

Rebuild

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Rebuild

by [imacashew](#)

Summary

After Helios, Loaderbot finds Rhys in the wreckage of Handsome Jack's office. With some help, he'll put the pieces back together. This is a story of what comes next.

AU Where the gang reunites much earlier after the Fall of Helios.

Chapter One

Chapter Notes

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

His body swayed as his one eye stared at the other in his hand. With a shaking fist, he crushed the ECHO Eye in his fingers, letting the shards of cybernetics slip through the gaps. Pain radiated through his skull and shoulder and he felt the blood seep into his shirt and vest.

Blackness swallowed the only vision he had left as his body pitched forward. He hit the floor of the smoldering office, letting the darkness take him.

“Rhys.” Darkness still surrounded him when he came to, pain shooting through his shoulder and head once more. He let out a pitiful moan. Shards of glass bit into his cheek and the smell of burning filled his nose.

“Rhys, have you expired?”

A disjointed robotic voice. He opened his only eye, blinking in confusion at the bright red optic in his field of view and he tried to focus. “Luh...Loaderbot?” He mumbled, voice rough and the words difficult to form through the pain, “Buddy, you’re alive?” Rhys wasn’t sure if it was the burst of emotion or the unbearable pain he felt, but tears pricked at his eye.

He pushed himself up on his one arm and it shook violently. Hands steadied him, but they felt unfamiliar. He looked at his friend again, eye widened as he looked the robot over.

Instead of the broken, battered body that Rhys remembered on Helios, there was the golden exoskeleton that Jack wanted shove violently into his body in the very office they were in.

He let out a strangled yelp, his throat hurt and it became much more difficult to breathe. His hand grabbed at the tie around his neck, threw it aside, and yanked at the collar of his shirt.

Loaderbot’s hands gripped him with desperate intensity. The metallic hands were doing to cause bruises later on, but Rhys didn’t think about that. His friend’s head was on that maniac’s ridiculous, horrifying metal body.

“Rhys, you are panicking. Try deep breathing protocols.”

Rhys let out a strangled breath, and attempted to calm himself down. After several minutes of staring into LB’s optic, pain knocked some sense into his addled brain.

“You need medical attention. You have lost a lot of bodily fluids.”

He let out a shaky laugh, “Yeah...I noticed that.” Laughing hurt. Talking hurt too. He put his hand on Loaderbot’s shoulder and attempted to get to his feet. After several moments of attempting to gather his strength, Rhys flopped to the ground. He pressed a palm to his aching head and groaned.

“Shall I carry you? Clearly, you cannot hold your own weight.” His brown eye glared at the robot, but maybe LB was right. He still felt tired and lightheaded. He’d probably die again if it wasn’t for the Loader. Reluctantly, he nodded and waited for the Modified Loader to kneel to his level and he put his left arm around his neck.

LB lifted him in his arms, like a baby or damsel in distress. If he wasn’t bleeding all over his friend and actually felt lucid, he would be horrified by this position. When Loaderbot stood, the movement jostled his bleeding shoulder. He hissed.

“Sorry.” The bot started moving forward to find a way out of the wreckage, but Rhys thought of something. Something important.

“Wait. LB, can you go over to that trophy case? It’s important.” Jack’s trophy case was on its side, smashed into shards of wood, pieces of metal, and bits of glass. It would be so easy. Loaderbot did what he was asked, and set Rhys down next to the case. Once he started digging through the splintered wood and glass, the robot behind him simply stared.

“I would recommend not staying long. You are still injured and need medical attention.”

“I know, I know. Give me...give me a second.” He found it under the cowgirl hat and oversized gun. The frame and glass was smashed to splinters as well, but that was fine. He just needed what was on the inside. He pulled it out and shook the deed.

“Hey, LB? What do you think about owning Atlas?” The robot simply continued to stare at him, unimpressed.

“I think you need medical attention.” At that, Rhys felt dizzy again and pressed his hand to his forehead. As if he understood the man’s moment of weakness, the Loader came over to him and picked up the large shotgun, slung it over his shoulders, then picked up Rhys in his arms. The man let out an oof of surprise.

“Okay. Okay,” He mumbled as he awkwardly shoved the Atlas deed into the pocket of his vest. He leaned his head against Loaderbot’s metal ribs and flinched at the pain, “We need to find Vaughn, LB.”

“Noted.” With his one eye, Rhys looked at the warped metal and glass. The fires around them didn’t seem to want to stop, the heat licking at the robot’s feet. The loyal bot kept Rhys away from it, lifting him higher from the flames.

He really needed to make it up to Loaderbot for everything he did for him. For Vaughn. For Fiona. For...Sasha. He really hoped he would survive this. He thought of Sasha and her cute face and fiery personality.

He sighed. He wanted to see her again.

A nagging voice at the back of his head whispered, *They left without you, cupcake*. Rhys shook his head. That voice shouldn't be in there anymore. He was sure of it.

The movement made his head ache even more, the dizziness flashed through his head for a mere moment. Rhys rested his head against Loaderbot's metal shoulder and let the cold metal seep into his throbbing skull.

The jerky rhythm of the bot walking out of the wreckage made him realize how exhausted he really was and he let the darkness take him again.

When he came to consciousness again, the jerky rhythm he felt was considerably faster. He was no longer in the arms of a robo-skeleton either. Rhys opened his eye and immediately squinted: the sun was up?

Looking around, he found he was in the flatbed of a Pandoran bandit technical. Someone had bandaged his shoulder and head haphazardly so he wouldn't bleed out. Did Loaderbot steal a car? When did that happen?

He opened his mouth to say something when the technical came to abrupt stop, making him bounce roughly on his side. He heard the snap and click of a shotgun being loaded. The brown eye widened. Oh shit.

Rhys scrambled up, his weakness made him fall back on his face, but he tried again. Once up, he dragged himself to the front of the vehicle. Breathless, but determined.

"LB!" He choked out, mouth dry and throat sore. He saw the robot pointing the gun that he pilfered from Jack's case at someone on the ground. Loaderbot didn't even turn to him.

"You're awake." Rhys nodded, glancing at the person at the ground. They had a blanket over their head, bright Hyperion yellow with the logos all over it, but covered in soot and tears in some places. He had one like that, back on Helios. He remembered there was a sale on them at one point.

Rhys shook his head slightly and looked over the person again. Their hands were raised, a Hyperion pistol in one hand, so he could see what they were wearing underneath the ripped blanket.

An orange button-down blouse.
A black pencil skirt.

The heels were missing from the pantyhosed feet and were replaced with heavy duty boots that were probably taken from the wreck or a dead bandit.

Rhys leaned against the side of the technical and placed his hand on the barrel of Loaderbot's shotgun and pushed down.

LB let him and lowered the gun, the red optic turned toward Rhys. He could only guess what was going through the robot's circuits: confusion.

"...It's a friend. Stand down."

"Rhys? Oh, thank god!" Rhys looked toward the figure, who lowered their hood.

There, in stolen boots and a makeshift Hyperion cloak, was Yvette. A grin stretched across her face. Her glasses were cracked and a few scratches littered her face. There was a bruise on her dark cheek, but she didn't seem to mind. He smiled.

"Glad you could make it, Yvette." With a nod toward her, she bolted to the back of the technical and scrambled onto the flatbed with him. He inched towards her and wrapped his arm around her neck in a weak hug.

Yvette never seemed to be the touchy-feely type, but she gently wrapped her arms around him in return.

"I was worried you weren't going to make it," She whispered in his ear. He squeezed her a little harder.

He let out a weak laugh, "You should know I'm hardier than that." She chuckled in response and pulled back from him. She took in the bloodied bandages around his head and shoulder and gripped him on his good arm.

"Are you going to tell me what happened?" He sighed.

"When we find Vaughn...definitely."

Chapter End Notes

This is my first legitimate fan-fic in like 10 years and first time writing for Tales from the Borderlands. The idea of this came to me about a month ago and hasn't left me alone since.

Leave Kudos or write comments, I don't mind.

Chapter Two

Chapter Notes

I wasn't expecting this to get much attention, but I'm glad people like it!

Just so it's clear: I have played TftBL like 4 times and almost every single time, I've played Rhys as really loyal to his friends. I always forgive Vaughn and let Yvette live. I wouldn't know what to do if I didn't. Rhys is also really loyal to Fiona and Sasha (especially if they call him and Vaughn friends).

I also have some background with Borderlands 2. I'm almost done with the storyline for that one!

Despite the warm reunion, sitting with Yvette at the back of the technical as they pushed onward proved to be much more awkward than anticipated.

It was obvious that she had questions, with the glances she kept giving him. Some were concerned. Others were confused. And despite everything (him forgiving and saving her), he still felt a little bit bitter that she sold them out. Either way, Rhys wasn't going to talk just yet. He wanted to find Vaughn first.

Vaughn, his best friend for practically forever and who seemed to be taking better to Pandora than he probably ever would, was on this hell planet alone somewhere. He just wanted to know if he was okay. Alive. He really hoped that the Psychos didn't get him. He squeezed his eyes shut. He felt a headache coming on.

"Rhys? You alright? You're shaking." Rhys blinked at turned his head towards Yvette. She had decided on the side with an eye, to make it easier for him to look at her.

"I am? Huh?" He turned his gaze downward to see his hand shaking. He gripped the fabric of his pants tightly on his thigh, the pale skin already paler. A grimace etched itself on his face, his knuckles whitened the tighter he gripped. Why did everything have to hurt so much?

Oh, *yeah* . He fell down a torture hole, nearly got sucked into the great abyss of space, crashed landed in a malfunctioning escape pod, and tore deeply-embedded cybernetics from his own body. That would explain every bit of agonizing pain he experienced at that moment.

He groaned and curled in on himself, resting his forehead on his knees. Rhys would do anything for a comfortable bed and a week of sleep. After this whole day and a half, maybe that was enough payment to the universe to let him do just that.

He squeezed his eye shut, trying to think about something, anything, that would distract him from the pain. Instead, his mind gave him Jack's laughter at the back of his mind and the visions of Helios crashing around him, debris hitting the escape pods and breaking them apart, killing his coworkers inside. *Stupid Jack. Stupid brain.* A groan escaped his lips.

A gentle weight was laid on his shoulders, making him a little warmer in the Pandoran sun. Rhys opened his eye to look at Yvette, who was a little closer to him, wrapping the bright yellow blanket around his shoulders.

"You look like you need this more than I do right now," she said with a slight smile on her face. He moved his hand from his pants to the blanket, fist tight. He gave her a small nod of thanks. Looking over her again, questions came to his mind in a furious stream.

"So...what happened with you?" His question came out rough, his throat sore and maybe drier than before. He swallowed.

She gave him a small frown and sighed, "You look like the walking dead, bleeding all over the place, and you want to know my story before you tell yours?" He shrugged. She stretched her legs in front of her, picking at a run in the pantyhose with still manicured nails.

"There's not much to it, really. I safely got down here with the escape pod and the first thing I came across was a bandit with a rocket launcher. They were running after me screaming gibberish and that made me break both heels. Found these," she tapped the sturdy boots, "In a Hyperion loot crate with some ammo. I picked up the pistol and the blanket in the wreckage. Some guy was wrapped in several of them crying. I think he was wondering if he should start eating dirt? Anyway, I wandered all night and morning before coming across your robot friend with the shotgun." Rhys looked at the back of Loaderbot's head. The bot seemed too focused on the road in front of them. He furrowed his eyebrows.

If Loaderbot was here and with him, where was Gortys? Was she with Fiona and Sasha?

"LB..." He started, but got interrupted by a huge bump in the path. There was far-off shouting behind them. He turned around, squinting at the horizon.

Oh.

Oh shit.

Bandits.

He looked back at Yvette, who seemed to have the same reaction as him. After a millisecond of hesitation, she scrambled into the gunner seat above them and swung the machine gun around, nearly whacking him in the head. That is *exactly* what he needed right now. *More* brain damage. He ducked lower and wrapped the blanket closer as Yvette shot at the bandits, who were closer and ready to swerve into them, sending bullets and sand everywhere.

