

## Can you see me? (Or should I keep waiting?)

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## Can you see me? (Or should I keep waiting?)

by [oh\\_snapperss](#)

### Summary

Etho glances out the window. Sure enough, nothing's changed. The empty void of space surrounds him, broken only by the asteroids in the distance and stars thousands of light years away. "I tried fixing up the ship a little, thought that maybe it would help pass the time until someone comes or..." Etho trailed off, the bleakness of his situation settling over him before he forces himself to breathe—

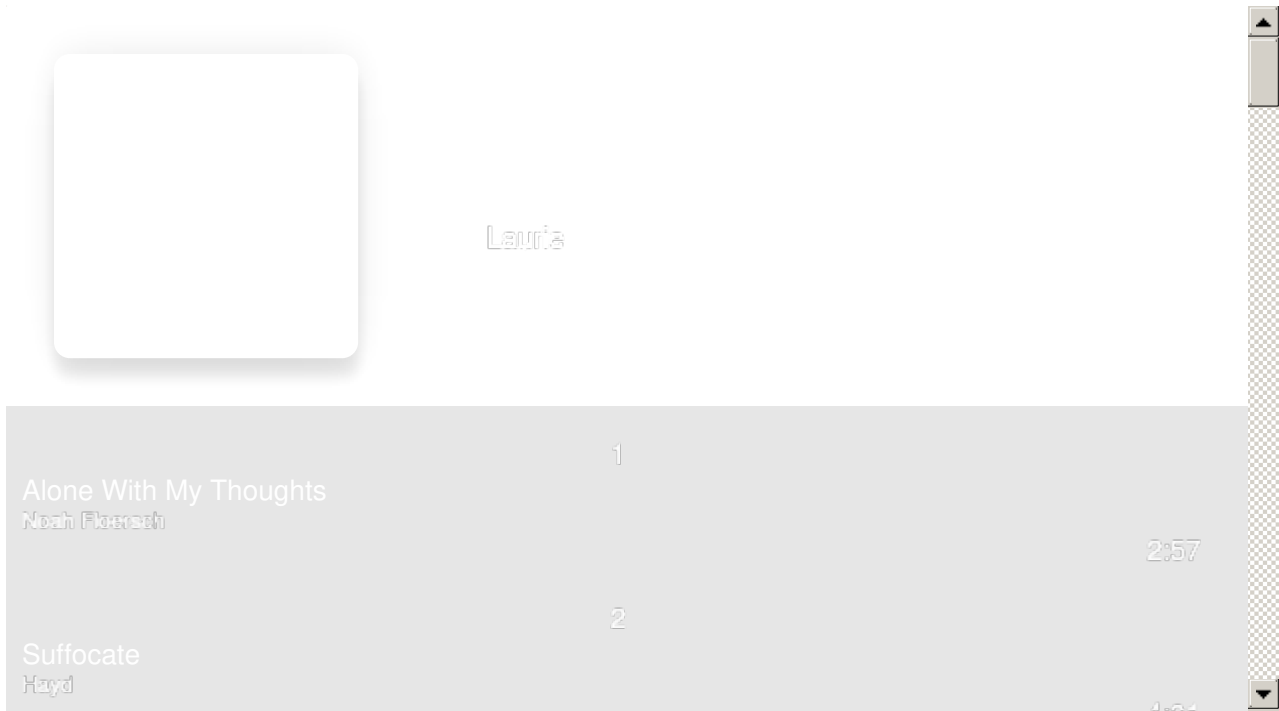
Stranded in space, Etho records logs daily to pass the time, and transmits them out to space without a recipient in mind. Unbeknownst to him, the logs are intercepted by the ship Bdubs is working on.

Fic title is from the song "Suffocate" by Hayd!

### Notes

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

# Chapter 1



It's a hurried goodbye, with steam rising from vents and other astronauts jogging by to get to their positions. Etho stands by the carrier with Bdubs, helmet sealed for liftoff and looking resigned to the idea of *another* mission.

“Just... one more time, ‘Dubs, and we’ll have our ship.” The promise sounds empty, but Bdubs is smiling up at him the same as he did dozens of missions ago when those exact words had been uttered.

“I know. Universe to explore together ‘n all that.” He grabs Etho’s helmet, dragging it down towards his face to press a quick kiss to the visor. “Come home, starsailor.”

There’s no real promise in Etho’s words. They both know it from the way Etho’s eyes are fixed somewhere past Bdubs’s shoulder, but he says them anyways, just like he has on every mission before. “I will.”

Goodbye routine complete, empty promises and smiles and kisses exchanged, Bdubs turns away to get off the dock before the ship leaves, and he doesn’t glance back.

(He doesn’t see the way Etho stays where he is, instead standing as he was until Bdubs is out of sight.)

---

FIVE YEARS LATER.

*Warning: Solar Flares incoming in T-60 seconds. 59. 58. 57. 56...*

“No, no, no, no!” Fingers fly across screens, frantically swiping through the constant stream of information and warnings, trying to jump out of hyperspeed, go back, *get out of there go back NOW no please this cannot be happening-*

35. 34. 33...

“Hyperdrive disengaged, Captain. Would you like to-”

“Turn on the shields, maximum power!”

“Apologies, captain. My programming will not allow me to do that when using that much power could dama-”

The ship lurches to one side, throwing its sole occupant away from the console. They pull themselves up, shaking, jabs of white hot pain coursing through their side.

15. 14. 13...

“Override! Do it now!”

3. 2. 1...

---

“Captain’s log entry seventy-one.” Etho pushes himself slightly away from the console, reaching up to flip a couple switches. “This is day four since the solar flares hit my ship, stranding me out here. Today I saw a few satellites. Nothing to get too concerned about, although one of them did have the Concorp logo, which was mildly annoying to see given it’s their damn minerals I was going to get.”

...

“No signs of other ships either. I, uh, thought there might be one. Yknow. Figured that at this point they’d’ve assumed I’d abandoned the job. Sent another ship to pick up the benitoite ore.”

...

He glances out the window. Sure enough, nothing’s changed. The empty void of space surrounds him, broken only by the asteroids in the distance and stars thousands of light years away. “I tried fixing up the ship a little, thought that maybe it would help pass the time until someone comes or...” Etho trailed off, the bleakness of his situation settling over him before he forces himself to *breathe*—

“Not much I can do for a ship without its fuel. Which I know I said yesterday. And the day before. But who knows, maybe something will turn up!” He grins at the camera, despite knowing full well his mask will hide his expression. “Anyways, I guess that’s really all I have to say for the day. This is Captain Etho Slab, signing off from the *Borealis*.”

*Analyzing...Processing... Encrypting... Log Transmitted.*

Etho fumbles with his mask for a second before pulling it off from his face, slouching down in the chair with a posture so bad he *knew* Bdubs would have been on his case about for the rest of the day—*not that that mattered, Bdubs wasn’t here and hadn’t been for years and he certainly wasn’t coming to save him*—and exhaling slowly.

*Someone would get that log. They had to, or... Etho didn’t want to think about the true inevitability of his situation. He heaves himself back to his feet, wincing at the ache that spreads through his side from the initial wave, and limps down the corridor. If he could just think, surely a way out would appear.*

---

“Captain’s log entry seventy-six. This is day nine since the solar flares hit..., and today I finally realized I’m going to have to start conserving my food and water a little bit more than planned.

“I finally managed to get my troubleshooting system online so I could see all the damage officially done, and well... it’s not looking great, I’ll tell you that.” Etho grimaces at the camera, once again acutely aware of his mask and the fact nobody can see his expressions anyway.

