.

This stat will heavily be tied to the usage of her Fae magic-- not necessarily in the sense that if she uses her magic more she'll be more cold, but rather that the way you go about influencing her won't be the same as if she didn't use magic at all.

For example-- if you encourage Amilia to use her magic often, she might flat-out refuse to help you unless you regularly allow her to do what she wants... which can at times be problematic, if not dangerous things. If you don't let Amilia use her magic at all, she might be more willing to help, but her help will be different, maybe even less effective. It's all a big balancing game, and at the end of the day, you'll have to decide what's most important to you in regard to the characters' personalities.

Freedom

MC's opinions: Freedom is the most directly impacted by MC-- even more so than the other companions. Whereas the others you can influence by speaking to or making decisions that affect them, MC's general disposition and view of the world regarding the balance of fate and freedom will change Freedom themself.

Let's say an evil MC views freedom as complete and utter chaos, the destruction of all organized things-- Freedom themself will become more chaotic and prone to lashing out/causing outbursts. Another MC views freedom only in regards to themself-- they only care about their own freedom and control of the world-- and Freedom will sacrifice other's free will as a sacrifice for MC's (imagining Freedom supporting MC regardless of what they do and do everything in their power to support them.)

There are a lot of ways the power dynamic between Freedom and MC can change based on MC's personality and choices in-game-- it's not as simple as a percentile affinity. The choices MC makes, their personality, their relationship with the other companions, etc-- all of it comes into play here.

MC's wants: If you made a deal with Freedom, you've been given the choice to specify what you want from the deal. Whatever it is that you choose will become Freedom's sole focus and goal, which will change their opinions on a lot of the major plot points of the game.

For example, say the group breaks into an argument over a choice in-game, which choice Freedom supports will depend on which choice best supports what it is that MC wants, which in turn will affect the group dynamics and how the story continues onwards.

While **Freedom** is an all-powerful wykna, they are also intrinsically tied to MC for better or worse. The relationship that forms can be one of respect, codependency, or any number of things. And who knows... maybe Freedom isn't the only wykna MC can directly influence or work with...

Maybe Fate isn't quite as cruel as they've been painted to be. Anyone can lie, after all, whether that be men or gods.

Demons | Part 1.

May 7, 2022

Demons, contrary to popular belief and mythology, are not born to inherently cause harm. They are born from innocence and want gone wrong-- longing and desire turned to resentment and bitterness. While many point at demons for bringing harm upon the world, scholars retort with the simple fact that had the realm been kind, demons would fail to exist in the first place. Because the truth is, demons cannot bring hatred where there is none, and they come not to bring harm, but comfort to the lost souls of the world. Alas-- demons are so broken and empty themselves that they can do nothing but make bad things even worse.

How they enter the realm of mortals.

Demons come to people in four ways: manifestation, summons, curses, and active hunting.

Manifestation is brought when an individual sulks in their negative emotions for too long and allows them to consume their being entirely-- when one allows their hatred for never having been loved to overwhelm their desire to be held, when one allows their adoration for a person evolve into resentment for never having their adoration returned. From these wrath and envy thrive.

Summons are when one performs a summoning ritual to bring forth a demon for *themself*. This is most commonly seen with demons such as lust, greed, and pride, as they bring with them love, wealth, and success.

Curses are when one curses a demon upon another-- it requires great focus and willpower so as to prevent the curse from twisting upon the one uttering it. One may curse Sloth upon an individual they hate, forcing a person into such deep, sudden depression that they may simply die. One may point a demon of Greed toward a cruel and selfish king in the hopes of righting him of his wrongs. Those who are most talented in Demonology may summon a demon of wrath and feed it with their hatred only to spring it upon another that they loathe until it tears them apart.

Active Hunting is when a demon actively searches for people to prey upon. This is only seen in demons of Lust and Greed. Not only do demons of Lust need to feed off sexual energy to survive, but they too long to be loved and held so fiercely that they will stop at nothing to find it, eventually (and always) killing their lovers to their utter anguish. As for demons of Greed... they're just as attracted to things that are shiny as their human counterparts are.

Hell.

Hell is not a place for mortals. It is not a land of the dead. It is the embodiment of all negative and dark emotions, and to many gods and immortals is viewed not as a place to be feared, but as an integral part of the world balance. The only ones who live in hell are demons, Wyknas whose domains deal in negativity, and any other immortal *mythosi* who play a role in bringing such emotions into the world.

Demons are not born. A set number was created at the conception of the realm under the control of Wykna. They may not die-- they are simply set to the beginning of their life cycle. They may not procreate either, save for certain exceptions of Demons of Lust and magic-users.

Hell and the culture of demons can most easily be compared to a rat race. A demon's life is a circle. It starts as an **Imp**. Small, relatively powerless, and forced to work under servitude to another, more powerful demon to help them achieve their goals. They are vindictive, furious at having their powerful life reset, and often backstab each other and their bosses. Through this, they gain power until they become a **Fiend.** Fiends are similar to Imps in that they are still subservient, though the demons they serve are of significantly more power. Some Fiends may choose to linger at this stage as it provides them with the safety of another demon-- though many, driven so much by their longing and desire, wish to become more powerful. Fiends then become **Demons***,* another stage most linger and stay at. The stage of Demon has multiple rankings to it dependent on the sin they embody. The next stage is a stage few reach-- **Archdemon.**

Archdemons are the most powerful a demon can possibly be, and there can only be seven, one per sin. They can freely walk in the land of the living and are free to enter and leave Hell as they please. They often control multiple powerful beings and are therefore able to control the realm to a certain extent. They cannot be exorcized, and are as powerful as thirty sorcerers combined at their weakest. The biggest threat to an Archdemon is an Archangel, or another powerful and aspiring demon who wishes for their position. Archdemons either fall quickly, losing their position to another, or remain in power for centuries.

Names of Demon Ranks based by Sin.

Demons of Wrath

- Imp.
- Fiend.
- Justice.
- Resentment.
- Destruction.
- **Archdemon: Wrath.**

Demons of Greed

- Imp.
- Fiend.
- Comfort.

- Hanker.
- Intemperance.
- **Archdemon: Greed.**

Demons of Sloth

- Imp.
- Fiend.
- Rest.
- Melancholy.
- Depression.
- **Archdemon: Sloth**

Demons of Gluttony

- Imp.
- Fiend.
- Content.
- Hunger.
- Ravenous.
- **Archdemon: Gluttony.**

Demons of Lust

- Imp.
- Fiend.
- Adoration.
- Infatuation.
- Obsession.
- **Archdemon: Lust.**

Demons of Envy

- Imp.
- Fiend.
- Wish.
- Want.
- Covet.
- **Archdemon: Envy.**

Demons of Pride

- Imp.
- Fiend.
- Success.
- Arrogance.
- Narcissism.
- **Archdemon: Pride.**

The first stage of a Demon is always a generally good thing. This is when a demon can first enter the realm of mortals to begin making deals, and they start in a place of goodness. Eager to be back with mortals, they often desire to try and make their lives better in hopes of “fixing” their sins of the past. First stage demons are Justice, Comfort, Rest, Content, Adoration, Wish, and Success-- natural human desires and wants. Demons of this rank are actually cautiously considered beneficial as they may motivate the person they are haunting to better themselves by seeking out more. However, with each stage, Demons grow more and more corrupt until they become harmful. Justice becomes Destruction, Comfort becomes Intemperance, Rest becomes Depression, Peckish becomes Ravenous, Adoration becomes Obsession, Wish becomes Covet, and Success becomes Narcissism.

Another branch of demons work as familiars, demons who take the shape of animals and often work with illegal Demonology practitioners or fae, but this will be covered in a separate section.

Demonology + Exorcists

It is to be noted that cursing and summoning a demon is the practice of demonology, a greatly frowned upon and hated magic, even *more so* than blood magic due to the uncontrollable nature of demons. Some demons will refuse to be summoned or cursed out of their own ego, and others may become so infatuated with their hosts that they will refuse to be cursed away. The practice of Demonology is only approved for one situation in the general world, and that is for exorcists. Exorcists are mages or sorcerers who study demons for the sake of removing them from plaguing others. There are very few in the world-- only a handful-- and many die young. In the end, the demons always win.

In the times before, in the Old World, many sorcerers and mages were exorcists. Even regular humans could become exorcists if they were clerics of certain Wykna. However, as magic faded from the world, clerics lost their abilities entirely as one by one Wykna abandoned their creations. And, as the persecution of magic-users grew in the realm, many sorcerers and mages gave up the craft entirely, choosing to retreat to places such as Vygrand where they keep them and their abilities to their own.

It is to be noted that demons can only thrive in areas where magic is strong. In the Kingdom of Plaithus, where magic is almost entirely banned except for usage in the military, it is near impossible for a demon to slip into the cracks and control anyone save for the Queen’s personal magic users. Even then, the threat is so minimal that it poses little threat.

In places like Vygrand, however, it is necessary for all sorcerers and mages to learn basic demonology for the sake of protecting themselves and others. Some fail-- those who do are forced to live with anti-magic devices and ribbons denoting the type of demons they are weak against. Some pity these magic

users, others sneer down upon them for their weakness. In some cases, those who fail are forced to give up their magic entirely and give it away to *Zethtyras*, “those who long for the light”, the children of powerful sorcerers who, for some reason or another, lack magic entirely. It is to be noted that it is experimental magic still, and, more often than not, starts from a place of desperation and often ends in tragedy.

Half-Demons

Half-demons are incredibly rare, and can only be born from relations between an Incubus/Succubus and a sorcerer. On their own, Demons of Lust are not fertile-- however, should they romantically fall for a powerful sorcerer who is filled with a well of inner magic, it is possible for that magic to be used in combination with the essence of a demon to create a child. Many times, Demons of Lust will attempt to live a “normal” life with a partner and child, however, as they progress in power, it will become impossible to do so.

Succubi tend to be incredibly doting on their children, loathing to be apart for even a second. They attempt to give their child everything they want, and all the power in the world. This leads to the Succubus becoming so deluded with love for their child that they tend to force their children into the culture of demons-- that is, they force their child to return to their roots and be forever stuck in the race of attempting to be the most powerful in Hell. Half-Demons born in these cases are often just as corrupt as their parent, finding it impossible to fight their inner wants and desires.

Incubui, however, become incredibly protective of their partner and child. This protectiveness continues until their behavior becomes obsessive, paranoid, and downright dangerous, oftentimes forcing their own partners or children to kill or exorcise them. Half-demons born by Incubi tend to live in the mortal world amongst other humans and *mythosi*. They are often looked down upon due to their infernal roots, and as such, tend to group themselves with other half-demons that they may stumble across.

in Vygrand, if a half-demon child is born and news escapes, it is the law for the child to be executed and the parent exiled, lest the Leading House who the sorcerer belongs to offers to sponsor their rehabilitation.

In Part Two...

- Familiars
- Types of Demons and their appearances/powers
- Feel free to drop questions below if there's anything else you want to know about and I'll try to cover it in the next section!

Under the Glamour (WiP)

Apr 23, 2022

Will this ever be finished? Maybe. Some day.

... in this distant future.

For now, take this.

Get ahold of yourself.

You blink, eyes wide but unseeing as you collapse further into the pool of blood.

You can feel your body failing you. No matter how used to this you've become-- these *mind games*-- your body will always lag behind. You squeeze your eyes shut, nausea racing over you. You can feel everyone's eyes on you before you feel someone kneel behind you, a hesitant hand gripping you by the shoulder before you fall entirely.

Freedom kneels in front of you, the blood around them rippling slightly. Your brows furrow as their eyes flicker between yours, their expression mimicking.

"Me leaving you isn't very good, you know," they say. "The memories will only get worse with me gone."

- ○ "I don't care. I just want you out."
- ◉ "You think I have any say in the matter?"
- ○ "Since when did you care about me?"

Next

"You think I have any say in the matter?" You breathe, teeth gritting together. You can barely make up from down, and the smell from the blood is so thick that it's suffocating.

Freedom's brows furrow at the comment, gaze hardening as they do nothing but watch you carefully, lips pressed together. You squirm beneath their stare, desperate to bite back your groans of discomfort.

"No," Freedom says, finally. "I suppose you don't." And then, even later, "and neither do I."

You watch as their hand reaches out for you, the long fabric of their sleeve falling downwards before their hand presses against your forehead. Goosebumps start to rise along your skin, and then--

Memories that are not yours flicker through your mind. You know they are not yours for one simple reason.

You have never died.

Creating Freedom (Start)

Apr 22, 2022

This scene is surreal, even to *me*. A lot of wacky things happen, but then again, that tends to always be the case with things involving the gods.

Also... I wonder who it is that kept MC from falling into the blood? 👀

Relationship A-Z Headcanons: Vethna Mevnrael

Apr 18, 2022

A = Affection (How affectionate are they? How do they show affection?)

Vethna's affection is open but tasteful. A kiss on the cheek, wrapping their arm around yours, brushing your hair, and fixing your clothing when it's messy are all ways they tend to show affection. They're always looking after you to make sure you look good and tend to preen you a lot-- pick stuff out of your hair, wipe dirt off your face, etc.

To put it simply, people will know you're together, but they won't be rubbing it into everyone's faces, nor will they feel the need to be overly affectionate 24/7, especially considering Vethna values their independence... *deeply.*

B = Best friend (What would they be like as a best friend? How would the friendship start?)

Vethna can be hard to befriend. They're snippy, dramatic, and quick to assume. They're also pretty witty and quick on their feet, so if you don't keep up with them and their humor, it's likely you'll never understand the million different subtle, under-the-breath jokes they make.

They're a walking bullshit detector-- so, if someone's being dishonest or trying to use them, they'll know within a heartbeat. If you just so happen to *not* be doing either of those things, then you're already off to a good start.

Vethna's more often than not the keeper of order. They're charismatic enough to be well-like when needed and prevent people from making less than wise decisions. They're also fiercely loyal to those who they consider a friend, willing to follow you to the ends of the world if necessary.

C = Cuddles (Do they like to cuddle? How would they cuddle?)

Vethna's like a cat-- that is to say, they're really not that into being lovey-dovey all the time, but when they *do* want to cuddle and be close, they won't stop complaining/bugging you until you give in and shower them in attention. They want your arms wrapped around them and a million soft blankets *at least*. In an ideal world, you're reading to them or brushing through their hair/braiding it. Non-sexual intimacy is *very* important to Vethna, so it's all those small, intimate things that really count.

However, in true cat-like fashion, there's a very real possibility of them suddenly changing their mind and disappearing to do gods know what before returning for even more cuddles.

D = Domestic (Do they want to settle down? How are they at cooking and cleaning?)

Vethna absolutely wants to settle down. Hells, they didn't even want to get up and start traveling in the first place.

Vethna misses Vygrand deeply, but until they can figure out a way to return safely and fix the deep corruption of the city, they refuse to. It makes them sick to see what they thought was a perfect childhood home be nothing more than a facade. However, even now they still hope to find a place to call home (preferably Vygrand), get married, and start a comfortable life that they can call their own someday.

E = Ending (If they had to break up with their partner, how would they do it?)

With a quick and simple sit-down. They'd get straight to the point, and while they'd be respectful while doing it, they'd be practically emotionless. Vethna, when push comes to shove, is great at completely turning off their emotions when need be. The person you were dating before that moment is not the person you are speaking to when you break up, and that might be the most heartbreaking, frightening thing of all.

Granted, Vethna's hard to court in the first place, so if they're breaking up with someone, they're likely filled with a lot of anger and shame toward *themself*. They should've been a better judge of character, they should've tried harder, they should've been *better*.

F = Fiance(e) (How do they feel about commitment? How quick would they want to get married?)

Vethna's a loyal person at heart, though they may appear fickle at times. It takes a few years of being together at least before Vethna would consider getting married, and even then, you'll need to give them plenty of time to plan the ultimate wedding of their dreams.

It's going to be over-the-top and ripped right out of a fairytale, and they'll be expecting to renew your vows on a regular basis (with each wedding just as extravagant as the last).

G = Gentle (How gentle are they, both physically and emotionally?)

Vethna tries hard to put on a tough facade, and they're pretty damn good at it. It's impossible for most to get a solid read on their emotions, and they tend to be good at ignoring them themself. However, at the

core, Vethna's an incredibly sensitive person and has a hard time not sympathizing with people, though it may appear the opposite at first glance.

Vethna's always willing to hear someone out, and will always provide a shoulder to cry on to those they're close with. It doesn't hurt that Vethna can keep a secret to the grave, either.

Physically, Vethna is always gentle and agile, even when upset. You won't ever see them trying to be a "brute" or overpower someone or something physically. It's just not in their nature, not even when they're being stern. The most you might get is a firm grip on the arm when you say something stupid or, if they're truly upset, a stomp on the foot.

H = Hugs (Do they like hugs? How often do they do it? What are their hugs like?)

Vethna *loves* hugs, bear hugs to be even more specific. They might act annoyed at first glance but it's obvious that they love it from the way they try not to smile afterward, their cheeks flushed. In general, they also like to wrap an arm through yours or hug you from behind whenever they're feeling particularly affectionate.

In general, Vethna's hugs are firm and filled with intent. Sometimes they might end up hurting on accident with all the jewelry they wear, but the lulling smell of their jasmine perfume usually ends up making it worth it.

I = I love you (How fast do they say the L-word?)

They won't say it until months of careful deliberation where they enter a minor existential and philosophical crisis. Even then, they'll still be scared and embarrassed to admit it to you, and they're not likely to say it often until they realize you won't be running off anytime soon. *Then* they'll say it at least once a day, just to make sure you know, and every time before you fall asleep. They're not leaving any room for doubt.

J = Jealousy (How jealous do they get? What do they do when they’re jealous?)

Vethna doesn't get jealous. They know they're a catch, and they know it's an honor for *you* to be dating *them* (just as much as it is for them to be dating you). As a result, they're very secure in any relationship they're in. Granted, they are a bit possessive, but that mainly stems from Vygrandian courtship as opposed to attempting to fend off any opposing suitors.

K = Kisses (What are their kisses like? Where do they like to kiss you? Where do they like to be kissed?)

Vethna likes kissing... a *lot*. They'll make sure to kiss you often, and when they do, they're soft and drawn-out, their hand always coming up to cup your face. When they kiss you, they don't want you to think of anyone but them no matter the situation, and they're good at ensuring as much.

They're a big fan of kissing you on the cheek-- mainly so they can leave a little print with their lipstick-- otherwise, they love to kiss you on your lips (for obvious reasons). As for themself, Vethna will become utterly inarticulate if you kiss them near the clavicle/neck. It's also the easiest way to get them to agree with you when they're being stubborn.

L = Little ones (How are they around children?)

Vethna's pretty torn on kids. They're cute when they're well-behaved and not crying, but otherwise, they're a nightmare. They're sticky and loud and touch things that aren't theirs... plus, Vethna has no idea how to respond to half the shit they say. Give them a sleeping baby and they'll melt. Give them a fussy toddler and they'll put a curse on you.

M = Morning (How are mornings spent with them?)

Vethna hates the mornings with a burning passion. They're grouchy when they wake up, and usually need coffee or at least an hour to themself before they're tolerable to be around. They take a while to wake up and *will* groan like the world is ending if you open the blinds before they're ready.

They also mumble some pretty amusing things when they're half-awake and will *not* remember it later in the day. It's a fun quirk of theirs that can lead to some rather interesting conversations, especially with how candid they are when they're not aware enough to be... *civil*.

N = Night (How are nights spent with them?)

Vethna has a long regimen for the night. It usually involves an incredibly long bath, a lot of hair and skincare, and at least fifteen minutes of being able to admire themself in the mirror before they can do anything else.

They tend to just lounge around in a robe and read or practice magic with some candles lit for relaxation. They refuse to be disturbed once the sun sets, unless it's you of course, and it's usually at night when Vethna is the most affectionate. They'll be content just cuddling against your side while you go about your own duties for the night... though they might also force you to wear a face mask while they're at it.

O = Open (When would they start revealing things about themselves? Do they say everything all at once or wait a while to reveal things slowly?)

Vethna reveals things slowly, one piece at a time. They won't tell unless you ask, and even then, you have to make sure to ask the right questions if you want an answer that makes sense. They come from a family known for their manipulative tendencies and ability to control the political battlefield. Lying is as natural as breathing for them, especially if it keeps them safe emotionally and physically.

If Vethna tells the truth to any extent, it's a sign of one of two things: A.) They're manipulating the persona and are trying to play the long game, or B.) they feel safe with the person. They're two extremes, and it doesn't help that Vethna's impossible to read to decipher which is which.

You know you're in their inner circle when they turn to you for advice and gossip, openly telling you about themself and their day even when you haven't asked.

P = Patience (How easily angered are they?)

Vethna gets annoyed easily, though the annoyance is usually quickly fleeting and shallow. They don't tend to hold grudges and Vethna is more than content to agree to disagree when it comes to most disputes. As a result, it's not often that they're ever truly angered. It's only when a blaring injustice makes itself apparent that Vethna might make a stand, but even then, they tend to resemble a frightened, cornered animal as opposed to a furious and powerful sorcerer.

As a matter of fact, Vethna has never been *enraged* once in their life, nor have they ever truly raised their voice. Some claim it's composure, though if you were to ask Vethna themself, they would admit it's cowardice.

Q = Quizzes (How much would they remember about you? Do they remember every little detail you mention in passing, or do they kind of forget everything?)

Vethna will remember every single thing you've ever told them about you ever. Your favorite food? Your favorite color? The fact you want that cool cape in the store even though you never actually *said* you wanted it? That one phrase your Mother said to you when you were five that hurt your feelings?

Vethna knows what it's like to go overlooked and ignored, and they'll do everything in your power to not let you feel that way *ever*-- not while you're with them.

S = Security (How protective are they? How would they protect you? How would they like to be protected?)

Vethna's fiercely protective of those they love-- it's because of this, their ambition, and their downright stubbornness that they've put their life on the line for their loved ones multiple times. They can be pretty handy in a fight when they want to be, they have connections that span across the continent, and they're quick on their feet when it comes to politics. That is to say, having Vethna in your corner is an almost unfair advantage in the world.

When it comes to being protected-- Vethna only really prefers to be protected when it comes to real, physical threats. Otherwise, they prefer to be independent. If you get involved in their affairs too many times, there's a fair chance you'll just end up annoying them and pushing them away.

T = Try (How much effort would they put into dates, anniversaries, gifts, everyday tasks?)

If you're in a relationship with Vethna-- congrats. You've earned yourself quite possibly one of the most romantic, over-the-top partners in the realm of Navara. Prepare to receive roses on the regular, small gifts just to remind you how much they love you, and being spoiled for the rest of your life. And don't get me started on anniversaries... just prepare for a getaway so magical that you might actually forget the real world exists.

U = Ugly (What would be some bad habits of theirs?)

Vethna needs approval and praise... like, *needs* it. This means they'll stay complicit with something questionable so long as they're being recognized as useful. They'll stay with abusive people so long as they remember to compliment them on the regular. They'll do *anything*, really, so long as you give them the spotlight and make them feel needed. The second Vethna feels overlooked or like a burden, their loyalty can no longer be guaranteed.

V = Vanity (How concerned are they with their looks?)

Vethna cares about their looks a lot-- but not to the point it's obsessive. They like to be well-groomed and put together, but they're also aware of the fact that life on the road can be a less than manicured experience. It's because of this that they're twice as thorough when given the chance to clean up properly.

W = Whole (Would they feel incomplete without you?)

Yes-- absolutely. A lot of who Vethna is is based on those around them. They define themself by the relationships they have greatly, and if those are taken away from them, it often leaves them feeling lost and confused. While Vethna *does* value being independent, they don't value being alone. Losing the one person they purposefully *chose* for some reason out of their control... it wouldn't go over well with them.

Y = Yuck (What are some things they wouldn't like, either in general or in a partner?)

Arrogance. Confidence is one thing, but once somebody goes on and on and *on* about how capable they are, Vethna begins to doubt. Who is it you're trying to impress? If it's them, you're doing a poor job of it. Vethna doesn't think anyone is better than anyone, and a person who thinks otherwise immediately makes it to the bottom of their shit-list.

They also hate over-protectiveness-- they need room to breathe and are *perfectly* capable of looking out for themselves, thank you very much.

Z = Zzz (What is a sleep habit of theirs?)

Vethna requires a *minimum* of three soft blankets to sleep well. There's nothing they love more than creating a little nest of soft pillows and blankets to burrow in for the night. If you ask nicely... they *might* share. They're also a major bed hog. They won't steal all the sheets, but you can bet that they're going to be sleeping completely diagonal no matter how many times you try to push them back to their side of the bed.

Warfare. | Syfyn Javall. (NSFW)

Apr 6, 2022

AN: This is very short and I've been holding onto this for a while— however, it has remained as being one of my favorite things that I've ever written, so I decided to share it on here!

It's meant to be one kiss— just one— but you can't help yourself, body lowering on top of hers as you press against her. You pull away just to kiss her again, and again, *and again*, and the softness of her lips has your head spinning as her hands come up to wrap around your neck and pull you closer still. Her smell is familiar, her taste is familiar, the calluses of her fingertips are familiar.

But there is something else here, buried. Some form of anger. Some form of fear. You are animals and you are on edge, waiting for the final shoe to drop. Tongue turns to teeth and caresses turn to claws, and you don't know if you're crying or she is when your cheeks become wet. You pull away to ask if this is alright— if this is okay— and she follows, lips chasing yours with a wild look in her eyes when she nods and barely croaks out a yes to tackle you against the bed. Her wings spread out as she straddles you, blocking out the world, and they are ruffled and uncontainable as she tears at your clothes.

This is not love.

This is a fight. A search for something.

And for what? Neither of you knows.

The more skin she shows the more scars you see— scars that you do not know, scars that are not familiar. The more she touches you the more you involuntarily flinch, memories of cellars and dungeons coming that she does not know— that are *not familiar*. Things that once fit right fit together no longer, and frustration arises as both of you force together puzzle pieces that do not match.

Because yes, this is Syfyn— but this is not the Syfyn you knew. And you are you, but you are not the partner she once had. You are broken and bloodied and shaken, and she is no better, You see flashes of you carving through her skin when you trace the outline of her body beneath yours, and she hears your screams when you groan and bury your face into her neck.

And yet still you march on.

Why?

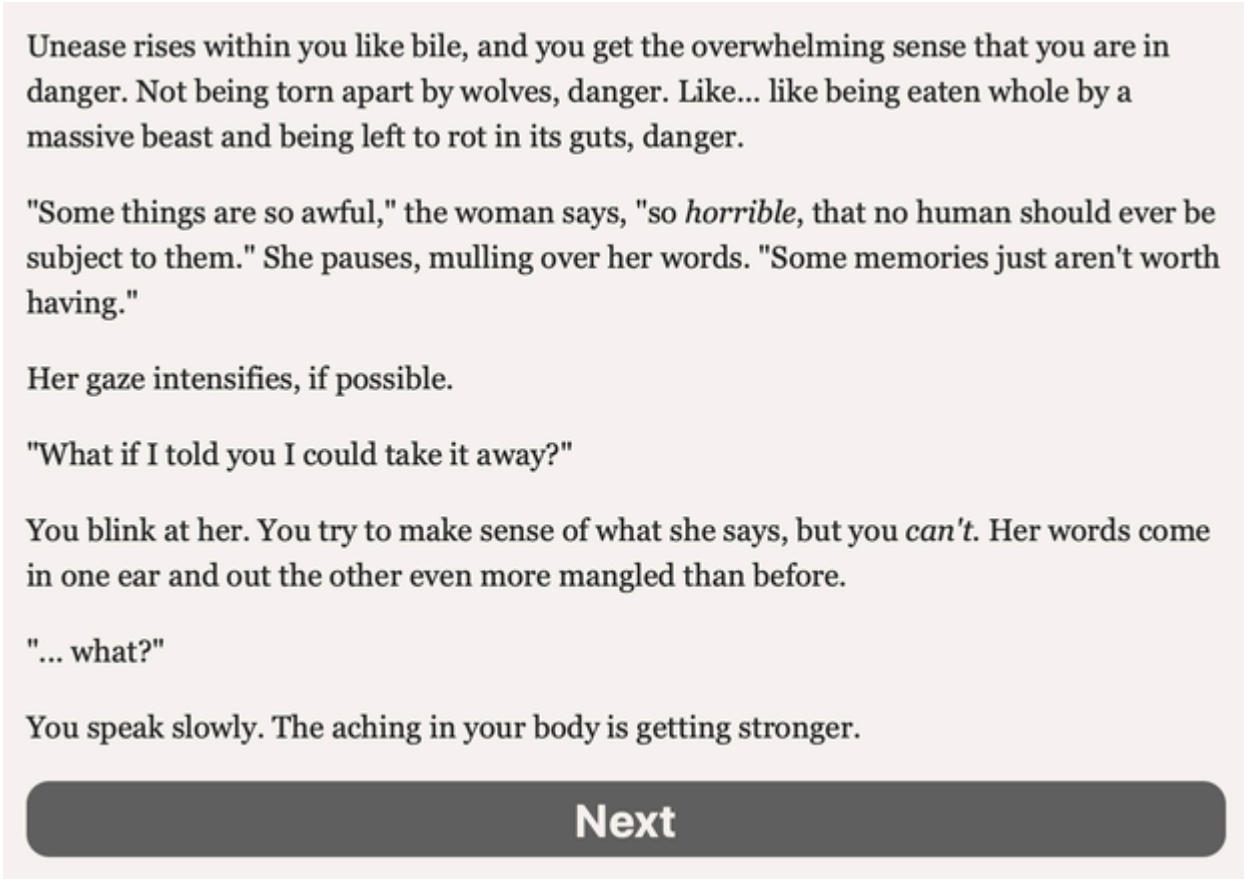
Why?

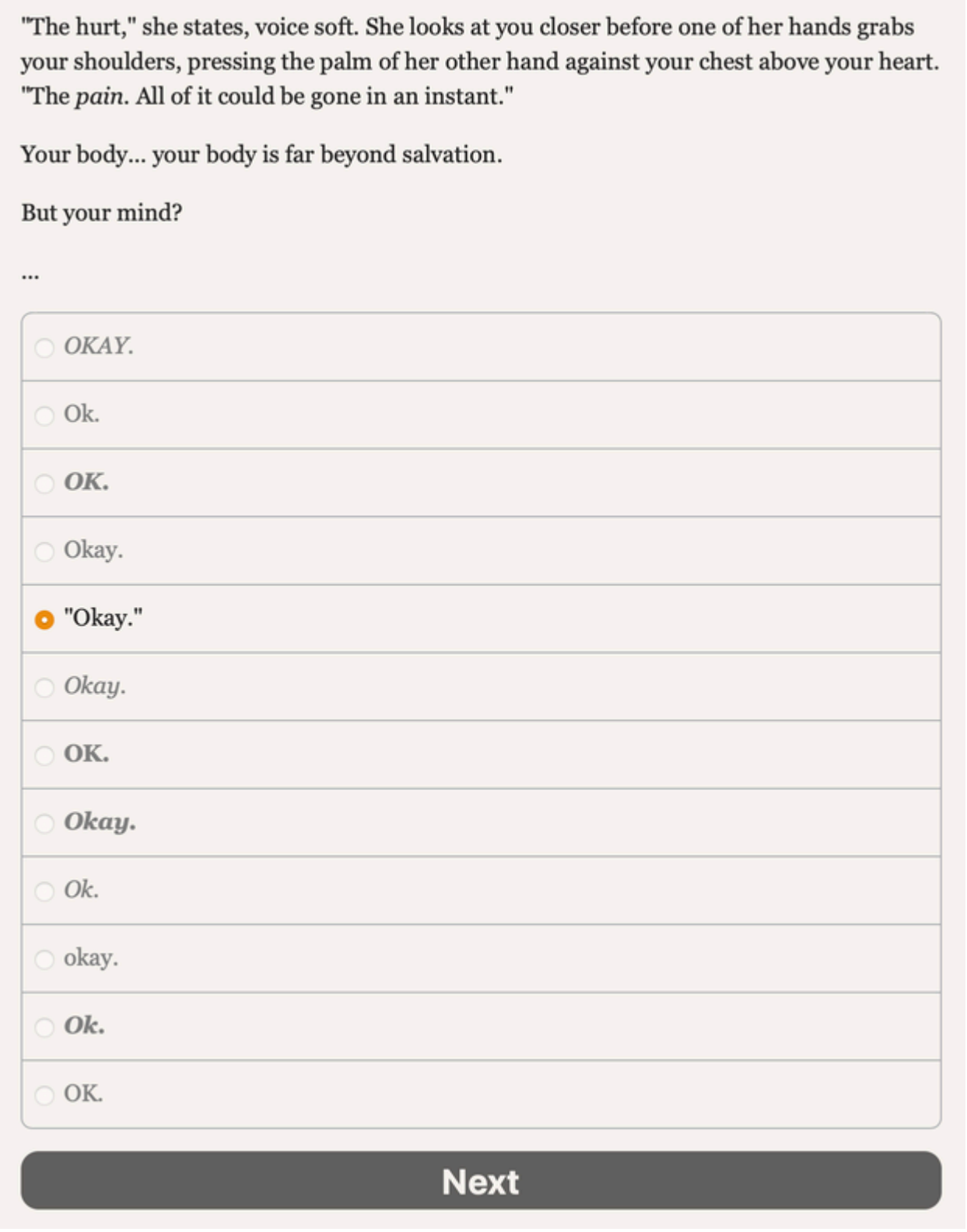
Because it is a fight. Because it is a battle. Because, at some point in the middle, you are no longer tearing at each other's skin. Because her breath washes over your lips before you kiss her, hands

intertwining. Because she is Syfyn. Because you love her.

But the bliss never lasts. At the end of the night, she is the same stranger she was before. She watches your shadow like a frightened beast, and you clutch the sheets every time her movements pause. Because when you are not lovers, you are enemies. And when you are not enemies, you are nothing but ghosts playing pretend, wearing masks of the people you used to be, and praying that maybe, someday, you'll be able to come back to life again.

That whatever it was you had— whatever it is that you shared— can come back to life again.





Memories Erased.

Apr 4, 2022

The woman you encounter at the end of Chapter 4 is very, *very* important, though MC might not quite realize *why* until a few years later.

---------- Chapter Five ----------		
Part One	Forest Flashback	4.5k
	Creating Freedom	
	Check in	
Part Two	Syfyn + Trystan Scene	
	Nikke Spar	
	Syfyn Spar	
	Argument	
	Sabir Scene	
Part Three	Check in 2	
	Vethna romance lock-in	
	Blythe Scene	
Part Four	Overseer/Syfyn Scene	
	RO Scene	
	Surgery + Mom Scene	
	MC's Armor	

Chapter Five Scene Line-Up

Mar 23, 2022

I've been writing bits and pieces of Chapter Five when I've had the free time-- and, as of now, it's about 4.5k words! This chapter likely won't be as long as Chapter Four, which means it should be done quicker... (aka. it shouldn't take six months to finish like it did with Chapter Four).

Here's the scene line-up! As per usual, anything's up to change. Note that the Vethna romance lock-in isn't the only one-- there's more in the future depending on what romance route you're taking!

You gave up on Plaithus a long time ago. By the time you were exiled, you didn't have it in you to care anymore. But Sabir... Sabir's never been like that. He kept hope in things even when it would be best not to. Where there's only darkness, he still sees light.

That's the only possible reason he could have so much faith in Plaithus, you figure. The only reason that he seems so... *rejected*.

"How are you holding up?" You ask.

He pauses at the question, a hand coming up to scratch at his beard. His body sways back and forth in thought.

"I don't know," he says. "I suppose there's a certain amount of relief to be found in helplessness."

"That meaning...?"

"No matter what we do, we're stuck," Sabir says. "There's nothing we can say or do. It takes the pressure off. There's no right choice to be making."

You pause at that, the weight of his words sinking in you. He doesn't say it in a reckless way like you imagine someone like Nikke would-- doesn't use it as an excuse to bring harm. It's like he said-- pure and utter relief. That's all you see when you look at him.

That, and a bone-deep sadness.

"You're worried," you say. "For the people."

"Of course I am. The Council would sooner strip them of their homes to build an extra stable than do right by them." You only hum in response-- he's right. "I suppose it doesn't matter now. Like I said-- helpless. My fate rests in your hands now. And yours in mine, I guess."

Sabir's always been in your corner whether you've wanted him to be or not. It's only fitting that he's here now, too. And, in truth... well, he's not a bad companion to have around. Not with his amount of connections.

Helpless... (in a good way?)

Mar 17, 2022

This is officially the last sneak peek of Chapter 4 you get to see before you finally get to read it for yourselves next week--

Oop. Welp. Cat's out of the bag now, I guess 👀 Make sure to keep an eye out for the inevitable and ominous "soon" post on the tumblr for the next few days!

Wake up. | Vethna Mevnrael. | P.O.V. Switch

Mar 17, 2022

Nightmare Scene - Chapter 2

It is silent in the night save for a rogue whimper and thrashing of limbs. No one should wake up. It's discrete. *Secretive.* And yet, the invading magic shines like a beacon within Vethna’s dreams, blood running cold as they sit up within the tent, eyes wide. It smells like rot and it’s stifling just like the southern summers. It urges Vethna to just *go to sleep*, but something is so terribly wrong that not even the deepest depths of exhaustion could lure them back into their kicked-back sheets.

So they stand, limbs weak, threatening to give out, as they step outside in a delirious state.

Sleep, sleep, sleep.

The Commander lays on the ground, blood rushing from their eyes and nose and mouth.

Sleep, sleep, sleep.

A choked, restrained cry leaves them, and Vethna can make out a single, pained “*please*,” leave their lips, tears falling from behind their shut lids.

Sleep, sleep, sleep--

It’s like breaking the surface of water-- clarity filling Vethna’s mind with a loud curse before they fall beside The Commander’s side, hands shaking as they try to pin down one of their flying arms. They don’t know why they even try, a pained yelp leaving them from the impact of the hit, a bruise forming on their skin.

There’s magic on The Commander-- and not their own. It’s black and heady, freezing to the touch as Vethna reaches out to shoo it away. Whatever it is, it’s not mortal. Whatever it is-- it’s meant to keep out anyone and everyone.

It’s a good thing Vethna’s never been scared of the gods.

They roll up their sleeves and tie back their hair, biting down on their lip as magic stirs to life within them, pooling within their hands before spilling over The Commander. They won’t let whatever this *thing* is hurt them any more than it already has-- especially while there’s that voice in their head. Unless it’s the same thing-- in which case they have an even bigger problem.

