

**Warning:** Mild violence.

**Note:** Though this is not a song fic, the song mentioned is “Thorns (distant voices)” by Wumpscut.

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“What are you doing here? I thought you were fourth year.”

“Well, yeah, but I managed to skip last year’s class,” Hazar groaned. “I really don’t want to be here.”

Lotor cocked his head. “How come? Chemistry is fun!”

“For whom?” Hazar looked flatly at him. “For one, I don’t fancy my face blown apart.”

Lotor waved a dismissing hand. “Wouldn’t you love to fly to Akhronion for free?”

“It wouldn’t be for free, you pea brain! I would get blown up first.”

“ChilleX, dude. You’re so uptight about things sometimes.” Lotor rolled his eyes and pushed his long, red hair back. “Listen, it’s mandatory we take Chemistry and you just lucked out!”

“How? For the fact that I’m with you?” Hazar looked at him flatly. “That’s about as good as signing my death warrant.”

“Ooooh! Below the belt! Hazar, you can be so mean, you know!” Lotor sighed, faking injured feelings.

“Oh, shut up!” Hazar snapped. “So what are we gonna do anyway? We have to choose a topic and develop it for the next three years until it’s complete.”

“LaserChem,” Lotor suddenly declared inspired.

“Say what?” Hazar stared at him.

“LaserChem,” Lotor stated again thoughtful. “A new weapon. We can combine Physics and Chemistry to create a most devastating weapon.” He snapped his fingers, looking rather excited. “Hazar! Think about it. If we can pull it off...”

“Lotor! I hate science! You may be good... sorry! Excellent at Physics and Math, but I don’t dig that stuff. I like History and I’m training to go into the Military.”

“That’s all fine and dandy, my friend, but you’re still gonna have to take the Sciences and pass them!” Lotor stated plainly. “You’ll either help me or I’m not doing your Math homework anymore.”

“That’s not fair!” Hazar protested. “That’s down right blackmail!”

“Live with it.” Lotor countered smugly. “Listen, we need...”

“Enough!”

Lotor and Hazar jumped back in their seats as their professor suddenly smashed a ruler over their desk. They shrank under the piercing gaze and pursed their lips as if trying to show that they would not erupt into conversation again. The professor gave them one last sharp gaze before moving to the front of the class again and resuming the lesson on the basics of Chemistry.

Lotor sighed and looked at the board, quite bored. Unconsciously, he began to doodle on his notebook and didn’t realise what he was doing until he heard a stifled snicker from Hazar. He examined his work and grinned. It was a rather compromising caricature of their professor teaching their class.

“Shh...” Lotor hissed quietly, still smiling.

Hazar shook his head and bent over his notebook, pretending to be taking notes. “This is so boring...,” he muttered. “I think I would rather be outside getting beaten half to death in Ghrapho’s class.”

Lotor smirked and bent his head low as the professor turned to face them. He thought the lecture would continue for a while longer, but was happy to hear that they were to take their places on the lab benches and start on their project.

Lotor had already heard about the fabled Professor Kardi, who was the harshest Chemistry instructor the Academy had ever known. It wasn’t so much that Kardi was extraordinary rough with the students; however, to earn marks in his class was nearly impossible. He had also created the three year long project in which the students had to develop a revolutionary chemical based idea and present the completed result at the end. Kardi monitored the progress carefully, and gave additional marks for anything he saw that was particularly outstanding. On top of the project, the students had to also complete the many assignments he handed out.

Hazar looked at the sheets in front of him. "Gibberish," he shook his head. "What do I care if nitro-glycerine is not all that keen with gun powder? Like I'm ever gonna need to know this stuff!"

"It's not?" Lotor cocked his head curiously. "How come?"

"I don't know. That's what it says here."

"Let's try it."

The two proceeded to scoop large amounts of the chemicals and then, nonchalantly, dumped the contents of their test tubes into a beaker. The explosion sent them flying to opposite ends of the room and they slammed hard against the walls.

"D'ssat! Morphay! What are you two doing?!" Kardi rushed over to the lab bench, which was being consumed by flames. "Have you two lost your minds?" He took out a fire extinguisher and proceeded to douse the flames. "What am I saying?! You two are insane! Get over here this instant and clean up this mess."

Lotor skulked over rubbing a large lump on his head. "Oops."

"Oops?!" Kardi slapped him hard, sending him back to the floor. "D'ssat, I hear you might be making into Honour Roll..." He narrowed his eyes and sneered. "But I assure you that even G hrapho won't be able to get you the Blacks if your Chemistry mark is low."

Lotor nodded subdued.

"And as for you, Morphay, the Black and Grey can be pushed further away. You're still a half of a mark away to getting it. Don't push your luck."

"I think he's unconscious." Lotor got up slowly, and eyed Kardi warily.

