

Prelude to a Dream

Recommended Track: Anthony Stewart Head - All the Fun of the Fair

*Night-time. Time of dark. Time of sleep. Time of dreams. I hate my dreams. Why do I dream such dreams? Why do I dream the impossible? Why? What right do I have? I? Me. I am not to dwell on it. To dwell on me. Kari told me. Kari, not like the others. I wish I was like the others. Then they would like me. Just want them to like me. Like me. Like them. I am not like them. Kari is like them, but not. She likes me. I like her, she is nice to me. Why? She is Sirac. She can think. She can talk. She can read. She can read me. The others can read me. I can't read them. I wish they wouldn't. I wish. I wish, need, want, yearn. I yearn. I yearn? What do I yearn for? More than this. I want this to end. I shouldn't. I have everything. I am cared for. I have food. I am clean. I am taught. I am safe. Am I safe? I am not like the others. Soon they will know. Them. They who teach. They who feed. They who control. They control us. They control me. I hate the control. I hate them. **I Hate...** They do not care about me. They will soon know what I am. What am I? I am not Sirac. I cannot read the others. If I could.... It would not matter. If I was normal, I would still be this. I would be me. I hate this. I hate me. But I will not keep this hate. I will escape this hate. I will escape this fear. I will escape this place. I will leave. I will **leave**. I will not let them get me. I will not let them put me in the militia. Tarn will not see me in the militia. I will not let him, or the others. They will not see me. They will not know me. They **cannot** know me. But Kari knows me. Will Kari miss me? I do not know. I care. I wish. I wish she can come with me. But she can't. she wouldn't. Would she? She can't. She won't. I will not let her. I cannot let her. I care for her. I cannot let her. She will be fine. She will not be harmed. I hope. Hope. What is hope? Hope needs future to exist. I must have a future, for I hope. I will make my future. I will escape . I will **live**. I will live.....*

Two fox, each at a monitor. Behind the monitors there is a window looking into a room with several beds in it, each one with a sleeping cub. The room is darkened, obscuring what the cubs are.

"Ryalto is asleep."

"What time is it?"

"23:48"

"Only took him 3 hours. Maybe we should give him a sedative tomorrow?"

"No. I think that won't be necessary. If we give him a sedative, then it will go on his record, could affect his selling."

"Wouldn't want that."

Chapter 1 - Today is a good day to cry

Recommended Tracks: Garbage - Nobody Loves You, Offspring - The Kids Aren't Alright, Staind - Blanker

4 more hours... just 4 more hours to night time. Then they will let me be.

A room with several cubs sitting in front of monitors. On the monitors are chemistry questions, asking what reaction happens if X chemical comes in contact with Y chemical and Z energy is applied. All the cubs are Sirac, with similar markings and of similar build except for one. The exception is sitting to the left of the door, has a bridged mask and is slightly taller, yet is also the skinniest of them. His ears are flat against his head, giving the impression he is doing poorly in the exam.

This stuff is too easy. Any idiot knows triflorine dicarbonite and oxygen with 120 kJ makes a big kaboom. Why do they ask such questions? Especially about explosives. Just more ammunition to kick me in the militia...*

"Thanks for the answer, cannon fodder."

At hearing the voice, Ryalto slides further into his chair.

"Why can't you let me be, Tarn?"

"Why don't you make me?" The Sirac three seats to the left of Ryalto gets up. He is short, yet gives the impression of supreme confidence. The other cubs stop working at their monitors and look up.

"Just leave me alone. I don't want to fight, just leave me alone..."

"Hmpf. You won't last three days in the militia. Might as well crawl up and die now."

"Shut up Tarn!" Another Sirac rises from her seat from across the room.

"Stay out of this Kari," Tarn turns towards her, "unless there is something you want to tell us about you two?" Ryalto rises quickly out of his seat, running out of the room.

"Just as I thought." Tarn sits back down, smiling. Kari leaves the room following Ryalto.

"Ryalto, wait up!" Ryalto runs under a stairwell, collapsing against the wall. Upon looking at his face we see he is crying.

"Why does he do that? Why can't he leave me alone? Why don't you leave me alone?" Ryalto looks up at Kari. *...He hates me. He just wants me to suffer. Why won't he just leave me alone. Why can't I ignore him?*

Ryalto's outburst shocks Kari, but his thoughts tell her what he is angry at.

Back in the room, a blue fox enters. She is holding a datapad and stylus, not looking at the cubs. She is muttering something to herself.

"...Hereto 4, Kari 5, Lena 6, Ryalto 2..."

She pokes her stylus at the datapad once, then looks up at the cubs. She immediately realise two are missing.

"Where is Kari and Ryalto?!"

"They went out" replies the cub that was sitting next to Ryalto.

"Herto, where did they go?"

"They went out, Larena. Ryalto got upset and ran out. Kari followed him."

Larena's expression changes from worry to anger.

"Tarn, when I get back, we are having a little talk" Larena growls as she exits the room.

"Just leave me alone. I don't belong here. Just leave me alone!"

"Ryalto, calm down. I just want to help you!" Kari tries to put her arms around Ryalto to comfort him, but Ryalto jumps up.

"Don't help me! Your helping just makes it worse! Don't you see? I can't even defend myself from Tarn." Ryalto starts walking around agitatedly.

"You are not going into the militia, only dumb violent cubs get sent there." Kari tries to hold Ryalto, but he shakes her off. Kari realises she cannot read Ryalto's thoughts anymore. Larena approaches from behind Ryalto.

"Don't touch ME!"

Ryalto lashes out with his left fist, missing Kari easily, instead hitting the wall. The wall is made of reinforced concrete, yet shatters under the impact. The noise of the wall cracking can be heard in the room, and several of the cubs enter the corridor to see what is up. Ryalto faints, lying limp at Larena's feet.

"Kari, call medical. Tell them to send someone up here." Lorena knells to examine Ryalto.

"Hmpf. Bet he broke his arm doing that" Tarn can be heard saying to another cub.

Larena's face displays puzzlement. *His arm isn't even scratched... How did he **do that**?* Two more fox arrive with Kari and a grav stretcher. They lift Ryalto onto the stretcher and leave.

"Larena, I couldn't read Ryalto..." Kari mumbles.

*triflorine dicarbonite is a made-up substance. In the likely event that such a chemical does exist, ignore its real properties, as its story properties are key to the plot. I am not a chemist, nor claim to be. I prefer physics ("Lets go play with uranium and build a phased plas-laser cannon!"- Me one day at college)

Chapter 2 - General Protection Fault. Press Ctrl+Alt+Del to restart your life.

Recommended Tracks: Staind - Home, Greenwheel - Shelter, Four Star Mary - Pain (Slayer Mix)

Ugh. Head hurts... What happened?

Ryalto awakes in a large dark room on a hard flat narrow bed. There is various equipment next to the bed and along the walls, as well as more similar beds. A chronometer near the door says 03:49.

Infirmery. Must have gotten hurt... But how?

Ryalto sits up and starts to examine himself, but then stops. He instead starts looking at the other beds.

Oh squid. Did I hurt Kari? Please no please no please no...

There is no one else in the room. Ryalto visible relaxes. He starts to get up, removing a few wires that were attached to his right arm. His left hand flinches as he removes the first one.

Must have bruised it some how. Where is Kari?

Ryalto leaves the room, going down the corridor and up a stairwell.

Larena enters a large office. Behind a large dark wooden desk littered with datapads is a short, stocky Gold fox. On the wall behind him are several pictures of ships, planets and one of a double helix. On a shelf along one wall there are several trophies* and along the other is a large vid screen.

"You wanted to see me Makkus?"

"Yes, sit down. I am concerned about Ryalto. I heard there was an incident today..."

"Nothing to worry about, he got upset and hurt himself. He is currently in medical, and will rejoin his class in the morning."

"Nothing to worry about?" Makkus presses a button on the desk, and a picture of the wall appears on the vid screen. "Apparently we have different meanings of that word."

Larena's ears partially fold back. "There is no evidence for what caused that. The concrete could have been faulty or..."

"Or we could be dealing with a very strong, very upset Sirac. You know as well as I that he is different. You were there..."

Larena's ears are now flat against her head.

Yeah, I was there. I saw the power surge hit his tube. Right as the genetic sequencer was at half way. I was there and couldn't do a bloody thing. Thank the Deities he lived.

"...And know that there is considerable interest in him. After seeing this, the militia is now **very** interested in him."

Larena's ears pop back up. "He's scared of the militia! Today's incident was sparked by that fear. Please don't say we're sending him there, he wouldn't last two weeks!"