He watched as bullets continued to batter the other vehicle, smoke starting to rise from the hood. The other car slammed into them, sending his bleeding stump of an arm into the side of the bed and he let out a hiss of pain. A bandit jumped into the technical, a shotgun aimed

at Rhys' head. Rhys fumbled around in his pockets as he looked for his stun baton. Where was it? Did he lose it between Helios and here? His eye darted around the bed of the technical - did it fall out of his pocket?

He spotted it across from him, on the other side. Right by the bandit's foot. He scrambled to the other side, narrowly missing a shot from the gun. The bandit kept shooting at him, the bullets missed and then ricocheted off the bed of the truck. Reaching his arm towards the baton, his fingers brushed the metal of the grip.

As he did so, several things happened at once.

Loaderbot swerved the technical and caused the bandit to stumble, their shotgun drifted from their target (Rhys). The stun baton rolled into Rhys' outstretched hand. With all the strength he could muster, he swung the baton into the bandit's chest. The bandit flew from the impact, out of the technical and was sent rolling into the dry desert.

Yvette's machine gun finished off the other technical, exploding it into bits of metal and glass. Rhys laid on his back, face turned to the wreck, eyes wide. He flicked off the stun baton.

"Rhys, you alright?"

"Is everyone alive?"

The two voices clashed in an absurd way, but at least he was happy to hear both of them. His heart thrummed violently in his chest. He was still alive. His two friends were still alive. He could do this. He let out a shaking sigh.

Yvette's face appeared over him, brows furrowed in concern. He gave her a shaky thumbs up. Her shoulders slumped in relief and she hopped out of the gunner seat and sat next to him.

"Your luck is still going strong, huh?" She joked, still a bit shaken from the experience. He could easily understand that. That's all that Pandora seemed to be. Bandits, bandits everywhere.

He leaned his head near her thigh and closed his eyes. She gave his head a gentle pat and then started playing with the strands of his hair. His eye glazed over, the comforting motions relaxed him and almost made him fall asleep.

He didn't know how much time had passed, but the sun was farther in the sky when he snapped out of his trance and Yvette was sitting on one of the benches in the technical bed. Rhys looked up at her, exhausted. Everything still hurt.

She sighed, “We should probably look into getting you an Anshin, Rhys. Maybe find you a real doctor to bandage your shoulder. You’re way past pale and starting to look grey.” He grimaced. He hadn’t seen a reflection of himself since Helios fell and he could definitely believe that he probably looked like a walking corpse.

In the moment, thinking about a one-armed zombie sounded absolutely hilarious. He laughed at the image despite himself and Yvette rose an eyebrow at him. He blinked.

“Well, obviously the blood loss and heat *are* getting to you. We need to stop somewhere to patch you up.” Rhys looked away and coughed into his shoulder. A taste of copper found itself at the back of his throat and he chose to ignore it. He’d deal with that later.

He looked past her into the Pandoran Borderlands; there was nothing but sand. Sand and dead things. The technical slowed down, a Catch-A-Ride sat innocently in the distance.

Rhys’ heart sunk into the pit of his stomach, guilt gnawing at his soul. With Scooter gone, who was going to take care of the business now?

His shoulders slumped as the technical pulled in front of the station, a figure already at the vending machines (bullets, guns, and first aid. Who needed vending machines with actual food in it? Not Pandora, that’s for sure) under the overhang that covered them and the information boards that usually discussed “temp work” (usually Vault Hunters getting asked to kill some bandits or creatures trying to kill you). They were still too far away to see any detail on said figure.

Rhys took a glance at LB, who seemed to have his shotgun at the ready, watching the figure dig through their pockets to use the gun vending machine and then the bullets one. He watched as the guy put money into the machine and looked over a rifle that came from it. This place was so weird.

At least it’s better than Helios and Hyperion, a voice that sounded like his own whispered at the back of his mind. He had to agree with that.

Loaderbot looked down at Rhys and Yvette from his perch and tightened his grip, “Stay here. I will get supplies.” The golden robot jumped down, which sent up puffs of dust into the air around his feet.

Rhys looked over at Yvette, who raised an eyebrow at him. He simply shrugged. They both watched as Loaderbot walked into the station, gun drawn. The figure froze, put their hands up, and turned to the bot, not dropping the gun in their hands. There was a moment of hesitation before the figure slung the gun over their shoulder and walked closer to LB.

They seemed to examine the robot with an intense gaze. Rhys felt his heart drop again, and he made a very stupid decision.

He got off the truck and stumbled his way over to Loaderbot, stun baton in hand, and Hyperion blanket over his shoulders.

“Rhys! Get back here!”

He ignored the call from behind him, Yvette forgotten as he walked towards Loaderbot and the other figure. “You stay away from him, asshole!” He coughed out, voice harsh, but not loud enough for the other person to hear. He scrambled over the stairs of the station, nearly falling on his own ass before reaching the top. Loaderbot seemed to hear him making a racket and whipped his optic towards him. The other figure jumped and looked at him as well.

He coughed again, lungs burning, “...Stay away from him.” Rhys shook the baton in a threatening way, electricity crackled from the handle up the rod. He fell to his knees, dropping the baton next to him. His lungs burned and he started coughing, small splatters of blood speckled the ground. He held himself up with a shaking arm as he stared into the reddened dirt.

Corporate-looking shoes entered his vision with the bottoms of stained brown pants. Rhys squinted, those looked really familiar...

“Rhys?! Oh crap. What the hell happened to you, man? Where’s your arm? Where’s your eye?” Hands grabbed him by the shoulders, gentle but with a familiar intensity. Rhys slowly looked up.

There were those weirdly familiar abs, goatee, and cracked accounting glasses of his best friend. He wanted to cry.

He grinned instead. “Hey Bro,” He moved his shaking arm to up and around Vaughn’s shoulders, pulling him down into a strange, one-armed hug. The other man hugged him back. The strong, short arms tight around him until Rhys let out a moan of pain. The hug became much more gentle.

“Sorry, sorry. Holy shit, man. I saw Helios go down and I-” Vaughn trailed off, unable to continue. Rhys had a vague idea of what he was going to say anyway.

I thought Fiona and Sasha were dead. I thought you were dead.

He just gripped his brother’s shoulder a little tighter, leaning on him with some weight.

“No wonder LB didn’t shoot you on sight,” he mumbled, taking a glance at the robot who merely stared at him with his glowing, red optic.

“Rhys. I told you to stay there. I was getting supplies.” Rhys frowned.

“LB, I thought he was going to disassemble you.” He got a stare in return. Whatever, so much for trying to save his friend from certain death.

“Hate to tell you this, Rhys, but you look like shit,” Vaughn deadpanned as he helped Rhys stand upright, letting his friend lean on him for support. A far off memory of Vaughn dragging him home from a college party came to mind as they found themselves in a familiar position. He looked up in time to see Yvette bounding toward them, her pistol aimed at Vaughn.

“Don’t touch him- Vaughn?” The former accountant let out a happy laugh.

“Yvette! Thank god, you’re alive too!” She pocketed her pistol in a holster on her hip and went over to help with Rhys. She was waved off by Vaughn, who apparently was fine carrying his much taller friend.

They made their way back to the technical as Loaderbot bought supplies from the machines, Vaughn and Yvette making him comfortable as best they could. He rolled over as he was laid down in the bed and let out a violent cough. More blood splattered. Vaughn let out a gasp of surprise and rubbed his back.

He felt his eyelid droop, the urge to sleep returning. He shook his head, which agitated his growing migraine, so he let out another moan.

“I have come with supplies.” Rhys opened his eye to see an Anshin vial roll by his head. He turned towards Vaughn and Yvette, who seemed to be opening a health kit. Oooh, he just remembered how much he hated needles. He shuddered.

Vaughn caught his eye and gave him a nervous, but concerned smile.

“Rhys, bro, just focus on me,” Vaughn’s voice was strong enough that he barely noticed the shake in it, “Okay?” He watched Vaughn as he felt a sharp prick in his neck. The contents of the vial took effect almost immediately. There was a weird, uncomfortable feeling in his gut and chest, like the Anshin was knitting his organs back together, which soon turned into a dull pain. It intensified tenfold in his stomach, which made the vision in his eye go white.

He had one last thought before his eye rolled to the back of his head and he passed out.

This really has to stop happening.

Chapter Three

Chapter Notes

I have no idea what I'm doing.
This seems like filler.

He felt light slapping on the side of his face as he came to, mumbling slowly turned into words.

“...need to change those bandages. They really look disgusting.” Yvette.

“Well, yeah. But might be easier if he was awake for it, wouldn’t it?” Vaughn.

He let out a quiet groan.

“Rhys?” The two voices became one. The slapping paused. A sigh escaped someone’s lips. He opened his eye a crack.

The sun was still in the sky and his whole torso pulsed with a dull ache. Seemed like the Anshin did its job.

“H-how long was I out?” He mumbled, lips dry. He swallowed, his throat still felt raw. Someone put a canteen to his lips and tipped the contents into his mouth. The water tasted metallic, harsh but still refreshing his dry lips and throat.

“Maybe a couple minutes? You really scared me there, dude.” Rhys looked at Vaughn, who looked like a weight was lifted from his shoulders. He realized that Vaughn was the one who gave him the water, as a ratty canteen was in his hands. Shaking, he moved his other arm and gave a weak push.

Nothing. He just wanted to sit up. Hands reached for his shoulders and sat him up. As soon as he did, his head spun a little and he pressed the heel of his palm to his forehead.

“Rhys?” He waved off whoever asked his name.

“I’m fine,” he mumbled, feeling their hands on his back. The dizziness passed and he opened his eye to look at them. Both friends had their lips in a frown; Vaughn’s eyebrows were furrowed tight and Yvette’s were high in disbelief.

“Okay, first things first. We’re changing those.” Yvette stated while pointing at the grubby bandages wrapped around the stump of his shoulder. It just occurred to him that they were wrapped around his clothes, just to stop the bleeding that came from the mass of flesh and

wires. It made sense, LB was probably the one who did it. He was a robot. He probably didn't know how to do human first aid.

With his nod, his friends worked together to unwind the bandages, then remove his Hyperion vest and half-pinstriped teal shirt from his body. Dried and sticky blood made the shirt stick to his skin as it was peeled away.

With the clothes and bandages gone, he had a good view of the arm socket, or lack thereof. The socket was ruined, metal pieces removed and probably still attached to the arm hanging in the ruins of Helios. Wires still stuck out from under the flesh, ripped and frayed. The whole shoulder was covered in dried blood, some still oozing from still open wounds, but others slowly scabbing over from the Anshin he was given. He felt a slight churn in his gut.

Vaughn poured a little of the water from the canteen onto the wound in attempt to clean it. Rust-colored water dripped from the ruined shoulder and onto the bed of the technical. Rhys just watched it in morbid fascination. Yvette used his ruined shirt to wipe it away, revealing the inflamed skin. The pale skin was an angry red from the abuse he gave it in Jack's office. He grimaced.

"Did a skag eat your arm, bro?" Vaughn whispered in a horrified tone. He raised a hand as if he wanted to touch some of the exposed wiring, but instead started to wrap the bandages around his friend's torso. Rhys merely bit his lip in response.

How could he tell Vaughn about how he crashed Helios to the surface of Pandora, killing their co-workers and bosses, ruining their only home since their career started, just to rid the universe of Jack? How would his best friend react? As it stood at that moment, he wasn't sure if he felt guilty about that or not? Sure, most of Hyperion employees were assholes, but he did like some of them.

Why didn't he feel more guilty about *that*? The voice that sounded like Jack echoed at the back of his head, *Sacrifices were made. Weren't they, kiddo?* He frowned. Why wouldn't he go away?

So many people died, you idiot. He told himself. There was a twinge in his gut. He was definitely not nauseous that time. There it was. That was the guilt that he expected.

There was a tug on the bandages and he let out a gasp.

"Sorry, sorry." Rhys ignored the apology as looked back down at his shoulder. He was still not used to the lack of the Hyperion-yellow Data Slicer. He missed having an extra arm, but this was the best idea he had in the moment of panic. What else could he have done? Part of him didn't think he should have survived all of this.

With one last gentle tug, the bandage was secure and, for the most part, clean on his shoulder. He barely noticed Yvette unwrapping the bandages around his head. They fell into his lap, brown and bloodied.

