

Backbone

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by Anonymous

Summary

Each beat of Subz's heart pushes blood through strained black and purple capillaries, carrying oxygen and endorphins and poison into every part of him. He thought he could get away from it if he left spawn, ran to the edges of the server, became a pacifist and renounced fighting. He called it morals to anyone that came asking, and nearly convinced himself that's what it was about, but in his head he couldn't stop thinking *coward*.

Notes

my gift for traffic-life on tumblr who also loves angst :3

Fighting hurts.

This is true for everyone, he's not saying something profound or groundbreaking, fighting fucking hurts. It gets you kicked and cut up, maybe even down a heart if you're unlucky or generally just dogshit at it. Fighting hurts Subz the most at the end though, when the adrenaline and strength pots wear off and he's left with shaky legs, sweat clinging to his skin under his armor, and a right side that feels like it's on fire.

Subz is used to his corruption by this point. He's used to the texture of his skin, warped and tough like leather, he's even used to the pain most of the time. It never really goes away, there's always a dull ache in his arm. But if he spends enough time building and grinding for resources, if he spends enough energy everyday that he's about ready to pass out on his feet each night— then he can pretend that ache is from a hard day's work instead of a still-spreading tangle of black and purple that creeps along his skin.

It's when he's fighting that he really can't get away from it.

In the midst of a battle there's a running thread of energy humming through the twisting and tangling web of corruption that seems to heighten his movement. His swings fall harder, his arrows fly further, it feels more like a gift than a curse. And then it ends, he gets away or gets more gear from the bodies that disappear under his weapons. The fight drains out of his body and he's left with a right side that feels like each cell is about to split open. There's no convincing himself it's from a hard day's work or an ache deserving of rest, it's just pain.

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Fuck it, maybe he was a coward, but could anyone really blame him? Let's see them live with the Void trying to devour their flesh for a day and see what the fuck they have to say then.

It wasn't a bad existence at the edge of the world. Yeah he was alone, but he liked it that way. It was safer that way. And then he was pulled back in again and again, until everything he had worked so hard for was lost in the blink of an eye. His heartbeat was pounding in his ears as he watched his base be torn apart under Mapicc and Zam's TNT, while some speech about pacifism not suiting him came from Mapicc's direction but the words barely registered.

Something was shifting inside of him.

Subz lost the fight in the end. It was a 2v1 after having his season's progress ripped apart in front of him so it's not all that surprising, even if it does hurt his pride. It couldn't matter though, he would throw himself into the next plan like he always did and keep that hurt tucked away in between his ribs to fester and push him into moving forward.

The Eclipse Federation was supposed to be his big project, his masterpiece, not an escape like his base at the edge of the world, but something of purpose. This was his return and his promise not to let anyone take advantage of him again. He planned and mined and worked himself to exhaustion every night, the aching in his body all melding together that some days he forgot about his corruption altogether.

The lava walls radiated a nearly unbearable heat as he placed blackstone supports around them. Even with fire resistance the heat prickled at his skin as he stuck his arms into the streams to finish reinforcing the walls behind it, and sweat pooled on his skin under his coat. Still, Subz grit his teeth and kept working. He was so lost in the routine he missed that his fire res was about to wear off. The pain hit all at once, and it caught him so off guard he didn't even think to scream.

Patching up a burn was always so fucking annoying. Subz sat on one of the blackstone walkways, dosing his right arm with a healing potion before blindly fumbling in his enderchest for regen. Honestly he was lucky it was the corruption that got the brunt of the burn. Sure it hurt like a fucking bitch but the skin was already so twisted and warped that any burn scars would just blend right in. He watched the shiny surface of the wounds close over with fresh unmarred skin before black and purple tendrils came slithering over to claim it for their own. That part was always the worst to watch, even after all this time.

Eventually the regen started to take effect and Subz leaned his back against the open enderchest while it did its job. He glanced to the side where his armor and badly burned coat lay on the ground. Fuck, now he was going to have to fix that too.