Kardi threw his hands up in the air. "Take him down to the infirmary." He grabbed Lotor by the collar. "And don't try to be smart again in my class, boy. You'll learn just what happens when certain chemicals touch your skin." He hurled Lotor towards Hazar.

Dragging Hazar proved hard, but Lotor managed to get him almost to the end of the hall when Hazar suddenly sprung up. He grinned at Lotor and shook his singed hair back.

"Hey!" Lotor protested.

"Well, that's the only way to cut class." Hazar winked.

"But I..."

"Stop being a ninny," Hazar scolded. "Cam'on, let's go out. I hear they are testing out new players for Tromme. I wanna be on the team."

Lotor remained where he was in the hallway watching Hazar running away. The latter soon realised he was alone and turned to face Lotor again.

"Are you coming?"

"I'll get killed!" Lotor looked upset. "I'm too little."

"Details," Hazar waved a dismissing hand.

Lotor sighed, looked over his shoulder at the Chemistry class and ran after Hazar.

"Get the puck!"

Lotor's head snapped up and he saw the cylindrical shape fly past him, barely missing his head. He skated quickly after, stick held up like a bat and noted the puck continued past the wall of the defence men and on towards the nearly empty opponent's side.

Narrowing his eyes, he gave up on skating and began to run. He watched the distance between him and the large Drule boys close quickly. With only a few feet to spare before the catastrophic collision, Lotor jumped up, flipped over their heads and landed with a light stumble behind them. He regained his balance quickly and chased the puck. With a swift shot, he scored a goal.

"Hah!" He threw his arms in the air. "I'm too good!" he boasted.

"Runt!"

Lotor turned, but not fast enough to avoid the opposing offence player jumping him and dragging him down to the ice. The two boys rolled in a fray of punching fists around the ice before the other players from both teams joined them. The coach, sitting in the stands, hung his head, threw his arms up in defeat and was not surprised. He had never seen a Tromme game end in anything else than at least one cadaver having to be dragged off the ice.

He was astonished, however, when the players broke the fight up on their own accord and resumed the game with full vigour; the players clearly intent in killing each other rather than scoring goals. He scowled when he heard Lotor scream something at the boy who had tackled him.

“D’ssat!” the coach called. “Dance!” he shouted referring to Lotor’s fighting style, which aided him greatly when he was playing. “Evade and score!”

Lotor heard and continued his play. He rarely took the defence position, since he was much smaller than the other boys, being half human, and had no true desire to be squashed. He twirled past two particularly large Drules and was about to shoot the puck when someone behind him caught his stick in mid air. He tried to remain standing but the momentum made him lose his balance and he fell backwards painfully, with his stick still snagged with his opponent’s.

“Scheiße!” Lotor cursed.

He was quickly stifled by a deluge of bodies falling on top of him. Hazar skated over quickly and joined the melee, trying to extract Lotor from it. The coach shook his head again and stood up. The game was over.

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“Hey! Lookit!” Lotor sat up in bed and fell back with a groan. “I’m not dead.”

Hazar glanced sideways from his own bed. “Me neither... But I wish I were. Kardi came over earlier and said he was not happy about us cutting class.”

After the fight at the arena, Hazar and Lotor had been taken to the infirmary with serious injuries. Lotor had snapped several bones and dislocated whatever he hadn’t broken. Hazar had had a stick impaled through him. At the end of the fight, only one boy had walked out of the arena by his own means and the coach had been genuinely stunned upon learning that no one had died.

“That’s your fault!” Lotor pouted.

Hazar shrugged. “Well, it had to be done...”

“What’s that?”

Hazar turned gingerly to face the direction Lotor was pointing. A strange and rather large piece of equipment was sitting on a trolley with long wires ending with pads. Hazar reached over and grabbed one of the cables.

“I think it’s one of those booster cable thingamajigs.”

“Ooh!” Lotor’s eyes went nearly round and he jumped out of his bed, completely forgetting that he was injured. “Let’s try it!”

Hazar lifted his shirt and placed the pads over his chest. Lotor turned a knob on the machine and then pressed a button.

“YOW!” Hazar nearly flew out of his bed.

Lotor giggled and took the pads from Hazar, whose hair was sticking up quite peculiarly.

“My turn.” Lotor placed the pads over his chest.

Hazar hit the button and Lotor’s reaction was more dramatic, since he had been standing up. He rammed against a wall and his hair fanned out.

“Dude!” Hazar laughed. “It’s my turn again...”

“Incoming!” Lotor rushed over and placed the pads back before leaping over Hazar and onto his own bed.

A nurse walked in, the only woman the Academy allowed in the premises. She looked at the boys and then at the notes in her hands.

“Hum... They listed you down for Tromme injuries...” She looked at them briefly. “Idiots. Anyone can see you’ve been electrocuted.” She walked out unimpressed, after changing the medical notes.

