

The rough scraping of talons against marble echoed in the nearly empty chamber, a familiar if not unwelcomed sound for those that frequented the stark ivory tower in the center of the Sanctuary often. Indra sat quite a ways up the soaring structure, farther up than most of the humans and all but a few of the Vayrons usually climbed, dragging the talons of her wings against the ground. In many lights it looked like a threatening gesture, or an action one might perform while plotting the downfall of a distant kingdom. In this light, the fading light of the day made up of pale pinks and purples cast about the interior of the white marble tower, it was something much different.

It was a nervous habit.

Indra watched as the city that has raised itself around her resting place in the ages past began to light up in the growing darkness. Lanterns were lit, magical apparatuses activated, and the windows and streets began to take on an ethereal glow as the sun set upon the horizon. Sanctuary was never very bustling or loud, but in the stillness of these hours of twilight Indra felt as if even the dead could be heard through the silence that seemed to blanket everything.

In many ways that silence was a blessing and a curse. The calm that it inspired among the people in the city was peaceful, and provided a feeling of safety and security that nighttime in any normal city might not bring. There weren't dangers and horrors lurking in the shadows of the buildings below, just normal shadows cast by the flickering of lamp and moonlight. The danger was safely outside of the magical barriers of the city and everyone within slept peacefully, content in that knowledge.

Except Indra, who did not sleep at all.

Centuries of sleeping under a magical haze meant she wasn't likely to get any more, anytime soon. Her nights were filled with restlessness as she watched the souls around her succumb to their dreams, leaving her behind. It didn't feel fair, but she supposed life wasn't meant to be fair in the end.

A cool breeze tickled the fur along her neck and back as it flowed in through the cavernous opening at the side of the tower where she was perched overlooking the settling city. In this hot and unforgiving land, even something as simple as a bit of manipulation via magic to create an otherwise unnatural climate was the least she could do for those that flocked to this city day after day. Just outside the barrier, which at this height almost seemed to be within reach, it was far hotter in the day and far cooler in the night. Many of those who resided here didn't seem to realize the difference, or pay any mind to always preferable climate, but she knew there were a few who were clever enough to catch on.

One such individual was currently at the base of the tower, throwing yellow feathers at makeshift targets made of scavenged burlap and tumbleweeds. The targets were shaped like various wild animals, ranging from Camels to Jackrabbits. The feathers being flung and

consequently pulled back to the thrower seemed to inexplicably avoid each target, looping gracefully around them in more elaborate patterns each time they were thrown. Perhaps they weren't targets at all then?

Not one to let her curiosity go when it was normally so fleeting, Indra simply let herself fall from the tower. It wasn't a far drop, she'd been able to watch Alizair with a reasonable degree of accuracy from that height after all, and within a moment or two she'd spread her wings to alight gently on the ground some distance away.

Clouds of dust kicked up at her arrival briefly obscuring Alizair and his targets from view, at which Indra inwardly cringed. Sometimes it still took some getting used to - existing in the same space as smaller creatures who would be so affected by things such as dust. When it settled a few seconds later however, the small chaser was smiling brightly up at her and only minimally shaking the dust from his feathers.

"Indra, hi!" his chipper voice called out, both of his tails seeming to stand and wave a bit on their own as he did so. She smiled at him and nodded by way of greeting, and gestured to the burlap critters before him. A few of them were a rather crude rendition now that she was up close - only the basic shape was passable, but he'd clearly tried to make them himself.

"Practicing something?" She asked, letting the curiosity color her tone. Alizair wasn't one to hide anything, and so Indra never felt like she should hide anything from him, either. Alizair smiled one of his big smiles at her, all teeth and no insecurity. She was envious.

"Oh you know, just the standard stuff," he said in a tone that meant he was absolutely doing something he was proud of and wanted to show off, and it was not standard stuff at all. Indra decided to take the bait for his sake, and because he was clearly very happy about her taking an interest in his evening training activities.

"Oh? Have you learned a new trick then?" The Tyrian asked, letting more inflection than usually into her voice. It worked, and Alizair bounced and nodded vigorously.

"I have! I can do much more than just throw them out and pull them back, I think," he adds almost as an afterthought, like he might doubt his ability even though he's clearly been practicing for some time. Indra gestures at the targets before them and lowers her massive frame so she's not towering over everything to watch.

"I would love to see, if you don't mind an audience," is all she has to say before Alizair is proudly trotting into place before his constructs. Indra's awareness is pinged briefly by another set of eyes watching from an open doorway at the base of the tower, but the familiarity of it means she pays them no mind, for now.