"Then he had better lose that fear fast. He leaves for the Terrus Point Research Station in three days, and it is two days journey to the spaceport."
Makkus gets up and walks around the desk. "I know you care about your charges, but they are nothing more than that. You will see to it that nothing more happens to him while he is with us. The transport arrives at 15:30. Good night."

Makkus returns to his seat, and picks up a datapad and starts to read it.

"Good night, sir." *Pretentious golden b*****...* Larena exits.

Ryalto is standing outside the sleeping quarters of his class.
There's Kari. She's asleep, looks alright. Gods I'm stupid.
Ryalto slides down against the wall.

Stupid and violent. They're gonna send me to the militia. They gonna send me and I deserve it. I almost hurt Kari today and all over such a stupid thing. All over some stupid chemistry questions.

Ryalto gets back up and walks over to the stairwell.

I don't want to hurt anybody. Don't want to fight. Don't want to kill...
Ryalto sees the cracks in the wall.

*Squid! Did I do that? If I did that to Kari... No. I will not do **that** to Kari. Not even Tarn deserves that. Nobody deserves that. I will not do that again. I will make sure of that.*

Ryalto runs up the stairwell.

Larena enters the Infirmary and toggles one of the lights on. We see that she is in a foul mood, both ears are pointing back, and her eyes are **very** focused. Looking at the beds, she sees immediately that Ryalto is not there.

Where is he? Damn it, why can't he stay where he's suppose to today? He must have got lonely and went to his bed. That's it. Those infirmary beds aren't fit for a Guttouve. Not that his bed is much better. I'd better make sure that's where he is. Larena toggles the light again and leaves.

Outside. Ryalto is on a balcony on the roof of what appears to be a 2-floor building. It is actually the main complex, with the majority of it being subterranean. We see three other buildings: one similar to the main complex with symbols reminiscent of Earth biohazard signs posted next to the doors, one with large doors facing a road leading eastward, and a small guard post next to the road. Next to the guard post is several tanks with writing on the side, but they cannot be seen at this time. There are various shrubs planted around the two main buildings. There is a tall wire fence surrounding the entire compound. Outside the fence is a large forest with mountains in the horizon to the west and south. To the east a large city can just be seen on the horizon, on the outskirts of the forest. To the north a very large lake can be seen. It is cold, but there is no snow and all the trees look fresh with new leaves. The roofs of the buildings are wet, suggesting it has rained.

Whoa, never realised the world was so big. No wonder they never let us outside. All that green. I hate green. Such an ugly colour... Where do I go? That city? No. There is probably fox there, and they would just send me back here, or worse. I

wonder what is over by that lake? Hmm... Probably more fox, can't go there either. Mountains. What was that thing about mountains... Caves! Mountains have caves! I could hide in one of those caves. The mountains on the opposite side from the city look closer... I will go there. It is so far though... Better get some stuff first.

Ryalto moves from the balcony onto the metal roof. Sliding carefully towards the edge, he looks down.

Uh... Don't think it would be a good idea to just drop. How am I going to get down from here?

Ryalto doesn't get a chance to think anymore on it. His feet slip out from under him, and he almost falls off the building. He quickly grabs hold of the guttering with both hands, but his left hand lets go with his left hand due to the bruising. Barley holding on, he tries to pull himself up, but just can't do it.

*Ohsquidohsquidohsquiddon'tscream**don'tscream***

Makkus exits the main complex. He puts his passcard into his shirt pocket, then takes out a device and places it to his mouth. We hear music, reminiscent of Earth Blues. Makkus starts to walk along the wall of the building towards Ryalto, but he does not know he is there.

Ryalto tries to grab the guttering with his left hand again, but fails. Unexpectedly, his right hand *passes* through the guttering and he falls.

SQUIIIIIIIIIID!

Makkus hears a whistling sound and looks up. All he sees is a large furry shape fall on his head. We hear a few cracks and he collapses into unconsciousness.

*Uhhhh. My tail, my head... At least I landed on something soft-ish. What **am** I on?*

Ryalto looks below him and sees a short gold fox. Then he sees a passcard just tucked into the fox's shirt pocket. Ryalto gets up and drags the gold behind the nearest shrub, which is just wide enough to conceal the short fox's feet. Taking the passcard, Ryalto stealthily heads for the building with the big doors.

Ryalto is standing by a small door on the opposite side of the building facing the road. He takes the passcard and slides it into a slot next to the door.

BEEP "Welcome, Cmdr Makkus"

Ryalto enters the building, into a short corridor. There are two doors, one at the end and one a few feet from him. Only the one at the end has a window in it, and both have passcard slots next to them. Ryalto walks up to the door without the window.

Wonder what's in here?

In goes the passcard, and the door opens. It is a fully stocked armoury, complete with full body armour and broadswords. Ryalto walks in and starts opening all the cabinets, just looking at the moment.

Larena arrives at the sleeping quarters and looks in. She sees all the beds full except one. She quietly shuts the door and goes to another door just down the corridor. She inserts her passcard and walks in. We see one fox at the monitors.

"Do you know if Ryalto went in there?"

"Nobody has gone in there, 'cept you. Haven't seen that door open either."

"Are you sure? Is there any time you weren't at the monitors?"

"Well... there was a short time, had to use the conveniences. But I was only gone for a few seconds!"

"Show me the record for that time now!"

Larena marches up to the screen and looks. The screen shows the door being opened by a grey-armed black handed individual. It does not show exactly who though. It is time stamped 04:03

"Squid!" Larena quickly exits the room, and heads back to the stairwell.

Ryalto is missing. Where did he go? He came here, I was right about that at least. Where is he going now? Gotta think... Her eyes catch sight of the wall.

He's gonna runaway. He's gonna try and escape. He thinks he's in trouble and doesn't want to end up in the militia, he's gonna run for it...
She stops.

Let him. He doesn't deserve to go to the militia. The militia doesn't deserve him. I'll give him a chance. Can't do more than that... Makkus! I'll have to stall him as long as I can! Larena heads to Makkus's office.

Back in the armoury, Ryalto has taken out lots of stuff and placed it all on a table near the door.

Let's see... Medkit, need that if I get hurt, combat knife, definitely need a knife of some sort, lots of rations Ryalto's stomach grumbles. *Better check those, for quality control...* Ryalto opens one of the ration packs and starts to eat it. *Eh. Not bad, sort of like the mystery meat they gave us two days ago. What else? Oh! Right, sleep sack... Do I really need anything else?* Ryalto scans the rest of the room.

Maybe I should take a weapon of some sort. I haven't a foggiest what's out there. Yes, a small weapon or two... Ryalto starts looking at the pistols. He picks one up and sees that it has **lots** of buttons. *Too complicated...* He picks up another, which looks similar to an Uzi. *Better, but a bit big... What's this?* Ryalto picks up a small, compact pistol. On the side is the initials TSP. *Small, simple, light. Well, guess it will do.* Ryalto starts closing all the cabinets. When he comes to the second to last he spies something shiny. *Wonder what that is?* He pulls out the object. It is a bandoleer with three spheres attached to it. One sphere has red/red/yellow strips, one blue/green/blue strips and the last black/red/grey strips around the centre. Each has a pull-pin and a safety switch on one side. Ryalto puts it on and looks in a mirror across the room. *Hmm, wonder what they do? They are kinda small, probably can't do much. Guess I'll find out when I use them.*

Ryalto closes the last cabinet and puts all the stuff into a duffel bag, except the spheres and the pistol. He then leaves the armoury. Back in the corridor he heads to the second door. Looking through the window he sees transports. Lots of transports, some big, some small, some armed and some with wings. He enters the passcard and walks in and feasts his eyes on all the glory. *Whoa... What are these things? Wait a sec, that's an antigrav assembly, like in physics class... That looks like a scramjet... Oooo.*

Ryalto's eyes stop on a hoverbike next to the wall with the doors. He walks over to it and puts down his bag.

Small, compact, looks fast. How do you work it? Ryalto looks around for a vid screen or a manual. He finds a vid screen next to a large armed wheeled ground transport. He tries to turn it on but can't find any switches, just a slot. He inserts the passcard.

BEEP "Welcome, Cmdr Makkus." A menu is displayed.
Lets see what I can find on that thingy...

Larena arrives at Makkus's office. She knocks, but there is no reply. She opens the door. The room is completely dark, and the desk is cleared.

That man isn't right. There is NO way anyone can clear that much paperwork in less than 20 minutes... Where is he?

Larena leaves the office and starts searching.

Back outside at the bush, Makkus is having an interesting dream about dragons chasing him, and Sirac falling from rainclouds.