Lotor and Hazar chuckled to each other. They remained still for another few, brief minutes, a record for them, before Hazar jumped out of the bed and went to a cabinet. He fumbled through it before he found some jars with liquid.

“What do you suppose this is for?” Hazar asked, tossing one to Lotor.

“Isopropyl fifty percent solution...” Lotor read the label. “I haven’t the foggiest.” He uncapped the bottle and drank it.

Hazar watched expectantly, hoping to see his friend spontaneously combust or something just as interesting. Lotor kept looking down at his belly as if expecting a twelve-headed hydra to poke all of its heads out through his navel. The two were very disappointed when nothing occurred, but Lotor drank more of the solution, having enjoyed the warm and fuzzy feeling it had given him. Hazar opened one of the bottles and also drained its contents.

Before long, the two boys were carolling most jovially. Another nurse walked in and found the two sitting on Lotor's bed cross-legged and singing whatever came to their young and intoxicated minds.

"Electrocution?" The nurse looked puzzled. "Any imbecile can tell you two are drunk and need to go to detox." She walked out of the room cursing, much to the boys' amusement.

Hours went by in that manner. Each time a nurse entered the room, Lotor and Hazar were diagnosed with a different manner of ailment. According to the expert nurses, they even had leprosy at one point.

"What will this do?" Hazar asked looking at Lotor and pointing to another bottle with a crossed skull on the label.

"It will turn you into a frog." The bottle was plucked from his hand from behind.

"Eek!" Hazar jumped away and crawled into bed. He began to cough.

"Can it, Morphay," Ghrapho commanded quietly and looked at Lotor who was pretending to be asleep. "And you, D'ssat. Eyes open, look alive."

"Yes?" Lotor asked sheepishly.

"You're putting me in some dire straights," Ghrapho stated casually, sitting on a chair. "I was going to push you for the Blacks for the end of the term, but I see that will be quite impossible."

Lotor sat up, still scratching at the spot where Hazar had dumped some powder on him, giving him an immediate allergic reaction. He regarded Ghrapho briefly. The latter had chosen Lotor to be under his protection. At first, Lotor had been terrified of the Weapon's Master, but soon, learned that Ghrapho, out of all the professors in the Academy, was possibly the fairest; even if he was so demanding.

Since he had seen the potential in Lotor, Ghrapho had pushed the youngster towards the black uniform that only the Honour Roll students wore. It had been over a century since Honour Roll was achieved, due to the demands and exploits that were needed. Lotor was a promising student despite his knack for getting into trouble and causing accidents.

"What did I do exactly?" Lotor cocked his head.

"You cut class..." Ghrapho smiled subtly. "For which I'll be punishing you myself."

Lotor groaned.

"You went to play Tromme without permission, and you've caused mayhem in the medical wing all day long."

"I was bored!" Lotor protested. "Say, what's this?" He reached under his blankets, pulled out a bottle and tossed it at Ghrapho.

Ghrapho tried not to laugh, but the damage was done. Hazar and Lotor sat up in bed and looked at him anxiously.

"This, my young, intoxicated friends, is rubbing alcohol." Ghrapho frowned. "And pray tell, how much did you drink?"

Lotor and Hazar exchanged glances and dumped several more bottles from under their blankets to the floor. Ghrapho shook his head, his long hair hiding his smile from the boys. He stood up and went to the window before the two saw his amusement.

"D'ssat, you'll be coming to the storage area as soon as they release you from here." He turned around, finally controlling himself. "And you, Morphay, will be coming along as well." Ghrapho raised a warning finger. "And just remember that if you two get in trouble there, you'll be facing me. And trust me, I'm just looking for an excuse to separate the two of you."

Lotor cocked his head. "Why would you want to do that?"

"Because, D'ssat, this friendship of yours is hindering you both." Ghrapho took his chair again. "And I also know that you're both cheating. You," he pointed at Lotor, "do his Math homework for him. And you," he pointed at Hazar, "do his Political and Military Practice assignments." He looked back to Lotor. "Let me assure you that you'll not be able to cheat so easily in Honour Roll. And as for you Morphay, get cracking on the Math. I have suggested to Laynton that perhaps granting you the Black and Grey would not be such a bad idea."

Hazar groaned. The black and grey uniform was the highest ranking uniform after the pure black from the Honour Roll. Lotor had already earned his and was among the few students to claim such tribute. Laynton, Hazar's Chancellor, wasn't anything like Ghrapho, and was, in fact, almost as harsh as Kardi.

"Please don't. I enjoy my Grey and Black..." Hazar sighed. "Professor, look, I really have no intention of making anything out of my life. I really want to just become a beach bum or something. I hear it's a lovely life."

