

vertigo

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/9247523) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/9247523>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Categories:	M/M , Multi
Fandom:	Star Wars Episode VII: The Force Awakens (2015)
Relationships:	Armitage Hux/Ben Solo Kylo Ren , Finn/Rey
Characters:	Ben Solo Kylo Ren , Armitage Hux , Dopheld Mitaka , Phasma (Star Wars) , Finn (Star Wars) , Poe Dameron
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Actors , Filming , Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms , Smoking , Bribery , Illegal Activities , everyone is exhausted and side-eyeing hux the entire time , Alcohol Abuse/Alcoholism , industry parties are the actual pits
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2017-01-08 Updated: 2017-01-28 Words: 2,890 Chapters: 2/?

vertigo

by [Verbyna](#)

Summary

It takes Armitage Hux two months to write Starkiller and three years to shoot it. They're not the easiest years of his life, but he makes do.

Notes

i write ahead, but my own shooting schedule is as chaotic and exhausting as hux's, so i can't guesstimate the frequency of updates. weekly? i hope? many thanks to FelicityGS for listening to all my grumbling, in fic as in life. <3

tumblr: soundslikepenance

Prologue: The Bridge

“We’re going to get shot, sir,” Mitaka says, eyes glued to the playback.

It’s a miserably hot day in July. They really shouldn’t be out here still, fighting dehydration and starving after craft up and left sixteen hours into the shoot, once Finn explained that there would be no paid overtime.

Around hour six, back on the lot, Hux sent someone to Ren’s green room with a sandwich and a big bottle of water. That was the only time Hux thought about food since waking up early in the week to a blinking phone and Thanisson’s panicked squawking about his editing workload back in L.A. It was a lot more than Hux and Phasma had tasked him with. There is nothing but unpaid overtime on a Snoke-driven schedule.

Hux rubs the daggers out of his eyes and glances at Mitaka, or rather over his shoulder at the framing on the monitor. “Keep rolling.”

Onscreen and live before them, Ren is getting out of the car again, turning to look back at the skyline. His face when he turns is just--

“Rolling sound. Quiet on set. Roll camera,” comes Phasma’s voice, doubled over the walkies, almost drowned by car horns from two kilometres’ worth of stopped traffic. A sea of cars, and god, they might actually die here, on this bridge in Mexico, with overheated air trembling over the asphalt and nothing to show for it except half a film’s worth of raw footage. If they don’t collapse they might be shot. Hux wonders how many amongst the crew would mind anymore. Then he wonders whether maybe he should drink something before he loses the plot, both literal and metaphorical.

The clapper loader claps the sticks a little too hard; Mitaka flinches at the sound, while Phasma twitches at the number of the take scribbled on the sticks. Hux catches Ren’s eye through for a second, catches the ghost of a dry smile, and nods back.

“Action.”

“And action,” Phasma repeats. *This is it*, Hux thinks, but he thinks that all the time.

He watches Ren turning around again. It’s such a simple thing, the way Ren looks at the ground before he lifts his head to say goodbye to the past or hold on to it a minute longer, the way he becomes just one of a thousand people stuck between places after that long closeup in the car, but it still feels like magic. Nineteen takes in, and it keeps getting better. Hux is good at cutting scenes and moving on but this is the last one here, and if he lets Ren keep going he’ll just give him more and more and more to choose from. He doesn’t understand how Ren does it but he’s doing it for Hux and it is very difficult to stop when Hux’s heart is pounding. Like finding buried treasure and a map to the next treasure in the chest. Like gambling on a winning streak.

Phasma cuts the scene and wraps for the day. Hardly anyone claps before they start loading the equipment to take it back to the lot. Mitaka confers with the DIT and asks Hux to go over the last two takes before that guy packs up as well, but Hux just tells Doph to check it himself and decides to beg a bottle of water off his van driver.

The DIT says something under his breath before he goes, either convinced that Hux doesn't speak Spanish or not caring if he overhears. His succinct assessment of Hux's character isn't far off the mark. If they didn't fill out the camera department locally, Mitaka would probably get stabbed by them Caesar-style on Hux's behalf.

They don't get shot, but bribing that many police officers to keep the stoplights off for an hour hurts like hell. Finn looks near tears as he passes callsheets around.

Ren is in the back of the van, wiping makeup and sweat off his face with a baby wipe. It smells strongly of talcum powder and overheated leather and sweat under the frigid A/C when Hux climbs in. Dazed by the sudden change in temperature and near-blind behind the blackout windows, Hux opens the cooler between the seats facing Ren and reaches in, blinking quickly and short of breath. Ren steps very delicately and deliberately on Hux's right foot with a dusty boot.

"You need to sleep."

Hux waves the water bottle in an arc to spray Ren with icy condensation. Ren doesn't flinch, just drags the back of his hand over his mouth and then pockets the baby wipe. The smell is starting to make Hux nauseous. He notices that he hasn't pulled his foot back yet and can't muster the energy to do so now. He has so many things to do before his flight tonight.

