Wind and Sand

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Wind and Sand

by FallLover

Summary

Horus is an airbender in the remote haven of Heliopolis, pining in secret for the powerful sandbender, Seth. When a storm hits the haven, Horus does his best to help, and ends up working with his crush.

Notes

This was originally posted on Archive of Our Own, and is being posted here as a back-up.

I don't think you really need to know anything about "ENNEAD" to enjoy this, though it helps with some of the character relationships. I also don't think you need to have seen "Avatar: Seven Havens" to understand it, because it only vaguely concerns events in the first two episodes of Book 1, but it does help to understand general Avatar world concepts like bending.

See the end of the work for more notes

Horus flew on his metal air skimmer – powered by his airbending – during a patrol on a sunny afternoon along Heliopolis' walls, checking to make sure there was no additional storm sign and wall integrity was up to snuff: the haven's storm warning system could be slow, but regular patrols meant they had the earliest warning they could. The haven's engineering corps was made up of benders and non-benders, and they all worked to improve the warning system against the worst enemy the haven had to deal with. Earlier warned was earlier prepared, and safer.

Sounds from the festival – of music and crowds gathered for food – occasionally reached him as he patrolled, but he ignored them. He didn't have time for music when he had to make sure everything was secure. He tended to work festival days, unlike other benders who tried to get that time off. Horus simply had no one he wanted to go with, and it wasn't fun going alone.

Most checks were okay, but the next station took him past two other brigade members: Seth, one of the older earthbenders and their best sandbender, who regularly patrolled the walls for storms, and Osiris, commander of the Brigade, and one of their best firebenders. They were standing together by the wall, with non-bender wall guards some distance away to allow them some privacy.

Horus, of course, could hear most of what the two powerful benders said in the air currents coming to him. And while Horus' mother had taught him that he should respect privacy, he'd found that keeping an eye on interpersonal matters in the Brigade was always wise. Especially when it came to Osiris and Seth. So he nudged the currents a little, so he could listen better.

"—ou should go back to your duties," Seth said, icily. "I have nothing further to say." The tall, pale-skinned earthbender had his arms crossed over his green Brigade uniform as he gazed out into the vast gold, brown, and green desert that surrounded Heliopolis' tall stone walls. His long, straight red hair fell over his back, and his rectangular golden earrings glittered in the afternoon sun. His red eyes gazed ahead, and he was clearly trying to look neutral, but Horus had known him long enough to know he was annoyed.

If Horus was honest, he was also on these patrols because *Seth* never took a break for festivals, either. And this at least meant Horus could see him.

Osiris, who was himself taller than Seth, and even taller than Horus, was a broad-shouldered man with dark brown skin, long brown hair tied in a tail behind his head, a cleanshaven chin, and sharp green eyes. He gazed down at Seth with a worried frown, almost like he was disappointed in something Seth had said. "We can talk about this later, perhaps after your shift?"

"I'm not interested, Osiris," Seth said, not even bothering to look at him. "And we both have duties to attend to."

Osiris frowned then, but eventually shrugged and turned away, marching in the opposite direction from Horus.

Horus hopped off his air skimmer near Seth, who only briefly glanced at him in acknowledgment before looking back out at the desert.

“There’s a storm coming,” Seth said.

Horus looked out into the desert with a frown, trying to pay better attention to the air currents. “The instruments haven’t registered anything yet…”

“The ground’s unsettled,” Seth replied. “And there’s sand already in the air.” Seth looked at him. “Can’t you feel it?”

Horus reached for the winds, but still only felt the barest hints of anything, and that could even indicate a storm that wouldn’t even *touch* Heliopolis, as they were so common in the Harshlands, keeping the place a largely uninhabitable wasteland. But that didn’t mean he didn’t trust Seth’s opinion on the matter, especially when he noted, “I woke up unsettled, and hoped I was imagining it. Looks like the corps will need to review guidance on our tests…”

“Everything here is old and degrading,” Seth said with frustration. “Some of the other havens have a better grasp on the technology than we do… But Osiris and Maat won’t speak with them for us.”

