

and the universe said...

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and the universe said...

by [Wayward Wren](#)

Summary

When he regained his senses and the world began to make more sense, Grian was slowly aware that he was lying - slightly uncomfortably - on his back. The sound of the sea filled his ears, waves lapping against the shore.

Other than that, it was completely silent. Unnaturally so.

He pushed himself up, feeling a strange tugging in his chest. The air felt... different. Familiar. But wrong. And as he looked around, he realised why with a strange mixture of deep nostalgia and acute terror.

They had gone back in time - but considerably too far. The whole world felt new, in a strange way. The land felt empty, slow, the air a little fresher and yet with fewer scents lingering. From where Grian was sitting, he could only see a sea stretching in front of him and a few trees behind him.

It felt like Evo.

Notes

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

Grian liked the evenings the best. That wasn't to say he didn't enjoy the chaos of the day, working on projects, trying to figure out redstone farms, carving a tunnel through the earth. He thrived on chaos - flitting from one project to another was invigorating.

But the evenings - the evenings were different. They were quiet, comfortable. They were meaningless conversations under the stars, watching the fire dance and flicker, laughing and friendly silence. They made Grian feel like he was actually *part* of something.

It reminded him a little of late nights during the Civil War, but far more peaceful. Far less of a sense of dread. This time he knew it was just a friendly rivalry - this time he knew later, he and Doc would be able to laugh about it.

This night in particular, the three hippies were sat around the fire as usual in the evenings. Ren had pulled out his guitar and was softly playing, humming or singing along quietly every so often. The music filled the air, the crackling of the fire answering it, and Grian could allow himself to relax.

He was sitting against a log, and Impulse sat behind him, careful fingers smoothing his feathers. It still felt strange to have anyone apart from Mumbo touching his wings, but there was something about the late-night fire that made Grian strangely vulnerable. A little more open than usual.

He was going to miss this.

Because it couldn't last - he knew that. He had known that all along, and yet on the eve of their grand plan kicking off, Grian couldn't help but feel a dull aching in his chest. As excited as he was to get his time machine back, to move onto new projects (and he had some ideas for what would come next) he was going to miss the quiet evenings with Ren and Impulse.

And deeper than that - the end of this era reminded him that everything must end. That he had been on Hermitcraft for over a year now, and maybe he was starting to outstay his welcome. Mumbo had invited him here as a place to find his feet after leaving the Watchers - and he had.

He was more than ready to move on, to leave Hermitcraft behind and to venture back into the world, to work on his own worlds, to create... well, he wasn't sure what, exactly. He just knew he'd been ready to leave for a while. He could admit he needed a place of safety when he first left the Watchers - a place to catch his breath and learn how to be a Player again.

But he didn't *need* that anymore, and he knew he couldn't outstay his welcome. He wasn't sure if he could handle being thrown out.

The thing was - he didn't *want* to leave. Hermitcraft reminded him of everything good about Evo. The friendship, the laughter, the pranks and games. Always a project to work on, always something new happening. It was busy, it was lively, it was exciting. And Grian loved it - he loved the Mini-Game district, he loved flying his flight course, he loved pranking the hermits.

He wanted to stay, but he knew he couldn't. Xisuma had already shown him more than enough patience letting him stay for as long as he had. Maybe, if he pitched the server-wide game he was slowly developing, he'd be able to stay until the end of the season. He was pretty sure there were rumours of that happening soon - Xisuma was apparently starting to look for a suitable new world, so it wouldn't be more than a few months away. Surely he could stay until then.

"Lot on your mind?" Impulse asked, with a note of amusement to his voice. Grian blinked, pulling himself out of his thoughts and realized sheepishly he had let out a rather large sigh.

"Yeah, I'm just... going to miss this," he said finally, and Impulse hummed slightly in agreement.

"Me too," Ren said. He laid his guitar away, leaning back against the log he was sitting against.

"There's something magical about a campfire under the stars."

"Everything ready for tomorrow?" Impulse asked, leaning back from Grian's wing as he finished

adjusting the last few feathers. Grian nodded, pulling the wing in front of him to stroke the now well-kept feathers.

“Got about three shulkers of flowers,” he said. “That’ll be more than enough.”