“My comms are entirely offline, and my hyperdrive is damaged to the point they’re unfixable. If I use them, my ship will combust. Not ideal. Also means nobody is receiving these comms, or at least nobody who will help.”

...

“I did manage to get my Nav system online... not that it matters. Turns out I’m nowhere near any civilization... planet... star.

“It’s just me and the universe, and our thoughts from here on out.” Etho shivers, a chill creeping into his bones as he speaks. Something about how it was just *him* now felt *wrong*. “Hopefully the universe is a kind one.”

...

“Welp, guess I better get back to... finding a way out. Yeah. This is Captain Etho Slab, signing off from the *Borealis*.”

*Analyzing... Processing... Encrypting... Log transmitted.*

---

“Captain’s log entry seventy eight.” Etho twists the tiny braid at the back of his head, a habit he picked up years ago. “Nothing really to report. Had a cup of noodles for my meal today. Looked at the stars. Asked them how they were.”

...

“Not that they replied obviously but... I. I miss talking to.... I mean, I don’t miss... just. Think about back when I had someone to talk to...”

...

“Nevermind.” He forces out a laugh. “Just a little sentimental is all. Back to work now, I think! The ship isn’t gonna fix itself!”

...

“Captain Etho Slab, signing off.” The camera flips off before he even finishes his sentence.

*Analyzing... Processing... Encrypting... Log transmitted.*

---

“Captain’s log entry eighty.”

There’s a waver in Etho’s voice today.

“There’s... no way to fix this fucking ship. Not a single fucking solution and it’s... I have to be

overlooking something *I have to be!*” He clenches both his fists, nails digging into his palms. “And I don’t understand because this was just a fucking mineral run, I’ve done it a thousand *goddamn* times and *this* is when it goes wrong?”

*Deep breath. Deep breath.*

Etho forces a breath... and it chokes him. He feels like he’s outside of the spaceship, not in, and the weight of the universe is pushing in on him... coming for him. *Not yet. This isn’t right this isn’t okay this is—*

He’s glad he wears his mask for the logs. “I just. All my *goddamn* life trying to get somewhere and *this* is where the universe decides I’ve seen enough??” The words are practically snarled through unseen bared teeth. “*This* is what it’s decided I deserve? I’m going to die *alone* and *hungry* and nobody *fucking* cares!” He slams his fist against the console, breathing heavily. “It’s not fair, I never got to go back to—” His voice cracks on the vowel, making him fall silent.

...

With a trembling voice, he continues, teeth grit to keep himself from breaking. “I gave *everything* for this. I gave my *time*, my *energy*, my—” His throat bobs with a swallow. “I gave up things *I never* should’ve left behind, and it’s not. Fucking. *Fair.*”

...

He forces himself to take another deep breath. In. Out. “*It’s not fair,*” is almost incomprehensible through the mask.

Refusing to look up at the camera again, he turns his gaze instead to the stars. It just makes him feel sick. The universe gazes back, cold and lifeless. Unwavering. *Uncaring.*

He stares back spitefully before reaching up and placing his hand on the side of the camera.

“Captain Etho Slab. Signing off.” The words sound empty, and the screen is turned to black.

*Analyzing...Processing... Encrypting... Log Transmitted*

## Chapter 2

### Chapter Summary

*Analyzing...Processing... Encrypting... Log Transmitted*

...

*Log received.*

### Chapter Notes

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

“Beef? We’ve got an incoming transmission, sender unknown.” Tango, the communications officer, engineer, and first mate all rolled into one frowns as he fiddles with a couple dials, headphones over one ear. “It doesn’t seem like it was meant for us... it’s like it was just broadcasted out here at random.

“May as well go and play it. Don’t have anything else to do,” Captain Vintage Beef glances up from where he’s playing cards with Bdubs, the medical officer (although at this point he does pretty much everything he can, given their crew is just the three of them and none of them want to hire anyone else).

“Gotcha.” Reaching across the control panel, Tango flips a couple switches. “I’m gonna send it to the main screen, looks like it’s got visuals along with audio.”

Bdubs doesn’t bother looking up from his cards. He’s sure it’ll just be another random transmission meant for nobody, or maybe an accidental pickup on a message for someone else, and at the moment he’s entirely focused on beating Beef at his own game.

Logically, he really should have won by now. He’s sure that Beef is cheating somehow, but the second Tango tried the game he wiped the floor with Beef, so now Bdubs is even more determined to win (and maybe he’s considering ways to cheat himself, what about it?)

“*Captain’s log entry seventy-one.*” Bdubs frowns for a moment, before glancing over to the screen. His hand stills on its own, distracted from the game at the all too familiar figure speaking. *No... no.*

“*This is day four since the solar flares hit my ship, stranding me out here. Today I saw a few...*”

Etho’s voice becomes white noise to Bdubs’s ears. *That can’t be real.*

---

“It’s just a short trip, right?” Bdubs’s fingers barely graze the side of Etho’s neck as he tugs strands of hair away from the rest of Etho’s hair.

“Just a few days,” Etho tries to nod and winces when the strands are yanked by his own movement.

Bdubs snorts at the look of indignation crossing Etho’s face. “Hold still!” He separates the strands into three parts, biting one lip in concentration while he crosses them over each other, forming a braid that quickly disappears into the rest of Etho’s hair when he’s finished.

He pulls his hands back, hesitating for just a moment before cupping Etho’s face. “Just... come back home to me, alright, sweetheart?”

Etho catches Bdubs’s hand in his own as it retreats. “Yeah.. ‘course I will, ‘Dubs.”

(They both know one day he won’t honor his promise as much as they both want to believe)

“We have a universe to explore together, after all.”

---

Bdubs doesn’t realize he’s stood up until Beef is pulling at his sleeve. “...ok? If we’re going to go pick up this guy we need to make sure we’ve got supplies”

Bdubs shakes himself from his thoughts, turning to Beef. “Hmm?”

“Medical supplies? Might want to have plenty of those if we’re gonna try and get this guy.”

“Oh! Oh, yeah we’re fine on those!” Bdubs nods, eyes still locked on his... his Etho, on the other side of the screen, frozen and unmoving from the end of the log.

“Tango, can you trace back the log?”

“I can, but it probably won’t be accurate if he’s floating and it’s been a few days. Hopefully if he recorded any more logs I can get a better idea of where he is.” Beef nods at this, hand scrubbing at his beard for a moment.

“Let’s try and get him, then.”

Bdubs sighs in relief, before he realizes—*hmm, that’s gonna be an awkward reunion.* Five years since Etho didn’t come home and nearly as long since he took up Beef on his offer to see the stars, and no attempt to reach the other from either of them.

(Five years and he still loves—no, misses— Etho.)

---

*“Captain’s log entry seventy-six. This is day nine since the solar flares hit..., and today I finally realized I’m going to have to start conserving my food and water a little bit more than planned.”*

”Shit.” Beef voices exactly what everyone else is thinking. “Tango, how far out are we?”

“Not close enough.” Tango muttered, looking at the nav system. “We’re at least another couple weeks out, and that’s assuming we don’t stop at all.”

“How long ago was this log?” Bdubs can feel a lump in his throat—it can’t be too old, right?

“At least a week.” Tango sits back. “Are we... are we sure this is the right move? He might be...”

“Shut up!” Bdubs glares at Tango. “We have to save him! He’s fine!”

“I’m just saying, this is taking a lot of fuel. If he’s already dea-”

“Don’t even *think* about finishing that sentence.” Bdubs stands up, furious at the lack of empathy from Tango. “We’re saving him, he’s *fine!*”

Etho continues talking from the screen, interrupting the conversation. “*My comms are entirely offline, and my hyperdrive is damaged to the point they’re unfixable. If I use them, my ship will combust. Not ideal. Also means nobody is receiving these comms, or at least nobody who will help.*”

“Okay, maybe not fine...” Beef groans at the confirmation of how dire Etho’s situation has become. “Tango, can the ship go any faster?”

