Divinity Rescue Corps

the Second Chapter



a cozy litRPG harem

by Nolan Locke

DIVINITY RESCUE CORPS

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Chapter the Second

by

NOLAN LOCKE

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Chapter 1- R&R (Rest & Retelling)

I knew, even before I got in the door of my home back in USA, that everything was working out perfectly. My father and my sister stood on the front porch of my house, or my old house at any rate. My new niece or nephew sat heavy in Sarah's stomach. Brayden looked significantly bigger than he had before. Two new cars sat in the driveway of the house. Newer, at least. Both looked like they were a couple years old and probably bought used.

Neither of them had that 'your mom's dead' look written on their faces, which I have to say was a massive plus.

Grinning, I trotted up the walk with hands outstretched, ready to scoop up Brayden. Unfortunately for me, he ducked behind Sarah's leg, eyes wide.

"Unk… Ris?"

"Yeah buddy!" I told him. "Uncle Chris!"

"Are you sure?" Sarah asked.

"Oh shut it." I bent low and peered around. "I brought you something cool, Brayden."

That brought him out. Soon enough I'd presented him with a large, wrapped box.

"Toph?" Sarah half-said, half-asked. "What's going on?"

I gave her a cheerful wink. "Uncle Chris has been out making that money. So my favorite and only nephew gets to be spoiled just this once."

"Wooooow!" Brayden said, ripping the paper off. "What is it?"

Sarah's mouth worked open and closed. Her expression went through several different important changes, but I couldn't catch them all. I was too busy reveling in Brayden's joy. He started trying

to get the box open, but when he couldn't manage, his grandpa stepped in. Soon enough they had the present out of the box and the extra pieces added on. My dad's a DIY guy.

"It's a balance bike," I told her. "I'm not buying him an X-Cube 720. I'm not a monster, Sare."

"But… where—"

Brayden flung himself into my arms, beaming with joy and thanking me. I told him he was very welcome, and that he should try it out right now. Dad had headed to the garage to get the wrenches necessary to put the three parts together so he could zip around.

That was done a handful of seconds later, and soon he was tootling back and forth over the sidewalk, then after my dad pulled the car out of the driveway, there too.

"Head on in," my dad said, overcoming his own urge to say something about whatever he saw before him. "Your mom's taking a rest. She just finished up her last round of treatments. I'll stick around here with my grandson."

The wonder and pride in his voice made this whole trip worth it.

We went through the house, while Sarah continued casting disbelieving glances at me.

"I'm glad you're here," I told her.

She seemed on the verge of saying something several times, but clamped her mouth shut. Finally, she went, "Where have you—"

But again, interrupted. "Christopher?" The sleepy voice came from deeper in the house. "Is that you, Christopher?"

"Ma?" I called.

My mother looked virtually unchanged from when I'd left: pale, scrawny, and bald from the chemo. Her clothes hung loose on her frame, but they hung loose on a woman who was standing under her own power. The former wasn't great, but the latter sure was.

I gave her a huge hug. "I missed you guys," I whispered. Suddenly my chest felt hot and tight, and it was like something had clamped down on my throat, strangling the words into tears.

She hugged me right back, and after several moments, Sarah's arms joined hers. It lasted a while, but not nearly long enough. Soon enough, she had me by the shoulders and pushed me out to arms' length. "Christopher Fletcher, you explain yourself right this minute! Where the hell have you been?"

"Right?" Sarah shrieked. "Can I get on his ass about being gone for six friggin months now? Am I allowed now?"

I laughed. "All right, all right. Should we wait until Dad gets in with Brayden?"

***

After six months the living room felt entirely alien to me, and in a disorienting way. Sure all these things were virtually unchanged and I recognized them, but I was a different person who had left them. I was seeing them with new eyes.

"I have to back up a bit, because none of this is easy to keep track of. I've been on a lot of adventures, though they've been pretty tame by the standards of most adventures people consider to be, uh, adventures." There've been near death experiences, but nothing like the movies.

Thankfully.

I didn't tell my family that. They don't need to know all that.

"There's a magical land through a portal," I told them, and described it. Mountains that just shifted around however they liked. Lakes that turned into dragons made of water and went on vacation whenever they felt like it. Trees that didn't necessarily grow towards the sun, some with leaves that were nothing less than car-sized spheres of yellow green. Clouds that shimmered with various different colored light depending on how the sun fell on them. A castle that hovered in the air, which was both rightside up and upside down at the same time.

My family shared a look that told me they might have to have me committed to a psych ward. What lay beneath that was a reluctance to contradict me. A serious amount of money had just flowed their

way on my behalf, and they weren't inclined to stop me from being insane, in case the money spout shut off.

When I mentioned Nakamamon the spell broke.

"What's that?" Sarah asked.

"These companion creatures. My friend Regina has one that's a fox with flowers sprouting up around its ears and multiple tails."

"Oh," as though she wasn't pleased this was the answer actually. "Who's—"

"The welcome guy has a pterodactyl-like creature with sparkling scales. The Healer trainer has a flying manta ray, and this jerk I know has a storm ferret. Anyway, there are Nakamamon that are humanoid, some that are like puddles of slime, some that are just sentient crystals. Anything and everything you can imagine, there's a Nakamamon for it."

"Is there a one-eyed, one-horned, flying purple people eater?" my mother asked.

"There are several different kinds of purple people eaters," I said severely, then laughed at their expressions. "No, almost none of them eat people. We're more of an invasive species. Anyway there's a wind serpent that my friend Tara has, and a glowing Tinkerbell fairy that my other friend Cinzy has."

"Cindy?"

"Cinzy, short for Cinzia."

"Do you have any friends that aren't girls?" Sarah asked, wrinkling her nose in disgust.

Yeah. We definitely weren't going to go into how the girl who'd brought me to the castle in the first place had seduced me and had sex with me up in a tree. Skipping right over that.

"Oh sure," I said instead. "There's Alan—"

"Hooooooooold on," my father said, holding out a hand. "Too many names. You said you would tell us why you haven't been home in over six months."

"Oh, right, that."

Well, I told the story: about how I first went through the portal and met Regina with her flower fox called Tweedle Dee—skipping the sex with Regina in the tree, and then the many instances of sex afterwards—and then went through the orientation of meeting the good-natured Rus—

"Too. Many. Names," Dad grumped. "Stick with what happened, and no quiz afterwards, okay?"

"Okay, okay. There's orientation, I choose what job I want to have over there. The options are like Guardian, Ranger, Wizard, Thief, or Healer. There are more but they don't really matter."

"And you went with… what, Thief?" Sarah asked.

"Healer," my mother said quietly. "You went to a magical land and you got magical healing."

"That's right," I said softly. Our eyes met, and an important current of energy ran between us.

"This is nonsense," Sarah said, too loudly. She rolled her eyes when everybody warned her not to wake her toddler. "What? I don't know why we have to listen to this BS. It's obviously not real. He's playing a video game, most likely. Or writing a book, like he always said he would. He left for six months, wrote a book—"

"And somehow managed to grab onto a six-figure salary with excellent benefits," Dad muttered.

It was that sort of tone that both cut through the bullshit and also explained to you that you were being a moron, and while you were at it could you please stop being a moron? Sarah's mouth snapped shut. She had a car, a new house closer to Mom and Dad's, peace of mind for her current son and her unborn child, and she sure didn't have a job that changed everything in the blink of an eye. And bee-tee-dubs, he hadn't just gotten them new cars and put food on Brayden's table, he'd also paid for a whole host of chemo treatments and specialists to come help deal with our ailing mother's situation.

Dad's tone told her that her older brother had made all that happen, and maybe he was stark raving mad by now, but she was

not going to antagonize him. In fact, she was going to listen to her stark-raving-mad-but-somehow-ultra-rich brother.

"Well keep going or whatever," Sarah grumbled, with less acid than before I'd left for half a year.

All right, so after I'd gone through basic training, there'd been a situation with the God of Footfalls—

"I'm…sorry?" Sarah asked.

"There's a small god for basically every natural phenomenon," I told her. "Some of them have names, some are just 'God of Sneezes' and that's that. This one got sick and needed to be healed, but the Healer trainer accidentally touched it while he was trying to calm it down."

Of course he did, that look said. And to be fair, saying the story out loud made it all sound pretty ridiculous.

"We woke up one morning and every time anyone took a step, a different sound came out. Yells and squishes and the phone ringing and all that. Nuclear explosions, laughter, all kinds of stuff."

"We eventually surrounded the thing, treated it, and the weird sounds got less… but I still needed to craft a cure. That ended up taking something like eighteen straight hours of work. It's basically potions class straight out of Frogwarts. If you do something wrong, you start the whole process over."

I skipped over the part where I had to go out looking for ingredients, and instead encountered the God of Lovers. This culminated in me having several hours of ravenous sex with a long-legged beauty, and grabbed me up the other job title I hadn't told them, and would never: Pleasure Seeker.

"That sounds difficult, especially for a new doctor," my mother said.

"Not easy. And it's magically infused. I needed, uh, help to go through eight hours of potion crafting, so I had my friends keep my mind sharp."

What I didn't tell them was that the girl I'd had sex with, Tara, kept my mind sharp by showing me progressively more and more

arousing sights: her cleavage, belly button, and then more.

"Here's the other thing. Once I went to administer the cure to this god, it touched me and bestowed a blessing on me."

"Of course it did."

The other gods I'd encountered had done the same. The Goddess of the Meadow gifted me with the knowledge of every flower there was in that world. The Lovers made me into a sex machine.

"After that, the administration wanted to send me out away from the main HQ on a field mission. Apparently these sick gods weren't just around the castle, they were everywhere. This involved me interviewing for positions on my team of eleven people."

Dad was nodding along.

"I chose four Guardians, two Rangers," (the ones I'd had sex with so far), "A Bard, a Wizard, a Rogue, and a Sorcerer. Some of these already had their companions, and some didn't. The most important part was that two of them were natives of that world. One was an ice ghost with a bunch of arms, the other one was a gigantic muscle mommy with orange skin and way too much hair."

"Fascinating," my mother said.

"Were they both girls too?" Sarah asked sarcastically.

"As a matter of fact, they were," I told her, and received a hefty eye roll in return.

Once I had my party, there was the small matter of traveling to the tiny town of Glumpdumpkin—

"You have got to be kidding me!" Sarah shrieked.

"Yeah you're going to love this. The two nearby towns are called Flunt-on-the-Rustle and Saxwhacket." Snorts of laughter erupted from the audience. "But we didn't even end up at any of those places. While we were trying to cross a magical lake, it took flight and carried us on our raft for a good twelve hours out of our way. Kind of a lake dragon."

Again, not mentioning the fact that the first girl I'd slept with, and the second girl I'd slept with conspired to sleep with me together in my tent on our journey. Or later, when a possibly-lesbian,

possibly-bisexual girl snuck into my tent in the dead of night and had sex with me several nights later. As a test drive. To see if I was appropriate to share with her girlfriend.

Come to think of it, a lot of this tale is not family-friendly. The parts that are end up being pretty short and not strung together well.

"A flying lake," my mother said in wonder. Thank all the gods great and small for her bringing me screeching back into the story. It would not do to get aroused in front of one's family.

At least I was wearing pants.

"Yeah, and all the wild creatures that were inside it were also flown up in the water. It was insane. Anyway, after it landed, we traveled to the nearest town, which was called Slinktrickle."

"Of course it was," Dad said. He had scooted up to the edge of his seat. I explained how the buildings were all on stilts, with huge platforms surrounding them. Some of those platforms just glommed together, while others had been connected by various types of bridges, from rope to fully constructed wooden walkways. This would be important when things got heated.

"You know how I mentioned that the gods of everything are all messed up?" I asked. "Well, apparently there was a god of wearing clothes."

I stopped and let that one sink in. The bombshell struck a moment later, with mom's nonexistent eyebrows shooting up, and Sarah throwing her hands in the air.

"Do we have to listen to this?" she asked.

"You can return the down payment on the ranch you just bought," my father said, with quiet venom.

"Ugh, fine!" she turned to me. "Please for the love of Pete don't tell me you walked around for the next several days naked."

"Try several weeks," I said.

"Ewww!"

"But it wasn't just me, it was everybody." The four female Guardians, both Rangers (well, Tara had gone back to HQ to get a

medicine that would hopefully keep us from transforming into natives), our female Bard who was absolutely smoking hot, and us five guys.

"Ewww! Super eww! Skip past this part."

The natives of Slinktrickle, strange white and green humanoids with fish tails, had a problem with their eggs being sick. Those eggs all had brown, sticky, soft spots on them that needed healing, and I was the person to do it. So I cracked my knuckles and clenched my butt cheeks, and got to work.

"And they were also due to hatch in the next few days, so I had to get them healed up as fast as possible."

"What happened?" my mother asked, fully invested.

"It turned out to be a mental and emotional affliction. The treatment was positivity, amazingly enough. The eggs responded to positive vibes." More to the point, they responded to the sounds of me having sex with one of their natives, an assistant named Vellenia. Add that to the 'do not mention' pile. "I suggested cheerful conversation, dancing, and singing, but the natives were falling into despair. We had to hurry. After a disastrous announcement with the townsfolk, we had to retreat back to the hatchery, the Guardians had to guard the bridges between the hatchery platform and the nearby others. Some bridges ended up being destroyed.

"So while I was busy making a cure in the hatchery with one other, the rest of the team tore up bridges, kept the townspeople from crossing, and slowly backed up further and further until we were almost completely encircled."

The cure was like essence of positivity. It glowed and sang with a heavenly chorus, and you couldn't help but feel better just looking at it, smelling, it or hearing the distant voices. The only problem was, it needed to be misted overtop the eggs, not drizzled or dunked.

"The only thing we had on us was our mouths. So Cinzia and I got mouthfuls of this cure and sprayed them into the air like we were doing a zillion raspberries."

"I love it," my mother whispered.

“Outside they’d almost gotten to the point of battling. The Guardian in charge had come in and told me we were evacuating to a safe spot, but I refused. We misted the eggs, misted ourselves, and misted the natives when they burst into the hatchery.”

“You mean spit all over them,” Sarah said, making a face. She really was the personification of that green disgust girl from that Disney movie.

“Yep. I spit all over them, and afterwards they threw us a party for saving their eggs.”

“But not dealing with the pants god,” my dad said.

“Ehhh… no.”

“It was just you flopping around all together, dancing around some bonfire above a marsh with a bunch of naked savages.”

“And my team members,” I said. “Don’t forget them.” It had actually turned into an orgy, but that went into the large list of things I didn’t retell.

“Ugh, you’re not allowed to say member when you’re telling this story,” she replied.

My father, bless his heart, laughed for what seemed like the first time I could remember.

“And this is what took you six months to do?” Sarah demanded. Her hands smoothed over her bulging tummy, full of child.

I laughed. “Oh no, that was basically just the first six weeks. I was supposed to have a couple of weeks off after the first two months working as a Healer, but things didn’t work out like that.”

This is Christopher about to spill the whole can of beans.



Chapter 2- Naked Coworkers

In the immediate aftermath of the situation in Slinktrickle, a decision had to be made: should we abandon the town and try to head back to our original intended location of Glumpdumpkin, or should we continue to aid the Slinktrickle-ians in their wardrobe malfunction situation?

Because one thing was clear: we were doing work we hadn't been asked to do. Presumably the people of Glumpdumpkin, a word I will never tire of writing, needed us. The people of Slinktrickle, another word I will have difficulty growing tired of, could function well enough even with the god of clothing sick or absent.

I didn't love the idea of leaving a god under the influence of whatever ailment had taken them. On the other hand, these people didn't seem to need clothing to live.

"We're having this meeting to discuss the pros and cons of staying, versus trying to get back on track," I said, before adding,"among other points of order."

The room wasn't a large one, and we were all fully nude. It was uncomfortable, to say the least. The Marshins of this village had built their domiciles well, but they were small and cozy, and we were ten people.

Drat sat on the dresser, while all four of the human girls sat cross-legged on the bed, with Chrysta hovering next to Larelle, towering in the corner with arms crossed, like a statue to ward off evil. The table had been taken by Trent and Alan, who used the meager cover to not have their junk on full display.

I was, and this fact boggled my mind, getting used to letting it all hang out. Leaning against the door as I was, the cover I'd been afforded came from Tweedle Dee, the vulpetunia Nakamamon sitting rigid before me. Sure everybody who wanted to could just lean to one side and stare at my twig and berries, but I was getting over the

openness.

"We ought to wait until Tara returns," Cinzy said. A lot of nodding and 'hear hear' erupted around the room.

"She could return as early as tonight," I said. "If we start the situation with this god, it could end up being days or longer before it's resolved to anyone's satisfaction. We're cool being naked in Slinktrickle until that happens?"

"The weather's been getting colder," Regina said. "I've been here long enough to know that the seasons aren't what we know back on earth. You could have a week-long fall, a two-week winter, and then a couple of weeks of spring. Or fall could go on for a month."

"Alan or Trent, do you have any way of predicting that kind of thing?"

"No," Trent said. "I do have a note here from Alan that I'm supposed to read."

"S-s-s-s-s-sorry," Alan muttered.

Everybody reassured him his stutter wasn't a problem, he had nothing to worry about, and he was a great Wizard, regardless of his stutter. The attention caused him to blush furiously, and he scratched the back of his neck.

"Read away," Drat said, in his customary wry Drat manner.

Trent read, "I've leveled up enough that I can cast the spell to contact the HQ. That's something I can do daily, so we should prepare reports."

"That's awesome news! Congratulations, Alan," Cinzy bubbled, and Alan went tomato red, having the supermodel gorgeous Cinzy not only pay him attention, not only talk to him directly, but actually *praise* him. I wouldn't doubt steam would've boiled out of his ears if it could've.

"We should probably ask whether we should stick around Slinktrickle or move on," Drat said.

"This is Fletcher's expedition," Chrysta said. The ghostly Nakamamon rarely ever spoke, but when she did, it was like you could feel the chill of winter creeping up your spine. "He will make

the ultimate decision regarding our course of action."

Several of us humans shivered.

"I meant," Drat said, "that we should ask HQ for information on Glum… on our original destination in case the situation there is quite serious."

"More information is better," Trent added.

"That's fine," I said. "We'll definitely do that, and I'll decide based on that info, and your recommendations. Not that it's a democracy right now, but I'll take a show of hands for stay and help out."

I was curious at who would choose to stay in the naked village. All three of my fellow males raised their hands right away.

***

"Yeah, no duh," Sarah said, still rubbing her very pregnant belly. "Of course they chose to stay where they could stare at their naked coworkers all day long."

"And the naked villagers," my mother said, smirking at the idea. "Don't forget the hundreds of nude fish people."

***

The actual reason my family didn't know that made the decision obvious; all three of the boys had just gotten laid at the big celebration the night before. Perhaps they'd guessed. I had too, and with a good dozen of the native Marshins.

Marshins… yet another word I'm definitely not going to get tired of writing down.

Of the ladies, Chrysta raised her hands, several of them. I had too stop myself from snorting a laugh at the idea that the many-armed Chrysta deserved multiple votes. After frowning, Larelle slowly raised her thickly muscled hand.

None of the girls on the bed raised their hands. That also made sense, if I figured everything was about me. If they didn't want the Marshins to have their females come onto me, it made sense that

Regina, Isabelle, Ivy and Cinzy might not want to stick around Slinktrickle.

"It's five to four in favor of staying," I announced, for no good reason, "unless any of the girls who didn't raise their hands have another course of action in mind."

They did not.

"I'll take this under consideration, but for right now, I'm thinking we'll hunt down the malfunctioning god, and get it set right. Without a strong recommend from HQ, that's what we'll do. Drat and Regina, I'll need to speak with you, but the rest of us have jobs to do."

"Me?" Trent asked.

"Priority one is reinforcing the redoubt. I don't think we'll have a repeat of what just happened, but I'd like that option if some god of psychopathic fury pops up and turns everyone into berserkers. Afterwards, I'd like for you to join a pair of Guardians," I said, "or pair up with Cinzy on the god hunt. You are all strictly forbidden from going anywhere near it. If I'm not there, you're dead if you touch it. Please do not."

Trent gulped but nodded, while I goggled at myself and what I'd just said. The charisma I'd just displayed is not something I'm used to. Immediately on the end of this thought is the next one: I hope I didn't piss anyone off.

But then, peering around at all the acceptance on the faces of my teammates, or rather subordinates, it's clear that this warning needed to be given. I hold up my hand, where the shape of a flower is somehow inscribed deep inside my flesh, and it can only be seen under a certain light. "I'm serious. It nearly killed me on my first day because I didn't know what I was doing. Almost everyone here has more experience in this world than I do… but we need reminders."

More nods, along with a light in Regina's eyes I take to be admiration… or horniness. She is an awfully horny Ranger.

"The second order of business that I was hoping to do is getting a read on everyone's stats and special abilities. I'd prefer for all of us to know everyone else's capabilities, in order for us to coordinate on

tactics and defense strategies if things go sideways." We were a group bent on surviving and helping to heal what made the people of this world sick. The people of this world had largely no idea what violence was in the first place, so there was no reason to hold cards close to our chests. We should never have been at odds in the first place.

Drat's feet slapped against the floor. "Uh, no thank you?" He went to stride out, but I called after him.

"I have an ability called Healer's Resistance, so if you ever end up poisoned or under the influence of a status effect, especially if you've touched a god, I can make it so the affliction is easier to resist and leaves quicker."

Drat paused on his way to shut the door. He turned, pursing his lips. "I'll keep that in mind."

I'd hoped that this would convince him that sharing was caring and he needed to grow a pair and trust us, but apparently not. He left without another word.

You can order him to stay, Larelle said, directly into my mind. *He is your subordinate on your expedition. You are the leader.*

I shrugged this off. The moment I stopped being a good and friendly part of the team and brought down my iron fist, I'd start getting back shoddy work. They'd cooperate only as much as they had to in order to satisfy the orders. Right now, Drat was searching for the cause of the egg sickness, and he was convinced it had something to do with an incredible surge of anger, but the townsfolk Nakamamon hadn't wanted to talk about it.

If I forced him to play nice, I doubted he'd be doing this job so willingly.

"Rogues," Ivy muttered. "I'm sure you had a reason to bring one along, but I tell ya, they're all like that. Every single sneaky one of them."

I nodded. With that done, I went through my list of special abilities, including the new one.

The non-sex abilities, of course. I wasn't about to tell them all I

could get a deep view of their kinks and deepest desires by touching them.

"I've got an ability that doubles my Token expenditure for class-related tasks," I said. It was something I thought everyone had, but I'd been wrong. "After that, I can spend Durability to resist the need for sleep. This I'll be using when I craft the next cure. The one I told Drat about is called Healer's Resistance. High resistance to all damage types, and reduces durations of long term damage. I can pass it on by spending a Token. Then there's Healer's Breath."

Ivy sat up straight.

"I just got this one after administering the cure, and you're going to like it." Maybe they wouldn't. After all, I basically had to kiss them to make it work.

Healer's Breath

(Special Ability, Uncommon, active)

Make a Treatment check with Affinity (or spend an Affinity Token) and breathe on the target in order to administer a temporary treatment for any damaging ailment. The target is healed by 3-18 hit points over 6 seconds. Symptoms of the ailment are reduced in intensity by 50% for a day. May only be used on a target once per day.

This one was big. First, it didn't require a Token to be spent, which was good. Right now I didn't have any left. Second, it didn't require me to collect, prepare, and mix ingredients into a salve, unguent, potion, or anything else. The treatments didn't take forever to make, but this was much faster.

"Nice," Cinzy said.

Also, Ivy had gained this ability after we'd had sex just two days ago.

Last, I added in a dash of my highest attributes as well, though they were all fairly even.

attributes:

Affinity 5 (0/5)
Durability 6 (1/6)
Ingenuity 6 (1/6)
Likability 5 (0/5)
Physicality 5 (3/5)

The new class was ramping up my Likability and Durability, while Healer mainly gave me Ingenuity. The result was a pretty even spread.

Next to each statistic was how many tokens I had remaining… not many. I'd spent them all on the latest cure, and resisting an ability Cinzy used to get me to abandon the cure.

We went over the abilities of the Guardians first. All of them had **Stalwart**, which allowed them to resist being influenced by social rolls and psychic powers. Several had **Fierce**, the opposite version, which gave them incredible skill bonuses for intimidating others. An ashhole named Blake used this on me when I first arrived at the HQ. Christa and Isabelle also had **Quick**, which made them extremely fast for a short time. Larelle and Ivy had **Sturdy**, a buff that gave them a bunch of bonus HP and strength for a short time. All four of them had **Interpose**, the power Isabelle had used to generate a magical blue tower shield once upon a time. It was largely what they'd used to keep the Marshins from dealing them violence.

"We're given the choice of offense or defense," Isabelle explained, "but the HQ people strictly regulate the choice of abilities to the defensive. Anyone who manifests a flaming sword or a purple magic staff is out of the program."

Larelle's magmamander did basically nothing, though it could be coaxed into starting the cook fire each night, or be the cook fire… it looked a lot like one of those huge Japanese river salamanders, except it was patterned with black and red.

I liked that all the names of the Guardian abilities had short, simple names that made sense. It certainly wasn't that way with Cinzy and her Bard abilities.

She had **Viltrayeen's Patented Entrancing Vocalization**, a very fancy way of saying she could be extra persuasive. While Fierce worked very well on a single target, Cinzy's special ability worked pretty well against anyone who could hear her voice. **Atateeren's Superb Ventriloquism** was what she used to put her voice wherever she wanted it, and was the most basic thing she'd received at level 1. After that she had **Courage Of The Allies Supremely Bolstered** and **Energizing and Refreshing Rhythms From The Soul**.

All of these were a mouthful, and roughly what I'd expected: she used her voice or music, and her presence to buff allies or debuff enemies. The last one could provide a stamina or mana recovery rate boost, and she claimed to have just received it from a recent level up.

The contrast, just in the names between Guardian and Bard special abilities, was delightful to me. I had a good laugh over it. You could've just as easily called them **Entrance**, **Ventriloquism**, **Bolster Morale** and **Stamina/Mana Boost**, but Bards didn't work like that, apparently.

Regina had powers to enhance her senses, which was a revelation to me. No wonder she'd been able to find me so easily in the anti-gravity HQ castle. She also had powers to travel more easily, faster, and more stealthily.

"I can speak with animals," she said.

"Pffff," Ivy said. "Anybody can speak with animals. You just use baby talk and pet them." She scratched at Muppin's gigantic stone crown extending off the back of his gigantic head. "Iddn't that right you widdle cutie patootie? Who's the best widdle pack mule? That's right, you are!"

Muppin leaned into scratches, as he always did, his rocky eyelids grinding closed and a placid smile appearing on his face.

Regina folded her arms and cocked out a hip. "They talk back."

"Mmm-hmm," Ivy replied, and tipped her an exaggerated wink.

After that, she had several arrow shooting abilities, which she

didn’t typically use. These included an arrow that could split into many, an arrow that was guided directly to its target, and an arrow that exploded on impact.

“We could use the exploding arrow as a signal flare though,” Ivy suggested.

“That’s a good idea,” Trent said.

We’d seen Trent at work a lot already. Trent had the ability to sense through rock, and he had a lot more mana for rock manipulation and shaping than Alan did. Alan could do everything but just a little. Trent could do one thing, and a whole lot. We’d seen him create tunnels, float rocks, shift the earth to push our huge and heavy raft into the lake, and create an entire igloo out of stone in mere minutes.

Garnet, his crystalline football of a Nakamamon, apparently boosted his mana for earth manipulation even further. Perhaps the most unknown power Garnet had was rapid movement through any kind of earth and stone, and its ability to communicate with Trent over a distance. That made the orange gemstone creature a potentially powerful scout.

“We’ll need that ability, I think,” I said.

It wouldn’t be long.

As for Alan, his abilities ran the gamut. They were essentially limitless in scope, on the condition that Alan could perform the complicated spell. He could teleport himself a short distance, if he ever got the spell to work. He’d already cooled things down, given them water breathing capabilities, and he claimed that now he could make gravity half as effective for a short time. They were calling it feather fall, but once he demonstrated, we called it moonwalk.

“We could’ve jumped off the cliff with this,” Cinzy said, as we all leapt high in the air and bounced around like we were astronauts. Only Chrysta didn’t need it, since she floated a few feet off the ground.

It was discovered, however, that she could float much higher off the ground when Moonwalk was used on her. She seemed to find

this disconcerting at first, but she got used to it like the rest of us.

Alan's other abilities were only limited by our imaginations. He manifested a ball of light that floated around his head. He made a message on a piece of paper vanish, until one of us touched it and spoke a magic word. Disappearing, reappearing ink. He had a spell for comprehending different languages, a spell to make a disc that floated three feet in the air, a spell to coat the area in sticky stuff, a spell to coat the area in slippery stuff, a spell to coat the area in flammable stuff.

This is Christopher being seriously impressed.



Chapter 3- Beast Talker, Pathfinder, Survivalist

The individual conferences I had after the team split to get to work involved first Regina, and next Drat. Cinzy seemed disappointed not to be joining us, and cast several glances back our way before drifting away to join the others and get to work.

Regina took me aside, and we were soon joined by Tweedle Dee. The flower fox rubbed against my leg and I reached down to give him some attention while we talked.

"Ugh," she said.

"What's that?"

"You were so… ugh. I mean I watched you plow through like a dozen natives without stopping. I keep getting wet just thinking about it, and I have to use a rag to keep myself from looking too shiny. I think maybe Isabelle noticed."

I couldn't deny that my body was ready to go and down to fudge literally all day every day.

"Every time I look at you I can see your teeth clenched and you spewing like a gallon all over three of them at the same time. Do you know what that does to a girl?"

"Makes her want to concentrate on doing the best job possible?" I asked innocently.

"It makes her want to take her man aside and get railed until she loses her ever-loving mind!" she all but shouted, then ducked her head.

"A little louder for the people in the back." I laughed at her embarrassment and bent to give Dee some belly scratches when he rolled onto his back, tongue lolling. Several tails thumped on the wooden decking again and again.

We planned to meet up after I found and spoke with Drat. I needed to investigate the marsh over where it turned out of sight and a stand of thick forest blocked our sight.

"That's great, a great plan," she said enthusiastically. "Then I can suck your cock and get your monster back inside me before I explode."

I arched an eyebrow at her, and took several deep, cleansing breaths. "I would say keep it in your pants, but… ugh. Anyway, we are strictly forbidden from talking about this kind of thing in public until the god has been found, treated and cured. And that, my dear, is an order. Like an actual order." I couldn't really handle walking around with an erection. It would mean answering some pretty awkward questions.

Her smile faltered and her face became serious. "My dear?"

"What?" I asked.

"You said 'my dear.' Am I your dear?"

It had just come out, apparently. "Uh… is that… something you're okay to be called?"

She considered. "I think… yes. Yes, it's okay. I like it."

"Well then, my dear, you're only allowed to get me hard when we're not surrounded by people."

"As you wish, *my dear*," she said, but I caught the telltale sheen of moisture between her legs and the way she was shifting her weight back and forth again and again. I also noted that she was thrusting her boobs out at me.

I wanted to take a little time to get my body under control, but I had very little time before Drat appeared. Regina went off north to the part of the marsh yet unexplored, and Drat was simply there the moment she had gone.

I tried to handle this without jumping a foot, but jump scares are always in horror movies for a reason. They work. "You shouldn't do that."

"You going to order me not to?" he asked, with only a touch of the snide.

“I confess, no, I’m not into forcing people to do things.” I wanted to be an easygoing guy. I hoped to have things go smoothly. I wished all these problems wouldn’t constantly crop up. But then life got in the way.

He nodded, saying nothing.

“Look,” I told him, “I know it’s only been a few days, but have you got something for me?”

Drat had been doing his job as Rogue, which was ferreting out the information we were after. In particular we needed to know who had caused the eggs such distress that they were infected. The mental malaise I’d had to cure with concentrated happy-juice had come from somewhere. I knew it was a concentrated blast of rage and frustration. Drat was in charge of figuring out who, or what type of Nakamamon was doing this sort of thing, or if it was the presence of yet another malfunctioning god.

“We are going to want to tread really lightly, boss,” he said, looking around. “These folks have good ears, even though they don’t look like they have ears at all.”

We locked eyes, and both looked at the planks below our feet. The third transformation form was called the Marshmellow, a wonderful and innocuous name… or was it? Though they were a very chill species, they could be in the marsh directly below us.

“Okay,” I said. “But you’ve got something.”

He nodded.

“Do we need to be worried about the people here?”

He shook his head. “They’ve already seen that our team are the good guys. You did the egg saving bit. We’re good in their eyes.”

“It’s not a god, because you’d have just told me, and then we could handle the problem of finding it and curing it.”

He nodded slowly.

The confidential and sensitive nature of his behavior right now meant the perpetrator was human. Possibly a friend of one of our team members.

“All right. Write it down then… we’ll have Alan cast his

disappearing reappearing ink spell on the information and get it passed back to HQ. When we're further away from prying ears, or when I'm free, you tell me."

Drat nodded.

Regina wasted zero time in showing me exactly what was about to happen when we went out ranging. Walking ahead of me meant she grasped each butt cheek and gave it an encouraging waggle, making it bounce just a bit more than before. She was also thrusting out her hips like she was a model doing a naked runway walk.

She'd glance over her shoulder and grin, even while Tweedle Dee pushed his head into her palm for ear scratches. I got into it, too, reaching forward for a couple of nice butt pinches.

"Well if you're going to be like that," she muttered over her shoulder, and stopped suddenly. This led to me crashing into her backside, and her giggling. It wasn't long before my body started responding to this treatment. The next time she halted and I collided with her butt, I was fully hard.

"Already?" she asked quietly.

"In my defense, somebody's got herself a really sexy butt," I said.

"You keep talking like that and you're going to find yourself getting very laid, Mister Fletcher," she said, and rubbed herself back and forth on my now insistent erection.

Dee was set on watch, and when Regina spun to face me, it was with fire in her eyes. All the joking fell away. She had a blush on her, making her skin the same color as her hair. It had flushed down the sides of her neck, and over the top of her chest, where she was heaving.

We were just out of sight when Regina fell to her knees in the grass and appraised my cock.

"God, Fletcher," she sighed. "How did I get so lucky?"

I didn't know what to say to that, so instead I just ran my fingers through her hair and smiled. I was still having trouble knowing exactly why any woman wanted to bed me… though less trouble

than the first time. Now that I'd had so many partners, it was starting to make sense: the emerging muscles, the disappearance of the fat, and one hoped my winning personality had a little something to do with it.

With my cock in hand, she licked at it from root to tip, then spent some time bobbing her head back and forth. With my increased Girth, she could no longer take more than a few inches before bottoming out.

Gasping, she pulled back and licked down lower. "You're way bigger than before, Fletcher."

"Should I apologize?"

"Definitely not," she muttered. "But… if you get any bigger… it's going to start hurting. Some positions already hit too deep."

What a compliment.

Regina kept going, making obscene noises and humming deep in her throat. She seemed entranced by the act, like she had slipped out of normal thought and into an unconscious or meditative state. Like she could suck on my cock forever, if necessary.

She was getting better, too. I could tell she was using more lip and tongue action than previously, extending her tongue out on the downstroke. It felt forking amazing.

Eventually I twined my fingers in her hair and tightened them to give her the indication that she could get up and let me return the favor. When she continued, staring up into my eyes and the corners of her mouth curled up into a hint of a smile, I hissed through my teeth.

"Now," I growled. "I want to be inside you now."

"Attaboy," she purred, and lay back.

I was down between her legs in a flash, slotting my cock down and dragging the head back and forth over her well-lubricated slit. It seemed a lot smaller now, facing my larger size. She started wriggling and moaning before I'd even pushed in.

"Please," she begged. "Don't make me wait. Fork me, Fletcher."

She even pulled back on her legs, until they were parallel with

her torso. This was also obscene. The head pushed down, met resistance, met more resistance, and just when she was gritting her teeth and groaning in a mixture of pleasure and pain, it popped inside.

"Oh my goooooooods," she moaned. "Ohhhhh…"

Now, I didn't know that if you have the same partner, her body simply adjusts to fit your size. I had never had the same partner over and over. It wasn't part of my reality to have so much sex your partner feels different. I hadn't gone away on vacation or gotten into a fight, having sex withheld for long enough that her inner walls changed size and went back to incredibly tight, after having had daily sex. So when I had to force myself in there, it was just normal now.

Entwined Ecstasy asked if I'd like to spend a Token to enhance our shared pleasure, and I gave my consent.

It was like fireworks were going off inside me. Now every shift of position and every smidgen of movement felt like going at it full bore for minutes on end. It was like putting on glasses for the first time and seeing across the street, except with my sense of touch.

Regina came immediately. Her body hunched down into itself several times, over the course of about ten seconds, and her eyes scrunched closed in a familiar way. Mouth opening, she half repeated my name several times while the spring of her orgasm wound tighter and tighter, and finally popped.

"Flet… Fletch… ohhhhh Fletcher… fuuuuhhhhh…"

As for me, her pussy wrapped around the head of my cock and squeezed to either side. I froze, because I could feel my own spring tightening, ratcheting up bit by bit as her body attempted to milk me.

After several full body shudders and some lighter aftershocks, I started to really give it to her.

"Wait…" she begged. "Fletcher, st... st-ohhhhh—"

I couldn't stop. Even though I could see her spring winding tighter and tighter again, after only a few seconds, I needed to feel

her squeezing every inch of me. I couldn't stop my hips without a gun to my head. Several more strokes and I was halfway inside her. That did it.

She came again, harder this time. Hard enough that she let go of her legs and flopped down bonelessly. The shakes and shudders were just as intense, and actually seemed to go right on.

This time I didn't stop. I just grabbed onto her hips, bent down to try to distract myself by getting my tongue all over her glittering boobs, and sawed in and out of her.

I was almost all the way embedded in her vice-like tightness, listening to her sputter and beg for mercy without being able to articulate full words.

I was doing this. Me, Fletcher, a limping punching bag for jokes and fists all throughout high school, the pity party for anybody that actually cared, was rocking a beautiful woman's world.

Regina's mouth closed and her teeth clenched yet again, and her eyes shot open. The spring had somehow wound down again and tightened to such a degree she couldn't even make a sound. A tiny squeal emerged from between her teeth.

She came again.

I couldn't hold on longer after her third rapid fire orgasm. Sure I had Stave Off at level 2, but the absolute treasure trove of heightened pleasure from the special ability overcame it.

"I'm…" I tried, but couldn't get the word out. If I spoke, I would dump a torrent inside Regina. Instead of speaking I pulled out of her tight confines, which pulled right back at me, and barely managed to get out of her before exploding in climax. I think she had another micro-orgasm right at the moment I popped free.

And then the dousing began. The first ropes hit Regina on the face, startling her, but subsequent blasts coated her boobs and then her stomach. She goggled down at what I'd done to her.

"Fletcher…" she breathed in wonder, then locked eyes with me. Her mouth worked open and closed, and she spent some time dipping a finger into what I've gifted her, swirling it around. "Holy

gods, Fletcher."

"I know," I said. "It's a big change." And then, sheepishly, I asked her, "Can you… go again?"

"You bet your giant cock I can go again," she said, though she didn't sound as confident as the words she spoke.

Twenty minutes later, I did to her back and ass what I'd done to her front, and all but covered her. Her head was buried in her arms by that point, and she was essentially just a ball of continuous orgasm. The shuddering and breathless crying hadn't stopped once I'd started rubbing the head up and down over her over sensitive slit.

After our little tete-a-tete in the scrubland beyond the marsh, Regina and I got cleaned up, then actually did the investigation we had been planning. While I checked through my gains, hoping for level 15 in Pleasure Seeker, Regina got to work being a Ranger, and did some ranging.

Unfortunately level 15 wasn't on the menu, yet. I'd need to do even more delicious deeds before that happened.

Entwined Ecstasy: *You have entwined with Regina Hampstead. Your relationship status remains unchanged presently. Your relationship level has changed to* ***passionate pairing****.*

Pleasure from intimate acts between ***passionate pairing*** *is boosted very strongly using* ***Entwined Ecstasy****.*

Your ability ***Wild Lore III*** *has advanced to* ***Wild Lore IV****. Alternatively, you may replace* ***Wild Lore*** *with* ***Beast Talker****,* ***Survivalist****,* ***Archer****, or* ***Pathfinder****.*

Do you wish to replace ***Wild Lore****?*

"Oh wow," I breathed. Passionate pairing sounded pretty serious. Then again, I'd called her dear. The sex was getting more comfortable, with me reading her more easily, giving her more pleasure.

Beast Talker would influence my relationship with non-humanoid Nakamamon found in the wild. It wasn't clear on the

exact bonuses, but promised me a greater affinity with newly discovered Nakamamon. Based on the fact that I'd had a near-death experience from spooking a metallic bird, this sounded pretty great. **Survivalist** would probably give me skill bonuses for finding or making shelter, finding water, and producing food when away from the villages. Another excellent choice. The last option, **Pathfinder,** would increase speed and also make difficult terrain easier for me to navigate. Similar to the boots I had called **Golightly**, from the god of footfalls.

Archer was right out. I didn't want to do violence in this non-violent world. I could probably conceive of uses for a bow that weren't killing something, but there were other abilities with wonderful effects I didn't have to shoehorn into usefulness.

I was tempted to see what **Wild Lore IV** meant and how it would aid me, but honestly, I hadn't made any use of it. **Beast Talker** and **Pathfinder** both sounded better. I could give the Golightly shoes to one of my teammates in the latter case. However, making friends with the local flora and fauna was even more tempting.

I instructed the UI to give me **Beast Talker**, then had a look over the result.

Beast Talker

(Special Ability, Uncommon, passive)

Your Likability is considered +3 when dealing with non-humanoid Nakamamon found in the wild. You gain a Persuasion skill of +3 with them as well. Your Identify is considered +5 when used on a new species.

Unlike **Wild Lore**, this one started out at Uncommon rank. It was a huge leap forward in power level, and was passive. I wouldn't have to succeed any checks or spend any Tokens to use it. Free bonuses all the time, score.

Dee joined us, sniffing around at the grass and the into the brush where we couldn't hope to fit. The place was mostly a snarl of dense

shrubbery that was basically impassible, but the flower fox navigated the whole thing like he was straight out of one of those liquid cat videos.

"You think he's going to transform?" I asked.

"I sure hope not!"

"Why not?"

"Usually the transformed ones aren't nearly so cute and cuddly. I like a fluffy and adorable companion pet, honestly. Those bright eyes, that silky coat. If he ended up as a humanoid…" she shuddered. "He'd be a furry."

I laughed. "Yeah, that would be the worst."

She shrugged. "I guess it wouldn't be that bad. He would be a kitsune, I guess."

There was a yip from somewhere inside the brush, and Regina started.

This is Christopher not liking the sound of that.



Chapter 4- Token Gains

Regina turned a look on me I'd never seen before: dread. The certainty that things were going to be bad.

"That's not good," she mumbled.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Dee ran into trouble of some kind."

Her eyes suddenly flared with bright green energy, and when that magic faded, they were the brownish gray of tree bark.

"I'll be right back," she said, and her glittering naked butt vanished into the brush.

There was no way she had gotten in there without a special ability of some kind. I'd just selected **Beastmaster**, but what I needed right here was more like **Pathfinder**. I momentarily cursed myself for picking the wrong ability… but of course I couldn't have known. I just had to believe Regina knew what she was doing and could handle this without me trying to barge through thick scrubby bushes.

Two minutes of fretting and waiting passed before I heard a panicked shriek.

For the first time since this vanishing clothes situation started, I really, seriously regretted the nudity. Every other time I'd been able to enjoy being in the buff, watching boobs and butts jiggle and wobble. Right now, what I needed were my tools and my ingredients. It was so awful not having them, and knowing I was going to be needed in a big way, very soon.

Worse, I didn't have any Tokens left.

Regina came back after five of the longest minutes of my lifetime. Every second was filled with worries and fears. Dee had fallen into a crazy deep hole and there was no way to get him out. Dee had spooked some creature like the one that had nearly gotten me once

upon a time, and it chopped him a good one. Dee had just had a run-in with a god we didn't know was there.

I didn't expect to see the fox at all, but he came out of the brush in Regina's arms. Several flower petals dropped off of his tails and ears as he came through the clinging brush. His body was limp, but the rapid rise and fall of his little chest confirmed that he was breathing, and therefore still alive.

Instant thankfulness and relief washed over me.

Regina had a look on her face I never want to see again: devoid of hope, but also filled with grief. She had already counted him out of the fight permanently.

In Tweedle Dee's jaws was what appeared to be some fabric. And it was glowing.

It was time to put on the reassurance.

"Heyyyyyyyy!" I said in my soothing, cheerful voice my dad used to use whenever I was sort of hurt, but not too hurt. "Hey there you two."

"Fletcher you have to help him," she sobbed.

"Of course, of course. Put him down," I told her with extra extra gentleness. She knelt and did as she was told. "Now, we need a stick to help keep that thing from touching us… and it has to get out of his mouth, okay? Before I do anything, that's gotta go."

She obeyed robotically, with shock setting in quickly. Seconds later, she handed me a stick, and carefully pried open Dee's jaws without touching the glowing piece of fabric. I scooped it out of there with the stick with extreme care.

It was a sort of old school t-shirt: long and laced up with a leather strip that was tied at the neck. What would you call that… a tunic?

The very first thing that needed doing was **Healer's Resistance**.

Healer's Resistance II

(Special Ability, Uncommon, active)

I- You may spend a Durability Token to resist damage from any source. Long term effects are reduced by 75%. Onsets of all diseases, venoms, poisons, or other afflictions are tripled, as are intervals. Lasts one day.

You may spend an Ingenuity Token to gift this ability to a willing target for one day.

II- You may spend a Durability Token after taking damage from any source. You gain a level of Resistance to that source permanently.

I still had a single of Ingenuity and Durability after handling the egg situation, and I spent them immediately. This reduced the damage, reduced the duration, and lengthened the time between taking more damage.

Now more than ever, I needed to replenish Tokens. Before tomorrow.

"I got you," I told her, and reached for **Healer's Breath**. Sure I was glad to have it, but you also hated to need to use something like this every time. I have to believe police officers would be much happier to not have to do anything… no crime would just be better.

But I bent down and breathed into Dee's little orange face all the same, hoping that my lack of Affinity Tokens wouldn't mean his death.

Healer's Breath

(Special Ability, Uncommon, active)

Make a Treatment check with Affinity (or spend an Affinity Token) and breathe on the target in order to administer a temporary treatment for any damaging ailment. The target is healed by 3-18 hit points over 6 seconds. Symptoms of the ailment are reduced in intensity by 50% for a day. May only be used on a target once per day.

The Affinity Check came with Treatment (potions) somehow, and out of the 8 ranks, I ended up scoring an incredible 4 successes. I

breathed out another deep breath, this one full of amazement and a soul-shattering relief. Dee was going to live.

Color immediately flooded back into Dee's fur, and he took a deep, shuddering breath. Regina's cry was so heart wrenching that I choked up as well.

"He's going to need that every day," I said. "Until this thing is cured… I assume it's divine."

I peered down at the tunic—or the really long shirt—and tried to will the Identify skill to work. That, plus Affinity, gave me 2 successes. Not enough to do the trick, apparently. The check said it was a Difficult check, meaning 3 or 4 successes necessary to get the ID on it.

It took some time for Dee to show signs of cognizance, but eventually he got up and shakily to his feet and went immediately into Regina's arms. There, he licked Regina's hands, then curled up and went immediately to sleep.

***

Without Tokens, I wouldn't be Identifying, Diagnosing, Treating, Developing cures, or eventually Administering them. None of that was going to happen until I got some Tokens back.