“Not a chance, Morphay. Your father will not allow that and you know it,” Ghrapho assured and looked at Lotor. “Don’t even consider it, D’ssat. You, especially, have a duty to your father and planet. You’re the Crown Prince of Doom.”

“That’s a dreadful accident.” Lotor looked thoughtful.

“No matter.” Ghrapho stood up as a nurse walked in to give the boys a release paper. “I will escort you down to the dormitory at this time. I will return in the morning and fetch you, where you’ll spend the day in the storage room polishing and sharpening the weapons.”

“All of them?!” Lotor’s and Hazar’s eyes widened.

Ghrapho smiled subtly. “Aye, younglings.”

He watched as the boys listened to the nurse’s instruction and studied them carefully. *Yes. You’re both well synchronised. I will use this to your advantage. Perhaps, if my plan works, I will gain you Morphay. You and D’ssat should have the same Chancellor. Laynton does not understand the potential you both have.*

Lotor and Hazar dressed and followed Ghrapho out. Once they reached their beds, they realised how tired and sore they still were and collapsed into their beds. Ghrapho remained for a few moments longer and soon realised that the two boys would likely sleep until the next day.

*Or at least I hope...* He looked heavenward expecting a miracle.

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“Sucks to this!” Lotor tossed a dagger at the wall.

“Amen!” Hazar sprawled on the floor.

“Up!” Ghrapho entered the chamber. “You’re not finished.”

Hazar and Lotor looked at him. Hazar groaned and Lotor stomped his foot stubbornly. Ghrapho, with a swift motion, grabbed a whip and cracked it over both of them. The boys cried out and began to polish the weapons again.

“You missed my class earlier. I did tell you I would train you to become the best assassins in the galaxy. But you have to learn how to kill first,” Ghrapho rebuked unimpressed. “Of course, you will have to make it up. Also, I have a special lesson I want to conduct with the two of you.” He looked at Hazar. “You have not yet been given your weapon of trade, have you?”

“No,” Hazar responded simply.

“Very good. I hereby present you with Credo.” He handed Hazar a large broadsword. “I know you handle those well...” He smiled. “Perhaps too well.” Ghrapho reached into his boot and produced a dagger. “And this is Anathemas. I know you like to have a dagger in your offhand. Take good care of them.” He turned to leave. “And do finish this up if you’re expecting dinner tonight. I won’t let you go until you’ve completed your time with me.” He walked out.

Lotor recommenced his task while Hazar just stared dumbly at the blades which had been presented to him. All students were given weapons to practice, but few were gifted with any permanently and arcane items were even rarer to be earned. Lotor paused long enough to look at him.

“Don’t you worry, brother, he’ll make you earn them. I don’t know what he’ll have you do, but I figure it will be something really risky and you might even die.”

“Oh, I have no doubts. Ghrapho is a maniac.” Hazar tested the weight of the blades before sheathing them. “So we learn how to kill... But we already know how.” He sounded confused.

“I guess he’s gonna teach us how to kill with elegance.” Lotor did a fencing move to demonstrate. “En garde, lâche créature, Je t’irai détruire!”

Hazar arched an eyebrow. “You worry me...” He picked up the cloth and another sword. “What the heck was that?!”

“French,” Lotor proclaimed proudly.

“What’s that?”

Lotor scowled. “I don’t know... But my mother taught us a bit cuz she used to read us books and stuff and I remember that passage.”

“Do you boys not want to eat tonight?” Ghrapho asked, poking his head in and interrupting their talk.

“Oh yeah!” Lotor slapped his forehead and began to work again. “I forgot.”

“Professor Praph is going to kill me!” Lotor groaned and fell to the ground with a flop. He rested his elbows on his outstretched legs and placed his head on his wrists. “This is the fourth uniform I’ve wrecked this week.” He sighed.

Ghrapho threw his hands up in the air. “How many times have I told you to change before entering the arena, D’ssat?” He turned his head slowly. “And you, Morphay, stop snickering. You’re in just as a fine mess.” He shook his head. “Boys, when you kill something, generally it will squirt blood. When that happens, generally you are going to get dirty.”

“Why don’t they make our uniforms out of vinyl or something? Why does it have to be this woolly stuff? Can never get the blood out,” Lotor pouted.

“Because, nitwit, you would freeze to death,” Hazar said and flopped beside Lotor. “It’s rather nippy here in the winter, or have you forgotten?”

Ghrapho looked amused. “Up. Your second training commences now. And I don’t know about you, but we’re having meatloaf for dinner and I, for one, don’t want to miss it.”

Lotor and Hazar were up before Ghrapho could blink. He nodded approvingly and led them to the very centre of the arena.

