

## Hearts of Tin

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/13221363) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/13221363>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Mature</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings</a>
Category:	<a href="#">M/M</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Shadowhunters (TV)</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">Magnus Bane/Alec Lightwood</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Alec Lightwood</a> , <a href="#">Magnus Bane</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Other Background Characters - Freeform</a> , <a href="#">Alternate Universe - Space</a> , <a href="#">Cyborg Alec Lightwood</a> , <a href="#">Captain Magnus Bane</a> , <a href="#">Magnus Bane Is Still A Warlock</a> , <a href="#">Space Politics</a> , <a href="#">Unresolved Sexual Tension</a> , <a href="#">Pining</a> , <a href="#">Enemies to Lovers</a> , <a href="#">Alternate Universe - Games Of Command Fusion</a> , <a href="#">Space Opera</a> , <a href="#">Battle Couple Magnus Bane/Alec Lightwood</a> , <a href="#">Cyborgs</a> , <a href="#">IN SPACE!</a>
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of <a href="#">In Command</a>
Stats:	Published: 2018-01-01 Updated: 2019-01-10 Words: 34,377 Chapters: 13/18

# Hearts of Tin

by [Pameluke](#)

## Summary

The universe isn't what it used to be. With the new Alliance between the Clave and the DownWorlder Association, Captain Magnus Bane finds himself serving with his former nemesis, biocybe Admiral Alec "Tin Soldier" Lightwood, while hiding his true identity. When a mysterious organization called The Circle leaves a trail of death and destruction, Magnus will have to figure out how dodgy The Clave really is, and whether Lightwood will remain The Clave's loyal cyborg, or if he'll break his programming and follow his heart.

## Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

# Chapter 1

## Chapter Summary

In which Magnus gets an assignment and is welcomed to the Alicante.

### **DOWNWORLD ASSOCIATION EMBASSY TO THE ALLIANCE - ADMIRAL LUKE GARROWAY'S OFFICE**

Magnus taps his fingers on Luke's desk. He just can't believe this. "I'm to be the Captain of the Alicante? The Nephilim flagship?" He wants to ask more, but he also doesn't want to jinx it. The Alicante is the pinnacle of Nephilim technology and he can't wait to get his hands all over her. Which is precisely why he doesn't trust this. "What's the catch?"

Luke frowns. "The Admiral and half of his crew will stay on board. You'll have the helm, but he'll be watching your every move."

Magnus blinks. Almost feels his glamour drop in surprise. The Admiral... It can't be. "Admiral as in Admiral Lightwood? The Tin Soldier Lightwood? The best cyborg the Clave ever built? This must be a trap."

"Remember, Magnus, we're allies now. The idea is to encourage mutual cooperation by mixing the fleet and its personnel. You were specially requested to serve as captain on the Alicante."

Alarm bells are going off inside Magnus' head. "Specially requested? By whom?"

Luke grimaces. "We're not sure, but they must be high up in the Clave. They'd never allow you access to the Alicante otherwise."

Fuck. They know. They must know. "Definitely a trap then," Magnus says.

Luke nods. "There's a high possibility of that, yes. But you'll be on board the Alicante, in the constant company of the Admiral, who's been privy to every strategy the Nephilim have concocted these last 10 years. He's both their greatest achievement and their greatest weapon."

"So it's both a trap and an opportunity."

"Exactly. So, your orders are to serve the Alliance Fleet as the Captain of the Alicante, to patrol the 26th squadron. Off the record, your mission is to figure out how Lightwood's cybernetics work and what his weaknesses are, figure out how that ship managed to escape us

for almost two decades, and stay abreast of any unsanctioned missions the Clave might be doing on their own. Understood?"

Magnus nods and stands up. "Understood, sir." He's nearly at the door when Luke adds another off the record order. "If they find out who you really are, Magnus, you're on your own. We can help Magnus Bane, but we can't help The Warlock. So don't let the Admiral find out."

Magnus grimaces but salutes. He figured that one out on his own. If Lightwood finds out Magnus Bane is the same person as The Warlock, who is single-handedly responsible for the magical destruction of several Nephilim Ground Bases and troops, he'll be dead in the blink of an eye. No trial, no judge or jury, but a straight-up execution. The Nephilim might hate Downworlders, but they truly abhor Warlocks, especially a Warlock Merc who has humiliated them on more than one occasion. Despite the Accords, there's still a price on his head, and since his crimes date from before his service as an officer of the DWA, there's nothing Magnus or Luke can do about it.

He still can't believe he's about to serve on the Alicante, be in control of her, all while being watched by the incredibly attractive, stubborn, emotionally repressed, half robotic Alec Lightwood. The Tin Soldier himself.

Magnus always did love a challenge.

## **ONE WEEK LATER - ALLIANCE STATION DOCKING BAY**

He gets to handpick his crew, which means Raphael is waiting for him at the shuttle that'll bring them to the Alicante.

"This is a trap," the ever-upbeat Raphael greets him. Magnus pats him on the arm in comfort. Raphael has been his second in command for ages and has always excelled at seeing the worst-case scenario. It's why Magnus keeps him around—no need to worry if someone else always does the worrying for you.

"We're at peace," Magnus tries. Raphael rolls his eyes. "We're setting a trap right back," Magnus adds. "Report on the crew?"

"We got everyone approved without a hitch, no questions asked. Same with our equipment. Standard checks for dangerous explosives and contraband material, but they didn't even confiscate our communication technology."

Magnus frowns. He has no idea what the Clave is playing at. He doesn't understand why they'd request him specifically to serve under Lightwood. It doesn't make any sense. Raphael continues his report while they dock the shuttle. "Nothing untoward detected in the crew's quarters, but then we're not sure what Lightwood's cybernetics are actually capable of, especially not regarding wiretaps. Who knows what happens if he plugs himself into the ship."

Magnus hums. He has only met Admiral Lightwood a couple of times. The first time he was still a Lieutenant and they were technically still at peace. Two times they met while they were at war, and Magnus was shuttling refugees. Once when the Accords were signed. Lightwood makes a tall and imposing figure, face always stern and serious, pose never at ease. There are so many rumors floating around about the Tin Soldier. That he is more machine than man, that he was born without emotions, while others claim they are mechanically suppressed. That he can shoot lasers out of his eyes, control ships with his mind.

Magnus only believes what he has seen, and what he has seen so far is a man with a bad mood, a good haircut, and nothing showing on his face that can be read. Magnus had stolen two ships of refugees from under his nose, and yet on screen, Lightwood had merely observed the decoy ship, inspected the code, and looked at the camera broadcasting all of that to Magnus. He'd saluted and left the ship. Magnus had dreamed of his eyes for weeks. Sometimes he still dreams about them.

And now he is supposed to be captain of the Alicante, while Lightwood, now Admiral Lightwood, watches his every move.

Magnus shivers. He might be biting off more than he can chew. "How is the Nephilim crew? Any problems there?"

Raphael snorts. "There's a lot of distrust, but so far we haven't run into any trouble."

"They've been friendly?"

Raphael snorts again. It really isn't a becoming sound. "They're Nephilim, of course they're not friendly. They're all very much by the book. All tall and imposing. But they've been helpful and they've obviously been ordered to be courteous."

Magnus frowns again. If he's not careful his brows will be stuck like this. He hasn't spent much thought on how he'll deal with the Nephilim crew, now under his command, but he has never had trouble managing a crew before. In the end, all a crew wants is a well-run ship that finishes missions. Magnus might be unorthodox, but he gets the job done, with very little casualties.

The shuttle docks the Alicante and Magnus feels the familiar thrill of boarding a new ship. He wonders how she flies. How quick she'll be to respond to his every command.

They're greeted by docking personnel, unfamiliar faces except two of his own crew. He waves and they both grin back. The Nephilim freeze in their actions, but don't otherwise react. Magnus has no idea how he is going to survive amongst these people. He can't imagine being this serious and stoic all the time. He wonders how much of it is Nephilim nature versus edicts of the Clave.

At the end of the docking station, a welcome-committee awaits them. In front is the Admiral himself, tall and imposing. Magnus puts a little swagger in his step. It won't do to be intimidated already.

The Admiral doesn't smile, doesn't hold out his hand. He does give a slight nod of his head, looks Magnus up and down slowly. "You're here," he says rather quietly. And then, "Thank you for granting my request and accepting this position."

"Glad to be here," Magnus says. Wait, what did Lightwood just say?

Unaware that he's just rocked Magnus' understanding of the Universe and their respective places in it, Lightwood continues, "I'll show you to your quarters."

The Admiral was responsible for his presence on the Alicante? Had personally requested him? That makes even less sense than the Clave wanting him on board. The man hates him.

"Dismissed," Lightwood says to Raphael, who scowls but lets it be. Magnus follows Lightwood on auto-pilot. There is something fishy going on, and he is going to give his all to finding out what.

The ship is as sleek and impressive on the inside as she is on the outside. Magnus can't resist stroking his fingers on her hallway sides. She's a marvel of Clave technology, and he is going to take care of her. If Lightwood notices his sentimentality, he doesn't comment, face as stern and blank as ever.

The elevator is as spacious as they can get on a spaceship, and yet Magnus is acutely aware of the tall, looming figure of Lightwood next to him. It feels like his eyes are burning on the side of his head, and his body seems to give off way more heat than regular humans do. Maybe a side-effect of the cybernetics? You can't see any of them on the outside. Lightwood looks like a normal human being, if not for the permanent emotionless state of his face.

"I hope you are comfortable here," Lightwood says, once they've entered the Captain's quarters. Which turn out to be the most luxurious quarters Magnus has ever seen. And he's been undercover on a Harem Ship for three rotations. The plush sofa, the draperies, the ornaments—are those red satin sheets he can see on the bed?

Nothing at all like what he'd expected from the famous Clave austerity.

"I had it adapted to something more fitting to Downworlder preferences," Lightwood explains. There's something in the way he holds his shoulders that's different. Less confident? Magnus can't believe Lightwood is insecure about this of all things.

But the rooms look quite comfortable. "I'm sure it'll be fine," he says. "Show me to the Bridge?" Lightwood nods, looks around the quarters one last time and proceeds into the hallway.

The Bridge is obviously busy, but everyone stands at alert once the "Captain on deck" is announced. Simon and Maia smile and wave, but most other faces are unfamiliar. A ship the size of the Alicante simply needs thrice the people that Magnus had needed on the Pandemonium. For a moment he feels severely outclassed. Then Lightwood comes to stand next to him, steady and warm and serious, and Magnus feels like himself again.

"I'm sure you're all familiar with Magnus Bane, formerly Captain of the DA Pandemonium. He served well during the War, and was a worthwhile adversary. Personally, I prefer him on our side, where I'm sure he'll prove himself again in this new Alliance. It was an honor serving with you this past decade, and I'm sure you'll honor me by serving Captain Bane with the same dedication and skill as you served me."

For a moment, Magnus is stunned. Lightwood keeps surprising him, keeps throwing him for a loop, and it leaves Magnus unbalanced. Cyborgs aren't supposed to be surprising, they are supposed to be perfectly predictable machines.

The crew is looking up at him expectantly and Magnus knows he needs to say something. Something not about their dastardly attractive and confounding Admiral.

"Hi," he says with a little wave. "I still can't quite believe I was outrunning your gunners a year ago, and here I am on the Bridge of the Alicante. She's a marvel and I can't wait to get my hands on her." He bites back a remark about wet dreams and her engines right on time, but beside him, Lightwood arches his brow, so Magnus feels admonished anyway.

He clasps his hands behind his back and clears his throat. "I'm sure we'll need to get used to one another—a new commanding style always takes some adjusting—but rest assured I'll do my best to be worthy of your service and the Alicante."

He looks at the expectant faces in front of him, feels the steady warmth of Lightwood next to him, and suddenly believes, with a strength that surprises him a little, that he can do this. Whatever the Clave's master plan might be, whatever Lightwood throws at him, he's got this. He knows how people work, he knows how ships work. He's great at getting the best out of both.

He'll figure out Lightwood eventually as well.

## Chapter 2

### Chapter Summary

In which there's death, arguments and no apologies whatsoever.

#### 4 MONTHS LATER - CAPTAIN MAGNUS BANE'S OFFICE

“Magnus, you need to do something, we can’t just leave!” Cat enters Magnus’ office in a flurry of rage and indignation. “This was a serious outbreak of *something*, and I haven’t figured out yet what caused it. All those deaths, an entire station, and we’re just going to leave?! Over my dead body.”

Magnus sighs. He understands Cat’s feelings on the matter. She’s a medic in heart and soul and never takes deaths lightly—even if these didn’t technically happen on her watch—so finding Cartha Hub completely devoid of life had been a severe blow. He’d known she’d show up in his office the moment he’d seen the notice of departure.

“I’ll see what I can do,” he tells her, “but you know as well as I know that arguing with the Admiral is like arguing with a Barbeteen smuggler; it’s completely useless.”

Cat snorts, more out of fury than amusement. “Thanks for trying. If anyone can change his mind, it’s you.”

Magnus isn’t so sure. He’s been serving under the Admiral for four months now and he hasn’t won a single argument yet. The man is an immovable object, no matter what Magnus throws at him. He has tried everything: using his charm, being serious and overprepared, being as outrageous in his suggestions as possible; nothing really changes the outcome of their arguments. He hasn’t lost them all either: most of the time Magnus barely avoids yelling at Lightwood while stating his case, gets a reasonably well-argued argument in response that takes the wind out of his sails, which makes him end the whole thing with a frustrated joke at both their expense. Somehow this mostly results in compromises and slightly altered orders. Not enough to deviate from Lightwood’s original plans, but enough to show he at least listened to Magnus.

It works for them, more or less, and if he is honest, no other officer would condone Magnus’ behavior and against-regulations outfits and decorum. No other officer has ever tempted Magnus to commit murder this much either, so Magnus figures he deserves to lash out occasionally.

The Alicante however, is a dream of a ship and if not for the Admiral, Magnus is probably the happiest he’s ever been. Even Lightwood isn’t necessarily terrible, he’s just very, very different and Magnus can never quite forget they’ve been at war for the larger part of their



acquaintance. They're cordial when they're not arguing, they work together decently enough. Fuck, lately they even drink coffee while they discuss orders and shipments, but they're still fundamentally different. No matter how long they work together, no matter that they are officially allies now, there still isn't really any trust between them.

So Magnus is pretty sure he's going to disappoint Cat, even if he'll try his best to convince Lightwood.

He makes his way to the Bridge, where Lightwood is overseeing the preparations for traversing open space.

“Captain,” Lightwood says, arching his brow. His eyes linger on Magnus’ shirt, which is definitely out-of-regs and says ‘*I can be your bi-lot, baby*’ under a spaceship leaving a rainbow-colored smoke-trail. It's one of his oldest shirts, the fabric softened by age. Cat isn't the only one shaken up by all the death they found in Cartha Hub, he figures some comfort is his due.

“My shift isn’t starting for four more hours,” Magnus says. Always better to start their arguments with a different argument.

“Officer Loss can yell as hard as she wants, we’ve got our orders. Lift-off in three.”

Or not. “Sir, the loss of life on Cartha Hub was very disruptive. We found no survivors, and all victims showed hitherto unseen symptoms. Cat fears for an unknown outbreak which might spread through the Fleet as we speak. It would be wise to remain so she can finish her research.”

Lightwood doesn't sigh, nor does he grunt or frown. As usual, he doesn't show any kind of emotion. Almost sixty dead and the Admiral hasn’t flinched even once. Instead, he folds his hands together. “The clean-up crew from Arbath II arrived six hours ago. We gave them all necessary information, didn’t we?”

Magnus nods. No use in disparaging the work of his own crew. “We gave a full report.”

“Loss did a full sampling of every victim, as I requested?”

She would have done a full sampling whether Lightwood ordered her or not, so of course she had. “She did,” is all Magnus says.

“Last I checked, The Alicante had the best on-ship medical research facility in both the Clave and DWA fleet.”

Every time Magnus beats Cat at cards she tells him that the only reason she continues to serve with him is that precise research facility. “She does.” He can't even hide the pride in his voice. The Admiral might not feel like one of his own people and he'll probably never will but the ship... Magnus loves the ship.

“So Loss has all data and equipment she needs and there’s no reason why we should be in the way of the cleanup crew. We’re no longer useful here. Our mission is to patrol the 26th

squadron, which we left to answer this distress-call. It's time to return to our post."

Magnus wants to argue, both for Cat and his own sense of honor. It feels wrong to leave the dead without any answers, leave their last rites into the hands of others. The Alicante found them too late to change their fate, they should bear the responsibility. But the Admiral isn't wrong either. It *isn't* their responsibility. The Alicante is a warship and belongs on the border, patrolling. Still, the way Lightwood just stands there, unmoving and unmovable, talking about orders and samples as if there aren't people involved doesn't sit right with Magnus. So he does what he always does in situations that make him uncomfortable; he makes a joke out of it.

"I should have known a man without a heart wouldn't care about the dead either," Magnus says and immediately regrets it.

For a second he thinks he sees hurt flash in Lightwood's eyes, but that can't be true—he doesn't have the necessary programming for that.

"I expect you at your post in T-2 hours," Lightwood says. "Dismissed." No use of Magnus' last name in their usual almost ritual, no invitation for coffee while they go over reports... Magnus feels thoroughly dismissed. Maybe he has fucked up. He should probably apologize.

Magnus doesn't mean it either. He isn't entirely sure how a biocybe works but he is pretty sure they still need a human heart. Even with all his technology, he's still part human, or well, part Nephilim. He's still part person.

Lightwood is a good Admiral too. He isn't friendly or kind or in any way emotional, but he is fair and takes care of his crew and the ships under his command. Magnus likes working with him. If he's honest with himself, despite not quite trusting him, Magnus likes him. As a person.

Magnus freezes for a second. Shit.

Unless of course, Lightwood and the Clave are hiding something. He doesn't think Lightwood personally has anything to do with what happened at Cartha Hub, but he could always be covering something up for someone else. He walks on, thinking of possible scenarios the Clave might want to cover up.

A gas leak caused by negligence, a food poisoning caused by spoiled rations, skimping on the construction materials of the station itself... So many things can go wrong on small stations like this.

Lightwood hadn't wanted to respond to the distress call in the first place, didn't want to leave their post. Which is ridiculous, since no one on the Alicante even knows why they are patrolling the 26th squadron in the first place, not even Magnus.

Except for providing some technical aid to two broken down freighters, they haven't encountered anyone unexpected for six months.

The longer Magnus thinks about it, the more suspect Lightwood's behavior seems to be. By the time he reaches his office, Magnus is positively convinced Lightwood must be hiding something, and he knows just the way to find out what. It'll be risky, but the best plans always are. No more of this liking business. They'll only need to wait for two shifts to pass so the Alicante is comfortably on its way again. Magnus cracks his fingers in excitement—it has been too long since he'd had to finagle something, this will be fun.

He refuses to think about the apology he wanted to make, nor about the look on Lightwood's face.

# Chapter 3

## Chapter Summary

In which there's conspiring, swooning and alleged breaking and entering.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

### MEDBAY - CATARINA LOSS' OFFICE

"I think we've been looking at this wrong," Magnus says to Raphael and Cat. "We've been looking at whatever might have caused the deaths, for signs of disease or decay. But I think we need to look for what else was out of the ordinary. If there's foul play involved in whatever caused this, we need to find out why Cartha Hub was targeted. Who didn't belong there? Who had something to gain? What was wrong with the picture if you look beyond the fact that everybody was dead. "

Cat frowns at him. She's still angry, fury obvious in the way she's aggressively browsing through files on her data-deck. "Everybody being dead is precisely what's wrong."

Raphael shakes his glass at her. "You're being too emotional about this. We need to stop asking how, but start asking who and why."

Cat grumbles under her breath but squares her shoulders a second later. "Mourning is important, so my emotions are justified, we're not Nephilim."

"Exactly," Raphael says. "So why were there three Nephilim civilian bodies amongst the dead? Cartha Hub is a DWA settlement, and Nephilim civilians don't travel unescorted. So who were they and what were they doing?"

Catarina immediately selects the files of the three Nephilim. "The preliminary examination showed the same cause of death as the other victims. There's nothing particularly notable about them, all three of them fall within the expected values for civilian Nephilim health, they all had a round rune on their neck, the woman had a healed fracture in her left arm, probably a childhood injury-"

"They had a rune?" Raphael interrupts her. "Nephilim civilians don't have runes."

Magnus perks up. This might be the clue they've been waiting for, the sign that something truly is suspect about this. It's not enough evidence to warrant putting forward a motion of distrust, but it's enough he won't get demoted for snooping around. It's worth the risk. "I think it's time we take a closer look at what the Clave's up to. Something fishy is going on

here, and it's our job to figure out what. The Alliance can't work if the Clave is not honoring the Accords."

Raphael nods, his posture straight and on full alert. "The Matrix Machiavelli, sir? Or maybe the Dump Slump?"

Cat rolls her eyes, but Magnus just grins. He'll be forever grateful he has his friends to count on for his many schemes. "I think the Admiral warrants a Sovontan Flytrap, but with a twist. Cat, darling, can you give me something that would make it seem like I'm seriously ill?"

Cat frowns. "Demon Pox ill, or Ferventulan Flu ill?" she asks.

"Something that'll make it believable I'm out of commission for two shift rotations at least. One to get into the Admiral's cabin, one to get a first glance at the data."