Vethna doesn’t know how long it takes for The Commander’s eyes to fly open. It started as only a few minutes, but then they began to feel exhausted, their magic being siphoned from them by whatever this *thing* is. And yet they push onward. At some point they somehow manage to get ahead of the rot-- act as some kind of wall from a continuing memory or nightmare-- and it's then that they can *feel* the presence within The Commander. It’s overwhelming and terrifying, striking fear into Vethna’s heart as their breath hitches, and yet they chase it with an unrelenting amount of force. It fights back, it tears and bites and lunges, and a cry leaves them as their very soul is torn at and shredded. They’re crying-- the warm liquid falling past their eyes and down their cheeks and onto The Commander, and the pain threatens to make them let go entirely out of instinct.

And yet they hold.

They hold, and The Commander shoots up right where they lay, a gasp tearing through their lungs. Vethna’s quick to grab hold of their shoulders if not to stabilize them, bile rising in their throat as the aftershocks of the encounter roll through them. Their muscles burn, and their head spins, but they need to know The Commander’s alright--

“*Vethna.”*

They say their name as if it’s the only word in the world. They say their name like it’s a tether. They say their name, and suddenly Vethna feels the overwhelming urge to care for them, to reach out and take their pain and shoulder it even if just for a moment.

The Commander falls toward them, arms extended and wrapping around their torso as they collapse entirely into their lap, sobs wracking through their body. This isn’t the first time they’ve broken down. Vethna’s heard their barely contained sniffling before, heard their tired voice in the morning after nights of not sleeping to avoid the nightmares. But this? This is foreign and *vulnerable*, the equivalent of some great beast exposing its injured neck as The Commander chokes on their spit, struggling and failing to keep quiet.

Vethna’s heart threatens to break at the sight of it. No one should have to feel this. And yet, as selfish as it is, Vethna would be more than eager to throw this suffering onto anyone else if it meant that The Commander could just *breathe* for a moment.

“It’s okay,” they murmur. They haul The Commander up into a hug, and they’re quick to bury their face into their neck. They squeeze them as close as they can, their body screaming in protest, and Vethna can feel the Commander’s hammering heart next to theirs. They don’t know how long they hold them--

but they don’t dare to let go until The Commander does. And even then, it feels like something’s missing.

Relationship A-Z Headcanons: Nikke Ivante

Mar 9, 2022

A = Affection (How affectionate are they? How do they show affection?)

Nikke's *very* affectionate if you know what his affection looks like. He'll ruffle your hair, throw his arm around you, always sit near you, and in general tease you a lot-- he can be a bit boyish when it comes to that. Chances are, you're also probably one of the only people he genuinely smiles at, which tends to be a dead giveaway of how much he cares about you.

B = Best friend (What would they be like as a best friend? How would the friendship start?)

The biggest requirement would be someone who makes him laugh but who can also be serious/mature. Nikke's a jokester at heart-- he deals with his problems by making light of them-- but he's not a complete child. There are times when he needs someone he can vent to and get genuine wisdom and advice from.

Making friends with Nikke is more than easy-- he's charismatic and more than willing to hang out with anyone and everyone. Chances are, if you walk up to him and ask to hang out, he'll be dragging you out for your first mischievous adventure without so much as knowing your name.

C = Cuddles (Do they like to cuddle? How would they cuddle?)

He can be pretty hot and cold when it comes to cuddling. Sometimes he hates it-- if he's already warm it can get too hot pretty quickly, and sometimes it just makes him in general feel uncomfortable (he says it makes his skin tingle).

When it's *cold*, however, he'll be at your side constantly, 24/7. He's cold-blooded for the most part, and having a personal heater sometimes goes from being convenient to being a necessity depending on the environment.

Your best bet, when cuddling, is to use firm pressure since he has a hard time dealing with soft touches. He also likes scratches near his scales-- especially if he's shedding.

D = Domestic (Do they want to settle down? How are they at cooking and cleaning?)

This is a trick question when it comes to Nikke.

At the moment-- no. He has approximately zero interest when it comes to settling down to any degree. He's rambunctious, impulsive, and has a lot of energy to work out of his system before he'll be mature enough to settle down.

In the future... still kinda no. Building a family is something he'd be open to as he grows older, but he'll never want to give up his work or love for exploring.

As for domestic things-- Nikke's great at cooking but exclusively when it comes to foods he grew up eating, so stews and meats cooked over fire. Anything outside of that, he'll butcher. And he'd be messy if he didn't keep such little belongings. He's smart like that.

E = Ending (If they had to break up with their partner, how would they do it?)

If Nikke was ever in a relationship to begin with, then you know that he was in deep. Chances are, if he had to break up with someone, it wouldn't be out of not loving them anymore but rather due to them becoming a less than stellar person.

He'd do it face to face, explain his reasons, and secretly be hoping that they'd promise to change or be a better person, even if he knows that's naive of him. A part of him would always love them in a sense, but eventually, his anger would kick in and he'd become resentful/bitter towards them.

F = Fiance(e) (How do they feel about commitment? How quick would they want to get married?)

The idea of tying himself down freaks Nikke out to an ungodly degree. Everything he's seen of love has always ended in pain, and he can't say that's something he's particularly envious of. However, if someone *did* manage to convince him to take the risk...

Nikke doesn't care much about marriage. Marriage in his culture isn't really a thing-- there's no formal event that's carried out and there's nothing to really distinguish between a married couple/unmarried couple. If his partner really wanted to get married, he'd be down, but it would be for making them happy as opposed to being anything meaningful to him. His dedication to you is shown through him and him alone, not an object or paper or religion.

G = Gentle (How gentle are they, both physically and emotionally?)

There is nearly nothing about Nikke that's soft or gentle. He just isn't a person who's gushy like that, neither is he particularly doting. He's not a fan of receiving any attention or affection like that either.

Physically, he likes to be a bit rough. Play fighting, arm wrestling, and randomly picking you up to carry you like a sack of potatoes are ten times more comfortable and fulfilling to him than cuddling or coddling one another. That's not to say he's not down to have a heartfelt one-on-one conversation-- he loves having deep conversations and learning about you-- he just will never be a "sweet" person like that.

H = Hugs (Do they like hugs? How often do they do it? What are their hugs like?)

He gives side-hugs all the time-- but he doesn't really give regular ones. It's not something he dislikes, it's just not his main way of being affectionate. Otherwise, he's content to yank you into his side, his arm slung around you as you walk together. Sometimes he'll purposely veer too far to his side just to make you stumble into him.

His hugs are cool since he himself tends to be cold, and they tend to be very tight and secure as well.

I = I love you (How fast do they say the L-word?)

It would take him a long time to be able to say it, and even then, he wouldn't say it often... mostly because it feels too mushy for him to say. He'll only really say it if it's apparent MC needs to hear it-- and it's usually only when they're that down in the dumps that Nikke will be anything resembling doting.

Most of Nikke's "I love you"s are instead said by him gifting you things/services-- little tokens or charms for you to wear and carry, offering you a snack, carrying you if your feet get tired, etc.

J = Jealousy (How jealous do they get? What do they do when they’re jealous?)

He doesn't get jealous at all-- it's just not in his nature. The only time he would be jealous would be if the person he was with *literally* dumped him to be with someone else-- but even then that would turn to anger and bitterness pretty quick.

K = Kisses (What are their kisses like? Where do they like to kiss you? Where do they like to be kissed?)

Nikke's kisses are usually pretty rough, and thanks to his fangs one of you usually always has a cut on their lip. He'll kiss you a lot-- on your head, your forehead, your shoulder, your cheek, your lips, anywhere is fair game. It's not in a sexual way so much as it's a fond, quick way of saying "I love you" or to express his excitement.

Otherwise, Nikke loves to be kissed around his neck, jaw, and torso. The front side of his body is the most sensitive, so being kissed/touched around there tends to feel pretty good. Smothering his face in kisses is also sure to draw a happy reaction for him.

All in all, kisses = A+

L = Little ones (How are they around children?)

Nikke *loves* kids. He has enough energy for at least five different adults, so he can play with them as often as they want him to and tire them out enough to have them ready to sleep by nap time.

He thinks kids are just kinda neat. They ask crazy questions, do stupid shit and somehow don't get hurt, and are loud. He thinks that's pretty cool. Granted, he's not too protective of them and can be *too* lax at

times, so there's a chance someone might *actually* get hurt doing something dumb. Depending on how bad it is, he'll tell them to brush it off or be packing and cursing like a manic as he tries to get them to stop crying before their parents come.

M = Morning (How are mornings spent with them?)

Nikke has boundless energy... but it takes him a while to start-up in the mornings. He tends to get up around eight pretty consistently, but he spends a good chunk of time just lying around doing nothing. If you want cuddles, morning is probably your best chance of getting them.

Otherwise, Nikke's schedule is never consistent. What he does can change on a dime and he loses track of his responsibilities/chores pretty quickly.

N = Night (How are nights spent with them?)

Honestly, who knows. Nikke gets into weird situations and hijinks all the time since he's so outgoing, and nighttime is usually when said situations really kick into full gear. He might have accidentally joined an underground fighting ring, joined a pirate crew, or survived an assassination attempt. Chances are, you're either right by his side in said situations as he panics and laughs or are the one getting him *out* of said situations when you realize he hasn't come home in a few days.

If he somehow manages to keep out of trouble, he'll want to be entertained. He tends to do that by drinking and playing games with you, whether that's risqué truth or dare or a really passionate game of poker.

O = Open (When would they start revealing things about themselves? Do they say everything all at once or wait a while to reveal things slowly?)

Nikke talks a lot but doesn't say much. You might learn he had a pet turtle that died when he was five but not know if it's a joke within five minutes of meeting him, and it'll be like that for the rest of the time that you know him. He doesn't take himself too seriously except for his relationship with his family. That's the only conversation he'll ever actually sit you down to talk about while being completely serious-- and if he tells you that story, you know that you're completely on his good side.

P = Patience (How easily angered are they?)

He's a bit of an enigma when it comes to his anger. On one hand, he doesn't take things very seriously, so it's hard to really rile him up because chances are he's probably agreeing with you *as* you're insulting him. He gets frustrated easily when he's annoyed or if he's being inconvenienced, however.

He only really gets *angry* if he feels he's being cornered, and when he does, he lashes out. He'll say things he regrets and overall just be a dick. If he's genuinely stressed, he'll act pretty similarly. His anger is probably one of the most difficult things about him since he can be pretty irrational about it.

He never learned how to express his emotions with his father since his opinions never mattered. It was either his Father's way or no way at all. The only way Nikke could ever escape his Father's demands was by fighting tooth and nail. His psyche hasn't quite realized he doesn't need to do that anymore-- that he can say *no* and people will actually respect it.

Q = Quizzes (How much would they remember about you? Do they remember every little detail you mention in passing, or do they kind of forget everything?)

He remembers the important stuff-- your favorite color, food, music. He finds family to be *very* important, so he'll remember anything you say involving them down to a 'T'. Otherwise, he's just like anyone else-- he might forget some of the smaller things but he tends to be pretty aware.

S = Security (How protective are they? How would they protect you? How would they like to be protected?)

He's really not that protective. He knows you're more than capable of taking care of yourself... so take care of yourself. He's the kind of person to laugh if you get hurt before asking if you're okay.

However-- if you were ever in any serious danger or seriously injured, you better bet that Nikke's going to see red. His anger in those cases is cold and calculated compared to when he lashes out. If you're seriously hurt, he'll actually be pretty caring and make sure to take good care of you. It's the most openly doting you'll ever see him be, and chances are he'll be holding a grudge on whoever hurt you longer than you will.

He's more protective when it comes to verbal things. If someone's being a dick to you, he's going to be a bigger dick back. He doesn't like people treating you poorly/talking down to you. You deserve better than that, and you shouldn't have to waste your time dealing with them when he can do it for you.

T = Try (How much effort would they put into dates, anniversaries, gifts, everyday tasks?)

On a very rare occasion, you might find Nikke actually planning something romantic. He doesn't like making a big deal out of things and prefers to be alone rather than in crowded places, so chances are it's something along the lines of a picnic in a secluded but beautiful area. That way you guys can just goof off and do whatever you want.

Otherwise, he just tends to plan out fun days together where you can go on weird adventures. He likes doing stuff with you... preferably exciting stuff to write home about.

U = Ugly (What would be some bad habits of theirs?)

His anger. It doesn't come out often, but when it does it can hit where it hurts, and some people flat out won't be able to handle/deal with it, nor should they be expected to. It's something he genuinely tries to work on, but he's always been a temperamental person.

He's also incredibly stubborn. He doesn't give up, which can be good at times, but more often than not ends up in him upsetting himself at not being able to do something. He has a hard time giving up on something, usually because it ends up making him feel inadequate or like he wasn't good enough to save it.

V = Vanity (How concerned are they with their looks?)

He's not... like... at all. He's stolen stuff off of dead people a lot just because he thinks it looks cool, regardless of its origins or if it goes with what he's wearing. Same thing with walking around/nature. He sees a cool bone? He's gonna add it to his belt. Sees a cool dagger? He's taking that also.

The only thing he consistently takes care of is his hair, which he shaves and braids regularly. The braids, however, along with his kohl, are culturally significant and are more of a requirement for him than a preference.

There are two things he's actually proud of physically: his tattoos and his scales. His tattoos are a sign of his home that are permanently etched in his skin, and he's rather proud of his scales thanks to their iridescence, which tends to be an attractive trait to other gorgons.

W = Whole (Would they feel incomplete without you?)

No-- he wouldn't feel incomplete without you. Nikke knows who he is as a person, and even though he'd love and care for you, if, for some reason, you were to go your separate ways, he wouldn't view it as a loss of self. He'd view it as the loss of debatably the most important person in his life, but not of himself. He's too independent for that.

X = Xtra (A random headcanon for them.)

Like all reptiles, Nikke (and gorgons) go through a shed. It happens usually four times a year around the changing of seasons, and when he goes through it he tends to be nothing short of miserable. He'll be tired, itchy, and generally grumpy for about a week, and it's the only time you'll find him actually wanting to be coddled and fussed over.

The best remedy tends to be for him to take a lot of baths, and he'll ask you to help peel his shed in the harder-to-reach places of his back.

Y = Yuck (What are some things they wouldn’t like, either in general or in a partner?)

Nikke loves his family a *lot*, even more than himself, and while he recognizes you've had your differences with them (*cough* with Jost *cough*) all he asks is that you be respectful of his relationship with them. He'll always defend you, but if you're antagonistic/disrespectful towards them, he'll call quits.

Otherwise, unless you're just outright mean to him or try to purposely feed his anger, he's a very easy-going person.

Z = Zzz (What is a sleep habit of theirs?)

If somewhere tropical and warm, Nikke enjoys sleeping outside more than he does inside. He'll find somewhere quiet and just curl up wherever he sees fit to look at the stars and enjoy the sounds of nature. It's pretty normal/standard within many *mythosi* cultures to do as much, but most humans find it to be rather peculiar and he hasn't had the chance to do it since being so far in the north.

Relationship A-Z Headcanons: Syfyn Javall

Mar 6, 2022

A = Affection (How affectionate are they? How do they show affection?)

Syfyn is about as affectionate as a rock in public-- thought that mostly stems from her general stoicism and awkwardness. As a result, any affection she does give is usually pretty small/mundane-- a pat on the back, a squeeze of the arm. It could be mistaken as meaningless if she didn't only do it to those closest to her.

Otherwise, her affection is shown by her looking over you-- she'll notice if you get a new cut or bruise and help take care of it. She'll notice if you've been drowsy lately and will let you nap on her lap as she's riding her horse, leading yours behind her. Don't bother lying about if you're cold or hungry-- she'll know, and she *will* do something about it.

B = Best friend (What would they be like as a best friend? How would the friendship start?)

Trying to become friends with Syfyn is *not* for the faint of heart. She has a wall a mile tall and wide around her, and the more eager someone is, the more distrustful she becomes. After the incident, she's adopted a, "it's better to not care about anyone than risk being hurt," mindset.

Despite that-- it's still possible to get under that armor of hers if you're patient and playing the long game... and trust me when I say it's worth it. If you're going to the end of the world, then Syfyn is coming with you. If it's your life or hers, she's laying hers out on the ground. It's you and her to the end, and then some.

C = Cuddles (Do they like to cuddle? How would they cuddle?)

Syfyn *loves* to cuddle, but she's far too shy to initiate it, which can make her look stand-offish if you didn't know better.

She's used to being the big spoon just because she can use her wings as a blanket of sorts for you both-- but should The Commander *also* have wings, a good, warm, sweetheart cuddle is the next best thing. She also *does* have bird-like tendencies and likes to build up a little nest of blankets to cuddle in.

If you *really* want to make her melt, brush through and preen her feathers. She'll be a happy, blushing mess in seconds.

D = Domestic (Do they want to settle down? How are they at cooking and cleaning?)

Syfyn's always dreamed about settling down and moving out to the country to live a quiet and peaceful life. Unfortunately for her, it's never been in the cards. She was given away to the military after her parents died and, as a result, was forced to dedicate her life to the cause of Plaithus. It's still a sweet dream, though... one she dreams of often, in fact.

As for domestic chores... Syfyn can *not* cook. She won't start fires or anything, but she will consistently burn her food and fail at making anything with more than a few steps. She'll still eat it, though. She's not a complainer, and thanks to being a half-*mythosi*, can weather foods that others would *not* be able to.

E = Ending (If they had to break up with their partner, how would they do it?)

She wouldn't.

Syfyn takes forever to open up and takes even longer up open up romantically. It's only thanks to having grown up with the Commander for decades that Syfyn was able to fall in love with them. At that point, she's dedicated completely, and if the person she loves becomes corrupt and warped along the way... she'll do everything she can to try and fix it... even if it means giving up on herself.

F = Fiance(e) (How do they feel about commitment? How quick would they want to get married?)

Syfyn's either all or nothing, so if she's with someone, she's with them for the long haul. She's never felt particularly strong about marriage, however. She doesn't need a ring or a legal agreement to prove she's dedicated to someone. When it comes to a *ceremony*, however... well while she *loves* the idea of wearing a gorgeous gown and being surrounded by friends and family, it's just another thing she doesn't find herself deserving of.

Most soldiers die young, anyway. There's not much time for romantic daydreams when you're fighting for your life every other day.

G = Gentle (How gentle are they, both physically and emotionally?)

Syfyn can be brash at the best of times, but she always does and says things that are in your best interest. It's *because* of that that she tries to be direct most of the time. She's also a fan of friendly ribbing, as it's easier for her to express than "softness."

However, there's another side to Syfyn that she tries to keep hidden from *everyone*, including herself. That side of herself is soft, and fragile, and, in her opinion, *weak,* and it's something only her closest companions can draw out from her. She gets fiercely defensive when she's like that, and is constantly scared of being judged for not being strong enough.

H = Hugs (Do they like hugs? How often do they do it? What are their hugs like?)

She's not a big fan of them, to be honest. In general, she doesn't like other people getting in her space. Plus, it can make things awkward if people don't know common courtesy when it comes to touching her wings. She'll only let the people close to her do it, and even then, she prefers it to be kept to be a minimum.

When she *does* hug people, which is usually only during emotional moments, it's nearly bone-crushing. She hugs you *tight,* usually becomes she's too emotionally overwhelmed to worry about her strength. Once she lightens up, though, they're actually quite secure and comfortable feeling.

I = I love you (How fast do they say the L-word?)

It would take her forever to say it, and even then, she almost never says it. She gets too embarrassed sometimes, so she tries to make sure you know it through her actions as opposed to her words. The few times she does say it, it's usually during quiet, uneventful moments. She always says it softly, though, like she's afraid of what you'll do when you hear her say it.

J = Jealousy (How jealous do they get? What do they do when they’re jealous?)

She doesn't get jealous at all. She has complete and full trust in her partner-- otherwise, she wouldn't be with them to begin with. Granted, she might get a little irked if someone is *throwing* themself at them, but unless it appears that her partner's uncomfortable, she'll stay uninvolved.

She might get inquisitive about who they were talking to, though-- but that's just because she likes to be aware as opposed to coming from a place of jealousy or insecurity.

K = Kisses (What are their kisses like? Where do they like to kiss you? Where do they like to be kissed?)

They always start off light and quick, like she's scared someone will see regardless of where you are. It can almost be infuriating how soft her kisses are, and more often than not, it'll be up to you to get things going to stop her from overthinking. Then... well, then they're frantic and desperate like she can't get enough of you or believe that you're really there. She likes to keep her arms wrapped around you somehow, just to make sure you won't up and fade away somehow.

And then there are the kisses she gives after a battle when she's up on adrenaline. She's shameless about those, grabbing you by the back of the neck to draw you close and kissing you like either of you could drop dead at any moment.

She *loves* to be kissed along her back between her wings. She can get pretty sore back there, so a massage paired with some doting kisses will have her *very* content.

L = Little ones (How are they around children?)

Syfyn is awkward around kids like she is around most things... but she's actually pretty good at dealing with them. She's around teenagers a lot since she helps train at the barracks a lot, so she's used to dealing with sassiness and pushback. As for *little* littles, she's an absolute softy for them (not that she'll admit it). She tries to act annoyed by them, but she has a sixth sense of being able to tell when they're in danger or in need something... and plus, she's pretty fun to play with. She'll play fight with them and dramatically fall to the ground when they win, watching as they excitedly run around bragging about how they defeated the Brazen Griffin.

M = Morning (How are mornings spent with them?)

She always gets up early, usually as or before the sun's rising, thanks to being in the military and just having a natural predisposition for being up quick. Most of the time she just trains until everyone else wakes up and she has to go about her normal duties. She might give The Commander a peck on the head if they're still sleeping or invite them to train with her if they're awake, but otherwise, she's too busy to lounge around before getting ready.

The only person who has a fighting chance is the Commander, but even then they better be convincing.

N = Night (How are nights spent with them?)

Syfyn's a strung-up person, and the evening is usually spent working (still) or, on the off-chance she has time to herself, trying to work off months of stress. She likes to drink ale (she makes a point of hating wine) and run off to the rooftops to look at the stars or goof off, something you're always more than invited to come along with.

Otherwise, she's fine just lounging around with you, or helping you get through your chores and work if she can.

O = Open (When would they start revealing things about themselves? Do they say everything all at once or wait a while to reveal things slowly?)

Syfyn doesn't tell you things about herself unless, for some reason or another, she finds it to be relevant. As a result, it's more than possible that you could know her for literal years and go not knowing half of her life.

It's a mix of her being generally closed off and just not finding herself important/interesting. Surely there are more important things to talk about than her childhood or favorite color. And as for the traumatic parts of her past-- the things that haunt her-- well, she'd rather pretend she's fine and that those things never happened. It hurts less that way, and it keeps you from ever looking at her with pity in your eyes.

P = Patience (How easily angered are they?)

It depends on if they're her friend or not. If it's a random person, she gets mad fast. If they say something stupid, or something she just doesn't like, or give one of her friends a glare, she's inclined to automatically hate them. Her anger is very quiet and cold, however, so she'll keep it to herself unless she's given the excuse to physically lash out at them.

As for her friends/lover... you could punch her in the face and she'd assume it was something she did. So she doesn't really get *mad*, ever. The only times she really gets upset is if you're planning to do something dangerous that puts your safety or life in serious danger.

Q = Quizzes (How much would they remember about you? Do they remember every little detail you mention in passing, or do they kind of forget everything?)

Everything. You tell her a story that you fell on a curb once years ago and she'll always make sure to keep an eye on you around sidewalks. You mention that you like oranges in an obscure conversation and she'll make sure to buy you one every time she sees one for sale. Her friends are on her mind all the time, and she does her best to show them how much she cares for them without being verbal or overly affectionate about it.

S = Security (How protective are they? How would they protect you? How would they like to be protected?)

Syfyn is very protective-- but not to the point it's overbearing. In general, as second-in-command, she's used to taking the brunt of the lack back on The Commander's decisions. That's a habit she's yet to break. If she feels they're too stressed out, she'll have everyone report to her instead so she can take care of everything. Most of the time, they never know she did it since she fixes the problems before they ever really become *problems*.

Otherwise, she's aware that The Commander is more than capable of fending for themself, so she tends to stay uninvolved in most things. If they give her the go-ahead to jump in, though, well... brace yourselves.

As for herself, Syfyn views herself as a protector more than the protected, physically, mentally, and emotionally. She doesn't really *want* to be protected that much. However, in a romantic relationship, she appreciates having an equal dynamic where her partner can fend for themselves. Otherwise, she'll get stressed out always trying to look out for them.

T = Try (How much effort would they put into dates, anniversaries, gifts, everyday tasks?)

A lot. Way too much, actually. At heart, Syfyn's a romantic, so if she actually gets the chance to give someone the romantic experience she's always wanted for herself, you bet she's gonna take it.

You can expect regular surprise dates that include sneaking off to hard-to-reach places and having a picnic, baths with bubbles and rose petals, and little cute drawings scattered for you to find.

Otherwise, Syfyn's love language is acts of service, so you can bet she's constantly doing things for you. Filling out extra paperwork, tidying up your room, fixing anything that needs to be broken. She puts 110% effort into everything she does, always, and even more so for you.

U = Ugly (What would be some bad habits of theirs?)

She's loyal to a fault. It doesn't matter how poorly she's treated, how badly she's hurt, or how many people beg her to quit-- once she's pledged her allegiance to something, it's nearly impossible to make her give it up... even if that loyalty leads to her directly betraying and hurting those she loves.

She also refuses help. She has an image of what she's meant to be: strong, unbreakable, *tough.* Asking for help is, in her mind, a direct contradiction to all those things. She'd rather suffer in silence or hurt herself than risk inconveniencing someone else for something "trivial," or being viewed as anything less than.

V = Vanity (How concerned are they with their looks?)

It depends. When she's in active duty or a mission, she couldn't care less. She always keeps her armor and weapons clean, of course, but that's a safety requirement as opposed to being out of vanity. When she's *not* on duty, she's always expected to look well-put-together anyway as a member of the military.

In her free time, however, she likes to be well put together. She's into a lot of self-care things but oftentimes feels too weird to ever partake in any of them. She has a hard time believing she can be as rough and rugged as she is and still be "soft."

W = Whole (Would they feel incomplete without you?)

Syfyn definitely places a lot of her sense of self in others, and that's mostly due to how much effort and dedication she puts into her relationships. She doesn't make friends easily, and once she does, she intends to keep them for life, through thick and thin. Losing The Commander, her best friend and significant other, completely broke her. Instead of trying to figure herself out, or heal, she's instead forcing herself to keep marching on, head bowed.

In truth-- it's something she needs to work and unlearn. She has no sense of self if she's not dedicated to someone or something, and, without those she loves, she considers herself to be nothing.

X = Xtra (A random headcanon for them.)

Syfyn *loves* cats, but cats are terrified of her because of her wings. As a result, she simply watches cats from afar and regularly puts out food for all the strays.

She always wanted to have one as a pet, but due to the volatile nature of working in the military and not having anyone to take care of it while she's gone, she never got the chance to.

Y = Yuck (What are some things they wouldn’t like, either in general or in a partner?)

Cowardice. Syfyn can't *stand* cowards... when it comes to physical things, that is. A thing or two can be said about Syfyn's ability to communicate and face her own emotions, but when it comes to war, she's always been fearless. She's willing to lose her life for a cause-- she's willing to be tortured for the rest of her life for a cause. You tell her to pick up a sword and fight, and she will. Those who choose to run away in times of need because they're *scared?* Well, she has a few choice words for them.

Z = Zzz (What is a sleep habit of theirs?)

Syfyn sleeps like a log, and she falls asleep quickly, mostly due to how much physical labor she does in a day. She tends to sleep on her stomach because of her wings, but she'll sometimes sleep on her side and cuddle into her own wings for comfort.

She's impossible to wake up and can sleep through just about anything anywhere. Just because she gets up early doesn't mean she goes to bed early though-- she can function with just two hours of sleep if she needs to.

Plaithus (A Brief History)

Mar 6, 2022

The Kingdom of Plaithus is the largest ruling force on the continent of Nerava, and, quite frankly, it is impossible to remember a time when this was *not* the case. One could say Plaithus is entirely isolated-- but that would be implying that there were other major human kingdoms left to interact with other than the free-land of the Vygranders.

No-- all other kingdoms were wiped out entirely over nearly six decades. One by one, they rose. One by one, they took up arms to attack the mighty figurehead that is Plaithus-- to steal its riches and jewels. And one by one they fell, wiped off the map entirely as Plaithus burned all that was left to the ground and slaughtered all who were left alive. Their histories were erased, books and scrolls burnt and artwork destroyed.

Plaithus rules nearly the entirety of Nerava-- save for a small belt of forests and valleys that stretches east to west and the western coast. And, as a result, *Plaithus rules the world.*

The Royal Family + Plaithian History

The rulers of Plaithus stretch back for generations, but people say the line only becomes important at King Aridivus Naulvonte The Great-- Marcelle's father.

King Aridivus inherited the throne after the sudden death of his father, leaving him at the age of thirteen to rule over the entire kingdom with a small council of advisors. What used to be nothing more than guiding hands to the ruler were suddenly granted the authority and power to sway the direction of the nation-- to "help" the young king rule by enforcing their own agendas upon him.

As a result, the council became *The* Council-- an elite group of council members that became self-governed seeing at the young king was too naive and... *young*... to rule over them. Plaithus entered an era of instability and resentment as The Council took over. Laws were changed, businesses extorted, cultures warped. What was once a formerly peaceful kingdom turned bloodthirsty as nobles fought against one another in hopes for a seat amongst the King, and it was only then that "masks" became important to Plaithian culture. Nobles committed increasingly cruel and malicious acts-- and fearing the backlash and consequences of their actions, they turned to elaborate, expensive things to conceal their identities from the public, adopting fancy titles to further separate themselves from the filth of the commoners.

Despite this, Plaithus remained the most powerful kingdom, and, if anything, became even richer. However, it was also at this point of time that they entered a time that would come to be known as *The Fall*-- a five-decade-long period of war. Some speculate it was due to the sudden instability of the ruling family-- that the enemies of Plaithus saw this as the perfect time to strike. Others simply said Plaithus was becoming too corrupt. But other than rumors, no historian has been able to prove *why* the wars erupted... just like they were never able to find *why* or *how* Plaithus became so powerful centuries, perhaps even millennia, ago.

And then things changed.

Aridivus grew up extorted by politicians, hated by the public for acts he didn't even commit nor have a say in, and given a country ruled by war. He grew up hardened.

He grew up cruel.

By his mid-twenties, he had completely seized back control, though it was too late to rid of the thing that had become The Council. Having learned from this mistake, however, he ruled with an iron fist. He was an insecure man-- paranoid and fearful of being betrayed-- and no one was safe from his anger or his rage. His armies grew in strength and power-- and while they had miraculously managed to keep Plaithus safe before without any guidance, they now flourished beneath his command.

Years of relative peace passed. Plaithus slowly but surely began to find its footing once more, but despite the stability, the people were anything but thankful for their King. His past was too muddled and unstable to ever forget, and as he matured he only became crueler.

He married a young princess named Viola from one of the many kingdoms he warred after having pillaged and destroyed her home. Their wedding was anything but a celebration. The kingdom was running out of resources as it seemingly combatted the rest of the world, and the people knew better than to celebrate the life-long imprisonment of their new queen. Despite this, Viola fell into her role well.

Duty. Duty came first to both Aridivus and Viola, and it was upon this one core value that the couple managed to tolerate one another.

Over the years, Plaithus grew weaker and weaker (or so people claim), but no historical records can be found proving this. Perhaps this is why the King and Queen were so desperate to have an heir-- to have someone to shove the blame onto. Two years into their marriage Queen Viola conceived and gave birth to Marcelle Naulvonte-- their only child and sole heir to the crumbling throne of Plaithus-- though the public originally knew her only as The Sole Heir.

The kingdom deteriorated. The wars continued. The people starved. At least, that's what certain people claim (no historical records can prove this--). This continued until Marcelle's naming ceremony at the age of sixteen.

It was as if it was a miracle-- as if fate itself had changed its course. The more power Marcelle was given as she grew older, the better the kingdom did. Month by month, year by year, the damage that was done by her father's rule was reversed until he stepped down from his position as king entirely once she turned eighteen.

It was only then that Plaithus truly flourished.

Marcelle did not start wars-- but she most certainly ended them. Battles that had previously been continuing for nearly a decade were put to an end as she rallied troops and reorganized power structures, marching into battle herself beside the famous Commander Javall. One by one the Kingdom's enemies fell-- and soon The Queen became drenched in the scent of death and battle, outwitting her competitors in politics and warfare. She earned herself the title of The Raven Queen as flocks of them followed her armies to war, knowing well enough that wherever Plaithus went, there would be bodies to feast upon.

The Queen married a foreign noblewoman-- one that the public embraced with open arms thanks to her kind smile and virtuous morals. Where Marcelle defended the kingdom, Emeline allowed it to prosper. She led charity efforts, redistributed wealth amongst the city, and rebuilt cultural and religious centers.

Together, Marcelle and Emeline had two children-- one their heir, another seemingly swept from off the streets-- The Golden Princess and The Lost Royal as they were respectively known by the public.

The Rubian Age of Plaithus, named after its success financially and in warfare, is regarded as the kingdom's most successful era in recent history. The era stretched from when Marcelle stated her new half-mythos Commander, The (Gilded Gorgon/White Wolf/Painted Phoenix/Deathless Demon). Together, under the guidance of Marcelle's rule and The Commander's ruthlessness, Plaithus put an end to The Fall, eradicating every other major, competing human kingdom save for Vygrand. It was only thanks to their combined efforts that Plaithus ever knew peace for the brief period that it did before The Circle-- and all the events that came after it.

Codex Entry: Jost + Nikke Ivante

Feb 21, 2022

Nikke and Jost were born approximately within three minutes of each other, though Jost is the older of the two (not that Nikke will ever let her say it). Despite this, they're both painfully aware of the real truth-- the truth that Nikke, despite being three minutes younger, has always been the protector of the two, and, by all accounts that matter, the older sibling.

Being born in Vrithka is regarded by everyone to be a curse. It's a hot, suffocating island filled with dangers that lurk in every corner. And, for *mythosi*, it is what most would refer to as being stuck between a rock and a hard place. Difficult to escape from thanks to the dangerous waters surrounding it, they are unable to leave despite the human mage-hunters who push their way inland. They are killed methodically in increments, and now? Now the numbers are blatantly in the human's favor as those who are not killed are taken by Vygrandian scouts to be used for blood magic.

As a result, Nikke and Jost were raised in a small, poor village, one of the last ones left remaining on the island, the one thing standing between them and the mage hunters being a gorgon-led gang known at The Taipan-- though it's just as much a protector of Vrithka's *mythosi* inhabitants as it is a regime. The only way to avoid them ransacking homes for supplies is to be a member of their ruthless ranks-- a sacrifice their father, Arman, took upon himself and fully intended for his children to make as well. It was the only way to guarantee their safety and security lest they wanted to be hunted down and killed, sacrificed for the "greater good."

The twins were taught how to hold a knife and fight by age eight thanks to their father-- and it's safe to say he never once took it easy on them. They were forced to train most days unless they were physically incapable of doing so. While most kids were left with scrapes and bruises from climbing, both of them were left battered from fighting day-in and day-out-- just like most kids stuck in Vrithka often are.

But that was the problem-- no one save for Arman was a fighter, and no parents were willing to watch what Arman put his children through just to offer up their own to be trained. If Nikke and Jost were to fail at securing a position within The Taipan, the village would, by all means, be doomed. But this was not why Arman trained his children. No-- he trained them because he knew regardless of if the village survived or not, the entire world would want his children dead-- and he was going to do everything he could to teach them to fight back-- to teach them that even if all hope is lost and they're cornered and death is certain, that they should, at the very least, make their future killers work for it.

They lived up to expectations. Both of them were accepted into The Taipan by age twelve, and from there it was a matter of climbing the ranks. It was also a matter of surviving their father. He grew tougher on them if it was even possible. The twins began to grow into themselves-- Jost discovering her gender identity and Nikke losing himself in training. Both twins revealed themselves to be temperamental (just

like their father) as they grew older, leading to screaming fights that escalated faster than their mother, Janiva, could stop them.

Nikke had always been Father's favorite. He was the better fighter-- faster and stronger and smarter. Once he saw someone fight, *really* fight, it became apparent that he could remember and copy all their moves from memory alone. He earned the name *Shadow* from The Taipan thanks to this. Jost was left behind whilst constantly being compared to her brother by The Taipan and her own father during dinner and training sessions. Shame settled within her, shame intertwined with bitterness and resentment for her brother and her situation. She learned then that if she couldn't be as good of a fighter, she'd simply have to find another way to catch up to her brother through ruthlessness and ruthlessness alone.

Nikke inherited their father's rigid, albeit confusing, moral compass. There were lines he wouldn't cross even if it meant his death. Jost spat on such a thing, learning to fight *dirty*. Any trick one could conjure up she was already doing. There was no such thing as mercy in her book. There was no such thing as honor. She became so cutthroat that even certain Taipan members came to fear her, earning her the name of *Blade*.

Despite being equal to her brother, the twins' father still largely ignored her thanks to their completely different views on how fighting should be carried out. Where their father was unbiased at all times and frustratingly rational, she was entirely fueled by passion and acting in the moment. Desperate to earn approval she became increasingly daring and impulsive, a trait she's seen her father praise countless times when it worked for the better. However, she was messy and careless, getting so excited that she'd often overlook the tinier, important details that made or breaked a mission.

Every time she screwed up, Father would be *furious*. And, every time she screwed up, Nikke would take the blame-- take the extra "fighting lesson" that their father would dish out, take the aftermath of the fighting that always ended with a shared bottle of whiskey and father telling him he "appreciates his tenacity, but he needs to learn to not be careless and risk his life for no reason."

Nikke took accountability for all her mistakes and achievements because that was how it was with Father. While he hated Jost's carelessness, he loved that she was daring-- not that he knew Jost was the one responsible for the stunts thanks to Nikke taking the fall each and every time. While Nikke carried more bruises, he also got more approval and love, and, as a result, Jost was left neglected and ignored in favor of her brother.

From there, the family fell apart.

Jost resented Nikke for always taking the spotlight-- and yet, she could never bring herself to take the beatings and constant yelling that Nikke had to endure to receive their Father's love. Nikke grew furious at Jost for always messing up their missions and purposely causing fights with Father. Jost found herself closing up entirely emotionally, distancing herself from everyone to become completely isolated. She survived this long, completely ignored and alone. She didn't see any need to change that. Nikke, in the meanwhile, dedicated himself to the community and village, using The Taipan's resources to help

the quality of life and rebuild the otherwise rotting village. The twins separated for years, not so much as on speaking terms until the war.