“The two of you seem to be attuned to one another,” Ghrapho began slowly. “It’s rare to find this particular feat. I’m going to train you to work in unison.” He turned to Hazar. “I know you’re wondering how you came to the blades so easily. Well, your test is to survive D’ssat’s attack. And you,” he turned to Lotor, “are to kill Morphay. I want you fight each other like you’ve never fought anyone else.”

Lotor raised his hand.

“Yes, D’ssat?”

“I’m confused.” Lotor cocked his head.

“That’s nothing new.” Ghrapho waved a dismissing hand. “This is so you can learn every move the other is capable of. If you can’t learn it, then I erred in my early assessment about you two.” He moved to the side. “Fight!”

Hazar and Lotor exchanged brief glances before unsheathing their blades and moving to attack. Ghrapho watched the display with cool detachment. The two boys had the potential to become, possibly, the grandest Blade Masters the Academy ever produced. Lotor had the deadly grace of a Dancer and Hazar the power of a Warrior.

“Watch one another. Learn everything there is to know,” Ghrapho conducted. “Even time each other’s breathing. A single blink out of place means something. Do not forget that.” He paused. “Morphay, bring that shoulder in. Yoursword is off balance.”

*How the heck did he know that?!* Hazar thought and followed the hint. To his surprise, he found that the sword began to respond to him much faster.

“D’ssat, stop panting!” Ghrapho scolded. “Control your breathing or you’re going to tire out long before it’s necessary.” He shook his head. “Your feet are too far apart, you’re going to fall. Morphay, keep your face blank!”

The two boys responded automatically to the instructions. The fight continued for long moments before twin whips lashed out, wrapping around Credo and Rue. Hazar and Lotor stopped immediately and looked at Ghrapho.

“That’s quite enough,” Ghrapho announced, releasing the blades. “Scabbard your blades. Morphay, you’re not cut for acrobatics; however, you’ll prove a good addition to D’ssat. And you,” he looked at Lotor, “can benefit from Morphay’s strength.”

The duo remained still, waiting for the next instruction.

Ghrapho nodded his head and a song began. “Listen to it and allow it to flood you. You will respond to all the moves according to this song. Here,” he tossed a bundle of papers at each one of them. “Study these and perform accordingly. I will return and check on your progress.”

Lotor watched Ghrapho go. “This is a joke, right? What is he doing? Teaching us ballet?”

Hazar scowled. “Maybe this is part of our punishment for all we did yesterday.” He regarded Lotor briefly.

“How come you didn’t let me kill you?” Lotor asked.

“I wasn’t supposed to.”

“Oh yeah. You had to defend yourself. Still, you could have at least allowed me to kill you. It would have looked better.”

“Maybe next time.” Hazar shrugged.

Lotor began to flip the papers. “These are some arabesques! You know, I don’t think it’s anatomically possible for me to contort this way.”

Hazar studied his own, which was different from Lotor's. "Who does he think I am? I can't hold this bloody blade out like that! It's too heavy."

Lotor groaned. "Well, we better get started. You know Ghrapho. He's been pretty nice so far, but my back still hurts from that last lash in the storage room." He paused. "Let's start, I'm hungry and the meatloaf is always good. Plus..." He yawned. "I'm getting sleepy too and I still got homework to finish before we can hit the sack tonight."

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"Why is the arena empty?" Lotor asked curiously, as he entered the area early in the day.

"I don't know... The Faculty is up there. I wonder if we're supposed to be elsewhere but we forgot about it." Hazar fell into a thoughtful silence.

"Oh, probably. And we'll probably end up in detention for it." Lotor sighed.

"Release the robeast," Ghrapho called from the stands. "You two are to fight it."

"Why exactly?" Lotor squinted up at Ghrapho.

"Because I'm telling you to."

"Got it."

Ghrapho nodded and suddenly music came alive. Hazar and Lotor exchanged glances and realised what was happening. They took their positions and unsheathed their blades.

The robeast was big, looked like a Cyclopes, and it lunged in a quick dash towards them. Lotor spun and concluded standing back to back with Hazar, who brought Credo down hitting the robeast ineffectively.

"Uh oh..." Hazar commented and brought the blade up to deflect the smashing fist coming down towards him.

Lotor jumped up, sheathed Rue and landed on the robeast's shoulders, stabbing down with Mourn using both hands. It howled and Lotor fell off the robeast in a spray of blood and brains. He landed heavily on his shoulder and stared dazed at Hazar.

"That's gross," he complained.

Ghrapho just stared in shock at the events in the arena, before dropping his head into his hands. The other Faculty members looked bewildered.

"I thought that was supposed to be the most fatal of all the robeasts," Kardi pointed out.

"It had only one weak spot and that dingbat found it." Ghrapho's voice was muffled by his hands. "Why can't they ever co-operate?" He stood up. "This is not what you're supposed to do!" he shouted at the boys. "You were supposed to carry the fight out for the duration of the song like you've been practicing!"