“It’s their lives at risk if a storm causes havoc,” Horus noted.

Seth shrugged, but his expression was bitter. “They believe we can manage just fine as we have. Which means more for everyone to bear. Benders, to tend to the storm, and non-benders, to tend to herding civilians and animals.” He did *not* look happy about it.

Horus glanced around, noting the guards were still keeping their distance, watching, potentially for all the nonexistent travelers coming to visit Heliopolis. With the increased storms in recent years, barely anyone made the long trip between havens to communicate. To Horus’ knowledge, there hadn’t been much communication with the other surviving havens in at least a year, even ignoring the ones who had cut off communication long before that.

“What did the Commander want to talk to you about?” Horus asked.

Seth’s fingers twitched on his arm, and his sharp red brows tightened. “Nothing important. An old argument.”

Horus imagined it was more than that.

“It’s always strange to hear you call him that,” Seth noted, and his mouth finally quirked in something almost like a smile. It made his handsome face even handsomer. “He’s your father. Don’t you find it odd?”

“It’s how Isis refers to him,” Horus said with a shrug. “And he *is* my commanding officer. I have nothing else to call him.” Isis and Osiris had separated near Horus’ birth, and Osiris had barely any involvement in Horus’ life as a result, beyond the fact he was a familiar face around the haven and in charge of Horus’ life in the Brigade. But he never made a big deal about it, at least not to Horus’ knowledge.

“Hmm,” Seth said. “I guess it’s weird since I remember when Isis was raising you, shocked you took after your grandmother and great-grandparents, and not either of your parents…” Horus’ grandmother and grandparents were all airbenders, while his mother was a waterbender and his father a firebender. “It’s hard to picture the boy she worried about being so distant from his own father.”

“He created the distance,” Horus noted, looking out again to try and see what Seth did. He could perhaps feel *something* more substantial out there now, growing into something more, though he wasn’t sure how Seth felt it. “It’s a relationship that goes both ways. Or doesn’t.” He looked at Seth’s handsome face again, noting the dark kohl Seth used to protect his vision in the harsh sunlight. “Do you, of all people, really want me to be nice to him?”

Seth’s expression grew a bit chillier. “No. I don’t. But I don’t need Isis getting mad at me for encouraging you otherwise.” They were old friends, after all. Even when Nephthys, Seth’s ex-wife, had revealed that Osiris seduced her, Isis hadn’t pulled away from Seth. They’d actually banded together and stayed strong through the whole affair, pulling back from both their former spouses.

“You aren’t,” Horus said with a smile. “But… if you need reassurance, we could get dinner later.” He was being overly bold and he knew it. He’d had a crush on Seth since he was young, one that had only grown worse when he’d revealed he was a bender and joined the Brigade. That Seth had never dated anyone after Nephthys only made Horus’ urge to grow up quickly worse. And now, at 23, it was harder to hold back.

Seth sighed and said, “I don’t know that we’ll *have* dinner today, with whatever’s coming.”

“We’ve survived storms,” Horus noted, a bit disappointed Seth was avoiding responding properly, but heartened he hadn’t heard a *no*. “Afterward, we eat, we recuperate and repair. And we prepare for the next. If we act like there’s no tomorrow, what’s the point of it all?”

Seth finally looked at Horus with a raised eyebrow. “That almost sounded like wisdom.”

Horus’ cheeks warmed a little. *Was that a compliment?*

“Careful,” Seth said. “You’ll make your mother proud.” He glanced around. “Unless you don’t finish your patrol on time.”

“Ah, yeah,” Horus said, reaching to his back for his large metal air skimmer. “But… dinner?” He wanted a clear answer.

“…After the storm,” Seth said with a soft smile. “We’ll see if I can think about tomorrow, then.”

Horus smiled back and then hopped onto his air skimmer, speeding off past Seth to check the rest of the instruments. He had to work harder to stop his air skimmer from spilling him off the way, he was so elated.

Horus also got word out about the storm. Earthbenders were shoring up the walls throughout the day. Guards were encouraging residents back to safe areas and bunkers, and helping move animals under cover. Civilians shut down stalls, and schools let out early, while children and the elderly were carefully moved to the safest parts of the city.