Cat grins and Magnus immediately steps back. That glint in her eyes is something he's learned to fear. He'll probably regret this.

"I've got just the thing," Cat says and promptly hits him with an injector.

## **SECOND DECK - AN HOUR LATER**

Magnus regrets every life-choice that has brought him on the Alicante, about to risk his life by breaking into the Tin Soldier's cabin. If he doesn't die of whatever it is that Cat has injected him with first. "I'd thought I'd said it had to be fake," Magnus groans into his comm-link.

Cat laughs like the manic, evil, awful friend she is. "I thought you said it had to be believable."

He'll kill her. If he survives this.

The floor looks so nice and cool. If he just lies down and not move ever again, he'll be the happiest warlock to ever live.

"Are you ready for the inspection of sector 3a?" Lightwood asks, coming out of nowhere. A man made out of metal shouldn't move this quiet. He's backlit by the bright lights of the hallway, the brightness forming a halo around his head. He looks like an angel, come to absolve Magnus from all of his pain.

"I look like a what?" Lightwood asks. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," Magnus says, sauntering past the Admiral. He will saunter if it is the last thing he does, no matter how much his muscles protest against moving at all.

"You don't look fine," Lightwood says. He's the worst. He never gives up. Magnus hates that. "Was it something you ate? Something wrong with the rations?"

“Maybe you should inspect the rations instead, and leave me be,” Magnus snaps.

Lightwood looks hurt. Magnus keeps hurting him, and Lightwood cannot even be hurt. Magnus is the worst. He's a terrible being. Magnus should apologize, he needs to atone for before as well, he owes Lightwood so many apologies... And he would! He would definitely apologize this time, if he didn't fear he'd start puking if he spoke another word. So he shakes his head, which is a terrible idea, and continues walking towards sector 3a. After three steps, however, he stumbles and falls backward, only to bump into something warm and steady.

There are arms around him, bracing him, and fuck, he's bumped into a person. A person with the best body Magnus has ever fallen against. He should fall more often. Though maybe not when he's near dead with fever.

He looks up and sees Lightwood's face, eyes worried. It's such a lovely face. Such a shame he's all cybered up. Although now that he's seeing the Admiral's body up close, it doesn't feel very robotic nor cybernetic. Just very human, very warm, very male... very nice.

“Magnus?” Lightwood asks.

Magnus smiles. It's so nice hearing his name from those lips. He should investigate the Admiral's body now that he's in his arms. For science, of course. For the greater good of the Alliance.

Lightwood lifts him up. Fuck, he's strong. “Med bay, I need an emergency evac on my location, now!” he orders through his comm-link.

Magnus can't believe the Admiral is carrying him bridal style. He wishes he wasn't too sick to enjoy it.

## **MED BAY - TIMEFRAME HAZY**

“What is wrong with him?” the Admiral yells through the med bay. Even through the fevered haze clouding his senses, Magnus realizes he has never seen him quite this angry before. Lightwood almost seems worried. Since that's categorically impossible, it must be a fevered illusion.

“I can't figure out what's the matter if you keep insisting on being in my way, Admiral,” Cat says. That definitely is her put-upon voice. Lightwood is in trouble.

Magnus grins, but both Cat and Lightwood ignore that.

“Will he live?” Lightwood asks in a whisper.

Magnus feels his face freeze. He doesn't dare to move. There's no denying that's actual concern in Lightwood's voice, like he actually cares. He isn't supposed to care, what else is the use of a biocybe? Lightwood can't be emotionally compromised, he's the fucking Tin Soldier.

Although that chest definitely wasn't made out of metal. Magnus shakes his head in an attempt to clear his mind. The fever is making it hard to focus.

“Admiral Lightwood, Magnus will be fine. It looks like a bad case of Doreen Dysentery. He needs three days of rest, lots of fluids, and he needs to avoid any other infections. You need to leave and let me take care of him.”

“Okay,” Lightwood sighs. “I expect a report in 12 hours, and I’ll personally come and check on him tomorrow at second bell. He better be back on his feet by then. Comm me if anything happens.” He sounds like himself again, serious and monotone. Must have been a glitch before then. Or Magnus' cooked brains.

He doesn't remember closing his eyes, but he must have, because suddenly Magnus feels a cool, gloved finger touching his cheekbone, blazing a hot trail on his face.

“You’re strong,” Lightwood whispers. “You’ll be fine. I’d order you to be fine, but you always ignore orders.” He strokes Magnus’ cheekbone again, touch feather light. Then he barks another “fix him!” at Cat, and leaves the med bay.

Magnus keeps his eyes closed. He needs a minute to deal with this. Whatever the fuck this is.

He's rudely forced from his pretend-slumber by Cat injecting him with what hopefully is an antidote.

“Stop playing dead,” Cat says. “Tell me what you did to our poor Admiral.”

Magnus veers up, ignoring the dizzy feeling in his head. “I didn’t do anything!”

“You fainted into his arms. He carried you in here. That doesn’t sound like nothing.”

Magnus fights the blush rising to his cheeks. Those are a nice pair of arms. “The question is what you did to me,” he groans. “I feel like a freight cruiser ran over me. Surely this wasn’t necessary.” His head hurts, but at least he feels like he can think again.

Cat shrugs. “It needed to look serious. You should be glad it was convincing, especially since it was the Admiral who personally saw you escorted to the med bay. He seemed worried.”

Magnus waves her implication away. “Any Admiral would react to the captain of their flagship being indisposed. It’s a resources thing, it doesn’t necessarily mean he’s glitching.”

“Mmm. Not necessarily,” Cat mumbles. She doesn't sound particularly convinced. Neither is Magnus. But the idea of reporting Lightwood for a violation of A.136—the malfunctioning of his emotion inhibitors—turns his stomach. Unless- “It could be that they programmed him to display expected emotional responses. Now that the Alliance means mixed crews. It might be a new strategy.”

“A valid emotional response to situations that warrant it would put a DWA crew at ease,” Cat agrees. “Although I’ve so far only noticed him emotionally reacting when it concerns you.”

Magnus chooses not to react to that. Luckily, his comm-link beeps thrice, right on time. It's a general warning, caused by Chairman Meow triggering the ventilation shaft motion sensors in cargo bay 2. The cat isn't easily trained, but he can be counted on to go exploring once allowed out of Magnus' quarters. It only takes a snip of his fingers to teleport the cat back where he belongs, nobody the wiser. But because of the location, the alarm will be dealt with as a possible security risk, in need of the Admiral's attention. The perfect distraction. Time for action.

## **ADMIRAL LIGHTWOOD'S CABIN**

Getting inside the cabin is easy. He's been in plenty of awkward meetings with the Admiral, where Lightwood offered him coffee as if to ply him before critically going over every executive decision Magnus ever made. Magnus still doesn't understand why Lightwood requested him specifically to serve on his ship, since the only thing Lightwood ever does is criticise him.

Now, Magnus is thankful for those meetings, because it means he didn't have to crawl through the circulation vents, but instead simply drew a portal to the Admiral's office. Nobody in the Alliance—except for a couple of very close friends—knows Magnus can portal, so nobody knows to check for his magic signature.

His heartbeat is elevated a little bit, this time not because of whatever Cat injected him with, but because he's committing a major crime. If he's caught, he'll be tried by the DWA Military Tribunal at best, by the Clave if worst comes to worst. You don't break in into an Admiral's cabin. You don't let loose your out-of-reg's cat on unsuspecting crew-members either, but Magnus is pretty sure the break-in will be the major offense.

The cabin looks like it always does, neat and tidy, nothing showing any kind of personality. It faintly smells of Lightwood, like freshly starched uniforms, circuitry, and man. Magnus has never realized he can identify the Admiral by his smell, but now that he's in the office without him, he can. He swallows, and ignores the warm feeling in his stomach that has been popping up more and more lately.

The data-deck is still on, the Admiral obviously not that worried about security in the privacy of his own cabin. After all, an Admiral should be able to trust his crew. Magnus ignores the guilt popping up as well. He's becoming great at ignoring feelings lately, maybe he should apply with the Clave to become a cyborg.

Magnus doesn't waste any further time on pondering his surroundings. The scrambler for the Admiral's personal access codes will take some time, as will searching for the data and downloading the lot. There's no knowing how long the Admiral will personally oversee the mayhem in the cargo bay. Time is ticking.

So Magnus gets to work. The scrambler takes its sweet time, the cybernetic access codes obviously of a high caliber. If the Admiral looks for it, he'll probably see where his firewall has been breached. Magnus is counting on the Admiral not looking for security breaches in



his personal files for a while though. If everything goes right, he'll have no reason to suspect anything.

There's so much data, Magnus just downloads everything that comes up on Cartha Hub, current Clave missions, the Clave's biocybe program and anything related to the rune they found on the Nephilim bodies. He throws in a search for his own name in as well. He'll sort through it all later.

## Chapter End Notes

Next week: eavesdropping! spying! IZZY!

# Chapter 4

## Chapter Summary

In which Magnus overhears a conversation that raises more questions than answering them.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Since looking at data transferring is the most boring part of any heist, Magnus is trying to figure out how to open Lightwoods desk drawers when he gets the comm-link alert.

"The Admiral left the cargo bay and is on his way to his quarters," Raphael's tinny voice reports. "ETA T-2 minutes."

Fuck, there's no way to finish the download in that time-frame, and there's no use in aborting it either because with this little time left that would leave a trace the size of an asteroid.

"I'll need a distraction ASAP," Magnus whispers into the comm-link. He puts away the scrambler and his lock-picking gear but leaves the drive inside of the port, hoping the Admiral won't notice. He flattens himself against the paneling of the wall. The doors unlock with a click while he casts a glamor on himself. As long as the Admiral doesn't look too hard and doesn't bump into him it should hold. If his cybernetics include heat-sensors or other ways of detecting people, Magnus is screwed.

Magnus' heart is beating in his throat. The Admiral condones a lot of Magnus' behaviour—he likes to think that is due to reluctant but hard-won respect—but this will be unforgivable. Never mind that their interactions have only recently become anything more than cordial, now that Magnus has earned Lightwood's respect, he finds that he doesn't want to lose it. He should never have broken into Lightwoods office, he should have just asked. No way would the man betray his own crew, what has Magnus been thinking?

He doesn't dare to move, so for a while the only thing he hears is the Admiral's heavy steps through the cabin. The man moves with a surprising grace for his length, but all that wiring weighs him down.

After what seems eons, the Admiral sits down at his desk, right in front of Magnus, the familiar creaking of leather accompanying the beeps and tones requesting an off-ship comm-connection.

Magnus holds his breath and looks at the Admiral's broad back. Is he about to witness a private call to the Clave? Forget a trial for breaking and entering, he is going to be hanged for espionage. If Lightwood doesn't fry him the moment he is caught. He can imagine it vividly,

Lightwood holding him up against the wall by his throat, cybernetics whirring, arms straining with all his power, standing so close Magnus can feel the heat of him. It would be devastatingly hot, except that the Lightwood in his imagination is devoid of all emotion, his face a mask of cold fury. Magnus doesn't want Lightwood to ever look at him like that.

The comm-screen lits up, an attractive woman in a lab coat answering the call. Is she the Admiral's scientist? His programmer? Is he due for a tune-up? Is Magnus really going to find out what makes the Tin Soldier tick?

"Admiral Lightwood," the woman says, her smile uncharacteristically broad for a Nephilim. "How good of you to call."

"Izzy, hey," Lightwood answers.

Magnus almost gasps at the hint of warmth in his voice and the familiarity of address. Except earlier when Magnus fainted, he has never heard the Admiral call anyone by their first name. Is she his lover? Has this woman thawed the Tin Soldier's metal heart? What would that even be like, being the object of Lightwood's affections? Do they have one of those Nephilim business arrangements, devoid of all feelings?

"Alec, what's wrong? The bane of your existence acting up again? Need some sisterly advice?"

Magnus' knees are wobbly. Lightwood has a sister? There's nothing in the DWA's files on the Admiral about any kind of family. Magnus had always assumed The Clave had plucked an orphan from somewhere to experiment on. Wait, was *he* the one acting up? Was that bane with a capital B? Has Lightwood talked about him with his *sister*? He's getting dizzy with the rapid speed he keeps thinking up new questions.

"You're a forensic pathologist, I'm in charge of the Clave's flagship. I'm not calling for sisterly advice, we don't have time for personal calls. The Alicante found an outbreak of something on Cartha Hub. No survivors. We couldn't stay, our orders are to patrol sector 3a."

There's no inflection in Lightwood's voice, but the silence after his statement is somehow poignant. Magnus is suddenly sure the Admiral didn't want to leave Cartha Hub, no matter what he said on record.

"An outbreak of what? Anyone of the crew in danger?"

"We're not sure. The DWA Medical Officer is looking into it. Loss is very capable, I am confident in her capabilities."

Cat will be glad to hear it, even if it is obvious from his tone of voice that the Nephilim don't really buy into the Alliance either. The arrival of the Seelie at their mutual borders might have warranted the birth of the Alliance, the enemy of the enemy is my friend and all that jazz, but nobody had truly forgotten. You don't forget years of war simply because the powers that be told you to do so. There had been too much propaganda breeding hate and prejudice for that, too many casualties.

“But she’s not me. You could always wire me the data, have me take a look at it.”

Lightwood’s sister is confident and enthusiastic, but Lightwood stays silent.

Magnus shifts his weight. He barely moves, but the creaking of the floorboard sounds almost deafening. Magnus’ heart stops beating for a second. Any moment now the Tin Soldier will grab him by the throat and squeeze the life right out of him.

But Lightwood just sighs and rubs his right temple, none the wiser of Magnus’ presence. The glamor holds.

“Alec? What’s wrong? Something about the data?”

"Our orders are to patrol the border sector 3a."

Magnus bites back a curse. If he hears the Admiral utter those words one more time, he is going to scream. Court-martial for espionage be damned.

"You'd rather stick around, I know." Izzy commiserates. "There's nothing you could have done. Who knows what's happening in 3a right now, you could be needed there to intercept Seelie spies."

"There hasn't been a sign of Seelie trouble since we started patrolling." Lightwood hesitates. "And you know as well as I know that’s not the reason we’ve been appointed that region. I wonder if we couldn't be more useful in the search elsewhere."

Wait, the search for what? Magnus’ brains are whirring. Are they on a secret mission for the Clave, pretending to be a general patrol of the Alliance? Would Magnus' spying end up being warranted after all?

But Izzy rolls her eyes. "You're always useful, Alec. You don't know how not to be. You should try having fun sometimes. How's the Howling Moon plan going? Have you asked him yet?"

Lightwood outright groans. "Not now Izzy. I don't have time for all that. Captain Bane is in the infirmary, so I'm really busy." Magnus perches up at hearing his name. He wants to think it’s not the work-load alone that is keeping Lightwood from his plans, that there's some actual concern for his well-being there.

"What's wrong with him? Is it the mystery thing? You should have me transferred, Alec, I could check him out." The girl winks, double entendre obviously intended, despite the seriousness in her voice. She is really attractive, petite and small where Lightwood is tall and broad, but with the same dark hair and eyes. In normal circumstances, Magnus might have gone for her. But she is Lightwood’s sister and part of the Clave, so it just feels wrong.

He does quite like her though, and it’s intriguing to see the conversation between the siblings. They say a lot without words. The Clave is listening in all the time; all conversations through the comm-link on a ship like the Alicante are on record. Magnus is constantly aware of this. He always thinks of Lightwood as a paragon of Clave loyalty, but now he’s not so sure

anymore, as it seems that Lightwood is at least some things from the Clave. The Alec Izzy is talking to seems very different from the Admiral Lightwood Magnus has to work with.

Lightwood frowns. “The Clave won’t approve family visits at this time, Izzy.”

“It’s not a family visit when you’ve got an outbreak on your hands that falls under my area of expertise. Request a temporary transfer, Alec, it can’t hurt. It’ll be nice to see your grumpy face in real-time for once.”

“I can’t promise anything, but I’ll try.”

“You should try and ask him too,” Izzy adds. “You’ve been thinking about it since the Accords were signed, Alec, there’s no need to wait anymore.”

Magnus is dying to know what on earth Lightwood should ask whom, but alas, the Lightwoods have talking in code down to a T.

“Logging off now, Lewis needs my immediate attention on the Bridge,” Lightwood says, eye-rolling obvious even from the back of his head. He has never really warmed up to Simon, despite the pilot’s excellent flying skills.

“Take care, Alec. Ask him!!”

Despite the so-called urgent business with Simon—Magnus recognizes the hand of Raphael in the distraction—Lightwood remains seated at his desk. He sighs, stares at the paneling in front of him. Not for the first time, Magnus really wants to know what on earth the Tin Soldier is thinking. What is new is the wish that Ale- no, Lightwood would confide in him and actually tell him. Let go of the tension in his shoulders and the stick in his ass, have a drink and just talk. Magnus is great with people, surely he’d be able to help with the Thing The Admiral Needs To Ask Someone.

He almost drops his glamor and reaches out, but Lightwood stands up, and the glimmer of his Clave insignia stops Magnus right on time. They are from different sides, Alliance or not, there can be no reaching out between them.

The moment Lightwood leaves his office, Magnus hurries to the data-deck where his drive is lit up green, signaling the download is finished. He’s so lucky Lightwood was too distracted by the conversation with his sister to notice the little drive, but then he doesn’t normally need to plug-in anything—cyborgs can form a direct connection with the plugs in their wrists—so Magnus had counted on that.

Making sure he doesn’t leave any trace that can lead back to him, Magnus portals himself back to the med bay, where Cat is frantically pacing her office.

“Magnus, finally! I was sure he’d catch you!”

“Dear Cat, I’m too fabulous to be caught and you know it.” Magnus doesn’t mention the sister or the surprisingly human side of the Admiral. He does show off the flash drive with

some fancy wrist movements. It's been ages since he got to stretch his sneaking-in muscles and he quite enjoyed himself.

“Let's make the most of the time we have before Lightwood comes and picks me up. You look for anything medical, anything about his protocols or the outbreak, and I'll look for anything related to sector 3a and what could be so important there. He mentioned something about a search the Clave is running, so Raphael, you check out that and anything related to our mysterious rune. Anyone find anything, comm me.”

Cat and Raphael nod and settle down in her office. Magnus takes Dot's office, while she stands guard at the door. He didn't pick them for this reason, but it sure comes in handy that the medical staff consists almost entirely out of his former crew members. The Clave doesn't have specialists in Downworlder diseases, and the Nephilim only rarely need medical help thanks to their basic runes. Since the Alicante has a mixed crew, the medical staff is completely DWA. They are also somewhat understaffed for a crew this size, but Magnus can deal with that if it means having capable people taking care of his crew. The impromptu spying office is just a bonus.

He basically copied Lightwood's entire archive, so Magnus grabs some tea and settles in for the long haul. He has some more spying to do.

## Chapter End Notes

Next week: Magnus finds more than he was looking for!  
(It's my favorite chapter and I'm super excited!)

# Chapter 5

## Chapter Summary

In which Magnus finds out more than he bargained for

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

### **MED BAY - DOROTHEA ROLLINS' OFFICE**

A quick first search doesn't turn up anything useful, so after 5 hours of slogging through boring report after boring report, Magnus gives into temptation and queries the data for his own name. He might find out why the Clave requested his presence on the Alicante.

At first, he only finds a couple of reports he filed, his official personnel-file from the DWA, including all his achievements and military accolades, and the fabricated backstory Luke and Magnus concocted to hide his mercenary past. There are no specific references to The Warlock, Magnus' former alter ego, so apparently Lightwood isn't on a secret assignment to sniff him out.

The Warlock does appear on a list of wanted criminals, but his last known location dates from before the war. Magnus feels a wave of a relief he didn't expect. A second search-string turns up a large data pack from the Admiral's personal files, hidden and heavily encrypted. Curiosity takes the better of him—no one has ever called him a nice person—so he opens them the moment he has circumvented the protective codes.

The data pack turns out to be personal logs, spanning several years, continuously appended and amended. They are addressed to Lieutenant Magnus Bane, DWA Greenhorn, amended to Commander Magnus Bane, Greenhorn, amended to Captain Magnus Bane, Pandemonium, amended to Captain Magnus Bane, Alicante, to be delivered in person, or upon the demise of Admiral Alexander Lightwood. The first log is dated years ago, from before the war. Magnus can't resist and immediately starts reading. They are addressed to him after all, so it isn't even really spying. Despite the official coding and address, the first log reads more as a letter than as a log.

*Lieutenant Bane,*

*I don't suppose we're officially acquainted, but I'm compelled to write to you, since I was so impressed with your actions on stardate 2237.87. Nobody has ever bested me in quite this way, with so much flair. You only had a crew of four, severely underqualified for a confrontation with my team, and yet you knew we couldn't risk an open conflict and only had to buy time.*

*We might be at open conflict soon, current relations between our factions being as they are. Chances are slim we'll ever meet again, the vastness of space isn't kind to Downworlders nor Nephilim, but I wish that if we would, I could ask you how you did it, scrambling the codes in this particular way, ask you for your tips on diverting code, maybe share a drink.*

*You weren't afraid*

—Magnus had been terrified and had been running on sheer bravado—

*and besides my siblings, I've never met anyone who wasn't at least wary of me. Thank you for that.*

*I wish you the very best, and safe travels.*

*Sincerely,*

*Captain Alexander Lightwood, Alicante*

Magnus is speechless, doesn't understand what is going on, so he immediately opens the next log, dated in the first months of the war.