Ok, the thingy is a hoverbike, a Macrarri 379. It goes fast, faster and Whoa, what was that, and I now know how to fly it. I have stuff, transport and a desire to leave very soon. Time to go.

Ryalto takes the passcard out of the vid screen, and it goes blank. He walks over to the hoverbike and puts his bag in a recess behind the seat. He then opens the hanger doors just enough to get the hoverbike out.

Waitasec, they will see me when I leave. Better distract them.. But how? Ryalto looks around the hanger and sees a small door that says 'Danger: High Voltage'. He walks over to it. Inside is the generator for the compound.

Hmm, if I blow this up, they won't be able to see me on any sensors they have up... but what about that guardhouse... Ryalto goes back to the hanger door.

Looking out he sees the tanks. The tanks read 'Danger: Triflorine Dicarbonite. No open flame'.

Ryalto takes out the TPS. *I think this is will generate over 120kJ...*

Ryalto runs back to the armoury.

Larena exits the main building and starts walking around the walls. *Was it Makkus that liked walking around outside or Dilyra?* As she approaches the bush, she sees a pair of fox feet. Looking around first, she then dashes over. It is Makkus, who

coincidentally is still dreaming of dragons and Sirac. *All this time and he's already out. Wonder how?*

Ryalto is holding in his left hand a string that goes into the generator room. In his right hand is the TPS. He aims at the tanks, and pulls the trigger. Nothing happens.

What the!? He looks at the TPS. He sees on button on the side that says SAFE. He presses it. Aiming again, he pulls the trigger. This time a bright neon blue bolt explodes out of the pistol and hits the tanks dead centre. The resulting explosion is impressively noisy, knocking the two Fox inside unconscious. "Heh. Explosions are fun." Ryalto pulls the string, and guns the hoverbike. He steers it over the fence and heads around the compound and towards the western mountains. Three seconds after the string was pulled the black/red/grey sphere detonates, sending shrapnel throughout the room. The damage done to the generator starts a fire, which spreads to the generator's fuel supply. This in turn also explodes, spreading fuel throughout the hanger. The entire hanger/armoury is now engulfed in fire, but none of the weapons in the armoury go off as they are in fireproof cabinets. The locks to the cabinets fuse, however, sealing them from use. Emergency fire retardant streams down from the ceiling, but it is too late, most of the transports destroyed or severely damaged. To the east, the sun starts to rise, and a lone figure stands to see Ryalto speed towards the darkness.

Chapter 3 - Fallout and Counterstrike

Recommended Tracks: Sisters of Mercy - Temple Of Love, The Offspring - Genocide, Garbage - The Trick is to Keep Breathing

The infirmary is bustling with activity. A blue and an orange fox, both wearing doctor badges, go between the beds, most of which are filled by foxes with cuts and burns. On one of the beds sits Makkus, with one arm in a sling. His tail twitches with boredom. The blue approaches him.

"Just how much longer do you plan on keeping me here? Only there is this young cub in serious need of being re-acquired, and it is just a little bit easier for me to do that if I am not in here."

"Commander, you have multiple fractures in the right humerus, and three cracked ribs. We are also concerned that you may have a concussion..."

"So my arms broken and my chest hurts. I don't have a headache and have no intention of sleeping for a good while. Can. I. Go?"

"It is against my better judgement, but yes, your arm has been set.."

"Good. Good day doctor." Makkus jumps up and heads swiftly out the door. The doctor watches him leave, shaking her head she mutters under her breath

"Ungrateful wasup..."

"What happened, Larena? Where's Ryalto?"

Kari is sitting on her bed, Larena in front of her, in the sleeping quarters. None of the other cubs are present.

"You should go eat, Kari. Ryalto has left, don't tell the others that."

"Where did he go?"

Little cub, I wish I knew... At least he's not going to the militia.

"I am not sure, they didn't tell me. Please go and eat your lunch."

"It's because of me, I didn't leave him alone. I just thought I could help him.."
She starts crying, flopping down onto her pillow.

"It is not your fault, Kari. He had to leave. He didn't have a choice in that."

"They were going to send him to the militia, weren't they? After yesterday? That's why he ran away."

Larena's expression turns to one of shock. *How does she... She **read** me!* "Yes, they were going to send him to the militia, but that is not why he left. He didn't know about that, still doesn't... But you can't tell the others that. You weren't to know that. And don't read my thoughts ever again, please."

"Sorry." Kari wipes at her eyes. "I think I will eat, now." She gets up and walks to the door.

"Thank you. I will be there in just a minute."

Kari leaves. Larena walks over to the bed across from Kari's and sits down. She reaches under it and pulls out a chest. She opens it and pulls out a red shirt, which she holds close to her chest.

Where are you going, Ryalto? Where are you headed?

7 hours. I've been going now for 7 hours and I'm already in the mountains. Boy this bike's fast.

The hoverbike is speeding about six feet above the tree tops heading up a mountain, and jerks left and right dodging the odd tree branch. As it clears the peak a lake with a cliff overlooking it appears in the distance.

Hmm, that looks like a nice place. It's getting to lunchtime, I think I'll stop there and eat.

"...I'm telling you, Ryalto went nuts. He tried to kill a bunch of the Fox last night and blew up one of the buildings. That's why the lights didn't work this morning. That's why he isn't here. He's nuts."

Kari enters a large room with several tables with benches beside them. Tarn is standing on one of the benches in the middle of the room, all the cubs give him his attention.

"How do you know that Tarn?" Herto speaks up. His ears are flat against his head, and he stares challengingly at Tarn.

"I read one of the Golds. It was all in his mind."

"Your wrong anyways, Tarn. Ryalto is no more nuts than you." Kari shouts. She crosses her arms and storms her way to the bench. She then stares at him for a second. "Wrong example. You are crazy. Ryalto should have hit you, not the wall yesterday. You're nothing but a weak minded bully!"

"Weak!? I am not weak minded!" Tarn closes his eyes in concentration. Kari reaches up and grabs his ears. She yanks him down onto the ground before he can do anything. He lies sprawled on the ground and stares in shock at her, holding onto his ears.

"One, never try to attack me that way. I am not Ryalto. Two, Ryalto left cause they were... Nevermind why he left. He left, but he didn't want to hurt anyone. And he definitely didn't try to kill anyone. Three, if you **ever** try to attack me again, I will do more than rip your ears. Understand?!" Larena enters the room.

"What is going on here?! Kari? Tarn?" She walks up to the two, and the other cubs scatter, returning to the tables. They start eating the meals.

"She attacked me! She just came up and attacked me for no reason!"

"Liar! He was telling lies about Ryalto and then he tried to attack my mind! All I did was defend myself."

"Tarn, Kari, sleeping quarters. Now!" Larena points out the door *Tarn again...*
What is the boy's fascination with hurting Ryalto?

Makkus walks to his office door. He reaches for his pocket to get his passcard, then stops. He then walks down the corridor to another door and knocks.

"Enter."

Makkus walks in. Inside is an orange fox.

"Commander Jolnas, I seem to be in need of a new passcard. Could you please see to it that my old one is invalidated in the system and get me a new one? Preferably now."

"So the kid took yours, huh? That explains some of the codes that he was accessing." Jolnas gets up and walks to a cabinet and takes out a passcard.

"Probably not gonna like this, but I just got an inventory of what the kid took. It included your TPS pistol and your Macrarri."

Makkus's ears go flat. Jolnas puts the passcard in a slot and types a few keys. He then takes it out and hands it to Makkus.

"Thank you. Please forward that inventory to me at the next convenient interval." Makkus exits.

"Teach you to leave that thing in your pocket..." Jolnas smiles and sits back down, humming something that sounds similar The Offspring - Why Don't You Get A Job.

Makkus goes back to his office and enters it. He sits down at his desk and calls up the comm.

Beep

"Comm services are currently on emergency access only."

"Command override, Makkus omega-1."

"Comm access granted"

Makkus punches in a comm number. Another gold appears on the vid screen.

"Good afternoon General. The situation has changed..."

Larena is scowling at Tarn and Kari in the sleeping quarters.

"You both know fighting is not allowed. You," she points at Tarn. "You are to report to Cmdr. Makkus. He wants to talk to you." She hands Tarn a slip of paper. "Follow the directions on this. Now go."

"But I haven't eaten my.."

"You should have thought of that before you started broadcasting what you heard. Now go!" *Maybe after spending time with Makkus, he'll understand Ryalto's fear. It should cure his attitude problem at least.* Tarn hears this thought and shudders as he walks out the door.

