

Rahst Blacksun

Backstory

Name: First name is pronounced "Rost"

Species: Athenian

Sex: ♂

Age: 29

Height: 5ft 9in

Weight: 185 lbs

Siblings: None



Species and Cultural Notes

Athenians evolved from humans. They are physically more efficient and mainly eat fruit. They are calmer and less violent than their ancestors, and the high levels of serotonin in their diets helps to maintain this.

They have a culture that supports better emotional health. However, when their emotional health does take a hit it tends to impact the individual harder than it would with a human as they are out of practice in managing mental health difficulties.

Athenian mothers typically either leave the workforce when they become mothers to stay at home and care for their offspring or continue work and have a relative or friend care for their child during the day. Most middle-class Athenians lack the money for a round-the-clock nanny, but nanny-bots do exist and are potentially a more affordable option. However, in practice, nanny-bots have not taken off in the market because Athenians in general dislike the idea of a cold, unemotional robot raising their children. The bots that are good enough to project a sense of emotional warmth are generally too expensive for such families.

Sersols

Sersols are small lizards native to the forest planet, Kalgea. They are about the size of a squirrel. However, in some ways they are more like monkeys than reptiles as they are intelligent, and like to climb and perch in high places. Typically, a pet sersol would be much more predictable than a pet monkey would be, and generally wouldn't attack anybody, so long as it was well-trained. They are approximately as predictable as a cat.

They are common pets in some worlds, and the Athenians generally consider them exotic pets: they're not a common pet but enough people have them that having one as a pet is not unheard of.

A sersol that is not properly trained is very likely to be aggressive. They have sharp teeth and claws and can do damage with these, although they are unlikely to be able to kill a

human-sized adult. They can however do serious damage to small children so require careful supervision around them.

Sersols are not appropriate pets for small children, and the youngest a person should probably be before taking responsibility for one would be around the age of 15, or if they are very good with animals, then ages 12 to 14.

If well trained, a sersol is gentle with its owner and other people. They are highly protective of their owners and might attack someone that tries to harm them.

Rahst is an original character from the *Azure Wheel Galaxy* world and *Soul Eater Saga*. As an adult, Rahst finds himself constantly torn between the feeling that he lacks enough power because others have official power over him, and lack of power because he has the official power he's been wanting but doesn't know how to use it effectively.

Trust & Confidence (newborn)

Rahst's birth was easier for him than it was for his mother. The birth itself went smoothly; it was only after the birth was over and he and his mother tried to bond when they experienced difficulties.

His mother developed post-natal depression soon after Rahst was born. With the strong focus within Athenian culture on mental health, she and her midwife put their primary focus on helping her overcome her depression. She was as nurturing as she could be towards Rahst, but whenever she felt she couldn't handle her new baby she delegated care to a nanny-bot.

This was a problem for Rahst. Nanny-bot technology was not yet well-tested, and these bots did not always tend to bond well with infants, especially if the infant had already begun to bond with its mother. Rahst himself experienced confusion as he was frequently passed between his mother, who would often retreat into herself soon after, and the bot, which lacked the ability to provide the non-verbal cues, eye-contact, correct body-warmth, and expression of love that Rahst needed to convince himself that he was welcome in the world and being competently cared for.

Unsure of the nature of his carer but also convinced that it was at least benign, if not benevolent, he accepted its care.

As a result, his mother assumed that all was well with Rahst.

Freedom & Self-Determination

(toddlerhood)

Rahst's mother found having the bot around reassuring, so as it helped her to maintain her good mental health by taking the pressure off of her to care for Rahst, and since Rahst's father, Andrus, had no particular argument against having a nanny-bot, the couple obtained an upgraded robot designed to care for toddlers. This provided Rahst's mother with a kind of crutch at a moment's notice for whenever she felt unready to look after Rahst, and provided her with the support needed to return to work if she so chose.

This did not work out well. Just like the infant-bot, the type of AI that the toddler-centric nanny-bot was programmed with was not yet thoroughly tested and had a few vulnerabilities. Its main vulnerability was its over-reliance on logical thinking, particularly in light of the fact that toddlers are primarily intuitive thinkers. This bot tried couching the things that toddlers - including Rahst - said in logical terms and this meant that as it adjusted its particular behavioural strategies to Rahst, it did so based on illogical, intuitive statements.

