

LAST NIGHT BEFORE DEPLOYMENT

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Warfang City

Early 3016

It was a night warmer than the ones before, summer was in full force. But the First Division would spend the remainder of this summer not in Warfang, but in the Shattered Vale.

This deployment had been whispered of in the moons prior - the other Divisions stationed across the western sea were wearing thin, but so were the Ape Tribes. It was inevitable that the Council would now send the First Division with its Elemental leading the spear to finally destroy the Apes' line of iron - retaking the Wetland Abyss and avenging the civilian slaughter from when it was lost.

With victory in its sight, the Army Fort hosted an event in its halls for the First Division, its soldiers and their families - and of course, with room for the Army clans. The soldiers would eat and drink to their hearts content, while above their officers and the clans mingled.

Among these was Commander Lynarius himself. This event was a rarity in that he'd willingly attended, though only for the morale of his soldiers. His mood was already sour, his father had quickly put him through uncomfortable introductions with clans and their dolled up daughters hoping that he might agree to a last minute

contract before his return to war. He had expected it, and still he was annoyed - but eventually he managed to wriggle out of the clan nonsense to see to his Regiment.

Despite this being a celebration for soldiers of all kinds to indulge in festive offerings and relax, Lieutenant Imerus found himself happily taking care of those in his regiment. With familiar faces and accompanying family walking by the dining table, Imerus cheerfully greeted as he handed off glasses filled with wine and platters to dragons. He had a sweet smile across his face as he took notice of his fellow first regiment soldiers with their loved ones. As clans intermingled stuffy as usual, the energy of the party with the common soldier was far more comforting and lively.

Offering drinks to others and getting to see those smiles put Imerus' troubling thoughts lingering in the back of his mind at bay. After the last celebration Imerus had attended ending poorly, he was overjoyed this one focused on those he felt most happy around. The regiment, fellow lieutenants and... Commander Lynerius.

As he continued to work, in the corner of his vision he noticed Commander Lynerius finally escaping from the dreadful clan gatherings. Imerus' emerald eyes lit up overjoyed, as embarrassing as it was to notice; his heart fluttering against his chest. Imerus honestly expected Lynerius to have been held up with clan business for the entire night.

“Commander~! Welcome to the party.” Imerus waved and gave a playful wink to Lynerius as he set down his offering glasses. “Our regiment has been good, no one has

gotten shitfaced yet. I'm glad you could escape from hell - hopefully you can relax for a while now."

"Hmf, I'd be impressed if we had drunks already," Lynerius said, naturally not acknowledging the wink.

"Drinking to their hearts content, afterall." Imerus tilted his head gesturing at some goofballs of their regiment drinking fast and loudly.

Lynerius huffed. "As for relaxing, we'll see about that, lately the girls have been approaching me alone trying to make me 'get to know them', likely at my father's urging. I'm forced to reject them *again*, and then it feels personal and they get upset." He grumbled. "I've been cursed at, begged to, slapped. The last one cried. It's like the new strategy to make me accept a contract is *guilt tripping*." Looking exasperated, he grabbed the nearest untouched drink and took a swig.

It was only a few years back that Lynerius started opening up so extensively to Imerus, a wall that had taken a decade to chisel down. Before that, he would have left it at '*we'll see about that*'.

Imerus gave a sympathetic frown. "Ahh..." He furrowed his brows and stuck his green stained tongue out. "That's just not fair at *alllll*. Seeing a girl cry hurts far more than a slap. Guess since everything else has failed, guilt tripping the next course of action." He gave a comforting smile looking up to his commander and glanced at the table crowd, motioning with his wings to Lynerius for them to get a little more privacy together. "Your poor handsome face though, hopefully that slap didn't sting for too long. They're mostly all young, right? Your father's type is... *very obvious*."

Lynerius pulled a somewhat amused grimace at the 'handsome' comment, too used to soldier banter to think, in the moment, that it wasn't sarcastic. It would occur to him later (and he would convince himself otherwise), but right then the obvious compliment was too obvious.

"Not quite so young, thank fuck, youngest has been early forties. Old enough to have eggs safely but young enough to never have had any prior. Which makes them a few years too old for his ideals," he said, sticking his tongue out. He paused as he walked with Imerus to a more vacant area, the two slipping through semi-transparent curtains and out onto a balcony. The sky was clear of clouds, stars glittering above them.