"Oh!" Lotor sat up. "Well, no one specified anything." He considered "If you pop my shoulder back into place, I'm sure Hazar and I could try again."

"You've dislocated your shoulder again?!"

"Well, it was a fourteen foot drop," Lotor pointed out. "And I landed funny."

"I'm just going to glue that bleeding shoulder of yours into place!" Ghrapho jumped into the arena from the stands. Lotor cried out as his bones were reset. "Now fight properly!" he reproached them both and with a smooth leap, got back on the stands.

Another robeast was released and the song began again. Lotor and Hazar exchanged nods and began to fight with the choreography Ghrapho had assigned them with. They were oblivious to the gasps from the stands as they performed their deadly routine of dodging the robeast with grace, speed and precision. They scored several hits and, even when they moved close to one another with spinning swords, neither hit the other. They seemed to have become an extension of each other.

At the conclusion of the song, the two positioned themselves appropriately and four blades flashed under Akhrondion's light before plunging deep into the robeast, which howled in pain before toppling over.

Laynton looked at Ghrapho. "So that is why you wish to become Morphay's Chancellor..." He studied the scene before him. "Perhaps you should give me D'ssat."

Ghrapho smiled humourlessly. "Could you really hope to get the two to work so well together? I assure you History will not unite them."

"I must say I agree with Professor Ghrapho," Impruss said casually, studying the boys in the arena. "I am a good example of his excellent training."

“Your head is still too big for your own good, Impruss,” Kardi snapped. “It’s a pity you managed to make an impression on the Faculty with your final project. I was looking forward to failing you.”

“But you failed,” Impruss smirked, his odd violet eyes glimmering. “And Professor Kardi, please, I am a guest. Show some manners.”

Ghrapho smirked. “Even Impruss agrees with my tactics. What is this world coming to?”

“You spoil them,” Praph added casually. “Especially the young Prince.”

“I spoil them enough to get a good response out of them. I’m training them to learn, not to hate me,” Ghrapho responded indifferently and looked at the Head Master. “Sire?”

“I have not witnessed such a performance in well over three hundred years,” the ancient Drule said. “And I must say that I agree with Praph. You do spoil the boys... All of them.”

Ghrapho sighed. “I reward them. I do not spoil them.”

“D’ssat, especially, is a rather delicate case,” the Head Master continued. “He has human in him.” He said the last as if it left a bitter aftertaste in his mouth. “As we know they are weak and require too much attention.”

“I disagree,” Ghrapho said. “D’ssat’s been holding his own since he first arrived at the Academy and is one of the biggest trouble makers. Obviously he does not need to be pampered. And I very much doubt King Zarkon has been easy on him.”

The Head Master looked thoughtful. “Very well, Ghrapho. I will give you Morphay. You’ll have a year probation. If it doesn’t work, Laynton will be Morphay’s Chancellor again.”

“Aye.”

Impruss cocked his head. “I have a feeling those two will work very well together,” he confided quietly to Ghrapho.

Meanwhile, Lotor and Hazar had sat on the ground in the arena and were working on a problem Hazar had. The paper was crumpled, having been in Hazar’s pocket for the whole day, but still legible.

“Do you think they are talking about us?” Lotor asked distractedly.

“They’re always talking about us,” Hazar shrugged. “Hold the phone! How the heck is that vector supposed to tell me that my velocity was five space knots?”

“Have you not been listening?”

“Yeah, but it still makes no sense!”

“Morphay,” Ghrapho was suddenly beside them. “I am now your Chancellor.”

“Really? That’s awesome.” Lotor grinned.

Ghrapho smiled lightly. “Don’t disappoint me. I want you in Black and Grey by the end of the term.” He paused. “Do you understand?”

“Ahm...”

“Do you understand?” Ghrapho narrowed his eyes.

“Check!” Hazar felt as if he had just seen the kismet in store for him.

“Now off you go. You have Biology next.”

Mogor stifled a groan as he saw Lotor enter his classroom. He had asked King Zarkon leave from his duties from the castle and gone Province Eight to teach rather than deal with the young Prince of Doom. In the relative peace he found on Province Eight, he had completely forgotten that the Prince would be attending the Academy once he reached enrolment age. To abandon the Academy and return to Doom was quite out of the question. He would have to deal with the rambunctious boy.

Knowing there was no way to escape his fate, he composed himself and waited until all students had sat down. He peered at the papers in front of him and saw that Lotor had been upped a grade since his performance in the earlier grade had been exceptional.

“Find a partner,” Mogor began, resisting the urge to pray. “Since you’re required to know internal organs, we may as well commence with vivisection.”

Lotor raised his hand.

*Oh, here we go...* Mogor almost shuddered involuntarily. “Yes, D’ssat?”