“Absolutely not, are you kidding me?” Incredulously looking between Beef and Bdubs’s expressions, he continues. “We’re already flying at the ship’s limit, going any faster could explode the ship. Come on guys, it’s not like we know him.”

“That... that’s the worst argument I’ve ever heard,” Bdubs shoots back. “We still need to get him! He’s... he’s still a person.” He forces himself not to blurt out that he *does very much know Etho, actually.*

“Bdubs is right,” Beef speaks after a long minute of silence, “But Tango is too. Let’s keep flying at the same speed as we have, and if we need to speed up based on future logs, we will.”

It’s the most Bdubs knows he’ll get from them, so he turns away from Tango and silently wills Etho to *live, live, just hang in there.*

---

*“Not that they replied obviously but... I. I miss talking to.... I mean, I don’t miss... just. Think about back when I had someone to talk to...”*

It’s not that Bdubs *hasn’t* had someone to talk to, he’s had Beef and Tango and they’re his friends, but he can’t help but wonder if Etho misses talking to him, if maybe Etho could be talking about *him.*

He’s probably coping. Is this coping? It’s definitely a little sad of him to be *pinning* after someone he’s not seen in person since that one day years ago, when he kissed Etho goodbye and told him to come home.

Because Etho *didn’t*, he *left*, and so did Bdubs, after a few months in their empty quarters, with all of Etho’s things gathering dust as a reminder that he wasn’t using them anymore. Etho had never said he wouldn’t come back, but as day after day passed by with no word from Etho, Bdubs grew... restless.

He’d always wanted to see the stars, and he told himself he only wanted to see them with Etho, but... when Beef reached out and asked if he wanted to sign on, he had only thought about it a few hours before saying yes.



Etho hadn't been enough for Bdubs, and Bdubs regretted thinking that every hour the ship brought them closer to where Etho was hopefully waiting.

---

*“Captain’s log entry eighty. There’s... no way to fix this fucking ship. Not a single fucking solution and it’s... I have to be overlooking something I have to be!”*

Something in Etho’s voice unsettles Bdubs. He honestly can’t remember hearing Etho this frustrated before, even when they had to break into their savings for the umpteenth time, or when Etho lost his main job and fell to solely relying on side jobs and anything he could pick up.

Maybe he just didn’t let Bdubs see him that way.

*“I just. All my goddamn life trying to get somewhere and this is where the universe decides I’ve seen enough?? This is what it’s decided I deserve?”*

Bdubs tenses slightly at that. He knows that... that most of their adult lives they had spent with each other, trying to save for that godforsaken ship that should have carried them away from harsh reality and to the life they had wanted. Etho was right, the universe was cruel. But... Bdubs knew both of them deserved better than *this*.

“Jesus, he’s having a bad day,” Tango twists his lips at the way Etho’s chest heaves up and down across the screen, and Bdubs feels a prickle of anger towards Tango at his complete lack of empathy.

*I’m going to die alone and hungry and nobody fucking cares!” Etho’s fist hits the console. “It’s not fair, I never got to go back to—”*

“You think he’s got a family?” Beef asks a question Bdubs doesn’t want answered—he can’t have, right?

“Mmm, might be. Definitely sounds like he wants to go home to *something*,” Tango agrees.

“Can we fly the ship faster?” Bdubs paces back and forth across the room, stopping in front of the screen again.

Beef and Tango glance over at Bdubs before Tango clears his throat. “Dubs, we’ve talked about this. Ship can’t go faster without risking our lives. Not worth it.”

*“I gave everything for this. I gave my time, my energy, my—” There’s a beat of silence. “I gave up things I never should’ve left behind, and it’s not. Fucking. Fair.”*

Bdubs is sure Etho means him, or maybe it’s his twisted way of pretending Etho still cares as much as Bdubs is realizing he still does. He flips back around to face Tango, who stares back at him without a hint of sympathy or understanding.

“He’s—he’s stuck there, though. My—sorry. Etho’s stuck out there and he needs help *faster* than this!” Frustration claws at Bdubs’s throat.

“Etho’s just. Bdubs! He’s just a *guy*. He’s not worth our *lives!*” Tango stands up, gesturing towards the screen incredulously.

“Etho’s life is worth way more than yours ever will be!” The words escape Bdubs before he can stop himself—and a viscious, warped part of him doesn’t try to stop himself. *It’s the truth, isn’t it?*

*Etho's always been worth more than Tango and Beef, who do they think they are acting like this, acting like Etho's nothing when he's everything, this isn't fair—*

What is he *doing*?

“I... I’m sorry,” Bdubs chokes out before fleeing the room, leaving Tango frozen where he stands, and Beef’s mouth opening and closing with an unmistakable hurt flashing in his eyes.

## Chapter End Notes

holy heck, thank you guys so much for the support on the last chapter!! that was definitely more than i expected and i cannot begin to express how much your comments and messages and kudos meant:)

I'm in the process of moving, so it may be about a week before the next chapter is out. Hopefully sooner though, since it's just editing!

hope you're all having an amazing day/night, and once again you can always ask me anything on my tumblr:)

## Chapter 3

### Chapter Summary

*It's really very cold out here  
I'm the only one  
It's really very lonely here  
I wish that I was done*

*-Alone with My Thoughts, Noah Flersch*

### Chapter Notes

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

*The steady blinking of the camera continues hours after Etho's last log. He sits at the table, mask off. He has sat in silence since his last transmission, with only the steady hum of the ship breaking the crushing weight of having no one and nothing to talk to.*

*Etho spins a coin on the table every so often. Considers it. He seems captivated by the way it turns, finally flipping onto one side before he's snatched it back up and set it to spin again.*

*He finally breaks the silence.*

*"Heads, I get out. Tails, you win."*

*The coin is tossed into the air, before landing on the table. Etho's expression is unreadable, but the outcome is apparent when he speaks again.*

*"...Last round was just a test. This one is the real one."*

*"I take it back. Third time's the try, right?"*

*...*

*"Heads I see Bd—I get to go home. Tails, you can take me."*

*The coin flies into the air again, this time landing on the floor and rolling before coming to a stop. The outcome can be seen from the camera this time.*

*"....okay, double or nothing." Etho exhales in what might have been laughter.*

*"Tails, I win. Heads, you."*

*He barely glances at it before he shoves the coin back into his pocket, then disappears through the doorway. It's moments later when he returns, this time shuffling a deck of cards.*

*"Coins might be in your favor, but the cards won't be, right?"*

*It's hours later when Etho slides down the wall into the corner, mask shoved over his face.*

*If the camera were clearer, it might have shown the tears.*

*The audio, however, isn't cut or grainy. It's perfectly clear enough for the cut off breaths and occasional muffled whimper to come across the accidental recording.*

And it's completely discernable to Bdubs a couple days later, who is the only one awake on the ship when it comes through.

Most of the lights are out or dimmed, and he's got a coffee in his hand—he's not really been sleeping much since the first log came through. Setting down his coffee, he leans away from the table to reach the switch that will play the log. It's tempting to wait until Beef and Tango are awake, so he doesn't have to see this alone, but... he knows he can't wait, and at this point... maybe it's best if they don't see the way Etho is affecting him. He still doesn't want to explain... admit he gave up on Etho. He doesn't want their judgmental stares if he were to admit he abandoned his hopes and dreams and love for no true reason other than the passage of time.

