

Crossing the Bridge

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Crossing the Bridge

by [KimiDoll](#)

Summary

Continues where Dana Burn left off, but all main characters (including Guy) survive (in one way or other) so not to worry :) I'm planning on making this Riki/Iason centred but I'll probably include other pairings as well. It's going to include slash but I'm guessing that's not a problem in the AnK fandom?;) Make sure to expect the unexpected, but no Mary Sue chars.

Escape from Eos

Author's notes:

OK, so after having spent a considerable amount of time reading what other authors have written on this marvellous fandom and doing quite a bit of rpg-ing myself, I've decided to finally have a go at it and write my own fanfic :)

I'm not a very experienced fanfic writer, I only ever wrote one "serious" fanfic in the Stargate Atlantis fandom that apparently several people bothered to read... so I hope some people might find some satisfaction in reading this as well ;)

I should warn you that I've never written anything too overly romantic before, but here goes nothing ☐

So basically this continues where the original novel left off: dramatic ending at Dana Burn. BUT main characters survive, no worries ;) This isn't one of those "lamenting afterwards"-fics (not that those can't be good of course) ;) I'm not really doing this in chronological order though, so probably there'll be a flash forward in this chapter and then what happened between that and Dana Burn will be explained later on.

I've only read the first two novels of the more recent series and some translated chaps from the original I've found on the Internet, so I'm mostly basing this on the animated movie and what I've read in other people's fics. But if I get any serious inaccuracies that really get on your nerves, don't hesitate to point them out to me :)

I'm not entirely sure from which area of Midas the black market is operating, it didn't appear to be explicitly mentioned anywhere in Vol. 2 Destiny, however there was a description of Riki driving along Orange Road, so I'm just gonna go with Area 5. Unless someone out there has read the entire series and found more information on this? I'm not even sure at this point whether Area 5 is called Janus or Diedo, cause in the maps that come with the novel it says Diedo is Area 5, yet in the actual text it says Janus is so... I'm at a bit of a loss here :P Diedo somehow seems more likely to me, as it's right next to Ceres.

Also I wanted to include a soundtrack consisting out of an opening and ending theme for each chapter. This is music I feel matches the mood or events at the beginning or end of the chapter, can be because the lyrics or style match the events but also because I feel the melody conveys the emotions the chapter is focussing on.

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opening theme: CellDweller - New Elysium

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Keep running. Just keep running. How hard can it be? Running should be easy if you know what it is you're running towards. Or perhaps more accurately in this case: running away from.

Pain. A burning sensation that made it feel as if her shins were on fire. Her stomach burned as well. How long had it been since she'd had a decent meal? Honestly, one would think that pet food crap had been specifically engineered to make one's brain cells deteriorate. Either way this had to be better than being continuously hit by an electro-whip. Or burning alive. Not that she had any clue what that would actually feel like, but if the whips were anything to go on ... unimaginably bad. And here she thought she had a vivid imagination when it came to pain.

It was truly amazing how ignorant one could be without realizing it. How blind to the ways in which this outer world of dazzling glitter and glamour truly operated, for underneath that beautiful, seductive mask was an emptiness more ugly and terrible than even those who grew up in the slums of Ceres could fathom. *Blind.* Until that fateful day. That day that changed the entire world, made it transform from something perfect and harmonious into something utterly despicable and incomprehensible. But no, it was not the world that had transformed. It were the eyes that perceived that world. Tanagura had always been a hell of sorts, it simply came in the guise of heaven.

Exhaustion. How long had she been running now? A couple of hours? A couple of days? It felt like it could very well be weeks. Although exhaustion was not too bad. It prevented her from thinking too much. About how her life had been one long enumeration of mistakes and lies, as much her own as other people's.

Betrayal. It was ridiculous how much it stung. By Jupiter, what had she been expecting? Those that are looked upon disapprovingly by Jupiter were unredeemable per definition. What made her think that a so-called friendship would be able to overcome that? *They* did not know what love was and *they* had no inkling of an idea of what true loyalty was. Fear, yes. Duty, most definitely. But in reality all those feelings could be reduced to motivations brought on by petty self-interest and the ever-present ambition and longing to fulfil one's own desires, whatever the nature of those desires may be.

A newfound, deep respect emerged from all these experiences, a respect for those that managed to operate within Tanagura and defy all that egocentrism that the system relied upon to control its inhabitants by keeping them in a constant state of blissful ignorance.

Daryl. By Jupiter what have I done to you?

Katze. That's right, get to Area 5, find Katze. If he's still alive. What if Jupiter knew about the black market operation and had sent over a squad to erase all trace of its existence? But no, even if she knew, she would consider such an illegal activity far beneath her notice, especially if it was being run by a rogue ex-furniture.

Don't use public transport. Try to stay off the radar as much as possible. Her wits were the only advantage she had over her enemies. Nobody had even suspected that a mere pet could know about the secret passageway out of Eos. The guards at the Sasan gates into Midas had been unsuspecting as well. It had felt way too good to shoot them. That raw, tangible energy that coursed through her veins. *Adrenaline.* That's what it felt like to be alive. Everything else was just a whitewashed picture, a fake imitation of the real thing. Strange how one had to get close to death in order to realise how precious life was. How one had to lose everything in order to realise what was truly important.

The blouse she'd stolen from a street vendor's stall earlier clung to her naked skin, completely soaked through by the rain that had been falling down steadily for the last half hour or so. *I could lose consciousness and die from hypothermia right here in this littered gutter.* It was almost funny, really. She could die now. That probably would not be such a bad thing, all other options considering. But no, she couldn't give up. Not yet, she had to know. Had to know for sure, from someone she could trust.

Surely if the Darkmen were still following her, she would have noticed by now? The pace she was running at had slowed down considerably, and she occasionally had to stop to catch her breath. But she never stopped for long, the risks of hypothermia and getting caught hanging above her head like Damocles' sword.

"Dammit, how much further is it?!" Such curses were most definitely a requirement in your vocabulary if you were getting chased all over Midas. *Perhaps they'll give me a beating for good measure and then... what was it?... toss me into the nearest dumpster.*

"Hey, baby, wait up! Hold it right there, cupcakes." *Shit! Not this again!*

A middle-aged, rather fat-bellied man dressed in a Hawaiian shirt and some cheap trousers that looked as if they'd originally been part of a suit approached her. On top of that he was also wearing a horrendous purple Mexican hat of some kind. From the way he was swaggering he was obviously in a very drunken state. *Good. If he's intoxicated I might be able to outrun him.* But she'd been running for almost an entire day now, without much rest and without any sleep. Her legs felt heavy, her heart was beating in her throat and her breath came out stuttering and raspy. She wasn't going anywhere. And of course she had lost her lasergun while running from the Darkmen earlier. It was incredibly stupid, but for some idiotic reason it had just fallen from her sweaty hand. Adrenaline could also have serious disadvantages. It made you act in a reflex, without thinking.

A few seconds later she felt a fat, clammy hand touch her shoulder. Her light body was effortlessly pulled towards her opponent. She felt the fingers, like disgusting spiders, crawl underneath her blouse. She was grateful she was still wearing the pet underwear underneath it. *Oh, no. Of course I'm not going to die of hypothermia. I'm going to be raped to death by this disgusting off-worlder pig.* There had to be some way to win this fight. The man was bigger and stronger than she was. But he was probably very dumb (definitely far less intelligent than she was) and his reflexes were slower because of the alcohol in his system. If only she could find something sharp and use it on the right body part with maximal force, she knew she could kill this bastard. Or she could talk to him and try to manipulate him into letting her go.

"I don't think you want to do that... sir", her voice sounded strange. Raspy because she was out of breath, high-pitched and unsteady because she was frightened.

"And why on Amoy not, sweetie?", the man giggled because of his own ridiculous joke. "It's what this place is for, isn't? Amusement?"

"Yes, well you've just touched someone else's amusement. Do you see this ring?" She held up her sapphire necklace into the light coming from a nearby street lantern. She was only still wearing it because she hadn't had an opportunity yet to get rid of it. Either way it had been deactivated, the only reason its presence still bugged her was the stinging sense of betrayal that went with it. "This means I am the property of Raoul Am, a very important elite and

Syndicate member from Tanagura. And let me tell you that the elite do not appreciate it when others touch their property. In fact ...”, she took a few steps backwards and away from his putrid breath while spinning her tale, trying to keep it as close to the truth as possible because she knew that her body would give her away if she told him an outright lie. “... there are several known cases of tourists inexplicably vanishing, never to be seen again, after having put their hands on what didn’t belong to them.” She gazed at his face, as if trying to calculate from its expressions if he was buying it or not.

The man hesitated for several seconds. But just as she was about to move and make a run for it, he grabbed onto her wrist and pulled her back towards him. “I don’t see any elite here, do you? And for a Tanaguran pet you are a long way from Tanagura, aren’t you, lil’ sugarcube?” Fight or flight. Which was it going to be?

“All right then, Mr. I have, out of the gracious goodness of my heart, given you ample opportunity to reconsider your most unwise decision regarding your intents at fornication with yours truly.” While talking she was studying the contents of a nearby dustbin. It looked like paper trash mostly, nothing very useful, not to mention it was out of her reach as long as he had her by the wrist.

“I however regret that I will have to inform you that I will be unable to meet your expectations in this respect ...” She glanced at the man himself now, and almost immediately spotted the ballpoint in his shirt pocket. “... meaning I will have to politely decline your most attractive offer.” She moved her free hand at a relatively fast speed, grabbed the ballpoint out of his shirt pocket and then jabbed it into the corner of his right eye socket with as much strength as she could muster.

It wasn’t a very elegant way to incapacitate him, but given the circumstances it was the most effective. While the fat man was stumbling around half-blind, screaming and attempting to remove the pointy object from his eye, she scrambled away from him and managed to right her body and run away at a relatively fast pace. She kept running for miles straight this time, you could never know if the Galarian tourist was being accompanied by more sober friends or even a trained private security corpse, as was not uncommon with filthy rich tourists who wanted to venture outside of Midas’ secure areas. As she ran unto a bridge across a highway, she finally recognised the area: Orange Road. Although she usually passed under this bridge in a chauffeured hover-limo sipping Red Emperor rather than running over it half-dead and wearing nothing but a scarce pet get-up and a sticky stolen shirt while looking over her shoulder to see if a fat, lust-crazed Galarian tourist was still chasing her. Not much further now.

When she got to the other side of the bridge she did a quick scan of the area and then decided it was safe to rest there for a couple of minutes. After making a mental assessment of her current situation, she all of a sudden burst out laughing. These circumstances were simply too ridiculous for words! The entire situation she’d just sketched in her head was unlike anything she’d ever had to deal with, and being a state dignitary came with a lot of unforeseen parameters to take into account. *Looks like I’m still not going to get bored anytime soon.*

Just as she had quieted down a bit and straightened up in order to continue walking, she heard the sounds of a group of individuals that were up to no good. As the group of three came closer, she could derive from their ragged clothes, worn leather jackets and darker, imperfect looks that they were residents from Ceres. *Great, I’ve escaped from a Galarian sex maniac*

with no sense of fashion at all only to be gangbanged and beaten to death by a Ceresian gang. I suppose I deserve it.

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It had been nearly three years since the incident at Dana Burn. An event that had not only shaken the foundations of the century-old building but also the very foundations Riki's entire world had rested on. *Iason. Guy.* Although Riki's youth friend and former lover had managed to escape with his life (but without his arm), he might as well have been dead to Riki after what he did. Katze had told Riki that about half an hour after the explosion, he had seen Tanagura droids approach the scene and go through the rubble. However shortly after that there had been an announcement that Iason Mink had perished in a "terrorist attack by anarchists from Ceres" and another Blondy had been elected as the new Head of the Syndicate. And that was it for Jupiter apparently, from her perspective it was probably just a malfunction in one of her human machines that led to its destruction, case closed.

Riki supposed he had to be grateful that nobody had come after him, as he was still officially a registered Tanaguran pet. Katze had taken care of that, doing what he did best, a couple of weeks after Riki had retired from the illegal hospital not far from black market headquarters. Katze had taken care of a lot of things. He had dragged Guy out of Dana Burn and stopped the bleeding at the point where his arm had been severed from his body. He hadn't bothered to recover the arm itself though. And after that he had followed Riki into the burning building, at the risk of his own life, stunned him from behind and single-handedly dragged him out of the burning building while inhaling more smoke than even a chain-smoker like him was used to. He hadn't attempted to evacuate Iason, as he was already unconscious when Katze went back in and weighed at least a ton when unconscious. After getting Riki out of there he managed to get him to take the Black Moon antidote he kept on him at all times, just in case he accidentally smoked one of the poisonous cigarettes or changed his mind after a suicide attempt. Whatever the situation, Katze was prepared for it. Then he had taken Riki to the illegal hospital, run by the black market operation itself, and ordered an accelerator-aided reconstructive surgery as soon as possible. That operation in and of itself had seriously drained the black market bank accounts, as the kind of accelerator required for reconstructing entire body parts was extremely expensive. But it was what his Master would have wanted, and strictly speaking all the money that belonged to the black market had belonged to Iason Mink. And as far as Katze was concerned, it still did. He was just using it to keep the black market operations running smoothly, and whatever winnings the black market procured were simply added to the accounts and kept there. In all those years Katze had not used any of the money, not even once, to indulge in anything but what was strictly necessary for his and Riki's own minimal comfort (even so he spent a lot more of the money on Riki than on himself) and black market investments.

After recuperating for an entire year, both from physical illness and mental grief, Riki refused to freeload at Katze's expense any longer and demanded that Katze allow him back his old job so he could at least partially repay him for everything he had done. Not to mention a distraction from his own tormented mind was also a much needed respite. Shortly after that Riki moved out of Katze's apartment, where he had remained for several months after he left the hospital, and into an apartment of his own right on the border between Ceres and Diedo,

not too far from the black market headquarters, that he had paid for himself with the wages he had saved up until then.

That first year in Diedo had been the worst: during the day Riki was plagued by the memories that would suddenly pop up in his mind unexpectedly and at night he hardly ever managed to get any sleep at all because he was tormented by the scorching flames of his nightmares. About the events at Dana Burn mostly, however also about Guy, Kyrie and even Mimea. All people he had failed to save, all people who were dead or who'd had to suffer because of him.