*Dear Lieutenant Bane,*

*You got appointed to a new ship. The moment war was declared, I knew we'd meet again. You're far too clever to be wasted on a freighter command.*

*I hadn't expected to see quite so much of you though. I'd assumed the DWA military uniform would have been more functional and not as glittery and form-fitting. I thought it would cover more skin.*

*Is your pilot still that same kid that was with you on the freighter? I think I recognised him on the comm-screen. If so, that was some adequate evasive manoeuvring. I probably shouldn't commend an enemy pilot on getting away from us, but it's always good to be challenged. A good crew is everything, Lt. Bane, as I'm sure you already know.*

*I hope the Clave and DWA come to an agreement soon, I don't like to fight you. I don't think I'm in danger of killing you soon, but people die in wars and I don't want you to be one of them.*

*Be careful Lieutenant.*

*Sincerely,*

*Captain Alexander Lightwood*

Magnus remembers that first skirmish. He'd been off duty and had been caught, if not with his pants down, with wearing his favorite silk pajamas. In fact, his current sheets were the same color of silk. Shit. Didn't Lightwood pick out those sheets?



Magnus reads on, morbidly curious to Lightwoods impressions of every time they met during the war and after.

There is always an undercurrent of admiration in the letters, but over the years the tone gets warmer and more informal, and the content becomes more personal.

*...You got a promotion! You look good with the captain's stripes, they suit you. I liked how the gold in your hair matched the gold of the insignia. Of course, you've deserved this promotion for years, Magnus.*

*I remember when I first made Captain, I got appointed to the Alicante right away, surpassing several more experienced officers. The crew was resentful, and I can't blame them...*

Magnus can imagine it, serious and dutiful Lightwood up against his reputation, the high expectations and a crew that equally admired, feared and disliked him. Nephilim might prioritize rationality over emotion, duty over feelings, but they were a proud people nonetheless.

*... but the truth is, I don't think we can win this war, Magnus. I don't think we should have started it in the first place. Space is so vast, you'd think there's room enough for both Nephilim and Downworlders.*

Fuck. Admiral Lightwood denouncing the war? The Tin Soldier disagreeing with the Clave? It's not technically treason, but it would be in the eyes of the Clave. Especially because he wrote it to an enemy officer.

Magnus can get Lightwood de-assigned with this information. Hell, he probably can have him killed with this.

But that still doesn't explain why Lightwood wrote these letters in the first place.

*...I got the notice of your assignment three days ago. There's still so much preparation to do before for our lift-off. The Alicante is the best ship we have, but she's got some mileage on her and deserves a tune-up. Yet I spent over an hour today buying sheets for you. It's important to me you feel at home here. I want you to stay...*

*...I've seen a lot of your shirts through the years, Magnus, but I wasn't ready for the robe. I probably should have made a note in your file—a robe is not standard off-duty wear—but well, I didn't. What's the name of that shade of blue? It really suits you, you looked good. I wanted to ask, but Santiago said I shouldn't bother you unless there was an emergency so I left you to your evening.*

*It must be nice, to have a crew have your back like that.*

Magnus looks up to make sure Raphael and Cat are still focused on their own research. They can never know about this. This is private, between Magnus and Alexander. Hell, it doesn't even quite belong to Magnus. He shouldn't be reading this, it's too personal, but he can't quite get himself to stop either.

*Dear Magnus,*

*You were talking about your time on Deerna Station today. Loss didn't quite approve of your antics, but that only encouraged you to embellish your stories more. I'm glad I'm not the only one you drive crazy like this. Although I assume Loss doesn't want to kiss you every time you tell a tall tale with a glint in your eyes.*

Magnus closes the log. Fuck. Lightwood wants to— It's impossible, the Tin Soldier is supposed to be a perfect biocybe, the soldier without emotions. He's not supposed to have any feelings, let alone feelings for an enemy officer, allied or not. Maybe it's just hormones? Attraction is a powerful biological imperative, maybe his programming hadn't taken into account that their prime biocybe might be... horny? Or maybe Cat is right, and Lightwood has been actually malfunctioning.

He taps his fingers on the desk, thinks of all the files and secrets he should be looking for instead of reading these personal accounts, but he can't stop wondering what else Lightwood wrote to him. If there's truly some feeling there or just base attraction.

Taking a deep breath, Magnus opens the logs again.

*I'll never kiss you, of course, there's no chance in the universe you'll ever want me to.*

Magnus swallows. The thing is, he's not sure he would object to Lightwood kissing him. When he's not scowling, he has a lovely mouth, and those arms. No, Magnus isn't sure at all.

*You looked so at ease, sitting at a table with your friend, I yearn for the day where we can sit like that, and you feel comfortable enough with me to let your guard down. But when I approached, you assumed I was about to reprimand you, and you stopped smiling. I never want you to stop smiling Magnus, I want to be the one that makes you smile. I wanted to join you, and share my own experiences, but you dismissed yourself.*

*I went to Deerna myself once, a couple of years ago. I thought I should try and get you out of my head, and to be honest with you, I wanted to be touched. No one ever touches me in kindness. Izzy probably would like to, but I'm not supposed to want to be touched, so she thinks I don't. Sometimes I think people think I'm actually made out of tin.*

*For one moment I wanted to be a regular person, be touched in affection. So I went to a bar at Deema, and let someone buy me a drink. He had a kind smile and seemed nice, so when he invited me to his quarters, I agreed.. But when I took off my clothes, I realized he hadn't known who I was until that moment. When he saw the scars and the ports in my wrists, he must have connected the dots. He stopped smiling, and while he tried to hide it, I could see the terror clearly in his eyes. I repulsed him. I terrified him.*

Magnus wants to kill that man. Wants to burn down the entire Clave for making Lightwood feel like he can't be touched. No one deserves to live without kindness and affection.

*I had no desire to force him into something that disgusted him so, so I put on my shirt again and left. I never tried again.*

*I realize this is not a story to share over a snack in the mess hall, but I still wanted to tell you. You've never been afraid of me. Even on our first meeting, when you were outgunned and outmanned, you held your own and were defiant.*

*I couldn't stand if that were to change, if something I did would turn you afraid of me. So I'll never kiss you, never touch you.*

*So here I am, still afraid myself tell you the truth. Maybe one day, I won't anymore.*

*Maybe one day, I'll make you smile. That would be enough.*

*With regards,*

*Admiral Alexander Gideon Lightwood*

Magnus can't stop blinking. His magic is swirling under his skin, looking to release all his pent-up emotion. He shouldn't have read this. He shouldn't know this. He can never make up for this break of trust. Lightwood feels for him, and all Magnus ever did was treat him with distrust. He broke into his fucking quarters.

He gasps. It was him Izzy was talking about. He was the one Alec should ask. He's still not sure what exactly Alec wanted to ask him, but he's got an inkling it might have been an overture.

Now he'll never know what his reaction would have been.

He doesn't really want to read on, but there's only one letter left--they're basically love-letters, Magnus doesn't deserve them--and he's read so far, it feels equally wrong to leave the last one unread. It dates from the morning before:

*Dear Magnus,*

*You called me Alexander once. It's different now that we're on the same ship, now that I'm your commanding officer. I'd hoped that your appointment on the Alicante would make it easier, that I'd be able to get you to know me. But every time I think we're growing closer, that we're having a conversation that's almost personal, and I think I could ask you, you pull back.*

*You don't trust me.*

*I can't blame you, the DWA and the Clave have been on opposite sides longer than we've been on the same side, the Accords are still fresh. But I'd hoped that serving together would mean...*

*It's hard Magnus. You show up on the bridge with your fancy shirts, with glitter in your hair, and all I want to say is how good you look. Instead, I say something about regulations, you stop smiling and we're back where we were before.*

*Jace says I should cut the crap and make a move. Izzy says I should just tell you how I feel and ask you out. Dinner and drinks at the Hunter's Moon or something.*

*I've been trying, Magnus, I have. I just need a little more time.*

*Today you told me you're not sure I have a heart. I've collected all data that exists about whatever it is they did to me, but I'll never be sure I know everything. I'm an experiment, not a scientist. But I am sure I have a heart Magnus, because it only beats for you.*

*Sincerely,*

*Alexander*

Shit.

## Chapter End Notes

Let me know if any of the formatting is wonky, it's the first time I'm trying anything like this.

Also \*brushes sweat from brow\* this is now the longest work I've ever posted!

I hope you liked this chapter as much as I do, IT'S MY FAVORITE! Alec deeply feeling things is my JAM.

<3

# Chapter 6

## Chapter Summary

In which there's a lot of denial, and the plot thickens

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Magnus closes down the screen and sits back in his chair. Shit shit shit. Ale- Lightwood. The Tin fucking Soldier, might possibly, maybe, theoretically, be in love with him.

Bypassing all of his emotional inhibitors. Obliterating them. For years. This is the most massive breach of a.136—the article stating cyborgs experiencing emotions are malfunctioning and should be reported and brought in for reprogramming immediately—Magnus has ever heard of, by the one cyborg who is supposed to be immune to feelings.

Magnus can't deal with this.

He should probably tell Cat, tell Raphael, file a report. Do something. This is one serious malfunctioning cyborg. But he can't. It feels too private, too personal. He was only supposed to have gotten these on the Admiral's death. The letters weren't meant for his eyes. Not yet. Magnus isn't supposed to know.

But maybe he'd known already? Suspected at least. Lightwood isn't wrong, they've become friends, sort of. They work well together. There's a certain amount of trust between them that can only be borne out of serving on the same ship for a while.

Would it be so bad? Lightwood is stupidly attractive. Fuck, if he wasn't half a robot, he would be exactly Magnus' type. Tall, handsome face, nice smell. Confident and capable, a good leader. He cares deeply, even if he doesn't show it. He'd worried when Magnus had been decoy-sick. Carried him in his arms. Those arms. Ale- Lightwood has a really nice mouth, Magnus wouldn't mind kissing-

Nope. Magnus isn't going to do this. No good can ever come from doing the dirty with a superior officer who can probably kill him in his sleep, is only technically on the same side, and is probably giving him up to the Clave the moment the Accords break.

Although Magnus isn't entirely sure about that last bit anymore. Lightwood always does his duty, but he has never really had to choose between his feelings and his duty before. Maybe Magnus could use that...

The idea alone makes him feel sick. Shit. There is just no good way to deal with this. So Magnus won't deal.

He leaves the small office and makes a run for Cat's, where she and Raphael are going through their part of the logs. "Raphael, Cat, you guys find anything? Mine are all a bust."

Cat shakes her head. "There's nothing here, except a lot of medical information about his cybernetics. Did you know almost all of it had to be installed while he was conscious? The man has to have been in pain for years, Magnus. The Clave cybernetics program is torture, plain and simple."

Magnus swallows. Raphael and Cat both look uncomfortable. He's not sure they would have cared before The Accords, before their time on the Alicante, but now they do. Lightwood, despite all his electronic bells and whistles, is still human. He's a good Commanding Officer, a great Admiral. He deserves better. He deserves better than Magnus spying on him and reading his logs- nope, Magnus is not thinking about that.

"There's a lot of medical data that might come in handy later, but nothing about how to disable him, or how to disable his electronics at least. Looks like the Clave kept that data from their own experiment."

Magnus frowns. They'd set out to collect data like this, but now that he knows how human Lightwood really is, that he has dreams and hopes and desires, it all feels horribly underhanded. Disabling makes it seem impersonal, but technically they're talking murder. It's not who they are, not who they are supposed to be. They're not the Clave.

"We're at peace anyway," Magnus says, dismissing Cat's comments and his own mixed feelings in one go. Nevermind his earlier suspicions that had caused the theft of Lightwood's data in the first place. This is all his fault.

"I wouldn't be so sure of that," Raphael says, pointing to his screen. "There's a lot of logs here, discussion between Lightwood and a Jace Wayland. Most of it is personal." Raphael looks up at Magnus, who can't help but wince. "But there's also a lot here about one Valentine Morgenstern. Apparently, both Lightwood and Wayland have requested an official mission to be able to apprehend him, and the Clave has refused time and time again, claiming it would risk the Accords by admitting Valentine had committed war crimes." Raphael hands Magnus his data deck.

The data turns Magnus' stomach. Morgenstern is a politician, who had been active through the War as a General, during which his torture, experiments, and murder of Downworlders had apparently been condoned by the Clave, if not outrightly approved. It's clear from the logs that Morgenstern hasn't changed his ways after the Accords, is still operating like before, and the Clave has done very little so far to apprehend him or bring him to justice.

Cat interrupts his reading. "I knew I'd read that name somewhere. Morgenstern's company is or was responsible for the Clave cybernetics program, and he was definitely at least tangentially involved in the torture of our Admiral." She sounds protective, despite her usual dislike of Lightwood, which means that whatever they put him through, it must have been horrifying.

"There's more," Raphael says. "There's not much here, but I think Morgenstern either defected or started a movement within the Clave. It's called The Circle, it's all about anti-

Downworlder and Accords politics, and they use a circle rune for identification.”

Magnus curses. Turns out those Nephilim civilians on Cartha Hub were not so civilian after all. This should feel like a break-through, Magnus should be happy they’re getting closer to the truth, but all he feels is queasy. “Does the Admiral know that the Nephilim were Circle members?”

Cat shakes her head. “The runes weren’t in my preliminary report, but it’s possible he found out through other crew-members.”

Magnus thinks back to the conversation between Lightwood and his sister, the search they mentioned, which was probably the search for Morgenstern, now that Magnus is connecting the dots. He thinks Lightwood would have told her, would have stuck around Cartha Hub despite his orders if he’d known about the Circle involvement. He thinks, but he’s not sure, and that’s the crux of his problem. He wants to trust Al- Lightwood, wants to believe he’s a good man, but he’s not sure he can. The Clave obviously can’t be trusted.

Magnus hits Cat’s deck in frustration. Who knows how many of his people Morgenstern killed, while no one was out there to stop him. "So instead of apprehending said war criminal, the Clave let Morgenstern continue to break the Accords, let him kill innocent people, most of them Downworlders, in the hope we won't notice? While putting in minimal effort to obtain him, and even going as far as disallowing their best asset to aid in the search?"

"Pretty much."

"That's definitely something we should get to Headquarters. DWA HQ, not the Alliance." Magnus frowns. “Even if Lightwood requested the mission for apprehending Morgenstern, that doesn’t mean he’s not still part of the Clave. When push comes to shove, we can’t be sure he won’t follow their orders. And I think we can all agree that those orders won’t be in our best interests.” He doesn’t want to believe Lightwood will betray them like that, it feels impossible in his heart, but he can’t believe he won’t, either. Magnus lost faith in people a long time ago.

Cat shakes her head. “I think he might surprise you.”

Magnus snorts. He's had enough of Lightwood's surprises for a lifetime.

Raphael rolls his eyes. “People don’t commit treason because they have feelings, Cat.” He turns to Magnus. “It’s obvious he has feelings for you though, so you should use that. Flirt a little, charm him some more, distract him. Invite him out for a drink, so we can get this information to HQ.”

Magnus flusters. “I’m- I mean- I can’t... I’m sure any feelings Lightwood has for me are entirely collegial.” How does Raphael even know? How can Raphael be this sure about Lightwood’s regard, when Magnus had been flying blind all this time? Did he find something in those logs from Wayland?

Raphael grins with an obvious evil glint in his eyes. “Do it for your country, Magnus.”

Magnus is flirty by nature, but he has never honey-trapped anyone, and he isn't about to start with the Admiral. Not when he knows how deep Lightwood genuinely feels. He can't play with his heart like that, it's not who Magnus is or wants to be.

"You shouldn't gossip about your superior officers. Lightwood is the epitome of professional, and we all know he's been programmed back and forth; the man is incapable of emotions." *My heart only beats for you.* His words taste like treachery, but he pushes forward. He won't betray Lightwood's secrets. "We'll distract him the old-fashioned way."

"I thought seduction was the old-fashioned way."

Magnus throws Raphael the finger. "Wrong. Explosions are the old-fashioned way. We'll cause a disruption at Molen Station. And I'm putting you in charge of it, while I get a message out to HQ. Which means the Admiral needs to remain on the Alicante, while I pay a visit to Maia."

Maia, a former mercenary turned bar-owner at a backward space station, is another protégée of Luke, and the fastest and safest way to get information to HQ in this corner of outer space.

"I'll prepare all the data for transfer." He'll make sure the logs addressed to him will disappear from the drive without a trace. "You make sure the Admiral gets caught up in something disastrous on the other side of the Station."

Raphael shakes his head a little but agrees and finally leaves the med bay to start his shift.

Cat hands Magnus a cup of coffee. "You know, Nephilim aren't that different from us. We all evolved from humans, just in various ways."

Magnus nods hesitantly, not trusting where she's going with this. "Meaning?"

"Meaning that if they'd stuff you with wiring, forced you through a horrifying process for a couple of years when you were just a kid, called you a robot until you acted like one... that still wouldn't fundamentally change who you are on the inside." She touches him softly on his breastbone. "He's still a man, Magnus."

Magnus swallows.

"A very tall, attractive man," Cat adds and winks at him.

Magnus takes a sip from his coffee to refrain from commenting. Even if she's right about that at least, the problem is that Lightwood is so much more than simply attractive. He's competent and determined and secretly kind. *Maybe one day, I'll make you smile.* Magnus suddenly realizes he's never outright seen Lightwood smile, he's never seen Lightwood not on guard, never seen him experience joy or simply happy.

And fuck, there's no use in denying it, it's all Magnus wants now. See the human side of Lightwood for himself. Make Alec smile at him.



## Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the support for the last chapter, I still plan on answering all comments, but life has been extremely sucky this week, so I didn't have much computer time.

Due to these personal issues, one of which being that I'll soon be without a job, I think it'll be smarter to change the update schedule a little, so I can assure the quality of future installments.

So from now on, Hearts of Tin will be updating biweekly (to clarify: every other week, on Mondays).

I'll probably post some sneak peeks on tumblr or twitter though, so feel free to hit me up there!

Until next time, when Alec and Magnus will face a whole lot of awkwardness!

# Chapter 7

## Chapter Summary

In which there's lots of awkwardness, and nothing goes as planned.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

### EVENING OF THE NEXT DAY - ALICANTE MED BAY

Lightwood is at the med bay doors half an hour before Magnus' shift is supposed to start. He's hovering next to Cat, who's checking up on Magnus' last readings.

He's completely healthy, but Lightwood still looks serious while he reads over Cat's shoulder. They didn't fetch fresh clothes, so Magnus is wearing the same uniform jacket and bright red shirt he wore 36 hours ago. He feels dirty and uncomfortable, and wishes he could put on some make-up—*sometimes you wear this dark shade on your eyes, and it always makes you look dangerous and mischievous at the same time... it drives me crazy*—or maybe not. No use in putting the cat next to the cream.

"I brought you a new shirt," Lightwood interrupts his thoughts. "It's an actual uniform shirt, no slogans, but it's clean."

Magnus makes grabby hands for it. He'll pick cleanliness over fashionableness every time. The shirt is starched and folded so tight, you can cut meat with its corners. Magnus has to fight the urge to bury his nose in it. This won't do at all. He disappears into the bathroom, shooing away Lightwood's hands that try to help him off the bed. When he comes out again, Lightwood is standing in awkward silence next to the bed, hands clasped behind his back.

For the first time since their acquaintance, Magnus isn't quite sure what to say.

"Are you going to escort me to my bedroom?" is what eventually rolls out of his mouth while they're staring at each other across the med bay.

Lightwood's eyes widen. Magnus would laugh if he wasn't panicking. He never panics.

"My rooms, I mean. I assume that's why you're here, instead of doing important Admiral things."

Lightwood nods slowly. "Wanted to make sure you were okay. We need to discuss the upcoming docking at Molen Station."

Magnus rolls his eyes. “I see. That couldn’t wait until after I’ve showered and changed my clothes, why?”

Lightwood waves an arm to the med bay doors to guide him outside. Magnus ignores him, blows Cat a kiss, and walks out of the med bay. Lightwood follows him out, his stupidly long legs catching up with him instantly, matching Magnus' stride. The Alicante is quite luxury for a military vessel—her hallways are bright and wide, her quarters aren’t cramped—and yet, with Lightwood walking next to him, close enough so Magnus can feel the heat radiating off him, Magnus feels like the walls are closing in on him. He needs space to think.

“We’ve lost enough time with the diversion to Cartha Hub and you being out of commission. I brought you a fresh shirt, so we could start our discussion right-away. It’s called efficiency.” Lightwood nods at the hallway directing to his office.

Magnus doesn’t want the reminder he’s wearing Lightwood’s shirt. All laundry is done in the general laundry room, so their clothes should smell the same, and yet Magnus smells Lightwood all over him, and despite everything, he enjoys it. He really shouldn’t.

“It’s called being a control-freak.”

Lightwood frowns. Magnus feels guilty. This will be tiresome quickly.

He’s never been this unsure in their interactions before. They’ve always had a rhythm. Be it as enemies or as reluctant co-workers; their back and forth has always come naturally to Magnus. Now, he feels that everything he thinks of saying is too revealing, and what he ends up saying is too harsh and too cold. Magnus hates this.

So he arches his brow. “Lightwood,” he says, leaving the familiar pause, in an attempt to lighten the atmosphere between them.

Lightwood straightens his shoulders and looks at him, corner of his mouth twitching. “Bane.”