"I need to work," he tells Ren. "And eat something." He takes an energy bar from the door and unwraps it in demonstration. His eyes are starting to adjust to Ren's absurdly clean face. Hux's hands, now cold, itch to touch him. It might stop the tremors. It might feel like touching his mother's rosary, something that helps the body to remember comfort.

The hand that lands on his knee feels like a brand. "You need to sleep," Ren says again, "so you're coming to my room. Do not pass go, do not collect your fucking laptop." He squeezes once and lets go when Phasma climbs into the passenger seat and starts talking to the driver in rapid Spanish. The driver laughs; Hux closes his eyes.

He wakes up outside the hotel. Ren is shaking his shoulder gently, so gently that he must've been doing it for a while, since Phasma is nowhere to be seen. The driver is smoking and it makes Hux crave a cigarette. Ren stays with him for two, steals a drag without looking up from his phone. He's playing a game that involves tilting the screen a lot in no discernable pattern, and it makes Hux dizzy, but he can't open his eyes enough to look higher than the general area of Ren's torso.

After the second cigarette, Hux has gathered himself enough to look around. The hotel is a pretty standard four-star production hotel, including Poe Dameron's judgmental face on the other side of the revolving door. He salutes Hux with his cigarette, or what might be a joint. Ren locks his screen, flips Poe off, and takes Hux inside. Hux just doesn't have it in him to make decisions anymore. He follows where Ren leads, which is up six floors and down an

endless corridor where Hux gets dizzy and ill again. Outside the door he looks around and takes Hux's hand before scanning his key card and walking him to the unmade bed.

They stop there awkwardly. It used to be easy to be alone together, especially when they were punchdrunk and too tired to talk. Talking is what made this difficult.

Finally Ren sighs and guides Hux to lie down on top of the sheets. They smell like his shampoo. Hux follows the scent like Pavlov's dog, presses his face against the pillow, and sleeps. They both make the flight, but only just.

COLD FRONT

Chapter Notes

my call is in four hours and we have an eighteen hour shoot coming up. pray for me.

First Order Productions has been getting cult comparisons alongside its cult status since the 1970s. Snoke, besides using a single name like fucking Madonna, demands loyalty from his employees to the point of subsuming their lives to the company.

Hux was put through film school by FO. He worked his way up from set PA to director, though what he really wanted to be was a producer. He misses being a 1st AD every single day of his overworked life, misses running sets instead of directing performances, but Starkiller is the first project that made him seriously consider quitting and joining the union as a 1st.

It's not just dealing with his inconvenient attraction for Ren. It's having Dameron and Rey as Ren's costars, whom Ren barely tolerates, and watching them pull Finn out of the FO system while Finn is meant to focus on producing the whole circus. It's how obvious it became circa Kenya that Mitaka should be directing and that Phasma will never leave FO with Hux. It's twenty locations with local subcontractors who didn't understand how FO works, that they'll be reassigned to whatever role they can perform and are expected to learn fast on the job.

It's the fact that he had to bribe so many people and trespass in so many places in the past three years that he'll likely spend awards season on Skype with his lawyer in between accepting accolades.

It's the fact that he *wrote the fucking script*, and if he leaves FO he'll be expected to write as well as direct. This is the only story he had in him. It's the best work he will ever do, and the only way to go is down if he goes freelance.

But mostly, it's Ren. Mostly, it's telling Ren's body and face what to do on a daily basis, then fielding calls from Snoke all night about his precious, untouchable protege. The height of Hux's career is just a stepping stone for Ren, who only wants to fuck Hux to pass the time until he moves on to bigger things.

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Six months before Mexico Hux had to get his stomach pumped in Moscow, and though it was Ren who called the ambulance, Phasma was the one to climb in with him and keep him

company at the hospital for that entire miserable week. By the time he was released, Ren had already left the country.

A lot of things led to that awful night and none of them were, even in retrospect, avoidable. Hux has been self-medicating since he was fourteen and his father married Maratelle. He didn't drink on the Starkiller shoot until they switched their Russian production company for the third time, and even then it didn't escalate until Snoke threatened to remove him from the project unless he wrapped the location in ten days.

And Ren--

This was before Hux realized that the roiling pit where his stomach used to be was love. He wouldn't have tried to fuck his way out of it if he'd known, but he had no frame of reference and limited resources to deal with it. One morning his alarm went off at five and he woke up naked and hungover in Ren's bed. Ren fucked him again before the car arrived, and Hux could deal with his awful day. So he just kept drinking and falling into bed with Ren, and he didn't stop when it made his days harder. Hard or not, Ren listen to him better on the days when Hux directed with a flask in his back pocket. It made the difference between being fired and blacklisted and meeting Snoke's deadline.