Imerus felt at ease seeing such a small amused expression from Lynerius. One day, maybe, he would see the commander smile. Much to Imerus' annoyance, the lingering thoughts brought on by an ex-fling echoed in the back of his mind. This clan relationship stuff was simply unfair, cruel even, for all parties. Lynerius being casual and opening up to him like this was the reassurance Imerus needed.

"Mmmh, that's not much better. I've been told that first time egg laying is scary no matter the age. Grateful he doesn't offer the late 20s to you, would be horrifying." Imerus scrunched his face in disgust but soon followed with a soft smile as they walked through the curtains onto the balcony. Imerus looked up to the starry sky and soon his signature half lidded loving gaze focused onto his dear commander.

"Let me know if you ever need help out of that proposal talk. Could scheme some sort of excuse where you're needed." Imerus sat down to the point of touching next to

Lynarius, not afraid or intimidated for such a bold move. "Oops, '*your Regiment Lieutenant spilled wine on a Frostspear*' or something." He laughed at the thought.

"Hmhm, I'd rather not get you in trouble, the old man will get sour if my Lieutenants interrupt us without a *fantastic* reason," Lynarius said, shifting as he sat but not moving away from Imerus. The closeness gave him pause, but he reminded himself that Imerus was just touchy feely with *everyone*.

"I don't mind getting in trouble if it's for your sake. But *ahhhh*, I get it. Shame I wasn't of clan status, would maybe help a *tiinny* bit." Imerus sighed sarcastically, though the thought did have genuine envy. As Lyn sat, Imerus gently shuffled so he could be properly facing his commander. His tail skillfully slipped under and around Lynarius' front paw, swaying gently against his formal armor. "Guess I'll continue to do what I can to lighten your load. Always here for you, no matter what."

"I-" Lynarius stammered, his brain malfunctioning at his Lieutenant's tail intimately wrapping around his leg. He didn't know how to justify that one. "Uh, thank you."

The nighttime air was cool and yet Lynarius found himself flushed with heat. The closeness and lack of distractions made it impossible for the Commander to shy away from Imerus' loving gaze. He swallowed, clueless on how to handle the situation. If he were to allow himself to fully think about it, he'd admit to himself that Imerus was the prettiest fucking man he'd ever laid eyes on, and that only served to fluster him more.

“Of course.” Imerus smiled, tail wrapped gently around as a means to not only flirt but offer a comforting hold, a hug, in some manner not too obvious. It was all he could offer Lynerius, comfort and support. Moments like tonight reminded Imerus just how hard he had fallen in love with Lynerius; the true selfless and noble nature under that grumpy exterior.

His emerald eyes glimmered at the slight hint of Lynerius becoming flustered, an extremely rare expression he rarely got to see. Imerus leaned his head up closer to his commander slowly, a mere breath away. All of his anxieties and fears could be put to rest at this moment.

“Lynerius, whatever the Ancestors have in store for us starting tomorrow- I’ll always be grateful to have had a moment of your time tonight. This feeling will get me through whatever war we are thrown into.” Imerus spoke tenderly and paused. “...I-”

Say it, idiot!

They were closer now, Lynerius could smell the sweet wine on Imerus’ breath. He felt like he should have pulled away, but questioned if he wanted to.

Sex was one thing, he didn’t shy away from that—he knew the rumors about Imerus’ promiscuity, and yet the thought of initiating something was not tempting. Imerus was one of the last dragons he wanted to risk hurting. If he wanted more, it was something Lynerius couldn’t give. And he didn’t want to lose him.

Romance... even when Lynerius felt something for someone, he couldn’t allow himself to pursue it. It was like wanting to put his paw in open flames—every instinct

told him not to do it. No matter how crippling his loneliness became, or how the crushing weight on his shoulders weighed him down to the ground and all he could do was bottle it up until he burst, he couldn't. He wouldn't even be good for anyone. Hell, there was nothing about his character to like, it was stupid to think for a second this was about that—Imerus had to know better. And in that instant, his walls were back up.