The Taipan was sent out to join on the side of The Circle against Plaithus-- and it was only on the battlefield that the Ivantes were reunited-- and aptly torn apart. Their Father died that day on the battlefield protecting Jost from The Commander's nearly unavoidable wrath. It was in that war that Nikke had to sit and let his father die in favor of saving Jost, carving a path through countless soldiers to get her to safety as she threatened to bleed out.

Both twins were left feeling responsible for their father's death. Both twins were confused on why they felt saddened by it at all. Maybe it was the fact that despite their father's harshness, their mother was indisputably in love with him, and him with her. Maybe it was the fact that they knew they were the only things left to protect their home now. Maybe it was the fact that nothing could be the same.

They returned home without their father or his body, both scarred emotionally and physically. When they returned home, they collapsed into their Mother's arms who sobbed as she held them, thanking the gods for them being alive. Despite her gladness for them, it was clear something within her broke that day of their return-- that day of learning of Arman's death. She became forgetful and distant, zoning out and difficult to reach. She would look at Jost and begin to tear up only to look at Nikke and break out sobbing thanks to their resemblance to their father.

It got to the point that Janiva could no longer even look at Nikke, leaving Jost to struggle to care for their mother. While Jost was used to Father not being around-- used to being in the peripheral when it came to caring for their now emotionally broken mother, Nikke was not. Confused by the death of his father and his role in it and desperate for any sort of affection, Nikke quickly fell into seeking out the company of others, jumping from one person to the next until it became practice-- a means of keeping himself entertained and distracted. As far as he could tell, love meant loss, and loss meant pain.

This unhealthy monotony continued for nearly three years until The Taipan sold the twins out to Vygrand to hunt down The Commander and bring back what they stole… and perhaps allow Nikke and Jost to get revenge for everything The Commander has done in breaking apart their family.

In breaking their *Mother.*

Her hand catches your wrist, and you realize you've yet again underestimated her strength as she strains to keep you at bay. You both wrestle against each other, and the second you bring up your other hand Amilia's eyes widen. The equivalent of a shriek escape her before she slaps you. *Hard.*

Your vision goes black until you blink, your head spinning as Amilia gasps, hands slapping over her mouth as she stares at you. You can feel everyone's eyes on you, burning through your skin.

"Commander--" Her hands shake, eyes wide. "I didn't mean to, I promise, I--"

The sting lingers on your cheek, your skin warm. You breathe through your nose in great huffs.

You're angry.

You don't realize you're growling, drool gathering in your mouth as your pupils shrink. You can smell her fear in great whiffs, can practically taste it on your tongue. She has little bird bones, you think-- *sharp and easy to break.*

A fearful little noise leaves her as you lean closer, face inches from hers. *One bite--*

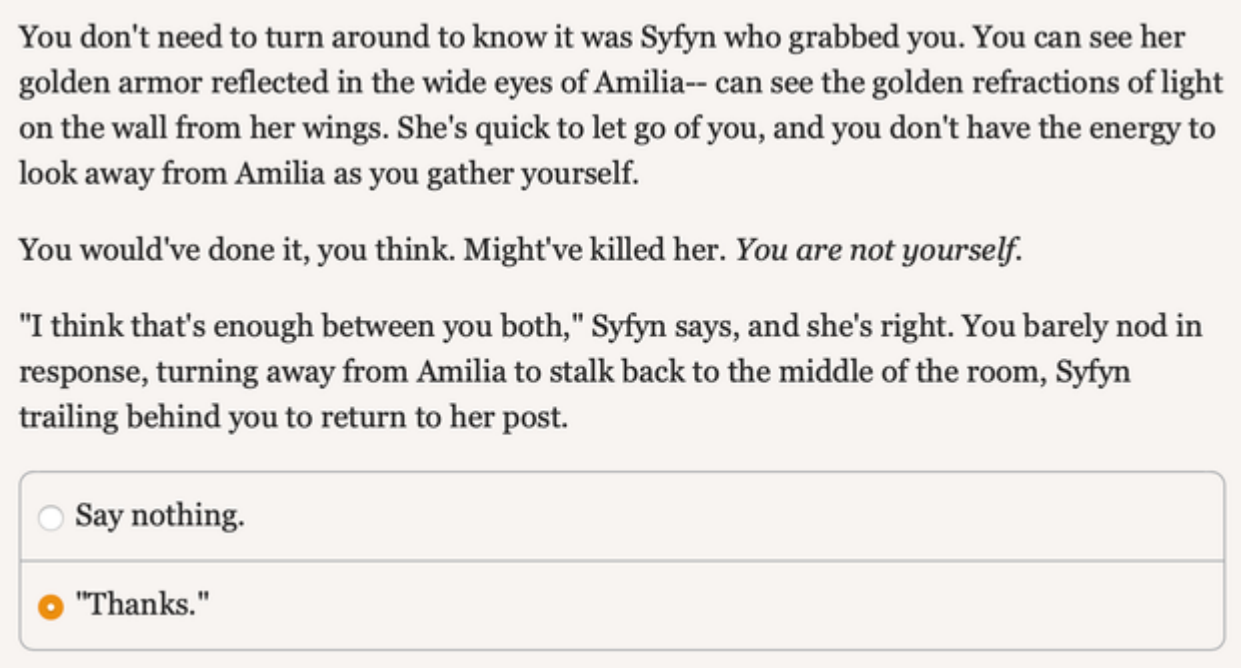
A hand grabs your shoulder.

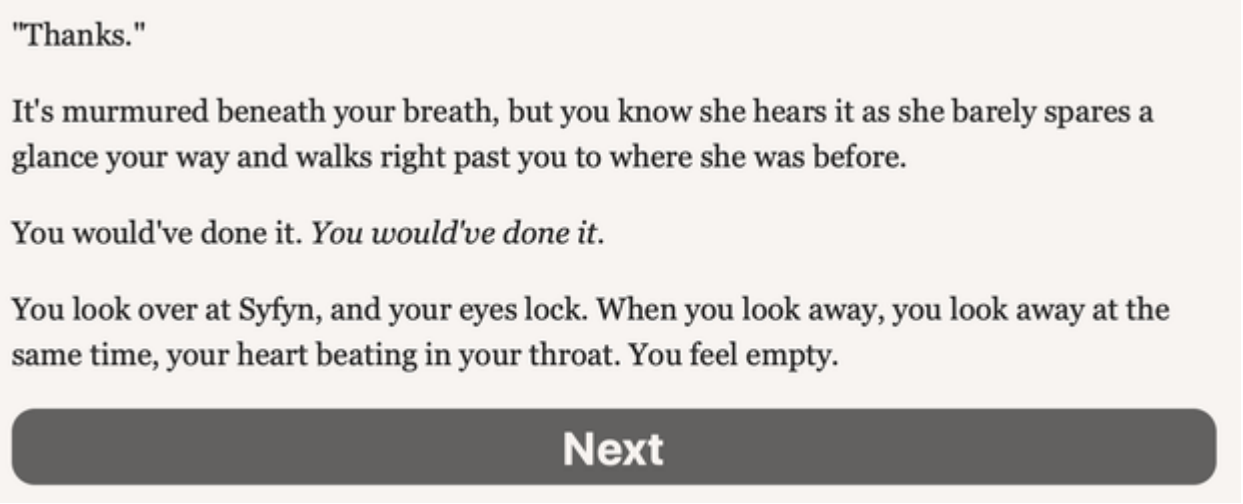
Your body goes to lunge at Amilia still, but the hand yanks you onto your feet and back before you can do damage like a dog pulled taut on a leash. By the time you blink, the urge, the *instinct* is gone, leaving nothing but adrenaline throbbing through your veins.

There is something in you. There is something in you, but it is not ***you.***

You can't remember the last time you felt like this. Can't remember the last time you felt more *mythosi* than human, as flickering of a moment as it was.

Next





Slap.

Feb 21, 2022

There's a lot of plot twists in Chapter Four... some of which make dynamics shift *real* fast depending on who you are...

You look at her, gaze flickering between her eyes, before you snarl. You use the last of your strength to push forward towards her neck before rearing back, yanking yourself free from her grasp.

You reel your hand back in a fist, and this time Syfyn doesn't have the time to recoil before your fist is colliding with the front of her mask in an awkward swinging motion thanks to the chains on your wrists. Normally the force of the hit would disperse throughout the metal... but you're not strong like a mortal, *no,* you're so much more than that.

You hear a sickening crack-- though it's nothing compared to the sound of your arm at the parade-- as Syfyn flinches, dark red blood dripping from beneath her mask. You grab hold of the front of her armor, forcing her backwards and slamming her into the wall between two statues--

"*Stop!* Just *stop,* okay?" She yells. Her voice cracks, desperation and fear plain in her voice.

It is only now that you feel how quickly her pulse races-- hear how ragged her breath is behind her mask.

She's not exhausted.
She's scared of you.

- (●) And she *should* be. Hit her.
- ( ) Stop.

Next

You shake your head before going to hit her again-- though this time it is the guards that grab hold of your hand. They're not half as strong as you, but the suddenness of it rears you back just enough for Syfyn to shove you onto the ground and pin you down, knee pressing against your chest to keep you in place beneath her. Her blood drips onto your chest, warm on your skin, as she struggles to regain her breath.

Her eyes are shut, and by the time she opens them her breathing is regular, body language stoic and unreadable. You would've never known she had just begged you to stop a few seconds ago.

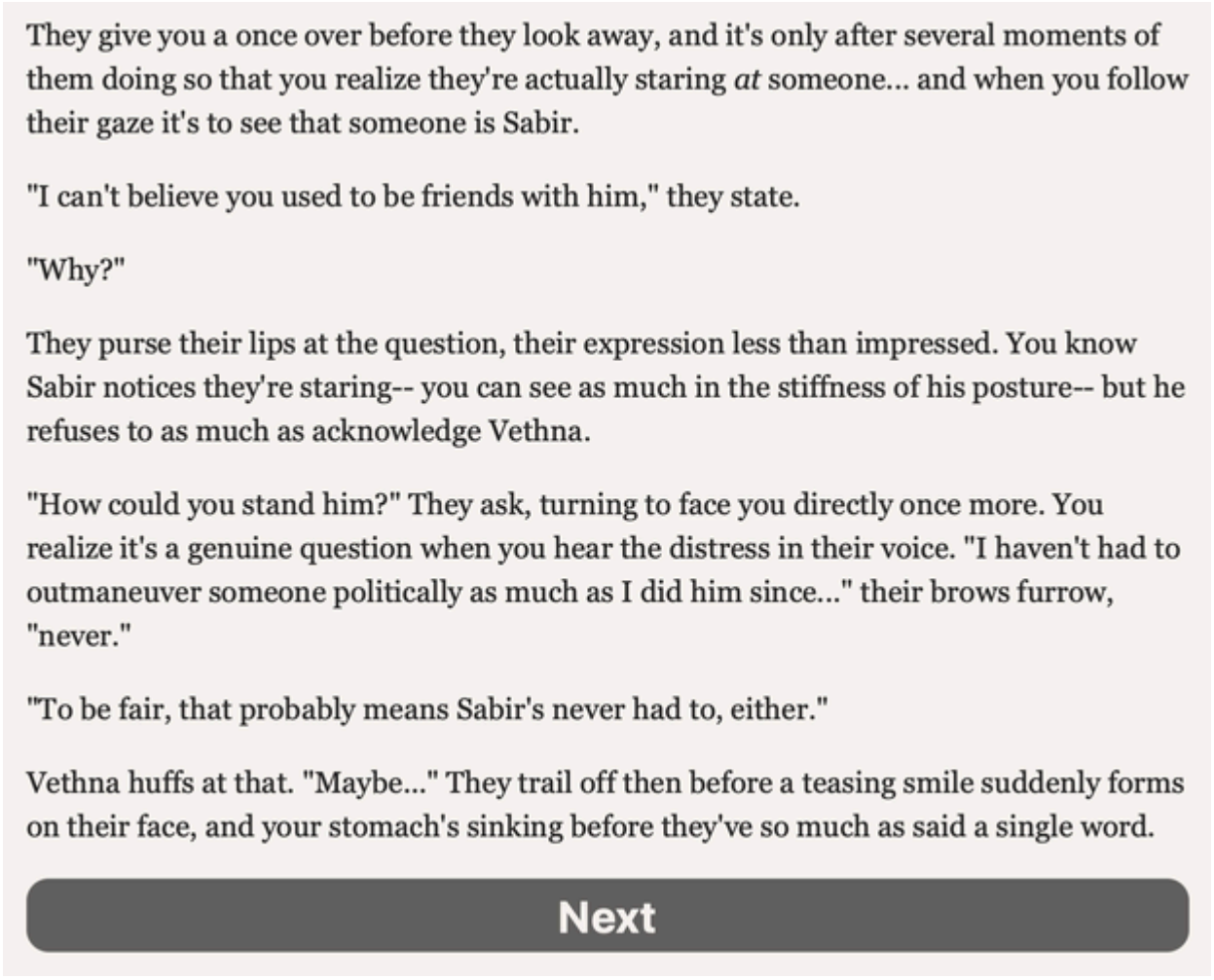
The hand she has on your shirt tightens, and you flinch in preparation for her to repay the favor of breaking your nose as she leans over you-- but she doesn't.

She instead rises to her feet, yanking you up with her, before forcing you down the hall once more, messily throwing a hand back in thanks to the guards for saving her.

Fear.

Feb 13, 2022

I said Syfyn wouldn't get any *emotional* punches this chapter... but trust me when I say there'll be plenty of physical ones.



"Though, now that I think about it... maybe you wish you were *more* than just his friend."

You blink. You blink because that's all you really *can* do as your heart lurches right out of your chest.

"What?" Vethna asks, sending you a sly look. "You didn't think I would notice all the *smiling* and all the *touching?"*

"Stop talking."

"Why? Scared he'll overhear?"

Your jaw twitches as you flex your hands at your sides. "No-- but I'm also not a fifteen-year-old about to be teased about their crush."

"No," Vethna scoffs. "Of course not. You're a fully grown *adult* who's about to be teased about their crush." They say the next part far too cheerily for your liking. "By me."

"No. No you are not going to do that."

"... actually, I think I am. I am going to do that. Right now. I am about to do it, *right now."*

"Don't."

"I think I already *am* doing it. I think it's already in motion."

"Then stop it."

"Okay, let me think about it." They pause for a second. "No."

"Gods fucking--"

Gods fucking? Freedom repeats. ***Absolutely scandalous. We do no such thing... except for when we do.***

Gods preserve you. You do not have the will power to be dealing with all of this today-- that much you're sure of as you squeeze your eyes shut and pinch your nose, desperately willing for the rest of the world to go away.

... unfortunately, when you open them, Vethna's still fucking there.

Sabir and MC sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G

Feb 5, 2022

Vethna will *always* tease their friends about their crushes... but especially if that friend happens to be a usually aggressive commander who was caught red-handed while flirting.

And, of course, Freedom can't stand to be left out. They're a bit of a prima donna when it comes to that.

Control. | Jost Ivante. (NSFW)

Feb 3, 2022

It is dark. So dark that even *you* cannot make sense of any of it.

Boom.

Lightning spreads across the skies, stretching from horizon to horizon and deafening you from the roar of its thunder. It grants you a second of visibility— just enough to see Jost leaping at you with a dagger in hand.

You're not prepared for her knee to slam into your ribs, and you're not prepared for her forearm to press against your throat, and you're most *certainly* not prepared for the force in which she slams her blade into your shoulder, sharp pain ripping through you as she twists it.

Her hand slaps over your mouth before you can yell out and it *stings.* You struggle to breathe as she leans over you, her wet hair dripping water onto your face. Chills run down your spine as her glowing eyes flicker to the wound, her grip on the weapon tightening. You can't predict her. You can't tell what she's going to do next.

She's dangerous.

You like it.

Adrenaline rushes through your veins like it hasn't done in years, adrenaline and *something else*, something that has your core filling with warmth as Jost's weight settles down onto you. The rain is cold but you are *hot*, and when Jost meets your gaze you can feel her go tense, your breath hitching.

She lets out a laugh in realization and sits up; it almost sounds manic as it echoes in the clearing, combating against the rain and thunder to be heard as she throws her head back. Lightning flashes, and your eyes catch on the way her vest sticks to her skin before you grab hold of her neck and *squeeze*. She coughs, her own grip on you faltering before her hands come up to claw at yours, a rattling hiss leaving her.

"Fuck you."

"I'd prefer it if you did instead."

“Of course you would,” she sneers. She manages to wrangle back in your grasp, your hand sliding, and it is then that she takes the advantage of ripping free from you, biting down on your palm, fangs delving deep. For a moment your breath hitches, your eyes locked— but the venom never comes as she lets go, your blood staining her teeth. She licks her red-stained lips slowly— idly— and the invitation and challenge are hidden clear as day in her gaze.

Fuck me.

You grin— and it’s something wild as her eyes gleam in excitement at your eager acceptance. No time is wasted before you’re grabbing the back of her neck and yanking her closer, teeth clashing when you kiss. You can taste your own blood in her mouth as you pull and rip at her hair, a favor she more than returns from the way her claws tear at your chest. You don’t know how long you both wrestle against the other, biting and tearing until bruises bloom and scratches form, but eventually you manage to pin her beneath you, both of her hands captured in one of yours as she hisses restlessly, snapping at you like some wild animal.

“What’s wrong?” You ask. “You didn’t *actually* think you’d be the one in control, did you?” You laugh, and she only narrows her eyes at you. She smiles, then, something so sweet it makes your teeth rot.

Her knee slams into your stomach.

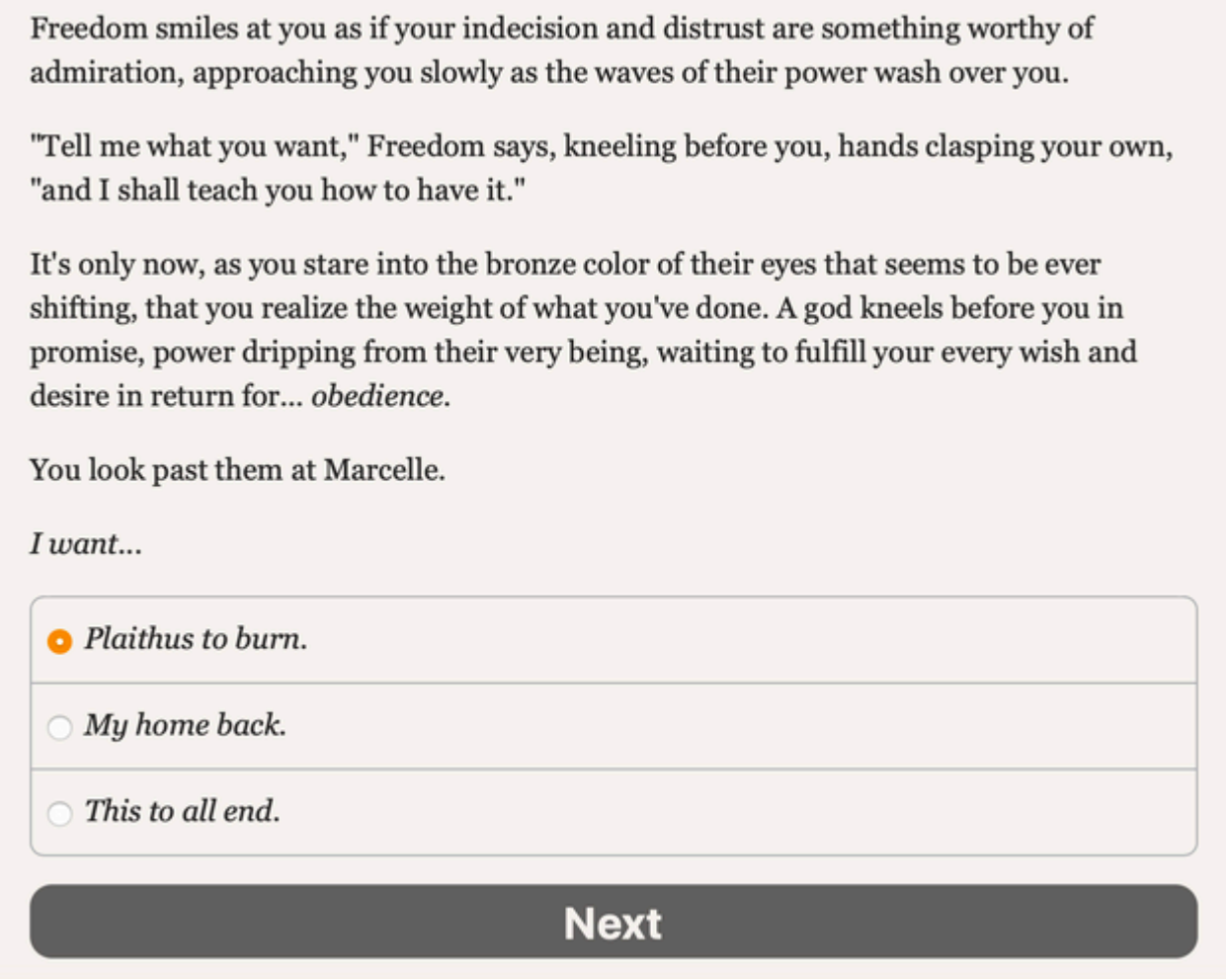
You’d yelp if there was any air left in your lungs from the impact— and Jost is grinning when she forces you off of her just to once again climb on top of you, long legs settling on either side of your torso. Trapped— you are trapped beneath her and stuck in her grasp as her grip on you tightens, suffocating you slowly, slowly, *slowly.* You open your lips to protest, but she presses a single finger against them to silence you as she grinds down against you.

Anything you wanted to say is replaced by a poorly bit back moan.

“What’s wrong?” She asks, leaning closer to whisper in your ear. Her hands capture yours to pin them to the dirt, fingers interlaced. There's something sickeningly familiar in the action. “You didn’t *seriously* think you’d be the one in control… *did you?”*

She's going to be the death of you, this much you are sure of, but what is it that all those scholars used to say? *"Love is rich with both honey and venom"?*

You figure there must be worse ways to go as she presses her lips against your neck.



The Commander's Goal

Jan 22, 2022

If you took Freedom's deal in Chapter 3, you'll be able to tell Freedom your one true wish.

They'll make sure it happens.

(White) Not started		WiP	Finished		
---------- Chapter Four ----------					
Part One	MC's Breakdown			**Expedition Expanded**	
	Nikke Scene			Vethna	Forced to work together
	Sabir Flashback				Repairing relationship
	Sabir Scene				Neutral
	Meeting Mother				High Romance
	Blythe Scene				Low Romance
Part Two	Sabir's Arrest V.1				Low Friendship
	Sabir's Arrest V.2				High Friendship
	Esme Scene				Hate
	Marcelle Scene				
	Court Scene			Nikke	Neutral
	Emeline POV				Low
Part Three	Expedition				
	Blood Room			Sabir	Past romance
	Mutilation Flashback				Past friendship
					Past aqcuaintence
					Past resentment
				Amilia	Romance, anti-fae
					Romance, apathy-fae
					Romance, pro-fae
					Platonic, anti-fae
					Platonic, apathy-fae
					Platonic, pro-fae
					Low affinity, anti-fae (Amilia fears the commander) (???)

[Chapter Four Progress Update]

[Jan 18, 2022]

It's been half a year since The Exile has been updated and two months since the beginning of my "hiatus" so to speak. However, I've still been working on Chapter Four whenever the opportunity arises. So, if you're curious about what Chapter Four will look like when it's done and how much is left to finish, keep reading!

At the moment, Chapter Four is 112k words with 10/14 scenes finished. So, just looking at that, I'm about 71% finished with Chapter Four. However, Marcelle's Scene and the Expedition Scene are the two largest scenes in the entire chapter, so it's probably more accurate to say I'm about 60% done. There's still no expected release for the chapter, and I'll probably hold off on making one until I send the chapter out to be read by alpha readers.

Back to the biggest scenes in the chapter-- Marcelle and the Expedition.

The first half of Marcelle's scene is based on The Commander's current personality and their past one. The scene will play out completely different based on if your Commander has changed or not and their current disposition. The way Marcelle chooses to handle and react to the commander heavily depends

on how they've changed. I also wanted to make the scene as "malleable" as I could for the rough draft, which means the Commander can be complacent, violent, aggressive, upset, etc. and the scene will play out completely different. Because of this, there's a lot that needs to be written.

The second scene is the expedition scene, which you can see be further broken down by the "expedition expanded" section. It's the first of what will be many "check-in" scenes, which are basically The Exile's equivalent of visiting your home base in a video game. You know how you run around and talk to your companions and get cutscenes based on recent things you've done? Yeah-- that's pretty much this. You'll have the chance to talk to two characters out of Vethna, Amilia, Sabir, and Nikke. Yes, the order you talk to them in may be important. None of your companions will enjoy you talking to Nikke first unless it's to threaten him. A romanced Vethna may not enjoy you rushing to speak to a formerly romanced Sabir before you speak to them. Past that, the conversations that are available to you and how characters respond to you will be completely different based on your relationship with them. Players who treated Sabir poorly in the past will see a much different side to him than players who were kind to him. A player who has somehow managed to keep a completely neutral relationship with Vethna may be cornered by them and questioned in an attempt for Vethna to get to know them better. Hopefully, this will be a scene where you begin to see just how your version of The Commander fits in the world of The Exile.

That's all for now-- I just wanted to post an update in case some people were worried/curious about where development was at!

Codex Entry: Vethna Mevnrael

Jan 11, 2022

Note: This contains spoilers for Vethna's backstory. Small details are prone to being changed in the future as well!

Vethna Mevnrael.

Vethna is the only child of House Mevnrael-- one of the most ancient and powerful houses in The South. Unlike most marriages in Vygrand, the marriage of Vethna’s parents was one of love and not forced betrothal, *and*, unlike most Vygrandian marriages, the couple shared complete, undeniable love and trust to one another no matter how many years went by. Neither of Vethna’s parents held mistresses, meaning Vethna had what many Vygranders would consider an unconventional childhood of being raised directly by their parents-- an unconventional childhood that most other Major Houses would claim made them weak and idealistic considering their parents never adhered to the cultural expectation of refraining from showing outward affection to them.

The Patriarch of the household is Xyleth, who also just happens to be the Archmage of Vygrand, having remained in this position for nearly eighteen years now-- the longest that any given sorcerer in recent times has held the seat. Born not only as the heir of House Mevnrael but also being expected to one day duel their father to stake claim to controlling The South, Vethna has always been given high standards.

Luckily for them-- magic has always come to them as easily as breathing.

They excelled in all their classes to the point they began to study on their own, reading and learning ancient spells as if they were child play from as young as twelve. At such a point, House Mevnrael called upon their alliance with House Erudias, the latter of the two promising to tutor Vethna along with two other incredibly promising students-- their own Jamie Erudias and the new, ambitious Xavier Refta...otherwise known as the only threat to Vethna's power.

Where Vethna has always excelled in illusions and pathos magic (as the many members of their family before them), Xavier has command over the elements like no other. Just like that, it was no longer people murmuring of how Vethna shall one day rule Vygrand, but people wondering which of the two-- The Mevnrael or The Refta-- will go home in shame...if they even come home alive at all.

Despite this external pressure, the trio studied without any particular goal of outwitting the other. In fact, having all been social outcasts due to their own academic prowess, they found themselves becoming quite close and getting into *more* than enough trouble, Vethna and Xavier often forcing Jamie into their adventures of breaking into the forbidden areas of House Erudias's libraries and chambers.

However-- while Vethna and Xavier never seemed particularly obsessive or worried about their respective statuses of potential rulers, anything else could be said for their families. It was a battle of the old and the new-- a long-standing, *the first standing*, house against the newest one. There was no equal footing to be found, not when their ideals and hopes for the city-states were so different. But, if there's one thing Vygranders are good at-- it's pulling deals that secure profit for everyone (and suffering, too).

Seeing as their children seemed to get along so well, the houses came up with a deal that would guarantee both into a seat of power: a betrothal. One that neither Vethna nor Javier had any say in… though it wasn't an idea either was entirely opposed to.

Vethna's hand had been sought by dozens of suitors, each one bringing outrageous gifts and promises in turn for the Mevnrael name and the sight of having Vethna standing beside them at public outings as nothing more than a decorative sidepiece. Perhaps Vethna imagined Javier to be different considering they had grown up beside one another, or maybe it was the fact he never shied away from admiring them. Perhaps it was the fact Vethna themself had a developing crush on the Thaumaturgist for years. No matter the reason-- Vethna was wrong.

The plan behind the betrothal was that *Javier* would be the one to take the ruling seat, reducing Vethna to nothing more than the very thing they have always feared-- a trophy. That idea alone would've infuriated the young Menvrael had they learned of it, however, it was kept secret from them for the first months of the betrothal until the official proposal, an event that includes binding blood magic. It was only

then, when it was too late to go back, that Vethna’s status as nothing more than “Javier’s Partner” was revealed.

The engagement was announced publicly, and while the plan itself was never revealed, Vygranders are no fools. Just like that, the public was divided into two major parties-- those favoring Refta’s rule, and those Mevnrael's. It was a disagreement between traditional and new values-- though any rage the parties may have felt to one another would pale in comparison to Vethna’s own fury at being caged.

Javier treated them as little more than a pretty object, and while it was clear he held them in high regard as a spell-caster, he looked down upon them in all other areas-- specifically in political intrigue. Sweet compliments became insults that were stated so subtly that Vethna tricked themselves into believing they were simply imagining them. Each day ground down Vethna's defenses and sense of self and logic until they became hysterical and unpredictable, their own family and Jamie coming to think them delusional until they simply learned to be silent.

It was also during this time that Vethna began to discover the secrets behind the blood magic used in Vygrand along with fully learning the history behind Silburn’s stone walls-- the slavery and countless *mythosi* deaths that it’s been built upon-- that it *continued* to thrive upon beneath their Father’s instruction. By the time Vethna tried to confront their parents about it they were already considered unstable, their questions gone unanswered and their pleas ignored.

Even then, as everyone fretted for their declining mental health, Vethna could see the affection and heart-warming concern in their parents' gazes as they tried to soothe Vethna. But it was patronizing-- infantilizing, even-- and it was then Vethna finally understood that they would never be taken seriously. Kindness and sympathy are *weaknesses* in Vygrand, and unfortunately for them, all they know how to be.

It was a breaking point-- and it was only then that Vethna decided to run away. It took nearly two years of planning and watching and inquiring until they had a plan that was foolproof. The third most important person of Vygrand behind only their Father and fiancé would disappear overnight without a single fuss. At least-- that was how it should’ve gone.

While Vethna was strung along, isolated, and manipulated, Jamie’s blind faith was being abused. They were forced into watching his confidence falter as he compared himself to Javier until he viewed himself as lesser than both of them, nothing but a lackey or servant to them both. They watched Javier convince him to do worse and worse things, promising safety to Jamie's house during the major shifts in power soon to come.

It was heartbreaking to witness, and, desperate to stop it, Vethna repeatedly tried to convince Javier to stop (“Stop what? You’re imagining things,” he’d say), to stop him from taking his rage out on Jamie and to take it out on them, instead.

It never worked-- and eventually Jamie even began to resent them for treating him like a child. Stupidly, they tried one last time to convince Jamie to stand up for himself-- to join them in leaving. They told him

everything, foolishly trusting their once closest friend. He agreed-- or told them he did, anyway-- and Vethna was left thinking everything was on track until the night of the plan.

Jamie told Javier everything.

Blood was spilled that night, but none of it Vethna's. In one evening their entire life was shattered and left broken. Cold, and alone, and frightened, they were forced into putting on a brave face like they'd done countless times before. It was as they healed and mended The Commander-- this stranger from legend and their last hope-- that they made a solemn promise to themself.

Never again would they be so weak. Never again would they be taken off-guard. And when Javier finally catches up to them, because he *will*, they will not be manipulated and *used*. This time? This time they will be strong.

Witch.

Jan 9, 2022

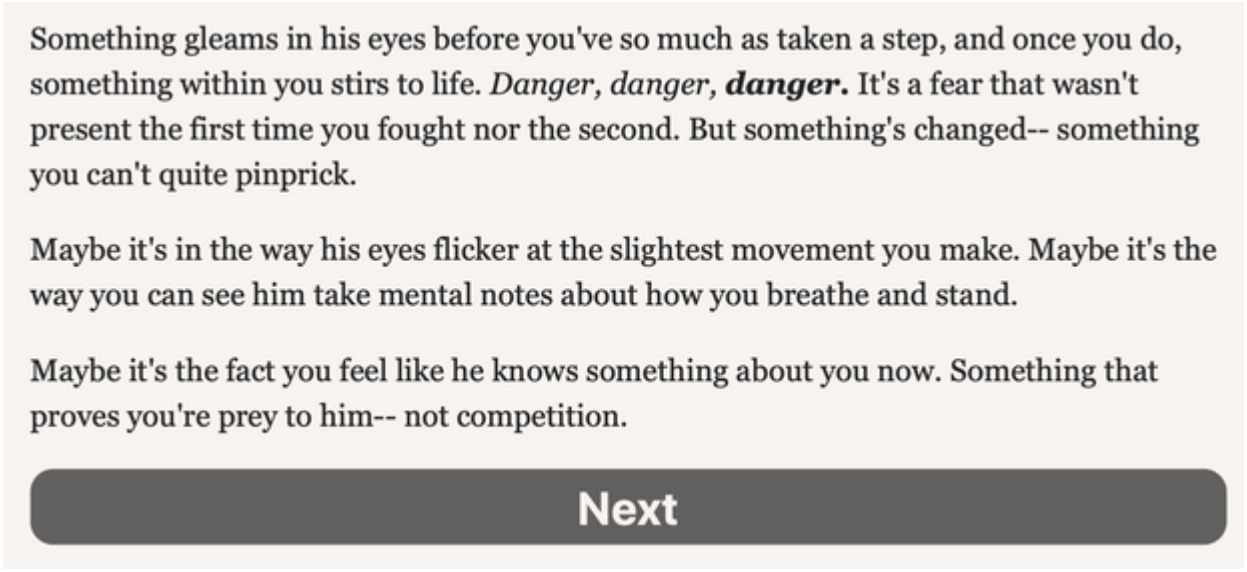
The woman briefly laughs at the question, giving you a slap on the face that you think is meant to be affectionate but leaves a sting.

You are entirely at this old woman's mercy. *You*, defender of Plaithus, The Gilded Gorgon, Commander of thousands, at the mercy of a civilian.

A wild look is in her eyes-- and it is only then that you take notice of their color: blue and green like fragmented, shattered pieces of stained glass. She smiles at you impossibly wide and sharp as she rises to stand once more, her silhouette surrounded by fog as the crows continue to caw.

"Hello, Commander."

The demo ends with The Commander remembering an odd encounter they had at the beginning of their exile. Turns out they *weren't* left completely alone to fend for themselves in the early days.



He bites down on his lip-- still grinning-- once you stand before him, arms crossed. Despite how shamelessly he scans you head-to-toe you can't help but feel as if you saw wrong by the time he's looking you in the eyes once again.

"Hi." he coos. You didn't know it was possible to fit so much smugness into one word.

- ○ "I'm going to kill you the second you give me the chance."
- ◉ "Give me an excuse-- *one*-- and I *will* kill you." He wants to play this game? Fine. You'll play it. ♥
- ○ "What's with that look in your eyes?" It makes you feel... *odd*. In a way you shouldn't feel-- not from him. ♥
- ○ "Quit looking at me like that."
- ○ "Think you'll be able to play nice?"
- ○ "You do realize you're completely outnumbered here, right?" You don't see how he plans to kill you with Syfyn breathing down both your backs.

Next

You take a step closer to him. His grin widens. "Give me an excuse-- *one*-- and I *will* kill you."

"Is that a promise?" He coos. His voice has a low, rattling quality to it-- something that you can really only describe as being snake-like. It has shivers running down your spine as something primitive awakens within you. Something about Nikke's gaze feels like he's looking right into you-- feels like he knows *exactly* what you're feeling.

He likes it.

- ◉ You like it, too.
- ○ *Fuck no*. Now is not the time, and he is not the person.

Next

There's a split second where you pause, wondering if you're actually allowed to do what you're about to do, before you look him over: *really* look him over.

He has a sharp nose and high cheekbones covered in iridescent scales. Your gaze trails lower-- to the dark green, patterned, triangular blackout tattoos on his neck. He swallows, and something within you churns from the way his throat bobs.

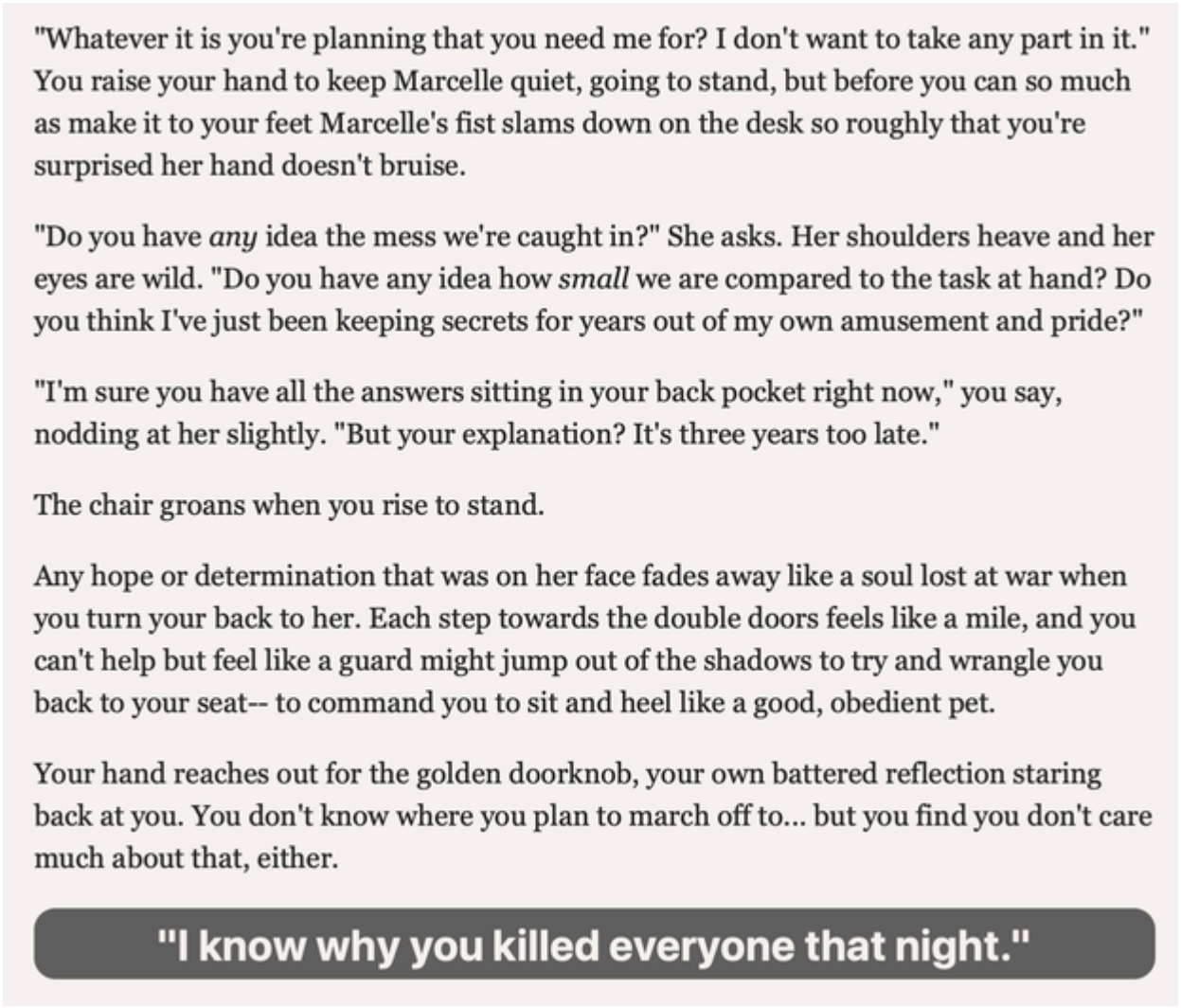
You snap your eyes back to his, and you're taken aback by how blown his pupils are, filled to the brim with some sort of anticipation. You are painfully aware of his presence now, and it's not just because you want to strangle him.

