

Confrontation with Shinsa

It was a nice, mostly eventless day. What with their sudden enlightenment about all things Langorian, Choma and Zaky have won some begrudging respect from Narseti academics ... although it probably makes them privately all the more resentful of the Pardu, since Choma and Zaky hardly seem the academic sort in their eyes. In any case, Zaky had an opportunity to show off his amazing stone-worked weapon before a mostly Narseti audience -- One of the Narseti patrons was enthusiastic enough that he pledged that he would acquire a batch of Lashbore eggs for Zaky's use in experimentation for ammunition for the weapon. (With a bit of forced laughter, he also added that he would, of course, be glad to provide ample water as well.)

So, with full bellies from the university cafeteria (no rodents on the menu, though), on the moon-city orbiting Narsus Prime, Choma and Zaky are walking along, minding their own business (more or less), headed toward the starport. The Narseti steer clear of them, seeing as Zaky has the big alien weapon he was just demonstrating, and Choma is practically armed to the teeth as well. (Plus, they look a bit odd -- Choma's tailfur hasn't quite grown back yet, and Zaky's fur is almost returned to its normal shade ... but not quite.)

They can't help but notice a Pardu female and her entourage of three Pardu cubs. As they approached, it becomes evident that this is no chance passing -- especially as she bids her cubs stay back, and walks up, a large and conspicuous vibro-axe (must have gotten that through customs on a technicality ...) held to one side.

Now, it seems there's something of a confrontation.

"I am Shinsa," the she-cat hisses, slamming the butt of her vibro-axe onto the permacrete sidewalk for emphasis. "My mate is dead, as are my two cubs, and I have three mouths to feed from my dead pride-sister. Does this mean anything at all to you? Which of you takes responsibility for what has gone before? Which of you will meet me with action, and not empty words? I demand retribution, and I will not leave until the honor of my pride has been satisfied."

She looks between the two of the Pardu males -- Choma and Zaky -- refusing to let her gaze linger for too long on either one of them.

Choma looks to his brother and then, stepping forward, to Shinsa, he says, "I accept responsibility for what happened. My brother is not a warrior; I am. The humans we traveled with did not know our customs, and I should have made them understand. I would not fight you if there is any other way. My fur is still stained from my part in the death of your cubs and mate. I can see no other honorable thing than to offer you and your cubs support and a home as

best as I am able. I can not undo what is done. Will you accept, or must we continue this tragedy?"

He holds his paws out at his sides, weaponless.

Zaky hears Choma's words, stunned for a moment by their eloquence, his twitching tail betraying a frustration at being unable to find his own. A tightness locks around his chest and throat. He feels his ears falling. His hand clenches on the haft of his weapon.

"I can't forget looking into the eyes of your cub, and then seeing them lifeless beside me minutes later.

"I can't forget the helplessness of waking up after everything had happened, and knowing I should have been smarter and seen this coming.

"I can't forget burying the little burned bodies, and the conflagration that took the rest of your clan.

"My brother offers support and a home.

"I offer that as well.

"I'll teach you what I know;

"I'll teach the survivor cubs.

"I want to undo this, I want to erase this. I want to forget.

"But words are words, and the past unchangeable.

"So I offer one more thing...

"If you can't let go of your rage, I'll take it.

"If you think no one can feel your pain, make me feel it.

"If you want someone to pay, I owe it.

"I accept responsibility."

Zaky steps forward and closes his eyes.

Shinsa stands there, fuming, her eyes going from Choma to Zaky, as Narseti pedestrians discreetly go their ways, keeping a wide berth and pretending not to notice.

Then, without warning, she lashes out. Her vibro-axe clatters to the ground, as instead she falls to kicks and claws, laying at Zaky with unbridled ferocity. It lasts for not that many heartbeats -- the massive Pardu, after all, can take quite a pounding, but given how he refuses to do so much as defend himself (and given her all-too-readiness to exploit his weakness), he soon falls under her assault.

Her pounding loses its momentum quickly, until her fists weakly land on both shoulders, and she drops to her knees, her back shaking in heavy breaths ... and quiet sobs. "I accept your offer," she mrowls in a hoarse whisper, then buries her face against the Pardu's pastel-tinted chest, twisting a handful of fur roughly in one hand.

"Ahem," says a short and bewhiskered Narseti patrolman, walking up to Choma, and only sparing a glance toward the other two Pardu to include them in his meaningful throat-clearing. He twirls his stun baton around in a "move along" gesture.

Choma chuckles, whispering to the officer, "Sorry about that, Parduegreeting ritual and all that." He begins to walk again, tossing over his shoulder, in Basic, "I'll see you back at the base, Zaky. I think you're going to have your paws full for a while!" He starts laughing aloud as he walks off -- though whether at the situation, the universe or himself is anyone's guess.

Zaky holds Shinsa tight, nuzzling her head and wincing at his many cuts and bruises. "Come, let me take you home." He stands, still hugging her and gesturing for the cubs to follow. He takes them back to his place, his hands very full indeed.