He had not forgiven Guy for what he did and he blamed him for what had happened to Iason obviously, however he also felt that somehow he could have avoided the entire situation if only he had talked to Guy more instead of shutting him out. The truth of the matter is that Iason Mink had very little to do with Riki shutting Guy out. When he'd started working for the black market he had made a choice based on what his youth friend Aire from long ago at Guardian had told him: hold unto what is most important. And somewhere along the line Riki had decided that investing in his own future through his work as a black market courier was more important than holding on to his friendship with Guy. But he just couldn't bear the thought of growing old and dying in Ceres without ever having managed to crawl out of that gutter. Not because it bothered him to live in those undesirable circumstances in themselves, he was tough enough to survive that and he was used to it, but because he wanted to prove to the rest of the world that they were wrong. They were wrong to judge him based solely on his origins and appearance. He was a human being just like everybody else and therefore he had rights. Hell, he had more human self-respect and dignity than most of the citizens from Midas! Truth be told, the confrontation with Iason in Sasan all those years ago in a way was what had triggered it. The realisation that there was this gaping social divide between them and how it had allowed Iason to humiliate him and treat him as if he was no better than a piece of trash or a toy you could just play with and then toss aside. So in a way, perhaps Iason was to blame for how Riki had failed Guy. Either way, how was he supposed to know things would turn out that way?

But what really bothered him most about the entire situation was of course Iason. Up to that point Riki had thought that Iason was still playing his game, same as he had from the start, tormenting him and driving the harsh reality that he was worth nothing deep into his core. He had been absolutely clueless to Iason's true feelings, could have never guessed that the artificial humanoid was even capable of experiencing such strong, human emotions. But in those final moments it had been made clear to him: Iason loved him and he loved Iason. The universe was just too cruel in the way she insisted on tormenting her inhabitants, revealing those truths only to extinguish any hope on acting upon them in the next moment. *Shit Iason why didn't you say something sooner?! Who cares what bloody Jupiter thinks about it!* But even if he had, what would they have done about it? Riki would have still been his pet, wouldn't he? Unless Iason had let him go again, but then they would not be together anymore. *It doesn't matter. We would have found a way around the system, found a way to be together. Surely a resourceful mongrel joining forces with an elite with an IQ of over 300 could've worked something out ...*

Riki had never really considered Iason a lover before, not in the way he had Guy. But now he thought Iason to be his first and final true love, and the thought of ever loving anybody else

struck him as impossible. Never again would he find something like that. If only they had been given the opportunity to make that physical connection a spiritual one as well. Riki felt as if he was living in the past, wondering about what if's and maybe's. What tortured his soul the most was that he would never find out, he never even had a chance to get to truly know the man he loved! That blank, pristine face had always been completely devoid of emotion, those ice blue sapphire eyes had always been cold, calculating and distanced. How was Riki supposed to know? He had always assumed that the emotions that Iason was showing him were the only ones he felt: meanness, rage, possessiveness and a sick psychopathic need to dominate him and cruelly crush his spirit. Or were those emotions Riki had derived for himself rather than truly seen in any of Iason's expressions?

Who were you really, Iason Mink?

And why did you love me when it went against everything you were ever taught, everything you ever stood for?

Dammit! Why does life have to always be so fucking cruel! Showing you a brief flicker of hope only to snatch it away from you again?!

It took several years for the pet conditioning to truly get out of his system. But Riki had reached the conclusion that no amount of time could ever make him forget about Iason Mink. Not because of the shit the blonde had pulled on him (although that occasionally still gave him nightmares as well), not because he used to be his "Master" but because in that final moment inside the burning ruins of Dana Burn he had realised that he loved Iason. The truth was that he'd loved him all along, but the circumstances under which they'd met and the social restrictions of the system they lived in had made expressing those feelings nearly impossible.

Shit! Why did it have to end that way? Why did things have to end so badly just when they were truly beginning? Riki often wondered what would have happened if both he and Iason had made it out of there alive. Would Iason have taken him back to Eos? Would Riki have let him? How would Jupiter have reacted to these events? Would his and Iason's relationship have changed? Or would he, at least officially, have remained a pet? And what would Iason have done if he had become too old for that? ...

That year had been one long, self-inflicted hell for Riki. Thinking the events of the past over and over again in his head, and then pausing and rewinding as if he were watching an old videotape. What could he have done differently? Where had he gone wrong? Could he have changed anything in the end? What if it was all his fault? Didn't he himself used to say how you make your own future? Looked like he had done a pretty good job at screwing up his own future then.

For a long time, Riki had been living in the past rather than the present, just going about his own business and doing his routine courier job on auto-pilot. It was a small miracle his lack of concentration and constant distractions had not led him to an untimely end while working on risky operations for the black market. Katze just watched it happen, unsure what to do and unsure as to what extent Riki blamed *him* for everything that had happened as well as himself. As far as Katze was concerned he had just been carrying out Iason's orders, more than that he had been carrying out his dying wish. For everything Iason had done for him in

the past, he owed him that much. Katze had quite a few unanswered questions of his own. Iason had never struck him as the type that did anything out of the mere goodness of his heart, but he had saved his life when lawfully speaking he should've killed him. Shit, he'd done more than that, he'd practically handed Katze his own life and independence back to him again. In the beginning Katze had made several attempts to talk things over with Riki, seeing as how they were both, each in their own way, suffering from the same event. But Riki had been like a closed book and for a long time Katze feared that the trauma of what had happened had truly extinguished Riki's spirit.

After having lived in Diedo and worked for the black market for about a year, Riki ran into Sid and Norris when strolling through Ceres, just passing free time he wished he hadn't had because it made him think too much. After chatting about old times over some stout in a local pub they used to frequent often, Riki found out that Guy hadn't gone back to Bison and that nobody had seen him since the incident at Dana Burn. Not that he particularly cared what had happened to his former friend anymore at this point, some things could simply not be forgiven and castration followed by the murder of your lover was definitely one of those things. Or at least that is what Riki told himself. Then slowly but surely things started going better for Riki, thanks to his re-established contacts with members of his former gang, he had managed to find his old self again. Yet he knew he would never truly be the same ever again, not after those years in Tanagura and not after what had happened to Iason.

Not too much time later Norris and Sid moved into Riki's apartment and even insisted on paying him a monthly rent for occupying his guest room. Riki understood not wanting to owe anybody anything all too well, but that was the only reason he accepted the rent. He was actually very grateful for the company, after work it kept his mind off of things and made him feel less lonely and more like his former self.

"Hey Riki! Crap man I keep forgetting how distant you've become at times..." Sid laughed when he saw Riki's startled reaction. The other mongrel had momentarily forgotten that he was on the town with Sid and Norris, and that the whole point of that was having fun and forgetting about unpleasant memories, not spacing out and reliving them.

Sid and Norris still had no idea what had happened to Riki in Dana Burn all those years back and they were smart enough not to ask. They knew Guy had something to do with it and that nobody had heard from Guy since then. They knew Riki had been taken to the hospital afterwards and had remained there for almost a year, after which he started working for Katze again. And as far as they were concerned, that was all they needed to know. Riki was their friend, more than that he was their gang, their family, and no amount of distance in time or space could undo those bonds.

"Yeah, sorry, I was just thinking ...", Riki trailed off, as he always did when his thoughts went back to his rather turbulent past.

"About what?" Norris asked. "Oh. Well, y'know, Riki, you shouldn't live in the past like that. If growing up in Ceres has taught me anything it's to live in the present, cause in the past there's nothing but shit that doesn't matter anymore, and you never know what the future may bring."

"You're probably right", Riki mused. Then he forced a smile unto his face and continued.

"How about we go back to that club we went to the other time? Y'know that dress-up

karaoke bar? I hear they take cash now as well.”

Sid and Norris responded enthusiastically to Riki’s suggestion as they approached the bridge that would take them into the area of Midas where mongrels could frequent bars in a relatively “safe” environment. Not that there truly was such a thing for them, seeing as how they had no ID cards and thus no rights, but the Darkmen usually stuck to the more popular areas of Midas that were frequented by tourists on a regular basis.

“Hey, guys... what’s that over there?” Sid pointed towards a small figure standing several metres up ahead, just at the edge of the bridge into Flare. Upon closer inspection, it turned out to be a girl, rather small in figure and delicately framed. What was a pet doing this far from Midas’ red district? She wasn’t wearing much, just underwear and a light white blouse, and by the looks of it she had been running around in the rain for a pretty long time. Her petite body was shaking and both her clothes and her long light-blonde hair were completely soaked. From her fair pigmentation and youthful looks, Riki identified her as an Academy bred. Even more unusual, Academy bred pets were very rarely sold to brothels this close to Ceres. Just how far had she walked through the rain to get here? She wasn’t even wearing any shoes ... Having been a pet himself for so many years, Riki found that he was almost ridiculously compassionate when it came to pets. He never would have even given this girl a second glance back in the days when his gang ruled Ceres and rode their bikes at neck-breaking speeds with not a care in the world. That almost seemed like another lifetime now.

Apparently the girl had noticed their approach because she suddenly turned around and bolted. She didn’t get very far however, as she suddenly tripped over an empty can on the sidewalk and fell down, straining her ankle in the process. Sid and Norris burst out laughing while taking another swig from their stout bottles. Approaching the girl Sid shouted: “Come on, Riki! Let’s go have some fun, free of charge!”

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When two of the Ceres mongrels started running towards her, she decided that, since they were still a good distance away from me, the best reaction was to just run off. Ceres residents were mostly looking for cash cards, cheap liquor and a fistfight with more worthy opponents when going to Midas, so perhaps they’d just let her go if it looked like she was going to be too much trouble. But she was tired, cold and hungry, making her movements less co-ordinated than they should have been, so she suddenly tripped over something and fell down on the pedestrian walk, face first. *Auwth!* With a loud *oof* sound what little air remained in her lungs was being pushed out in one go and she momentarily had trouble regaining her breath. She tried to scramble back to her feet as quickly as possible but immediately fell down again when she felt a vicious pain in her ankle. *Shit shit shit!* She looked back and let go of all hope of getting out of there crawling, as two of the mongrels were already within 2 metres of her. *Think! Think of something to say!* The problem was that nice talks did not usually work on mongrels the same way they did on Midas citizens. A line that had Midas citizens kissing your ass usually ended up insulting and antagonising a mongrel from the slum. And she very much doubted she could single-handedly outmanoeuvre them with a ballpoint, used as they were to hand-to-hand combat in street fights.

But when she heard one of the mongrels’ exclamations all plans of how to overcome or escape them disappeared from her mind. *Did they just call that other one Riki?* It could be a

coincidence, Guardian wasn't known for its originality when it came to naming their newborns. Without a doubt there were hundreds of mongrels by the name of Riki in Ceres. Oh, what difference did it make! At the very least she would be killed by someone who had the same name of the man she loved. This was far more preferable than being flaunted around at soirees by Raoul and then being sold off to some brothel in Midas where she could be re-acquainted with that whore Mimea!

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Apparently at hearing the name "Riki" the girl looked up from where she was laying, a mixture of hope and determination on her small, pretty face.

"Shi-it, isn't this quite the looker!", Sid said as he crouched down next to the fallen, angelic figure on the pavement and reached out to pet that long blonde hair. "Looks like fucking rays of sunshine ... Isn't it kinda strange that one this fair and refined is just strutting around in this area? Didn't you say these were usually Academy bred, Riki?"

Riki approached them and the young girl. He had grown significantly over the last few years, not the sinewy body of a young boy anymore but the more sturdy, slightly muscular stature of a man. Also he had grown his jet black hair long and now carried it in a short ponytail.

"Just cut it out already, OK? It's cold and hurt, no need to be mean to it, God knows what those motherfuckers at Tanagura have done to it ..." Riki's scornful, disapproving gaze stopped Norris in his tracks and Sid pulled his hair back from the beautiful girl's golden hair. "Oh, come on, Riki! Don't be like that! We were just taking a look, we weren't planning on hurting it or something like that ...", Sid started defending himself.

"Yeah, seriously, why are you so concerned with the well-being of pets as of late, huh? What, don't tell me you had a girlfriend or something at Tanagura back when you disappeared on us for three years?", Norris added supportively.

"It's just that... well, when you get to actually know some of them you realise that they're human beings, just like us. They just had even worse luck than we did and were born in that hell of a place ..." Riki faltered, his memory going back to those dreadful days in Eos. Yes, those were definitely the worst days of his life, far worse than anything he had ever had to endure while growing up in Ceres.

"How is being pampered all day long and having to worry about nothing but your looks and sex worse than how we have to fight for our very survival on a regular basis and are scorned by all of society?"

"You don't know OK! You don't know what it's like over there! Everybody thinks that place is so nice and sparkly, but it's not! It's hell! Those kids are being played against each other and treated like *things* and then when their time is up they're tossed out like they're no better than garbage! If they're lucky they don't last very long in those horrible places in Midas you sometimes hear nightmarish tales about. They just never get a chance to make something of their lives. At least we get to enjoy our freedom and do whatever we feel like doing, and if we fail then we at least have ourselves to blame for it!"

"Philosophical speech much? Geez, Riki, I had no idea you cared so much man. Why didn't you ever say anything? I mean, you know you can talk about what happened during those years, right? We're your friends, Riki. Frankly I don't give a shit about what Guy did or thinks about you, if he's just abandoned you like that he's a selfish asshole and never really took Bison seriously after all!"

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As I lay there, helpless and unable to move both because of the pain in my ankle and the cold of the rain that had seemed to have seeped into my bones as soon as I stopped moving, I caught several words of the rather loud conversation that went on not too far away. First one of the mongrels, the one called Riki, talked about pets and how they were being treated like trash and how Riki himself had apparently disappeared from Ceres for three years. Then the conversation went to an apparent “asshole” called Guy who had quit their gang, called Bison. *Riki. Pets. Guy. Bison.* Perhaps there really was a God watching over us and orchestrating the seemingly coincidental events in the universe. And he wasn’t called Jupiter. Just as that thought struck me, my eyes became heavy and the lights went out. *Hypothermia after all then.*

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“Holy shit! Dude, I think she’s seriously ill or something... I can barely feel her pulse!” Norris stated as he examined the now unconscious, ice cold blonde girl.
“What do we care? We came out here tonight to have some fun, not to baby sit some stray pet”, Sid objected.
“Oh, so if you were lying here you’d want us to just let you die? Don’t be a selfish prick, Sid, this world’s got enough of those as it is. Here, help me carry her... Or, never mind, she weighs absolutely nothing, must be seriously malnourished. Those Tanaguran bastards.” Riki said as he picked up the extremely light, slim body. Even when looking pale and miserable with slightly blue-ish lips this girl was extremely attractive. It wasn’t just her perfect features but there was something about her, a kind of divine aura that just drew you towards her. Strangely enough she reminded Riki of another blonde creature with such an aura, the very same creature that had him chasing after it in Midas that day all those years ago ...