“I think if I focus hard enough, I can do some really cool things!” Alizair proclaims loudly before whipping his double tails at the nearest target. Indra’s attention is fully back on him in this moment, fascinated as she always is by his particular brand of magic.

Two long yellow feathers fly from him, she suspects his tail directly for the most momentum, and zip towards the targets. She can clearly see a distinct warm light encasing them as well as a barely visible anchor to his own body. She doubts he can see the string connecting them himself or he’d be much further along with his own magic, but she’s got centuries of magical practice on him and so she says nothing as he works his own skills.

The feathers are aimed at what appears to be a lumpy camel, but just as they near the center of mass they adeptly curve outwards and around it. Indra can hear the telltale whistle as they cut through the air, apparently now controlled by Alizair’s sheer force of will and focus alone. They dance briefly in the air behind the target, and then with another sharp whistle they curve back around the target and rejoin their kin on Alizair’s body.

The technique and skill is quite impressive, especially for such a young and inexperienced Vayron such as Alizair. He’s practically a pup in Indra’s eyes, but more than that the entirety of his early life was spent alone and without any form of guidance. To have come so far since having joined her here is truly a feat to be proud of. Which if the grin on Alizair’s face were any indication, he is quite proud of indeed.

Indra matches his grin and nods, her eyes lighting up as she regards the small Vayron.

“Very impressive, a good amount of control both in releasing and retrieving them,” she compliments him, and he seems to puff up with the words of encouragement. His double tails wag perhaps subconsciously, and she has to suppress a giggle at the sight of the small and practically vibrating yellow Chaser. A pup indeed.

He’s about to say something, probably something along the lines of a further demonstration to prove his talents, when a young woman bursts forth from the archway that separates the garden from the front of the tower and its grand marble steps. Her sudden appearance and disheveled demeanor set Indra slightly on edge, but she’s long passed reacting visibly to such a disturbance.

Alizair on the other hand is startled quite a bit, and he trips over a discarded roll of burlap at his feet as he turns on his heel to look at the woman. When he finally rights himself he’s gone quite dusty, again.

“Symphony,” Indra greets, and nods at the woman.

Bright red hair cascades over shoulders clothed in simple white robes as the woman does a quick bow before straightening. Her hair has come undone from its traditional bun, and she

looks quite dismayed. Her eyes meet Indra's as she stands, and the ferocity in the normal tranquil golden pools is troubling.

"You are needed outside of the barrier," is her first declaration, but then she seems to shake herself a bit and tries again, "There was trouble outside the barrier, there are injuries."

"Bad?" Comes from Alizair's mouth before Indra can reply, but she was wondering something along those same lines so she doesn't chastise him for it. Symphony seems to glare at the small Chaser briefly, but upon seeing Indra waiting for a response decides to ignore it and move on.

"We were able to heal most of the affected parties," she informs them, pride seeping into her tone, "But there is a troublesome *patient* that requires a more experienced hand."

Indra is curious again now, as there aren't many that require her help specifically unless they are truly beyond normal means of saving. Symphony and her brother and quite capable healers, for them to come to her in this hour has her attention quickly.

"What type of injuries are they?" Indra asks, but she is already raising her body from the ground. Alizair gives a small squeak and then jumps bodily onto her tail. She pays him no mind as he clings on, he wouldn't be able to keep up with her otherwise.

"We are not entirely sure, but they seem to have been inflicted in a fight with something...sharp. A tusk or a sword by the looks of them. There is much damage, despite the scaling," Symphony advises, and Indra nearly stops short. Ah, so there it is. Scaling on a Vayron is not common - and they are not affected by magic in the same way any "normal" creature would be. Why she didn't start with that information is a bit uncharacteristic, however.

"Are they conscious?" Indra asks, drooping low briefly so that Symphony may also climb onto her back. It's a bit of a process, but she does not know the way and it would be foolish for them all to walk.

"That would be the other problem," Symphony says at last, settling atop Indra's shoulder blades as gracefully as she can manage. Her small hands grip the long mane and fur as she braces herself knowingly. She is a smart woman, Indra thinks, before launching herself off the ground in a whirlwind of dust and debris. Alizair's makeshift creatures clatter about the ground but he pays them no mind, already focused on the task at hand. Good boy.

As they rise into the air, Indra nods her head as best as she can as she moves her massive wings with the strength required to lift them all. Those that need help do not always want it, and Symphony's words were telling enough.

"Let us be off, then," is all Indra says before breaching the shimmering barrier above the city and setting off over the empty dunes and craggy rocks of the Thedale desert.

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With flight it takes them little time to reach the outcropping of rocks jutting from the impressive sand dunes nearly 10 miles from Sanctuary. Symphony can guide the way with subtle gestures, and Alizair clings and watches the sand go by while the sun fully sets beneath the horizon.