The familiar cadence between them settles something for Magnus. They are friends, even if their relationship is a little unconventional. He likes Lightwood, and they’ll be fine. He’ll just ignore everything he knows and shouldn’t know in the first place, and focus on the mission.

“Look, Alec.” Magnus notices the slip-up almost right-away but ignores the audible breath Alec takes in reaction. “What’s the ETA for Molen Station? 29 hours? Me taking a shower won’t make that much of a difference, but it will make me more awake. That’s efficiency for you.”

Alec hesitates but nods eventually. “My office, 20 minutes. I’ll make you a coffee for extra efficiency.” He lingers, keeps looking at Magnus' face, eyes severe. He looks the same as always, but now that Magnus knows what’s behind that look, it feels warmer somehow.

“Thank you for the escort,” Magnus breaks the silence before it can become awkward again. “And thank you for your care, yesterday. I wanted to say so before, but I was kind of out of it. And sorry for fainting in your arms.” Magnus has no regrets whatsoever, but he still means it. People who have your back are rare and should be treasured.

Alec blinks at Magnus' words, opens his mouth and closes it again. He looks so stunned, Magnus can't help but smile at him. It's a wide, bright smile that has none of his usual calculation in it. He knows he's doing it, but he can't stop it, and he doesn't really want to either. Alec deserves an honest smile.

He kind of hopes Alec will return the smile, because Magnus deserves a smile too. But Alec remains as severe as ever. He does lick his lips, the glimpse of his tongue distracting Magnus for a moment, so he nearly misses that Alec reaches up and almost touches Magnus' cheek. But he checks himself and clasps his hands behind his back again. "I'm just glad you're okay," he says, voice low and gravelly. "See you in twenty."

Magnus' heart is beating in his throat, but before he can react, Alec nods at him and turns away. He walks towards his office, his strong shoulders still tense, his broad back a little too straight, those delightfully narrow hips gli-

Magnus really needs a shower. A cold one. But he's keeping the shirt.

## **28 HOURS LATER - NEAR MOLEN STATION - ALICANTE DOCKING BAY**

Docking is well underway and running without a hitch. It'd been a hectic couple of hours, but the crew knows their jobs and does them well, and it all runs like a well-oiled machine. Magnus would never have thought that a crew existing out of Nephilim and various Downworlders could work so well together, but apparently, all they needed was a long run in outer space with little docking time—no-one wanted to delay the opportunity to leave the ship.

They'll be docked for only a 24-hour cycle, the crew split in three shifts of 7 hours for leave. Molen Station never sleeps, but Magnus has made sure he's on the first shift off-ship. He'll get their papers in order with the Station Officer, and then make his way to Maia to deliver all the data they've gathered. Lightwood is staying on board at first, overseeing the reparations to some faulty wiring in the loading cranes that can only happen when docked. He'll take his leave with the last shift, so they'll probably not even need the distraction on Molen Station itself.

Magnus is on his way to the shuttle that'll bring him to Molen Station when Alec joins him in his steps. He's wearing one of his more formal uniforms and is carrying a small bag. He looks handsome and ready to debark. This isn't the plan.

"Sir?" Magnus asks.

"I'm accompanying you to the Station Officer," Lightwood says. No explanation, no request, just a statement. This won't do at all.

"Is my work not to your satisfaction? Do I need supervision?" Magnus puts as much offense in his voice as possible. Honestly, he kind of means it. He thought he'd deserved enough of Lightwood's respect by now to be trusted with something as simple as docking administration.

“No, not at all. Your work has suffered no consequences from your ailment.”

Magnus crosses his arms. Behind Lightwood’s back, Raphael is making ‘do something’ signs at him.

“Well, something made you change our schedule. The schedule you insisted we spend three hours on getting absolutely right. I’d like to know what it is.”

Lightwood opens his mouth and closes it again, tongue wetting his lips. Magnus doesn’t stare. He doesn’t find it cute either.

“It’s our first leave since you started on the Alicante. That is, it’s the first time I-. I was wonder- I’ve been wanting to ask you-” Alec takes a deep breath. Magnus’ pulse is racing. He thinks he knows where this is going, and there’s nothing he can do to stop it.

“There’s a place called Hunter’s Moon. I thought we could have drinks. Together. Out.”

Fuck. Magnus is blushing. This isn’t happening. Alec finally gathered the courage to ask him out, and it’s the worst possible moment, when it might be treason to say yes. No matter how much Magnus might want to.

“I already-“ Magnus breaks off his sentence when he sees Raphael making the universal sign for ‘I’ll kill you’, followed up by kissing mouths. He’s right, Magnus would be the perfect distraction. Go on a date with the Admiral, distract him, woo him a little. It would be fun, see if he can make him blush. Only, Alec is more than the Admiral, and Magnus doesn’t want to. Not like this, not for this reason. Alec doesn’t deserve that.

But they could be at war in the next hours. And nothing is ever fair in love and war. Especially not love during a war. Not that Magnus loves Alec and he still isn’t entirely sure if Alec is capable of feelings that strong. But there is something between them, and Magnus finds that, now that he is about to betray that something, that he wants it. He wants Alec Lightwood. The Tin fucking Soldier. He’s pretty sure he’s wanted him for a while.

“Drinks?”

“Apologies, this was inappropriate. Of course you already had plans. I’ve filed for the docking permission, so I need to take this leave, but I’ll simply do the paperwork with the Station Officer, so you are at leisure.”

Raphael is going to kill him if Lightwood will be gallivanting on Molen Station without an eye on him. With their luck, he’ll be drowning his sorrows at Maia’s bar while they try to hand over the drive. They can still go for a distraction, but explosions and civilians are never a good idea, and definitely not with the Admiral on site. He’s capable of wanting to hunt down the attackers in person.

So Magnus swallows down his feelings and smiles. It feels plastered on his face.

“I would love to have a drink. It’s been too long.”

Alec blinks and slowly straightens his shoulders. He looks like he can't quite believe what he heard, and Magnus can't blame him. He doesn't quite believe it either.

"The paperwork will be more efficient if we do it together, anyway," Magnus adds in an attempt to seal the deal.

"Yes, paperwork. Efficiency is key," Alec says. He clears his throat. "And then drinks? Then drinks." Alec looks almost flustered, almost pleased. He still hasn't smiled. And now if it happens, if Alec smiles at him at the Hunter's Moon, it will be based on a lie, and Magnus will hate himself. This isn't okay. Magnus isn't even supposed to *know*.

But here they are, Magnus will have to flirt and distract Alec, fetch them drinks, while Raphael will hand over the drive to Maia during his disembarkment. It's the perfect plan. It just feels all wrong.

"Shall we?" he asks, pointing towards the shuttle bay.

Alec simply nods and starts walking. His stride is long and certain, like he hasn't just shaken Magnus' world to the core. There'll be no way back from this. If he steps into the shuttle, he'll have to flirt and then later he'll have to break Lightwood's heart.

Magnus steps into the shuttle.

## Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay you guys, life still sucks!

Luckily there's all the malec teasers and trailers and spoilers to distract us with.

Next time: even less goes to plan!

# Chapter 8

## Chapter Summary

In which things crash and burn

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Getting leave for an entire crew of a ship the size of the Alicante always is a bit of a hassle. Molen Station is relatively large for this part of outer space, but it's still only got a static population of about 10000 souls. Which means the Station Officer takes his duty of security rather serious and expects a whole lot of paperwork before granting permission to dock. Magnus doesn't mind—he's always liked flying shuttles since they give him the chance to feel a ship flying under his own hands again, which he seldom gets to do these days—and today the delay is welcome. It means he has some time to figure out how he'll deal with this whole date mess. Or ignore the mess and just fly for a while. Only, when they enter the cockpit, the Admiral takes the pilot's seat, intending to fly the shuttle himself. Which leaves Magnus' with nothing to do but think about his sins. He has a lot of them.

Lightwood is silent as well, going through the motions of preparing the shuttle for lift-off quick and efficiently. Magnus can't help but watch his hands. As always, Alec is wearing fingerless gloves, fingers strong and sure, no sign of nerves whatsoever. Magnus has never seen the skin of his palms. Suddenly, all he wants is those capable hands on him, skin against skin. Fuck. This is so bad.

Soon, they are cleared for departure and detach from the Alicante. The shuttle trip to Molen Station will be short and easy, all space-debris around the station cleared a long time ago, and thanks to the Alicante her size, there are no other shuttles in their lane.

Which is why, when they've made it halfway to Molen Station and suddenly six sleek D16 space fighters appear on their tail, it's such a surprise.

For a second nothing happens, but then one of the fighters has a lock on them and the alarm for incoming fire sounds, loud in the small cockpit of the shuttle.

Magnus moves to the co-pilot seat, checking their shields. By now, two of the ships already have them locked. "If you're going to evade, do it quickly! They're onto us!" Magnus yells.

Alec grunts then curses when his maneuver to the left doesn't shake the fighters loose.

"Alicante, this is Admiral Lightwood. Shuttle B is under fire by a squadron of unknown origin. Taking fire, assistance required."

Magnus puts everything they have to spare in their shields, but the shuttle isn't built for battle, so even with the shields maximized it will only sustain a couple of hits.

The first fighter hits them straight on the starboard flank. The impact nearly shakes Magnus out of his chair.

"Fuck it, where did they even come from?"

Alec moves them upwards, evading the second impact, but flying them into the crosshairs of the third fighter, while behind them the remaining fighters are joining into the chase.

"Maybe we should switch, you can control the shields and the counter-fire simultaneously," Magnus suggests.

"And you're the better pilot," Alec agrees. "Switching controls to you in 15 seconds."

That's why Magnus likes Alec so much, he's efficient and honest, and not afraid to recognize when someone is better at something than him. Even if that almost never happens.

"3, 2, 1... switching controls."

"Switched," Magnus confirms. "Better brace yourself, Admiral." He veers the shuttle right and back down at a breakneck speed.

Next to him, Alec smirks, while opening his gloves and plugging himself into the system. For one moment his face looks alive and beautiful, the next the almost-smile disappears from his face, eyes blank and alight with the eerie blue-white sheen that means he's cybering up.

"Alicante, come in, returning fire in 5," he says in a monotone.

"What are they doing? They should be throwing some cover fire at the least."

But deep down, Magnus fears they are on their own. If these fighters popped out of nowhere without triggering any proximity alarms, they're probably using some kind of jammer, which means comm-deck won't be picking up their calls. With the whole crew preparing to dock, chances are the Alicante hasn't noticed the attack yet. This is supposed to be allied space, after all, nobody expects an attack on home turf, even this close to the border.

Another impact shakes the shuttle, the six fighters now very close on their tail, blocking their way back to the Alicante. They can't go to Molen Station either, you don't bring a squadron of space fighters to a civilian zone. So the only way out is away; away from the protection the Station or the Alicante can offer. Which is probably the attackers' goal. The shuttle isn't built for an extensive fight in outer space. Fuck, it isn't built for a fight at all.

"They're driving us up," Magnus yells through the ruckus. The fighters are taking open fire at the shuttle now, Alec's counter fire just adding to the general noise. "We need to seek shelter planet-side, wait for the Alicante to take them down."

Alec nods mechanically, freakishly white-blue eyes still focussed inward, while he keeps up the shields with sheer force of will. And cybernetics. "Planet-side," he confirms. "Shields at



47.71%.”

Fuck, that means they can sustain maybe four more impacts, five if Alec works some of his magic.

“Don’t worry, cupcake, I’ll get us out of here.”

Alec shakes his head. “Prefer Alexander.”

Magnus gapes at him for a second, but the next impact shakes him out of his shock. They need to get out of here.

He starts to plot a route to Mol 3.b, the planet below them, avoiding all satellites and sensors surrounding the Station. The planet is mostly water, so he'll have to get their landing area right. He ducks the shuttle further down, swerves so it faces one of the fighter ships head-on, satisfied when Alec immediately disables it by destroying its right wing. Magnus flies them over the crashing fighter, then immediately swerves down towards the planet.

“We’ll need more speed to get away from them, then switch back everything to shields once we reach orbit.”

“Reducing shields to 21%, increasing engine power,” Alec confirms.

That means only two more impacts at the most, and they might not survive the crash through the atmosphere even with that.

Magnus speeds up anyway. Immediate evasion is more important. He’s always tried to live in the moment, he’s not stopping now.

The instant they are out of reach of the fighters, Alec stops returning fire and focuses all his energy on preparation for entering the atmosphere. The shuttle is meant to handle both atmo and space flying, but not really to tackle the switch between them at these speeds.

“Chance of exploding engines when breaching atmo at current speed: 92.6%,” Lightwood reports. He's still using that monotone, no inflection in his voice showing fear or hesitation at Magnus' plan. Magnus is high on adrenaline and the thrill of the chase, which makes him appreciate Alec's calm competence even more. He's amazing.

They’ll need to wait with braking until the very last moment, or the fighters will catch them after all. Magnus puts in the command to brake but maintains their current speed for now.

“Put everything into shields, T-60,” he orders Lightwood.

Lightwood nods. “Copy that.” He turns to Magnus, lit-up eyes still giving him an eerie appearance. “Magnus, I have to tell you-“

Magnus cuts him off. “I know, I know. But we’re not dying, so no need for dramatic confessions. Not yet. I'll get us out of here.”

There's no time to say anything else, as they are quickly racing towards the planet. Around them, the shields croak and alarms blare. Alec seems frozen in place, except for his eyes, which are lit up and moving quickly—the only sign of the massive amount of data he's processing.

Magnus throws everything they have into the brakes.

They've escaped the fighters, now they only need to avoid burning to a crisp in the Mol3.b atmosphere. Or crashing to death. Or drowning in its massive ocean. So many various ways to die planet-side.

Magnus braces himself against the dashboard. They are still going too fast, and no matter what he does, their speed isn't decreasing quickly enough. Unless...

Unless Magnus uses his magic.

He looks at Alec, who has his hands spread out over the dashboard, wires exposed where he's hooked himself into the console, eyes and runes flashing with eerie inhuman light.

*...I don't like it when I have to plug in when you're watching. I don't want to remind you I'm a biocybe. You're always more distant after, start treating me as a mere ally again. I'm always the same, Magnus. I might be a cybe, but I still have a heart, and that hasn't changed since before I was volunteered for the program. I'm still the same person underneath. I wish you could see that...*

Magnus swallows. He can't believe he never kissed him. Never admitted to reading his letters, never tried to see if the something between them could grow into something real. It's so unfair.

No. Fuck that.

Magnus braces himself. If Alec can be vulnerable in an attempt to rescue them, plug himself in although he hates it, just to try and save Magnus' life, then so can Magnus. He can risk exposing himself, if only they survive. If Alec survives, the fall-out will be worth it.

"Projected crash, T-90," Alec reports in his tinny cybe voice—maybe that's where the nickname came from. "Brake thrusters not responding, shields at 36,2%."

Magnus almost can't hear him through the ruckus of their shuttle falling apart around them.

"31,3%."

Magnus knows this planet, knows the area where their trajectory will roughly lead them. He can save them. They aren't going to die today. Frantically he pushes in the codes for the emergency pods to be unloaded, while the mechanisms haven't yet burned through. He buckles himself loose from his chair and reaches for Alec's chair. He'll get them out. Through the screen in the corner of his eye, he sees the familiar dark earthen and blue tones of Mol 3.b hurtling towards them. With a snap, he unfastens Alec's seat harness, and pulls

him close, not giving him time to protest. They almost fall on the dashboard, but Magnus holds them up, Alec's weight straining his muscles.

"I've got you."

With a deep breath, he looks at Alexander's beautiful face one last time, wraps his fingers around his wrists, and teleports them out of the shuttle.

## Chapter End Notes

Woop! How do you write action???

As you might have noticed, the final chapter count went up. This is mostly because I occasionally underestimate how much words something in my outline will take, but also because I've changed my mind on where to end this. I guess everybody wins because this means even more Malec In Space :D

See you all next time, when things come to a head and there are confessions!

# Chapter 9

## Chapter Summary

In which things come to the surface.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

### **SURFACE OF MOL 3.B - WHO KNOWS WHEN**

Magnus groans. His body feels like he fought a meteorite shower and lost, everything bruised and battered as if he's been crushed by a freighter. But the taste in his mouth tells him he isn't waking up from the party of a lifetime, but rather that he's expended too much magic too quickly.

He'd had to in order to save Alexander.

Magnus sits up in a hurry, sudden worry propelling his aching muscles into action...

...And looks straight into the barrel of Alexander's blaster.

"Who are you and what did you do with Magnus Bane?" he asks threateningly.

What kind of joke is this? "It's me. Did you hit your head when we crashed?" Magnus reaches out, but Alexander steps back and raises his blaster without hesitation.

"We didn't crash. I woke up lying on top o-" Alexander hesitates slightly. "I woke up here, with you, while our- my shuttle is over there, crashed and burning." He points to the horizon, where a dark cloud of smoke is visible. They'll need to move quickly before someone comes to investigate. "I'm reading traces of magic everywhere. Obviously, you got me out of the shuttle somehow after attacking us. But you miscalculated severely. I'm Admiral Alexander Lightwood, though you may know me better as the Tin Soldier. No matter what magic you can do, I won't be taken down easily. So tell me, where is the *real* Magnus Bane?"

Magnus can't believe this. "Alexander-"

Alexander raises his blaster even more, frowning. Magnus needs to adjust his frame of mind. He settles into parade rest but leaves his hands by his side so Alec can see them.

"As you wish, Lightwood then. I am Magnus Bane. You mostly call me Bane. We met while I served on the Greenhorn, right before the war began. Currently, I serve with you on the Alicante."

Alexander is still aiming that blasted blaster at him, but the fury on his face is slowly morphing into wariness.

“You don’t want me to know, but you bought me fancy sheets for my quarters to make me feel welcome when I first boarded.”

*“...sometimes I imagine you on them, but that won’t ever happen. I don’t know why I bought them, they’re not within regulations, but I couldn’t help myself. I hope you like them. That you feel at home here.”*

Better not mention that. “It worked. Until you yelled at me about my shirt.”

“I didn’t yell,” Alexander says, slowly lowering his blaster. “You never take regulations seriously, but an officer is supposed to lead by example. You’d-“ He breaks himself off in the middle of the familiar rant, aims at Magnus again. “You used magic. There never was anything in our files—or the DWA’s, for that matter—about you being a warlock. The Clave would never have approved you serving on the Alicante if they’d known. Were you planted by the DWA? You’ll never take the Alicante, the crew won’t have it, there are fail-safes-”

“Dammit, Alec, I don’t want the Alicante. I never asked for that assignment in the first place. *You* requested my presence. Without you, I’d never even have set foot onboard.”

Alec steps back, blaster unwavering.

“The Alicante is very valuable, they could have swapped you instead of the real Magnus, installed you as a doppelganger to spy on us.”

Magnus has enough of this. “I’m not a spy! I am the real Magnus. I’ve always been able to do magic. The DWA hid it because your precious Clave is prejudiced against warlocks to this day and has been hunting us down for centuries. So excuse *me* for keeping that a secret.”

“Magic on board of any kind of spacecraft is a known safety issue-” Alec starts, but Magnus doesn’t let him finish the all too familiar Clave diatribe.

“Oh please, that’s exactly the kind of prejudice I’m talking about! And fuck it, at least my secrets have a solid reasoning! There’s no valid reason for the Clave to keep whatever went down on Cartha Hub a secret! You know this, Alexander... You know there was something fishy going on or you wouldn’t have requested to stay!”

“The Clave’s motivations are none of your concern, *Bane*, if that’s really your name.” Alec sneers the last part. But then he freezes. He continues quietly, almost soft. “How do you know I wanted to stay at Cartha Hub?”

Magnus is done. His head hurts, he needs to hydrate to recover from using too much magic, and he’s been sitting in the dirt for too long now. His heart hurts as well. He doesn’t like Alec not trusting him, and he knows where this is going. He’s not sure he’ll be able to deal with Alec’s reaction to Magnus’ true identity. But first things first... they need to move, and he can’t let Alec stop him.

With the last touch of magic he has left, he snaps his fingers, making Alec's blaster disappear into the void, and stands up. "I was in the room when you called your sister."

Alec's staring at him, mouth opening and closing again a couple of times. "Izzy?" is all that comes out of his mouth. He almost sounds afraid.

"It wasn't my intention to intrude on your personal call, and I regret the breach of privacy. I needed to know what the Clave was hiding from us, and your data-station was our only in."

"So you were spying! Once the Clave learns of this, the Alliance is *over*." Alec's voice goes from fear straight to fury again.

"What will end the Alliance is the DWA learning of the six Clave ships that just shot us down! Not to mention the fact that you've got a megalomaniac mass-murderer killing Downworlders on your hands and you're keeping that hidden! If this is how the Clave operates, the Alliance has been a farce since the start!" Magnus is yelling, standing his ground like he has nothing left to lose. He's pretty sure he's already lost everything anyway.

"We're trying to apprehend him without causing a panic! I've been trying to be approved for that mission for months! And you're not supposed to know about Valentine!" Alec's voice is raised, hands clenching and unclenching at his sides. The involuntary movement keeps drawing Magnus' eye. He's never seen Alec this visibly emotional.

Magnus sighs, his shoulders heavy with the weight of their impossible situation.

"I know you've been trying, Alexander. But you being a good man does not make the Clave any less corrupt or destructive. I have a duty to my people. I have to warn them about Valentine. It was my responsibility, my duty to find out what was going on. I thought you of all people would understand duty." Magnus is losing steam.