“And the tunnel’s all set,” Ren added.

“I think we’re set.” Impulse looked up towards the countdown, standing above them. “Good luck tomorrow boys.”

“Can’t wait to see Doc’s face while we steal my time machine from under his nose,” Grian said smugly, causing both his friends to chuckle.

“Hopefully we won’t see Doc at all,” Ren said. Grian grinned, poking at the fire with a stick. The sparks danced up the flames, leaping towards the stars and he forced himself not to worry. Everything came to an end, especially good things. He knew that all too well. But that didn’t stop him from enjoying the good times when they were to be had. And this right here, he wanted to enjoy.

Everything went surprisingly smoothly. There were a few false starts to the launch of the RV that flew over the walls of Area 77, but it was underway eventually. Between the three of them, the distraction was a success - flowers covered every inch of the area within the wall, and the RV was wedged comfortably against the cliff face.

Satisfied with their distraction, the three of them retreated to the tunnels in an attempt to break through into the facility. Once again, everything went surprisingly smoothly, and a few well-placed tnt broke them into the hanger where the time machine was kept.

The easiest way to transport it out was to fly it. Grian had vaguely considered that but now, as Ren and Impulse piled into the small space behind him, he realised he hadn’t really thought this part of the plan through. Doc and Scar had obviously taken the time machine apart slightly, and while he was *pretty* sure he had fixed it, he wasn’t 100% confident.

But everything had gone well so far, and they were comfortably inside the time machine. If they waited any longer, the chances of being found out were increasingly high. So Grian only hesitated a moment before flicking the appropriate levers and launching the time machine into time and space.

And that was where things went wrong.

He had barely flicked the lever to activate the machine when it let out a loud *screech*, shuddering violently and knocking them all to the ground. Grian instinctively pressed against the side of the machine, the whole thing shaking rapidly.

Another loud screech and shudder rocked through him, and he curled into himself, wrapping his wings close to try and protect himself.

Just in time - the world exploded around him, white light filling his whole vision and his vision flickered.

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He wrapped his wings around him, running his fingers through the feathers to remind himself that they were still there as he tried to steady his breathing. This was still Hermitcraft. This was still Hermitcraft.

He turned his attention back to what was directly in front of him - a large crater slightly smoking in the sand. The time machine had been destroyed, unable to be supported by the ancient code. Beside it, Impulse was waking up with a grimace, sand in his hair. Ren was still unconscious.

“I think we went back a little too far,” Grian said, trying to sound cheerful and unbothered. But oh, this air felt unnatural, felt alive and brought with it memories. So many memories he had refused to linger on.

Impulse dusted sand off his pants, looking around at the empty land around them. He grinned, and Grian couldn't help but be relieved at the sight.

“Whoops,” he said. “What happened to the time machine?”

“The old code doesn't support it,” Grian muttered. “But I think I can make something work.” He had to - he had to bring them back, he had to make sure they were safe. He had put them into this mess through his silly games and it was his responsibility to bring them home safely.

He had some magic still, some lingering whisper of the gifts the Watchers had given him. It had been enough to create the time machine in the first place, and it would be enough to bring them home.

It had to be.

He just wasn't sure he wanted to use his magic here. Now. It felt too exposed. Hermitcraft had a very specific set of code walls and protections around it and Grian felt safe enough to occasionally use Their magic. Here - here it felt like he was tempting fate if he did that.

A low groan pulled him out of his thoughts and he turned his attention to where Ren was waking up, grimacing and gripping his left arm. Impulse darted to his side as he sat up, clear pain flashing through him.

“You alright?” Grian asked, and Ren grimaced.

“I'm good,” he said. “But I think I may have broken my arm. Do *not* recommend.”

“Sorry,” Grian muttered, shuffling his wings. “Sorry - I - I didn't mean for this...” He took a long breath, twisting his fingers in his feathers.

“I thought you knew what you were doing?” Impulse asked, and Grian couldn't help but flinch.

