

"Finn, maybe that's not such a good idea," Aarrow cautiously observed from the floor. Finn had found the reason why Aarrow's room seemed to be so cold. The vent above his bed was blocked. Unwilling to wait for Junko to check it out, the blond storm hawk decided to balance a couple crates on top of Aarrow's bed and clear the vent himself.

"No problem buddy, I can do this. Trust me," he urged from over his shoulder as he reached and stretched for the vent cover. "Its the least I can do for our fearless leaaaa-" the crates suddenly wobbled forcing him to cling to the vent grate until it was the only thing holding him up. Finn's eyes went wide as the vent cover screws starting popping out one by one from the stress of his weight.

"Finn, let go!" Aarrow threw the crates off the bed to give him a soft landing.

"Not like I have a choice!" Finn suddenly fell to the bed, grate in hand. He bounced clean off onto the hard floor with a thud, nearly missing Aarrow. Along with Finn came a shower of dust and the sudden bam of a leather book hitting the floor.

"Wait... What's that? Was that what was blocking the vent?" Aarrow picked up the book and dusted it off before turning it over in his hands. For a moment it looked like a volume from Piper's collection that had been misplaced.

"It better be, I'm not doing THAT again," Finn got up rubbing his backside. "I'll uh," he turned the grate around in his hands "I'll go get Junko," he said before slipping away from the scene.

Aarrow was too engrossed with the book to notice. Carefully he flipped it open and looked at the steady writing across the pages.

"Its a journal," he said to himself as he started to read. It wasn't just any journal.

It was the journal of Lightning Strike, the former leader of the storm hawks. Inside were tales of their adventures, his notes of the ship, observations on the terras, and personal thoughts on his squad... one in particular. Aarrow found himself reading out loud softly.

"Jet has proven himself to be a dear friend and the best pilot I have ever seen. He has many years to go before he becomes a sky knight, but I have already begun to teach him. The boy has an intense competitiveness. As we sparr he actually looks to beat me," Aarrow read on silently for more pages as Lightning Strike talked about his young co-pilot. He didn't let up even as Finn, Piper and Junko came walking in.

"You should have known better Finn, it's not like we have a lot of spare parts these days. You could have broken something," Piper scolded as they walked in.

"Aww it's no big deal Piper. I can fix it," Junko replied with his constant smile. It was then that the three noticed Aarrow with his nose stuck in the leather bound book.

"Aarrow? What's that?" Piper asked curiously as she walked up. Aarrow finally looked up with a serious face.

"You would not believe it,"

Within the hour Piper had glanced over the whole book and started briefing the rest of the Storm Hawks on it.

"This is GREAT. We can learn so much from this journal. New maneuvers, what that lever over there is for... All kinds of stuff," she said with barely a breath in between.

"Or like what went wrong," Aarrow spoke up as he slid the book over to him. He had yet to be able to finish reading it.

"Went wrong?" Finn's head tilted as he said it. Junko and Piper were equally confused.

"The Storm Hawks were betrayed by their own member. A man they trusted. Co-pilot to the strongest, bravest sky knight of Atmos. And he didn't see it coming," the seriousness in his tone caught even Stork's attention.

"Aerrow's right," Piper agreed.

"First things first, Stork, set a course for Terra Haven," Aerrow ordered. The helmsman nodded and turned to the controls as Piper got out a map and started plotting the exact route.

Aerrow read the book late into the night. Though he knew he needed the sleep, he couldn't stop analyzing the words Lightning Strike used to describe the situations, this 'Jet' and his character.

*The boy is so competitive, but I know his heart is in the right place. I've started showing him my sword and teaching him the ways of the sky knight. Though, more often the lesson comes in hindsight. Despite that, I'm sure they only etch themselves deeper into his heart and mind.*

*One thing if for certain, my son has taken a liking to him. The feeling seems mutual. Regardless of the age gap between them, the two seem inseparable at times. I think I've made up my mind. Jet will be his guardian.*

It was nearly 1AM with Aerrow finally got some sleep. Stork woke them brutally as his drowsy sight nearly had them side swipe a jagged rocky outcrop as it seemed to jump out from the heavy fog.