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ending theme: Madonna - Heartbreak City

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To be continued ...

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Author’s notes:

OK, pls tell me what you think and if it’s worth my while to continue writing this fic :) I haven’t got a complete storylines worked out yet, kinda just typing what comes to mind, so if you have any suggestions for how this could continue don’t hesitate to state them :)

This isn’t your “typical” AnK fic storyline, I know, and some people might be out of character because of that. However I’m trying to keep everybody as much in-character as I can. I’m not too sure about Sid and Norris cause they don’t really feature often in a lot of fics, so I’m just kinda portraying them as I would your average slum mongrel. And perhaps my Riki is too compassionate, dunno, it just seems to me that he might identify with the pets seeing as how he used to be maltreated as one himself. Also he’s more grown-up here, so possibly less worried about how he’s going to come across, and the other mongrels there are

his friends from childhood so probably he's less concerned about showing his true emotions to them than he would to others. The girl.. yeah, she's definitely going out of character, but that's to be expected given the circumstances. But I won't tell you anymore about that until in the next chapter, cause it would be a massive spoiler if I did ;) Personally I think she was pretty awesome when she was talking to and viciously assaulting that tourist lol :P And she can actually see the humour in her own miserable situation.

For your information I am not planning on turning Raoul into a complete asshole here. I'm just trying to be realistic about it. All of this is being described from somebody's personal perspective, so that means they're interpreting things based on what they know and how they feel at the moment they're being described ;)

OK, I'll stop now, or my notes are going to end up being longer than this chapter ;) So pls review, let me know what you guys think and if you want a continuation!:D

Reunited

Chapter Summary

Continues where Dana Burn left off, but all main characters (including Guy) survive (in one way or other) so not to worry :) I'm planning on making this Riki/Iason centred but I'll probably include other pairings as well. It's going to include slash but I'm guessing that's not a problem in the AnK fandom?;) Make sure to expect the unexpected, but no Mary Sue chars. 2nd chap up!

Author's Notes:

So I decided to give it another go and to continue on with the next chapter :) There will be a very startling revelation at the end of this chapter, which will probably decide whether you hate this story or not :P I am planning on getting things back to normal eventually though ;) And a much needed explanation will of course follow in the next chapter (if anybody bothers to read this one that is) ;)

I hope I'm not going into dialogue too much here, when having a lot of characters around and a lot of conversation going on I tend to get more dialogue-focussed, which I know some people don't particularly like when reading fic. Do let me know if it is bothering you at some point in the chapter and I'll see if I can add some more descriptions in between :)

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opening theme: Nano - Magenta
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Darkness. Slowly, but surely, she felt her thoughts return to her conscious mind and the sensations into her limbs, first the fingers, then gradually the rest of her sensitive, battered body. It wasn't anything like an automatic reboot, for that was immediate and right now she felt as if the swoon of sleep was trying to lull her back into it. And the soreness, by Jupiter, the soreness. She felt pain in places she didn't even realise she had, yet the pain could not be pinpointed accurately which made it feel as if it was everywhere at the same time. She thought about sitting up multiple times, but for some strange reason her body did not obey her cerebral commands. Finally she managed to crack open one eye but immediately shut it again when a terrible migraine kicked in. She groaned and decided to wait a little while longer to sit up and to mentally assess her previous state in the mean time ... *Riki!* Riki had been there, along with two other mongrels, just after she had crossed the bridge over Orange Road into Area 5.

“Hey, I think she’s finally waking up!”, she recognised the voice of one of the mongrels. Not Riki though.

“No shit! I was beginning to think she wouldn’t wake up, she must’ve been sleeping for three days straight man!” Again not Riki. Where was the dark-haired, feisty, spirited mongrel that had caused this entire mess to begin with?

“Yeah yeah, I’m comin! Try not to accidentally kill her before I get there, dumbasses!” There he was! But his voice sounded different than she remembered, less loud and overbearing, with a definite lower pitch and a bit more gravelly.

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Riki approached the blonde girl they’d rescued several days earlier and who had spent the entirety of those days sleeping in Riki’s bed while he’d slept on the couch. He had washed her with a cloth and tried to bandage up her wounds as best as he could. But when her fever didn’t go down he called a guy Katze knew who apparently had acquired certain doctoring skills. Rumour had it the bloke wasn’t originally from Midas so that would explain where he would have picked up something like that, while being just an ordinary lowlife like the rest of them. According to the “doctor” she had a minor concussion and indeed a minor flue virus, however it was nothing too serious so a couple of days of peace and quiet ought to do the trick.

As Riki bent over her still, slender frame to check if she was truly waking up or was having another nightmare, she suddenly turned her head his way and slowly opened her eyes. When obsidian met blue it was as if time momentarily stood still ...

For a moment Riki was completely gobsmacked. Nothing in the world could have prepared him for the piercing, highly intelligent gaze that met him through those familiar ice blue orbs that sparkled like sharply cut sapphires and appeared to contain the wild depths of all the planet’s oceans. It was a gaze that left one wondering whether the person that gaze originated from could actually read one’s mind. It was the kind of stare that intoxicated and fascinated a man yet left him nailed to the spot with instinctual anxiety.

It took Riki several moments to gather his wits again and reflect on this rationally. Surely he must be imagining things, no pet could have that kind of intelligence, that kind of presence that left someone feeling so captivated yet so distraught. Not to mention the way in which the fierceness of those sapphires immediately sent cold shivers down his spine, yet not necessarily in a bad way, struck him as intimately familiar.

Sid and Norris were not entirely oblivious to the sudden transformation upon awakening either. It was as if the pretty doll that had been lying in Riki’s bed for the last couple of days had, by some divine intervention, transformed into a full-fledged Venus. Which was very remarkable, seeing as how most pets even when being awake gave that lifeless, tame impression almost as if they really were objects rather than living creatures. But this was an entirely different creature all together. Yet it was without any doubt female, small, with perfectly symmetrical proportions and fair pigmentation of the kind that could only be obtained in a test tube. So if not a pet ... what was she?

“Fuck... she’s like a goddess or something, man ... Riki, dude, what the fuck did we pick up? What if she escaped from one of Jupiter’s secret labs or something?” Norris was known to

read too much into the overly exaggerated rumours the residents of the local pub told each other to pass the time. However when confronted with such an unusual combination of striking features, his perspective sounded a lot more convincing than usual.

“Shut up! I think she’s going to say something!”, Sid barked and then all three stared at her, mouths gaping open, almost as if in trance. She opened her rosepetal-ish lips but no sound came out, after which she briefly coughed. The flue must not have entirely passed yet and her voice was probably a bit hoarse because of it.

Riki hurried over with a glass of water. Not the disgusting brown-ish kind that came out of the tap in these parts, but the clear bottled kind that Riki had actually gone to purchase for exactly this occasion. It had amazed him how clean water actually cost more in the local supermarket than a bottle of stout. Even after having been back in Ceres for years, part of him still took the luxuries he had experienced on a daily basis in Tanagura for granted.

To everyone’s great surprise she tried to gulp down the water so quickly she almost choked on it, yet while choking she still appeared to be doing it in an elegant fashion. “Easy now, easy, don’t drink too much all at once. There’s more where that came from, nobody’s going to take it away from you”, Riki gently told her, trying to use his most suiting voice yet not used at all to addressing people in such a soft, civilized manner. He remembered how Mimea would often be frightened if he started speaking too loudly and directly towards her. Pets, especially young females, were very sensitive to that sort of thing. Yet Riki had never really cared about such things until now, never had he wanted to not frighten a pet so badly as right now. Which was very strange considering she was a complete stranger, right?

“Ri ki....”, a shrill small voice came out of the little goddess’ mouth. The volume of the utterance so low that Riki, who was about 3 inches from her face, almost couldn’t hear it.

“Yeah, I’m here, don’t worry about ...” Then it struck him. She knew his name! Yet he had not told her his name. So how did she know? “She ...”, Riki nervously licked his lips. “She knows my name.”

“Maybe she unconsciously heard us calling you by it while she was sleeping or something? I’ve heard that sorta thing before, y’know, that people in a coma can hear it when you talk to them. I even met a guy once who used to go to a hospital to play music to those coma patients...”

“Sid!” Riki and Norris simultaneously exhaled.

“OK, sorry, I’ll shut up now”, Sid responded with a grin and a mischievous sparkle in his muddy brown eyes.

“Riki...” A small, pale hand that looked as if it could have been made out of porcelain reached out and took a hold of his wrist. Damn, there was a lot more strength in those fragile fingers than he would have imagined.

“Ergh... sorry but have we met somewhere before? I’m pretty sure I would have remembered that...”, Riki hesitantly began. Perhaps he shouldn’t have said anything, what if she became upset that he was asking her all of these annoying questions? What the hell am I worried about? I don’t even know this girl!

“D... Dana.... Burn...”, her high-pitched but melodic voice came out again, while she determinedly grasped Riki’s wrist more tightly, as if trying to stress her point.

“What’d she just say?”, Sid asked with a frown on his face. Ever since he’d gotten involved in a grenade fight while on black market business he’d had some hearing problems.

“I think she said “Dana Burn”...”, Norris responded.

“Well, that makes no sense whatsoever, what the fuck is Dana ...”

“It’s those old ruins, man, y’know, beyond Guardian? There was an explosion there a couple of years back, I even heard that there was an elite who died in ‘em or something ...”

“You and your ridiculous rumours, Norris!”

“No man, I’m serious, it was on the news and all that... some big shot elite from Tanagura... Surely you must’ve heard it as well, Riki? Wasn’t that right around the time you came back to Ceres? Riki?”

The moment the name of that dreadful place that brought up so many bad and good memories for Riki was spoken aloud, Riki looked as if he had been struck by lightning. Dana Burn. That was the place where the love of his life both began and ended. He often wished he could have died there as well, sometimes he felt as if he wasn’t truly alive anymore, despite his friends’ best attempts to cheer him up. Although the passing of time had significantly healed the old wounds in his heart, the scars were still there and even a brief mentioning of that place like now just tore those wounds straight open again.

“No, you’re in Ceres, in our apartment, we live here. You’re perfectly safe here. Or... well as safe as you’re gonna get in Ceres that is”, Riki continued in a rather distraught voice he could barely keep the suffering out of.

“This is... your bed... then?” The girl continued, opening her eyes again to stare at her surroundings with a mix of worry and curiosity on her face. Somehow it made her appear more human straight-away, those simple expressions that swept over her youthful, snowwhite face unchecked. The mongrels began to feel more at ease around her.

“Ergh.. yeah. I mean, I couldn’t let you sleep on that horrible couch, we found it in a junk yard and we never really managed to get the smell out of it ...”

“How very...”, she briefly coughed in her hand. “Apologies ... How very gallant of you, Riki. Most definitely... full points for style.”

Riki was about to respond to her appreciative remark when his heart appeared to freeze stuck inside of his chest all of a sudden. *Zero points for style. I’m not impressed.* Those were the first words Iason Mink ever spoke to him. What in Jupiter’s name was going on here? Who was this mysterious girl and how did she know those things? Or did she? Perhaps it was just a coincidence that Riki was reading too much into.

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She saw how he completely froze up again, similarly to how he had when she had first opened her eyes and looked into those gorgeous, fiery obsidian orbs that could now actually make her heart beat faster. She decided she had to erase all doubt from his mind right-away. If she had interpreted his actions 3 years ago correctly, such knowledge would only be beneficial. Hopefully.

“I’m very impressed”, she managed to add after another terribly embarrassing coughing fit. Oh, well, she had been able to observe him in all kinds of compromising situations. What harm could it do if he were to observe her in such a situation for a change?

One of the other mongrels even approached and gently started hitting her on the back. She was guessing it was meant to be an attempt to stop her from coughing but from the feel of it

he was only managing to beat her whip lash marks black and blue all over again. “Stop... torturing me already... you bastard...” She did not succeed in making it sound particularly menacing though, with her hoarse feminine voice. Norris quickly pulled his hands away from her back, almost as if being electrocuted. “Wohow! She can actually curse! I’ve never heard a pet curse before!”

She studied Riki intently again. Was it these organic eyes that did not function properly, or did he look different? *Why of course he looks different, humans tend to undergo physical changes between the ages of 18 and 21.* Indeed upon closer inspection he did look different. He was taller, making him tall enough to literally tower over her now, interesting development that was. His build had also become more sturdy: his shoulders were slightly broader and he looked as if he was packing more muscle, although still in a sinewy rather than a bulky way. His beautiful exotic black hair had grown longer and was in a ponytail, which only accentuated the pleasing yet strong proportions of his facial bones better. His skin was tanner than it had been, no doubt caused by spending his days once again under the merciless sunrays so near the desert wastelands that Guardian and Area 9 bordered on. As such it was not merely a physical extra wild touch added to his already feisty appearance but a manifestation of his years spent as a free man as well. In short: he looked even more stunning than he did before.

And without even having to spend one conscious thought on it, she felt her body reacting to his presence almost as if it had a will of its own. *Now here’s something that hasn’t happened before.* She was usually very much in control of this body, at least to the extent that she could decide whether it got turned on or not, which was remarkable considering it was actually based upon the genetic blueprints of a pet body. Then she couldn’t help but wonder. *Is this what he has been experiencing all those times? This wonderful yet uncontrolled raging fire that just swoops up your spirit and sweeps through your body completely outside of your own will? No wonder he screamed so loudly.*

“Ergh... I... Well, I...”, Riki stammered and apparently couldn’t manage to pronounce another coherent sentence. *What the fuck?! Could it be that this girl ... is a messenger, sent by Iason? But no, Iason is dead... or is he?*

“Have you any food?” Perhaps taking in some protein or sugar would help her ailing brain recover itself from all the stress brought on by the escape and the physical exertion that came with it. Not to forget that anxiety probably did not work miracles for an improved brain chemistry either.