Except... Etho's not speaking. He's not even looking at the camera, he's staring at something in his hands, and—his mask is *off*. Bdubs's breath hitches, and he lurches toward the screen, a pang of... something in his chest. Despite it being years since he last saw Etho without his mask, he still remembers how the rare Etho smile would make his heart stutter.

Etho looks... older. His lips turn slightly down now instead of up, and there's a tiny scar Bdubs doesn't remember him having before. He's... fiddling with what looks like a coin. Bdubs frowns, but before he can skip the log forward to see if there's anything at all that might help find him, Etho speaks.

*"Heads, I get out. Tails, you win."*

"Oh, Etho..." Bdubs feels a lump in his throat at the way Etho looks defeated at the result, before trying again, and again, and again.

*"Heads, I see Bd-"*

And it's there, it's there Bdubs feels himself reeling backwards, one hand over his mouth and *he's gonna be sick, Etho didn't forget, that braid he'd noticed Etho fiddling with was for him and he kept it and Bdubs didn't keep his and—*

Yanking open the door, Bdubs stumbles into the bathroom, fingers fumbling at his hair as he separates it into the same parts like he had done years ago. It takes several tries—partially because his hands are shaking so badly, but mostly because... it's been *years* since he did this last, and he was usually braiding it for *Etho who kept his braid he kept it he still loves him he—*

He makes eye contact with himself and the figure that stares back at him is almost unrecognizable, with bloodshot eyes and bags he's sure he didn't have before. It's an uncomfortable few minutes as he's forced to come to terms with the way he's not slept or taken care of himself since the first log days ago, but as soon as the tiny braid is tied off he snaps his gaze away from the mirror, stumbling back down the hallway, and deleting the still-playing log from the systems entirely. He can't let Beef and Tango see that, and he doesn't think he could handle watching it himself.

*Just a little longer, hang in there*

---

Hours later, Beef and Tango are awake. With the ship still on course, Tango and Beef pull out Beef's card game to pass the time. Beef grins over at Bdubs. "You gonna come and lose again?"

"No!" Bdubs snapped with a little more force than he meant, settling in at the table and drawing

cards.

*Maybe... maybe if he wins this time Etho will live.*

And yet *again* Beef outplays him, just like he has every time, cheating his own card game just to keep Bdubs from winning *just once*.

“Good game!” Beef laughs and starts dealing the cards out again.

Bdubs doesn’t say it back.

*Please... just let me win. Just let him live.*

A few minutes later, it’s Tango who wins this time, although Bdubs is sure he saw a card disappear up Tango’s sleeve at the start of the round.

Bdubs deals the cards this time, slamming cards before them with such vigor that Beef looks a little concerned.

And somehow, he *still loses*.

“Goddamn it!” Bdubs slams his cards on the table before Beef. “One more round!”

He *needs* to win, he *has* to win, if he could just *win* this stupid fucking made up game of Beef’s—

“Hey, ‘Dubs—”

“Don’t *call* me that!”

Beef stares at him, mouth half open.

“...sorry.”

There’s a long silence, before Beef clears his throat awkwardly. “Bdubs... maybe we should take a break from this.”

Hysterical laughter breaks out from Bdubs. “Take a break? A *break*? I don’t need a break! I just. I need—”

“Bdubs.” Beef’s brow creases as he looks at him in concern. “Are you... maybe go get some rest?”

“No... no... I don’t need sleep. Who needs sleep?” Bdubs feels another hysterical laugh bubbling at his throat and gives in—it’s been far too long since he’s laughed. “I’ll sleep after we get Etho!”

“Woah... hey dude,” Tango looks up from his own cards as Bdubs keeps giggling. “Maybe... Beef is right. We all want to save Etho, but he’s not... he shouldn’t be affecting you this badly. I mean... he’s just a dude in space, right? I’m sure there’s a million Etho’s out there, stranded just like him.”

The laughter stops... becomes a sob that can’t quite make it past his chest and instead turns into a strangled noise Bdubs didn’t know he could make. “Etho is *so* much more than that. He’s—”

Beef and Tango are both looking at him with expressions he thinks might be concern or confusion or even pity.

“He’s *my* Etho...”

“...*what?*”

It's only then Bdubs finally reaches up and pulls back his hair enough to reveal the braid.

## Chapter End Notes

Hello! Just a couple things real quick--first of all, you might notice the chapter count has gone up! I did not write an entire new chapter, but I did miscount them this entire time on the doc on accident LMAOOO so that's been fixed. The tags on the fic have also been updated.

once again, thank you so so much for the support on the last chapter!! commenters, anon on tumblr, friends on discord and everyone who left kudos--you guys are seriously so cool:)

thanks for reading, and i'll see you all soon:)

## Chapter 4

### Chapter Summary

*Tick... tick... tick... tick....*

*Time is running out.*

### Chapter Notes

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

The room is spotless today, but Etho considers cleaning it again before he records the log. In fact, he almost doesn't record the log, because there's much more productive ways to fill his time, he reckons. However, routine is important even now, so he drags himself to the camera and presses record, avoiding glancing at himself in the reflection. He knows he looks like a madman, with his hair everywhere and oil smudges all over his face.

“Captain's log entry eighty three.” Etho's fingers tap against his leg, jittery with some sort of energy he can't quite put down to sleeping—mainly because he's not been sleeping well. His knuckles are still bruised from punching the console days beforehand, but the frustration and fury has abated, instead leaving a feeling of absolutely nothing. He thinks he prefers it this way anyway—he can fill his time being productive instead of moping and dreading his soon to be end.

“I've gotten a lot done! I cleaned the storage rooms out and organized them, and then reorganized them to make them look even better. I also looked more at fixing the ship—no luck there but always worth a shot, right? I cleaned some of the ship but then I was pretty tired so I stopped to take a nap and... haven't really done anything since, to be honest.” He stops his sentence there, realizing that now that he's said it out loud, it sounds far less productive than it felt, and just as pointless as it had been when the ship first was hit.

“Good news, though! I've adjusted to the new rations, haven't even needed them much. In fact, I've barely had to dip into the food rations!” His lips twist up into a mockery of a smile. “So that means I have more time before the bitter end, I guess.”

...

“I'm kidding.”

...

He doesn't laugh.

There's a long pause before he clears his throat, swallowing the lump in his throat. “Not really much else to do, so might play some cards. Or reorganize the closet again. I dunno.”

(He needs a shower, he knows his hair is starting to look greasy and clumpy. Or to eat, because it's

been *days* now, but he's just not hungry, and he doesn't really need it, he lies to himself.)

He signs off the log, but now that it's over, he can't make himself get back up to do something. Instead he sits, staring at his watch and the ticking seconds and waiting for nothing.

*No one is coming, and that's alright.*

---

*Hours from now, Etho will fall asleep, still watching the clock. The ship will be silent, holding its breath, waiting for something to happen.*

*Hours from now, Etho will wake to the ship still soundless, lights out from the lack of movement on it. He will check the clock, see it's early morning or would be early morning if he still lived on his home planet.*

*Hours from now, he will look out the window in time to see the oncoming asteroid, helpless as it knocks into the ship, throwing him off his feet and into the sharp edge of an engine part he left lying on the ground. The lights of his ship will flash red, warning of danger already past and locking down his ship so he can keep breathing the limited oxygen left.*

*But that is not now. For now, he just watches the clock tick and remembers a time years ago when he used to want it to keep ticking, and pass the hours until he was back home.*

---

He doesn't want to watch the log that day.

*What's the point?*

Bdubs drags himself from his quarters after sleeping for close to sixteen hours, a record he hasn't hit since the months after Etho disappeared in the first place. It's not a habit he wants to fall back into, but honestly, he finds he doesn't really care that much as he drags himself down to the main room where Beef and Tango are, for once, *not* playing a card game. Tango has his headphones pulled on, listening intently to whatever speaks on the other end while eating a can of soup, and Beef is nowhere to be seen.