With that in mind, I spent the rest of the day asking around for how to do it. Alan said it was a meditation situation, and Trent agreed. Both of them had done it under the guidance of their trainer back at HQ. They offered to sit down with me and get some meditation on, and I accepted. This led to Larelle and Chrysta also finding us, asking what we were up to, and joining us.

You must clear your mind and open your soul, Larelle told me. *It is vital that no distractions disrupt you. Your breathing is everything. Every inhale, and every exhale.*

And hey, I tried. I closed my eyes and opened up what I thought was my soul. I had done a lot of magic already in this place. I'd used a lot of abilities, I'd been able to begin sensing magic through smell, and I'd even begun to see it in certain instances. There was a sort of

third eye in the center of my forehead that reacted every time I went to use abilities.

There was another… I don't know, a core of power down in my abdomen. Sometimes it felt like it was in my freaking balls. Like a power generator buried in my body, the power went up throughout my body and into my brain, then out through the middle of my forehead. Usually.

So I will say this: I tried my best. I visualized the battery of power in my stomach, visualized the potential there all flowing up and into my third eye. I steadied my breathing. It was so steady. I could've fallen asleep if it hadn't been for the need for Tokens.

This… did not work.

Hours later I didn't have a single Token back. My hips and legs were numb and sore from sitting criss-cross applesauce, along with my lower back. And I was frustrated.

See, there were problems. Regina was insensate. There was a glowing holy item we'd very carefully brought back across the marsh and to the village, and the villagers did not like this thing to be among them, so we relocated it to Trent's stone redoubt. Tara had been gone for days, and there was no word on when she would be getting back.

If I'd made a different choice of Wizards, our Wizard could have opened a chat line directly with the HQ, but I'd been so drunk on sex and enjoying the time with Regina and Tara, that I simply accepted their recommendation without really thinking things through. Never mind that I wasn't aware of the communication problem, I was responsible for these people and it was my ignorance that was causing problems. So I was back to my old earth way of blaming myself, taking on all the responsibility, whether it fell to me to take or not, and that was clogging up the Token replenishing pipe.

I had to do better.

Unfortunately, this anxiety crushed any chance of getting Tokens back through clearing my mind, because my mind was far from clear, and I wasn't any good at this.

I went to bed safe that night, but generally disgruntled.

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Vellenia approached me the next day, after we had had our meeting about next steps. I'd taken a break to wander around the village and get my thoughts together, and the Marshin fell in step with me.

Outside, the air was getting even cooler, and I wanted to be able to wear, um, anything.

There was a tunic infused with godly power, but putting it on would likely kill me within hours, if not minutes.

I hadn't noticed she was beside me initially. The marsh spread out before me, on the edge of town here. Here and there, her fellow Marshins paddled those shallow boats. Some of them were meeting with their next version beings, the Marshmellows. The mermaid-looking Nakamamon hefted themselves onto the sides of the boats or simply held themselves up on their enormous eel tails.

I was so caught up in my own thoughts and the surroundings that I nearly jumped on spotting her.

"Savior of the eggs," she said, giving me the title the rest of the village had. They'd been so excited they'd jumped in bed with me, one after another.

"With luck, this fall will turn immediately back to spring," she said.

"That happens?"

She nodded and took my hand, lacing her smooth and cool fingers into mine. "Sometimes the cool weather lasts only a few days… other times a few weeks."

I peered around to see whether or not any of the other Corps members had seen us. Well, basically everyone knew I'd had sex with Vellenia already, so it wasn't a *huge* deal. I could practically see Regina salivating in my mind… and since we'd been in this town for several days, I had an excellent mental picture of her nude, so I knew what it looked like when she salivated. And got really aroused.

“That is wild. I sure hope so, because we don’t know where this nudity god might be. I would love to tell you we know where he is, but there’s a story about an emperor with no clothes. Everybody just ignores the fact that he’s nude because he’s powerful. Me? I know I haven’t got any clothes on. No lie here.”

She threw back her head and laughed.

“Your levity is most wonderful,” she said.

I was so glad she hadn’t been exposed to much earth levity, because I was far from an expert.

“Fletcher, could you accompany me out to that stand of brush?”

She pointed out away from the platform we were on. Five minutes later we were on one of their wide-bottom boats, with Vellenia using a pole to push us this way and that.

“I am aware that you have attuned enough to my world that you may bond a Nakamamon,” she said quietly.

I went still. “Oh? How… are you aware of that?”

“Your third eye and your core have opened to the magic of Dorfialtos.” As if that explained things. “As such, if you were to bond a Nakamamon, they would be required to accompany you on your adventures.”

***

“What’s a Dolph Realtors?” Sarah asked, then blinked at herself. “Wait, what?”

“He said Doric Freeloaders,” my mother said. “He said Doreen… feels… toes. What the heck? Why can’t I say Door Feelings Strohs?”

I chuckled, more pleased that my mother wasn’t laying around the house trapped by her own weakness, but rather vibrant with the need to know what else happened.

“For some reason we can’t say the name of the other world. I don’t truly understand it, honestly. The natives can say… that word. We can’t.”

My father just sat there with a smirk on his face and a knowing

glint in his eye. “Go on, son. You were about to bond with a magical creature that was nude and female?”

I spluttered in embarrassment.

***

This was one of those times where I channeled my father. I needed to shut my yap and listen, so that was precisely what I did: let the old noodle work overtime processing while your ears pick up vital clues to help you figure out what the missing puzzle pieces. There is a great value in silence and listening, and not just because I had absolutely no idea what to say.

“I have longed to travel beyond the reaches of the marsh and my village,” Vellenia told me.

“I think,” I told her, “that you don’t need to bond a human in order to leave your village in search of the wider world.”

“I would like to accompany you, Fletcher,” she said, “and as your bonded Nakamamon, we can do much more than simply mate.”

“I have to confess,” I said, “I don’t know a whole lot about bonding, about how it’s done or the advantages of doing so.” Chrysta and Ivy hadn’t bonded Nakamamon yet, and Ivy mentioned she just wasn’t interested in having a pet following her around. Chrysta hasn’t talked about a lack of bonding because one, she hardly ever talked and was scary, and two, she was a Nakamamon herself. Larelle had her magmamander. I didn’t need to know how the rules might be different.

Once we reached the stand of shrubbery, the boat slowly ran aground and she hopped off before extending a hand out to me. I didn’t need it, and I was thrilled with that fact. My balance was better, my legs were hurting less, and I had stamina to go farther and do more than I ever did in my teens. It was like aging backwards.

“Marshins are fairy aspect and water aspect,” she said, and I took her hand. “You receive abilities and resistances based on those two aspects.”

The shrubbery was a good ten or twelve feet high, and some of them were vines tangled around one another, tipped with purple balloon flowers. Some of those were still big purple balls, while other had popped open into star-shaped blossoms. Other bushes sported clumps of berries of all sorts of colors. All of them were swirled with two colors: red and gold, white and sky blue, orange and silver.

"And," she said quietly, "if you agree to the bonding, we will be able to mate much more frequently."

She squeezed my hand and turned to face me with a winning smile. The large eyes, the strange hair and the no nose all served to make her simply adorable. The perky breasts didn't do much to lower her cuteness factor, nor did the supple butt I kept watching wiggle this way and that as the humanoid creature walked.

She stopped. "What do you say?"

I blinked several times at her. "I say… okay! Let's do it!"

She jumped up and down several times, making those perky breasts bounce. Finally she jumped onto me for a crushing hug, wrapping her legs around my waist and burying her face in my shoulder.

"Fletcher! Thank you so much! You won't regret this, I promise you."

This is Christopher doubting I would regret it either.



Chapter 5- Bondage

The innocence and purity that pervaded her so completely were adorable and I would be thrilled to have that in my life. Although I had secretly hoped for a dog or a fox Nakamamon to stroke or pet, having a gorgeous female that only wanted to have me railing her day in and day out was actually a trade up, not a tradeoff.

She got down and faced me, beaming, holding both my hands in hers. "Here! Let's do it here!"

"Now?"

She nodded vigorously, so cute I smiled, then closed her eyes.

"Reach for the mana within you," she said, so I did. My mana had refilled with ease in the day or so after curing the eggs, so my resources were topped up. Once I had that sixth sense clenched in the magical fist that was my control over my internal magic, that beatific smile grew even more. "Now wind it into my mana," she said.

Mana wasn't easy to see or hear or feel. I was only getting the hang of it. That said, something blue and shimmering and barely perceptible was expanding out away from Vellenia just as my own green white mana was doing for me.

When they connected, my breath left me in a rush. I felt both a great pressure in my core, an electric zap of pleasure that got me hard instantly, and a rush of sensation up into my head I had never felt before, like my brain was being cupped by two large hands.

"Ohhhh," I said, shivering.

"Wind our mana together," she muttered.

I didn't know how to do this, exactly, but it didn't matter much. She took the lead, drawing the thread back toward herself and around mine. I tried to urge my own mana to replicate this, and found sweat popping out over my forehead. It worked, but it was

slow, and it was difficult. I got at least one Affinity check happening in the UI, but I had no Tokens, so I couldn't do anything but test my magical skill.

The overwhelming sensation of arousal grew. The feeling like someone was gently massaging my brain inside my skull intensified. The electric tingling up my extremities only grew. I tried to focus on my breathing and the spot in the middle of my forehead that controlled the flow. Vellenia' s breath caught, and she twined her fingers with mine, even as her mana thread wrapped slowly around my own.

Finally, the UI made the announcement.

Congratulations! *You have bonded with a Marshin.*
You have gained the following:
**Water resistance*
**Water breathing*
**Glamor resistance*
**Dazzle*

I wanted to access these things and figure out what they meant, but Vellenia was kissing me. Her lithe, light body was pressed against mine. I had my hands running up and down her back soon enough, feeling her tongue dart into my mouth.

"Hmm." She was humming into my mouth, and both of her small hands were already encircling my hard shaft.

"Fletcher," she moaned. "I want to mate with you every day. This feeling you give me…"

Here the UI gave me the opportunity to spend a single Token to enhance our pleasure, but I was nearly out. It did not, however, give me the option to spend 2 Tokens to induct her into the fold, using **Entwined Ecstasy**. It would've given me a power from her, and her one of mine. The bond must've prevented this.

She rubbed her nipples up and down my torso, but I already had my hand between her legs. The Marshin anatomy was usually a

smooth expanse of nothing, but once she got aroused, genitals appeared. Meaning her slit was blossoming like a flower, petals slowly opening at my touch and breath rushing over the side of her neck.

"Yesss," she urged me on.

I bent low and scooped her up by the backs of her thighs. I didn't truly understand what Nakamamon were at their core, but I did know she weighed practically nothing. I hoisted her up and brought our faces level without any effort. She kissed me even more deeply, moaning and humming while her tongue licked at my lips and did battle with my tongue.

Out under the brisk air, we gradually warmed her up by rubbing her over the top of my shaft.

"I love this, Fletcher. Your human mating apparatus, it is clearly superior to all of my kind, and the others of your kind. Though I have only seen a handful, yours is by far the best."

"You can call it my cock," I told her in a husky tone.

"Your cock," she breathed, like I'd just given her a secret word only available to the two of us. A shiver went through her body. "Please, Fletcher, I need your cock again. I feel empty without your cock."

Okay with such an adorable creature saying that, it sounded far dirtier and alluring. She snaked a hand down between us and lined the head up. Now when I lowered her an inch, we were both forced to groan. Vellenia' s body accepted me, inch by inch.

"How is it… so big…" she asked.

I didn't answer, and instead started moving her up and down the length of me. It wasn't even fully inside her yet, and I had to be careful not to hurt her. I stroke down, slowly inching deeper and deeper until she winced just slightly each time. And each time I pressed deeper into her tight confines. The whole time she shuddered and trembled with the pleasure, clinging to me tightly.

At around the seventy-five percent mark, she threw her head back and cried out in orgasm, before nearly shaking herself off me. I

had to put her down on the cool grass to continue plunging down into her depths. Meanwhile, I bent and latched onto one of her nipples, licking it in circles. I know this drove her wild, because her hands gripped me frantically, and the tension of a coiled up orgasm waiting to strike again wound down and down toward another.

Finally, she came again, her whole body arching back and sliding against mine yet again.

Down below us was a thickly muscled tail containing a few swim fins. It didn't waggle like a cat's tail would, but simply swished back and forth. Now, when I got up on my knees and turned her on her side, Vellenia's tail was within reach. Why not?

The moment I stroked it her mouth went wide and her eyes shot open. Clamping down on me with her pussy, she went through several convulsions I thought might not even be orgasmic. She bucked time and again, seeing and saying nothing.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

"Oh… oh Fletcher. Oh… wow. I cannot describe… wow."

"So that… was good?"

She nodded with eyes closed. "It was astonishing." Then she got on her elbows and looked up at me. "You have no tail. Can I provide you with such a sensation?"

I had never played around with trying to get to know my prostate, and had no real interest in it. Regina did, however, learn a trick.

I took her hand gently in mine and pressed her fingertips against my sack. "If you rake very softly here, or squeeze with just a hint of pressure, you can—"

She did it perfectly, staring up at me with absolute innocence in her expression.

"Mate with me, Fletcher," she said with a sultry look on her adorable face. "Give me your seed."

Consequences and the future were the furthest things on my mind at this moment. I pounded down into my new Nakamamon with renewed vigor, pushing her body forward and back by several

inches, causing her to jiggle and groan. At the same time she played my body like a concert pianist. She somehow just knew how to stroke, and where, and when.

In minutes my orgasm had risen up, and now it cracked the dam. If I didn't pull out this moment, I'd fill her just as full as I'd done with Tara all those times.

"Give it to me," she whispered.

"I—"

"Inside me," she begged.

I gave in and seeded her, loving the way her eyes rolled back in her head. Sensation overflowed, poured out of me in earth-shattering bursts. "I can feel it," she told me. "It's so warm."

For a time, we lay in the grass, a tangle of limbs, sharing warmth. Eventually she ended up lying fully on top of me, her butt and tail pressed against my softening cock, her back on my chest. Her head rested comfortably in the hollow of my neck. She placed my hands over her boobs and cooed softly without speaking.

She gave me the opportunity to inspect the UI's announcement regarding our mating.

Congratulations! *You have bonded with a Marshin.*

You have gained the following:

**Water resistance*

**Water breathing*

**Glamor resistance*

**Dazzle*

The descriptions were simpler than other special abilities.

Water resistance: You are immune to water aspect damage from your bonded Nakamamon. All water aspect damage has a 50% chance to be reduced to zero. Any water aspect damage taken is reduced by 50%. This functions identically for status effects derived from water aspect damage.

Water breathing: You may breathe water as though it were air.

Glamor resistance: You are immune to fairy aspect damage from your bonded Nakamamon. All fairy aspect damage has a 50% chance to be reduced to zero. Any fairy aspect damage taken is reduced by 50%. This functions identically for status effects derived from fairy aspect damage.

Dazzle: By concentrating, you may spend 1 Affinity Token to hypnotize a target with 7 automatic successes. This is a contested Likability + Persuasion roll, and the target knows they have been hypnotized. While under the effect of hypnosis, the target will be much more truthful and compliant, though they may not be ordered to harm themselves or others.

I pondered these new abilities while holding Vellenia.

The resistances were in line with what I'd come to understand regarding Nakamamon bonding. That guy in HQ had immunity from his own bonded Nakamamon's lightning attacks, which was how I'd learned about it. This meant Isabelle and Trent both had stone or earth resistance, and Larelle had fire resistance that caused her to hand me a living ball of lava. Regina had… I would have to ask if there was a beast resistance, or if she had a plant aspect resistance. Cinzy had Glamor resistance like mine, and Tara must have the same but for air damage.

Now that I saw these, I'd be willing to wager Tara had a way to keep herself from instant death falling damage. Emergency wings, flying squirrel skin flaps made of pure magic, or just sparkly stuff that cause her to fall slower. Something of that nature. In that way, Tara's might be the best of all. She could jump off a cliff and float down without having to worry at all. Heck, she might even be able to fly with mana or something.

By far the ability with the most potential for abuse was Dazzle. It screamed corrupt abuse of power at me, and I vowed never to use it unless I was directly under attack. This sounded almost identical to what Fairy Poppins had tried to use on me, to get a truth serum effect so I would answer Cinzy's questions more truthfully.

No thanks.

The water breathing, though… I would definitely find a way to use it, if I could bring myself to do so. All I'd need to do was attempt to drown myself, no biggie.

Though it was cool, the sun shone down from high above, in a sky so blue and limitless, you'd only be able to see anything close in Montana, or maybe the Mongolian steppe. Sparklers that looked like shooting stars twinkled down, glittering with colors. We lay like that for some time, her wiggling against my cock with glacial slowness, and running her fingers over my hips while I massaged her fantastic breasts.

I would've gotten hard again if she hadn't suddenly sat up.

"Oh!" She said. "I meant to show you this. That was the main reason for coming out here."

She once again took my hand and led me around the clump of strange bushes.

"You need this," she said.

I frowned, knowing what I was looking at but not entirely sure what they meant. "I guess I do."

There, in the midst of a patch of dead grass, lay a pair of shining pants.

***

My mother was enrapt. "What was with the pants?"

Sarah's eyes were narrowed. She wasn't okay with the truncated version of events concerning Vellenia, whereby we'd just bonded with mana, hugged it out, then gone to see the glowing bell bottoms. She seemed to have a sense that I'd just amputated part of my story, and she could see the ragged stump of events.

"First I have to tell you about the game stats and the abilities," I told them. "Then I'll get right back to the pants situation."

"Yes, the water breathing sounds fun," my father said. "Terrifying but fun."

"Why terrifying?" Sarah asked, sharper than she'd probably

meant.

I held up a hand. “When lava will kill you all your life and then suddenly you’re told you can swan dive into lava and it won’t kill you, you don’t just immediately do a cannonball into a volcano.”

Sarah had to concede that this did make sense.

“Tell us about the abilities,” my mother said, “just a bit, then you have to go back to the pants.”

I have stats in the other world. I told my family, and they didn’t get it. “Like a video game. I don’t know how the system came into being, but when I got there, I got to put points into my stats. There are Physicality, Durability, Likability, Ingenuity, and one for magic called Affinity.”

Hard eye roll from Sarah.

“It started out not too complicated. Every time I need to do something difficult, or someone tries to influence me socially, there’s a check involving my stat level, and the appropriate skill if I have it. It seems like, for every three levels of attribute and skill, I usually score a success.”

But stats also had Tokens associated with them, a finite resource that only replenished every five levels in your class. Unfortunately, it was always really tempting to spend Tokens for automatic successes, or to lower the difficulty of checks.

“You make this so difficult to believe,” Sarah said.

I held up my hand and manifested a Physicality Token. I used these the least, so the enormous gold coin that manifested between my thumb and forefinger wasn’t a huge loss.

Sarah’s mouth dropped open and her eyes bulged. Both my parents were agog as well, eyes fixed on the glittering golden coin some half inch thick and three inches across. One side had a raised embossing of a buff human torso with arms up, flexing bulging biceps. Unreadable otherworldly runes also ringed the token.

“Is that sleight of hand, close up magic? Are you a magician?”

I fought the urge to roll my eyes, and instead beamed out a big smile. “Physicality Token. This is pure magic, and it gives me the

opportunity to do feats of strength I couldn't otherwise. It'll dissolve into sparkles and smoke in the next twenty-four hours." I tossed it to Sara.

This is Christopher knowing what works for Dick Johnson works on my sister as well, and this is Christopher cringing from that sentence.



Chapter 6- I’m So Close!

In the immediate, I got a new Achievement.

Achievement: *Bonded a Nakamamon!*

Congratulations on bonding your companion. How deeply the bond goes will depend on your relationship to the Nakamamon.

You have gained access to the bonding menu. In addition to the rewards you gained from the bonding itself…

Reward: You gain +1 Free Token

The reward of an extra Free Token was an incredible gift. Having a cache of Tokens I could spend at any time on any action was a huge boon none of the others shared, so far as I knew. Tara had confessed to only having 1 Free Token. Of course, it took a near death experience for me to get the reward…

It was important for me to go over my gains after the—ahem—party that saw me having sex with something like a dozen female Marshins, followed by Regina. I would have been sore and had difficulty walking for maybe a full day after so much repetitive boning, but this was a magic world and my body was enhanced by my levels.

To my family, I simply told them there’d been a celebration of our curing the eggs, and I gained levels. It wasn’t a lie, exactly, just an omission of events no one wants to explain to their mother. How many people have ever discussed orgies with their parents? I’m going to go with practically zero, throughout the entire history of people.

And speaking of which… not that I would ever tell my family, but I’d just leveled up three times in my second class, Pleasure Seeker.

Congratulations! *You have reached level 14 in Pleasure Seeker!*

I was still 11 levels away from ranking up from Initiate to whatever came next. It would be Apprentice in Healer, but I didn't know about Pleasure Seeker. Maybe Sexpert.

I chuckled.

The trainers back at HQ, Rus, Allie and Rainer, had all explained things changed at level 25, and changed again after level 100. I was trying not to get too ahead of myself, but when you leveled up three times after one wild sex party, you start to look forward.

I also knew that, after level 12, I could officially bond a Nakamamon. This caused a surge of excitement to well up within me. Yes!

What would I pick? Something fiery, so I could work on my cures without needing to borrow Lanelle's Magmamander? Something that could fly like Tara's Slitherwind so I could travel quickly to the places I was needed? Something adorable and cuddly like Tweedle Dee? Something with healing powers, the way Cinzy's fairy matched and enhanced her Bard powers? Or the way Drat's companion helped him stay even stealthier than he otherwise would be able to? The way Trent's gem thing helped him scout beneath the earth and extended his earth magic capabilities? Something completely different, like the gigantic pack beast Muppin? The possibilities were literally endless.

I had to shelve it for now and concentrate on how I would progress.

Each level up brought with it specific bonuses, like in the most popular tabletop RPG in history. Sometimes I got to spend them how I liked, and other times I was just assigned a specific ability.

Level 12: +2 skill points

Level 13: +1 Durability

Level 14: Ability Upgrade: Blissense

Just like that, I'd blown past my Healer level. In one sense it was gratifying, because getting upgrades after having sex was absolutely incredible. In another way it was a little disappointing that I was

doing more philandering than healing. But I wasn't about to look a gift horse in the mouth. I would saddle that baby up and ride it, because I was becoming an expert at riding.

I could be down with upgraded **Blissense**.

Blissense II

(Special Ability, Rare, Active)

I- By touching a target and spending an Ingenuity Token, you gain insight into their deepest desires, kinks and passions. Your target also gains bits of insight into you.

*II- Any time someone within 30 feet of you has desires pertaining directly to you, you may spend an Affinity Token to reveal who, and gain a glimpse into the thoughts in question. *Note: these desires need not be sexual in nature.*

Okay… I was initially disappointed with this. The first one had only really been usable in two instances. It was great if I wanted to get a deeper look into the mind of a partner I already had, like Regina. I could therefore understand that she was open to basically any and everything, didn't want to have a long-term exclusive relationship with me, and was only really looking to shack up in order to have her world rocked from time to time. She didn't want to marry, not at the age she was, but she did want to explore and have a lot of orgasms.

The second tier ability seemed, on the surface, like an invasion of privacy. I couldn't see using it… until I considered the note afterwards. This actually could be a really useful ability. I hoped I wouldn't need it.

The other bonuses I'd gotten were great. I wanted more skill points, because everyone wants more skill points all the time forever. I had been pretty liberal in spending them on the Qualities from my new class, because they transformed my body into sex god status. I didn't regret this, but I always wished there were more skill points to be had.

Unfortunately I just wasn't going to get the skill points flowing in

like candy, like I wanted. Well, you can't always get what you want. Another life lesson my father had given me that proved out time and again.

Now, I had also leveled up as a Healer, by producing and then administering the cure to the ailing Marshin eggs. Those little cuties were going to hatch today or tomorrow, and I swelled with pride knowing I'd done my best to get them healed up, and fast.

Christopher Fletcher
Healer - Trainee 12
Pleasure Seeker - Novice 14

attributes:
Affinity 5 (0/5)
Durability 6 (0/6)
Ingenuity 6 (0/6)
Likability 5 (0/5)
Physicality 5 (3/5)
Free Tokens: 1/7
Unspent attributes points: 0

Healer Skills:
Diagnosis (physical 3, spiritual 3, magical 3, mental 3)
Treatment (potions 3, salves 3, tinctures 3, elixirs 3, unguents 3)
Develop cure (swarm 3)
Develop cure (small 3)
Develop cure (unique 7)
Administer Cure 8
Pleasure Seeker Qualities:
Girth 1
Load 1
Stave Off 2
Length 1

Other Skills:
Identify 2
Hiking 2
Cooking 1
Persuasion 1
All other skills unranked
Unspent skill points: 6

Special Abilities:
Hard At Work II (Uncommon, Passive)
Wild Lore II (Uncommon, Active)
Eagle Eyed II *(Common, Passive)*

Healer Special Abilities:
Healer's Endurance (Common, Active)
Healer's Resistance (Uncommon, Active)
Healer's Breath (Uncommon, Active)

Pleasure Seeker Special Abilities:
Blissense II (Rare, Active)
Post Sharing Clarity (Rare, Passive)

Divine Gifts:
Floral Knowledge (Rare, Passive)
Pleasure's Bounty (Secondary class)
Entwined Ecstasy (Legendary, active)

"Back to the pants," I told my family in the real world.

They were, obviously, a part of the god we were hunting. Or the god's pants anyway. I didn't know if the god had melted there and left the pants behind, or it had shrugged off all its clothing and this was one of several pieces. As I stared at them, one thing was clear: they were divine, and if anyone touched them, they'd die a rather quick and painful death.

Not good.

I'd have to run a diagnosis. Without any Tokens to speak of.

Actually…

I understood that Tokens came back with time and meditation. I was terrible at it. But there were other ways…

***

When I returned to the village on the boat with my new bonded Nakamamon, I realized some important conversations needed to take place.

"Vellenia," I said cautiously. This time it was my turn to pole the boat. She sat directly beside me and clutched onto my leg, sliding her hand up and down the inside of my thigh.

"Hmm?"

"You do know that I have, eh, mated with some other women, right? In the ongoing sense."

"Of course."

"Oh… does that bother you?"

"Why would it? You will need human companions to mate with, since we aren't compatible."

That… was a surprisingly pragmatic take on things. And good information to have, us not being able to produce offspring. I was so glad thus far to be surrounded by women who weren't jealous monsters. Hopefully they wouldn't be jealous of monsters, or more specifically the monster I'd just bonded. I certainly was glad they chose me over Alan, Drat or Trent, or just existing and being single. In the same way, I was really lucky they didn't quarrel over possession of me. This was no different.

Tweedle Dee was sitting curled up in a ball on Regina's bed, shivering and beginning to look faded out. He was surrounded by the team, peering hopefuly at him, and then at me. Another dose of **Healer's Breath** got him looking better again, and Regina cooed and stroked him the moment he opened his eyes.

“This is Vellenia,” I told them, “in case you hadn’t met her before. She is not my bonded Nakamamon!”

A lot of staring happened then, though Chrysta and Larelle, Alan and Trent were quick to offer congratulations. Regina, Cinzy, Ivy and Isabelle also did, after a period of awkward staring with mouths hanging open. Fairy Poppins, in a move surprising everyone, flitted up off Cinzy’s shoulder and zipped out the door.

“We discovered a pair of pantaloons,” I said, and soon led them outside to where the pants had joined the tunic. I gestured grandly.

The pants had the same golden glow coming off them, though the tunic was summer green beneath, and the pants more of a rusty tree trunk hue.

They were definitely divine and a hundred percent off limits to everyone except myself. They were to be guarded at all times, and Cinzy was soon off with Vellenia to let the natives know these were here, and not to touch them. Regina declined to stay in bed with Tweedle Dee, and instead chose to range out around the village, where Trent would help her by looking inside the earth if necessary. Together, they would search for any other items of clothing that glowed, and were surrounded by the glowing goop of what was likely a liquefied god.

I put Chrysta on guard duty first, took Larelle aside, and let her know that I would need for security. Luckily for us, none of the clothes were moving. Both garments just lay there, glowing with energy. Larelle assured me she would make it so, and left Ivy and Isabelle to me.

“We have a problem,” I told them. “I can’t seem to make meditation work to get Tokens.”

They nodded.

“I’m close to level 15 in my class.”

More nodding.

“Are you interested in helping me get to level 15 in my class? Obviously there’s a chance whatever ability you got from me will level up, which helps all of us.”

This part was the cutest. Isabelle blinked and said, "But we're not hurt… how can you heal us to get to level 15 if we're not injured?"

Ivy snorted.

***

This was how, ten minutes later, I was nestled in between two beautiful women, one of whom was definitely bisexual and the other one on the fence about being a lesbian.

"Thank you," I muttered to the two of them.

Ivy's body crawled with slowly moving tattoos that hadn't been on her body when I first met her. Only her face and hands were still uncovered. The rest had slowly swimming fish, skulls breathing fire through their mouths and eye sockets, snakes and spiders and Dr. Seuss characters gallivanting around her body. Isabelle, by now, was almost completely swirled with pink and sky blue, with that now-familiar silver filigree having sprouted tiny flowers and leaves. Most of the silvery bits of her skin swirled into spirals or curled around her limbs. It all made for a surreal situation.

Ivy snorted laughter. "We haven't even done anything yet."

"Except agree to fulfill every straight guy's fantasy," I retorted.

"That is fair," Isabelle admitted with a giggle. She was far less squirmy against my side than Ivy.

"You don't get to thank us until you've reached your next level," Ivy said, sliding one toned thigh up and down my leg. Her hand drifted down and cupped my junk.

"May I ask you a question, Izzy?" I asked.

"You just did, you lunk," Ivy responded. She got up overtop me and slid her whole body over mind, nestling the junction of her thighs just below my hip, and dipping one nipple into my mouth.

"It's okay," Isabelle said.

In between licks, I asked, "Is it okay for a lesbian to have sex with a guy?"

Her cheeks reddened. "I just— there's a— Ivy said— I mean, you

have to unders—”

“I got this,” Ivy said, giving me her other nipple to suck on. “There are plenty of straight girls who go through experimental phases, just like there are totally straight guys who end up giving a blowjob or having a finger up their butts… or going all the way. Then they decide it’s not for them. Just like there are lesbians who never got with a guy and decide maybe they want to, or gay guys who get talked into trying it out with a girl. All these things happen… maybe sometimes they change who you are on a fundamental level, but a lot of times they don’t.”

Isabelle wasn’t reacting well to my question, and I realized belatedly it had been a terrible time to probe really sensitive area.

“Hey,” I told her, “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean—”

“Change positions,” Ivy declared, and slid over Isabelle. On the bed, I was no longer the cream filling of this sandwich cookie, Izzy was. She turned to face Ivy, and the two began making out. Hands clutched every body part, until Ivy’s hand reached behind her and pulled me up to where I was spooning her girlfriend.

From here, I was able to caress and fondle Isabelle while the two of them kissed like lovers. Still feeling like a bit of a dolt, I tried to get back into the groove with butt squeezes, breast caresses, neck licks and kisses, and then getting my hand down between Izzy’s legs.

Ivy had beat me to it.

She did, however, grab my hand and press it against Izzy’s slit, before reaching further and grasping onto my shaft. A couple of quick strokes was all it took to get me fully hard again.

Rubbing the whole deal like Regina had shown me, I soon had Isabelle moaning and humping back into me, and forward into Ivy.

“Now,” Ivy breathed, “you’re gonna get this big cock inside you. And I’m gonna lick your clit the whole time.”

“Ohhh,” Isabelle moaned. “Ohhhh fudge.”

I had one finger inside Isabelle when Ivy’s finger joined mine. “There’s a spot on the inside, at the front… right here.”

Isabelle nearly head butted me when her whole body convulsed in ecstasy. She let out a loud moan of appreciation.

I copied Ivy's motion and got a similar result, while the tattooed Guardian slid down her girlfriend's body and began to run her tongue over my hand and between Izzy's legs. Isabelle could only pant and groan now, head thrown back against my shoulder. Her ass humped against my midsection in a way that drove me crazy. I wanted nothing more than to get all the way up inside her, right now.

An instinct made me stop that impulse and keep pressing against the g-spot, driving Isabelle wild with pleasure. Ivy's rhythmic tongue work certainly did the job too. In minutes, Isabelle's body writhed in climax.

Moments later I felt Ivy grip me again, and guide my cock into her girlfriend. The way was tight, but she was plenty lubricated from all the foreplay.

"Oh… oh my gods," she muttered, and humped back into me.

"I'm here, babe," Ivy said, sliding up the bed and kissing Isabelle yet again. Fingers once again danced over the place where we had joined, first pressing against Isabelle from the outside and tightening even more against my cock, and then drifting down to lightly rake nails over my balls.

In time, Isabelle would have a second orgasm, and Ivy would pull me free of her in order to get all her juices by sucking my cock deep into her mouth. She was in the middle of telling Isabelle how good she tasted while she mounted me and had half my length inside her.

"Oooh," she moaned. "I needed this."

I couldn't disagree with that. It seemed like ever since I'd started down this path with Regina, my cock had been drawing me back toward sex over and over. Any day I didn't have it was a bad day. Any day I did have it was acceptable, and any day I had it more than once was perfection.

Ivy rode up and down, and I watched in fascination while the tattoos writhed over her body and my shaft appeared and

disappeared into her. The flex and relax motion of her thighs and the six pack abs was hypnotic.

We ended up having sex for several hours. Ivy beckoned Izzy to join her, and the two continued kissing while Ivy got her fill. Switching positions allowed me to pound Ivy from behind while she nestled in between Isabelle's legs and ate her out. Isabelle still seemed unsettled, and wouldn't make eye contact with me, but it wasn't an issue. She still spread her legs for me and accepted me inside her while Ivy rode her face. Having sex with a girl while her girlfriend slowly ground her pussy into her face was something I never thought I would personally witness.

I ended up blasting off all up Ivy's stomach and boobs a good half hour later, with Isabelle laying dazed.

"That's a lot," she marveled.

I just grinned down at her. "Thanks." Part of me wanted to watch her lick and swallow it. Whether Ivy could read my mind or not was up for debate, but she grabbed onto my ass and slid down so she could get the head in her mouth, and suck the lat drops off of it.

Her eyes widened in surprise.

This is Christopher wondering for the very first time what his jizz tastes like.



Chapter 7- Like Nothing We've Ever Seen Before

The bright sunshine blunted some of the bight of the brisk coolness of the fall day. All around me, the blue, blue sky shimmered in places with various other colors, like someone had put an iridescent layer of plastic over it. Not a cloud could be found anywhere. Distantly, the cliff still towered well above most of the village and the marsh, obscuring the way we've come. I kept checking it, hoping to find Tara flying around on the back of her wind snake.

Although it was not to be, I had still gotten level 15 in Pleasure Seeker and watched as all my Tokens topped up. Most encouraging of all, I now had 7 Free Tokens.

"I've missed you guys," I whispered, looking at my character sheet in wonder. Even better was the message regarding level 15 of Pleasure Seeker.

Level 15: +1 free attribute point, +1 skill point

The attribute point could go in so many places, but I considered Ingenuity probably the best fit for it right now. As for the skill point, I couldn't be sure. It would sit with the skill point pool for now. More than anything, I wanted to add it to the Pleasure Seeker Qualities. I found the lovemaking and cries of ecstasy so relaxing and right. They were what I could look forward to after doing the work that needed doing.

First up: spending a Durability Token to use **Healer's Resistance** on Tweedle Dee. The little guy was starting to look bad again, and the moment color flooded back into his coat, Regina visibly relaxed. I like the relaxed and cheerful version of Regina over the concern and helplessness that came from her staring down at an

ailing Nakamamon.

Now with my tools and ingredients, it was easier to whip up a little something to treat Dee.

"I think an elixir will do it," I told them both.

Elixirs are harder to make, but last longer.

Soon I set to the task: getting the oil heated, choosing the herbs, roots, flowers and ground bark necessary for this one. Lucky for me, I hadn't used up any of the magical cure ingredients when working on the mental cure for the Marshin eggs.

I needed henge grass and mist lilies again, but for a longer lasting type of treatment, you couldn't use jaln oil.

"Vel?" I asked.

Vellenia appeared in an instant, sinking to her knees by my side and cooing over the convalescent flower fox.

"How may I assist you, bonded one?"

Regina's mouth quirked up in a hint of a smile.

"I will be using phraxseed oil for the treatment, but I will likely need to extract some more and keep it for future treatments or cures. Does your village have a press for this?"

She tapped at her chin in a very cute manner, then held up a finger. "I will inquire, and return to you."

"Smashing," I said.

"Smashing?" She repeated. "Is this not a euphemism for sex? We are not engaging in intercourse presently, are we?" Her eyes narrowed. "It seems highly unlikely."

Finally, Regina's veneer of misery cracked and she let out a bark of a laugh.

"No, Vel. Back on earth, smashing also means 'that's great!'"

"Ah. Smashing, I will inquire about the phraxseed oil, after which you may have free time for smashing."

She peered at us, huge cute eyes looking back and forth between Regina and I for confirmation that she'd done it correctly. Regina continued snorting laughter, then slapped her hand on her thigh. I

joined in too, shaking my head.

"She's a treasure," Regina said.

"You're not going to get the two of us in bed," I growled at her. "Not right now."

Honestly though, if I had sex, there was a nice bonus of +2 to all my stats from **Post-Sharing Clarity**. We actually could start my job off with a bang.

"Do you really want to…" I trailed off.

"Want to what?" she asked with a sparkle of amusement in her voice.

"There's a stat bonus if we get freaky," I told her, glancing around to see if we were alone. Aside from a snoozing Dee, the place was presently empty.

"Ooohhh," she said.

And this was how, just a few heartbeats later, Regina had my member in her mouth and her hands roaming all over the insides of my thighs. I goggled at her, and she grinned around my hardening member.

"Just go ahead today," she whispered, "right in my mouth." and plunged back down onto me. She worked backwards and forwards, slurping at me and gasping for air after a good ten or twenty seconds of slurping and sucking.

There was nothing to be done for this, except get my fingers twined into her scalp and watch her go.

"Or on my face," she added, in between long licks. She jacked on me while licking up the entirety of the shaft, then back down. She was getting better at this. She'd been pretty clumsy at it the first few times, though I'd been a complete novice as well. Every bit of attention was both mind-boggling and seriously arousing. Not to mention pleasurable. To go from my hand to a girl's mouth was… euphoric. Unbelievable. She wasn't just doing this act, she was down on her knees before me, staring me in the eye until the moment I could paint her face if I wanted to.

I groaned and she smiled. She looked so proud of herself.

"You're getting… better at this…" I told her.

"I want a lot of practice," she said, then dove down.

It was so awesome, having someone totally dedicated to my pleasure. I made a mental note to dive between Regina's legs next time and lick with abandon.

With no reason to stave off my orgasm, I just stood there and relished in the attention and pleasure. It built, watching her slide her mouth up and down my shaft. It built, feeling her tongue wriggle against the underside. And it built, from the attention and dedication she was showing me.

And then it erupted. I growled out a warning and received a pleased coo before she accepted the first few bursts into her mouth. Then she pulled off and jerked me to completion, taking all the rest on her face.

Holy heck.

When I was finished, the UI dutifully informed me that I had a good long while before the +2 on all my stats ran out.

"Thank you," I told her.

"Thank *you*," she replied, and swirled her finger around the mess I'd left on her face, then licked at what she had scooped up on her face.

I carefully gathered ingredients and adjusted the height of the cauldron over Larelle's Magmamander. Then, with my phraxseed oil warming and the beeswax added to melt, I infused the mist lily petals. While they steeped, I ground up some of the willow bark, added henge grass when the time came, and finally extracted the film of yuck that rose to the top.

The time passed in a bit of a daze. I couldn't tell just how much, as I slipped into the trance of creation. I begin to draw on the core through the strange new spot in the middle of my forehead where the mana comes out, and place it down into the concoction before me.

Treatment check: *Elixirs are naturally longer lasting treatment*

options for magical injuries than potions, and are thus more difficult to craft. You have the Treatment (elixirs) skill at rank 3, and the associated attribute is Ingenuity. The check is Difficult, requiring 4 successes. Would you like to spend 2 Tokens for an automatic success?

Total Tokens: 7 Ingenuity and 7 Free Tokens.

Note: This check qualifies for the **Hard At Work bonus of double Token value.*

I considered just tapping on **No**, but was brought up short by the possibility that I wouldn't succeed. Usually it went 3:1, where 3 attribute and skill points equalled a single success, though I'd done better than that in the past. I'd also done worse. This could be one of those times.

I also had +2 on my Ingenuity due to the uh… boost I'd just received from Regina.

"Nah," I said, and pressed **No**. If I failed I could use a Token to retry the check.

The success came out after all, exactly the 4 I needed. In a flash, the mixture went from ink to a bright yellow, bubbling with what looked like carbonation. I soon had the elixir cooling in an aluminum camping mug. When Dee drank it several minutes later, he perked up immediately. New flowers sprang into being around his ears and tail, blossoms I definitely hadn't seen before. Daisies were there, some really odd ones that were called glorybowers, pansies, the list went on. I loved how the Goddess of the Meadows had bestowed upon me perfect recollection and understanding of what these flowers were.

Tweedle Dee was a wonderful Nakamamon, and I shared in Regina's delight at having his tails waving behind him, his eyes alight, and the color back in his fur. Regina hugged me tight yet again, and pulled me in for a quick kiss.

"You can't really…" I trailed off. She could. Even if Cinzy found out… I had plenty of interested female partners already, even if some of them weren't technically on the permanent bedding list. I

didn't, strictly speaking, need to try and add Cinzy to that list. With every addition, I was courting trouble.

Still, Regina and I danced around the building where I had my lab set up, with Dee weaving his way in between our legs, leaping up between us, and yipping in delight.

"That is going to last… a few days," I said, reading the notification from the UI. I bent and gave the little guy some head and ear scratches, avoiding the flowers ringing the base of his ears.

"Let's get to work then," she said, and together the two of them headed out to search for any remaining pieces of divine clothing.

So weird.

"Hey!" I called. When Regina popped her head back in, I told her to take Alan or Trent with them, to search using a mana sense or a spell.

***

I ran the Diagnosis thinking that this god probably had a magical ailment as well. With the sensing stones I'd used with the eggs just days ago from the lacquered wooden box, I unwrapped the first and waved it slowly over the tunic and pants. I followed this with the other stones, carefully re-wrapping each stone before getting the next out, since they couldn't be allowed to contaminate the others.

"Bonded one?"

I peered back at Vellenia. "Hey."

"Do you require assistance?"

"I… guess I could use another pair of hands. Just don't touch these." I indicated the glowing clothing.

Diagnosis check: *This check works with Affinity. This check is Very Difficult.*

Would you like to spend 4 Tokens for an automatic success?

Total Tokens: 5 Affinity and 7 Free Tokens.

Note: This check qualifies for the* ***Hard At Work* *bonus of double Token value.*

This was also a tempting bargain. 12 Tokens seemed like a lot. 8 successes seemed practically impossible for my current level. And then there was the chance, like before, that this might not even be the actual illness afflicting this shirt and pants, meaning that I'd be throwing 4 Tokens in the garbage. Also, losing 4 Tokens until I could hit level 15 in my Healer class or level 20 in Pleasure Seeker… it now seemed like a much more serious investment. Unless I could replenish Tokens with meditation… I'd just have to figure it out sooner rather than later.

"You wouldn't by chance have a whole wealth of Affinity Tokens lying around to lower my difficulty, would you?"

Vellenia blinked twice, before producing 6 Tokens out of thin air. Just like with mine, they appeared out of nothing, jumped and spun in the air, and made that telltale *cla-cling* sound six times in quick succession.

For that cost, the difficulty lowered by 2 and meant I would only have to spend 3 instead. It didn't seem worth it, honestly.

"Uh… thank you." I felt dumb now, but spent my 3 Tokens anyway.

The window that popped up before my eyes was very confusing.

The being you seek to diagnose suffers from a magical malady, as well as another type of malady. Though you have succeeded, the exact type of illness eludes you.

"What the…" I trailed off.

A few minutes later I had Alan's binders full of trading card-sized clay tablets that could be expanded with a spell if you wanted to read the whole thing without giving yourself a headache. I was slowly trying to locate anything in the literature talking about an illness that had more than one type of cause. And I'll be damned if it didn't take something like forty-five minutes, me standing there in the buff with a magnifying glass pressed against my face, looking for the cure to a magical-and-another-type of malady. Alan even showed up, and rapidly started expanding the pages I was working on, onto

the desk, and shrinking down some of the ones I'd been looking at for mental maladies, so they could be more easily read.

"W-w-w-what are w-w-w-w-we looking f-for?" he asked.

"A dual type affliction," I said, not pausing at my work.

In the end… nothing.

I had to go through the Diagnosis process again, and possibly again.

At least I thought I could rule out Physical Diagnosis pretty easily. There would be no running my fingers over the articles of holy clothing I had before me, nor using a stethoscope, though I seriously considered it for a time. Instead I got out the reactant strip, and cautiously placed it down against the fabric of the pants to avoid touching it.

Alan watched, holding his breath. Others had joined me in the building, even though they were supposed to be out searching for other holy… vestments I guess you could call them.

The reactant strip flashed momentarily gold and I dropped it like it was made of hot lava. It didn't even hit the ground before dissolving into gold glittery stuff, which vanished into the air.

This time, the Diagnosis check was at a lowered difficulty: only 4 instead of 6. My Ingenuity and skill gave me 10 once more, and I wasn't confident I could get 4 successes. 2 Tokens seemed like a high price to pay just to hear the UI tell me no, but I paid it anyway.

And the UI then told me no, it wasn't a physical malady. Whatever had disintegrated a god but left its clothing behind wasn't viral or from a sword slash.

The nature of the affliction is not physical, the UI reported.

It went on to lower the difficulty of the remaining two categories: Mental and Spiritual.

This time, I decided to skip Mental and go to Spiritual. Now, I wasn't even an Apprentice Healer, but I'd been shown the very basics in how to perform a Spiritual Diagnosis. A lot of this came directly from the three points of Diagnosis (Spiritual) skill sitting on my character sheet.

For shirts and giggles, I slapped a skill point into the skill, and was satisfied with it. I now had 11 ranks to use.

"Why not," I breathed, and put another skill point down there.

The information was there now, resting inside my brain. The sensation of it appearing was a warm flow over my brain, like someone had just opened up my skull and poured in a bit of coffee. Not hot coffee, but coffee that had been cooling for a little while.

The information I got was that a spiritual malady could be checked with a number of spiritual tests: one was burning a specific type of incense and wafting it around. This was usually done with a censor. The next test involved sprinkling the afflicted with holy water. Next was drawing a ritual diagram and laying holy artifacts and specific plants down in the diagram, before infusing it with a touch of holy mana.

"I will need…" I muttered, "something called heaven's tears. It's a flower that grows in the shadows of some specific holy sites."

A spiritual sickness involved a degradation of the actual divinity, which I didn't quite understand yet. The mana that made up a lot of these Nakamamon wasn't the same energy or particles as the holy stuff. What it was exactly defied understanding thus far. Wizards were good with the mana side of things, but this spiritual side didn't operate by scientific laws like we were used to on earth.

The diagnostic tests were there in my mind because of the skill ranks I'd just purchased, but the rest of the knowledge was just instinctual. I needed to go through Alan's books to see what else Rainer the Mustache Head man had written down on this topic.

I was interrupted by the appearance of Larelle and Trent. They had a tiny column of stone moving along the floor, and on that stone lay a single glowing sock.