“Yeah - yeah, so did I,” he said. He shifted, feeling the sand move under his feet, feeling his wings fluff behind him. “I... I think I forgot the compass. I’m sorry, I-”

“Hey, it’s all good,” Ren said, and Impulse nodded absently, though he was focused on trying to get a good look at Ren’s arm. “You got a plan to get us home - ah!” He cut himself off with a noise of pain as Impulse picked up his arm, face paling instantly.

Grian nodded, feeling useless and out of his depth.

“Y - yeah,” he said. “We need... uh.” He hesitated, trying to think what would channel magic best. Unfortunately, it was going to be one of the hardest things to find. “I’ll - I’ll make a list, but we’re going to need diamonds.”

“We can do that easily enough,” Impulse said. He looked up from where he was kneeling in front of Ren. “Can you first get me some sticks so I can at least splint Ren’s arm?”

Grian nodded, eager for something to do and scurried towards the trees.

They spent the first night in a small dirt cave, hearing the mobs of the night growl and prowl around them. Grian curled into a corner, a little away from the other two, wrapped in his wings.

They were taking it well, being stranded in the past. Both of them were motivated to gather materials they needed as quickly as possible, focusing on how to get out of here instead of *where* - or when - here actually was.

Grian still hadn’t been able to shake how uncomfortable this place was. He could *feel* the code, feel how outdated it was, feel how it pushed back against them. He had never felt like that in Evo. Maybe it was a lingering remnant of the Watchers. He seemed to keep finding more of those.

He buried his face in his knees, trying to keep his thoughts at least a little under control. But it was hard - the very air of this place was bringing up memories of his friends, of events he had tried to forget.

It wasn’t that it had been a bad time. On the contrary - Evo was one of the best times he had ever experienced, maybe even the best before coming to Hermitcraft. It was more that he didn’t know how their story ended. He had left them - abandoned them to whatever fate the Watchers decided for them. And he knew the Watchers. He knew it probably wasn’t a good fate.

“How ya doing?”

Grian looked up with a start as Impulse settled down beside him. Ren was curled on the opposite side of the small cave, sleeping. He’d been going hard, knocking down trees and helping them carve out this safe space despite being clearly in a lot of pain because of his arm.

“I’m fine,” Grian said quietly in answer to Impulse’s question. “Just wanna go... back.”

He had almost said home. His words had nearly betrayed his deep desire - to call Hermitcraft home. But he couldn’t, because really, he was still just a guest. The least he could do was get his friends back to their home.

“You have a plan right? Diamond block, some wool, couple of buttons. How hard will it be!” Impulse’s intense optimism hadn’t faded all afternoon, and Grian couldn’t help but be grateful to him. The optimism was infectious, and Grian found his thoughts fading slightly.

“Yeah, that’s the plan,” he said. “It might also be a good idea to set up some kind of base - something more than a dirt cave. I’m not sure how long we’ll be here.”

“That can be tomorrow’s goal then,” Impulse said. Grian nodded, staring at the dirt under his feet. They were silent for a long moment, and then Impulse let out a breath, casting a glance towards the small dirt wall they had put up. “I forgot how creepy the early worlds were,” he said with a chuckle in his voice. “It almost feels like someone is watching you.”

Grian stiffened at the word, heart skipping a beat and starting again ten times faster. He forced himself to attempt to breathe normally, but the very reminder of how unprotected they were here was enough to put him on edge.

“I hope not,” he said finally, stiffly. This was still Hermitcraft. There was no reason anyone would be Watching this world. There was no reason they would be Watching any world that had no Players on it, and this world didn’t have Players until Xisuma led the Hermits here.

But maybe there *were* here. Maybe they *were* Watching, and maybe this would be their chance to snatch him up and bring them back to him. He still didn’t fully understand the Watchers’ reach, finding him in an unprotected world far in the past may not be impossible.

“Grian?” Impulse asked, his voice soft and concerned. Grian took a shuddering breath, focusing on just breathing for a moment as he tried to settle his heart. “You okay?”

No, Grian wanted to say. *No, no I’m not okay. I put you and Ren in danger - maybe more danger than you even realise - and I just want to go home, but I can’t even call Hermitcraft my home.*

He wanted to say a lot. But he just nodded, wrapping his wings a little closer around him.

“Yeah,” he said. “I’m just tired, I think I’m going to try and sleep.”