"Tell me, *Commander,*" he leans forward and rests his forearms on his knees, "what is it that you're here for?"

Nikke Convo (Chapter Four)

Jan 5, 2022

You can finally flirt with Nikke in Chapter Four if you have high enough affinity with him! Don't worry, he's just as insufferable as you last remember him in Chapter Three.



Three years too late.

Dec 26, 2021

It's funny how the tables turn when you're the one holding all the power... though one has to wonder if Marcelle is actually going to tell the truth this time or just spin another web of lies.

Quiet. | Nikke Ivante. (NSFW)

Dec 6, 2021

*AN: **NSFW.** I keep finding old snippets I've written a while ago that I figured some of you guys might like to read!*

“Nikke—“

“Shush.”

“But I—“

He grabs a broken chair and props it up against the door, keeping the handle locked before he turns to face you.

“Shut the hell up.”

He hates you, *gods,* he *hates* you, you can feel that much in his gaze as he takes a single step closer to you. You back up against the wall, your back hitting a shelf as you do. He gives it a passing glance when it rattles before he's staring at you again, as if you’re some foreign body that he can’t quite make sense of but knows he’s repulsed by.

His hand grabs your jaw. He forces you to look at him.

It’s wrong, and it makes you feel pathetic, but you like it— you like his attention on you. You like the way it feels on your skin, like the way it sends electric shocks down your spine and has your toes curling, hands nervously flexing at your sides

His eyes flicker over your face, searching for something in your eyes. His gaze is heavy, weighted, and it flickers to your lips.

No— flickers is far too light of a word for how he watches his thumb drag slowly over your bottom lip, claw sharp against the sensitive skin. You don’t know why the hell you open your mouth, but you do as if by instinct. And maybe— maybe you’d be embarrassed for it if it didn’t have his pupils going from slits to fullblown circles as he presses his thumb down on your tongue just to make you drool.

The hatred is palpable, *suffocating*, and you drown in the smell of cedar when he slowly leans down over you, face next to yours so he can whisper in your ear. “Ya know— I think this mouth of yours is a hell of a lot more useful when you’re not talking.”

He removes his hand from you then, wiping it off on your shirt and lazily shoving you back into the shelf just to watch you wince. He smirks when you do, and you can’t help but feel like a maimed mouse being played with by a house cat.

You don’t stop him from kissing you. You don’t stop him from grabbing your face between his hands and hauling you close and stealing the breath right from your lungs, or from fumbling with the buttons and straps of your outfit as if he might die in the next ten seconds if you’re not out of it. And, in turn, he doesn’t stop you from tugging at his hair to force him closer or from sinking your fangs into his shoulders when his hand slips inside your pants.

The two of you are like two stupid animals in heat from the way you claw at one another, each moan that leaves you drawing out a muttered sigh of pleasure from him.

Hates you; he hate, hate, *hates* you, you can see that much in his gaze. But *gods,* does he want to fuck you.

And he does, and in so many ways that it's not even fair. He does it here, claws buried in your hips as he does with you what he pleases, his hand pressed over your mouth in a shitty attempt to keep your cries quiet. And he does it when he stops for a moment to kiss you— just *kiss* you— so softly that you could almost mistake it for something that's more than whatever *this* is. And he's even gone the extra mile of fucking you *over*— like when he twisted his blades into your back not even a month ago, determined to put an end to your life.

And the worst part of it is that you'll never stop him from doing any of this, because how could you? And you know he won't ever stop himself, because how could he?

"Nikke…"

"I said be quiet."

This? It'll never stop, not until one of you is buried six feet in the ground. But that's a problem for the future— not now. No, right now, all you have to worry about is being quiet.

And that? That you can do.

[Deleted/Unfinished Scene] MC's First Transformation | Body Horror (18+)

Dec 3, 2021

There was previously going to be a scene in Chapter Four that would showcase the first time MC transformed-- however, it was instead replaced with something else. *So,* here's the unfinished transformation scene that otherwise would've been in Chapter Four. Keep in mind it is incomplete (thus why I didn't put a playable copy).

Some general notes-- The Table of Contents lists the sections word for word, so you can just command + F to skip around. Anywhere that has "???" is meant to be MC's name. Anywhere there is a * or (Choice:) is where a choice was made automatically. Demons + Phoenixes are classified as "Immortals," and Gorgons + Werewolves are classified as "Shifters."

Table of Contents:

- Intro
- Asking For Syfyn
- Asking For Mother + Phoenix Transformation
- Werewolf Transformation (Alone)

Intro

Instructor Baltrice holds the vial, [PHOENIX: its contents resembling lava more-so than blood.] [DEMON: Instructor Baltrice holds the vial, the blood within it a thick, viscous black.] [OTHER: Instructor Baltrice holds the vial, the blood within it a dark red.] She swirls it around once, *twice,* before looking down at you.

"It is time," she says.

You look around the small room you stand in, hidden away in the depths of some building in the barracks you didn't know existed. There is next to nothing in it-- some buckets-- one with water-- a bed, and a mirror, tucked away in a corner.

A shiver runs down your spine as you turn back to her. You thought... you thought you wouldn't be alone. You thought Mother would be here.

As if sensing the question, Baltrice's lips turn into a thin line as she shakes her head. "It's too dangerous."

You look up at Baltrice with helplessly wide eyes. "How bad will it hurt?"

Your voice cracks, and for once the hardened woman's eyes soften. She reaches a hand out towards you, as if to comfort, but her hand pauses midair as she looks away from you, brows furrowing.

"It will be worse than anything you have ever felt," she says. Her expression saddens. "But it will not be the worst you will ever feel."

You don't know why she looks so sad as she says that.

"What's... what's going to happen to me?"

"We humans are... *limited*... in how we perceive the world," she says. "You will learn to see this realm through the eyes of something built from magic-- something handcrafted by the gods."

At your confused expression, she licks her lips and tries again.

[PHOENIX: "You're going to change-- physically and mentally," she says, placing the vial in your hands. "You will learn a wiseness and patience that only the immortals among us have the time or making to learn." Your grip on the vial tightens. "You will learn to have emotions strong enough to fell kingdoms,

and you shall learn to keep them in check lest you destroy yourself and those you love. And you shall learn to live like this for the rest of your life."]

[DEMON: "You're going to change-- physically and mentally," she says, placing the vial in your hands. "You will learn a wiseness and patience that only the immortals among us have the time or making to learn." Your grip on the vial tightens. "You will learn to hear voices of the dead and corrupt-- to feel them fight to control you. And you shall learn to live with it, for they shall follow you for the rest of your life."]

[OTHER: "You're going to change-- physically and mentally," she says, placing the vial in your hands. "You will learn a strength and primitiveness-- a wildness-- that only the shifters of our world have ever known." Your grip on the vial tightens. "It will compel you to hurt things-- those you love and yourself. And you will learn to live with it, for it shall follow you for the rest of your life."]

For the rest of your life.

You've heard the screams before-- seen the doors shake on their hinges as soldiers went through this very same process, begging and crying for someone to help them. You look back at the vial-- at your own reflection on its glass surface.

[FINISH]

Asking For Syfyn

You look at the vial, heart hammering. There's only one person you want to be here with you-- one person who's already been with you for *everything*-- and you her. Slowly, you meet Baltrice's gaze.

"Can I see Syfyn first?" You ask. Before she can even react you continue-- "It'll be quick. I promise."

Baltrice's brows furrow, and you bite down on your tongue as you wait for the inevitable no.

Instead, you watch as she moves to the door and asks one of the guards in the hallway to fetch Javall. Baltrice peeks over her shoulder at you in a, 'don't tell anyone,' manner before you both wait, anxiety and giddiness filling you as you pace around the room.

You remember when Syfyn's wings grew in two years ago. You were the only one who tried to help-- the only one she'd *let* help. You sat behind her, hands bloodied, as you helped keep the open wounds on her back clean, picking out ingrown feathers and keeping her fever down as her body forced itself to adapt-- to *change.*

But Syfyn... Syfyn was *born* to change. Born to be a *mythsoi.* You? You were not.

A knock on the door.

Baltrice shouts out to come in, and slowly the heavy door creeks open-- a familiar blonde peering into the room. Her brows shoot up when she sees you.

You watch emotion after emotion flash over her face. Confusion as to why she's here-- confusion as to why *your* here-- and then confusion for the vial in your hand. And then it turns to shock. And then fear.

Immediately she enters the room, wings tucking behind her to squeeze in before she practically slams the door shut behind her, hinges rattling. She strides over to you so quickly that you might fear she'd tackle you if you didn't know better.

And then she seizes the vial from right out of your hands.

"Now?" She asks. "Why didn't you tell me?"

She looks up at you-- and the helpless look in your eyes is answer enough. *Because you didn't know.*

Rage wouldn't begin to describe the look on her face. You've never seen her like this before-- not unless you count when someone pushed her too far during training until her patience simply snapped like a twig.

For a moment you think she's going to shatter it right within her hands, but instead she turns to Baltrice. "What-- what is it?"

Baltrice only nods at you to explain.

You lick your lips though your mouth is just as dry. Your hesitance to speak has Syfyn going more tense by the second. "(beast) blood," you croak.

[SHIFTER: Syfyn's brows furrow as she looks back at the vial. "But that's... it's--"

"I would save your comments for later, Javall," Baltrice says. Syfyn's lips press shut, body going tense.]

[IMMORTAL: Her eyes widen. *"What?"* She turns to Baltrice again, feathers ruffled. "You can't make them take this--"

"They're the only one compatible with it," Baltrice says calmly. "It's the best fit. Anything else could be... [i]problematic."

"But--"

"I would save your comments for later, Javall," Baltrice warns. "For ${name}'s sake-- not yours." Syfyn's lips press shut at that, body going tense.]

Slowly, Syfyn goes to hand you back the vial, shoulders slumping in defeat.

"Hurry and say your goodbyes," Baltrice says. "The sooner we start, the sooner it'll be over."

You and Syfyn exchange a look-- and you see something spark in her eyes, something daring. "What do you mean?" Syfyn asks, glancing at Baltrice. She lets Baltrice part her lips to speak but cuts her off

before she can utter a single word. "I'm not leaving ."

"Javall, you of all people should know how *dangerous* this is--"

"??? was there for me."

"That was *different*," Baltrice stresses, taking a step closer. "You-- your temperament, your abilities, your *control*-- it was spaced out over years," she says. "Your body is designed to naturally go through the process. ???'s isn't. They'll be going through years of development in days."

Syfyn looks at Baltrice. Baltrice looks at Syfyn.

Neither one moves.

"They'll need someone to take care of them," Syfyn states. "If not me-- then who?"

Baltrice's silence is answer enough as Syfyn crosses her arms and plants her feet. She's not leaving.

(Choice: You can't complain. You want Syfyn to stay.)

Syfyn glances at you out of the corner of her eye as if to double-check-- and when she sees your hopeful look she nods as if to further affirm her decision.

Baltrice looks between the two of you, the fight in her expression fading by the second until her shoulders slump. "Fine," she mutters. She takes a step away from the two of you, only fully backing away once Syfyn places the vial back in your hand.

You hold the weight of your entire future in your hands.

Asking For Mother + Phoenix Transformation

"I want Mother--" Baltrice opens her mouth to argue-- "*please."*

"It's *too dangerous--"*

"Dangerous?" You ask, anger boiling up within you. "Or do you just think she's too busy for me?"

The way her expression hardens confirms your suspicions as you take a withering step away from her.

You shake your head. "You're wrong," you hiss. "She'll come." *

"???--"

"Ask!"

You shout the last word out with all the rage and fear that's in your body, and the volume of it has Baltrice flinching, nostrils flaring from anger. "You want to be disappointed?" she asks. *"Fine."*

She storms to the door, and you follow as she grabs one of the nearby soldiers, demanding him to go to the Queen. The color immediately drains from his face, but she shushes him before he can complain, crossing her arms to turn and look at you.

"This is going to happen *tonight,* ???," she says. You glare at her, gripping the vial so tightly it might break as you both wait in silence for the guard to return. Your heart hammers as you stare her down.

Mother will come. She *will*.

Five minutes pass: Baltrice watches the door-- peeks her head into the hallway-- but there is no sign of Mother nor the guard.

Ten minutes pass: Dread begins to fill your stomach as you look at the vial, studying yourself in the reflection of the mirror in the room.

Fifteen minutes pass: Baltrice watches you angrily, and you begin to wonder how much longer this can go.

A horrifying idea crawls into your mind and fills you with more dread than even the vial possibly could.

What... what if she *doesn't* come?

Thirty minutes: You sit on the floor, cross-legged and dejected, as Baltrice storms towards you, gripping you by the arm and forcing you to your feet.

"We've wasted enough time," she states, ripping the vial from your hands to open it.

"But the guard didn't come back--"

"Yes-- most likely because he interrupted an important meeting," Baltrice snips, going to uncork it with a dagger. The vial pops as she does so, the cork falling at your feet as she's sticks her hand out for you to take it back once more.

You eye it warily, heart pounding, and slowly, your trembling hand goes to take it.

One sip. One sip and your life changes forever, and your Mother couldn't even be bothered to be here.

Your hand pauses, fingers barely touching the glass, as you hear low voices outside the door. Baltrice shakes her hand angrily for you to take the vial-- but your eyes are glued to the door.

Please--

There is the sound of the lock opening, and with a groan, the door opens.

Behind it is a guard.

And behind him is Mother.

You immediately rush past Baltrice, abandoning the blood in favor of heading towards Mother as the door shuts behind her.

You tackle her in a hug that nearly knocks her off-balance as you bury your face into her shoulder, barely hearing the choked, "My Queen--" that Baltrice manages to squeak out. Mother smells of elderberries and wine, the fabric of her gown soft against your cheek as her arms wrap around you.

For one moment you can close your eyes and *breathe*, fingers clawing at the fabric of her dress as your hammering heart begins to slow. You don't know how long you stand there-- don't know how long you try to force the rest of the world away from you and pretend to be a child again-- but eventually Mother pulls away from you, pushing you away at arm's distance to look at you.

Her eyes scan your face, brows furrowed slightly as she brings a hand up to tuck your hair out of your face.

"Why did it take you so long?" You ask.

She doesn't answer you-- in fact, it's as if she didn't even hear the question as she lets her hands fall off your shoulders. You thought you were imagining it-- but day by day, week by week, she grows more distant. You don't know what you did to disappoint her. You don't know what you did to lose her love or her attention.

And yet here you stand, barely a few feet away from your Mother and feeling an ocean away.

(Choice: "Please don't make me do this.")

You already know the answer is no. But some deep, desperate part of you has a flicker of hope. *Yes.* Maybe she'll say yes.

"Please--"

She turns away before you've even asked the question.

Your heart sinks in your chest as you watch her walk away, taking the vial from Baltrice's hand who watches her just as cluelessly as you do. Every clack of Mother's heels makes your stomach churn until she stands in front of you once more, a hand on your back as she guides you to sit on the bed before sitting beside you.

A tear falls down your face as you stare at the vial. Another falls as you take it from her, staring down its contents.

"I can't do it," you whisper.

"Yes you can," Mother says. She says it with such fierceness that you're almost inclined to believe her. "You were trained for this moment," she says. "You were raised to be tough."

"Mother--"

She squeezes your shoulder. "You must do what others cannot, ???," she states. She's using that tone of voice she uses whenever she lectures you, and out of habit, you turn to fully face her. "It is not fair and it is not just-- but such is the duty of the strong."

No, it's not fair you think. And no, it is not just. The two statements shatter any hope you have left, and it is with a sudden shock of courage or perhaps utter foolishness that you lift the vial up to your lips and swallow.

It *burns.* Your tongue scalds, and you can feel your throat burn inch by inch as you swallow, innards churning. It doesn't cool down, no-- you can feel it sitting there in your stomach, setting flame to your innards and burning through organs.

Mother waves a hand at Baltrice as you collapse against her, forehead pressed against her shoulder. It burns, *it burns,* ***it burns.***

Baltrice moves the bucket of water in front of you-- and you keel over desperately, cupping handfuls of water and drinking greedily, the liquid spilling down your face and onto your clothes. But it's futile-- *useless*-- as steam billows from your mouth.

You feel like you're on fire, the heat filling your chest more and more as you slide off the bed and onto the ground, splashing the cold water onto your face. You're on fire-- ***you're on fire.***

A desperate cry leaves you-- hands gripping the sides of the bucket. You can feel your nails break and tear, talons ripping through your skin and digging into the wood of the bucket before you dunk your head into the water. The only thing you hear when you rise other than the sound of dripping water is that of the door slamming shut and locking-- and it is then that you realize you have been left alone-- completely and utterly alone-- to suffer through this.

For the first time in the sixteen years you've been alive, you fear for your life.

Werewolf Transformation (Alone)

The blood is cold and salty on your tongue, taste tinged with iron, and your eyes squeeze shut as the thickening, congealed substance slides down your throat, leaving a bitter aftertaste.

There is something inside of you.

It's a single sentence, a single thought, that comes to the forefront of your mind as you freeze, and suddenly the nausea doesn't seem bad in the slightest.

There is something inside of you and it needs to come out.

It is going to come out.

You have no say on if it comes out.
It's coming out.

You collapse on the bed, writhing this way and that as your skin glistens with sweat. You feel like you're going to be ripped open, and all you can think of-- all you can *see*-- is your body being broken and mangled. You can't even begin to fathom the pain that is in store for you-- pain that you have no choice but to feel.

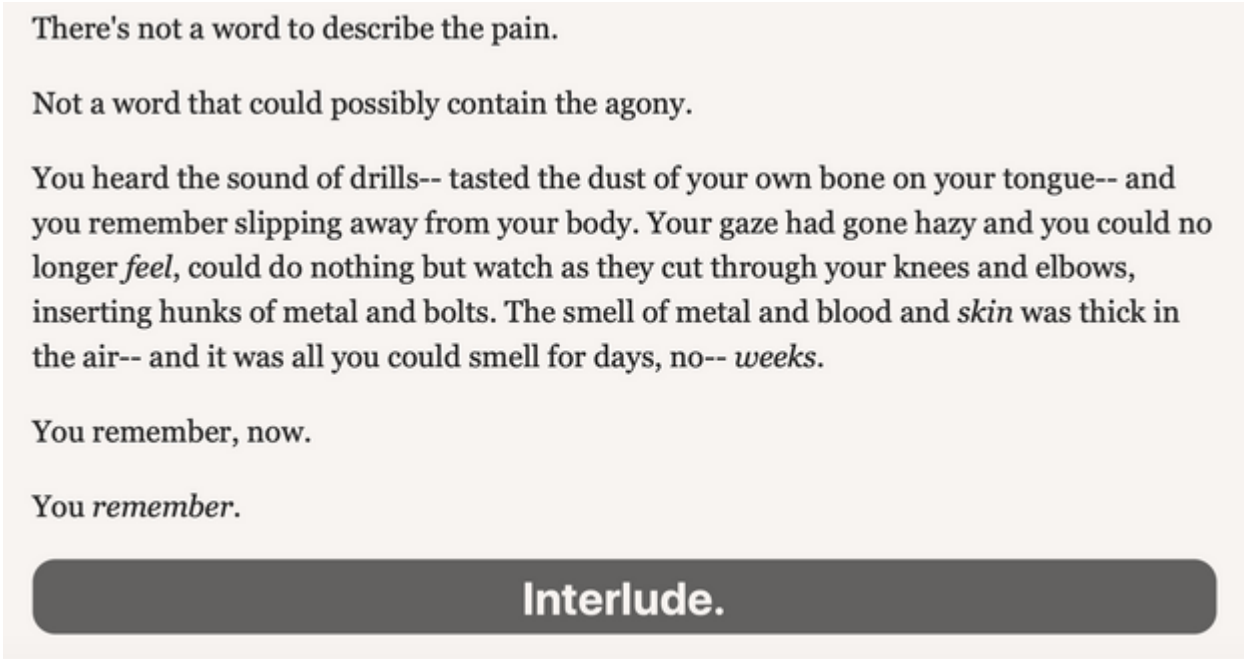
You are completely and utterly helpless.

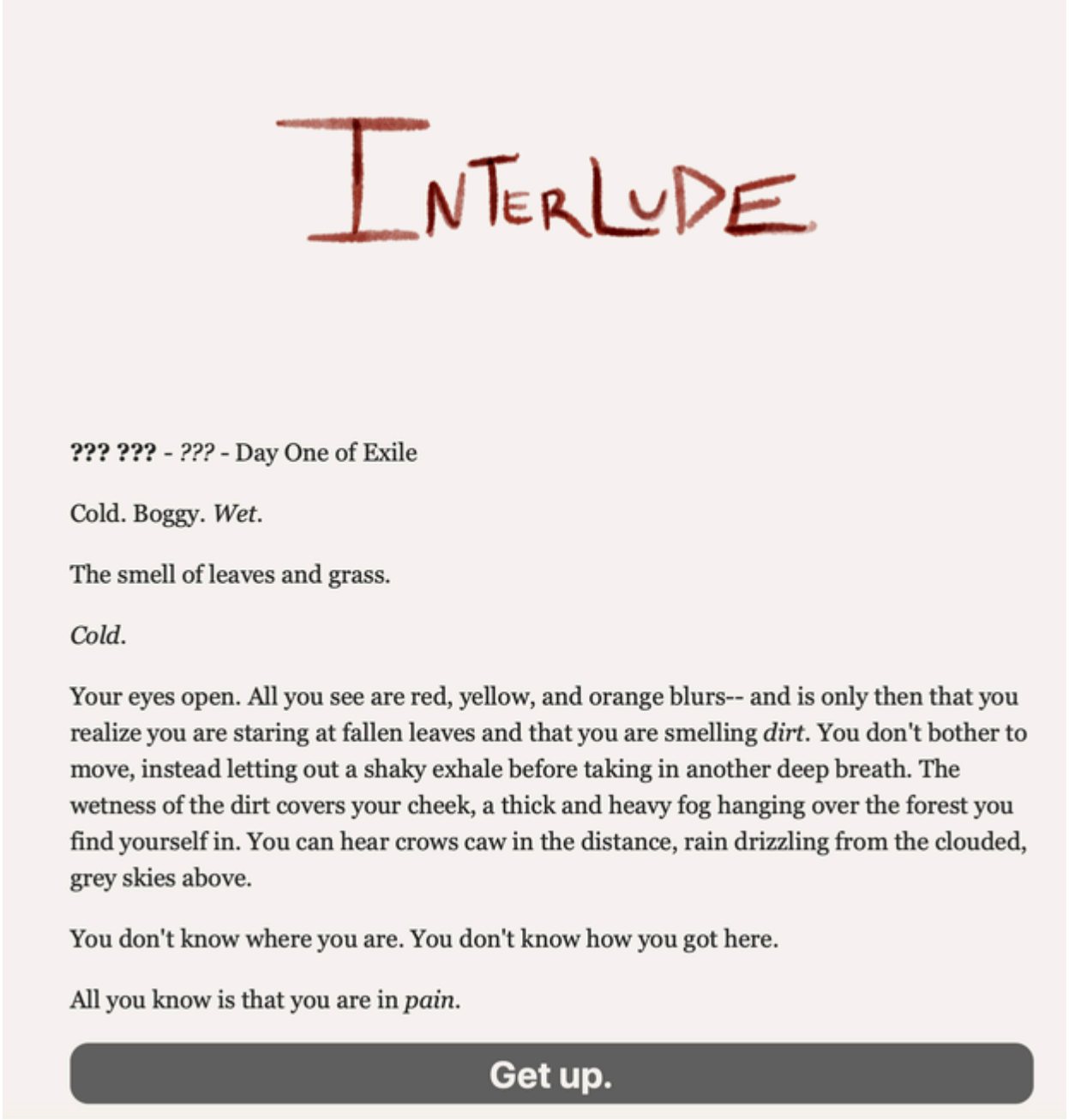
The nausea worsens by the second as cramps take over, stomach aching as you whine, kicking at sheets and pawing at your abdomen. It feels as if your organs are worms slithering around inside of you-- and you realize then, in horror, they're doing just that. You can feel them beneath your palm, moving and rearranging and *squirming.*

Worms, worms, worms, ***worms--***

They are inside you.

Get them out, *get them out,* ***GET THEM OUT.***





(TW: Body Horror + Gore) Interlude of Chapter Four

Nov 27, 2021

I mentioned on the tumblr deleing and rewriting a portion of the new chapter-- this here is the new, currently in progress scene. It wasn't planned, but as I was writing it finally came to me as a piece of The Commander's past that needed to be fully explored.

??? - *Dungeons of the Palace of Lapis*

Your eyes fly open, skin burning and covered in sweat. This place is too hot and too humid, leaving you writhing on the ground and attempting to resist the urge to peel your skin back and off your bones. Maybe then you'll be able to breathe easy--

"Could you *please* for the love of the gods shut the hell up?"

You freeze. You can barely remember the person being dragged in, but now that they've spoken your senses struggle to come to life once more, combatting the heavy dreariness that rests on your shoulders. You're stuck in a cloud of confusion, incapable of finding the source of the voice despite how you can feel their gaze on you.

"Wow-- you're dumb." A scoff intertwined with a laugh leaves them, and you recognize the voice finally. It's unfamiliar from when you first heard it. It's pained and weakened, but arrogant all the same.

Nikke.

You finally see him in the darkness of the hall. He's on the other side, three cells down. You can barely make him out from where he lazily lounges against the wall, sitting on the ground and flipping a dagger in his hands. You sit up slowly.

- (•) "You look like shit."
- ( ) "Were you watching me this entire time?"
- ( ) "How the hell are you so quiet?"
- ( ) "The second I'm out of these bars I'm going to kill you."
- ( ) Say nothing.

"Wow-- you look like shit."

You can see him pause, his knife coming to a halt between his fingers as he looks at you. Light reflects from his pupils in an eerie blue-green, and it's all you can truly make out of his features.

"You can't even see me."

"You don't know that."

"Oh yeah? How many fingers am I holding up?" You struggle to focus on his face, and it's then that you see his middle finger aimed at you when you do. "Got you to look," he chuckles, though it lacks any humor.

He goes back to flipping his dagger.

Your eyes go to the blade.

"How did you get that in here?" You ask.

He snorts. "My ass."

"Oh that's cool. I just brought a sandwich but in hindsight I probably should've shoved a weapon up there too."

He sighs at that, and you watch as he drags his hand down his face and sighs. "Fuck," he mutters.

"What?"

"You're funny and it's pissing me off."

"Sorry. If you want, I can tell a dad joke to even the playing field a little more--"

"Why do you even want to know about the dagger anyway?" He snips, interrupting you. You can't help but feel a bit of pride despite the situation at having gotten to annoy him. "Hoping that I'll break us out?"

Knife

Nov 16, 2021

If you follow my tumblr, chances are you witnessed the butt knife discussion. Behold! Witness the scene in which it was born. (This specific version of the scene is the Sarcastic one-- but all personality types will be blessed-- cursed?-- with Nikke's terrible humor).

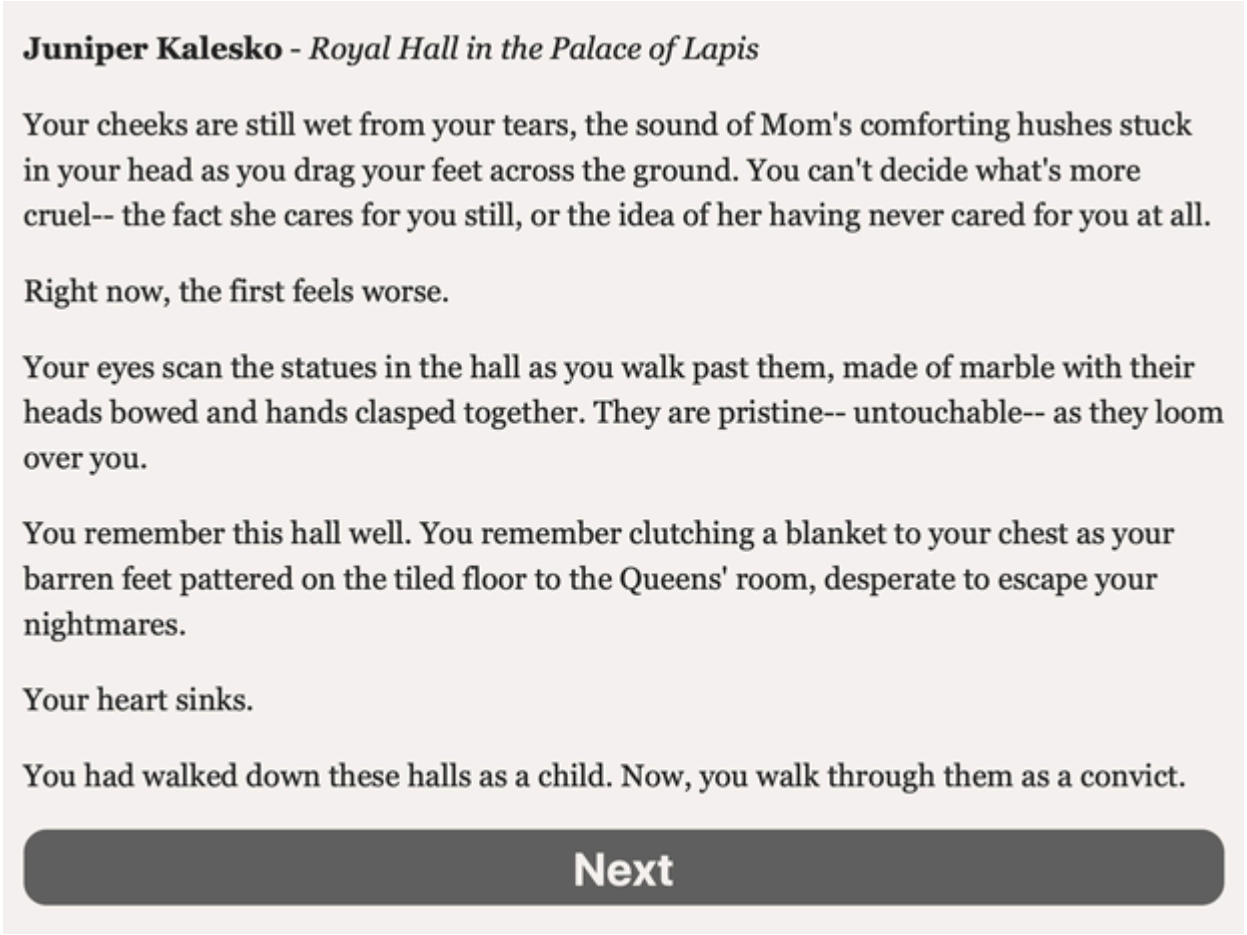
EA Trial Scene

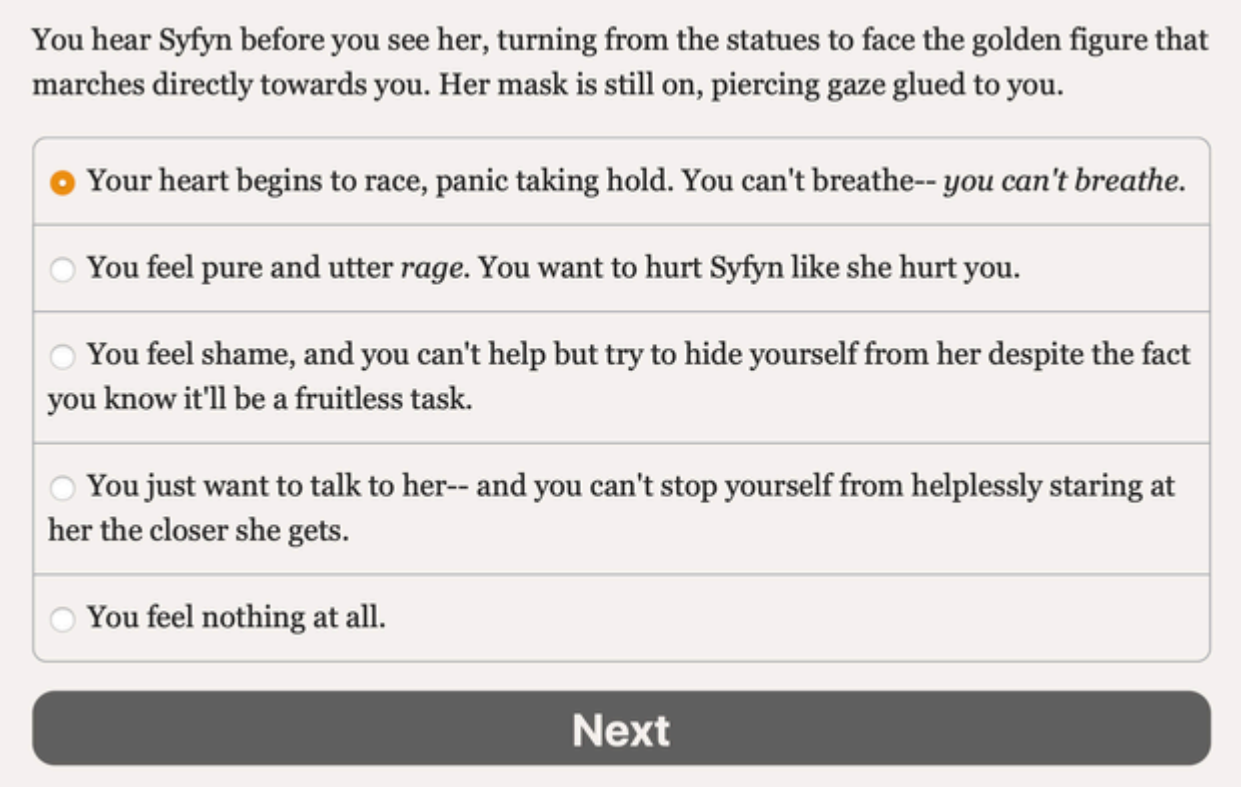
Nov 12, 2021

This scene is 16k words in total with an avg play length averaging out at about 5k words! This summarizes and covers the first trial MC went through after the incident along with the final conversation Sabir had with MC before their exile. This is on the shorter side when it comes to how long it is, but there's definitely a lot to be found with all the variation 👀

You can play it here!

Note: This scene is liable to change and edits before the final release of Chapter Four. There shouldn't be any bugs since it's been play tested and read through by alpha readers, but if you encountered a problem feel free to message me! :)





Part Three Opening | Chapter Four

Nov 8, 2021

True to the title, this is the opening page of the third and final part of Chapter Four!

"Three years ago, The White Wolf kneeled before me after an incident that left thirty soldiers dead and our two most valuable fighters and leaders in critical states," Marcelle says, hand gesturing over to Trystan and Syfyn.

You look over at them, heart stopping when you find Trystan already looking at you. Their gaze is sad-- and you find it hard to hold as you look past them. Syfyn flinches at the mention of the incident. It's so subtle you don't think anyone else would notice, but it seems even three years apart has done nothing to impede your ability to read Syfyn like an open book, face covered or not.

"And now, three years later," Marcelle continues, "they kneel before me again after returning to Plaithus after exile." The crowd begins to murmur amongst themselves, seemingly more curious than blood thirsty. "I'm sure you are all well and familiar with the punishment for such an action..." she trails off, and the word comes to mind automatically. *Death*. "But this is a unique situation."

Her gaze goes to Sabir then, entirely maskless and vulnerable beside you, and it is now that the crowd begins to rile up. Their whispers grow in intensity, seemingly echoing around you with rumors of he said she said.

"Our very own Silver Viper has betrayed the country--" the crowd's murmuring turns to speaking and then shouting, and you watch as the guards grab hold of Sabir's neck, forcing him to sit up straight. He grimaces, though the crowd is pleased.

You are surrounded by half-grinning, half-scowling, malicious, masked faces.

- (●) *"Get off of him."*
- ( ) Act out to put their anger on you, instead.
- ( ) Look at Marcelle.
- ( ) Do nothing and watch-- it's not like you can do anything to help that won't get you both in deeper trouble.
- ( ) Do nothing and watch-- he deserves it.

Next

Group Sentencing.

Nov 2, 2021

I'm wrapping up this scene as I post it, and I have to say-- this is the most emotionally tapped out I've been writing a scene... *ever*.

Betrothal. | Vethna Mevnrael + Javier Refta.

Oct 28, 2021

Tonight is a quiet night— a peaceful night. The kind that's filled with the dry, warm air that signals autumn and the sound of crickets chirping, a muffled ongoing choir to the stringed instruments that play within the dining hall, the musician's eyes downcast but expressions calm. By all accounts, this is an evening that is meant to be enjoyed— to uplift heavy hearts with the scent of apple cider and sweet, spiced mead.

But none of these things do anything to calm Vethna. Their heart hammers as their grip on the dagger in their hands tightens. They can see their face in the reflection of the gilded blade, the handle thrumming within their grasp, orange magic filling the hollowed jasper in its hilt and making it glow. The magic is intense, filled with the overwhelming need to consume and to destroy. It reminds Vethna of a brutal storm or tsunami— destroying everything in its path and leaving nothing behind.

It reminds Vethna of Javier.

They turn the blade over a few times before setting it down on the table, hand pressing down on it as if it might jump up if not restrained. "Whose idea was it?" Vethna croaks. They struggle to find the energy to wear a nonchalant mask at this moment, stomach sinking as their parents exchange a glance. It takes them a second too long to answer.