"Now, as for you. You are to clean this room from top to bottom. And help me clear out Ryalto's stuff. It needs to go to storage. Come on!" Kari starts making one of the beds. Larena turns away from her and puts her hand to her face.

I can't take this anymore. I can't pretend to like this anymore. I'm leaving...

Ryalto lands the hoverbike close to the cliff's edge next to a large boulder. The trees are only three yards from the cliff, and the boulder obscures the bike from being seen from any side but from the trees and directly above. He gets off and opens the bag. He takes out the spheres and puts them in the bag. He then withdraws a ration pack and the combat knife. He opens the pack with the knife and then returns the knife to the bag. He then climbs onto the boulder and starts to eat, looking out onto the lake.

Not a bad view, even with all the green... Pity plants aren't red or blue, I like red and blue. At least the water is blue... I wonder what Kari is doing? Does she miss me? Does she even know I'm gone? I miss her... Stop! Stop thinking of the past! You can't undo it, might as well get on with my life... A red mini whip circles down from one of the trees and lands in front of Ryalto. He breaks off a bit of the ration and tosses it to the whip.

Wonder what that is? All the stuff they taught me, and they didn't even teach me what the world has. Looks pretty though. Heh, red thingy and I think it's pretty. Kari was pretty... Stop!

Ryalto jumps off the boulder, landing next to the bike. The whip flies off, a small flap of flame escaping in surprise. Ryalto takes the sleep sack out of the bag and lies it beside the boulder. *Better get some sleep, don't want to crash...* He lies down and closes his eyes. *Why did I leave? Why?*

Tarn knocks lightly once on Makkus's office door. Nothing happens and Tarn knocks again, slightly louder.

"Enter.." Makkus is sitting behind his desk, reading a pad with his good hand. Tarn walks just inside the door, leaving it open.

"Tarn, isn't it? You are the one responsible for Ryalto's reaction yesterday?"

"Yyyes sir." Tarn sees the trophies on the shelf, and his eyes go wide, ears flat back.

"Calm down boy, I won't harm you... yet. Are you aware just how important Ryalto was to us? No, of course not, even with your exceptional mental gifts, you haven't been around anyone who knows that. He was one of a kind. Unique. *Irreplaceable.*" Tarn flinches at the last word. "You have set off a sequence of events that has caused him to go missing. Now you will help get him back, or you will go in his place."

"Me? Go in his place? Bbut you just said he was irreplaceable. Go where?" Tarn edges closer to the open door.

"Sit down. Now."

Tarn closes the door and goes to the seat, sliding as far back into it as possible.

"Ryalto was created by chance. An accident occurred during the production of your batch, and his tube was severely affected. None of the rest of your batch was, however. This in it's self was odd, as the nature of the accident... Well, it just should have killed the whole of your batch."

"Batch?"

"I like you, Tarn. You ask good questions. Your batch is your class. All of you were created at the same time, in a batch. Since batch sounds so... industrial, Exotica Genoworks likes to call them classes. As I was saying, you all should not exist, especially Ryalto. But you do, and He does. The accident changed Ryalto, he is not what he should have been. For start, he should have been a she."

"Is that why there is more boys than girls in my class?" Tarn's ears start to perk up a little.

"Yes. Anyway, Ryalto's genetic makeup had been changed. What's more it had been changed to something that had not been thought possible. Since no information was available to discern what this new-found DNA strings would do, it was decided to let him mature with his class - your class - and see what came up. After yesterday's incident with the wall, it was decided that Ryalto would be sent to a secure location for further analysis by Military Research. But Ryalto is not here now, and the people in MR still want a Sirac for study. They will settle for you.." Tarn's ears flatten out again. "... but would prefer Ryalto. Since you started this mess, you have this option: Find Ryalto or you go. You have one day, then the transport arrives. I will get you any equipment you need, and will accompany you at all times." He reaches into a drawer of his desk. Out comes a collar. "You will wear this. It is a homing beacon that will stun you if it you try to remove it. I will not lose another Sirac." He gets up and places the collar around Tarn's neck. Tarn flinches as the collar clicks into place.

"Do you understand?"

Tarn nods. "Good. Here is a list of items we have access to, and here is a list of items Ryalto took. I will be back in a few minutes." Makkus walks out the room, locking the door behind him. Tarn's eyes return to the statues, and then to the lists.

"No way I'm going to that research place..."

Makkus walks into the sleeping quarters. Larena holds Ryalto's box and Kari is tidying the last bed.

"Larena, a word?"

"Kari, take this to storage." Larena hands the box to Kari. Kari walks out quickly, closing the door with her tail as she leaves.

"What do you want, Commander?"

"I wish to discuss the matter of how you found me... Thank you for taking me directly to medical."

"... Commander, I wish to be frank with you. I can no longer maintain my current position in the company. I formally resign."

Makkus is caught off guard by this. "I am sorry, did you just quit?"

"Yes. I can no longer remain with the company. The violence of Ryalto's... departure has deeply affected me. I am sorry for any inconvenience this may cause, but I cannot remain here." *I can't stand this company's hypocritical nature any longer...*

"Perhaps you could transfer to another class? Or another facility? You are remarkably well qualified for this post, and it would be hard to replace you..."

"Sir, I cannot look at any of the young ones and not think of Ryalto's escape." *He looked so happy, so free...*

"I see... Very well. How exactly do you plan on leaving though? All the transports were badly damaged in the fire..."

"You said earlier that a transport was due today. I will take that." *Trying to keep me here? You little...*

"Yes, well, yes. Fine. Arrangements will be made. Do you wish to tell the class yourself? Or would you prefer.."

"I will do it. I cannot leave them without saying farewell."

"Very well then. Good luck, Larena. May you find peace and honour."

"Thank you Commander." *I will...*

Makkus leaves the room, and Kari enters. She runs to Larena and starts crying.

"You're leaving me too... Why? Please stay!" Larena takes Kari into her arms and sits down on one of the beds.

"Hush.." *Read my mind now Kari, please. I cannot tell you this aloud, they will hear...* Kari continues crying but nods her head. *Good... I have a plan. I cannot take everyone, but you can come with me...*

Makkus returns to his office. "Well? What have you decided?" Tarn looks up from the pads.

"I, uh, I have decided that Ryalto wanted to leave. He took food, bedding and transport. He does not want to come back. He also took weapons..."

"Yes, the pistol, grenades and combat knife..."

"Uh, actually I think the knife was just a tool... Not for combat. You need something to open the rations with..." Tarn's ears fold down.

"... You have a point. Good work. Do you have a list of items for us yet?"

"Just this skimmer and some scanners..."

"Good. I will add a few items to that, but good." Tarn's stomach growls. "Did you not eat?"

"I didn't have time.."

"Go and eat. I will sort this out, Meet me back here in 30 minutes."

"Yes sir." Tarn gets up and leaves quickly.

Makkus looks at the list again.

"The boy has talent... I think he'll do..."

Makkus walks back to Jolnas's office.

Tarn is sitting on one of the benches, eating a sandwich. Kari enters the room. On seeing Tarn she frowns and starts to leave the room. Tarn looks up at her.

"Please don't go. I'm sorry for what I've done."

Kari looks at him and sees the collar. "Why shouldn't I? After all you've done to Ryalto, you deserve anything you get."

"They're going after him, Kari. They're gonna make him go to the militia. If they don't find him they'll take me. That's why they put this thing on me." He points to the collar. "Please help me!"

"Then I'd better say good bye. They won't find Ryalto, he's too smart to let them find him. If he could get away once then he can get away again. He will keep out of their reach as long as they chase him, and you will go in his place. Ironic, isn't it? You will suffer the fate he would have had, and all because you wanted a laugh. I'm not hungry anymore." Kari leaves the room, slamming the door.

"Then I'll get him myself! You hear me?! I'll get him, and make him go with them!"

No one hears him.

Chapter 4 - I love the smell of wet fur in the morning, smells like Victory.

Recommended Tracks: Offspring - Living In Chaos, Linkin Park - By Myself, Travis - Side

"The transport should be here in a few minutes..."

Several fox, mainly blue and orange but for one gold, are standing outside the main building. The hanger is still standing, but the doors are no longer on it. Inside the debris has been cleared, and there is smoke damage visible along the walls. The guardhouse is also damaged, but still standing. In the distance, a transport can be seen approaching.

"Thank you everyone, but this is really not needed. I promise I will keep in touch..." Larena stands in the middle of the group.

"Nonsense, you deserve better than this. It is so sad that you are leaving, you have the best talent for dealing with young ones I've seen." The blue doctor speaks up.