Alec doesn't react to Magnus' plea about duty. He's looking at Magnus like he's never seen him before. "How do you know I've been trying?"

Magnus freezes. He thought he'd lost him already, but this is it. This is the moment where he truly loses any claim to Alexander's trust. He knew it was coming. He's been expecting heartbreak to befall them from the moment he realized hearts were even at play at all. He just hadn't expected it to be his. He doesn't want to lose Alexander's respect, friendship, devotion, *love*. Not when Magnus hasn't been able to explore his feelings, find out exactly what they are.

He takes a deep breath, closes his eyes for a moment, thinks back to Alexander's face while he asked him out. He takes a brief second to imagine the two of them at the Hunter's Moon. Magnus flirting outrageously, innuendo in every line, trying his damndest to make Alexander blush. Alexander not quite relaxed, but his iron control somewhat loosened. Like the collar of his shirt. Alexander maybe - possibly - smiling at Magnus, taking his breath away. But that.... that future is gone now.

Magnus opens his eyes, looks straight into Alec's.

His voice is a little quiet, but he tries to be as sincere and gentle as possible. “I read your letters. I wasn’t looking for them, but I searched for my name while going through your files and... they popped up. I couldn’t resist. They were addressed to me, so I figured I’d get to read them eventually, that the timing wouldn’t make a difference. I was wrong. I’m truly sorry.”

Alexander turns pale, then red. Magnus hadn’t been sure Alec can still blush. He’d always assumed that his body temperature would be controlled by the cyber tech. However, Alec looks ready to kill him out of sheer embarrassment.

“You- How long...? When I asked you-“ Alec doesn’t finish any of his sentences, biting out the words, cutting himself off. His fingers are clenching at his sides again, like his feelings are battling each other to get out. Then, he turns utterly still and motionless. All emotion disappears from his face.

Magnus can hear a soft whirring, but it takes him a moment to realize the noise is coming from Alec. The rune visible on his neck lights up for a moment before turning black again. Magnus has never figured out how the runes work with the tech, whether they still have specific purposes or they’re just meant to make the biocybe blend in with his Nephilim brethren. He wishes now he knew whatever it is that Alec just did, because he’s never seen him quite like this. Every trace of Alexander seems to have disappeared from his face. There’s no emotion, no feeling, no warmth whatsoever.

Not even when he was plugged into the ship had Alec seemed this inhuman.

For the first time in their long acquaintance, Magnus is seeing the Tin Soldier. He doesn’t like it. He *hates* it.

Silence stretches between them, a cold and vicious thing.

Magnus sighs. He wants to explain himself, even though he knows there’s really no way to mend this breach of trust. They shouldn’t be dealing with their personal issues in the first place. Magnus teleported them here because he knows there’s an old smugglers’ haunt at this side of the planet, but there’s no knowing what awaits them there or who might come looking for the crashed ship. Those Clave ships might still land and try to find them. They aren’t safe here.

“We should move,” he tries.

Alec doesn’t react.

“I know you feel like you can’t trust me right now, but it wasn’t me who shot us out of the sky. Those Clave ships might still be after us, so we need to get as far from the shuttle as possible.” A little impatience seeps into his voice despite himself. Whatever personal issues Alec needs to go through will have to wait. They need to *move*.

“Circle ships,” Alec interrupts him, his voice monotone and awful. His posture remains stiff and unchanged.

Magnus takes a moment to digest this info. It's definitely possible. He didn't have the time to really see if the ships wore any markers, so he's inclined to trust Alec's reading on them, and it would explain why they'd been a target. It certainly makes more sense than the Clave itself suddenly attacking their pet project and favorite weapon.

"Circle ships then," he acknowledges. "Whoever is after us might want to come back and finish the job, so we should find shelter. I know a smugglers' hideout where we can lie low and try to get a signal to the Alicante." He looks at Alec, expecting an arched brow or at least a question about how he knows this, but Alec remains impassive. Fuck. "I ejected the emergency pods, so if you can track one of them using its homing signal, we can grab some supplies."

Alec doesn't say a word. His eyes glow eerily for a second, then he starts moving, his steps heavy but swift. He doesn't check to see if Magnus is following him.

He doesn't look back.

## Chapter End Notes

Next time: even more confessions!

Also a massive thanks to Irene for hashing out this chapter with me, so grateful to have you as a beta!



# Chapter 10

## Chapter Summary

In which there are confessions in the dark

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

### THE BRUSH OF MOL 3.B

Magnus follows a couple of steps behind Alec. He keeps an eye on their trail to make sure nobody follows them but stays close enough in the case Alec wants to talk.

They walk in silence. The landscape is undulating, thorny bushes and rocks making their hike difficult. There's the sound of some kind of insect Magnus doesn't recognize, and he can taste dust and who knows what on the air. It's off-putting and unfamiliar. He's been planetside before, of course. Fuck, he's spent time enough on this one, but he's a space dweller born and bred, and will always prefer the familiar surroundings of steel, plastics, and filtered air.

He would have thought that Alec was like him that way, but the Tin Soldier moves his heavy body through the brush like he belongs there, step never faltering, stride ever sure. He's probably using some kind of vision cybernetics to scan their surroundings. Magnus imagines the software makes him perceive most environments in very similar ways, narrowing the world down to terrain analysis, thermal imaging, strategic escape routes, and the like. But Magnus would have to check Alec's eyes to make sure he's using them, and since he's giving Alec some space, there's no way to know for sure.

Alec's moving at standard operating speed, strong and steady. Normally, Magnus wouldn't sweat to keep up, but he overexerted himself portalling them out of the shuttle, so now, he's having trouble matching Alec's pace. Alec doesn't seem to notice or care, and Magnus is hesitant to let him know. It's mostly a matter of pride, but also... If Alec is about to mete out some kind of Clave justice, Magnus doesn't want to appear weak. There's dread simmering in his stomach, making him antsy and anxious. Magnus doesn't want to believe Alec would hurt him, doesn't like thinking of him in this way. He's Alec, after all, but he's still a Clave member, and their record with Downworlders isn't good. Although, knowing Alec, he'll probably follow Clave protocol to the letter and deliver Magnus to the Inquisitor to have him tried for treason.

Fuck. Magnus has really gotten himself into a pickle this time.

Magnus is so focused on keeping his pace steady and his breathing regular, he almost bumps into Alec, who's stopped moving. "Closest emergency pod is 2 clicks away. 5-minute break." Alec doesn't say anything else, doesn't explain the break is for Magnus' benefit. He doesn't even look at Magnus. And yet, Magnus knows he's doing it for him – Alec's body is built and modified to be able to keep moving and operating even in the most dire of circumstances – and Magnus is grateful and humbled that Alec is still taking care of him. Even after everything.

He stops walking and leans against a rock, making sure he's positioned within Alec's indirect line of sight, and stretches his arms, grimacing a little. The landing really did a number on him. He'll be sore as fuck soon if he doesn't take care of himself. "Space travel and magic don't really go well together. At least not portal magic, which needs a clear starting and ending point." For some reason he doesn't understand, Magnus feels compelled to explain why he's currently endangering them both by being so out of it. "Since you're always moving in space or in flight, most lower-grade warlocks can't risk portalling without an anchor. That's how people end up floating in space. There are a lot of cautionary tales told to young warlocks about people exploding or getting stuck in circulation vents. I'm sure the Nephilim have stories like that as well."

He looks at Alec, but there's no reaction whatsoever.

"So, basically... we were moving too fast, I didn't have a clear starting point, I underestimated your weight by a lot, and I didn't have time to compensate for all of that and get our ending location right... which is how we ended up where we were. I just... ran out of magic."

Alec's shoulders tense a little. Magnus is sure he's not imagining it – he knows the set of those shoulders well. Alec still doesn't speak, though.

"I'm glad I had enough magic to get us safely on the ground, at least. But magic depletion feels like about ten hangovers at once, and I didn't even get that drink you promised me."

Alec scoffs.

Magnus sighs. He knows it's hopeless, knows he's lost any chance at figuring out this thing between them, but the loss stings, even though he saw it coming.

"You good to go?" Alec's voice is no longer colored by his cybernetics, but it's still flat, devoid of emotion.

"Yes, sir. I'll keep up." The honorific sounds weird coming out of his mouth, since Magnus has never really bothered with titles before. Too late, he realizes it almost sounds mocking, although that's not how he intended it. He just has no idea how to act around Alec anymore, and it makes him feel off-balance and out of sorts.

Alec starts walking again, Magnus follows with a sigh, close behind.

## **ALICANTE EMERGENCY POD CRASH SITE ON MOL 3.B**

The emergency pod is in a relatively good state. Half of the hull is smashed to pieces and one of the personnel capsules is caved in, but most of the supplies are fine. The pod only holds the bare essentials: some emergency rations, water for five days, two medkits, and two blasters with spare ammunition. They also find a couple of blankets, a floater, and standard uniforms that won't fit either of them.

The comm link doesn't work, unfortunately, and there's no gear to modify it to circumvent the jammer. Alec tries anyway, attempts to plug himself in and ignores Magnus for about an hour, but it's no use. Magnus begins to suspect the people behind this have inside information about their communication systems because their jammer works too well, as if it was specifically designed for them.

He makes use of the time Alec spends trying to contact the Alicante by eating a day's rations to replenish his magic and by stretching out his muscles, so he won't be too sore to function tomorrow.

Eventually, Alec gives up and grabs something to eat. The silence is awkward and tense. Fuck, Magnus has never dealt well with tension like this. He usually ends up running his mouth or doing something impulsive. Often both. Best to try and keep it professional.

"I have no idea where we are exactly, but somewhere out here, there's a smugglers' hideout I've got the access codes to."

"Coordinates?" Alec asks. Magnus' comm link is fried, probably thanks to his magic, so he moves over to Alec, holding his hand open for Alec's comm link. Only, Magnus should have realized that Alec's comm link isn't standard gear, that it's wired into his system, so there's nothing to hand over. He's about to withdraw his hand when Alec steps a little closer, moves behind him, and lays his wrist in Magnus' palm.

Caught off guard by the unexpected move, Magnus' heart starts pounding. A sudden rush of emotion clogs up his throat, making it hard to breathe, and his skin tingles, like there's a magic current between them. He swallows all of it down... Alec's position is a matter of convenience, the easiest way for Magnus to access the comm link right side up. It's practical. It's a kindness. But they're standing awfully close. He can feel Alec's breath on his ear and jaw, can feel the heat radiating from his broad chest, which is almost touching Magnus' back. He can hear the soft whirring sounds of Alec's cybernetics for the first time. On the Alicante, Alec's cybernetics are never audible. Magnus isn't sure why. Maybe it's because they blend into the cacophony of spaceships sounds or because Alec's never had to activate all his systems onboard. The soft noises are oddly comforting, reminding Magnus he's not stranded on this planet alone, that Alec's there, that Alec still has his back.

Magnus takes a deep breath, pretending for a moment that everything's fine. He inhales the enticing scent that's so familiar and so Alec, even when mixed with the sweat and dirt of their day. Then he sighs, gently grabs Alec's wrist, and enters the coordinates to the hideout. His fingers linger for a second on the sliver of exposed skin on Alec's wrist, feeling the wiring

beneath his steady pulse, then Alec steps back, wrist slipping from between Magnus' fingers, the moment broken.

Fuck.

Alec fusses with his comm link to calculate the distance and safest trajectory, then he closes his eyes and stands still for a second.

“It’ll be dark soon, and we’re not equipped to deal with any opposition without the advantages of daylight and proper recon. We should rest here and move at dawn.”

Magnus nods. “Who knows? The Alicante might deal with that jammer and locate the emergency pods during the night. We might be saved by morning. I’ll take the last watch.”

Magnus grabs a blanket, activates the floater so it expands quickly, moves it next to the outer hull of the pod, and settles down on it. Designed for turbulent seas and rough terrain, the military air mattress isn’t as comfortable as a bed, but it’s considerably more pleasant than the rocky ground. Alec follows his lead and settles down opposite him, leaning against a rock. His legs are spread out, his shirt looks creased, and even in the twilight, Magnus can see the streaks of dirt and dust on his handsome face. There’s a little bit of blood by the corner of his mouth. He’s never looked more human than in this moment, tired and tousled. Magnus wants to clean off his face, cuddle up against him, and wrap a blanket around the two of them, to comfort Alec and be close to him. But that’s not an option, so looking at him just... hurts.

There’s no use thinking of what could have been.

“There’s more than enough place on the floater for both of us. They’re built for four people, you know.” Magnus shuffles to the right side of the floater so there’s more space for Alec to sit. He doesn’t want to force him any closer than he wants to be. “Easier to make sure I don’t sneak away in the middle of the night too.”

The joke falls flat, but Alec has never reacted much to Magnus’ jokes, so at least that feels somewhat familiar.

Magnus sighs, closes his eyes, and tries to relax enough to fall asleep, but the image of Alec shutting down his humanity keeps running through his mind. His stomach’s churning at the memory, at how dreadful and sad it is that Alec did that to himself, all because of Magnus. Alec had been trying for so long to open up to him, had been trying to get closer, and then Magnus had betrayed him.

He’s truly the worst human being on this planet. There may only be the two of them, sure, but that doesn’t make the sentiment any less true.

When Magnus opens one eye to take a peek, Alec’s still sitting in the same spot, unmoving, cybernetics whirring quietly.

He’s not looking at Magnus. He’s doing a slow sweep of the surroundings, taking his watch duty as seriously as he does everything else. That’s why Magnus can always depend on him.

It's why, even now, with all the tension between them and their situation fraught with too many politics, Magnus still feels utterly safe with him.

That knowledge makes him want to be the same for Alec. Someone trustworthy. A source of safety and support.

Magnus frowns. There should be something he can do to fix this. Magnus knows all of Alec's deepest secrets. He can't undo that, but maybe it's time he evened the playing field.

"When I was a kid of five or six or so," Magnus starts, closing his eyes again. It's easier to confess to the darkness, even though he's sure Alec's listening. "I killed my dad. He was one of those mundanes Downworlders who believe that all Downworld mutations, vampiric, were or warlock, are due to some kind of demonic influence. He blamed my mom, blamed me, blamed his gods. Never cared enough to become informed. Honestly, any basic genetics book would've told him that all Downworlders, even mundanes without any sign of magic, are carriers of the gene responsible for magic mutation."

Magnus hates telling this story. He's only done it twice: to Camille when she took him in, and to Luke when he was recruited to the DWA. Alec's not saying anything, but Magnus thinks that the whirring has quieted down a little, as though he wants to listen more carefully.

"My mom protected me for a long time, but in the end, she couldn't take the beatings. She died. Killed herself. Then, my father started hitting me. He nearly beat me to death, but I came into my magic just in time. Didn't have any control, so the whole compound exploded, leaving me alone in the middle of the devastation. I didn't have a scratch on me except the bruises he'd given me. So, I ran away."

Magnus can still feel the heat on his skin, how the magic had welled up inside him and flowed out of his body in waves. It's been decades, and he's still never felt that much power. He fidgets on the floater, pressing his cheek against the cold metal of the pod for a moment to ground himself in the present.

"After that, I was a station kid for a while. I ran wild, stealing food, clothes, and anything else I could get my hands on. Nephilim must have urchins too." He looks at Alec for a moment, not sure if he should speak his mind, but fuck it, it's not like their relationship can become even more fraught. "Before I knew you had a sister, I always assumed you were one too, and that was how you ended up as an experiment."

Alec twitches, almost imperceptibly. But Magnus has been learning his minimal tells for a long time now, and he knows this is a sign to wait out the silence until Alec breaks it. So he does. The stillness stretches out into a long, torturous moment, and then Alec speaks.

"My parents volunteered me." Alec's voice is low and quiet. "It was a political move, part of their campaign to salvage the family reputation. Didn't quite work out the way they planned. Working with the Clave never does. Had to build up the Lightwood name myself."

Magnus tries not to breathe. It's the most personal thing Alec's ever told him face to face. When he doesn't follow it up with anything else, Magnus clears his throat.

“Well...I’d say you succeeded. You’re well known, and honestly, Alexander, your reputation doesn’t do you justice. You’re a great Admiral and a great leader to your people, but an even better person.”

Alec shifts position a little, his shoulder making a popping sound.

“Really, you’re going to kill your back sitting on the ground like that. Sit on the floater. I won’t kill you in your sleep.”

Even in the almost dark, Magnus can see Alec hesitate. Eventually, he gets up, bones and cybernetics creaking in protest, and settles down on the other end of the floater. He doesn’t say anything, so Magnus assumes that’s his cue to either go to sleep or continue his tale of woe.

He decides on the latter; having started this confession thing, he might as well finish it. “I didn’t use my magic much because I was afraid of it, but dock urchins are terrible gossips, so eventually word got out. I was caught stealing by some gang members. They brought me to their leader, who promised me torture and bloodshed if I didn’t help them with my magic. I was sure I was going to die – they even had the burners fired up to brand me – but then Camille showed up, and killed the lot of them.” He swallows in the darkness, the memory of her blood-covered face still vivid, even after all these years. “She was a vampire, so it was pure carnage with blood and bodies everywhere. She just stood there in the midst of it all, untouchable and invincible, then she reached out a hand and invited me to come with her.

Magnus takes a breath. “She was the most terrifying thing I’d ever seen, a true avenging angel... and she’d saved me. I would have followed her to the end of the universe. It was only years later that I discovered she’d set the whole thing up in the first place.”

“Ah,” Alec says. He doesn’t sound surprised, just like he knows what’s coming. Magnus supposes it might be a familiar tale to him, a tale of being deceived and manipulated over and over again until you’re the last one standing in the wreckage of what used to be your life.

“The first few years were amazing,” Magnus continues. “I finally got off that station. Camille taught me how to fly, put me in contact with other warlocks so I could master my magic. We drifted from place to place, taking odd jobs here and there. I wasn’t very involved at the beginning, but then Camille started to ask for little favors. Soon those favors turned into... terrible things. Before I realized what was happening, I had become a wanted criminal, and there was no way out.”

Magnus closes his eyes. It’s fully dark now, so it doesn’t make much of a difference in terms of visibility, but he feels too vulnerable and needs to shield himself somehow. He’s spent years trying not to think about those awful times. He doesn’t much like the person he was back then.

“I’m not proud of who I was. I loved Camille, and she used that against me, used me for her own profit, but... when push comes to shove, I was still the one who chose to do those things.”

Alec sighs. In the dark, it's impossible to see if he looks resigned, or sad or dejected, but Magnus likes to think he sounds commiserating. "What was the first one?" Magnus is so surprised that Alec's talking to him that he doesn't answer. Alec clarifies, "The first favor."

"Camille asked me to portal us into someone's home. She said the man had tried to hurt her when she rejected his advances. Said she wanted to take something from his house to teach him a lesson. I did what she asked. Later, I learned that he was a Station Administrator and she'd stolen the access code to the food reserves to ransom them."

Alec shifts his legs. There's a pause, then he starts talking, his voice soft. "My parents told me that it was the only way to restore their honor and reputation. That I'd be stronger and would always be able to protect them and Izzy. They promised it would only be the one operation, that it would hurt, but it would be over soon. I was only seven, so I believed they'd keep their promises. Then I nearly died on the operating table. When they told me I wasn't finished, told me I had to go back, I refused. My father said that if I didn't go, Izzy would have to go instead since they had no other kids to bring honor to the family. I never argued again."

It's a confession in the dark, quiet and hesitant. Magnus' heart breaks for that frightened little boy who didn't know what they were doing to him, just wanted to protect his family, only knew he didn't want his sister to suffer. Magnus can't help looking at Alec, wanting to reach out, to offer some comfort.

Alec's already looking at him, eyes lit up white in the dark, his expression weirdly empty because of it. It's a little unsettling. Magnus never thought much of the old saying about eyes being the windows to the soul, but he keeps catching himself trying to read Alec's eyes instinctively, so there must be something to it. But Magnus is getting used to them. They're just another part of Alec, and he knows now that there's a man hidden behind all those cybernetic bells and whistles, a man who cares and feels deeply.

He closes his own eyes, lets his glamor drop, and opens them again. There's a soft sound from Alec's corner, but he doesn't say anything. They just look at each other, amber eyes reflecting white ones gleaming in the darkness. What a pair they make. Maybe they're both inhuman. Or maybe, if Alec's not a monster, Magnus isn't either.

It's dark, but with the glow from Alec's cybernetics, Magnus can see just see Alec lick his lips. "You really are The Warlock," he says quietly, putting two and two together.

Magnus sighs. He really hates that name. He'd started as The High Warlock, as a tribute to the highwaymen of yore. But people are lazy, kept dropping the "high," and the name had stuck. It's a ridiculous moniker. There are thousands of warlocks spread over the universe, so he's not the only one. He's not even the best or the greatest or the powerful. But that's how names are... once they catch on, they're impossible to change.

"I suppose I am. I already had a bit of a reputation, thanks to Camille. By that point, I'd begun to realize that she would never really love me the way I loved her and that she was using me. But I didn't know how to get out, and I guess... I guess I always hoped I could change her. It all came to a head on a smuggling run. The cargo she agreed to traffick turned out to be a bunch of kids who were going to be trafficked on the black market. I refused. I

pleaded. I bargained. I begged. Camille wouldn't bend or budge. She just laughed at me, at what she called my 'tender heart.'"

Magnus rubs over his chest, the ghost of past heartbreak and betrayal still aching after all these years.