He was in Russia when he found out that his mother had died and Brendol hadn't seen fit to tell him for weeks. He drank to her and remembered sitting quietly in the wings at her auditions in London, everything new and bright and so terribly close to the bone of the story. It was nothing like the war films his father produced, which he only saw when they were finished. His fascination with bringing stories to life started at his mother's rehearsals.

He told all this to Ren the day after he heard of her death. He needed Ren vulnerable for a nude scene: closed set, the main character getting the news of his father's death. He told Ren about the apple-flavoured gum she'd buy him for hours spent watching her from dark theatre seats, about getting his knees patched up backstage on concrete staircases.

Ren switched to straight vodka after the fifth take. Snoke started to make noise about Best Actor awards when he reviewed the material. But what Hux remembers is that they were alone, Hux operating the dolly and Ren naked on the bed, and they did five or six takes at a time before Hux called for touch-ups. And it was quiet. And Ren did all the crying for him, even if Hux didn't tell him that she was dead.

Ren took Hux's empty grief, the shell of the boy he used to be, and turned it into art.

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After Russia, Phasma and Mitaka did commercial work on the East Coast while Hux fucked his way through half of London. Ren filmed a short horror about the dangers of social media, three weeks in Berlin, then dropped off the radar until one of Snoke's countless PAs summoned him to the next longterm location in the film.

When they talk about Russia, they mean their crew getting arrested for trespassing and Mitaka's husband coming in to detox in fucking Moscow, of all doomed ideas. They mean the DIT bailing before he backed up the footage from a perfect location they bribed their way into and can't reshoot.

They don't mean Hux losing his fucking mind over Kylo fucking Ren. They don't mean Kylo slapping Hux awake before the ambulance came, or how Hux tried to drag Kylo into the ambulance with him. How he said *I need you* and meant *I don't want to die alone*.

Hux doesn't really want to talk about what happened, but he should warn them that it isn't over. That they should manage their expectations for him. That he's always one sleepless night and a sixteen hour shoot away from the same pit, now, like his mother before him. He's just much, much better at not looking down.

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After Mexico, Hux and Pasma make their way back to LA with Finn to be raked over coals. They're two million over budget halfway through a fifteen million production, and Finn comes out of Snoke's office looking ashen and ill. He takes the brunt of it; it was his job to say no. Pasma pats him on the shoulder and hands him a bottle of water, shrugging at Hux as Finn chugs the whole thing.

"Is it worth the expense?" Snoke asks when it's Hux's turn. Meaning: awards. Meaning: raising Ren's profile. Meaning: are you making this your whole life's purpose?

"Yes," Hux says. "I will touch base with editing to get some rough cuts to you before we move to Hungary. I think you'll agree that it's something..." He blanks for a second, trying to come up with a way to describe it other than *magic*. "...Special."

"And how is Ren? Are you finding it difficult to curb his less professional tendencies?"

Hux holds Snoke's creepy eyes and lies through his teeth.

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He waves off Pasma's offer of quiet drinks and checks his email for distractions. London is home, but LA is where he built his career; he has to network and be seen, much as he'd rather nurse his ongoing personal crisis and a bottle of gin.

He RSVPs to a party at the Standard, swings by the lot to borrow some distressed Saint Laurent jeans that make him look like he belongs in his age group, and makes it to the

Rooftop around 10. He gets a gin & tonic and sits cross-legged on the edge of the pool, staring blankly past the crowd at the lit-up skyscrapers in front of him.

It's not until an hour later that he notices Rey and Finn making out next to the DJ. Fantastic. He does so love to run into fraternization when he's trying to clear his mind. Something about the way Finn is cradling her face makes his stomach twist - too tender, too desperate - and he looks away, only to see Ren.

Hux barks a laugh.

Because Ren is talking to the skater-turned-director from his Berlin project, and when he leans in to whisper in the guy's ear he's looking straight at Hux. *Watch me*, Ren telegraphs as he bodily turns the man around to show him something off the edge of the roof. *Look at what you won't let yourself have*.

Hux stays where he is. He won't be run off by an actor; before he was Snoke's, he was his father's son, and he learned from his mistakes. Especially the one where Brendol gave Maratelle enough rope to hang him.

Later, after Hux does the rounds and catches up on financing rumors and floating scripts, Ren walks up to him at the ballustrade. Hux is facing the party but looking up at the sky; it takes him a moment to smell Ren beside him, sunscreen and leather and gasoline.

"I didn't know you were in town," Hux says. "Shouldn't you be with your plus-one?"

Ren hums low, cutting under the music. "He's here for funding meetings. I'm just showing him around."

"I'm sure you're showing him all kinds of things."

Ren smiles, then turns around to face the crowd and slips his hand behind Hux to palm his ass. "I like these jeans on you," he says, quiet and vicious. "You're almost like a real boy. So lifelike."

Hux laughs; it's exactly what he was going for, and isn't that rich? His disguise left him exposed. He's always exposed to Ren, he's been guiding Ren through his Id for two years, but he didn't think Ren would say it out loud.

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