He glanced up. His friends were staring at his temple. At the gaping hole in the side of his head. He knew the broken wire from the port was sticking out, probably covered in blood.

“What the hell, Rhys.” He can only imagine the thoughts that were running through Vaughn’s head. His best friend was the one who took personal time when Rhys got the initial cybernetics surgery. Sat around the hospital wing for the twelve plus hours while he was in surgery just for the ECHO eye and neural port (plus the extra twelve for the arm).

He and Vaughn had read the risks and manuals together. They nearly felt sick at the amount of medical jargon and the complexity of the surgery and the cybernetics involved. They both knew, in detail, why it was so complicated.

There was a lot of delicate wiring and technology in his head (He had seen the X-ray of his brain afterward. He nearly gagged seeing the criss-cross of lines on the negative). He probably fucked up his own brain by doing this. *Was it worth it?*

Words tumbled out of Vaughn’s mouth as Yvette stared in horror, “...What happened to your port, man? How the hell are you still coherent right now?”

He let out a shuddering sigh. He had to tell him what happened.

So, he did as they gingerly cleaned off the gaping hole in his head where the port used to be and wrapped it, starting from the part before they even got to Helios.

He talked about the thruster failure and Scooter’s death. He glanced at Yvette before she gave him the go ahead about her betrayal. He talked about having to up to Jack’s office in the trap door, covered in blood and entrails. He talked about Jack offering to let him rule Hyperion, but rejecting it. He explained Jack’s stupid, idiotic plan (Both of them looked at Loaderbot as he did. LB stared back, optic glowing but otherwise unresponsive) and how he escaped.

He talked about how he shoved his stun baton into the bowels of Helios and sent everything Handsome Jack built into the dusty borderlands of Pandora, killing coworkers with the intention of ridding the universe of the psychopath forever.

He skipped over the escape in the janky escape pod and went to the final confrontation with Jack.

Rhys told them about how the asshole tried to trick him into feeling bad for him while he forced himself back into his subsystems. The arm was no longer his. His eye no longer his. His mind didn’t even feel like his own. They didn’t need to know some of his own thoughts were sounding like Jack right now.

“All of them had to come out,” he mumbled near the end, looking down at the dirty bandages in his lap. “...I was doing the stereotypical self-sacrifice thing. I guess a little part of me wanted to be a hero, but not like him. He’s no hero. Never was. I’m an idiot.”

“You’re not an idiot, bro. Lacking in common sense sometimes, sure. But not an idiot.” He looked up at Vaughn, who gave him a comforting smile. He was glad that this man was his brother-of-choice.

“Thanks, man. You’re the best, I don’t tell you enough,” Rhys managed to say with a smile.

Vaughn snorted, “Nice of you to say, but I should’ve been with you up there.” The port was dabbed clean with the metal water and his dirty shirt and wrapped with cleaner bandages.

“Vaughn, we already talked about that,” he murmured. Vaughn sighed.

“I know. I know. But looking at you like...you know. Shit, man.” Rhys leaned a little forward to wrap his arm around his bro’s neck as if to tell him, *it’s okay. I’m still alive, aren’t I?*

Vaughn let out a shuttered sigh, returning the hug. It was another minute before they released each other and Rhys patted the vest that was in the bed next to him.

The Atlas deed was still in his pocket. He let out a small sigh.

Picking up the vest, he put his left arm through the armhole and attempted to put it on by himself. Without his shirt underneath. He didn’t want to put that gross thing back on anyway.

Yvette and Vaughn stared at him for a moment before helping him put the vest on. The right arm hole looked quite sad without an arm going through it.

He made a small disappointed noise.

“So, what’s our plan? We can’t just sit here forever,” Yvette mused, “Either the *fun* wildlife or bandits will get us. And not to mention, with Rhys looking like that,” she gestured to him with a flourish, “We’re just sitting ducks. No offense.”

Rhys shrugged. She had a point.

Vaughn crossed his arms, “Shouldn’t we go look for Fiona and Sasha? Make sure they’re okay?”

Yvette frowned and huffed, probably remembering being shoved into a cell by them.

Rhys’ stupid heart thumped excitedly at the mention of Sasha’s name. She had to be okay. She was badass. *He wasn’t.*

What are you getting all excited for? Didn’t they leave you behind? They’ll probably kill you on sight, cupcake. They weren’t your friends.

He shook his head. They were his friends. Fiona had said so. It must have been a mistake...right?

“Rhys? You okay?” He waved that off.

“So, think they’d be in Hollow Point? Worth a shot to look?” He offered and then looked at Loaderbot, who was staring at the ground, hands gripping the shotgun in his hands much tighter than before.

“LB? You okay with driving to Hollow Point?” The robot looked up at him, the red optic slightly dimmed.

“LB?” The robot went to the front of the technical, slinging the gun over his shoulder.

“To Hollow Point.” Rhys thought he could hear a twinge of anger in the robotic voice, but that wasn’t possible, was it?

“Thanks, Loaderbot.” The other two former Hyperion employees piled into the technical, one on either side of him. Vaughn, at his right side, was careful not to press too hard against his shoulder. He just dropped his head on the top of Vaughn’s, using the shorter man as a pillow.

Vaughn let out a sigh, “Bro.”

“Bro,” he responded in turn. Vaughn merely shrugged and rolled his eyes.

“I’m sorry.” Vaughn glanced up at him, eyebrows knitted together as if to ask him, *For what?*

“Everything, man.” Vaughn always seemed to know what he meant in the fewest words possible.

“It’s okay. We’re okay, dude.”

As it turned out, they were still a day and a half away from Hollow Point. Rhys watched the landscape tumble by as they drove through the badlands, red rock in the distance and dust everywhere in the air.

Several times within the next few hours were spent trying to talk to Loaderbot, who seemed to ignore anything that he said. The loud engine of the bandit technical tended to drown out his voice, already quieter by the pain in his neck. After the tenth time of attempting to talk to the loader, he gave up and started to pick at the yellow blanket they still had with them.

And his stomach growled.

“...When was the last time we ate?” He wondered out loud and looked at Vaughn. The shorter man furrowed his eyebrows.

“Was it before you went to Helios?” He vaguely remembered eating something questionable in Hollow Point and promptly throwing it up in zero gravity hours later.

Was that really the last time he ate? His stomach gurgled again and he looked at Yvette, who had dozed off, her chin in her hand.

“I don’t think we can just walk into a town and ask for food,” Vaughn frowned, his fingers tapped on the sniper rifle in his hands, “I mean, it was fine when we were with the girls, but...”

Rhys was still wearing a Hyperion vest and Vaughn had lost his ages ago, but still looked fairly corporate. Yvette was still fresh off the corporate boat, toting a Hyperion pistol that he knew was in R&D for almost a year now. The locals of Pandora would probably still refuse service regardless.

And Loaderbot was...well, he was pretty conspicuous. If he had something to cover up the golden exoskeleton and optic, he could probably pass as human. Of a sort. That was probably a dumb idea. It wasn't the best one he could think of. Must have been the blood loss.

Vaughn caught him looking at Loaderbot and scratched at his stubbled cheek.

"What if we dressed up Loaderbot? Is that weird? It's weird, right?" Rhys shrugged.

"Not that weird, bro. I was actually thinking the same thing." But the real question was how would they do that? They didn't have any extra clothes in the technical other than Rhys' bloody shirt and that wouldn't do anything useful.

His stomach grumbled a little louder in protest. Vaughn's gave a reply back.

They could go without food for a little longer, right?

Shots of gunfire in the distance and a final shriek echoed overhead, which made them both jump in alarm. Yvette continued to nap through it.

A dead rakk dropped into the bed in front of them, blood oozing out of a bullet wound. The blood ran towards his shoe, making the grey skag skin stain red.

His stomach churned a little. He gagged.

Vaughn was a little more nonchalant about it, "...We could cook that, right?"

The two stomachs growled in agreement.

Chapter Four

Chapter Summary

Rhys overthinks everything, the Hyperion trio eat rakk-kebabs, and Hollow Point?

Chapter Notes

This only took a month because I hyperfixated on reading "The Raven Cycle" series. I had off from school for a month, so I ended up reading and writing periodically. Plus, me finding fault with some pacing issues with this chapter. I have some headcanons that show up in this chapter, specifically when it comes to Rhys and Vaughn and Rhys sleeps some more. Enjoy the chapter!

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

It took a ridiculous amount of time to figure out who would prepare the rakk for cooking. It was a sizable creature, about half the size of Vaughn.

There was a lot of bickering on the boys part, simply because both of them were grossed out by the prospect of skinning something that could easily dive bomb their heads.

Rhys reasoned that there was no possible way for him to skin the rakk. He was kind of down an arm. Lacking a hand. There was no way.

Rhys also reasoned that Vaughn was perfectly capable of skinning the rakk. He had two hands and this seemed like the next step in learning the ways of Pandora. Vaughn was taking to Pandora like a fish to water anyway. Already miles ahead of Rhys in that department.

Rakk blood continued to seep into his shoe. Ugh.

As they bickered, Yvette conveniently woke up from her nap and threatened to smack them both in the head, regardless of current Rhys' condition of being an invalid.

It felt...normal. It felt like they were up on Helios when they hung out in each others' apartments after hours, when they would talk for hours about their dreams and ambitions, making five-year-plans, and as true friends do, laugh at each other and pick on them because you knew they could handle it.

It was like nothing on Pandora even happened and tiny part of him wished it was just an insane, ice-cream induced dream. That he'd wake up on Helios the morning before the big promotion and tell Vaughn about the absurdity of his dream. He'd tell him that Rhys would

have to lay off the ice cream and they would laugh, laugh so hard that their stomachs would hurt.

But it wasn't like that. The insanity was real. The betrayals were real. The pain was real.

He just had to deal with the fallout. This was fine. He'd manage. LB was here. Vaughn was here. So was Yvette, but his trust in her had to be solidified again. They'd all find Fiona, Sasha, and Gortys and everything should be right in the world.

He just had to keep telling himself that and ignore the massive amounts of insecurity that was given a voice that sounded like Handsome Jack's. His shoulders sagged.

"Rhys?" He blinked, Yvette was waving her hand in front of his face.

"Huh?"

"You still with us?" He shrugged.

"What do you consider *still with us*?"

"Not dead or about to pass out due to blood loss." He squinted, lips forming into their signature pout and thought about it for a moment.

"Can I get back to you on that?" Yvette rolled her eyes and turned them to the bleeding rakk in front of them.

"I don't know how you guys plan on skinning that," Yvette deadpanned, "Especially since we don't have a knife." At that statement, the technical stopped, which prompted the three occupants of the back bed to wheel their heads over to Loaderbot.

They heard the sound of rummaging around in the front, as if LB had to stop and look in a glove box for a map or a car manual.

Did bandit technicals even have glove boxes? What would even go in those?

Bullets, heath hypos, ...bones? He gagged again.

Gross.

The rustling stopped and the golden, metal body of Loaderbot climbed over from the front seat. He pulled himself over to the bed with ease, completely ignoring the gunner seat between them.

In his hand was a hunting knife, large and jagged. Perfect for skinning a rakk of this size, but it was also stained.

The blade was a rusty color, like old blood. Like someone had used it to disembowel someone else some time ago.

Rhys felt the blood drain from his face. He watched in horror as Loaderbot grabbed the rakk, hopped from the flatbed and started skinning it. He couldn't stop watching, no matter how disturbing it was.

He watched as LB cut off the wings and broke the bones as if he was a chef and he was butchering a chicken for cooking. Or something. How in the hell did Loaderbot know how to do that? Did he see someone doing that down here? There were way too many questions going through his head that made him want to throw up.

Vaughn got up from the bed of the technical and hopped down to scan the area. Rhys watched his friend as he slung the sniper rifle over his shoulder, sighed as he put his hands on his hips. Vaughn bent over, picking up some small broken twigs and dried out tumbleweeds.

"What are you doing?" Rhys asked, somehow finding his brain again to form a coherent thought and voiced it. Vaughn just continued his search for dried wood and plant matter.

"Looking for kindling. I don't think any of us want to eat that thing raw, right?" He looked up at the other two, tired and weary, but determined. Rhys nodded in response and continued to watch Vaughn in silence. His friend seemed to stand a little taller, and had been a little bit more every single day since they came to Pandora.

