

Somewhere Out There Act Zero - Your Life

By Bartan Tirix

The automatic glass doors to the hospital slid opened easily towards the somewhat busy lobby. Many of the staff getting off for lunch just a bit early while others were still waiting to be seen. Likely ruining their summer festival being so ill, the yellow wyvern thought after seeing them. But there was nothing she, or the large grey wyrm walking beside her could do for them. They were here to deliver a package together, one being nearly dragged awkwardly by the smaller female towards the front desk.

Checking in as a visitor the staff told a quick joke towards Maverick, asking what was wrong with him this time as the grey one just grumbled shyly in reply. Still, they were pointed down to the room where they left the bear for the night, stating that he was still fine and his wound was doing well. With a quick thanks, and another shot at the wyrm for knowing the hospital inside and out by now, they left the nurses to their duties. Granted, that didn't give the larger dragon any relief from Adine's giggles, snorting at the joke now that they were out of earshot. "What? It was funny."

"It wasn't that funny." Mav grumbled, still hearing the little giggles as the wyvern nearly dropped the package.

"Well, how well *do* you know the hospital?"

"I'm not answering that." He almost growled, nearly making her flabbergasted at the quick response. Taking a moment for her to recover and a breath for himself. "...I shouldn't be here."

"Because you're not injured?" Adine teased, though not getting the annoyed response she was expecting. But one of almost guilt. "Why?"

"Why should I be? After..." The yellow tail with the crescent horn tapped his side, getting both red eyes to lock for a few moments. Now noticing the difference between them; whereas the female's was a bit more pink, while the wyrm's was more orange.

"He wants to see you."

"You don't know that-"

"I do." She tried to hold in her giggles, as Maverick started to stare her down. "All of-"

"-Don't." Another bit of laughter as he sighed.

"Just come in and say hi. It will mean a lot." A look of discomfort from the grey one as she tossed her green striped muzzle. "Quit being a sourpuss. He won't hold a grudge against you."

"And if he does?"

"Then he deserves to be shot like he was." The larger one just looked down the hall where the bear's room was, until he got another tap. "Who has he been hanging out with the most since he got here?" No answer, but another awkward look of guilt. "And who knows him better?"

"...You."

"Then trust me. Just like you did last night to let me use that map to find another entrance." A sigh through that grey muzzle, and a faint nod. Still letting the wyvern take lead as they entered the room. "Hey bear-oh my!" A double take from Maverick as he peeked inside the doorway, seeing the white furred one in bed, but a light blue nurse runner with her upper half under the blankets. "Are we interrupting something?"

"-Yes."

"-Yes." They both answered, getting a chuckle as the cyan one tapped the bear playfully. Pulling on some of the mattress sheets a bit as she withdrew. "You're not supposed to agree with me, cottonball! Especially in front of your girlfriend." A giggle from the yellow one as the nurse started to leave.

"Where's the fun in that?" Bartan quipped, getting a snout toss from the staff member. "Thanks for the change, ma'am."

"Call if you need anything else."

"Oh I will." A devious smirk from her as Adine continued to laugh. "I love the staff here."

"I'm sure you do." The yellow one teased, setting the box on the side table for the moment and giving the bear a lick on the nose. "How are you?"

"Perfectly fine. Better than expected after getting shot."

"So your leg is okay?" A nod. "Okay enough for a visitor?" A noise in question as she looked towards the doorway, though vacant of anyone in sight. "If you don't come in yourself, I'll drag you in by your tail." A grumble from the hallway, and a breath. Soon seeing the grey wyrm shyly enter.

"Oh, hey."

"Hey..." Maverick awkwardly said, looking over the furred one lying on the bed in a room for one. "They... Really paid for this?"

"You didn't get a room to yourself?" A head shake from the larger dragon. "I guess so then. I suppose it's not great to have an ambassador of a peaceful mission to be shot while visiting."

"By an outsider from your world." Mav grumbled, getting a white paw in surrender.

"I know, I know. Not pointing any fingers. Or paws? Claws? I'm not sure what the expression is

here." A giggle from Adine. "But really, it's nice to see you Maverick. Hope you brought good news then."

"About what?" A puzzling stare from those brown discs only made the wyrm release a small awkward whimper.

"Did he...?"

"He just came to visit you." The female answered his whisper, still chuckling.

"Oh. That's better then." Another awkward grumble from the large one as he looked over the room. "Is Sebs okay?" A double take.

"...Sebastian was nowhere to be found on duty." A breath of relief from Bartan made those orange-red eyes study him for a bit. "What?"

"Nothing." The look continued. "Just... Tell Bryce not to go too hard on him, okay?"

"Any specific reason why?"

"Because... I convinced Sebs to take the night off." A bit of silence, and the grey one took a breath. "Thank you, Maverick, for last night." That gaze of his dropped a bit.

"...I killed your partner, why are you thanking me?"

"Because he wasn't my friend." A look in confusion from the wyrm, then he got a gesture to come closer. Taking a few moments to study, then a near threatening 'fist' from Adine to be nice. Sighing before coming closer, seeing the bear slide to the side of the bed to place a paw along that grey muzzle. "Seriously, thank you."

"So... You don't blame me?"

"Not in the slightest." A moment of silence, and a deep breath from the large one. Only for their moment to be interrupted by the cyan nurse from the hallway.

"I swear, if you get out of bed, I will break your other leg myself!" She playfully shouted, getting the three to chuckle.

"You heard her, fluffles. Back in bed, I brought you lunch." A near excited look from those brown eyes instantly made her giggle.

"I was hoping that's what was in the box."

"What else would it be?" The grey one grumbled, seeing those white shoulders shrug.

"My weight in fish?" Another laugh from Adine as she got it prepared. "You want some?" He offered to the wyrm, getting a double take and almost a shy look in return.

"...No. No, I shouldn't. I... need to get back to..." A nod in understanding as the large one started turning around. "Get... Well soon."

"Thank you." And Maverick left, those brown eyes not leaving sight of that tail until it was completely gone, getting the female to giggle again. "You have no idea how much I want to tap that."

"More than my lunch?"

"Yes, but that is a *very* close second." Another chuckle. "**Very**." The two talked a bit while the white one ate the delicious meal, but something still bothered the wyvern deep down. After a bit of silence, she looked over Bartan a bit sadly. Watching those brown discs study her back while making a noise in question.

"Bear?" A nod from the furred one, watching the yellow dragon almost fight with the question taking a breath. "...Truth or Dare." One of his eyebrows raised, looking back and forth from the hallway and her for a moment.

"This seems like an odd place to take a Dare, so Truth I guess?" A bit of a sad look from those red eyes, once again almost asking a question but stopping herself.

"Why... Why do you hate humans?" Just like that, it felt like the world was flooded with a heavy tension. One that nearly shaded the sun itself, as a cloud passed over. The white one eventually took a breath. "I know you do, even though you try to hide it."

"Did Reza or someone say something to you?"

"...No. But... It's like the air gets thicker everytime they're mentioned around you." Another breath from the bear as he stared into space.

"It's a long story, Adine. I don't have a single answer for you." A faint nod from her as those brown eyes looked down at his leg. "...I suppose we have time, don't we?"

"Yes."

"You don't have to get back to work?" A shake of her head, and the furred one took a deep breath. "...I was different. From the very day I was born, I was different. Not just physically, but mentally as well. I had your standard family-"

"Bear..." A paw made her trail off, as he motioned towards the door. Getting a nod and closing it for him. "You don't have to..."