Outside of the barrier things are very different, and it is why Indra rarely leaves on her own except when necessary.

The world is cold and dark here, no lanterns to light it and no magic to keep it bearable without the sun to warm the sands. The shadows can hold any danger the imagination can think of, if the shadow itself isn't living danger. Without the magical atmosphere of Sanctuary, Indra can almost feel the magic being leeched from her body. It's uncomfortable and cold, the single horn protruding from her forehead seems to dim in response. If any of her companions notice, they say nothing.

Before long Indra can see where they should be going, there are multiple sources of light in the distance both from a campfire and torches nearby. A large outcropping of rocks provides a bit of shelter, which in the sun would have been a blessing. It serves as protection from whatever may be lurking from one side at least, now.

As they approach there is quite a commotion.

A group of the woman, men, and Vayrons seem to be clustered around something in the sand, but not close enough to do anything but form a shoddy circle around it. There is low growling, a warning really, but little movement from the circle. When Indra sets down, less gracefully and carefully than in the garden earlier, the growling gets louder.

Alizair is the first off, bounding towards the humans and Vayrons that he has come to know well in his time in the city. Symphony elegantly dismounts and likewise seems to rush to their aid, earning a few grateful looks in her direction when they realize just what kind of aid she's brought.

Uncertain of how to proceed, Indra takes a moment to look over those from her Sanctuary and takes note of the injuries on them. Various cuts and bruises, but no broken bones or missing limbs at least. There is a Vayron slumbering near the fire that looks to be under some magical or alchemical influence to aid their healing, but is otherwise stable. Indra assesses the situation with a critical eye, but makes no move towards the group around the clearly distressed Vayron. She does hear Alizair, though.

"Woah hey, are you alright? WOAHA! Do not try to bite me," his tone is placating and gentle, even when he scolds the other for what Indra assumes was a half hearted snap at the little

Chaser that always gets just a touch too close. She inches forward just a bit, in case she's needed quickly.

"We're here to help you, you know," Alizair says, in a language that hopefully only this Vayron will understand. The humans around them are not unused to this behavior and simply keep their focus on where it is needed most. Perhaps they do not wish to be surrounded?

"Alizair, might we give our friend some space?" Indra suggests, and almost immediately many of those in the circles begin to dissipate away and towards the campfires or simply away. Alizair remains near, and Symphony hovers at the edge of the pit that's been dug by the now clearly struggling Runner. With a more clear view, Indra realizes this was likely a greater ordeal than she initially thought.

The sand has been brushed away and clawed down to the hard packed clay underneath in many areas, indicating at least some form of struggle or attempt to leave the area. There is a great deal of blood, both dry and wet, coating the ground and the Vayron themselves as well. Indra scents the air subtly and notes there is almost no fear, but plenty of anger. It appears this Vayron cannot walk at the moment, and in their attempts to help may have lashed out at those from Sanctuary in response.

Indra moves forward, she would keep low and nonthreatening but that is quite impossible due to sheer size alone. Almost any Vayron would be hard pressed to find her unassuming on approach, at least. The growling increases in volume, slipping into a snarl here and there. Indra remains calm and proceeds forward, until a gravelly voice breaks from the growl.

"Don't," it's a single word, but there's a lot of...*something* packed into it. It causes Indra to pause, and Alizair looks at the Runner curiously.

"We just want to help, Indra can help," he says, gesturing to the Tyrian in question quickly. The scaled Vayron glowers at Alizair and Indra in turn, scales shifting over muscle as he adjusts his position. If he were capable of it, Indra is sure he would try to run or fight. Probably fight.

"Don't need it," comes the gruff reply, blue eyes flicking between them as if considering who might be a greater threat to himself. Indra has her money on Alizair, honestly.

"That is not what I see," Indra says, moving into his field of vision as she finally reaches the edge of the pit that he's dug around himself.

"Then you are blind," is practically spat back at her, but she is not deterred. Her head cocks to the side, long mane brushing the loose sand on the ground as she considers the Vayron in front of her.

“The muscles in your leg seem to be, malfunctioning,” she says instead, gesturing with her chin to the lame leg stretched out behind him and the one barely able to hold him up, “I can speed the recovery process up if you’ll let me and you can heal on your own.”

Alizair is nodding like a maniac, looking desperately at the other Vayron like *his* own life depends on it.

“Don’t even try it,” is the response, and Indra has to resist the urge to roll her eyes. Surely he must understand that laying out here, bleeding all over the sand unable to move is practically a death sentence, right? He’s either stubborn by nature or stupid. Maybe both. Or maybe neither and there’s more to him than she has the patience to understand.