Where Rhys faltered, screaming and ruining everything in his wake, Vaughn seemed to flourish and find where he was supposed to be.

He'd probably be better off without you, Rhysie. You've been holding him back this entire time and you just couldn't let go of your little, nerdy best friend. You're just too chicken to be left on your own, huh, cupcake?

The thing was, he *was* afraid to let go of Vaughn. They had been through everything together: high school, college, Hyperion, and now their crazy Pandoran adventure.

(There was a time between high school and college where he thought he was *in love* with Vaughn. They both realized they were both wrong on *those feelings* for each other. He did love him, but not in that way.)

Vaughn had told him once that Rhys was the cool one, taking everything in stride. He had been worried that Rhys would throw him out onto the curb, like he didn't need him anymore.

Rhys didn't know where he'd be without Vaughn and that scared him.

A lot.

But it was also the afraid part of him that also believed that Vaughn would be better without him. The only reason that Rhys could get through this insanity was because Vaughn was there. Beside him, like always.

Until he realizes you were holding him back, anyway.

He sighed. Vaughn had finished collecting kindling and was now trying to build a fire while Loaderbot skewered rakk meat onto sticks. It looked more like an actual meal than it did

previously.

He scooted himself to the edge of the technical, so he was closer to LB and Vaughn, and wondered if he should try to be more useful. He felt a gentle touch on his empty shoulder and turned to that side. Yvette had come to sit next to him and started rubbing his back in small circles.

“I know you’re still feeling weird about us,” she murmured. “Weird about our friendship.” He let out a small sigh and looked down. Did he really show his heart on his sleeve that much? Did everyone think he was that obvious?

“...What do you expect? You sold us out to Ass-quez. Literally the asshole of space station assholes.” Her warm hand paused under his shoulder blade.

A whisper, “I know.”

“...Technically, Vaughn did too, but he didn’t mean it.”

Yvette didn’t seem too surprised by that, but she still didn’t continue rubbing his back.

“I honestly thought you two were done for when you came down here. If you guys were going to be dead...”

“You could still take the advantage Vasquez gave you,” he mumbled, but met her eyes.

Her brown eyes were filled with guilt, drowning in it.

“...Yeah.”

He sighed, bringing a shaking hand to run it through his hair, “I understand why you did it. It was Hyperion, you got to use our faces as a rung of the ladder. I thought you were our friend, so it still stings, I guess.”

“I really am sorry, if that means anything. I’ll continue to make it up to you. Both of you. I swear.” Rhys let out a long, suffering sigh.

“I’m going to hold you to that, Yvette.” She gently touched him on the shoulder. While they haven’t been friends as long as his with Vaughn, Yvette still always seemed to understand him. He wanted to trust her again. She had to show him she meant it.

He gave her a small smile.

Rhys looked back to Loaderbot and Vaughn, who were now roasting the skewered meat over the small fire. The smell alone made his stomach grumble angrily and momentarily made him forget that that was a creature that had bleed all over his shoes. It smelt vaguely like that Truxican breakfast burrito he had before he went up to Helios.

Was that made of rakk meat?

...Ugh.

No, Rhys. Don't overthink it. You need to eat.

Overthinking was apparently how his life worked.

Overthinking must be encoded in his very DNA.

Overthinking was the reason he still survived in some way.

...He was overthinking overthinking.

He did think about the burrito being rakk meat, which made his stomach churn uncomfortably. But, his thoughts turned into how that burrito ended up being vomit.

All over August's face in zero gravity.

Which was oddly satisfying to think about?

His stomach rumbled. He looked down, a pout forming on his face.

"Hey bro, you can get it to calm down now." Rhys looked up at Vaughn, who held out a skewer of meat with a small smile. Unconsciously, his right shoulder jerked forward, as if he was trying to reach out with a cybernetic arm. A sigh escaped his lips while he reached out with his flesh hand, taking the meat.

"Thanks, man." Vaughn gave him a pitied look, one that hadn't graced his face in years. Well, that had to stop.

The rakk skewer in his hand looked so appetizing and appealing mere moments ago, with his stomach acting out in anger, but as soon as it was in his hand, he couldn't do it. His appetite gone in mere seconds. Shame settled deep in his gut, forcing out basic needs such as this.

"Rhys. You must consume the rakk that we prepared." The inflection in the robotic voice made the hair on his neck stand up on end and a shiver ran through his spine.

A clink against metal, then "LB, next time, just use the word eat. Please. Using 'consume' makes you sound like a serial killer. Or an eldritch monster that someone made a warlock pact with in BnB."

"Noted."

"Hey, Rhys." A touch on his shoulder jolted him from his thoughts, causing him to look into Vaughn's eyes. Concern seemed to fill every crevice of the icy blue. Rhys let out a small noise of acknowledgment.

"Just eat that and ignore him." There were unspoken words of *you're not okay* and *everything will be alright in the end*, where the former was true and the latter was considerably harder to believe.

He ate the meat anyway. It was tough, greasy, and settled right on top of the shame in his gut. When he was finished, he tossed the stick weakly into the small fire below. When he

was offered a second skewer, he was half-tempted to reject it. The second stick was pushed into his hand, like he was a small child at the dinner table.

He ended up eating that one as well and was given another. He ate and ate until he was bursting, the greasy meat sat in his belly. He pulled the ratty blanket closer around himself.

The sun started to set, coloring the sky with pinks and oranges. Rhys could see it slowly dipping into the horizon line, settling in for the night ahead. For a chaotic Hell planet, the sunsets were certainly beautiful. Part of the sky even looked purple, blending with the other colors like a watercolor painting.

A part of him envisioned him sitting next to Sasha, holding hands and watching the sunset together. Her head resting on his shoulder as he had an arm wrapped around her. He could almost smell her if he thought about it: gun powder, flowers, and slightly of sweat.

He missed her already.

Rhys shook his head to clear the image out of his head, and caused pain to shoot through his brain. He had to stop doing that to prevent more brain damage.

A wave of exhaustion passed over him, making his eye and head hurt even more. He barely registered anyone talking to him as he pushed himself back into the technical bed and rolling into his side. As he rolled onto his side, pain flared through his shoulder and head.

He just wanted to sleep.

And he did.

Someone was shaking him.

It rattled his aching head. It upset his pained shoulder.

He let out a tiny groan. He kind of felt like he was on fire. Heat flared through his body, it settled deep in his bones.

A cold hand brushed hair away from his forehead. It felt nice.

“...Burning up.” There was a sigh of frustration? Or concern? Something.

“A fever? I thought the Anshin was supposed to prevent infection...”

They were too loud. His head hurt. Rhys blearily opened his eye, a monumental feat. Light burned his retinas. Vaughn and Yvette sat over him, twin worried looks in their eyes.

“I thought so too, but it seems like he has one. He’s been out for hours.”

He groaned again, a little louder this time. Both of his friends jumped and looked at him.

“Hey Rhys, you feeling okay?” Yvette pressed her hand against his cheek. Sweet, sweet coldness.

He let out a mumbled *no*. The two of them looked at each other, unsure of what to do.

“We are at the entrance of Hollow Point.” Loaderbot’s voice came from behind them and the blinding light disappeared.

Vaughn let out a sigh of relief and crawled out of view, he started talking to Loaderbot but Rhys couldn’t make out what was being said. He just wanted to go back to sleep. His eyes grew heavy and started to close them.

The cold hand moved to his forehead, and he opened his eyes again.

“Don’t go to sleep just yet, Rhys. Okay? We should probably get you help first. Talk to me?” Yvette’s eyebrows were furrowed, but she gave him a small smile.

He wasn’t sure what he was talking about. It was a mix of random jumbled thoughts that rattled around in his head since he came to Pandora.

He thought he talked about how Jack was a crazy bastard. How pretty Sasha was when she fired an SMG. How swole Vaughn was and how he needed to go to a doctor.

Yvette laughed at that.

He was so tired.

“I know you are, Rhys. Just stay awake a little longer until we find your friends.”

It wasn’t long before the technical came to a stop. They were surrounded by buildings and darkness. The air was chilly and felt good on his hot skin.

“I will carry Rhys.” Loaderbot came to the bed, picking him up with ease. Rhys flailed weakly, not wanting to be carried when they saw the girls.

“Don’t fight him, bro. Please? You’re obviously sick.” He looked over at Vaughn, who was nervously folding his hands together.

Turning away from Vaughn, he saw the caravan. It was on the other side of the alley, a little beat up from a brutal landing. His heart thumped excitedly. He wanted to throw up.

He leaned over LB’s metal arm and all of the rakk meat he ate came back with a vengeance.

“Yeah, he definitely needs help.” Vaughn and Yvette walked ahead of him and Loaderbot, whose stilted walk sent jolts of pain throughout his shoulder and head. Vaughn walked up to the door of the caravan and knocked hard.

There were a few moments of silence and the group exchanged looks of confusion.

There could have been a possibility that there wasn't anyone in the caravan. Fiona and Sasha could have abandoned it there to throw off a trail.

Suddenly, the door flew open and Fiona stood defensively with a shotgun in her hands.

Vaughn let out a yelp and Yvette stumbled backwards. LB stood his ground, hands tightening around Rhys' body.

"Back off or I'll shoo- What?" Fiona looked at the frightened Vaughn and Rhys weakly staring at her in Loaderbot's arms. Her green eyes widened in surprise.

"You guys survived." She let out a breath of air and brought the shotgun to her side. All looks of surprise and shock wiped away from her expression almost instantly. She brushed her single-streaked hair out of her face and gave them a smirky smile.

"Wait till I tell Sash."

Chapter End Notes

Come say hi on tumblr at [cashew-butter](#) or [cashewwritesstuff!](#)

Chapter Five

Chapter Summary

While fighting off his infection, Rhys falls in and out of consciousness.

Chapter Notes

This chapter may seem a bit disjointed, but I swear that's on purpose. It took much longer than I wanted, but I'm busy all the time right now. I also think it's time for another playthrough of TftBL because I'm forgetting Jack's many nicknames for Rhys.

Also, as of this chapter, it has surpassed 10,000 words! I think that's the longest fic I've written in YEARS.

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

As she let the Hyperion refugees into the caravan, Fiona gave Yvette a long, hard glare that turned into a bit of a shock when she got a better look at Rhys.

He stared back, single brown eye slightly glazed over.

“Heeeeeey Fi,” he slurred, head bumping slightly against Loaderbot’s metal upper arm.

“What the hell happened to you?” She dropped the shotgun to the floor, resting the barrel against the wall of the caravan near the door. Rhys’ tongue felt swollen and dry all at once, unable to come up with something else to say. He felt like he was in a volcano. Maybe he was. Maybe he was going to die like Jack. In a volcano.

“I’m pretty sure he has an infection. Hey LB, maybe put him on the couch?” Vaughn had shifted to the front of him, placing a cool hand on his forehead, “Yeah, that fever is still a thing. He needs help.” He was placed on the couch, ratty Hyperion blanket still wrapped around him. Instinctively, he curled into a fetal position when the blanket slipped a little.

He absentmindedly watched Fiona’s high-heeled boots walk out of sight. His eyes grew heavy and he wasn’t sure how long it was later when they came back into view again.

Another weight was placed on top of him, making him feel even warmer than before. With a weak kick, both blankets flopped off of him. In mere seconds, he started to violently shiver.

Bent over, Fiona picked up the fallen blankets to cover Rhys, “And how the hell did- Wait. Where’s his arm? The wacky-hacky one?”

“Er, yeah, that’s all on him.” Vaughn came over to tuck the blankets into the sofa, making it harder for them to be kicked off. Rhys continued to shiver. He watched Fiona, dazed.

She wasn’t acting like a person who would leave him behind. She was acting like a friend. A moment of clarity in the flame and chill.

She’s a con artist, dumb dumb. She’s definitely faking it. Why would she actually consider you a friend?

No. She’s not faking.

All eyes turned to him. Vaughn’s brows furrowed together in confusion or concern. Yvette’s eyebrow ticked upward, confused. LB’s intense glowing optic. Fiona’s intense glare, scrutinizing him.

He was sure he had thought that. He was positive that was in his head.