The suddenly lurch of the ship ejected them from their beds, blankets and all. Aerrow came to the bridge in nothing but his boxers.

"Stork! Is everything alright?!"

"... Now it is," Stork grumbled as he reached for mug and took a long sip.

Aerrow could only imagine that it was coffee or something he'd been using to keep him awake through the night.

"As soon as we land, I want you in bed Stork. You've done enough," he added calmly as he walked up to the glass to look out over the terra blanketed in mist that glowed softly as it reflected the light of a distant moon. The wreckage of houses and buildings poking up through it like tombstones in a graveyard.

It was dawn when the group were finally on the ground. Aerrow lead the way with Piper as they tried to map out what had happened.

"The town was to the north of here. This terra was once like Atmosia. It was near to the center of the known Atmos and economical center. The Aurora Stone was once housed here. Like it does for Atmosia, it kept the weather tempid and clear. Haven has much of the same features as Terra Rex and the Aurora Stone made the rest of this small flat plateau great for farming," she would have continued had it not been for Finn making excessive talking faces.

Aerrow was lost to most of the banter between the two as he walked up to a farmstead. The building had been badly burned, just like all the others they had passed. But this one was still standing even if it only had half its roof. As Junko tried to talk Piper and Finn out of an argument, Aerrow wandered in to the dark building.

Boards creaked dangerously under his feet as he slowly stepped in. The livingroom was still standing along with the fireplace. The kitchen ahead looked charred and he could easily see a large hole in the floor. That left the eerie hallway to the left. As he walked he noticed all the doors were beaten down. That had happened after the fire. It was odd and made his horrible visions of screaming parents and children begin to fade. Maybe this family made it out.

He continued even as Piper, Finn, and Junko realized he was missing and started walking in the front door calling for him. He was too intrigued with this home. The young sky knight peaked in to each room. There was fire damage in each of them and no sign of anyone who perished there. He was about to walk out when he noticed some stairs leading down.

"Guys, I'm ok, I'm going to check on something down here. Just be a minute,"

he finally responded as Piper's voice began to strain.

"Aerrow?" She responded.

"Down where?" Finn asked.

Aerrow started down the stairs and took out one of his twin blades. It lit the basement in a cool blue glow. He didn't even make it off the stairs when he saw the handcarved stones. He froze in his steps as he read the names. Suddenly the words of the journal began to repeat his mind.

*He went home to bury them. I tried to come with him but he was in too much pain. When he did finally speak to me again he told me how they all had perished. That he buried them and even carved their headstones. He wouldn't say anymore. The day it all happened will haunt me forever.*

Aerrow would have sat there staring but he was interrupted as Junko's foot suddenly busted through the damaged boards.

"Oopsies..." the wallop chuckled sheepishly. With that, Aerrow came out of the basement and out of the house.

After hours of surveying the forsaken terra, the Storm Hawks weren't any closer to solving exactly what happened there. Back onboard the Condor, Piper poured over her library, but only found a vague mention of a large battle at Haven over the fate of the aurora stone.

"It's like was lifted from the history books," Piper exclaimed in annoyance as she slammed another book shut. "No mention of the sky knights involved, not even a word about what happened to the terra. Even Lightening Strike's journal just seems to skip over it except for what he says about Jet's family," she continued as she let her head fall into her hands.

"Well someone knows," Aerrow replied as he stepped closer "We just have to get them to talk," he then turned to a fully rested Stork with orders to fly to Atmosia.

The Dark Ace was in another foul mood as he left Cyclonis' throne room. Another mission to fetch some rare or unusual part for her new project. He was starting to feel more like an errand boy than the leader of the vast Cyclonian forces. The dark pilot cracked his knuckles as he pasted a bickering Ravess and Snipe.