“A pity it had to come on a festival day,” Neith said as Horus’ squad finished wrapping tarps around a stall and watched another family shutter their home behind metal shielding while the sky grew darker. Every able-bodied person had tasks to take care of where they could, and the squad had stopped to help with this. “I was enjoying the new school play about Avatar Ra. For kids, they sure get into the roles.” Neith was a tall earthbender who had her long, dark hair tied back in a bun, with colored beads throughout. Her green eyes glittered as she kept her eye on everything: she was the best fighter on the team, and was good with crowd control.

“I was hoping we’d get more time to eat,” Hathor said with a pout as she tied off another tarp. “I missed breakfast *and* lunch today!” Hathor was shorter than Horus and Neith, with pale skin, long black hair she kept in golden ties, and bright purple eyes. Her red firebender uniform was neat and crisp, but the sleeves were rolled up to bare her arms. Intricate golden earrings dangled from her ears.

“That’s what you get for chasing boys instead of focusing on work,” Neith muttered, unimpressed.

Hathor stuck her tongue out at the other bender, but then noticed Horus glancing at them and put her face down. “I was *asked out*, that was all! And it’s rude to eat while chatting with someone…”

“As long as you don’t collapse during the emergency,” Anubis, their waterbender, said, solemnly. “We need all hands on deck for a storm.” Anubis was as tall as Horus, with pale skin like his mother, and dark, wavy hair like his grandmother. And as an adult, it was so incredibly obvious he took after his biological father, Osiris, and not Seth. He could have been a pale twin of his father.

When he was given a squad to command, Horus had considered asking for a different waterbender, but there were few enough benders as it was, and it wasn’t like he *hated* the man. So he did his best. And they worked well together, despite getting into arguments often enough. They just avoided each other when they weren’t on a shift.

Plus, it meant that Horus had more excuses to see Seth, for the rare occasions Seth and Anubis ran into each other when Horus was around.

Hathor rolled her eyes, but said nothing.

“Let’s go support the benders on the wall,” Horus said as the wind picked up. They were done in this area, and he had seen other benders reporting to the wall, as well. “Neith, get ready to go help the other earthbenders there.”

Neith nodded and then ran ahead as the squad moved towards the wall.

The haven was empty around them but for a handful of patrolling benders on their own tasks.

Neith split off to stand by while other earthbenders finished closing off the gates to be high against the storm. Sometimes, a storm was weak enough that would be enough. But not always.

Horus had a bad feeling *this* was one of those rare times. And he glanced to his right in time to see Seth sandsurfing through the town, nodding to other benders before going towards another part of the city by the wall, presumably wherever he thought the danger was most likely. Seth had trained other sandbenders, which was a difficult specialty of earthbending, but they all still took his direction for how to handle storms. He had a sixth sense for storms, despite not being an airbender, and people speculated it was because of his trips deeper into the Harshlands. Some people even said he was more comfortable out there than in the haven.

Horus didn't think so. He imagined it was easier, at least, to be out there than back in Heliopolis, separated from his wife, and away from Anubis' resentment over the whole situation. Certainly Horus could understand not wanting to be around that, after hearing far too many angry rants about Osiris from his mother. It wasn't that he didn't agree with her, after how Osiris had treated them, but sometimes, he'd wondered how Isis looked at *him*, as Osiris' son. And that was uncomfortable.

Horus just wished Seth had other things to cheer him. And focusing on Seth let him ignore his own problems.

The wind picked up even more, and thunder and lightning could be seen in the distance in the middles of a giant green and brown sand tornado. Neith cursed as they saw the storm crash into the wall… and start to creep over. It crashed into the wall, with a bang, another bang, and then began to creep over it, before smashing downward in a way that would have crushed buildings, let alone people.

Or it would have, if Horus and a handful of other airbenders and some sandbenders hadn't stepped in and shoved it back. They were not the haven of wind and sand for nothing.

There was a boom and loud crackles, and the storm yanked back, but there was far more of the storm, flooding into the haven.