“Do we get points for mess?”

Mogor blinked in disbelief. Lotor continued staring innocently at him, expecting his answer. Finally, Mogor sighed deeply and shook his head.

“Just follow the instructions, D’ssat.”

Lotor sighed in disappointment and looked at Hazar. "You're my partner."

"Okay."

"So what do we do?"

"We have to cut something up..." Hazar furrowed his brow thoughtfully. "But it's got to be alive."

"Easy," Lotor waved a dismissing hand and stood up.

Hazar rose and followed Lotor to the dissecting tables. The Prince hopped up on a table and pulled his shirt up, crumpling it under his chin.

"Okay, you cut me up, label all my parts and then toss everything back in," Lotor instructed. "Just make sure you put everything back in order. I don't want my viscera confused about relocation or anything awful like that." He laid down on the metal slab. "Besides real estate value might drop if that happens."

"Gotchya!" Hazar picked up a marker from the table holding all the instruments.

Tongue stuck out the corner of his mouth, Hazar stooped, his forehead creased in concentration, and began to draw the marks on Lotor's abdomen. To his surprise, Lotor squirmed and began to giggle.

"That tickles!" Lotor accused, still chuckling.

"Just hold still, you ninny," Hazar scolded. "I have to draw marks."

"Why?"

Hazar shrugged. "I haven't the foggiest. "It looks more professional, I guess."

"Good point. We should get extra marks for that."

Lotor locked his jaw and endured the tickling the pen brought him. Finally, Hazar sited the marks with one eye closed and holding up his thumb, still biting his tongue.

"Perfect," Hazar nodded satisfied at his work.

"What are you two doing?" Mogor sounded pained.

"We're just about to start our vivisection," Lotor replied.

"Prince... er... D'ssat, do you know what will happen to you if Morphay vivisects you?" Mogor asked.

"Ahm..." Lotor fell thoughtful. "Well, I'll probably bleed a little, but I'm sure Hazar will be careful..."

"D'ssat, you're going to die!" Mogor snapped.

Lotor cocked his head. "Is that a pass or a fail?"

"At least you'll be giving your life to science," Hazar said importantly.

"Yeah." Lotor's eyes widened. "That's got to count for at least a few marks. My noble effort to the medical field..."

"D'ssat! What do you expect me to tell your father?!" Mogor demanded.

"The truth?"

Mogor's shoulders slumped. "There, take one of the slaves." He pointed to the far end of the room. "They are supposed to be vivisected, not you."

"Oh, you didn't explain that." Lotor sat up.

"And that's permanent marker. You're going to have that on your skin for at least a few weeks," Mogor added.

Lotor peered down at himself. "Oy!" He looked up in shock at Hazar. "Dude! You drew a happy face on my belly?"

"I don't know how to draw, man." Hazar raised his hands defensively.

Lotor looked defeated. "A happy face... why...?"

Hazar began to walk away. "Oh, stop worrying about nothing. I'm sure it'll be a hit. You'll be the only one with something on you that's not skull."

Lotor followed looking thoughtful. "Dang... You're right." He cheered up.

Mogor shook his head. *Why do I have you as my students? Maybe the Faculty feels I needed punishment...*

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Lotor's eyes nearly popped out of their sockets when he was ushered towards the gigantic dome that was the Zero-G combat training grounds. Breakfast had brought the announcement that he and selected others were to commence their training and he could barely wait to get into the dome.

"That's brilliant!" Lotor exclaimed.

Hazar looked just as excited. "Dude! We are so gonna ace this."

Finally, the class left the dome and they were led within. The door was sealed and Professor Kreek stood in the centre.

“The seniors will instruct you in the lesson. This is part of their training as well.” He looked at Lotor and Hazar. “And you two behave. I am well versed with your records. If you try anything silly, you’ll be training with lasers...” He smiled in an eldritch manner. “And let me assure you that you’ll be killed.”

“Not fair. How come we’ve been singled out already?” Lotor kicked the ground.

“We have a record?” Hazar looked surprised. “Wow... I’m better than I thought.”

They were suddenly weightless and Lotor swam around, getting acquainted with the new experience. He giggled when he saw Hazar trying to get himself right side up again and failing miserably.

“Move to the side, and propel yourselves by pushing off the walls,” came a voice that sounded like the owner had been kicked rather harshly on a particularly sensitive area of his anatomy.

Lotor and Hazar froze momentarily before looking at the source of the voice. The Drule boy was tall and well muscled, with hair cut so short to seem shaved. He looked mean and particularly vicious. Hazar and Lotor exchanged looks and burst into mirthful laughter.

“What?! What’s so funny?” the boy demanded.

“What happened? You got attacked by helium?” Hazar leered.

“Maybe it’s a nasal cavity. Ever thought of getting a filling for that?” Lotor hooted.