"Thank you, but there are other duties you all need to attend to. I feel guilty keeping you from them." Larena starts to blush. *I can't sneak Kari out if they're here, how can I get them to leave?*

"I am sure that there are, but you have been a member of the staff here since the first classes were produced. Your class was one of the first! It's such a pity about that one..." The gold elbows the doctor. "Er, sorry."

The gold speaks up. "If you really feel guilty about us being here, perhaps we should leave. If you do feel this way, then I personally feel that my presence adds to that, and I respect you too much to allow that to happen." We see that he has a badge on his shoulder denoting that he is a geneticist.

"Thank you Derk."

The group starts to leave, all saying their farewells to Larena as they pass. The last one to leave is Derk.

"Your up to something, aren't you Larena? I have known you for the last 3 years, right before you joined EG. What do you need to be alone to do?"

"I can't tell you Derk, you might try to stop me, and see where that got us last time?" She smiles. "Besides, it's no where near as dangerous as your probably thinking." *No, it's far more dangerous than a skunk cookie... I hate having to lie to him. He's the nicest gold I've ever meet, nothing like Makkus... Probably has to do with his not being in the militia...*

"Well, what ever you do, don't be stupid, don't make a mistake, and don't.."

"...Get caught. I'll remember that. Farewell Derk."

"Farewell Larena. And good bye..." He walks back into the building. The transport pulls up the guardhouse and stops. Out comes a red fox who first looks at the hanger and then approaches Larena.

"Hmpf, Looks like someone had fun... Where are the deliveries supposed to go? Normally we'd put them in the Hanger, but..."

"Go up to the main building, the second door to the right." *Glad I asked that, and got the 'privilege' of telling them that. Sure made things easier...*

The fox gets back in the transport. Larena walks beside the transport as it heads up to the main building. The fox gets back out and another fox gets out on the other side. They start unloading the transport and two more fox come from the building to take the supplies in. Larena goes in the building and puts two bags next to the things to be loaded. The fox finish unloading the transport and start loading it.

"Are you the one we're taking back to civilisation then?"

"Yes..." She looks in one of her bags. "... Uh oh. Looks like I forgot something, I'll be right back."

"We leave in 5 minutes. If you're not back, you'll have to wait for the next transport."

"Shouldn't take me that long, It's only a family heirloom, probably left it on a shelf in plain sight. I'll be back before then, or I expect you to ditch me in this backwater." She smiles. The red fox smiles back.

"OK then."

Larena goes inside and down one level. She walks up to one of the doors marked maintenance. Opening it we see Kari with two small bags.

"You ready to go?"

"Yep. Got the bags... Where are we going?"

"As far from here as we can get. Hopefully we can find Ryalto before Makkus does."

"We do know him best." Kari grins. We now notice that the fur under her eyes are damp.

"Let's go." They both go down the hall towards the other end of the building.

Outside on the other side from the transport, there are two skimmers parked. Makkus, Tarn and five golds are standing beside them.

"The plan is simple. We three," he points to Tarn and the short Gold, "will take the first skimmer west along the same heading that the target was last seen taking, while you three will take the other skimmer further south and then turn parallel to that heading. If we do not find him before we hit Wolf territory, then we will extend our search south. Understood?" the five golds nod. "Good. We will go first, you three wait a few minutes then depart. Keep radio silence, we're too close to the wolf territories for them to learn about this escape. We will radio if we find him, and you can radio if you do, but otherwise, nothing. Oh, I want him alive. No dissentegrations. Good hunting."

Makkus, Tarn and the short Gold enter one of the skimmers and they leave. The other three golds start talking to each other.

"So, how long do you think we should wait?"

"Oh... He said a few minutes, so probably at least an hour." The gold smiles.

"Hardy har har. Want a drink?"

Both fox say yes, and he goes to the door. Upon entering he sees Larena and Kari. Larena hits him once in the jaw and he drops. She shakes her hand.

"Owww... That doesn't look half as painful on screen." She and Kari drag the fox to the nearest door, also labelled Maintenance. Larena searches him and finds a key.

"Looks like he was the pilot. That makes things easier." She reaches into one of the bags and pulls out a silver cylinder. She walks back to the exit and throws it beside the two fox, then ducks back in. A bright flash followed by a bang knocks the two fox off their feet, and they lie unconscious. The transport starts up just milliseconds after the bang, though, disguising the noise.

"Hmpf. My timings off... They must have waited for me." Larena walks up to the skimmer with one of the bags and opens the hatch. Tossing the bag inside she then turns to the door and waves Kari over. Kari runs across the short distance and tosses the bag inside. Then she walks up to one of the golds and kicks him in the groin. Larena's jaw drops.

"He's the one who locked us in the vid room three days ago." Kari shrugs. "Just felt the need to hurt him."

"Don't do that again, unless the guy deserves it." She turns away from Kari and grins. *Well, that's one less thing to teach her.* They both get in and lift off, heading south-west.

Ryalto wakes to darkness. He gets up and stretches. *How weird that the first night in two weeks that I don't dream of anything, it's when I have everything to dream for...*

He picks up the sleep sack and goes over to the hoverbike, tripping over a stone. He lands face-first next to the bike. Getting up, he dusts himself off and shivers.

Sure is cold... Should have thought of that. I hope it doesn't get colder... He opens the bag and puts the sleep sack in it. His hand brushes against the spheres.

A loud humming can now be heard. Over the ridge of the mountain a skimmer appears.

"Squid!" *They must be tracking the bike... Gotta get away from it. Gotta hide..* Ryalto starts to close the bag, but then looks at the spheres. *Hmm..* He pulls at the seat cushion of the bike and it pops up. The underside of the cushion is soft foam. He takes out the knife and spheres and starts cutting.

"Sir, the scanner's picking up a metallic reading on the top of that cliff." The gold is sitting at a control panel with a HUD visor/headset over one eye.

"Any sign of the target?" Makkus looks up from a pad he was reading. Tarn is sleeping in the seat next to Makkus.

"No sir, this valley has too much plant life, can't get a clear reading out of the Bio-sensors." He looks back at Makkus. "Do you want me to close on it?"

Makkus looks at his pad again. "... Yes, a strike craft reported seeing a hoverbike in this area a few hours ago, could have been him."

"Aye, sir."

Makkus looks at Tarn. He then reaches across with the pad and taps him on the ear. Tarn jumps awake. He stares at Makkus frightfully for a second.

"We're in a valley, Ryalto might be here. Do you sense him?"

Tarn looks at Makkus, then looks out the front of the skimmer.
"... I don't know... He might be too far away."

Makkus looks thoughtful for a moment. "Keep looking for him."
He turns back to his pad.

"Wait! He's there, next to that big rock!" Tarn points at the cliff.

Makkus puts down the pad and taps a key on the panel next to him.
"Beta, this is alpha. Target sighted..."

"...converge on these co-ordinates..."

Kari is sitting next to the panel and looks up at Larena.
"I didn't touch anything this time! I swear!"

Larena looks back at the panel.

"Squid! No, you didn't, Makkus has just found Ryalto. Hang on!"
Larena hits a few controls and the skimmer speeds towards the valley faster than sound.

Looks like they've spotted me... Well, I'm ready.

Ryalto puts the knife in the bag and tosses the bandoleer to the side. He puts the bag across his back, and climbs onto the bike. An audible pair of clicks are heard. He starts the bike and looks one last time at the skimmer.
You want me? Come and get me.

"He knows we're here." Tarn looks at Makkus.

"Oh?"

"I think he's up to something... I don't know what.."

"You're probably imagining that. Pilot, prepare to intercept. Target is going to be moving soon." He taps a button on his panel. A small turret slide out from under the skimmer's fuselage

*What is **that**? Looks like a gun of some kind...*

Ryalto hits the accelerator and the bike shoots forward. He dives towards the lake. The skimmer opens fire, blue bolts tracking towards him. He pulls up

suddenly and heads across the lake, his path erratic. *Don't shoot that blue stuff at me*

He takes one hand off the controls and pulls the TPS out of its holster. Checking the SAFE button is pressed, he returns fire.

"Squid..." The pilot presses a few buttons and the skimmer turns abruptly. A few bolts hit the skimmer, and several yellow lights start flashing.

"Keep on target!" Makkus leans forward.

Ryalto turns the bike again, dodging another set of bolts heading his way. He looks at the skimmer, then aims again. *Come on... A little closer...* He fires another volley and then turns the bike again, this time towards a river feeding out of the lake.

"Stop dodging his shots and get close to him!" Makkus glares furiously at the pilot.