"Dark Ace! What's going on?" Ravess suddenly began to follow with Snipe at a distance, but he wasn't in the mood to feed her curiosity.

"Back off Ravess, it doesn't concern you," he barked over his shoulder as he continued down the hall.

"But Master Cyclonis knows how I yearn to serve Cyclonia. Why does she keep us in the dark?" she begged with a stoic air. The Dark Ace snorted as a smirk came to his face; at least she was good for a laugh.

"'Yearn' Ravess? Really?" he chuckled, "why don't you put that vocabulary to better use and teach the wordless wonder you call a brother," he said as he walked into the hanger.

Ravess was left at the doorway, embarrassed and frustrated, she soon stalked off with Snipe following like a confused dog.

In the air, the Dark Ace forgot them as he focused on this order to pick up a special grade of crystal glass from Saharr; yet another component for the new machine. As he flew with a silent squadron of talons, his mind began to drift to his uncertain future with Cyclonia. If this young ruler continued grow even more distant and detached from the rest of Cyclonia, he could find himself out-living his usefulness once her powers are solidified. At some point she might not even have a use for talons when she controls Atmos as he family once did.

Cyclonis was not like her father. He understood the value of men and how to control Atmos. She only put her faith in crystals. Only those with knowledge of the delicate alchemy were seen as worthy of her attention. His basic knowledge made him nothing but a close pet in her eyes. He clenched his teeth against the thought. That child would bring in that Storm Hawk girl and give her more just because of their shared interest. That whiny brat was hardly useful. Aarrow would be a more worthy acquisition. The boy could fight and he meant what he had said to him. With a little more training he would make an excellent talon. The Dark Ace had to let go of the thought as Saharr came into view.

The doors to the sky knight council slammed shut again in that unmistakable fashion. The Storm Hawks were left outside, their poking had proven unwanted. It left Aarrow pondering more as he walked down the steps. The rest of his squadron confused.

"Soooo what are we doing now? Do we just give up?" Finn prodded.

"Finn! We don't just give up... Right Aarrow?" Piper stepped closer. Their redheaded leader turned with a determined look.

"Right Piper, we're not giving up. There's one person we haven't tried,"

"Who?" they asked in unison.

"Jet."

"Uh... Wait, isn't Jet, ah... the Dark Ace?" Junko asked as the rest of them looked on stunned slightly.

"Yup," Aarrow's confident smirk returned.

"No, no Aarrow. You can't try to ask him. You don't even know if you'll get the truth out of him," Piper urged him.

"Not to mention he's the Dark Ace! Not like you can just have a sit down with him! 'A hello, yeah, I'd like to speak to the Dark Ace'," Finn pretended to make a long distance call with his hand in the shape of a phone.

"I'm going to try," there was no swaying Aarrow from it.

As they got back to the Condor, a message came over the radio that Cyclonian forces had come to Saharr and already took out the Third Degree Burners. Aarrow had Stork set in a course immediately.

The Dark Ace inspected the glass again as talons loaded it onto the carrier. He wasn't about to make another trip should one arrive with a crack in them. The small factory had been easy to deal with, and the Third Degree Burners were pathetic as usual. Still, he didn't want to visit this hot ashtray of a terra again. He was already starting to feel himself sweat under his uniform.

He looked to the stark blue skys as the hatch closed; surprised the Storm Hawks didn't show up. Sending Aarrow crashing into the sand would make this trip a little more worth the annoyance.

"Close it up!" he ordered as he turned for his switchblade elite. Just as he mounted it, his wish was answer. The Condor was soon seen on the horizon and devilish smirk crossed the Dark Ace's face. "It must be my lucky day," he sneered.

"Remember the plan, take out the talons and the cruiser. I'll handle the Dark Ace," Aarrow encouraged them as they flew in along side the Condor.