"It's the only way to guarantee your power," Father says.

That's not what they asked.

Vethna's eye twitches, and it takes everything in them to not stand and try to flip the table over.

For years they have been respected. For *years* they have been guaranteed the seat of Archmage in Vygrand. There was no question about it— Vethna was the most skilled sorcerer of their age, and by the time it came for them to battle their father and any other competitors they would undoubtedly come out on top.

"You don't think I can beat him," Vethna breathes. "You think he's stronger than me."

"We didn't say that," Mom says. Vethna lets out a scoff, throwing their head back to look up at the beams of the ceiling.

“It’s our safest bet, Vethna. Our family has remained in a position of power for years. If the Reftas were to beat us for the title, they could strip us of everything,” Father says. His voice is calm and stern as always, filled with a subtle judgment that rarely gives way to anything else.

“I could win,” Vethna says, looking at him. They know they sound desperate, and they know to beg is a mistake as his gaze hardens, riddled with an emotion akin to disgust as he scrutinizes them. “I *will* win. You can’t—” They stop there as his disgust turns to a challenge.

Say it, his glare says. *Question my authority.*

“I don’t *want* you to take this away from me,” Vethna whispers, looking down like a beaten dog.

“And yet I will,” Father says, rising to stand. He splays his hands on the desk, and Mom frowns as she watches him lean over the table towards Vethna, voice cold. “And you will do nothing, *say* nothing, about it, and you *will marry him.”*

Vethna’s face crumples, though their hair hides it, as they fiddle with the rings on their fingers. Their heart hammers in their chest, hands sweaty and eyes threatening to fill with tears. They peek up from between their fallen bangs at Mom, and though she frowns she says nothing. They do the same to Father, and though their pitiful expression makes his own severe one lessen somewhat, he does not take back his words. *You will marry him*.

Only beloved child or not, there is no getting out of this it seems. And, just like that, Vethna’s entire life is shattered. Twenty-one years of grueling work, of blood, sweat, and tears, all gone down the drain in a matter of minutes.

“You like him anyway,” Mom says with a shrug. Vethna thinks she might be trying to make them feel better… though all it does is make Vethna feel ashamed as they look away from her.

“Alright,” Vethna croaks. They grab the dagger off the table, glance at their parents as they rise to walk away only to immediately cringe at the eye contact, before shakily heading toward the stairs, ignoring the burning feeling of their parents’ eyes on them before they whisper to one another.

It’s funny. They always imagined their wedding. It would be big— extravagant— and they’d be the center of attention (naturally). Their heart always fluttered at the thought, cheeks flushing as they grinned stupidly in bed at night, imagining something ripped out of a romance novel. They would be so in love that it pained them, and though they could never fully picture the face of who stood beside them at the altar, welding the dagger that would cut into their skin in a sealment of fates, they knew their eyes to be filled with adoration.

And the proposal… they imagined a dinner of some sorts— a bouquet of red roses and red wine before being surprised with the dagger. *I am yours*. That is what would be promised to them that night.

They hold the dagger up beneath the candlelight as they ascend the stairs. This was most definitely not that kind of proposal.

“Vethna.” They freeze at the low voice, blood running cold. It comes from approximately the last person they want to see right now. “Did you— did they tell you?”

Javier rises from the chair he was sitting in beside the door to their bedroom, and Vethna can only look to the fireplace as they attempt to piece together a coherent thought.

“Tell me…?”

“The news.”

Vethna watches how the flames curl around one another in a dance of oranges and yellows, and it’s only after they feel tension form in the air that they decide to meet Javier’s gaze.

Something about his demeanor unsettles them tonight. Maybe it’s just the fact that they’re staring at their fiancé now— not just a friend.

“They did,” Vethna says. Both of their gazes flicker to the dagger in their hand.

“And…?”

“What do you mean, *‘and?’”* Vethna mocks. “I don’t have a choice in any of this.”

“I don’t either.”

It’s hypocritical, but the casualness of his tone punches Vethna in the gut. *He doesn’t want to marry you.* Vethna’s eyes narrow as they look at him. He shifts his weight beneath their stare. *He doesn’t want* ***you.***

“What’s wrong?” Javier takes a step toward them, and Vethna doesn’t have the energy to take a step back.

“Do you… even like me?” Vethna asks. They hate how pathetic they sound. They hate how pathetic they *are*. But the ground beneath them is giving out by the second, and they’re not entirely sure they can take another disappointment tonight.

Javier blinks— taken aback by the question— and if Vethna wasn’t already embarrassed they most certainly are now.

They hate that his response isn’t immediate.

“Vethna…” Another step closer— and this time Vethna manages a half-step back. But it’s too late now. He manages to snag their hand in his palms, callused and cool compared to their own. “Of course I do.” His voice softens. “How could I not?”

A hand grabs hold of Vethna’s chin and forces them to look up at him. “Look at yourself, Veth. You’re beautiful.”

Their hammering heart stops right then and there as a scoff leaves them, accompanied only by the rolling of their eyes as they take a step away from him.

“You didn’t like that?” Javier asks, genuine confusion in his voice as he watches them turn their back to him.

“Your standards are just low, is all,” Vethna mutters, looking at the dagger again. They twirl it nonchalantly between their fingers with practiced ease. “There’s a perfectly good portrait of me in the main hall if you’d like to go marry that instead.”

Javier’s quiet for a moment. “My standards are *you,* Veth.”

They frown at his words, holding the dagger up so they can see where he stands behind them before they glance over their shoulder. “You’ve liked me for a while, then?”

“You know I have.”

“And you couldn’t be bothered to propose to me yourself?”

He falters, brows knitting together. “That’s what has you upset?”

“No, but it sure does add to my sour mood,” Vethna sneers. They stop themself for a moment— barely manage to reel themself back in again as they take in a deep breath and pinch their nose. “I am losing *everything* by marrying you. Don’t you get that?”

“No, you’re not.” He shakes his head, grabs hold of both their hands now and squeezes. “You’d rule by my side. *We’d* rule. Together.”

“And suppose we have a disagreement on how things should be done?”

He pauses for barely a fraction of a second— but Vethna notices it all the same. “We’ll figure it out when we get there.”

He tugs them behind him before they can so much as part their lips to argue, leading them into their own room and moving them to stand in front of the mirror. “What are you…?” The question dies on their tongue as Javier undoes the orange sash around his waist before untying their own. They look to the side and swallow, desperate to ignore the flutter in their stomach at the abrupt contact before Javier ties his own sash around their waist.

“There,” he says, voice satisfied. His hands don’t leave their waist when he finishes, and for a moment they both just look at their reflection. It feels like a piece of them is missing without the familiar green fabric, the bright orange of the Refta colors a stark contrast to the dark gown they wear.

They always imagined it would be someone wearing *their* family colors… not the other way around. It’s a confusing sight, one that leaves them feeling lost and only adding to the strange sense of dread and

guilt that's been building up in them all night. But they can't deny the giddiness within them at Javier's proximity— can't ignore how addicting his cologne is or how electrifying his presence alone is. He leans in closer, his braid hitting their back and breath warm against their neck.

"We'll own this country, Vethna," he murmurs, voice rumbling as he pulls them closer against his chest, squeezing their hip. "And once we do that… we'll own the entire continent, too."

They ignore his words, closing their eyes and simply focusing on the way he makes them feel, instead. It's what everyone does to them, anyhow.

"Alright," Vethna murmurs.

Alright.

Parade. | Syfyn Javall. | POV Switch.

Oct 25, 2021

The night Syfyn Javall received the letter of The Commander's return she went to the bathroom, looked at her reflection, and shattered the glass with her bare fist. The shards had embedded themselves in her knuckles, and she had flexed and unflexed her fingers just to watch the blood that spilled from the wounds, the pain doing nothing to quell the thrumming adrenaline that rushed through her blood.

She punched it over and over and *over* again until the flesh of her knuckles was gone, panting as she hunched over the sink, an odd gurgling noise leaving her as she bit back sobs and whines. The porcelain threatened to shatter in her grasp, so she had taken to pacing her room, hands in her hair as she progressively pulled the blonde strands out.

There are not many things Syfyn willingly runs away from. She is accustomed to pain. She is accustomed to ripping her body apart over and over again as her Queen demands. She is accustomed to carrying out murder in the name of glory despite the way it has left her crippled and vomiting late into the night.

But the memory of The Commander is something that strikes fear into her heart like nothing other.

And she will never, *ever,* stop running away from them.

She locks every memory of them she has behind iron bars, encasing them in shackles and throwing away the key. She refuses to remember them, head bowed as she passes their mural on the wall. No

one dares to utter their name in her presence. As far as anyone's concerned, The Commander is dead to her— more than they are to everyone else.

To everyone but him. *Sabir.*

She can't even begin to count the amount of fights they've had the past few years. He reads her like an open book no matter how stoic she remains.

"You cannot keep running," he says, when he is sympathetic. "You are a coward," when he is not. He blames her— she knows this much. He hates her. She knows that, too. But no one hates her as much as she hates herself— no one except for...

The Commander.

…do they want her dead?

Of course they do. How could they not? But maybe... maybe she can at least give them that, even though they won't be here to see it. It's not like she hasn't already considered it—not like she hasn't tucked her wings into her body midflight just to let herself fall.

Each time she does it she comes closer to the ground before trying to catch herself. And soon… well soon, there won't be any time left at all between the time she opens her wings and the time she would otherwise hit the ground.

She thinks about doing it now as the rigid wind curls its fingers into her scalp and feathers, chills running down her spine as she looks down at Melhrost below her…

She dislodges the thought with a violent shake of the head: she has her orders, not that she can say whether she likes them or not. She refuses to put any more thought into them than absolutely necessary. *Autopilot:* she goes into autopilot because it is the only thing that keeps her from shattering completely. So long as she keeps moving, so long as she keeps going forward, she'll get out of the storm. At least, that's what they always told her.

Maybe that's why everything happens in flashes. Wind, sky, and the cold— *darkness*. The sounds of a crowd, the force of her wings curling back in on themselves as she lands— *darkness.* Wide eyes— green and glowing and another *familiar*— ***darkness.*** She's only faintly aware of the fact she's raising her foot before she's already slamming it down. The crunch of shattering ribs doesn't register in her head, nor does the feeling of cold blood on her hands before she's moving again.

Her body feels heavy, old, and tired. That's all she really notices as she approaches them, hand grabbing hold of their throat and forcing them to kneel on the ground before her. Her joints ache and her lungs shudder, and she feels more machine than human.

But for one, split second she is organic once more as The Commander gasps within her grasp.

"Please just say something," they whisper, trembling hand wrapping around her wrist. She nearly flinches at the contact. "*Please."*

They don't know it— can't see behind the mask— but her lips do part to speak. And then they close again as she bites down on her lip hard enough to draw blood, brows furrowing and heart racing.

How could she possibly find just one thing to say to them?

I hate you. ***I love you.*** *How dare you put me in this position.* ***I am so sorry for what's about to happen.*** *I don't know if I can do this.* ***I want to do this.***

It's too much all at once, and as she raises her boot for the second time that night, she decides that she'd much rather stay part machine than ever return to being human again.

Crack.

The crowd cheers.

Comic Vote

Oct 16, 2021

For the short story this month, I released a photo of a comic I'm working on. This comic has, as per usual, gotten much longer than intended. I currently have the base done for five pages, which I believe I can line and color before the end of the month.

There's a few options here.

OPTION A: I post-pone the comic and instead write the same storyline out as a text-only story for this month (so it'll still be about Javier and Vethna). I will *then* release and post the complete, finished comic whenever I manage to complete it. NOTE: Whatever month the comic is finished in, there will most likely *not* be another short story released for that month.

OPTION B: I release the first part of the comic (five pages) for this month, and release the second half of the comic whenever it is completed. Just like with Option A, in the month that the second half of the comic is released, there will most likely not be another short story released for that month.

OPTION C: I'll write the whole story in text and use what I have of the comic as visual aid to the story-- so in short, a regular short story but it has images to go with the text.

OPTION D: I post-pone the comic and write a different, text-only short story for this month. I will then later post the completed, finished comic whenever I complete it. To be clear-- this does not mean that there will be two short-stories this month (one comic and one text), it means that for this month it will be a text story and possibly next month (or after that) will be the comic.

I'll leave it up to you guys! Hopefully all the options make sense. If you have questions feel free to leave a comment below! <3

Release it as a text-only story and post the finished comic when it's completed (whenever that may be).

Release the first half of the comic and the second half when it's finished.

Write the story with the first half of the comic used as a visual aid.

Write a different text-only story for this month and post the finished comic when it's completed (once again-- whenever that may be).

51 votes total

Codex Entry: Vrithka

Oct 12, 2021

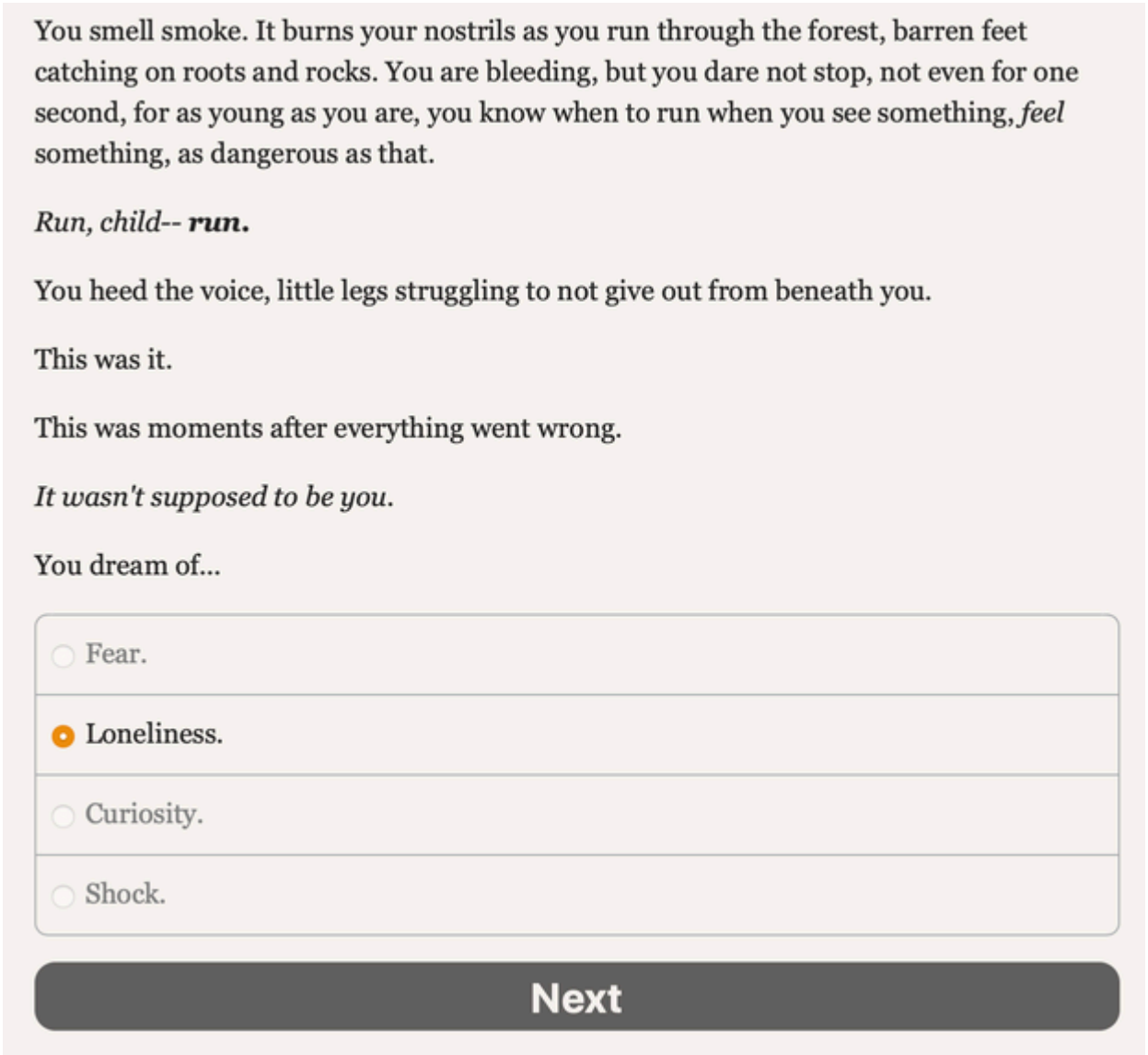
Not much is known about Vrithka— though, unlike Vygrand— this largely has to do with geography than it does purposeful reclusion. It is located at the very bottom of the continent of Nevara, just past Vygrand in the south on its very own island. It is, as far as anyone is aware, the last place where *mythosi* can truly flourish within the New World, though even this is changing with mage-hunters pushing in-land to hunt them down and reclaim the territory.

Because of this, Vrithka is largely referred to as being "The Home of the Mage-Hunters," and it's true— all books of their history come right back to the island. Some basic research reveals that Vrithka often hires itself out to Vygrand to hunt down rogue sorcerers and mages. This is, politically, what keeps Vygrand from slaughtering Vrithkans and taking them as slaves as they have with so many other civilizations and cities. However— not much is known outside of this.

With this information, it's safe to assume Vrithkans are made, not born. No one willingly chooses to raise their children in such a dangerous and lawless place. Those who *are* misfortunate enough to be born there often spend their entire lives trying to get out— to have some semblance of a normal life that isn't locked in civil war with *mythosi* or filled with the constant fear of being overtaken by Vygrand.

Vrithka is humid and hot year-round and the entire island consists of jungle and swamps, making it *incredibly* difficult to navigate. Everything on Vrithka is dangerous, from the people to the beasts and very fauna that make up said jungles, often-times filled with poison-ivy and venomous plants that only local wildlife and *mythosi* have adapted to.

It doesn't help that the island itself is difficult to get to. It's impossible to peacefully get there through the north by cutting through Nevara thanks to Vygrand's proximity, and even if one *was* to sneak through undetected, they would then need to navigate past the fae-wilds. This forces one to sail all the way *around* Nevara in order to reach Vrithka, which in itself doesn't sound problematic so much as it does tedious until taking into account the *mythosi* infested waters, which include but are not limited to mermaids and sea serpents. On a good day, it's easy enough to avoid them. Unfortunately, Vrithka doesn't have good days— only storm and rain-filled ones.



You don't know how you managed to survive long enough to make it to Plaithus-- it seemed that everything just played out... *perfectly*. When you were hungry you would stumble across berries, when you were tired you'd stumble across a cave, and when you were dirty you'd find a lake.

You also don't know how you knew to head to the city-- or how you knew where it was. But eventually your raw feet met the cobbled streets.

You were yelled at and chased away just like all urchins are. You were forced to scrounge for food in trash bins. People spit at you-- throw things. Occasionally nice people-- usually servants or lower class-- take the time to stop and offer you bread.

Some of them even offer to take you in.

For some reason, no matter how badly you wish to say *yes*, you always say no.

You live in alleyways for years.

You dream of...

- ○ Fear.
- ○ Loneliness.
- ◉ Curiosity.
- ○ Shock.

Next

Sometimes things stuck out to you-- *called to you.* They would beckon you hither and whisper secrets only you could hear, though their words were often jumbled and incomprehensible.

For one reason or another, the dove is one of those things.

It stares at you, tilting its head this way and that, its white feathers gleaming in the sun. You reach out for it, and instead of flying away it hops just out of reach. You stand to try again, and it does the same thing. When you run for it, it flies-- but only a few feet away.

Follow, it says.

So you do.

You dream of...

- ○ Fear.
- ○ Loneliness.
- ○ Curiosity.
- ◉ Shock.

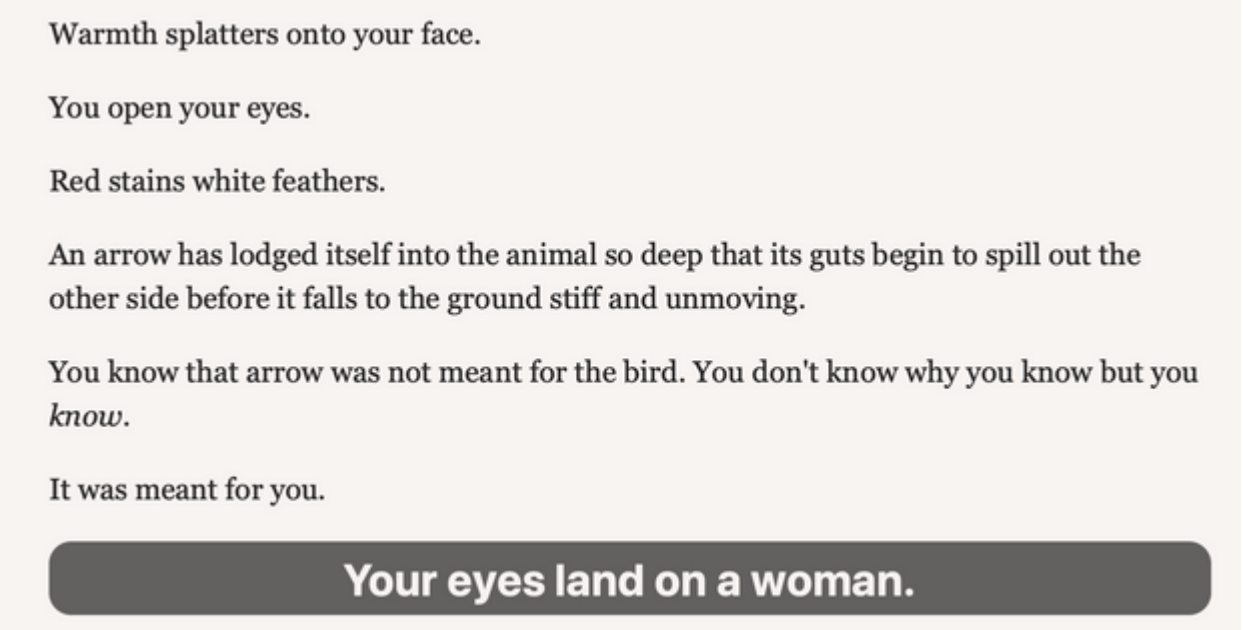
Next

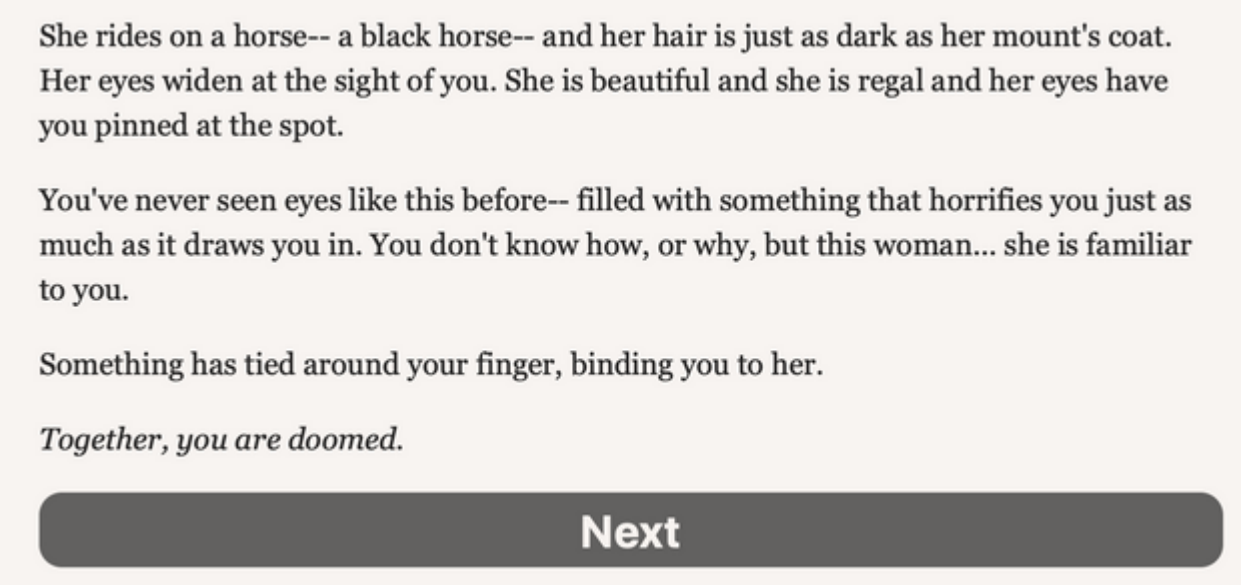
You follow the dove out of the city, laughing despite the dirty looks you receive when you bump into people. You follow it right out the gates, ignoring the guards who try to catch your attention by yelling out, 'child!'

You follow the dove into the woods once more, through thorns and bush, and through a large overgrown hedge by slipping through the tiniest crack in the leaves.

You follow it and you follow it, you follow it until it stops to rest on a low tree branch, and when you reach your hand out for it this time it clambers on, watching you curiously.

Whoosh.





Meeting Marcelle.

Oct 10, 2021

Throughout Chapter Four you'll get to see the story of how MC met the Royal Family... this just so happens to be the beginning of how MC meets Marcelle. 👀

And no... Marcelle was *not* the one who shot the arrow (surprisingly enough).

JAVIER?
VETHUR

Just marry him.

(WIP) Betrothed.

Oct 9, 2021

Working on this month's short story being told in a *different* format than usual...

Until now, you and Sabir have only seen one another in the court as he argued for your life: for your freedom. You can't help but wonder why they finally let him in now. They said it was so he could say goodbye. You think it's just to rub your failure in both of your faces.

He paces outside your cell, pulling at his own hair in frustration.

"They can't do this," Sabir utters. "They can't-- not to you."

He looks at you then, and you are taken aback by the look in his eyes. It's too much at once-- fear, anger, *longing*.

"???..."

He says your name far too softly.

- ○ "Please don't," you croak. You squeeze your eyes shut and swallow. "Not now."
- ◉ "I know."
- ○ Let him finish.

Next

"Let me guess-- you are utterly in love me, body and soul, because of my charming personality and devastatingly good looks?"

Sabir approaches you as you speak, a crooked and struggling smile on his face as he kneels down to be level with you from where you sit on the floor of the cell. "You got me," he says, grinning. His air of confidence fades quickly as he looks off to the side, however, biting on his lip.

"Can't help but wonder if such a charming and devastatingly good looking person could ever feel the same way for someone like me."

His voice is low-- solemn-- and it doesn't take much to know why.

It's too late.

- ○ Grab his hand through the bars. "They do."
- ○ "Of course I do."
- ◉ You don't deserve him. It doesn't matter if you want him or not-- he's not yours to have.
- ○ "Sabir, I'm sorry--"

Next

For a moment you say nothing and simply *look* at him. His gaze is filled with longing, and you almost hate how kind his eyes are. You do not deserve this. You do not deserve his kindness. Your self-resentment must show, since he frowns, lowering himself to sit, too.

"What is it?" He asks. His voice is too gentle-- too caring.

- ◉ "I don't deserve you."
- ○ *Lie.* "I don't care about you like that."
- ○ *Tell the truth.* "I don't care about you like that."
- ○ *Push him away.* "It's your fault I'm in here," you sneer.

Next

"Sabir, I... I don't deserve you."

His confusion is evident in his voice. "What? What are you talking about?"

"Sabir, *look at me."* You gesture to yourself, and from the way his shoulders slump you know he understands what you're referring to. "I'm a killer. *An exile."*

The way he's watching you is the same way he watches other politicians in the court.

"No." He states it so simply-- as if he could not possibly have more confidence in this one word. "That's not what it is."

"What?"

"You've *always* pushed me away--"

"Because it wasn't right!"

You immediately cringe when you raise your voice, heart hammering and fearful that one wrong move might make it happen all over again-- *oh gods it can't-- it can't happen again, not again,* ***not again--***

"How wasn't it right?" Sabir asks. He sounds desperate.

"You were my *charge*, Sabir."

"We could've kept it secret," he says. "I could've protected you."

- (•) You scoff. "Like how you protected me during the trials?"
- ( ) "It was supposed to be my job to protect you," you sigh. "Not the other way around."
- ( ) "No, Sabir." You let out a bitter laugh. "No, we couldn't have."

Next

"No, Sabir." You can't help but let out a bitter laugh. "No, we couldn't have. I mean, what would we have done? Held hands in secret and kissed behind curtains?"

"Yes-- *yes!"* He sits up straighter and grabs hold of the bars. "That's exactly what we would've done!" He sounds equal parts disbelieving and upset-- as if he can't fathom why this idea seems like such a distant reality to you. "That's exactly what we would've done," he repeats. His face is only inches from yours, but the bars make it seem distant-- muddled-- hard to read.

"Sabir..."

"I would've brought you roses and sent you secret letters under the guise of being from multiple suitors just to see the look on Marcelle's face. And I would've made excuses for us to leave the city just so we could be alone together. I would've--"

"Sabir!"

He freezes, mouth still open and tongue still pressed against the roof of his mouth.

You fight the heaviness in your chest-- ignore the way your jaw begins to ache as sadness takes hold. "It's over, okay? It's too late."

The words hang heavy in the air, and both of you are helpless to do anything about it. Because as much as you want it to just be angry words-- as much as you wish you just said them to try and win this argument-- you know they're true.

And so does he.

"Fine." His voice is monotone-- unreadable-- and you can't help but get the sinking feeling that you were just shut out.

Sabir's Confession.

Sep 29, 2021

Since content has been a bit scare for the second half of the month, I thought I would share an extra long excerpt to make up for it!

This scene takes place with a sarcastic!MC who was in denial about their feelings for Sabir in Chapter 2 and takes place *pre-exile*, right after MC has officially been sentenced as guilty. As you can see by all the options I did *not* pick... there's a lot of variability. Most of Chapter Four's one-on-one character conversations look like this.

Jealousy. | Jost Ivante.

Sep 29, 2021

Lightning. Darkness. Cold. Wet. Thunder. ***Boom.***

The rain washes away the blood trail that Jost leaves behind climbing up the sides of buildings, broken ribs tearing open her guts and lungs. She coughs up blood-- can't seem to get a full breath in-- but she keeps going, because she can't afford not to.

Nikke. Dead? No. Maybe. ***No.***

She winces, and the pained gasp that leaves her when she keels over is muffled out by another blast of thunder. *Boom.*

The world seems to shake as her knees meet the rooftop, body collapsing. Blood fills her mouth. She spits. It fills again. She spits some more. She chokes-- rolls over.

She's never been in this much pain in her life except...

Lightning. Darkness. Heat. Humidity. Thunder. ***Boom.***

Father said to stick to the instructions he gave-- to stay on the path and not to try and bite off more than they can chew. The Taipans aren't to be messed with, he says. Slow and steady wins the race when it comes to impressing them, not childish, brash decisions.

But to hell with that.

"I've got the creeps," Nikke mutters from beside her, holding up his hand to watch water droplets drip from his fingertips as they walk deeper into the forest.

"Don't tell me you're wimping out on me," Jost teases. He elbows her sharply, only giving her a glare when she laughs. And then his eyes widen.

It happens in the span of a second.

Something leaps out from the darkness of the rainforest, and Jost can only see an open mouth filled with sharp teeth before the beast is on top of her, fangs embedded into the flesh of her arm as she tries to keep its snapping maw away from her face.

"Nikke!"

She screams his name, and just like always, he's there.

"Fuck," Jost mutters. She wipes a hand over her face, squeezes her eyes shut as if that can fight off the sinking feeling in her chest that has her feeling like she might just vomit.

He never hesitates-- Nikke. Never stops to worry about himself. She screamed for him as The Commander had her in their grasp, their snarling mouth inches from her face as their claws dug into her skin, and, just like always, Nikke was there to put his life on the line to save her.

And you left him.

She forces herself to sit up, bites back her cries of pain as her body rips itself apart further and *further*, to look back at the lights of the parade in the distance.

She's almost positive they'll kill him, and if not that, torture him until he breaks. But that's the thing, isn't it? He won't.

Her hands are shaking as she opens up her bag, takes out the box that they've been so desperate to protect these past few months. It's still locked tight, the circular glass cutout emitting a soft, cream-green light. It's warm to the touch despite how cold it is as the wind blows on her wet skin, and a choked sob escapes Jost as she curls in on herself, holding the box to her chest.

It pulses like a heartbeat.

She knows what he would say if he were here. *Don't go back. Keep going. I've got it handled.*

"What did you do, Jost?" Father takes a step closer, rage painted on his features as he bares his fangs at her. She stumbles over her own feet, body falling back and against the wall. "All you had to do was follow directions."

There is regret in his voice despite the fact he has not yet done anything.

"It was my fault," Nikke says. Both Jost and Father are surprised at the sound of his voice, and she watches as Father turns to look at him standing in the doorway, his long hair sticking to his face from the rain. "I told her I knew a shortcut."

Jost stares at him, and she feels something dark grow within her at the sight of him. Anger? Annoyance?

"Jost, find your mother. Nikke... get in here."

She can't argue-- not when she's caught between the stubbornness and will of her father and brother-- so instead she does what he says, casting one wayward glance at Nikke before the door is slammed shut on her.

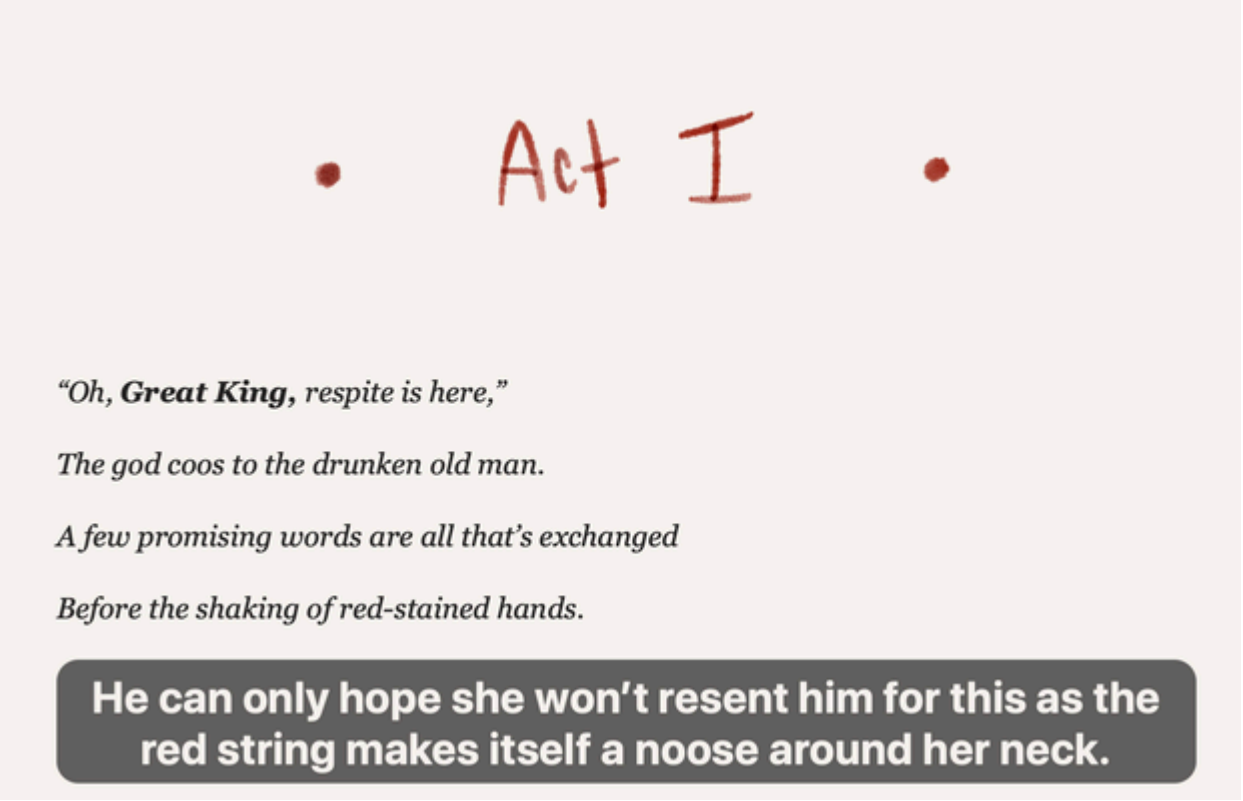
She pretends to not hear the yelling and breaking of glass. This, this she is not envious of.

She also pretends to not notice them as they pass a bottle of whiskey back and forth from where they sit on the roof not even a few hours later, talking and laughing in hushed voices despite the bruises that sit on their faces. This... this she is envious of, because as Nikke coughs and sputters on a particularly daring gulp Father chuckles and squeezes his shoulder with fondness in his eyes.

Because with him... with him it's all or nothing. You either bear the brunt of his rage to receive his love or receive nothing at all. And Nikke... Nikke got it all.

Finally, she understands this sinking feeling in her chest, and it is not guilt.