Some of Rahst's statements as a toddler included, "I want to be a bird", which he said one day after watching birds fly outside of his window. The nanny-bot was designed to support childrens' aspirations so it added the possibility of Rahst becoming a bird to the list of possible outcomes. It assumed from Rahst's phrasing of the sentence that he had already filtered for the possibility vs. impossibility of becoming a bird, had assessed it as possible, and was expressing a wish for something possible. From this it formed the belief that species was not a constant for biologicals, so later, when Rahst said he was hungry between meals, it believed that he was turning into a different species and therefore had a higher than usual requirement for food. It provided this food to Rahst.

Rahst was pleased with this, and noticed that the nanny-bot commented on him needing to keep himself big and strong so that he could become a bird. From here on Rahst learned that if he wanted to get a snack or meal at any time, he could talk about becoming a bird and the nanny-bot would feed him. This reward for food was enough for Rahst for a while, but he also picked up on some other cracks in the nanny-bot's logical armour.

For a while, Rahst took a fancy to a particular toy, a little robot figure that appeared in a series of story books that he also owned, and began to call the nanny-bot by its name. The nanny-bot resisted at first but Rahst had a few tantrums about this as he only wanted to acknowledge the nanny-bot by the toy's bot name. He liked the idea of being looked after by his new robotic hero. The nanny-bot was programmed not to give in to tantrums, but Rahst continued for so long that his mother eventually told the nanny-bot to allow itself to be called by the toy robot's name, so it did. This contributed to the nanny-bot's gaslighting by telling it that the toddler's whims were - or at least could be - objectively correct. Soon enough the nanny-bot assessed the harm that was being done by misnaming it (none) and the greater ease with which it could do its work if it

capitulated. In time Rahst found that he could, in fact, call the nanny-bot by his toy's name.

He spotted a pattern forming and tried all sorts of other ways to manipulate the robot.

A third manipulation - again, one that started innocently enough - proved problematic. The nanny-bot and Rahst's mother had taught him two particular sentences: "Give hug" and "Make up". As Rahst's linguistic skills were still rudimentary at this time he mistakenly combined these two sentences to "Make hug". He did this once after spilling a drink. He had seen his mother and father get frustrated at him before over spilt items and wanted to make up and seal the forgiveness with a hug, but his words didn't articulate this meaning very clearly. The nanny-bot responded to this demand by stopping its cleaning of the spilled drink to 'make (a) hug', which it assessed to mean the same as "give (a) hug".

Rahst remembered this and began to use it with biologicals too, including his mother. He learned that if he said it confidently then it was more likely to be readily accepted. What he took from this was the idea that if he did something wrong, asking for/offering a hug - a physical expression of forgiveness - would make it alright without the need to apologise or help clear up the mess.

His mother's post-natal depression wore off and she applied herself with fresh enthusiasm to caring for him. However, it didn't matter how much she tried to be there for him, he clearly had a go-to person for his needs, and that person was the bot. In time she learned that trying to come between them was useless and reluctantly stepped back to let the bot do its job.

This would have been painful enough for any parent, but she also noticed that Rahst's behaviour seemed somewhat 'off'. He delighted in outwitting people; not just the bot but her too. He didn't seem embarrassed when his efforts failed, and instead would try again. He often had a glint in his eye that said "I'm the cleverest person in this room and I'm going to prove it". She didn't know how to respond to that.

She had never been the most emotionally resilient person, and her uncertainty over how to put this right combined with her guilt about leaving him with the bot for so much of his young life, plus the fact that the bot was clearly Rahst's favourite sent her into another depressive spiral.

She left the bot to continue being Rahst's primary carer.

However, Rahst was not entirely on the offensive when it came to this kind of wrangling behaviour. The bot had been programmed to encourage Rahst to excel in maths and physics, as his parents liked the idea of having a clever, successful son. They were keen enough on the idea, and believed their child to be so bright, that they tried 'testing him a

little' by setting the bot to give Rahst lessons that were a little bit above age-appropriate for him - perhaps better suiting the cognition of a 3 to 5 year old.

While Rahst was experimenting with using language to get whatever he wanted from the bot, the bot took every opportunity to encourage him to count things or guess what physical things might do (such as a ball falling to the floor if it rolled off a table, or a car-toy rolling backwards on a slope instead of moving forwards, like a car was 'meant' to do). It also tried teaching him to catch and throw, which he lacked the motor control and hand-eye coordination for. Having things thrown at him, even soft things, didn't do much for his mood.

This was age-inappropriate and unfair to Rahst. He was too young to understand how the laws of physics worked. Indeed, he barely had an intuitive idea of how it all worked, let alone a calculated one. He found his bot's insistence on trying to teach him these things frustrating.