Despite his obvious dismissal, Indra steps into his little pit with a single clawed wing. She’s almost certain he won’t attack her, largely because it wouldn’t do much good and partly because he doesn’t seem to be unintelligent - quite the opposite if anything.

Sometimes certainty is a pitfall though, and with little warning the scaled Vayron *does* indeed lunge to grapple her wing.

It’s a short struggle, because in the end she’s much larger than him and currently more mobile (and Alizair fires a few feathers in his direction which likely sets him off balance), which ends with the injured Vayron pinned by a large wing and framed by a second. The growling naturally ensues again, but it seems a bit token at this point. Indra shifts her weight so she’s not putting all of her massive heft onto the poor thing, and stands more firmly in his space.

“Perhaps you will reconsider?” She tries again, and can hear Alizair stifling his giggle. Indra does *not* sigh.

Beneath her clawed wing the other Vayron struggles briefly, but seems to realize the pointlessness of that endeavor, finally. He doesn’t verbally relent, or concede, but Indra can feel him stop struggling so hard against her.

“It won’t work,” he says at last, and Indra looks at him with confusion.

“What won’t work?” she has to ask, because the tone in his voice sounded almost sad rather than angry and defensive.

“Your magic,” the scaled male explains, he unabashedly scratches one claw against his own scales, “I’m a mutant, no magic.”

“Ah,” Indra lets out, so that’s the problem then? Whatever his past has been like up until this point, she suspects his status as a “corrupted” Vayron has come heavily into play. She doesn’t

let herself feel sorry for him, she suspects it would not be received well, but she does make note of it mentally.

“That is why they called for my help specifically,” Indra lowers her head so that her horn is glinting in the fire light. It looks almost orange in this light, the blueness having been leached out of it being so far from Sanctuary. The Vayron gives it a cursory glance but doesn’t seem entirely convinced, his blue eyes wary as she straightens once more.

“Let me try,” she says into the blooming silence, noting how still Alizair has gone in anticipation. It feels like a year passes before the other Vayron speaks.

“Fine,” he finally consents, but with great reluctance. Indra releases him from her grasp, but he makes no effort to move. She’s sure he can, but suspects he might just be choosing not to. She nods once, and focuses her energy.

There is no particular fanfare or magical display. Indra simply focuses her magic on the wound and stitches it back together as best she can. It is more difficult than with a human, or a “normal” Vayron due to the corruption, but it is not impossible. Within minutes it is over, and the wound is healed and blood flow staunches.

“There,” she says, a soft smile on her face as the other Vayron gets to his feet a bit shakily. The dust falls through his scales with a soft sound, mixing with the now dried blood and mused sand below. He shakes himself, but it’s an interesting gesture considering the scales themselves. Now that he’s standing Indra is happy to move out of his space and settle a comfortable distance away.

“You won’t see me again,” is all he says, turning to go without so much as a thanks. Indra isn’t surprised, but Alizair gives a scandalous gasp nonetheless.

“Might we know your name at least? After all we’ve been through surely that is not too much to ask,” Indra says slyly, a bit of humor in her tone. The Vayron looks at her reproachfully and seems to consider her words carefully.

“I don’t owe you,” he declares, though he seems to be convincing himself, first.

“Of course not,” she replies easily, tone smooth like melted butter. He scoffs and rolls his eyes, stepping out of the light of the fire and away from the onlooking group that has gathered before them.

“Be careful out there!” Alizair calls, though Indra can tell he’s a bit disappointed. The Chaser tucks his tails closer to his body and seems prepared to watch their brief companion dart out into the darkness.

“Nirah,” is the last word spoken before the scaled Vayron, Nirah, does just that. He disappears quickly, scales as dark as the night sky above them, and before long he’s been completely absorbed by the night. Alizair heaves a very dramatic sigh next to Indra.

“Wow, he was so cool,” is what he says when he’s done watching out after the phantom that they will apparently never see again. Indra chuckles, turning to the campfire and those around it.

“Is he lucky to have crossed our path, or are we lucky to have crossed his?” Indra asks, directed to no one in particular, watching as the small camp goes back to it’s business and begins setting up a more suitable area for the night.

“May time tell,” Symphony says, and for a moment Indra does startle, having forgotten her presence completely. Odd.

“Indeed,” the Tyrian agrees, before setting about assisting the camp in whatever they may need.

She will head back before long, it is not wise for her to leave the city unattended overnight, but for now she is just a Tyrian in the cold Thedale sands. Surrounded by companions that have placed their invaluable faith in her.

Indra isn’t sure if it’s the campfire or that thought that brings warmth to her in the darkness.