“That’s not funny!” the boy screamed at them, only to cause more hilarity.

“Gran’nam, what’s going on?” Kreek asked sternly.

“They seem to find this class amusing,” Gran’nam responded.

Lotor imitated the high-pitched, irritating nasal voice before surrendering to gales of fresh laughter. Hazar, who was still upside down, held his sides from obvious discomfort from the laughing cramps he was getting.

“Gran’nam has a voice like...” Hazar stopped, unable to prevent himself from laughing.

Kreek rolled his eyes. “Get a hdd on yourselves!” he yelled.

It took some time, but Lotor and Hazar finally managed to stop laughing. Lotor wiped away tears from his face, which nearly matched his red hair. Hazar’s jaw trembled with suppressed laughter.

“Begin your training!” Kreek shouted again. “And no more silly business!”

Lotor moved like a coiled snake. He tackled Gran’nam and the momentum sent them into the other two seniors. Hazar somehow managed to straighten himself and followed Lotor, though he knew that he would probably get severely injured from tackling the larger boys.

True to his fears...

The two landed hard against the wall. Lotor evaded the next attack by adhering to the wall and scooting away as fast as his hands and feet could take him, but Hazar had not been so fortunate. Lotor pushed off the wall and barrelled into the melee of weightless bodies, sending them all to the ground.

Kreek’s head slumped forward. “Why can’t they just be expelled?” he muttered grievously and shut off the Zero-G, sending everyone crashing to the floor.

Lotor grabbed one of the senior’s lapels. “Unhand us at once!” he snarled.

The boy stood up and Lotor hung on, his legs dangling about a foot from the ground.

“Oh... Uh oh... Hi!” He grinned releasing the lapels and falling to his feet. He reached up and straightened up the boy’s collar. “Nice meeting you.” He darted out followed by Hazar.

Gran’nam and the other seniors chased after them and soon Hazar and Lotor found themselves trapped with absolutely no avenue of escape. They gulped loudly, waved goodbye to one another and decided to make their last stand. Hurling themselves against the seniors, they fought valiantly. However, they were unarmed and a lot smaller. With a murderous gaze, Gran’nam and the other seniors grabbed Hazar and Lotor and commenced to admonish severe physical punishment upon their anatomies.

Lotor lay with his hands under his head staring at the starry night. Akhrondion shone brilliantly, being so close to Province Eight. He had convinced Hazar to partake in a late clandestine trip to the roof of the Academy’s infirmary to talk. After getting the beating from Gran’nam and the other seniors, they had not regained consciousness until late in the day. Ghrapho had gone to see them earlier and had congratulated them in being sent to the

hospital wing only once on that day. His tone, however, was sarcastic and his red eyes looked vicious; promising severe punishment if they didn't perform more accordingly to what was expected of them.

"Why do you think we keep getting in trouble?" Lotor asked quietly, not considering for an instant that their being on the roof was, in itself, another infringement of the rules.

"I don't know." Hazar shrugged. "Things just happen all the time. I suppose we're just accident prone."

"Well, I think we should try and fix that. Ghrapho says that the Faculty is really upset with all the stuff we're doing." Lotor paused. "And he looked particularly peeved." He shuddered involuntarily.

"I hope I get expelled."

"But I can't be. If I get thrown out, father is going to have a giraffe and then make me swallow it alive and stuff." He knitted his brow. "Although that sounds awfully interesting, I don't think my constitution would be all that pleased with that."

"Well, no... Generally that's not something not many constitutions would be happy with."

"You know, I don't think my father told me the truth... I think he killed my sister," Lotor said suddenly. "I mean, he never liked her."

"So you don't believe she died in her sleep?"

"Nah..." Lotor's voice cracked. "It's just not like him to be so... nice. I think that he killed her and told me that he didn't cuz then I wouldn't be mad." He paused. "Can I go over to your house for our break?"

"Will your father let you?"

"I'm sure he won't care. I can always say that we're going to be practicing and he'll let me. I don't think he likes when I go home anyway. And besides, I don't want to stay here this time."

"Sure," Hazar responded, unsure exactly why Lotor avoided going home so much. Lotor had never told him about all the beatings he suffered every time he went home. "I'm sure my father will be cool with it. And Dorma will, of course, be most happy to see you."

Lotor grinned. "It's settled!" *Father, I really don't want to see you ever again in my life. You've given me naught but misery. Even Serath you took away from me... Why do you even keep me around? It's obvious I don't perform as you wish I would. I don't know what else to do to please you. It feels like everything I do only angers you further and gives you a reason for you to beat me up.* He sighed and looked at his wrists. *And I can't even run away anymore. I really can't figure this out. You hate me, and yet, you don't want to loose me.* His mind spun. *Ooh. I'm so confused.*