"I portalled us all out of there to a planet much like this one, empty but survivable. I brought an emergency transponder and took the Dewar valve out of the engine so that Camille wouldn't be able to track us too soon. And then... we just waited and hoped. Me. Alone. With sixteen hungry, terrified kids on a rocky planet with very little shelter and my magic completely depleted. I was convinced I was going to die, that in trying to save these kids, I had murdered them by stranding them on a planet they couldn't escape."

The night air is colder now, and even with the blanket, Magnus feels utterly chilled. He scoots a little closer to Alec, who's radiating warmth like always. He holds his breath, but Alec doesn't object.

"Luke found us. I think I cried when I saw the shuttle. He got all the kids out of there and debriefed me for 18 hours. I was so delirious from magic depletion and sheer relief that I told him everything, every horrible thing I'd ever done for Camille, every ration I'd stolen as a kid... everything. He offered me a deal. I took it. Serve five years as an undercover operative without backup or official affiliation – basically, do the dirty work the DWA couldn't officially be involved with – and my crimes would be pardoned."

"He used you too," Alec comments.

Magnus shrugs. He's never held that against Luke. Politics are politics. "He saved me. From that planet, but also from myself. It was a fair deal. I needed to atone for my crimes somehow. I still do. After my five years as The Warlock were over, he provided me with a cover story and new false identity papers and then gave me a legitimate position at the DWA as a Lieutenant. You tried to raid my ship shortly after all of that."

Alec's quiet. Nothing in his demeanor, at least the little Magnus can discern in the dark, betrays how he feels about Magnus' confessions. He's not sure it's enough to gain Alec's trust again. Confessing to his past doesn't absolve him for reading the letters... yet another crime he has to atone for. But Magnus hopes it'll at least ease Alec's concerns about him being a traitor to the Alliance. Alec could never love someone like Magnus, not the real him, but at least this way, they might still be able to work together without bloodshed.

"So... I guess you know all my secrets now. I'm still the same person you've worked with all this time, Alec, but now everything is just in the open."

"You should sleep," Alec responds, voice flat and unreadable, not giving any sign whether he agrees with Magnus. "You've overexerted yourself and need the rest. We don't know what we can expect tomorrow. I'll need you at your best."

Magnus smiles wryly into the darkness. Guess the time for personal confessions has passed, and it's back to professionalism again.



“Okay,” he says. “Wake me up for the second watch. You need rest too.” He scoots a little closer again, until Alec’s warmth seeps into him, chasing away the chill that has crept up on him. He closes his eyes. No rest for the wicked and all that, but he’s so fucking tired right now, he thinks might actually be able to sleep.

He wakes up with the sun shining in his eyes. He’s comfortably warm under his blanket, head resting on something softer than the metal hull he started out on. There’s something solid and warm against his back and shoulder. Magnus blinks against the blinding light. His head is resting on Alec’s lap, blanket pulled snug around his shoulders, Alec’s arm wrapped around him. They’re both absolutely still, except for their breathing, and the soft whirring of Alec’s cybernetics. Magnus has never felt safer, and it’s been a long time since he felt this well-rested. There are emotions welling up in his throat, and he can’t quite fight them back. Damn Lightwood and his fucking generosity. Damn Alec and his penchant for care. Damn Alexander and his tender heart. Magnus doesn’t deserve him.

## Chapter End Notes

Woop! In honor of my birthday, have an extra long chapter!!!

For those curious, there's a [Spotify playlist](#) I've written most of this story to.

I'd also really like to thank Irene for all her awesome beta help. Without her superpowers, this would be half as good <3

See you next time, when our heroes will kick some ass!

# Chapter 11

## Chapter Summary

In which there's breaking and entering

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

### **MORNING - SURFACE OF MOL 3.B - SOMEWHERE IN THE BRUSH**

Magnus does his best to keep his breathing even, but Alec must have realized he's awake. His cybernetic sensors pick up the smallest details, so surely if he's monitoring Magnus from this close, nothing can escape his notice. Neither of them moves.

Magnus feels himself flushing. He's so comfortable and warm, and the weight of Alec's arm makes him feel sheltered. Alec's hand curves around his shoulder, fingers grazing the bare skin of Magnus' neck every time he inhales.

He's never felt this protected or cherished.

Magnus squeezes his eyes shut and tries to make sense of a world where he wakes up curled up with Alexander Lightwood, especially after they spent the previous day at each other's throats. Fuck, he told Alec his most painful memories.

It's too much. He's feeling too much to make sense of it all.

He pushes himself up, hand resting on Alec's warm, muscular thigh for a moment before he can find his bearings and get off the floater. In an attempt to gain some semblance of normalcy, he pats down his pants, but it's no use – the dust sticks to his clothes, and normalcy is nowhere to be found.

Alec lifts a brow at his antics.

"You let me sleep too long," Magnus complains. Offense is the best defense, after all.

Alec stays unflappable. "You needed the rest more. To replenish your magic."

"Alec, you need rest too. My magic won't be any use of us if I have to carry you around because you've fainted of exhaustion."

Alec frowns, gets up from the floater much more gracefully than Magnus had. "I'm not fainting yet."

The thing is, Magnus wouldn't be opposed to having Alec in his arms, needing his support. Or have him in his arms, just because... But that possibility is still lost to him, so he shouldn't think about it. Magnus hands Alec a packet of rations. "Eat this to make sure, though."

The corner of Alec's mouth twitches, but he takes the rations without any further comment. Their fingers touch for just a moment, but it's enough to make Magnus shiver. He's still never felt Alec's hands without those gloves, but his bare fingers feel surprisingly soft, despite the callouses.

Alec's eyes are back to their warm, normal color, and Magnus finds himself staring into them. Fuck, are they having a moment? But that can't be, he's probably imagining it. He breaks eye contact, looks away and searches for a water bottle to calm down, then starts packing up their gear. Alec eats his rations as he's told, then joins Magnus, helping to deflate the floater and put everything they won't bring with them back in the escape pod.

He holds out one of the blasters to Magnus, but Magnus declines. "Don't really need them. My magic is a much more powerful weapon, plus you can use the spare since I magicked yours away."

Alec's teeth graze his bottom lip. He slowly attaches the blazer to his belt. "Technically, this is out of regulations," he comments, but it seems more to himself than an actual reprimand. "You shouldn't be unarmed. I don't know the specifics of your abilities..." Alec breathes audibly, his equivalent of a deep sigh. "I wish there was time to properly test your reach and power."

Alec's standing at parade rest again, hands clasped behind his back, shoulders straight, legs steady. Nothing in his demeanor betrays any kind of emotion, and yet, something about the curve of his lips and the arch of his brows makes Magnus think that he's being teased, that Alec would genuinely like to see his power and competence.

Alas, they have no time to linger, to explore any more of their secrets, to unveil more of themselves. Everything unspoken will have to remain so.

"We should get going," Magnus reminds him. "You'll just have to take me at my word."

Alec just looks at him for a long moment. "I believe you," he eventually says gravely. It sounds like a vow, like he always has and always will. Like he believes everything Magnus confessed to last night. Like he believes in Magnus.

"I never lie to you," Magnus responds, trying to be as sincere and honest as possible. It sounds like a vow as well.

Alec nods, jerks his head back to the brush. "Time to move out."

They move quickly and quietly, limiting their conversation to observations about the terrain. Despite their precarious situation, there's a comfort to the familiarity of this. During their

time on the Alicante, they've made many rounds of the ship, often walking in comfortable silence. There's a certain kind of peace in knowing that your words are valued, but your quiet company is as well.

The closer to the compound they get, the slower their movement becomes. They're both on high alert, ready for everything or anything that might come their way. Still, nothing could have prepared Magnus for the sudden stench that assaults them putrid and penetrating, almost making him heave.

"There's a ditch 300 meters ahead," Alec says. He's back to his cybernetic monotone, but this time, it's not because something Magnus did, but instead to keep them both safe. It sounds and feels different somehow.

They approach the ditch carefully, but nothing moves. The smell gets stronger and more sickening the closer they get, so Magnus suspects it's a grave even before they spot the bodies. There are five of them, all in various stages of decomposition. "Can you scan them for anything obvious?" Magnus asks Alec.

Alec nods and scans the bodies while Magnus focuses on their surroundings. "Three have obvious wounds from blasters. They also seem to have been dead the longest. The others have a variety of wounds, some of unknown origin, and the bodies don't seem to be intact. The one in the red shirt has been here the shortest amount of time, based on the percentage of moisture left in the body."

Magnus takes another look at that one, while Alec checks their surroundings. There's something about the slant of the jaw that's familiar, even if it's hard to tell with the two large wounds on the head. Then he gasps, steps closer to Alec, reaches out to him instinctively. "I knew him... that's Elias," he says.

He'd never expected to see any of his old smuggler associates again. His current position at the DWA wasn't really suited to dealing with petty criminals. He'd said goodbye to his former acquaintances when he ended his life as The Warlock and vowed to never go back. Still, he'd spent many nights with Elias, an eternal worrywart, who was always useful for keeping you awake through a long watch with petty complaints and worst-case scenarios.

Magnus steps even closer to Alec, seeking comfort when he realizes what those wounds mean. "They took his warlock marks," Magnus explains to Alec, the thought alone making him sick. "Like my eyes," he says, letting them flash amber. "He had horns, but for them to know that, they'd have to have broken his glamour." Glamour magic is very instinctive, the first thing a young warlock learns, besides wards. It takes a lot of pain to make it drop against a warlock's will. Magnus doesn't want to think about what they put Elias through to make that happen.

He looks at the bodies again, notes their clothes and wounds. "I think all of these people were smugglers - probably the crew that was occupying the hideout." He doesn't recognize anyone but Elias, but still. He feels like these are his people who have been slaughtered and tortured.

"Execution by a competing gang?" Alec says, almost sounding indifferent. His stance changes, though, and he angles his body towards Magnus. It's not quite an invitation, more of

a subtle softening in his body language. Magnus leans into Alec's steady body gratefully, needing his strength.

Magnus shakes his head. "Smugglers mostly deal with each other, there's not much violence like this between us. Threats and beatings, definitely, but no mass executions like this. And we'd never deface bodies like this. You don't break a vampire's fangs, don't burn a werewolves fur, don't take a warlock's mark. It's a violent desecration. You'd have to be sick to do something like this. Really hate the person you're doing it to."

Magnus doesn't see him move, but suddenly Alec's right there, hand on his shoulder. It's the briefest of touches, barely lasts a second, but Magnus feels better right away, some of the tightness in his chest easing. He's not alone. Alexander is with him. "The Circle," he says, like it's the only explanation. Magnus is inclined to agree. Which means that the same people who tried to shoot them out of space are probably occupying the hideout.

Getting to the Alicante just became a whole lot harder.

"I know a hidden entrance that comes out behind the third storage hall. I think chances are low the Circle will have discovered it, and even if they have, they probably won't have changed the access codes. This system is so fucking old that it's gone from safe to outdated and back around to being secure again."

Alec nods, moves so Magnus can take point. With a last look at Elias and the other victims, Magnus approaches the compound, Alec on his six. There are no wards on the secret entrance, which is a clear indicator that there are no warlocks in the compound anymore. Magnus braces himself, then uses his magic to move the rocks hiding the tunnel out of the way. Behind him, Alec inhales sharply.

"Sorry," Magnus apologizes. There's no way not to use magic on this mission. "I promise only to use magic when absolutely necessary. I don't want to make you uncomfortable. At least not more than I have to."

"You don't make me uncomfortable," Alec says immediately, firm and decisive. "That's a very convenient way to handle obstacles." Magnus smiles at the compliment. Trust Alec to appreciate efficiency.

Once Alec's made sure there's nobody in it, they move through the tunnel until they reach a pair of metal doors with a rusty, outdated access panel. Magnus makes quick work of it, the old codes still working, just as he expected. "Anyone there?" he whispers.

Alec shakes his head slightly. "I'm not picking up any heat signatures or signs movement. But the metal is thick. Best to be careful."

Magnus nods and counts down on his fingers before he puts in the open command. He debates for a second whether or not to dampen the sound of the creaking door but decides to save his magic for any upcoming confrontations.

They make slow progress through the tunnel, pausing to check every room for Circle members so that no one can attack them from behind. Magnus has been here before, but it's

been years since his last visit, and soon, most of the tunnels and storage rooms look the same. They're close to the center of the compound when Alec signals that they need to halt. "There's someone moving in the next room," he says.

Magnus tries the access panel, but it seems the codes have been changed on this one. "Don't have the code. I can blast it open, but that'll make a lot of noise."

"Let me try," Alec says. To Magnus' surprise, he doesn't plug into the panel, just starts hitting buttons, trying out codes, putting in sequence after incomprehensible sequence. After two nerve-wracking minutes of this, the door opens with a click. The corner of Alec's mouth lifts, and he looks pleased with himself. "Circle members are still very much Nephilim. All their codes are still Clave based, because they feel so superior that they don't believe anyone will ever come after them. They didn't even bother to change the reset frequency."

Magnus can't believe this. They were shot out of orbit by a bunch of lazy incompetents.

He signals to Alec that he's ready to face whatever's in the room. Alec kicks open the door, Magnus right behind him, arms outstretched in front of him, magic at the ready, but there's no one to fight. The room's filled with empty cages, meant to restrain rare animals. Instead, one of the smaller cages at the back holds a person, barely moving. There's no one else in the room.

"Clear," Alec confirms. They both hurry towards the cage. Magnus' heart sinks into his stomach when he realizes who's laying there.

"Fuck. No. Dot!!" She's not moving, and there are dark lines streaking the skin of her face, getting darker where the lines coil down her neck to disappear under her shirt. There's clearly something in her bloodstream. Magnus is scrabbling at the locks, trying to get them to open - to no avail.

Alec gently pushes him aside. "Let me take care of this," he says. He grabs two of the metal bars and starts pulling them apart. His muscles strain, his cybernetics whirring like mad, and his face does complicated things. At first, it seems like nothing is happening, but slowly, so very slowly, the bars begin to move. Magnus is nearly frantic with worry for Dot, but he still stops and stares at Alec for a long moment, irresistibly drawn to all that power. There's sweat forming on Alec's forehead by the time the bars are wide enough apart for Magnus to struggle through. He hadn't even known Alec was capable of sweating. But he wishes he could kiss Alec right now as a way to express his gratitude and sheer attraction.

Magnus climbs through, ignores the sour scent of Dot's body, and drags her out of the cage. The black lines going down from her neck are inching ever closer to her heart. It's a bad sign. They did something to her that's causing blood poisoning. Magnus has never been great at healing magic, but he tries anyway. Because it's Dot. She's one of the first warlocks he ever met, she's the one who taught him that neat little trick for enhancing cocktails with magic. Magnus can't let her die of blood poisoning. So he tries, spending a little too much of his magic reserves on the attempt.

Alec watches the hallway while Magnus works, eyes bright white and blaster at the ready. But when Dot opens her eyes, he moves a little closer to them. "How many combatants?"

What kind of weapons? What's their mission? What did they do to you?" He asks, rapid fire. Magnus rolls his eyes a little and winks at Dot. "Don't mind him. He's very focused on getting us out of here and forgot his manners. How're you feeling?" Ignoring him, Alec motions to Dot to start talking.

Dot frowns. "Like shit. Why are you here? With the Tin Soldier, of all people? He's the one they're after, and if they find out you're The Warlock, they'll chip you too – just like they chipped me." She tries to move her hand, but can't quite lift it, still too weak to have proper muscle control.

Magnus follows her movements, sees that the black streaks emanate from the base of her skull, and flinches. "Chip you?"

"It's that Circle lunatic. He's been chipping his Nephilim recruits, and now he's trying the tech out on Downworlders. I'm not entirely sure what he's trying to accomplish, but it can't be anything good. Everybody else is dead. I was well on my way to the stars myself, if you hadn't come around."

From the corner of his eye, Magnus sees Alec reaches a hand for the back of his own neck. It's an odd gesture, because Alec never makes moves like that. He doesn't touch other people, doesn't use touch to soothe himself, and he certainly never fidgets. But he's frowning, and that absolutely is cause for worry, because Alec is always careful with showing expressions, doesn't tend to show them much at all. Well, not ones that aren't caused by Magnus anyway.

"Alec? Do you know what's going on?"

"Most of my programming was implanted with a chip," he explains, then looks back and forth between Magnus and Dot, making it obvious he's not going to talk while she's within hearing distance.

Magnus gives her one of their water bottles, then stands up to and goes over to where Alec's shifting awkwardly. He places a silencing ward around them. "This should keep any sounds in. Can your sensors still read what's going on outside?"

Alec's eyes flicker for a second, then he nods. "Neat trick," he says, neutral tone belying the compliment.

Magnus smiles. "Dangerous if you can't tell what's happening on the other side of it. But pretty awesome when you're around as a countermeasure. But then, we've always worked well together."

Alec's eyes stay the same cold white, but his face seems to relax somewhat, the arch of his brows becoming less severe, lines on his forehead smoothing out. His lips part a little, just looking at Magnus. "Yeah," he breathes, voice barely audible but warm. "We make a good team."

It's the first time Alec has ever acknowledged any kind of relationship between them, and Magnus can't help himself. He beams. "The best," he corrects Alec. He's never been humble,

he's not going to start now.

Magnus is still beaming as he says, "Anyway, I can't keep this up forever. What was that about your chip?"

"I deprogrammed most of it," Alec says without preamble. "Put in firewalls of my own, circumvented the emotion inhibitors, and overrode a lot of the behavioral imperatives. Valentine installed it to be able to control me and update or change my programming at will, but since the program was officially terminated, the programming was never truly worked on again, so eventually, I hacked it."

"Does the Clave know that?" Magnus asks. He's thinking about Alec's reputation as the mindless, ruthless weapon of the Clave, about all the regulations in the standard operating code of the Alliance about Cyborg malfunctions. He's not sure whether they're trying to save face by upholding the charade or if they truly don't know.

The corner of Alec's mouth turns up, so he's almost smirking. "The Clave never goes looking for problems. As long as things run as they should, they don't much care how they're running. So I let them think what they want to think."

Magnus' stomach swoops. There's nothing as attractive as someone confidently running a conn, but this is more than that. Alec used the Clave's prejudice and arrogance against them, and managed to break himself free.

*...I often think back to our first meeting, how you laughed at me with your eyes, the smirk on your lips. Victory looks lovely on you, and you knew you'd bested us before we set a step on your ship. Something changed in me that day. I'd already deprogrammed most of the Clave's software, mostly because it was outdated and I could. I wanted to be me, to think and decide for myself, to feel... But I had no idea who I was.*

*Until I saw you, and for the first time since Valentine disengaged my fear response while I was lying on his operating table, I felt something. Took me a while to realize that what I was feeling was probably desire, but at that moment that mattered little. You unlocked something in me, Magnus, and I'll never forget. I made myself free from my programming, but I only became a person because of you...*

Magnus blinks, momentarily distracted by the memory of Alec's log. He hadn't realized while reading them the first time what this truly meant, hadn't known what Alec had gone through. But now he knows, and he feels, and Alec's almost-smile is making his heart do somersaults.

Magnus shakes his head a little. "So Valentine is adapting the original chip he developed for you, and trying it out on Nephilim and Downworlders alike? What is he trying to accomplish with that?"

Alec's eyes flash again, the whirring of his cybernetics increasing in volume. Magnus pats his elbow. "Relax, the ward is still up. No one can hear us." Somehow his hand lingers on Alec's arm.



Alec steps closer, ducks down so his lips grace Magnus' ear when he whispers urgently. "I think Valentine wants to stage a coup against the Clave. He'd always been very vehemently against the Downworlders, always wanted to exterminate all of you, and he's been very vocal against the current peace treaty. The dead Downworlders we found fit my theory."

Magnus gasps, bends his head back so he can look Alec in the eyes. "The attack on Cartha Hub... Those Nephilim civilians... He's designing mind-controlled minions to carry out his suicide-missions."

Alec nods. "I haven't confirmed it yet – I would have told you once I was certain, but that's what I think."

Magnus groans, bumps his head against Alec's shoulder. The flash drive with information is still in Raphael's hands, and Magnus isn't sure whether he made the handover to Maia or got distracted by the attack and aborted the mission. In any case, he can't be sure the DWA is currently on alert for Valentine, which means they need to get back to the Alicante as soon as possible.

"If he experimented on my friends here, that means there must be some data onsite. We need that in order for the DWA to understand what the Clave's been hiding from them."

Alec frowns lightly, but nods. "And for the Clave to understand the severity of the situation and change their plan of action."

Magnus doubts that the Clave will care enough, but he lets it rest. If Alec can find fault in their actions, after being basically brainwashed since he was a kid to be blindly, unquestioningly loyal, then maybe the Clave can change as well.

"So we'll need to take the compound, without giving anyone the chance to destroy data or get away to warn their co-conspirators."

Alec nods, shoulders straightening. He steps back, Magnus' hand letting go of his arm. Their little bubble of privacy seems to disappear. "We secure the compound. Nobody gets away. Fresh information is secondary to keeping the systems secure and our location secret." Alec sets the parameters of their mission. "We need to get as many details out of Dot as possible and then lock her in here with a blaster, so she can defend herself."

Magnus salutes to acknowledge the orders, waves the ward away, and moves back to Dot. "We're going to have to take this compound..." he starts. Dot nods, clenches her jaw. "Give me just a minute, and I'll help."