And he moved away from Impulse, curling onto his side and wrapping his wings tightly around him as though that might be able to block out the world.

As though that might protect him from eyes that could Watch from anywhere.

It was easier to forget his worries in the day. If he was being honest, he was almost starting to enjoy himself. Ren insisted on helping out, despite his arm, so they put him in charge of creating the house while Impulse and Grian began to gather what they needed for the time machine.

It was nice to slow down. Grian had felt that during the quiet evenings around the fire in the hippie commune, and he felt it again here. The old worlds felt *slow*. Again, it reminded him of Evo, of slow evenings in the Grian Empire and quiet afternoons around the fountain at Spawn.

He wasn’t sure how he felt about that. The memories weren’t bad, they just hurt in so many ways. They were a reminder of how he had abandoned all of his friends there.

So he tried not to dwell on the memories, focusing on gathering equipment and battling the inhospitable world.

He was coming back to their small base with a handful of wool and a pile of logs when he paused on the hill above the beach and took in the small house Ren had made. Impulse was currently helping him with the windows and to be frank - it was an ugly house. That was part of the charm, of course, it was a house cobbled together with laughter and what little supplies they had. But it was

ugly, and there wasn't much denying that.

He pushed the door open with his shoulder, hands full of items, shaking his head in friendly mockery.

“What is this building,” he said. Ren gave a mock pout from where he was placing a window into the space Impulse had made for him, one arm hung in a makeshift sling. “It's a monstrosity!”

“Hey, it's home!” Ren said, laughing slightly.

“You call yourselves Hermits,” Grian said as he made his way towards the chest in the corner. “You should be ashamed.”

“You're a Hermit as well, don't see you doing any better!” Ren shot back.

And Grian froze, blood suddenly pounding in his ears.

He wasn't.

He wasn't a Hermit, not in the way Ren and Impulse were. He was a visitor, a guest, he was allowed to stay while he needed it. (He was taking advantage of their kindness and outstaying his welcome).

“I -” Ren and Impulse were both looking at him in concern and Grian swallowed nervously, depositing his items into the chest. “I'm not.”

“What do you mean?” Impulse asked. Ren echoed his confusion, a deep frown on his face.

Grian shifted uncomfortable, his wings flaring up behind him as he tried to find the words. Surely they already knew this?

“I - I'm not a Hermit...?” It was almost a question, as though he was begging for the answer to be something other than what he knew it was going to be. “I... I'm mean, I'm just staying. I'm not... *actually* one of you guys.” He chuckled nervously, rubbing the back of his neck.

“What are you talking about?” Ren's voice was incredulous, and he sounded so shocked that Grian would even say that. Grian opened his mouth to continue, but Ren beat him to it. “You've been with us all season, my dude. What makes you think you *aren't* a Hermit?”

He didn't want to have this conversation. He didn't want to explain to them why he didn't belong, why he would have to leave. He didn't want to tell them.

“It's nothing,” he muttered, moving towards the door again. “I'm... gonna go see if I can find more wool.”

He managed to slip out the door before either of the others could fully react, and he was almost up the hill by the time Impulse came out.

“Wait - Grian!”

He didn't answer, didn't listen. He needed a breather - needed to *fly*, but he couldn't, there was something in the air of this world that grounded him.

There was so much. He moved quickly, walking as a substitute for flying for the moment, trying to wrangle his thoughts in order, but that task was about as easy as getting a villager to do what it was told.

He wanted to go home, but he didn't know where home was. He wanted to call Hermitcraft home, but he wasn't going to get his hopes up. He had put Ren and Impulse in danger, and that wasn't going to be a positive note in his favour even if there was a chance he could stay.

He had abandoned his old friends on Evo, had left them behind, and now he was reminded starkly of them, of what it was like to have a home that he *knew* he belonged to. And oh, he wanted that again, but he still had no idea what had happened to the other Evolutionists. He had no idea if he could have stopped a tragedy.

And did he really deserve a home if he could have?

He should keep moving, because if he stayed in one place for long enough, the Watchers would find him again.

And that was what encompassed all his thoughts in a terrifying blanket. Because he was *here* - and he was unprotected. And what if They found him, what if They wanted him back, what if They were angry, what if They took that anger out on Ren and Impulse?