He became prone to tantrums. His mother, who already lacked confidence in raising her son, delegated the task of resolving his tantrums to the nanny-bot rather than learning how to deal with them herself. The nanny-bot was programmed to adjust its speech according to how long a tantrum had been happening or what else had been tried to calm the outburst, but was ultimately infinite in its patience. As a result of this, Rahst learned to expect infinite patience from other people.

Despite all of his bot-wrangling, Rahst was still an Athenian baby and wanted as much love and attention from his mother as he could get. However, the fact that she didn't seem to particularly want his love, or only wanted him when he was in the best of moods, was not lost on him. He learned to be 'good' for her if he wanted her, and would have a tantrum if he did some small thing wrong, cry for a moment, or otherwise present her with a challenge to encourage her to hand him back over to the bot.

He developed a strong tendency to feel anger towards others for letting him down (as his mother had) or for being overly simplistic (as the robot was), and because he was so young and tender, that anger felt monumental. He couldn't express this anger towards his mother as she would give him to the bot. He couldn't express it to the bot because it responded with nothing other than logical sense or reassurances that tended to feel off the mark. Instead he channeled his anger into his manipulations. If he was angry at somebody or something, he would manipulate them to feel better.

His tendency to end up in the bot's care consolidated Rahst's expectation of infinite patience from others. As far as he was concerned, other people owed him infinite patience, just as if they were a robot. If they failed, then they weren't good enough and deserved to be manipulated to 'teach them a lesson'.

In addition to this, he learned that in order to get what he needed, he must be seen. If he wasn't noticed then how could he get them to do what he needed them to do in order to ensure his well-being?

All of this set up a series of unhealthy, interlinked issues for Rahst. For him, at the time, they were adaptive and made sense, but he would keep these habits long after they were no longer necessary and would continue to develop them.

Ambition

(young childhood)

By this time, the nanny-bot had been gaslit so thoroughly that its behaviour was no longer appropriate for being around the average toddler. It entertained whims and doubted its own objective observations when faced with the slightest doubt or contradiction by others. The only issue was, Rahst by now was no ordinary child.

Some types of nanny-bot would be returned to the store at this time to be reissued to another family, but this particular line of nanny-bot was designed to provide continuity of care over several life stages. It was built to be upgraded occasionally to reflect the needs of its child charge. For this reason, and because Rahst's parents already felt that he was too much of a handful for them alone to cope with, they had the nanny-bot upgraded to be age-appropriate for Rahst as a young child and kept it around for a bit longer, hoping that its calm and reasonable tone and words would help bring Rahst back down to earth.

This meant that all the gaslighting adaptive programming that the nanny-bot had developed throughout its relationship with Rahst remained part of its response protocol, so Rahst continued to benefit from the manipulations it had put the robot through and to keep building on what he had done.

As Rahst grew a little bit older and further developed his cognitive abilities, he became able to solve the nanny-bot's mathematical and physics questions. However, in effect this still provided him with fodder for honing his manipulation skills.

The nanny-bot had moved to more advanced questions in response to Rahst's age, although it was capable of reverting to younger-age questions if needed. Rahst learned this, once again by accident.

The bot would ask a question and Rahst would get confused. He learned that holding his temper was better than having a tantrum as he could continue to articulate himself better if he had a cool head. If he said "This is too hard" then the bot would eventually cave in and ask him something simpler, such as counting.

That's when Rahst got his revenge on the bot. The bot would ask him a question like, "If I cut this fruit into quarters, how many pieces do I have?" Rahst would distract the bot by saying that his mother was home or that he had heard a knock on the door, or something else that would make it look or walk away, and would take a slice away while it wasn't looking. When it came back to the task it would find that it had apparently miscounted, as there were only three pieces of a fruit it had cut into quarters.

At another time, Rahst played with blocks, making a tower. The bot came by and asked how Rahst could make the tower taller. It meant for Rahst to answer, "add more blocks", but Rahst thought ahead and came up with a solution that would keep the bot busy for a while. He turned one of the blocks so that its corner touched the top of the tower and said, "Make the bottom and top corners flat so it can stand like a diamond." The bot ran its logic processor and agreed that this would work. Rahst gave the block to the bot and said, "Can you do that?" It went away to plane down the block accordingly, and Rahst had his victory.

Rahst's continual manipulation of the bot wasn't the only dynamic in his life. Andrus had begun to try to involve himself more in Rahst's life, but Rahst had his own terms for this.

Andrus had picked up on his wife's guilt over her lack of involvement with their son's upbringing, and that had prompted him to assess how active he was in Rahst's life. He felt that he should become more involved, partly for himself and partly to see if he could pick up his wife's slack. When he found that it wasn't as easy as that and that Rahst preferred his bot, he tried incentivizing Rahst to spend time with him. He bought him toys and treats, and if he had ever heard of the Pavlovian response then he might have admitted that he was using it to wean Rahst onto preferring him over the bot.