Magnus' heart warms. Dot was never much of a fighter, but she was always loyal to a fault. "You're in no state to fight," he says. "Al- the Admiral and I can take care of this. You're in charge of giving us the intel we need. How many Circle members are on this base? Is Valentine here?"

"I don't think he's here anymore. I haven't seen him since before Elias died. At some point, there were more than 30 or 40 people here, I think, but I heard all the fighters leave, and they haven't returned, so it's definitely less than that now." She pulls herself partly upright on

Magnus' shoulder. He helps her up, tries to make her comfortable against the wall. "I can't do nothing, Magnus. I'll be fine. Just let me help, please. They killed all my friends."

"I know. But we can't kick their asses properly if we're concerned about you. You can do one thing to help us, though. Keep yourself safe," Magnus says, handing her the blaster. "And guard this exit. Make sure no one gets away, that nobody who isn't us leaves alive, okay?"

Dot's face is grim, but she nods. Magnus helps her to the door, where Alec is keeping watch again. "She'll watch our six. Make sure the exit stays clear."

Alec nods, doesn't question Dot's capability to fight. Magnus is sure Alec's got a reading of her vitals and knows she's not capable of much. He appreciates that he's letting her keep her dignity like this, that he trusts her because Magnus does. He takes a last look at her, black veins stark in her drawn face. "Dot, if you can't fight them off, it's okay to portal yourself out of here. Go the furthest your magic can take you. We'll be fine, so don't wait for us. If it gets too dangerous, you make sure you're safe, okay?"

Dot smiles at him – a wan little smile, but a smile nonetheless. "Don't worry about me, Magnus. I'll be fine, and I'll keep this exit clear."

He pats her cheek. "I want you to live, Dot." Then he moves to where Alec has moved a little deeper into the tunnel.

Further on, there's a big metal door with an access panel that looks new. "I can read a wide open space and at least five moving heat signatures," Alec whispers. Which means they're in for a fight, and it'll probably get ugly if these are more of Valentine's experiments because who knows what kind of cybernetic adjustments they might have.

"If they haven't changed the space, the room behind this is pretty much a hangar to storage equipment and the bigger cargo that isn't meant to be kept long." He snaps his fingers and draws a picture from his memory, smiles wryly at Alec's grunt of amazement. Alec's only quiet for a second, though, immediately uses his finger to point out where the Circle members are currently moving, leaving soot marks on the paper. He also draws a big shape at the back of the hangar, which wasn't there when Magnus was last here. "Lots of electronic readings here and a lot of heat. I'm thinking a spacecraft, maybe another fighter."

"We need to make sure that doesn't get away." Magnus looks at their map. He doesn't really see a way to keep the Circle members from reaching the craft, especially with his magic still not entirely replenished.

"I could fry it, but the ship might be our only way out, so I'd rather not disable it as a resource."

"Yeah, let's leave messing with the ship as a last resort only. But if you can fry a ship's electronics, does that mean you could also probably fry all the electronics in the compound? Including the automatic ports? The aircraft entrance is hidden, so it can only be opened electronically, or with a whole lot of manpower."

"I probably could, if I've got access."

Magnus points to the access panel placed low on the wall next to them. “We’ve got access right here.”

Alec shakes his head. “We don’t have any explosives to open the door after I fry the electronics.”

Magnus pats him on the arm, lets his hand linger for a moment, like before. “That’s where my magic comes in, handsome. Dramatic entrances are my forte. You take care of their exit routes. I’ll take care of our way in.”

Alec presses his lips together, checks over the access panel again. “I’ll have to finesse it, make sure I don’t disable the electronics beyond repair, so we can reboot quickly once we’ve secured the compound.”

Alec bites his lip, looks up at Magnus through his lashes. He’s stupidly attractive when he’s talking strategy. Magnus wants to kiss him so badly.

Alec doesn’t seem to be aware. “Looks like we’ve got a plan. Be ready. The moment I fry the system, I want us to bust through that door.”

Magnus nods, draws his magic to his fingertips in preparation, and watches as Alec readies himself. His stomach is burning with days of pent-up emotions and battle nerves. He’s ready to destroy some Circle members, needs to let loose all this energy surging under his skin. It doesn’t matter that they’re outnumbered against potentially cybered up combatants. They’re the Warlock and the fucking Tin Soldier. They’ve totally got this.

## Chapter End Notes

Breaking and entering of hearts yo!

Sorry I'm a day late, this week has been pretty bad depression wise, and it didn't help that Sunday involved a 16-hour car ride, which took a lot more out of me than I'd anticipated. (Basically, my body has been a wreck for two days now).

At least it was a long chapter (had to split it in two again)! And Dot!

Next time, our heroes fry a lot of electronics, some Circle members and each other's brains!

# Chapter 12

## Chapter Summary

In which electronics, Circle members, and nerves are fried.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Magnus thought he was prepared for Alec frying the systems, but expectation and reality never turn out the same. So, when the lights suddenly go dark and all he sees is the white light of Alec's eyes and his runes light up, for a moment, Magnus is blown away by how alien Alec looks. Alien and utterly beautiful. Breathtaking. Half a second later, there's a loud, sizzling explosion somewhere in the hangar, followed by a lot of shouting. "Now," Alec orders in his electronic monotone.

Magnus doesn't hesitate. He blows out the door. The hangar is shrouded in shadows, the only sources of light a couple of ventilation holes in the back and Alec's electronics. Magnus can't really tell where or how many combatants there are, but before he can comment, Alec's already reporting. "Seven combatants, four there, one there, there and there." He shoots something at every spot, sparks lighting up the dark suddenly, so Magnus can see where they are. Magnus moves immediately. "I'll handle the three that are spread out, you get the four close ones. And tone it down, your lights make you too visible in this darkness." They light him up enough that Magnus can see him shrug.

"Let them shoot," Alec says. He moves his big body towards the cluster of combatants, his step heavy and sure, arms whirring while he loads up his weapons.

"Fuck, you're so hot," Magnus mumbles, a little too loud. For a blink of an eye, Alec's step falters, then he moves forward.

Magnus has no time to admire the sight. He has some Circle members to obliterate. He runs towards the closest fighter, sending two bursts of bright light to the other two, trying to blind them so they're temporarily disabled. The man in front of him is hard to see in the dark, but he's easy enough to locate by his heavy breathing. Magnus sends a burst of magic behind the man. Then, once his target is distracted, Magnus blasts him right in the chest. It's enough power to kill a man, but the Circle member, who drops his weapon in surprise and grabs his chest, remains standing.

Even in the dark, Magnus can see how the Circle rune on the man's neck flares a bright red. It reminds him somewhat of how Alec's runes light up when he's in cyber mode.

"Alec!" Magnus shouts. "They've been enhanced. They're biocybes."

All Magnus hears in response is a lot of grunting and the sound of blasters going off. He's got no time to worry about or check on Alec, because in front of him, the Circle member is bracing for attack, and Magnus can hear the other two fast approaching. He fires another magic bolt at the closest one, then runs for higher ground. If they're anything like Alec, they'll be heavy and slow, and Magnus can use his speed to his advantage. The dark makes moving fast difficult, however, and Magnus isn't sure it's delaying the Circle members similarly. They'd constructed their whole plan around the combatants being Nephilim. If they'd had a night vision rune, they'd still would have needed time to activate it, giving them the advantage of darkness on top of the element of surprise.

Now, the darkness is a drawback, offering the Circle members cover while Magnus is the one who can't easily see where he's running. Unless... Alec has seen his eyes after all, and these traitors won't live to tell the tale. Magnus hesitates for another heartbeat, then lets his glamor drop. With his cat eyes, the hangar becomes a little brighter, and Magnus can easily see the three Circle members move towards him in the dim light. He quietly jumps on a couple of crates, then calls his magic to himself in preparation. Holding all this power makes his skin prickle, and for a moment, he revels in the sensation. He so rarely gets to use his magic this freely.

Then, he lets go.

Magic bursts from his fingertips in bright bolts aimed at the Circle members' weapons, hands, and necks. If he can't kill them with magic, maybe he can fry their enhancements. It definitely slows them down, but Valentine's flunkies seem immune to pain, so it takes far more of Magnus' power than he'd expected to keep them at bay. He keeps at it until they're all crumbled to the ground, all but one.

"Will you stay down?!" Magnus yells at the last of his targets, who has somehow found another blaster and is currently taking shots at Magnus from behind a crate. Magnus thought he'd hit every piece of electronics in the big lumbering idiot, but apparently he was smart enough to pack a spare weapon. His legs are hurt badly though, so he's stuck behind the crates, unable to move. Magnus ducks when another salvo comes his way, then grins when he spots the metal barrels behind the man. He hopes they're filled, but even empty, they'll probably do the trick. He has to strain himself to lift them, magic spluttering under the weight. He should practice more; he's getting rusty. With a grunt, he lets go, raining down the rattling barrels on top of the Circle member. "Bet you'll stay down now," Magnus says with a grin.

He can't crow over his victory for long, however; behind him, he hears something that chills him to the bone. Alec's grunting in what sounds like pain.

Magnus makes his way from the back of the hangar to where he can hear Alec fighting. When he gets closer, he sees Alec fighting with two Circle members in close combat, a motionless body at their feet and another on the ground a small distance away. Alec moves fast despite the bulk of his body, and Magnus can tell from his form that it's not the first time the Tin Soldier is fighting hand-to-hand. But Alec is fighting empty handed while the other two have big, ugly-looking knives. What's worse, one of the ones that was previously down is pushing himself up again, blaster in hand. Magnus feels a frisson of fear travel up his back.

Alec can't die. Magnus can't let anything happen to him before he's told him... before he's made him smile.

Magnus rushes forward, cursing Valentine and the Circle in every language he can think of. Once he's within range, he sends a powerful burst of magic toward the would be shooter. The Circle member falls down, crying out in pain, blaster burnt to a crisp.

Magnus skids close, searches the Circle member for a knife, and slams the hilt of the weapon against the man's temple to knock him out. The Circle member stops breathing, which isn't quite what Magnus had intended but proves an effective way to eliminate the threat nonetheless. When Magnus looks up, Alec is trying to pull off one Circle member of his back, while the other is circling him, looking for an opening.

When the circling one moves forward to make his move, Magnus doesn't hesitate. He hits him with enough magic to push him back several feet, the scent of burning flesh filling the hangar, his clothes caught on fire. He can't do that with the other one because Magnus can't risk hitting Alexander, can't risk disabling his cybernetics now that his magic is tuned to them.

For a moment, Magnus feels utterly helpless. Then, Alec makes a complicated move, twisting his arm unnaturally, grunting in pain while his cybernetics whirl. He ducks down while he does it, grabs the Circle member by the throat, and throws the man over his own body towards Magnus. Magnus doesn't hesitate. He blasts the Circle Member with the full raging might of his power, frying him while he flies through the air. His body lands with a sickening thud several feet away, neck bent at an awkward angle.

Nothing moves in the hangar anymore, except both their heaving chests. After a couple of heartbeats, Magnus snaps his fingers, summoning several lights to hover around them so they can make sure they truly got rid of them all.

"No other signs of life," Alec reports, voice the now familiar monotone. It's oddly soothing.

Alec takes a step forward, then hesitates, the movement even more awkward now he's in Tin Soldier mode. "Report," he says. Then, voice a smidge less frozen: "Are you okay?"

Magnus nods. "Yeah, I'm not injured. Are you okay? Your arm looks... bad."

Alec looks down, like he's only just noticing that he dislocated his own arm to win the fight, then roughly shoves his arm back in a more natural position, an awful, nauseating crack filling the silence of the hangar. Magnus reaches out, holding back the movement just in time.

"All systems ready," Alec says.

Something in the way he says it, the emotionless way he talks about his own body suddenly makes Magnus furious and protective. He's not even sure Alec felt any pain in that shoulder, isn't sure how much his cybernetics can overwrite, but he doesn't care. He feels it for Alec. All the pain and betrayal at being used like this. No one should feel this callous about their own well-being. He's so angry he can't speak, throat choked up with rage and emotion.

Alec doesn't seem to notice. Instead, he takes stock of the Circle members, some of whom are still smoking.

"Well done," he says.

Magnus snorts, but his stomach drops all the way into his boots when he looks around. The Circle members Alec dealt with seem like clean, methodical kills, perfectly aimed blast shots and a broken neck. The ones Magnus dealt with look like they were consumed by fire, their clothes melted onto their bodies. They look destroyed.

Magnus swallows, but looks up at Alec defiantly, keeping his glamor down. There's no hiding the monster now. It's hard to face Alec amidst all the destruction he wrought. It's one thing to show off his eyes. It's another thing altogether to face all the death he's caused with the power running through his veins.

"I get it now," Magnus says, after the silence between them lasts too long. "What you said in your letters... I get why you don't like it when I watch you plug in. I've never minded. You're stupidly attractive when you're being all capable and impressive. But now... I get it. It's hard to show the parts of yourself you dislike. I have all this magic that I hide away and..." Magnus waves a hand at the bodies lying around them. "And when I let go, only destruction follows."

Magnus looks away. "I'm sorry you had to see me like this. I know you can't possibly feel the same about me now, not after everything that happened, not after seeing me like this, but I wish it wasn't like this, Alexander. I wish..."

Magnus' heart feels heavy with regret and sorrow. If only things were different. If only they were both regular mundanes who'd met at a Station somewhere in outer space. No politics, magic, or cybernetics between them. If only they'd had a chance.

Magnus takes a deep breath, looks back up at Alec. "I wish things were different between us."

Alec is quiet for a couple of moments, long enough for Magnus' heart to become even heavier, weighed down with dread and regret. He shouldn't have brought up Alec's feelings. He'd lost the right to talk about those, not that he'd ever really had it to begin with.

"You read my letters," Alec says, interrupting Magnus' depressing train of thoughts. "So you must know, Magnus. You must know how I feel about you. Nothing could ever change that."

Magnus shakes his head in disbelief, heart somersaulting with hope. "I couldn't believe it. Nobody has ever loved the real me..."

"I do," Alec says. "I don't care that you're a warlock, or The Warlock. I don't care about the things you did. You're Magnus Bane, and I love you. Every part of you."

Magnus lets out a shaky breath. He can't quite believe this, no matter how vehement Alec sounds. But he can't help but think about all the little moments between them, the way

they've worked together, the way Alec has always held him in regard and listened to him... The way Alec looks at him, even now.

"I didn't dare to think you could still love me... but I hoped so anyway," Magnus confesses, voice small in the open space of the hangar. He licks his lips and takes a small step forward. If Alec can be this brave and honest, he can too. "And I love you too, Alexander. It just took me a lot longer to realise it." His heart is hammering so hard that he's sure Alec's sensors can pick up on it. He's never felt more vulnerable. "I'm in love with you too," he whispers.

Alec just looks at him, surprised and unguarded, lips parted slightly. He closes his eyes for a second. The whirring that has been present ever since they crashed on the planet dies down. Only their soft breaths break the silence surrounding them.

When Alec opens his eyes again, the eerie white light is gone, and they're the warmest Magnus has ever seen them. A strange look passes over Alec's face. He's looking at Magnus like he's never seen him before.

Magnus swallows and looks back.

"Fuck it," Alec mumbles. "Screw regulations." He takes two steps forward, eyes darting to Magnus' lips, grabs him by the lapels of his uniform and kisses him.

## Chapter End Notes

Depression is a bitch. Work is a bitch on top of that.

Apologies for the very, very belated update. Not sure when I'll be able to update again, my brains are very unreliable at the moment. But I haven't abandoned this, and I will finish it, rest assured. We've gotten to the good part now, after all.

Thank you all who've kept commenting on this story while I was dealing with things, they really helped brighten up dark days. And as always, I couldn't have done this without Irene, my partner in crime, my badass bitch, <3.

I love to discuss this fic, or anything else related to Alec and Magnus. I can be found at [tumblr](#) and [twitter](#), although I'm currently trying to give my mental health a break so I'm off and on again.

You can always use the hashtag #HoTMalec too.

<3



# Chapter 13

## Chapter Summary

In which breaths are lost.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Magnus' heart is beating so hard, it feels like it's going to jump out of his chest. Alec's lips are soft but insistent, stealing Magnus' breath away with every slide against Magnus' lips. A soft sound of surprise escapes Magnus when he feels Alec's tongue slide into his mouth. Somehow, his hand makes it to Alec's waist, pulling him closer. His other hand is splayed over Alec's chest, where he can feel the slow, steady beat of Alec's heart against the palm of his hand. Alec feels so big and sturdy against him, heat radiating off of him.

Magnus wants to hide away from the universe in his arms.

Magnus wants to protest when they part - he wants to kiss Alec forever, but before he can speak, Alec pulls him close and kisses him again. Magnus' stomach swoops in an entirely undignified way, like it's the first time he's ever been kissed.

He has no idea how long they kiss, how long they stand there amidst the destruction, but he knows he never wants it to end. Which is why he chases Alec's lips once more when Alec moves back, and why he keeps his eyes closed for a moment, trying to memorize the feeling of Alec's lips against his. When he opens his eyes, the way Alec looks is... devastating. There's a subtle flush in his cheeks and his lips are parted, tongue flicking out for a brief moment, and his eyes are wide, looking at Magnus in shocked excitement.

"Wow," Magnus breathes out.

Alec blinks. He moves to clasp his hands behind his back to settle into parade rest, then stops himself. Instead, he reaches out towards Magnus, then hesitates and lets his hand fall awkwardly, dropping to his side. Magnus wants to devour him. Kiss him for hours. Get him somewhere horizontal and make love to his magnificent body until every part of Alec knows it's okay to touch Magnus. Always. Everywhere.

"I-uhm..." Alec's voice comes out in a breathless croak. It's the most human he's ever sounded, and the most beautiful thing Magnus has ever heard. "I didn't expect it to be like this."

Magnus steps a little closer, unable to stay away, pulled towards Alec like a gravity well. "What did you think it would be like?" His voice is husky as well, but he refuses to be

embarrassed about it. Apparently, Alexander Lightwood makes him weak at the knees, and Magnus is ready to embrace that fact. He's ready to stop hiding from this. From them.

Alec swallows, eyes locking on Magnus' lips like he wants to kiss him again. "I expected... I thought you'd move away, be... repulsed, maybe shoot me."

An iron band squeezes around Magnus' heart. "Alexander," he whispers. He slides a hand up Alec's chest, feeling the immovable strength of him, then straightens the collar of his uniform shirt. "I would never. I've wanted to kiss you since you boarded the Greenhorn. Haven't wanted to shoot you nearly as much." He strokes the corner of Alec's eye, where there are subtle laugh wrinkles etched into his skin even though he never smiles. "Couldn't stop thinking about your eyes. "

The corner of Alec's mouth lifts up. It's an almost smile, but it's enough to quicken Magnus' heartbeat. Before Magnus can do something undignified, like swoon at the Admiral's feet or cry, Alec's hands settle on his waist, hesitantly pulling Magnus closer. Magnus goes all too willingly, sliding his hands up to Alec's shoulders, happily getting lost in the feeling of Alec's lips on his.

He doesn't move back when they part for air, his lips brushing Alec's as he mumbles, "So, what is it like in reality?"

Alec heaves out a breath. "Like flying," he says. "Like magic."

Magnus' heart does the swooping thing again, but before he can kiss Alec while tearing off his uniform, there's a coughing sound by the door. Alec moves in the blink of an eye, pushing Magnus behind him, arm braced protectively in front of Magnus, cybernetics whirring.

"Didn't want to interrupt," Dot says awkwardly. "But I didn't hear any shooting anymore, so I came to check up on you guys."

Magnus pats Alec's shoulder. "Easy, Admiral, easy." Still, the protective gesture makes him feel warm all over. Makes him feel cared for. "You're very sweet," he says to Alec, smiling when color rises in Alec's cheeks in response. "I can look after myself, but I appreciate it."

"I know you can look after yourself," Alec mumbles. Then, barely audible, he adds, "Still want to look after you."

Magnus can feel himself getting hot in the face, and this won't do at all... He can't be so obviously compromised, feelings bared for everyone to see. They're professionals, not to mention they're surrounded by dead bodies and Dot is watching them with disbelief and shock. Next to him, Alec visibly pulls himself together, posture stiffening, eyes glowing white while he reads their surroundings. It hurts to see Alec lock himself away like that, but Magnus understands. He's not really keen on explaining himself to Dot either. This thing between them still feels private and fragile, like only one word would blow it all away.

So Magnus takes a step back, clasps his hands behind his back in an imitation of Alec's posture, and nods towards the deck at the back of the hangar. "I'll look after Dot and check

all those crates and boxes. You check if there's any more information to be found at their data-station."

Alec nods, opens his mouth as if to say something, but then his eyes dart to Dot, and he moves away without a word.

Dot is leaning against the wall, eyebrow arched. She still looks like death warmed over, but Magnus is honestly relieved to see her alive.

Dot smirks at him. "The Tin Soldier, Magnus? Really?"

Magnus waves her away. "It's nothing serious. Just letting off some steam." The lie is an automatic response, but it tastes foul the moment the words leave his lips. He sneaks a look at where Alec is working on the data-station, hoping he didn't hear. Magnus doesn't ever want Alec to think Magnus doesn't feel what he feels. He's not sure what they are to each other, not sure where any of this is going or what it all means, but he's sure it's serious.

"Uhuh," Dot hums, disbelieving. Magnus ignores her, not willing to lie anymore, but not willing to expand on this thing between him and Alec either. It's too private, and he's not used to sharing the inner workings of his heart.