"But he wants us.." Tarn starts.

"Quiet!" Makkus hits a button on the panel.

Larena's skimmer comes over the ridge and heads towards the lake.

"I see him! There's Ryalto!" Kari jumps out of her seat and points out the window.

"Sit back! And put on your belt on!" Kari sits back down and buckles the belt on her seat. She looks at the panel next to her, and sees a button flashing.

"Uh... Larena? What does 'Master Arm Switch' mean?"

Larena looks back at Kari briefly. "Where does it say Master Arm Switch?" *Are these skimmers armed?* A series of blue flashes are seen emitted from the other skimmer.

"Kari, push it and press whatever comes up on the screen next to it."

Close enough! Ryalto aims one last time and shoots again at the same time that the turret fires. This blast hits the turret of the skimmer. The turret starts spitting sparks, then explodes. One of the bolts from the turret hits the rear of the bike. The bike spins out of control, throwing Ryalto into the lake. Three seconds later the blue/green/blue sphere detonates, emitting an EMP. The EMP hits the skimmer and knocks out all the systems. It crashes into the lake and floats there, drifting slowly towards the shore. Two seconds after its brother, the other sphere detonates, destroying the bike. Ryalto hits the lake, the bag still on his shoulders.

"No!" Larena looks back at Kari. "Did you?"

"No, I haven't pressed it yet! Where is Ryalto?" She tries to see around Larena's seat but the belt restrains her. "I can't sense him anymore... Ack!"

"What!?" Larena taps one of the controls and the skimmer stops.

"Tarn! He's on the other skimmer!"

"Is Makkus still on it?" Larena taps a few of the controls. A box pops up showing information on the skimmer.

"No, he's knocked out. I think Tarn's hurt." Kari looks at the box.

"According to the scanners, There's still someone conscious down there. We can't get Tarn. I'm sorry Kari... The scanners aren't picking up any other life signs either." Larena taps a few more controls then shakes her head. "Can you sense him?" Larena looks at Kari.

"...No."

Ack! I didn't make it to the other side. Can't breath...

Ryalto starts to sink into the water, but the bag rise. Ryalto grabs onto the bag and floats to the surface. He surfaces in the river, and is pushed faster down it. Up ahead are a large boulder and some rapids. He entwines the bag in his arms

SQUID!

Ryalto hits the boulder and is knocked unconscious. He still holds onto the bag as he rushes through the rapids. The river bends and picks up speed. Ahead is a large waterfall. Ryalto goes over it.

Larena taps on the control panel and a box pops up, 'Auto-pilot Enabled'. She looks back at Kari, who is asleep. *Poor girl. Poor Ryalto. At least the militia didn't get him... I hope he's alright. I hope...* She yawns.

I hope the Mounties will help us. I don't know who else to go to, the Wolves? They won't let me keep Kari. She's like a daughter to me... She taps the control panel once more. A timer appears and she sets it.
I've lost you, Ryalto. You who I created, my little miracle. But I won't loose Kari. I won't let her be used. I will remember you, Ryalto, with her.

Several hours later a large skimmer arrives at the lake. It lands next to the disabled skimmer and a tall Gold steps out. He walks over to the skimmer and two more golds get out of the large skimmer, following him. On the other side Makkus, Tarn and the pilot are sat around a fire. Makkus sees the gold and stands, saluting. The pilot follows suit

"General, I didn't expect you to come here.."

"Can it, Makkus. You had your chance, and lost. Get in the skimmer. You will report to central command for this failure."

Makkus's ears flop. "Yes sir." He salutes once more then walks to skimmer.

The general looks at Tarn. "You must be Tarn. I've heard interesting things about you... Intel will be glad to hear your coming." He signals the two fox behind him.

"Escort the young Sirac on the skimmer, and remove that damn collar. Don't know why he's got that on him. They don't work after being submerged... You there, get on the skimmer. No sense guarding that piece of junk. A salvage squad will reclaim it tomorrow."

The general goes back to the skimmer and the rest follow him. All enter it and it departs.

Chapter 5 - Reconfiguration

Recommended Tracks: Staind - It's Been Awhile, Staind - Epiphany

Early morning. A lone black wolf walks along a river bank. Ahead he sees a grey lump half in the water. He walks over to it and sees Ryalto unconscious, one arm still submerged.

"Well what do we have here?..." He reaches down and feels for a pulse.

"Hmmm... Looks like your still living. Better get you to a doctor."

The wolf picks up Ryalto and puts him over his shoulder. A bag that was in the water is pulled out, still tied around one arm. The wolf takes the bag with his free arm and puts it on his shoulder.

"I think I know a nice place to get you fixed up... But first lets get you to my skimmer." The wolf walks into the forest.

Late morning, and a skimmer flies into a fairly large wolf city. It heads to a tall building with a landing pad on one of it's roofs. Upon landing two wolves and a Mouny head over to it carrying a grav stretcher. The black wolf gets out.

"So what did you find this time Amiz?" The Mouny speaks up.

"A half drowned cub, not sure what he is, but he's still alive. Brought him to your expert care, Charla" Amiz smiles sweetly at the Mouny.

"Flattery gets you everywhere. Come on you two! We've got an unknown with possible hypothermia and who knows what else. Let's get him into triage." The two wolves place Ryalto on the stretcher and take him in the building.

Amiz reaches into the skimmer and picks up the bag. "I found this on him, might be useful." Charla takes the bag.

"Thanks. You need to move your skimmer now, Amiz, or I'll get in trouble. See you inside." Charla runs inside.

"Like you ever get in trouble.." Amiz gets back in the skimmer and lifts it off the building.

"So, how is he?" Amiz is looking through a glass window at Ryalto. Charla is next to him with a datapad.

"He's fine. We dried him off, put some fluids in him and cleaned him up a bit. He has some bruises, but they are a bit old. Where did you find him?" She looks up from the datapad.

"You know the river that feeds out of Shiva Lake? I found him near the bend after the waterfall."

"Ack! That explains the bruising. He's lucky not to have anything broken."

Ugh.... Where am I now? Is this death? So dark... Oh! My eyes are closed...
Ryalto opens his eyes. *Where am I?* Charla enters the room.

"Good, you're awake. Welcome to Zantos. I am Doctor Charla"

"Uh, hello. What is Zantos?" *Never seen anything like her before.. What is she?*

"Zantos is a Wolf city, fairly close to Centralis for your information. Where are you from?" She looks at her datapad and takes a stylus out of her pocket.

"Where am I from?... I don't know, I just left them and they found me at that big water, then they shot at me and I shot back... Then I fell in the water." Ryalto starts shaking.

"It's alright." She reaches over and touches his shoulder. "You are safe here. I will be right back." Charla walks out the door. Ryalto looks around and sees the bag.

At least they let me keep that bag, I think..

"Looks like we got an EG escapee." Charla looks at Amiz. "What should we do?"

"I know a guy, works at a youth hostel. He could go there. They provide education and a place to stay, provided he can pass the entrance exam... How long are you planning on keeping him here? Did you ask him his name yet?"

"I plan on keeping him here overnight, just to make sure he's fine. I didn't get his name... But I did get a rundown of what happened to him. He did go over that waterfall, Amiz. He is a very lucky cub." Charla walks over to the door.

"Is it alright for me to talk to him?" Amiz walks to beside Charla.

"Don't upset him. And try not to scare him."

Charla and Amiz walk into the room.

"This is Amiz, he found you. Uh, what is your name? I need it to file some paperwork..."

Paperwork? Larena complained about paperwork, wonder why she needs my name for.. Oh! "My name is Ryalto. Uh, sorry but what are you?"

Charla grins. "I am a Mounnty, and Amiz is a Wolf. I doubt you've seen any of our kind before. Well, I have to get that paperwork sorted. Bye." She walks out, and Amiz stares after her. Turning back to Ryalto, he gulps.

"Uh, hi. Um.. Well, you know what I am, but what are you?"

"Me?!" *What am I? They always said I was a Sirac, but I'm not like the others... But I do look like the others. I must be a Sirac then. Well, at least till I find out what I really am..* "They always said I was a Sirac."

"Sirac? I think I've heard of them... A few years ago... Never mind."
Other Sirac? Great...

"Where were you heading then? You seemed to be going somewhere when I found you.."

"I just wanted to get away before I hurt someone. I think I ended up hurting the people in that skimmer... But I was heading to the mountains. I didn't want to end up in the militia, and they probably would have sent me there for running away.."

"That's ok. I have an idea. I have this friend, he takes care of cubs that have nowhere to go. I think he might be interested in you." Ryalto's ears flatten out.