Fiona squatted next to the sofa and made herself eye level with him. Her green eyes (the same shade as Sasha’s, but so much sharper) bore into him, a knife stabbing through the haze.

“...You better not be talking to Jack.” Yvette pursed her lips behind her while Vaughn stepped forward.

“I don’t think that’s going to be a problem. He, uh, kind of tore out all of his cybernetic parts?” Fiona’s head whipped around so fast, it gave *him* whiplash. Rhys squeezed his eye shut. So tired.

“He what? Aren’t those attached to him? In him? What the actual hell?” She screeched and it sent sharp pains through his skull. Like somebody was stabbing him with a shard of glass.

Oh. Wait.

He whined. Fiona was immediately shushed.

“Well, fine. He’s a moron. Good to know that’s still happening. Leave Rhys alone for a few days and he tears off his own arm.” He opened his eyes. She huffed and turned back to him.

“I don’t think he had a choice.” Yvette. Fiona pouted.

“Well, doesn’t matter now, he did it anyway,” Vaughn. “I think we might need to change his bandages again.”

Fiona let out a long, frustrated sigh, “I’ll get the first aid kit.”

He fell asleep. Again.

He woke to the sounds of yelling.

Blurily, his eye opened. He was cold. Freezing.

Someone had taken the blankets and his vest. There were bloodied and pussied bandages on the floor next to him. The blankets were there too, just barely in reach.

He attempted to reach for it with his right, completely forgetting again that the arm wasn't there, and tumbled to the floor.

The yelling stopped.

His head was spinning and his shoulder ached. A firm hand held his left bicep, steadying and bringing him back to reality. He looked up.

Vaughn's eyes were wide, looking him over. Rhys had to tear his eye away and it drifted to his friend's other hand. A piece of paper was held in a death grip.

He continued to stare at it for a few moments before he realized what it was.

"...Hey. That's mine." Vaughn put down the paper next to him and helped him get into a sitting position.

"What do you mean that's yours, bro?" Vaughn picked it up again and unfurled it, "This is a deed to frickin' Atlas. Why was it in your vest?"

"Stole it from Jack." He swayed slightly.

"Wait. What?"

"I won. It's mine now," His words slurred together, a complete mess. He swallowed. "Give it back." He forced his hand to reach for the deed. It felt like an anvil.

He continued to mumble, "Rhys, CEO of Atlas. The frickin' best. You could be CFO, man. My best man." Vaughn gave him a weird look as he tried to grab for the deed again.

Vaughn sighed before draping Rhys' arm over his shoulder, "Come on, dude, back on the couch. I'll think about your job offer if you sleep."

Rhys let out a quiet *yeeeeeah, future kings of Atlas* as he was dumped back onto the sofa and wrapped up in blankets. They smelled bad. Like pus and puke.

He watched as Vaughn gave him another pitying look as he turned around. Back to his conversation with Fiona and Yvette.

"Well, I guess that clears up some things. I think?"

"You think? From what I can tell, he went from one company to another like a warmonger."

"Cut him some slack, Fiona. You know he's not like that."

A huff and an angry grumble.

Rhys' eye drifted shut as the shouting muffled.

The second time, he woke to a door slamming open. He weakly jumped awake, seeing the others sitting around the caravan, who reacted in the same way.

“What the? Vaughn?” It was the voice of an angel. A gun-toting, badass angel.

“Sasha!” In his haze, Rhys' stupid heart thumped wildly, tears welled up in his single eye.

She was here.

He turned his head to see Sasha as she hugged Vaughn tight in her arms. A wide grin was spread across her face.

He let out a weak noise, too quiet to be heard. But, as if she did hear him, her green eyes focused on him and widened to the point of seeing the white in them.

“Rhys?!” She tore herself from Vaughn and rushed to the sofa, falling hard on her knees as she reached him. Her hand stretched toward his face, but she pulled it back just as quickly.

“What the hell happened to you, Hyperion?” The laugh that escaped her lips couldn't cover up how concerned she looked.

“I beat the bad guy,” he whispered with a weak, shit-eating grin.

“Oh, did you?” She looked like she was trying to wrestle the look of wanting to cry from her face. He didn't blame her.

“Yeah. Kicked his AI ass.”

Sasha laughed, a small thing just for him. She looked him over, from the bandages on his head and the ruined socket of his arm, to the waxy pallor of his skin.

“Did the bad guy rip off your arm?”

“Nah. I did that.”

“What?”

“Maybe ask him those questions when he's more with it, Sash?” Fiona's voice called over from the front of the caravan, “He's been like that since they got here.”

Sasha pursed her lips as if she was considering her sister's words. She nodded.

“Hey, Rhys. You can tell me about how you beat the bad guy later, okay?” He hummed in acknowledgment.

Sasha gave his cheek a gentle pat and he leaned into her touch. She got up from her knees as she spoke, "Go to sleep, dork. You look like you need it."

"But I've been sleeping so much," he mumbled, words slurred as exhaustion took over once again.

When he woke, he didn't feel hot anymore.

He wasn't entirely sure where he was either.

For one thing, he was in an actual bed. He vaguely remembered being in the caravan, on that tiny sofa that sat behind the driver's seat.

Another, he looked to be in a real building. How did he even get here? Where was Vaughn? Yvette? Loaderbot?

Weren't Fi and Sash there too? He thought he remembered seeing them.

He glanced around the room. It looked like a basic bedroom, with another bed to the right of him, across a small gap. There was a bullet-ridden chest of drawers at the foot of the bed with a quiet crackling radio. Everything was stained a rusty brown or black.

Blood and mold, maybe? He grimaced.

No one was there. Something twisted sharply in his gut.

Seems like they definitely left you to die to sepsis on your own, pumpkin. Had to abandon you somewhere. Why not the disgusting, moldy room?

He squeezed his eyes shut.

"Just shut up. Shut up," he hissed under his breath. Stupid, stupid Jack.

They couldn't have left him alone, did they?

Rhysie, they totally left you alone to die. The long and painful way. Honestly, the right way to do it, ya' know?

Tears pricked at the corner of his eye. They wouldn't just leave him here after all that.

He slowly pushed himself up with a shaking arm and stared at a yellow stain on the quilt. His fist closed around the patchwork blanket, tight and pale.

There was a click at the door. He froze as it squeaked open.

"Oh, hey. You're awake."

His eye widened, still staring at the yellow stain.

The bed sagged, extra weight dropped next to him.

He looked up, coming face to face with Sasha.

If he wasn't already drained of his own blood, his face would have blushed a bright, rosy red.

Tears fell from his eye and a grin stretched across his face.

"...You didn't leave me behind," he whispered, voice rough from disuse.

Sasha's eyebrows furrowed, "Why would we do that?"

He went back to the yellow stain. His tired brain vaguely wondered what that was supposed to be.

"Rhys? Why would you think we'd do that?" A hand rested over his clenched fist. Tanned and calloused.

"Because," he started, nearly stumbling over his own thoughts, "I fucked up. I had Jack in my head. I lied about it."

She let out a snort. "Yeah, that was stupid. You fucked up, but you also didn't sell your soul to that asshole in your head," Sasha pat his pale hand, "We'd never leave you behind on purpose, idiot."

His fist slowly released the blanket, savoring the heat of her hand on his. His gaze went to stare at that instead.

He tried mentally kicking the tiny part of his brain that didn't believe her.

For now, it went down without a fight. He was winning.

He tilted his head to look at her again. There was a small smile on her face and her intense, green eyes were soft for once.

His dumb, happy heart thumped a few times for good measure.

"Where are we?" He coughed out, throat sore. Sasha gave him a glass of water from the side table.

It was slightly yellow, but he wasn't going to question it as it quenched his throat.

"Still in Hollow Point, unfortunately. At the Purple Skag," Her mouth twisted into a grimace. He felt like he should know that name.

She must have noticed confusion on his face.

"August's bar. Fi and I patched him up, so he's letting us crash here while you get back on your feet. Better than the couch, right?"

He shrugged. They all spent a lot of time on that couch before.

“Considering how out of it you were when I first saw you, I’ll bet it wouldn’t even matter to you, huh?” Sasha smiled.

He shrugged again, pain shot through his shoulder. He grimaced.

“You okay?”

“Fine.”

She gave him a skeptical look as the door opened behind them.

Fiona and Vaughn filed in and Yvette hung back near the door. There was a purple bruise blooming on her cheek.

Rhys squinted at it as Yvette just shook her head. *I’ll tell you later.*

“The one-armed wonder is awake, huh?” Fiona noted with a sly smile.

He pouted.

Vaughn navigated himself to sit on his right side, nervously glancing at the bandaged shoulder, “How are you feeling, bro?”

He shrugged. Vaughn frowned.

Fiona leaned over at the foot of the bed, palms laid flat and hunched over like she was making battle plans.

“Sash and I have a lot of questions, Rhys. Think you can answer them?”

He looked back down at the yellow stain in the quilt and sighed.

“What do you want to know?”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter Six

Chapter Summary

Questions and answers.

Chapter Notes

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

With all eyes on him, Rhys had the sudden urge to twiddle his thumbs.

Since he didn't have another thumb to twiddle, he started picking at the dirty quilt instead. One of the threads came loose, easy to play with.

He twisted it between his thumb and index finger, spiraling it and letting it bounce back.

While he did so, he looked back up to Fiona, who gave herself a moment to get her thoughts together.

"I'm going to address the bullymong in the room," she started, making the decision to sit at the foot of the bed, "And ask about your lack of arm."

Sasha let out a snort, raised her eyebrow, and crossed her arms, "That's what you're starting with?"

Fi gave her a weak glare and went back to looking at Rhys.

He wasn't sure where to start with that, honestly. He twisted the thread around the tip of his index finger, cutting off the circulation, and allowing it to go numb.

Fiona's voice made him release the thread, blood rushing to the tip of his finger, and made it prickle, "Vaughn said you did it to yourself."

Rhys cleared his throat, dryness settling into the back of it. He swallowed, attempting to push his anxiety that returned back down.

"I did."

There was a gasp to his left.

He tried to ignore it as he continued, "Jack tried to kill me and I panicked. I, uh, tore it off?"

There was a sharp intake of breath and nothing else.

He glanced at Vaughn. The other man looked at him with sad, blue eyes.

There were the pity eyes again.

Rhys looked at the yellow stain on the quilt again before he elaborated, “In the wreckage of his office, he took over my arm and strangled me.” He said softly, “It had to go. I could still see and hear him, so I ripped out my port.”

The pale fist clenched the patchwork of colors, “He was still there and I ripped out my eye.”

“...Is he gone for good?”

The voice to his left was quiet, but sharp, so he looked up.

Sasha was looking back, thin eyebrows furrowed. Her green eyes searched for any indication of lying. That alone made his stomach churn in fear.

Fear that they didn’t believe him.

Considering you lied about me in the first place, cupcake, I honestly wouldn’t be too surprised.

Technically, he didn’t even lie about it. He just didn’t tell them about it because he thought they would kill him.

Kiddo, lying by omission is still lying. Trust me, I know.

Also because Jack told him not to.

Jack, even as an A.I., scared him shitless.

He thought about his metal arm moving on his own. Curled fingers, no longer under his own control, around his neck. Squeezing as he began to suffocate, black danced at the corner of his vision. Error codes flashing on the surface of the ECHO eye, indicating imminent loss of life and loss of the ECHOnet.

He shuddered, murmuring, “I’d hope so. I crushed my own eye to get rid of him.”

Sasha’s face softened as she leaned away from him, “Okay.”

“Okay?”

She nodded and gave a look to Fiona that resembled something like, “*Move along to the next question .*”

Fiona went into her coat pocket and pulled out a folded piece of paper. She unfolded it quickly before spreading it on his lap.

It was the Atlas deed that he picked from the shards of Jack’s trophy case. The corners were little ripped and it looked like blood (probably his own) seeped into the paper.

“What is the purpose of carrying this around?” Fi’s upper lip was curled in disbelief, “You told Vaughn it belongs to you now.”

Rhys looked at Vaughn, who simply scratched his neck in response, then his stubble covered cheek, “You were pretty out of it, bro. You asked me if I wanted to be your CFO when you became CEO.”