I've never seen something like that, Horus thought as he focused on shoving the storm back.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a building crumbled under the weight of the storm, and while earthbenders moved to support it, it crashed into an aqueduct. Fires started.

Horus' squad ran off to go lend their aid to the different emergencies. Horus himself kept pushing back the storm, panting in between crashing waves. The air barely listened to him, and sending it off barely seemed to weaken things, while ripping it apart too much risked creating a second storm, assuming Horus even had the strength for that.

We're not beating it, Horus thought, desperately. *Surely it has more of a mass we can cut through somewhere?* He ran towards the thicker part of it, feeling along for where its heart lay. Sandbenders raced past him to help in the area he'd left.

He found himself in a small courtyard in the haven, where Seth was twisting sand out of the storm and letting it drop to the ground, harmless, weakening the storm bit by bit. It was truly impressive, and so fast that Horus didn't have time to join in with him.

There were no other sandbenders around, and Horus imagined Seth had sent them away to help others needing it.

Seth must know we need more coverage, Horus thought. He wondered if he should go back to where he'd been, too.

But then, as he stood by a wall, he saw Osiris step out from an alley by Seth's back. And he was glaring at Seth.

What's a firebender doing here? Horus thought, confused as he used the wind to keep his face free from sand. *He's better off elsewhere.*

But then Osiris stepped forward and called flame to his hands, before tossing it at Seth's back.

Horus' eyes widened in surprise – Seth was too busy bending the storm to even *see* Osiris, let alone respond to the attack!

Horus leapt forward, not even thinking. It felt like time slowed down.

He reached for the fire, and spun. And bent it away.

He expected it to scorch his fingers. But it didn't. It felt… welcoming. And as it vanished from his fingers, he came face to face with Seth, who stared at him, shocked.

What have I done? Horus thought. He hadn't airbent. He'd… bent fire! But only the *Avatar* could bend more than one element! And the Avatar was the enemy of Heliopolis, the enemy of all havens, for what she'd done to nearly destroy the world.

Am I a monster? Horus wondered, his heart racing. Seth wasn't just a powerful sandbender: he was also one of their best fighters. And Horus didn't want to end by being taken out by the man.

If Seth thought any of this, he didn't signal it.

They both looked up as another wave of storm came crashing down on them. The storm wouldn't wait for whatever human dramas played out.

I won't let a storm destroy this place, Horus thought. *Whatever I am, this is my home. My mother lives here. My grandparents live here. My friends live here. I will protect them.*

Seth seemed to come to his own conclusions, and didn't attack, either. Instead, they turned, as one, to fight back against the storm.

Horus' heart raced as he moved in familiar *airbending* patterns, working alongside Seth's fast sandbending to weaken the monstrous gale, and keeping his face and ears clear so he could

be read for anything.

But he wasn't so distracted by his work that he didn't check to see if Osiris was still there. After all, they couldn't afford another attack, even if he had no idea why Osiris did what he did.

Where Osiris had stood was a crumbled building.

When the storm was finally gone, it was late at night, and Seth and Horus were both breathing heavily. The haven was strangely quiet.

All of Horus' limbs were exhausted. He hadn't moved that quickly in a long time. This storm had been stronger than any he'd seen in years. And he felt if he did too much more, he'd collapse where he stood.

"Thank you," Seth said. "Your help was invaluable."

Horus tried to shrug, but was too weary. As he panted, he looked back at the fallen building. And saw that the building hadn't broken: it had dissolved into sand. And there was a leg in a red uniform poking out of it. It didn't move.

"Why did he…?" Horus asked. The commander was a powerful fighter, but not a murderer.

"He hated that I kept rejecting him," Seth said. He scoffed. "He always felt entitled to take."

Horus felt chilled by that. It was like what his mother said. But he'd never thought Osiris would go to such ends. They'd never been close, and Horus couldn't tell what his feelings were now. Empty.

Osiris had looked so wrathful when he'd attacked Seth. And his actions would have hurt not just Seth, but everyone in Heliopolis.

"You saved my life," Seth said to Horus, close now. "And you… you bent fire."