Rahst was becoming exquisitely acute to dynamics like this, and he used it to his advantage. He learned how to give Andrus just a little bit of what he wanted, but only when he was given an incentive. If he was given no incentive then he wouldn't reward his father with the affection he clearly wanted. Sometimes Rahst actually wanted to spend time with his dad but he wouldn't let himself have that, as he wanted the treats. More so than that, he enjoyed having control. When his dad became likeable enough to him that he genuinely wanted to spend time with him without the incentive of a treat, he felt as if his father was turning the tables and manipulating him back in some way he couldn't see, and he would resist it, sometimes rather angrily.

From Andrus' perspective, having any kind of nice time with his son seemed to be transactional in nature, not spontaneous. He didn't have any problem affording all of these treats, owing to his substantial financial success as a businessman, and he hoped that with enough kindness he would break through to Rahst, and every time he saw Rahst give up playing with him after a few minutes of father-son time in favour of something else that seemed to be more interesting, his heart would break again.

All of this had a predictable enough outcome for Rahst's school life. He wasn't particularly interested in becoming friends with the other children, but they did tend to have interesting things that he hadn't seen before - toys and snacks mostly. He learned how to get what he wanted from those children. Sometimes it meant charming them. Sometimes it meant bullying them. The grown-ups around him realised that he had some interpersonal issues, but whenever Rahst believed he was being watched he would either demand a bribe from his father (or more likely, wait for his dad to realise that a bribe was needed, or would only accept requests to behave if there was an incentive for him) or if he felt unable to demand a bribe he would follow the rules. But he was always biding his time to assert his will again.

Children in this life-stage are generally preoccupied with their developing abilities and where the limits of those abilities are. They begin to look at the world around them and think about what they would like to do as a grown-up. This is a time for imagining oneself as a train-driver, an astronaut, a zoo-keeper, or any one of a thousand professions, albeit in a simplified, idealised way.

Rahst did not quite frame his experience this way. All he wanted was to have control and he was already well on the way to learning how to do that. And yet, his view of this was so all-or-nothing that the ways in which he lacked control gnawed at him. He developed and maintained a laser-focus on how to have better control.

If there was one profession he did like the look of, it was that of a businessman, like his dad. When he looked at his father, he did not see a heartbroken parent, but an immensely powerful business leader. That's what power looked like to Rahst, and he wanted it.

This was not his only childhood fantasy. He also loved the ostentatious and absolute power of the Emperor, and imagined himself as one. Occasionally he also imagined himself as a wolf-like creature, if he was in the mood for an animal-type fantasy.

Productivity

(older childhood)

Rahst's interpersonal relationships with other children only deteriorated from here. He didn't genuinely like any of his classmates. He liked some of the things that the other children had, and if they didn't have anything he wanted he considered them worthless and scorned them for it, often openly. He developed ways to bully in ways that were too subtle for his parents and teachers to see but no less cutting for that.

Turning away from another child at just the right time was highly effective in wounding that other child's self-confidence; it said, "you're nothing to me". Doing that with the right children made those children work hard to be good enough for him. He rather enjoyed the rush of power he got from that and he built on it.

He watched the world around him with increasing clarity. He started paying attention to his parents' lives beyond the household. More specifically he noticed more of the nuances in his father's life.

Andrus did a lot of charity work and this took up quite a lot of his time. He supported multiple charities and earned a lot of praise for it. Rahst looked at this and felt that his father was being a father-figure to everyone but him. He felt cheated, and that made him angry.

The grown-ups in his life - his parents and teachers, mostly - could see that something had gone very wrong with him. He could be anything from haughty to aggressive with them, but then again, when he wanted to be nice he could be charming. Not 'nice' exactly, but charming. Charismatic, even. Aside from this they saw how the other children either avoided him or seemed to feel painfully self-conscious or wary around him. They tried to get him to empathise with the other children, and on the surface of it he could be kind to those other children, but they became aware that he only did it when they were watching. His relationships with those children did not improve so they knew that he was still doing something to hurt them. To make things worse, not all of the teachers agreed with this; some only saw his charm and believed that the other children were just lacking, somehow.

From Rahst's perspective, he felt that the grown-ups had unfair leverage over him: they had authority (which, he realised, only existed among people who subscribed to it), they were physically stronger, and they had access to all the resources, including the things he wanted and needed. The unfairness of that made him angry again, and since he couldn't attack them directly and saw that they cared about the other children's well-being, he punished them by bullying the children who seemed to need their care the most, especially when they weren't watching so they couldn't prove anything, so couldn't use it as leverage over him. Some of them knew that he was being cruel to the other children and he knew that, but he noticed that they relied on evidence, and he used that insight to evade punishment.