"It's... Important, Adine. A lot of it is." A sad look from her as the bear continued. "It was pretty standard: mother, father, three sisters, I was the only son. No substance abuse, no cancer, none of that typical BS you would find in TV or movies..." Another breath. "But I'll get to them later."

"I was disconnected." Bartan stated, lying in the green grass and using the brown drake's middle as a pillow. The two staring up in the night sky as they took a couple of drinks. "Completely detached

from their society, just too different from them. I couldn't... Function like they could. I never felt the same way others did, to the point where all I could really do was mimic them. Study the actions and body language of how emotions were portrayed, and just... Attempt to do them."

"No offense bear-" Bryce burped, pausing for a moment. "You sound like an alien from a bad sci-fi movie."

"...That wasn't far from the truth, really. Regardless, I was thrown into the public schools like your hatchlings are. It took no time at all for them to figure out I was different, aside from a stupid name I was given when I was born- and before you start: No. You will never know it."

"Come on bear." The drake tossed that scarred muzzle. "We're all friends here."

"I know, but... That name died when that world died. Regardless, I was tormented with it. From the stories I've heard here, wyrmlings are no different from humans: they'll rip apart anyone and anything who isn't like them." A bit of silence fell over the evening. "...One would think that they would grow up and mature after a while. But that was just wishful thinking." The furred one took a drink.

"Didn't you have any friends?"

"...I'm not sure if I would call them that. I had people who wanted to be around me, yes, but more for their benefit, not my own. They wanted somebody to listen, they wanted someone to care about their lives. To notice their accomplishments, rant about their despair... And hardly ever return such a thing."

"It couldn't have been that bad. Maybe you're just remembering it worse than it really was."

"...How often were you called fat when you were younger?" A growl from the dragon. "That's why you got into fitness, wasn't it? Because of them?" No response. "It's worse when they pick something you cannot change, regardless of how often you wanted to. Regardless of how often you tried. You'll always be remembered as that slightly chubby cub with the stupid hair and the somehow even dumber name. They'll use it as ammunition against you for the rest of your fucking life." Another drink, and the bear continued.

"I don't know about how things are done in your..." A gesture towards their surroundings. "But back where I grew up, we were taught how to be nice to others when I was young. That you treated people how you wanted to be treated, that you give others the same damn courtesy. That you will be rewarded in some way for doing good, and punished greatly for doing bad... A lot of those punishments were long overdue." A deep breath as Bartan adjusted himself in the bed. The small cyan wyrm resting beside him, half in his embrace.

"...That's pretty close to here then." Lorem mumbled sadly, getting a faint nod that was barely seen in the dark. "And it eats away at you later on in life..."

"It does." The bear sighed. "What's worse is that if I wasn't on the radar of being bullied, I was

invisible. Either to the peers, teachers, parents and supervisors. I was quiet, I was always taught to be. I never fit in, so I became this shy loner, off to himself in the corner. Often being labeled as 'Absent' from a class just because the teacher didn't fucking notice... And those go on your records. When my father found out about the 'dozens of days I've been out of school' he lashed out on me. Just because the damn adults were just too blind to see that I even existed." A small whimper from the wyrm as the furred one took a breath. Stroking the dragon a bit in comfort while he continued.

"But of course that didn't end there. I was invisible in school, I was invisible in the public. I was transparent at home, which I will get to soon enough." Another breath as he stared up at the smooth rock above them, as the beige raptor rested on his body. The officer offering himself as a blanket earlier, and the bear taking it. "It seemed that no matter what the form of community or family it was, I just didn't belong in it."

"Then you haven't found the right one." Sebastian said, getting a near grumbling exhale from the furred pillow. "They can't have been that bad-"

"Do you know what a Skidoo is?" A noise in question. "It's a motorized sled used for transportation in the snow. Mostly in the deep snow when the winters hit back home. You might not have them here, but the first time I was ever close to one, I was really small. There was this... Gathering, my father forced me to come to. Mostly something he wanted to see, but didn't want to go alone. Since my mother was working, the others were busy, he dragged me along there instead."

"Bartan...?"

"I didn't understand the point to it, but apparently they were going to take the children on Skidoo rides around this short area round... Where ever this area was taken place with. Granted, not on the sleds themselves, but they would pull trailers with the children in them." A sigh from the bear. "Everyone got in, except for me. Mostly because I never liked such things: motorized vehicles or children. Yet they insisted. They had this makeshift 'sled' for one, and had a Skidoo pull me around about a twenty minute track."

"Bear, where are you going with this?"

"...On the way back, the trailer broke off. Leaving the Skidoo to continue on without the driver noticing. A twenty minute track, and it took them over an hour to realize that I wasn't even there. Likely my father wanting to get home and suddenly remembering that I existed."

"But they came back."

"After a while, yes." A heated exhale from the furred one. "I have *dozens* and *dozens* of stories like this, Sebs. The same thing happening over and over again. Me attempting or being forced to participate in the social gatherings or activities of that damn species, only to be left behind. I know this story didn't really have me willing to take part or even try, but I have attempted before."

"I know the feeling." The white wyrm stated, as the bear sat at the park bench. "Especially when

you have a reputation that's more of a negative connotation." The two faintly nodded. "What about your family then?"

"I'm not sure where to start."

"One bit at a time. Start with your father." A heavy sigh from the furred one, but he nodded.

"Robert, but most people called him Bob." A noise in question. "Something they liked to do way back: shorten someone's name down and find something that rhymed with it. In this case, Robert would be Rob."

"And Rob rhymes with Bob, okay." Remy lightly smiled, getting the bear to do the same as the wind blew through the pink trees nearby.

"My father was... He was a good person, a good friend. But he was a terrible father. A horrible teacher, just expecting you to suddenly know *everything* he did, and just could not explain the simplest of instructions to anyone." Another breath. "It also didn't help that I was named after his brother, one he eventually had a falling out with that was never patched or fixed. So I was a walking constant reminder of that damn argument, and I swear he was taking that anger out on me my entire life. He was never violent, but there was just no damn reasoning with him. And to question why you had to move eight tons of stainless steel up and down a damn hill each summer, he wouldn't have it." A heated exhale.

"...I hated him. For as long as I could remember, I hated that bastard. It didn't help by the time I was about 14 years of age, basically a young teenager, if that makes any sense to you-" A white scaled paw was felt on his shoulder.

"It does, Bartan. Continue." A nod from the furred one.

"...He was diagnosed with a brain disease. Alzheimer's, even though it wasn't quite that, it was damn close."

"So, his brain was rotting?" The pink runner asked, still studying some of the test results on her computer while the bear sat on the bed. Overlooking the lab equipment for moment. "Go on."

"It was... Kind of rotting in a way. The best way I could describe it is: if the person didn't have to think about the task, be it simple as walking or telling someone their first name, then they were fine. But if it required thought, even just having some sort of observation, like what season it is outside..."

"Then they couldn't do it."

"Yeah... Like having a brain fart." A very strange look from those green eyes, finally getting Anna's gaze away from the computer and making Bartan release a noise in question.

"...Brain...?"

"Fart? You've never heard of a Brain Fart before?"

"I can't say I've ever heard of that organ passing gas before, no." A chuckle from the bear.

"It's just an expression. They would draw blanks, unable to come up with an answer without just guessing flat out. This often effected their memory more than anything, but..."

"It can also effect many other things as well."