If Rhys’ face could get any paler, it probably did.

That’s what Vaughn’s role would have been if they had climbed enough ranks at Hyperion. If Rhys had gotten to the top, Vaughn and Yvette would have been right there with him.

“Rhys?” Vaughn placed a gentle hand on the bandaged shoulder as he tried to catch him in the eye.

“I mean, who else would I ask?” A lopsided smile inched onto his face, “Honestly, though, I didn’t really know what I was thinking. I just took it.”

The thing was though, Rhys sort of knew what he was thinking. He had some idea, despite all the pain he was in at the time. He didn’t really want to admit to the girls that he still wanted to own a company. He didn’t want to admit that he made tiny business cards as a kid. Despite everything that happened with Hyperion and Helios, he still wanted to be CEO of *something*.

Vaughn would know (obviously did know) and that’s probably why his grip got tighter on Rhys’ shoulder, who let out a small hiss in pain.

Fiona folded up the deed and threw it at him. It landed on his lap with a soft flop.

“It’s covered in your blood anyway.”

He let go of the quilt to grab with his hand.

This was his now.

Atlas was his.

“Not sure why you’d risk yourself for a dead company, but sure,” Fi snorted, “Knock yourself out.”

His hand shook a little as he clenched it in his grasp.

When he fixed himself up, everything he had was going into Atlas. It was going to be better than Hyperion, that’s for sure.

He swallowed, “Before you ask me anything else, I have a question for you, Fi.”

She raised an eyebrow, which seemed to disappear in the shadow of her hat.

“Where’s LB? He hanging out with his girlfriend?” He said with a snicker.

The laugh on his lips faded as he saw Fiona’s eyes widen and attempt to catch Sasha’s.

The silence in the room became almost deafening. Had he said something wrong?

Something pained flashed in Fiona's eyes, but her mouth turned into a deep scowl.

"Fiona?" As he called her name, she bolted from the room. Sasha got up from her spot next to him and followed after her sister.

Rhys' shoulders sagged. He *did* say something wrong.

"LB hasn't said a word to Fiona or Sasha since we got here. It's like he's angry with them or something," Vaughn mumbled under his breath, "I wonder if something happened to Gortys because I haven't seen her either."

The way he snapped his head to look at Vaughn made his head spin and nearly had him pass out again, "You haven't? She was with Fi and Sash when we split up on Helios."

Vaughn shook his head, "From the way Fiona reacted, I don't think it's anything good."

Good, innocent Gortys...disappeared? Gone? Possibly destroyed?

Rhys' stomach churned. Was this his fault too?

"Something must have happened when they landed on Pandora. Or even before that," he sighed, "Let her burn it off, I guess."

Vaughn nodded before letting out a long sigh.

"So," he stated as if he was going to start a difficult conversation, "Atlas."

Rhys clenched his jaw, "What about it?"

Vaughn sighed again. Reaching to the blood-stained deed, he pried it from his friend's lax hand. The accountant smoothed it flat on the dirty quilt.

"We both know why you took this, bro."

This man was his best friend. His brother. The one who knew everything about him.

"...Despite everything, I still have a dream, Vaughn," Rhys' voice was quiet, speaking to his lap as he avoided the other man's gaze.

The gentle hand was on his shoulder again. Always wonderful Vaughn.

"I know you do. I'm not going to judge you, but I will help you if you need it."

Saying such a thing encouraged Rhys to look at him.

"Really?" Rhys' heart squeezed a little, like he almost didn't believe it.

"Of course? Why wouldn't I?" Vaughn looked like someone punched him in the gut, "Man, if you're not leaving me behind, why would I do that to you?"

That statement kicked the built anxiety down a few notches, “Oh man, bro. I could kiss you right now.”

Vaughn grimaced, “Don’t do that, we did that a few times and we both agreed that was weird.”

Rhys twisted himself to give him an awkward one armed hug with all the strength he could muster. He could feel a chuckle come from Vaughn’s chest.

“I’ll accept that instead.”

It ultimately took another four days for Rhys to regain his strength.

Well, some of it.

He still felt like shit, but at least he could walk around a little bit.

Sort of.

He mostly needed help since his balance was completely off. As it turns out, getting rid of a mechanical arm that was directly implanted in your body years ago really messes with walking a straight line.

The once-company man found that out on the first day where he got up, found himself veering to the right, and walked straight into the wall in the bedroom.

At least he managed to go downstairs and sit at a table. That made him feel less like someone who needed to be taken care of.

He was fine, more or less.

The concerned looks from Vaughn and Sasha weren’t helping, so he decided to avoid them, which was very difficult to do since they wouldn’t let him out of their sight for too long.

He managed to lose them for an afternoon since they went out to get supplies for the rest of the gang.

That afternoon, Rhys found himself sitting at one of the dirty tables in the bar with a cup of muddy-thick coffee. Next to the chipped mug was a piece of scrap paper, covered in doodles and plans for new arms.

He couldn’t get a new arm installed until the dock and wiring was fixed. That seemed impossible on Pandora. He exhaled through his nose.

He twirled a chewed up pencil in his fingers, wondering how the hell that was going to happen.

Then he blanked. Forgot what he was doing, what he was thinking.

All he knew after a moment or two was someone calling his name.

“-hys! *Rhys* ? Hey jackass, can you hear me?”

He blinked several times before he noticed Fiona right in front of him. She had her hand raised as if she was going to smack him across the face.

“Wha?”

“I was trying to get your attention for five minutes, dumbass. You were just staring into space tapping that pencil and twitching. What the fuck. Are you okay?”

No.

“Yeah, fine. Just tired.”

She narrowed her hard green eyes and slumped into the seat next to him with a shrug, “Whatever. I had to talk to you about something.”

“Something?” Rhys raised an eyebrow. He glanced at the wooden table that he stabbed a hole into with a pencil.

“Well, specifically, I need to talk to you about Gortys.”

With some effort, he turned so he was facing her.

“What happened to her, Fi? I haven’t seen her since I woke up from the infection.”

The pain in Fiona’s eyes returned, but it disappeared in an instant.

“Sasha and I had to destroy her. When we got back to Pandora, Vallory made her summon the Vault. The Traveller came with it,” as she spoke, the con artist looked like she was trying her best not to show any sort of emotion that she was feeling.

He could hear the guilt coating every word. It was a familiar feeling these days, it seemed.

“She had no chance at beating that thing, Rhys.” She took off her hat and ran her fingers through her hair, “I didn’t want to do it. Believe me.”

“I know you wouldn’t. She’s our kid,” he said with a sad smile.

Fiona pretended to throw up, “Don’t joke about that.”

“Is this why Loader Bot is pissed at you?” He asked, poking at the hole in the table with his pencil.

She let out a sigh, “Probably. I promised him that I would protect her and I killed her instead. I don’t blame him.”

“Did you tell him what happened?”

Fiona looked at him like he was an idiot. Or if he suddenly grew an arm.

“I’ll take that as a no.”

“Of course not! I haven’t gotten a chance to be in the same room alone with him because he always leaves when we are. He’s avoiding me.” With a flip of her hand, the hat was back where it belonged on her head.

Rhys gave her a smile, “He’ll come around eventually. It’s Loader Bot.”

She crossed her arms with a shrug, “We’ll see. What have you been up to other than avoiding Sash and Vaughn?”

He winced, “You noticed?”

She raised an eyebrow, as if she was saying, *Duh, dumbass.*

Putting the pencil down, he ran his fingers through his hair and rested his hand on the back of his neck, “Well, first, I was thinking I could grow a mustache and give myself a new image before starting Atlas.”

She tapped a seafoam-painted finger to her lips, “You’d look ridiculous with a mustache and I’d make fun of you until you died, but seriously, what are you up to?” The same finger tapped the paper of drawings on the table, “You trying to make your own arm?”

He pouted. He’d look *great* with a mustache.

“I thought about it until I remembered I completely busted up the shoulder socket when I improperly removed the whole damn arm in attempt to get rid of an annoying, homicidal computer virus.”

Fiona winced, “Anything you can do about it?”

“My first idea was that I would have to get in contact with someone in Hyperion who installed the thing in the first place. Then I also remembered, they’re probably dead and I’m screwed.”

She snorted, “What’s your next plan?”

He shrugged, “I’ll get back to you on that.” He threw the pencil on top of his drawings and pinched the bridge of his nose, “Everything sucks, but it’s all my fault. I’ll have to live with it.”

“Despite all the bullshit, we’re still friends, okay?” Fi gave him a grin, “We’ll help you through it.”

Rhys gave her a genuine smile in return, “Thanks, Fi.”

With a bark of laughter, she kicked him under the table.

Chapter End Notes

And we're back after 2 months! I'm officially done with graduate school and ready to write!

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Chapter Seven

Chapter Summary

Talking and thinking.

Chapter Notes

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

Rhys generally thought his relationship with Yvette was easy on Helios.

More often than not, he'd go up to her and ask for a favor (one that couldn't be handled by himself or Vaughn), where he'd beg and offer to buy her lunch as repayment.

It worked nine out of ten times and most of his paychecks went to buying whatever she felt was the most expensive that particular day or week.

Although it was barely two weeks, he could tell that it wasn't going to be so easy on Pandora.

After talking to Fiona, he found her nursing a chipped glass of Rakk Ale, about to put it to her lips.

"I wouldn't drink that if I were you." A grimace etched its way into his face.

She looked up at him, confusion in her dark eyes.

"Pandorans don't know real alcohol. Rakk Ale is just paint thinner, so...don't drink it."

Her nose crinkled up and pushed the glass away, "I did ask for the strongest they had."

The least he could do was to make sure she didn't die from paint thinner poisoning.

With a huff, she muttered, "Drinking paint thinner would explain the Psychos, to be honest."

She offered Rhys the seat next to her and he took it.

The bruise on her face looked uglier than the other day, if that was possible. It was bright red and purple on her dark skin.

He winced.

She must've noticed him staring, "It looks worse than it feels, Rhys. Don't worry about it."

He stared at the table in front of them. He could see a shard of broken glass in part of it. A broken lead tip of a pencil lingered near it.

He reached out to poke it.

“Are you avoiding Vaughn?” Her sharp voice broke through the tension and his muddled thoughts.

He focused on the broken piece of glass. It was brown and slightly opaque with a jagged edge. Someone must have used the bottle it came from as a bar brawl weapon.

He tore his attention from the sliver of glass, “Er, yeah?”

She raised an eyebrow.

It was in that moment when he realized that he hadn’t hung out with Yvette individually all that much on Helios.

Vaughn was always with them. A trio.

And when there was a duo, it was usually him and Vaughn.

He cringed on the inside.

And you call yourself friends, huh, Rhysie? Some friend you are.

Maybe he should work on that.

“Uh, don’t worry about that,” he mumbled, “Who punched you?”

“Your friend.” She started tapping the table before adding, “Sasha.”

“Sasha punched you?” His brow furrowed. He wasn’t surprised, but there had to be a reason for it.

“Evidently, she was pissed at me for betraying you and Vaughn.”

“What makes you say that?” He tore his eye away from the table to look at her. She raised an eyebrow at him, as if she also thought he was a dumbass.

“She told me herself. Apparently, you saying no to Vasquez left an impression on her.”

The tips of his ears changed to pink and he ran his fingers through his hair, “I could talk to her for you?”

Yvette sighed, “No need, I’m not here for her. I can deal with being hated. Wouldn’t be the first time someone hated my guts, Rhys.”

“Okay, if you’re sure...”

“Seriously, Rhys, don’t worry about me. How are *you* doing?” Yvette (like himself) was a master at diverting a conversation.

(Sticking to one conversation was Vaughn’s unofficial job in the trio.)

He started to pick at the hole in the table with his fingernail. What could he say to her? That he felt like he was going crazy when his own thoughts sounded like Handsome Jack? That he couldn't get a new arm without a possibly dead Hyperion specialist?

Rhys scratched the back of his neck, "I'm fine, for the most part."

Yvette gave him a long, scrutinizing look. The kind of look she used to give him before agreeing to another one of his stupid, corporate plans. He felt like she was using it to see some sort of deeper meaning in his words.

She sighed, "You should talk to Vaughn, you know."

He ran a hand through his hair again.

He needed a real shower.