What if They had taken that anger out on Evo?

What if it was his fault?

What if he stayed and the same thing happened to Hermitcraft?

He stumbled through the trees, struggling to breathe but needing to keep moving. His breath was coming short and sharp, and he was barely aware of anything beyond his thoughts and the next step.

A river opened in front of him and he stumbled to a stop before splashing into the water. For a moment, he stood there, breathing heavily, shimmering tears unshed blurring his vision.

Then he looked up and saw a figure.

For a moment, his heart skipped a beat at the sight of the unfamiliar person. He stepped back, heart thundering in his chest, flaring his wings.

He knew the legends. Every Player knew of the legends, and every Watcher knew they were true. Some called him a glitch, some called him a god, some called him a myth. Either way, everyone had *some* story of the ancient legend.

Herobrine.

And here he was, standing across the river, eyes glowing a bright, *bright*, white that seemed to seer into Grian's very soul. He couldn't move, caught in the spell of this ancient being.

Even the Watchers didn't know *what* he was, or what had happened to him. But here he was, standing, silent, and for some reason, Grian didn't feel afraid.

And then, he spoke. His voice was silent, a presence in Grian's mind that didn't feel obtrusive or even worrying. It spoke in a language he understood, though he wasn't sure if that was because of his time with the Watchers, or because of the magic inherent to this powerful, ancient creature.

“||J= J::L· 1J T. Jf:J 1L,” it said. *You are not alone* .

And for a brief, second of a moment, Grian felt as though the whole Universe were surrounding

him, holding him, *seeing* him.

And then it was gone, and the riverbank opposite him was empty.

For a moment, he stood there, unsure what exactly he had experienced or how to process it. Unsure if that had even been real.

And then footsteps drew his attention and he turned to see Impulse hurrying through the trees, Ren a few paces behind him. The relief in Impulse's face as he caught sight of Grian was almost enough to make Grian collapse right there.

"Grian!" They both made their way towards him and Grian felt strangely detached. He still wasn't entirely sure what just happened, wasn't entirely sure how he was supposed to respond.

Then Ren wrapped his good arm around Grian, and Impulse grabbed his hand, and he slumped into Ren's side, grounding himself in their presence. They had come after him - somehow, Grian hadn't expected that.

"You freaked out, dude," Ren said. "Everything okay?"

Now wasn't that a loaded question. Grian's first instinct was to wriggle out of Ren's half embrace and grin and nod, come up with some excuse about just needing air and continue on with his day. Pretend it never happened and not make them worry anymore.

But something stopped him. Maybe it was the way he had felt for a brief moment before - the sense of *belonging*, of being wanted. Maybe it was because he was weak, and it was only the three of them here. Maybe he just wanted to finally talk, to tell someone - *anyone* - a little more about his past, as much as he wanted to forget it.

So he pressed his face into Ren's shoulder, fluffing his wings up and shook his head.

"I don't think so," he muttered. "There's just... a lot." He tried to laugh, a small huff of air. Ren and Impulse exchanged a look over him, and then Ren's embrace was swapped for Impulse, who started slowly walking Grian back towards their small house.

"Well, let's get back somewhere a little safer and you can tell us," he said.

They returned to the house, piling all the spare wool they had into a bundle of blankets and pillows on one wall. They sat in a small triangle, Grian cross-legged with a pillow clutched to his chest. Ren was lying on his back, clearly exhausted from the day's work and a still sore arm, and Impulse was leaning against the wall.

Impulse and Ren were both quiet, clearly waiting for Grian to start. He was grateful for that, as he tried to gather his thoughts, to figure out *how* to talk about everything. He stared at the bundle of wool he was holding, picking absently at a loose thread.

"Have you heard of the Watchers before?" he asked finally, figuring they were as good a place as any to start. It still felt strange to speak of them aloud. It still felt a little illegal, especially here, where they might be able to hear him.

But Watchers were always more about watching than listening anyway.

"I've heard an old legend," Impulse said. "Something about powerful beings watching over worlds."

Grian nodded, pulling further at the thread until it started to unwind.

