

# AS THE WORLD BURNS

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PLANET ARX

41 ABY

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*'A pathogen has been released into the atmosphere by a new terrorist group that has so far remained unnamed. This pathogen has proven itself highly contagious and 100% fatal in the first victims to succumb to the disease. The top professors in the Collegium have begun research on the virus but suspect that it always proves fatal within 48 hours, with symptom onset only showing in the last twelve hours of the disease. All spaceports on Arx are closed to incoming and outgoing traffic and-*

A click echoed throughout Sev's apartment as he stared at the now blank holoscreen on his wall, the wheels in his head slowly turning as he came to terms with what the broadcast meant. He was infected with an airborne pathogen that was absolutely fatal with no margin for survival, and had no way off Arx.

He was stuck here. To die. Alone.

Well, kist.

In all the ways he expected to die, this was not it. At the mercy of some woman he angered in some corner of the galaxy? Sure. By Savi's hands when he inevitably went too far in one of their arguments? Plausible. Merc'd by some bounty hunter on a far away planet? Probably. But silently, in his own home, probably in a very slow and unpleasant way? No.

The Hybrid jumped up from his couch, nabbing his communicator off of his coffee table. Surely there had to be a way, some sort of prophylactic measure he could take to prevent himself from contracting whatever illness was befalling the people of Arx. The first person he dialed was Sivall. Surely the Aedile of Galeres was already looking into counter measures, as Arx and the Collegium was as much her home as Selen.

Two rings, then an answer.

"Severin please tell me you're not home."

"Siv-"

"Please tell me you're not on Arx."

Silence then, for a few seconds. Severin could hear his heart pounding in his ears, his heart racing from the urgency in the Chiss medic's voice. He swallowed hard, then answered.

"No, I'm on Arx Siva. I'm sorry."

The long string of Cheunh curses broke his heart and caused a lump to form in his throat. He hadn't known Sivall for very long, but what little time he had spent with the Shadesworn had secured her spot in his heart. He had met very few people as genuinely *good* as her.

"We'll figure this out, Siva. There's got to be some way, some cure—"

"Not in time! *Tar to ravri'ihah bei!* Just... just hold on. Okay Sev? We're working on codifying the virus now. I'm waiting on a report from Rhylynce and his group. We'll save you. We will."

No they wouldn't. He could hear it in the tone, feel the faintest tinge of hopelessness creep into his bones. She would try, sure. Sivall Zoria would drive herself nuts in her office, working herself into the ground to try and save as many of the scholars of the Collegium as she could, because that was her. But they wouldn't be in time to save him.

"Maybe you're not even infected. Are you symptomatic?"

"What are the symptoms?"

"Delirium, fever, chills, bloody sputum. Blood from the eyes and ears. Pink-tinged sweat."

"No, none of that." *Yet.*

"Good. Keep me posted, okay? And hold on. Stay home. We'll get you through this."

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When he finally became symptomatic, Sivall cried on the phone. She raged and broke something in the background that he couldn't quite place over the delirium that had set in. More reassurances that she would find a cure, more begging for him to hold on. Reminders that he mattered and needed to fight the illness battering his body from the inside.

Ghosts from his past, fighters he had killed or people he had assassinated for Addyn floated in the corners of his vision, pressing in, making it hard to breathe. Hard to think. He hung up with Sivall with promises that he would try his best to hold on till the quarantine on Arx had lifted.

He knew it would be too late.

The Kessurian-Echani was lying on the floor in his kitchen, arms and legs spread out as far as he could manage, his shirt discarded so that his bare skin could press against the cool floor. He was so hot and so cold at the same time. Every place his skin touched each other felt searingly hot, like he held a roaring fire within his skin.

Half lidded silver eyes turned to look at the communicator held weakly in his left hand. His limbs felt like lead but he still needed to try, still needed to do one last thing.

Dialing Savi's number felt like it took hours. He would fall into unconsciousness halfway through and be woken by the angry dial tone of inputting insufficient amounts of digits. By the time he managed to make it through the entirety of Savran's number, blood had begun to leak from his eyes, staining his vision. The pearlescent scales surrounding his eyes caught the blood and began turning to rubies.

One ring. Two. Four. Seven....

*The number you dialed is unresponsive. Please leave a message after the tone.*

His voice when he spoke was hoarse and weak, his tongue dry and feeling like it was several sizes too big.

"Savi... *M'a Niku Xuo*... I want you to remember how wonderful you are. A glorious pillar of strength and beauty, standing tall against the waves of everything that has tried to take you down. I have never met anyone like you. I'm lucky to have known you. I love you, Savran Has. I'm... I'm sorry I messed everything up. I'm dying. I didn't make it off Arx before the quarantine."

A fit of coughs stopped his speech, splattering blood. He could feel the metallic fluid filling the little sacs there that should have been holding air instead.

"Please, *please*, Savi. Please live. Truly live, for both of us. I want you to *thrive*, I want you to enjoy life. That was my.. plan. To help you.. find the joy in life again. I'm sorry... I'm so sorry Savran..."

He hung up and his eyes closed, unable to hold themselves open any longer. Each breath was agony, slowly drowning in his own fluids. He could feel his blood-tinged sweat creating a puddle around him on the floor.

How pathetic he must look.

The last hour was exhausting. Each moment of living absolute torture. Blood leaked from everywhere it could, the exsanguination preventing his body from carrying the oxygen it needed. The delirium got worse, the world swam. All he could do now was wait.

It took six rings before he heard his communicator blaring beside him. He almost didn't make it in time to answer before the voicemail box took over.

"He...llo...?"

"Severin?"

Relief flooded him, nearly tipping him over the edge into the abyss.

"Savi..." he breathed, clutching his communicator. They called back.

"What do you mean you're on Arx?! I'm coming to get you, just.. Hang on. This isn't goodbye, dammit, you hear me?"

Tears filled his eyes, surprising him as he was sure he had sweat out all the liquid in his body that wasn't blood. They mixed with the sanguine tracks running down the sides of his face that stained his snow white hair. Once-pink lips that were now tinted blue trembled, transferring their wobbling to his voice.

"You.. can't. The ports are.. Shut down. Savi-"

"I forgive you. I forgive you, okay? You can't die." Silence, like she was holding back tears. "You can't leave me too...please."

He could hear the pleading in her voice, begging him to stay. He wanted to. He thrashed against his failing heart, his failing body, desperately trying to cling to life. He'd done the impossible before, beat opponents multiple times bigger and stronger than him, cracked the ice surrounding the heart of Savran Has. He could do this, he could beat the inevitable, right?

No.

Silence as he gasped for breath, struggling to stay afloat.

"... I love you, too. Please don't leave me."

He plunged into the dark, faintly hearing Savi screaming for him from a distance. He tried so hard but couldn't break the surface again, couldn't pull himself from *The Great Sea*.

Severin Xand was no more.