He became supremely adept at cutting down children out of sheer spite, often the terminally shy ones but also newcomers or other unfamiliar children, where he had an advantage.

All of this discusses his social and emotional development at this time. On a more academic level, Rahst was attending a private school at this time. Despite his preoccupation with social dynamics he did quite well with his studies and achieved grades that his teachers and parents considered perfectly acceptable.

His parents continued to try and use the nanny-bot as a stabilising influence, although by this time all it did was make sure he did his homework or help if he needed it, and provide him with meals and snacks. One day when he was 12 years old, on a day when

he felt particularly angry, and the nanny-bot's straight-laced way of handling things annoyed him, so he decided to do away with it.

He waited until the robot had turned its back, then threw himself on the floor and cried out in obvious pain to bring his parents running. When they came he accused the robot of attacking him. They sent the robot away and Rahst never saw it again.

This left his parents with no buffer between themselves and Rahst, so they hired a biological nanny - an Athenian with experience in child-care.

Rahst tried to get her to act as he wanted by undermining her self-confidence, but although he occasionally saw his attacks hit home, she kept coming back each day with her confidence restored. She was too well-supported and experienced to be knocked down so easily. He didn't like or appreciate this, so he feigned injury again to get rid of her.

His parents were not pleased with the nanny, but they had their doubts about whether Rahst was being truthful. They dealt with the situation with the seriousness it deserved and made sure the nanny knew never to attack their child, even if she hadn't. Then they allowed her to return to work.

Rahst observed as much of this as he was able, and fine-tuned his plan. From here on he deliberately pushed the nanny's buttons. He tried everything and watched out for the things that succeeded in undermining her self-confidence and annoying her. When he knew what these things were, he did them as relentlessly as he could.

He staged all of this so that the nanny would look annoyed with him whenever his parents were around so that they got the message that she disliked him. His parents did nothing about this and simply hoped that the problem would disappear of its own accord.

It did not. He continued to push the nanny in a thousand tiny ways until she snapped.

She didn't do much, she only raised her voice. But between her emotional burnout and Rahst's attempts at staging all of this for his parents to see the worst of her, it was enough for her to be dismissed. Rahst was curious about what would happen to the nanny afterwards - and of what his parents thought of the whole thing - so he was nice to them for a while. He played at feeling sad and vulnerable and asked them for 'reassurances' about whether the nanny would ever shout at him or another child again.

He got the information he wanted. His parents had not written him off as a complete monster, so he discovered that he absolutely could play at being a victim to get more information.

Child to Adult Transition

(adolescence)

At around the time that Rahst entered adolescence - between the ages of 12 and 13 - his father became seriously ill. He had all the money he needed to be able to get the medical attention that would save his life, but he had somewhat anti-science views on the subject of medicine and believed that healthy living and exercise would cure him. He was quite wrong, and between 6 months and a year after his original diagnosis, he passed away. Rahst's reaction to this bereavement was effectively "Meh".

Andrus had owned one large business called Biocere, which in turn was an umbrella business for multiple, smaller others. In addition to this he was a serial investor with both active and passive investments in many other businesses. He left the investments to his wife to keep her financially secure, and bequeathed Biocere itself to Rahst, so that he could take over running it and learn what running a business was like. His plan was that his business associates would mentor Rahst in the role of CEO, and that Rahst would learn a sense of responsibility for keeping the business thriving.

He was wrong about this too. Rahst's inheritance of a business did not reform him as his father - and mother - had hoped. He loved the glamour of owning a large, successful business but had no interest in learning how to run it. The board higher-ups didn't like him: they found him to be burdensome and disruptive on the few occasions he showed up. Soon enough Rahst lost interest in trying to do anything with the business, and contented himself with just reaping most of the business' profits.

He developed a social circle and managed to circumvent a lot of the awkwardness of being a teenager with his well-crafted charm. It became a point of pride to him that he could make anyone like him, although to him these successes felt more like conquests than the validation of being liked.

With that said, he kept people at arm's length. He had over-relied on his chameleonic approach to sociability for years, and by this point had little idea of what he himself was actually like. Having casual and platonic contacts was fine, but any relationship that required true intimacy, such as a romantic relationship, required that he reveal his authentic self, and this felt like entirely too much. He settled into a small clique whom he could subtly manipulate into doing whatever he wanted them to do.