He can see the log paused on the screen. Etho's hair looks, well, disgusting. The room he's in is spotless, though, and there's a dullness in Etho's eyes that Bdubs knows should worry him more than he feels.

*He knows his eyes are the same, from the way he looked in the mirror the morning after telling Tango and Beef the truth, waiting for their judgemental stares and looks of disgust and "Why didn't you tell us sooner??", only to be met with silence, before Beef pulled him close, pressing Bdubs to his chest and promising they **would** save Etho.*

*Tango had been unnervingly silent, but he patted Bdubs awkwardly on the shoulder, reassured him they were gonna get Etho, and disappeared into the engine room.*

He drags his feet to the button that will play the log, staring at it a good twenty seconds before Tango speaks up.

"You know, you could have told us."

Bdubs doesn't answer. *He can't make himself, and he can't make himself care enough to.*



“You could have told us from the start, we wouldn’t’ve cared.”

...

“Come on, Bdubs. We’re your *friends*. I don’t—I don’t understand why you wouldn’t—” Tango tugs at his hair, agitated. “Are you even going to reply to me?”

“No,” Bdubs replies, and while he knows it’s just about the worst response he could have possibly had, it’s all he can force himself to say, preferring the mind fog that he’s sinking into rather than the *rage* and *begging* and *misery* he has shown the last week and a half.

Tango doesn’t speak again, but makes no move to stop Bdubs from pressing the button this time.

The log plays, and he barely processes a word Etho says. He catches something about Etho not eating, and not feeling hungry... yeah, he can relate. Nothing has tasted like food to him in a few days and he gave up yesterday morning after choking down cereal that tasted like sandpaper.

“He’s looking worse than yesterday,” remarks Tango, his mouth stuffed with soup.

For once, Bdubs can’t respond or snap back. He just keeps *staring* at Etho. *He looks like he’s half dead—*

“Bdubs?” At some point Beef must have reentered the room without Bdubs hearing. “Hey... hey buddy...you wanna play a game?”

He’s already shuffling cards, and Bdubs doesn’t miss how this time, Beef doesn’t slip a card up his sleeve.

Today, he doesn’t care.

He sinks down next to Beef, shakes his head, and stares at the digital clock in the corner of the screen.

*Tick... tick... tick... tick...*

---

*Tick... tick... tick... tick....*

The clock on the wall reads 11:32 A.M., but neither Etho nor Bdubs heed the seconds ticking away as they’re busy hauling boxes into the room. Bdubs hauls a box onto the table and sits next to it, and Etho appears a few moments later with several boxes stacked precariously on top of each other. As he kicks the door shut with his foot, the boxes at the top sway dangerously, and Bdubs hurriedly hops back off the table to take some from Etho.

“You know we can take our time, right?” Bdubs’ cheeks are hurting from how much he’s been smiling that day, but he finds himself grinning even wider as he surveys Etho’s—no, *their* quarters. “Come on Etho, we’ve talked about this day for a long time, we can move my stuff over more than a couple trips outside!”

It’s true—Bdubs can’t count how many times they’ve talked about what they want to do. *Move in with Etho, save up for our own spaceship, go see the stars together*. Sure, Etho already saw plenty of space on the runs he did collecting minerals for Concorp, but it wasn’t the same as *traveling*. As for Bdubs, unless he signed on a ship as a medic, he didn’t really have a ticket to the rest of the galaxy.

He didn't really want to do that anyway—not without Etho.

“Nooooo,” Etho half drops, half lowers his boxes to the floor. “The faster we get the boxes, the faster I can stop going up those damn stairs!” He leans against the wall, pulling his mask down to wipe at his face and take a deep breath. “I drag enough boxes on those mineral runs anyways, and...”

Etho is still speaking, but Bdubs' breath hitches, just like it always does when he sees Etho's face. Even though Etho took off his mask every time Bdubs and him were alone, and Bdubs knew that now they lived together he would see Etho's smile far more than he had before, he couldn't help the warmth that blossomed in his chest at the show of trust.

“Dubs? You there?” Etho is smirking over at Bdubs, and he realizes he must have zoned out while still staring.

“Wh-yeah! Sorry!”

Etho breaks into a grin, then crosses the room to Bdubs. “You like my face that much, ‘Dubs?’”

Etho breaks into laughter at Bdubs' indignant splutters, and steps over boxes to where Bdubs is, before pulling him into the softest kiss Bdubs thinks he's ever gotten.

“I love you,” Etho mumbles against Bdubs' lips, and Bdubs feels him lightly tugging on the new braid at the back of his head, a promise to each other of lifelong commitment.

“Love you too,” Bdubs presses himself against Etho, and time slips by.

*It's going to be like this forever.*

*And several hours later, when they've cleared out just enough boxes to see the middle of the floor, they play an old tune, and Etho leads Bdubs in their first dance in their new home, hands on Bdubs' waist, foreheads pressed together, and Bdubs utters in love with the man before him.*

*“I can't wait to see everything with you,” mumbles Etho, and Bdubs ignores the unreality of such a dream—the impracticality, the work they would need to put in, the money neither of them have to afford such things as spaceships.*

*They'll get there, together.*

---

*Tick... tick... tick... tick....*

The clock reads 4:18 P.M, this time. The two of them are sat at the table, staring at the letter on the screen.

Etho's elbows are on the table, and he rests his head in his hands, his brow furrowed. Bdubs sits back quietly, processing the *massive* expense laid before them.

“...we may need to use the ship savings.” Bdubs finally breaks the silence, and Etho sags into the table even further. “Etho. Fix your posture, you're gonna ruin your back doin' that.”

Etho sits up stiffly. “Dubs... you know that if we use that money, it's gonna be another year, maybe longer before we can build that back up and be able to see the stars?”

Bdubs nods. "I know... but we don't really have a choice." He rests his hand on Etho's leg in silent reassurance. "If you keep flying your jobs and I keep workin' at the medbay, we'll get out there in no time!"

Etho purses his lips, but agrees. "Just a couple extra jobs."

---

*Tick... tick... tick... tick....*

It's late. Bdubs can't actually see the clock at this time of night, but he doesn't really want to. It's been almost five months since Etho took off on that last mission, and he knows... he knows Etho won't come back this time.

*He's not dead*, and Bdubs knows he's not, because Etho has always longed to travel the universe, and now he's doing just that. The ship Etho was on returned without him, and when Bdubs marched up to the captain and demanded to know where Etho was, the captain had shaken his head and said Etho had taken another job on a ship traveling thousands of planets away.

He tries to feel bitter. He really does. By all accounts, it's unfair, and so unlike the Etho he fell in love with. He would be well within his rights to be angry.

Instead, as he looks around the empty apartment for the thousandth time since Etho disappeared, he feels... nothing. Etho's belongings are still scattered around the apartment where he left them, and Bdubs hasn't bothered to pick them up.

Bdubs knows he can't stay there. It's maddening, living in an apartment so stifling.

*His hands still shake when he tells Beef he wants to join them.*

---

*Tick... tick... tick... tick....*

*Time is up.*

## Chapter End Notes

just two more chapters to go! i'm very happy with how this chapter turned out:)

as always, thank you so much for the comments and kudos!

and you can always yell at me on my tumblr!

I'll be posting a much fluffier one shot later this week on there before the final chapters of this comes out. as uh... an apology for what's coming.

see you all soon!

## Chapter 5

### Chapter Summary

...