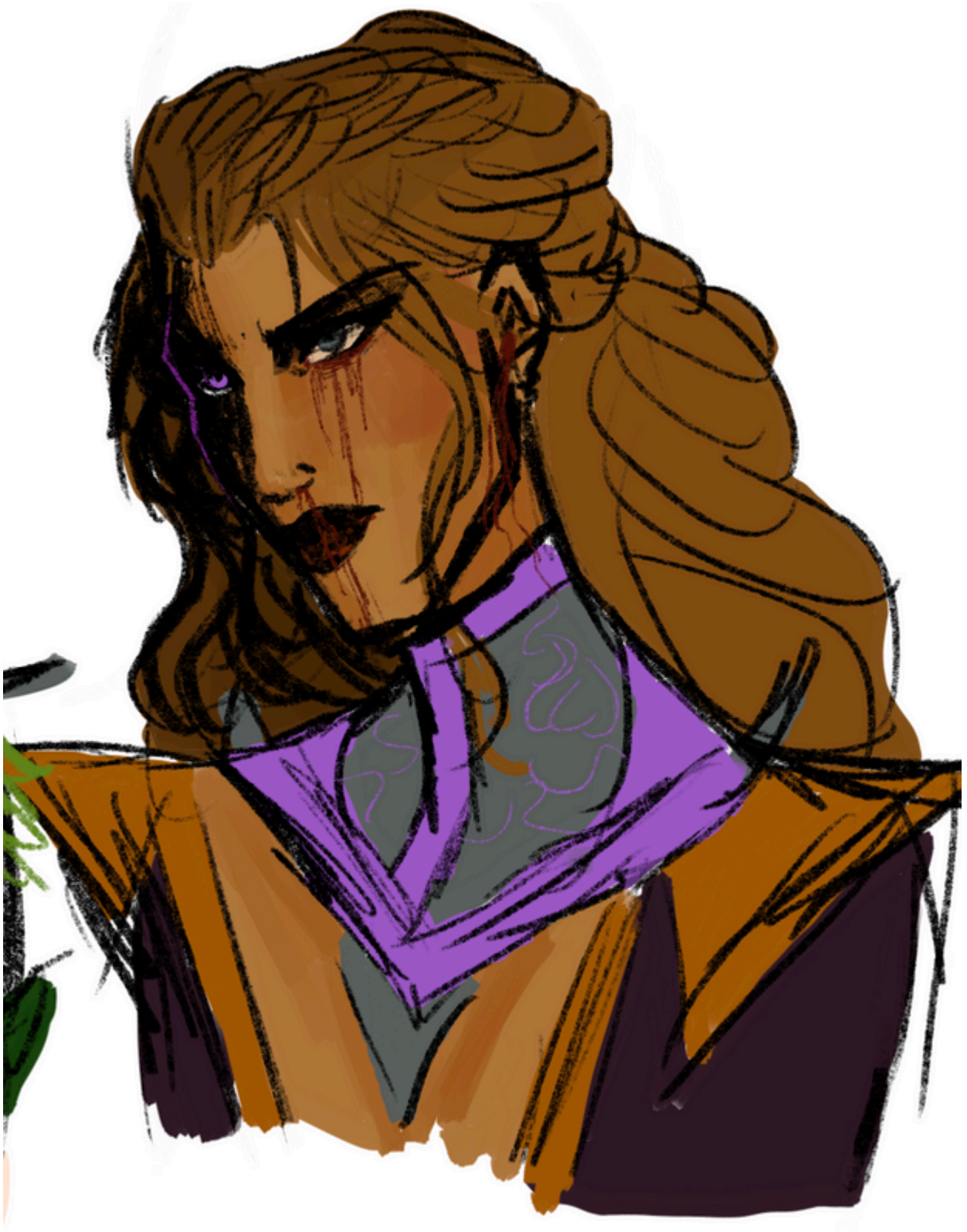
It is resentment. And when she squeezes the box a little tighter and mutters a promised, "I'll keep going, Nik," she fears it might even be happiness.



Act I

Sep 18, 2021

Act One likely won't start until *after* Chapter Five, but I thought I would share this anyway...



Outsiders.

Sep 10, 2021

Absolutely *no one* gets out of Chapter 4 scot-free... especially not our southern companions.

A small grunt leaves you as you strain to reach over your shoulder, fingers brushing against the back of your shirt. You push against the fabric.

It is a gamble on whether you touch a nerve or not-- extreme pain or no sense of touch at all.

You are lucky enough for it to be the latter.

Indents run along your entire back-- from where the wings used to be and all around your ribs to your stomach. The muscle had been cut off from you like you were a cow butchered for steak, thrown to the side and discarded with bone, sinew, tendons and feather. Your sense of balance has never been right since your wings have been stolen from you-- and lying on your back and simply wearing *clothes* has left you in a near debilitating pain-- a pain that you've long ago grown used to.

You remember crying yourself to sleep from the agony just *wishing* for it go away, but now? Now you're not quite sure what you would do if it did. You would be lonely, you think. Left without any kind of company for the first time in your life.

And the real kicker?

You can't even remember how you lost them.

You know it must've been some sort of surgery, of course. With their sawbones and sutures they took your wings. Your *freedom*. This much you know-- but the actual event? The *feelings?* Your mind has blocked it out from your memory.

Some sensations are so heinous that not even someone like you should remember them.

But still-- ever since that day a piece of you has been missing. A piece of you that was injected into to you as a child at the age of sixteen through the vial of blood that you drank--

Remember.

Wings.

Sep 9, 2021

You slide your good hand further beneath your chest before sucking in a burning deep breath through your mouth. *Push, push, push*-- a grunt leaves you but you manage to do it, shaking like a trembling leaf with each inch you manage to rise from the ground. It is a pathetic display of defiance as you manage to squeeze your knees beneath you, heaving, dog-like pants leaving you as you kneel on the ground on three limbs.

Up, up, up.

You cannot catch your breath no matter how hard you try, and your body is on *fire*-- or is it encased in ice? You cannot tell up from down but what you *do* know is that *you must rise*.

So you do, though your legs threaten to buckle at any moment and you cannot feel your feet and you cannot breathe nor can you see.

- (●) So you scream. You scream until your throat is raw and you are spitting up blood.
- ( ) So you sob. You sob until you spit up and vomit.
- ( ) So you rage. You rage until you break everything in this cell, and when there is nothing left to break, you will break yourself.
- ( ) So you laugh. You laugh because your misery is the only thing that brings joy to this wretched kingdom, is it not?
- ( ) So you give up. You give up because you cannot possibly live like this for one second longer.

Next

Snap.

Aug 21, 2021

It is safe to say The Commander is *not* doing well in Chapter 4.

Red. | Vethna Mevnrael + Javier Refta.

Aug 15, 2021

Authors Note: Contains power imbalance + an unhealthy relationship.

Red. A signature color of Vygrand*—* a symbol of power, passion, love, and death. It is all-encompassing just like the very element it represents: blood.

And Vethna doesn't think they've ever seen so much blood in their entire life. It's sickening and *rotten,* the smell enough to have them biting back a gag, hand flying up to cover their mouth. Javier eyes them from the side, lips pulling down into a frown.

"Really?" He mutters.

"It's disgusting," they reply between their fingers, eyes squeezing shut before they turn to the side. The fumes are dizzying, and that's not accounting for the countless corpses strung across the floor like discarded toys. To the left a corpse, to the right a still twitching hand, in front of them a vat filled to the brim with *red* and mucus and countless other things. The only safe place to look is the ceiling*—* so upwards they gaze, eyes focusing on the faintly glowing constellations painted on the ceiling and the moon that hangs above the skylight.

"You said you wanted to know how it was done."

"I did. *I do."*

Javier scoffs at their answer before reaching out to grab them by the arm, his other hand grabbing their chin and forcing them to look at him. They swallow down their disgust, hands grabbing hold of the fabric of his robe and focusing on the faint flickers of orange in his dark eyes. His expression, severe, softens then, his thumb gently tracing the lines of their jaw. Something about it has them feeling weak, and not in a good way.

Lesser than. It makes them feel lesser than.

"You can't handle this, Veth. It's alright."

Their lips part to speak, to argue, but they can't find the right words to say. Maybe he's right. Maybe they can't handle this, and maybe he's right to be looking at them like they're lesser than, because maybe they *are.* Their brows furrow, and when they try to look to the side, to glimpse the gore once more, Javier forces them to stare at him again.

So they let their head drop, and they allow him to press a kiss against their temple, and they allow the smell of his cologne to drown out the scent of rotting bodies and death, and it is as he pulls them closer in a near stifling embrace that they peer over his shoulder at the countless bodies strewn across the floor. A gorgon, a werewolf, a chimera, a basilisk*—* *mythosi*, all of them*—* and since *when the hell* did The South have *mythosi?* Fae surround the wilds*—* and perhaps a rogue werewolf pack passes through from time to time*—* but enough for *this?*

Their nails dig into Javier's back, and they don't know whether it's from fear or because they *want* to hurt him. A piece of them is desperate to withdraw, to use their nails as if they're claws and cut across his face, or punch him, or slap him, or just do *something* to show that they're not some weak, complacent, pretty little thing*—* but that would be a lie, wouldn't it?

Because if they're not a complacent, pretty little thing, well, then they're not quite sure *what* they are. The future Archmage of Vygrand would've been an alternative answer, once upon a time, but even that's been stolen from them, signed away and promised to Javier along with their body and future. And if that's the case, then all that leaves for them to be is *Javier's.*

Resentment boils within them as his hand settles on the small of their back, leading them out of the room, but what's new? Resentment, bitterness, disgust with themself, of all things...it's not fair, *gods*, it's not fair. Their entire life they have been the best. The best in their class, the best in illusion magic, the best competitor for the ruling seat of Vygrand, and all of that has been stolen away, each and every title that was ever their own replaced with "Javier's partner*—*"

"You're crying."

"What?"

Vethna snaps their head to look at him accusingly, and he seems unaffected entirely by their barely contained rage, a thumb wiping away a tear. He smiles softly then, as if their pain is invisible*—* or, worst of all, not even worth acknowledging. "Still beautiful when you cry," he murmurs to himself like it's an observation, and they think he may intend it to be a compliment.

The audacity.

A scoff leaves them, though they know better than to try to recoil from his touch. They could run to the ends of the world and he'd still hunt them down, seeking them out as a hound does blood. So they stand still, muscles tense, breathing frantic. "Smile, my love. Why don't you get dressed up nice, and we can go out to the city*—* put all of this nasty blood magic behind us."

"I don't *want* to do that," Vethna croaks before he can truly finish his sentence. They think they must sound like a toddler about to throw a tantrum, but any control they've had over themselves has been whittled away over the past few months. Well-conducted or not, they're treated the same. Angry or not, they are treated the same. Hells*—* they think that if they set fire to this entire damned house, they would still be treated the same*—* *perfect,* perfect and weak and incapable of doing any wrong.

"What *do* you want?" Javier asks. They start to cry harder, biting down on their lip hard enough to draw blood because they would rather be stabbed than cry in front of him. He has taken their independence, their future, and now he demands their vulnerability, too.

They want to scream. They want to yell out that they *hate him*. But they'd look insane then, they think. *As if you don't look insane now.*

I want to get away from you. “I...I don’t know.”

Yes. Yes, you do know. Just say something— for fuck’s sake, **do something.**

Javier sighs softly in a manner that is entirely affectionate and entirely degrading, as if this is the answer he has come to expect from them. “That’s alright,” he says, finally. He grabs their hand and squeezes. “That’s what I’m here for.”

They collapse into his arms because there is nowhere else left to run, and they swallow down their pain because it takes too much energy to be so angry. And they think to themself maybe they can just get used to this, just like they do every single time they break down. Because, after all, they've always been such a *complacent, pretty little thing.*

Chapter Four Scene Line-Up

Aug 13, 2021

As always, these are subject to change as Chapter Four is further developed! I don't think Chapter Four will be nearly as long as Chapter Three-- if it *is*, it would be due to variation and not length. (But then again, every time I've thought something would be short, it always ends up being long, so who am I to say?)

Chapter Four's main focus will be *conversations* and *insight*. You'll get the chance to talk to a few important people from the past and say all the things you wanted to say and finally get all the missing pieces to the puzzle of The Commander's exile.

If there's any specific things you've wanted to say to Mother, Esmerelda, Trystan, and/or any of the ROs, feel free to leave suggestions in the comments!

Also-- I want to thank all of you. This month we've seen a skyrocket in Patrons and your support truly is something I'm both thankful and honored to have. So thank you! :)

Cell.

- Courtroom Flashback.
- Sabir Conversation-- re. Vethna + Amilia.
- Time skip-- fits of hysteria and flashbacks.
- Nikke conversation.

Palace.

- Mother discussion.
    - Esmerelda encounter (?)
- Courtroom.
- Alone time.
    - Amilia and/or Vethna discussion.
- Planning the expedition.
    - Wykna discussion.
- Bloodroom. :)
- Mutilation Flashback

- End of Chapter Four

Character Codex Entries

Aug 11, 2021

Hello everyone! I've recently been toying with the concept of a codex and what type of entries it would hold, so naturally character codex entries came to mind. I'm not entirely sure when I would have the first one finished by, but I'm curious to see if those are something you would all be interested in seeing on here.

It would be for the $10 tier due to how many spoilers from the main game it would have. I also can't promise whether or not it'll interfere with the current short story schedule on here (for example-- it may make it so that as opposed to getting a short story *and* a codex, you only get a codex).

Also-- extra content for this month will be coming soon after Chapter 3 releases (which will be very, *very* soon) since some of them hold content from it :)

Yes-- I'm interested in the character codex entries!

33

Depends-- I'm interested in the character codex entries so long as it doesn't interfere with the current short story schedule.

14

No-- I'm not interested in the character codex entries.

0

Poll ended Aug 18, 2021 · 47 votes total

"You scare me." | The Queens.

Aug 6, 2021

Note: Originally wrote this for the prompts on my tumblr before deciding it was too spoilerific to post there...so now it is here!

Marcelle is many things, though she has always listed them in a specific order when asked by Emeline.

“I am your wife,” was always her first response, voice coming out confused, nearly offended. It would be followed by, “I am The Queen,” and then, after a moment of pause, as if she had forgotten, “and a mother.”

If one were to ask Emeline the same question, she would state she is a mother, a wife, and, she supposes, a queen, but that had never originally been in the cards for her— not like it had Marcelle. No — her wife’s upbringing was one of nobility, regalness, and expectations. Emeline had met Marcelle's father— met the cruel man who had led Plaithus before her. Marcelle was not his daughter in his eyes but an asset— the one who would take his place one day. He expected nothing less than perfection. And even then— sometimes perfection wasn’t enough.

Marcelle does not cry— this was something she learned during that period. So Emeline would cry for her, inspecting the welts on her arms and bandaging them. Emeline had apologized for being so weak— for crying like a child— and Marcelle had cupped her face in the darkness of the room and told her she was sweeter than anything she had ever seen within these marble walls.

But Marcelle had been kind, too— gentle. Where her father yelled and screamed at her, she had stood, silent, unmoving, unbreaking. She took each insult with dignity. She did not bow her head— she did not respond— she did not fight back. It only drew him deeper into his anger. It only made him more the fool. The servants would whisper of The King’s madness until he died— and they would then only speak of The Queen’s strength— her competence and her adoration for her country. She knew— and *knows*— the servants by name. She recognizes soldiers the few times she meets them, remembering their families, remembering their struggles. She expresses genuine empathy for them, brows furrowing as she squeezes them by the shoulders in reassurance.

Emeline doesn't know where it all went wrong. Maybe Marcelle's affection— her attention and her love — had already been given away. Maybe there was simply nothing left to give their children.

And The South— The South had been more antagonistic than ever before after hearing of the shift in power. Where some called Marcelle kind, others called her weak. Emeline pities the fools who confused the two— not that they're around any longer. Countless kingdoms attempted to rip them to shreds, and each new enemy that arose only furthered the ghostly look on Marcelle's face.

It was as if fate demanded their downfall— but Marcelle had never responded kindly to being told what to do.

Tragedies passed— the enlistment of their child into the army, the incident, their exile— each one leaving Emeline more hollowed than the last. Tragedies passed— and Marcelle became hardened for it. Distant— stoic— closed off: she was all these things before, but now she is something else entirely. The ambition in her eyes has faded, her confidence wilting into confusion and stress.

Syfyn's letter only makes it worse. Marcelle reads it in silence despite Emeline's inquiries, and immediately she stiffens. An odd noise leaves her— something stuck between a scoff and a whine— as she crumples the paper in her fist and throws it to the side before storming to the window to look out.

Emeline picks it up— unfolds its corners.

They're coming back.

Fear is the first thing she feels. Fear for what will happen to them. And then it is joy— they are alive still. And then it is worry.

She looks to her wife, shoulders taut, hands gripping the railing so tightly that the pale skin of her knuckles go red. Emeline approaches her slowly, expecting one of her steps to draw Marcelle's attention — but they don't. She stares at the back infront of her. She does not reach out.

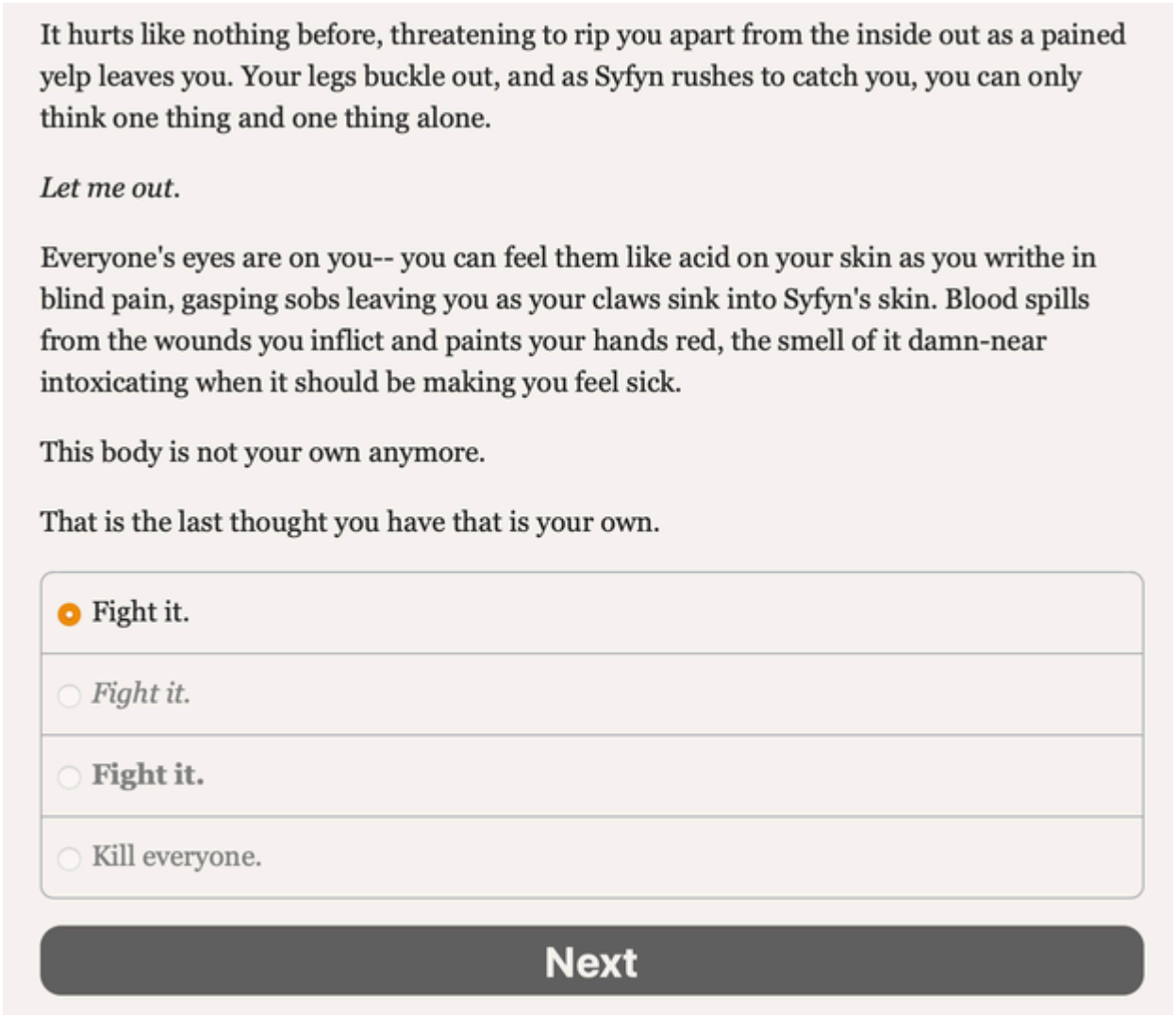
"You must think me a monster after all these years," Marcelle breathes. Her voice trembles, and Emeline would give anything to see her face.

Her tongue sticks to the roof of her mouth, and she struggles to speak. She shouldn't say this— shouldn't admit it. It's been her duty to support Marcelle when no one else would— when no one else possibly *could*— "You scare me."

It slips out.

There is a split moment of silence.

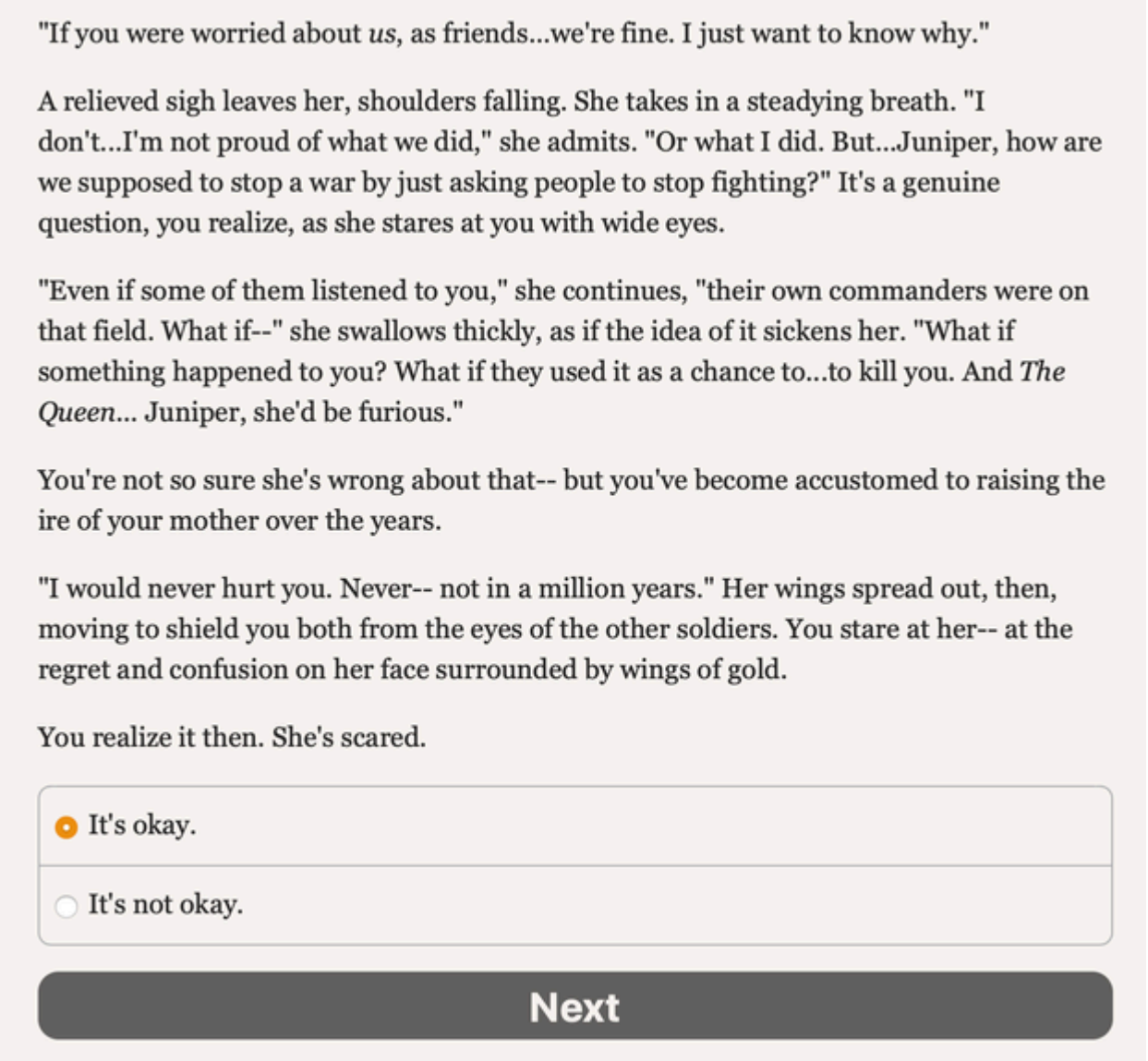
Marcelle crumples entirely. She collapses to the ground, Emeline crouching beside her and holding her hands in her own. Long dark hair conceals Marcelle's face, but her shoulders shake all the same.



The Incident. (p2.)

Aug 3, 2021

Chapter 3 is a whopping 175k words with an average play through being anywhere from 22k words to 40k. It's safe to say it ends with a bang...



"I would never hurt you. Never-- not in a million years."

Jul 29, 2021

A quick look into the final scene of Chapter Three that partially takes place in a flashback...

Kiss. | Syfyn Javall | P.O.V. Switch

Jul 24, 2021

AN: MC is a half-werewolf mythosi in this.

Syfyn has always admired The Commander.

She admired the way they led their troops. She admired the way they charged into war with no fear in their eyes And she also admires the way their nose scrunches now from drinking piss-tasting ale, a sputtering cough leaving them as they slam their fist against their chest.

"Tastes wonderful, doesn't it?" She asks, leaning closer by habit.

They don't dare respond beyond a struggling hum of agreement lest they vomit it all back up again. She can only laugh at them.

They look nice like this— hair tossed and armor off. Their mask sits lopsided on their face, and it's endearing in some odd way, as much as Syfyn would wish for it to be off entirely. It's always like this. They'll come so close to just being normal friends like anyone else in this world only for some tiny flicker of formality to remain— some reminder of the fact that they can never be "normal" ever again.

They signed that away long ago along with their childhood.

"I've missed you, ya know."

She's not sure why she says it. It just comes out, really, and though it's unintentional in being spoken, it's true. It's been months of paperwork and training and grueling work and, worst of all, being apart. There've been too many close calls on the field where she turned, expecting to find The Commander at her side, grinning. Too many nights of groggily wandering around the halls from being sleep deprived and always, *always*, ending up standing in front of their empty room.

And now they're here again. It's almost overwhelming in some odd, bizarre, heart-stuttering way.

The Commander kicks her legs beneath the table, offering her an affectionate smile that has her heart skipping and stomach lurching. "Don't get sappy on me now, Javall."

"Oh, I'm sorry, was that too soft for your tough guy act?" She asks, kicking them back *much* harder beneath the table and smirking when they let out a hiss of pain. "Just say you missed me too."

"Did I?"

"You're such an ass."

They both share their amusement until things change for the solemn: discussions of war and death, of missing heirs to rotting thrones. They're backed into a corner, this much she knows, but she wishes The Commander didn't have to point it out at every given opportunity.

So she suggests the first thing she can think of to change the topic of conversation. "I'm tired of talking about depressing shit. Let's *do* something."

She eyes the wall of weapons on the side, a forced smirk on her face as she stands, The Commander following. The room is small— pitiful so— her wings brushing against furniture and walls even when she has them as tucked to her body as they'll go. She's at a disadvantage, and from the way The Commander smiles knowingly to themself, they know it as well.

She traces the weaponry with her finger, the dull blades threatening to cut skin. "Funny to think we started with these things," she comments. The Commander huffs in agreement. She can remember their spars as children— the clumsy movements, the stumbling feet. It was almost fun then. Back then you didn't fight with the intent to kill, you fought for fun.

How foolish they must've been to think the battlefield would be the same.

They fall into fighting positions as it were an old habit. She supposes it is, even if time would try to convince them of otherwise.

A low growl rips through The Commander's throat, and, as if for show, they bare their fangs in a snarl that threatens to send shivers down Syfyn's back. She's seen them rip through flesh and bone as if humans were nothing more than oversized chew toys. Someone would have to be awfully foolish to not be fear them.

"I don't have to worry about you biting me, do I?" She teases, readjusting her grip on her sword. The Commander smirks.

"Why? Scared of a little dog bite, Brazen Griffin?"

Some fuckin' dog.

She lunges at them, weapon raised, though they do nothing to defend themselves. No— instead they just have that knowing smirk of theirs that they always wear before they say something stupid—

And then they move like a flash of lightning. One second they're in front of her— the next, they're ducking right beneath her sword and arm, slipping up in front of her and grabbing hold of the front of her armor.

And they kiss her.

It's not a soft thing, but it is passionate— months of frustration and years of longing all poured into a single action. A gentler side of her threatens to give out right then and there, to drop her sword and pull The Commander tighter against her. No one else— no one else could ever compare. How could they?

Instead, she rips them off her as if they were an infection, using far more strength than intended. They stare at her in a panic, and she can't imagine she looks much better from how she heaves heavy breaths, cheeks burning red.

The Commander licks their lips, voice shaking when they call her name. "Syfyn?"

"You kissed me." She can still feel her own lips tingling and the phantom grip of The Commander's hands on her waist. *"Why?"* She spits the word out, and once again The Commander cringes. Gods be damned— she wasn't born to be gentle or sweet, and she's never cursed it more than she does now as The Commander prances around her as if she were an angry beast that just might snap.

"Because I like you," they murmur, softly, voice hoarse.

People didn't like her. She was blunt and at times cruel. She was meant to be hated— a figurehead for people to direct their anger at. And yet...despite all that...

"You do?"

Liar. | Sabir Du Vaelas

Jul 18, 2021

Lady Krysta is far from a pleasant woman, not that anyone in the court would know it. Her eyes are a warm hazel that have an ever-present charming gleam to them, and the corners of her rose-colored lips are always quirked up into a coy smile. She always looks like she knows something you don't, and chances are she does.

And it is because of this that Sabir thinks to himself that her royal-blue mask must be specifically designed to look as docile and welcoming as possible as the two of them stand behind the large curtains of the ballroom in hushed conversation. She lazily waves her fan at her neck in an attempt to chase away the warm humidity of the spring.

"Come, Sabir. Nothing ill will happen to the child— I simply must know who leaked the information and..." she purses her purple lips, "*correct* them."

He can't meet her gaze, hands clammy and heart pounding, so instead he stares at the tiled floor of the estate, eyes attempting to pick out repeating patterns among the beige and red squares. "I don't know who it was," he says.

"Do not mumble."

The back of her fan slaps him on the backside of the neck, and he's quick to stand to his full height once more, just now beginning to tower over The Duchess. "I do not know who did it," he repeats, voice louder but hardly steady.

She lets out a low hum at that, dark gaze scanning him head to toe. "Is that so, Du Vaelas? You *are* aware I do not tolerate lying from my students...well, not to *myself*, at the very least."

Damn it. How do these nobles find it in them to be so stoic all the time? Maybe...maybe he's just not built for this. Maybe they were all right...he's just too *soft*.

"I'm not lying," he utters. At the very least his voice doesn't sound like it's coming from a trembling, shaking child...though that description wouldn't be entirely inaccurate in describing him.

She pauses to admire her fingernails in the dark light of the moon and flickering torches. Her silence is stifling. "Tell me, Sabir...how's your mother?"

It takes everything within him not to jolt at the question— to hide the rage that burns within him and the fear that rattles him down to the core at the inquiry. It takes even more to control the way he smiles— to make it slow and charming, almost as if the question, if anything, was pleasurable in nature.

"What of her, Lady Krysta?"

"I heard she's been feeling less than herself lately. A few of the boys were talking about it— or, actually, was it just one?" She taps a finger on her chin. "I just can't seem to recall."

He holds his tongue. The first few steps of this waltz are best carried out slowly and self-assured.

"No?" He questions. He wishes he had a glass of wine to hide behind like all the other courtiers. He never realized how relieving it is to let your mask fall for one single sip before pulling it right back on again. "It's a shame my peers would stoop to such...*low* topics of conversation. Some might even call it disgraceful."

"Perhaps," she agrees, swirling her own dark glass of wine and giving him a knowing look. It only unnerves him further— not that he shows it. "Though I think there's a clear solution to our issues here, no, du Vaelas?"

He swallows thickly when she steps closer, striking her fan beneath his chin to lift his head. "A name for a name," she states..

"I already told you," he mutters. "I don't know—"

"He said a bit more than that, though-—the boy. Something along the lines of you...well, I wouldn't *want* to accuse you of lying about your lineage and blood-status, but..."

And, just like that, it all clicks into place. The names that they both seek— Lady Krysta and him— are one in the very same. Only one person could've possibly leaked the info because only one other person lied about their past when coming here: and it just so happens to be the very one who seems to be so keen on spilling everyone else's secrets in the ballroom tonight.

It's a clash of emotion that comes, and somehow the wave of pride at Lady Krysta for having made an unknown mistake overrides the pain that he feels within his chest at a friend's betrayal. It is a horrific moment— a temporary loss of humanity in favor of power.

"I don't know who did it," Sabir snips— almost yells, really— as his hands ball into fists. The outburst takes Krysta off-guard, body recoiling and a gasp leaving her as she brings her fan to her chest like a shield. "I don't," he rasps.

"I could have you imprisoned," Krysta states. Despite the threat, her voice wavers. "Perhaps even killed. Your family would be sentenced to exile."

He could do it, he thinks. He could utter this shared name, sell him out, and go home safe. Safe for now, at least. At the very least it would buy him more time. All in all, it would be a good first win in his books: the first of many names to be cleared off the board.

And then he thinks of the way their hands trembled as they helped one another figure out the buttons and clasps of each other's outfits, making shitty jokes about their situation.

No. No— he will not. He will not be like the others. He will not throw another name into the dirt, even if it's deserving. It will not be the downfall of others that lends its way to his success.

"It's funny, my Lady," Sabir begins, licking his lips. "You're using the conditional. Was it not you who told us to never *conditionalize* threats that we intend to carry out?"

She stares at him owlishly, taken aback by her own words being weaponized against her.

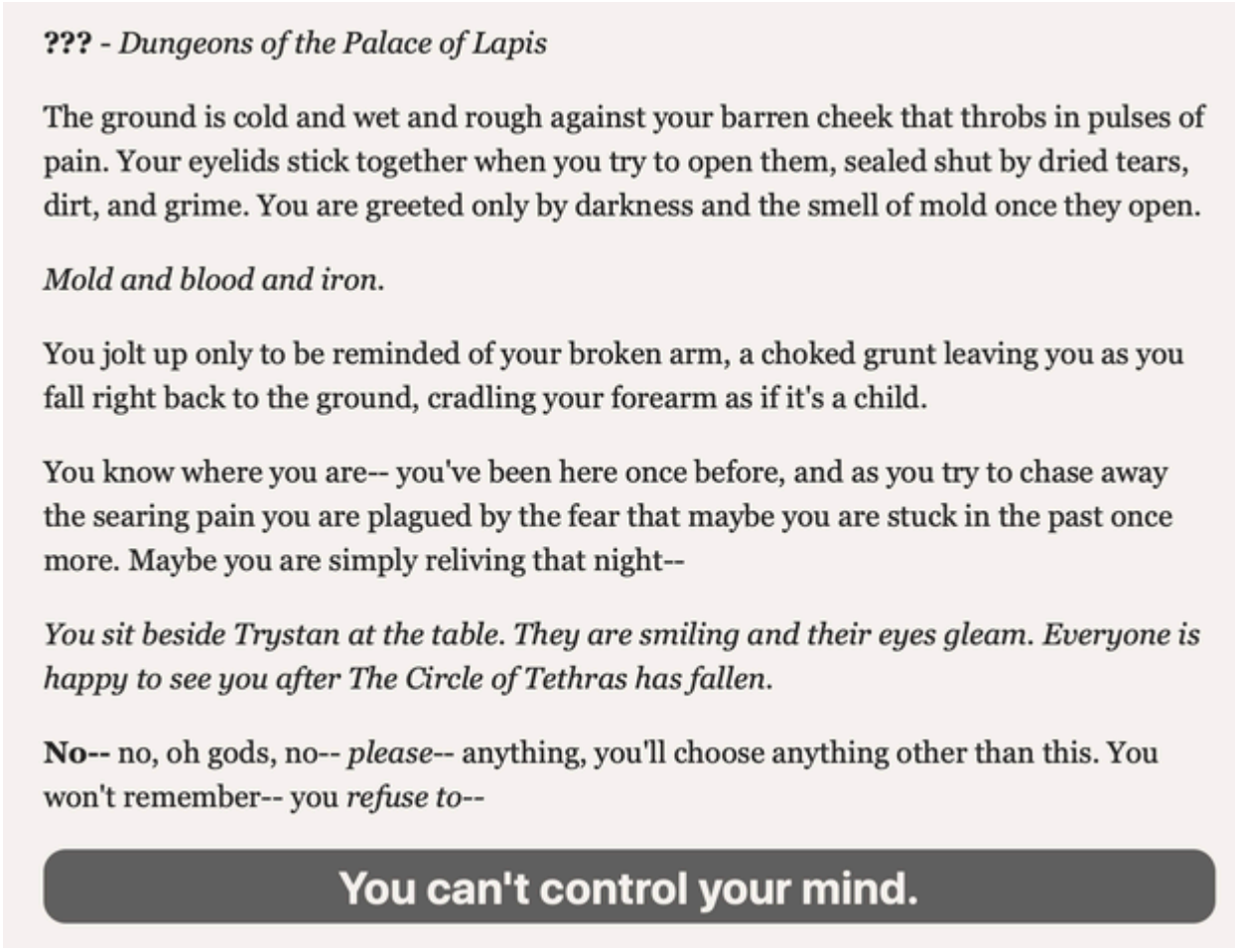
He continues, "it pains me that I cannot help you— but I shall reinstate it for clarity's sake one last time: *I don't know* who spilled your secrets to the court. Now, if you'll excuse me."

She hesitates to call out to him as he presses past her and into the ballroom, and when she *does* manage to it's nothing more than a half-hearted sputter— one that he happily ignores as he pushes his way past dancing couples. It earns him more than a few curious looks, spectators glancing from him to Lady Krysta as she curses out his name in a manner that is anything but ladylike.

Their watchful gazes burn, Sabir notes. They *burn,* and they make him feel shameful despite being the one to outsmart Krysta. So he does not stop once he is inside the ballroom and off of the patio, no— instead he storms past the traitor who spilled his own secrets even as he curiously calls out his name and reaches for his arm. He storms past the guards and he storms out of the estate and through the surrounding fields until he's over a hill and behind a tree.

And it is only *there* that he collapses in his stolen, gold-worthy suit, choking on poorly-contained sobs and biting on his lip hard enough to draw blood because *politicians* are not so weak as to be put to tears.

But— it seems as he finally lets out a whimper, curling into a ball as he begins to cry—Sabir du Vaelas is.



The Incident.

Jul 17, 2021

The end of Chapter Three will finally allow The Commander to remember the one night they have been forever desperate to forget.

Wren Vaustus.

Jul 10, 2021

"You cowered when duty called to you. You were incapable of facing the crimes that your country had you commit. Does that make you a saint, or rather a coward?"

Your lips part, but no words come of it. It only serves to make the pleased grin on Wren's face widen. "I'm glad to see we both know the answer."

Wren Vaustus is a character that you'll meet in Vethna's branch of Chapter Three, though not all encounters are guaranteed to end so poorly...

"Don't you regret this at all?" They ask, voice low as they raise the paper.

"Of course I do," you spit. You feel...you feel *angry*, and *scared*, and *confused*, and for a split moment you're back in those streets with your blood soaked blade. They had told you it was the right thing to do. They had promised you it was the right decision.

So why do you feel so wrong? So broken? So *lost?*

"I...I didn't..."

You didn't what? You didn't know? Your mistakes have left hundreds dead, and now their death notes lay at your feet, all of their death-stiffened fingers forever pointed at you in accusation.

Vethna's brows furrow, and you can see that they're just as conflicted as you, lower lip wobbling as they turn away from you, hands balled into fists. "If I were there-- if I were *here*..."

You would've killed them.

"Don't you regret this at all?" They ask, voice low as they raise the paper.

You swallow, lifting your head up as you had done before, when people cursed your name and threw whatever they could at you as you marched through the streets: rotting food, animal shit, stones. Somehow, this moment still feels more shameful.

"It was my duty," you say, voice scraping against your throat.