Horus stiffened. They all knew how Avatar Ra had destroyed the world. It was the law that any sightings of the Avatar had to be reported to the council, and Seth had not only collapsed a building onto the commander of the Brigade, but also wasn't dragging Horus to the council.

That wasn't a fluke, Horus thought, much as he wished it was. Even now, he could recall the feeling of fire in his hand, and had noticed the sand responding to him as he worked through the storm. He'd lived 23 years not bending anything else. He'd sometimes felt the call to something else in his life, but he'd thought it was airbending, and nothing more. He'd focused too much on his goals for much else: being close to Seth and mastering his airbending to encourage that.

"I…" Horus began, unsure how to make a case for himself. Or if he was allowed to. They had so few records on Avatar Ra, or what she'd specifically done. Only that she'd destroyed everything she could. *What if I do that by accident?* He wondered.

“If you were as bad as the stories say,” Seth said, “you would have let the storm destroy us. But you could have died, or let us die, any number of times.” Seth looked to the pile of sand where Osiris lay. “Thank you.” His red eyes glittered.

“You saved yourself,” Horus insisted. Horus certainly hadn’t collapsed the building. And he wondered if Seth would have sand surfed away in time, if he’d known Osiris was there.

“You gave me an extra moment,” Seth replied. After a beat, he added, “I won’t share your secret.”

Horus’ heart raced, and he supposed his horrible gift couldn’t be *too* terrible, if it had saved Seth in even a small way. But he didn’t know what would happen to him once more people knew. “But what do I do now?” Could he really hide forever? He wasn’t sure. It hurt when he wasn’t able to bend regularly, and now that he knew other elements called to him, how could he avoid it?

Seth looked towards the exits, then back to Horus. “You survive, if you want to. I’ll help you. As repayment for saving my life.”

Horus shook his head, “I don’t need repayment.”

“But I do,” Seth replied. “Just deal with it.” He smirked, then, “Besides: we haven’t had dinner yet.”

Horus smiled, despite himself, almost but not quite unable to enjoy it. “How can you joke at a time like this?” All of this was terrifying. *And it’s not like he thinks of me in any way other than a younger recruit. Perhaps he even plans to keep an eye on me, and report the council if I get out of hand.*

Though the idea of Seth keeping a close eye on him had its own appeal…

“What else is there to do?” Seth asked. He looked again at Osiris. “The alternative is turning vicious, like your father. And I have no interest in that.”

Horus nodded, slowly. For all Seth was deadly, he was kind, too. It was part of what made him appealing. He’d always supported Isis, and he’d never been cruel to Nephthys, even after everything that happened. He was quiet, which only made Horus more curious about him. “We should contact the council, let them know that Osiris attacked you.” He couldn’t imagine Maat blaming Seth for what happened. Horus would speak on Seth’s behalf personally, for as long as his word had any merit, anyway.

“…Yes,” Seth said. “Of course.”

But will he let them know about me? Horus wondered, and felt stupid for the thought. A man was perhaps dead, and he was panicking about his own fate, but Osiris had attacked *Seth*, and Seth didn’t want to join Osiris in death any time soon.

“Let’s talk to your mother as well,” Seth added. “She’ll want to know about…” He glanced at Osiris and then away, his expression troubled. “And if there’s one thing I know, it’s that Isis

is your most powerful ally and would never turn on you. On either of us."

Horus was glad Seth was so thoughtful, since Horus' head just kept racing in circles. "Yes. I don't think she would." But after a moment he asked, "Were you serious about dinner?"

Seth blinked at him, and then laughed briefly, before knocking his elbow into Horus' chest in a way that was almost painful. "Let's see what state we're in after we've seen Isis. And *then* we'll decide." He turned away from Osiris' body, preparing to leave the area.

Horus was glad Seth could still smile, at least, and followed Seth, smiling softly himself. Things had been bad, but they'd beaten the storm. And Horus would stay by Seth's side, no matter what came.

And if I can survive my mother, Horus thought, dismally, *that'll be something.* But with Seth at his side, he felt anything was possible.

End Notes

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