### Chapter Notes

Alright guys, this chapter is a heavy one. TW for medical procedures, specifically an amputation--the surgery isn't medically detailed, but is heavy emotionally for Bdubs. PLEASE make sure you've read the tags for this fic, and take care of yourself!! I've marked the start of the scene with a <<<<<<<<<<<<<<< and the scene runs to the end of the chapter. I'll put a summary in the end notes for what happens!

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

hi. if you haven't read the chapter notes above, GO READ THEM NOW. seriously. you've been warned, go read please!

enjoy the chapter:)

---

“Captain’s log entry eighty...four? five?” Grimacing at the way his leg feels like it’s on *fire*, Etho forces himself to take a shaky breath.

“Well.. it’s not... it’s not really great news today. Not that... not that I guess any day is gonna be great news, but... an asteroid hit my ship. Took out the medbay and the rest of my engines.”

“I mean.. I’m uninjured at least. So my plan of hanging out until someone comes for me stays the same.”

*His leg is burning, it’s burning and it HURTS, and he doesn’t know what to do he can’t fix it he can’t fix this, it’s bleeding and bleeding and he’s torn his jacket into strips for a makeshift bandage but... it will be the end of him and he knows that.*

*He lies to the camera anyway.*

“That’s... all I have to report. Captain Etho Slab, signing off for the final time. Or not final, until tomorrow!” He’s shaking, and he’s sure it’s showing to the camera, but it’s not going to matter soon anyway.

After the log, he decides to eat an extra can of his food. It’s not because he won’t be alive to eat it soon. *It’s not.* Hands shaking, he presses the can opener and twists one open. However, it’s immediately obvious he won’t be able to stomach either can from the way his stomach is swooping and he’s so cold and... huh. The room around him is spinning. No... he’s spinning... or just dizzy...

He slaps a hand to his forehead, and—oh. He has a fever. That seems... that seems fine. He can just.. get some medicine from the medbay... take a nap... that would be best...

*There's no medbay. He takes a nap at the edge of his ship instead. As his eyes fall shut he has to wonder if this is it, if this is where he finally dies.*

“Sorry, ‘Dubs...”

He breathes

.

.

.

and breathes

.

.

.

.

.

and

...

---

“Log eighty four, sweetheart... eighty four.” His voice is flat, a monotone, but he can’t help but glance closer at Etho.

Etho’s... he's talking about the medbay missing. Engines gone. Saying that it’s fine, everything is fine.

*Something is wrong.*

The way Etho’s voice is quieter... the way he doesn’t look at the camera... actually, he’s not focusing on *anything*. It’s like... it’s like he’s looking at something not even there. His jacket is missing, and he’s shivering almost uncontrollably.

Bdubs sits up from his chair. Steps closer to the screen, just like he had thirteen days previously. His fingers brush the screen, and then he hears Etho sign off the log.

*“Captain Etho Slab, signing off for the final time. Or not final, until tomorrow!”*

Etho’s eyes are crinkling, like he knows something no one else does. It’s the same look he gave

Bdubs on his birthday, when he somehow always managed to surprise Bdubs with *something*.

Something is wrong and Bdubs *knows*. A wave of nausea overtakes him, and he's stumbling over to Beef and clutching at his shirt and telling him *Etho's sick, he's hurt, look at him please can we go he can't die not now can't lose him now*—

He *knows* Etho is lying about not being injured. He's seen that look far too many times on the patients he failed to save.

It's acceptance of the inevitable end.

Beef finally snaps at Tango to fly faster, who this time doesn't protest straining the ship like that, despite knowing the chances of the ship tearing apart were much higher.

They reach Etho's ship a few hours later. Bdubs can't tear his eyes from the mangled masses of metal floating about the ship, nor the stray supplies and items that he's sure would have helped Etho if they were accessible.

“Scan the ship for lifeforms” Beef's voice is heavy, as if he's already accepted what Bdubs refuses to—*he's not dead, he's not, he was just tired in that log and he'll be on that ship and in Bdubs's arms soon*.

“Bdubs...” A hand lands on his shoulder, offering unwanted comfort and condolences for the man Bdubs used to know.

“Don't. He's just fine!” The steadiness in Bdubs's voice surprises him, because the queasiness in his stomach and the way his clenched fists shake certainly don't support the way he sounds .

(Even to himself it sounds like a lie)

“Oh my god,” Tango taps frantically at the screen. “He's... he's alive! Or—or something is—”

A gasp of relief escapes Bdubs—*we aren't too late, we can still get him*—

“... heartbeat is faint.”

Tango holds the screen out towards Bdubs, and there it is—a pulsing light on screen, representing someone or something's heartbeat, towards the far end of the ship—close to where a chunk of the ship is *missing*. Bdubs watches, fixated for a moment before he realizes the light isn't moving at all, and it's not pulsing at a steady pace either—it's beating much slower than a heartbeat should, and sporadically.

Bdubs feels his legs about to give under him, but he steels himself and feels overwhelming relief after a couple seconds because *he's not dead, he's alive, we can save him, it's not over*.

“Let's go.” Tango nods at Bdubs.

“You're... you're coming?” Bdubs's eyes widen, because he honestly thought Tango would refuse, given the potential danger.

“Yeah... yeah.” Stepping closer to Bdubs, he claps a hand on Bdubs's shoulder. “Listen... I know it's been stressful. And... I'm sorry.”

Bdubs gapes at him for a moment, but Tango is already turning away towards the door. “Let's go save your Etho.”

It's not long before they're ready to go for the ship—Tango keeps reminding Bdubs to grab the things he might need—radio, basic first aid kit, even the mask, just in case.

*He's about to see Etho at least one more time.*

As badly as Bdubs has wanted it, a part of him dreads it more than anything. If Etho is dead... or... or dying. Or even if he's not—maybe he doesn't really miss Bdubs, and he was talking about someone else, or the braid might have been a hallucination, or, or—

He steps onto the pod, and the door seals them in.

---

“Etho?”

The first thing Bdubs notices about the ship once they've reached it and clambered out of the pod is the silence—there's something wrong with this quiet, the way there's not even a hum of systems running. It's unnatural, and Bdubs feels as if any noise he makes won't combat this kind of stillness—it's like it's *consuming* everything in its path, sucking any life away. Absentmindedly running a hand along one of the crates they walk past, he wonders if this is what Etho heard—or didn't hear—for the weeks it had been.

He knows it would have driven him insane.

He and Tango move through the ship, leaving the carefully sealed blast doors open behind them. Etho must have closed them to try and keep the ship from losing oxygen if another asteroid hit. Each one brings them nearer to the faltering light on their map that represents—had *better* be Etho.

“Should be just after this room and one more hall...” Tango muttered as they reached—*oh*.

The room where Etho had recorded his logs—probably the only room of the ship that actually looked like it had been lived in. There's a small pile of empty soup cans in the closest corner of the floor, and the table has another half eaten can and an unopened one on the edge. The camera stares at them, no blinking light to be seen. Bdubs hopes it's off—he hates the feeling of something watching without his knowledge. And then—oh. There's blood on the floor. Half dried smears of it on the chair and against a stray crate... drops of it all around the room, a small pool of it with strips of bloodied fabric Bdubs recognizes as what used to be Etho's jacket.

They rush for the other side of the room, through the already opened blast door and down the hallway. Tango doesn't look at his map now—the blood directs them now. And *finally*—

There's someone on the floor.

“Etho!”

There's no response from the—from *Etho*, who is collapsed on the floor at the edge of the ship, separated from the void outside by nothing but another sealed door.

Bdubs rushes down the hallway, skidding to a stop on his knees and rolling Etho over into his lap. He's completely passed out, and it takes a few moments for Bdubs to feel his chest rise, just barely enough for him to feel where his hand rests over Etho's heart.

