

Inner Discord-43

Alex woke in a more luxurious bed than he'd ever been in. The closest he could remember was during the Dukorys job, where Tristan had them posing as wealthy partiers as part of getting close to the target and it had involved staying at expensive resorts.

He vaguely remembered Tristan carrying him, gunfire, the smell of blood and burned fur.

Despair.

At least, sleep had taken care of that one. He still smelled of the rest.

The lockers in the room came with locks, and every item had a gravitic inducer to ensure they stayed in place. So, he was on a ship. Unless Tristan had found a second landing pad, they were in Carter Hart's ship.

He located the cleaning locker and hung his clothes in it. By the time he was done with his shower, they were clean. He'd have to see to the repairs himself. He'd yet to learn of one that could do that.

The door opened to a more spacious area. A lounge on one side, food preparation across it, and something that had the feel of an office next to that. If this was the ship Alex had seen on the landing pad, it hadn't seemed this spacious. He determined the back was where the armored hatch was, so he went in the opposite direction, opening the door there onto a cockpit and the vastness of space through the screen.

It, too, was more spacious than he expected. There was a seat next to the pilot's for a copilot, against the right wall were the communication board and a scanner station. On the left side was an entire wall of readouts Alex figures were for the ship's component.

"Just how many people does this ship need?" He went over the layout. "And where would they sleep?"

"Past the desk is a ladder to six cryo bunks," Tristan answered, turning the chair to face him. "How are you feeling?"

Alex opened his mouth to answer, but nothing came out. His mind felt like all the code in it trying to exit through a single communication port.

He dropped into the seat at the communication station. "I don't know," he admitted. "I don't want to you to chain me to the wall under our house anymore, so that's got to be an improvement. But if no longer going off on murderous rages means I'm going to be doubting myself every time I fight, I'm not sure we should keep going then."

"It won't last. Once you are in control, you won't be plagued with doubts, so you'll be able to confidently decide what your actions will be."

"Read that somewhere?" Alex replied and hated himself for the derision in his tone.

"Experience. Doubting myself was at the core of most of my actions while I was broken. Only I expressed it by trying so hard to demonstrate I had no reason to doubt myself."

"Where are we?" Alex didn't feel like revisiting those days. He listened to the computer and heard Tristan's signature in how rigid its voice was.

“Two and a half hours away from the planet, on steady acceleration.”

Alex frowned. He felt like he'd slept longer.

“I needed time to retrieve our things from the previous ship,” Tristan said. “As well as look through the books that survived your fight.”

Alex gave a noncommittal nod, then forced himself to ask, “Anything of use among them?”

“I don't expect there will be anything relating to your situation. While Carter Hart collected old and ancient things, unlike at the sanctuary, he kept them purely to what he felt was art. Even the fighter I chased him with was considered a work of engineering art in its days.”

Alex chuckled, the mention of the sanctuary causing his mind to bring Teklile's behavior to him. “You know, if the sanctuary hasn't been razed since we left, Teklile is going to believe Hart actually came to his senses and stop sending merc after that painting.” Tristan gave him an odd look, so he added. “Unless we go back to tell him we took care of his problem for him.”

“Let's not. I don't think he would appreciate how we went about it.” Tristan hesitated. “I think it serves him better to believe the universe isn't as harsh as we know it to be.”

Alex studied his Samalian. There was more to it, he could tell, but he couldn't work out what.

“I have to take care of a few things before I can go under cryo,” Tristan said. “If you want to go now, the bed has a stasis system.”

So Tristan wouldn't tell him, then. “Unless you object, I want to make the computer mine first.”

Tristan gave an affirmative tilt of the ears, so Alex set to work.

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Tristan rolled the metal ball between his fingers, sitting in the center of the of the hold, his books stored in crates and secured around him. The sphere had become the item he focused on to meditate. He felt its surface, studied the flaws in its fabrication as well as those acquired over its existence. He thought about what it represented, what it meant to his people, to him, to the universe.

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The silence was absolute.

Tristan stood before the golden dome.

“I don’t know what to do,” he told it. It was easier to admit that to it, then it had been to admit to himself. Seeing Alex giving up, even if it was temporary, had been almost too much. “Is this really the only way?” He raised the book. The ancient tome. A copy of the one he’d come across in the sanctuary’s library while searching for the one that would matter to his people. It was still there. He’d scanned it with his datapad and read that, but in this place, wherever it was, things seemed to be what they truly were.

“You can’t expect me to put him at risk like that without some form of reassurance.” He wanted to scream at it. Issue demands, threats. But those hadn’t worked before. They wouldn’t work this time.

The truth was that it could. Only it wasn’t.

And that was the problem.

Tristan could deal with demands being made of him. They brought certainty. This was...

“That’s why you brought me there, isn’t it? It’s why all those clues as to where the tome was came to me. You needed us at the sanctuary to protect them, to protect the man’s faith.”

He hadn’t made the connection until Alex had laid it plain before him. Teklile was a man who believed the universe was just, when given enough time. Carter Hart could have destroyed that, along with the place itself, but, chasing knowledge and a way for Alex to resolve his problem, they had been there to stop him. Had even gone the extra step of removing him. Tristan had taken possession of the man’s accounts, so the contracts would be nullified.

“I’m not your...”

He was deluding himself. He was an aggressor. He was one of the aspects that made up the Source. Wasn’t he there for it to decide how to best use?

He placed a hand against its warm surface. “You know trust isn’t easy for me. What you’re asking me to do, to risk...”

Pleading didn’t work either.

“Alright.” He stepped away. “I’ll do it.” He turned and smiled. “Once I’ve exhausted

all other options.”

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With the ship’s course and evasion protocols set, Tristan entered the bedroom and looked at his human sprawled on it.

His human. The one person he was desperate to keep, to cherish, to hold. To protect.

He slipped under the covers and pulled Alex against him.

His human made an unintelligible sound of not quite awareness.

Maybe Tristan would chide him later for letting exhaustion steal away his alertness later.

“It’s okay,” he whispered. “I have you. You are safe. You are mine. No one will ever take you from me.” He held him tighter and asked the Source to make his belief truth.