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"We aren't going to Dresden's Bubble," Grid spat when they were free of their Aequitas escort, in their private cabin aboard the next train to Eurasia.

"It's believable," Valle countered. "We're two degrading zoans who are far from home and headed in his direction. I'll buy you a better bicep."

"It's *biceps*," she jabbed a finger at nothing in particular. "Biceps is singular, and you won't buy me anything."

She slumped into one of the upholstered chairs, hands hanging down over its arms. The private cabin was furnished and carpeted, and had a window that would

look out onto the ocean once they left the station, illuminated by the tunnel's lights. Much as the bird fumed at the upgrade, she still dug her feet into the carpet and watched the station wall outside the window in anticipation.

And it was free. The money was starting to make Valle itch. It would be another six thousand miles before he had a chance to spend any of it now.

"I've never seen it happen so close," Grid said softly. "I've seen... after. I've seen that several times. But I haven't..." she waved her hand across the crown of her head, gesturing the motion of the ring of burning ash that had danced across that of the decimated human.

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Valle didn't say anything. He had seen it up close. He had seen it many times. Some of those, Crucis had made him watch.

"I'm going to bed," he announced. He tossed his wig onto the rucksack abandoned on the floor and climbed into one of the curtained bunks. "You have your bracelet control, if you decide to kill me."

"Maybe I will," she muttered.



The intercontinental transit tube rose gradually, from its suspension in the aphotic depths to the midnight zone and finally meeting the ground on the continental slope in the twilight. At that point, there was finally something to see outside the windows, if mostly only rocky slopes that stretched into the darkness. Here and there the current-blasted ruins of an antediluvian town, an algae-eaten car. The endless roaring of the trains in their metal and glass tubes kept wildlife away, what little macrofauna had survived the irradiation of the atmosphere.

They had a breakfast delivered to their cabin, at the Aequitas Army's expense. Vegetables and boiled meat. They ate in starved handfuls.

"They say that everything we eat is made out of krill," Grid observed. The latter half of the trip, she and Valle had done little more than sit and watch the window. "They have to send drones out to sweep them up in swarms, because they can't survive near the cities. All the noise from ten billion people living in one glass dome causes a resonance that kills them if they come anywhere near. But they don't have any predators now, or any competition, so there are swarms all around, wherever people don't live, that get to be a thousand miles long. That's what they say, anyway."

She eyed her captive as she imparted the rumor. Deciding, Valle thought, whether he had any sympathy for the starving masses who had only krill-based foodstuffs to eat, or for an ecosystem being overrun by a single species. At least she left the option open to consider that he might.

"If you're a member of the Class," she continued. "you get hydroponic-grown vegetables, real-culture meats. I didn't taste a real

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carrot until I was twenty years old.”

“I was ten,” Valle said.

He couldn’t recall the particular vegetables, but Valle remembered well the meal Mr. Walter had prepared when the gray-haired human had rescued the bat pups from their orphanage. He winced, because he couldn’t think of their first encounter with Mr. Walter without thinking of their last, when Osah had come to requisition them.

“Why are we going to Osah?” he demanded, as gently as he could.

“We aren’t going to Osah,” scowl. “we’re going to Dresden’s bubble. We signed the papers; Aequitas knows it, so we can’t deviate.”

“You aren’t going to let me go when we get there.”

“Maybe we’re going to go kill your brother.”

“Good luck. How do you know who he is, how do you know any of what you know?”

“Why would I tell you that? *Maybe* you’re not Osah’s Other Fang, but you’re still his brother. What I say to you goes straight to His ears.”

“We were orphans, and Osah took us to look for candidates for assassins. They liked that we were brothers, because if they could make us hurt eachother, they could point us at anyone. Crucis did great, I just got sicker and sicker.”

Grid glanced at him from where she sat, and back to the window.

“I can’t do anything right now,” Valle pushed. “But when we’re there, I only have to make one false move and Osah catches us.”

“Then I’ll give you every ounce of anaesthetic I’ve got.”

“Crucis won’t let me die at his doorstep. They can do amazing things at their med lab. I’ve seen it.”

Grid sneered, but softened when she looked away.

“All you need to know is that I fought the Class until I couldn’t, and then I had a run-in with the Vampires, now I’m returning it in kind.”

“You’re going to die, and I might see Crucis, which is worse than you dying.”

She rolled her eyes.

“Look,” she pointed at the window, where the edge of the easternmost walls of Eurasia was just coming into view. “Zoans

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built that. We built all the cities. We were the labor force. There are chiropters and buteos in mass graves around the sea walls. That was...five generations in? They'd already given up on us as their perfect slave labor, but they brought us back to build their walls."

"Someone's always being sacrificed," Valle noted.

Grid didn't look over at him.

"Yeah."