"Seriously, Rhys. I don't think I've seen you guys not talk for more than hour at a time," She frowned. "It's been a whole two days."

He groaned, "Yeah, yeah. I know."

"So, why haven't you talked to him in two days?"

He avoided looking at her this time, "Because he keeps giving me looks like I'm pathetic and someone to worry about."

You are pathetic, cupcake. Real pathetic.

She let out a heavy sigh that forced him to look at her. Her hand was halfway down her face, as if she did a facepalm.

"You are someone to worry about, Rhys," she muttered. "Regardless of what you think of yourself."

The hairs on the back of his neck bristled, "What's that supposed to mean?"

"People are going to worry about you because you make stupid decisions on a daily basis." Yvette shrugged.

A pout formed on his face. Were all of his friends that mean to him? It seemed like Vaughn was the only exception, "Thanks for the vote of confidence there. I *really* need that."

She pinched the bridge of her nose and continued, "Okay, not all the time, but you have made some questionable decisions."

His history of questionable decisions got him into this mess in the first place, "...Fair point."

"If your positions were reversed, you'd worry for him and you know it."

That was also true.

That's all there was on Pandora. Worrying about and looking out for Vaughn.

Vaughn was allowed to do the same.

Rhys was a hypocrite.

He sighed, "I'll talk to him."

Yvette nodded.

"Yvette, this is very off topic, but what if I grew a mustache?"

"Rhys?"

"Yeah?"

"Please don't grow a mustache."

For not for the first time, Rhys regretted getting his cybernetics.

In the past, those regrets often occurred when he had crippling migraines that would force him to use his minimal sick time because he couldn't get himself out of bed and out of his small Helios apartment to stare at a computer screen for eight hours.

This time, it was due to finding himself blanking more and more frequently, which resulted in him twitching violently and staring into space.

After the first time with Fiona, he did it another four or five times within the next three days, with Sasha finding him on the fifth occurrence.

By that point, he had a strong feeling something was probably wrong.

"Rhys?"

Her voice broke through the blankness and snapped him back to reality after...whatever that was.

"Huh?" His words slurred slightly, like he wasn't completely all there.

"You okay there? You were twitching."

Lying seemed completely off the table with Sasha, if he was being honest with himself.

"Uh, probably not?"

Her eyebrows furrowed as she slid down the wall next to him, "Want to talk about it?"

He sighed, “Not much to talk about. This isn’t the first time this happened.”

She took his hand and gave it a gentle squeeze.

He froze at the touch and in realization.

“Oh hell. I fucked up my own brain, Sasha.”

She gave him a confused look as a migraine pricked at the empty hole in his head.

“When I pulled the port out, I’m pretty sure fucked up my own head.”

He groaned and rubbed his face, wincing as it brushed the empty port.

“There were so many wires in there. Crap.”

Sasha squeezed his hand once again, “Rhys...slowly. What’s happening?”

He turned to her, a little annoyed that she was on his left side. His mouth turned into a grimace.

“How do you feel about vivid descriptions of brains? Or brain surgery?” He winced, “In this case, I think they’re interchangeable.”

Sasha’s mouth dipped into a frown and said nothing.

He took that as a sign to move on.

“Well, I’m sure you assumed by now that I didn’t always have the port. Or any of it before Hyperion,” he mumbled.

Sasha raised an eyebrow, “I wasn’t sure, but thanks for confirming it, I guess? Wait. That includes the arm and eye? What did you have before that?”

Rhys rubbed the back of his neck, grimacing as he stretched and it let out a small *crack*.

“Uh, a normal arm and eye?”

Sasha’s eyes widened, “You’re telling me you cut off your own arm for your evil company? What the hell, Rhys?”

He flinched under her judging tone, “Hey, if you think that’s weird, I heard there’s a Vault Hunter out there who cut off her own arm because she wanted to digistruct her science fair project faster. Who does *that*?”

“That Vault Hunter was supposedly one of the ones who took down Handsome Jack, you know,” She stuck out her tongue at him, “Also, you’re one to talk, buddy. Apparently, there are two kinds of people. Those who cut off their arms for fun and those who cut off their arms for profit.”

She sniggered, “Guess which one you are, Rhys.”

He blushed a violent red, unsure if it was out of embarrassment or the banter with Sasha.

She was really pretty.

He really did like her a lot.

“Fine, whatever, I had all of it done at Hyperion. The surgeries were really intense and took a lot of sign-offs that I was sound of mind, understood the side effects, etcetera. I had to have someone be responsible for me for a month or so afterward, you know?”

He tried to gauge her thoughts. He couldn't. She was intently listening to him, so that had to count for something, he supposed.

“Well, turns out the port and eye surgeries were really complicated because they had to directly wire them...directly... into the brain. They connected nerves and parts of my head to the mechanical parts, resulting in a shit ton of wire and delicate equipment,” he let out a long breath.

“Basically, if any of that was messed up or placed improperly, I'd probably lose major functions in my brain. At least, that's what they told me at the debrief beforehand. And what they told Vaughn after I was drugged up with pain meds.”

He bit his lip before continuing, “They warned that seizures would probably be an issue and I didn't have any of those because they did it right the first time, but...”

“You removed all of it by yourself and you think you're having seizures now? Rhys, all you've been doing is staring into space a lot. That doesn't seem that much out of the ordinary.” Sasha squeezed his hand gently, but she didn't seem to understand any of it.

“Sasha, just because I'm not laying on the floor, twitching and unresponsive doesn't mean it's not a seizure. I looked it up a forever ago.”

She let go of his hand and crossed her arms, “Okay then. What do you need, Rhys?”

He groaned and stared at a crack in the opposite wall, “I don't know. I guess I need a neurophysiologist and an expert in Hyperion cybernetics...”

A squeeze of the hand, “And you think they're all dead.”

“I don't see why they wouldn't be?” His thigh started to bounce with anxiety, “Ugh, this could get worse if I don't do anything about it.”

Everything was a problem that wouldn't have been an issue if he hadn't put that freaking drive in his head.

He knew Nakayama was a crazy asshole and he did it anyway.

Freaking Nakayama. This was his fault.

He deserved to be killed by stairs.

Another squeeze, “Rhys. Rhys. Calm down. Breathe.”

He let out a deep breath that he apparently was holding.

“There you go, tough guy. Deep breaths.”

He did just that.

“I’m sure you have an idea to fix it,” A bump to his good shoulder. “You’re always the man with the crazy plan.”

She was right. He needed a plan.

If Fiona, Sasha, Yvette, Loaderbot, and himself survived the crash, there could be a chance for more survivors.

If the universe would work with him this time, he’d find exactly the doctors and engineers that he needed the most.

He just had to go looking for them. It shouldn’t be that hard...

Right?

Chapter End Notes

As of this update, *Rebuild* has 69 kudos and nearly 700 hits. When I posted this fic for the first time, I honestly wasn't expecting that. I really appreciate all of my readers and supporters. Thank you, everyone, for supporting whatever this is. :)

As always, don't be afraid to come say hi on tumblr at cashew-butter or cashewwritesstuff!

Chapter Eight

Chapter Summary

A Midnight Bro Chat.

Chapter Notes

While this wasn't as great as I wanted it to be, it's a new chapter and this fic isn't dead.

I've been dealing with a lot of stupid stuff in my life, got uninspired from Tales, and wrote some other things in the meantime.

But recently, with BL3 out (despite me not having the game yet), I wanted to play Tales again. I missed being in Rhys' head, his interactions with his friends, and how silly I can be with this. I'm hoping I can find a direction with this and stick with it.

So, new and old readers, welcome to whatever this is and thank you for reading. <3

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

Rhys often praised himself when making new plans.

He was a planner and an implementer. Back on Helios as a middle manager, he created strategic plans for his department left and right and they *worked*.

On Pandora, no one cared.

He figured that out quickly. Especially since everyone just kept walking and winging it when he talked.

Like that wasn't frustrating or anything.

Regardless, he still liked to plan and they usually went to shit because that's Pandora in a nutshell.

Things always go to shit.

He stared out into the darkness as he tried falling asleep, trying to come up with some sort of pitch to get his friends to come with him to scope out the Helios ruins for a doctor.

Even though he considered himself a decent planner on a bad day, it had been a miserable week.

This was a really bad plan.

He didn't want to go. Thinking about it made his hands shake, heart race, and made the urge to curl into a ball and cry strengthen.

Rhys was weak, one-armed, one-eyed, and had an open hole to his brain. He was going to get himself killed.

For real this time.

"Craaaaaap," he mumbled under his breath as he rolled onto his left side.

He pulled the ratty quilt over his head considered hating himself a little more.

This was a no good, very bad plan.

Which meant he had to implement it anyway. He had to maintain his track record of bad decisions, didn't he?

Vaughn would probably be on board, as usual. He always followed if Rhys lead the way.

A twinge of guilt twisted at his stomach. He'd be getting Vaughn into trouble, as he always did to his bro.

Sasha would probably be on board as well, as her influence made him think of these ideas in the first place. She'd probably be doubly on board if she shot some stuff on the way.

Fiona would probably call his plan stupid and try to come up with another one that didn't require a lot of pre-planning. She would try to implement the plan she had, then give up halfway through. They would probably almost die (again) and, knowing Fiona, everything would probably work out just fine in the end anyway.

She'd probably go if Sasha did.

He closed his eye, sighing deeply through his nose.

If he really thought about it, he'd just want to go with those three and Loaderbot. It would almost be like it was before.

These days, it was harder to find LB and Rhys couldn't help but be worried.

The robot had to be still angry at Fiona and Sasha for destroying Gortys. Refusing to talk to them and hear the real story, wandering around Hollow Point without a purpose in his artificial life.

His heart clenched painfully in his chest at the thought of Gortys. The lack of her cheery presence caused a void that he didn't even think existed.

They *were* a family, weren't they? Him, Vaughn, the girls, Loaderbot, and Gortys?

Maybe he grew attachments too fast, too quickly. Maybe it was a bit rash to call the sisters who nearly killed them on their first day on planet "family." Maybe it was kind-of-sort-of weird to think of the bots as his own kids (LB *did* call him father, after all).

In its own way, it felt right. Maybe a month of life or death situations really created a family of sorts.

"Family" only gets you killed slower and much more painfully, Rhysie.

Rhys grit his teeth. Fuck that. He trusted them.

They were his family. It had been awhile since he thought of anyone like that other than Vaughn.

He smiled to himself before thinking about Yvette.

In the past, a part of him wanted to consider family too, but that never happened. They were very good friends, nothing more.

He should have known that a lot of their friendship was meant to further their careers in Hyperion, but it was genuine.

Parts of it, anyway.

As Rhys thought about it more, he honestly didn't really want her to come. The betrayal nagged at the back of his addled mind. Her effort to make things right lagged behind and became irrelevant in his racing thoughts.

He felt like an asshole. A complete and utter asshole.

He groaned into his dirty pillow.

"Hey Rhys? You awake?" Vaughn's voice was quiet in the dark, breaking through his own thoughts.

Pulling the dirty quilt down from his head, he squinted his eye to the bed next to his.

Vaughn was looking back at him. There was a frown deep on his face seen in the dim light.

Rhys swallowed the lump in his throat and forced a grin on his face, "Did I wake you, bro? Geez, I'm sorry."

A wave of a hand got him to shut up.

"Don't worry about it, man. Seems like you have a lot on your mind...as per usual, right?" Vaughn shifted to get a better view of his friend, looking like he himself had ten million thoughts going through his head.

Rhys let out a deep sigh, “Too much, bud. Too much.”

“Want to talk to talk about it?”

It had been two days, but as always, it was easy to slip into conversations and heart-to-hearts with his best friend in the universe, “I think I fucked up my brain, bro.”

He closed his eye, ignoring the oncoming migraine. There was a beat of silence before Vaughn’s voice came through the darkness, “From removing all of your hardware, right?”

A sigh, “Yeah.” Another beat of silence. “I keep spacing out and twitching. It’s freaking me out and I think they’re-”

“Seizures?” His best friend’s voice sounded frightened, which prompted Rhys to open his eye to look at him.