“Wh... what?...” It appeared as if he had not understood the message she had been trying to implicitly pass on to him. Seriously, how blunt must one be with these mongrels to get any information into their thick skulls? But she couldn’t be too explicit, not with those other two still in the room and within earshot. After all, the last one of Riki’s gang associates, the one known as “Guy”, had turned out to be a very derailed and psychologically unstable individual. Riki’s term for it would probably be “nutjob” or “psycho killer”. What if all these mongrels were insane and Riki was the only one with a semblance of sanity? She could very well perish for good on this impulsive expedition, but then again that had not stopped her from going “on a suicide trip” earlier so it made perfect sense it had not stopped her now.

“Riki, dude, are you all right? You look kinda pale ... When was the last time you ate something decent yourself, huh?”, Norris asked in a chill yet concerned voice.

“I’ll see if we still got something in the kitchen, guys...” Sid disappeared into the small kitchenette that was only separated from the rest of the small living space by a series of make-shift cupboards and an old gas stove. “Er.. not exactly what you’d call princess food but it’s edible. I think I could cook up an acceptable pot noodle with this stuff.” Sid was the chef among the three of them, not that he was particularly talented, not in the way that Daryl had been back in Tanagura. But Sid somehow managed to use just the right amount of spices to make people forget what disgusting stuff it was they were actually eating.

“How about some more water?”, Norris said as he approached the girl with the glass. All of them looked surprised when she, her initial unquenchable thirst having passed, sniffed the glass and stared at it with a calculating gaze.

“What are you doing?”

“I am merely trying to establish whether or not you are attempting to drug me... which I suppose you would have no reason for doing...”, she responded as she tried to sip the glass at a more steady and elegant pace rather than just gulping it all down in one go, as even now her reflexes were still screaming she should be doing.

For a moment Sid and Norris had no idea what she was saying, but after picking up the word “drugs” they understood she was worried that they were trying to poison her. A good thing she hadn’t chosen the word “pharmaceuticals”.

Riki, who was slightly more versed in the wordiness of the Tanaguran language and more knowledgeable on the practice of feeding pets aphrodisiacs, immediately understood what she was talking about. “Shit, we wouldn’t do that, OK? We’re not that desperate to get laid that we’d poison someone just to have our way with ‘em, and even if we did there’d be no satisfaction in it if we could only get any if we won from our opponent using poison instead of our own two hands and feet ...”

“Something tells me you would not have a lot of trouble “overcoming” me as an “opponent”. Besides, the whole point of using “poison” is not because of a lack of prowess in combat, in a pet-related context that would of course be very improbable, but because it leads your “opponent” to believe that he or she is actually a willing participant in the whole event and is therefore at least partially to blame for it, which would significantly rule out further misconduct and resistance to the norm in future...”, she responded almost in an automatism. But when she consciously started thinking about it, she added: “Which is of course a very cowardly and manipulative way of maintaining order, suggesting that the actual order being maintained is not democratically accepted as being the advised order at all but is something a minority has forced upon a majority with nothing but the reinforcement of their own power as their aim.”

“Crap, Riki... I think she speaks another language or something, what the fuck did she just say?” Norris asked, his mouth slightly gaping open as he stared at the girl as if she’d transformed into an alien.

“I thought pets were supposed to be kinda stupid? That one doesn’t sound stupid to me ...”, Sid interjected.

“She said them fuckers in Tanagura use aphrodisiacs on people to trick them into blaming themselves for being raped”, Riki explained while still trying to wrap his head around a pet using such an extensive vocabulary in such a round-about way. The contents of the second

statement also showed that she actually knew what the system in Tanagura was truly about and was not afraid to express her own disagreement.

“Why’d she use so many words just to say that?”, Sid wondered.

“Why would anyone need to convince pets that they want to get laid? I mean, isn’t it what they like doing more than anything else?”, Norris added.

“Perhaps you’re trying to “lay them” with a person they don’t like. In which case if they would be allowed to refuse, it would confirm their freedom to choose which would in turn result to them beginning to see themselves as free-thinking individuals rather than just tools used as part of the social system.”

“You know a heck of a lot about how Tanaguran bullcrap works... especially for a pet. How about we stop beating around the bush here and you tell me what it is you know about Iason Mink? And don’t play dumb with me, there’s just no way you speaking the same words he spoke to me the first time we met is a fucking coincidence!”

“Riki? Who the fuck is Iason Mink? Do you know this girl?” Sid asked, not used to Riki getting so worked up over something a mere stranger said.

“Could you guys perhaps go for a walk? Just for half an hour or something. I need to talk to her alone, I think she knows something that’s important to me ...” Riki hated to ask it of his friends, he didn’t want to give the impression he didn’t trust them. But they didn’t know anything about his time in Eos or Iason Mink, and he wanted to keep it that way.

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“So... why are you really here, huh? Who sent you?” Riki asked as he sat down next to her on the bed, close enough to use his physical proximity to get answers even if she didn’t want to give them.

“I didn’t get “sent” by anybody, I came by my own will and means, which are rather restricted right now I must admit.”

“Oh yeah? Then who does that pet ring belong to?” Riki grabbed the necklace she was still wearing and snatched it from her neck, breaking the delicate gold chain it was attached to in one movement, after which he examined the sapphire pendant in the palm of his hand.

He made it look so easy to remove that thing. She had spent hours trying to rip it off of her throat after she had lost the lasergun, yet simply lacking the tools and apparently physical strength to remove it. She hated the thing not only because it represented her own imprisonment, but also the betrayal associated with it. And also because it reminded her of how Riki had been treated unjustly during his time in Eos.

While studying the pet necklace to try and figure out whether it had any owner initials engraved in it, Riki’s free hand absently reached towards his own pet ring, which was now attached to a black string on his neck but under his shirt to avoid any questions about it. He’d just never had to hard to get rid of it after Katze had somehow managed to retrieve it from the rubble (apparently his pet ring had been made out of a very tough and indestructible, very expensive metal). Her eyes followed his free hand as it went up towards his chest while he was studying her pendant. When she saw those tan, strong fingers reach under his shirt and retrieve the familiar ring, her heart leapt up into her throat. *He’s still wearing it!*

Then another thought occurred to her: pet rings almost always came with trackers. Without a doubt Katze had removed the gps-tracker from Riki's ring, he would have had ample time to do so over the last 3 years. But hers was still active!

"We have to destroy it. If not Jupiter's droids could be upon us in a couple of hours."

"Jupiter's bloody droids? Shi-it, just how stuck-up are you pets nowadays in Tanagura? They'll probably just send the police, if anyone, why would they bother to ..."

But she wasn't an ordinary pet, that much had been obvious right from the start. What if she was some secret messenger sent by Iason and her interception would mean Iason himself would be at risk? Riki threw down the necklace without hesitation and crunched it under his heavy biker boot.

"You've got one too."

"What?" Riki asked distractedly, his eye still upon the destroyed pendant on the floor. The sapphires had reminded him of Iason for a few seconds and he suddenly felt bad about destroying the object so carelessly.

"A pet ring", she pointed at the ring on the string around his neck.

"Oh. Yeah ... it's a long story."

"I have plenty of leisure time at my disposal."

"Why the fuck do you talk in that refined kind of way? Does your Master like you talking that way?"

"I don't have a Master", she sniffed with an air of disgust and slightly scrunched her pretty little nose up. "And if I did it would definitely not be the owner of that trinket."

"Doesn't look like a mere trinket to me. I mean, sapphires *and* gold, your non-Master must be well-off ..."

"There are some things more valuable than money. And he significantly lacks all of those admirable qualities. And your ring is a lot more expensive, you could buy an entire strip of apartment buildings in down-town Midas with that kind of money. I suppose it's a small price to pay for something that's indestructible."

"Gee, I didn't think anybody could tell the difference between this "indestructible" stuff and plain silver just by looking at it. I sure didn't. Shit, I feel kinda guilty now." For some strange reason Riki felt as if he could trust this girl, that he could express his inner feelings to her and that she would understand. He couldn't recall ever having felt that way around anybody, least of all a complete stranger. After all trust was hard to come by in the slums, and impossible to come by in Midas or Tanagura.

"More debt to repay? If it suits your mind, I'm sure your soul would most definitely make up for the costs."

"You know everything, don't you? But how? Who are you?! Did Iason sent you?" Riki couldn't keep his emotions under control any longer and grabbed onto the girl's arms. "Is he alive?! Please, tell me at least that much!"

"Like you said, that metal is indestructible and his skeleton was made out of the very same material your ring is made out of."

"So he is alive?!" For the first time in years Riki allowed himself to hope, despite being fully aware of the fact that if that hope were crushed his heart might very well not survive this time.

"He is. But if you keep shaking me like that I'm afraid he won't be for much longer, there is only so much this pet body can take."

“What do you mean? Is Iason in danger? Where is he? Can I speak with him? I must speak with him! I must tell him ... something very important.” *That I love him. That I’ll love him forever, only him. That I’m his for as long as he wants me, no matter the cost.*

“It took him a while to come to grips with all that is emotional and human and to draw his own conclusions from that. And then to come up with a feasible plan of escape. But he succeeded at long last and now he is right here, Riki. Although I believe the more accurate term under the current circumstances would be she rather than he”, she added with a wink and that sexually depraved, half-evil half-taunting sparkle in her icy sapphire eyes that Riki knew so well.

Iason!

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ending theme: Duran Duran - Save a Prayer
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To Be Continued ...
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Author’s Notes:

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaargh I can’t believe I actually wrote it!:P

I read several “Riki as a girl” alternate universe fics, but something like this I’ve never encountered and it definitely never had Iason as a female character. So it’s original. Possibly too original? I leave that up to whoever decides to read this fic ;) Mind you, this is not meant to be an alternate universe or alternate gender fic or something like that and it will be explained how this unlikely transformation came about in the next chapter. And in all probability the transformation will be reversed at a later point in the story (unless some readers really don’t want to see that happening?).

I thought such a transformation would be interesting not only because of the change from male to female but also because of the change from android to human body. The way I see it you definitely experience the world differently in an actual human body than you would in a robotic one, at least that’s my take on it ;) Also our little “imperfections” are often said to be what “makes us human”, therefore in order to get the full “human” experience one should be able to deal with physical imperfections such as illness, pain, anxiety and so on. And in Iason’s case it definitely helps to create a better understanding of what Riki was actually going through during those years as a pet and even fighting for survival while growing up in Ceres.

So let me know what you all think and give me some reviews pls!!:D

Only the Beginning

Chapter Summary

Continues where Dana Burn left off, but all main characters (including Guy) survive (in one way or other) so not to worry :) I'm planning on making this Riki/Iason centred but I'll probably include other pairings as well. It's going to include slash but I'm guessing that's not a problem in the AnK fandom?;) Make sure to expect the unexpected, but no Mary Sue chars.

Author's notes:

Hi everybody :D Well then I've finally taken some time to write up the next chapter for this fic. I apologise if it's a bit late but I've been busy writing my AnK Christmas fic and studying for the upcoming exams so this is the first chance I got to continue this fic ;)

Thank you all for reading it and thank you for giving it a chance despite its rather unusual plot featuring female Iason :) This chapter should already give you some clarification as to what happened to Iason after Dana Burn, however flashbacks of him experiencing life as a pet while still in Tanagura will only follow in the next chapters ;)

I've also incorporated part of the lyrics for both the opening and the ending theme songs now, I hope that's allowed? I am mentioning the title and the name of the band, so that's not plagerism, right? I've only typed the parts of the text I felt were relevant to the events in this chapter... Anyways if it's not allowed, somebody just let me know and I won't do it again in the next chapter and just mention the title and band of the song then ;)

I haven't had time to properly re-read this chapter but I'll just post it already, I'll take care of some typos and stuff later cause it's getting kinda late now and I ought to go to bed ;) I hope you'll all enjoy this next chapter!:D I hope I'm not getting Riki and/or Iason too much out of character here... But next chapter should have a demonstration of Iason's domineering nature in it ;)

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opening theme: CellDweller – Precious One

Close your eyes, Precious One

And you will see your life has only just begun.

Nevermore be afraid, I embrace you

And I'll take you

all the way through

endless time

To your new life

I await the Divine

Lost in time but I'm holding on

I see Her face, light all around me

Filled with Grace, darkness fades away

Her embrace, I'm at Her mercy

Bring me home, as She takes me from this life

Now I walk through to the other side

Former life a memory

Everything inside is amplified

.....

Iason was touched to see the concern and desperate passion in Riki's eyes as he – to his own knowledge up until that point – asked a stranger urgent questions about the well-being and whereabouts of Iason Mink. *His Master. He is still mine, even if I have lost everything else. He will always be mine, no matter the cost. He is simply beyond what one can buy.*

As Iason studied his night-black eyes more intently – his growing awareness of who exactly it was he was speaking to only adding to his charm – she thought back to her actions during those moments they had both presumed to be their last. *He chose to be mine when he came back. He gladly laid down his life for me, there is no greater sacrifice. He has proven to be my dearest and most loyal possession.*

“Well then? What is it you have to tell me with such urgency, Riki?”, she asked while trying to keep her voice as level as she could while in this compromised, weakened state. She could not do anything about the momentarily dishevelled state of her body and its uncontrollable reactions to environmental stimuli such as exhaustion, thirst and anxiety. Thus the only kind of control she had left was the control over her oratory skills, which were actually rather unsettled when she initially encountered Riki again. *How peculiar, even when I spoke to Jupiter while I in this human form the anxiety did not lead to such a numbing of my speech organs.*

It took him a while to form a coherent response. Probably he was not only very surprised to see Iason alive but also very surprised at seeing him – or rather *her* - in such a state. *What if he perceives it as weakness and no longer feels for me like he did at Dana Burn?*

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Iason! Holy shit, how the fuck is this even possible?!

But now that he knew there was no denying it. Having spent over three years nearly solely in the company of his former tormentor, Riki knew Iason’s expressions – which were observable in his electric blue eyes rather than his ever-passive face – and thus recognised them in the eyes of this young girl. After overcoming his initial surprise and tremendous relief that washed over him like a tidal wave, Riki attempted to formulate a response, if only because the impatient look in those eyes immediately made him feel ill at ease, as was always the case when he was at the receiving end of that ice-cold glare.