"You've got to be kidding me," I said.

"Sorry, Fletcher," Trent said, understanding my frustration instantly. He had the stone column arrange the sock—which had a hole in one toe—at the bottom of the pants, where it would go if you were about to make a doll or a scarecrow… that had socks.

“I’m going to run the diagnostic,” I said, “but I’d bet we need to find the rest of the clothing to make the cure and administer it. We’re looking for underwear, maybe an undershirt, possibly gloves and a hat. Vellenia, could you kindly ask the Marshins and the Marshmellows to assist in the search?”

The lookey-lous in the room nodded and filed out to look around the village.

“This incense,” I told Alan, “is filled with frankincense, heavenly blue morning glory, and sacred lotus. There are hints of a lot of other flowers here too, because here divinity is real and we don’t really know how that corresponds with earth religions.”

“Wild,” he said, fascinated.

“This will be a serious problem to replicate. Hopefully this is the last time I need to use it.”

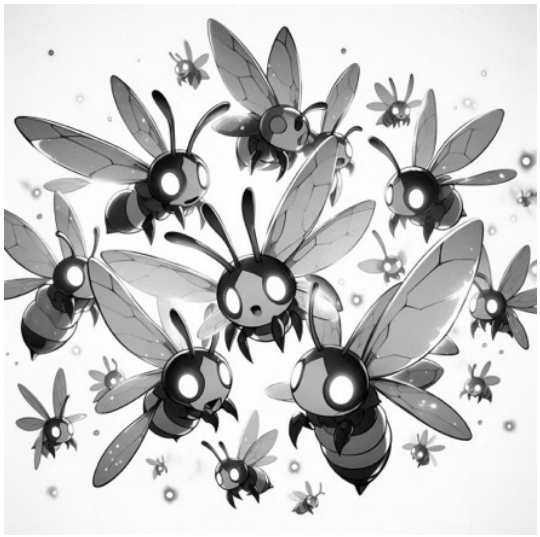
The incense I had I quickly burned, and we wafted it around over top the laid out clothes. I didn’t have a censor, which was just an incense holding ball on a chain that you’d waft around in a church. I’d only ever seen them on the internet.

Oddly enough, the pungent smoke seemed to congeal around knee height, over a foot above the clothing. A lot of it just drifted away and diffused around the room, leaving a thick aroma that wasn’t pleasant to my nostrils.

What was left was an incomplete 3D rendering of a humanoid form… made of smoke. Hovering over the assorted clothing.

“Whoa,” Alan said.

This is Christopher wholeheartedly agreeing.



Chapter 8- Angels From Heaven, Made of Jelly

Well that cooked it; we were dealing with an entity that was both magically and spiritually sick. I still couldn't 'pass the check' and get information out of the UI until I'd done the other spiritual diagnostics, but that much was clear: it was a dual type. Just like Vellenia was a water and fairy aspect.

I ran the mental diagnostic test just to be sure we didn't have some sort of weird trifecta of ailments, but with nothing to respond to me, there was no response. At least the UI didn't make the check difficult, and I passed it without having to spend a Token.

I hadn't dealt with this kind of thing, obviously, because nobody had. At least according to the record Alan had brought along.

"Are you able to contact HQ?" I asked Alan.

"W-w-w-w-w…" he started, then grew frustrated and held up a finger. "Ev-v-very day, one time."

"Once a day, got it. Today, you're going to ask about a cure for magical and spiritual illness in gods to Rainer. He's the mustache headed man in charge of the Healers."

Alan snickered. He knew exactly what I was talking about: with bristly mustaches for eyebrows, and a big bristly mustache that ran around the back of his head. And that wasn't even counting Rainer's actual mustache, which looked like roadkill taped under his nose.

"S-s-s-sure."

He soon left, and I was joined by Vellenia again.

"You require a break," she said.

"What?"

"You have worked hard throughout the evening," she said. "Darkness has fallen, and it is time to put work away. You require

rest, my bonded one."

I nodded slowly at her, and we headed out of the hatchery building, and into the night. The cool night are enveloped us, leaving Vellenia clutching my side for warmth. However, a variety of glowing creatures were out tonight.

"What's this?"

"This is a show that happens once every few days," she told me, brimming with cheer. It was like watching someone watch your favorite movie, the look on Vel's face.

Transparent things like earth animals flew about and pulsated. I used the Identify skill to spy **Glimmerfly**, which were simply flies made of ethereal wisps of color.

Glimmerfly

Second Stage Nakamamon

Glimmerflies appear only briefly in the daytime, as the sunlight overpowers their natural glow, but can charge themselves up with mana once the sun retreats for a truly spectacular show.

Typical length: 1-2 inches (tiny, swarm)

Typical weight: <1 ounce

Gender: unknown

Aspect: holy/creature (bug)

Transformations: unknown -> unknown -> Glimmerfly

***Glimmerfly** has been added to your Nakamadex.*

They came in every aurora color imaginable: neon and electric green, bright pink, and a a silvery glow. Had these things been out all day, and we just couldn't see them? I was also curious about where they'd come from, and what kind of caterpillar or pupa they had before they became these funky butterfly things.

The thing that emerged next was far more impressive: an orca-sized firebird composed of the same sorts of colors as the Glimmerflies. The thing left streaks of light dissipating in its wake.

This one was harder to Identify, but after several attempts I got it.

Glowvern

First Stage Nakamamon

Glowverns, like the Glimmerflies they often appear with, are naturally invisible during the daytime, but can often put on a show during the night. Although they seldom interact with or get close enough to make contact with, be advised that their high concentration of holy essence can be damaging for humans.

Typical length: 20-30 foot wingspan

Typical weight: 25-50 pounds

Gender: unknown

Aspect: holy/creature (beast)

Transformations: unknown -> Glowvern

***Glowvern** has been added to your Nakamadex.*

"Holy…" I muttered.

"Precisely," Vellenia said, clutching me against her body. I loved the way her boobs pressed against my arm. "They have been showing up more and more often."

"Have they?" I asked, watching the glowing wyvern wheel around in the air and circle back around in a holding pattern above the town.

"And… oh, I have not seen these previously."

Descending from far, far up, were hundreds of jellyfish made of similar stuff. They trailed hundreds of long tentacles from their large bodies. They appeared to be no more than bulbous sacks.

While the Glimmerflies and Glowvern simply glittered with power, these jellyfish things pulsed with it. The holy energy sizzled down their tentacles and in some few cases caused arcs of electricity to bridge the gap between them. And these weren't your garden variety, soccer ball-sized jellyfish either. These were bigger than those Portuguese Man O'Wars they have, where the head is bigger

than a person and the tentacles are something like 75 feet long.

"Cute!" Vellenia said.

The bells of these colossal jellyfish had little wings sprouting off them, and halos floating above them. The wings were flapping, and helping move them in the air little by little.

The glowvern was giving these things a wide berth.

Identify confirmed what I'd suspected.

Angelly

Basic Nakamamon

Angelly, or Angel Jellies, are colossal creatures composed of pure holy energy. Though ethereal, beautiful and quite rare, their tentacles can deliver punishing holy damage on any creature foolish enough to get near them. These are especially dangerous to dark aspect Nakamamon or their bonded humans.

Typical length: 70-100 feet (huge)

Typical weight: 40-75 pounds

Gender: unknown

Aspect: holy

Transformations: none known

***Angelly** has been added to your Nakamadex.*

The window in front of my vision listed them as rare.

"We don't want to be close to those when they descend," I told her, and started leading her back toward my tent.

"Everybody inside!" I shouted. "That's an order."

Over on one of the large platforms, the team perked up.

"Cinzy!"

She stopped, some fifty feet away from me on a different platform, with Fairy Poppins bobbing around her head like a tiny yellow lightbulb.

"You've got to call out to Drat. He needs to stay well away from

those things.” It was a guess, but I was pretty certain Drat had a sort of forgettable-ness power, or a straight up invisibility power from his Nakamamon, McCauley Skulkins.

Her voice came like a megaphone positioned directly behind my head. “Drat! Keep well away from all the light creatures. Fletcher thinks they’re especially dangerous. Get inside right— ow!” The sound was everywhere.

She dashed aside as a tiny spark zapped off a tentacle some three feet away, and accepted Ivy’s hand.

It rapidly became apparent that the Angellies weren’t just a slight problem. The moment we got inside, we noted the tentacles passing right through the wooden roofing. The glowing ropes continued to descend through the ceiling toward us.

“Huh,” I said. “That is something, isn’t it?”

“I do not understand your tone, bonded one,” Vel said.

“We have to get lower. Where’s the nearest boat?”

All round us, Marshins were getting the same message. They had been skywatching like Vel and I, and were now heading for cover… after that, they ducked out of their homes and down to the docks. And when that didn’t look safe, many of them simply headed into the marsh. Their bodies were built for a semi-aquatic lifestyle, after all. Some of them were hauling Marshells down with them, or sliding them off the platforms and directly into the marsh below. They’d call out and shove their young off together.

I had to hope Larelle would see this and handle the safety of the rest of the team. They had shield powers, thankfully. That was the closest thing one could get, and I was hopeful they would work against holy energy.

We dashed outside, and I pulled Vellenia up short before she ran headfirst into a lowering mass of tentacles. We dodged around it before hitting a stairwell that descended to the surface level. There, the platform was a dock: with their wide bottomed boats all tied up to posts every four feet or so.

All around us was a chaotic maelstrom of movement. Most of the

Marshins were taking care of number one first, but a few made mad dashes for the hatchery, where their eggs still lay. A few were rising and diving through the waters at blistering speed, pushed on by their powerful tails, until they were directly beneath the hatchery. If there was one thing I could be thankful for, it was the calm determination in the air, rather than the hopeless grief that threatened to destroy their eggs just the other day.

"We'll just get in here," I said, and hopped onto the boat. If I had to, I'd end up with just my nose sticking out of the water. Vellenia did likewise, and we poled out away from where a few tentacles were poking through the raised platform some twelve feet above us.

After a tense few minutes, or perhaps an hour, it became clear that the Angellies weren't going to float directly down to the marsh's surface… or lower. We had about five feet of breathing room, and watched as the colossal jellyfish hovered in place, their mantles pulsating with both muscle activity and tiny lightning bolts of holy power.

Afterwards, I called out, and was grateful to hear Cinzy's voice coming out over the marsh. The natives were fine. She was okay, the others were okay. Only Drat remained unaccounted for.

Vellenia and I watched the glowing creatures in silence in silence. Minutes passed. A lot of minutes. She held my hand, then scooted over and draped her body over mine. She warmed up, and warmed me up, as time went on.

"They are coalescing," she said.

"So they are," I said, and sat up.

The vast majority of the tentacles were drifting over into a few directions. This created vast pockets of safety, for one thing, and that was good, but I knew what it meant.

"Let's follow them," I said.

In another hour or two, the Angellies had gathered in roughly three spots. The one we were closest to ended up being close to the cliff's edge and the cave we had traveled through to get to the surface. We ended up finding a boulder the size of a house beneath

a snarl of vines and thick shrubbery, and when Vellenia dove into the marsh, she came back grinning excitedly. The holy light of the Angellies bathed her face in a holy glow, leeching the color out of the minty green portions of her body.

"Fletcher, come quickly!" She said, and dove beneath the surface again.

***

"And here it is," my father said.

"Yeah," I told him.

"Here what is?" my mother asked.

"The water breathing power," Sarah called from the kitchen. She was now feeding Brayden, doing the airplane over and over again to get applesauce and creamed corn and such into his face.

"How was it?" my father asked.

I laughed. "It… was awful, Dad. Awful."

***

My body's natural instinct, to hold my breath and screw my eyes shut… was gone. The moment I entered the water, I instantly understood what had happened. The mana gave me gills at the sides of my neck and middle back. They just morphed into being. Also, the ability Eagle-Eyed from Tara gave me the ability to see in the darkness. Luckily there was still some illumination from the Angellies, filtering through the shrubbery and the water. It wasn't much, but it was enough to work for Eagle-Eyed.

And besides, the sock was glowing.

Now, I swam the rest of the way through the marsh without coming up for air, back to the village to link up with the rest of the team. The feeling of having water in my lungs-slash-gills was so wonderful and so weird. It tickled a little, but in another way, it felt… good. I can't really explain, because the sensation was like nothing I'd ever felt before. Also, the water wasn't nearly as chilly as it was up in the village.

Up on the docks below the stilts and the building platforms, I met up with Cinzy, Regina, the four lady Guardians, Alan and Trent.

"There's… a sock," I gasped. The water leaving my gills and the air replacing it… also a strange sensation I couldn't easily describe.

"A sock, he says," Cinzy said, as though I was mentally deficient and needed to be talked to like a three year old. She turned to the rest. "There's a sock, everybody."

Regina and Ivy both snorted laughter.

"We know all about the sock," she said.

"You do?"

"Wait, there's another sock?" she asked.

"Uhh, duh. Yes, there's another sock," I said, and described where I'd discovered the sock.

As for their sock, right now, a whole host of Angellies was now clustered over where it had been hidden, buried under some marsh muck. The current guess was a Nakamamon swam by it and with a powerful tail flick, sent some silt and dirt to cover it up.

"It was barely visible," Isabelle said. "You want to see it?"

I went to ask how they'd gotten it back to the lab, and Isabelle held up her hand, manifesting the shield again out of mana. Instead of the ginormous tower shield she'd brought into being when saving me, this one was only a little larger than a dinner plate. The ghostly blue energy contrasted with the dark of twilight, and I could even make out rivets, the space where the thick planks of wood had been joined and covered by an iron band running around the outside. The center had a pointy metal spike—probably metal at any rate, since it was all made of magic—and was held by flexible straps to her hand and forearm.

"Okay… well, if any of you can breathe water, or hold your breath for a long time, the other one is in an underground cavern sort of."

Cinzy took two purposeful strides forward, and thrust out her absolutely stunning set of boobs. And straight out of my favorite fandom of all time, she said the words which both shocked and delighted me. And she did it in the exact voice. It was like Cinzy had

been replaced with a two foot green muppet on the even of his 900th birthday.

"No, there is another."

As it turned out—while Trent went off to grab the other sock without getting anyone killed—Cinzy had spotted a third gathering of the Angellies. Although the big guys were pretty terrifying descending from the sky, they had been extremely useful in giving us the locations of the nudity god's clothes.

She marched ahead with ridiculous purpose, arms swinging and knees pumping up and down in the darkness.

Periodically she'd freeze and I'd walk up beside her to find her smirking ridiculously at me. One eyebrow was raised as if to say 'eh? I look so dumb, don't I?'

"We're close," she said imperiously, and thrust a finger in the air for good measure.

"Somebody else is close," Regina whispered, when Cinzy marched off again and left the rest of us following after for the second time.

"Not right now," I breathed.

"I'm always on the verge," she went on. I gave her a grin and stuck my tongue out at her, then put a finger up to my lips. She probably wasn't the only one with enhanced senses.

Cinzy continued to march along. It must've felt really good to suddenly have a strong and clear purpose. She'd spent the beginning of our expedition feeling like a fifth wheel, and once she finally got a chance to prove her worth, she felt she had mucked it up. For a girl who had never had much in the way of trouble academically, or trouble finding friendly faces, or trouble with her job, she'd spent the last few days being really down on herself. She blamed herself for what nearly happened with the Marshins.

A patch of forest obscured any view we might have had of another group of Angellies. So it was a complete surprise when, after almost an hour of poling out through the marsh and and trekking naked through the dark forest, we began to see a bit of glow diffusing through the trees.

Cinzy breathed out a sigh of relief, probably that she hadn't imagined it. I gave her a squeeze on the shoulder and she returned the gesture with one of those smiles that you never thought you'd get from the most beautiful people on earth in real life.

"Go on," I urged.

"What?"

"You discovered it… go tell us what it is."

And this is how, just a few minutes later, Christopher learns that we've finally found underwear.



Chapter 9- Tighty Whities Of The Gods

By the time we had all the pieces of clothing back in the former hatchery and now my laboratory, I was completely exhausted. Cinzy asked me to meet with her to talk about this. She needed to give the Marshins some kind of news regarding my job.

I wearily agreed, and sent everyone else to bed. Vellenia retired to my tent outside the building, and Cinzy watched that happen.

Her hair was purple, green and gold today, and the patches on her skin had begun to shift places around her body faster. The colors they turned were cycling quicker. It was another reminder of Tara and her mission: to reach HQ, get more of the pills that stopped us from absorbing too much mana, and get back to where we now were. The only problem with that was she'd left without knowing which village we'd eventually find. It was two problems in one: Tara was part of the team and needed to be here, for one. We needed those pills before something unknown happened to us from all the mana, for two.

"Hey!" she said quietly, but cheerfully, and put a hand on my arm. "You did great today. I'm starting to think you're more of a Bard than I am."

I smiled, and tried not to let the tiredness show. I knew she needed reassurance about her place on the team, and she needed my help to do her job.

"You did great," I told her. "Exactly what the team needed… and you sent Fairy Poppins off on a mission to follow those other angel jellyfish."

She smirked. "Angellies… awesome name."

"Here's what I can tell you about the cure: almost nothing."

She frowned, so I took her into the hatchery building that now served as my laboratory. I had herbs and plants drying, hanging from the rafters, other plants and algae growing, mushrooms cut up into cubes and drying on workspaces, and on one table, the clay tablets with the various cures for magical and spiritual illnesses that Rainer had sent along with Alan. Clearly, there were no dual-type illnesses, and no dual-type cures for that matter.

Cinzy read along, close enough that her arm brushed against mine. She read through the different names, looked at the cures and how they were concocted.

"This is all really complicated," she said.

"Potion brewing," I said. "It's kind of like mage spellcasting except a lot more stirring is involved. And hopefully fewer fireballs."

She chuckled, and in the slight wince I recalled she'd been stung by the Angelly.

"Show me your wound," I told her.

"It's not a big—"

"Show it to me," I said. Her job was to soften the blow to the Marshins about the time frame of getting this cure put together: half past never. My job was to make sure when people got the business end of a holy-damage-inflicting jellyfish with angel wings and a halo, they healed up properly.

She showed me her other arm, where a section of her tricep was bone white, like a tiny lightning bolt. She seemed more uncomfortable with me touching her than with the actual damage.

"It's only about ten percent of my HP," she said. "It's all right."

"I'm going to breathe on you," I told her. "Don't be alarmed."

Treatment check: *You will automatically succeed in treating the holy damage using* ***Healer's Breath****. While this will cure immediate damage, it will not cure the underlying affliction without a check. Would you like to make this check?*

Holy damage was no joke. I mentally gave my assent, and breathed onto Cinzy's arm. The Affinity check for the healing ended

up succeeding, thankfully.

A wash of menthol and mint green steam billowed out of my mouth and over her wound. She shivered, and goosebumps popped up.

Treatment check: *You have the Treatment (elixirs) skill at rank 3, and the associated attribute is Affinity. The check is Difficult, requiring 4 successes. Would you like to spend 2 Tokens for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 5 Affinity and 7 Free Tokens.

Note: This check qualifies for the* ***Hard At Work* *bonus of double Token value.*

More Tokens. Still, I didn't want to mess this up. I went Yes and watched as the two Tokens went *cla-cling!* into existence, with the familiar form of a fairy on the one side. They dissipated into thin air, and I watched in fascination as the white wound covering her arm fizzled up into motes of white light. They winked out, like embers drifting up out of a camp fire.

"Ohhh."

"You okay?" I asked.

"It was a… strange feeling," she said, then flashed her patented smile at me. "Fletcher, you're my hero!"

I tipped an imaginary cap at her. "Just doing my job, ma'am."

"Ugh, don't call me that. I'm way too young to have anybody call me an old lady."

"Noted." I gathered up several vials that I'd left out and put them carefully back into their leather sleeves in the trunk I had. It was full of sturdy vials, beakers and flasks, but they were still glass.

"Hey Fletcher?"

When I turned to look back at her, she'd adopted a weird pose: leaning over the tall stool the natives had supplied, both hands together. It had the effect of squashing her perfect breasts together, and giving me a view of her cleavage that was total. Large, dark

maroon nipples peeked out on the insides of her arms, and shit I was staring where I wasn't supposed to.

Cinzy knew it. Dragging my eyes up to her face, I noted the satisfied smile immediately.

"We never had our dinner," she said.

"We did not," I confirmed. "Really sorry… it's been one thing after another once we got here. I thought the nudity thing would be resolved sooner."

"It's all right," she said. Her butt was swaying back and forth, reminding me of a hypnotist's charm on a string. Back and forth, back and forth. *You will fall under my spell. When I snap my fingers, you will do anything I say.*

"I just… you know, I wanted to get to know you better." She straightened, allowing her boobs to jiggle back to their regular position. My eyes immediately fell down there, and I blinked the sight away. "But then you used that special ability, and I learned all about you!"

Oh. Right. Blissense. We had sort of… shared a glimpse into one another's passions and desires… and kinks. And I learned all about Cinzy's predilections.

"All. About. You."

"What happened to you the other night? After we healed the eggs?"

"We uh… had a dance party," she said. "A whole bunch of the younger Marshins weren't really ready for…um…"

"Mating?"

She nodded. "We joined the Marshells and the eggs, and they were kind of bored and tired. And I knew the eggs needed to stay cheerful. Happy. Anyway. We were talking about you, and me."

"Cinzy," I said.

"Don't use that tone with me," she pouted. "That's the 'I have some bad news' tone, right before you tell me that you have another girl. You don't, you can't… you just got here. You haven't been here that long."

Apparently Cinzy had no idea how fast some women could work.

"Wait, you're not gay, are you?" She narrowed her eyes. "I have pretty good gaydar. I would know. But just in case, you have to tell me."

I chuckled. "Not gay." Then, before she could open her mouth again, I got in her space. Closing the gap between us caused her to suck in a bit of air. "Would it bother you if I had another girl?" I asked.

Her eyes widened. "Uh… that's kind of a weird question."

"And what if I made it clear that I wasn't interested in being tied down right now?"

A spark of understanding lit up her features, but she was getting aroused just thinking about the situation we were in. "I didn't take you for a playboy, Fletcher. It was one of the things I liked about you."

I shrugged the question off as unimportant. "It sounds like you want to be the center of my whole universe… but I just bonded a Nakamamon and we've already mated a couple of times."

Cinzy's jaw dropped open. "You… and the… well of course, I guess, I could see that happening. That's… wow. Okay."

I took another half step forward. "She has no designs on stopping me from mating with humans, though." Cinzy's blush deepened and spread. It was nice to see her on the defensive now, off balance.

If she knew I was with Vellenia, that… sort of qualified as her knowing I wasn't sleeping around. As long as she knew I wasn't aiming at an exclusive relationship, that would cover potential problems… hopefully.

As always, being faced with a woman who was launch-10,000-ships gorgeous was a sobering, astonishing experience for me. She was one in a million, and the system had enhanced that to one in a billion. We were, finally, discussing me doing the most intimate acts you could conceive of with someone. The type of things guys with growth plate injuries and scoliosis did not do with the Helen of Troys

of the world.

"I just want you to know this up front… my attitude on these things might not be what you're used to, or what you can handle."

And the ultimate test of how fundamentally odd this reality could be was staring down into the space at my hardening cock.

"What attitude is that?" Her voice came out in a quavering whisper, husky and throaty. She dragged her eyes away from the few inches of space between us, where my body was reacting to her presence.

"When I'm with you, you get to be the center of my universe. I can treat you like a goddess. I can try my best to make every moment amazing. But I won't be exclusive." I smiled, half apology and half jokingly. "Also this all-the-time nudity thing is super distracting."

She let out half a laugh. "Fletcher…"

"So if you want me to make love to you, that's what you have to know before you decide."

She didn't hesitate. Instead the words came out in a breath that went into my mouth.

"I'm ready."

By now I was hard. Rock hard. This heavenly angel—who could have absolutely anybody had just agreed, knowingly or unknowingly—to share me with at least three other women.

I bridged the last of the gap between us, and kissed her softly on the lips. She responded by wrenching herself onto me and getting as much bodily contact as possible in: her belly, boobs, her thighs, and her sweet pussy was now pressed against me. Her arms wrapped around me, up under my arms until her fingers wrapped around to my shoulders. The sides of her feet were even pressed to the insides of mine.

The kiss was divine, and went on. She moaned in her throat several times, slowly beginning to hump against me. She tried my crotch first, and once she had my cock pinned between her thighs, began rocking forward and back. Coating me with her already-

flowing juices.

The UI asked if I'd like to enhance our sensations using **Entwined Ecstasy**, and I agreed. As much as I wanted to heal up this god from its clothes, I wanted to impress Cinzy even more. When we finished here, I wanted her to believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that it wouldn't matter how many women I slept with, so long as she and I could do it again.

Breaking the kiss, I immediately noted the sex-drunk expression: half-lidded eyes, the rosy cheeks, the parted lips, and the shudder.

"Lay back," I told her, "and spread your legs." I hadn't done this in the past, but I thought now was the time. The one thing I absolutely needed was to have Cinzia Graham utterly convinced that I was some kind of sex god by the end of this session. I put a skill point into Tongue, and another one into Adaptability.

Cinzy's breathing quickened further, and she obeyed. One hop later and she was up onto the workbench I'd just cleared off, going back onto her elbows and watching me intently.

I also wanted to take my time. Running my hands over her thighs and up her stomach, I cupped each one of her perky boobs in my hands and thumbed her nipples in lazy circles. Soon I had the first one in my mouth, followed by the second.

The Tongue Quality made my tongue stronger and more dextrous, along with a little longer. I used this to my advantage, swirling it around and around. Cinzy had an impressive and unique set of nipples, which lengthened out both thick and long. They were the biggest and longest of any of my partners so far… and apparently the most sensitive.

"Fletcher," she moaned, "Ohhhh Fletcher, what are you…" She stopped there as a throaty groan escaped. Like with the others, I felt the coiling spring of orgasm tightening down toward the point of no return. She shuddered, said my name, and clutched at my head.

And just as she was about to go off, I stopped.

"Wha—"

I knelt down between her spread legs while she whined and

complained. That all cut right off when I shoved my newly enhanced tongue between her lower lips.

The spring that indicated her imminent orgasm had begun to unwind after I released her nipple, but it went right back to coiling down, and faster than before.

Cinzy had a larger clit than I was used to as well, and I took full advantage of that fact by gliding my tongue up one side and down the other. Now her fingers were in my hair and she clamped her legs onto my head. It blotted out most of the sound, and I soon heard the rushing of my own blood, but her moans were still there, only muffled. I didn't let the pressure stop me, but went right on servicing her delicious pussy.

She jerked once, twice, and the fingers tightened in my hair before she climaxed. The pressure on my head intensified. Arching her back brought her ass up off the workbench, and took me with it.

The next climax came barely five minutes of licking and nipple play later, but this one had the added benefit of her begging me to wait, that she was too sensitive.

But I'd been down deep into the mind of Cinzy, and I knew what she wanted. As the second one was doing, I stood and plunged myself into her scorching, slippery slit.

More back arching. More shaking and shuddering. Eyes rolled back in her head and hands scrabbling for something to hold on to. Like I was the force of gravity and she had no control over anything that was happening.

Cinzy's pussy admitted me greedily, for the first three inches at least. After that I needed to slowly saw in and out to loosen her up. She rode the wave of what was surely an intense orgasm before getting up on her elbows and staring at me.

"F-fletcher," she breathed, and something strange happened: she gushed. Some kind of fluid burst out of her unexpectedly, splashing up against my midsection and flowing down my body. It was warm, and feeling it trickle down either side of my cock was unique. Not unwelcome, just odd.

I pushed, slowly and inexorably, until I was buried inside her. Her head fell back and another string of disbelieving noises emerged. By now I was having my own trouble, thinking my orgasm might be imminent. Gods but she was tight. Once I was nestled inside, the pressure loosened, and I breathed out a long sigh.

"Turn over," I told her, sliding ever-so-slowly out of her. "Hop down."

She scrambled to obey me now, presenting her glorious ass in my direction. So much of her juices and her squirting juices had gotten all over me and her that this next part wasn't as difficult as I thought.

I leaned over her back, and breathed, "I'm going to fuck your ass now."

Her breath caught, before a tiny, almost inaudible word came out of her. "Okay."

She helped, reaching back and spreading her cheeks to either side, exposing her back door to me. That was all it took: I lined up the head and began pressing inwards.

For a long time, there was nothing: no sound from her, no forward motion. No progress. She was holding her breath, and clenched tight.

"It's okay," I told her. "Go limp."

Resting her head on the workbench seemed to help. The head popped inside her, and all the breath went out of her in a whoosh. After that was a ragged moan. Adaptability had mitigated the pain of my enhanced Girth from the other Quality, shrinking me slightly so she could handle it. I'd need Adaptability for every point of Girth I had, or I would break this girl.

What followed were twenty minutes of the slowest sex I'd had yet. It was just me going millimeter by millimeter for a while, and her twitching and grunting. Eventually I forced another inch in there, and she seemed to come to life. Getting one leg under her, she slid one hand down and began playing with herself.

"You like it?" I asked. "You like Fletcher's cock up your ass?"

She couldn’t say the words. Instead she just nodded into the workbench and strummed her clit.

“This is what you wanted,” I told her, and again she could do nothing but nod. “The most beautiful girl I’ve ever seen in my life wanted a big, fat, cock, in her ass.” I punctuated the words with slow, deep thrusts.

“Yes,” she cried, when I first felt my abdomen press against her perfect ass. “Oh my gods, yes.”

I lost track of the number of times her ass clamped down on me and she came again. Eventually I started making Durability checks, aided by the Stave Off Quality. She came at least four more times between the first check, which I succeeded, and the fourth check, which I failed.

I grunted, told her she was going to get an ass full of my cum, and emptied it all into her before she could try to speak.

“There,” I breathed in her ear. “You’re gorgeous, and you’re even more gorgeous when you come with my cock up inside your butt.”

“Oh my gods,” she whispered. “Oh my gods.”

“Was it everything you hoped it would be?”

Her face didn’t seem to register the words, and staring off into the middle distance, she slowly nodded.

“That’s good,” I told her. “I can’t wait to do it again.” With exaggerated slowness, I extracted myself from her rear end.

This is Christopher beginning to accept the truth.



Chapter 10- Triumphant Return

Night was well and truly on, now, brisk in an uncomfortable way on my naked skin.

After a short rest to get our breathing back to normal, I helped Cinzy to get to her building, and then to her room. With both of us ignoring the leaking that was going on down her legs, she took slow steps on unsteady feet. She clutched at me, and actually fell asleep kissing me in the perfect dark of the bedroom. She perked up again, grunting and falling into bed, where she pulled a blanket over herself and immediately began snoring softly.

I was also dead tired.

Still, I couldn't help but take a gander at the night sky, as I had done most nights I'd been in this new world. Thousands of glittering stars stared back. They sat in nebulous fields of reddish, orange, purple and greenish dust light years away. Only a few stars remained stubbornly in patches of absolute blackness. It was a breathtaking sight.

I definitely was not too tired for a bath in the marsh and brushing my teeth back in the laboratory. You could hardly be a sex fiend satisfying multiple women without keeping clean and fresh.

Back in the hatchery, Alan had reappeared, and was trying to perform the enlargement spell on several of the newspaper-sized tablets from Rainer.

"Hey," I said.

"Hey," he answered.

"You passed on a message to HQ?"

He nodded, but didn't say more.

"I'll assume that means you can't get a response yet, or they

didn’t give you any news regarding the problem we have.”

He nodded, holding up one finger. The former then.

“You don’t have to do more of these. We’ll pick it up in the morning.”

He only grunted in response, and cleared space for yet another one of the tablets and started the incantation.

By now the hatchery was just chock full of them. Neatly arranged under the workbenches, leaning up against the walls in careful stacks, side by side on any of the workbench that wasn’t my main alchemy workbench. The whole thing had been carefully numbered, and a few of them were even painted, glazed, and fired, but they’d run out of time, so most were the dull white of fired, rough porcelain, or the earthy orange of fired, unglazed regular clay.

I only really had enough brainpower to check over what had happened between Cinzy and I with the sex. I hadn’t brought her into the fold using Entwined Ecstasy, so there was no special super power to get. That would be for later, if I felt it possible to have a straight talk with her, and she agreed to be my, uh… third girlfriend? Third *human* girlfriend?

Still, Pleasure Seeker had gained xp, as it always did when I had sex… which was happening an awful lot these days. I stared at the little experience point bar long enough that I nodded off. I roused myself and shook my head, trying to focus on anything except the notion that I’d just had my first anal experience ever, and it was with the girl of everyone’s dreams.

I ended up falling asleep trying to read over the clay tablets, and Alan fell asleep trying to enlarge several more so I didn’t have to squint at a magnifying glass.

***

When I awoke the next morning,warm sun was pouring through the tent and making motes dance in the scant illumination coming in. At some point during the night, I must’ve roused myself and zombie walked outside to the tent, but that part was a blank. I was

so, so thankful that the sleeping bags worked, and didn't immediately vanish when I covered up each night, because that night had been quite brisk. Like very chilly.

Another thing that had helped to rouse me was excited chatter outside. With no clothes to put on, I instead stretched out, a lot, rolled over, and realized with a start that I wasn't alone in my bed.

"Greetings, bonded one," came the sleepy voice.

"Oh! Hello," I said awkwardly.

"It appears there is a kerfuffle outside," she said. "I don't know as I would recommend taking time out to mate again."

"Oh. Good idea, definitely. Yeah."

"I'm unsure how often humans are capable, or if your species simply timed the mating season with the Marshin mating cycle in a burst of excellent luck. So I… oh."

She had gotten a look at Mr. Morningwood.

"This is normal? It is not an illness from one of our sick gods?"

I chuckled. "No, humans are able to mate multiple times a day."

It was like the floor had fallen out from under her. "Multiple… a day? Every day?"

I stroked her side. "Until I'm in my forties maybe? We don't have to this morning, if you don't want. It will eventually go back to normal." Fat chance of that, with a naked and willing creature as beautiful as Vellenia in my bed.

"It is my duty as bonded companion to assist you in any way I can," she said, and hesitantly encircled me with one hand, like it might jump out and bite her if she wasn't careful.

"That can't be true," I said, thinking about Fairy Poppins.

"No," she breathed, already sliding her body on top of mine, "but I cannot deny a strong urge to…" She slotted my heat seeking missile in the place where it most desperately wanted to explode.

And then there wasn't any more talking.

Somewhere along the way, I'd forgotten that Vellenia's tongue was actually a half dozen small, independent muscly tentacles. When

we kissed, these wriggled in my mouth strangely. They wrapped around my tongue and slid over it in ways no human had ever done before. They dragged against the roof of my mouth and gripped my tongue, then squeezed it gently before letting go.

It was good she did, because people were walking by and sliding their fingers along the rain fly of my tent, making a *vrreeeeeeeep* noise. Several voices chuckled outside, and a call of, "Wake up, sleepyhead," came, from Cinzy of all people.

I ignored them and made Vellenia do her duty.

Twenty minutes of very quiet lovemaking later, Vellenia begged to be left here until I had taken the team on whatever mission we were going to get up to today. She was leaking out onto a towel we'd placed under her white and mint green butt.

"Bonded one," she breathed.

"Hmm?"

"You have pleased me a great deal," she said, and squeezed my hand.

"The feeling is mutual," I told her.

***

In the address to the assembled team, I tried to soften the blow a bit, but they knew. Either Alan had already told them, or they understood by the way I said 'dual affliction' that it wasn't going to be a quick or simple operation. This was a god we were dealing with, after all, and the first one I'd ever cured had taken a good three days to craft correctly. We were only in the workshopping ideas phase, and not even to the researching cures phase.

From Alan, the question here was what the god's sickness represented. How long it had been sick and the degradation compared with the other gods we had all experienced. He wanted to look at this magical and spiritual problem from a scientific standpoint.

The rest of the team obliged him and listened without interruption, while his stutter slowed everything down to a glacial

pace. The only real information came from the Guardians, who had helped with the God of Footfalls and watched as the days passed.

"Whatever it was bleeding, it was sort of rainbow colored," Isabelle said.

"At the beginning," Ivy confirmed. "It started going yellow toward the end."

"The divine essence can manifest as many colors," Chrysta said. "The pure ichor of a god is said to be golden in hue."

Chrysta is correct. I have seen this, Larelle told us mentally.

I already knew a lot of this, given the way my skills injected knowledge and instinct into my brain.

"That's fine," Ivy said, hand on one cocked hip. "No problem. It's your show and you run it as you will. We're here because you picked us, so we do the job. The question to get back to the practical side of things: what can we do?"

Ivy was strong, fierce, took no shit, and was focused entirely on what could be done.

I took a deep breath. "We will need to replenish the ingredients, and look for rare plants and flowers. Regina knows—"

"I know too!" A familiar voice called down. "By the way, what the hecky Becky happened to my clothes and my backpack? Did they get teleported somewhere?" All of us turned and rejoiced to see Tara flying in from astride her semi-transparent Nakamamon, Airaconda. She rode it like a witch riding a broom, though I noted a bridle on the creature's head with reins she had grasped in both hands. "I have to say I'm kind of glad you're all naked too, because I almost turned around and flew back to town."

What followed were several minutes of confused and delighted awkwardness, where everyone was both completely nude and wanting to hug one another. They settled for pats on the shoulder (Trent and Alan), delighted squealing while hopping back and forth from foot to foot (Izzy and Ivy), and dancing in a circle while grasping hands (Regina and Cinzy). Tweedle Dee, still ailing and not quite in great shape, came forward for chin and ear scratches.

Muppin rumbled forward and nuzzled at Tara, nearly knocking her off balance, Fairy Poppins danced around her head, and…

Vellenia appeared, and had no such qualms about hugging. When I introduced the long-legged, bronze-skinned beauty to my bonded Nakamamon, the Marshin leapt into Tara's arms.

"You are most welcome here, team member of Christopher Fletcher, savior of the eggs. His friends are our friends."

Tara directed a very pointed look my way, and I blinked at her. The smile I got in return was knowing an impish, like she was already imagining what positions I'd taken Vellenia through. Her eyes darted down to my midsection and back up.

Tara had left before we ever arrived at the Marshin village.

"Wait," she said. "Hang on. It took me like two days to get back to HQ, and then it took me four days to get here… and… you guys didn't mention to HQ that there were no clothes?"

A lot of embarrassed grumbling and mumbling met her, with some scratching of the neck and back of the head.

"What about backpacks?" she yelped. "My backpack vanished along with all my clothes back over that way."

"Well… shirt," Regina said. Her flower-shaped freckles had grown, and now glowed so well that it was impossible not to see her at night. In the full light of day I only caught the stray sparkle here and there, since the freckles seemed like gems or sequins embedded in her skin.

"The pills were in that backpack, weren't they?" I asked.

"They were indeed!"

We needed those pills to knock the surging mana out of our bodies so we didn't… something. None of us knew what would happen if we absorbed too much mana, but HQ was adamant it was bad.

"Do you mean to tell me I now have to go all the way back to HQ to get another round of those fracking pills?" she shouted.

Everyone fell silent. This was both in the face of her frustration, and the realization that we were reaching dangerous levels of mana

absorption. If you believed what HQ said, and there was no reason not to, we were about to pass beyond the limit they'd set forth as safe.

Isabelle now looked a lot like a Nakamamon herself, she was so brightly colored blue and pink. Silvery threads that looked like filigree wound through her whole self. And she was… starting to grow a tail. Yes, a tail about three inches long now protruded from just above her butt.

Ivy's entire body was thick with tattoos. It definitely hadn't been that way when I hired her about a week ago. Those tattoos had very slowly crept around her body before, but they were surging, growing, coalescing, battling against one another in places. Also her thin stubbly hair was gone, leaving only the dragon tattoo curling over her skull.

The others were transforming too. The large patches covering Cinzy's body were shifting to colors that were never people colors: rusty red, blazing orange, deep green, icy blue and still others. They were growing, merging and shrinking at around the same speed as Ivy's tattoos. Her hair was now moving of its own accord, like she had a fan on it at all times. It had grown down below her butt. I knew because I had once noted how gorgeous the curtain of hair fell down below her shoulder blades.

Trent now looked a lot like he was made of dirt and rocks, with bits of moss covering his head, shoulders, and random places elsewhere. Alan… was becoming transparent. Luckily not transparent in a way that showed us his muscles and guts and digesting food, just transparent in the way that Chrysta's upper legs and the edges of her were transparent.

"You guys have been working so much that you didn't even notice what was happening to your bodies?" Tara demanded.

"We thought you'd be back with the pills," I said lamely, "and it wouldn't be a big deal." You would be hard pressed to argue that healing up a god was less important than getting the mana out of your body, especially if you believed the cure was on its way.

Again, this was my fault, in a way. I'd brought Alan on board thinking he would level up and gain the capabilities we needed. Instead his inability to contact HQ in a timely manner cost us. He had leveled up, just not fast enough.

Tara was beyond upset. Her hands flew up in the air. "My whole backpack, gone!" She had lost more than just pills, of course. People carried some personal items with them, to remember earth. "Ach! Arrgggghhh! Ugh! Flaaarrrggghhhh! Flibbertyjibbet! Flack knackles! Worm… wobbles!" Then her finger flew in my direction. "You, on the air serpent, now! The rest of you, do whatever it is you're supposed to do anyway. I have to have a private word with Fletcher and this failure of leadership, right this moment."

Nobody countermanded her order. For a few seconds most everyone gaped at her, save Larelle, who trudged back to her post defending the holy items of clothing we had collected.

Shocked, I mounted Airaconda, the sensation very odd on my totally exposed backside and… the bottom of my sack. A very naked, totally furious and utterly gorgeous long-legged Tara strode over, mounted her own bonded Nakamamon, and looked over her shoulder. Without needing to be told, I put my arms around her waist and would have immediately started to harden, what with my midsection being pressed against her butt, but the situation was so surprising that I kept myself from insta-rection.

We launched into the air for my first ever, what I'll call broom ride. Riding on the enormous manta had been like being on a huge tube and dragged around a lake by a fast boat. Riding the glimmerdactyl had been very much like riding a horse.

There was hardly anything to the Slitherwind. I clenched my legs against her sides and clutched onto Tara for dear life while it streaked into the air, quickly reached the top of the cliff we'd been on previously, and settled down.

I got off, feeling like I'd been on a roller coaster. While she started baby talking it, I got my wits about me, or tried to.

Using the Identify skill, I focused on the creature to put it into my

Nakamadex.

Slitherwind

First Stage Nakamamon

These large serpents made of elemental air are rarer at low altitudes. They typically feed on wisps of airborne mana or the occasional small flying beast.

Typical length: 20-40 feet (large)

Typical weight: 2-10 pounds

Gender: female

Aspect: air

Transformations: unknown -> Slitherwind -> unknown

***Slitherwind** has been added to your Nakamadex.*

I almost had to chuckle at the weight of the creature.

"That's a good girl," Tara was still saying, patting the air elemental serpent just behind the head. She commenced to scratching again, raking her fingers from the base of the creature's head some six feet. It looked a bit like she was ripping apart the wrapping paper on a huge Christmas present. "Somebody's been flying for days and days, hasn't she? Somebody needs a massage again," she said, as if she were talking to someone's adorable Pomeranian. "Yes she does! Yes she does! You'll get a nice massage later, yes you will!"

"Tara—" I went to start apologizing, only to have her whirl on me.

"Ohhh no," she said, jabbing an accusatory finger in my direction. "I am going to get me some Fletcher deep inside me, and I'm not going back to HQ unless I'm leaking like a sieve."

I mean, what could I say after that charged sentence? I stared at her, flabbergasted.

"You had better frack me a good one, Fletcher. I have been almost a week without a good fracking."

This is a guilty Christopher about to do the duty that has been

demanded of him, and without complaint.



Chpater 11- Annoying Yet Welcome News

The sun was rising and promising a warm day. A barely discernible breeze tickled at my exposed skin and my green hair. Across from me stood Tara, bronze of skin and long of leg, finally releasing her Slitherwind and striding towards me. Her eyes weren't bronze like they had been when I'd last seen her, meaning she'd taken one of the pills back at HQ. She still looked just as lithe, just as toned, and just as beautiful as she had been when she'd left almost a week ago.

"So," she said, walking towards me.

You'd better believe I fracked Tara until she was begging for me to fill her up, yet again.

"I guess it's a good thing we're both naked already," I said. "It'll make fracking you easier."

"You gonna give me enough for another full week away from you?" she asked, with considerably less venom than before.

"Come here and clamp those thighs around my head and we'll

see how well I frack you," I told her quietly, a smile spreading over my face.

She lost all her annoyance in an instant, and leapt onto me. Wrapping her arms and legs around me, she kissed me fiercely and pressed her blazing midsection against my stomach.

As for me, I held her by the butt and made sure she didn't fall. Tara had a thing about wrapping her legs around me and locking her ankles together. I loved it when she did this. I grew hard rapidly, and the head pressed against her even as she lashed at me with her tongue and got her hands over every part of me.

Tara was a talker normally, but now it was her hands that did the talking. They were on my shoulders, up and down my back, up into my scalp and threaded into my hair, and then back down. When she finally broke the kiss and gave me smoldering eyes, she had touched every part of me she could get her hands on: jaw, ears, neck, traps, shoulders, and she'd tried to get at my butt with her fingertips.

"Somebody needs this badly," I told her. Hell, I'd just had sex the night before with Cinzy, and the morning afterwards with Vellenia. They were spoiling me now.

"Yes," she moaned. "I didn't think it could be like this. I don't know what you did to me, you monster, but I can't stop thinking about it."

A few brave trees stood on top of this tall, phallic rock, and I got her leaning up against one of them so I could put my enhanced tongue to work. With my newly upgraded tongue, I went to work slipping it between her folds and deep inside her. She tried weakly to protest at first, but in seconds I had her moaning loudly.

Then I spent a Likability Token to activate **Entwined Ecstasy** to enhance the pleasure of this act, and listened to her appreciative moans double in length and volume.

"Fuh… Fletcher!" she gasped. "What… what are you…"

She only lasted five minutes, with me slurping up her drooling juices and wriggling my tongue against her hyper sensitive clit. I alternated tonguing her hole and tickling that little bud with my

fingers, and swirling my tongue around it again and again, while curling my fingers up inside her.

The whole time, she tensed and tensed and tensed, further and further into the familiar coiled spring setting that said they were about to let go. Finally, I reached up and tweaked one nipple to the pressure she liked, with my enhanced tongue curled into the inner spot she loved to have stroked, while my other hand rubbed over her clit gently.

She went off hard, knees buckling and needing me to support her as she melted to the ground.

For a good minute, Tara just stared in a daze, like she wasn't sure where she was or if this might be a dream of some kind. I smiled indulgently, feeling amazing that I could grant a girl so hot this kind of ecstasy. Finally, her eyes drifted over and locked onto my face.

"Fork me, Fletcher… who taught you that?"

I just smiled. "Stand up… it's time to get the fracking you wanted."

Squealing like a high schooler about to see their favorite heartthrob on stage, she bolted to her feet and jumped back into my arms. A rain of kisses followed, while she narrated everything she'd been feeling.

"I can't believe you found my g-spot," she gushed. "You got it—" Kiss. "—with your fingers." Kiss. "Ohhh that was so—" Kiss. "—so amazing." Several kisses. "And then—" Kiss. "—oh em gee, you—" Kiss, followed by her tongue lashing at my lips. "—you got it with your tongue!" Kiss. "I can't believe—" Kiss. "I can't believe—" Yet another kiss. "How did you—"

I reached down and pulled my cock back and forth over her drooling slit. Delighting in the gasps this produced, I continued. Not for long though, because she began growling with impatience.