He runs his hand over Etho's hair, pushing it back from his forehead to feel the way his skin is burning against his touch—of course he *would* be running a fever.





him, instead focusing on dragging out his medical supplies and busying himself with fixing Etho as much as he can.

Before he starts looking at the leg, he pulls on gloves and a surgical mask. As he peels away the fabric again, he can't help but peel away parts of the skin with it, reopening the wound even further. What's worse, however, is how deep it's infected, and just how much dead flesh is around the wound. Heat radiates from the wound, and when Bdubs checks Etho's temperature, it's sky-high.

*There's no saving this.*

It wasn't like Bdubs had never amputated a patient's limb before. Before he had joined Beef's crew, countless patients had come through his ward, needing amputations from various accidents or diseases. But... he's never had to do it to someone... someone he knows. Or cares about. Or loves—

Nevertheless, he takes a couple deep breaths before pulling out everything he needs. He tries to go on autopilot as best he can, after taking one look at Etho's face and almost losing his nerve then and there.

He cleans the area as best he can, then ties a tourniquet as tightly as possibly just below Etho's knee. Then he... he hesitates for just a moment longer. He gently runs his hand along Etho's hairline, before pulling down his surgical mask to give Etho a soft kiss against his burning forehead.

"I'm so, so sorry." He whispers against Etho's skin, and before he can lose his nerve again he pulls the mask back above his nose and begins.

*Move the saw forward.*

*Etho smiles at him across the kitchen, tea in hand.*

*Move the saw backward.*

*He's kissing Etho goodbye.*

*Forward.*

*They're dancing in the main room of their quarters, some cheesy tune from centuries ago playing across decade old speakers.*

*Backward.*

*He's looking at Beef's offer in a silent room, void of music or the laughter that had come with it so long ago.*

*Forward.*

*He's braiding Etho's hair, just a small segment. "There ya go," He grins up at Etho. "Now y' got somethin to remember me by while you're up there!"*

*"I could never forget you anyways!" Etho's eyes are crinkled, his one dimple on display and melting Bdubs's heart in the way it always has, because that dimple was reserved for him.*

*Backward.*

*He's on the ship. It's too quiet, his bed is too cold, but he's seeing the stars and living his dream. He's looking at the tiny braid of his own, undoing it, shaking out his hair so no sign of it remains.*

*It's over, and it's time he moved on.*

By the time he's finished, Bdubs can feel the stains of his tears against his cheeks and his mask is soaked through. Years of practice keeps his hands steady enough to move Etho to a clean bed before he collapses into a chair next to Etho, head resting on the bed, only to realize Etho's fever hasn't gone down in the slightest. He springs back to his feet, placing cool cloths against Etho's skin and propping him up enough to give him the medicine Etho needed days ago.

It's hours later, when Etho is breathing more steady and looks more like he's just sleeping than dying, that Bdubs *finally* sits back. Although the fever is still high, the bleeding has stopped, and Etho's heart rate has stabilized to a slow, steady beat. Bdubs pointedly looks away from the saw and the... the *leg*.

Instead he rests, hand entwined with Etho's own pale, almost-translucent looking hand.

## Chapter End Notes

Summary starting after the warning:

Etho's leg is injured. Bdubs and Tango are able to get him back to their ship, but Etho loses part of his leg, and he's not woken up yet. BUT!! He is alive and stable and Bdubs is with him now:)

-----  
thank you all so freaking much for the comments and kudos!!! as always you can yell at me on my tumblr:)

special thanks to the three of you who dmed me art for the fic:) you're all insane and made me cry/pos

## Chapter 6

### Chapter Notes

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

*I will not tell the player how to live.*

*The player is growing restless.*

*I will tell the player a story.*

*(But not the truth.)*

---

*Somewhere in the distance, a clock is ticking.*

*Something is beeping. A broken system, maybe? The nav system?*

*(Does the afterlife have clocks?)*

Wait... does the afterlife have... pillows?

...is someone holding his hand?

He blinks his eyes open, and shuts them just as quickly as white light fills them, making him wince. It's been weeks since he's seen lights like that—his ship was running on emergency power, at the end, and none of the lights brightened to where they should have.

He should be dead.

His leg isn't hurting, not really, although as he gains awareness he realizes he's definitely sore, especially his right knee. Odd.

(Proof, then, that he is dead? His leg was *killing him, burning, bleeding, sucking away his life as he stumbled down a dimly lit corridor for help where there was none to be found.*)

He's so *confused*.

“Hey, starsailor.”

Etho's eyes fly open at that, squinting against the bright light to search for the voice, because that sounds like... but it can't be, he lost Bdubs when he...

And yet, there Bdubs is, *holding his hand* and looking older than Etho remembers. He has a couple creases by his eyes, and his hands are more scarred, but it's *his Bdubs*.

“...’Dubs?” He croaks out after a couple tries, wincing at the way his throat feels sore. *How long has it been since...*

“Am I dead?”

A startled laugh escapes Bdubs, and Etho relaxes despite the loudness, squeezing Bdubs's hand as best he can, although it's immediately obvious he's weak when he can barely even tense his

fingers.

“You’re not dead, my lo-Etho.” Bdubs looks away at the slipup, cheeks reddening slightly. “Your logs... my ship got them.”

“So you did see the stars? After all those years?” A small smile tugs at Etho’s lips, and he shoves away the urge to cry. *This is your fault, be glad for him.*

“I.. yeah. I went just about everywhere, y’know. But... honestly it didn’t impress me like I thought it would.”

Etho hums quietly. “No?”

“Well... my dream wasn’t just stars, Etho. You know that.” Bdubs still isn’t looking at him, instead fixing his eyes on the monitor Etho’s sure are his vitals.

Etho can’t make himself respond to that.

They sit in silence for a bit, with their hands still linked, before Bdubs clears his throat and mutters something.

“What was that? Didn’t quite catch that, sorry.”

“Your braid. I... I redid it for you. Saw you kept it in the logs ‘nd... was looking a bit messy when we got you so I fixed it for you.” Bdubs’s cheeks are bright red now, but he looks Etho in the eyes, and Etho can feel the same spark he did ages ago, when they were younger and more naive.

“I... thanks.”

Another bit of quiet passes, and Etho finally asks the question he thinks he knows the answer to.

“Dubs... why can’t I feel my leg?”

“Aha! Well, about that—”

“Did you *cut it off*?”

“No! Well, I mean, I didn’t *want* to, but—yknow. You were *dying*...”

“Was I though...?” The joke falls flat.

“Yes.” Bdubs shivers, “You were *dying* and I couldn’t— I tried— I...your leg and your *heart stopped beating* and—” He cuts himself off, pulling his hand from Etho’s to wrap his arms around himself and shaking slightly.

“It’s okay, ‘Dubs. But you gotta do something to make it up for me.” Etho tries to lighten the mood, attempting to sit up before grimacing at the shock of pain and falling back on the pillows.

“Dude.” Etho shrinks under the *look* Bdubs gives him. “Whatever you want, maybe *don’t* pull out your stitches?”

“Sorry.”

“...what is it?”

“You gotta come back home with me. Teach me to walk again?” Etho gives a dramatic sigh.

“After all, how *else* am I gonna learn?”

“You’d be fine.” Bdubs deadpans, but his hand finds Etho’s again, and this time when Etho squeezes it, he squeezes back.

“Forget the universe and the stars. Can we go home?”