“How... You’re alive! Shit, you’re alive! What the fuck happened?! Did Jupiter operate on you and transplanted your ergh ... Crap, were you imprisoned or something?!... You’re alive! Shit, you’re alive!”, he kept on repeating almost as if it was some kind of mantra to really convince himself of that fact or something that he could simply not make sense of at all. *OK, damn it all to hell! I’ve had just about enough of suppressing this!* All of a sudden the mongrel pounced in her direction and ended up partially on top of her – he was heavier than

before but of course she was also *considerably* lighter – while she was still lying down in the bed and started vehemently kissing her, almost as if to check whether she was real. He then started to study her face up close and touching her hair as if to also check whether it was genuine.

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Iason was so taken by utter amazement when Riki jumped on top of her and started kissing her, that she even remained passive during his ministrations. *Riki not only willing but also taking the initiative? Now here is something new I could definitely become used to.* The kiss ended way too soon, before Iason could even get her slow, dazed body to respond. After which Riki proceeded with examining her as if to check whether the girl was really Iason Mink. It had to be very difficult for him to understand. Well, it was sometimes still difficult for *her* to understand so the mongrel's seeming unwillingness to believe it was hardly surprising.

“Riki, what are you doing?”, she inquired as soon as she had regained control of her body's vocal cords. For some strange reason the pet body was acting even stranger than usual while around Riki. Perhaps whatever illnesses it had entrapped while on its way here were not completely out of its system yet. Unfortunately Riki had at this point moved too far away from the bed for Iason to make any attempt at returning his kiss. *I believe this is a situation to which the term “dammit” would apply.*

“I ergh... I'm checking to see if you're... well, you”, Riki responded absently after staring at her for several moments. As always he would stare Iason directly in the eye without even the slightest hesitation. Nobody else in Tanagura would have ever dared to do that. Even while in this body Raoul would not dare to because he knew who she really was. She liked how he would do that. Him looking her in the eye signified that he was really looking at *her* and not just at her perfect Blondy elite body, which she didn't even have now. It also meant he was honest because he showed his emotions to her face, he didn't pretend to be submissive only to gawk at her back. Neither did he crawl through the dirt, cowering in fear and bowing down in sickening fake admiration. He was an independent, proud, honourable man whose respect and love were actually *worth* something.

“And what are the conclusions to your observations?”, Iason inquired, sincerely hoping that she would not have to prove her identity to him. Although between the two of them there were sufficient secrets known to nobody else to be able to assert Iason's identity.

“Ergh... shit, it really *is* you, ain’t it? Shit! I...”, the mongrel apparently could not make sense of his own words anymore and suddenly jumped up to pace around the room, almost like a wild animal stalking around in a cage. “OK. OK, just to make sure that this isn’t some sick manipulation by Jupiter... Where did we meet? I mean the first time we met...”

“Not far from the Midas Gates in Sasan. You were about to rob someone and I stopped you. I decided to let the matter drop but you insistently followed and insulted me and offered me your body as payback for my silence.” At least that had always been what Iason had assumed were Riki’s motivations. But now she was not so sure anymore.

“What hotel?” Riki began pacing up and down the room more quickly and made other nervous gestures, like repeatedly scratching his nose and crossing his arms only to uncross them again only seconds later.

“I believe the establishment was called “Club Minos”, at least that is what it said at the door yet it did not appear to be a club at all”, as it had appeared to be a multifunctional establishment which functioned as both a love hotel and a brothel.

“Which door? Blue, red or yellow?” Riki continued his interrogation, while now pacing back and forth between the foot and the head of the bed while keeping his eyes on the blonde, petite girl in the bed, which was rather similar to a way a wolf or a wild dog would try to corner a frightened rabbit. Only this rabbit did not appear to be afraid at all, perhaps slightly annoyed at the constant movement that was giving her a bit of a headache.

“If I know the name of the establishment for some other reason than me being Iason Mink, then would it not be probable that I would also know the details about the inner arrangement of said establishment?” *Honestly how many questions does he have to ask me if he apparently has already ascertained that I am Iason Mink?*

“Exactly why I asked it, it was a trick question! Any normal fool would just automatically answer the question if he knew the answer, but Iason Mink would not be able to resist pointing out the stupidity of my questioning methods!” Riki exclaimed as if his question had really gotten Iason where he wanted her. Which was a bit unsettling to her seeing as how she was still lying down flat on the bed, her body too sore to get up at this point, and he was standing towering over the bed using a loud voice and making wild gestures.

“I’m not sure whether I should feel flattered or insulted. Although I suppose there is always something very flattering about your insults, Riki, for at the very least they are genuine.”
There really is no reason why I shouldn’t just tell him the truth about how I feel about him now.

“Shit, it IS you! I thought you were dead! Crap, I thought you were dead and it almost killed me too, you know! Why the fuck did Katze have to... you told him to, didn’t you? I thought that fire was gonna kill you for sure!”

“Yes, I was under that assumption as well at the time. But apparently there are hardly any limits to what an elite body can survive. Not that much of said body was left, as Jupiter could only address me virtually after she had recovered me from the ruins.”

“So what happened? Did she put you in that body? I mean, surely she could’ve built you another elite body, right? Or is this like a temporarily thing, if so why such an ... ergh ... harmless form?” Not that he minded, it was actually rather refreshing to talk to Iason while *she* was not able to physically kidnap, imprison or torture him. Almost like talking to a normal person, to an equal.

“Actually this body is my punishment for defying Jupiter’s rules in order to keep you and for allowing my emotions for you to dictate my actions, even after the explosion at Dana Burn, at which point I was not sure whether Katze had actually managed to save you or not.”

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Flashback:

Iason. Wake up, my child. You are safe again now, you are safe with your Creator.

It took Iason a few moments to realise that he was in cyberspace and in direct contact with Jupiter’s main matrix, yet he had not remembered physically going to Jupiter Tower and establishing a data link with Jupiter. That in and of itself was unsettling, and the absence of his own android matrix in the background of his mind even more so.

I apologise if this means of communication is inconvenient and confusing to you, however I really had to speak with you straight away and this was the only way in which that was still

possible. Your body has been damaged in the explosion to the point of no longer being able to reboot anymore. Fortunately my rescue droids made it to the scene in time, before your emergency oxygen and glucoses supplies ran out.

Jupiter's metallic voice echoed around Iason's mind in a strange fashion. Then he realised that rather than momentarily transferring her own consciousness into *his* mind she had in fact done the exact opposite now, and had transferred his consciousness into *her* own mind. The sheer vastness of the amount of data her mind consisted out of was simply daunting and made Iason feel very small and insignificant.

Here, let me try and make you more comfortable, my child. All of a sudden a virtual world gradually began to emerge in the empty, vast darkness of Jupiter's main matrix. Eventually Iason could make out the vague yet discernible shapes of trees in bloom around her, their petals flying in the wind causing a myriad of colours comparable to the aurora-effect Jupiter usually caused in the metallic dome when he physically interacted with her in the Sanctuary at the top floor of Jupiter Tower. And Jupiter herself of course, who appeared in her usual form, being a slim, beautiful woman dressed in a light violet coloured Roman style dress, her long and pale purple hair fanning out around her and blowing in the same wind that caused the petals to move. It almost appeared as if the hair, the petals and the air merged into each other. But of course there was no hair, no petals and no air to speak of as this was merely a virtual reality that Jupiter was projecting to appease his mind.

While all of this was appearing, Iason had some time to arrange things in his mind. Riki had been kidnapped and he had found out that he was in Dana Burn. After which he had gone to Dana Burn to get his beloved pet back straight away. There was a confrontation with another mongrel, a former gang member and pairing partner of Riki's. He had mutilated Riki! And there had been a fight, Riki had intervened and saved the other mongrel's life, and then ... There had been an explosion and then the entire building was on fire. He told Riki to get out, which he did but... *He came back! He came back so that I wouldn't have to die alone! He sacrificed his life for mine!* But no, he remembered Katze appearing on the scene and carrying off Riki's unconscious body, yet Iason had no way of knowing whether or not Riki was even still alive at that point. *Riki! No! I have to find him!*

You will do no such thing, Iason. This madness has gone on long enough and it has now become apparent to me that I should have intervened in this matter a long time ago. Besides, you would not be able to go find him now, seeing as how that requires having an actual body. Surely you must realise now that this mongrel, who should by his very definition be of no consequence at all, has caused you nothing but trouble? This irrational affection you feel for this pitiful creature has almost cost you your life, Iason!

He had to make sure Riki was all right. He had to get to him somehow to reassure him. And tell him. Tell him he felt the same way about him. Tell him he loved him.

But even now, after having nearly died, your mind still strays to him? Jupiter's voice sounded serene and emotionless as usual, which made it impossible to derive any emotions from it. But the colours of the flower petals, like her aurora in the Tower, gave away her mental state to some extent. When she was calm the aurora took on a light blue-ish colour, however as she became more agitated – as was the case right now – it became green and even bordered on purple.

I love him, Mother. I simply cannot help it. It is not something I chose to feel, it just happened, I am unsure as to how. I am sorry if I have disappointed you, Mother; it was not my intent. Iason felt rather strange trying to explain this to his Creator. It was not something he had ever really attempted to have a genuine conversation about, even with Raoul during his many objections to Iason having a mongrel pet.

But why, Iason? Why go through all that trouble, what has this whole affair with this mongrel brought you in the end? I do not understand how you can even get any sexual satisfaction from a creature like that. A creature that is not only physically imperfect but that has also fought you, insulted you and disrespected you every step of the way, showing nothing but ingratitude for everything you have done for it. Her choice of the word “affair” showed that she knew everything there was to know about his relationship with Riki now. She probably questioned Raoul on the matter while he was still unconscious. Not to mention the many rumours circulating among the pets of Eos must have at some point found their way to Jupiter. Nothing went on in Tanagura without Jupiter knowing about it eventually, as she was always carefully observing the actions of all of its inhabitants through many visual and auditory channels.

With all due respect, Mother, I do not believe somebody who – as you yourself have just put it – lacks even a body, could understand anything about sexuality or love for that matter.

Jupiter apparently chose to ignore the underlying insult in those words and the accusatory tone that implied that she tried to speak about things that she did not understand and were thus none of her business. *You speak as if there is a difference between the two, my son. Please explain what you mean by this. I am eager to gain a better understanding in the errors that have almost led to the destruction of my best creation.*

I do not think they are, in fact, errors. A sexual craving can be satisfied by any means that is aesthetically pleasing enough, it only depends on the physical. Yet that is not the way I feel with Riki. It has to be him, it cannot be someone else, that would not be mentally satisfying to me. And this is not just because of some physical aspect that he has and the Academy-bred pets lack but it is something in his behaviour, in his personality that causes this attraction. Next to that I also care for his well-being, for no reason other than this inexplicable attachment I feel towards him. These recent most unfortunate events have also shown me that I would go so far in this need to protect him that I would actually die for him.

Jupiter simply could not understand it at all. Had she not done everything within her power to make sure her children were both physically and mentally perfect? Then how come her very best creation, the proud of all of Tanagura, ended up developing such psychological, almost human, imperfections? Perhaps she had failed in her attempt to create something better than mankind. Perhaps she had ended up merely creating a more intelligent version of mankind. But then what would it take to take the imperfections and disturbing irrational tendencies out of these sentient beings?

How can something that causes such utterly irrational behaviour and eventually leads to one's own destruction be anything but an error? And a fundamental one at that. I thought I had made you better than that, my child. But not to worry, perhaps this entire problem was merely a coincidental freak accident that might very well never occur again during your lifetime. It is simply a matter of erasing all data relevant to this mongrel from your mind and then you can have a fresh start without all of this trouble. She spoke almost in an reassuring fashion, as if to her the entire solution to the problem was simply mind-wiping him, which essentially made the problem disappear all together, as if it had never even existed in the first place.

No! I will not allow you to do that, Mother! I cannot!

And why not? Surely you cannot, even in your current deluded state of mind, deny how your irrational behaviour is bringing not only you but all of Tanagura great difficulty? Yet it has nothing advantageous to show for itself. So wherefore would you wish for this behaviour to continue? It was as if she was genuinely surprised that Iason was not eager to get rid of those memories. As if they were discussing a virus that had found its way into his software and thus had to be removed from it.

With all due respect, Mother, that you cannot see these advantages does not mean that there are none. I have never felt more alive than I have since I've met Riki. He makes me feel complete, as if my life has actual meaning. If only he could make her understand, but for the

first time in his life, he was not sure at all if she was even capable of understanding what he was trying to tell her. For the first time he realised that his Creator was not perfect and omniscient, thus not like a god at all.

Are you implying that your life had no meaning before, Iason? Surely you realise what an important function it is that you, as a Blondy elite and Head of the Syndicate, have carried out effortlessly for the last century?

Yes, the work I did for you had meaning, I am not denying that. Yet it is in no way essential to this work or even its quality that I – Iason Mink – do this. If I were to die, another elite could simply take over my job and responsibilities. But nobody could ever replace Riki for me and vice versa. Moreover the path you laid for me is not the path I have chosen for myself, therefore it is – in a sense – not really my own path at all. The only decision that I have ever truly made for myself was the decision to keep Riki as my pet. Yes, there were other decisions regarding pets before, but those simply applied to a pre-arranged box of pets available. The fact that I chose Riki outside of that box, in all probability even outside of the functioning of a normal pet, shows that it was my own decision.

It does not appear to have been a very good decision then, my child, as you find yourself in your current predicament.

All of a sudden Iason felt anger surfacing in his mind. Is it really my decisions that have led to this predicament, Mother? Or are they your decisions? The decisions that have created this framework that all of Tanagura operates within, a framework that apparently has not provided a place for true happiness. All the satisfaction I have ever felt pales to nothing when I compare it to what I felt when I realised Riki cares for me in the same way I do for him. Why have you denied this from me, from all of us, for so long, Mother? Honestly, what is the point of living at all if one does not even get to feel truly alive?

Enough of this! You are overstepping, Iason Mink! I am your Creator, I am the Creator of all the glory and splendour that is Tanagura!

And who created you? Or I suppose you just appeared out of nowhere one day to do your divine, perfect work and build this perfect, inhuman city? You say you have made a mistake when you created me, but who is to say your Creator did not make a mistake when he created you? How am I to know whether the mistake is mine, or yours? He was seriously overstepping and would likely not survive a confrontation like this, yet he did not care. It was

about time someone voiced these unspoken questions and reminded Jupiter of the fact that it was not infallible and that it could make mistakes as well.