"Yes," she confirmed. "It's time. Tara needs that big D, Fletcher." She threw back her head and groaned again. "Oh em geeeeeeee Fletcher, put it in me."

I kept right on teasing her, raking my head slowly over her slit,

bumping her clit just a tiny bit and making her moan out her readiness to get right to he main event. Right. Now.

"Inside," she commanded, and nipped at my ear with teeth. "Now, Fletcher, don't make me wait. Put that cock to good use, okay?"

One last rake was all it took to get myself lubed up with her secretions, before I hunched forward and slipped inside.

Tara sighed and let her head fall back. "There it is. That's what I've been thinking about for hours with a giant snake between my legs. This snake is what I've been dreaming about. Fork me, Fletcher."

As requested, I pulled her butt up and down to impale her again and again. She simply held on for dear life. The pleasure from the special ability was ramping up, and I was thankful to support my partner's entire bodyweight. It was distraction enough to keep from bursting inside her. She was tighter than before. Hotter. Wetter. She felt so good squeezing down on every bit of me with every bit of her.

At first, she kept up the stream of dirty talk. "Stretch out Tara's pussy, Fletcher. Ohhhh… Pound me until I can't walk."

I switched up positions and settled her hands on a rock, as sticking out towards me. Then I lifted one leg and re-entered her. Gods but she was so beautiful. Shining in the morning sunlight. Vocal in her appreciation. Both wet and tight. The dirty talk was interrupted by heft moans now.

"Unhhh… fork me… Fletcher. Ohhhh yeah… just… like that. Slow and d-deep. Ugh."

She was flexible enough that I could bring her one leg up onto my shoulder and grab onto her thigh for leverage. She was strong enough and had the balance and power of an Olympic athlete.

"Oh my gods…" she muttered. "So deep. So… forking… deep. Make… make me cum… Fletcher…"

I continued pounding away, but now got one hand on her clit and played it like I'd been shown.

Her whole body tensed down and she eased her head onto her

hands, clutching the stone here for dear life while I railed her. With long, deliberate strokes I brought her right to the edge.

"You want it?" I hissed in her ear. "Inside? Again?"

She nodded into her hands. "Inside! Ohhh fuhh... Fletcher I'm…"

With a final mighty thrust, I took her over that edge, and got there right as her inner muscles clamped down on me and started squeezing on me like a fist. I could only guess what it was that drove Tara to have me empty all my passion directly to where it would create the most complications, but she asked for it every time.

She got it every time.

I came, and came, and came. I cried out and she seemed to harmonize with me. Her leg slipped off my shoulder, and this helped her keep her feet. Those long, toned legs flexed and quivered, up on her tip toes. She looked like a statue like this, with her metallic skin.

She was panting from the exertion and from the pleasure I'd overwhelmed her with. However, I wasn't done. I hadn't seen Tara for almost a week, and she had gone beyond the original mandate of the mission for me.

We did it once more after that, with her riding me and reaching back to rake my sack lightly with her nails. In the meantime, she pressed a hand against her belly. "I can feel you," she told me, "rearranging my guts. You're not human, Fletcher. You're something else."

I grinned, and continued thrusting upwards while watching her perfect boobs bounce. And when she took her hand away, amazingly, I could see a bit of a bulge appear every time she slammed her hips down and got the full length of me inside her.

And she came again. And then again. I watched and felt every spasm and twitch, and the second time she came on top of me, she was begging me to seed her yet again.

And I will say, I was too far gone. I couldn't have pushed her off if I'd wanted to. She already had a load inside her, and she'd taken some eight or so before that. She was going to get another one,

right now. I grunted and gritted my teeth, and did my best to spurt all the way.

In the aftermath, we cuddled in the gigantic branches of the weird trees here. She stroked my face, and stroked my cock, and afterwards she stroked herself, bringing her fingers up to see the copious amount of seed that had leaked out.

She sighed. "I guess I'll be heading back."

I chuckled, tired. "Actually, you don't have to."

"What are you talking about?"

"I have the recipe for making the medication. It's a Healer product, after all. Rainer spends most of his time manufacturing those pills, or outsourcing the work to the administration. The Wizards can't use magic to make it, but there are so many who come here and want to be Wizards that they have to spend some time every week making those pills."

You could develop a non-class skill if you had enough time and practice; I was proof enough of that.

"We spent a lot of time working on the project that seemed pressing, we just assumed you would have the pills when you came back. But it won't be a big deal for me to make that stuff. Collect ingredients, then follow the instructions to work up a batch. Everybody will be fine by this time tomorrow."

She shot up, staring at me. "You mean to tell me you could've done this the whole time, and the whole week you could've been stuffing my tiny little pussy with your big fat cock?"

When she put it like that? No. I had the egg situation to deal with, and leadership meetings to conduct, and natives to reassure, and herb collecting to do.

And also a few of the other girls to service.

"Not… really," I said, and explained all that we'd been up to.

"Well I'm still very… um… annoyed with you. Wait… who have you been having sex with?"

I gritted my teeth and smiled awkwardly. "Almost… everybody?"

***

"How is it everyone in this other world is ultra beautiful, anyhow?" Sarah demanded. She was helping my father in the kitchen, but had peeked her head out into the dining room, where I continued telling the story to my fascinated mother.

So far as they knew, Tara and I simply went up onto that mountaintop and had a discussion about what had been going on, then she'd extracted an apology from me instead of several potent loads of my seed. Finally, she was surprised, overjoyed, and more than a little annoyed to learn she'd traveled to HQ and back when she hadn't needed to.

"Eh… you know how my body doesn't look like it used to?"

"Duh," she said. "You're like a Mr. Universe version of the Toph I remember."

"It all comes from the system stats," I said.

If you boosted Likability and Physicality, you were going to turn into a physically more beautiful version of yourself. Just Physicality would transform your body, while Likability would cause some minor facial changes, but ramp up your natural charisma. Or in my case, create some natural charisma where there wasn't any before.

My mother admonished me, telling me not to talk like that, and I ducked my head as though she'd just threatened me with a rolling pin.

I could sense the next few questions coming: if you have a high Physicality, why aren't you a mountain of muscle? I was still a sort of lanky person, more like a mountain climber mixed with a runner's build than a power lifter or a body builder.

"Anyway, the process basically refines whatever's there. You can have a high Physicality and still be a skinny guy like Drat, because most of his Physicality is in quickness and controlled movement, for stealth. My Physicality is sort of a balance of power and dexterity. Larelle is a hundred percent muscle. She would have a million followers on InstaSnap easy."

"Or people would run for the hills to get away from her," my father declared, out of sight but definitely still listening.

We all had a chuckle. Yeah, a seven foot mountain of muscle with orange skin, no nose, and so much hair you'd wonder if she had a genetic problem… would cause a stir.

"So you whipped up these pills?" my mother asked.

I nodded. "They took some time to perfect without using Tokens, so I got the mixture wrong a couple of times before getting it right. I wanted to save the Tokens for the thing with the glowing underwear."

I had already failed at enough cures with the God of Footfalls that I did not want a repeat. I was growing certain that this situation was one of a kind, or complex enough that I was going to fail repeatedly.

My mother slid a pale hand across the dinner table and laid it on mine. It was cool to the touch, and dry, reminding me of a mummy. But she wasn't gone. She was still hale and hearty, as hale and hearty as one could be when they'd had three different surgeries to remove tumors and two different rounds of chemo over the course of four years. And here she was, trying to make me feel better about my circumstances.

"So what did you do after the magic pills were done?"

"I want to know what happens when they take these magic pills," Sarah called. "I need details."

I grinned. "You got it."

"That will totally reassure me this isn't all a figment of your very elaborate imagination and it was a hundred percent real."

I locked eyes with my mother, grinned, and rolled my eyes far more than was necessary. She snorted before throwing back her head and laughing.

This is Christopher hearing and seeing the mother her grew up with, at least for a little while.



Chapter 12- The Hatchening

The sun got fully into its role as Tara and I relaxed in the bough of one of the boogie trees. I relished in the warmth of the sun on every bit of my exposed skin. The spongy green sphere that served as its leaves allowed us to lay there and cuddle, enjoy the puffy iridescent clouds, and discuss how things were going. Tara, for her part, kept rubbing her hand over her abdomen in a way that concerned me… a little. When I asked her if she was ready to be a mother one day, she just gave me a smile and told me not to worry about it.

I blinked at her, and tried to follow her advice.

Although I didn't level up as a Pleasure Seeker, the UI made sure I knew my relationship status with Tara had fallen in the week she'd been gone. It was now back to **confidants**. My special ability from forking her multiple times, **Eagle-Eyed**, didn't advance yet. It would take more romancing before that happened.

"Fletcher, you beast!" she said quietly.

"Hm?"

"Ivy and Isabelle are a couple, aren't they?" she asked, then seemed confused to learn that Ivy, the more butch of the two, was more bisexual and needed to use me as a dildo sometimes. Isabelle, on the other hand, was far more of what you'd consider 'girly' than her girlfriend: long hair to Ivy's close-cropped mohawk, cute clothes and mannerisms to Ivy's general bullishness. She was also more reluctant to have a man inside her. "And you did them both… at the same time?"

I shrugged. I still wasn't entirely clear on what they wanted from me, or if Ivy would just decide every once in a while that she needed a bit of dick to tide her over until she and Izzy could get back to the land of strap ons. I also thought Tara was probably trying to distract me away from the question of her eventually

getting pregnant.

I mean, the first time with her had been under the influence of a god. The subsequent times… that was all her doing.

"What about Chrysta? Or Larelle?" Tara said, pulling us further away from my possible future baby.

I waved her away, until I remembered that Larelle was ready to disrobe and get in on the action when I'd been brewing up the cure for the God of Footfalls. Now that I had Adaptability, I thought maybe I could… no, she was still far larger and stronger than I was, and I had plenty of gorgeous female companions already. There was no need to add Larelle to the possible conflicts.

"Here's the thing," I told her, "Cinzy thinks I've only been having sex with Vellenia."

"Who?"

"The native. My bond."

"And you and Cinzy…"

"Last night."

"You're unbelievable," she said. She wasn't wrong. I couldn't quite believe it myself.

"Anyway, I have to ease her into the idea that I also have human partners. So we'll have to play it cool for some time. Ivy and Isabelle don't care; they're doing each other. Regina obviously doesn't care. But I don't know about Cinzy yet."

"Wow," she said. "Just wow. Wow wow wow. I can't believe it, honestly. When I met you, I thought you were kind of puppy dog cute, and then the Lovers happened to us, and all that changed when I got to know you… carnally."

"It was not planned, that's for sure," I said. "Speaking of which, how are you feeling about all this information?"

She thought this over with an adorable look on her face, peering up like she was examining her own brain.

"Look, I won't lie that I'd like more of you. I like having you around. Like, I wouldn't mind being a couple. Hugging against you

and looping my arm around your elbow, but I know about your other class. You're simply not as effective if you're only plowing my field."

I nearly winced at the mental image of sowing seeds in her field.

"I can take you out from time to time," I told her. "I'm thrilled at the opportunity to make you feel as beautiful as you really are. I'd be a lucky man if I could take you out on a date and parade around with someone as good looking as you."

"You're going to have to keep flattering me like that, a lot," she said, wide eyed and serious.

Tara agreed, calling me a sly dog. She wasn't wrong. I just wish I was as sly as she gave me credit for. Finally, conversation concluded, we headed back to the village where I could do what needed doing.

One piece of good news was, upon heating up and then concocting the anti-magic pill mixture as it was laid out in the instruction manual tablets, was that I leveled up my Healer class.

One look at the level up bonuses and I was a hundred percent on board with it.

Level 13: +1 Ingenuity, +2 skill points

My attributes were looking very respectable.

attributes:
Affinity 5
Durability 6
Ingenuity 8
Likability 5
Physicality 5

I sure was a long way from where I'd started, with all 1's and 2's.

The increase in Ingenuity, like all of the other attributes, didn't feel any different. Physicality sure eventually caused me to look different, and increased my physical capabilities to levels they'd never been at before.

After having had the team capabilities talk, I now understood that

the Guardians each had a Physicality or Durability that was above 8, and the other above 7. In contrast all their other attributes were quite low. Cinzy had a Likability of fracking 12, and an Affinity of 5, but everything else was under 3. In the meantime Trent spiked in Affinity first and Likability next, while Alan had an even split between Affinity and Ingenuity. With our two casters, everything else was super low.

Only the Rangers and I had fairly even stat arrays. I'd be willing to bet that Drat specialized in Ingenuity and Physicality, though I couldn't be sure. I couldn't even be sure he was anywhere within a 5 mile radius right now, given his stealth.

All the girls were thrilled to take their doses of the magic restricting medicine, even though it was pretty gross tasting not in pill form. The only way I could do it was to spread it over some flat bread and let it dry in the sun, and have them eat it. The other option would've been to just have the gross herb mixture all alone, and it was bitter as hell. We all had a good laugh at the others, watching their faces scrunch up as they tried it.

Alan and Trent were more hesitant about taking it though. They felt a better connection to mana and their magic powers this past week. I let them know I wasn't going to order them to take the medicine, but we didn't know what would happen if they didn't.

As for my own body, I had gotten very green hair, along with veins of green running throughout my body. They had been pulsing with glowing green. Thankfully, those retracted back toward my heart, and my regular brown roots showed soon after I ate the awful bread.

Well, medicine was only delicious on earth because we had hundreds of years of experience turning everything sweet. Honestly, I was glad not to live in a place where corn was somehow transformed into high fructose syrup. The food here alone was trimming fat off my body.

I had just settled down to begin the research process again when Trent and Isabelle burst through the door. I dropped the thin clay newspaper sized tablet to the table and watched in horror as it broke

into some thirty bazillion pieces. Or just thirty, whatever.

"Guys ohhhhh!" Isabelle's excitement turned to horror, and she looked up into my eyes looking for the punishment that was to come. That broke my heart a little.

"Hey Alan?"

"Hm?"

"You got a magic spell to repair things?" I asked idly, smiling at Isabelle.

"Y-y-y-y-yeah."

"Clean up on aisle 2 then," I told him. "Sorry for dropping it, my man. Isabelle's really sorry too."

"I am soooooooo sorry!" she called to Alan.

The Wizard just laughed and waved it off. "N-n-no big d-d-deal."

We watched silently as Alan grabbed up his magic wand, dangled a length of thread in front of himself, and chanted the words in a language that sounded vaguely Latin and sort of alien.

And wouldn't you know it, but as soon as the string—and another component, a piece of clay—dissolved into the spell, the pieces drew together in a wash of bluish glowing magic, and fused back together like they'd never been broken.

"That is so cool!" Isabelle said. "Isn't it cool?"

"You had news to share with all of us?" I asked, arching an eyebrow.

"Oh! Oh!" She started jumping up and down. "The eggs! The eggs are hatching!"

"That is too many exclamation points for one message," Drat said from directly beside me, in his same laconic fashion. I tried not to jump right out of my skin.

Isabelle practically dragged me to the new hatchery, a large house in the village, home to something like thirty Marshins. It was longhouse shaped, like what you'd see in a Colonial American period movie, but with beds hanging from the ceiling, pots and pants and accumulated living stuff hanging from below those, and a couple of

pet-shaped Nakamamon running around the floors pestering some of the larger Marshells, which were like gigantic clams with little kids hiding inside. Some of them poked their little white and green faces out of their shells and petted their dog and cat-like pet creatures, while others just sat nearly closed, with the little ones barely peeking out.

In the center of the whole thing sat a large cooking fire, and ringing that at a good remove sat the clutch of eggs. All thirty-one of them shone with pristine white, with green blotches, and not a hint of brown sticky infection to be seen anywhere.

Two of them already held jagged cracks and several others could be seen wobbling.

Isabelle took her place next to Ivy, in the cluster of Guardians. Cinzy was already there, and beamed one of her incredible smiles my way. Man, those were truly capable of making a guy feel lighter than air.

Drat, Alan and Trent fanned out around the room, where Marshins met them and took their hands, talking in low and animated tones. Everyone knew they weren't supposed to hog the limelight here, and just let the miracle of life happen as it would.

Tiny crinkling noises could be heard, and soon enough bits of shell began falling to the floor. Now the assembled villagers and my team were cooing and 'awww'-ing with delight, as tiny faces and hands poked out, then retreated. One of them split right down the middle and a baby came tumbling out into the hands of a Marshin who was on newborn—er, hatchling—duty. She scooped the child up and brought it over toward a series of shells that had been arrayed on several long tables, along with others lining the space beneath and around.

The Marshell reached out for one of the clam shells, clenching a tiny fist again and again in its direction. It didn't seem big enough, but the tiny baby crawled into the two halves of the shell like a hermit crab getting its improved home. Then the Marshin on duty picked up the whole deal and shuffled off, perhaps to nurse or feed the new Marshell.

"That is so cute!" Tara gushed. "I wonder if they suckle or if they get fed something. What do clams eat anyway? These aren't clams but you know what I mean. I think clams are filter feeders. That wouldn't make any sense here, obviously! Ha ha!"

She kept right on rambling about the new Marshells until finally she seemed to sense everyone staring at her. Then she fell silent, and buried her face against my upper arm, until it seemed to dawn on her that she wasn't supposed to be clutching against me.

In the meantime four more of the little ones had hatched and were selecting their clam shells from the array on the tables. The new Marshells were tiny little things, basically the size of human infants, except they had stubby little fish tails and looked to be, I'd say, three to four years old. Like the Marshins they had pure white skin, mint green striping here and there, and also spots of pink. Some ran their whole scalps, others had a strip down the throat and belly. Similar, but just different enough to be unique.

Finally Tara broke off of my arm and hovered over to Regina. "I'm not allowed to say I want one, am I?" she whispered.

Regina laughed, and once again I had the question rise up in me: what was she going to do if I put a child inside her? I wanted to ask, but now certainly wasn't the right time.

The Marshells being born was another cause for celebration, but this one was far less adult and far more about the children. The day was spent prancing around the town with them, holding them up for all the world to see, dancing and singing, while some villagers threw confetti made of flower petals or pulled leaves. Still others decorated and made food for a great big banquet dinner.

The Marshells who looked large and perhaps ready to transform into Marshins were included here. Arrayed around the largest open platform, they played a ball game, with rules I didn't understand. Sometimes they'd let the ball roll and bump against their shells, while other times a little white and pink and mint green hand or foot would dart out of the shell and bop the ball in this or that direction. There didn't appear to be a goal they could score, but instead at random times, the Marshins would all cheer boisterously, and clap.

The team and I would try to follow suit, but there were several times we started cheering and clapping, anticipating the natives would do the same, only to have nothing happen, and all the Marshins would look at us in confusion.

In the meantime, the caretakers to the newborns (hatchlings) paraded their charges around for everyone to meet. We got to meet every single Marshell, though in truth only three of the thirty peeked out with a face or fingers. I caught one breathing out a mostly unintelligible word. I thought maybe it was 'thanks.'

"They're really shy," Cinzy said, as the fourth and fifth of the new Marshells reached out and brushed her face with their tiny fingers. She had been in so much contact with the villagers since we'd been here, she had become something of an expert.

"This is the best day ever," Tara declared, and beamed at me.

And I hoped it was my imagination, and that Cinzy didn't read anything into that very affectionate smile.

***

I went to bed that night after saying goodbye to my nephew and my pregnant sister. It had been a long night, with me talking a lot and them listening even more. I realized that I had a lot to tell them. With everything being alien, I had to explain it all. I couldn't just gloss over any specific bit. What did the Marshins eat? It was almost exclusively vegetable, though they grew something identical to rice but which had a saltier taste than I was used to, and had access to sugar cane. The salty sweet desserts they made up were so strange, but delicious.

"It's been a long night for us," my mother said, and handed me a towel and toothbrush. When I went to take the toothbrush, she held onto it and I found myself staring into wondering eyes.

Her mouth went to form a question, but stopped in the middle of it.

"Mom?" I asked.

Instead of saying anything, her mouth quirked up in a

complicated smile. It seemed that since the diagnosis, a lot of her facial expressions had a whole lot of emotions bunched up into them. It was heartbreaking that I couldn't just get happiness or pride out of her.

Right here and now, there were both, but there was also a lot more. Grief, sadness… I knew she missed me, so some of that was in there. Relief at finally knowing I wasn't dead.

"I'm just glad you're home," she said, and hugged me for what was probably the twentieth time that day.

"Me too," I told her. Had she guessed why I was here?

This is Christopher knowing he's not a genius, after all.



Chapter 13- Master Has Given Us A Sock

Following the jubilant party I was calling the hatchening were hours upon hours of languid research in the laboratory building. So far, there was absolutely zilch in the way of literature regarding dual type illnesses. I held chat sessions with the various members of the group as the day wore on, to get myself free of the laboratory for a minute. We walked around the platforms and crossed the bridges of Slinktrickle in a slow circuit that gave me a chance to stretch myself, and keep abreast of the situation with each member of the team.

It was during one of these breaks that I snuck a look at Ivy and Isabelle's gorgeous bodies and grinned to myself. Abreast. Members of the team. Then I had to clamp down on my willpower to ensure I didn't get a very visible erection.

As nice as it was to see the girls in their birthday suits at all times, living in a nudist colony wasn't for me. My hormones were far too active to handle the situation well.

I was walking around with Regina and Tara, complaining about how none of this was supposed to be possible or work like this. I couldn't treat the illness because I wasn't sure what I was treating. At least with the God of Footfalls I'd been able to blunt the weird sounds that came out every time someone walked anywhere.

"I don't know what to do," I told them.

I could tell Regina wanted to reach up and squeeze my shoulder, then make out for a while, grinding herself against me, then watch as I slid in and out of Tara for several minutes while pressing her drooling pussy directly onto my face. Since she couldn't do any of that, she just gave me a smoldering look.

"That's awful," she said. "Did the city give Alan any reply back?"

"Yeah. It was useless."

Alan had gotten a response back from HQ that was essentially a gigantic shrug and a plea to move on. They didn't know, and since it was only nudity, they didn't care.

Tara shrugged, and actually did reach out a hand to touch my arm. She was a very touchy feely one. "Why don't you just try and cure one illness first, then do the second one after?"

"That'd be a shame," Regina said, chuckling. "Then you'd have to undress me with your eyes, and actually undress me before you give me the railing of a lifetime." She stopped. "What?"

She'd noticed both Tara and I freeze. There, hovering a good eight to ten feet away, was Cinzy's Nakamamon, Fairy Poppins.

I made my way directly back to the laboratory afterwards. Tara's idea was the only one I'd gotten so far. I was thankful she had worked with me so closely on the cure with the God of Footfalls, but I was kicking myself for sending her away after the anti-magic pills. Her idea wasn't bad, actually. I didn't have a strong hope that it would work, but it was better than doing nothing.

The human body is insanely complex as a machine. Multiple factors go into healing: whether you're male or female, your age, your weight and your BMI. Then, if you have other illnesses or issues, those have to be taken into account. Naturally, I just assumed that a spiritual ailment would compound a magical ailment, and make everything infinitely more complicated. I felt that there had to be orders of magnitude more work to do in dealing with both at the same time.

However, if I just worked on the one first, and it worked, I could naturally just work on the second one independently.

I had no frame of reference to know if it would or wouldn't work, so it was worth a try. The scientific method can include process of elimination, after all.

***

"What the heck does a spiritual cure even look like?" my mother

asked. She was sipping at some tea and wearing a thick, comfy robe I didn't recognize. A new purchase using my god healer funds, I was happy to learn. It looked like either a bad fur coat, or the a robe you could while away a full day in.

My mother was a lovely person, but not religious. She prayed, but didn't need church. Once cancer was part of the equation, the concept of God as a benevolent being slowly fell in her mind. She still prayed for healing, but the justifications of the priests didn't interest her. She didn't like the idea she was being punished by God for something. What had she done? She didn't like the idea that God just let bad things happen to good people for no reason.

The scientific method generally didn't include spiritual anything. The soul was not a measurable construct. Handling maladies of the soul generally meant therapy, and assessing emotional problems tied to faith.

"You're gonna love this," I told her, and poured myself some coffee. I had missed this in Door feely altostratus… Dolphin eel allosaurus… Endorphin… ugh. I missed coffee in the other world with the name I couldn't say. "It's not too different from what people think of as god appeasement strategies. You have your prayer, your incense burning, singing and dancing, which is sort of just prayer but with more people and body movements, your offerings, your sacrifices—"

"Please tell me you didn't sacrifice those adorable fish people," she said, alarmed.

"The ancient peoples used to sacrifice some of their food at each meal," I told her, "or goats or pigs… but sometimes they'd just prick themselves and sacrifice some blood. And yes, some cultures had human sacrifice, but no we weren't about to get to that. Anyway, offerings are pretty much the same thing… you offer some of your money, or your belongings, or your food."

These were the typical remedies.

"You don't want to wait for Dad to wake up?" I asked.

She warmed her hand against the side of her mug, and slid into

her seat at the dinner table. “He’s less interested in everything that happened. He’s just glad you’re back. He wants some help around the house and for you to watch me while he does some errands.”

I chuckled at that. He didn’t need me for any of that stuff, just the pleasant familial feeling of having your offspring there while you did menial tasks and passed on that knowledge to your kids.

“He conscripted Sarah after you left and she’s been bringing Brayden over. Then she does her Esty thing and tries to sell jewelry. She bought something to cut out stickers and paper so she could make craft things to sell online.”

Nodding, I considered this. It was probably the best way to make any kind of money in the face of being a single mother and being forced to spend time with your own mother, watching her in case of any emergency. Not that Mom needed it.

She got up and retrieved some donuts they’d bought the day before I arrived.“So tell me what happened.”

***

“Okay,” I said, “we’re going to try the simplest version, which is prayer.”

A dozen Marshins sat down cross-legged on the floor of the laboratory in a ring, surrounding the carefully arranged clothing. Seated this way, their fish tails stuck out from their butts and created a kind of sunburst pattern if you viewed it from above.

Using the incense I’d employed to suss out whether this was a spiritual malady, we periodically got a glimpse of the figure floating prone above the clothes. It became clearer then that the difficulty to diagnose this had lowered the more bits of the outfit we ended up gathering.

The Marshins tried the hands folded method first. Some of them rocked back and forth, and the others picked up on this. Once one of them began muttering under their breath, the others followed along.

After a good hour, no progress had been made.

We shifted to everyone holding hands in a circle and chanting.

Someone started swaying back and forth, side to side, and the rest of them got into it, but again, nothing.

After a good two hours, still nothing. By now we were running low on the incense, and some of the materials weren't easy to collect.

Oh well, I told myself, at least I'd have ample opportunities to head out away from the village and have a little alone time with Regina, Tara, Vellenia, or any combination of the three. Hell, maybe all three.

The second method would be song and dance, but these natives didn't know the name or the aspect of this god… they didn't have a song prepared, or a dance for that matter. The tablets mentioned several hymns that were non-specific, and could be used for any god. I told them that I'd consider what to do, but for now it was far easier to begin attempting to work in some sacrifices or offerings.

The tablets suggested food, burned in a fire, dedicated directly to the god in question. The god in question wasn't named, which was a problem we had yet to remedy.

"Well then I guess we're just going to throw everything at it and see what sticks," I said.

We offered some money to it, destroying the jade beads the Marshins used and blowing the powder over the clothing where we knew the god's body was floating. We burned some food gestured vaguely in the god's direction, then blew the ashes over its body. Afterwards we tried just throwing some of the jade beads directly on it. Cinzy tried throwing a Likability Token directly into it. We tried to get water blessed and dump it onto the set of clothing. We tried offering it grasses, flowers, herbs and spices.

In all cases, the materials sparked and fizzed like they were dissolving in acid or burning up, and vanished. In essence, these all failed.

We tried blood, with me offering to do the deed and all the Guardians freaking out. Absolutely not, they said. No way no how. Ivy had her palm slit with a pocketknife while we were arguing over

the situation, and the blood similarly fizzed and popped like they were being burned.

Nothing was working. Talk started up about wrangling a Nakamamon and sacrificing it to appease the god, or cure it.

"No. Nuh uh," Regina said, and Tara immediately backed her up. "There's no way we're sacrificing a poor, defenseless creature on the off chance that violent death, which has never worked before, will suddenly now work."

"You can't stop us," Ivy said with the sort of calm and cold calculation you'd only see out of movie villains.

"We have to use clothes then!" Cinzy burst out.

All eyes turned toward her.

"It's a fashion god. Or a god of clothes anyway. We have to use clothes on it. Offer it the clothes."

Ivy turned to me, as if to ask if she should go out and rustle up a bunny rabbit so I could slit its throat. I gave her a tiny shake of the head. No, we didn't need to start killing adorable widdle bunny wunnies. No thank you.

Jeez, Ivy could be scary.

We ended up asking some of the villagers to grab up articles of clothing they had, and they complied. Within a few minutes, we had Marshins holding the billowing, filmy dresses and clothes they normally wore, looking at me with questioning eyes.

I simply gestured at the arranged glowing clothes, as if to say 'be my guest.'

"Do we burn them f… okay I guess not." Tara froze when the first Marshin dumped the dress unceremoniously onto the arranged clothing.

Once again, the material dropped onto the clothes disintegrated.

"This is bullsh—" Ivy started, then stopped.

The shirt began to fill out, as though something were inflating it from below. Everyone stared, hoping for the sleeves and neck and pants to begin inflating, and have the god return to existence. For

long, tense moments we all stared.

"More clothing," I said, and the next Marshin threw in his pants.

Again the shirt swelled as though something were filling it.

"More," I said.

Marshin after Marshin dropped clothing on, and the inflation continued. The sleeves on the tunic began to fill out, along with the top of the pants, then the legs. Over time, the rate of expansion slowed dramatically. The first and second pieces of clothing offered up did a lot of filling out, while the later pieces didn't have much effect at all. It was barely visible.

"Holy—" Regina went to say, but Tara clapped a hand over her mouth.

"It's a spiritual malady," I hissed. "It literally is holy."

More clothes were added. Then the kicker popped up: a message from the UI that we were doing it right.

***Administer Cure Check**: This check is Very Difficult. You currently have Administer Cure at level 7, and Affinity at level 5. Would you like to spend your 4* Tokens to lower the difficulty to Develop Cure?*

Total Tokens: 5 Affinity and 7 Free Tokens.

**__Hard At Work:__ Your Tokens are worth double given you are engaged in your class duties.*

Not only were we doing it right, but we hadn't been forced to make another check to Develop Cure. Somehow we bypassed that, and I wasn't going to question it. It would have meant another incredibly difficult check, followed by me spending a lot of Tokens I didn't want to spend.

I was tempted to just spend the four Tokens, but I had an inkling that the way this had worked with the inspiration might work again. If we just did the right thing, the difficulty should lower over time.

"More clothes!" I shouted. "Faster please!"

The Marshins rushed out to bring in more. I also turned to our

team members to offer up a pair of socks or an extra t-shirt if they had one. They also pelted out of the room, followed by a surly looking Drat. He too went, while I sprinted to my tent and grabbed up my backpack. Locating a pair of underwear dotted with red hearts, I grinned and dashed back to the lab to throw it on.

Before my eyes, the Develop Cure check I was being asked to make dropped in difficulty, requiring me to spend only 3 Tokens instead.

Once Regina, Tara, Ivy, Isabelle, Cinzy, Alan and Trent had added their clothes, the figure looked almost entirely filled out. A ghostly, shining face had begun to swim into being above the neck hole in the tunic, and gleaming hands were now barely visible in the dim light of the laboratory, poking out of the sleeves.

"We're just about there," I said.

All eyes turned to Drat, who stood there frowning, holding a sock.

"Go on, Drat," Cinzy urged.

"I like this sock," he grumped. "It's my favorite sock."

"Give Dobby a sock, Drat," Tara said. "Everybody else gave."

"Do it," Ivy said.

"I don't follow your orders," he said, then turned to me.

I wasn't having this. A timer had appeared above the Administer Cure check write up, and it was counting down fast. "I can just spend the Tokens and pass the check automatically," I said.

"Boo!" Isabelle called, cupping her hands against her mouth. "Boo!"

Drat took another second, then finally dropped the sock onto the figure.

A moment later, the check had been passed. The difficulty had lowered down to one, and I instructed the UI to simply make the check. With my 12 levels of Affinity and Administer Cure, I managed 4 successes. The additional 3 successes were going to be made available as Free Tokens when dealing with this godly being. Step one really was to just attempt to cure the illness. Steps two through

five hundred were on the way.

This is Christopher breathing out a huge sigh of relief.



Chapter 14- Regain the Chill

It seemed like the whole world got a bit warmer once the god had reconstituted from the offerings made by both the Marshins and the people on my team. The sun seemed a bit brighter and more cheerful. The cutting breeze died down a little. All seemed well.

All seemed better when we got an achievement.

Achievement: *Pray to the Gods*

You have conducted an offering to a god, in order to bring it back from the brink of spiritual and magical collapse. Though your work is not done, you have succeeded in the first step: reverence.

Reward: +1 Divine Resistance

**Divine Resistance is considered a skill and may be advanced as skills. This aids primarily in Durability checks to resist the influence of the gods over you, though other attributes may be called for.*

"Holy—" Regina started, but Tara once more clamped a hand over her mouth.

"Quit that! When things are literally holy, you can't just blaspheme all over the place, okay?" Her brow furrowed. "Are you… licking my fingers?"

Regina had a mischievous look on her face.

"That is so gross," Tara muttered, and held her hand out in front of her. "You're so gross. I wish you were wearing clothes so I could wipe my hand on your shirt or your dress. Gross gross gross!"

Tara left in search of a way to purge the feeling from her hand, while the team and I celebrated… quietly.

"What do we do next?" Trent asked.

"Well, it still has a magical ailment," I said.

"Luckily we have our resident expert Healer," Cinzy said, and

looped an arm around my shoulders. This put her in close, close contact with me. Her boob against my arm, her hip on mine.

"I'm not an expert by any means… Tara and Larelle know that. But we were successful in the end with the God of Footfalls."

"That's what I like to hear!" Cinzy said, and seemed to realize all eyes were on her, and that she was naked, I was naked, and she was touching me… more than a little bit. She moved away in a hurry. "Okay! I'll tell the council and the natives that we're moving into that cure-making stage you talked about, and hopefully it won't be several days, and even if it is, big fracking deal, and then we'll all be wearing clothes again. Whoooo!" She threw her hands up and did a really nice dance as she headed out of the building, even twirling a few times. And boy did she lock eyes with me right before moving out of sight.

***

I stared at my mother for a time. Her face twitched with impatience.

"What?"

"I know you're going to ask," I said.

"Ugh, get on with it," she said, and threw a donut hole at me. I caught and stuffed it in my mouth. I then theatrically chomped on it again and again, mouth big and opened wide, just so I could show her what was happening to her projectile with every gnashing of teeth.

My mom's expression fell serious. "You're not allowed to tell us any of this, are you?"

"You're jumping to the end," I told her. "You're going to want to hear all about Glumpdumpkin and Saxwhacket."

"And Cunt Hustle?"

"Um, I think you mean Flunt-on-the-Rustle," I said, in mock affront, tinged with some very real disgust. "Jeesh, Mom, you can't say that word to your own son. As Tara would say, gross."

"What kind of trouble are you going to get us into, Christopher?"

she wondered aloud. “Are they going to come in here with guns and badges and mind wipe all of us? Is poor little Brayden mixed up in all this?” She sat up and gave me a glower I didn’t much like. “You had better not have endangered my only grandson’s life, Christopher Matthew Fletcher.”

Oof, the dreaded middle name. Although I could tell she was joking, sort of, there was a very real concern that men in black suits were going to show up and disappear the whole family, no matter what age. Whether that meant a government facility somewhere or a bath in acid to turn them all into sludge, where they’d be kept in a hazardous waste barrel forever, she didn’t know. Either one of those outcomes was totally unacceptable and avoidable, if only I kept my trap shut.

“Everything will be fine, mother. The good news is that nobody who talks about this will sound even remotely believable. The only reason you believe me is because I have so many details. I doubt you were recording everything, so there’s no way you’d reproduce the whole story in full. They’d claim you were spewing fiction, or were schizophrenic. Either way you could be laughed off by the news media. Maybe somebody would believe you on a message board online somewhere.”

She frowned, but didn’t protest. I was right, but she didn’t like knowing secrets that would get her disappeared and brainwashed at best. She was safe, though she wasn’t entirely convinced.

“After all, you don’t know where the portal is.”

“It’s not in the Arctic Circle?” she asked.

“What’s not in the Arctic Circle?” Sarah called from the front door. “Hey! I brought McBreakfast. I figure you didn’t have the opportunity to eat much deep fried processed food in nudity world.” She held up several brown sacks with the delicious aromas of butter, oil, McEnglish Muffins and meat wafting out.

I didn’t think she would be back to hear more story so soon after last night, but here she was. Brayden came groggily through the door trailing a filthy stuffed animal, and walked directly into my hug.

“Hey little dude.”

After a break for breakfast, helping Brayden do some biking, climbing, swinging, and ball catching, we drove out to an apple orchard for apple picking, a hay ride, apple cider and donuts, and caramel apples. Brayden was predictably super excited for the caramel, less excited for the peanuts, and uninterested in eating the gigantic apple once he’d gotten all the sticky caramel off the outside. I laughed at the state of my nephew and let Sarah chase me around the parking lot while my father wheeled my mother slowly behind us in her wheelchair.

Afterwards, Brayden immediately fell asleep, despite predictions that he wouldn’t sleep until he was thirty-five. I stuck my tongue out at Sarah.

“All right fine, how long did it take?” my mother asked.

“How long did what take?” my father asked.

“The cure to restore the nudity god!” she retorted. “Keep up!” When he raised his hands in defeat, she barked at him again to focus on the road.

“Well?” Sarah demanded.

“It took weeks.”

***

The God of Footfalls wasn’t as far gone as this new god. Me not knowing its name was the first bad part. I had to level up my Identify skill first, because simply concentrating on the glowing figure inside the clothing just flat didn’t work. Failure only really gave you the good xp the first time; more trying after that was just the definition of insanity.

“The UI says it’s going to be Nigh Impossible,” I grumbled.

The whole team was assembled around me, except for Drat and Chrysta, who was presently on Guardian duty. Sometimes people weren’t very careful. Other times they might just trip and fall, and get a face full of divinity. Deadly, deadly divinity.

They all sat around the laboratory building, still naked and still

not pleased with the situation. Trent and Alan had the worst of this, though Isabelle was the most self-conscious of the ladies. Larelle was the least, proudly thrusting her enormous breasts out and standing with feet confidently shoulder width apart. Although Larelle possessed far more hair than any human on her head, she possessed not a single hair down below. I know this because I had a completely unobstructed view.

"Nigh Impossible," the assembled team members said, and looked at one another in wonder.

"Yeah. Easy, Moderate, Difficult, Very Difficult, Extreme, and then Nigh Impossible," I said. "I have an ability that will double the value of my Tokens, and it still said it would take 9 Tokens to make this happen."

After protests that 'maybe that wouldn't be so bad' and 'didn't you get 3 bonus Tokens for curing the spiritual illness?' I had to remind them that administering the cure would take yet another check of roughly the same difficulty. And if I wanted to use any Tokens on, say, healing them when they got hurt, I would have to have some Tokens.

It almost certainly wouldn't have worked. I had 7 Free, 3 Bonus, and then 5 Affinity Tokens, so a total of 15… that wouldn't have been enough.

And it felt like cheating. Some of my team members said they would use their Tokens to lower the difficulty, but when pressed, only Alan and Trent had enough Affinity to really make a difference. They had special abilities that required the use of those Tokens. Isabelle and Ivy didn't even have the 3 Affinity in order to help lower the difficulty by a single point.

The ace in the hole was Larelle, who had contributed 15 fracking Tokens once upon a time… but for whatever reason she didn't offer those up at this moment. I made a mental note to ask her later: why not?

To get out of the funk this put me in, I headed out on expeditions to see more wildlife and identify it using my skill. Also, I needed

more herbs, plants and flowers. This also allowed me to test out my **Beastmaster** special ability. In the evenings, I split my days between researching the best cure for the job, and trying to make meditation work at replenishing my Tokens.

Regina refused to go anywhere with Tweedle Dee not at full strength. I'd been using the Healer's Breath on him each day. Closing in on the cure for the nudity god made this easier each time, but Dee seemed to lose a few flower petals each day. His fur seemed just a shade duller as well.

This meant mainly going out with Tara or Trent.

With Tara, we were able to get some brief bouts of air time on the back of Airaconda. The Slitherwind didn't have the endurance to take two people far.

"Okay what the heck are those things?" I asked, eyeing several tiny tornadoes in the distance. They were difficult to make out against the clouds, little more than smudges of vertical cloud. As Airaconda closed in, I squinted and used Beastmaster to kick in with its Identify bonus.

Cyclowl

First Stage Nakamamon

The Cyclowl will routinely hunt in packs, using its tiny cyclones to throw smaller prey off course, or draw them from shallow waters. When larger prey is snagged by a flock member, they are happy to share the catch.

Typical length: 3-5 foot wingspan (small)

Typical weight: 2-4 pounds

Gender: unknown

Aspect: air/creature (beast)

Transformations: unknown -> Cyclowl -> unknown

***Cyclowl** has been added to your Nakamadex.*

That was pretty metal. The tiny cyclones criss-crossed one

another and seemed to flick at other smaller creatures. Using Eagle-Eyed, I was able, with difficulty, to make out what they were hunting. Again, Identify kicked in.

Flameingo

First Stage Nakamamon

Flameingoes use powerful elemental fire to keep predators at bay, and to keep rivals from their main food source: valuable minerals in volcanic lava and ash.

Typical length: 3-5 foot wingspan (small)

Typical weight: 3-5 pounds

Gender: unknown

Aspect: fire/creature (beast)

Transformations: unknown -> Flameingo -> unknown

***Flameingo** has been added to your Nakamadex.*

I couldn't keep the awe out of my voice. A surge of amazement and glee shot through me, seeing a burst of fire come out of the red Flameingoes, and cause the Cyclowls to veer away.

"That is so cool," I muttered. "Does this mean we're close to a volcano or a vent or something?"

"There," Tara said, pointing down at a mass of escaping steam and smoke. Dozens of Flameingoes were landing there and clustering around other creatures.

"Let's head down."

The heat was palpable as we drew closer, but thankfully it lessened as we descended. "Hot air rises," I told myself.

I quickly located and Identified the tiny offspring of the Flameingoes, as Kindlets. These things were adorable, with big fat heads and fire smoldering over their entire little bodies in the shape of new feathers. They weren't even a foot tall, and stumbled and fell down repeatedly because of the size of their heads.

"I love them," Tara breathed. Then, when her bonded pet made a

groan of complaint, she got in a bunch of head and neck scratches. "Oh hush, you. I'm not going to replace you. Things can be cute, you know."

A number of Magmamanders also basked nearby, grumpily moving aside if pecked too many times by the Flameingoes.

"Wait, do you see that?" Tara asked.

I followed where she was pointing, but only saw a hump of glowing coal, like an ember but a good six feet long.

"I don't… wait, is that thing breathing?"

It was. The system identified it as a Scorchomp.

Scorchomp

Unknown Nakamamon

A rare Nakamamon with little known information. HQ records indicate that this Nakamamon should be regarded with extreme caution.

Typical length: 12-15 feet (large)

Typical weight: 1-2 tons

Gender: unknown

Aspect: fire/draconic

Transformations: unknown

***Scorchomp** has been added to your Nakamadex.*

Peering into the camp fire was a hypnotic and meditative exercise, and this wasn't any different. So it was, looking over the assembled creatures trying to eat the minerals bubbling out of the volcanic vent from several hundred feet away. I couldn't take my eyes off the heat shimmer of the basking Magmamanders, the darting heads of the Flameingoes, or the cute antics of the Kindlets.

I couldn't tell you how much time passed. However much it was, suddenly the smaller creatures surged into motion. I'd never seen Larelle's Magmamander react except when feeding, but these things suddenly burst into action. They scurried away from the Scorchomp,

which lumbered to its feet.

The thing was a dinosaur. Spines that had lain flat before now stood up, and the triangular head lifted. An obsidian eye opened, and one flame-orange pupil swiveled and locked onto Tara and I. It had chips of volcanic glass for teeth, we saw now that it yawned. That maw would easily be able to fit my leg into, possibly both. The tail unfurled behind it, long and powerful.

Like a cat waking up, its maw opened in a long and relaxed yawn, and it quivered as its spine arched in a stretch. It reached out with front legs, then rear legs, before it shook itself. And here was the wildest part: it stuck its head directly down into the lava, then moments later disappeared down inside. The volcanic vent they'd all clustered around swallowed up the Scorchomp. I held my breath, expecting it to burst out closer to us, huge crocodilian mouth wide, but it didn't.

Beside me, Tara shivered. I definitely felt that.

Identify went up to level 3 that day, and level 4 three days after that. I catalogued a lot of new creatures.

Ranging further from the village went like that: I'd add this or that creature to my Nakamadex, a system-based index that catalogued all the Nakamamon I'd seen.

By some kind of Wizard spell nonsense I didn't understand, new entries and information was periodically downloaded from whatever all of us had seen, and added to the overall index. The person who'd engineered this was a collector, that much was clear. They wanted us all to discover all the Nakamamon for ourselves.

The natives of Slinktrickle didn't push us. They continued to supply us with food, allow us to use their buildings, and once in a while, Alan or Trent would stagger back to camp with a certain smile on their faces. They wouldn't talk about the dopey grins, or what they'd been up to, but I knew. The girls knew, too.

This is Christopher enjoying the wider world, and trying to regain some of his chill.



Chapter 15- A Fly in the Ointment

Over the course of a week, I managed to raise my Identify skill to level 5. **Beastmaster** did give me a bonus to Identify Nakamamon, but not gods.

In that time also, I had some good relaxation time with Vellenia, with Tara, and once with Ivy and Isabelle.

Each night in my tent, Vellenia appeared and laid with me. If I'd been out that day with Trent or Tara looking for Nakamamon to Identify, she was far more cuddly and insistent that she satisfy me sexually. If we'd spent the day researching in the lab, preparing ingredients or sorting them out, she was less likely to demand a good forking. In both cases she wanted to lay directly on top of me, or be spooned. Let me tell you, having a fish tail sticking out above her butt made spooning a unique experience. Vellenia was so cuddly and physically affectionate.

Each time I went out with Tara, the athletic and long-legged beauty wanted me to pour as much of my seed as I could directly inside her. She didn't want to swallow it, she didn't want to have it coating her body, she wanted it inside. All ranging and Nakamamon identification and chill took second place to a good fracking.

Regina refused to leave Dee's side, and I could see her growing impatient with me as time went on. I started avoiding the situation. I went into her building for daily treatments to slow the effects of touching a god's, uh… holy garments, then promptly left. Using **Healer's Endurance** each morning to deflect the majority of the damage and slow down the spread. I'd created an elixir that would last the week, meaning Dee was sitting pretty. He seemed happy and cheerful, but his coat didn't have the luster it had when I first met him. Regina took him out at times for slow and careful walks

around the village. I wasn't invited.

On the seventh night, Ivy sat directly on my right as I gazed into the nightly camp fire. Since we were still all nude, and the nights would still be chilly, it was either fire or bedrolls. Larelle remained, gazing into the fire, while Chrysta was on patrol. Trent and I had been out looking for Nakamamon species all day, with Isabelle and Muppin tromping beyond the marsh, and Trent was exhausted. Alan took this time to continue spellcasting to try to up his level. Admirable dedication, but I knew that levels would come. Burnout would also claim Alan four days into this week, and he had nothing to do but meander around the village. Meander until one of the natives pulled him into one of the huts and rode him to a delirious orgasm, that was. For now, he was already asleep, having exhausted his mana like Trent.