"Like not remembering how to get out of a chair. Where the restroom is, regardless if they passed it six times in the last two minutes. Leaving coffee in the microwave, heating it up and forgetting about it. Causing an endless loop that would occupy his entire afternoon." A deep exhale through that muzzle. "And I had to watch it happen, because he couldn't be trusted being alone. He even took the car once and drove off with it, thinking he wanted to visit someone, without his wallet or license. At the time, we only had the one vehicle."

"I'm... Not sure I understand." The bartender stated, washing the floors of the bar for the night while the furred one did the dishes. "What exactly is a car?"

"Think a bus for one to five people. Depending on how it's designed." It took a moment for the bear to realize the dragon behind him was just staring in question. Getting Bartan to double take. "...You don't have buses here?"

"I don't believe so."

"I know you have ships." A nod from Zhong. "Are they motorized?" Another look in question as he started to tilt his head, getting the bear to sigh a bit. "I'm getting off topic. Long story short: humans are both genius and lazy at the same time. They build machines that they can ride to get to place to place so they don't have to walk the distance themselves. Much like how you built ships so you don't have to swim the distance."

"Well, not many know how to swim."

"Let alone, attempt to do so with some sort of cargo. Hence the invention of transportation."

"Then what's a license?" A grumble from the bear as pressed the space between his brown eyes. "Sorry, I'm frustrating you-"

"No, no. It's not you. Just another dumb thing they did." A sad look in question. "You're not allowed to run one of these vehicles by law until you get a special little paper that says you've gone through the process of learning how to operate one."

"That... Sounds like a good idea?"

"In a way, yes. But they bog the process down in order to trick you into making an error. So, if you play it safe and cautiously, you will be considered Wrong and therefore fail the process. The way they have the system set up is about memorizing the correct answers, not about learning how to properly control such a vehicle. That's *if* they decide they like you to begin with."

"What do you mean?"

"I've taken that damn test several times, and the people in charge I swear took one damn look at you and decide then and there if you're going to fail or pass the test. Forget teaching you about any mistakes or failures, your job as a student is to be Right in the very beginning. Not to fail and learn." Another heated breath from the furred one. "I knew when I first seen them look at me that was what they were planning... I just convinced myself that it was just paranoia. It wasn't until the last time I attempted and failed that I stood up against the staff and ordered her to tell me what the fuck I did wrong."

"But isn't that part of your job?" Lorem asked, walking across the field and still drying off from the flooded building. Granted, still disappointed that they didn't get a reward from the treasure hunt. "Don't your books teach you these things?"

"The books don't teach you anything. They provide you the correct answers for you to memorize, then forget after you no longer need the information. For someone who learns by *doing* over *reading*, it's just another way the entire human system was against me. Against how I was developed." A breath to collect himself as those yellow eyes looked at him sadly. "I get that none of this was intentional, just coincidental. But that doesn't make it any easier for me to attempt to get anything done. For someone who never wanted to learn how to drive in the first place, to be forced into such a thing over and over again, constantly being rejected..." Another heated exhale.

"Why didn't your parents help you then?" A gaze from those brown discs. "I-I know you mentioned how bad of a teacher your father was. What about your mother?" A deep breath from the bear made the cyan one frown. "That bad, huh?"

"Lorem... My mother was a god damn superhero." A double take from the wyrm. "She could endure just about everything. I was more like her than anyone else, but..." A blue paw on his side, and the furred one stopped. Placing one of his own on the smaller dragon's head before lifting him up and carrying him a ways. Almost chuckling at his sudden yelp. "Charlotte worked as a Nurse... Kinda. More for one looking after the elderly. She's a prime example of what I was talking about."

"Getting a license?" A chuckle from Bartan that time.

"About learning by doing, over getting an education. She was trained as a nurse, but never got any degree or diploma stating that she ever was one. Yet, she was able to teach dozens of others without such a thing." Another breath. "But the workload was hard for her, almost too hard. Most people didn't bother staying to work there because of how often they were getting hurt, looking after these older people. She did this for forty years, about half her lifetime."

"And doing so..." Adine continued off for the bear, as they looked over the beach. Moving her head a bit to get away from the glare of the sun that was reflecting off of the crutch in the grass. "She was often too tired to teach you anything."

"Yeah... They pretty much left it to the schools, but go figure I went to the worst school in my

entire province." A look in question as those red and blue ears perked. "Think State." One of them flicked. "One step below 'Country'." Her head tilted and the white one tossed his muzzle. "Humans are stupid! We've established this!" He grumbled loudly, getting the wyvern to giggle. "They put boarders on freaking everything! If you need them to make mapping and navigation easier, ***fine***. But most of this was for territory marking, minus the urination!" Bartan snorted loudly before continuing.

"There's not really much else to say about Charlotte. Like me, she was... Almost inhuman. So, we'll head down to my oldest sister: Becka." A groan from Bartan for a moment, getting the yellow one to chuckle again.

"Siblings?"

"-Are the damn worst, I swear." A near frustrated breath from him. "You know how it's often said that the youngest sibling is the most spoiled?"

"Ugh, yes." She tossed that striped muzzle.

"-Complete opposite here!" A series of giggles. "I swear, this bitch could get away with fucking murder, she was so damn spoiled! She was about... Four years older than me, give or take. Often bossy as hell, but within reason. Becka *was* the oldest, after all. However...!"

"Oldest does not mean mature-"

"-Exactly!" The bear grumbled, taking a sip out of his drink while the beige raptor chuckled. Looking over the beach at night, a bit away from the bonfire barbeque and the group of others. "She was the first to leave home, obviously, but she had to come back because of some mental breakdown. Look, I understand that sometimes you need a break from life. But twenty years of shrugging off your responsibilities is *not* a *Break*, it's a ***Vacation!*** After her first 'accidently cutting herself' episode because she didn't get her way, the doctors specifically told my parents that they could no longer say No to her. And I swear Becka heard this." A heated exhale, making Sebastian wonder if the bear really couldn't breathe fire for a moment.

"Thus began a civil war that tore my family apart. This Bitch with a capital B was allowed to do anything-take anything from us. She was allowed to take the car where ever she pleased, even if my parents needed it for work. She racked up Seven Thousand Dollar Phone Bills- ***Fucking Plural! Bills!*** Talking to internet boyfriends long distance! And she did this without being punished, because the doctors stated that my parents couldn't fucking **Parent** anylonger!" A loud growl from the bear as he caused the bottle to shatter in his paw. Shaking the debris out of his fur before pressing the space between his eyes. "We went bankrupt because of her. Because of those doctors..."

"...And this went on for twenty years?" Remy asked, taking another sip out of the wine and making a slight face at its taste. Making the bear do the same, just with a much higher dose.

"Yeah... Forget the fact that she was fooling around with other guys. Forget the fact that she got herself pregnant. Nothing was going to stop her vacation or conquest to become a damn princess, just throw the responsibility to her mother while she could take off and party all night. Visit more guys, and

get pregnant *again*." A frown from the white wyrm. "You think this is done? Try adding in drugs while she was carrying, causing both children to become autistic."

"Good grief-" A furred paw lifted, pausing him for a moment.

"Not done." A whimper from the dragon. "Now imagine her getting money from the government to help support Becka as a 'single mother' with two autistic children, getting that grant, custody of both children, then forcing one of the fathers to pay to support that child." Another pause as those wavy ears fell.

"...You're not done." The bear shook his head.