"Be careful Aarrow," Piper pleaded over the comm from inside the ship.

"Nothing to worry about, Piper. I can handle it," Aarrow had his determined

smirk still even as he saw the cyclonia squadron leave the terra and head straight for them. The Dark Ace out front with sword drawn.

Immediately the dog fight ensued sending Junko and Finn out to tag team the talons as Aarrow played chicken with the Dark Ace.

Not about to back away, the Dark Ace stood out on the nose of his ride, blade out front to cut clean through Aarrow's Ultra III. It was Aarrow who turned, but not away. The youth inverted his ride and dodged the glowing double blade yet still managed to tag the tall warrior on the shoulder.

"You're it!" he taunted as he flew off from the fray. The Dark Ace jumped back to his seat and following in anger at such a childish attitude.

Aarrow lead him towards the rocky outcrops and weaved through the spires to temporarily lose him. The talon commander was forced to pull high to try and spot the agile skimmer, but it was suddenly nowhere in sight.

"Over here!" Aarrow called out as his voice echoed off the rocks. The Dark Ace spun in his seat but couldn't see him.

"Coward! Come out and fight me!" he called back in anger.

"I don't think so... Not this time. I have a few questions for you, ... Jet,"

The name caught the Dark Ace's attention. No one had called him that for years. He was happy that it had been forgotten along with what he once was. Hearing it out of Aarrow's mouth only meant trouble for him and he circled the rocks angrily. The boy knew something and he would see to it that the investigation ended.

"How do you know that name...," he growled.

"It's the name of a Storm Hawk!" Aarrow's voice rung back.

"It's the name of a dead man who perished with his squad!"

"Why... Why is he dead. Why is his family dead?"

The scowl left the Dark Ace's face as the memories were forced back on him. He remembered the house, the graves, the pain he had pushed down to the remnants of his barely beating heart. How dare he bring this up now to satisfy his curiosity. The scowl returned to his face with a vengeance.

"They're dead because the sky knights are a bunch of pompous fools who want nothing but their own glory, like you!" he had to find him now and punish him for his arrogance.

From the safety of a cave, Aarrow watched the Dark Ace circle. He had seen the look on his face change. The man wasn't stone, but he was certainly twisted.

"The sky knights serve and protect!"

"Their own interests! Come out! And I'll give you a lesson, boy!"

"Lightening Strike was a good man! He cared about you. He even made you guardian over his own son! You don't even know the kid anymore, do you!"

A smile suddenly came to the Dark Ace's face as he began laugh. The laughter grew and bounced off the rocks until Aarrow's frustrated mounted.

"What's so funny about abandoning that kid who loved you!?"

"Fool, you're just like him... how do you THINK you're related to him!"

Aarrow's eyes went wide as his mouth fell open. The evil smirk on the Dark Ace's face could be seen and the youth shook his head thinking the man had to be lying. There was no way that he once was a friend, that he even KNEW this traitor of Atmos.

"You have no memory of it, do you?" he laughed again. "I was a fool then as well until I saw how the world really works. Now come out, and I'll teach it to you!" he started blasting the rocks at random.

Aarrow was left stunned. There was no way, no WAY he could have - that could have been - his mind wouldn't accept it. He shrank back inside the cave shaking his head back and forth.

The Dark Ace noticed the sudden silence and took advantage of it.

"You don't believe me?" he said as he held back his sword so Aarrow could hear

him clearly. "You don't still keep that bear, do you... what was his name? Nimbus?"

That was the last Aarrow could hear. He got on his skimmer and flew out to meet the Dark Ace head on. The talon was ready and raised his sword in time to meet Aarrow's blade.

"I could have never looked up to you! NEVER!" he swung hard again.

"You did, but then I was an even bigger fool,"

"You would have been a sky knight, a great one, but instead you killed them!"