Fine! If you want to side with the humans that give in to their every irrational, instinctive desire as if they were just as mindless as animals, then I shall grant you your wish! If you think that humans are that much better than I am, then perhaps it is time for you to realise what it truly means to be a lowly human! After which she abruptly severed the connection between their minds, causing Jason a great deal of pain which several seconds later caused him to black out. While mind-blowing pain pierced through his brain the vision of Jupiter's divine form and the perfect yet non-existing virtual garden gradually faded from his mind, leaving only a timeless and placeless emptiness ...

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“Punishment?”, Riki asked with a raised eyebrow. “Sorry but it doesn't look very.. punishing, I mean... you're very ergh... beautiful, you're very beautiful... not that you weren't beautiful before, but I mean this is ergh...”

“Of course somebody who has been experiencing the pains and discomforts of the human body during his entire life would not understand how such an existence could be deemed a punishment. But when being used to an artificial elite body, I assure you it is anything but pleasant, especially at first. It took me several months to even be able to walk or speak in this body. During those early days it was as if I was in constant pain and had no control to speak of over the actions of my own body, which I believe is something you can relate to. I have to admit, pain really *is* intense. It as if the mind can no longer focus on anything else, similar to a loop in a computer's software...” The memories of those days still caused her great suffering, her body reacting almost as if it was not aware of the fact that these events were in the past and was almost partially reliving the experiences. At least she was able to control the reactions now, to the point that she did not start screaming again.

“Wait, you're telling me that before Jupiter put you in this body... you had never even *felt* pain before? How the fuck can that even be! I mean, if your ass was on fire, how would you even know?!” As if nobody else around would notice if an elite had suddenly caught fire.

“I did not state that elite android bodies have no way to register such a thing. My android body's connections to my brain would simply inform me of the elevated temperature and the damaging of tissues, yet in no way would this bring about an experience that could be

considered even remarkably comparable to pain. I never really understood why pain was such a strong incentive while conditioning humans, I do now. And I find it utterly incomprehensible how you managed to deal with it the way you did on so many occasions, Riki”, her blue eyes staring into his were filled with admiration and... regret?

“This the part where you apologise?”, Riki asked, his black eyes almost bulging out of his animated dark-skinned, angry face. *This can't be fucking happening!*

“Of course not. I was not aware of any of this at the time, thus given the information I had access to then I do believe I could not have made any other decision regarding your problematic behaviour. If I had not done what I did you would have acted out even more, which undoubtedly would have eventually led to you being taken away from me and probably disposed of”, which was utterly unimaginable for her.

“It never even occurred to you that perhaps I was acting out *because* you were torturing me?! Shit, why did you even kidnap me?! Why did you... Shit you could've just asked me on a date or something! Hell, I might've even said yes, despite all the shit you'd already pulled me in that hotel room!” All of the frustrations and questions Riki had been going over in his head over and over during the last three years seemed to be surfacing all at once. Now that he had made sure that this *was* Iason and that Iason was *alive*, all of a sudden he had an outlet for that suppressed anger that he had not known with to do with for *years*.

“For your years in Tanagura you truly know nothing of its regulations, do you? For an elite such a concept as a “date” does not even exist, neither should one wish for such a thing according to protocol. Moreover when I met you I did not fully realise that what I felt for you was different from what one feels for a pet. It was the only choice that could be made given the circumstances”, Iason argued, as if the entire thing was perfectly rational and really there was nothing more to talk about.

“Unbelievable! Fucking unbelievable! Even after everything we've been through you still *insist* that you were right to do those unspeakable things to me! To just humiliate and dehumanise me, to steal me from my home, to imprison me and take my freedom from me and to torture me! Well you had no right! I don't give a SHIT about what Tanaguran law says, you had no right! I am a human being, not a thing! You can't just use human beings for your own purposes without their permission! I have free will, a mind of my own, and you should have respected that!” Riki raged on, unaware of how he had grabbed onto Iason's frail shoulders now and was shaking her small, soft body hard enough to bruise and to make her feel slightly nauseous.

“I do respect that, Riki. Why do you think I chose you while you clearly did not meet any of the criteria a Tanaguran pet should?”, she responded, her voice not as even as usual because

of the rising anxiety that Riki's booming voice, wild gestures and now painful shaking of her light body caused.

"Well I don't fucking know!!! That's the same bloody question I've been asking myself since the day you decided to kidnap me and ruin my life! I guess you must be a real sadistic fuck to take such pleasure in tormenting and destroying people like that!" Riki angrily grabbed a nearby chair and threw it across the room, where it banged against the wall and part of its seating actually shattered. The loud bang and Riki's hollering that was increasing even more in volume, made Iason's heart pound in her ears like it was about to pound out of her chest and made her breathing quicken to the point that she thought she was nearly suffocating. After trying to calm herself down by counting to ten in her head and momentarily catching her breath, she responded to his accusations.

"It's for the exact reason you have just mentioned yourself, Riki. You are an independent, strong, resilient being that has survived on its own in the most difficult of circumstances, against all expectations. You refuse to lay down and die. You refuse to obey my commands, even when threatened with physical pain. You are completely independent and rely on no will but your own, no matter the circumstances. These are all things that I admire in you, Riki, they're the reason I chose you and not some boring pet that would just lick my feet and mindlessly do whatever I told it to. Because believe it or not, such a thing cannot bring me any genuine satisfaction for it is not a genuine action to begin with. Pets just lick their Masters' feet because they were trained to do so, not because they chose to do so or even because they truly feel anything for their Masters. I think I have gained a better understanding in what it is you find so disgusting in pets, Riki." There, she'd said it all now. Except for those three words she remembered from old, human movies.

"So... wait a minute! You think it's a *good* thing that I'm free and independent? Because I do *not* obey you? Then why the fuck did you almost beat me to death when I didn't! Fuck!" *You sure have a strange way of showing your appreciation, Blondy!*

"I wanted to see whether it was real. I wanted to see how far it went, whether it was just a layer of varnish or whether it was something deeper. At least that's what it started out as. But then...", she hesitated as if unsure how to formulate her next line of thought. "But then I wanted something else from you, and I did not truly know how to obtain it from a free creature such as yourself."

"Well what the *fuck* was it? What the fuck did you want from me?! What, my *sanity*?! Did you want to *break* me?!"

"I could never want that Riki, for it is what makes you Riki and it what I like about you. No, I wanted... I wanted you to feel at least a fraction of... of what it was that you made *me* feel. I suppose I wanted you to respect me too, I suppose I wanted you... to like me."

Huh. He hadn't seen *that* one coming. Riki gaped at her for a while, as if he was now seeing her for the first time and thought her to be an extremely peculiar creature.

"You wanted me to like you... so you kidnapped and tortured me? Yeah, sure, that makes perfect sense! And then they say elite are so smart and rational and all that!"

"Well, I do believe that at that point I was still unsure of my own true intentions. I thought that if I could only convince you that you belonged to me you would become mine, body *and* soul. And now you *are* mine. You clearly demonstrated that when you decided to lay down your life for my sake", Iason responded while a small smile appeared on her face, yet it was as bright as the sun, almost as if some kind of inner light was projected from her and bounced off of her long sparkling blonde hair.

It was that exact moment that Norris and Sid entered the apartment carrying shopping bags and loudly complaining about how some member of an enemy gang of Bison's had tried to pick a fight with them at the grocery store.

Riki hardly listened to all they were lively explaining to him while they were unpacking the food, and continued to stare at the angelic figure on the bed with her golden, radiant hair arranged around her head as if it was an aureole. Yet she had a rather demonic smile on her face and that same possessive, burning look in her bright blue eyes that Riki remembered. *You are mine, Riki of Bison. Now and forever. And now that you have practically admitted it yourself, there is no denying it anymore.* Riki almost heard those thoughts in his mind as she thought them.

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ending theme: Limp Bizkit – Behind Blue Eyes

No one knows what it's like

To be the bad man

To be the sad man

Behind blue eyes

And no one knows what it's like to be hated

To be fated to telling only lies

But my dreams they aren't as empty

As my conscience seems to be

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To Be Continued ...

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Author's notes:

OK, so pls let me know what you think about this chapter in a review!:)D

From Aphelion to Perihelion

Chapter Summary

Presented with the arrival of his presumed-dead Tanaguran lover, Riki has no choice but to face a trip down memory lane in order to confide in his fellow gang members and to face a difficult decision regarding his future...

Author's notes:

So here I finally am again, sorry to keep you all waiting! I've had some readers ask me when I was going to continue this fic, so I hope this chapter isn't too little too late ;) Not too much action in this chapter though, but rather conversation and contemplation. I just feel the story can't be packed with too much random action at this point, with Iason completely out of his element here and Riki not knowing what to expect after having Iason unexpectedly return to him in the shape of a girl no less :P So this chapter is meant to be more of a turning point in the story :) Either way I hope you'll all enjoy reading it! :D

Aphelion: point in the orbit of a celestial body at which it is furthest from the sun

Perihelion: point in the orbit of a celestial body at which it is closest to the sun

Soundtrack: Scandroid – Aphelion

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While the mongrels were haphazardly cutting the supposed food and throwing everything into a filthy cooking pot in one big, inedible-looking mess, Iason felt how her eyes were beginning to fall shut against her own wishes. After those anxious years spent as a Pet - not knowing for certain if her beloved Riki had survived the ordeal at Dana Burn – the long-awaited climax of seeing her mongrel soulmate again was pointlessly interrupted due to the exhaustive actions she had subjected this body to in order to get here. Human physiology was simply ridiculously impractical! She went through all of this to see her Riki again, and now her own body was preventing her from reconnecting with him, even after having already slept for days on end! She had as little choice in her body's physical needs now as she'd had in her heart's needs to permanently power down her Elite body at Dana Burn in order to save Riki.

I don't want to power down

But what else can I do?

The only thing she had been able to accomplish during the brief time after Riki's realisation of her survival, was to have another fight with him about their past in Tanagura. She had come to understand many of the mongrel's frustrations with that city and its system of order and control. It was a place where humanity and human feelings such as love could not continue to exist for long before being snuffed out into oblivion by conditioning based on egocentric needs. Riki had been her salvation, the only thing that had been alive and real in a dead, artificial world of materialism and software.

When life breaks my heart I pray to God

That I fall in love with you

When the other Bisons began making arrangements to try and cook their esteemed guest a decent Ceresian dinner, Riki had been momentarily distracted, worried that somehow the other gang members would figure out that the girl knew something their leader had been carefully keeping from them. But that would be absurd, how could his friends even begin to suspect the history he and Iason shared? If someone had told him what he would be reduced to years prior to his capture, he himself would not have believed a single word of it.

When he turned his attention back to the epicentre of both his heart's fears and desires, he was completely caught off-guard by the endearing sight that met his eyes. The vision was so contrary to the turmoil and seriousness of his current inner state, that he could not help but burst out laughing. Right in the middle of their argument, Iason had apparently only needed a momentary distraction in order to fall right back to sleep, the excitement of seeing Riki again combined with the lingering flue virus having taken its toll on her Pet body. All menace of the cold, steel-hard rationality and know-it-all confidence of Tanagura's iconic favourite had melted off of the innocent, tired face of the girl currently lying curled up like a kitten on the bed.

The sheer approachability of the sight of the sleeping girl who possessed Iason's glorious hair, piercing blue eyes and overwhelming mind made Riki's laughter stick in his throat as hot tears came to his eyes. Tears caused by unrequited love for the surreal but no-longer-physically-flawless creature in front of him. Tears that had been building up throughout long years of agony but that had never been allowed to come forth and expose Riki's weakness in the face of the nemesis who had incidentally also become Master and owner of his fierce heart.

For how could the mighty Son of God, the beaming sun of Tanagura's power and grandeur, the very pinnacle of all Amoyan society, ever reciprocate the miserable, human feelings of a lowly, impure mongrel from the filthy slums of Ceres? Opposite ends of that social scale could not possibly come together in any other relationship than that of a slave and a master, therefore Riki's hopes and defiance had been completely unreasonable. Sexual gratification was even far more than he may have ever dreamed to get from the likes of Iason Mink. He should have just accepted his losses and left it at that. But he had already dared to dream of far more, so he simply could not accept that the beautiful, regal being he had come to love regarded him as just an object, a temporary pass-time.

In my favourite dreams I feel your heat

Though I'm farthest from the sun

However somehow the slumdog had – against all odds of the social system – managed to capture the attention of the angelic child of their world's electronic deity. Not only had the Elite developed an interest in the mongrel that bordered on obsession, but he had also taken great personal risk by keeping the wild creature in his own house. Although the android had proven to be just as cold and distant as the white-marbled halls of the utopian city that he governed, at other times Iason had shown a passion so hot that it could have reduced many a mortal man to embers. Fortunately Riki had proven to be of a more resilient breed than most, or else he would have surely perished in the blaze contained beneath that symmetrical, always-composed face. They had been as closely intertwined as any two living beings could physically be, yet at the same time Riki had been as far-removed from him as a man gazing up at the northern star.

But your glowing eyes are cold as ice

You are my aphelion

"Hey man, are you OK? You've been acting weird after we got back... Did she say something else before she went back to sleep?", Sid inquired with a slightly-worried look on his sun-burned features.

After taking a minute to get a handle on his nerves and straying thoughts, Riki turned away from the girl on the bed and towards his fellow gang member with his best tough-guy pokerface on. "Yeah." Dare and ask me for more information.

But Sid and Riki had practically grown up together, so he was one of the few people who *did* dare to address the infamous Riki the Dark even when it was unwanted. "So what'd she say? She say how she ended up down here?"

“No.”

In only a brief moment of hesitation, Riki made a decision that he prayed he was not going to regret. He may have been willing to not mention what exactly had transpired during his two-year absence from the gang, but with Iason right here to keep playing dumb would mean to down-right lie to his gang at some point. He wasn't gonna do that, he was no coward. He simply had to come clean. He just hoped that Iason would keep the more embarrassing details of their acquaintance to herself.

“But knowing her resourcefulness, I don't need to know the specifics to imagine how she pulled it off”, Riki shrugged while walking away from Sid, towards the steaming cooking pots on the old stove.