He could see the fear in Vaughn’s eyes and the tightness of his jaw. If they had been sitting up in this conversation, he would be twiddling his fingers. Their eyes met and there was an unspoken *What’s the plan?*

“I think we need to scope out the ruins of Helios and check for survivors. See if there’s a doctor that could help me with...all of this.”

“Not the worst plan.”

“Not the best plan either, Vaughn.” He watched as Vaughn propped himself up on his elbow.

What was going on in his friend’s head at that moment? Was he thinking of all of the complications that came from surgeries the first time? Was he regretting their friendship now, after all this?

“It’s all we got, right?” The once-accountant finally spoke, “I mean, there’s also getting off planet and finding someone that way, but-”

Rhys let out a long sigh, “I might not be able to get into a spaceship like this, buddy. It was bad enough when I had everything in place, not gonna lie.”

Vaughn squinted at him in the dim light, “Did you throw up on someone?”

“Yeah. August.” A grimace spread across Rhys’ face in response as Vaughn tried to contain his laughter. After several moments, they both quieted, let the silence wash over them and watched each other in the darkness.

Talking like this brought back memories of high school sleepover discussions and late nights at their college dorm, talking and laughing about anything and everything. They would talk about stupid things as boys did. It was just like this, without the pain, stained sheets, and background noise of gunfire.

“Hey Vaughn?” he whispered, gripping at the ratty quilt.

Their eyes met again, “Hm?”

“What would you think if I said I didn’t want Yvette to come with us. To go to what’s left of Helios, I mean?”

He watched as his friend frowned slightly, “I’d understand why, but ask you to reconsider. She wants to make it up to both of us, bro.”

It was in that moment that Rhys realized Vaughn and Yvette could be cut from the same cloth if they wanted to be.

Because Vaughn had taken the deal to consider backstabbing Vasquez later.

Because Yvette had taken the deal to potentially backstab the boys later.

But they both had a sense of loyalty to certain people: each other and Rhys. While the boys were on Pandora, Vaughn grew to trust two more people, Fiona and Sasha, and Yvette had realized who was more important after all the shit went down.

Loyalty was important in situations like these.

And Rhys couldn’t not be loyal to anyone he considered a friend.

“...We’ll bring her, but we’ll have to be peacemakers between her and the girls, you know,” he mumbled loud enough for Vaughn to hear, who hummed in agreement.

As the silence settled in again, the last few days of avoidance guilt curled up in his stomach, “Vaughn?”

A yawn, then, “Yeah, bro?”

“I’m sorry for ignoring you. That was shitty of me.”

He closed his eye tightly shut. How many times had he apologized to his best friend over the course of the month? It had probably been too many, considering all of the bullshit they had gone through. He would probably apologize thousands of times more if he had to: he just kept fucking up.

Rhys waited for Vaughn to say something, anything, in response. Something like an angry retort, a dismissal, or an apology accepted.

But there was nothing, just quiet snores blending in with the background of gunshots and screeching skags.

Sighing to himself, he rolled over and thought about his plan again; the pitch had to be just right.

After all, they had another chance at dying.

Or surviving, if they were lucky.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter Nine

Chapter Summary

Rusty garbage arms and dumb plans.

Chapter Notes

New year, new chapter? I'm so sorry about the delay of this chapter, but the beginning of the year was absolutely terrible for me. Thanks for hanging with me, readers.

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

“What the hell is *that* ?”

Whatever *that* was, it was the reason that Fiona and Sasha obnoxiously woke him up bright and early the next day.

It was thrown into his bed on top of him.

It landed on his knee.

It was made of scrap metal.

“ *That* was my idea,” Sasha smiled, or was it more like a smirk?

Rhys’ brain short-circuited at whatever it was, but he recovered quickly as he moved the contraption from his leg and pulled off the quilt to examine his bruised knee, “That doesn’t really answer my question...?”

“Sash thought it would be a good idea to get you an arm,” Fiona explained while picking at her nails. “At least a temporary one, so you don’t look too much like skag food.”

Sasha narrowed her eyes at her sister, arms across her chest, “I could have said that, but I didn’t call him skag food.”

Fiona rolled her eyes, “It was implied.”

Sasha shrugged, “Okay, it was a little implied. I’d rather Rhys not become skag food.” She crossed her arms over her chest.

Rhys thought he saw her cheeks darken with a rosy tint as Fiona rolled her eyes again. He picked up the contraption in front of him by a leather strap.

In his own personal opinion, the contraption could barely be considered an arm. The shoulder joint had several straps to attach it to a torso, without any complicated neural connections. The arm itself was more of a skeleton with metal bones and no protective covering or insulation.

It would have to do for now, he figured. He rubbed his fingers over the elbow and wrist joints, brushing away the orange-red rust that rested there.

Pandoran designed and made.

Better than having nothing at all.

“Aw, you guys really do care,” Rhys said with a half-hearted grin. “I have to ask though, did you pull this off a dead guy?”

The sisters looked at each other before they gave him a “are-you-really-that-dumb” look at the same exact time.

“No, I found it in a scrap heap,” Sasha said, pointing at him. “Someone else probably pulled it from a dead body.”

“Oh, ‘cause that’s so much better, Sash.” he muttered under his breath as Vaughn finally woke up to the commotion.

“...Is that an arm?”

“Yup,” Rhys lifted the metal contraption’s hand to eye-level to examine the fingers. The joints on those weren’t much better.

Vaughn moved closer to examine it himself, taking in the rusted joints and lack of articulation, “...Was it taken from a dead guy?”

“Probably.” Both men looked intently at a large red stain on the forearm of the contraption. Rhys rubbed at it with his thumb before deciding it was probably blood.

Vaughn scratched at the stubble growing on his cheek, “Huh. I’ll be back after I go pee. Maybe I’ll get food.”

He left the room, making a weird hobble as he went and Fiona followed after him.

Rhys sighed, “You go do that. Get me a bagel, if you can.”

He then realised it was only him and Sasha in the room.

“I doubt August has bagels, but you can try.”

He stared at the garbage piece of scrap metal that could barely be called an appendage.

The bed sagged next to him as Sasha sat down next to him.

“Okay, let me help you with that. Think you can hold it up as I do the straps?”

He did what he was told because he didn’t want her to punch him in the face. Although, he’d honestly thank her if she did.

Rhys held the garbage arm to the ruined socket, feeling the rust flake off on his hand, and grimaced. The disgust went away as he felt Sasha’s calloused hands on his back.

He could feel his face flush hot and accepted the fact that he was probably going to die here with Sasha attaching garbage to his body.

This was fine.

“Rhys? Still with me?”

He blinked as the strap tightened and nodded aggressively.

“Good. Wow, I never realized that you had so many scars.”

He felt her fingers trace the old white, bumpy scars that ran along his spine and ribs. A shiver ran down his back.

“I, uh, yeah. That’s from the initial surgeries. It was, uh,...pret-ty involved.”

Her palm rested in the middle of his back, where he knew the mass of scarring clustered there. He hated looking at it in the mirror, at how ugly it truly was.

“Can we, uh, get this over with, Sash? Please?” Rhys somehow strangled out of his throat.

He was going to be permanently bright red from all of this. Forget his slowly malfunctioning mind from unsafe hardware removal, his brain was going to be completely broken by a pretty, badass woman.

He’d be completely okay with that, honestly.

She stopped touching him. More like pulled her hand away like she had stuck it close to a buzzaxe.

“Right,” she snorted before pulling on the straps again, “I guess we should get you a shirt to cover all this.”

“Yeah, a shirt would be nice.” His voice came out squeaking and embarrassed with a cringe.

You are something else, cupcake. Quite the fuck up.

The scrap-metal arm hung heavy on his shoulder. It felt like that weight of guilt on his heart, a reminder of what he’d done in Hyperion and after.

Before he went and gave in to the guilt, a wad of fabric hit him in the head, sending waves of pain from his open port hole.

“Oh, shit, sorry!” Sasha’s hands were on him again, on his bare shoulders and neck.

“Fffff-! My depth-perception really sucks right now.” He grasped at his head, the pain stabbing and throbbing. That probably made it bleed again, it sucked a lot.

He looked at the wad of fabric with a wince. It was a steel, blue-grey color.

“Aw, shit, are we stealing August’s clothes now?” He whined, which got him a glare from his companion, “Fine...”

“Better than nothing, idiot. Let’s go.”

“So, what’s the plan?”

“Go to Helios, see if there’s a doctor to fix me and do the thing.”

“Rhys, that’s a terrible plan.”

“Well, that’s the plan, Fi. Take it or leave it.”

“One, now I know that all of your plans are stupid. Two, your plans usually go on for ten more minutes. I might do one better...”

“Guys, guys. Knock it off.”

He had pictured that going much smoother and longer in his head last night. They had regrouped down in the bar for breakfast, which consisted of a few rakk eggs, skag bacon, and a few bagels.

Granted, the eggs were green, the bacon was tough, and there was definitely toxic mold on Rhys’ bagel.

Part of him still wanted to eat it because he *really missed bagels*.

If brain damage or Pandora didn’t kill him, he really hoped it would be a bagel.

He was going to build the best bagel place when he took over Atlas. That’s for damn sure.

Rhys shook his head, the start of a migraine pricked at the back of his head.

Moving on.

“Honestly, guys, there’s no other option for me right now. It’s either this or go off planet. Do you really think the caravan has it in her for another ride?” He sighed, taking in his family’s faces.

Vaughn looked conflicted, as if the thought of going back to Hyperion was too much to bare, but for the sake of his best friend he would.

Sasha, on the other hand, looked a little excited. Probably wanted to shoot some Hyperion bastards in the face while doing a life or death mission. Figures.

Fiona looked like she was thinking about the odds of this plan, with her eyebrows furrowed and biting her lip.

Loaderbot was standing farther away from the rest of them, as if he wanted to keep away from the group (or rather Fiona and Sasha), but Rhys could tell he was listening intently. He had to talk to the bot about Fi soon, otherwise he wasn't sure what would happen between them.

Amongst all of this, Yvette looked uncomfortable and slightly concerned when he looked at her as well. As if she felt like she didn't want to be there with two trigger-happy Pandorans or thinking about the complications of going back to a bunch of corporate douchebags.

He would probably agree with her on the latter.

He cleared his throat, "Well?"

"I'm in." As he expected, Sasha was first, giving him a confident smile.

It made his heart do some weird flops in his chest.

Vaughn followed shortly after, "You and me forever, bro. Of course I'll follow you."

The sisters burst out laughing and Fi wiped the tears from her eyes, "You guys are adorable, you know that?"

This bro turned a violent shade of red as Rhys let out a nervous laugh, "Thanks, Fiona. We are adorable."

He watched as Vaughn gave himself a facepalm with a smile on his face.

Yeah. They were adorable.

He cleared his throat, "Yay or nay for you then, Fi?"

She gave a nonchalant shrug of her shoulders, "Yay, I guess. You're gonna get your ass kicked if I don't."

A smirk etched her way onto her painted lips and Rhys gave her a roll of the eyes and a shit-eating grin. Fiona was definitely good to have in his corner, that's for sure.

"I agree with Fiona." The voice that came next was unexpected, considering it was robotic and agreeing with Fiona.

Loaderbot stepped forward, golden skeletal body glinting in the low light. Rhys could practically sense loyalty oozing out of every circuit, every processor.

He was definitely naming his firstborn Loaderbot. No one could stop him now.

“I owe you, buddy.”

Loaderbot stared at him with his red optic, as if to say, “ *You owe me a lot, Rhys.* ”

Rhys tried to do a thumbs up with his mechanical hand.

The piece of scrap flopped and clanged uselessly at his side. Rhys stared at it, pout forming on his face.

When he looked up, everyone was staring at him. Some looked like they were going to laugh at him.

Vaughn was the first to speak, “Rhys...were you...”

“Don’t.”

The former accountant shrugged, smile on the corners of his lips.

He glanced over at Yvette, who still leaned against the wall in silence. From her face, he assumed she was weighing her options. The pros and cons of this bullshit mission.

Finally, she spoke, “I did say I’d make it up to you, didn’t I?”

“You certainly did, so you in?” He could feel his doubts in her simmer under the surface, nagging him.

Rhys had to try to trust her again, since it was better to have friends than enemies on Pandora.

She nodded.

Chapter End Notes

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