His 'friend' sounds like the militia, they take and interest in strays... Amiz looks at Ryalto, perplexed. Then he remembers.

"Not that kind of interest! He just likes helping cubs! I think you'll fit in there..." Amiz walks out, chuckling to himself.

"I think I'll go talk to him right now, in fact."

Somewhere I'll fit in? Maybe I was right to dream...

The next day, outside a 6 story building. Ryalto is standing next to Amiz, who is paying a small transport. Ryalto has his bag on his shoulder and is wearing a red shirt.

"Thanks." Amiz turns to look at the building. "Here we are."

"..." *This will be my new home...*

"Let's go in." Amiz opens the door and walks in. Ryalto follows.

"What you reading there?" A brown wolf cub walks into a large room with several chairs and a sofa. On the sofa is a white female mouse reading a large book. She is grinning and mumbling words sounding like 'cute' and 'cuddly'.

"A book on Terran racoons... Why? You don't care what I read normally, Geran." The mouse closes the book, placing it on a table nearby. Geran grins.

"Oh, nothing. Oh! I heard something about a new cub coming today. Shall we go greet him?"

The mouse looks at Geran for a second.
"Ok, but if this is some joke, you are so dead..."

This place is interesting... Wonder what's in there..
Ryalto is in a corridor next to a door with a sign saying 'Main Office'. Three feet down the corridor behind Ryalto another door opens. Geran and the mouse walk into the corridor.

"SnuggleCoon!" The mouse jumps onto Ryalto and squeezes him.

"He's so soft and fuzzy and squeezy and..."

Gah! Help! Ryalto tries to crawl away, but is pinned down. He gasps for breath as the mouse squeezes him again.

"Uh, Hedtra, you might want to let go before he passes out... He's looking a bit pale." Geran walks up beside Hedtra and offers Ryalto his hand. Hedtra looks at Ryalto's face and squeaks. She lets go and starts jumping up and down.

"Snuggle 'coon! Snuggle 'coon!..."

Amiz walks out from the office. Upon seeing the bouncy mouse, he shakes his head.

"Ryalto, could you come inside please?"

Ryalto pushes himself up and dashes quickly into the office.
Crazy female... Must run far away. Far far away.

Amiz looks at Hedtra again, then at Geran.
"He's a bit shy... Try not to scare him like that, Geran."

"What did I do?" The wolf cub looks accusingly at Hedtra.

"I'm sure you planned something like this to happen. Why don't you go clean your room? Takrus said something about the state it was in the last time I was here, if your mother knew..."

"Bye" Geran runs down the corridor and around the corner.

Amiz looks one last time at Hedtra and decides not to bother. He re-enters the office.

Inside is a blue wolf sat behind a desk looking at a datapad. On the desk are several datapads, several chewed styluses and a small vid screen. Ryalto stares at the blue wolf. *Same fur pattern as Larena... But he's a wolf. Wolves sure look similar to fox...*

"Hello, you must be Ryalto. I am Takrus. Welcome to the Zantos Youth centre. If you would sit down there, you can begin answering these questions," he hands Ryalto the datapad and an unchewed stylus, "while I sort out the paperwork for you being here." He gets up and goes to leave the office. "Come on Amiz, he has to answer the questions on his own."

Questions... Ok, what's the first one? He looks at the pad. How much energy to ignite 50 kg of triflorine dicarbonite...
A smile spreads across Ryalto's face.

Geran and Hedtra are waking down the corridor. Hedtra smiles as they pass the office, and tries to look through the frosted glass.

"He's so cute and fuzzy... I think I'll call him Redshirt." Hedtra turns towards Geran. Geran raises one eyebrow and the opposite ear flattens.

"He has a name already. Ryalto."

"Does he? Ryalto, Redshirt, both start with 'r'..." Hedtra walks back into the room with chairs and grabs her book. Geran follows her, smiling and shaking his head.

"Well, either way Ryalto's going to be bunking with someone."

Hedtra flips open her book and sits down on the sofa again. "He can stay in my room, I wouldn't mind having a roommate." She looks up from the book at Geran.

"One, you've scared him enough already, I doubt he'd go in the same room as you for a while." Hedtra pouts. "And two, you know very well that they don't let boys and girls share rooms." Geran walks back to the door.

"Must you spoil all my dreams?" Hedtra goes back to her book.

"Hey, I did 'introduce' you to him! I wonder how he's doing..." Geran walks out the door. Hedtra looks up as the door shuts, then continues reading, again mumbling words sounding like 'cute' and 'cuddly'.

In the office, two hours latter. Amiz and Ryalto are sat down, Takrus is standing looking at the pad. His ears are standing upright in suprise.

"... You got 100% in the physical/chemical sciences and mathematics, but got next to nil on the history and geography questions. Under normal circumstances, you wouldn't qualify for a place here. But Amiz here tells me you escaped from EG.."

"EG?" Ryalto looks at Takrus in confusion.

"Exotica Genoworks. You didn't know who you were being held by? Interesting... Anyway, that means we can't expect you to have a normal well-rounded education. Since you seem mentally stable and are very good at those subjects you pass, we are prepared to offer you a place here."

They want me to stay...

Takrus stands there waiting. Amiz turns to look at Ryalto.

"Huh? Oh! Uh, Thank you, I would like to stay here."

"Very well then. You will have to share a room with one of the others. Geran!" Geran opens the door.

"Yes Takrus?" He has a large grin on his face.

"You're eavesdropping just earned you a roommate. Ryalto, this is Geran. His mother works in another system as a Terraforming Engineer, not a suitable place for youngsters. Geran is staying with us as he has no-one else to watch him and is quite intelligent," Geran's grin gets wider, "though he does have the tendency to cause mischief. Geran, why don't you show Ryalto your room?" Geran takes Ryalto by the hand and drags him out the door.

"Hi, do you like hoverbikes?..."

The door shuts. Amiz reaches for the bag and pulls out the combat knife.

"This was the only weapon found on him when I brought him in. I would appreciate if you kept it for him till he is... mature enough for the responsibility of it."

Takrus looks at the knife.

"Sure, not a problem. I'm doing something similar with a dagger of Geran's, used to belong to his father." He takes the knife and puts it in a drawer.

"Thank you. Well, I must be off. I have important business in Centralis, and I'm already gonna be late for it." He walks to the door.

"Look after him, Takrus."

"I always do." Amiz walks out the door.

Takrus sits down and looks at the knife, tapping his fingers on it. "Interesting person, Ryalto. Very interesting... I wonder what you will do..."

What Dreams May Come

Recommended Tracks: Garbage - The Trick is to Keep Breathing, Garbage - Push It

9 Years Later

Ryalto is standing in a line at Centralis spaceport. On one shoulder is a beat-up bag that on closer inspection bears a small barely-cleaner patch the same shape as the EG logo. Beside him are a tall brown wolf and a white mouse. The line moves forward a few feet then stops. Ryalto starts twitching his tail.

Why can't we get moving? All this time standing around, the shuttle's supposed to leave in 30 minutes...

The wolf looks at the front of the line and sighs. "Ryalto, you know when we said we would see you off? I don't think we will be."

"Geran, you are going to jinx me if you don't keep quiet." Ryalto looks at Geran. "I'm already going to be late to the academy as it is." He glares at the mouse.

"Will you please stop that? How was I to know that that application was yours? It was just on the table..."

"With my name on it and it was almost finished, Hedtra. You have no idea how hard it was to get a second application..." The mouse's face drops. Oh crud, not the waterworks..

"Hedtra, why don't you go see what's holding up the line?" Geran winks at Hedtra.

Huh? What's Geran up to? Hedtra walks towards the front of the line, out of site.

"You really should go easier on her, Red. She really cares about you, and it was and accident."

"Yeah, but she's always sort of gave me the creeps... I don't know why, she's nice and all..."

"Probably has something to do with how you two met." Geran grins.

"Which I will get you back for." As soon as you get back... Oh are you in for a shock, Mister Prankster. Hope you like my 'redecorations'. "So, you never told me how your mother's doing. Did she get that promotion?" Ryalto shifts the bag on his shoulder.

"Yes, but I don't think I'll be seeing her as soon as she thought. The project was having some problems, not quite sure what... But you'll be in the system. Be my little spy?"

"Not little, but sure. Might as well, your mother was always nice to me." Always nice, like a mother... Don't go there Ryalto, you don't need to...

Geran notices Ryalto's face turn sour.

"You want to tell me something?" Hedtra walks back.