“Wait! You mean... you *know* her?!” All of a sudden the other Bisons in the room stopped what they were doing and glanced towards their leader. Riki *knew* that Pet girl? How could that be?

“I guess that's why she ran towards Ceres. She'd have no other reason to come here but me”, Riki continued while stirring in one of the pots, ignoring the array of stares he was getting.

“Yeah, but how the fuck would you know someone like that, Riki? I mean she's a Tanaguran class A from the looks of it, even at a later age those never fall down as far as Midas. So how did you even meet her?”

“She ain't no freakin' class A, all right! At least she didn't start out as one. When I met her I guess she was free to go around Midas as she pleased. We met in Sasan on a busy night, about two years back, just a big coincidence really. I wasn't looking for nobody and neither was she, but there we were all of a sudden.”

As of late he had often wondered if there really was such a thing as fate. How else could such an unlikely series of events have ever occurred? Not only did they run into each other that night. Not only did the Elite take a fancy to him and even made him his Pet. Not only did Riki end up falling for him in return, in spite of the bloody awful way he had been treated. Not only did Iason show up against his own better judgement when Guy had kidnapped Riki. Riki also went back. Went back to die with the very being who had tormented him for years, who was the natural enemy of the people of Ceres. And now he was right here, in Bison's ramshackle gang headquarters, in the form of a female, runaway Pet.

“This wouldn't happen to be around the time you disappeared on us, would it?”, Norris asked with a snort, having always thought it suspicious that Riki never spoke of his time away from the gang and never really having forgiven him for bailing on them without a word.

“Look, I know what y'all thinking now, that I ran after a hot piece of ass and a bright future without even a backward glance at you guys. But I'm tellin' ya that's not how it went down, kay?”

“Then how *did* it go down, huh? Who is this girl and why the hell are we sharing our food with her without even knowing what she's doing 'ere?!”

“I’m in charge, I decide who gets food and who doesn’t! If you don’t like that, Norris, there’s the door.”

“Yeah, so how ‘bout you grab that miserable whore of yours and walk right on through it!” Norris yelled while animatedly pointing in the direction of the exit with his half-empty stout bottle before violently throwing it to pieces on the floor right in front of Riki’s feet.

“Shit man, you’re just jealous that Riki had some way or other got to get to know a pretty girl and you didn’t. So just quit the crap and show Riki some respect, man! He don’t deserve to be treated like this, he’s always taken care of us. If he went and left us for a couple of years then I know he must’ve had a damn good reason, I ain’t gonna question that”, Sid interrupted while positioning himself in between Riki and Norris, unwilling to take sides but unwilling to stand by and watch their leader get scorned either.

Riki took a moment to stop his rising anger from boiling over and causing him to do something to Norris he might regret later. The thing was, he was right, the gang had the right to know why Riki had abandoned them like that. How were they to know that sharing the story with them would mean impossible humiliation for their leader? He couldn’t share the whole story obviously, or they’d never respect or fear him ever again, but he could tell them the truth about bits and pieces of it. If they’d still hear him after Norris’ little outburst, that was. But if anything at least Sid seemed willing to listen to his side of things.

“If y’all just shut up for a second then maybe I can tell you what y’wanna know, morons!” Everyone, including Norris, fell silent after hearing Riki the Dark use his don’t-mess-with-me voice for the first time in years. This was the kind of voice he got when you’d made him angry enough to maul and kill.

“Good. So like I was sayin’, we met in Sasan and it was pure coincidence. She caught me pickpocketin’ but kept her mouth shut. I had to repay her after that, and yeah I didn’t mind a shot at gettin’ some Tanaguran ass while I was at it either. So I followed her and persuaded her to go to Menos with me. One thing led to another, and before I knew it I was livin’ in her house in bloody Tanagura with no way of leaving. Believe me, it wasn’t for lack of trying, that place is a freakin’ fortress. Locks ‘n scanners on all doors, camera’s everywhere, centurions at every hallway corner, fire walls run by Jupiter herself. Not to mention I had a fucking tracker in a place I’m sure you wouldn’t’ve considered cutting either.”

“If all that’s true, then how did you even escape?”, Norris questioned, not convinced at all by the non-sense story the other was throwing him. It all sounded highly unlikely, even for one who defied the odds like Riki the Dark did.

“I didn’t. They let me go.”

“Just like that?” In Norris’ eyes the story just kept on getting more and more unbelievable.

“Guess they got sick ‘n tired of my insufferable attitude”, Riki grinned, thinking that probably everyone in Tanagura *but* the one who’d let him go had felt that way.

“Why’d they even lock you up there in the first place? What, the chick belonged to some snob politician who had you jailed?”, Sid joined in the interrogation. Not to question the truth

of Riki's tale though, but out of curiosity for how such an impossibility like a mongrel in Tanagura had come to be.

"Nah. But it *was* her fault, really, she enjoyed my company a little bit too much. So they kept me there, as entertainment for her." Not mentioning that she herself was the one who kept him there for her own entertainment, being an Elite, seemed like a wise decision at this point. This was as close to the truth as he could make it. For one Norris definitely didn't like her and as she was right now any one lousy mongrel could be a threat to her life. He didn't get Iason back just to lose him again so soon, least of all to his own gang.

"They kept a mongrel to entertain a Pet? No shit!", Luke exclaimed in wonder, having remained quiet before, unsure of what to think or how to react to their leader's improbable story.

"She wasn't a Pet back then. It's some kinda fucked-up punishment for risking her own life to save mine." He couldn't imagine how *he*, a mongrel used to doing whatever it took to survive and being the social underdog on a grander scale, had come out of the life of a Tanaguran Pet with his dignity more or less intact. But someone as proud, self-assured and authoritarian as Iason Mink, going from top Elite to someone's plaything and following orders to sexually perform? Unimaginable!

"She risked her own pompous, spoiled ass to save you, a mongrel?! How the hell did that happen?"

"That's just a big lie. How could a creature as dumb and selfish as a Tanaguran Pet or whatever she is, ever risk their own lives for one as lowly as us?", Norris threw back into the conversation, still finding the whole thing extremely hard to believe.

"Truth be told, I didn't like her very much either back then. OK, I have to admit that the sex was great, no question there. But as a person? I hated her guts, I'm sure I would've killed her back then if I'd been given the chance. She was the reason I was locked up there and she selfishly kept me there for years on end. Only making out when she felt like it and messing with me, never treating me as a human being but more like a favourite dog. And it wasn't just fun 'n games, they'd torture me for disobeying. They'd hit me with electric whips for hours on end. In the beginning they kept me tied up at all times, and later I wasn't allowed to leave the house. Till I went and did something I wasn't supposed to again, then they'd chain me back up again. I'm telling ya, even cursing a servant or smoking were considered offences, so of course I'd be in a constant state of either punishment or recovering from punishment. Those folks who say that Tanagura is heaven have clearly never been there themselves. I'm telling ya now, that place is hell."

All of the other mongrels were momentarily stunned, just standing there, mouths agape. Many of them had speculated what could have possibly taken place during their leader's absence, but none of them could have ever dreamed up something as horrible and unbelievable as this. Even Norris had to admit that this series of events far superseded Riki's own imagination. And if he had wanted to tell them a bunch of lies just to be done with it, there'd be no way he would have come up with something no man in his right mind would

ever believe. So it either had to be true or their leader had gone completely nuts. Not to mention the whirlwind of emotion coming from their usually-fearless idol's eyes and voice confirmed the truth of the events described.

"So you never told us... cause we'd think you weak for being imprisoned and tortured? Shit man! I'm sure those Tanaguran fuckers are even worse than the Dark Men, and let's face it, we all fear those bastards. If they pull one of those electric stun guns on you... Crap, there's no man strong enough to withstand that without screaming his lungs out. To go through that for years on end? Holy fuck, I can't even imagine the strength it would take to survive all that with your sanity intact. Yet here you stand, thinking yourself weak! You don't know the meaning of the word, Riki!", Sid responded in awe, hardly believing the agony his childhood friend must have endured. To him it only confirmed how this man was more than worthy of his deep-felt admiration.

"So the chick saved your life by helping you escape in the end?", Luke asked with a slight frown on his face, suspecting there might have been an additional motivation for doing so other than her affection for a mere mongrel.

"She did let me go at some point, that brief period I was back here. But then she started missing me and they put me back there, threatening you guys to get me to comply."

"Crap. Riki, man, I'm sorry, I had no idea. It's just that when you said you knew the girl, I just jumped to conclusions. I'm sorry, I should've known you were somehow trying to save us and not condemn us", Norris apologised reluctantly but honestly.

"That's all right. I would've probably drawn the same conclusion myself. I guess there's nothing so impossible that it could never happen, even in Midas."

"So how'd you escape in the end, if not with the babe's help?"

"She died and I lived. Or at least that's what I thought until we found her in that gutter over at the bridge tonight." Riki had a hard time holding back his tears after years of thinking Iason dead, mourning who he now realised was the love of his life and resigning himself to forever wonder at what might have been. For all the bullshit that the Blondie had pulled on him, in the end he had proven his affections were genuine, hadn't he?

And all that time I thought I walked these empty streets alone

I never thought I'd be with you, heading into the unknown

"How did it happen? If you were safely locked up in her apartment in Tanagura, then why did you need saving?"

"Another reason why I never told you any of this. Guy was involved, and not in a good way either."

“What the fuck’s any of this got to do with *Guy*? That why he left the gang and just disappeared? Some folks over at the pub even say he’s dead, burned alive in that fire at Dana Burn some years ago. Wait... Were you, your girlfriend and Guy all actually there?”

“Yeah. You see, after I got back from my short break in Ceres, I was given a lot more freedom and I started living at Apathia, helping out Katze in the black market again. That’s when Guy found out what had been going on with me, and overcome by jealousy he caught me by surprise and took me to the ruins. He had the whole place rigged with explosives and didn’t even hesitate to remove my tracker. I swear he was raging like a complete lunatic, I could see in his eyes that he’d totally lost it, the thought of me being compromised by Tanagura having driven him insane. If she hadn’t shown up when she had, I’d be dead now, mutilated and buried under piles of rubble. That’s exactly what happened to her when she’d come for me, a part of the building fell on top of her, crushing her legs. She told me to get out, only concerned for my safety and not her own. But I just couldn’t leave her like that, so I went back in. That’s when the rest of the explosives went off and the whole building just came crashing down on top of us.”

“Holy smokes!!! How on Amoy did you survive all that?!”

“Up to date I’m not sure myself. Apparently Katze came along and managed to get me out in the nick of time right after I’d lost consciousness. But he couldn’t get her out anymore. I’m guessing the Tanaguran officials arrived and dug her out after the building had already collapsed, picking up her pieces and somehow putting them back together again. I’ve absolutely no idea how it’s possible for her to be alive, Tanaguran science is simply beyond me.”

“I can’t believe Guy would do something like that, especially to you, Riki! We all know he’s practically worshipped you all his life! He must’ve thought he was saving you more suffering by killing you... What happened to him?”, Sid asked, having serious difficulties to keep the moisture out of his eyes at the thought of such a heart-breaking betrayal from one of their most trusted and distinguished gang members.

“Who cares what happened to him?! Didn’t you hear, he cut Riki and tried to blow him up! But wait, do you still have...?”, Luke asked while pointing at Riki’s crotch, a look of loss suddenly entering his eyes. He’d been trying to get into Riki’s pants for years, so of course he’d have a problem if there was nothing inside of those pants anymore. From his perspective Guy’s betrayal created an opportunity for himself. The thought that the Tanaguran girl could be competition never even entering his mind.

“He ain’t dead, at least not that I know of. Katze got him out before the whole thing came down on us. He got seriously hurt in the fight with ergh... the Tanagurans though, but nothing lethal. I had Katze promise to take care of him afterwards, which I’m guessing he did.” He couldn’t get any closer to the actual truth without the gang members becoming aware that his supposed girlfriend had ripped off Guy’s arm with her bare hands. Blaming the whole thing on “Tanagura” in general was probably the best thing to do.

“I thought you said the Tanagurans only came after the building had collapsed?”, Norris’ sly voice interrupted again, a sliver of distrust entering his gaze.

“They did, but it was just one android that came early. Grabbed Guy as if he were a straw doll and just ripped his arm straight off. I didn’t like watching it but he’d kinda deserved it so I ain’t sorry for him. But watching him die, I just couldn’t.”

“No shit... Those androids are real scary, man! I suppose Guy did deserve it... but I can’t help but think his intentions were good, even if things turned out so badly”, Sid mused, still finding it hard to fathom he was actually having this conversation. Everything about it was completely unexpected. The way in which fate had brought Riki and the blond girl together. Riki’s imprisonment in Tanagura and his subsequent release. Guy’s betrayal. An android’s violent involvement. Guy’s escape. Riki’s rescue at the hand of the black market boss. The girl’s miraculous survival. What did Katze have to do with the whole thing anyways? Did he just happen to be standing around in the middle of the freakin’ desert? He wanted to believe his friend, but a lot of stuff just didn’t add up...

“What happened to the android then? Cause I’ve heard stories about those things, they don’t just stop...”

“Apparently they do if tons of burning debris fall down on top of them. How ironic that the burning ruins of the old world are capable of destroying the most accomplished technological feats of the new world, yet fail to destroy the result of millions of years of biological evolution.”

“What the *hell!!!*”, Riki jumped at hearing the well-known calculation and lack of emotion in that high-pitched voice. “Goddammit, Iason, don’t spook me like that! How long have you been awake, huh?!”

“Only long enough to hear one of the better parts of the story, which was the removal of redundant body parts of your annoyingly interfering... *friend*, for lack of a better word”, the petite nymph responded with a sweet smile as she was slowly and clumsily climbing out of the bed, or rather the pile of old mattresses that made up Riki’s sleeping place.

“Shit, she just stopped being cute and started being creepy...”, Sid whispered while taking a couple of steps backwards, unsure of how much damage a young girl could do when pissed off. Up to this point he had simply assumed that women were incapable of being scary in the slightest.

“The ripping off was performed under my supreme management if I may add. In spite of your most interesting horror stories on androids it actually took a great deal of logical deduction and hacking skills on my behalf to have it perform such an act of raw violence over the damaging of a mere Pet. The message being that if you damage or threaten *my* Riki in any way, I will destroy you limb by limb”, the girl cheerfully continued while stretching her dainty limbs, her voice reminiscent of little chiming bells.