Ivy sitting next to me on my right was the signal that she and Isabelle wanted some playtime. I tried to keep my expression neutral and not give away that I was suddenly a bit nervous at the prospect of having yet another threesome.

Holy magnolias, I had been absolutely blessed.

I whispered to Vellenia that I was going to mate with one of my fellow humans, and asked her to keep quiet about it. None of the others needed to know. She gave me a bright grin, nodded, and went to engage Cinzy in some cultural exchange dialogue: she wanted to know about earth and its weirdness.

Minutes later, Ivy disappeared from my right, and Isabelle left not long after that. I made my excuses, which weren't excuses at all; I was dead tired.

It only took a minute for me to find myself pulled into the girls' temporary living quarters and then into Ivy and Izzy's room. The door closed with a soft click, and soon enough I felt Ivy's mouth surrounding my semi-hard cock.

"Jeez," I breathed. In the gloom, Isabelle sat on the bed watching us intently. Of course nude, but she had her thighs spread and her hand working between them. She was heaving for breath, eyelids

drooping.

In the meantime Ivy lashed the underside of my cock with her tongue in a way that said she had some decent amount of practice at this. My hands drifted down to her bald head, and I swear for a moment I could feel the tattoos moving on her skin. That is a weird thing to feel, but I am certain I felt it.

"I need you inside me," Ivy whispered.

"I need to watch you kiss your girlfriend," I said. There would be no sexing with either of them if Isabelle wasn't happy.

Ivy pulled a slow about face, then extended her hand and slunk towards Isabelle.

"Babe," she whispered.

"Y-yeah?"

"Put those fingers in my mouth."

Isabelle made a soft groan of arousal and allowed herself to be pulled to her feet. The whimpering didn't cease as Ivy lovingly licked and sucked at the fingers that had been inside her girlfriend. Moments later they had their tongues battling.

"You two make a cute couple," I told them. I wasn't sure they were listening. By now they were making out furiously, groping one another and beginning to drift around the room. Ivy slowly backed Isabelle up against the wall beside their window. Moonlight and cool night air spilled into the room through the open window, the shutters still thrown wide.

Both panted and grunted, grinding their midsections together. In the light hitting Ivy's body, her original tattoos from earth stood out starkly against her natural skin tone. The muscles worked as she humped against Isabelle, the both of them panting and periodically locking lips. Battling tongues, fingers intertwined, the two forgot I was there or focused on one another.

Or so I thought. At some point Ivy's fingers closed around my rock hard member and pulled me in. Instead of what I thought was about to happen, she rolled so that Isabelle's luscious butt was pointed at me. Still pulling, she grabbed onto Izzy's other butt cheek.

“Baby,” she breathed, “Fletcher’s gonna give you what I can’t.” When Isabelle opened her mouth to protest, Ivy put a finger against her lips and kept grinding their pussies together. “It’s okay. He’s good. He’ll give you that power…”

“But—”

“And I want you to stare me in the eyes while I suck on your clit with him inside you. I love you, babe.”

Isabelle moaned, mouthed the words in the dark.

Ivy’s insistent hand pulled at my hip until I pressed into Isabelle’s back.

“Tell me no,” I breathed in her ear, inaudible to Ivy, “and I won’t.” Even as Ivy ran her tongue over Isabelle’s lower lips and glided softly over the pleasure button. “Tell me stop, and I’ll stop.”

It was such a sight, seeing Ivy’s hands wrap around Isabelle’s butt cheeks and massage them before pulling them open for me.

“It’s okay,” she told me, gasping and writhing. Did she want to be filled up in a way Ivy’s fingers or tongue couldn’t match, or was she doing this because Ivy was pushing it on her? I didn’t know, and my rampant erection did not give a single solitary fork. But I had to stay in control, so this might happen again.

“Tap my leg and it’s over,” I continued, low and slow. “Say zucchini and it’s over.”

Then, incredibly, I felt Ivy take hold of my erection again, and begin rubbing it back and forth over Izzy’s drenched and hot slit.

“Just stay there, Fletcher, don’t move. She’ll push back against you. I know she wants it.”

This was the moment I chose to spend the Token in order to enhance the pleasure between Isabelle and I. The instantaneous groan of pleasure proved me right.

Isabelle was whining now, a moan building inside her, standing on her toes so she wouldn’t slide down and impale herself on me. At the same time her back was arching and she was rubbing herself against the head and the shaft. One iota at a time, she rubbed her clit on me, and Ivy kept the pressure of my shaft pressing against

her dripping pussy.

The moment came when she slid downward, bending over completely and nestling the head against her opening. Ivy was right; she pushed backwards and, inch by inch, impaled herself on me.

For a good three inches anyway.

"Ivy," she whined. "It's so biiiiiiig."

"I know, babe. You don't have to take it all."

But she seemed determined. Minutes passed with her quivering and rocking herself forward and back. I couldn't help but run my hands over her soft, curvy torso and up over her breasts.

"Up she goes," Ivy murmured, and I was forced to dip my hips in order to let Isabelle's body straighten, her back against my chest. "Now you do the work, big boy." Then, the tattooed Guardian dipped forward and began licking over where we were joined.

Now I don't know about you, but this was something I'd never felt before. Something I never expected to feel at all. Ivy's meaning was clear: I would slide in and out of her girlfriend so Isabelle could remain in place and have her clit toyed with.

"You're so beautiful," I told Isabelle, feeling every available inch of her while slowly rocking my hips up and in. She didn't protest when I kissed from her shoulder over to her neck, then up her neck to her ear. In fact, she didn't mind at all, laying her head back against my shoulder and turning her head so I could kiss over her cheek, her jaw line, and finally her lips.

Down below, I could barely make out Ivy's head between her legs, but the sensation was proof of her tongue working over the both of us. When I slid out, a wriggling tongue lashed at the underside, while she concentrated mostly on Isabelle's pleasure.

It wasn't long before the sharp intakes of breath announced Isabelle's oncoming climax. She shifted her weight several times, while I sped up a fraction.

With the Pleasure Seeker Qualities, and all skills, an instinctual knowledge arrived. I knew I could increase girth and length to their maximums, or retract my full size a tad. So it was now, when the

quivering started, that I inflated Girth to its full size.

The result was explosive. Isabelle's knees buckled and her body melted into a swoon. The pressure around me tightened and loosened, with the irregular shakes of her whole self.

"Ohhh!" was all she managed to get out.

The orgasm went on for no small amount of time. She bucked and shivered, and when it seemed like it was over, she'd shiver and shake several times all over again. I would tell that Ivy was doing something, but I didn't know what.

"Let's put her on the bed," Ivy said.

The old me would never have been able to stand up and do 15 minutes of micro-squats. I'd have had days' worth of pain. Now I felt a slight ache in my thighs, and a feeling like I should sit down.

"I want to ride you," Ivy told me.

Moonlight streamed into the room and onto the bed, where I tracked Ivy's every movement. She sauntered over and climbed onto the bed. Standing like that, towering over me, she seemed like a giant. She shifted so I could get a better look at the junction of her thighs. She ran both hands over it, pulling it open to reveal where I was going to be in just a minute.

"You'd better not steal my girlfriend, Fletcher," she whispered.

"When I get to have sex with both of you at the same time?" I smiled at her like I was chiding a simpleton. "Why would I do that? Do I look insane?"

She grinned and squatted over my midsection. For now, I would keep my cock its former size.

The athletic display here was very welcome. With the moonlight, I got a totally silhouetted Ivy, and I was treated to the vision of her unfolding to welcome my cock into her.

"You did a good job with Izzy," she whispered, and sank down the first couple of inches onto me. "Ugh, Fletcher… she wasn't lying. You're big."

She felt… different than Isabelle. She had muscle control Isabelle didn't, and kept squeezing around me. Also, the feel of her thighs,

her ass on me, and her fingers on my abs were totally different than Isabelle's softer body.

After a few minutes of getting accommodated inside her tight confines, Ivy began riding me. It was heavenly. At first I ran my hands over her defined thighs, but soon I felt over the six pack abs and then up her smaller breasts.

"You ever, ugh, do two girls at once?" she asked, smiling down.

"The only people… I've ever done… are all in this village…" I told her. The truth, that Regina and Tara had been in a clumsy and hot experimental threesome, might not have gone over well.

She seemed surprised by this, but didn't stop her rhythm. She'd started working at her clit, using my knee to help her keep her balance.

"Fuuuuuudge I needed this," she breathed.

She seemed content to rise and fall on my pole just like this, but I was nearing orgasm and that wouldn't do. I got up and latched my mouth onto her nipple, surprising her, then turned and put her on her ass without breaking our union.

"What… Ohhhh yeah. Pound me good, Fletcher."

I started sawing in and out of her in earnest. Whatever it was about the cowgirl position, that pressure on the underside of my cock was absent now. I saw the message with the Stave Off check vanish. Without missing a bead, Ivy resumed rubbing at her clit, and now added mauling one of her nipples to the mix.

Something caught my eye, and I turned in the middle of filling Ivy full of my cock to behold a tiny glowing mote outside the building, just outside the window. Just as Isabelle roused and started tonguing Ivy's other nipple, Eagle-Eyed told me I was looking at Fairy Poppins.

"Don't st… don't sto…" Ivy's head fell back against the bed and she started to cum, hard.

By the time she'd finished bucking and groaning, the little fairy Nakamamon was gone.

I closed the shutters after that, and serviced Ivy yet again. She

wanted to be on all fours with Isabelle's pussy in her mouth. She wanted me to lay down and ride my face while Isabelle stuffed herself full of me again, and the two of them made out on top of me. Lastly, she wanted me to explode all over their faces. They knelt, side by side, and Ivy begged to have it all over her.

The kiss afterwards almost brought my cock immediately back to fighting shape.

***

This was the third time I'd been with the couple together and the fourth time I'd been with Isabelle. Each time felt wild, like we were doing something you only ever saw in a porn film.

In the back of my mind, the situation with Fairy Poppins replayed again and again. The tiny Nakamamon had fled the scene after staring through the window at me. On the one hand, I was worried. Although Fairy Poppins hadn't communicated with me in the form of words, she had insinuated herself into several situations. Now that I thought about it, I didn't know if the tiny fairy could speak.

Whether she could speak only to Cinzy or could speak with all of us was immaterial if the revelation of the threesome got back to her companion. I wasn't a fan of keeping secrets, and I'd skirted around the issue of having sex with other girls when I brought it up with Cinzy. She might take the news badly.

On the other hand, I wasn't sure I had any need to be worried. Fairy Poppins might take umbrage with what I'd been doing, but she'd also been eavesdropping on my personal business. I was an adult, Ivy and Isabelle were adults, and our private affairs were our private affairs. Neither the Nakamamon or Cinzy had any right to judge us based on that kind of thing.

I swore on my walk back to the tent, where Vellenia was waiting for me. These mental gymnastics weren't working. Cinzy could very well take things badly, because people had emotions and were prone to act on them in ways that weren't advisable.

This is a glowing golden fly in Christopher's ointment.



Chapter 16- Not the Consequences We Were Expecting

Vellenia welcomed me in and asked how mating with my human compatriots had gone.

On the one hand, amazingly. On the other hand, terribly. On the other *other* hand, it was so strange to talk with a gorgeous non-human who I was sexually involved with about matters pertaining to sex with humans I was sexually involved with.

Since I didn't want to worry Vellenia and it wasn't her problem to handle anyway, I left out the Fairy Poppins situation. There was no good way for me to get out ahead of this oncoming train. I'd try to deal with it in the morning.

Or it would come and deal with me.

"What about your divinely granted abilities?" she asked.

My relationship status with Ivy and Isabelle leveled up. Both their special abilities also leveled up, a definite bonus that put a smile on Vellenia's cute face. She grinned and clapped several times, staring at me in the dimness of the moonlight filtering through the tent.

Stalwart II

(Special Ability, Common, passive)

I- You come from sturdier stuff. Whenever you are forced to make a contested social check, you are considered to have the skill for such a check at rank 7. If you are in physical danger, you are considered to have the skill at rank 3 instead.

II- Whenever you are forced to spend permanent Durability Tokens, regain one at sunrise.

Fierce II was just as impressive to me as **Stalwart II**. They felt like they belonged on opposite sides of the same coin. Isabelle for defense, and Ivy for offense.

Fierce II

(Special Ability, Common, passive)

I- You know you're kind of scary when you want to be. Whenever you force a contested social check against an opponent, you are considered to have the skill for such a check at rank 7. When you enter a dangerous situation, you gain a temporary Token in Physicality and Durability. These Tokens disappear after an hour if unused.

II- Whenever someone attempts to use a special ability against you, the check is at +1 difficulty. If they spend Tokens against you, they must spend +1 Token.

On defense, I would regain Tokens unless I died. On offense, people would lose out if they came at me.

It was a lot to keep track of, but I was thrilled to have more cool special abilities.

"I like the passive ones better," I said. "Sometimes I'm in the middle of things and I'm just trying my best, and I forget that I have active special abilities."

Vellenia patted my arm in understanding.

"There will be a limit," she said.

I stopped and looked at her. "I'm sorry what?"

"There is a limit to how many abilities you can comfortably handle. Your body can only grasp at so much power." As it turned out, I could only have one special ability for each of my attributes. Affinity, Durability, Ingenuity, Likability, Physicality. Five, tops.

Meaning right now, after **Beastmaster** from Regina, **Eagle-eyed** from Tara, **Stalwart** and **Fierce** from Isabelle and Ivy, there was only one more to gain before I was done.

"What about my classes?"

"Your class abilities will likewise conform to your attributes."

I blinked several times and tried to take all this in.

"So a maximum of five?" I had more than five abilities.

"From each of your classes. Dual classing is not unheard of, though it is rare. You will be blessed with fifteen special abilities, given time." Holy mackerel. Vellenia smiled indulgently. "Five is a special number in Dorfialtos, Fletcher."

I had **Hard at Work**, **Healer's Resistance**, **Healer's Endurance**, and **Healer's Breath** so far. After that I would really only get one more? And for my other class, I had **Blissense**, and **Post-Sharing Clarity**. A radar for knowing how to grant my partners pleasure, and a bonus for getting my freak on.

"I uh… there are gifts from the gods. I have a complete understanding of flowers from the Goddess of the Meadows." Not to mention I had **Entwined Ecstasy** and my second entire class. "Are those—"

She shook her head and cut me off. "The divine is limitless."

Finally, I settled in to my nightly snuggle fest with Vellenia. A guy could get used to having a gorgeous female draped over him every night for the rest of his life. As Nakamamon went, a snuggle bunny was the best of all possible outcomes.

***

The issue with Fairy Poppins came to a head on a perfect day. The sun rose bright and early, giving us a wonderful view of thick mist on the marsh. After getting my fill of Vellenia cuddles, I extracted myself from her arms and headed out to find bright rays of sunshine warming my face. Banks of fog sat on the marsh, turning the normal and mundane into the mysterious.

I started off the day by re-applying **Healer's Resistance** to Tweedle Dee and enduring the disapproval radiating off Regina. I was getting used to this, in a way that disappointed me, but used to it regardless. That done, I gave Dee a couple of reassuring scritches and met Vellenia outside the girls' dorm building.

Alan was now in the process of shrinking down the hundreds of large clay tablets we'd enlarged in our research. I felt like I now knew so much about the different cures developed by Healers in the short time this world had been available to humans… but still not enough. As for the others, Ivy and Isabelle were still in bed, Larelle and Chrysta never seemed to sleep, Tara was out with Airaconda, and Trent was slow in waking up.

Drat, as always, was nowhere to be found.

The tiny ball of light zipped up and got right in my face.

"Oh… hey… Fairy Poppins." A fairy of her stature shouldn't have made me nervous. I wasn't nervous of Fairy Poppins herself. She had a fairy dust ability I could shrug off more easily now that I had Stalward and Healer's Resistance, and now that Vellenia was my companion. My resistance to fairy aspect magic was high… Larelle was practically immune to the fire coming off her Magmamander, so I should be immune to fairy effects.

Still, her aggressive posture was disconcerting. The flitting up and down and chirping indignantly in front of my face also gave me a bad vibe. I was supposed to be enjoying the fog this morning. Of all the weather phenomena, fog was by far my favorite. What was over in that direction? Surely not the same thing that had been there the day before! Now it could have a ring of mushrooms in it, or a wise old sage, or a sleeping dragon. Anything could be right over in that boring old spot, now that it was obscured by dense fog.

Also, I didn't get to hang out inside a cloud every day. Fog was just cool, like you could get lost in your own neighborhood.

The tiny Tinkerbell stabbed an accusing finger at me, pointed down at the ground, and followed this up by pointing back behind her. I didn't see anything back there. Teensy chirps of anger came out at me.

"I don't know what you're doing here, and I can't understand what you're saying, unfortunately. I'm sorry you're upset, if that helps."

It did not. Fairy Poppins was furious. She got so close to my face

that I felt the pinprick of her finger against the tip of my nose, and actually saw her facial expression for once. The minuscule human was enraged, her eyes filled with fury.

"Is there anything I can do—"

I wasn't able to finish that question, because Cinzy was there.

"That's enough," the Bard told her Nakamamon.

Fairy Poppins wasn't having this, and went right up into Cinzy's face at once. A hushed conversation followed, with both of them muttering and hissing almost-discernible whispers a good fifteen feet away from me. Cinzy pointed off several times, but the Nakamamon didn't go anywhere. It was only when Cinzy stomped her foot on the platform's wooden planks that Fairy Poppins got the hint, and sped away.

Something was going badly wrong here.

And wouldn't you know it, but it was this very moment when Drat chose to appear before me.

The hatchet-faced Rogue still somehow looked like a goth, even though he was tall, thin, and saw practically no sunlight. It was the lanky black hair obscuring his dark eyes, and the blade of a nose protruding from beneath.

"We need to talk," he said, in that sort of tone you'd reserve for conspiracies.

"Yeah! Yeah we do," Cinzy said, stomping over to get in my personal space. "Why don't you go first, Drat?"

"I think this is between Fletcher and I—"

"Oh no," she spat. "I insist."

I noted the brief appearance of a Token, but it disappeared before I could register what kind of Token it was. She'd just used a special ability, probably the same one she'd used on me when it was time to administer the cure on the eggs. Where I had **Stalwart** to counteract the persuasion ability, Drat had nothing.

Drat's brow furrowed briefly, before the concerned left his face and he smiled. Weird. I didn't think I'd seen Drat smile once during this whole trip. If he had, it had been at someone else's expense. He

had a dry sense of humor and wouldn't do much more than tease the others.

"I found… what I was looking for," he said.

"And what were you looking for?" Cinzy asked, with extra saccharine coating her tone.

"I told Fletcher I would tell him alone," he said, still sounding confused but pleasantly so. Like he had just entered this room but wasn't entirely sure why.

"That's perfectly okay," she said. "Fletcher won't mind."

Fletcher would mind, but the force of her personality rolled into me.

"Cinzy, you don't need to do this."

"Don't I?" The way she turned her head to lock eyes on me reminded me of a creepy doll movie. The contrast between the sweetness in her voice and the eerie expression couldn't have been more stark. "Don't I want to hear about whatever other secrets you have stored up, Fletcher?"

It was at this moment that Fairy Poppins dropped down onto Drat's head and bathed him in a shower of fairy dust. I know firsthand that stuff would cause a pleasant euphoria and a truth-telling effect would roll over him. Fairy Poppins then perched herself on Cinzy's shoulder and stared daggers in my direction.

Cinzy rolled her hand and told Drat to go on.

"Cinzy—"

"It's Cinzia," she growled.

"I found out who was responsible for the egg situation," Drat said. Maybe, in his dazed state and under the effect of Cinzy's ability, he wanted to stop us fighting, and this news was the way to do that.

"And who's that?"

"Blake," he said.

"Blake?" both Cinzy and I blurted.

"He had several others with him, but I asked Regina to describe him, and this confirmed it. He was with a small expedition of

Guardians and magic-users to catalogue this village and the surroundings."

"Blake, Regina's-once-upon-a-time-admirer Blake?" Cinzy asked.

Drat nodded cheerfully.

"The guy she rejected out of hand, that Blake?"

Drat continued bobbing his head.

"Blake the guy who used his intimidation ability on me?" I had hoped to have zero contact with that guy. In all honesty, forgetting him after getting here had been an easy task.

"That's the guy. From what I gather, he came here and attempted to have sex with several of the natives."

"That sounds like Blake," Cinzy murmured.

"They weren't comfortable with his presence," Drat went on. "Which made Vellenia's conduct toward Fletcher more confusing. But the elders sent her to figure out if he could be trusted, and whether Blake's actions constituted an attack or not. Vellenia reported back that it had not."

Meaning… having sex with Vellenia had been a test? And that test was for whether they were going to defend themselves against my group? The implications swirled through my brain. If the Marshins had had a less than stellar experience with Blake, causing the eggs serious distress, I was amazed they'd let us into the village at all.

"They wouldn't have let us in at all if Fletcher hadn't been a Healer."

"You are dismissed, Drat," Cinzy said.

"Okay!"

Drat turned on his heel and walked off. He had a blithe look on his face. If it were me I'd be seriously relieved at fleeing the powder keg set up between the Bard and myself.

For a good little while, there was no speaking. I regarded Cinzy and tried to figure out what to say. She seemed volatile, barely contained, like if I said the wrong thing she would go off like the Fourth of July.

This wasn't what I'd signed up for.

"Cinzy—"

She held up a hand, again the forceful personality seemed to smother me emotionally. One Token appeared and puffed out of existence, followed by another one. The UI informed me that **Fierce** had just caused her to spend an additional Token. I could spend 6 Tokens to break out of this effect, and that my **Stalwart** special ability would assist me in the check if I decided against Tokens.

I had a very limited Token budget for the time being. The check, even at +7 skill ranks, still only netted me 4 successes. Not enough.

Cinzy walked up to me. "I gave you my body, Fletcher. I was even stupid enough to believe you when you said you weren't going to be faithful and stay with me alone. Well that was an understatement to say the least!" She barked out a bitter laugh. "Ivy and Isabelle! Really? Not only are you banging others on the team, but you're banging the lesbian couple? I can't wait to find out who else you've stuck your cock into… Regina? Oh, probably. Tara? She's way out of your league, but who knows. What about Larelle? You got yourself a muscle mommy fetish there, eh Fletcher?" She laughed again, two quick mocking jabs. "Chrysta? I wouldn't doubt it, I guess. I don't know how you'd get your dick wet on a literal ghost, but I bet you would if you could."

I wanted to roll my eyes, but the suffocating pressure of Cinzy's Bard special ability or special abilities meant I could only stand there and vibrate indignantly, and a bit of shame. Yes, I should have told her I wasn't going to limit myself to only her.

Suddenly Cinzy's face crumpled miserably. "I thought I knew who you were, Fletcher. I thought we had something special."

She was crying. Tears welled up in her eyes and one spilled down her cheek. The last words came out in a betrayed hiss, almost inaudible. "I let you fuck my ass."

Her words, like her mental state, seemed to warp the air around her. The gorgeous misty morning suddenly felt chilly. A breeze blew over my still-nude body. The villagers who were making their way

here or there suddenly looked at the two of us and gave us wide berth. All the while, tears slipped down Cinzy's cheeks.

Fairy Poppins had stood and made her way over to Cinzy's neck, where she hugged against her companion. Cinzy flinched, and like she was swatting at a mosquito, catapulted the fairy Nakamamon out away from her. Then her eyes widened at the realization of what she'd just done.

"Fairy..." she muttered, looking lost and hurt and like a cornered animal. When she reached out, the glowing tiny fairy shied away from her.

Fairy Poppins fluttered over to me and settled on my shoulder.

"I didn't mean… I'm s…" Cinzy started, but couldn't bring herself to say she was sorry in my presence. Her mouth hardened into a tight, flat line, and for the first time ever, the anger in her made her ugly. "It's them or me, Fletcher. You want me? You get only me. I'm the best you've ever had, so go ahead and choose, right now."

I sighed. She apparently took this as confirmation that I wanted to have sex with everyone before her. Her snarl grew even worse.

"Well, you can screw anybody you want, now. I'm leaving. I quit."

Silence wasn't the only thing between us right now. It was, however, the main thing right at this moment. It spun out awkwardly.

This is Christopher losing a member of his team after only two weeks.



Chapter 17- Disobeying A Direct Order

The fog burned off and turned into a delightfully warm day that felt Spring… ish. I didn't quite understand how the seasons changed here, having only been in the world for a good month, but I was informed that this could be a Strawberry Spring situation and that more chilly weather could be on the way. I hoped not.

First I had to inform everyone that Cinzy, uh… left the team. Before she left, I was able to get back to my normal self. Now that the special ability had worn off, I tried chasing her down and telling her she wasn't allowed to go. Finally, I ordered her to come back here.

***

"How did everyone take the news?" my mother asked.

"Oh, terrible," I said. "Alan, Trent and Drat all really liked her, obviously."

"Because she was naked all the time," Sarah said. She was in the other room putting Brayden to sleep, but I could hear the eye roll in her tone of voice alone. She then made a noise of disgust with herself, because Brayden came awake after being close to slumberland.

I'd just told them that Cinzy lost her mind over me wanting to have a private chat with Drat… and she'd coerced him with special abilities into spilling what the private chat was about. I sort of lied about how much Cinzy cared about the truth… although it was more or less the truth. Ugh, being halfway truthful was what got me into the mess with Cinzy in the first place.

"She has a Likability score that's through the roof," I said, and got

out my phone. I turned it on, and while waiting for it to boot up, I went on. "So obviously the others took it badly. I didn't want to tell them what the reason was, and also didn't want to lie. Here, this is what she looks like."

I showed them the phone, and my mother actually gasped. My dad's eyebrows rose at the photo of Cinzy in a simple sundress. You could just tell that she was the most beautiful person ever from a single photo. She was and would always be the most beautiful person in any photo ever taken with her.

"Yeah," I said, and turned the phone off again. "So the girls also liked her, but were more understanding. They knew that I had ultimate say over the information. When Drat appeared and told them they were better off not knowing, they didn't like it, but they accepted it. Regina took it the worst, and stopped talking to me."

"She wouldn't!" I loved my mom for how indignant this made her, like anyone would choose to dislike me.

"Sadly she would, and she did. She didn't like that Tweedle Dee was slowly succumbing to the touch of the divine. I kept healing him back almost all the way to the top every morning, but it wasn't back up to a hundred percent. He got a little worse every day… and she blamed me. That was how it went."

"And your supermodel girl left," my father said.

"She wasn't *my* girl," I muttered in protest.

"How long before she came back?" My mother asked.

"What makes you think she came back?"

She looked down at my phone, already connecting dots. Phones didn't work in the other world. I hadn't met Cinzy here on earth. She'd been smiling and lovely in the photo. Ergo, we had reconciled. No matter what stupid things came out of our stupid mouths when we'd been upset, it had worked out in the end. My mom was sharp.

"A few weeks… it wasn't soon." It had not been a wonderful time, and I wasn't looking forward to telling her this bit.

"Can you just do that, quit the team?" My mother asked, though she didn't look like she was in any condition to hear the answer. It

had been a long day of playing with Brayden and traveling, then telling the story in the car on the way back, and finally over dinner. She and my father were both exhausted.

"I'll tell you more in the morning," I said. "Get some sleep."

"At least tell me she came back," my mother said. "She seems like such a nice young girl. I'd hate to think she ran off to join that Blake character."

My mom was adorable. Sweet, kind, understanding.

"It took some time, and it wasn't fun, but she came back eventually. Now, it's past eleven. I told myself I wasn't going to push you too hard. Let's pick it back up tomorrow."

Neither she nor my father felt the need to countermand this order. Instead, he escorted her to the bedroom. They disappeared, but not before my dad turned a grateful smile my way, and a teensy wave.

Roger that, I thought.

I helped Sarah get a woozy and cranky Brayden to her new-ish car.

"Now get in," she said.

"Huh?"

"You haven't seen the new house, you haven't met my housemates, and there's a lot you haven't told me."

"I'm pretty tired," I lied. Housemates? I did not have a speck of interest in seeing which new dirtbag she had shacked up with. I didn't need to meet another guy with a wispy goatee who smelled of BO, nacho chips and weed.

"Nuh-uh, no, no way, not a chance," she said, and pushed me to the car she'd bought on the stipend I'd set up for her from my salary. "Jeez, what're you made of, concrete? What'd they feed you over there, a dozen eggs at every meal?"

I laughed this off. "Nah it's—"

"Don't care. Get in the car."

On one hand, I was very glad Sarah was back in my parents'

lives, and vice versa. On the other hand, there were times like this. I got in and got buckled up, and soon we were heading to her new house. "Okay, now that they're out of the picture, you have to tell me why Cinzy left."

"I told you… she learned what Drat was doing skulking around and listening in on conversations and such. She wasn't happy to have me engaging in those sorts of activities." This sounded decent enough to me. A good mostly non-lie.

"And how did she learn about that?" she asked. "What raised her suspicions? No, there's more going on here."

Shirt. Sarah was much better at this than my parents, or my mother sensed it and didn't want details about my extremely complicated love life. Sarah was the kind of person who picked a scab every twelve hours. She was relentless. In some ways this was kind of good, but right now I didn't much enjoy it.

"Eh… I don't… know? She didn't say. Maybe some Marshins or Marshmellows told her they'd caught Drat sneaking around or something."

"Or something. You're not a great liar, bro. I don't buy it. If they did, she would have convened a meeting between you and her and the villagers. There's no way you just hang out with all these naked gorgeous girls all day and all night for weeks without getting up to some monkey business. You want to know what I think?"

I did not, and said so.

"I think," she said, steamrolling me, "I think you chose Drat because he was a skinny goth dude, Alan because he was a stuttering noob, and Trent because he was a geeky wannabe, meaning you'd be the most desirable male on the team, and then you spent the whole time flirting your way up these girls' skirts."

"You could not be more wrong," I said, resisting the urge to laugh. It would sound condescending and arrogant, and maybe like I was confirming her suspicion. She certainly had a high opinion of my flirting and skirt chasing abilities.

"This Physicality and Likability thing went directly to your head,

didn't it?" she demanded.

"I promise, it did not." Though just before the Cinzy blow up, I had begun to feel like them coming onto me made some sense. That was not the same, by any metric, as me going around skirt chasing, or selecting team members based on their forkability.

Okay the Rangers are an exception to the rule. Cinzy, most gorgeous woman of all women I've ever seen in real life, was not selected with the possibility of sex anywhere near the forefront of my mind. Ditto Ivy and Isabelle.

I weighed the pros and cons of coming out and telling her I had begun to amass what you might technically call a harem here on earth.

"At least you didn't get freaky with any of the non-human natives," she said in a deadpan, dry as a desert. The sarcasm was impossible to miss.

"Hey! That's not nice."

"I notice that's not a denial. You did that Vellenia, the guide, didn't you?"

"If I say yes will you stop asking your brother about his sex life?"

"I knew it!"

I rolled my eyes. "Could you keep it down? You already woke him up once." Thankfully Brayden had been lulled to sleep by the warmth and the vibration of the car.

"So you did sleep with some of them? You had a naked, humanoid Nakamamon bond with you magically… and then physically. That's so weird." She didn't let me answer. "And the party they threw for you after saving the lives of their babies didn't include any of those naked humanoid monsters approaching you after having some alcohol? Or did you approach them for a little game of hide the sausage? Either way, you did at least one of them, and probably more."

"Can I not talk about hiding the sausage with my own sister?" I asked.

"That all depends," she said.

“Depends… on what?”

“How many of the holes in your story are actually girls you boned.”

“Gross.”

Five minutes later we pulled up to a modest bungalow that needed a new paint job, or new siding. I checked out the well-kept lawn in the glare of the porch light, and noted the edging. I also noted the red subcompact car we parked behind.

“Dad taking care of the lawn, eh?” I asked.

“Way to dodge the question,” she said. “And yes, he’s been furious that neither my housemates nor I do the yard work. And he insisted on edging.” She shook her head. “Men are so weird.”

I couldn’t disagree with that statement.

“You’ve gotta tell me the next part, right now.”

“What part?” I asked, knowing exactly what she was talking about.

“You were just at the part where you were hated to see Cinzy go, but you loved to watch her leave.”

***

Cinzy gathered her belongings and hit the road. Of course, she put on a display when she left. Maybe she was hoping I would beg for her to stay, or apologize, or anything like that. She was sorely mistaken. She wasn’t the only one who could get irrationally angry.

I had a full-on menu just for being the expedition leader, which said this about me giving orders. *You may issue commands and give out quests through this menu! DRC members will suffer experience penalties for disobeying, and be given experience point bonuses for complying.*

That second part reminded me that I needed to continue giving orders any time it was someone’s job to do something. They needed all the xp they could get. Part of Alan’s job as a Wizard was cataloguing the known world and seeing how it aligned with the

magical world, where those points of contact existed and how they altered one another. He got some for casting spells as well. He was getting xp all the time. The Rangers got their xp for exploring and interacting with the wider world, so I had them out on collection assignments as often as possible.

As for the rest… Trent spent a lot of time meditating and trying to figure out how his magical blood could be used to further enhance his powers. That and practicing his arts. I gave him a lot of latitude, so he could shape the earth, but also gave him orders so he could gain xp any time he was helping with my stuff. Drat… did Drat things. He was his own person and disliked being given orders. I wasn't bothered as much, and was secretly a little pleased he was losing out on the bonus xp of being given orders.

Served him right.

The four Guardians were the hardest to grant xp, given that their job was safety. Since we were only threatened with shame and embarrassment in the current malfunctioning god situation, there was precious little for them to do. I gave them a lot of make work assignments (gathering herbs and flowers with the Rangers, training exercise times where they could fight one another in mock battles) to try to make up for that.

Staying together was part of mission parameters, so the only thing I could think to do now was punish Cinzy for quitting the team. Although she had quit, her name was still on my user interface menu roster. She needed to tender her resignation with HQ in order to quit for real. That meant she'd lose her bond with Fairy Poppins, not be allowed back through the portal, and I assumed she'd get the flashy thing treatment from Men in Black. Psychic Nakamamon existed, so they could almost certainly flashy thing her.

I couldn't stop the dots connecting in my mind, and I couldn't stop the boiling anger. She had… she should've apologized… she didn't… instead she got angry… with me? I was the *leader*!

Angry thoughts are usually stupid ones, self-serving ones, and angry words and actions are never your finest moments.

"You will stay with the team and do your duty, Cinzia Graham," I cried out. "That's an order!"

I have to admit, this was a huge mistake and I knew it the moment the words came out of my mouth. The emotions warring within me confused me, angered me, and most of all, left me feeling stupid. Fear had prevented me from telling her the full and unvarnished truth, fear that she wouldn't want to be with me.

Why had I been so afraid to lose out on the chance to be with Cinzy? Was it the raging hormones? Was it the inexperience? Was it the possibility of dating a ten?

It was a bit of all three, and it had an extra garnish of people pleasing. At his core, Fletcher is a people pleaser, and hates letting people down. The interview situation exposed that. My team didn't have to be eleven people. I didn't, strictly speaking, need Drat to ferret out secrets, or Trent to shape the earth. I hadn't needed to choose Alan either. There were dozens of interested Wizards with more experience. I hadn't needed to include two Rangers who had both promised to be okay sharing me in bed. But Fletcher liked it when there was harmony, and leaving either Tara or Regina behind was unthinkable at the time. Their disappointment that they wouldn't be coming was not something I would handle well.

Also Fletcher was terrible at dealing with times when there wasn't harmony.

I'd gotten lucky so far, very very lucky. Drat was a disharmonious factor in the group, but he'd largely stayed away from the others. Trent's recklessness had been tamped down in a hurry. I hadn't tried to initiate Larelle and Chrysta into the complicated series of knots that was my fledgeling sex ring.

So when Cinzy did the disharmony thing with explosive anger, I reacted badly. It happened in the moment: me, being in a position of authority when I never had been before, me, wanting to have all the cake and eat it too, and me, wanting to avoid possible difficult conversations and repercussions, only to have them slingshot right back into my face.

Everybody makes mistakes. I might not make them so often, but as it turns out, I make them big, hard, and loud.

Cinzia froze at hearing my 'that's an order'. She paused, for just a moment, which gave me almost enough time to apologize.

"Cinzy, I'm—"

"Ah, ah!" She cried out. "No no, don't. You ordered me to stick around. Watch what happens when things don't go well for Fletcher for once." The terrible feeling in my gut that I'd just done something really dumb, and really bad, calcified into a solid lump that made me nauseous.

"Cinzy," I tried again.

She defiantly slung her backpack up onto one shoulder.

Big mistake.

In an instant, the backpack vanished. It only took a moment for realization to set in, and then the uncaring, imperious beauty vanished. Rage overcame her. She roared in frustration and betrayal now, screaming with her enhanced powers. It hit like a physical wave, pushing me back a step, and didn't stop at me. It wasn't targeted. It rolled out over the marsh, out over the village, and spread up into the air. She'd used a special ability, and unlike the Guardian intimidation ability, hers could (and did) influence a range of emotions. It was her whole job, after all.

A concentrated surge of rage and hurt and disappointment and betrayal were given magical form, then spread out like Saturn's ring away from her and into the whole village. It was another Mental ailment.

This was how my days and days of preparation to heal up the nakedness god went from week to *weeks*.

Cinzy kept right on going. With the fairy dust blessing from Fairy Poppins, gravity only affected her by around half. She leapt around twenty feet in the air and slowly floated down into the marsh, before leaping again. Those mighty arcs soon got her to the edge of the marsh and onto dry land, where she hopped along like she was on the moon.

We had brand new problems to worry about, immediate problems.

This must have been quite similar to what happened with Blake those weeks ago. Her concentrated fury, empowered with her stamina and her mana, struck the Nakamamon and poisoned them.

The village wasn’t large. Everyone within a quarter mile or so ended up sick.

This is Christopher about to work overtime, and deserving it.



Chapter 18- The Meat of the Matter

I didn't get further than that. Sarah was out of the car, unclipping Brayden from the carseat and getting his sleeping self gathered up. I waved her off, telling her that she was very pregnant and needed to let me handle this while I could. She grumbled about it, but acquiesced.

Soon enough we were in the house, depositing Brayden in his bedroom, and meeting Sarah's roommates. Plural.

First was Christine. She was a willowy brunette in thick, comfy pajama bottoms and a hefty hoodie. Next I was introduced to Heather, a stocky redhead also wearing pajamas. Heather had on a cutesy cape and hood thing, with little rabbit ears popping up off the top.

"Bitches, I'm home," Sarah said.

"Hey," Heather said, and gave her a quick hug.

"Sup, slut," Christine said, and hugged her also.

"This is my brother, Toph."

Heather nodded at me, as did Christine, just a quick flick of the head. And that was it. If they checked me out, it was behind my back where I couldn't see it. I made very sure to make eye contact and nod in polite greeting. I had entered the viper's nest, and it would do to be very careful here.

I took a thoroughly conked out Brayden upstairs and Sarah lost no time in making her way to the living room, where she collapsed onto the couch and curled her feet beneath her.

"Holy crap what a day," she said. "Chrissy if you're up can I have some tea?"

"You got it, bitch!" we heard from elsewhere in the house.

"So uh… I'll just walk back to Mom and Dad's house, then?"

"No, you idiot, you tell me all the things you couldn't tell our parents. Starting with whoever you sank your fangs into first. Then you sleep in the guest bed, assuming you don't work your sex magic on my housemates and end up sleeping in their bed. You freak."

"I am not discussing this here, with your housemates here, and I'm not talking about my sex life with my own sister."

She nodded sagely. "You said sex life, meaning you have had sex over there. I was right. One point for me."

"Stop it."

"Stop what? Piecing together what really happened, since your story doesn't take everything into account? You could just tell me what really went on."

Christine reappeared with two steaming mugs, and gave one of them to a grateful Sarah and the other to me. Her bending down to pass me the tea made me realize she'd ditched the frumpy hoodie, and I got a deep look down the open neck of her loose night shirt. *Pretend you don't see anything out of the ordinary, Christopher.*

Sarah warmed her hands with her tea, while the lanky brunette sat on the couch and began absently massaging Sarah's feet one at a time.

"I can't really… I'm not supposed to go into this stuff with your friends here."

"Oh, the confidential and top secret information is okay for your pregnant sister, is it? But it's too much for a complete stranger who doesn't know any of these people and isn't going to believe you anyway?"

Christine turned guileless eyes my way and blinked at me.

"Sare, what are you doing?"

"Which one is it?" she demanded.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Honestly, I didn't know what this question meant.

"Which one is your girlfriend?"

"None of them."

She frowned and took a drink. "Okay then, which one was your butt buddy? And don't tell me you didn't sleep with any of them, because I'm calling bull on that nonsense."

I sighed. It was at this point that Heather came into the room. She'd also ditched her hoodie, and it was instantly clear that she had no bra on, and very large nipples. The cape with the cutesy ears was still on her head, and she entered with a bowl of chips in one hand, and a plate of quartered sandwiches in the other.

Do not look at your sister's friend's nipples, I told myself. Do not look at her nipples.

I wanted to ask her what was happening right now, but her question had caught me off guard.

"I know you did Vel," she said, "but I don't think she's the only one. I think you went to work for this company and they worked you to the bone, you got a bunch of muscles, and the girls were throwing themselves at you. So, out with it. Cinzy left because you were screwing somebody else on the team, right?"

I sighed. "Yeah."

She clapped excitedly. Seriously, it was only the juicy gossip stuff that got my sister's attention. All the weird and wonderful other world bits, the magic and marvels were nothing to her, only spilled tea.

"Good! There we go! Admitting it is a good first step. Because… she wanted you, or because you hopped into bed with her and didn't tell her about somebody else you were bumping uglies with?"

"Ugh. Can we not—"

"Just answer the question." She chomped down on a chip as she waited, and I watched Christine rub her feet while I thought it over. Lying to her wasn't working. She seemed to have a bullshirt detector that I couldn't skirt around or dissuade her from using. I felt cornered, and annoyed, honestly. This wasn't her business.

"Look, this is none of your—"

She sat up, cutting me off. "Then you shouldn't have started

telling me your insane story to begin with. Now, you went through all the boring stuff with Mom and Dad, you get to go through the spicy stuff with me. Now, you did it with Cinzy or you were about to, and she found out?"

"Did it," I said, rolling my eyes.

She turned to Heather and Christine. "I saw her in photo form. She's way, way out of his league."

"But you believe him?" Christine asked. "When he says he did this super hot girl?"

"For some reason, I do," Sarah said.

"Hang on," Christine said, pausing in her foot massage to finally make eye contact. "So this most beautiful girl in the world… let's call her Zendaya… so Zendaya wanted you, and you got her…"

"Correct," I said.

"And then you lost Zendaya, the insanely beautiful one, because she caught you doing somebody else."

A huge sigh out of me.

"Are you a special kind of stupid?"

"I'm seriously wishing this line of questioning would end," I said truthfully.

"Wooooooooowwww," Heather said again.

"Now, let's get back on track," Sarah said. "Who was it? Tara, Regina? Larelle? Chrysta?"

"Ivy," I said.

"Ivy! The lez girl with a fracking girlfriend?" She laughed. "Now you've got me doing it. Okay one more time… the lesbian girl with the *fucking* girlfriend?"

"And Isabelle," I said, shaking my head, eyes closed. If I could mitigate the damage a little, that would be good. Give her something juicy and she wouldn't keep asking about me getting into bed with anyone other than Cinzy, Ivy or Isabelle.

Something soft bounced off my head. I looked up to find it was a quarter of a sandwich.

“I feel like I know what that was for. Look, can we drop this?”

“You need to tell me everything,” Sarah said. “We’re not going to bed until I wring every drop of detail out of you.”

I stared until she relented.

“Okay bad choice of words, but you know what I mean.”

“You don’t want just the main thrust of the story,” I said.

Her mouth fell open.

“What you want are all the juicy ins and outs of what happened. What took place out back. You really want to bend this story over—”

“Okay you don’t—”

“Get your fingers in there—”

“You can st—”

“You want to drill down to the meat of the matter—”

“Gross, stop!”

“With my sister.” Her housemates were busy laughing it up. Christine had a high-pitched giggle, while Heather kept her theme of being almost silent and laughing without a single sound.

I did a quick gloss over of the real actual story: Isabelle approached me secretly to ‘test me out’ because her girlfriend was actually very bisexual and wanted an occasional filler. This led to several threesomes where I made sure Isabelle was the main pleasure focus first, and then gave Ivy what she was asking for. “I also made sure they both knew that I wasn’t looking to break them up, I wasn’t looking for a throuple or whatever you call a threesome couple arrangement.”

This was how I framed it: Cinzy had been trying to date me the whole time.

“Would you have done a throuple if they proposed the idea?”

I had considered this, and the appeal wasn’t really there. I couldn’t see the point of adding myself as Isabelle’s competition. The concept of a throuple didn’t really make sense to me. I saw it instead as a series of 3 different relationships that needed careful maintenance at all times: one between me and Ivy, who seemed like

she had a temper, one with Isabelle who had some kind of man-related trauma I didn't want to detangle, and one between the two of them I would probably only be intruding upon. That felt like so much work. No thanks.

"I can't believe you cheated on Cinzy," Sarah said. "Now that I've seen her…"

"It wasn't cheating. This thing happened with Ivy and Isabelle while Cinzy was waffling around, trying to decide if she wanted to go out on a date, and we were just talking. Maybe light flirting."

"That sounds fair," Christine said.

"Yeah. Sounds fair," Heather echoed.

"I made it plain that I wasn't looking for a girlfriend. She wasn't my girlfriend. We just, kind of, tried to go out on a date. But we were supposed to be working literally seven days a week. So when she decided to heck with it, and told me we were going to skip right to the sex part, I flat out told her, hey, I can't just be in a relationship now. And she went ahead and sexed me anyway."

"You're bad!" Sarah said, but she had finally lost the demanding edge to her voice. Giggles erupted out of her and the other two. Finally, her laughter trailed off and she yawned.

When I asked if the interrogation session was over, she admitted it was.

And just like that, it was bedtime.

***

It kind of surprised me to learn that neither of the housemates had been tasked with finding out whether I was well endowed. That was the first thing I expected to have happen. It didn't. Either that or Sarah asked them, and both Heather and Christine refused. Did they give a 'hell naw' or tell her she was gross for wanting to know if I had a huge dong? Or was I just imagining things were hyper sexual everywhere, and they really only were in the other world?

I didn't have an answer to those questions, but was thankful that hadn't happened. Because, and this won't shock anyone hearing or

reading this story, there's a lot more sex that will go on over the course of the next five months of not making it back to earth.

It surprised me to learn that Sarah was up early with the sun, and that Brayden slept in. She hefted her heavily pregnant self out of bed and Christine and Heather seemed to have accepted their roles as substitute housewives or husbands, and chipped in on her behalf. Those two cooked up a quick breakfast and started on some early morning laundry while Sarah waddled around the house and periodically complained about her back.

"Your housemates seem like good people," I told her.

"Nope!" she declared. "On with the story! I need to know what happens next, and now you don't leave out any of the really salacious stuff, okay?" She narrowed her eyes in challenge. Sarah might be prone to getting the wrong kind of men to impregnate her, but she wasn't stupid. She saw through my tendency to skip over the places where I plunged headlong into caverns both moist and hot. I sighed.

Well, I accepted a cup of coffee and a plate of breakfast while sighing.