“Something like that,” he said quietly. He picked at the thread, struggling to figure out where to go from here. There was a lot... With a long sigh, he decided the beginning was probably a good place to start. “I was in a world, a lot like this,” he explained. “There were a few of us, maybe half a dozen or so. We had fun...” He trailed off, the aching guilt present in his chest again.

Where they *okay* ?

Ren and Impulse were quiet as he paused, picking at the wool.

“Then we started getting... clues. Messages... challenges. To upgrade the code of the world we had to solve the puzzles. They were riddles, they clearly wanted something from us. But they only ever spoke in riddles and rhymes, never outright telling us where to go.”

“The Watchers?” Ren asked, his voice soft. Grian nodded.

“They wanted one of us,” Grian said quietly. “They wanted to take one of us... to train him to become like them.” He let out a long breath, digging his fingers into the depths of the wool. “When the code finally changed enough to connect to the End, my friends and I naturally went to go and fight the dragon. What else were we supposed to do? It didn’t help that the Watchers had been pushing us there the whole time. It was the natural next step. Last step.

“We got separated, after we went through the portal. I ended up there alone, had to fight the dragon on my own. When I ended the fight, the Watchers made their choice.”

He trailed off again, remembering how it felt, leaping into the void of the portal leading - where he thought - home. Remembering the cold chill that sucked the life out of him, the voices whispering around him. Remembering how he was promised a good life, power. How it was promised his friends would be alright, how he would be able to Watch them.

Remembering how every single promise was broken bar one. They had given him power alright.

“They chose you,” Ren said quietly, finishing Grian sentence. Grian blinked, pulled back to the present, and nodded slowly.

“Yeah,” he said, and if his voice cracked a little as he spoke he wasn’t going to mention it. “They chose me... They took me from my home and my family. They took me and *changed* me and -” He trailed off, wrapping his wings around himself and fighting back the tears. “They demanded everything of me.”

Ren pushed himself up, moving to Grian’s side, and stretching his arm out for a hug. Grian gladly fell into the side embrace, resting his head on Ren’s shoulder as he continued to fight back tears, as he continued to force out the words because now that he had started he wasn’t going to be able to stop.

“They said Evo would be safe, that all my friends would be okay, would be let go. But I - I don’t know if they kept that promise. They didn’t keep any of their other promises. So I - maybe they...” He blinked rapidly, and Ren gently squeezed him closer. “I left,” he said finally. “I ran, and maybe they’re angry because of that, maybe they let me go. I don’t know.

“I ran, I left them, and I... Mumbo found me.” He smiled slightly at the memory - his first few weeks of leaving was a blur, but he remembered Mumbo holding him while he cried. “He said I could come to Hermitcraft, to find my feet. I... I never meant to stay for so long.”

There wasn't much more to say. It felt strange, to have it all in the open. To have someone other than Mumbo or Xisuma have some idea of what had happened.

"I'm sorry," he muttered quietly, because here he was, unable to compose himself. Here he was, when they needed to be level headed and figure out a way to get home.

"Don't be," Impulse said, and Ren gave him a quick squeeze.

"You are amazing, my dude," Ren said quietly and Grian blinked back his tears again. He really wasn't. He had run from them, and he was still running. "I've only heard some vague stories of the Watchers, but they always sound super powerful."

"They are," Grian whispered. "Powerful enough to destroy a world."

"Tell us about them," Impulse said. Grian blinked, looking up at him as Ren gently rubbed his back. "Your friends," Impulse elaborated. "On your old world. If you want, I'd love to hear about them."

He hadn't thought about them properly for a long time. It hurt too much, to remember what he had lost, what had come after. As well as the fear, the guilt, the loss. Never knowing what had happened to them after they had finally arrived at the End.

But he missed them. And part of him wanted so badly to be allowed to remember them.

So he took a deep breath and carefully wriggled out of Ren's arm, rolling his wool pile between his hands.

"Martyn and Timmy called themselves the Property Police," he began quietly, and slowly, carefully, he told his friends about those he had lost.