“So you really are the one responsible for all the sadistic tendencies, are you? And here I was hoping some of it might have been Tanaguran standard programming...”, Riki spoke accusingly, but his gang members – who knew him very well – could hear that he was speaking in jest.

“Tanaguran standards do not include any inclinations worthy of being called emotion, and that includes rage. An android will beat you to within an inch of your life without any need for such a petty, human emotion. A simple transgression on your behalf is cause enough.”

“If I didn’t know any better I’d think you were speaking in a disapproving way about Tanaguran protocol...”, Riki added, a naughty smile beginning to form on his dark lips.

“I *do* disapprove, thanks to the more primitive feelings you have invoked in me. Living in Tanagura, one is not truly alive. One only needs to behold the beauty of your lively spirit to realise that.”

“Strange how you’re the only one who’s realised it so far then.” It was probably best to simply ignore the compliment, although Riki felt the blood rush into his face at hearing Iason praise him for a characteristic other than looks. “Sure you’re not the one who’s... *flawed*... in some way or other, huh?”, Riki said with a teasing wink as he patiently waited for her to approach him on her still-unsteady mannequin legs. He had an indescribable inclination to just run towards her, grab her and hold her close to him, to never let her out of his arms again... But doing that would make him appear soft and he couldn’t have that, especially not in front of his gang.

“Someone was helpful enough to inform me of this on a daily basis, though using far more decibels and foul language than is required to bring across a clear message. After much consideration I have now established approximately the same conclusion: Tanagura is a fucking hellhole full of no-good cowards and lifeless push-overs.”

Riki’s mouth fell open, soon followed by roaring laughter. Iason Mink as a rebel, this was hilarious and brilliant all in one! “I don’t think I’ve ever heard you use one curse word before, let alone a whole strain of them! You must have been branded such a traitor for bad-mouthing Jupiter’s supreme power like that...”

“I am merely making a critical assessment, which fits perfectly within my job description. I do not see how that would make me a traitor at all. If the required information for a sound decision-making process cannot be gleaned from the usual sources, then it is necessarily acceptable to resort to more unorthodox methods, in this case your rude protestations at the social practices of Tanagura.” It was so strange to hear such Elitist talk coming out of the mouth of an A-class Pet. But despite that fact some of this creature’s features were remarkably similar to Iason Mink’s. She looked more or less like how Riki imagined Iason’s little sister would look like. Both like Iason and not like Iason at all. She wasn’t tall, broad-chested, wardrobe-shouldered, male and deep-voiced, but short, small-framed, skinny, female and chirpy.

Eloquent as her speech may be, her walking movements were anything but as she nearly stumbled her way across the room, stopping to lean on the table for support before apparently combining all of her meagre strength to throw herself across the rest of the room in Riki’s direction.

“That sounds like a whole load of mumbo-jumbo crap to excuse yourself from being just as much of a rogue now as we are. You wouldn’t need any help to make your way over here would you, *princess*?” A broad grin currently split Riki’s tan face from ear to ear. It was just

impossible to keep the glee out of his voice as he watched what he now knew was Iason freakin' Mink stumbling along in a less-than-elegant fashion. *Oh, how the mighty have fallen to grovel in the dirt with the rest of us.*

"I can't recall you following the straight and narrow after having been physically exerted for hours on end, not even including the highly interesting ways in which you would move about on all fours after having been paddled... *my darling*", the girl chuckled, the height and fragility of her voice eerily clashing with the underlying sadism.

Iason's diabolical mind inside of that sweet, innocent girl made for an utterly unnatural combination. One moment Riki would feel confident in having the upper hand – from the former Head of the Syndicate of all people! – yet the next those scaldingly cunning words and harsh, arctic eyes would remind him of just *who* he was talking to. Perhaps some aspects of this unlikely situation were not as blissful as Riki had hoped upon discovering that this little thing was his former enemy and destined lover. Perhaps this was merely the preliminary to a whole new set of future problems. But at least this time around the infamous gang leader figured it would be worth it, he knew what he was fighting for now. He knew that somewhere inside of that frosty Elite's heart was an answer to his own fast-burning passion. Somewhere deep inside that glacier the ice was melting. If nothing else Iason's rebellious words and escape from Tanagura demonstrated that cracks were already forming in his façade of bland order and lifeless lustre. Could it be that Riki – and Riki alone – actually had the power to pierce through that impenetrable wall of cold perfection?

So far away again

My winter has begun

"Holy fuck, dude! Do all Tanagurans have such a dark sense of humour?", Sid asked with a slight look of alarm. Could this Pet possibly pose a threat? And she was the cause for Riki's suffering, wasn't she?

"Only those of us with half a brain", she added in a chipper tone and with a dazzling smile that left everyone – including Riki, who should know better by now – temporarily stunned. After which she added to the drama by plastering her petite form all over Riki's muscled, leather-clad body and lovingly nibbling the part of his neck that she could just reach on tip-toe. *I should've taken my high heels with me. And a pair of hand-cuffs might have come in handy as well, because it is impossible to chase him with this worthless body if he bolts.*

"Could you just stop doing that? It's creeping me out!", Riki snapped in what was really an effort to hide his own aroused reaction to Iason's close proximity and the unusual evidence of devotion she was displaying.

"Doing what?", the sun-haired nymph asked with a surprise and indignation that was so convincing that even Riki wasn't sure whether it was genuine or feigned.

“Acting all cuddly and lovey-dovey! And putting on those harmless, child-like expressions when you’re saying sadistic stuff and obviously thinking of how “delightful” my suffering is to you!” If Iason thought he was just gonna get over all the violence and abuse of the past simply because they had been willing to die for each other and Riki was now acknowledging his feelings – at least to himself – she was sadly mistaken!

“It’s this body and the way it’s been conditioned, harmless and child-like apparently makes up the default range of expressions for a Pet. I used to find it bothersome but now I believe that I have managed to adapt them to my inner self to some extent at least. In addition I am still weakened, therefore I apologize for being temporarily unable to harass you to the extent I know you’re so desperately craving”, she softly responded with a voice as neutral as if she was merely reading a weather forecast. As she spoke with an air of distance, she began to play with some loose strands of jet-black hair, overcoming the different hunger the smell of the nearby cooking pots was causing within her. When was the last time she had eaten?

“Adapt them to your inner self? As in come across as scary as hell and totally psychotic? Yeah, I’d say you’re definitely pulling that off!”, Riki hissed, his annoyance caused not only by the steadfastness of Iason’s determination to scare the shit out of him but also by the way in which his own treacherous body was actually turned on by it, even now. But he had not the heart to push her wandering, tiny fingers out of his hair.

The gang members were all staring at the girl’s tiny form in disbelief, the sharper ones among them already beginning to see her through different eyes and adjusting their impression of her accordingly. She may not be physically dangerous but that did not exclude that she could still form a potential threat. Just what sort of weird relationship did she have with Riki? Their leader *was* allowing her to get physical with him in public in ways that had not been permitted even for Guy.

“Did you know that the devil used to be an angel himself? But he fell from heaven when he dared to challenge God’s omniscience and called his reign tyrannical, according to John Milton at least”, the little girl’s voice sounded as wonderingly as if she was reading a fairy tale out of a children’s book, while her wandering hands were moving from Riki’s hair and nape to slither under his shirt and unto his strong, feline back.

“So... “, he was momentarily distracted from his train of thought by the feeling of small, warm, living hands moving over the naked skin of his back, “so now you’re considering the devil as a role-model? This just keeps getting better and better...” And it kept getting more and more difficult to stop himself from hugging her closer to him and kissing the hell out of her. Iason was alive. Iason was right here, willingly offering herself. Moreover Riki would now be the stronger one by far, meaning that he could take their interaction to wherever *he* wanted it to go. Or couldn’t he?

And I can't see when you're next to me

You are my aphelion

“What I mean to say is that it is always a possibility to change sides and monstrosity is merely determined by one’s point-of-view. Therefore mongrels are not monsters but merely the first ones to figure out the flaws in Jupiter’s system”, she spoke matter-of-factly.

“Oh. So you were comparing *us* to the devil, but of course!” Riki looked in the direction of his gang members and was surprised to see that none of them had said anything in Iason’s presence yet. Another look at their eyes told him the reason: they were afraid of her. On some instinctual level, Iason’s aura and way of talking had made them realize that they were not dealing with a harmless Pet at all. They were now all closely observing how Riki communicated with the creature in order to try and figure out what to make of her as far as threats were concerned. Did she really have Guy’s arm ripped off? How did she even do that?

“What difference does it make? The system is flawed, and we are the only ones who know about it. Logically speaking, it is up to us to take action. When Jupiter presented me with a choice between you and her, between defiance and obedience, between human and machine, it was swiftly made. Of course I have come to care for Lambda 3000’s personality over the years, but no computer’s faults should be overlooked and left to fester by its human managers”, she spoke with a newfound conviction and the unrelenting resolve of one who had made up her mind permanently.

I don't want to go offline

But what else should I do?

"And in the process of taking up said action, I would like to redeem myself in your eyes, to whatever degree that may still be possible. I promise you that you have nothing to fear from me, Riki. I might have grown up believing in the efficiency of Tanaguran conditioning, but I am not a *complete* idiot when it comes to someone’s psychological well-being. Why else would I have even let you out of my sight? I apologize that it took me so long to figure out the meaning of that phrase often used in romance novels: to love someone is to let them go. It was a mistake to try and keep you with me, I should have let you go and followed you, as I did on the first night we met.”

With a broken heart I pray to God

I can orbit close to you

“So you’re telling me... that even when you’d sent me away... you did so out of concern for me rather than out of boredom with me? Crap... I should’ve known you weren’t ever gonna quit, not really!” But inside of his chest Riki felt his wild heart ticking like a timebomb, for the truth was that all that time he had been waiting for Iason to get back to him. It was only a

matter of time before he gave in to the blonde's advances again, regardless of what form his star-crossed lover came in.

"You make that sound as if it is a bad thing, yet we both know that you do not genuinely wish for me to stop pursuing you", she said, and continued her oral assault on his neck and shoulder with complete disregard of how his dark, rough hands had taken a hold of both of her upper arms again. "In fact an existence in which I was no longer pursuing you seemed so unappealing that you chose to die with me rather than live without me. I can count the number of people who would do that on one hand, probably on two fingers nowadays. It is most intriguing how becoming a renegade punished by Jupiter makes one's popularity plummet to nothingness overnight." The slumdog's hands remained but made no attempt to either push her away or pull her closer, as if their owner's mind had not yet been made up.

Riki responded to that last comment with a snort. "Far as I know, you never gave a canned camel's shit about what anyone thought of you. I mean it took some time for me to discover that even one in a position of power like yourself, could barely get away with being associated with a mongrel. So I figured that if *you* didn't care about associating with *me*, then neither should *I* care about associating with *you*."

Ever since being released by his Blondie he'd had dreams about him every night. They hadn't stopped when his Master had taken him back and set him up at Apathia, and since Dana Burn they had most definitely increased. Sometimes they were wet dreams. Sometimes nightmares. Most times they were both rolled into one. But as of late there was no way to predict what role Iason would play in these nightmares: the role of aggressor or the role of victim. Having been confronted with Iason's mortality and his own acceptance of it in those burning ruins, Riki now considered the older man to be actually human. That Iason was able to die meant that he was real, not just an android but a real person. Ironically, the thought of the finiteness of the Elite had made him more interesting to be had. Riki's dreams were filled with images of Iason's angelic form bursting into flame, the light of the blaze so bright it looked like the sun itself, its rays rendering the divine, artificial body more beautiful even as they scorched it into ashes.

In my favourite dreams you feel so real

Like a fire from the sun

But human and fragile as the tiny, female body in front of him was, it only took one glance at those sky-blue eyes to remind Riki of exactly why he feared this being and would always have the perverted wish to be submitted to its dark desires.

But your foreign eyes are cold as ice

You are my aphelion

The truth had been revealed that Iason had not truly died, but had merely been reborn as something else. Even if that something was arguably far more destructible than the synthetic body of an Elite, Riki did not make the mistake of thinking that Iason's existence would now be fleeting and insignificant.

And all that time I thought I walked these empty streets alone

I never thought I'd be with you, heading into the unknown

The question remained: did he want to be a part of that existence – whatever route it took from this point onwards – or not?

So far away again, my winter has begun

Punishment of Jupiter's, my ass. This was all part of his master plan to get me back, both body and soul this time. That crafty little bastard!

And I can't see when you're next to me

So the bigger question was: did Riki have a real choice this time around?

You are my aphelion

Even as the mongrel's sly mind was working through the different scenarios within its limited scope, firing up the heat of its organic circuits, he could feel the doll's hands in his hair transform into predator's claws by their sheer determination not to let go. Never to let go.

So far away again, my winter has begun

And I can't see when you're next to me

You are my aphelion

Looking down at the slim girl in his arms, Riki's eyes were held by the sparkle of those long golden tresses that appeared to lure him in like a siren's call, after which that old sparkle he had felt that night at Sasan all those years ago was reignited in full force.

In my favourite dreams you feel so real

Like a fire from the sun

But your foreign eyes are cold as ice

You are my aphelion

He had to follow this creature, this ethereal creation of Amoy's god.

So far away again, my winter has begun

And I can't see when you're next to me

You are my aphelion

He had to hold unto its blinding brilliance, no matter what the cost to his own mortal soul.

So far away again, my winter has begun

And I can't see when you're next to me

You are my aphelion

So far away again, my winter has begun

And I can't see when you're next to me

You are my aphelion

Having made his decision internally, the black-haired man's hands slightly tightened their hold on the pale body currently curved around his bigger frame. Unbeknown to the man, a devilishly satisfactory smile of triumph appeared on his angel's innocent face.

My aphelion

My aphelion

My aphelion

My aphelion

My aphelion

My aphelion

My aphelion

My aphelion

My aphelion

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To Be Continued!

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Please be so kind to leave a review!!! :D

A preview of the next chapter:

Carefully studying the steaming piece of unidentifiable nourishment on the end of her non-too-clean fork, the Bisons' esteemed guest turned up her tip-tilted, mouse-like little nose. "What did you say this dish was called again?"

“Ergh... I’m not sure if it has a name... but we prefer to think of it as chicken ‘n rice,” Sid answered with a smile that was so unconvincing that it looked more like a pained grimace.

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