

The undercliff was eerily beautiful. The glowing plants gave the area a hauntingly ethereal vibe. Ravine would have admired the unique fauna and ecosystem in the undercliff...only if he wasn't currently being suffocated by the humidity.

"Uh...Ravine, are you sure this is the right way?" Caligosto asked as he fanned his face with his hand, "pretty sure we walked by that weirdly shaped rock couple minutes ago."

They were also lost. Ravine and his companions have been walking around in the undercliff for some time now, and at first the purple crook was confident in his directions. Now..? Not so much. But he refused to admit it to his companions...for now.

Ravine carefully slid down a flat slanted rock down to the lower level of the undercliff then he turned to answer his crook companion. However, Ravine's expression shifted from subtle frustration and annoyance to confusion when he noticed Vacant slipping away. The crook stepped to the side as Caligosto joined him, his indigo eyes staying on the dark nautilod, "Vacant, where are you going?"

"It's this way..." Vacant grunted as he sauntered off to the right instead of joining his party.

Ravine frowned, he was already making his way back up to Vacant, "No, it's not. We've checked there already, remember? The rocks over there are unsteady. One slip and the rocks can come tumbling down." The crook hastily reached his nautilod companion and grabbed his bicep to stop him from advancing any further.

Vacant yanked his arm away from Ravine, his lips drawing back slightly into a slight snarl, "You've checked, and quite frankly at this point I'm not sure if you did thoroughly." Vacant stomped off without waiting for a response from Ravine.

A low frustrated growl rumbled from deep within the crook's chest as he followed Vacant closely. Ravine looked over his shoulder waving their third party member over before falling in step with Vacant.

"I'm telling you the area over here is too dangerous to cross."

"..." The nautilod ignored the warnings and ventured deeper into the undercliff until they came across an opening. He looked around the area, sure there were some loose rocks here and there but they were neither big enough to be a threat nor in their path. Vacant could hear Caligosto catching up to them as he headed over to the opening, which would undoubtedly lead them outside.

"Watch out!"

Vacant had barely taken a step into the tunnel when he felt a pebble drop on his head. The nautilod rubbed his head and looked up right when Ravine yanked him back. Both the nautilod

and crook tumbled backwards and onto the uneven and jagged ground. The purple crook hissed as a sharp pain shot through his back and head as he hit the ground. The hiss was followed by a startled grunt when Vacant fell on top of him.

“You two okay?!” Caligosto rushed to his companions just in time to see the tunnel collapse just a few feet away from them. The cccat took a second to breathe and thank their luck. One second late and Vacant could have been...Caligosto shuddered, refusing to finish the thought. Instead, he turned back to his party.

Vacant and Ravine were gathering themselves when the crook and the cccat noticed something red trickling down the nautipod's head.

“Oh shoot, Vacant, you're bleeding!” Caligosto knelt down immediately, assessing his friend's wound, “what happened?? Did you hit your head when you fell?”

“No...a small rock hit me on the head when the entrance collapsed,” Vacant pointed to the culprit lying several inches away from them. An edge of the rock was stained in red.

The sight of Vacant injured made something in Ravine snap. Within a split second, everything from that day...came rushing back to him in full force

His pack.

The massacre.

The screams.

The wails

The agonizing helplessness.

The silence that followed the tragedy that fell upon his pack. Leaving him alone. A lone survivor.

“What were you thinking?!” Ravine snapped, panic, fear, and something far more primal bled into his voice. The usually stoic crook bristled, “Do you not think? Do you not listen? I told you to be careful! Did I not warn you of the dangers? If I had not pulled you back when I did, then you-”

“Hey, Ravine...” Caligosto slowly reached out and gingerly placed his hand on the crook 's shoulder, “hey man...easy.”

Ravine's wide eyes snapped towards the cccat, he was breathing heavily, he looked frazzled, unnerved.

Caligosto gave Ravine a soft squeeze on his shoulder as an understanding smile crossed his countenance, "hey man...it's okay. Vacant's here. You saved him. He's here. *We're* here."

Ravine looked to the cccat then to the nautipod then back to the cccat. The crook closed his eyes and took in a deep shaking breath before slowly opening his eyes again, "Yeah...yeah...you're right..." he dragged both hands down his face then slowly exhaled, "you're right. Sorry. Yeah."

"It's okay. You good?"

"Yeah, I'm fine..." Ravine nodded, placing his hand over Caligosto's and giving it several pats, "I'm fine. Sorry. I..."

"It's okay," Caligosto's smile softened, "you don't have to explain. But like I told you back at the motel...when your past comes to haunt you...we got your back."

"I know. Thank you."

"..."

"..."

Caligosto turned to Vacant who had been sitting there with a vacant expression. Vacant blinked once...then twice...then cleared his throat as he rubbed the back of his neck, "Sorry..." he muttered, "should have heeded your warning."

Ravine sighed again as his nerves started to calm down, "it's fine. I'm just glad you weren't hurt too badly."

"We should probably tend to Vacant's wound and try to get out of here..." Caligosto huffed, "I'm starting to miss the sun. Ravine, do you know which way to go? Is the way we were headed the right way?"

Ravine paused, "...". He swallowed his stubborn pride and muttered, "...no..."

"Great."