***

The very first thing I needed to do was employ my **Healer's Resistance** to shrug off the damage to myself. Cinzy's little tantrum had once again thrown a huge Mental ailment to blanket most of the town, and the healer needed healing fast to tackle it. This cost me a Durability Token. In a flash the gigantic coin went *cla-cling!* into being, and I barely glimpsed the figure in relief before it vanished. The bent back, the gigantic heavy pack perched atop it, you could practically feel your body ache and the sweat pop out over your entire self. Another Durability Token gave me some resistance to this type of damage permanently.

"Thanks, Isabelle," I muttered. **Stalwart** gave me the ability to replenish a Durability Token every morning, and I was going to use that to build up a resistance.

What followed was several full days of me whipping up batches of treatment potions just as fast as I could go. The whole team got involved this time, learning basic potion craft in a heartbeat. Isabelle used her **Healer's Breath** special ability out where no one could see. She treated the Marshmellows who had been affected, but she treated them down on the surface of the marsh, at the boat launches.

It wasn't fun work, since Cinzy's departure soured the mood considerably. Nobody felt good, even when treated. Quick potions do the job, but they're less than delicious. They clear the damage, but this was another mental and emotional illness she'd left in her wake.

Like the eggs, this was emotional. People suffered from depression. If things went badly for them for too long, their simmering anger could explode into screaming and vicious insults that weren't true and they didn't mean. This caused the sickness to spread.

Healer's Resistance would have worked, but I simply didn't have the Tokens to insulate the team from the effects for a single day, let alone multiple days. The text said *I- You may spend a Durability Token to resist damage from any source. Long term effects are reduced by 75%. Onsets of all diseases, venoms, poisons, or other afflictions are tripled, as are intervals. Lasts one day.*

You may spend an Ingenuity Token to gift this ability to a willing target for one day.

It luckily didn't take a Durability *and* an Ingenuity Token, but I had no will to spend multiple Ingenuity Tokens every day. If only I'd been able to deal with mediation. Instead I started off every day whipping up a batch of the treatment potion, and once the team had theirs, they would get right to work.

I will say this for the team though: they picked up the skill quicker than I was able to handle upgrading my Identify. They also got into the process of mass-producing the simple feel-better potion, and handled organizing tasks. Regina and Tara were on ingredient gathering detail, Alan and Trent on mana infusion duty, while Drat

and the Guardians did the container washing, the grinding with the mortar and pestle, temperature control, mixing and stirring, and other basic tasks. They also organized the distribution network, so all the affected patients got their doses every day.

Once we had a good production line, I whipped up another batch of the mental cure. This one strained resources further. Of course it did. I wanted to save all available Tokens for working on the nudity god, only to have a curveball thrown my way.

I kept telling myself this was fine. I needed experience in my Healer class. This was something I'd dealt with before. It wasn't new, even though it was a far larger job than the egg situation had been.

After a few hours of searching through Alan's archives on day 2, I found the cure again, and had him enlarge the clay tablet it was inscribed on. This one was going to need a few adjustments, seeing as it wasn't for small creatures, but medium. Also, this recipe was for fairy types, which were the eggs… and the Marshins. Oh, also the Marshells and Marshmellows. The team members weren't fairy aspect Nakamamon, they were humans… and an ice ghost, and whatever the heck Larelle was. I made a mental note to Identify her.

Either I'd need to make two separate cures for the same ailment, or one that applied to different species.

It was not a leap to believe that the Marshins and my teammates might benefit from the same mental cure, which boosted positive feelings and banished the depression and negativity from Cinzy's shout. All the afflicted had sapient minds. They were all thinking beings, so I could work with that.

On top of the sundrinker, which was like a magical sunflower, and the common numphties, I added tears of laughter to the recipe. It was difficult to remember to gather these, but I had some specially packed away in insulated containers. Everyone considered laughter to be the best medicine, and the water fairies here were no different.

I grabbed out the sun drinker seeds and petals, and the common

numphty. I sent a silent thanks up to the girls for running around the area surrounding the marsh and collecting up so many flowers. We were going to need a lot more than what I used to cure the eggs.

In fact, we were going to need the biggest cauldron available.

"Thank fork for Muppin being an amazing pack beast," I muttered.

The common numphty I ground up and put in, while adjusting the temperature to one eighty. With the oils and the ground numphty stems, it was time to begin adding the mana.

Vellenia swept into the room as I began adding the mana.

"Oh Fletcher, what has happened?"

"Jealousy," I said, and held a hand out to show her I couldn't really talk. No, I had to infuse the contents with a lot more mana this time, and just as slowly. This was going to take hours and hours of concentration. That also meant not thinking about how badly the Cinzy situation had gone.

It had been a fit of anger, me ordering her not to leave as punishment. She couldn't just quit the team, not with all of us taking commands from the HQ. She needed to go back to HQ and be formally reassigned. Barring that, if she simply wandered in the wider world, she'd suffer the penalties for disobeying my direct order. She already had reason to be upset, and now I had only made that far worse.

"Fletcher?"

I swore quietly, and messed up the entire batch of cure.

"Well sheep dip," I muttered, and watched in dismay while the mixture congealed into a thick, black sludge. It would take time for it to cool down, and then hours more to scrape all this out of here so we could start again.

"Could you kindly come with me to grab another several bunches of common numphties?" I asked, sighing.

This is Christopher about to become a monk.



Chapter 19- Glorious Progress

The process began again. This time, I kept my brain off the only thing I couldn't control, that Cinzy wasn't coming back. This wasn't easy, getting my anxious and overworking brain off the thing that wanted a better resolution and simply couldn't get one.

I attempted meditating again, focusing on my breathing. In through the nose, hold breath, out through the mouth. Feel the air rushing in through the sinuses, focus on the feel of the chest expanding, deepen into the feel of the breath leaving the body.

No Cinzy.

No sickness, either the villagers or Tweedle Dee.

No nudity.

All was well. Mind blanked. Only breathing.

There was only so much I could change, and the things I couldn't change or control were not part of my existence in the here and now. I could accomplish only what was possible for me, given the resources at my disposal.

My eyes shot open and I reached for my character sheet. Then I stopped.

Congratulations! *You have gained the Meditation skill at level 1. This skill allows for a purity of thought. While in use, mana channeling and mana regeneration are increased.*

I knew that with higher levels of Meditation I could eventually regain Tokens. I immediately put a skill point into it, but was stopped when the system informed me boosting it again wouldn't be possible without a level up.

"Ugh, fine." I would level up Healer soon enough. This much potion making and cure creation would make that happen, sure as the sun rising each morning.

With some clarity of thought, I got back to work. Common numphties ground. Cauldron suspended above Lanelle's dozing Magmamander and heating the oil. Sundrinker petals and stalks separated for later. Mana at the ready. Vellenia collecting more of both ingredients in case I messed this up again.

I smiled. Vellenia might not be a pack animal like Muppin, or a golden snitch like Fairy Poppins, or an assistant in hiding or earth bending, but she was smart, kind, and dynamite in bed. I was lucky to have her.

With another ten minutes of meditation, I began the process again.

This time the hours passed with a quickness that made little sense. The sun dipped below the horizon and people filed in to get status reports, only to disappear again when Larelle told them I needed to focus. I sensed Tara's eyes on me, but just kept feeding mana into the cure.

The temperature needed to be raised up to three hundred for the infusion of mana, the stirring, and the adding of the sundrinker stems. Then, after those were in, I had to bring it back down to two twenty.

I found a clarity of mind in the middle of this act, like I was watching the waves crash against the shore, or staring into a camp fire. Time passed but didn't seem to matter. Not even my body or my needs mattered. Only the act before me and the final product I was creating had any significance. I was able to adjust the legs of the tripod holding up the cauldron while feeding more magic into the concoction. It was like I'd hypnotized myself.

More sundrinker petals went in, along with more mana. More stirring. More semi-conscious meditation while working. Finally, with a burst of mana, I tipped the tears of laughter into the mixture and hoped this wouldn't break the whole thing.

The Develop Cure (Mental) check was more intense than the one for the eggs. It was a bigger issue than the eggs situation.

***Develop Cure (Medium/Fairy) Check**: This check is Extreme*

(9). You currently have 5 Likability, 0 levels in Medium Nakamamon, and 0 levels in Fairy aspect Nakamamon. Would you like to spend your 5 Tokens to automatically succeed at this check?

Total Tokens: 5 Likability and 7 Free Tokens.

*****Hard At Work:*** *Your Tokens are worth double given you are engaged in your class duties.*

I didn't say a lot more intense, but more intense. Luckily, not a lot more difficult.

However, I was able to get Vellenia to spend 3 of his Likability Tokens to lower the difficulty by 1, and that meant I would only need 4 Tokens to pass this check. Three Tokens to save me only one didn't seem like a great tradeoff, but I was the one dealing with the nudity god… whenever that would happen.

Without Tokens this would otherwise be completely impossible, so I spent the four tokens.

Success! *You have crafted a cure for a mental ailment, for medium creatures.*

The morning of the third day following Cinzy's departure found me scooping up a cooled cure into cupfuls with Vellenia, and 'misting' the whole village one raspberry at a time.

Where else can you spit in the face of a person like Drat and have them thank you for it?

The process of curing these people took hours. I hadn't eaten dinner, and only scarfed down a hunk of bread after finishing the cure, but the singing, glowing cure washed all my troubles away, one mouthful at a time.

Once cured, the team was able to get their own doses of cure and go around spitting on the natives. Phhhhbbbbbttt! Over and over again, raspberry after raspberry, the morning stillness was interrupted by disgusted laughter and the sounds of people making silly spitting noises.

Sometimes spitting in the face of mental illness is what works.

***

Sarah lamented that I didn't give her any of the spicy tidbits on the way back to meet up with my folks later in the morning. My dad was off at work, and we spent some time playing with Brayden in the yard. It was getting to be late fall, and that meant raking up leaves into huge piles and flinging the boy at them. Either he was flinging himself or I was flinging him.

Then he had a cranky period, followed by a hefty nap.

"It's time," my mother said, smiling.

"Time to continue the story?" I asked with an easy smile.

"That and end the weird no-clothes situation that's been dragging on forever," Sarah added.

"He's going to get there eventually," my mother said. "Patience."

"I actually did take steps basically the day after Cinzy quit the team," I said. 'Quit the team' wasn't the right term for it, since HQ hadn't processed any HR documents, but she sure as heck didn't take a leave of absence or paid time off. Though thinking about it later, I would reflect that she essentially abandoned her duties but was still drawing a salary here on earth.

There was no further need to dwell on the Cinzy situation, though. We had actual problems to deal with.

Everyone else took a well-deserved day off. We had been working around this problem for over a week now, and the whole village had not only suffered from a mental attack and ailment, but they'd had to work through the ailment to treat the hundreds of villagers while I got my cure on. They had also 'dispersed' the cure.

My sister made a face at the mental image of me spitting in people's faces.

"We also ended up receiving Achievements."

Achievement: *cure a whole village*

You've really outdone yourself this time, haven't you! Cured an entire village of the sick. What a lovely thing you've gone and done.

You should be proud of yourself.

Reward: +1 Free attribute point

I wasn't sure about that last line, since triggering Cinzy was in a way my fault. I tried to rationalize it away; it was just as much Fairy Poppins's fault, just as much Ivy's fault. Still, the feeling that the responsibility lay with me remained, heavy for now.

The free attribute point gave the team reason to perk up. We all discussed how they would be spent, but I could pretty easily see them going in their main stats. Mine? I wasn't so sure. It seemed like I needed Affinity to work on this god situation… but I wanted more Physicality. My growth plate injuries and scoliosis were giving me zero problems nowadays, but I wanted more power and more stamina for my bedroom activities.

Sighing, I sank the point into Affinity after a short internal debate. We needed this nudity god situation dealt with, and it had already been over a week.

The remainder of the team enjoyed some R&R.

I made my way to the laboratory, where the body of the fallen god lay in its glowing clothes. Even now, the god had no distinct features, but was instead a hazy and faceless representation of a person. The hands had no fingernails, but looked to be condensed out of shifting smoke or mist.

Also it was floating. It was only three to five inches off the floor, slowly rising and falling like the respiration of some gigantic beast. A blue whale.

It continually leaked a kind of blood or ichor that slowly dissolved into the floorboards. The color was odd, shifting an iridescent oily pattern, but the smell was almost impossible to handle. I wrinkled my nose but passed the simple Durability check for resisting.

"All right," I told the prone god. I had taken the rest of the day off and really given Vellenia a serious pounding just minutes ago. She lay in our bed right now, woozy and getting some extra sleep.

That meant I could utilize my Pleasure Seeker ability, **Post-**

Sharing Clarity.

Post-Sharing Clarity

(Special Ability, Rare, Passive)

After having intimate relations with a partner, both partners gain +2 temporary bonus to all attributes for the next 10 minutes. This bonus does not grant additional Tokens.

The duration increases by 10 minutes for each relationship level above base acquaintances.

Right now, because my relationship with Vellenia was tier 3, all my attributes were temporarily boosted by +2 for a good thirty minutes. I could get on board with having sex before undertaking any important task.

"Yes please," I muttered to myself.

In my parents' living room, I waited until my mom had headed to the bathroom to tell her about Post-Sharing Clarity, but made her promise not to laugh and make Mom suspicious. She showed confusion at first, but once she heard a description of the ability she snorted and burst out laughing.

Settling down to meditate next to the body of the fallen god, I attempted to identify him… her… it. It was essential that I get the god's identity known, so I could try to help it overcome its magically malady. I could only surmise the system had a reason for it.

With my Affinity temporarily boosted to 8, and my Identify skill finally up to level 5, I had 13 levels total. I could probably see 4, maybe a lucky 5 successes out of this check.

Identify check: *You possess the Identify skill at level 5, and Affinity presently at 8. This check is Difficult. Would you like to spend 2 Tokens for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 6 Affinity and 7 Free Tokens.

*****Hard At Work:*** *Your Tokens are worth double given you are engaged in your class duties.*

Sweating bullets, I suppressed the fear of failure and went with it. I could spend a single Token to retry the check. Turned out I scored an unbelievable 6 successes.

Success! *You have Identified the god.*

I breathed out a sigh of pure relief. Things were once again starting to go the way I wanted them to.

God of Apparel

(Medium/Unique)

Description: *This god governs the covering of the body through artificial means, the wearing of clothing.*

History: *You have diagnosed this god with a magical sickness, which is in an advanced state. The sickness completed its course, killing it. Dying then discorporated this being into component parts. These were flung and scattered to nearby locations.*

By bringing these parts together and giving the god items of clothing in offering, you have successfully reconstituted it. The god has been brought back to life. If enough time passes without intervention, the sickness will take it once more. It will die and discorporate yet again. The consequences of this will be more severe than the original death.

Progress. Glorious progress!

I leapt to my feet and pumped a fist in the air, then experienced the dizziness of getting to my feet too quickly and steadied myself against a workbench. It wouldn't do to slump over and make full contact with a divine being… again. Not when I was the only one who could whip up treatments and slowly brew up a cure.

Also… the god was dead? Holy crap… I had resurrected a god.

Achievement: *resurrect a dead god*

Not a sentence you ever thought you'd see written, did you? Nor is it a sentence you ever thought you would see written… about you. But you did it! Not only have you brought a dead god back to life,

but now that you've successfully identified it, you gain this achievement.

Reward: the favor of the god

Holy crap. The description of the achievement wasn't wrong. I never imagined that sentence would exist, let alone be pointed in my direction. Although I knew what 'favor of the god' meant in vague terms, it had been different in every instance.

The Goddess of the Meadows gave me the innate ability to know all flowers ever. The God of Footfalls gave me divine footwear that made it so I'd never get tired. The Lovers gifted me with a second class. These were so wide ranging and bizarre that I could only wildly speculate as to the gift I might end up with from the God of Apparel.

The ability to become instantly nude if I thought about it? That one made me chuckle. The ability to wear nothing but have other people believe I was wearing clothes, like the Emperor's New Clothes? An item like the shoes from the God of Footfalls, where I could make it fly off my body with a thought? It would be great if I could make it fly onto me like the wizard's cape from those superhero films, and tangle people's limbs up and such.

Each idea I had was funnier and dumber than the last.

After this, I created a treatment for the magical illness, an elixir I spent a couple of Tokens on. This put me over the edge of not one, but two level ups.

Level 14: Ability upgrades: Hard At Work and Healer's Endurance

Level 15: +2 skill points

"Awwww yisssss," I said. I wasn't about to start thanking Cinzy for putting me through so much business for these level ups, but I was grateful for being closer to level 25.

The special ability Hard at Work had upgraded to level 3, and I was secretly excited to see what happened after level 4. Wild Lore had offered to go up to level 5, or switch over to a higher tier ability,

so I was already looking forward to a more powerful healing ability. Then I remembered this was only level 3, and would take some serious time to upgrade it not once, but twice more.

"Let's get a look at you, then," I said.

Hard At Work III

(Special Ability, Common, passive)

I- When engaged in checks that pertain to your class, your Tokens are worth double.

II- When you assist someone in their job, and seek to reduce the difficulty of a check, 2 Tokens will reduce the difficulty by 1, instead of 3 Tokens for 1 reduced difficulty. When you reduce the difficulty of your own checks, 2 Tokens

III- When you engage in a check that pertains to your class and don't spend Tokens, you gain one free retry. You may spend Tokens on the subsequent retry.

I wasn't expecting much from this first ever ability, but I was pleasantly surprised. A free retry was worth a Token. This would help me push my luck a bit, use the check system without automatically spending myself dry like before. Nice.

"And a second ability upgrade as well. Let's check you out."

Healer's Endurance II

(Special Ability, Common, active)

You may spend a Durability Token to resist the need for sleep for 24 hours. Penalties for sleeplessness are suppressed during this time, but take effect afterwards.

This is Christopher, pleased as punch.



Chapter 20- Shagnasty

Two important things happened in the wake of my level up. One, the duration of **Healer's Endurance** shot from 10 to 24 hours. Two, the penalties for sleeplessness were no longer doubled. I hadn't used this ability much, but I was seriously considering it now. With **Stalwart** I regained a Durability Token each morning. This was good, like 'never sleep again' good.

"Nope," I told myself, squashing that impulse. If there was a future version where I never took the penalties for sleeplessness after using the ability, then I'd consider it, but not like this. If I went for more than five days without sleep, I was liable to seriously injure myself.

Still, this was great. I'd begin on the cure for the God of Apparel right away, and I wouldn't stop until I got it right.

Creating a treatment for the God of Apparel was the first stop. There was no way to open its misty, smoky mouth to pour a potion or elixir in there. No, this one needed a compress on its exposed head and hands. Compresses used salves or unguents, or sometimes tinctures. I hadn't made an unguent or a tincture yet, but I had the basic knowledge.

Tincture: concentrated herbal or plant remedy made by soaking and reducing the material down in liquid. It would be a liquid treatment, but required no boiling. Instead, the plant matter dissolved in a solvent. I had two basic possibilities here: alcohol alcohol, or glycerin, sugar alcohol.

Unguent: grease or oil-based remedy spread on the affected area.

The tincture, unlike potion or elixir, would work without being drunk. It was topical. It could soak through the god's clothing and get into the mass of its body. The unguent couldn't. We'd have to peel its clothing off to do that, and there was no way in hell I was

going to strip down the literal God of Getting Naked to do that.

”Tincture it is,” I told the room.

The reason I’d stayed away from tinctures so far was very, very simple: they used alcohol or glycerine as a solvent. I had been issued both of these by HQ when I left, but in limited amounts. So far as I knew, the natives didn’t have the technology level necessary to turn vegetable oil into glycerine… you needed tiny amounts of sulfuric acid, and a whole host of other materials. You needed time as well.

Neither pure alcohol nor glycerine could be manufactured in this other world. And we were now far enough away that getting a resupply was going to be difficult… maybe impossible. For now, except in the event of an emergency, I needed to stick to oil based elixirs, salves or unguents, or oil and water-based potions.

This was one such emergency.

I retrieved the glycerine jars, thankful that Trent’s stunt in the first week of our mission had only destroyed our supply of the anti-magic pills and not these babies.

Glycerine from HQ was pharmaceutical grade: a clear white liquid, and viscous, like nail polish remover.

I took a deep breath; this was all I had, and getting more would be a serious pain in my bare naked behind. Therefore, getting the tincture recipe out with Alan’s help, I saw only a single remedy listed for gods of medium size.

Sighing, I put a single skill point into Develop Cure (Medium), and found that I’d already had a point in there. I blinked at it, and concentrated on the skill. The UI did the work for me, informing me that I’d gained a first skill level through sheer research over the last two weeks. I knew that it had been applied when Alan and I were reading over the entire handbook on healing, in our half-exhausted state. I must have missed it.

If I lucked out and got another level before developing the cure, I could spend another skill point. Level 2 would have to be enough.

Once again, the familiar rush of knowledge trickled over my

brain. It felt like the one time I'd smoked marijuana, but in reverse. Instead of the weed making my brain feel like it was cupped in a pair of hands and squeezed, this felt like a warm liquid poured onto my brain helped it to feel larger and… fluffier than before. Fluffier was the right word for it.

That knowledge? The correct temperature to distill the rough dosage for medium sized gods and Nakamamon entered my mind. I knew all the flowers, and how potent they were. I knew a large number of the herbaceous plants and how potent those were as well. Now those aligned to form a clearer picture of the correct amounts to use when developing the cure.

It was time.

This is Christopher putting this thing to bed.

The tincture set me back only another three hours. The laboratory grew a little heady with the mixture of herbs and flowers, in addition to the weird smell of heat coming off the Magmamander.

I carefully added flowers in a single layer to the tray of glycerine, and only stirred once it was clear the alcohol was breaking them down. These were cherry violets, a unique species to this world. In the daytime they went bright red, but as dusk set in they bled down to purple and finally blueberry color. These had be added to the mixture at a specific time: an hour after dusk, to maximize the mana soaking properties. After the cherry violets turned the glycerine a deep ultramarine and made the place smell in a way I can't properly describe, I had to use a sieve to grab out the petals, then add the heartsblood stems.

Only the sap of the heartsblood was important, so that meant squeezing the devil out of them and trying to avoid the thorns. I also needed to spread the sap evenly throughout the whole tray full of tincture-to-be. Last, I needed to ensure my own actual blood didn't end up in there, so even when I pricked myself several times, I had to whip my gloved hands away, bandage up as fast as possible, and apply bandages at lightning speed. Then I had to get that sap flowing again, to the areas of the tray without. I ended up cutting myself only seven times.

(Sarah didn't believe me, but that was my story and I was sticking to it.)

Afterwards, I raked the mixture back and forth this way and that, spreading out both sap and cherry violet infusion. The glycerine then soaked up various medicinal plant matter: aloe vera, rosemary, peppermint, and yet another native plant, lemon vera. With these on, I needed to add the mana but in a new way.

With potions and elixirs, the mana was getting stirred in and around. This one wasn't getting heated, and that meant the material wasn't moving around in a volatile way. Instead I just swept my stirring stick through it, back and forth, over and over. It also meant I needed to add mana in a sort of web. I hadn't done this before, but the Tincture skill gave me a basic understanding of how it was supposed to happen.

I took a deep, steadying breath and reached into my soul for my mana. It needed to be turned into a web shape as it came out of the center of my forehead, through that third eye. The weird thing was knowing that there were several seats of mana, and one of them was… ahem… in my balls.

Now, it was much easier to get magic out of my gut, and out of my heart, and easy enough to get some of it out of my brain, but in the end it wasn't enough. I needed it from all the chakra places. Grabbing power from within my sack was just… odd. It was weird to contemplate, weird to visualize, and then weird to do. I'd witnessed the blossoming of power when having sex with the ladies, but it felt strange drawing it up from within that place.

But I did it.

Again, I knew the feeling of draining mana out of my stomach, a hungry sensation of gnawing emptiness. I knew the feeling of draining out of my heart, which was a sweaty, racing heart with palpitations. I also knew the woozy, headachy feeling of drawing mana out of my mind, but I'd always avoided drawing mana out of the lowest 'storage vessel' if you will.

It was like the feeling of having too many orgasms in one day. It

was like my body, and specifically my nether regions, were begging for water.

The feeling didn't start out that way, obviously. At first it was just a strange tugging sensation from all of those places at once. As I added the herbs, the mana was used to speed up the process of the alcohol breaking down the plant matter, and spread it throughout the glycerine evenly. The heartsblood and cherry violets needed to be spread out the same way, so the mana infused the glycerine and told it to grab and pull.

Time went on, with me doing the stirring with mana alone. Since I'd never done this before I wasn't sure what to expect out of the tincture itself. The glycerine had been set into essentially a baking tray, and as the mana hit it, it coruscated with various colors. Lights appeared and dimmed out of existence. Sounds clapped into being and vanished.

In short, magical remedies were fracking weird. To help me handle the oddness of this, and the even flow of mana from my body and out through the third eye, I entered the meditative state. It was much easier, now that the temperature on my skin, the floor on my feet, the workbench feeling on my hands and the sights of the tincture tray and laboratory all faded to the background. Instead there was only mana. Only my body slowly drawing it out of the air, and the sources of mana producing a stream that went up through my spine, into my brain, then out in a net to the tray.

Treatment check: *You have the associated skill Treatment (Tinctures) at level 3, and Affinity at level 6. This check is Difficult, requiring 4 successes. Would you like to spend 2 Tokens for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 5 Affinity and 7 Free Tokens.

*****Hard At Work:*** *Your Tokens are worth double given you are engaged in your class duties.*

With Hard at Work in play, I decided to chance it. The new level of the ability would give me a free retry without spending a Token,

so I could afford to fail.

Which I did.

It had been possible on 9 levels to hit 4 successes, but unlikely. So after the skill check reappeared, I spent the 2 Affinity Tokens. They came into being: cla-cling! cla-cling! and spinning just once to reveal the Fairy Poppins-looking figure with one outstretched leg, and the dragonfly wings. They vanished just as soon as they had appeared, in a shower of multi-colored sparkles.

The UI notified me of the success, and I smiled a triumphant grin. Then I got on with finishing the damn treatment.

This was, at best, fairly sloppy. Mana bounced off the tray edges where I failed to line things up well, and flowed out into the world where it created random sounds, bursts of image, colors, smells, and even tactile sensations. These were just mana doing what mana did when it was used: change things.

I registered very little, except the sensation of a large blubbery creature brushing up against my hand on the workbench. I didn't even notice team members come or go, intent on not disturbing me. They probably saw the shimmer of magic passing down into the tray, and the intent way I was staring at the tray of glycerine before me, and decided not to mess with me. Only Larelle made her way around the workbench and displayed her female parts to me.

I almost choked with laughter, seeing her do what Tara had done when we concocted the cure for the God of Footfalls. Thank all the gods that it didn't completely wreck my concentration. The Affinity Tokens I'd spent helped to solidify my control, shaky as it was, and assisted me in crossing the finish line.

"That wasn't necessary," I told her shakily, once I'd slumped forward and almost gotten my hair in the tincture. The UI was telling me I'd done such a great job, and that I was being awarded xp. I ended up getting some bonus xp for messing up the first check, causing me to chuckle.

Wonderful.

I thought this was a human tradition, Larelle told me mentally.

"It was merely Tara being Tara."

I am uncertain as to what that actually means.

"She was trying to help keep me focused… with her body. It was halfway a joke, and halfway not."

She narrowed her eyes.

The tincture smelled heavily of medicine. It was the strongest cough syrup smell I'd ever beheld. It made my eyes water, honestly.

Tincture made, it was time to apply it. The first thing I did was soak three rags, fold and press those rags down onto the being's fog-swirly forehead, and the backs of its resting hands. I then poured the rest of the mixture directly onto the god's shirt and pants.

Then I nearly jumped out of my skin when my boxers and socks reappeared on my body.

It took about two minutes for everyone to come swarming into the laboratory and start dancing around me. The girls were now in their bras and panties, along with socks. The guys were in their underwear and socks, like me.

Although some demanded explanations, Tara was quick to explain: when we had treated the God of Footfalls, the strange effect of all our footsteps sounding insane had muted. Not gone away, but it got dramatically better. You could actually hear yourself think when you were walking down the hallways.

I got a lot of hands clapped on my shoulders and plenty of cheerful thanks.

"It's so weird now," Trent said, eyeing his boxer briefs. He then seemed to sense, all at once, that he was wearing a golden pendant. "Oh! Oh my gosh, I'm so glad this is back."

"Y-y-y-you kn-n-now," Alan said, and everyone hushed. "W-w-w-we sh-should l-l-look for a-a-any backpacks, o-o-o-or—"

"All the things we were holding or wearing that disappeared!" Tara shouted, right overtop Alan. "My backpack might be out there."

I went over to give Alan thanks for his dynamite idea.

As it happened, most of the discarded clothing and backpacks were recoverable. Vellenia and I found Tara's bulging rucksack in the marsh waters, along with several others that had been on people's shoulders when they crossed the boundary and into the God of Apparel's influence. Regina and Muppin had headed down the long and difficult way, around the cliff that Trent took us directly through. She brought us to the place where her clothes and backpack disappeared, and we found it in under ten minutes.

More celebration was on the menu, and I allowed myself to be swept up into that joy. The girls were now dancing around in bra and panties, and in a lot of ways this felt even more lewd and erotic than before.

There's an undressing paradox, where the more you see, the less it affects your mind. I don't know if I can explain it well, but it goes a bit like this: if you see a woman fully covered save for her hands and head, anything she removes—no matter how insignificant—will seem like a lot. If she suddenly has a plunging neckline with just a hint of cleavage, that cleavage will seem extra provocative and sexy. If instead she has a sliver of midriff showing, you'd better believe that midriff will draw the eye and get more of a reaction than a girl who habitually wears a tube top and micro-mini skirt.

Similarly, for whatever reason, if the skirt and the knee high socks leave a two inch gap of thigh, it's somehow infinitely sexier than bare legs all the way down to her shoes. In this way, semi-transparent stockings are sexier than bare legs. A backless shirt is sexier than just a naked torso.

Now, for sure, there is a short time when a clothed person becomes unclothed, and their allure increases. I think this closely aligns with the the law of diminishing returns: the more you see a woman naked, the more it will seem normal as opposed to mind-blowing and erotic.

All this is to say that I couldn't keep my eyes off the girls now that they were half-naked. It sounds ridiculous, but it was true. Isabelle wore cutesy floral patterned purple underwear with a silky shine to it. Ivy had similar but with less adornment, and all in black.

Tara and Regina were full functional: white and plain.

Now, I was sure that Cinzy had some dynamite underwear. Call it a hunch, or call it intuition, but she was the type of girl who really gave her wardrobe some thought.

And yes, it was a massive shame that she'd left, but no, it wasn't just because I wanted to see her in underwear that cost more than my dad's car. One should not lust after one's coworkers.

This is Christopher changing his name to 'whoopsie-daisy.' But not really.



Chapter 21- Don’t Rush The Wizard

The night of rest and relaxation ended under a pair of simply enormous moons. I don’t know what trick of magic or atmosphere caused it, but one of the moons was a white yellow color, like the one we know and love on earth, while the other had a decidedly bluish tone to it. The blue one was larger. The air smelled fresh and sweet, after the overbearing herbal scents of my lab, and I got several lungfuls with eyes closed before studying the moons.

It felt weird seeing that moon out, and so big. It wasn’t until a shimmer of rainbow light passed in front of it, because of the mana in the air, that I understood. Everything, and I mean everything in this world was so wildly different than everything I knew and experienced on earth. The flowers and grasses, the trees and shrubs and mountains and creatures, everything. Even the clouds had shimmers of mana that made them look odd. So for just a second, the moon reminded me that earth now only existed.

Fresh air inhaled, I then joined the team in their fireside ruminations. Some were staring into the fire, while others stared up into the sky at the spectacle of the moons.

Frankly, it felt perfect right this moment. Yes, Cinzy might be gone, but she had taken a whole lot of drama with her.

And Fairy Poppins remained here with us. I found her fluttering near the edge of the platform, and invited her over.

“What are they called?” Drat asked from behind me. “The moons. They have names, right?”

“Come on,” I whispered, and stretched out a hand to her. It took some time, while Chrysta thought and then answered, for Fairy Poppins to flit over toward me and land on my hand. I brought her back toward the fire.

“There are names for them,” Chrysta answered. “However, the names given by your human leaders caused laughter and joy. The sounds one must make in order to say Glumpdumpkin please us, and so the name was adopted.”

All of us stared around at one another. It seemed unreal to have these sapient creatures not just accept but embrace the silliness of it. It seemed they didn’t understand the lewdness or the innuendo associated with them.

“Which is why we have renamed the yellow moon Shagnasty, and the blue moon Snuffletrouser von Zipyankee.”

Isabelle was the first to break, but the rest of the team erupted into snorts and laughter not long after. The laughter had a rebounding effect. Watching Isabelle abandon herself made the rest of us laugh, and watching first Tara and then Regina fall out of their chairs laughing caused her to snort. Her snort set off Trent and Ivy even more, until several of us were pointing and laughing. Pointing at Regina, kicking her feet and holding her sides.

Things were beginning to look up, and I definitely wasn’t cursing myself and my team for that thought.

I had a hunch that my newly bonded Nakamamon sexpot was laying in my sleeping bag, buck naked and bone white butt up in the air. I don’t know why this knowledge appeared in my mind, but it was there nonetheless. Vellenia was on her stomach with her butt pointed up at me, and it was bedtime, and not only that, but I knew she had been fingering herself.

You know how sometimes you can just tell when someone’s home? Even if you’re on another floor you can sort of sense that someone’s there. It’s a comforting feeling, and you don’t have to go looking to check that your mom is in the kitchen, or your dad is in the workshop or the basement. You just know.

This was like that feeling, but stronger.

So when Alan approached me on the way to my tent, I wasn’t really ready to have a conversation. I was starting to get hard, because, and I swear this is true, I could feel Vellenia caressing the

junction of her thighs. Normally it was just a blank expanse of white with some mint green, but with enough fooling around, a sex organ appeared.

"F-F-Fletcher," he said.

"Kind of late, huh?"

Vellenia was pulling her lower lips apart and grinding herself against my pillow. She had her eyes closed and, very delicately, was pulling her clit up with tiny flicks of a single finger.

He nodded. "L-l-listen, there's a m-m-m-m-m—"

"A message? From HQ?" He nodded both times. "Is it critical to get to it now?" I hated to cut him off because it probably felt shitty on account of his stutter, but I couldn't help it. Vellenia was psychically calling out to me somehow.

He nodded again.

I held off on the compulsion to swear. "Okay. Hit me."

Little shocks of pleasure were coming from my own nether region, as though Vel and I were already having sex. And that was… awesome. Would have been awesome were it not the wrong time. Her mouth was open and all six of her tiny tongues were darting around looking for my cock.

My now very hard cock.

Alan informed me that the situation in Glumpdumpkin was worsening, and that this delay wasn't helping in the slightest. I knew the problem they sent us out there to handle probably wouldn't be getting better while we messed around here, but now that Tweedle Dee was suffering from divinity poisoning, I absolutely had to cure the God of Apparel. Regina would do something more drastic than cutting off the flow of sex if I let Dee dwindle and die.

With Alan, the explanation took extra time. His stutter made leaving impossible, and I'd already used up my quota of rudeness. I felt like a dick and didn't want to make it any worse than it already was.

Which made the Vellenia situation all the more difficult. She was now rubbing that one finger back and forth, up and down over her

clit. It was the slightest of feather touches, but like a well-tuned violin it still produced a clear tone of pleasure in my mind. She was growing impatient; her other hand was pressing one finger into her tight hole with excruciating slowness.

It was setting off fireworks in my brain.

"W-w-w-what should I t-t-tell the HQ?" he asked. "Y-y-you okay F-F-F—"

"Not okay," I groaned, doubled over. "Must've been something I ate."

The finger got as far as a single knuckle inside. She was slowly building up the tension of a really nice climax and I was going to be there for it.

"I'll tell you in the morning," I muttered, and hurried off to my tent.

I had just ripped open the flap of my tent when another call came up.

"Fletcher?"

I turned to see Tara striding towards me. Somewhere, probably her reclaimed backpack, she had gotten a set of matching bra and panties that were sapphire blue, along with a pair of stockings that went up to mid thigh.

"Holy…" I muttered.

There below me was Vellenia, knees parted and dripping slit pointed right up at me, while Tara's long and lithe legs were striding towards me. The rest of her was of course gorgeous, but the stockings were doing their job and sucking my gaze down to her toned thighs and calves.

"What are you… are you already hard?"

My tent was a large four person dome tent. You could just about stand up in it, and it made sleeping two no problem. Three could sleep comfortably, and four could manage if you needed to share warmth and didn't care about rubbing elbows.

"Get in here," I told her, and ducked into the tent.

“What in the… oh holy frack,” she muttered.

Vellenia nearly jumped out of her white and mint green skin at the appearance of the leggy Ranger, but looked to me and then back to Tara. Understanding came on very quickly.

“You intend to mate with Tara?” she asked.

“It looks like we both intended to mate,” Tara whispered, eyes focused on the sex organ now visible. She turned to me. “I didn’t know they had… organs.”

Tara had been gone for the egg healing situation and the party afterwards, during which the Marshins all mated… and some of them with Alan, Drat and Trent.

I considered. Tara had fallen to her knees and was gawking at Vel, so I zipped the tent flap closed and hugged her from behind.

“This wasn’t what you thought you’d be walking into, is it?” I breathed.

“Do you want me to go?” she asked, but her hand slid between us and started fondling at my boxer-covered junk.

“Vellenia, my dear, do you mind helping me mate with Tara?” I asked in a thick, suggestive tone. I ran my hands up and down Tara’s sides, and then over her breasts and tummy, down to her panties. Her breath caught.

“Oh!” was all the Nakamamon could reply. “You haven’t mated with multiple females at once before. I didn’t know if it was allowed.”

“That’s up to Tara,” I said, kissing her shoulder and ear, and slipping my fingers under the waistband of her panties. “She might say yes if she sees your tongues.”

Vellenia was still on her hands and knees, still slowly working herself over with her fingers. She tilted her head back and opened her mouth, allowing her multiple little tentacle tongues to emerge and wriggle about.

“Oh my gods,” Tara whispered.

“Could you help me with Tara’s mating site?” I asked Vel. “It should be very wet before I mate with her.”

“Is it as tasty as yours, my bond?” she asked.

“Go ahead and find out.”

We slipped Tara’s panties off, with me chuckling over the fact that that hadn’t lasted long. With her legs spread wide, Tara could only gasp as the Nakamamon slit forward and began running those tongues up and down over every available inch of her.

As for me, I headed around behind my bonded companion and slid ever-so-slowly down into her depths. I locked eyes with Tara, whose face contorted with pleasure.

Whatever the bond did to join Vellenia and I, it made abundantly clear how much pleasure she was feeling and how close she was to orgasm. She’d been rising towards it when I came into the tent, but having me inside her boosted it to on-the-verge. There was no need to boost pleasure with a Token, she was basically there.

Vellenia’s moans went directly into Tara’s pussy. Her tongues faltered a bit as the orgasm came on like a wave and crashed into her, but it didn’t matter. She had two tongues deep inside, two pushing against Tara’s outer lips, and two of them rubbing at either side of Tara’s clit. The shuddering and jerking might have added to Tara’s bliss.

Vellenia came for a long time, tightening up around me and then finally relaxing after a good thirty seconds or more. I kept right on slowly thrusting down into her depths, until she broke off from her tongue duty.

“Mate with this one, my bond,” she said. “Your joy is my joy. Your pleasure is my pleasure.”

Easing out of my bonded Nakamamon, I beckoned for Tara to join me. She was going to go at me cowgirl, but I told her to turn around. Reverse cowgirl wasn’t something Vellenia had seen yet, and I also had other ideas.

“You look so beautiful,” I told her. “Both of you.”

The stockings were a stark contrast, and in this position her ass looked divine. She sank slowly onto me, all the way down, and breathed out a sigh of relief.

"I've missed this," she said.

I spent a Token to make sure what she missed was something no one else could give her.

Tara made cowgirl look like an art. She could do it kneeling, and she could balance on the balls of her feet to pump up and down on top of me. Vellenia watched with rapt interest. Minutes passed where the only sounds were the slap of skin on skin and the grunts of exertion. How many minutes was it, where my shaft just disappeared up into her again and again? How many times did I watch her butt jiggle and ripple? While I held Tara's ass and pumped my hips up into her, she began to show signs of an impending orgasm. I redoubled my efforts, speeding up and pulling her hips down, until I heard the groaning from between clenched teeth. The wave rose, crested, and then slammed into her with wracking force. Tara cried out loudly in climax.

This lasted for some ten seconds or so, with her frozen but quivering.

"Lay down on my chest," I told her. Mentally, I tried to envision what I wanted, to see if this would work.

Tara complied, and with her legs wide and me still deep within her, Vellenia got my signal. She crawled between our legs and began to use those tongues on the place where both of us were joined.

This set Tara off into a sort of aftershock orgasm, or maybe it hadn't quite finished. As for me, the sheer eroticism of this, and the feel of Tara around me caused my own climax to begin bubbling up. I held her up slightly, and pounded upward.

Some five minutes passed, with Tara alternately cumming and begging, and Vellenia's tongues working on us, before I was there.

"Come on," she muttered. "Fletcher… give it to me."

I kept on pounding.

"I want to feel it," she told me, and turned to kiss me.

"Give it to her, Fletcher," Vel said just as insistently. "Mate with her."

Visions of what Tara might look like with an expanding tummy

swam into being. Wearing nothing but a white button up shirt, making breakfast in the kitchen with her long, long legs bare and her butt peeking out, she'd run a hand over her expanding pregnant belly and I wouldn't be able to stop myself from bending her over the counter and giving her another round.

With all my might, I tried not to explode deep inside Tara. I got another good minute of hard thrusting in. It was only when Vellenia's tongues slithered down over my sack that my resistance came to an end.

Kissing Tara, squeezing her ass, and fracking for all I was worth, I arched my back up and erupted deep inside Tara. Tara came yet again, for what seemed like the fifth time.

"Ugh!" Tara moaned. "I can feel it, it's so warm."

Vellenia congratulated me on a job well done. Tara told me what a good job I'd done as well, when she got her wits about her. Vellenia came and draped herself over me. She alternated stroking Tara's leg and her arm, shoulder and neck.

"Will Tara sleep with us?" Vellenia asked. "My bond can often mate again come morning. He can fill you with seed once more at least this night."

"Your bond needs to sleep and needs to work in the morning," I told her. "Tara's absence will be noted as well. She will have to go."

"You're no fun," Tara murmured. "Maybe I'll take your Nakamamon to the girls' cabin. Maybe *she* wants to sleep with me."

There was no way that didn't end with disaster. Since I was able to feel Vellenia's pleasure psychically, if those two got up to more sexy shenanigans, I wouldn't sleep a wink.

"It's only Ivy an Isabelle, and Regina in the other room. Now that Cinzy's gone, there's no one in the cabin who's not in the know."

I goggled at Tara.

"What?" she asked. "Regina's a little miffed at you, but you'll fix that once the god is cured. She won't care. Izzy and Ivy won't care. Vellenia doesn't care, do you? No, she invited me to stay."

"No!" Vellenia said cheerfully. "I find Tara to be soft and very

desirable for my Fletcher to mate with."

I had created a monster. Or rather, I had bonded with a monster… who was already a monster, technically.

Anyway she was a monster who was now a worse monster.

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"So it was that I ended up having Tara sleep over with Vellenia, and in the morning we uh… did it again."

I hadn't noticed Sarah had fallen asleep already. Only her two housemates were listening now, enrapt. Like the night before, they'd shucked their comfy clothes for something a little more revealing. Heather, the shorter and more curvaceous of the two, had nipples that were visible even in the gloom. Christine wore a tank top that hung so loose I could see practically everything.

"That's wild," Heather said, while Christine got Sarah up off the couch to help her to bed.

"And this Vellenia… she's not human?" Heather asked.

"What makes you say that?" I had tried to omit the parts about her tentacle tongues or the fact that her sex appeared only after getting aroused.

"It's not a name I've ever heard of," she said.

"I did mention that I was working up in Alaska, past the Arctic Circle, right?" I lied.

Her face went wide and innocent. "Oh, right, sure, yeah." Then, with slow and theatrical speed, she winked.

"Leave it, Heather," Christine stage whispered. "Come on, we're headed to bed."

Heather hung back and looked at me. She was a shorter and slightly heftier version of Regina, though Heather had curly red hair to Regina's straighter red hair. She also sported a huge pair of breasts, with the biggest nipples I'd ever seen, and I hadn't even seen them properly. She squeezed them together by clasping her hands together.

"You don't have to sleep on the couch," she whispered.

"Nope," Christine hissed from the stairway. "Sarah's rules."

"Phooey," Heather said. Pouting, she stomped over to the stairs, cast one regretful look back at me, and joined Christine in helping get Sarah up to bed.

This is Christopher feeling like he's in a nest of vipers.



Chapter 22- Godwatch

The smell of coffee, that blessed heady aroma wafting around my parents' kitchen, was something I had missed. So much. I hadn't realized just how much until I'd gotten out of the other world and back to earth. By all the gods great and small, coffee was great.

"It smells better than it tastes," I said.

"But the effects are unmistakable," my father said, drinking from his mug.

I nodded.

"Hey," he said, "I'm going to be working in the garage this morning."

"No work today?"

"It's Saturday."

"It is?" I hadn't been keeping track of the days of the week in… months. The whole time I had been in Dorfialtos. It was one of those bizarre aspects of being in the other world. It was both like being on a permanent vacation and being permanently on the job at the same time. There was no other feeling like it.

"All day long," my father confirmed with more than a touch of his old self. I was pleased to hear the warmth and confidence back in his voice. The old fix-it man was feeling more and more like the guy I'd grown up admiring.

I had succeeded in bringing the family back together… and all it took was traveling to a magical world of wonder and unexpectedly high amounts of sex. This of course felt amazing. I was thrilled to have been given the opportunity to work for the company, to heal the sick, and of course have a ridiculous amount of ego-boosting carnal relations. I want to say it's just a bonus and perk of the job, but that's just not true.

I spent half the morning helping my dad, and listening to him

swear good-naturedly at the cam shafts, the bearings, the valves, the piston rings, and all that other car-related mechanical stuff he was trying to fix up and repair. I supplied the tools when he asked for them, and continued on with the story in my head.

***

Before I got to work on my cure, I set about tidying house. First, my character sheet. I pulled up my attributes first.

attributes:
Affinity 6
Durability 6
Ingenuity 8
Likability 5
Physicality 5

"Time to hit that Physicality," I told myself, but didn't really believe it. I needed to get to a place where I could work on these treatments and cures without having to spend Tokens at all times. So far I'd gotten lucky, I thought, since the situations I was dealing with were tiny and not so far gone that they couldn't be cured. I would probably increase Ingenuity and Affinity a lot more before I went in for more Physicality.

However, I really enjoyed not having pain after five minutes of walking. No, now it was taking a good half a day of walking before I experienced any of the nasty pain in my legs, hips and back. Physicality was literally curing my growth plate injuries and I was here for it.

"Skills now," I muttered.

Healer Skills:
Diagnosis (physical 3, spiritual 3, magical 3, mental 3)
Treatment (potions 3, salves 3, tinctures 3, elixirs 3, unguents 3)
Develop cure (swarm 3, small 3, medium 1)

Develop cure (unique) 7
Administer Cure 8

Pleasure Seeker Qualities:

Girth 1
Load 1
Stave Off 2
Length 1
Tongue 1
Adaptability 1

Other Skills:

Identify 5
Hiking 3
Cooking 1
Persuasion 1
Meditation 2
Divine Resistance 1
All other skills unranked
Unspent skill points: 5

Something still fluttered in my stomach at seeing the words 'Divine Resistance' and I had to stop myself from sinking a skill point into it just because I could. When hovering my attention over the skill it didn't give me anything concrete to go on. Instead the skill description just read 'You are more likely to resist the effects of a god's influence or damage from a god.' In numerical terms that meant nothing. That said, the same thing applied to the Meditation skill, and I was assured that eventually it would help me replenish spent Tokens.