Vethna almost looks as if they'd been stabbed by the statement before they look away, crinkling the paper within their grasp as they turn away from you.

You don't know how long you both stand like that, but you know each and every second of it is stifling.

"I found a book that might help with the wykna." They say, then, moving to stand by the desk they had set the book down on. When you don't do anything they give you a grim look.

You go to stand by their side, ignoring the tension that might as well be an invisible wall between you both.

"Don't you regret this at all?" They ask, voice low as they raise the paper.

"No."

It's as if you slapped them across the face when you say it, and they stare at you as if you're nothing short of their own killer. You suppose, in some odd way, you are. Had Vethna been in the city for one reason or another...

"You're a cruel person, Juniper Kalesko."

You can't help but feel as if you let them down-- failed at fulfilling this falsified image of you that they had in their head.

"I know."

"Don't you regret this?"

Jul 5, 2021

Depending on who's branch you take in Chapter Three, you'll learn different parts of The Commander's past (though all will be revealed with time). In Vethna's route...well, some decisions you've made were questionable at best.

And, as a little update, Vethna's route is currently 21k words :)

Liberty. | ??? | P.O.V. Switch

Jun 23, 2021

They hate it here. In fact, they don't even know how they got *here* to begin with. One moment they just *are,* existing freely as everyone and everything. And then, the next moment, they're being yanked and tugged through a tiny little hole, being torn into shreds and cut up into small pieces to better fit in before being thrown back together again.

And now they're *here:* wherever here is.

The Commander isn't a particularly interesting character from what little they've seen, but they *are* powerful...though they loathe to admit it. It took *years* to break through, *years* to get even the tiniest of whispers into this thick skull of theirs. And now? Now they fight them vehemently, with every last ounce of will left in their sad, pathetic body (and they'll be the first to tell you— it's not much).

But now they've done it. All it took was for their guard to come down for one moment for them to reach out and seize control of The Commander.

They fought, they *fought so hard.* And the funniest part was they actually believed they had a chance...

They believed they had a chance.

And now they're here, right in front of them. It's a funny technicality thing— the fact that *they* aren't real in the waking world, but *here*, where The Commander is lacking body, they are. Their touch is just as painful or pleasurable as any mortal's, their gaze ten times commanding.

"You are *such* a drama queen," they coo, grabbing The Commander's chin. They startle at the action, one of their hands twitching as they attempt to lift it to stop them. It doesn't move, of course. Here? Here they're helpless...and *oh*, how Freedom revels in it, claws digging into the soft skin of their jaw and forcing them to stare up into their eyes. They're angry— no, *infuriated*— it shows in the red spikes that run all along their aura and the way they huff away, teeth bared in a snarl.

"Let go of me."

"Oh— but then we'll be *so far apart*..." Freedom leers in close, so close that they know it'll drive the Commander insane as they writhe in their grip. They forgot how it feels to interact with these mortals one on one...how it feels to tease and taunt them to see whatever response it is they throw back. It's...*amusing:* fun.

The Commander finally manages to wrangle themself free of their grip, body beginning to become theirs again. Something...no, *someone*, is interfering with this, helping The Commander regain control of their subconscious. If what little information Freedom has been able to father over this past month is true, they can only guess it's that wretched little mage The Commander's been traveling with.

"Who are you?" The Commander asks. A flicker of exhaustion shines in their eyes and it's absolutely *delicious.*

"Oh, I'm wounded, I truly am. Besides— it's more of a...*what* am I, than a 'who.'" The Commander takes a step back at the ominous words...Freedom takes an even bigger step forwards. They struggle to recall who they truly are...*what* they truly are..as defined by the humans, that is. What do they call it again? Justice? Chaos? Cruelty? They're all the same, really...

Freedom.

They had called it freedom. "You can call me Freedom," they coo, simply. The Commander's features twist before realization dawns upon them. It's not as comically amazed as they might've hoped.

In fact, it's the exact opposite.

The mortal takes one step closer, their "body" only a few inches away from Freedom, not that they can truly feel the proximity of it. Not here. It's...*odd*. Nothing like what the others in the past have done, no, none have had the courage...Freedom can't help but find it in them to laugh in the absolute audacity of it all— of this sad, little attempt to play coy.

"Oh, well aren't you just precious? Endearing, really...cute, even." They trace a claw along The Commander's face, reveling in the way their throat bobs when they swallow, pupils blown. Oh, yes, this will do quite nicely, they think...they so dearly missed the wide and adoring eyes of the few mortals they chose to show themself to in the past. And...well, if they're to be stuck in The Commander's head, it might as well be fun, right? Still...there's something more important to be discussing than how adorably pathetic this mortal is. So, with a great sigh, they pull back. "That's not what I'm here for."

They walk circles around them, scanning them head to toe. It's the first time they've seen them, and it's a struggle to get past the pain and sorrow that covers them like an immovable blanket of trauma. These little heroes always *do* have a way of falling from heaven.

"I want to make a deal with you. Well, it's more of a, 'you have to do what I say, regardless,' situation, but..." they stop their pacing to stare at The Commander, gaze narrowing. "Well, I do know how sensitive you things get."

"Things?"

"Mortals. You and your obsessions with the illusion of choice...always so desperate to be the ones to carve your own destinies."

Fear rattles through The Commander's body. "What do you want?"

It's almost too easy.

"What anyone wants, Commander. What *you* want." They drag it on for as long as they can, taking in and observing The Commander's shortened breaths and narrowed eyes. They try *so* hard to put on a tough exterior, and it's almost invigorating to leech off of their crumbling and broken will. "Freedom, justice...*chaos*."

A shiver runs down their spine at the very thought of it. The world could be theirs once more, if *only*—

"Freedom?" The commander repeats. "I'm not trapped."

They pause. "Are you sure about that?"

They'll be the one to show The Commander all they've lost. They'll be the one to bring back every single painful memory that they've ever tried to hide away. They'll force them to stare at their shackles and stare at their blood-stained hands, and they will force the past to become their present once more.

And it's then, and *only* then, that Freedom will offer them the key to liberty.

Well, liberty under *their* command, of course.

[The Morning After. | Vethna Mevnrael (NSFW)]

[Jun 21, 2021]

Warnings: NSFW. It's not particularly vulgar and it's only for a few paragraphs, but still.

There’s a rumble of thunder in the distance that wakes Vethna up, quickly followed by the rather harmonious noise of chirping birds and wailing wind. Rain patters against the window, and a contented hum leaves them when they roll onto their back, stretching upwards and arching their body, muscles pulled taut before relaxing. The red sheets of the inn’s bed fall from their tanned body, pooling at the sides—

And it’s then that it becomes far too apparent that they’re completely naked, body lacking the fuchsia silken robe that they always wear. It’s also then that it becomes far too apparent that the bed is far too warm, and it’s then that the tips of their fingers brush against skin that’s not their own, body jolting upward.

The Commander lays next to them, and a muffled sound leaves Vethna as they slap their hand over their mouth to contain the whine that threatens to leave them at the sight of their body. Their entire chest is exposed, head fallen to the side and mouth parted ever so slightly. Vethna can see their red lipstick smeared all over The Commander's face, running down their jaw and neck and chest and even downward still, disappearing well past the sheets.

Fuck.

They can't recall the previous night. No, all they can remember is the sweet and spicy ale on their tongue as The Commander pulled them close, face nuzzled against theirs, breath smelling of alcohol. There was something different in The Commander's gaze that night, something soft and sweet and *kind*, sharpened by the primal yearnings of something more carnal.

A sharp exhale leaves them when they toss their hair over their shoulder, and it's then that they notice the bruises that paint their body: circular purple marks on their hips and scratch marks down their thighs —

Dear gods.

Panting breaths and barely contained whimpers, The Commander writhing beneath them, hands on their hips and guiding Vethna. They couldn't remember the last time they'd been touched like that— or if they ever even *have*— the deepest parts of them being reached and heart aching from how full they felt, their hands caressing every inch of The Commander because it wasn't possible for them to be any more close than they already are, but *gods* did they want to be.

"Vethna."

Their name was murmured like a prayer, and The Commander had looked at them as if they were some kind of holy being. They felt like they were when they were with them— like they were *good*. Magic spilled from them despite their attempts to keep it together, and it was with a sudden bucking of hips that Vethna had let out a keeling moan, body stuttering and nails digging into flesh. They had let The Commander flip them beneath, their muscled arms on either side of their head, hot breath on their face and groans filling their ears.

Safe. They had felt safe, and they had felt *wanted*, each lingering kiss on their burning skin telling them just how much The Commander had desired this.

And now...now they lay beside them in bed where they snore softly, and Vethna can't bring themself to touch them— can't bring themself to wake them up and see their sobered gaze devoid of any longing or yearning, their thirst for Vethna adequately quenched by the night prior. Instead, they pull the sheets closer to their chest, breath hitching and shuddering, expression soured. A hand runs through their hair, attempting to make any sense of the tangles, and they can't even imagine how abysmal their makeup must look at this moment. They're a sorry sight to wake up to for sure.

"Fuck, my head hurts."

Vethna’s entire body tenses, and before they can even make sense of what’s happening their mind kicks into overdrive, their body scrambling away from The Commander and hands clawing at the duvet to yank around their body. They nearly fall right out of the bed from their eagerness to be up and away, back pressed up against the freezing window.

The Commander stares at them through bleary eyes, blinking a few times as they try to get a bearing of their surroundings.

“Veth?” They murmur their name, a hand running through their hair as they sit up, shamelessly revealing more of their skin. Their eyes go from Vethna’s body to their own and back again only for realization to dawn, eyes widening and lips parting to form an ‘o,' and Vethna is helpless to do anything but further curl into themself.

“Did we…?”

“What the hell do you think?” Vethna hisses, pulling the duvet tighter.

The Commander’s expression softens, then, eyes going over Vethna’s body. They blush, turning their head to the side, desperately searching for any ounce of strength or sass that might save them from their embarrassment. “What are you looking at?”

“You.”

“But *why?”* They’re desperate and it shows, body tense as they send an accusatory and poorly defensive glare at The Commander. They’re far too aware of their makeup, their hair, the bruising and—

“You’re pretty.”

“I’m not,” they murmur, shaking their head. They can’t bear to stare at The Commander when their expression morphs into sadness at those words. They can only hear the rustling of sheets before The Commander whispers their name again.

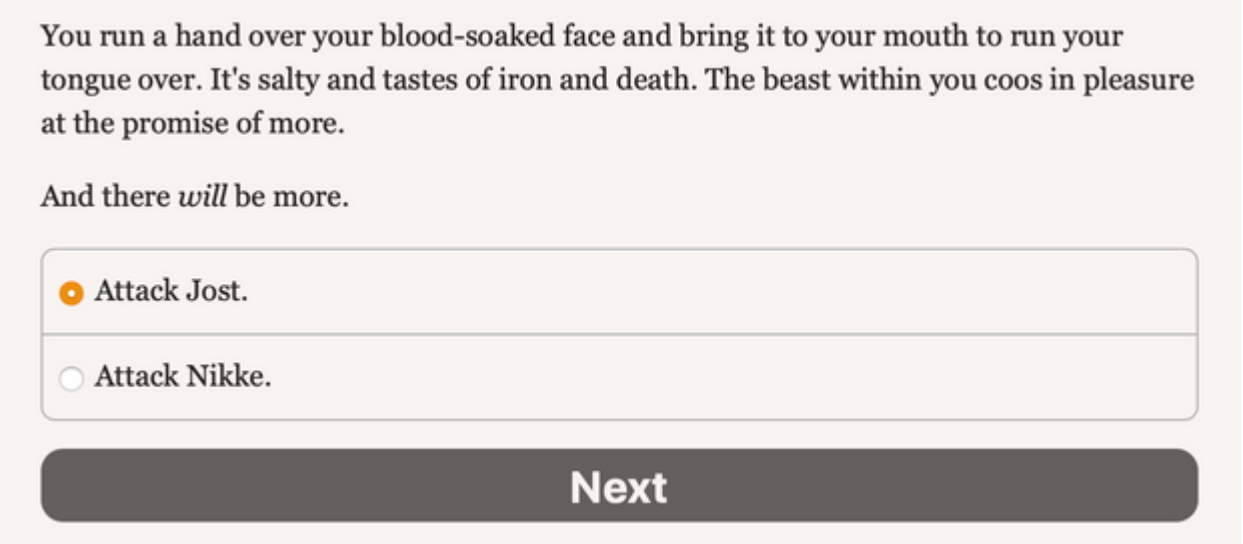
“Look at me, Veth.”

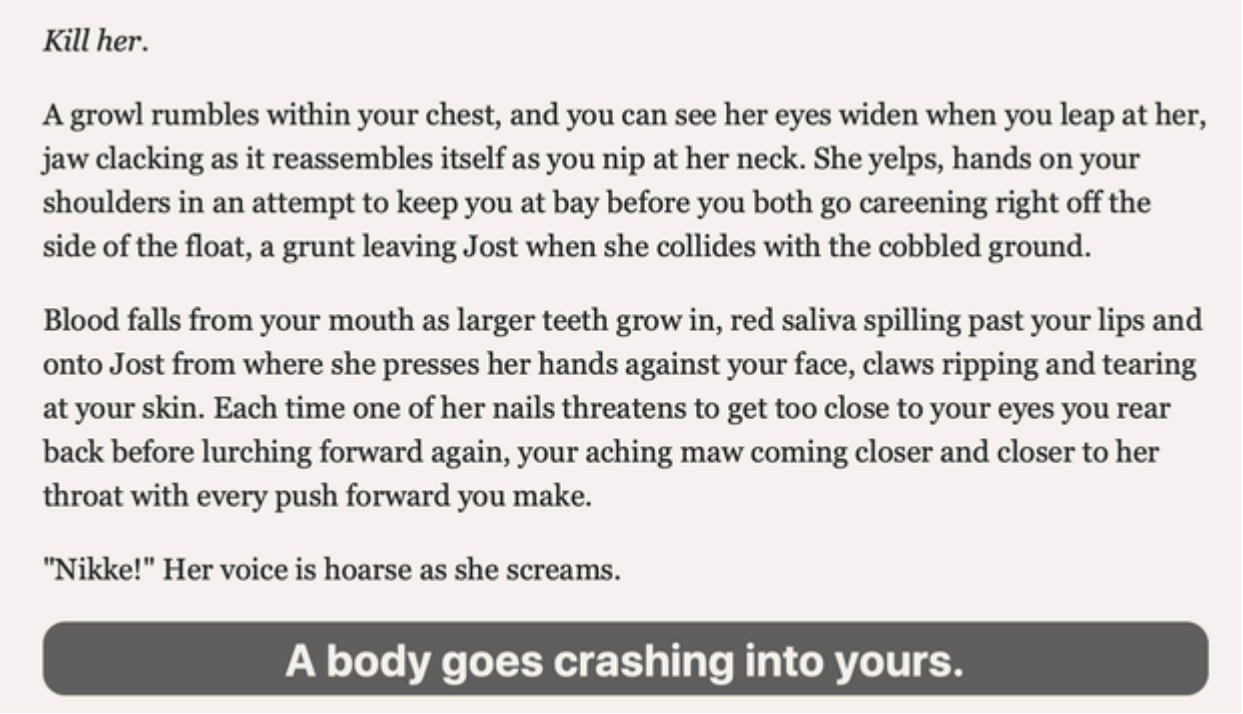
And they do, for some gods-awful reason, and their lower lip is wobbling and their jaw aches and their legs feel weak. The Commander opens their arms to them, and Vethna approaches for one reason or another, shaking hands holding the duvet that The Commander gently pries from their hands. Cold air falls over their skin as the fabric falls to the floor.

They’re barren, completely naked and in more ways than one, and The Commander’s callused hands grab them by the waist before pulling them close and into their lap, replacing the shedded duvet with the soft and warm sheets of the bed, practically cradling Vethna’s body within theirs.

This is foreign. This is strange. This is new and it’s different and it’s *dangerous*. It’s too soft, too intimate. It’s just asking to be hurt.

But maybe...no. No, it’s not, it couldn’t possibly be, but some part of Vethna says maybe it’s worth it. Maybe, this feeling of contentment, this feeling of warmth, is worth the possibility of losing home all over again. And maybe, just *maybe*, The Commander might even choose to stay.



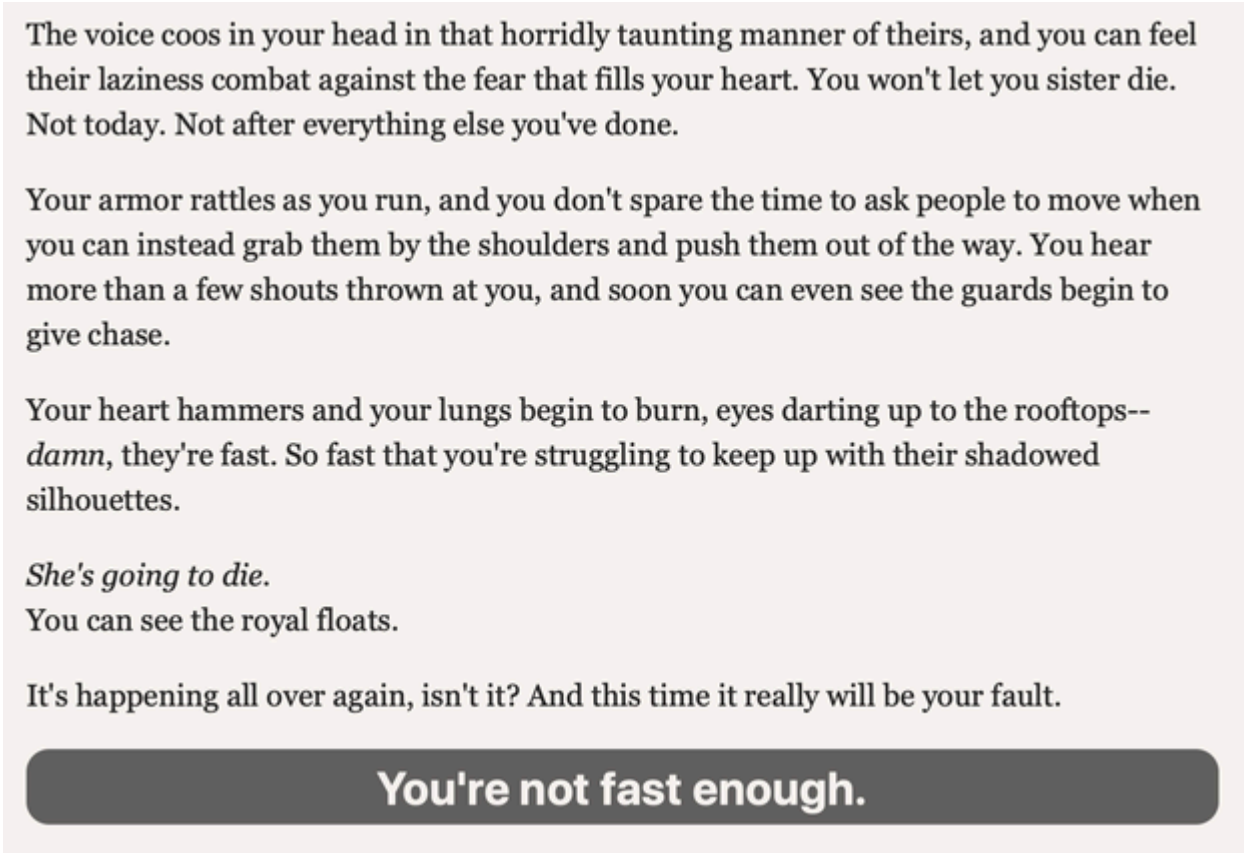


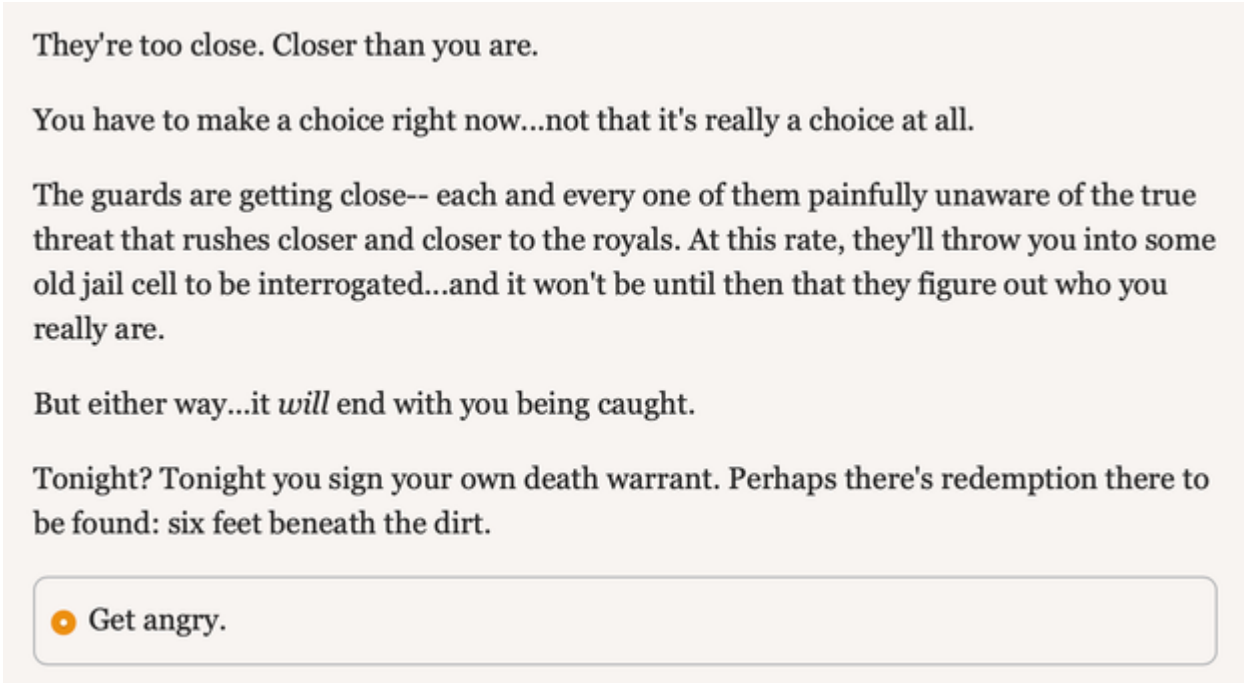
Attack Jost | Werewolf Commander

Jun 20, 2021

This is only one of *many* ways this fight can play out...

The scene plays out differently based on your own decisions and then spans out from there depending on your character's disposition, relationship with Nikke, mythosi blood, and combat stats.

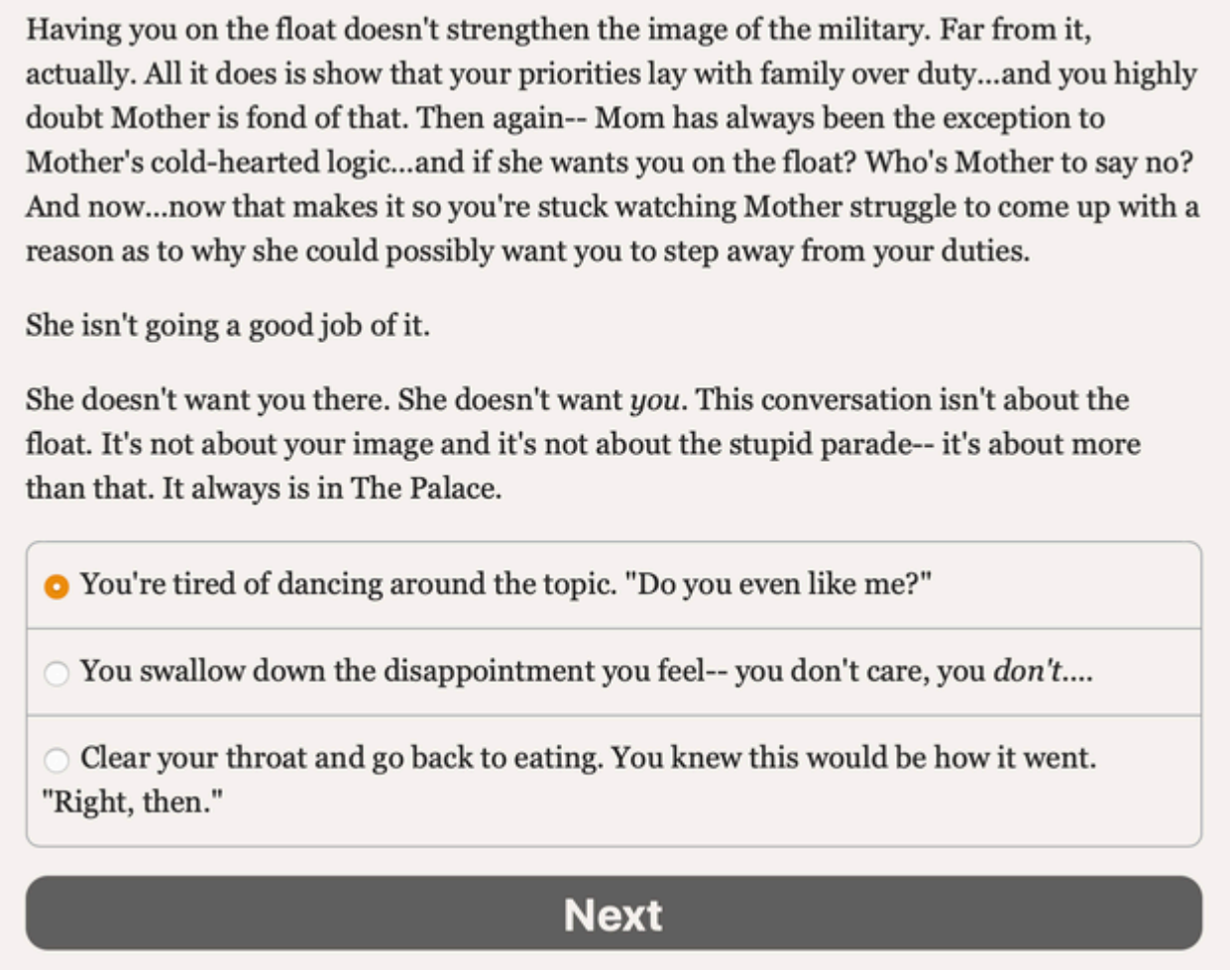




[The Parade.]

Jun 15, 2021

Not quite as festive as The Commander remembers.



Mother Dearest

Jun 9, 2021

The last sneak peek of the Tavern scene until it's released in full to the Soldier Tier... 👀 I'm finishing it up still since I decided to add a bit more content to it...meaning that the final scene will be over 10k words in total.

June Schedule

Jun 4, 2021

Hello everyone! This is just an update on what to expect this month with Patreon and the story itself.

Stories: The short story for the Soldier tier will be the second highest voted story from last month's poll-- Sabir's training to become a politician. For the POV switch for Initiate, it'll be the scene where MC first meets the mystery RO within their own head.

Early Access: This month, for the **Soldier Tier**, early access will be given for one of the scenes. However, there's multiple ones that are nearing completion. Instead of just picking myself, I decided to make a poll! Here's a synopsis of each scene.

**Tavern Scene
**Features MC, Vethna, and Amilia and a flashback scene to when MC was younger with The Queens and Esmerelda. True to its name, it takes place in a shabby little tavern where the group makes the discovery that Melhrost is not nearly as safe as they had anticipated-- specifically for The Commander.

**Vethna Branch (first half) - High Affinity
**Features MC and Vethna. As the title says, you'll only be able to play this scene with high affinity with Vethna. It can either be romantic or not. The Commander and Vethna decide that the best way to learn more about the wykna in MC's head is to visit an old mage library-- one of the last left in the entire kingdom.

**Opening Scene
**Features MC, Vethna, Amilia, and a *very* short flashback scene at the palace with The Queens and Esmerelda. Picks up toward the end of the groups journey from the end of Chapter 2. A *lot* of variation, but is shorter length wise than the other two.

Whichever of these three ends up getting the most votes will be posted within the next two weeks. The poll ends by the 7th.

Finally-- Chapter Three should be coming out by early July! It's possible it'll come earlier (or later), but that's when it's looking like it'll be finished. I'm expecting Chapter Three to be over 100k words...but we shall see. Until then, keep expecting to be getting sneak peeks of the story!

Tavern Scene

14

Vethna Branch (first half)

6

Opening Scene

1

Poll ended Jun 7, 2021 · 21 votes total

You look at the position of the sun so frequently that your eyes burn, tiny dots dancing across your vision by the time you reach the right block. Already people are camping out in the streets for the parade, set up with chairs and dried goodies for snacking. A subtle buzz of excitement hangs in the air.

Soon, the royal family will be here. If only they knew one of them was already standing amongst them.

"Is that...it?" Vethna asks. They come to a halt as they stare at a particularly run down building squished beside a large brick brewery, an alley layered with posters on its left.

"Yes," you murmur. "That would be it."

'*Ampston's Emporium of Arcane Goods*' is painted in large, bold red lettering on top of a yellowing wooden sign. Beneath it you can still see the remnants of what *used* to be painted there.

'*Anpston's Academy for Young Magi.*'

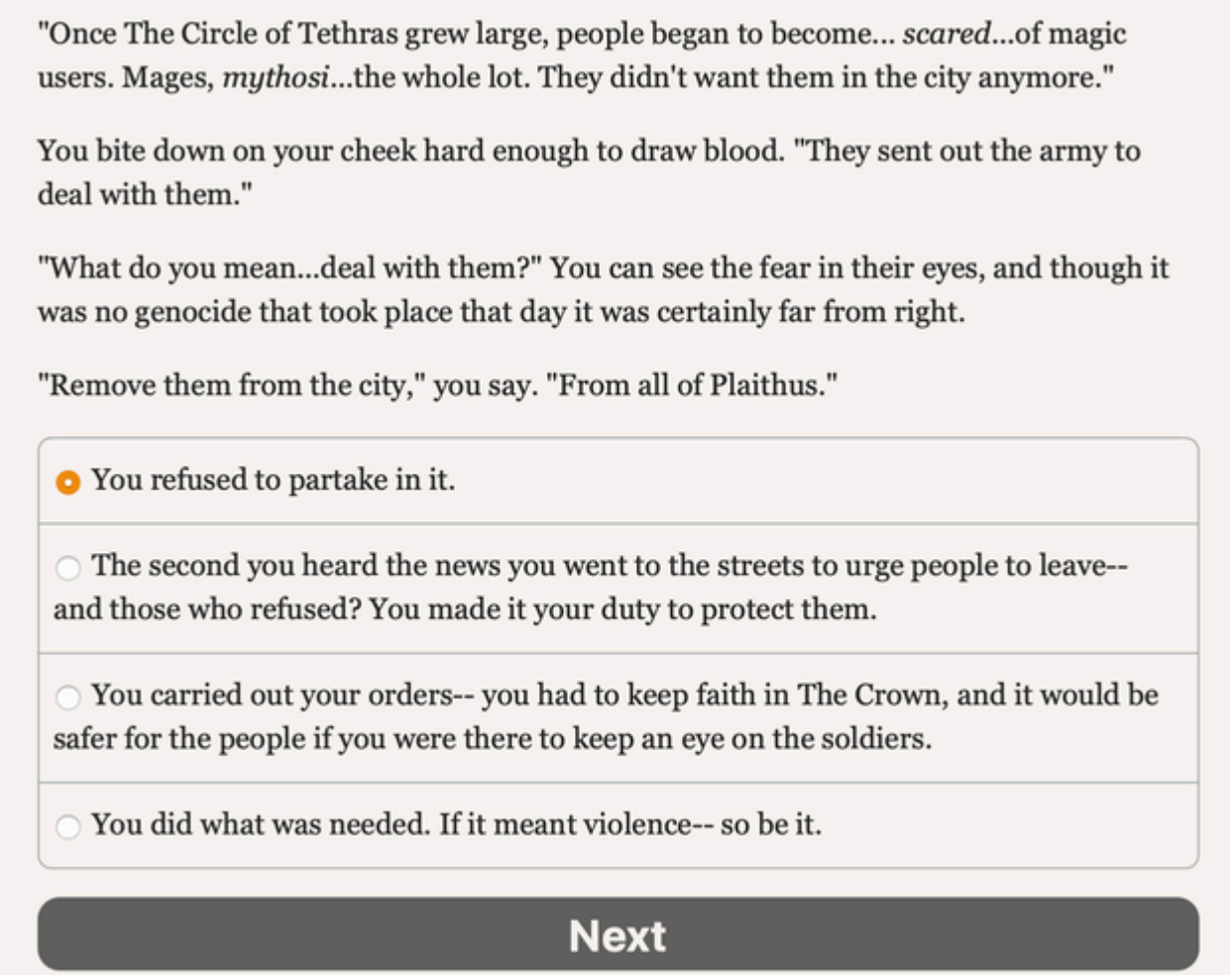
Vethna steps closer as you trail behind them, taking in the deep cerulean blue that the building is painted in. Behind it is a large tower-- though that also appears to be falling apart. It'd be the only building in such state for miles, that much you're sure of.

"What happened to it?" Vethna asks.

There's a lump in your throat that grows the longer that you stare at it. "The war," you say. "That's what happened to it."

They look to you, wordlessly asking for you to explain.

Next



Ampston's Emporium of Arcane Goods.

May 28, 2021

In chapter 3, more lore is revealed looking into Plaithus's past with magic and where MC falls within that past. Be careful what you choose...it might impact how future characters respond to you when you're in need of aid.

Each other. | Syfyn Javall.

May 28, 2021

TW + Notes: Descriptions of gore. MC is referred to as the preset, gender-neutral name "Juniper Kalesko."

It makes Syfyn think of cutting fabric. For just a moment she can squeeze her eyes shut and pretend that the sound of ripping flesh is instead one of the maids tearing through a large sheet of silk: red silk, *crimson* silk.

Itchy: gods, it's so itchy that it's almost unbearable, skin stinging and sheets covered in drying, crusted blood. It smells foul, like rot: rot, *rot,* ***rot.***

If she just reaches back, maybe she can rip out the cursed feathers. It's a tempting idea...one that has her silvered gaze going to the dagger on the bedside table—

"*Syfyn."*

The door of the shared barracks rattles. One time, two times, *three times*—

And then a figure manages to squeeze itself through the gap, kicking and gasping and writhing all around before they get through, covered head to toe in dirt. *Juniper.* They're quick to rush toward her, a bowl of soapy water in their hands that she's thoroughly impressed they didn't spill— until they set it haphazardly on the table, that is.

"It smells gross in here," they comment, nose wrinkling.

Syfyn swats for their face, barely missing by an inch. They only laugh at her as they dart about the room in search of a clean rag.

The second the pain of her incoming feathers had come Juniper had been quick to, quite literally, chase everyone out. That was a few hours ago now. Every time one of their fellow soldiers tried to come back in it would result in Juniper smacking them and locking them back out again until they simply decided to barricade the door shut entirely.

She can't find it in her to worry about the repercussions of when Instructor Baltrice finds out. It's not like there's much the woman can do to chastise her...nor did she do much to help when she saw the golden feathers just beginning to break out from Syfyn's shoulder blades. Who is she to fault Juniper for taking things into their own hands?

"Let me see," Juniper mumbles. They hop up and onto her bed, legs crossed beneath them as they pull the bowl of water into their lap, staring at her expectantly.

She pauses at the sight of it. She didn't ask for their help and yet—

"It's gross," she says. "You don't want to see it."

Their eyes flicker down to the blood-stained sheets at that— at the claw marks that tear through the fabric and wooden posts of the bunk bed. "You're in pain," Juniper says. They reach out for her, fingers catching on her shirt and pulling. "Let me help—"

Her hand snaps out to wrap around their wrist, grip strong enough that it has Juniper flinching with a barely contained yelp from the abruptness of it.

They're not as strong as you anymore.

"I— maybe it's for the best if I'm alone, for now." She lets go of them, and she can *see* them will themself to not move too quickly when they rub at their wrist so as not to alarm her of how badly it aches.

"I'm not leaving you. You wouldn't leave me." They look up at her, then, eyes filled with a sudden hesitance as they slowly speak the next words. "You...you *won't* leave me."

She knows what they're referring to the second those words leave their mouth: *the infusion.*

"No," Syfyn says. Her hand reaches out for them again, though this time it rests upon their knee. They don't flinch away: not like the others. "I won't leave you."

Not now. Not ever.

She can see the relief on their face though they try to conceal it.

"Then let me help." They reach out for her shirt again, and, yet again, she catches their wrist (though not nearly as rough as the first time). There's a heavy silence that lasts only a fraction of a second, Syfyn's gaze averting from theirs as she lets go. Their movements are slow— cautious, as if not to scare her away— as they lift the back of the blood-soaked shirt. The open wounds murmur in discontent at being exposed to the cold air of the barracks.

"...is it bad?" She asks.

"Kinda," they murmur.

She can hear them dip the rag in the water— hear them twist and drain it of the excess and feel the phantom touch of their hands as they approach with it. The hair on the back of her neck stands on end.

"Ready?" They ask.

She nods.

It's an odd feeling once the towel meets her raw, bleeding flesh. The skin aches and pulses in heated bursts of pain that have her clawing at the sheets and shredding them with her talons, eyes squeezing shut as Juniper does their best to be light in their movements.

She's not even aware she's crying until she tastes the salt on her tongue, face warm and wet and Juniper's hands falling away from her back. It's not the pain that has her body trembling though, nearly inaudible whimpering whines rising from the back of her throat. It's what this all stands for— her transition, Juniper's upcoming blood infusion.

It's the end of their childhood. The end of their innocence. The beginning of a life ruled by violence and war that'll most likely meet a grizzly end before they even make it to thirty, because from this day onwards they'll no longer be Syfyn Javall or Juniper Kalesko but Plaithus's strongest weapons.

No words need to be exchanged between them both within the darkened silence of the room. They both know.

So, instead, Juniper scoots closer and wraps their arms around her in a makeshift hug, chin resting on her shoulder and breathing quiet. Their hands are stained red, small slivers of feathers acting as splinters in their knuckles and palms.

This is all they have. This is all they've *ever* have.

Each other.

And, well, if she loses that? Syfyn's not sure what she'll do.

"Is there someone waiting for you back home?" You ask. They cough at the suddenness of the question, eyes widening and cheeks going flushed.

"What?" They blurt, practically spinning on their heels to face you.

You take a step closer to them, then, and you can see them fight the urge to step away in response as you do so, hands fumbling with their rings beneath their long sleeves. "Is there anyone waiting for you back home?" You repeat. Their eyes flicker over your face for a second, as if trying to spot a sliver of disingenuous intent, and, upon finding none--

"Do you?" They ask. Their voice comes out low-- barely above a whisper.

- (•) Your mind goes to Syfyn.
- ( ) Your mind goes to Sabir.
- ( ) No.