"Then blow all that money on herself, while preying on Charlotte's kindness. Forcing her to take care of two autistic children, **Expenses** and all." Those white wings sunk, almost to ask if he was done, and the bear nodded. "Now ask yourself this: do I deserve to hate her?"

"W-well..." Remy stuttered, not really knowing how to answer. "Somehow, I don't feel like I've gotten the full story."

"Not quite." The bear mumbled, getting another glass of wine. "But the good news is, Becka is the worst one." Sitting back and raising his glass to a black and white furred dragon that was now in Remy's spot.

"Tell me about her, then. The next one."

"Roxann?" A shrug from Kevin as he took a drink out of the wine. "She was maybe three years older than me. Honestly, it's been so long now I can hardly remember. She was..." A heavy breath as Bartan leaned back in his love seat. "Roxy was amazing. The highlight of the family, really. She was into cheerleading, athletic, artistic- and I mean really damn good as a traditional artist." A breath of remorse. "She was a lot of fun to be around, the complete opposite of Becka, really. Almost her counterpart."

"So you and her were besties?" A shake of the bear's head. "Really?"

"Rox was great, don't get me wrong. But she was also older than us, and had her own friends." Another deep breath. "I think everything started going downhill when her best friend was killed in a car accident. Age... Sixteen? Seventeen maybe? She also suffered a rather harsh concussion when my youngest sister Betsy hit her in the back of the head with a bag of dried dog food." A look in question from those strange teal eyes, ones Bartan was still getting used to looking into. "Humans are weird."

"You've established that, yes."

"But haven't even scratched the surface." A sad smirk from the bear. "It's hard to tell what really did it between the dog food incident or the car crash, but she... Started getting heavy migraines. Likely night terrors of that accident. It almost ruined her." Another drink. "Then Becka started doing that bullshit with the phone bills, basically taking a wrecking ball to our family portrait. Putting us at war, the younger three vs the older three. Eventually Rox got so pissed at the situation that she moved out

without my parents knowing." A large drink to finish his glass. "My father was furious."

Setting the glass down, the bear got comfortable along the love seat. "I'm not going to bore you with the details of what happened after. Long story short, she attempted to move out with someone she was in a relationship with. Big dreams of getting away from the forgetful father and move to the big city... Under-estimating how much money it was going to cost living out there, and after a harsh breakup." Another heavy breath as the large grey wyrm looked over Bartan, lounging in Bryce's office.

"What?" It was barely a question.

"...She committed suicide." The angry tension within the room faded quickly, getting those orange red eyes to just stare at the furball for a few moments. "Nobody was expecting it, but I felt it that night."

"How." No response. "That still doesn't..."

"Put us on equal level?" Bartan asked a bit harshly. "You think I'm done? That was just another milestone in the shitshow theater that is my life. The youngest sister, Betsy? She loved Roxann, followed her like a damn Zealot... Eventually taking the same damn path, not even two years apart." A heated breath from the furred one. "And Betsy was my best friend for 90% of my life at that point. I stayed behind another school year for her, just so she didn't have to be alone."

The grey one didn't respond. "There is no hard and harder, Maverick. There is only Hard. No score, no unit of measurement to identify tough times. But you don't judge what you don't understand." The white one sighed a bit, leaning back against the couch's armrest, soon feeling a heavy body and a pair of thick arms around it. "What are you doing?" Bartan lightly chuckled.

"You need a hug, bear." Bryce stated, as those brown eyes stared up at the ceiling of his apartment. Eventually hugging the drake back and stroking that dense body, soon hearing a grumble from it. "What about love?" A noise in question from the furred one. "Did you ever... Try?"

"To love another person?" He felt the drake nod. "...Yeah. When I was very young, I found someone around the same age who didn't tease me. We were a thing for a while, but..."

"Buuuut?" Bartan just sighed through his muzzle.

"Children are terrible. They started teasing her because she was seen with me from time to time. She couldn't take it, so she ditched me. Choosing popularity over..." A shrug from the white one as the dragon growled a bit. Moving down the bear's body. "What are you-?"

"Screw the hug, you need something else." That scarred muzzle snorted, retreating and aiming for the bear's pants. "Off."

"Bryce-"

"Off, or I'm tearing them off. Your choice." Bartan rolled his eyes a bit, but undid the zipper

regardless. Half containing his gasp when that thick tongue slipped inside.

"Easy you..."

"Kee gowin." The furred one just shook his head and sighed. "Wa yooges wone."

"The youngest one, Betsy. Yes-" A bit of a growl from the furred one that time, as he endured the sting from the large needle.

"You'll live." Anna half grumbled. "Talk. I'm still listening." She moved towards her microscope.

"Sure you are-"

"Best friend for 90% of your life, zealot towards your first lost sister, and judging by a previous statement: likely the most unspoiled one of the litter." A look in question from those brown eyes, as she smirked at the bear deviously. "I'm listening."

"Fair enough. Betsy was... Pretty much the personification of Negativity. We were only a year apart, to the point where people thought we were twins sometimes."

"I can only imagine the surprise on that one." The runner stated sarcastically, making Bartan smirk.

"Yeah... As you stated: we were best friends, because she had no one else. She was somehow even worse at social activity than I was. I can't say for sure if she was teased as much, other than being slightly chubby as well, Bets was pretty normal. She just didn't have a lot of friends."

"Which is why she usually stuck around with you-damnit." The furred dragon cursed at the arcade machine, exhaling his frustrations and putting another coin in. "I swear, the first round on this guy is a total breeze, then the difficulty skyrockets."

"Sounds like another game I know." Bartan mumbled.

"Go on."

"Well, she was creative in many ways. Often made the best of things given the poor situation." A sigh from the bear. "Like, I'll be straight with you; there are others that had it a lot worse than I did. Than we did. We were still clothed, sheltered, fed, and had heat. Clean water and air, healthcare, you name it. I know a lot of these statements and complaints sound like first world problems, but..."

"This isn't a story about your life, bear. It's about-damnit!" Kevin hissed, giving up on the game. "It's about you and humans. I'm just assuming it's all important in the end." A faint nod from the outsider. "So, continue. What changed your sister into a Negative Nancy?" A bit of a chuckle from Bartan.

"Want to take a guess?" A moment of thought.

"...The oldest one?"

"Becka, yes. Steamrolling over our lives and just making it miserable. Betsy just... Learned not to hold her anger back. She held a heavy, *heavy* grudge against Becka-within reason, mind you. But that negativity ruined her in the end. Once we got rid of Becka after a while, my parents finally sending her off to live with her boyfriend for a bit... All that anger had to go somewhere." The white wyrm looked up from the PDA within his home and gazed at the bear a bit sadly.

"...You?"

"No... Not yet anyway. It was actually towards herself. Bets' past self. All the things she was interested in, all the things she enjoyed, practically ionized by her own rage. Whatever was left turned into a totem to ensure that she never became that 'lame' person again." Remy whimpered a bit as those blue discs gazed at the furred one. "She basically destroyed herself, and after that was victimized, she would find something else to hate. Literally, hate. Be it a certain country, person, religion, or even humanity itself."

"What made you so different?" The grey wyrm half grumbled, almost freezing when footsteps were heard outside of Bryce's office. Going past the door and relieving Maverick, clearly not wanting to be caught talking to the bear alone. Double taking at the brown discs studying him and struggling not to release the whimper within his plated throat.

"You really want to know?" No response from the dragon, as the furred one sighed. "...My family."

"The... Ones you've been talking about?" A head shake from Bartan, making Mav release a noise in question.