*He knows he doesn’t deserve it. He hadn’t meant to leave, but that fateful day, so long ago when he’d been given the chance to travel... to see everything... he had thought maybe it would pay enough to bring Bdubs with him next time.*

*At least, that was what he told himself. Just one more trip... one more time... one more month and he’d go back...*

*It got easier to say yes every trip. (It got harder to picture going home and facing Bdubs.)*

Etho looks up into the face of the man he once loved and always will, and asks one more time.

“Can we try one more time?”

And Bdubs, after so many years of heartache and longing, and years of learning to love life again without Etho, hesitates.

---

*Months from now, they will arrive back on Earth, with Etho heavily leaning on Bdubs. It takes time, but Etho learns to walk with his new prosthetic. Bdubs stays with him to help him learn—or that’s the excuse Bdubs gives.*

*(Months from now, Beef will drop Etho off on earth alone, and Etho will sign on with a crew, instead of taking a solo run. Bdubs will go on with Tango and Beef, and life will return to what it was before those damned solar flares ruined Etho’s ship.)*

*Bdubs will sleep on the floor next to Etho’s bed, but it won’t be long before Etho insists he share, after all “wouldn’t want you getting sick from the cold, fragile flower!”*

*And Bdubs will snap that he’s not fragile and he actually loves the uncarpeted floor, thank you very much, and yet he will clamber in next to Etho, albeit as far as possible on the other side of the bed.*

*Neither of them say anything when they wake up curled into each other as if they’re still...*

*(Etho never takes out his braid, and he refuses to tell the story of how he lost his leg. His new captain, a tall creeper alien named Doc, asks him once. Etho just smiles, pain in his eyes, and says, “Another day, maybe.”*

*Bdubs never removes his braid, even when Tango points out it’s been months and he’s not corresponded with Etho at all. He just tells Tango to leave it be, and twists the braid with a distant look in his eyes.)*

*Etho starts walking smoother, leaning on Bdubs less and less as the days fly by. Neither of them make a move to move on, though. They just wait, relearning the other’s daily routines, and falling into them as if the last five years never happened.*

*(Etho never can look at space the same, but something in him can’t stop going. He travels and travels, and he doesn’t stop, even when exhaustion sets in, and he finds himself gazing at the edge*

*of the known universe.*

*It's not impressive, honestly.*

*Bdubs doesn't stray as far out, but he finds solace in his crew. As time goes by, he finally unravels his braid, and lets himself love others without fear of losing again.*

*He never can find another Etho, and he realizes he never will. It's far too late to go back on his refusal, though, and he can't quite regret saying no.)*

*There's a festival almost a year after they land back on Earth. A celebration of another year gone, another year of peace. The last time Bdubs was on planet for it, he'd stayed in, and stared at the dust collecting on the windows as he listened to the crowd outside cheer and dance and finally release the lanterns to the sky at midnight.*

*This year, he and Etho go out—it's awkward at first, remembering the times past when they'd kissed and flirted and... and Etho had asked Bdubs to braid his hair. It's not long before they fall into a comfortable silence, though, as Etho hangs on to Bdubs' arm and they wander around the festival.*

*And at midnight they send a single lantern into the air together.*

*(Bdubs isn't on the planet for the festival again. He, Beef, and Tango play their card game, Bdubs loses, yells at Beef to stop slipping cards up his sleeve, and at midnight he slips to his room to look out at the stars.*

*He wonders if Etho is looking, too.*

*Etho doesn't realize it's the new year. He's too far away for it to really matter, anyway.)*

*One night, Bdubs flips on ancient speakers he found god-knows-where, and plays a familiar tune on them. He brings Etho to his still-unsteady feet, and pulls him to the center of the room.*

*Before, Etho would always lead them, with Bdubs pressed against his chest and arms wrapped tightly around him to keep him from tripping over his own feet. This time, Bdubs leads them, and while it's a much clumsier and probably stupid looking sway, Etho is perfectly happy to lean on Bdubs and press his forehead into Bdubs's shoulder.*

*It's Bdubs who takes Etho's head between his hands, drawing him near and pressing his lips against Etho's, basking in how Etho's arms tighten before kissing him back.*

*And Bdubs knows, he knows he made the right choice, knows Etho loves him, always has and always will, and he knows they don't need to see the universe together when his universe is right there, contained in Etho.*

*(And Etho, as he stares at the universe, realizes how insignificant it all was, in the end. He wonders why it let Bdubs save him, when they can't be together anyway.*

*He turns away from the cosmos, spirit empty.*

*And Bdubs turns to his friends, and he finally wins that fucking card game, and he laughs in elation, but can't help but feel rage towards the universe for this.*

*What a sick sense of humor, to let him win only when he's already lost by his own doing.)*

*And which ending here is true?*

*Well, dear reader, that is a question only the universe knows the answer to.*

*And the universe said I love you*

*(The universe said I am indifferent)*

*And the universe said you have played the game well*

*(The universe said you played the game)*

*And the universe said everything you need is within you*

*(It said everything you need is beyond what I can give)*

*And the universe said you are stronger than you know*

*(The universe said you are only the player)*

*And the universe said you are the daylight*

*(You are the night)*

*And the universe said you are the night*

*(You are the daylight)*

*And the universe said the darkness you fight is within you*

*(The darkness cannot always be fought)*

*And the universe said the light you seek is within you*

*(The light you seek is gone now, because of your own discontent)*

*And the universe said you are not alone*

*(The universe lied)*

## Chapter End Notes

sooo. that's it! that's the ending. or endings i guess.

there are a couple things i want to talk about in the fic, now that it's done:)

first of all, the songs. as i said before, this fic is written after Alone With My Thoughts. throughout the fic you can find various references and nods to it, and ultimately, i think the song is about etho and his choices. if the sad ending is true, the song's second verse onwards is about etho after he splits from bdubs the second time. however, the fic is named after Suffocate, and that song represents bdubs incredibly accurately. throughout the fic there are references to that, and i hope that i did the song justice.

next: etho's logs. you may have figured it out, you may not have, but each of etho's logs represent a stage of grief. the first chapter has denial and anger, chapter three is bargaining, and so on.

as bdubs gets the logs, he also goes through the stages in his own way, until etho reaches acceptance. at that point bdubs goes back to denial, because grief isn't linear, and bdubs isn't ready to let etho go.

or is he?

bdubs is a very conflicted character. on one hand, it's etho, on the other, he's spent the last five years learning to love without etho there.

which brings us to the ending.

as i was writing the original ending, i realized it didn't feel right. i remember sitting at my desk, surrounded by moving boxes and various items that needed to be packed, and i just... i wondered if maybe this fic wasn't supposed to have a clear ending. and that was when i wrote the ending it has, texted it to my beta, and asked "is this anything?"

(my beta cried.)

i don't know which ending is real. both of them feel like a dream and like reality to me, which is kinda the point honestly.

there's a ton of other meanings and tiny lines that make up this fic and add to the overall story, but you can figure them out on your own i think.

thank you for reading! thank you for the kudos, the comments, the art (which I'll be linking below, it's so fucking cool!!!!), and thanks to my beta reader for dealing with my absolute mess of a writing process and for being the best beta reader of all time.

and uhh yeah!

my [tumblr](#)

and the art:

[Chapter One and Two art!](#)

[Chapter four art!](#)

[more chapter four art!](#)

## End Notes

Hello all!

This fic is entirely prewritten and ready to be posted, but I plan to release a chapter every few days as I finish editing them. HUGE thank you to [@peskyybird](#) for betaing this--this would not have seen the light of day without them.



Additionally, I came up for the concept of the fic from [this](#) song, and I would highly recommend listening to it because it made me insane and I think it adds something to the fic.

thanks so much for reading!! comments and kudos are greatly appreciated but not mandatory of course. My tumblr is [oh-snapperss](#), feel free to reach out to me there!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!