Next

You think of her poorly hidden smiles and the way her voice would soften for you and *only* you. For a fraction of a second you can even feel the ghost of her touch upon your skin, feel her lips against yours and the way she'd clasp your hand before battles with whispered promises of returning home to one another.

And then it's gone. *She's* gone. But Vethna? Vethna's still there, staring at you, waiting for an answer.

No-- not waiting for an answer-- reaching a conclusion. Your moments hesitance clearly served as enough of an answer for them, and before you can say anything they're looking away from you and to the ground instead, expression a poorly crafted mask of apathy to cover their disappointment.

"We should get going," they say. "Don't want to waste too much time."

They're already heading in the direction of the shops by the time you regather your senses.

Vethna Branch -- Choice: Your mind goes to Syfyn.

May 16, 2021

Things can get a bit...*complicated*...when returning home.

Dangerous. | Amilia Von Clamile | P.O.V. Switch

May 12, 2021

Amilia knows a dangerous person when she sees one: all hardened gazes and callused hands. They move through the world as if nothing scares them— as if nothing else is truly worth their time, whether it be from arrogance or sheer self-loathing.

Maybe that's why she's also able to recognize the stranger from the northeast for what they truly are: *dangerous*. It bleeds from every crevice on their body: from the belts strewn with blades and poisons to their face that's covered in scars and dried, peeling blood.

Dangerous. They're dangerous and you need to run—

But, even more than that, they feel familiar. And maybe *that's* what keeps her from running away once they're alone together in the woods, The Mevnrael kept safe back at the camp. Guarding them of all people is...well, it's safe to say that it can't be an easy job, nor a simple one. The Mevnraels don't play fair. They never have and they never will.

But Vethna's different, of course. Otherwise they wouldn't be here, miles from their home: miles from a life of royalty, doting suitors, and *power.*

So that, naturally, raises the question of just how much The Commander knows. And just how much does Vethna *want* them to know? And, more importantly, *why?*

"I haven't seen anyone else on these roads since I've started traveling," Amilia comments, looking at them. "Not anyone *important*, anyway."

That seems to catch their attention— pull them from the seas of apathy and aloofness that they seem to constantly be drowning in (and a part of her just can't help but wonder if it's by choice or not; whether this is the tragic act of someone losing themself in the overwhelming waves of grief or a deliberate act of spiritual suicide).

"And who do you consider to be important?" They ask, raising a brow. There's an almost amused lilt to their lips as they duck beneath a rogue tree branch, pace speeding up so they're beside her as opposed to trailing behind. Their presence is suffocating but diminished, nothing more than a shadow of whatever greatness used to be there. It's cold, and it's *lonely.*

"Oh, you know...interesting people. You'd think that people traveling would be more intriguing, but they're not. They're all just boring and rude. Nobles, usually, or knights with sticks up their arses."

They huff a laugh then.

Dangerous. But dangerous people can also guarantee safety, be willing to get their hands covered in blood and gore for the sake of those around them. She can't help but get the sneaking feeling that Vethna's own thoughts were similar when it came to snatching up their mystery hero— their mystery *killer.*

"So, you've tried talking to them, then?" The Stranger asks.

"Sometimes," she murmurs. "None of them were mage hunters, though, if that's what you're trying to get at." Her hand comes up to brush a rogue strand of red hair that tickles her nose. She wonders if The Commander knows just how powerful Mevnrael is. Knows what kind of people are chasing them.

If not...she frowns. Mage hunters should be the least of their worries.

The sound of The Stranger's footsteps falls away into silence and she pauses, turning to face them. "Squirrel got your tongue—?"

Her joke falls short— as does any mischief she might've been feeling only moments ago.

A hand falls onto the hilt of a sword, the scream of metal scraping against metal filling the otherwise peaceful sounds of nature.

The blade sings as it cuts through the air, and an overreaching arc of translucent ruby red flies through the flickering flames of what remains of the village in some sickening display of power and control.

It takes a moment for the body to fall.

It takes a moment for ***their*** *eyes to fall upon her, shaking, nails ripped and torn and bloodied from clawing at the tree she stands in front of.* ***You're next****, those eyes say.* ***You're next and death will seem a mercy compared to what shall come to you.***

The blade's aimed between her eyes, and while there's still a few feet of distance between them both she knows it means nothing. The person across from her is a predator, and she's nothing more than their cornered prey.

"What—" her voice catches, and she swallows despite her mouth being completely dry. "What are you doing?"

"You're a fae," The Stranger states, gesturing to her ears. Their voice is cold, and while it had been monotone before this is something else entirely. This is the mask a killer wears to keep the stench of corpses from lingering on their own skin— to make it linger on someone else's instead. Some kind of fictitious alter-ego who carries the brunt of the slaughter; who wears the cloak of the sadness and sorrow that comes with being a practitioner of death.

"A *half*-fae," she clarifies. She doesn't even know why she speaks— it'd be smarter to just stay quiet. "And I've never hurt anyone."

A lie. A blatant one, at that.

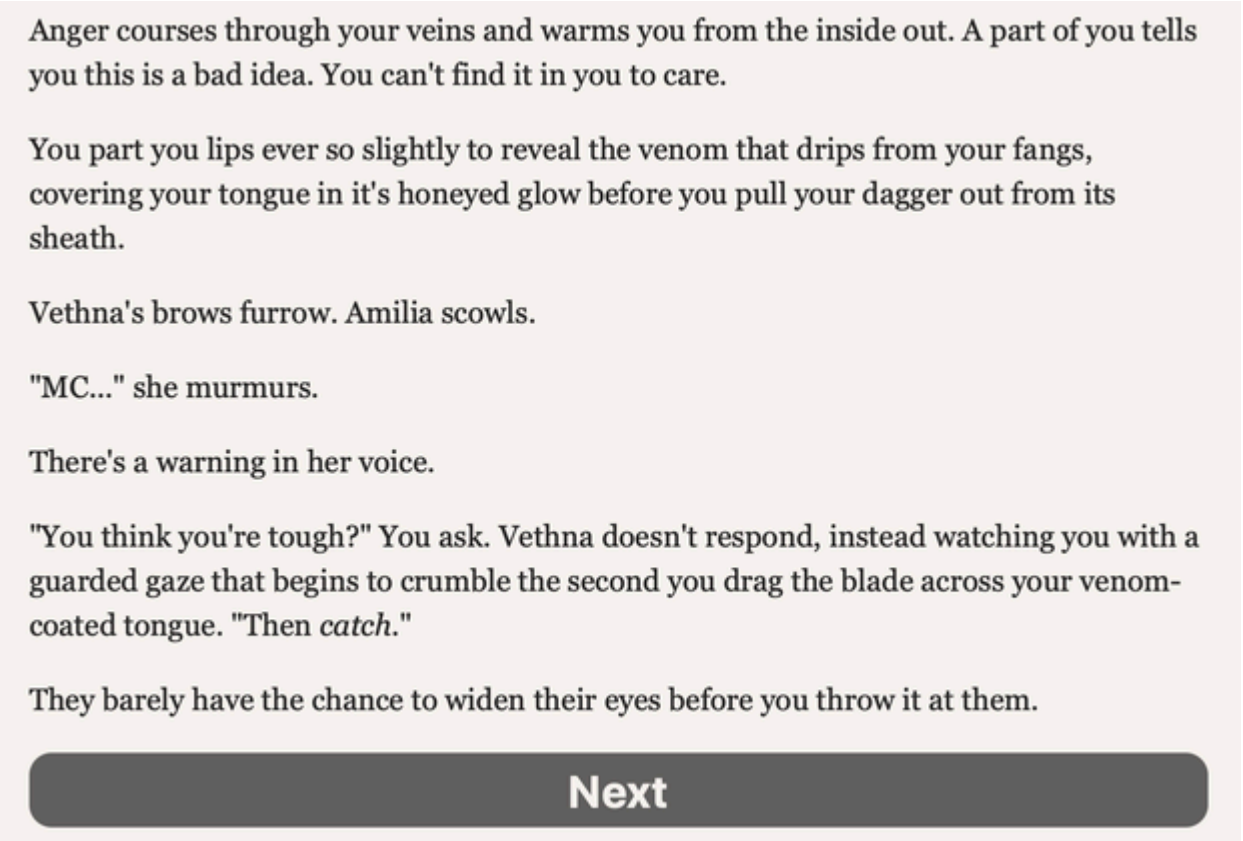
Still— it works in buying her time as The Stranger looks upon her, head tilting to the side in idle curiosity. Their gaze might as well be a tangible thing from how she feels it sliding over her scar. It's biting and it's *humiliating.*

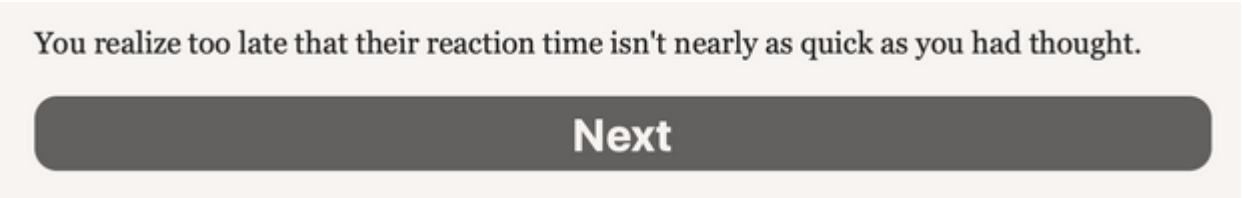
It's humiliating— and it's a show of just how easy she is to kill. A show of just how pathetic she truly is. So much so that it has The Stranger dropping their sword and sheathing it entirely, looking down upon her as if she's nothing more than the dirt beneath their shoes— some kind of annoyance in their plan to protect The Mevnrael.

And she knows, now, in that gaze, that she's been marked down as just that— *an annoyance,* a flaw in the plan, and a *burden.*

And perhaps her sister was right. Perhaps some things never do change.

And perhaps this is all she’ll ever be.





Threaten them.

May 9, 2021

Sometimes, you just happen to vastly overestimate just how capable your charge is when it comes to scaring the living daylights out of them.

What should the next short story be?

May 5, 2021

Alright, everyone... it's time. It's up to y'all to vote on what the next short story will be! All of these will be finished eventually, it's just a matter of which comes first.

The poll will close by the 8th.

Vethna x Javier

22%

Sabir's training to become a politician.

28%

Syfyn growing her wings (Ft. The Commander).

44%

One of Amilia's first (and possibly cruel) shenanigans.

6%

Poll ended May 8, 2021 · 18 votes total

Group Dynamic Variability (Chapter 3)

May 3, 2021

Starting in Chapter 3, you'll begin to see group dynamics form based on MC's personality and how they've treated their companions...safe to say, it'll benefit you in the long run to have them on your side.

Are you a friend or a guard?

You know Vethna's glad to be with someone who's a true magic user like themself and from their homeland (without the threat of giving away where the two of you are to their family). And while you might be as far from southern as it gets, it hasn't stopped you from being roped into their antics.

If anything, you would say this doesn't just feel like a traveling group anymore but like you're all just...

Friends.

You know Vethna's glad to be with someone who's a true magic user like themself and from their homeland (without the threat of giving away where the two of you are to their family). It's a bit odd to see them so...light. Happy, almost. Distracted from the fact that you're all still on the run for your lives.

If anything, you would say this doesn't just feel like a traveling group anymore but like the two of them are actual *friends*, and you their guard.

And don't forget the Golden Rule: you'll be treated how you've treated others.

"Are you...okay?" Vethna asks. You raise a brow at them in question though you know what they're referencing already, shame creeping up and into your gut as you bite down on your cheek hard enough to draw blood.

*Broken, **broken,** broken, **broken**--*

"Your nightmare," Vethna says, softly, so quiet that Amilia can't hear-- though you can tell she's making an effort of maintaining a distance to give you both privacy.

"What about it?" You ask, throat taut. A part of you desperately wishes they'd just stop asking. *Stop caring*.

"I'm serious, MC, do I need to be worried about you?" They almost sound frustrated from your refusal to give a true answer. You suppose you're frustrated with yourself, too. But some part of you secretly hopes that maybe, if you just keep ignoring it, it'll go away.

"We need to talk," Vethna says, voice low.

"About what?"

"Your nightmare," they state. "We've avoided it long enough."

Avoiding isn't the right word. More like Vethna's been too scared to broach the topic and you too ashamed.

Ashamed, ***ashamed,*** *ashamed,* ***ashamed--***

You go to look at Amilia to see if she's listening, but if anything, she's making it a point to not overhear the conversation, riding just a bit ahead.

"What about it?" You ask, throat taut.

They frown at the question, grip on the reins tightening and gaze hardening. They regard you as if you're a threat. Maybe you are.

"Do I need to be worried?" Vethna asks, raising a hand before you can actually respond-- "and not for you. For *me*." They look to Amilia. "For her. "

Coming On Strong. | Nikke Ivante | P.O.V Switch

Apr 21, 2021

The weather is cold— horribly so— nothing like the tropical and humid rains back home. Despite that, the feeling of rain on his skin has Nikke feeling on alert for the first time since Jost and him left their homeland. The foreign lands surrounding the northeast have been nothing but *alien* these past few weeks and, quite frankly, *horrible*. He misses his clan. He misses his mom. He misses having an actual fucking bed to sleep in.

But right now? Right now he's stuck wading in waist deep flood water due to Jost shooing him out upon the discovery of The Commander setting a ward. He doesn't know what she was expecting; exiled or not, The Commander had never been a fool.

Warm, yellow light pours out from the window above, and each grasp of Nikke's clawed hands on the cobbled wall brings him closer, clothes and hair sticking to his skin. A part of him expects the window to be slammed shut in his face, or for Mevnrael to conveniently peek their head out right when he's about to enter, but it seems the gods are on his side when he manages to get his hand through the opening.

Time to make an entrance.

The window frame groans beneath his weight as he steps inside, a hand running through his hair and slicking it back. He would take a picture of their dumbstruck faces if he could, Mevnrael stumbling behind The Commander, their eyes wide as The Commander reaches for their sword.

They're infuriatingly quick to gather their senses, a cocky and lilted grin settling onto their face.

"Oh, this is awkward," The Commander cringes, squinting their eyes at him. "We kinda need...to get...through there." They waggle their finger at the window, earning them a disbelieving look from their companion.

"We *do?"* Mevnrael sputters. The Commander only shrugs in response, holding up their hands as if they're quite literally weighing their options.

"I mean...evil snake lady at the door...angry townsfolk...the window is really our only option here—"

Even now they joke, refusing to take their situation seriously. It's enough to have Nikke's blood boiling.

"You talk too much," Nikke murmurs, stepping closer. The Commander takes a step back. *Good.*

"Way to single me out," The Commander huffs. "Vethna *never* shuts up. Except now, it seems." The duo takes the chance to glare at one another before The Commander speaks again, Nikke pulling out one of his daggers and leaning against the wall, spinning it idly between his fingers.

Who's he to get angry at their poorly borrowed time? It just gives him longer to think about all the ways he could finally put an end to the waste of life in front of him.

He tosses his knife up into the air before catching it again, holding it up and slicing through the air, forced perspective giving him the satisfaction of slicing The Commander's neck before gutting them like a fish.

"*Look*, your friend," The Commander throws a thumb at the door behind them, "revealed that you both know who I am, which means you're probably *more* than aware of what I can do." The Commander takes a step closer, something dark, something *malicious*, in their eyes. "So why don't you go ahead and move aside for me?"

There you are.

There's the same person he saw on that battlefield all those years ago. That cocky, horrible, *arrogant* Commander. They step closer and closer, so close that Nikke can feel their breath on his skin. Close enough for him to see the way their pupils shrink when they stare at him. He wonders if they hate him even a fraction of how much he despises them when the warmth of their skin caress his.

He wishes it was cold. *Dead cold.*

Something about this moment, something about their eyes being locked together, has The Commander faltering, lips parting but no words leaving. Nikke realizes it the instant they begin to stutter.

Someone has a crush.

A grin crawls onto his face, hand shooting out to grab their neck, their racing heartbeat fluttering across his palm as he does. “*Cute,”* he purrs. They stumble backward in an attempt to not completely fall over as Nikke guides them toward the other side of the room, slamming them into the door once they’re close enough. The wood shakes on its hinges. He wants to do it again, and *again*, *and* ***again***.** He wants to break the door with their body and crack them in half. Snap every bone within them until they look up at him in nothing but fear.

“A bit too forward for my tastes,” The Commander grumbles, gasping as his grip tightens. His hand goes for the handle to let Jost in.

Doesn’t work.

It *doesn’t work* and The Commander has the audacity to laugh at him, even as their eyes go red, even as they begin to choke on their own spit and kick and flail. “What?” They cackle. “You didn’t *really* think that would work, did you?"

He opens his mouth to hiss, fangs protruding and venom on his tongue, but it’s too late. His one error, his *one second* of poor judgement, gives The Commander more than enough time to wrangle free of his grasp, a fist flying into his jaw and sending him reeling back. The Commander doesn’t spare a moment before they’re grabbing hold of Mevnrael and dashing toward the window, the two of them jumping out and into the night.

He's left standing there alone in the room, blood dripping from his mouth that he's slow to wipe away with the back of his hand. Cold air blows in from the window, fluttering through the old, rotting and laced curtains. It should be chilling him, slowing down his movements and encouraging him to curl up into a ball to sleep until summer comes— but he's anything but tired.

Anything but *cold*.

His skin feels warm and he feels *hot*, blood racing and heart hammering. *Kill*. He wants to kill them, *gods*, he wants to rip them apart.

He wants his claws in their flesh, for them to be writhing, begging for mercy, begging for him to stop but wanting more. He'll make the punishments of The Crown seem like a mercy by the time he's done with them.

Something predatory coos in delight at the prospect, a churring noise leaving him as he shudders, approaching the window and watching The Commander and Mevnrael struggle to make their escape: *like flies caught in a web.*

Jost appears from just around the corner outside.

"Hurry the fuck up before we lose them, asshole."

He gives her a mock salute, the wind whipping at his hair as he leaps into the water below. Something within him just *knows* that they'll get away. This isn't the right place, the right *time,* for him to kill them. It's too hectic, too chaotic and unsightly, to be fitting.

Still— he'll play the game. He'll play it and he'll play it well. It'll just make the end taste all the more sweet.

First Meeting. | Vethna Mevnrael

Apr 21, 2021

The mainroom is cold and foreboding despite the fireplace being lit. There's a lump in Vethna's throat that tightens with each step that they descend, one hand running along the metal and wooden guardrail and the other tracing the mural that sits upon the stone wall.

They can see the entirety of the room now. Empty— or so it seems. They know better than that, though.

"*Dearest—"*

They trip on the last step as a voice appears from behind them, a hand gripping their waist and turning them on their heel to face him. Javier watches them with a purely sadistic gaze, the smile on his face dripping with malice.

"Where ever are you going, beloved?"

"Where's Jamie?" Vethna asks. They don't bother trying to stop the hand that comes up to cup their face despite their anxiety, his thumb rubbing tauntingly soothing circles on their cheek.

"Why don't we talk about something less stressful?" Javier asks. His grip turns tight, *painful*, a fistful of Vethna's braided hair being yanked back as they yelp. "Like your little plan to run away. You think Parson is going to like that?" His breath is hot and revolting as it fans over their neck, and Vethna's eyes go to look at the mural of their mother above the fireplace, regal as ever as she sneers down upon them. "The Circle will hunt you down, Veth. We won't stop. Not until we have you."

"Let go of me, Javier."

“Honestly, it’s better to just save the hassle and stay here. Stay with *me.”*

“Javier, I’ll only tell you once—”

His other hand goes to grab their throat, face red with barely contained rage. His hand doesn’t meet its target before Vethna slaps him, pulling out their dagger in one swift movement and pressing it against his throat. “Don’t follow me. Don’t try to find me. Just *let me go.”*

“You know we can’t do that." The room is silent save for the sound of Vethna's panting breaths, their blade shaking in the air. Javier only smiles at their faltering confidence. "I mean, do you truly think that a broken down commander can save you? Who’s even to say they’d wish to protect someone like you?”

Vethna doesn’t respond, only swallowing thickly and taking a step back when Javier further presses the blade against his own throat in his approach.

“A dirty, good for nothing blood mage. Words you’ve said yourself. You’ve said other things too— like if you deserve to live. To be *saved*. All good questions, Vethna. All questions that The Commander will ask.” He leers closer and closer until Vethna can smell his after-shave, and the next words that he says are crooned beside their ear, slipping inside the crevices of their brain and tearing away at their already crumbling defenses. "And I'll tell you the answer to all of those things: it's *no."*

"Stop—"

They don’t know if they mean to do it or not, but either way, the blade goes cutting across Javier’s throat, blood spraying onto Vethna’s face as they squeeze their eyes shut, muttering out a string of words. The red liquid falls past their lips and lingers on their tongue, *hot* and *revolting* and *metallic*.

Their vision goes purple, magic warm as it envelopes them, reality shifting and warping as they see fit.

They imagine the infamous armor. They imagine the foreboding voice. They imagine the weighted gaze. They imagine their weapons and their rallying cries. They *remember* their sword clashing against their skin, their overwhelming strength and power and the sickening sense of fear that they had felt as each blow threatened to bring them closer to meeting death.

And then, they *fall*. Fall through time, through space, through the fabric of the realm until they reach a standstill, knees weak and wobbling.

They open their eyes.

What they see is a forest. A pitch black, *cold* forest, that, once their eyes adjust, is filled with nothing more than dead and rotting trees. They can sense magic in the air, can feel it on their skin, hesitant and skittish and a yellowing-orange: *Jamie.*

Jamie, *Jamie,* ***Jamie***— that little idiot. Of course Javier sends him out to do his dirty work.

They call out for him, voice echoing within the woods, leaves crackling beneath their feet the deeper in they wander. Watched...they feel like they're being watched.

Pitter patter, pitter patter, ***pitter patter****—*

Running feet. Running, *hammering* feet and heaving breath. They look around, hands extended out in front of them as they do their best to ignore the drying blood on their skin. Off. *Off*. They have to get it off, and *soon*.

He'll find you. He'll find you and he'll kill you. He'll drain you of every last ounce of blood within you and you'll hate him and you'll hate him and ***you'll hate him.***

But if they just don't care— if they just stop caring— maybe it means they all stand a fighting change. Maybe it means…

Pain. Their body goes flying back, so much so that they're nearly knocked entirely off their feet and onto the ground, and immediately a snarl meets their ears. It's dark and violent and *horrifying*, shrunken pupils staring at them as if they're nothing more than a piece of meat to slice through.

And they realize it then, chest heaving, eyes meeting theirs.

"It's you."

The Commander's lips part to speak in response, a flicker of curiosity within their frantic gaze, but it's quickly ruined by a flash of yellow and an overwhelming rush of warmth, the smell of burning hair scalding Vethna's senses. It's with a strangled cry that The Commander falls to the ground, the skin on their back sizzling and melting, clothes intertwining with flesh.

When Vethna looks up, it's to see Jamie.

"What the *hell* are you thinking?" Vethna hisses, stepping over The Commander's writhing body. A part of them worries for them. The other part yells at them to not be foolish. *Dangerous: their dangerous.* Gold threaded heels threaten to sink into the muddied ground as Vethna approaches their old friend, though they still tower over the man, rage within their very blood.

"They were chasing me, Veth! I tried to get away, but—"

They slap him, rings colliding with his jaw, blood and spit dripping from his mouth when he looks back at them. A hand comes up to rub at his reddened flesh. "I would think long and hard before you start lying to me, Jamie."

His gaze is ashamed. Ashamed and *scared*.

"He made me. He said he knew you were trying to leave and— if I just— if I just cursed them—"

His hand twitches toward The Commander, and Vethna’s quick to grasp his wrist, squeezing it tightly enough for him to whine in protest.

“You *knew?”* Vethna asks. Their heart twists within their chest, body aching from the weight of the realization. “You *knew* I was trying to leave and you were going to *help him?”*

“I can’t get caught between you both, Vethna. I *won’t.* You’re strong but you—” He cuts himself off, chewing on his cheek. “You haven’t seen what he can do.”

A bitter laugh tears itself from their throat, one of pure and utter disbelief as they look out into the forest clearing. “Oh, no, I know what he can do just fine, Jamie.” They look at him again. “I’m just not a coward.”

They look down at The Commander, at their wounds and the way their fingers claw at the muddied earth. Despite their agony they’re silent, wild eyes glued to them.

“Look at them, Veth. They’re no saving grace. They’re hardly even a soldier.”

Those words admittedly sow more doubt than they should. And yet...

It’ll be okay.

Will it?

They can remember studying well past midnight next to Jamie, huddled together and struggling to translate ancient Vygrath. They can hear laughter and the sound of clinking glasses, the overjoyed smiles of having discovered new magic. An illusion— all of it— but Jamie had been there for all of those moments. *He* had been real.

And he had been good, too.

“Jamie—” They whip their head to face him, strands of brown hair falling from their braid. “You could come with me. We could both leave. Start over—" Jamie's expression twists into something akin to revolt. "What?"

“Are you insane?”

“What do you mean?”

He rips his hand from theirs, staring at them as if their mad— or perhaps just foolish.

“They’ll kill you before you even get a mile away.”

“Maybe,” Vethna admits. They lick their lips, mouth suddenly dry. “Maybe not.”

“I’m not going with you. I won’t tell Javier, either, but…” He steps away, eager to make his leave, and while he might've beens someone trustworthy before he became *corrupted...*

“I can't just let you go, Jamie.”

There’s a pause. The kind of pause that makes your hair stand on end and panic rattle through your bones. The kind of pause that tells you something bad is about to happen. The kind of pause that has Vethna hardening themselves in order to carry out the bad thing that *needs* to happen.

“I won’t kill you,” Vethna murmurs, softly. “I just—” they look down at their blade, completely devoid of use after their teleportation trick. The barrier of the city has never been easy to get around, but even so; Javier's blood should've been stronger than this.

He doesn’t care about you.

Their grip tightens as they shove the thought away.

“How can you just—*”* Jamie's brows furrow. "How can you just say it so matter-of-factly?"

They ignore his question. “I just need some of your blood.” Vethna steps closer, grabbing hold of his vest. Their head tilts to the side, lips pursed in thought. "Or, well... a lot."

"You can't do this."

"I can," Vethna says. "And I will."

Free. Gods, they want to be free. And if this is their only way of achieving it? Well, it's as their homeland says— "The victorious are those who are willing to wield the blade."

“It’s kind of you to offer to not tell Jamie about where I am,” Vethna admits. Regret churns within them as they align the blade between Jamie's ribs, emotions flickering and fading with each and every breath they take. “But I’m afraid that’s not enough. Not with him.”

"Vethna, you can trust me. I won't say a word—"

"I never confessed to doubting you." They frown. "But even so— even if you do somehow manage to scrounge up the guts required to face him— he wouldn't believe you anyway." They look to the blood on their hands. "He already knows."

“He’ll— he’ll trust me! It’s different this time, Vethna, *I swear*—"

“*No*, Jamie. It’s never, *ever* different. Don’t you get that?” Their voice raises, burning and scratching against the back of their throat as their eyes grow wet. “He doesn’t care about us! He *never* cared about us!”

No, ***wrong,*** *stop— just* ***stop caring.***

“He cared about you," Jamie hisses, spit flying onto Vethna's face from between clenched teeth. "You somehow had him tied around your finger and you *never even cared—"*

"I said *be quiet."*

A sharp exhale leaves him, every muscle in his body tensing, hands clawing at Vethna’s shoulders. Their blade cuts through fabric and flesh, blood filling its center.

A choking gargle leaves him, blood spilling from his lips, and Vethna’s eyes flash purple. They can see his magic, his *soul,* as a single line of thread, ready to be warped and shifted and changed— and change they do. They sew it until it’s something of use— the perfect lie— one that admittedly might get him killed.

“It was all my fault—” He'll confess. He'll *lie*. He'll lie and he'll do it so poorly that Javier will be more consumed with rage for Jamie's audacity than desperate for Vethna's magic.

Their blade sings when it’s removed from his body, and Vethna uses the whispers of their magic to shut the wound just enough for him make it back to the estate upon awakening.

His body crumples to the floor when they release him, and it’s then that Vethna moves to stand over The Commander. Their breathing is shallow, skin pallid, and as Vethna kneels down beside them to heal their wounds they feel something within them. Something cold, and foreign, and *dangerous.*

And dangerous? Dangerous means safe.

And all I have to do is convince them.

The United Houses of Southern Vygrand (Lore)

Apr 21, 2021

The South.

The southern territories of Vygrand have no king and no queen— only the leading noble houses and an Archmage, who is regarded as the most powerful mage of the human lands. Most are weary of the south due to its strict hierarchy system and fascination with the Old World. In fact, it's the only largely established human area that so openly embraces it.

As of now, there are six main families that rule over the land, the leading house being House Mevnrael, whose patriarch has served as the Archmage for over seven years by defending his title in the annual

(and deathly) magical duel that is hosted in Silburn, the south's Capital city. Each house is locked in a bitter feud with one another while also relying on one another in strenuous alliances to keep lower houses from ever rising and keeping out invading armies. Not only do they compete for the seat of the Archmage, but for land and the strongest magic users of the lower classes to marry into their families.

The culture of the south thrives on ambition and greed, adored for it's bold advancements in magic while being feared for its near lack of self-preservation. If it's in the name of the greater good, there's no such thing as too great a sacrifice. Quite simply put— no one knows the meaning of "the ends justify the means" quite like Southern Vygranders.

They assemble under no unified title nor name, instead introducing themselves by their *own* names and which house stakes claim over their land. "Josephine under House Erudias" is a symbol of being claimed by a greater house while "Josephine *of* House Erudias" symbolizes a noble of one of the leading six houses. One word differentiates between royalty and commoner, and it's vital to never mix the two.

Marriage + Romance

A family's respect and holding in the south directly depends on the strength and control of their magic, and as such, most families are desperate to have powerful children. It is expected for people of similar magical prowess to marry, as marrying someone with less magic is considered shameful. It's not unheard of from a great house to fall due to poorly made pairings. For this reason, most marriages within the south are arranged.

However— before marriage, it is viewed as completely acceptable for powerful mages to sleep around or date lower class magic users so long as they have no child nor ever marry as each other's *first* partners. It's not entirely uncommon to see nobles marry and bring their lower class lovers into their houses as a concubine or mistress. For this reason, polyamory is fairly common in the south. It is not considered good nor bad for the lower magic user to be brought into a noble family. Some will claim they are abandoning their people and are selfish. Others will say they were smart for finding a way to upper their social status. Lower class mages that serve as concubines or mistresses, however, may never have children of their own, and as a result, their lineage dies.

Children who *are* born from these relationships are called *trystha*, or dual-blooded. They are often shunned and feared due to the uncontrollable nature of their powers, usually wielding powerful magic but weak bodies.

There are no rules for who approaches who when it comes to official courting— it is not reliant on gender or family. So long as they are of similar magical prowess, they most likely come from similar social circles. However, they must go through the family before they may ever actually court the person they have their sights on. The leading parents of the family decide whether or not it's a good fit— and then allow their child to make the final call. Families cannot force their children into marriage officially, but it's not uncommon to hear of them threatening them to marry or otherwise risk losing all financial and familial support.

Courting tends to involve what most cultures traditionally think of (flirtations, exchanging of gifts, etc.) but also heavily relies on magic as it is viewed as the closest two people can be spiritually. As a result, creating a spell together that requires the use of both people's specific magic is common and viewed as incredibly intimate and binding.

As opposed to exchanging rings during a wedding, the couple will exchange custom made daggers made with their own magic for the other to have and carry, along with filling vials of their blood to give to the other.

The wedding ritual itself has one person marrying into the family, and the person welcoming them into theirs. The first, the person marrying into the family, shall offer their forearm to the second. The second, using the dagger they were gifted, will cut into the first's arm as the first guides them. The first person shall say the following words:

To you I entrust my blood, my magic, and my soul.
To you I promise the passage of my life,
And the honor of my death.
By your blade I shall bleed, by your hands I shall die.
You are my forever and my always,
Damnation or otherwise.

The second shall then reply, as the first repeats the same process on them:

*Salvation or otherwise—**
Your magic and mine shall intertwine.
In happiness and sorrow I shall lift your cup,
And breathe life into your lungs as you've breathed into mine.
You are my forever and my always,
By my blade you shall bleed, and by my love you shall fly.*

On the last line, the second partner shall heal the wound of the first while leaving their own wound to bleed. It is an acknowledgement of the sacrifice the first makes leaving their home and title to join their own, and, as a result, they shall make their own sacrifice by having a scar to show their dedication to their partner.

Marriage is intended to last for both mages' entire life, though divorce isn't unheard of. The reasoning behind this is the fact that marriage, in itself, is a blood pact between the partners, and to undo such a permanent act is dangerous, and, at most times, lethal. Those who manage to survive are forced to live with shortened life-spans and health issues. As a result, most tend to stay married far after they've grown to resent one another. The concept of true, *genuine* love in the south isn't well known, nor is it openly chased after. Those who do are written off as foolish and idyllic, and, most importantly, *weak.*

Familial Dynamics + Children

Families are lead by either a matriarch or patriarch (those falling outside the binary simply being called the House Leader)— them being whoever is from the more well-established house and/or is the more powerful magic user. Unlike most cultures within Vygrand, there is no room for sentimentality or affection with children, at least not in public. Such displays are meant to be kept behind locked doors and with family only, meaning if one were to visit the south, the most kind thing you'd see a parent do is squeeze their child's shoulder.

Children are expected to excel in school, families often competing to get into the most exclusive academies and losing notability along with respect if their children fail out of them. Education isn't about teaching the next generation— it's about creating the next generation of heirs.

Within families, there are strict hierarchies, with the House Leader having final say on all matters within the family. Concubines and mistresses often serve more as parents for the children of the leading parents than the actual parents do, bathing them, helping them with schoolwork, and in general taking care of their mental well-being. As a result, most children come to resent their parents or hold nothing more than a begrudging respect for them.

Government and Leading Families

The south has no official government. There is no officially elected council, and it would be inaccurate to describe them as a democracy. If anything, it's a brutal free for all where the powerful thrive and the weak are eaten alive— a dictatorial oligarchy.

Once per month, the Leading Houses will gather and discuss their respective duties along with any concerns for the south. If there is anything to compliment within their rather chaotic "government", it is their ability to work together when necessary to keep the nation together, these meetings being the best example of such an act.

The six leading houses that partake in such meetings are as follows: House Mevnrael, House Erudias, House Hydreza, House Lilliant, House Vaustus, and House Refta.

House Mevnrael is the leading house, along with being the most revered. They are known for having one of the most powerful magical bloodlines and are the longest founded ruling house, having been there since the first council. As a result, they hold ties all over the realm, many of which make others fearful of them (even if it weren’t for their high position). Their predominant use of magic is Illusory and Enchantment, often allowing them to manipulate others to do as they wish— not they ever need to resort to magic to do so, being heavily recognized as the most manipulative house and family in the south.

House Erudias has been a servantory house to Mevnrael for the past century, the two houses serving a heavy alliance to one another. In exchange for protection, Erudias, renown for their libraries and education, have promised tutors and ancient texts. As a result, no other house is ever aware at any given point what their plans are. Erudias has never been a big player on the field, much preferring to keep to the sidelines, wanting only a position as a noble house to have the freedom to study whatever they please. They are known for Conjuration magic.

House Hydreza is as regal as they come, blue-blooded and arrogant. Hydreza has taken it upon themselves to “lead” the south despite not truly holding the authority to do so, setting up moral and civic standards along with focusing on the protection of the city. The latter is the only reason anyone tolerates their meddling, as they are the most powerful Abjuration users. Mevnrael and them have been locked in a personal feud for as long as anyone can remember, which has many concerned about the security of the city.

House Lilliant, a favorite among commoners in the south and foreigners alike, has a focus on diplomatic relations and aesthetics. Many of their family have travelled and serve as diplomats in foreign nations, making an active effort to keep relations open with other countries despite the south’s reputation. They are known for taking care of those in need and offering shelter and support, though the other noble houses tend to look down upon them for this. They predominantly use Transmutation magic to create vital resources.

House Vaustus is a reclusive house and the smallest house. They aren’t kept in power due to fear or respect, but because they are the only known family of Divination users. They have predicted multiple events, keeping the south safe from invasions by predicting them years in advance. However, as of recently, they’ve gone radio silent, no one having seen them in months. This, safe to say, has most in unease, some claiming its foretelling of disaster, others peace. Many hold a fascination for this house due to their rather mysterious reputation and odd personalities, some foreigners traveling just to get a reading into the future from them.

The last and final house, House Refta, has only just recently joined the Noble Houses after a house war that left the former leading house (House Jyshra) in shambles, the only living members being exiled from the south and shunned by its citizens. They’re loud and overlooked by most due to their lack of having done anything of any true importance, but anyone who looks at them closely can tell that there’s something *dangerous* about them lurking just beneath the surface. They predominantly use Pyromancy, a rare and dangerous magic, but not one that easily garners respect due to it’s naturally destructive nature.

Culture

Due to the humid and hot weather, most buildings are made from sandstone, filled with large, stained glass windows portraying historical magical battles. Everything is large and grande with buildings covered in vines and gardens filled with cypress trees. The paths are stone, and nothing *isn’t* enchanted, floating lanterns and candles keeping areas illuminated at night.

The city itself is covered by a large, magical force field of sorts, maintained and upkeeped by House Hydreza. The city has strict laws regarding entering and leaving, and as a result it’s near impossible for outsiders to enter— and near impossible for those within the city to leave without proper clearing (whether that be from house title or mage status).

Common fashion seen are heels and gladiator sandals along with sashes tied around the waist. These sashes correlate with the color of whatever house the people are ruled by— green for Mevnrael, royal blue for Erudias, light blue for Hydreza, gold for Lilliant, purple for Vaustus, and orange for Refta. Most

clothing is flowing and long, meaning gowns and long coats. Deep v-necks are a common fashion, as are chokers and golden jewelry. It’s rare to see anyone wearing head decor of any sort unless for religious reasons, and most tend to braid their hair in elaborate patterns, tying off the ends with colorful twine and thread.

Common makeup is metallic with a focus on sharp and strong features. This includes painting the neck to accentuate the jawline, eyeliner beneath the eyes but not above, and brightly colored, patterned lipsticks.

The city could be equated to a large resort of sorts— nobles and upper class citizens spending their days studying and practicing magic as the lower class are kept looking nice only to not offend the upper class. The lower class are tasked with cooking, cleaning, and maintaining the city’s flawless appearance.

Aesthetic and power are the two most important things in the south— and everything within it does its best to remind you of it.