"I was given most of the things I needed to survive, but not everything. Especially when it came to mental stability. My mother was too tired from work, my father was a bastard. Betsy often put me down as much as others did, whereas I used to hide my intelligence from them. Becka was a bitch and Roxann had her own friends."

"So...?"

"...They say that the mind bends and twists in order to deal with the stress of life. Believe me when I say that my mind bent so much, it broke in two. In some ways, I had a family, yes. But in others..." Another breath from the bear. "So I made others to fulfill those roles."

"Made others...?" That grey neck curled.

"I needed a proper role model, so I made one. I needed a reliable father figure, so I created one. I needed someone to help me with understanding empathy and emotions...!" A heavy breath that time, and he got a white scaled paw on his shoulder. "It started out with just a few, but as I grew older, more and more needs were required... Most people wouldn't consider them real, but to hell with what they

considered to be real or not. These people taught me things I never knew myself, expanded on talents I never knew I had."

"I'm... Not sure I understand." Remy mumbled a bit sadly, as they walked around the park in the late evening.

"I... Didn't explain it well. Let me try again." Another breath to clear the furred one's nearly scrambled brain. "In... At home, we had things: TV, videogames, computer, etc. Before this happened, I was using videogames to cope. But I didn't always have access to them, barely had the TV or computer." Bartan grumbled. "However... I did have music. With an old pair of headphones, I discovered that I can drown out the entire world if I played it loud enough. And in the process..."

"It stimulated your brain to the point where you started seeing things." A nod from the bear. "And they were your... Fictional family?" Those brown eyes fell a bit. "I'm sorry, that was insensitive of me."

"You're not wrong, though. They weren't physical, but I started seeing them in the world, and they started seeing the world the way I did."

"And you grew really attached to them." Another nod.

"To the point where I even mated with a few of them." A bit of a blush from those wavy ears, and Bartan chuckled. "As in married, but we did end up doing that too." A whimper that time. "But that came a little later. Regardless, I... Lived solely for them for the longest time. To me, watching their lives play out was like my own after-school special that nobody knew or could see but myself. In a way, that was kind of lonely, yes, but at the same time."

"They made you feel special." Zhong stated, as they walked down the streets at dusk. "They were like you." An odd look from those brown discs, and the walker shrugged. "This story is about misanthropy, I can't imagine they were human."

"Y-you're right, but..."

"But?"

"I... You're looking at this at a different perspective." A noise in question from the green one. "I wasn't born a bear. I was born human." A long awkward silence as every dragon stared at the furred one for several moments before;

Zhong: "What"

Lorem: "In"

Sebastian: "The"

Remy: "Name"

Adine: "Of"

Anna: "God"

Kevin: "Damn"

Maverick: "Hell"

"Vear!?" The brown drake growled with his muzzle occupied with a certain rod. Eventually releasing it before stuttering several times. "When-!? What-!? How-!?" I have so many questions!!" The furred one shyly chuckled at Bryce's expression.

"I don't know. I honestly can't tell you what happened, but..." A breath as Bartan looked away. "It isn't for a while."

"Meaning what exactly?"

"Meaning: after I..." The bear trailed off sadly, and the drake understood. Sighing a bit and nodding himself before resuming his work. "You don't have to-" He grunted, getting a tight squeeze from the furred dragon.

"You deserve it, Bartan." A faint awkward grumble from the bear. "You're letting me stay here for the night, least I can do is give you a hug."

"Well, odds are you'll be snapping me in half if they get progressively tighter."

"Is there that much left to it?"

"Well... I can't say it gets any lighter." A sigh from the black and white walker. "But yeah, I ended up making my own family of... Many different creatures. Almost none of which were human, and if they were, I didn't really see them in the real world."

"What did the others think about this?" The small blue wyrm asked, sketching out another drawing as the bear was forced to pose. "You moved your arm." A roll from those brown eyes.

"It's just getting numb, and they... Didn't know about it. I never told them until years, and I mean *years*, later. When most of them were gone." A breath from the furred one. "I was afraid of someone calling them stupid, of them being criticized by the world I was surrounded in. Not to mention, when most people would hear that I've been seeing 'creatures', they..."

"Would likely consider you to be...?"

"Mentally ill. Or that it was a problem that required fixing, no matter how damaging it is to their future." A near heated exhale from Bartan as he struggled not to move. "You want to know how a human society tends to work? Skinny, socially privileged people get to draw this neat little circle. Everyone inside the circle is considered 'normal' while everyone outside the circle should be beaten, broken, and reset. Just so they can be brought into that circle. Failing that, they should be

institutionalized, or worse: pitied. Some variables may change throughout the decades, but that's the gist of it." Another breath, but the bear continued.

"I didn't know it then, but my 'family', which I called the Clan, were saving my life in more ways than one. The big difference between me and Betsy was them... Because they kept me happy."

"Happy?" The grey wyrm grumbled in question, then releasing a faint awkward whimper when those red eyes gazed down at the bear's pants. Hearing the furred one chuckle without even getting up from the couch or gazing away from the ceiling in Bryce's office.

"Funny how everyone jumps to that, but no. I'll get to that later maybe, but what I really mean is... Your form of creativity; imagination, it is the key to your own happiness." Maverick curled his neck in response. "And now you're thinking it's childish to say such a thing, yes?" Again, no vocal response as the white one took a breath. "Betsy thought the same thing about her past self, so she ended up abandoning it. Disconnecting herself from that more fun person, and ended up becoming... Nothing but a hateful void."

"I can't imagine she would make many friends that way." Zhong stated, giving his thanks when Bartan handed him a cup of tea and taking a seat within the apartment.

"She really didn't. And if she found one that put up with her, it wouldn't take long for her to start getting mad at them for the smallest things. Seriously, Bets had a list of over one hundred pet-peeves that she would tear your throat out if they were done around her. Anything from just singing, humming, saying the word 'Spine', referring to Becka as any pronoun other than 'It', the list went on."

"And she expected others to memorize such a thing?"

"Usually through trial and error. Match that up with attempting to take care of a progressively forgetful father who never taught us anything about life..." Another breath as the bear took a drink. "Eventually things started to look up, even after we lost our first home. Bob got a pension from the government from his condition, and we could survive... For as long as he did."

"I can only imagine how hard that was." The walker stated sadly. "Especially since..."

"I never liked him to begin with, yeah... I was trapped in a place where I needed to satisfy Betsy, while taking care of an Alzheimer's patient. Unable to go out anywhere or do anything, because we didn't have enough money to. Meanwhile, back in the city where Becka was living, she started writing checks for two hundred to eight hundred dollars every damn week. Using up ones my mother gave to her for Emergency use only." A near growl from that white muzzle. "I still don't know what the hell she was doing, but Becka was staying in an apartment with at least two others. I can only assume they were pitching in, but she came up with these lame excuses: *Oh, my boyfriend lost his wallet for the **seventh** time in a row.*"

The yellow wyvern looked at him sadly as the two sat at in the empty cafe. The rain pelting at

the windows as the evening started to shift and the white one continued. "Regardless, after graduating from school... We could only afford sending either me or Bets to a University or even Collage, while the other stayed behind and looked after our father. Because our mother couldn't do it alone." A heavy breath from Bartan. "And I told Betsy to go."

