

TWO: The Arcane Philosophy

The second Arcane had left the room expecting Aero to follow, Aero was certain that he had frozen his paws to the stone floor below, because Aero couldn't move. His fear blocked his brain's commands to move from reaching his ~~steps!~~ he berated himself ~~mentally~~ *to pay any attention at all to Arcane! Now you're doomed!* Aero was thoroughly convinced that Arcane was going to punish him, force him to his will, or even worse still, kill him. Or would it be worse? Aero had no idea. Arcane was well, arcane, when it came to anything like this. There was no telling what this tyrant would do at all.

"Well? Are you just going to stand there, or are you going to follow?" Arcane turned around to address Aero, one sided cape swishing as he did. There was patience in his voice. Was this a facade? Aero could not tell. If it was, then Arcane hid it very well. Aero looked into the tyrant's blood colored eyes. There was no hint of a negative emotion within them either. What was going on...? Aero knew Arcane was up to something. The question was what exactly?

"Y-yes sir," Aero's voice was shaky and unstable, just like his legs as when he tried to move them, they refused to. Aero tried the best he could to keep his voice calm and to move his legs. To no avail. Showing obvious weaknesses? That was a very easy death sentence, and Aero knew it. Still, when he finally able to take steps forward, his paws still felt heavier than stone. To the best of his limited ability, Aero ignored it to keep pace with his tyrannical leader.

"I saw that skirmish you had between our brethren during the meeting," Arcane began calmly as Aero's heart panicked and sped up. "I will not chastise you for not defending yourself, but I do believe you should have at least attempted to do as such. You should have shown them your power. Showed them that you are not to be trifled with no matter your demeanor," Arcane continued.

He was trying to manipulate his weaknesses, Aero knew that. If Arcane thought he could do so so easily, he should think again!

"I can sympathize with you, Aero. I too was constantly targeted in my youth. Like you, I was also the runt of my litter."

What was Arcane going on about...? Aero hadn't the slightest clue. He could only continue listening.

"Points of authority never helped once. Always turned their heads and feigned ignorance. It got so bad that eventually I was considering just ending it all for good...."

Aero most certainly wished Arcane had! He couldn't imagine how much better life would be without him!

"Just when I thought all hope for my supremacy was lost, it all came together. What if I enforced my own authority instead? What if I, against all whim of others, rose up against all the terrorists in my life and took control?! Forced them to cease and desist?! Bow down to my once hidden might!? And what would I do to do just that...?" Arcane prompted with a boastful tone.

Considering how Arcane usually responded to attacks on him and Hydyraen, he struck back harder with an iron paw. Retaliation was Aero's best guess. But he was still too wary of Arcane's actions to even open his muzzle.

"Retaliation of course!" Arcane declared and his confirming Aero's suspicions. "Not just any retaliation, though. I had to hit back and hit back twice as hard if not harder! When I had done so, just thinking of all their helpless distraught faces fill me with laughter! They felt just as they made me feel. It felt as if Justice was really served for the first time. After all that, they became subservient to me and never messed with me again."

"U-uh sir?" Aero finally brought himself to speak. "I-if I may interrupt... what does all this exactly have to do with me?" he asked nervously, waiting for Arcane to smack him or something like that.

"You are going through the same things I used to, am I right? Being bullied into submission constantly because you're the runt of the litter?" Arcane asked for confirmation.

"I-I guess so?" Aero responded uncertainly and carefully. One thing was for certain, Arcane cannot know that he was a pacifist!

"And I suppose you desire for all that torment to end, right?" Arcane pressed.

"Y-yeah, I do, actually," Aero replied, still wary, but certain in what he said. This was a relatively new feeling for him. Certainty. Wait a minute. No. This is what Arcane WANTED him to feel. Cannot let him manipulate! Don't!

"Then you must take charge! Defend yourself for starters! Don't let anyone see your weaknesses! Show them your will to survive! Become your own authority!" Arcane said with a proud expression on his face.

Aero had to reiterate in his mind again that he was too pacifistic to do anything of the sort. So how would he do something like that without fighting? Impossible! "How would I do that?" he unintentionally spoken aloud. It took all the remaining self control to keep him from slapping his paws to his face.

Arcane burst out laughing as he proceeded to pat Aero's back. Aero tried not to wince. "I hope you are joking! Why, you must use the Powers of Darkness to do so, lad! I know that you're just exiting your cub years, but I'm confident that you can channel that power now! I mean, you have begun undertaking my assignments, have you not?" he asked.

Arcane seemed to have forgotten that he has yet to even let Aero out of the gates of Hydyraen and to the surface yet. And Aero has never even tried escaping yet. All foxes that have tried to were hunted down and likely killed. The only one who was rumored to have evaded that was Shade...

Aero was not sure how to respond. He had never even tried using those powers, let alone done so at all! And even more let alone for Arcane's bidding!

"Show me that power of yours, then. Hit me!" Arcane said suddenly.

"H-huh?!" Aero exclaimed in surprise. That was out of the blue for sure!

"Show me your power!" Arcane repeated. "Summon those negative feelings of yours. Channel them into the power of the Darkness. Show me how much you wish for the torment to end!" Arcane said. His tone was encouraging and inviting. As if he genuinely wanted to help Aero... no. No he does NOT want to help him! Aero knew it! He must resist!

Aero also knew that if he were to actually attack his leader like he wanted to, Arcane would definitely see just how weak he was. That thought made his stomach drop straight into his tail. At that point there would be no point in hiding how weak and pathetic he was. What would Arcane do?! How would he react!? Aero stood there for several seconds debating on what he should do. And every second he wasted was one that led Arcane closer to the revelation Aero wanted to steer him away from! Oh what a mess... what should he do!?