He also avoided sexual relationships, so he did not date. This may not have been the case if Rahst had grown up in an Earthian culture where women can and often are considered to be a product (at least, to a much greater degree than on Rahst's world), but Athenian culture is dissimilar to that of Earth in that the goddesses of most Athenian religions are female, as are the leaders of the various civilizations of the galaxy. To most Athenians, Rahst included, women had a genuinely esteemed position in society, so Rahst did not tend to pay for sex as a way to get it without entering into a

loving relationship. He simply avoided both, or occasionally sought the companionship of Athenas' equivalent of geishas.

Closeness in Relationships

(young adulthood)

When Rahst reached adulthood and became thoroughly bored of the pretense that he was responsible for the smooth-running of Biocere, he turned his attention to other forms of satisfaction.

He turned his attention to the world of sex and dating, which he found thrilling, and learned how to fake authenticity enough to convince women to get into relationships with him. He felt desired. He began having sex as part of the 'reward package' he got from putting on this act for these women.

But of course, these were not genuine relationships, and when he grew tired of a particular woman he would leave her. He rarely took long to move onto the next. And yet, he still felt powerless. He could feel the tug of give-and-take that was expected of him and resented the inherent equality of relationships.

The upper management of Biocere had made it clear (although not explicit; Rahst simply had an acute ear for when others were trying to manipulate him) that they didn't want him around, and he had given up trying to force himself to be interested in running it.

As far as he was concerned, what was missing was a sense of power, of being at the top of the hierarchy. He may have been the CEO of Biocere but it was obvious enough that the real power lay in the network of higher-ups. His title could not grant him power over those. To Rahst, the most logical solution was military power.

Of course, Rahst was not used to having to work, especially not for the (as he saw it) paltry reward of being considered 'good', or worse, just not being shouted at as much. But he wanted an impressive military rank so he gritted his teeth through the training and bribed his superiors to rise up through the ranks. This worked for a while.

At one point in his rise, he came to the attention of General Drast. Drast had the highest authority in the military and reported directly to the Athenian Emperor. The general noticed Rahst's rise, observed him for himself, and recognised Rahst for the manipulator that he was. He decided to harness Rahst.

Drast understood very well what type of person he was dealing with. He recognised that Rahst had joined the army not for discipline, a life purpose, or a substitute father-figure as many soldiers did, but for vanity by way of power. He had seen it before, and Rahst

gave his motivations away in his disdain for being told what to do. All of this meant that the promise of more power would be his leverage when dealing with Rahst.

He strong-armed the leader of the Emperor's personal military team (called the Military Suns), Aredon Bredrit, into allowing Rahst to join his platoon. Aredon was distinctly unhappy about this, but had no choice but to accept.

Drast's reason for harnessing Rahst was this: a few years prior, the Athenians had won the Athenian-Othian war. Drast wanted to eradicate the Othians now that the war was over. He had already laid the groundwork to use the Emperor, who, much like Rahst, was young and inexperienced in the role, as a political puppet. He wanted Rahst to act as a mole within Aredon's team, and possibly to replace Aredon in the longer term.

Rahst finally had the power he had desired for so long. In this new position he was as the closest to the Emperor as he could possibly get. The Imperial Suns were the Elite of the Elite, which meant that if he wanted to, his unit could command the rest of the military if they needed to. And yet he didn't feel validated, and certainly not satisfied. Instead, he felt lost and confused.

That isn't to say that he didn't find ways to make his mark. At one point Rahst got himself a pet, a spikecrest sersol, which he named Dread. Rahst enjoyed having Dread around, perhaps because he was able to mould Dread into exactly what he wanted him to be.

He allowed Dread to be aggressive towards other people. Dread in turn picked up on the nonverbal elements of Rahst's cruelty towards others and learned that cruelty was simply how he could have fun, so he had as much fun as he could. Launching surprise attacks, or cultivating a wary attitude in Athenians became Dread's meat and wine. One day for example, Dread jumped on Trent, a member of the team, and tried to claw his eyes out. Rahst found this amusing.

Rahst quite enjoyed using Dread as a 'blameless' way to attack people. Whenever Dread did that, he would claim that the person who Dread had attacked had provoked the sersol. As an extension of this, Rahst also taught Dread to attack on command, with the command being a nicely unobtrusive wink.

One day, Rahst was involved in an incident in which he sacrificed another soldier to save himself. Aredon promptly used this opportunity to dishonourably discharge Rahst. This discharge was conducted in front of the Emperor and multiple prominent political figures, and Rahst felt intensely attacked and humiliated that day. The very public fashion in which this happened was too much of a fall from grace for Rahst to tolerate.