Adine's gaze dropped onto the table, reaching over and holding that white paw, feeling it squeeze back. "People... Whenever I told this story, people always stated that decision was Noble or some jazz." The bear stated, exhaling near heat. "I never seen it as such. If there was something my father taught me, it was the idea of Quality of Life. This. This situation, wasn't noble. It was messed up. There was nothing noble about watching someone die slowly, no matter how much you fucking hated them. There was nothing noble about keeping someone alive when they can't even recognize their own wife, the person they spent the last forty years or so with. But we needed to keep him alive so **we** could survive!"

"I started to see it everywhere, Lorem." Bartan continued, walking out of the bar and holding the door opened for another couple going in. "This concept of who should be allowed to live or die based on the things they've done."

"This is..." The cyan wyrm whimpered a bit. "This is starting to sound like a Vigilante origin story." A half a chuckle from the furred one.

"It's not, but that did cross my mind. But for all the things that you've taken away in your lifetime, do you feel like you've given enough to be qualified for a life? The same idea as Karma?" A frown from Lorem. "I suppose to a degree, humans had a system like that."

"They did?"

"Typical prison system, but even that didn't make enough sense. For those who deserve to die, the people have to pay to keep them alive so they can live out a sentence. Why not just remove them and get it over with? If they do not help progress within society, why keep them around? Why waste resources on such a thing?" An exhale as the dragon started feeling uncomfortable. "I even turned that system to myself as well." A double take that time. "And no, I didn't deserve to live either."

"What...?"

"I didn't participate in the world that didn't want me. The body I had was breaking down constantly, due to neglect. Bad ankles, bad knees, bad hips due to the sciatica nerves. A primary arm that was losing motor functions, a defective heart that only seemed to slow down with adrenaline, hair falling out, the list went on. I was no more qualified to have a life than my father was in his mental state." The two went quiet for a few moments. "The wrong two siblings in that family died, Lorem. The right parent, but the wrong children."

"You can't say that, bear." The brown drake almost growled. "You can't keep thinking like that, life doesn't work that way." Bryce took a large drink out of his bowl before setting it on the restaurant table. "I can't tell you how many times I've went through the same thoughts, but you can't-"

"Why?" The bear asked, a bit thickly. Getting a stern look from those golden eyes. "Why is it that everybody tenses up whenever this subject appears?"

"Bearrrr."

"I know it's difficult to remember all this information, and I've been jumping all over the place, but just think about it for a moment. If Becka was removed from our lives, we could've managed. We wouldn't have had to go bankrupt-"

"But your father would've still had old-timers-"

"Alzheimer's." Bartan corrected him, sadly smirking at that snout toss. "I know, but... They would've managed. Charlotte, my mother, was a lot like me. She lived around death for years- She *understood* it the way I did. Seen the Quality of Life. She would've let go to end a lost old man's suffering, and releasing us of the burden of carrying him on our backs for a damn decade and a half."

"Bartan..." That scarred muzzle grumbled a bit before taking a breath. "You can't talk like that-"

"Bryce." The furred one interrupted, lowering his voice in a harsh whimper while looking him straight in the eyes. "You are going to **Die**. That is not a threat, that is Truism. Eventually your body will break down further and further over time. No matter what you eat, how well you work out, even the very act of breathing itself is slowly *killing* you. Medicine, Hospitals, this is all nothing more than a **Stall**." The drake's heart sank a bit, but he didn't respond. "You can't be afraid of death like they were, like they still are. It is nature at its very core."

"...What did you mean by that?" Remy asked a bit quietly, returning from his kitchen with refreshments. Though, nearly growling when the bear got up to help him. "Being afraid of death like they...?"

"By nature, humans are petrified yet intrigued by the unknown. Death is no exception, whereas they can't really tell specifically what happens when something dies. Yet, in some ways they treat it like a damn crime. If you even state that you've been thinking a lot about death and an end, you'll be considered mentally ill, and likely be restrained in one form or another. They'll take away your freedom, ability to make decisions, your will, until they've specifically changed your mind. Enforcing you to live in one way or another." A sad look from the dragon as the bear looked deep into those blue discs. "...I know you've been thinking about it, especially lately." That look morphed into shock as the furred one could nearly hear the wyrm's heart race. "You're afraid? Do they have such rules here too?"

"I-... I'm not sure how to answer that, Bartan." As a scaled paw reached to set down his glass, Bartan's own lightly held onto Remy's for a moment. Getting them to share a look once again, and the dragon to sigh. "Once again, your clairvoyance does not fail you. It's been getting... Hard lately. With my job at the library and such."

"I know."

"A little too much, really. It... Concerns me." The wyrm admitted. "Can... I speak freely, Bartan? Please?"

"Of course."

"This... Person, the one that has been telling this long tale of yours." A calm nod from the bear. "Why does it feel so different from the one I've gotten to know the past couple of weeks?" Another nod from the furred one. "I guess what I'm asking is... Which one is real and which is a mask? A-and I mean no offense to that-" The lift of a white paw interrupted him.

"It's okay. But... They both are the same person."

"Seriously?" The pink runner grumbled, walking down the alleyway at night.

"Is that so hard to believe?"

"Yes." Anna snorted. "It's obvious that it depends on who's around, but no one turns into a sexual deviant just because they're near a different species." Bartan chuckled.

"Why not?" A growl from the raptor that time. "I've been fascinated with anthropomorphism for as long-"

"What the hell is that?" A laugh from the furred one as she tossed her snout.

"It's a human word. Defined as giving something non-human human like qualities." A stare in question and near frustration from those green eyes.

"...You made that up."

"I did not."

"What the hell does that even mean? Giving human-like qualities?"

"I suppose in your world it doesn't make any sense because you're not sure what they're capable of, but..." A shrug from the bear. "It's rather broad, but it usually refers to giving an animal a form of intelligence. Possibly even speech, or the ability to stand upright." A grunt in question. "Honestly, you would be considered an anthro to them."

"How?"

"Intelligence, speech, the ability to grip and use tools." The pink one started to smirk. "But something like your breath weapon wouldn't count."

"Because they don't have the ability to do that." She half questioned, getting a nod from Bartan and a sigh.

"I always found those... 'Creatures', for lack of a better word, more interesting than any human."

"To the point where you wanted to get under their tail-"

"Much later, yes!" Anna chuckled at him. "But you're jumping ahead. Though they were not 'real' specifically, they were just more... Interesting. More attractive to me than the species that's tormented me my entire life. They were so obsessed with their own flesh, defining beauty and perfection through magazines and endless forms of media. Something I don't see around here."

"You just haven't seen the right magazines then." The female runner smirked.

"I have, actually. Seen a couple, and I can see a drastic difference from them."

"Because it's something you're..." The beige raptor started, blushing a bit in front of the campfire on the beach. Whispering in hopes that the other dragons couldn't hear the conversation. "Attracted to?" A chuckle from Bartan.

"True, but it's far past that as well. Within the magazines and posters, there's dragons of all species here. They are not overly sexualized-" Sebastian shh'd him, getting another chuckle. "They're not displaying a look that you or any others should be aiming for. Some subjects may be within the same area, but even the fitness magazine I seen was quite varied." A breath from the furred one. "They're not... False."

"False?"

"Fake. Unreal. Digitally edited to the point they are a deformity of what they originally were. Yet, it's praised and held up as a damn standard, plastered all over every form of media out there. A message stating that no one will ever love you, or remotely like you unless you look this *perfect*." A heated exhale from the white one. "...The good part is that those who lived in that world rarely thought that way, but it's just... It's fucking weird."

"What is, exactly?"