"You know what…" I muttered, and put a skill point in there anyway. Gods had nearly killed me before, and they came in swarms, so it was best to increase the skill at every opportunity.

The other place to increase my skills was probably the Treatment options. I'd been making a whole lot of Potions and Elixirs so far.

Now that I could only spend a single skill point without needing a level up, it seemed less vital to keep my skill points in reserve. Also, the more I withheld the skill points, the more I was finding myself in situations where I wanted to buy more Pleasure Seeker Qualities. Who wouldn't want the ability to change the size of your dong any time the necessity arose?

I sank one each into Potions and Elixirs, but couldn't bring myself to spend the rest.

The next pull on my want to spend the skill points came from the other side: diagnosis was incredibly difficult and my skills were only 3 in each of the four categories.

Then the questions hit: what if I wanted to have a big orgy again and orgasm repeatedly, and get it up repeatedly? What if my size needed even bigger increases? What if we came across a challenge that could only be solved by forking my way out of it?

Yes, it was a stupid line of thinking. The trouble with being filled with hormones and desires is those inevitably rise up and make you question what anything is for. Surely only the biological imperative to mate matters. All those hormone-addled thoughts ran through my head regardless, and the temptation to keep the skill points for Qualities had a tug of war with the Diagnosis skills. And so the skill points sat, for now.

Lastly, I didn't really need to look up the special abilities I had, but I looked into them anyway.

General Special Abilities:
Hard At Work III (Uncommon, Passive)
Wild Lore II (Uncommon, Active)
Beastmaster (Uncommon, Passive)
Stalwart II (Common, Passive)
Fierce II (Common, Passive)

Healer Special Abilities:
Healer's Endurance II (Common, Active)

Healer's Resistance (Uncommon, Active)
Healer's Breath (Uncommon, Active)

Pleasure Seeker Special Abilities:
Blissense II (Rare, Active)
Post Sharing Clarity (Rare, Passive)

Lastly, there were the Divine Gifts, which I was given to understand couldn't be raised by any means, like gaining experience in them through training or practice, or spending points.

Divine Gifts:
Floral Knowledge (Rare, Passive)
Pleasure's Bounty (Secondary class)
Entwined Ecstasy (Legendary, active)

The problem inherent here was this: one, I'd gotten these Divine Gifts through close proximity and then touching the divine. This had nearly killed me in several cases. I didn't want to discuss this with any of my fellow party members not because I didn't want them to gain access to them, but because I wasn't ready to bring people back from the brink of death. I'd basically cured some slowly encroaching sickness, a broken ankle, and some hurt fee-fees. Sure the Debilitating Lash from the Marshins had been awful psychic damage of some kind to the party, but they weren't in serious danger of dying. They would have snapped out of it on their own. The broken ankle would have even healed on its own.

No, I didn't share the knowledge of the Divine Gifts because I was pretty sure several of my teammates would be dead already, and I wasn't good enough to save their lives. I was a Healer, not a Miracle Worker. Treatments and Cures took time, like back on earth.

Now that I had **Healer's Breath** that changed slightly. I could probably get some help and knowledge regarding the Divine Gifts, and have at least one idiot suicidally try to gain more power without risk of losing them.

That person would probably be Ivy, I decided.

Actually… I had an idea, but it would have to wait until I had some privacy. For now, I had checked over my character sheet, found most things as I wanted them, except for skill points. I always wanted more of those.

I spent the day in the lab and about the village surroundings. People needed coordinating. They didn't know what this flower or that herb looked like, or smelled like if you rubbed your fingers on it. They weren't sure if I needed the root, stem, leaf or flower.

Alan put together the cure that had been communicated to him from the HQ, and I started to ensure we could make it.

There was a beauty in standing over the cauldron with mana slowly leaking out of you. Simplicity in the work. The meditation skill had yet to give me any Tokens back, but instead it helped to keep my mind on the task of slowly trickling mana into the cure I was making up.

I was very thankful to have HQ's assistance in this matter. Just seeing the list of cures and reading about the volume of differently sized gods, I knew well how much I didn't know.

Larelle or Ivy was usually the one who was helping me to grind or chop ingredients. Alan or Trent generally helped organize everything and keep me on task, while Tara was best at flower finding and reclamation.

Now that Drat's main job was over, he did nothing but hang around and provide wry commentary. Usually he sat on a workbench and knocked his heels against the drawers. After he was shouted at, he moved to a workstation without drawers, a table, and kicked his feet.

"Grind it like you just got to the club," he told Ivy in that same toneless drawl. "Unh, oh, ugh, yeah. Nice grinding." The delivery was so deadpan, not a bump of expression to be found. You could skate across his delivery in stocking feet like a waxed dance floor.

She paused in her work at the mortar and pestle. "Stop being gross."

"I would cease to exist," he replied in that same non-tone.

She paused, and instead chopped up the leaves of a mint into teensy little bits. This required hard eye contact the whole time, apparently.

"Girl you scary," he said, still totally deadpan.

"I liked you better when you were invisible… and not around," Ivy said.

"You wound me," he said. "Boss, how long are we stuck here?"

I sighed. "The recipe is going to require me to work on it continuously for two straight days," I told him.

"Two days." Finally, I hear a hint of expression in his tone: disbelief.

"Yes. I have a special ability that allows me to work through the night without incurring penalties, which I'm going to activate once the sun goes down. But you're going to find me here again in the morning, adding mana and stirring and adjusting the temperature. It will be the very definition of boring."

"Copy that." He nodded, hopped off the table, and made to leave. Turning at the door, he gave me a sad smile. "Your abilities suck, bro."

I waved cheerfully at him as he left. I didn't have the heart to tell him I had an ability that made me more awesome when I had sex, or a series of skills that literally transformed my body into that of a sex god.

Instead I got down to work.

What followed were several days spent working up a cure. I was informed by HQ that the magical cure I'd used for the God of Footfalls would not suffice. The extent of the injuries through this magical illness had effectively killed the god. It was much further along… I was forced to record the symptoms of its illness each morning and send the intel along to Rainer and the HQ Healer knowledge compendium Wizards so that I could get an idea of what the affliction was actually called.

I reported that the mana of the creature was disappearing as it

bled out. Like my Affinity checks couldn't track where the mana was going, even when I passed those checks. It was like the mana simply ceased to exist. And, aside from the infused mana that came with the treatment elixirs I made several days later, it wasn't gaining any mana from the surroundings.

Two days of watching, recording and reporting these symptoms later, Rainer informed me that my efforts had borne fruit.

Alan reported that this was called Disjointed Mana Syndrome. This meant the entire god was out of phase with the reality. If the whole reality was the numbers one and two, somehow the God of Apparel had slipped in between one and two. It was one point three seven, in a manner of speaking. Maybe before the Spiritual cure with the offering of clothing, it had been exactly one point five, right between one (alive) and two (dead) and slipping out of existence entirely. With the tincture, it was being brought closer to one, where mana could once again energize its body and soul.

"You said it would be two days," Drat said, now sitting cross-legged on the work table.

"How do we reorient the body of a god to the reality it occupies?" I asked, ignoring the Rogue.

So a couple of things I glossed over here: one, there are multiple realities. That one was pretty easy to accept, due in large part to the portal linking earth to this other world. Okay, no problem there. Two, mana essentially is the means by which reality is allowed to change from one state to another. On earth, this is biological processes and laws of physics. Somehow mana allows people to briefly alter those things, by speeding up biological processes, freezing them in place, stopping them entirely, imposing extra gravity on an object, causing spontaneous combustion, that kind of stuff.

"Fletcher, this place is a backwater and there's no more secrets to ferret out. I'm friggin dying here."

"Head out with Tara and find where the other three towns are. Glumpdumpkin needs us there soon, but I'm not going to leave a patient."

"What? Really?"

"If any of the Guardians volunteers you can take one of them too, for protection."

"Pff, no worries there."

"Eh, allow me to reconsider. Take one of the Guardians. I think Chrysta is the quietest and fastest. Stealthy and fast is the way to go."

"All right, all right." He was nodding, while I continued to boil an infusion of several different herbs Rainer thought I needed. "We'll check out in an hour."

"Your orders are to find information on the location of the target towns, and any other information you can glean without entering the town or speaking to any inhabitants. They don't need to know who we are or that we're coming, especially if the situation is bad. Once you have that information, you are to return."

The silence that followed let me know he really didn't love that direct order.

"Listen," I said. "I can send Tara alone. She can travel fastest on her Nakamamon, put eyes on the target, and come back in probably a day or two."

"No, no way. I'm going," he protested.

"Then just be aware that going against my direct order will cost you xp, and HQ might even learn because the system will log that you disobeyed."

"Fine," he relented, clearly wanting to get into the town and start snuffling around. "I'll grab Chrysta and Tara." I couldn't really blame him for wanting to do his job, just like I couldn't really blame him for wanting to find out how bad it was in Glumpdumpkin. I had a feeling it was far worse than hanging out naked in town.

Thankful to have his attitude out of earshot and away from me, I continued work. Healing here was a lot like on earth: slow, boring, technical, methodical, sometimes grueling, and in some cases frantic.

I'd been awake for two days already on symptom watch, but I

was relieved by Trent and Alan, and got some shuteye the third night. It was already two weeks after dealing with the egg situation and nearly having the whole village pull a zombie, psychic attack situation on all of us. Every day since I'd reconstituted the God of Apparel, the Marshins and their larval forms the Marshells had been coming by to pay their respects and offer up prayers.

I awoke on the third day ready to craft the cure. I just wished the bonuses from **Post-Sharing Clarity** would last a good forty-eight hours. Sadly, all I could manage right now was a half hour after having delightful sex with Vellenia.

Two full days of heating, steeping, infusing, stirring, grating, chopping, sifting, separating, and directing mana lay ahead of me.

This is Christopher quietly loving his job.



Chapter 23- A Super Dense Black Hole

With the weather warming, forty-eight hours felt easier and easier to handle. When I wasn't working in a laboratory constantly baking with the heat of Larelle's Magmamander, I was nipping in to treat Dee, supply plenty of ear and belly scratches, and give Regina a bit of hope.

Which was good, because she was laying on the floor curled around the poor creature and wouldn't even look at me when I came in.

"Don't you worry, lil guy," I told the flower fox. "Uncle Fletcher's going to finish up this cure starting today. I'm going to have you just like new in no time."

Tweedle Dee's tongue lolled and he lay panting happily on the floor of Regina's room, tails wagging slowly with quiet bliss. That said, he'd lost a lot of flowers from around his ears and tails. The ones that remained were in some state of drooping and withering. His coat didn't hold the same bright orange sheen as before.

"You mean it?" Regina asked. She turned red-rimmed eyes up to me for the first time.

"I mean it," I told her. "Your sweet little companion here is going to be right as rain, and that's not just some doctor's office BS either. Once the cure is in place and the god does his disappearing act, it will be like he was never sick. I promise."

I really hoped I could keep my promise. This was easily the most difficult patient I'd ever had to deal with.

With **Healer's Breath** used to treat Dee, I finished preparations and began the cure as outlined by Rainer.

A cure to reorient the God of Apparel with this reality was going

to be a hell of a shock. It involved a massive amount of stimulant. Rainer identified several stimulants, and we were going to use neffkhat, a natural amphetamine. On earth there was a version of this, but not imbued with the sort of potency a magical plant could supply. For obvious reasons, the knowledge of the existence of this plant was strictly confidential. This stuff could kill you easy if you didn't know what you were doing. Rainer had even given it an innocuous name so nobody got any ideas about it.

I had a supply of neffkhat, but it was in a secret pocket sewn into the lining of my supply box.

Once there, it was time to juice the whole thing with mana and divinity. The latter was simple enough, the former not so much.

This didn't make sense on the surface: why would it be an easy matter to infuse a cure with divinity and less so with mana? The answer had to do with how malleable mana was. It could take any form, so it drained out of plants easily. Hell, it drained out of potions just as easily. If you stored them for too long, their magic just disappeared.

"And I used to laugh at medicines with expiration dates," I muttered, chopping and cutting at the divinity plants. These could be safely added before the mana ingredients, because divinity was strong. It was, so far as my skills told me, the building blocks of reality. That didn't make much sense on the surface, and I wanted to know more, but I trusted the automatically gained knowledge. When I didn't have a resentful girlfriend, or fuck buddy, distraught over the worsening state of her best doggo, and we weren't needed in another city to help with whatever the declining situation there happened to be, maybe I wold investigate what divinity meant.

For now it meant getting golden halos and radiant primroses steeping separately, concentrating their power and readying to add them to the main mixture.

"I'll just add these?" Trent asked.

"You definitely won't," I told him. "I don't want to have to scrape you off the walls."

He froze, staring down at the flower petals as they dissolved into the heated oil and the melted beeswax. "Uh… what?"

"Divine plants release tiny amounts of divinity," I told him.

"Ah." I could tell he wasn't on the same page.

"Meaning if we add them at the same time, they might explode with divine energy. Remember, we're not supposed to touch divinity directly?"

"Right." He was looking down at the steeping plants with much more respect now. "And we can't get these other ingredients yet… because…?"

"The mana infused ingredients need their mana fresh and topped off when we harvest them. Otherwise they'll leak out mana or begin transforming into other plants while we wait." With extreme care, I stirred the radiant primroses clockwise as the recipe directed.

"We don't have a lead-lined container for that kind of thing?"

"It's portable," I said, tipping my head toward what looked like a beer cooler, sitting in the corner surrounded by caution signs. "And it's already stocked with our reserves of mana potions." Our *dwindling* reserves of mana potions. "Don't tell me you're getting antsy and bored too."

"I wish I could be useful," he admitted.

"What happened to the native you uh… befriended on celebration night?"

Not only did he redden, but he also ducked a bit. It was a little easier to broach certain topics in underwear, but not foolproof.

"It, uh, didn't work out," he said.

I gave him a suspicious look while summoning him to hold the large cooking pot. I scooped the radiant primrose concoction into the master cure, chuckling a bit at Trent's discomfort. He looked terrified that I was about to blast us both with divine energy and splatter us all over the place.

"Care to explain?" I asked.

Everybody was under orders not to anger the natives. Had he

been messing around with multiple natives? Or did he break her heart some other way?

"Don't look at me like that," he said, "it wasn't my fault. She suddenly said she wanted to be with egg, and—" He stirred the master cure while I worked on the golden halos. "That's it. No egg with human."

"All right."

"Hey man, I could ask you the same thing about Cinzy. What happened with her, huh?"

"I'm not blaming you," I told him. "I just want us to be careful. With Cinzy gone, we have to smooth out any wrinkles by ourselves. And no, I'm not going to go into personal matters. She had a problem with me and thought the best way to resolve it was not by talking the situation out."

We worked in silence for some time, stirring according to the recipe, and later adding the syrup of golden halos to the main mass of the cure. From there it was mixing time. The divinity needed a lot of stirring to mix with the powerful stimulating properties of the neffkhet.

It was maybe thirty minutes later, maybe an hour or more… I couldn't tell. I was adding a steady stream of mana to the fledgling concoction before we got to the mana-addition properties, when he finally spoke up. "It doesn't seem like her, that's all I'm saying."

"I know. I'm not happy she's gone. I think we're going to need her more for Glumpdumpkin."

He snorted. "Such a dumb name. I love it."

I nodded, focused on making sure the mana I added was continuous, steady, and the correct amount. What I was doing now was willing the divinity to cooperate with the stimulating amphetamine properties of the neffkhet, and it took a whole lot of mental effort, as well as a whole lot of time. You ever sit and build a jigsaw puzzle of five thousand pieces over the course of like twelve straight hours without a break? One of the ones that's like three colors, or just the yellow faces of building block guys. The sheer

mind-fudgery possible is immense. The crazy part is that the system stops notifying you of penalties due to sleeplessness. Your mind can't handle as much when you're running on fumes, and the system is the first thing to go. That means you literally have no idea how far you're falling.

And since this cure required roughly 48 hours, I needed to keep my wits about me.

To assist, **Healer's Endurance** was there for me. I activated the ability, and I was thrilled to regain the Durability Token once the system judged that another day had dawned.

Trent eventually fell asleep, and was replaced by Alan. The others had also been in: Ivy and Isabelle, holding hands and laughing at something, Larelle, who removes Trent and carries him in her enormous arms out of the laboratory and back to the tent he shares with Alan, and even Regina.

She hadn't left Tweedle Dee's side in weeks. Although I'd been feeling guilty about the situation the little guy put himself in, I was confident this cure would be the end of his misery. Not like 'put him out of his misery' but ease his suffering. In a good way. Why did it keep sounding like I was pronouncing doom and gloom for Regina's best boy?

Almost twenty-four hours had passed by now, and I was getting low on mana. I was still a low level Healer, though I did have 15 levels of growth as a Pleasure Seeker. I wished that meant I would gain the hit points and mana of both classes, effectively making me doubly hard to kill and doubly capable of creating magic cures, but it isn't to be. Each class granted me roughly half of what they otherwise would.

The upshot was the attribute and skill growth… though I had an additional set of skills. The real upshot was the special abilities! Well, unless you factored in that I wanted all the special abilities to level up, and there were more of them to upgrade.

Ugh. Attribute growth seemed to be the only tangible benefit of having two classes… and that was only because in my off time, I

was able to gain xp between the sheets. The fun way. Everybody else only got to level up their skills doing class-specific stuff, and less experience growth helping out others—read: me—as they went about their class-specific duties.

"Hey!" I said, trying not to get sidetracked. It was just about time to add the first of the mana-specific ingredients. "You okay?"

She nodded absently. She wasn't okay. "Just wanted to check on you. Hey Alan."

I pointed a finger at him. "Sorry, he's under strict instructions not to speak to anyone since he's on stirring detail." Stir too fast and the divinity-laden mixture, which was also boiling hot, could kill you. Stir too slowly and the whole thing could harden into a taffy-like sludge before turning into a block of cement.

That would mean a brand new cauldron, and those things weren't so easy to come by in a marsh village a week's travel from HQ. No thank you.

"He's super busy, sorry," I said. "Sorry about that, if he fails now we start over. It'll be another two or three days to get back to where we are."

She nodded, this time with more vigor. "Sure, sure."

"Thanks for going out on ingredient runs," I told her, and continued swirling the cherry violet mixture. This one needed twelve hours. Since the cherry violets went from health focused to mana focused starting at dusk, I needed to work on them all throughout the night in order to enhance the mana properties. At precisely dawn they'd be as capable as possible of shifting mana. Rainer said this was the main reagent for shifting the god from one point three seven back towards one.

It was exhausting, but these people were counting on me. I smiled at Regina after explaining all about the cherry violets.

She walked up and wrapped me in a hug, taking care to allow my free arm to continue stirring.

"The second Tweedle Dee is back to normal I'm gonna fork you til you can't walk," she breathed in my ear.

It was enough to prompt a Durability Develop Cure check at Difficult. I blinked and gaped at her, and she hissed through her teeth in horror. "Ohhhhh no, I'm so sorry, I'm—"

I failed the first check, got the free retry through the Hard At Work ability, and promptly spent the two Durability Tokens to pass the check on the second time.

"No worries," I told her. "Though if you could kindly, uh… go grab out some more, um, radiant primroses, that would be delightful."

She backed away, hands up, like I was holding her at gunpoint. She had this look on her face, the 'I just caught my parents having sex' look. I continued stirring as though she hadn't just proposed hours and hours of mind-blowing carnal delights.

At the end of my twelve hours of stirring the cherry violets, I added them into the main concoction, and Ivy relieved Alan. It was time for me to get on the second mana-rich plant, the highland bellroot.

Just like ginseng, these things had specially shaped root systems. They were only found in high elevation areas of the world here, by a single flower. From there, you had to follow the longest fracking stem in the world to the root.

As for the roots, instead of looking like ninjas doing a flying side kick, or dancers doing their thing like nobody was watching, like ginseng, the bellroot seemed to grow the root into tiny cauldrons that were filled with concentrated liquid mana. Regina and Trent had managed to find four of these, while the recipe just said 'as many as you can find'.

I crushed the root balls with the flat of my blade, scraping the thick iridescent blue mana juice into a bit of alcohol and stirring it. And adding even more mana.

Even. More. Mana.

This thing was so filled with mana, I was amazed it didn't transform into a fracking dragon and eat our faces off. Or swallow us whole. I'd only ever seen the Scorchomp.

Finally, I'd gotten to the point where my own mana fizzled out, so

I was forced to use another of the mana potions.

"Where are we at?" Ivy asked.

"We're at the heat, stirring, and mana phase," I told her. "If I don't have enough mana, we start over. If I stir it wrong, we start over. If the temperature is wrong—"

"We start over?" Ivy asked, rolling her eyes.

"Actually I think it turns into a super dense sort of black hole made of acidic magic, destroys the lab, falls through the floor, and drains all the water out of the marsh," I said nonchalantly. "Somewhere in there we all get sucked in and compacted into a singularity the size of a baseball. So we all die."

The utter astonishment on her face was totally worth it.

"I'm kidding… mostly. But I don't want to do this again."

She just nodded, not sure what to make of what I'd just said.

The UI window for the Develop Cure check came at the forty-three hour mark.

This is Christopher getting his eyes on the finish line.



Chapter 24- Isabelle, Isabelle, Isabelle

I felt the warmth of **Healer's Endurance** keeping me alight during the hours that followed. It was naught but stirring, trickling mana into the cure, and the bubbling of the whole thing from the Magmamander radiating the heat from the below.

Assistants came and went. Alan, Trent, Ivy, Isabelle, Larelle. Regina was out helping to replenish the stores of materials I would need, but she popped her face in before heading off to sleep, smiling encouragingly.

Hours came and went. I entered a meditative state with the help of the Meditation skill, and that helped quite a lot to while the hours away without me losing focus and making a mistake. With Meditation, the outer world fell away. Emotion receded. Anxieties disappeared. Nothing remained save for the here and now, and the task at hand.

So when the Develop Cure check finally came, it didn't phase me as it had with the God of Footfalls.

***Develop Cure (Medium/Unique) Check**: This check is Nigh Impossible difficulty. Although the difficulty is 16, presently 12 Tokens* will suffice to automatically succeed at the check. Since the difficulty of this check is higher than your current combined skill and attribute level, a penalty of 4 Tokens has been imposed. Would you like to spend these Tokens to succeed?*

Total Tokens: 6 Affinity and 7 Free Tokens.

Hard At Work: *Your Tokens are worth double given you are engaged in your class duties.*

"Holy…" I muttered, and made a quick note of the circle that

appeared next to the prompt, ticking down the time. I had only a few seconds to decide whether to dump all of my Affinity Tokens plus all of the Free ones. Obviously I had no chance of success without spending Tokens. With 1 level of Medium, 7 levels of Unique, and 6 levels of Afffinity, I had 4 successes I could count on, and maybe 6 if I was lucky, but even if I succeeded with every single available skill and attribute level it wouldn't be enough.

I gave my mental assent, and vowed in the future to have Trent or Alan on hand to help by spending their Affinity Tokens. Tara had helped back with the God of Footfalls by spending 3 of her Affinity Tokens and lowering the difficulty by 2, and that meant I could count on the Sorcerer or the Wizard to supply me with at least double that, possibly triple. That much of an expenditure probably wouldn't be necessary, and I didn't want to strain their resources, but this was critical. If I could lower the difficulty to be even with my skill level, it would save me 4 Tokens going forward.

Success! *You have crafted a magical cure for a unique creature.*

I breathed a huge sigh of relief and slumped back against the nearest workbench. Ivy watched in interest, and slung my arm around her shoulders.

"You okay, killer?" she asked.

The accumulated stress and sleeplessness hadn't fully hit me; they would. For now, I gave her a smile tinged with not quite my full level of exhaustion.

"Yeah… I'm good."

It was still another hour before Regina came to relieve Ivy. She found the tattooed Guardian cuddling with me in my tent.

"Heyyyyyy," Regina said, ducking in.

Ivy sprang to her feet. Regina chuckled. "It's all right. I know you were just making sure he was okay after that ridiculous potion making situation."

"Yeah," Ivy said. "Yeah, exactly. Where's Izzy?"

Regina grinned and shrugged, and Ivy hustled out.

“Didn’t find you in the lab. I thought you might be taking a nap. You okay?”

I smiled tiredly. The sun was going to be making its way up in another hour or so. “I’ve been worse. It was a lot of Tokens, but we did it.”

You’ve never seen a girl smile like Regina smiled at me. Okay you probably have. You just need to save her beloved pet’s life, or fundamentally alter her life for the better.

I still had to Administer the cure with another skill check.

“When do you want to administer the cure?” she asked.

The sooner the better, as it turned out. We were about out of tincture, and people were getting used to having their underwear on again. Nobody wanted to go back to being fully exposed on the regular.

Regina grinned. “Just let me know, okay?”

The potion I’d slaved over for two days would require me to administer it within two more days. I wouldn’t have time to try meditating and grab more Tokens back. Also, I was over Slinktrickle. It was cozy and quaint, but there were other people out there that needed me. The scouting missions that helped me raise Identify had shown me there was a lot more of the world yet to see, and the Scorchomp reinforced that. It was so awesome and cool and mind boggling that I needed to see more of them. I wanted to see a real, super awesome dragon, and that wasn’t about to happen in this marsh village. I wouldn’t rest until I’d added more and more draconic aspect Nakamamon.

“Let’s do it,” I told her.

Something had happened while I was out, and I felt it immediately the moment I turned toward the laboratory to go fill the syringe and administer the cure.

There was a force of nature trying to push me away. It was visible when I exited the tent, a wavering to the air without color. The heat haze shimmer didn’t rise up like it would if it made pavement look like water in the far distance, but instead radiated

outward from the lab.

"What the…"

I had to force my way into the building that had been the hatchery, the simple square building with the shutters instead of window glass, the workbenches and the area over to the side where the formerly dead god lay in its clothes.

The UI informed me that I would be making a Durability check, and added the Divine Resistance skill. I pumped a skill point into it immediately, and with the 8 total levels, scored 2 successes. It was enough to force my way through the space and into the lab.

Ingenuity and the Develop Cure (Unique) skill coupled with the Develop Cure (Medium) skill explained just what in the heck was happening: the god had begun to discorporate again. The divine cure all the people of the village had performed had come to an end, and the god was once again coming undone.

I surged forward like I was walking against gale force winds. The moment I laid my hand on the syringe, the system message appeared.

***Administer Cure check**: This check has fallen under the Durability attribute due to the circumstances. This check is Extreme. Would you like to spend 6* Tokens for an Automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 6 Durability, 1 Free Tokens

**__Hard At Work:__ Your Tokens are worth double given you are engaged in your class duties.*

Yes, yes I would. I didn't care if the next 5 levels of my classes were 10 years away, I wanted to end this thing's suffering. Paying the toll for the check helped immediately, making me resistant to the waves of divinity now pouring out of the body.

Squinting against the pressure, I got the huge horse syringe and filled it with the cure I had crafted. Then, with immeasurably slow steps, I forced my way across the lab and right up to the body.

Here, so close, I could now see the divinity more clearly. The body of the god was pulsing with whitish, yellowish light, throwing

off that light in a way that distorted the whole room. I pressed onward, and pulled myself along using a workbench to help me.

"Fletcher!" Someone yelled.

My lab equipment was being pushed away from the god, sliding across the workbench surfaces pulse by pulse. As the god discorporated further, the pulses got stronger. It came with a deep basso thrumming sound, a *whum… whum… whum…*

"Grab my gear!" I shouted. "Don't let anything break!"

Whum… whum… whum…

Reality started changing. I'm not sure how to qualify and quantify that statement, but that's what was happening. It was like the hatchery building was less real. Like the boards beneath my feet were going to become quicksand. I felt insignificant, like I wasn't even a speck of dust.

Whum… whum… whum…

Finally I fell to my knees and crawled the remaining few feet. With a surge, I shot forward and jabbed the needle into the god's arm, and pushed the plunger down at the same moment.

Everything. Stopped.

It was like all of time froze for a moment. The thrumming pulse of divinity vanished on the spot, and I nearly shot forward and collided with the being. Its spine arched like it had just been zapped by a bolt of lightning. Its eyes shot open and they were searchlights, beaming sunlight directly across the room and into the ceiling. That light was hot enough to scorch everything it touched, including the four by four joists and beams.

A sort of bronze skin was creeping over the creature to form an outer layer over the roiling cloud stuff that was its body, the way frost spreads over surfaces at night. That stuff spread over the clothes it had on as well. It wasn't quite enough to cover the whole thing, and stopped in a number of places before it could connect into a bronze whole.

It took another injection of the cure to get the bronze to fill out over the whole body of the being. Only then did I receive the

notification that the god had been cured.

Only then did all my clothes suddenly appear on my body.

"Man oh man," I said, realizing I'd been about to say 'holy cow.'

The god stood and acknowledged me, no longer radiating enough light from its eyes to laser me in half. I was quite thankful. As it regarded me, the clothing on its body seemed to be all the different types of clothing at once: a bikini, a full burka covering everything but the eyes and the hands, a puffy winter coat, a strip of cloth like a tube top around the upper torso. Miniskirt, sun dress, dungarees, chambray work shirt, tuxedo, stockings and garter. Some of them it wore at the same time in bizarre configurations that made my brain laugh, like the snorkel and cowboy hat and polka dot blouse and board shorts, with elbow length gloves, knee length soccer socks, and flip flops. It had a stocky and stout female body, and it had a lithe and lanky male body, it had a sinuous and big-hipped female body, and it had a bodybuilder's male body. It was fat, and it was thin, and tall and short, long hair, short hair, wild curly hair, and all of these things were true at the same time.

You have been damaged, the god told me in my mind.

I peered down at myself to find blisters on my hands and forearms, then shrugged. "That's nothing. I have remedies for burns. Though… I appreciate the concern."

As you will, then.

The god vanished, as though it had never been there at all.

[God of Apparel] appreciates your efforts in saving it. You have been gifted [Prismatic Apparel]. [God of Apparel] understood resilience and tenacity could be found in the humans, and marveled at the cooperation of humans and natives to this world. [God of Apparel] has seen your effort and the difficulties you went through in crafting the cure, and has bestowed upon you +1 Durability. You gain 1 Durability token.

It sounded a lot like the item from God of Footfalls. And another attribute point was of course a thousand percent welcome.

I took a look at Prismatic Apparel.

Prismatic Apparel

Item, Wondrous, Legendary

This set of clothing is able to be shaped in any way the wearer wishes. Merely turn the articles inside out to alter their form. The color of the new form will be randomized.

This item has the following properties: godsbane, unbreakable, soulbound, returning.

Godsbane: While wearing this clothing you are assumed to have +5 Divine Resistance.

Unbreakable: This item never takes damage and can never be destroyed except by divine power.

Soulbound: this item belongs solely to you. You may gift this item to another, but the item may never be taken from you.

Returning: this item returns to your possession at a thought.

Everything about this item seemed better and better. Now that I had an outfit to go with the shoes, it seemed like any of these god-given items would be unbreakable, soulbound and return to me if I ever leant them out just by thinking about it. The new property was puzzling, to be sure, but wonderful nonetheless. It made sense, of course, with the God of Apparel dealing me a wound just by being in its blast radius.

The wounds themselves were golden blisters that wept iridescent and color-shifting liquid when I lanced them. They ran over the fingers and backs of my hands, over my wrists, and halfway up my forearms. Once I lanced them with what looked like the lovechild of a scalpel and a pushpin, beneath glowed faintly golden in color, though there was a hint of oily iridescent color from the residue of whatever the liquid had been… holy pus?

Also they… didn't hurt? That was almost as odd as the words 'holy' and 'pus' together in the same sentence.

"Hey Fletcher, is it safe to come in?"

I didn’t know the answer to that question, so I told them that for the tie being, no it wasn’t safe. Isabelle came in a few minutes later, blue magic shield blazing and held out defensively. One look at me had her gaping, and not in the lewd post-sex way.

“What the hecky Becky happened to you?”

“I haven’t seen a mirror… is it bad?”

“You look like an oil slick.” She stared in morbid fascination, like I was a dissection experiment in science class. Then she winced. “I probably shouldn’t have said that. Come on, Isabelle, have some tact!”

My Diagnosis skill informed me this was a spiritual injury (not an illness, which was important), which came from the waves of divinity coming off the God of Apparel. It looked physical, but it turned out not to be. Luckily the same type of plants were listed in the manual as the ones I could use in a salve.

So, an injury I could just handle with the Treatment skill. Develop and Administer Cure skills wouldn’t be necessary. Working quickly, an infusion of golden halos, sacred lotus, and the radiant primroses all mixed with the oil and beeswax to use as the paste. With my trusty Magmamander on loan from Larelle, I had the one temperature shift handled without difficulty, and the three different flowers were infused into the salve.

I passed the Difficult check by failing to get the 4 successes the first time, then getting my free retry with **Hard at Work**. With Isabelle helping on the second try, using 3 Durability Tokens to lower the difficulty by one, I was able to get it on the second attempt just by chancing it. The second time, I scored 5 successes. Her Tokens hadn’t been necessary after all.

I would need to investigate the chance of success and failure a little bit closer. Sometimes I could get over forty percent of my skill levels to succeed, other times barely over a quarter.

Best to consider it later. For now, I smeared the cooled salve onto my hands and forearms with Isabelle’s help. She kept a tightly controlled expression now and refused to say anything, even when I

prodded her.

"I took a bath in pure divinity," I told her, while she wrapped my hands in bandages. This wasn't really necessary.

No response. I chuckled anyway.

"Do you want to check inside my clothes?"

Her eyes flickered up to mine, and the vague frown deepened.

"Okay, I'm kidding. Unless you want to check inside my clothes."

Isabelle scowled, pulled my boxers open, and peered down.

"Nope, your gigantic dick is still there and seems to be totally healthy and ready to wreck some poor girl's innards." She rolled her eyes and let the waistband snap back.

"You know what my mom used to say?" She asked me.

"I have no idea what your mom used to say." Frowning at herself, she got the metal thing that looked like a tongue depressor, and started smearing the salve all over my face.

"She said if I didn't close my mouth once in a while I was going to swallow a whole swarm of insects."

"That's not very nice."

"Yeah, well, you don't overshare every time you say something. Or, you know, bring up traumatic childhood memories that don't need to be shared at all."

I grinned at her, but tried to make that smile one of commiseration. I wasn't sure what to say otherwise.

"Isabelle, Isabelle, Isabelle," she told herself, "you've got to keep your big mouth shut, or else you're going to embarrass yourself for the rest of your forking life."



Chapter 25- Whozzere?

It turned out I had the same non-painful divine blisters and burns on my face. Everywhere on my face: my forehead was littered with them, but also my nose, lips, cheeks, and even my eyelids. I spent the next day just soaking up the salve all over my hands, arms, and face. It was a boring day, at first, but after I got over the not seeing anything, it felt calm and relaxing. The village had no other threats. There was no work for me to do here, and that felt amazing.

The very first thing I did was level up. I'd catapulted two full levels through making a tincture, a salve, working on the treatment for Dee, and then the colossal task of generating the cure for the god. That netted me enough xp to go from level 15 to 17.

Level 16: +1 Affinity, +2 skill point

Level 17: +3 skill points

I couldn't decide whether the extra Affinity was more welcome, or the five skill points. I mean *five* skill points was a heck of a lot. There was never a shortage of places to spend them. Diagnosis, Treatments, Cures, Meditation, and the skill that definitely helped me cure the God of Apparel: Divine Resistance. And that said nothing of the capital Q Qualities that were turning me into a sort of sex god. Deciding on where to spend these was not going to be a simple matter.

This was more skill points than I'd ever received before from a single level up. My immediate hope was that the number would continue to rise with subsequent level ups.

I examined where I might be best served in spending skill points. The problem from this latest cure situation had been with the Develop Cure step. First, the cure needed a simply ridiculous number of successes, more than I'd had skill and attribute levels. However,

there were a staggering number of different types of gods.

It seemed that the best way to go about it would be to increase the size category skills. Swarm, Small, Medium, Large and Huge+ were all good places to sink skill points. I placed one into Divine Resistance first and foremost. The other four I put into Tiny/Swarm, Small, Medium, and Large. Although I had no intention of attempting to heal something bigger than myself, I wasn't about to run from the challenge.

The problem was that the larger things got, the more magically infused their bodies were. So what we think of as an adult dragon would be able to contain and handle exponentially more mana than something the size of an elephant, and that was exponentially more mana than something person-sized. So if my mana pool was x, then an elephant's would be x times 100, a dragon's mana pool would be x times 10 to the power of a thousand.

This was the way Mustache Head had explained it, anyway.

If something was huge, there was no way I would be able to handle treating it. The difficulty of doing so would be, what… higher than 50 successes? Or perhaps even higher?

My Healer skills now looked a tad more respectable than before, with Diagnosis (Magical) and Treatment (Potions) having leveled just from enough practice.

Healer Skills:

Diagnosis (physical 3, spiritual 3, magical 4, mental 3)

Treatment (potions 4, salves 3, tinctures 3, elixirs 3, unguents 3)

Develop cure (swarm 4, small 4, medium 2, Large 1)

Develop cure (unique) 7

Administer Cure 8

"Aww yeah," I muttered, laying there with salve all over my face, and only able to see because the system had somehow gotten into my brain.

Vellenia snickered.

“Vel? What in the names of all the many, many gods are you doing here?” I asked.

“Not disturbing you,” my bond replied. “Aside from that, watching over you. And considering whether or not you are well enough that I may mate with you.”

“You’re insatiable,” I said, but in response I felt my own libido rise to the challenge. Could I mate without the ability to see what I was doing? I was certain it was possible.

“Can I help it if I am completely filled with my bond mate each time you press into me? Can I help it if the pleasure you lend to me is more than I ever dreamed? It is like this hole was meant to be stuffed with Fletcher.”

“Please for the love of all that is holy tell me there’s no one else in this tent,” I said.

“We are alone,” she said, from much closer than she had been just a moment ago. Feather light fingers drifted over where my cock was presently stirring. “Does that mean I should erect your tower and bury it in my cave’s deepest recesses?”

I would have said yes, but I wasn’t certain whether the divinity I still had in my body was contagious or not.

“I’m going to hate saying this, but not now. I might be able to poison you with divinity.” She made a pouty sound that made me laugh. I could tell she wasn’t being serious… mostly, anyway. “Also, you chose to bond with me knowing that one day I would leave your village. Are you prepared to depart Slinktrickle with me, long term?”

“Oh,” she said. This sobered her up, and that didn’t please me. She hadn’t thought this through in the long term sense.

“I do hope you’re not regretting your choice to bond with me,” I told her.

“Oh! Oh no, of course not. I have been gifted with an exceptional human. You are the finest member of your species I have met.”

Heh, she said member. “And how many humans have you met?”

“Including your nine team members? Almost twenty. A staggering amount!”

"You're very kind," I said, genuinely thankful she thought so. I didn't think she had nearly enough of a sample to be representational, but so far as I knew, the bond wasn't something that could be broken. It couldn't be rescinded. I wasn't even sure that someone could have their bond member die and then bond another. The program was new enough that this information just didn't exist.

We discussed what she might need and who she might want to talk to, which included Larelle. Vel promised she would prepare to depart, but paused before exiting the tent.

Then fingers were fumbling at my pants.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"This was a great deal simpler when the God of Apparel was sick," she muttered, with a twinge of annoyance. Soon though she had my pants open, and quickly slurped my cock into her mouth. Those tentacle tongues of hers went right to work fluttering around every available bit of me. The moment I began to harden, she pulled away. "Bond mate, I will return!"

I laughed and cursed her for turning me on, but she was already gone. It was up to me to get my pants back in order.

Larelle was next to visit. That familiar voice intruded on my thoughts. *How are you feeling, Healer?*

"I'm well, thank you."

You have done a great service to this village, to the team, and to your species, she told me.

I wasn't entirely sure what to say to that, so I didn't.

I will make preparations to depart when you are well. Tara, Drat, and Chrysta have returned from their scouting mission and informed me about what they have found. Fear not, all will be in readiness when you are healed.

When it became clear she wasn't about to share that information, I got a bit grumpy. "I'd like to see if I can replenish any of my spent Tokens then."

Your wish will be respected. I will keep the remainder of the team

from disturbing you.

This wasn't entirely what I'd hoped for, but that's what happened regardless. I soon had peace and quiet, and practiced my meditation skill for the remainder of the day. Since I'd burned through all my Tokens for Affinity and Durability, and all of my Free Tokens, I was in a place where I could really use them.

It only took a solid half day of meditating before the check came.

***Meditation check**: For purposes of replenishing Tokens, this check falls under the auspices of Affinity. This check is Difficult. You may not attempt an automatic success.*

As it happened, my 6 levels of Affinity and my 2 levels of Meditation were not up to the task of 4 successes. For the first six hours at least.

Interesting that it should say 'for the purposes of replenishing Tokens,' meaning I would need to seek out Larelle and ask what the other uses there were for Meditation.

Clamping down on my frustration, I tried again. Within a few minutes the calm and focus descended back down upon me, a blanket smothering outside distractions. I couldn't imagine anything like this in the current day and age. With a cell phone in my hand, there was simply no way to shut out the outside world. Notifications and alerts were constant, along with the constant desire lurking in the back of my mind that there was something more to see, whether that was on Tweetly or MeBook, Instantify or PersonaGram. Or, hell, any of the tubes, depending on how you wanted to watch your videos: Boobtube for old TV show episodes, Newbtube for tutorials on everything imaginable, Tunestube for music, Toontube for cartoons, Cubetube for science or math lessons, or the others.

By the time it was feeling like dusk, I had been given another check, and this time succeeded.

***Congratulations!** You have regained a Token. It has been applied to Affinity.*

"Nice," I said, and wondered if some other woman was going to comment about me talking to myself, followed by sex stuff.

Achievement: *first Meditation success*

You have begun the ascent on your progression path towards enlightenment. The road is long, and sometimes steep. The journey can be circuitous, and must be walked alone.

Reward: +1 Token replenished. It has been applied to Durability.

I drifted off to sleep contented.

On the second day, I woke up to giggles and the feeling of cool breath rushing over my naked body. Specifically, someone was sliding my boxers down my thighs and possibly another someone was kissing and licking between my legs.

"Hrm?" I mumbled. "Whozzere?"

Someone's body slid up and over mine, smooth and warm and with curves I reached out to grab. Hands pulled mine away. "Don't open your eyes," she whispered, "Don't move. We'll play a game," she whispered. "If you can tell who I am by my mouth or my pussy, you win a special prize."

"A bigger prize than sex?" I asked.

"Mm-hmm," the voice said, mouth already otherwise occupied.

Lips tickled at my cock, which rapidly began to harden. Soon they closed over the head and began to work in a steady rhythm, with some low humming. The vibrations felt delicious around my shaft.

I snaked my fingers into her hair, her straight hair, and massaged her scalp while she took me into her mouth repeatedly. She would sometimes lash the underside with her tongue, and other times swirl her tongue around the head before plunging back down. I knew this technique…

As if reading my mind, she released me and climbed up my body. My hands ran over her body and got a good feel of her, but the shape of her ass, thighs and her waist wasn't what I thought. The technique and the hair had definitely been Tara, but her legs weren't nearly long enough. Regina and Isabelle had similar body types,

while Ivy's legs were much leaner and thicker with muscle. The size of the boobs would give it away… Isabelle's were much larger than Regina's.

It didn't matter, because she took hold of my raging erection and slid it back and forth over her slit several times before pressing down and sinking several inches inside herself. Even as I felt her up and compared sizes, she rose up and forced herself to take my full length. She was painfully tight, and that gave the game away.

"Ugh, Regina," I moaned, as the sweet feeling of her enveloped me again and again.

"I've missed this," she breathed.

"Regina's not the only one here," Tara whispered in my ear. "Now you'll need to return the favor."

It wasn't even my birthday. In a flash, those toned thighs slid over me and settled on either side of my body, and I got two fistfuls of her naked ass. I detected fabric; she was wearing long socks again, and the mental image almost made me pop off inside Regina. I couldn't exactly say what it was about the blonde vixen that was even sexier with knee high or thigh high socks, but when I ran my hands up and down her legs, I groaned with pure lust.

I pulled on that amazing booty until her pussy came into contact with my open mouth, and found it already sopping wet. I guess blowing me and then watching Regina stuff me inside her really got her engine revved.

"You look so hot like that," I heard Regina manage in between moans.

"Ohhhhh," was all Tara could respond. I'd gotten my hands on her boobs and I was pinching and rolling her nipples around. I'd been through a number of different sessions, getting the proper technique down over time. A little pinching, a little twisting, and a bit of massage was what Tara liked, along with a tongue running up into her and over her clit. She liked that almost as much as she liked having my extended tongue thrust all the way up inside.

I felt it first, Regina's mouth close over the nipple I was grabbing.

Even as she forked herself slowly and deeply up and down my length, she leaned forward and got a mouthful of Tara.

With one hand free, I could insert a finger into Tara and focus my tongue completely on the tiny nubbin of flesh at the top of her slit. I alternated with my tongue flat, scraping back and forth, and using the tip of my tongue to circle the little pleasure buzzer. Meanwhile, I gave her rhythmic thrusts with just the tip of one finger.

It was enough. She groaned and shifted and humped her hips back against me, trying to get more of me inside.

"Gods you're sexy," Regina muttered, and then the kissing began. In the meantime, she slowly and forcefully shoved herself down onto my cock over, and over, and *over* again. Riding me without hurry, savoring the whole of the experience, and now that Tara was involved, trying to make sure she could enjoy Tara just as much as she was enjoying me.

Tara eventually came like that, shuddering and moaning until she bucked and humped against my face. With Regina on her nipples there was nothing to be done. Regina came at the same time, and that was almost enough to send me off, but I held on thanks to Durability.

Because someone needed a load shot inside her.

Tara had slumped to the side after an intense orgasm, but perked up when I slid one leg aside and slowly sank my length into her. I kept petting the thigh high stockings she had on, admiring the difference in texture between her ass and the material.

Regina decided this was a spectacle that needed watching. She hoisted Tara's long leg up my body and made sure I was hanging on, then got down close so she could see every thrust.

"You two are so hot," she breathed.

"That's so embarrassing," Tara said, throwing a hand over her eyes so she wouldn't have to watch. And that meant she didn't see Regina leaning in with tongue outstretched to get at her clit. Meanwhile Tara's wetness accommodated me perfectly, pushing me ever closer to my own explosion.

Somehow, seeing Regina's wanton behavior did it for me. I groaned loudly in warning.

"Cum in her," Regina hissed. "She wants it. You want it, don't you?"

Tara, forehead slick with sweat and eyes shaded by her forearm, nodded wordlessly.

I had a powerful mental image of Tara wandering around our shared house with her hands cradling a bulge in her stomach, popping out her belly button. Her breasts were swollen and leaked milk. She had her hands on her lower back and winced, but she still looked over her shoulder at me like I needed to be giving her even more seed. I needed to bend her over and let her know I was still committed to her even though she had my child inside her. And in my mental image, I saw myself bend her over the dishes she was doing, and take her just like that.

That did it. This is Christopher letting out a strangled groan and once again trying to breed Tara.



Chapter 26- Hump Thruster

The UI set me up with level 16 in Pleasure Seeker, and also informed me that my relationships were advancing. **Eagle Eyed** advanced to level III, while **Beast Talker** advanced to level II.