"I was nothing, and I would have stayed nothing... you have a lot to learn," The Dark Ace said low as he suddenly swung his sword up into his powerful move, the power from the firebolt crystal crackling loudly before sending the powerful blast at Aarrow.

The storm hawk was easily able to roll away from the shot. He paused only a second when he realized the Dark Ace had better aim than that. He took opening and retreated; wondering if he had knocked the man off his game or made him remember how he use to think of him.

That last thought sent a shiver down Aarrow's spine as he sped away from the talon leader. He couldn't remember his life when he was young, but he could NOT picture himself hand in hand with that monster.

Back at the Condor, the Storm Hawks had happily sent the carrier and talons into a battered retreat; their little 'shopping trip' cancelled for the time being. The glass the cyclonians had looked to secure was surely mashed after that onslaught. Aarrow was proud of their work, but strangely distant, even as they joined the Third Degree Burners in tent city for a meal.

"Aarrow? Are you ok?" Piper sat down next to him as Finn and Burner started up another bet over darts.

"I'm... ok," he responded as he poked at his food.

"You haven't told us what the Dark Ace said. Any clues?"

"No...,"

"Well... what did he say?" she gently prodded.

"I don't want to talk about it right now," he finally confessed despite knowing that would only make her worry more. The moment was suddenly lost as Finn came over.

"Guys, what'd ya say? If I hit the bullseye they buy us the next round AND a refueling," Finn's grin was infectious and even Aarrow found himself smiling.

"FINN, we don't bet! And what, pray tell, did you say we'll do if you miss?" Piper's dry tone matched the annoyed unimpressed look on her face.

"Oh nothing really, just... um, some... entertainment,"

"WHAT? What entertainment?!" Piper was completely animated now. Aarrow snorted in amusement.

"A little dancing, a little singing," Finn flashed his sheepish grin. Aarrow laughed.

"Fine, but don't miss," he responded despite Piper's disapproval.

"Why do you encourage him like that?" she begged an answer.

"Its just a little fun, Piper," and right now, Aarrow needed the distraction more than ever.

"You dare come back here empty handed?" Cyclonis hissed angrily. "I NEED that glass, not excuses. ESPECIALLY not the excuse that the STORM HAWKS showed up!" she turned to see her stoic commander at one knee with his head low. He showed no signs of fear even as she stepped closer to him.

"Perhaps I've given you too much, Dark Ace. If you think you can just leave my chambers with barely a mark of your failure," she lifted his chin with a finger.

"No, Master. I will take a new carrier and bring the glass as you command. It was my wish to report this failure personally. I do not hide from your anger," he responded coolly.

"Because you have no fear of receiving it?" she asked as she looked into his scarlet eyes.

"Because I know the consequences, Master. I know my place well," he hid nothing before her. She had a way of always knowing. What he didn't realize was that he was hiding something this time. The exchange with Aarrow had left him swimming in memories and it was hard to pack them away again; except for when he was before her.

"Bring me the glass. Or prepare yourself to withstand my next experiment," she said as she released him and conceded to a second chance.

The Dark Ace left her chambers unscathed for the moment. He went to his quarters to collect himself. Once inside he slammed the door and went for a change of clothes. Meanwhile, the memories slowly surfaced in his mind.

He had gotten so use to hating the teenager Aarrow had become, that the thought of the toddler the boy once was began to sting. The boy was innocent then and curious without a doubt. Coupled with this fearlessness for flight, Jet use to take him up into the skies often. Of course they would get scolded for such careless behavior, but it was worth it to see the smile on Aarrow's face. They even shared a room on the Condor due to the lack of space. Many times that tiny kid climbed into Jet's bed for security and snuggles. As if Jet was his older brother.

The Dark Ace kicked the dresser in sheer frustration. He didn't want to be thinking about this. Not when he has to face the young sky knight again in combat. He couldn't afford to be soft and sentimental. Aarrow chose his path foolishly; he would have to pay the price like all sky knights.