"To deem it as acceptable. As a normal part of society. Unrealistic standards, to the point where they shouldn't even be considered human anymore. Yet I was considered strange or abnormal for liking something *just* as imaginary as those photos. Those advertisements. To the point where it made me beyond sick to see... **Humans**."

"...Because all you could think of is..." The blue wyrm started. "What they did to you." A slow nod, as they rested in the large bed. Taking a few moments of silence.

"The weird part was... I wasn't alone. Or, as alone in such thoughts as I expected." A look from those golden eyes, nearly glowing in the dark. "There were others who liked such things: anthros, anthropomorphism, etc."

"The human-like quality thing?" A nod from the bear. "I still can't quite picture it."

"Well, they look a lot like me, really- which probably doesn't help if you don't know what a polar

bear is." A chuckle from the smaller one. "I guess... Look at the differences between me and Reza."

"So, fur coat. Odd shaped head." A playfully shocked look that made Lorem laugh. "It is strange."

"Compared to yours and his, yes. But there's nothing 'odd' about it." The furred one snorted.

"You found people though?" Bartan paused his breath for a moment, then released it.
"...What?"

"I... Did, yes. But I still didn't..." A noise in question as those blue ears perked up. "I didn't feel like I belonged in the group. Not like others did, not like others seemed to. I still felt broken within the fandom, disconnected. The only difference between their society and the one I grew up in was that I was not teased within this fandom."

"Yet, that would have made it a much more positive experience, yes?" The green walker asked, resting in a different bed from before as the two spooned.

"It did." Bartan sadly smiled. "There is no denying that, but... It also proved another point of mine."

"Point?"

"...That I wasn't human." Zhong looked behind him, attempting to study those brown discs in the dark.

"...But you said-"

"I know." A heavy sigh from the furred one. "I was born... 'Biologically' human, but I was so far different otherwise."

"So, instead... You were an... Erm."

"Anthro?" A noise in confirmation. "...No."

"I'm afraid I don't understand then."

"I was... Species-less. I wasn't anything, just... Unknown. Unable to fit in any category that there was."

"Yet, you call yourself a bear. That's a species, yes?" Remy asked, now back in the apartment bedding.

"It is, yes, but..."

"Why a bear then?" A shrug was felt from the furred one.

"It matched my nature. Passive, yet assertive at times. Often solitary. Loves the cold, and enjoyed sleeping for months at a time. I donno." A breath from Bartan. "It was never my spirit animal, I

never had an affection with it in that first life. Never met one in person, it just... Felt like the only thing that remotely fit." A sigh as he lifted up the furred paw to study it in the dark. "A gift given after death, almost a second chance due to all the hardships I've gone through. The pain I endured. Now that I've found humans again, I know it wasn't just my planet."

"You can't do that!" The human male harshly whispered, not wanting to be heard in the grassy field at night. "You can't just assume that the mistakes that our planet made were the same as yours!"

"Of course not." Bartan grumbled sarcastically. "Something else just randomly started stockpiling nuclear weapons in your warehouses all across your world. Just setting there for safe keeping until they were retrieved, and it happened to be the near death of your species. Sure." Reza rolled his eyes at the bear. "The ruins of your old world state differently. All the damn signs were there: history books, old media, films-!"

"What the hell do they have to do with us being in the past!?"

"You know damn well! Humans have been brainwashed- poisoned into thinking that they're the good guys in everything! And the **moment** some other species walks onstage, you consider them to be an antagonist!" The man nearly growled. "Tell me I'm wrong! That the first sight of who your partner was, you considered me **expendable**!"

"If that's what it means to save the human race-"

"And once again, it's all about you! Fuck whatever's in the crossfire, consider it a sacrifice for the '*greater good*' of humanity!"

"Like you wouldn't do anything possible to save the ones you love! The ones you care about! The only reason why you're considering this is because you found something more closer to your liking!" Reza yelled, no longer attempting to be quiet if the bear wasn't going to be. "Tell me I'm wrong!"

"You're damn right, but also because they're not a **Self-Destructive Species**!"

"You can't know that!"

"I'd rather take my chances over humans actually learning their fucking lesson about unity!" Bartan roared. "You guys haven't even thought this out, have you? Or maybe they have, and you're just not in the loop." Another growl from the human, as some rustling was heard in the bushes. "If you're going to pull that gun out on me, you might as well do it now."

"Is that... What passes for innuendo in the human world?" The brown drake half purred. The other half: questioned.

"Yeah, most officers carried around guns of sorts, among other tools to help them defend themselves or others."

"Why?" Bryce tilted his head, still pinning the bear to the shower floor and nearly resting on top

of him.

"Because they didn't have the ability to defend themselves properly." The dragon's head tilted the other way. "Don't get me wrong, they can be quite resourceful, doing a lot of damage with what little they have, but..."

"Buuuut?"

"No claws, not much for teeth. No breath weapons, horns, no natural weapons of any kind."

"Well, duh." Adine tossed her snout as Bartan washed her back. "The gun thing makes sense then, dummy."

"Does it?" A near glare from those red eyes. "Humans are the same. Sure, they come in different sizes, colors, some with unique abilities and such-"

"Like?"

"The ability to eat metal." A few blinks from the wyvern. "Some can run without ever getting tired. Some don't even need to sleep. But with those, there are the polar opposites: those who need to sleep very often. Who get tired quickly, or who can hardly eat anything."

"So, just like how some of us can fly and others cannot."

"Not quite." A growl and playful shove from that yellow tail. "Easy you."

"I don't understand then."

"What's the difference between you and Sebastian?"

"He's a male, Bartan." She giggled. "Is that who you've been thinking about this entire time?"

"Maybe." He teased, getting another chuckle. "But alright. Difference between you and Anna."

"Ugh, where to begin."

"Species." The furred one tapped the pink thigh. "The answer is species, mistress." The runner wasn't sure whether to purr or growl at the bear.

"I'm a biologist, Bartan. You think I don't know that?"

"I knew you'd get around to it eventually, but just moving my point along here."

"And that point being?" She lifted her foot, signaling the furred one to get to work.

"That humans are the *same*."

"Racist." Anna smirked at him.

"Perhaps, but I'm saying this without the standard Colloquial that is often projected with the word. If you can somehow believe that." A look in puzzlement from those green eyes, and the bear tossed his snout. Still scrubbing her paws. "Colloquial. Think: negative attachments that tend to be absorbed into the word over time. Now, you should know the answer to this next question: what would happen if you attempted to mate with an earth dragon?" Another devious smirk from her.

"You just want to see me get mounted by Bryce, don't you?"

"Maybe." Bartan teased again. "But what would happen, procreation wise?"

"Nothing. We are not compatible."

"Exactly." A noise in question from her. "Humans are the *same*. They are compatible with each other; they are the same species. Why is it that they tend to act as if are not?"

"You mean..." The white wyrm started, whimpering a bit when that washcloth went under his tail and hind legs. "Territories, wars and such?"

"For the most part, yes. Even after obtaining communication on a global scale, they insist on distancing themselves as if the entire world is untrustworthy. No matter what I did, I could never convince them of that one concept."

"*We Are One Planet*." Remy quoted, feeling a nod from that wet furred muzzle. "And... An Orgasm-"

"Organism." A high pitched whine when the wyrm realized his mistake, covering his head with those wings and making the bear chuckle.

"A-at war with itself... Is doomed." A depressing tension showered over them as the two stood in the rain. Bartan cupping the beige raptor's muzzle with his paws as they were surrounded by darkness. Illuminated under a single streetlight.