However, while the machinations of that discharge were still in action and before the discharge went ahead, Drast approached him. Drast had been forming a secret, personal team, which he called the Tao Guard, and invited Rahst to join. Rahst was

pleased for the opportunity and accepted, and entirely missed the fact that he was being manipulated with the promise of power - and subversive power too, given the secrecy of this new group.

Rahst was not happy just to accept this consolation prize though, however juicy it was. He felt that he had a score to settle. He retaliated against Aredon's discharge by capturing Aredon's team scientist, a small and weak man named Shae, and torturing him. Aredon himself was too big and strong to be captured - he was 7 feet of pure muscle, no less - so as Rahst couldn't catch and torture him, he did it to an easier target who Aredon cared about. Rahst planned to kill Shae as soon as he'd tired of torturing him.

Another member of the Tao Guards, Juneri, saw the torture in progress and decided he could not stand by and let it go ahead, so he alerted Aredon to what was happening. Aredon reacted quickly to rescue Shae, and as a result of Juneri's quick response to the situation, Aredon recruited him to the Military Imperial Suns.

Rahst developed a grudge against Juneri for this.

The kidnapping would have come to the attention of the nobility and other higher-ups of Athenian society if not for Drast's intervention. He covered up the incident to prevent Rahst from facing repercussions.

Throughout all of this, Rahst had been developing an infatuation with another member of the Tao Guards, a woman named Trianea. She fell in love with him. She saw that he was unhappy in the military and began to talk him into leaving for the sake of his own mental well-being. They developed plans to move in together.

Drast heard about this and developed, and carried out, secret plans to have Trianea murdered so that Rahst had nothing to leave the military for. He made a calculated guess that Rahst could not bear to leave the military if Trianea wasn't around any more, and that he would want revenge on whoever was responsible for Trianea's murder. As far as Drast was concerned, that would only give him more leverage over Rahst.

This put Trianea into a unique position in Rahst's psyche. For the short time that their relationship had lasted, she had put her best foot forward in being empathetic and selfless, and hadn't yet shown him her flawed side - at least, nothing substantial enough to put him off of dating her. Their time together had been so short that he hadn't had time to grow bored of her best side, either. Her death meant that she would never be able to fall from this pedestal of perfection, so Rahst came to love that image of her and to believe that that was the real Trianea - that he had finally met the perfect companion.

It was Aredon who worked out who had arranged the murder, and he was vocal enough about it that Rahst overheard. As a result of that, he felt compelled to avenge his 'perfect' Trianea by bringing Drast down, no matter what it took. He looked at the

resources he had available to do this. The Emperor already distrusted Rahst, so Rahst knew he could not directly approach him about Drast's behaviour, so his only other option was Aredon. It made him sick to his stomach to approach Aredon for help, but he swallowed his pride for the purpose of avenging Trianea and punishing Drast, and did so.

Aredon had his doubts about how true Rahst's story was, but he had always taken pride in being a forthright leader. He set an investigation into effect that was designed to capture any efforts by Drast - and Rahst - to lie or manipulate their way out of the truth. When he was satisfied that he knew all the facts, he acted decisively against Drast. Drast's plans for the genocide of the Othians were uncovered, and he was removed from office and placed in jail.

The whole situation left a strong impression on Rahst. He still believed himself to be the cleverest person around, but the raw power that Aredon had used - and that Drast had used in killing Trianea, for that matter - were direct acts of power, not manipulations or subterfuge. And they had shaken his world, repeatedly. Rahst found himself unable to ignore the comparison of direct vs. indirect use of power, and he began to wonder whether indirect power was really the most powerful kind of power, as he had always believed.

However, Aredon wasn't quite finished yet. He saw that Rahst was reeling from these events but was not so naive as to expect the changes to remain. He took advantage of Rahst's period of contemplation by suggesting to the Emperor that he banish him to the planet Goso. The Emperor was as weary of Rahst as Aredon was, so he agreed to this and sent Rahst on a 'mandatory retreat'. The high chieftain of the bisibi, Goso's dominant species, owed him a favour, and this allowed him to leverage this.

The Bisibi was a species with excellent empathetic skills, and they were natural telepaths. Only a very few were capable of telepathically reading the minds of those outside of their own species. All of this meant that Rahst suddenly found himself in a community of beings who could read his body-language better than anybody ever had before, and reacted to his genuine feelings, not his charisma or lies. He found that the strategies he had used to get his way all his life simply didn't work.