He told them about the feud between the Property Police and the Mafia. He told them about Squiddy, the squid Zee had made, and his life and death and return. He told them about making Taurtis run for mayor, and the subsequent voters fraud and how he had had to moderate for everyone. He told them about the scavenger hunt he had set for Netty, how he had played pranks, made an empire.

He told them about how Pearl had fallen from the sky to join them, his sister who he had lost contact with literally falling back into his life. He told them how the Grian Empire grew, how he had had plans to expand and grow the Empire further. He told them about the underground railway that was never used, about the builds that dotted the horizon, about the jokes and laughter.

He told them about his *friends*.

And somehow, it helped. To actually remember them, instead of holding their memory far away. It hurt, it still hurt that he didn't know what happened. That he didn't know if they were okay or not. But talking about them, telling his new friends about his old journeys - it felt good.

"I miss them," he said softly to finish. "And I... I don't know how to find them again."

"I'm sure they're out there somewhere," Impulse said. He had moved closer, sitting on Grian's other side so he was sandwiched in between his two friends.

"We'll help you find them," Ren said. "When we get home."

He looked pointedly at Grian, and Grian dropped his gaze to stare at the wool surrounding them.

Home.

He wanted so badly to call Hermitcraft home, but he still didn't know if he could. He was here to readjust to being a Player, not to stay forever.

"Grian, you know, when Mumbo got your message he nearly lost it," Impulse said, and Ren nodded in agreement. "We were just finishing up a weekly meeting, and he almost screamed."

"Squealed like a pig, you should have seen it."

Grian smiled slightly at that, imagining his friend's reaction.

"He was so excited that you were back - that you were *alive* . He immediately demanded Xisuma let you stay with us," Impulse continued. Grian winced slightly, lowering his gaze again. But before he could get caught up in his own thoughts, Impulse kept talking. "But you know what - Xisuma was already offering."

"He was?" Grian asked, looking up. Both of the Hermits were nodding.

"We all kinda knew who you were," Ren said. "Mumbo's been trying to get you to join Hermitcraft for years."

"Yeah, he really has," Grian said, remembering now ancient days of sitting in a field in a world empty but for the two of them, listening to Mumbo pitch him Hermitcraft. Back then, he had been happy on Evo. Back then, he never thought he would need anything more.

"And we were all more than happy for you to join. Even if you didn't need us," Impulse said, reaching out to squeeze Grian's hand. "In many ways, I think we needed you."

"Hermitcraft wouldn't be the same without you, dude," Ren said.

Grian blinked, staring at the wool.

They wanted him. They wanted *him* - not out of some sense of obligation to make sure he was okay, not out of some sense of duty.

They cared about him.

"Thank you," he whispered quietly, and both his friends pulled him a little closer, holding him tighter.

"No Hermit has to leave before they want to," Impulse said. "And you've been a Hermit since the moment you joined this world."

"And thank you, G," Ren added. "For telling us. You didn't have to. Thanks for trusting us."

"Thanks for listening," Grian said. "I needed that."

If the three of them fell asleep curled together on the pile of wool, no one else was there to see. They spent the next few days working together, gathering the resources they needed. Grian still felt uncomfortable, exposed, but with Impulse and Ren here - with Impulse and Ren *knowing* what he was scared of, it felt manageable.

And eventually, they found their way back to Hermitcraft - back *home* . After the whirlwind

opening of the Area 77 theme park or whatever mad plan Doc and Scar were up to this time, Grian found himself back in his small house (well, rather tall house) in Hermitville.

He sat on his bed, and it felt a little strange to be alone after having Ren and Impulse close by him for the last week or so. But it was nice to be alone for a moment, and he let out a long breath, saying something he had been afraid to for over a year.

“I am a Hermit,” he whispered softly, and for the first time since the Watchers had taken him, he finally felt like he was *home* .

End Notes

you ever just write a fic and then Herobrine shows up and says 'my fic now' and you're like OKAY WHERE IS THIS GOING??? cos that's what happened with this one but I think it worked

also I wanted to do more with ren and impulse in general in this fic, cos season 6 hippies supremacy, but it didn't quite pan out how I expected. However this fic sets up some stuff for future ideas I have, bear with me [and part of that is that Ren is 100% human at this stage, no wolf hybrid or werewolves here :)]

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