The rest of the Eclipse Federation base was completed without major incident or delay, and before he could think twice about it Subz was messaging Vitalasy to meet up. He knew he should have slept before meeting but his nerves and limbs were shot through and if he didn't do this now he knew he never would. It'd been so long since he'd had a team of his own that he honestly wasn't quite sure how to ask him to join. By the time Vitalasy made it to spawn Subz was certain this was a mistake and he'd be alone again by the end of the day, but it was too late to back out.

“Vitalasyyy,” he called, dragging out his friend's name like he always did in greeting. Vi's ears perked up before he even spotted Subz.

“Subz!” he yelled back, rushing toward him and only tripping a handful of times over the uneven terrain of spawn. Even with the ever-present gnawing of doubt he couldn't lie that it was good to see his friend again. Maybe he really had spent too much time at the edge of the world. It didn't really matter in the long run, that time had been taken away from and he was starting something new today.

They talked as Subz guided them through the wasteland that used to be spawn, ducking passed withers and lamenting the state of the server.

“You got used,” Subz said, forging on ahead. He glanced back at Vitalasy and saw his ears twitch slightly.

“I don't like to see it that way,” he said in a small voice. Subz didn't comment on that and kept them moving toward their destination, until eventually the ruins of spawn gave way to a more intact landscape. He led Vi through their old bases, a tour of their past and a reminder how every single time they thought they could have *something* it would get taken away. There was a spark in Vitalasy's eye that Subz was keeping a look for, the same kind of anger and determination he felt in himself.

By the time they made it to the last of Subz's old bases his heart was racing and the grip he had on his pic was wavering just a bit. It was fine, he'd be fine this was the last part. The elevator descended and a rush of hot air flew up to meet them.

Vitalasy's eyes went wide as he took in what Subz had built. The polished blackstone snakes glinted in the lava falls behind them, marking their descent.

“We aren’t gonna be the gum under everyone’s shoes any longer Vitalasy,” Subz said with a wild grin as they hit the bottom on the base. The rage and determination that had carried him through the last few weeks was bubbling up into something like excitement, something like conviction.

“Do you want to join me in what I’ve made here?”

Vitalasy finally turned to face him, eyes wide with wonder, but he didn’t say anything. Time stretched on in front of them and Subz was rapidly falling into doubt again. This had been a mistake, he should have stayed at the border, he could have rebuilt, he should have *run* . Panic was trying to tear its way up out of his throat and the sharp nails of his right hand were digging into his sword before he could get a handle on them.

“Yes!” Vitalasy said after a fucking lifetime of waiting. Relief hit Subz like a punch and he nearly stumbled at the weight of it.

“Oh.” Subz paused. “I, I honestly didn’t expect you to agree,” he said with an unsteady voice and an even unsteadier grip on his sword. It sat heavy in his clenched hand, tip trailing down toward the floor as he blinked down at it. He was going to ask for a sacrifice, that was the next step in his plan. His head swam and he tried to shake the fuzziness away, only to end up pitching forward. Distantly he heard Vitalasy shout and felt a hand grab his shoulder before he absolutely ate shit.

Through spots in his vision and cotton in his ears Subz saw Vitalasy lower him down and kneel down next to him, muttering something about how he clearly overworked himself. Whatever retort he was about to say died on his lips as his arm spasmed and the sword in his hand clattered to the ground. Okay, *maybe* he’d gone a little overboard this time but it was fine, he was *fine* . Subz clung to Vitalasy’s arm until he blinked his vision into existence.

“If I’m joining this Eclipse Federation business, you have to actually *rest* sometimes, because you clearly haven’t been,” Vi said, eyebrows furrowed in concern and just a little bit of exasperation. Subz smiled weakly before letting his eyes fall closed for the first time in way too many days.

“Deal.”

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