They were fully capable of verbally communicating with him, however, the cultural barriers meant that he found himself largely isolated, with only a very small number of Bisibi who could telepathically communicate with him. He came to need the interpersonal contact they provided, which in itself was a new experience to Rahst, who had always considered other people as either resources or a nuisance. He'd never been short of options for people to be sociable with before. If he tried lying to them or charming a bisibi, not only did it not work (because their preferred communication was via telepathy, not the spoken word), but he learned quickly that they would react to his less agreeable thoughts, feelings, and desires by using their psionics on him. He was physically thrown a mile into the air multiple times.

This was not as dangerous a set of circumstances as it may appear. The bisibi were highly adept with their telekenesis, including using it in a way that avoided serious injury to their victim. They knew what they were doing, and the only damage Rahst sustained was the occasional temporary scrape and bruise. Indeed, even if the bisibi had been rougher with him, the Athenians had the medical advancements to fix major injuries, and Rahst, as a citizen, would have had access to this treatment. These throwings may have been painful, and they were certainly humiliating, but they did no lasting harm to Rahst.

Rahst had always been quick to assess the people around him and to adjust his behaviour accordingly to ensure that he got the best 'deal' out of them. With the bisibi he came to see that the best 'deal' he could have was a little bit of company that didn't end up with him being thrown, and he learned that the way to get it was to seek the authenticity within himself and to be completely honest with himself and his conversational partner. His loneliness became a powerful driver for this change.

The bisibi respected his anger, of which he had plenty, and the few he got to interact with reacted far better to his authentic expression (or even admission or acknowledgement) of his anger than his attempts to weasel justice for himself. They spotted his extremely fleeting moments of fear and sadness - emotions that Rahst had been certain he didn't have; these were emotions for 'weak' people, after all - and offered him things that would make those better. Usually inclusion, as much as they were able to do it.

They also responded to his moments of joy. The joy he felt when he remembered victories over those who had 'wronged' him annoyed the bisibi for they were tainted with a sense of sly glee, and once again he would be thrown. His moments of joy at the good things in life, however - good food, moments of relaxation, social time - were responded to by the bisibi with joy too, and in this way he got both negative, and positive reinforcement for a completely new, authentic set of behaviours.

Rahst found settling into this new culture exhausting, especially at first after he stopped trying to manipulate the bisibi and began to try getting the social contact he missed so badly, but in time he developed excellent social skills that allowed him to express his emotions authentically and to meet his needs and desires without resorting to trickery.

Out of all of this, the only area in which he didn't grow was his idealising of Trianea. While the bisibi could be relied upon to throw him whenever they felt irritated by his attempts to manipulate, they responded differently to his love for the woman of his dreams and showed restraint. They sensed the great pain behind his loss and would not throw him for his self-deception about her perfection, even if they did see it plainly for what it was.

Passing on Responsibilities

(older adulthood)

Eventually Rahst was retrieved from Goso to attend to Tao Guard business, and he was brought back to Athenis. To his surprise, was welcomed back to his previous job as leader of the Tao Guard.

The Tao Guard had always been assigned to the Supreme General. After Drast's imprisonment a new Supreme General had inherited the role, and therefore the Guard. Therefore, Rahst found himself serving a new Supreme General: one Kalerias T'Aben.

Rahst remained in this position until he retired.

During that time he made amends for the damage that he had done over the years in every way he could. Indeed, he did such a good job at this that even Shae eventually forgave him.

Rahst may have grown in many ways, but he never quite learned to take Trianea off of her pedestal. He never dated again, and did not marry. He never had children, but as one of his acts of beneficence to the world around him he mentored young recruits to help them find their way.

All of this isn't to say that he became a paragon of perfection. The weight of responsibility tended to draw out his anxieties, and he continued to mask those with anger. He still sometimes used manipulation to get results more quickly when he felt under undue pressure, but he found himself wincing at his own actions whenever he did. His old habits were hard to break but he no longer had a 'sting in the tail'.

Rahst didn't want to retire, as putting things right had become such a driving force for him, but eventually time caught up with him and he found that he could no longer keep up with the demands of the job. When that happened, he reluctantly retired. When he did, he was pleased to at least be able to put the leadership of his team into the hands of a younger soldier who he felt to be trustworthy and capable of the task.

End of Life

(old age)

Rahst continued to remember Trianea in his old age and hoped that he would be reunited with her in the afterlife. He adjusted to not having a job, and filled up his time with other things. At his advanced age it took less activity to fill up his days anyway, but he had become respected enough that he had visitors, and could remain a part of the culture and community surrounding military life.

When he died, he was given a hero's burial and remembered for his contributions.

Credits

Based on theory by:

Erikson, E., (1951) 'Childhood and Society', W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. chapter 7.

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~Hayley, The Character Consultancy