"There is no saving them." The furred one stated softly. "You cannot protect something that large from themselves."

"That doesn't mean we shouldn't help them, Bartan."

"Sebby-"

"They asked us for help! They're living in a wasteland-"

"A fate they brought onto themselves."

"Just because you had some bad experiences with the species doesn't mean that they deserve to be abandoned-"

"Sebs..." The two exhaled, looking away from each other for a few moments.

"It's not your decision, Bartan."

"It is." The bear responded thickly, getting a sharp look from those faded purple eyes. "You don't know them like I do. You don't know their habits-their history."

"That doesn't make it your choice." Zhong stated softly.

"You're wrong." Bartan almost growled. "I'm trying to protect you from them! They will drain everything from you!"

"But they've only asked for a few generators." Kevin argued. "Surely we can provide them more than that-"

"You don't understand! They see what you have here. How long do you think it will be before they start asking for more? And now long do you think it will be until they just decide to take it by force!?" The bear paused for a moment, brushing the heavy rain from his eyes. "The only thing they care about is themselves, their hunger."

"Something you can state for just about every species." Anna snorted at him.

"Not as drastically as them!" The female runner growled at him for snapping. "You didn't live around them! You haven't had everything considered yours stripped away! Torn apart by their savagery again and again! You didn't have to give up so much just to survive! So your family could survive!"

"Everyone makes sacrifices, Bartan-" A snarl interrupted the white wyrm.

"**Not this much!** Not Your Freedom! Not Your Education! Your Health! Food! Entertainment! Mental Stability! **Future!**!! **-What the Fuck do you have left in Life!?**" Those blue eyes just looked at him sadly. "Nobility!? An invisible currency that nobody accepts!?"

"Calm down, please." Lorem whimpered, getting furred one to stop and take a heavy few breaths. "Bartan..."

"You haven't experienced the things they are capable of. The damage they can cause *without* weapons. I've **survived** the nightmare of looking after your parents! Changing their diapers, bathing them, taking hours to feed because they spend twenty minutes chewing on a piece of food. You haven't had to look after autistic children for nine years while somebody else gets **paid to live a life long Vacation!**"

"That doesn't mean that every human is bad." The yellow wyvern mumbled, looking sadly at the bear as they stood out in the harsh rain.

"I'm... Not saying that they are. But it's because of their stupid rules that they ended up in such a fate to begin with. It's because of their ridiculous *laws* that I was forced to crawl through a Hell disguised as a fucking Life! And those *innocent* people? Those bystanders in all of this? They did **nothing** to change any of this! The signs were displayed time and time again, yet they refused to get off their asses and

demand that things be different! For their lives to be better than this!"

"Bearrrr!" The chief growled, getting a thick stare from those brown discs.

"I am trying to save you from them, Bryce! I am trying to protect your species-your world from their madness!! You know what they did to their planet! Do you want that to be here too!? Maybe not this Generation, but further down the years! Your Grandchildren!? Their Grandchildren!? What would you do to protect them from the same damn fate!? How far would you go!? It's bored into their brains to corrupt everything they touch! To take what they have for granted!"

"That doesn't make it your decision." The grey wyrm growled, getting a heated exhale from the furred one that nearly turned the rain to steam. "I don't like them being here either, but it's not my decision to-"

"You sacrificed a lot already, Maverick." Bartan interrupted. "I get it. But you are missing the point."

"And that is?"

"I *Was* Human." A puzzled look from those orange red eyes. "I was treated- ...Like that, and I was the *same* as them." A faint growl from the wyrm. "You're not human. How long do you think it will take for them to decide that you are an antagonist, an obstacle in their way towards a better life?" Silence as the rain started to ease up. "How long until they claim that it is okay to cut you down? Your species? Bryce and his species? Anna's? Your towns, cities, countries- the list goes on." The grey one didn't answer. "You've already been shot by Reza once, without a second thought. What makes you think he's going to actually *consider* it next time?"

"...Do you know where he is?"

"Yes." The dragon just stared at Bartan for a few moments. "And I know where he will be." An exhale from Maverick. "This is my decision."

"Why do you keep saying that?" The human growled, still aiming the firearm at the bear in the white hallway. "Move."

"I won't." The furred one stated harshly.

"I'm so close to saving us, I won't let you get in the way! Not right now!"

"This is my decision!"

"Bartan...!" The two remained still for several moments, until the bear stepped forward, getting Reza to shoot him in the leg. Growling loudly at the pain, but the furred one remained standing. Stupidly taking another step forward, close enough to just barely stop the revolver from shooting the white one in the head. The gun going off next to his ear, causing it to ring loudly as Bartan struggled to hold the weapon with both paws. The man's hand locked in with the bear's grip.

Another step forward caused Reza to take one back, nearly stumbling over the generator that was set behind the human. Getting the two to continue struggling, as the bear started aiming the barrel towards his own furred head. "Your Species Has Taken Everything From Me! Leaving Me A *Deathwalker!*" A frightened look from the human's brown eyes. "**Finish It! Take Away My Paradise! Take Away My Garden Of Eden!! Take Away My Life-!!**" As the man struggled to pry his hand out of the grip, the trigger was pulled. Omitting a loud click of the hammer, and nothing else.

The grip on those white paws faded and Reza scrambled free as the white one fell to his knees. Grabbing the generator and ditching the weapon, he took off down the hallway. Hearing the doors far behind him slam opened and something large start to chase him down the hall, passing the bear as a grey blur before hearing that roar. Soon following; the harsh sound of teeth meeting flesh.

The pain in his leg was suddenly felt, getting Bartan to growl loudly at it as he slid his back towards the wall. Soon seeing the yellow wyvern slide towards him with a blueprint in her paws. "A-are you okay!?"

"Fine." The furred one grumbled, holding his half deaf ear for a moment. "It's nothing serious, I'll live." Another growl as he attempted to examine the wound himself. "...I liked these pants." The quip caused Adine to giggle as the grey one came around. "Thank you."

"Yeah..." Maverick mumbled, almost awkwardly. "Hurts like hell, doesn't it?"

"Wouldn't be the first time I was shot." Bartan grumbled. "Let alone, by a human."

"Somehow I believe that." The wyrm snorted, getting another giggle from the yellow one. "Can you fly for some help? I'll carry him out of here in the meantime."

"Sure." The wyvern moved past them before her face was painted with worry. Trying not to look at the body limping on the floor, but it was hard to. Exiting the doorway and taking a quick turn out of sight for a few moments, the bear's roars still echoing through her mind over and over. Even after returning from the memory to stare at Bartan sleeping in the hospital bed.

Adine studied in silence as the hallway lights started to dim with the late evening. Eventually seeing a nurse pass the doorway and double take at her. "Excuse me, ma'am." It still didn't get the attention of those pink-red eyes. "Visiting hours are over." A faint nod from the yellow flier at the night staff. Holding onto the bear's paw for a few moments before getting escorted out of the hospital. "You can come and visit tomorrow, if you like."

"Yeah... Thank you."

"Are you going to be alright?" The nurse asked sincerely, getting another almost stunned stare from the wyvern and she nodded. Yet, the question replayed constantly in her head, echoing over and over. Was she? Having an interest and almost faith in such a species' existence, then being told what they are capable of? Was the furred one right, or was he just a victim of poor probability?

Who's decision was it really to make? And if she was to make it...?