For Imerus, his entire life was a jumbled mess on the concept of sex and romance. For many years he had numerous flings purely for the sake of making his mates happy, not a care for his own happiness. He never once felt romance towards these males, even though some were close friends- he could tell nothing in his heart was yearning for love. It was not until he got to work alongside Commander Lynerius this spark of desire formed. Imerus has been trying for years to move on from the past, avoiding old flings and limiting his playful flirty nature.

Imerus loved Lynerius in every form. Sex, romance, friendship- whatever it was, Imerus wanted to love and spoil his commander; to see him happy and give him the love he deserved. Everyone else lived in peace thanks to Lynerius' efforts and to Imerus it wasn't fair the man himself was all alone with these burdens.

'I love you. I want to be a reason you can smile and be happy.' Imerus thought to himself, gazing up lovingly to Lynerius. Sadly the lieutenant couldn't get these thoughts out in time.

"Lynerius!" An all too familiar voice called out.

In Lynerius' internal spiraling he'd barely processed what Imerus had been saying, only to snap out of it - shooting up to his paws and pulling his foreleg away

from the Lieutenant's coiled tail. He looked back to the curtains leading back inside to see them parted by his father, who seemed unhappy, to say the least.

"...Come with me, *please*," the General said through gritted teeth.

Imerus quickly swayed his tail away from Lynerius' arm, though still flirtatiously swaying. "Haa... At least he said '*please*'." Imerus whispered softly and faked a cough. "I'm sorry, General. Commander." The lieutenant politely bowed his head to both Lynerius and Tordner. "*I'll see you later?*" He whispered to Lynerius again, that sweet soft voice of his hopefully beyond Tordner's hearing.

"See you, Lieutenant," Lynerius somewhat mumbled as he turned to walk to his father. His eyes looked anywhere but at either of them, and so he missed the way his father was glaring at Imerus.

Tordner was alarmed, to say the least. Finally his son seemed close to another dragon, but that dragon was *male*. Was that why his son refused contracts and unity? A taste solely in males, or THAT male specifically? That one, whom he recognized from whispers of divergence and infidelity, some *homewrecker*? His frown deepened, and his glare turned threatening. He then stepped back and dropped the curtains as Lynerius stepped through, and the two left.

"*Sorry...*" Imerus grimacing, letting out an apology again. Lynerius' averting eyes caused his heart to sink a little. Did he mess up? Maybe being sappy was the wrong move... Or perhaps Lyn was just upset he had to return to the endless contract candidates? These thoughts and concerns for Lynerius were interrupted as Imerus felt a chill run down his spine, his gaze drifting to General Tordner.

If looks could kill, Imerus would have been shot dead by Tordner's hateful glare. It had been a long time since someone had looked at him so threateningly. Imerus has been trying so hard to clean his record, rejecting aggressive ex-flings, even having to fight back on occasion; for the stigma to still linger was disheartening to say the least. Despite that nasty glare, Imerus simply waved to the Stormbringers with a sweet smile across his muzzle until the two disappeared back into the party.

Imerus' smile faltered. "*Just some clanless fuckboy who isn't worth anything to the Stormbringers...*" He said, quoting to himself one of the nasty insults Rhewis had said just a few moons ago. *Damn it*, why did that bastard have to be proven right! He felt like such a fool for trying to push the limits of what they had tonight. Imerus just wanted to prove that ex-fling wrong and yet... Ah, nothing he could do about it now.

Imerus looked up to the calm night sky, the half moons shining bright. His heart ached.

He needed a drink.

"What was that?" General Tordner asked his son as they walked down the hall. Though he hadn't asked him to go *anywhere*, Lynerius seemed intent to go *away* from where they'd just been.

"What was what," Lynerius quipped.

“You and that Lieutenant.”

“Nothing. I was just complaining to him.”

“About?”

“You.”

Tordner grunted. “While breathing in each other’s faces? *I know* what I was seeing. You have to know better than to be swayed by that one, some *boywhore* chasing clan coin.”

Lynerius stopped sharply in his tracks, forcing Tordner to stop so as to not walk into him. Lynerius cast a dark look over his shoulder. “Don’t ever talk about my Lieutenant like that.”

“Please. I’m just trying to look out for you.”

“I know *exactly* what you were looking out for,” Lynerius hissed, turning back and bumping past his father, slipping down a different hallway to return to his regiment.

If he was in any way lucky, that’d be the last damn talk of the night.