"It's some Mouny holding everyone up, he's being overly thorough... But they're gonna open another desk to help clear everyone." She looks at Ryalto, then at Geran. "What were you talking about?"

"Just stuff, don't you two have to go to that viewing..."

Hedtra looks at the chrono on the wall and squeaks. "Geran, we gotta leave in 5 minutes, or we'll miss the shuttle to Avistar!"

"Hedtra, the shuttle is just across the terminal, we won't be late." He takes a small package out of his pocket. He hands it to Ryalto. "Here, we got this for you, sort of a good luck gift."

Wonder what's inside? He starts to open it as the line starts moving again.

"Uh, thanks. I'll open it on the shuttle, since it looks like I'm actually gonna get on it." He smiles and puts the package in his bag. Then he turns to Hedtra and hugs her.

"Sorry for the grief I gave. I hope you get that job on Avistar..." *I must be nuts, I'm hugging Hedtra... Well, beats being smothered by her... ACK!* Hedtra hugs back, stronger than one would expect from one of her build.

"Good luck. Write to us!" Hedtra lets go and steps back.

"Good luck Red. Remember all the tricks I taught you..."

"I will." *And so the learner becomes the master... You will be proud, as soon as you get back... Ow, my ribs hurt.* He rubs his chest as Geran and Hedtra walk off. The line moves on.

Mars, fourth planet from Sol. Only a short hop to Earth, homeworld of the Humans. Supposed to be a few humans on Mars, wonder how many? Must be more than that pilot said... I'll have to get some Earth stuff for Geran and Hedtra... A big stuffed plushie Raccoon for Hedtra, that should keep me safe next time I'm around her. He smiles. The line ends, facing two desks, one with a short Mouny and the other with a short wolf.

The Mouny finishes with the wolf standing in front of him. "Next," he says in a bored tone. Ryalto walks up to the Mouny. "Papers, please." He takes out a pack of papers and hands them to the Mouny.

The Mouny looks at the papers and frowns. "These papers are for a minor. No minors allowed on this fight un-accompanied."

Here it goes again...

"No, those are for me."

The Mouny looks at Ryalto, and frowns.

"If you are accompanying the minor, I need your papers."

Ugh! "Let me make this **very** clear to you. I. Am. The. Only. One. Boarding. Those papers," he taps them, "are mine."

The Mouny's face twists in confusion.

"You cannot use another's papers to board this shuttle..."

This is ludicrous... "Stop. Stop right there. Go get your supervisor, and while you're at it, go get your head examined." Ryalto's tail starts twitching aggressively. *Why do all the idiots in the world work as clerks? And why do I always end up dealing with them?*

The Mouny backs up in shock and runs quickly through a door. He returns a few minutes later with a wolf. The wolf's expression is that of disbelief.

"What seems to be the problem, Mister..."

"Ryalto. Your clerk seems to think I am a Minor. I have tried to explain it to him, but..." Ryalto shakes his head, tail still twitching.

The wolf looks at the papers, then at Ryalto. "Are you a..."

"EG creation? Yes." The wolf looks at the papers again and then hands them back.

"Sorry for the inconvenience. Please have a nice journey." She turns to the Mouny.

"You..." She grabs the Mouny and drags him back through the door.

Ryalto puts the papers away and walks up the ramp to the shuttle. He stops half way and looks back. *I'm not saying good bye... I will return here. Some day...* He walks onto the shuttle.

Hmpf... 20 hours just to get in system, and another who-knows-how-long to Mars... I wonder what's in that package. He pulls it out of his bag. Tearing it open, he lays it on his lap. It is two long, thin cuboid blocks stuck to a larger block, their long sides in an 'L' shape. He pulls on one of the blocks and it extends from the others, a strong, thin, rigid membrane extruding between them. Pulling the other one gives a similar result, but with a shorter membrane. A small button is now visible on the inside of the centre block.

What is this? Geran must have made it... He touches the button, and the long membrane lights up, displaying a datapad style screen.

"It's a datapad! But why the two membranes?..." The second membrane lights up, displaying a Qwerty style keyboard. "Cute, Geran must have remembered my classes..." *This will come in handy... I wonder what's on it.. No, I'll save exploration for later.* He taps the button again and the membranes switch off. He collapses the blocks together and puts the datapad back in his bag. He sits back and looks out the window.

I have come so far... From Larena and Kari and Tarn to Amiz and Geran and Hedtra... Not a bad trade there, Tarn for Hedtra. Why did I leave there though? I didn't have it so bad... That crack in the wall. How did I do that? I haven't ever been able to repeat it... Never could. Must have been faulty concrete. Oh... Why? Not even Tarn was reason enough to leave. I could have lived on, learned to ignore him. I learned to ignore Hedtra's fascination with me. I don't know. I just don't know... Why? EG was good, I was taken care of. Why leave? Zantos was good enough, why go to Mars? Could have gone to Avistar with Geran and Hedtra... I must be destined to go somewhere else.... No other reason. So where? Earth? What's there at Earth? Humans... But there are humans at Mars, a few at least... Hmpf. ...I miss Larena, and Kari.... What happened to you two? Larena's probably still at EG, teaching who knows what. If she survived the plague... Kari... What about you? You have to do those 20 years... Only 8 would have been passed by now. I hope you're alright. I hope you lived, are fine. I hope I meet you again some day... I hope... Ryalto falls asleep.

Don't Walk Away

Inspired by Oasis - Don't Walk Away

Kari

Stupid chemistry, such a stupid subject. It's not hard, just stupid. Triflorine dicarbonite. Pfbt. Easy... So just how much energy does it need again?...

"Thanks for the answer, cannon fodder."

Huh? Tarn! Leave Ryalto alone!

"Why can't you let me be, Tarn?"

Make me!

"Why don't you make me?"

You little.... You asked for it!

"Shut up Tarn!" Kari gets up. *Leave him alone! or I'll...*

"Stay out of this Kari," Tarn turns towards her, "unless there is something you want to tell us about you two?"

You! You...

Ryalto rises quickly out of his seat, running out of the room.

Me what? Nya!"Just as I thought." Tarn sits back down, smiling.

Ryalto, stop! Wait up! Kari follows him out into the corridor. *Damn Tarn... Why can't he leave Ryalto alone, he has it hard as it is.* "Ryalto, wait up!" Ryalto runs under the stairwell, and Kari walks up to him. She sees him sitting against the wall. *Youngest of us, and he can't mind talk. Why can't he mind talk? I'll have to ask Larena about that...*

"Why does he do that? Why can't he leave me alone? Why don't you leave me alone?" *...He hates me. He just wants me to suffer. Why won't he just leave me alone. Why can't I ignore him?*

He doesn't hate you... But you can't hear me, can you. Oh brother, I wish I could help you....

Tarn

Heh, that was too easy. He's such a baby. Don't know why they keep him with us, they should send him to one of the younger groups. So what if he's smart, he can't cut it with us..

Larena walks in. *Uh oh, just act natural, she can't know what's happened, she can't read us...*

But I can, Tarn. "They went out."

"Herto, where did they go?"

"They went out, Larena. Ryalto got upset and ran out. Kari followed him." *You shouldn't have upset Ryalto, Tarn. Nothing good can come of this for you...*

Oh shut it!

"Tarn, when I get back, we are having a little talk."

Kari

Please calm down Ryalto...

"Just leave me alone. I don't belong here. Just leave me alone!"

Brother, please... "Ryalto, calm down. I just want to help you!" Kari reaches out to Ryalto, concern in her eyes. But on placing one hand on his shoulder, Ryalto jumps back from her.

"Don't help me! Your helping just makes it worse! Don't you see? I can't even defend myself from Tarn." Ryalto walks away, pointingly avoiding Kari's reach.

Managing to grab Ryalto again as she steps up to him, Kari says "You are not going into the militia, only dumb violent cubs get sent there." *Brother... Please! ... Huh? Wha?*

"**Don't touch ME!**" Ryalto punches the wall with his left fist, leaving a large dent with cracks. Shocked by his violence, Kari backs away, and stands staring as Ryalto collapses on the floor at Larena's feet.

I couldn't read him... I didn't even know he was gonna hit me.

"Kari, call medical. Tell them to send someone up here." Lorena knells to examine Ryalto.

Kari turns, the task giving her something to do to distract her. She runs back to the room and opens a panel by the door, revealing a comm panel.

"Hmpf. Bet he broke his arm doing that" Tarn says as Kari passes by him to hit a button on the comm panel.

*His arm isn't even scratched... How did he **do** that?*

"Larena, I couldn't read Ryalto..." Kari mumbles. *Oh, Ryalto. Why?*