"What's the holdup, Aero? Wait a minute... Do not tell me that.."

Oh no! Has Aero waited too long?!

"That you're-- Th-that's it! You got it!" Arcane exclaimed in approval.

Aero wondered what Arcane meant by that, but he gasped when he noticed that his handpaws were encased in a dark grayish aura that looked exactly like the auras used against him time and time again by the other shadow vulpines. So this was the Force of Darkness. His power...

"That does look like a formidable amount of power from here," Arcane observed. "Only one way to find out for sure. Use it on me!" he demanded.

Aero still did not move. Yet when he looked down at the manifestation of his indecisiveness, he did have to wonder just how strong he'd be if he used his hatred towards Arcane, Hydyraen, the entire shadow vulpine species, and his overall state of life. If the strength of the Force of Darkness is based on how negativity one can draw up then... Aero felt himself glaring and clenching his fists when images of recent events crossed into his thoughts. A fury like no other started to build and a red haze infiltrated his vision. Without even realizing it, he yelled, "Get the hell away from me!" and threw a punch right in front of him. He felt it connect with something solid and bony, and he realized just a little too late that it was Arcane's shoulder. As the punch hit, he felt his negativity transfer to Arcane's body and it evaporated from his mind

almost instantly. His first sight when the red haze faded was that of Arcane's body being thrown off its paws and several feet backward, well over halfway down the hallway. Arcane's body hit the ground with a resounding thud.

"S-sir!" Aero yelped without his volition.

Arcane was still lying on the ground, but he burst out laughing. Aero was not sure whether to have expected that reaction or not.

"Sir...?"

"That's incredible! Such power at such a young age! That is much more than I could have expected from anyone! Aero, my friend, you've got lots of potential. Hell, you might even succeed me one day. With our forces combined, I can feel the denizens of Nyethra quaking on their paws right now. We'll be unstoppable," Arcane said with complete confidence. Or was it arrogance? Both, probably.

Aero was in a state of absolute amazement and horror at the same time. Was his sheer hatred for all that is around him just that strong!? It couldn't be! He HAD to get out of there!

"Can you stand up?" he asked worriedly.

"No, I can't! You're just that strong! Are you sure you're sixteen, Aero? No fox of that age should be able to produce so much power! Not that I am complaining of course. I am relieved to have you as an ally rather than an enemy."

Arcane may think Aero is on his side, but he's definitely wrong about that. If Aero was really as strong as Arcane said he was, then maybe one day he could use his power to end Arcane's reign for good. One day, Aero knew, Arcane was going to be sorry!

It took a few more moments before Arcane was able to stand again. The entire time he lied on the ground he was laughing. Aero couldn't tell if it was maniacal, happiness, or what. Nonetheless he couldn't believe his ears. How could this happen? Aero gaining Arcane's approval?! Not even in either of their dreams! Yet there he was, merriment taking over. And yet, Aero was not going let himself be fooled. He knew very well that Arcane was up to his manipulative tricks as he always was. But how exactly was he doing so...?

"That little skirmish, by the way," Arcane returned to the subject they started with. "I saw that one shadow vulpine, Shade, come to you rescue. I saw you... talking... with her," he said, suspicion crossing his face. That was the last thing Aero wanted to see, was his suspicion.

"Y-yeah...?" he said nervously.

"She may have saved you, Aero, but I do not trust her. Not in the slightest. I have this nagging feeling that she is going to conspire against me. Every morning when I see her at these meetings, I don't see that spark in her eyes that indicates bloodlust and Nyethran suffering. She can't be a real shadow vulpine. She MUST have infiltrated us

so she could spy on us and potentially overthrow us and destroy our ways of life. The ways of us," Arcane said.

Aero's ears perked at Arcane's confession. "Are you sure, sir?" he asked. If Arcane truly did not trust Shade, then there was no doubt. Shade definitely was his ally.

"I'm not too sure, but I most certainly have my suspicions over her," Arcane replied, narrowing his eyes. But her history with this stronghold, the way she reacts to other shadow vulpines and our meetings. On top of the look in her eyes every day. Nothing adds up to the way I want it to. There is definitely something I do not trust about her at all. This is why I need you to go and find out more about her potential motives. I must know if she has it out for me or not. I can count on you, right?"

Wait a moment... Arcane wanted Aero to spy on Shade? He actually wanted him to go and meet Shade, albeit for different reasons. This had to be his chance to find out why he in particular was so important to her. If she was conspiring against Arcane, then that meant they shared a common goal. Wait. Is this why she needed him? To help her against Arcane?! Aero knew he needed to know more about this situation. There was no doubt that he was going to accept.

"Well, Mister Aero?" Arcane pressed.

"I-I accept!" Aero replied feeling another strange and unfamiliar spurt of confidence.

"That's a good answer, Aero! Be sure to notify me if you find out anything interesting you hear."

"Yes sir, but, where might I find her?" Aero asked as he paid no heed to this command.

Arcane chuckled. "Where else other than the vixen living quarters in the eastern side of Hydyraen? I wish you luck, Aero," Arcane said. And with that, Arcane began to walk away, down the hall. Aero watched his receding form until it reached the end of that hall and turned left.

When Arcane's tail swished out of sight, Aero instantly celebrated his success silently. He had somehow evaded any form of punishment and even proved his strength against Arcane. He even had a valid excuse to find Shade! It was as if Arcane were inadvertently helping him... Aero knew that Arcane was likely manipulating him somehow, but he had no intention on dwelling on that now; he had to find Shade! She must want the same thing as him in ending Arcane's reign!

"When I find Shade, you're going down, Arcane," Aero spoke under his breath. "That I promise." He had the feeling that Shade was somehow going to help him rid himself of his misery. He couldn't figure out exactly how, but he knew that Shade must be here to save him!