He sits Dot down on a stool while he goes through the stuff stashed in boxes stacked against the wall. There's a lot of personal trinkets and belongings, and he has to swallow back his grief when he finds a familiar medallion that used to belong to Elias. There's no time to linger, no time for a proper burial. So he pockets it, along with a few more small mementos for the other Downworlder victims. He'll remember them. Get justice for their deaths.

He can't hide his sigh of relief when he finds the familiar lodestone he was looking for. "The necklace is gone," he says, handing the stone to Dot. "But I think this is yours." She closes her hand around it reverently, relief obvious on her face. "Thank you," she says, her voice trembling. "Thank you for getting me out of that cage. I know you didn't come here for me, but thank you, Magnus. I won't forget."

He pats her gently on the shoulder. "Don't mention it. I'm glad we were here."

"If there's anything I can do to repay you..." Dot's voice trails off.

Magnus shakes his head, then aborts the movement. "You don't owe me anything," he says. "But... we don't know what's out there waiting for us, and we might not make it back to the Alicante. Someone needs to make sure the DWA knows what's going on here."

Under the dark marks on her skin, Dot pales. She swallows. "Where do I need to go?"

"Use your lodestone to get out of here, then get a message to Luke Garroway at the Admiralty. Don't communicate with people from the Clave, only DWA personnel. If they ask for credentials, say, '16 kids are stranded on Farain.' That should get you in direct contact with Luke. Then tell him everything Valentine's been up to, the experiments, the suicide attacks using Nephilim, and that the Clave is keeping it hidden."

Magnus takes Dot's hands in his own, wrapping his fingers around hers and the lodestone she's clinging to.

He can feel Dot trembling under his hands, but nevertheless, she nods.

"You'll be alright, Dot. Luke's the one who got me away from Camille. He'll look after you."

"Okay," she says, voice shaky, but growing stronger. "I can do this."

"Yes, you can. Now, get out of here."

Magnus steps back and watches Dot stand up, her movements slow and careful. There's a pang in his heart because... he's not entirely sure she'll be okay, and even after all this time, she feels like crew, like one of his people. He wants to look after her himself. But this is the safest way out of here, and her lodestone is too small to teleport more than one person.

Dot smiles at him. "Be careful, Magnus," she says. She presses the lodestone against her breastbone. "And be happy."

Dot disappears before Magnus can object or deflect, and he's left feeling raw, his emotions all over the place.

But there's no time for feelings.

Magnus makes his way to Alec, who's plugged himself into the mainframe of the data-station. "There's not much data here," Alec reports. "I'm downloading it all, but as far as I can tell, there's very little about Valentine's plans here. Most of it is logs on the coming and going of the freighters and fighters. Nothing about the prisoners or experiments he conducted here."

Magnus frowns. Luke will believe him if he gives a report in person, but they don't know the status of the Alicante. If Raphael is dead or lost the drive with the stolen data, Magnus isn't sure there's enough evidence to convince the DWA the Clave has broken the Alliance. "The logs might give us an idea on how the Circle members move, so those are good to have. Can you make a copy for me? We should have a backup, in case... in case only one of us makes it out."

Alec looks up at him, white eyes turning an expressive hazel. "No," he says decidedly. "Nothing will happen to me. Or you. We'll make it out. I only just- We're..." Alec doesn't finish his sentence, but his eyes say it all.

Magnus smiles wistfully. He knows from experience nothing is certain in wartime, but Alec's certainty that they'll somehow survive all of this and make it out together is touching. He wants to feel that kind of certainty, but... he's never trusted good things. They never stick.

"It's a good protocol to make a backup," he says instead, appealing to Alec's thorough nature while he hands Alec one of the portable stick drives he always carries.

Alec nods abruptly, plugs in the drive, and starts the download, brows furrowed.

“Anything on the Alicante? Can we get past that scrambler, get a message out to her?” Magnus asks, mostly to distract Alec from his darkened thoughts.

“Can’t operate the scrambler from here - it’s likely operated from Molen Station. But I’ve accessed the sensors, and the Alicante’s still within reach. No sign of other ships.”

“Have they docked at the Station?” If Raphael has gotten the drive to Maia, Luke will have data to corroborate Dot’s story.

“There’s no way to know what the Alicante did in our absence, but they aren’t docked, so they might be moving out any moment if they think we’re dead. So, we should look at the ship next,” Alec says, while they wait for the transfer to finish. “It’s our only way out of here.”

They’re running out of time. “I fear it might be disabled in some way because none of the Circle members tried to get to it to escape.” Still, even with the time-crunch, Magnus can’t get himself to move to the fighter, lingering behind Alec’s shoulder. He deserves a couple more moments of closeness.

He’s absently watching Alec type away, when he realizes that Alec’s only plugged in with one hand, even though he would be able to work more quickly with double data streams.

When the download finishes up, Alec hands him the drive without comment and makes to move toward the ship, but Magnus grabs his wrist, turning it over in his hands. As always, Alec’s hands are covered with his fingerless gloves, the ports and wiring in his wrists protected by the leather. The port at the base of one glove is ruined, and Magnus can see the wiring disappear into the skin of his wrist underneath. “What happened?” he asks, finger carefully trailing over the mangled skin.

Alec hums awkwardly. “You didn’t unplug me when you teleported us out of the shuttle, so it tore.”

Magnus feels bile rise up in his throat. “I’m so sorry,” he whispers. “You should have said something... I didn’t know.”

“It’s okay,” Alec says. “The other one still works.”

“I never meant to hurt you,” Magnus whispers, raising Alec’s wrist to his mouth, pressing a kiss to the leather and metal covering his wrist.

“I know, Magnus. It’s fine.”

Magnus presses another kiss to Alec’s wrist, then reluctantly lets go.

Alec doesn’t say anything for a moment, the quiet between them filled with tension and feeling. Then, he huffs out a breath. “We should check out the fighter ship.”

Magnus wants to object, wants to apologize more, wants to swear he’ll never harm Alec again, but the right words won’t come, and they still don’t have time to waste on feelings.

They head over to check out the fighter ship. The engines are cold. The ship's completely shut down, and Magnus curses while Alec hacks the access panel. It'll take a while to get her running, and every moment that passes, he feels the time pressure rise. He hates being out of touch with the Alicante, hates that there's no way of knowing if their crew is okay.

It's dark inside the ship, and Magnus stays close to Alec, wary of any nasty surprises in the form of booby traps. But the fighter is clear, and the cockpit is clean. No Circle members lying in wait. No people in cages. Alec moves into the pilot's seat, plugs himself into the dashboard, and starts up the controls. It takes a while for the system to light up, and when it does, Magnus' heart sinks.

There are error messages flashing all over the screen. With a muffled curse, Alec starts pushing buttons, his eyes lighting up white. "There's a system error. She needs a complete reboot. I know the system well so it won't take long to start up the reboot, but it'll take about an hour to reformat."

Magnus nods. He lingers for a moment, feeling useless while Alec works, then shakes it off. The ship's emergency lighting flickers on after a couple of moments, so he sees that as a sign to explore their surroundings. He pockets the dried emergency rations he finds and is pleased to notice that the medikit is fully stocked. He tries out a couple of his old smuggler tricks and is gratified when that yields a stash of illicit candy. Chewing on the sweets, he makes his way back to the front, taking a moment to ogle Alec's broad back while he works on rebooting the fighter's system. Alec is listing to the side slightly, his left shoulder even tenser than normal, making Magnus frown. Did he miss another injury?

Alec swivels around in his seat, saying, "We'll have to wait while she works through the program. I can't speed it up any more than I have."

There's a dark spot, barely visible on his black uniform, but Magnus was looking for a sign. "You're hurt," he says, immediately grabbing the medikit he found earlier. "Let me take a look at it."

"It's not impeding my proper functioning," Alec says, sitting up straight.

Magnus rolls his eyes, sighing. "It's impeding mine because I'm worried. So let me take care of you."

Alec eyes him for a moment, then nods and leans back, his movements stiff despite his claims. Magnus moves closer until he's standing between Alec's legs, hands moving to the buttons on Alec's shirt. Alec doesn't say anything, doesn't move, but something in the slant of his mouth makes Magnus hesitate. "Is this okay?" he asks quietly, fingers hovering over Alec's top button.

It takes a couple of beats of silence before Alec nods. "Yes. Otherwise, you can't apply proper medical care."

Magnus wants to object. He refuses to be the one taking away Alec's choices about his body. Too much of that has happened already.

Alec interrupts his train of thoughts. "I trust you."

Magnus' heart skips a beat. He looks at Alec's face to make sure he means it and gets lost in the hazel of his eyes. A hesitant smile curves around Magnus' lips. "I trust you too," Magnus says, voice low and too tender, revealing the emotion he's desperately trying to hold back.

He opens the first button, still signaling his every move, giving Alec ample time to object in case he changes his mind.

"This isn't quite how I imagined undressing you," Magnus mumbles.

"You thought about undressing me?"

Magnus flushes. It's embarrassing how much Alec affects his ability to control his reactions. "How could I not?" he confesses. "I tried not to... it's not ideal to fantasize about your superior officer."

The corner of Alec's mouth lifts into an almost smile, making Magnus' breath catch in his throat. He wants to see a real smile on Alexander's face with a desperation that borders on agony.

"I thought you liked breaking regulations," Alec says, a hint of teasing in his tone.

Magnus is delighted. He can't help but grin as he undoes another button. "Only if it's worth it," he agrees. "And you're very much worth it, Alexander."

A hint of color rises in Alec's cheeks, spreading all the way to his ears. Then he looks down at Magnus' hands, hovering over his chest. "I- There's a lot of scarring."

Magnus remembers Alec's story about the man at Deerna station. *When he saw the scars and the ports in my wrists, he must have connected the dots. He stopped smiling, and while he tried to hide it, I could see the terror clearly in his eyes. I repulsed him. I terrified him.*

"You're you," is all he can say, unable to find the words to express that he'll never, ever look at Alec like that man had. He remains careful while unbuttoning Alec's shirt, fingers barely grazing the warm skin of Alec's chest. When it's undone all the way, Magnus parts the fabric of Alec's uniform. He moves slowly so he doesn't aggravate Alec's wound, his movements baring an abundance of dark chest hair, a muscular chest marred with pale, criss-crossing scars.

Magnus' breath hitches, fingers tensing around the lapels of Alec's shirt. What's left of his magic makes his skin tingle, his emotions surging up within him and searching for an outlet. It's strange to be simultaneously overcome with burning rage and desire.

When he finally tears away his eyes from that delectable chest, Magnus is dismayed when he sees how Alec is looking at him, full of wariness and caution. Magnus lets go of Alec's shirt to tenderly stroke his cheekbone. "You're beautiful. Every part of you," he says, voice rough with how much he feels. "All I feel when I see your scars... all I want is to burn down the Clave for what they did to you. Every single one of them - Valentine twice - Until they're

wiped out of the universe. And then, lick every scar, kiss every reminder of where they hurt you until all you can remember is bliss.”

Alec’s lips part, his cheeks and chest flushing. Magnus wants to devour him. Tenderly.

“Not sure now is the time,” Alec croaks after a couple beats of silence. “But I would be amenable to that.”

Magnus smiles wolfishly. “I’ll remember that,” he promises. “Now. Let me take care of you.”

He grabs the medikit, then steps back between Alec’s legs. The wound doesn’t look deep. It’s not a stab wound so much as a cut, but the edges look frayed. There doesn’t seem to be any fabric stuck in the wound, so it’s easy enough to disinfect it. Applying the field bandage is a little trickier because Magnus is very aware of Alec’s warm breaths ghosting over his throat, aware of Alec’s hands resting on his spread thighs, aware of the heartbeat drumming so close to him. But he manages to keep the wound closed while he sticks the repairing bandage on there.

“All fixed,” Magnus says in a husky voice, carefully patting Alec’s skin above the bandage.

“Magnus.”

Alec’s voice feels like a caress, deep and warm. When Magnus looks up, Alec’s still flushed, and his eyes are filled with something Magnus can only read as desire.

“We don’t have time,” Magnus objects automatically, immediately regretting it.

Alec moves his hands to Magnus’ legs, sliding over the back of his thighs until they end up resting on his hips. Almost without pressure, he pulls Magnus a little closer.

“Maybe I like to break regulations too,” Alec whispers.

With a choked moan, Magnus slumps forward, hands sliding up Alec’s chest until he can cradle his head. Alec meets him for the kiss, leaning up, lips parting against his.

Alec seems to swallow every one of Magnus’ breaths, his tongue exploring the inside of Magnus’ lips, his fingers digging into the curve of Magnus’ hips. They kiss until Magnus is dizzy with it, until his legs are so shaky he’s afraid he might fall.

His skin feels like it’s on fire when they part, and Alec looks... debauched. Cheeks flushed, chest heaving, mouth chasing Magnus’ lips, he looks and feels like he stepped out of the best of Magnus’ dreams. Even better, because the rapidly beating pulse under his fingers means this is real.

“Let me make you feel good,” Magnus whispers, trailing a finger down Alec’s chest, until he hovers above the button of Alec’s pants. Alec is noticeably hard under the straining fabric, and Magnus wants like he’s never wanted before. While Magnus has always considered himself a generous lover and has amassed many a compliment from satisfied bedfellows, this time, it feels different. Because this time, his desire is flavored with something else, a deep



longing to make Alec forget himself, pleasure him until he's awash with joy and exultation. He wants to make Alec happy. "Please," he begs.

Alec nods, eyes heavy-lidded, and Magnus doesn't hesitate. He opens up Alec's pants, shoving them down as well as he can, baring his cock, then climbs onto Alec's lap. It's graceless and frantic, but Magnus doesn't care. He kisses Alec again, getting lost in the way the soft caresses of Alec's mouth belie all that simmering power and strength.

Alec's hands slide up his back, pulling Magnus close and tight until Magnus' clothed cock is pressed against Alec's bared one, and they break apart, foreheads resting against each other. Magnus can feel himself shudder with the strength of his desire, and he has to blink while he collects himself.

Alec gasps when Magnus licks his own hand. "Can I touch you?" Magnus asks, still wanting to be sure.

"Always," Alec says. He says it like he means it.

Magnus has to kiss him again for that, reveling in the trust bestowed upon him, then he finally wraps his fingers around Alec's cock. Alec's whole body jerks like he's been hit with a blaster shock when Magnus moves his hand. His fingers tighten around Magnus' hips, and his eyelids slide shut, chest heaving with his heavy breaths. Magnus devours him with his eyes, hungry to see every minute reaction on Alec's face.

Beneath him, Alec's trembling, and with every stroke of Magnus' hand, soft little noises escape his lush mouth, stirring Magnus on.

"Magnus, I-" Alec sounds wrecked already, like they've been fucking for hours, when Magnus has barely touched him. "I've never- You feel so- I'm so..."

Magnus gets it, even though Alec's incapable of finishing his sentences. He swoops down to taste that mouth again, needing to inhale all of Alec's shuddering breaths. "It's okay," he mumbles against Alec's lips. "You can let go with me."

Alec moans, fingers digging into Magnus' skin, head falling back. His hips jerk under Magnus' thighs, trying to move with Magnus' hand. Magnus speeds up his movements, and it only takes a couple more strokes until Alec comes, his whole body shaking with it.

Magnus' heart overflows with joy and tenderness at the look of bliss and relaxation on Alec's face. He should always look like this, and Magnus wants to be the cause of Alec's happiness forever.

His own cock is straining in his pants, and with a bitten back moan, Magnus undoes the buttons of his pants with one hand, the other braced against Alec's stomach.

"Let me," Alec says, his voice husky. His gloved hands struggle with Magnus' uniform pants for a moment before pushing Magnus up so he can slide them down Magnus' thighs. They get stuck below Magnus' butt, and after a couple more attempts Alec gives up, pulls Magnus' back on his lap and finally releases Magnus' cock from his underpants. He reaches for

Magnus' cock, then hesitates, stroking down Magnus' cock with his fingertips instead of wrapping his hand around it like Magnus craves. "I want to... But- My gloves, they... they'll chafe," he explains haltingly.

Magnus grins. "Speaking from experience?"

Alec's already flushed face becomes even redder. "Possibly," he mumbles, then adds, "I don't want to hurt you. I never want to hurt you."

Magnus trails his hand up Alec's chest until he can cradle Alec's jaw. "All you have to do is kiss me and hold me, and I'll take care of the rest."

Alec nods. "Affirmative." And fuck if that doesn't go straight to Magnus' cock. He'll never be able to spend time with Alec on the bridge anymore, not if every word is going to get him going like this. Which is probably why what they're doing is very much against regulations. But what little care Magnus had for Clave rules evaporated the first time he got to kiss Alec, and he's not stopping now. Especially not when Alec slides his hand up Magnus' arm, pulls him closer by the shoulder, and kisses him like it's the first time all over again. With a heady mix of desperation, tenderness and heartbreaking determination. Like he's resolved to map out every part of Magnus' mouth with his tongue.

Eventually, Alec lets go, stroking those gloved hands down Magnus' back. "Come for me," he murmurs, wrapping his hands around Magnus' waist.

Magnus wraps his own hand around his cock, looks down at where Alec's come is still clinging to the soft hairs of his belly and starts stroking himself. He doesn't need much. The long-simmering attraction has combined with the adrenaline of battle and the sight of Alec coming undone under his hands, to turn him on more than ever before. Magnus strokes himself while he braces himself against Alec's chest, forehead leaning against forehead, his pants mingling with Alec's breaths. Alec is rubbing his back, his thigh, the ridges of his fingerless gloves making for a strange yet arousing sensation.

Magnus bites his lip and increases the speed of his hand until he comes, biting back his cry of release, moaning at the sight of his come spattering all over Alec's belly and mixing with his own. It's messy and undignified and utterly glorious, and Magnus revels in it.

Hands tangling in his hair, Alec pulls him down in a kiss. Magnus is still breathless so it's somewhat sloppy, but judging by Alec's enthusiasm, he doesn't mind.

They're rudely interrupted by a series of beeps. Alec groans. Magnus is just about to ask what's going on when the interior lights of the ship come on, dazzling Magnus with their brightness. Behind Alec, the dashboard lights up too, screens all active and going through their start-up process. "The reboot finished," Magnus says.

Alec nods. "We should get cleaned up and get to the Alicante. Report." His fingers tighten slightly around Magnus' hips, betraying the fact that he doesn't want to move either.

Magnus sighs. Duty has never appealed less to him. He strokes down Alec's cheekbone. "When this is all over, we'll go on leave, and I'll take you to bed properly... so we can take our time."

Alec nods, lips parted. His cheeks are slightly flushed, his hair is in disarray, and Magnus can't believe he ever thought Alec inhuman or unreadable. All Alec's emotions are right there in his eyes, and Magnus feels flustered and shy under the heat of emotion in that gaze.

Sighing again, Magnus disentangles himself from Alec's lap. He pulls his pants up and straightens his shirt as well as possible. He gives Alec a bandage from the medikit to clean up his stomach, not daring to do it himself lest they get sidetracked. The blinking lights of the dashboard serve as a constant reminder that they can't linger anymore. Their time apart is over. Time to face reality and deal with the threat of Valentine. Time to bring the DWA up to speed and try to force the Clave to observe the Alliance. Who knows what state the crew of the Alicante will be in when they find the ship, especially after seeing their two commanding officers shot out into space... With their luck, there'll be a mutiny on their hands. Magnus' money is on Raphael ruling them all.

When they're both dressed, Alec takes the co-pilot's seat. "I'll do weapons and shields. You've got more experience in planet lift-off."

Magnus nods, smiling slightly as he takes place in the pilot's seat. He could get used to Alec appreciating his experience in this warm tone of voice. The ship is an unfamiliar build, but it's pretty self-explanatory, especially since Alec deals with most of the start-up sequence. Magnus taxis the ship out of the hangar, the blinding light of the outdoors coming as something of a shock. The dry bushland of Mol 3.b stretches out before them.

"Alexander," Magnus says, then takes a deep breath. Alec looks at him with a question in his eyes, face almost back to his professional blank one. "I know this Valentine thing is a mess, and everything is going to get even uglier, but I'm still glad this happened. Us." For some reason, Magnus' heart is hammering. But Alec does that thing with his mouth where he lifts a corner of it ever so slightly in a tiny gesture that softens his whole face, the almost-smile that's quickly becoming one of Magnus' favorite expressions.

"Me too," Alec says.

He doesn't add anything else, but it's enough for Magnus. They'll fight their way to the Alicante. They'll deal with the Clave and Valentine and the DWA and anything else that stands in their way. They'll rescue the Alliance. They'll do it together, and together, they can do anything. They're the Warlock and the Tin Soldier, and there's nothing in the universe they can't handle.

"We'll make it out of this," Magnus declares, pulling at the joystick to accelerate the ship.

They have to. Magnus still has to make Alec smile properly.

Thanks as always for the incomparable beta @irisadler  
I couldn't write this fic without your continued support. <3

Until next time, when things get heated!

## End Notes

Inspired by and roughly based on the book Games Of Command by Linnea Sinclair.

Updates every other Monday

EDIT: **Currently updating erratically.**

My personal life is currently very difficult and mostly chaos, and I'm struggling with my mental health. I will be back, I have a beta who really loves this story and won't let me leave it unfinished... I just need a little break now and then.

I love talking about Alec and Magnus, Shadowhunters and Space, so come find me at [tumblr](#) and [twitter](#)!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!