

Part 1. Naltag



Naltag watched the child. The boy was dragging in heavy equipment, quite a haul for his size. He was careful to avoid crushing the few sprinkles of grass poking out from the ground. When the metal piece landed on his foot, he tossed out curse words.

Naltag decided to approach. The child would have to do. He was spirited, but the best candidate. Too many rotations had passed, and per needed to begin.

"Jeremiah!"

A female voice rang out from the depths of the compound. The child held on tight to his haul, intent on not crushing his foot for a second time.

"Q-time approachin'. Come to the inside!"

"Yes, Marme!"

Naltag had minutes. If per didn't act, it could be a multitude of rotations before another suitable candidate appeared above ground. Calling out would be too rash, and per had been taught the consequences of rash decisions. Slowly, per stepped out from behind the rotting metal husk. Against the barren landscape, even subtle movements proved to be profound.

The boy noticed Naltag immediately. He froze, but didn't scream. Naltag waited. If per moved anymore, the boy might spook. Per waited.

"Jeremiah, you done puttin' tech up?"

Marme's question unfroze the child. He jerked forward, and stepped back, as if he couldn't make up his mind. He stared at the red button aixed to his wrist piece. Naltag assumed once sounded, the button would summon enforcers. The boy's hand closed around the wrist piece.

"Jeremiah, heed your marme!"

He didn't press the red button. He finished putting away the machines, one eye fixed on the stranger. What did the boy perceive? A tall, long-haired traveler with foreign clothes and a foreign face, with little indication at per's method of travel.

The child remained silent, giving one last thoughtful glance before shutting the concrete door of the compound.

From the glance, Naltag expected the boy would return when able. Per had chosen a suitable candidate indeed.

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