Eagle Eyed III

(Special Ability, Common, passive)

I- Your eyesight and hearing become better than human. You are able to discern details at a distance, and analyze close objects much better than base humans.

II- Your peripheral vision and reactions are increased beyond human maximums. You may not be caught off guard.

The changes to Eagle Eyed were subtle, just a few words. Important words, though. These included no longer being able to be caught off guard, at all, not even when asleep, and adding hearing to the list of affected senses. Both excellent additions.

Beast Talker II

(Special Ability, Uncommon, passive)

I- Your Likability is considered +3 when dealing with non-humanoid Nakamamon found in the wild. You gain a Persuasion skill of +3 with them as well. Your Identify is considered +5 when used on a new species.

II- Your Likability and Persuasion are considered +1 with all Nakamamon.

**Note: these bonuses are lost if you take hostile action against any Nakamamon.*

I liked the bonuses for dealing with sapient, humanoid Nakamamon, which stacked with the non-humanoid ones.

As for Pleasure Seeker…

Level 16: +3 skill points

Those were excellent. Three was better than the usual two, obviously. I was definitely going to give them a good thinking about and consider what to do with them. There were a lot of ways to spend those points, and I didn't want to do it wrong.

We got moving later that day. The Marshins, Marshells and Marshmellows all turned up and gave us a warm sendoff, and for the first time since I'd met them, they wore clothes. Since they had white skin with green and sometimes pink stripes on their bodies, their clothes were for some reason the same colors. This would be a theme going forward.

"I love that all your people are wearing white and pink and mint green," I told Vel.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Nothing," I said. "Out of curiousity, how much have you been outside your village?"

"Oh. Never."

I nodded thoughtfully, sure that she was about to be in for a world of surprise.

Magical fireworks zinged and zipped and swooped around before exploding with various silly sounds. Since they were magic, they could twirl and whirl, go directly over our heads, or even flit between our legs before blasting off safely not far away. The fairy part of the Marshins allowed for some pretty wonderful illusion magic.

And then we were off. After heading down to the boats, we made our way to the edge of the marsh, to where Muppin was already waiting, muddied up to her spiky head crest. Fairy Poppins bobbed nearby, before settling onto one of the gigantic beast's back spikes. I knew she'd given Muppin several doses of whatever fairy magic she used to make things lighter. It was kind of a Tinkerbell effect, gifting the power of flight, only Fairy Poppins wasn't strong enough for that kind of thing… yet?

"Thank you for helping Muppin get across the marsh, my lady," I

told the tiny fairy. Sure Cinzy had slapped her away, but I had always assumed she and Cinzy just had a more contentious and emotional relationship than most others had with their bondmates. For Fairy Poppins to actually part from Cinzy was still confusing to me. She had, after all, been the spy that ratted me out to Cinzy in the first place.

I tried not to dwell on that, though. Cinzy had been the jealous one who felt the need to spy, and Fairy Poppins was small and fast enough to do the job. Not to mention, they were bonded. With these things in mind, I let bygones be bygones. I had already alienated Cinzy, and didn't want to add Fairy Poppins to that list. "I'm glad you're coming with us."

In response, she flitted over to me, patted me on the head, and said several things I couldn't hear because she was so damn small. She got the point across by flying back and forth over Muppin's spiky surface. Where it wasn't covered by all of our accumulated traveling gear, she mimicked scratching the hippo-sized rochidna.

I had neglected Muppin lately. The big stone beast was so patient and quiet it was easy to forget she was there.

"You're so good to us, Muppin," I cooed, and scratched under her chin. The rest of the team came over and gave her a good scratching, including Vellania, who delighted in helping in every way possible. Soon her eyes drifted closed and she made a deep rumbling sound, like two gigantic stones slowly grinding together.

Then we were off.

I was joined on the road by Tara, Drat and Chrysta. They gave me a recap of what they'd found over the course of the last two days. I told Tara I noted that Airaconda was curled into a snakey spiral on top of Muppin, long body easily avoiding the spines by winding around them. She was sleeping peacefully… and snoring?

"He snores," Tara admitted, grinning.

The recap thankfully laid out the way to Glumpdumpkin, which was not far. Two days due west and a little north, possibly three if we kept the pace relaxed. The town itself was much larger than

Slinktrickle.

"You're not going to believe what it looks like though," Tara said.

"Why wouldn't I believe it?" I had seen a whole lot of difficult-to-believe stuff so far.

"She means that no matter how we describe it, you'll have trouble understanding until you see it for yourself," Drat said.

"This is correct," Chrysta added. The normally stoic and silent floating ice lady was hovering much closer than before. She radiated cold, and I was glad to have clothing on for once. "The town itself is difficult to describe."

I turned to Drat, and he nodded. Although the Rogue seemed loathe to give out secrets to anyone who wasn't me, he confirmed that HQ hadn't been wrong. He had spent several hours prowling around the outskirts and listening in without being seen. He had a lot to report and didn't want the knowledge to get farther than himself and me. I considered this, but then figured that whatever we learned was good to have public. And Tara would make sure it was public.

There was a problem in Glumpdumpkin. As much as the name was adorable, the people were beset by some kind of god malfunction.

"You didn't happen to see any humans there, did you?" I asked.

He squinted at me. "Noooooo…"

He had. "All right. We'll discuss it privately after we get camp set."

The day turned gorgeous, and we were able to get out of the wet marshy area, into a series of rolling foothills covered in tall grasses, grains, and wildflowers, with the occasional boogie tree dotting the landscape. It looked a lot like there was no end to the hills. Another series seemed to rise up on the horizon every time we crested one.

The Nakamamon seemed sparse at first, until we got down into a shallow valley between two of the hills, and suddenly a crocodile-like creature exploded into motion. All four of the Guardians were quick to bring up shields and draw aggro.

We all went wide around the thing while it caused the earth to rumble and pillars of stone to rise up and put the Guardians off balance. It also tried creating potholes in the dirt to trip them up. Trent helped by working the dirt beneath their feet flat again.

I marveled at the creature, which was studded with gems where the scales would have poked out like spikes. Many of these were orange like Trent's companion Garnet, yellow, brown, or deep red. The creature's teeth were crystals in these colors, along with its claws.

Geodile

First Stage Nakamamon

The Geodile can be easily classified by the numerous crystals and gems it uses as teeth and scales. It can often be solitary in nature, relying on its ability to soften earth to conceal everything but its eyes and nose. While it can use earth magic to put prey off balance or ensnare them, the lumbering creature's powerful tale can propel it through regular soil as though it were water.

Typical length: 20-35 feet from nose to tail (large)

Typical weight: 2000+ pounds

Gender: unknown

Aspect: earth/creature (beast)

Transformations: Unknown -> Geodile -> unknown

***Geodile** has been added to your Nakamadex.*

It lunged and tried chomping on Ivy, but Isabelle was there with her shield, with poured out magic sparks when the creature's teeth scraped against it. Ivy seemed to grow to three times her size, and that caused the thing to reconsider eating her.

Once we were out of striking range, the Guardians backed off. Trent assisted with a timely sinkhole beneath the creature.

"Don't see a lot of those as bonded companions," Trent announced, and the others laughed.

Some things I took to be features of the environment were instead Nakamamon. Several bushes burst into motion when we approached them, and I employed Identify yet again.

Shrubbit

Basic Nakamamon

Shrubbit are excellent at camouflage, preferring to disguise themselves as tufts of grass or bushes and able to sit absolutely still for hours. When that fails, they are extremely fast.

Typical length: 1-1.5 feet (small)

Typical weight: 3-8 pounds

Gender: unknown

Aspect: plant/creature (beast)

Transformations: Shrubbit -> unknown

Shrubbit has been added to your Nakamadex.

We then ran across a nest of Tulipedes, which had various different flowers growing out of each of their many body segments (not tulips, not sure why they went in that direction), and one enormous rock turned out to be a Bouldurr.

"Please tell me it isn't a big stupid troll and we called it 'durr' because it's not that smart."

"Would you prefer Boulderp?" Regina asked, and gave me a wink.

Actually I kind of did. When it turned to regard us with its too-big head, there was a derpy tongue lolling out from one side that made it look especially dumb. Although the Guardians were on their guard, the thing didn't react at all, except to track us with its eyes. It stuck one rocky finger into one rocky ear and wiggled it around, then seemed to forget we were there and contemplate whatever it had just pulled out.

Overhead, more things flew around, but they were either too fast or too far away to track. I definitely spotted another Slitherwind, but otherwise several new creatures I hadn't seen before.

Achievement: Enter 50 Nakamamon into your Nakamadex

Gotta classify them all, adventurer! The world of Nakamamon is endless, vast, variable, and full of surprises. Keep your eyes peeled for even more.

Reward: +1 Identify skill level, +1 skill point

"Wow!"

Everybody else (save Alan) had already gotten this Achievement, but they still shared in my exuberance. We went through the weirdest and coolest examples of creatures we'd seen in our Nakamadexes, and the Scorchomp draconic aspect earned some jealousy and low whistles. There weren't many draconics to be found. That was fair, since the Scorchomp lived inside a magma vein. The thing was enormous and powerful enough to be immune to all fire damage.

There were creatures that were made entirely out of crystal, like Garnet, but some of them weren't just gem shaped Nakamamon. Some looked like moles or other tunneling animals, but it wasn't unheard of to have them in humanoid shape, or the shape of sea creatures. After all, there'd been a crocodile that could swim through the dirt beneath your feet.

Thankfully, Muppin the Rochidna smashed its gigantic feet into the ground with every step, announcing that there would be trouble for any of the Geodiles or other predators that tried to get the people traveling near it.

"I th-th-th-though the a-a-a-a-admin said n-n-n… n-n-n-n-n…" Alan paused and growled at himself in frustration. "N-n-n-no v-v-violence," he asked. Regina clapped a hand on his back and gave him a good comforting rub between the shoulder blades, and he smiled in return.

"That applies to the sapient types here," Chrysta said. "We have used our magic and abilities to defend ourselves from predators since time immemorial. And the predators here can be…" She trailed off.

"Large? Fast? Powerful?" Tara asked.

“Vicious? Ambush predators? Coordinated?” Isabelle asked.

“Precisely,” Chrysta affirmed.

She then went on to describe how, when she was still just an ice aspect Nakamamon and not yet dead, their village had been attacked by a number of orca-like Nakamamon during an exploration and fishing expedition. One of their number had been killed, but they had also taken one of the colossal orca things with them. While the other orcas went insane and eventually feasted on their own companion rather than the tiny ice creatures, Chrysta and her people had been able to get away.

Secretly, I wanted to know why the ice ghost had opened up in the last two days. She had spoken more in just the last ten minutes than she had on all the other expedition days combined.

Nobody asked. It would’ve been Cinzy’s thing.

***

“Well I hope there isn’t a gravity god that’s sick and needs curing,” I muttered, staring at Glumpdumpkin.

See, there was this… let’s call it a mountain. It looked like a half pipe, in a way, where the ground rose smoothly in an arc up the sheer cliff face. This mountain got thinner and thinner until it appeared to be as thin as a potato chip, and not only were there houses and buildings covering the whole thing, they were on both sides of the potato chip thin part some several hundred feet in the air.

“Imagine being a window washer for the Empire State Building,” Trent said in awe, “but you have to live on the outside of the building.”

Tara snapped her fingers and gave him the finger guns. “That’s how I should’ve described it.”

This wasn’t the end of the weirdness.

And somehow the river ran over the midpoint of that thing, branching out into three tributaries… and one of them ran up the slope.

***

"Down the slope," my father said.

"You'd like to think that's how it worked," I told him. "I mean, I was on a lake when it transformed into a dragon and took us into the sky, so here we were looking at a new impossible thing."

"That's wild," my mother said. "If only you could've gotten a picture of it."

I was able to create something like it using an AI image generator on my parents' ten year old desktop computer, but I had to point out several places where it wasn't quite right. The river didn't run through the valley, it ran over the hump of land here. Yes, that meant the water was held in at an angle, defying gravity. The one tributary ran through the valley.

"On the other side of the valley it rose up into another thin spire of earth, with even more houses on it. These ones didn't seem so much like they contradicted gravity, but it was still weird to see a heavy building several stories high on an outcropping of land only about three feet thick." It was like the earth should've cracked and sent everybody's houses tumbling down and shattering into a million pieces.

"Well, Glumpdumpkin doesn't sound like the right name for it at all," my mother said.

"You've got that right," my father said. "It sounds more like it should be called 'Death Wall.'"

"Not Hump Thruster either."

I cringed. "Mom, it's called Flunt on the Rustle."

"Well, what were the people like in Glumpdumpkin? If they were the wrong sort, then Sex Racket seems more like the proper name for it."

"Saxwhacket!" I cried, grossed out. "Sax as in saxophone, whack as in whack-a-mole."

She shrugged and gave me a guileless smile. "I thought you said Sex Racket."

“Well I didn’t, and I’d rather you stopped saying gross things,” I said, while from the other room where Sarah was changing Brayden’s diaper, I heard snickering.

“Well next you’re going to tell me there’s a town called Analville __”

“Mom!”

“Or Two Girls One Cup Burg or—”

“Okay that’s enough of that!” Sarah called from the other room.

My father was breathing through his nose, hands clenched in a white knuckle grip and looking like he was about to have an aneurysm. Trying not to laugh, clearly.

“How do you even know… no, you know what, absolutely not. I don’t want to know where you heard that from. Gross gross gross.”

My mom sat stock still, staring like she had no idea what was happening, which made me totally certain she knew what she was doing and that she was having fun watching me squirm. It also told me she knew why I’d come back home and why I was telling her all this. She had already guessed The Plan.

That meant I needed to get through the next four months of what had happened during my stay in Dorfialtos, and get The Plan moving.

This is Christopher amazed at his mom’s dirty, dirty mind.



Chapter 27- Poppins On Duty

A pleasant warmth from the sun, and a gentle breeze played over us as we looked down on the town that definitely had a silly name and not a dirty one.

I had to wonder if Glumpdumpkin had somehow slid sideways, or if it was constantly in motion, see-sawing back and forth up and down. I mean, I'd seen mountains simply float over on top of other mountains. This could be like that.

Tara's Slitherwind companion helped us find a more vavigable road, though the going wasn't very slow as it was. The road had fewer ambush predators, so that was a plus. We joined a stream of people moving toward the town, though I use the word 'people' pretty loosely. None of them were humans.

There were all sorts of Nakamamon headed into town at Glumpdumpkin. Some of them were bipedal and appeared sentient, though the Bouldurr had been bipedal but barely capable of grooming itself.

It was kind of Seussian, to be honest. Some of the people-shaped Nakamamon radiated heat and flame, others were blobs of purple goop that sometimes stood upright on two feet in order to converse with their neighbors, or sometimes glommed into a huge purple mass with a whole bunch of pairs of eyes in there. We had flying creatures who hopped alongside the walkers or took flight to head up and down the line, we had lizard-like ones, we had ones made entirely of cloud, one that was twenty feet tall, and a few that appeared tall, broad and very hairy like Larelle.

Next, the amorphous ones. Some of these floated a little ways in the air, and were all kinds of shapes. One example of this was a floating ring of water droplets, each the size of a basketball. This pulsed with light when it… talked, or communicated anyhow, and the droplets slowly circulated in a counterclockwise direction.

Widdershins, as it would've been called in Discworld. No idea yet on whether these were multiple smaller Nakamamon, or one collection that made a single organism.

Another good example was the purple goop blob, though a really great one was one of those boogie trees. It had apparently uprooted itself and was walking around on four big thick legs that ended in several root-like toes. There were also a series of different bugs, like mantises and beetles and spiders.

Then there were the big quadrapeds like Muppin, but made of all kinds of different materials. A cloudy elephant-sized creature descended out of the sky and bounced off the road, only to go soaring back up and away from a bunch of others. It was trailed by some dozen of other smaller ones. Another example looked like an anteater, while another looked like a shark that had grown stumpy and cute little legs. Some were feathered beasts, and I couldn't understand the need for feathers at all. They couldn't fly…

"Chickens," I told myself, and I got some funny looks.

I wasn't yet good enough at Identify that I could just get them all. Identify required me to stop in place, concentrate, and get several good seconds of observation in before the UI window could pop up. I tried, because these creatures were so cool, but I didn't want to lag behind the team.

Glumpdumpkin grew larger and larger until the two spires of rock towered overhead, and made the presence of buildings at the tips not just weird, but ludicrious. The angle of elevation was all wrong. It wasn't possible in the slightest to walk up and out to those houses. Were they only available to the smaller bird people?

Nope. The distant, ant-sized creatures were navigating the town as though it was an ordinary activity. Nothing to see here, this is as normal as the nose on my face.

I shook my head to clear those kinds of thoughts. I'd been in an antigravity castle. I had literally flipped upside down upon crossing whatever threshold it was that turned one plane of gravity into another. It wasn't difficult to believe that magic had formed this

place, or deformed it, and then kept it like this… for however long it wanted.

I drifted over to Drat. "Okay, so the first problem is the overcrowding?"

"Definitely," he said.

Glumpdumpkin was supposed to be a village. It had enough people streaming into it that it definitely qualified as a city, to say nothing of the residents of the place.

Nearing the place put us at the bottom of a swoosh-shaped village, looking up in either direction at a cacophony of sights, sounds, and individuals all coming and going.

"Holy moly," Regina muttered.

"You can say that again," I said.

"Holy moly," she repeated.

"It's a figure of speech," I told her.

"Your mom's a figure of speech," she retorted.

***

Both my mother and father snorted.

"I like her," my mom said. "Is she in the running to be my son's wife one day?"

"Mom," I warned, "definitely don't do that."

She elbowed my dad, as if to say, 'look at how easy that was.'

"I wouldn't be surprised if it's the big hairy guard lady," my dad said. "That's a lot of woman."

My mother giggled in response.

"I don't know what's happening right now, but I don't like it!" I declared.

"We promise not to judge," my mother said. "And we promise we'll come visit you and your muscly wife in Inserting Woods."

"Just be sure to give us plenty of gigantic, muscly, hairy grandchildren, okay?" my dad added.

I frowned. “You two would fit in with the administration over there.”

***

Chrysta swung over in front of us.

“You will be in danger if we continue forwards,” she said.

“I’m… sorry?”

“I feel the presence of danger ahead. Beyond this point lies danger.”

Now, it had been really easy to ignore Chrysta before this. I had Regina, Tara, Cinzy, and sometimes the twins to deal with, before Vellenia showed up and became my Nakamamon of choice for the purposes of sexual gratification.

I had made damn sure so far that both Larelle and Chrysta were work acquaintances, and that everything between us would be purely professional in nature.

But when Chrysta hovered directly in front of me like this, it was impossible to miss a few things. One, she was always nude. She hadn’t suffered one bit under the influence of the God of Apparel. She was lithe and slender, with a white body that ended in the midsection area. I had noticed that as the weather cooled, she seemed to become taller. Meaning that when it was colder out, I could see her crotch and the top half of her thighs before they faded out of visibility. Nothing lewd on her slim build, no visible genitalia or nipples, which was why she seemed like maybe she was wearing a bodysuit. She wasn’t.

Two, though I knew she could multiply the number of arms she had, she appeared at first glance to have only two.

Her hair likewise became transparent halfway down her back. Overall, she was visually striking, and if you hadn’t seen the proliferation of her arms, you might wonder how it was she ended up as a Guardian. Larelle made sense given her sheer bulk and size, but Chrysta looked like you could snap her in half over your knee like a dry twig, or melt her with a strong breath.

I knew better.

The air around us now was definitely cooler than it had been a second ago.

"Way to ruin the surprise," Drat said conversationally.

I called a halt. "What kind of danger are we talking about?"

"It's a special ability as a Guardian," she said. "It goes off as a check, and offers me the ability to spend Tokens if I fail."

"And?"

"It is beyond my ability to succeed, and requires more Tokens than I possess."

"Can I help? I'll lower the difficulty. Tell me what we're working with."

Chrysta's eyes widened. "This is… an Ingenuity check."

I nodded. "Perfect."

Right on cue, the UI message appeared in my vision.

Assistance: *Your team member is attempting a check. Your ability* ***Hard at Work*** *will allow you to lower the difficulty by 1 for every 2 Tokens spent. Do you wish to assist Chrysta in determining the source of danger in the surrounding area?*

Total Tokens: 8 Ingenuity, 1 Free Token

I gave my mental assent and flicked the number up to 6 Tokens. I didn't want to lose them, but I had Meditation now, and that meant I could spend some hours every day attempting to get them back. I was down quite a lot of Tokens, but I was only 3 levels away from a full Replenishing as a Healer.

This should work.

Chrysta's eyes were still wide, and she nodded her thanks. A few seconds later, a red haze flooded my vision, showing me that the whole area before me was dangerous. That didn't make a lot of sense, seeing as Nakamamon of all types were marching confidently into that cloud. They were clearly ignorant of the danger.

The cloud definitely appeared thicker and more dense the further

you went into it.

"What's happening?" Tara asked.

Instead of telling her what I saw, I was curious to know what she was looking at, and asked.

"A whole lot of Nakamamon walking right into town."

"No fights breaking out, nothing horrible happening?"

"I mean we're looking at the same thing," she said. "The huge purple goop monster that I'm calling Sneeples just broke into a bunch of humanoid bipedal peoples, and they split up in different directions… wait, one of them just laid down on the ground. That's weird. Sneeples, what are you doing? A couple of other ones are just laying down. Some of them walk further than others I guess. A lot of creatures in there are laying down in the middle of the street… I guess they're tired? Why are you asking me? You're seeing the same thing I am, although if you're asking me that means you're not seeing the same thing I am. So… you're seeing something I'm not?"

I smiled. "Big cloud of danger," I said. Okay, the thickening of the cloud as they got further into town now made sense. Whatever was happening to them was stronger, and more likely to make them 'lay down' the further in they went.

"Is Sneeples… dead?" I asked.

"I've never seen a dead Sneeples," she said.

"Fair point."

"But I don't think so."

I called a huddle and explained what Chrysta and I had experienced. She had the ability, so I invited her to explain what she was talking about, but she only looked vaguely embarrassed. Leave it to an ice ghost protector lady to suddenly get stage fright.

"You misunderstand… It is not that I am unable to speak," she said. "This is not something I have encountered before. I do not understand exactly what I behold."

"Ah," I said. "Anyway I'm going to go in there and investigate a little, and come back. It's almost certainly a divine problem, based on what we've seen before. I don't have the Durability Tokens to

give everyone resistance to the effect. If you've been pumping up your Divine Resistance skill, great. I think we'll make it a priority to level it up every time you level up your class, so we can be ready for more of this—" I waved my hand vaguely at the town, where a lot of creatures were sprawled out in the streets. "—in the future."

"That's… you're the only Healer," Isabelle protested. "You're taking someone with you."

All four Guardians immediately volunteered to come with me.

"Now, I have 2 Durability Tokens," I told them. "Meaning either I can go in and then gain a measure of resistance over that damage forever, or I can lend that resistance to one other."

Healer's Resistance II

(Special Ability, Uncommon, active)

I- You may spend a Durability Token to resist damage from any source. Long term effects are reduced by 75%. Onsets of all diseases, venoms, poisons, or other afflictions are tripled, as are intervals. Lasts one day.

You may spend an Ingenuity Token to gift this ability to a willing target for one day.

II- You may spend a Durability Token after taking damage from any source. You gain a level of Resistance to that source permanently.

This was a lie… I could gift the resistance to another for the low, low cost of an Ingenuity Token. Of which I now had only one remaining. I agreed to take Chrysta with me.

"This time," I told the others.

"I have damage resistances anyway," Ivy said, and Larelle nodded in agreement. They all had **Stalwart** or something like it. They persisted, but I shut them down. This was highly likely to be divine in nature. If that ended up being the case, I would have to treat everyone who entered every day using abilities and finite resources. And abilities meant Tokens, another finite resource. They grudgingly agreed after this, and their apprehension watching the two of us

enter was touching.

The most ardent member who wanted to accompany me was Fairy Poppins. I had a long talk with her, telling her I couldn't justify the expense, and that I would be safe. Of course, I still couldn't understand her strange language or tiny voice, but I sure did try. In the end I wasn't sure whether she didn't want me to go, or if she was concerned Cinzy might be in the invisible red damage cloud.

"I need you to do something," I tried. This had worked with Brayden occasionally.

She stopped buzzing in front of my head and instead hovered in place, waiting for me to continue.

"My bond Nakamamon and my team are here. They could use someone to watch the perimeter and alert them if there's anything strange trying to get at them."

Fairy Poppins listened intently.

"There are a lot of strangers around here, and," I leaned in close, "Drat told me there might be some bad humans nearby. I would appreciate it a lot if everybody was safe and sound when I came back… can you help?"

She nodded furiously and flew off to start her new job as perimeter watch. For my part, I breathed out a sigh of relief. I couldn't see spending the Tokens to protect Fairy Poppins when I wasn't even sure why she remained behind without her bond.

That done, I spent the Durability Token to protect myself and another Ingenuity Token on Chrysta. Now, usually when I spent Tokens, they would appear from around chest high, twisting around in the air with a video game coin sound—cla-cling!—before vanishing into a shower of multi-colored sparkles. When I used them on **Healer's Resistance**, the sparkles went a pure clinic blue, and formed a dome around me. That dome shimmered and made a clean, sharp sound, a tinkle of scalpel that had been sanitized. And in we went

Here's what we found on entering:

People—Nakamamon, be they sentient or animalistic pets—lay

everywhere. I had to step lightly over them on any number of occasions, and walk around the bigger ones on others. Some of the residents of the gigantic town were still up and about, a few of them going about their lives not sure what had happened to the prone ones, and others milling about in a daze.

The red damage haze was pervasive, penetrating through walls and buildings. The Diagnosis check, which I failed, would have required me to spend more Ingenuity Tokens than I had. I wasn't upset at spending 6 Tokens to help Chrysta with her work, but I wasn't pleased at not having the resources to figure out what was going on.

You do not currently have enough Tokens to automatically pass this check came the window's response once, and twice before I told it I didn't want to try again.

We'd need more information to make the check difficulty any easier. Or more Tokens.

Level 20 couldn't arrive fast enough, I told myself quietly.

In some of the buildings, Nakamamon worked at their jobs, unaware of the red cloud of damage all around them.

You have resisted contracting a mental ailment for now, the UI let me know. *The chance of infection will be based on your successes on a Divine Resistance check using Ingenuity, modified by* ***Healer's Resistance****.*

Chrysta had received the same notification, which was useful information. The system periodically made the checks, let me know I'd passed, and that the next onset check would come in x period of time. When I first passed, the next onset check was scheduled for 12 hours from now.

"Twelve hours?" I asked. Chrysta affirmed this.

Creatures with lower Ingenuity who had failed this check were compelled to lay down, while some Nakamamon continued with their lives, only disconcerted at the sorry state of the streets.

"Excuse me," I asked a large metal creature. Identify told me it was called an Alloyum, a golem made of a mixture of metals.

The hulking, no-necked metal person ignored me.

"Can I ask you when all this started?" I tried anyway.

Nothing.

You'll not get anything from that big lug, a voice said from behind me. Or rather, a voice in my mind indicated that the direction of the owner, and the direction I was supplied was behind me. Confusing, I know.

We turned to behold what I can only describe was a yogi version of a Nakamamon: thin, stoic demeanor, purple gem embedded in the middle of the forehead, flowing pants tied with a thin cord, and a gauzy top not really restraining a full bust. Nor was it covering up the view of her boobs. Oh, plenty of jewelry too: many gold rings on the skinny neck, bangles on the wrists, ankles, and a gold and gem encrusted sort of waist necklace.

Also she floated in place with legs crossed, and fingers in what I'd think of as a meditation pose. Like Chrysta, she had a number of extra arms, and all of them were in different meditative gestures.

This is Christopher hoping we were about to get some answers.



Chapter 28- Glumpdumpkin Imperiled

The information given to us by the floating Nakamamon was this: this affliction had begun somewhere far from her jewelry shop, and slowly spread throughout the town itself. No, she wasn't sure where the effect was strongest. She was a psychic aspect Nakamamon, and like her, other psychic aspect Nakamamon were immune to this effect. The Alloyum that worked for her in the shop had only the barest scrap of intelligence programmed into it, and was likewise immune. Those who were dual aspect psychic types were lasting long, but reported to her that they had to leave the town occasionally. Those who weren't psychic aspect often found themselves wandering the streets. Sometimes a psychic would help them regain themselves, other times they were just left to later lay down.

"You will find the opposite to be true with a certain number of the population," the floating meditative woman told me.

"What will I find?"

"They operate without sleep, going about their duties the whole day through. Since this began some month ago. My neighbor across the way has been baking bread around the clock, without pause."

Also, her name was Shakindria.

"Those who lay down don't require food or drink, which I find odd," Shakindria told us.

"Have you tried rousing the… sleeping ones?" I asked.

She nodded. "If you find a fellow psychic aspect laying in the road, it is because they attempted to break a layabout out of their slumber."

"Hm." Definitely holy in nature. There was a god somewhere, a

powerful one. More powerful than the God of Apparel, which meant an increase in difficulty. Not the news I was hoping for.

"And then there are the gods."

"Come again?"

"A number of gods are also behaving very oddly. Thankfully the effects are temporary, intermittent."

Oh man.

So, although there was technically danger, and it seemed a little creepy, none of the residents were dying. The ones in the streets merely went to sleep. The constant workers weren't doing themselves damage. After interviewing the master baker, I didn't find blisters up and down her hands from all the baking. I did find that she was on the verge of running out of baking supplies, but wasn't driven insane by the situation of simply baking and selling baked goods all day and night.

"Definitely the god's doing," I told Chrysta.

"Agreed. Although odd, the situation is not so dire as we first imagined. This is well, since the strength of this god is far larger than the god of nakedness."

"True story."

A chilly, ghostly hand fell on my shoulder. "Christopher Fletcher, team leader, I wish to thank you for bringing me on this expedition."

"You're quite welcome," I told her. "Now, there's something I want to do. I hope you don't mind if we take a bit of a detour."

She looked a question at me.

"I want to get to the bottom of this… and by bottom I mean top." I turned and started marching in the direction of the very tippy top of the town.

"It is quite a distance," she said. "Are you certain we have time?"

"Not… really, but I don't think I'll have a problem passing the next check. It would be a shame to come all the way to Glumpdumpkin and not see any of the sights, you know?"

"I was given to understand you have a physical issue…" she said,

and trailed off.

"And you don't?" I asked, already striding off.

She blinked in confusion, then turned to follow. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"You don't have any physical body at all," I said, then waved this away. I was being a dick. "Sorry, that wasn't nice. I don't think you were being cruel about your remark… I've had a problem with my legs my whole life, and people have been cruel to me ever since. Lots of unnecessary teasing."

"That… is awful. I can assure you I meant no offense," she told me.

"I know."

We moved on in silence for some time. Eventually the 'danger sense' ability wore off, and the town returned to normal. Well, people were basically everywhere, laying haphazardly in the streets and propped up against buildings. Someone had taken the time and effort to drag them out of doorways and the middle of the streets in places, and sometimes put them in odd poses. A few were marching across the street like that Beatles album cover. Several were spooning one another. Two were laying opposite one another, with heads on each other's shoulders.

The going wasn't uphill, though we were definitely ascending. Again, it was precisely like we were on a level road.

"I received a gift from the God of Footfalls," I told her, and showed her the shoes. **Golightly** wasn't something I went around advertising. I had used them exclusively, to keep myself from becoming too fatigued on our long marches out into this wonderful world.

"They are truly divine," she said, admiring them from close up. I didn't even have to stop walking, she simply floated down level with the street.

"Also, Physicality has helped quite a lot," I told her. "I really want to put another few points into it. If we travel for more than an hour or two, I start to feel the pain again, but I'm able to resist it well."

"I had noticed very little discomfort when you undertake the long journeys," she said. "This was the reason for my query."

"I appreciate your concern," I told her. "I'm grateful for your intervention regarding the danger."

I walked on, and she hovered on, rising through the town though it felt just like we had traveled a couple of blocks. Minutes passed with me goggling at the architecture.

I hadn't been able to fully appreciate the houses here, which were made out of literally anything imaginable. One was a boogie tree, with a treehouse there made out of… something cream colored and geometric. The tree was slowly undulating its trunk, causing the mini house to rise and fall slowly.

We had a clump of mushroom houses for people that couldn't have been more than four inches tall, with three to four inch tall creatures sprawled out in the yard containing the mushroom houses. We had houses expertly crafted of purple crystal, houses composed of what looked like marble threaded through with veins of what looked like liquid metal, and a house on stilts like the ones in Slinktrickle.

I'm pretty sure that house over there was built out of literal cumulus clouds, somehow held in place and in shape. They were largely left to their puffy selves, but they had been shaped into straight walls and softly curving doorways or window areas. And they moved… somehow. Blue sky shone through between where the clouds dissipated, before new ones formed.

Another house was invisible. I knew this only because a blank space stood where a house would otherwise be, with a space for a lawn or garden, and as I was staring at the space, someone opened a door to reveal a house inside, then stepped out. It was a ghostly being composed of blurry outlines: a head, shoulders, and hands were the only parts visible. When it turned and closed that door, the old timey bedroom vanished.

Yet another was made of candy. I wanted to turn to Chrysta and inquire about the weird ability for their houses to mimic earth

designs when she spoke up yet again.

"May I ask you a more personal query?" she asked.

"You may absolutely ask me a personal question," I said, "on the understanding that you may not like the answer, or you may be disappointed by it." I tried to give her a reassuring smile to let her know I'd try not to make it difficult.

"In my former life, I was a part of a civilization that was frequently… physical. We huddled against one another and packed in tight when we slept. This was largely a defense against large predators, but in times of safety there were grooming rituals, and through commerce we would clasp hands, and cheek kissing was common."

"I see."

"Would you be averse to contact with me?" she asked.

"I would not be averse…" I considered how best to phrase this. "but you have to understand that your new body is cold, and that could cause me pain."

"And you me," she said. "Contact with the living can be damaging. I have accepted this."

I grinned, trying to stave off the pity and sorrow I felt. "Well then come here and give me some cheek kisses."

"Oh!"

She didn't move when I kissed her one cheek, followed by the other. I didn't mind the burst of cold. Her startled look was enough to set me off laughing.

"It's all right. Perhaps hand holding—"

She shot forward and pressed her lips to mine. Now when she started moving, and darted her tongue forward to lick at my top lip, I got a notification. Ignoring it, I reached out to touch her shoulders, then rubbed up and down her arms once.

She broke off. "Oh! Your lips have gone blue… I'm sorry, Fletcher. That was unwise."

I reassured her it was fine, that I hadn't taken any damage at all.

In fact, the notification told me what I imagined I would see: my Adaptability Quality had helped prevent the damage, but it would have to be higher before my body was compatible with Chrysta's.

No time like the present. I pumped a skill point into Adaptability.

"Here," I said, and took her hand in mine. She had Nakamamon hands, which meant she had three thick fingers and one thick thumb, and it was cold, but the Pleasure Seeker Quality helped blunt the pain by turning me partly into an ice ghost.

"How is this possible?" she asked.

"What do you mean?"

"You haven't suffered." More importantly, that astonished voice said, she hadn't suffered either.

"It's not a big deal," I told her. "No need to look too deeply into it." My instinct was to tell her it was a Healer thing, but it wasn't a Healer thing, it was a Pleasure Seeker thing, and half-truths had gotten me in trouble already.

She responded by wrapping her whole upper body around my arm, and snuggling her frigid cheek against my shoulder. She followed that by wrapping several more arms around my torso.

We walked on with her cooing in delight, and me feeling like the big man on campus.

Pausing once we had reached the end of the swoosh, we looked out over the town and surrounding landscape. No one was around us now, with this part of the town narrow, sparsely populated, and the living inhabitants in a sort of coma state.

"I would like to… kiss you again," Chrysta said, floating out over the place where the sidewalk ended, or rather, where the city curled down against the pull of gravity to the underside of the swoosh. She promptly vanished out of sight with a surprised yelp I wouldn't have thought possible for a ghost.

When she reappeared, it was like she was taking the escalator from the underworld, up and around nearly three hundred and sixty degrees.

"That was… embarrassing," she said.

"No worries in the slightest," I said, laughing.

"To be fair to me, I have dealt with this gravitational oddity only rarely."

"Are you blushing?"

"I am not!"

I couldn't help but laugh. Eventually Chrysta found the humor in it as well and laughed along with me.

"Fletcher, your ability to touch me… is phenomenal," she said, and wrapped herself around me in a big hug once more. Extra arms made sure it was a tight one.

"You're pretty excellent yourself," I said. "Never been hugged by so many arms at once."

She was once again embarrassed only until I told her it wasn't a bad thing, and that I liked it. Depending on how you viewed the situation—and I found it fortunate—the moment was not quite broken.

Chrysta held me at arms' length… and was promptly hovering upside down on the other side of the lip of stone. She returned to rightside up land and dragged me backwards, away from the very edge, the two of us giggling like idiots.

"Have you done that on purpose, human?" she asked playfully.

"I promise I didn't."

Now she leaned in and kissed me. Had I been wearing glasses I would have instantly fogged them up. The kiss was far softer than I imagined, and grew softer still. She let out a soft moan, and once more her tongue appeared, licking its icy way along my upper lip and then into my mouth. She was clutching at me, walking me backwards, backing me into a house wall, kissing me all the while.

She felt softer, and somehow softer still. I couldn't understand this, until her tongue went *through* me. One second it was causing me shivers—the cold kind—and the next minute I felt that cold all the way through my whole tongue. Her fingers were inside my shoulders, massaging the muscles and pressing against the bones beneath. It was… odd, to say the least.

She was no longer kissing my lips, but my teeth, and then she wasn't really even kissing me at all, because she was intangible and she was floating into my whole body. The coldness I'd felt before intensified, doubled, and there was no way to stop a full body shiver that started through me.

Finally, I started taking damage.

A jet of vapor shot out of my mouth. "C-Chrysta," I said, trying and failing to stop my teeth from chattering.

Still she was kissing me: my sinuses, down into my throat, and probably my brain. I couldn't say, because things were really weird after that. There was a ghost occupying the same space as my brain. It was literally freezing my insides.

My special ability **Healer's Resistance** appeared with glacial sluggishness. It was especially strange to have the backs of my eyeballs feel like they were freezing, and have the window pop up appear like it struggled through a vat of syrup. And the words also came into being with exaggerated sluggishness. Did I wish… to spend… a… Durability… Token? Yes… or no?

I could hardly process thought by this point, but I pressed Yes somehow, and most of the current situation snapped back into place. 75% of the damage was shunted off by the magic of the Token. The onset of the damage may have already started, but the speed of renewing the damage dropped dramatically.

I just wished I'd had another Durability Token to set up a permanent cold resistance. As it was, being able to think my own thoughts was nice.

"Chrysta, wait…" I made my mouth say, and the words came out, cracked midair, and literally fell to the ground as bits of frost.

She reappeared, backing out of where she had fused with me. For just a moment, there was a hollowness to her eyes I'd never seen before. It was like opening your eyes on a moonless, cloud-filled night in the woods. Nothing. Absolute void. And it felt like it could swallow up all of me without any trouble, and keep right on going.

“Are you all right?” I asked.

She blinked and the icy blue of her eyes returned. “Oh! Oh, Fletcher, I’ve damaged you. I’m… sorry.” She was backing away, hands up, like I had a gun trained on her.

“No, I’m sorry. I should’ve been clearer.” I caught her by the wrists and gently guided her hands back onto my shoulders.

“What do you mean?”

“I had a run in with a god… and I gained a second class.”

This is Christopher telling her… everything.



Chapter 29- Humpalumpagus

In the clear light of day warm on my skin, sky bluer than you'd ever seen it on earth, under a shimmering blanket of magic suffusing into the clouds, Chrysta absorbed the tale of The Lovers and Tara without a single expression or reaction. She wasn't silently judging every word and muscle twitch like Drat. Rather, hers was the pure open naiveté of a child.

Then I told her about leveling up using Vellenia, swapping powers with Regina, Tara, Ivy and Isabelle. I told her about the Qualities that came with being a Pleasure Seeker, and she nodded right along.

And I told her how Cinzia's emotional state had changed dramatically upon having sex with me, then finding out I had been with others. I tried to lay everything quickly but thoroughly, telling her she could ask questions afterwards. And not get too caught up in any details.

For her part, Chrysta was more interested in the Qualities, the Special Abilities from the Lovers, and the swapped Special Abilities from those I'd 'brought into the fold' using Entwined Ecstasy.

"I had known about second classes," she said. "These have been stored by the memory keepers on the memory boards of my people. They are well established."

I wanted to see these memory boards.

"Classes granted by a god are another thing," she said. "This is exciting and special. And…" She turned all bashful here, "if I may make a request, it would be for you to increase your Adaptability. Please know that this contact is precious to me, Fletcher. Although I am your protector here, I feel as though you have protected me from years of suffering just by this simple contact."

I told her that I was absolutely honored to hear this, and that I would see what I could do.

Which is how my fierce Guardian chaperone into this dangerous town ended up plastered against my arm the whole walk back, with her cheek pressed down into my shoulder and head nestled in the crook of my neck.

Now, here's the thing: you don't think about how weird that actually is. Real people can't do this while walking. It would jar her head loose the whole time. You'd have to be riding those hoverboards with extreme expertise at the same speed in order to try this kind of walking while cuddling.

Chrysta could manage this because she floated through the air without the typical boat-in-water bobbing motion. She wanted to wrap more and more arms around me, being a creepy—yet somehow wholesome and adorable—ghost creature, but stopped herself because she started phasing into my body again and again.

Aside from wondering whether or not I was ever going to have sex with a ghost—I was pretty sure I eventually would—I kept my eyes on the surroundings. An Identify check here and there gave me more types of Nakamamon to add to my Nakamadex.

And then we found it.

"There," I told her.

Stumbling around as if drunk, surrounded by a number of wet glittering little bits, was a fuzzy creature the size of a baked potato that was ninety percent mouth, but with stubby arms and legs shooting out of its blue furry head. It was the closest thing to a muppet I'd seen here yet.

As we watched, it vomited up another couple of tiny, tinkling gold and silver objects on the cobblestones. Concentrating, I focused on the creature and attempted to identify it. This time, Ingenuity live 8 and my Identify level 5 were up to the task, and netted me the 2 successes necessary to give it a name.

Success! *You have Identified the god.*

A broad smile broke on my face.

God of Lost Earrings

(Small/Unique Beast)

Description: *This god is responsible for transporting lost earrings and other small jewelry out of existence, by eating them.*

History: *Unknown, though it appears this god is currently afflicted by the same ailment plaguing the entire town of Glumpdumpkin.*

We shared a chuckled at the name and look of the thing.

"Is there any way for us to get it out of the affected area?" I asked.

Chrysta produced a shield very much like the one used by Isabelle, and took it in several frosty, clawed, semi-transparent hands. It was an easy enough task to get the insensate creature to walk onto that shield, but more complicated to keep it there. Chrysta rushed off at a much faster hovering dash than I'd seen her use before.

"I will see you outside of town," she called over her shoulder.

I broke into a run as well. The town was much larger than Slinktrickle, and there was a lot to see, but I had a job to do and curing things made me feel just about as great as expanding my knowledge of this world, or the pure joy of uncovering more of it.

The timer showing me how long it would be until the next Durability check still had some two hours on it, and it didn't take more than twenty minutes to reach the bottom of the swoosh. I'm pretty sure I spotted another god by the river that wound its improbable way over the Glumpdumpkin Humpalumpagus.

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Sarah threw back her head and laughed like a loon. It wasn't long before, clutching her sides and kicking her legs, she fell over on the couch and fell off onto Brayden's old play mat.

Both my mother and father were also chuckling along with her, but Sarah was something else entirely. She howled, rolling back and

forth on the floor, until a bewildered Brayden came tottering up to her, also laughing, and smooshed his confused body into hers. She hugged him and laughed until they were just tiny squeaks coming out of her.

"Did you say Humpalumpagus?" she asked, wiping tears from her eyes.

"It's a part of town," I quite helpfully explained.

"Well?"

"You can't just leave it at that," my mother chided.

"Well, how do I put this? The town rested on the sleeping Nakamamon that was something like two hundred feet tall, and every once in a while it would shift and roll. The whole weird wings sticking up at odd angles were the sun-catching plates of the Humpalumpagus. You know those cool stories where the island is a colossal turtle or a fish, right?"

They nodded. "Well imagine that it's a… hm. Imagine it's like a pig, but with a kind of an iguana head, and that dirt sticks to it and grows plants, and that those two big plates are like solar collectors. It photosynthesizes some of its own food, and that allows it to sleep for… a long time. Years I guess."

They nodded. "And the town just grew on top of it?"

"I guess it's got the capybara disposition. It's super chill."

"Huh… huh… Humpalumpagus!" Sara said, and cackled all the more. Brayden laughed right along with her, even though he had no idea what she was so amusing.

***

Although the God of Lost Jewelry was freed, it still needed to be cured. This was a curious one, because once we got it out of the city it should've theoretically been fine.

"Is there an inoculation option?" Trent asked.

"A great question," I said. "And… no, I'm not aware that exists."

Lucky for us, the god was both tiny and not fast. It wobbled and

tottered around the camp that had sprung up over the past number of hours. It also, and this was wonderful, responded to the joy of the team. All the girls needed to do was gush over it and coo a million times and keep it from running off. This left Alan and I enough time to research this, and send off a message to HQ.

The following day, we got back the order to do what we were already doing, which was diagnosing and then brewing up a cure for a mental ailment.

This meant using the various accoutrement for diagnosis, though it didn't seem necessary at first. The glowing stones to check for magical ailment nearly glowed when I passed them near the creature.

"The main thing in town has to be magical," was what Regina said from directly beside me. I turned a smile her way.

"Somebody's turning into a nerd," I chided.

Apparently, the creature being tiny and not seriously ill meant the successes needed were lower than they were for the God of Apparel, who'd been freakin' dead. The spiritual and physical tests also proved out negative.

It turned out the mental ailment in question was Severe Confusion.

Congratulations! *You have diagnosed the illness in question.*

Severe Confusion means the afflicted god is periodically unaware of their own existence and capabilities. They may even be touched without causing divinity poisoning, though this is not recommended.

Oh stop being such a stick in the mud, I touched it yesterday.

What were you thinking?

I paused and wrinkled my brow in my own severe confusion. The next day, Alan would report that Rainer helped to write the system explanation messages with another famous Healer, who had since disappeared.

"Was his name Jack MeHoff?" I asked, and got a confused look from Alan. "Ben Dover? Ivanna Cumlotts? Dick Hump-frees? No?"

Her name, because apparently there was a senior Healer who was a woman, was apparently Dickens. I was hoping for it, and I got it. I wondered if she was European and her name was something like Gimme or Putya. "Though Ivanna is still on the table," I mused.

For now it didn't matter. The UI message was written by Rainer and Dickens, whoever that new person was.

You may test for divinity poisoning easily by using a live subject, though this is not recommended.

You'd better believe it's not. The other (recommended) check for divinity poisoning is to use the Spiritual illness diagnosis test. If the divinity reacts even slightly, this means the god is exuding its power and may not be touched without dire consequences. This can be difficult to detect. Even if it is not exuding divinity, the signs that it has begun to do so are subtle.

So touch it while you can.

Definitely do not do that without extreme care, and I wish you would turn text erasing back on.

Rainer has a stick firmly lodged in his backside. And he looks like a Muppet.

He does not.

If he does not, it is only because he had it painfully, surgically removed. And had lots of facial reconstructive surgery to boot, to remove the filthy scrub brushes from every part of his head.

Stop being such a child.

I stopped reading from there, chuckling at Healer Dickens, and told the girls what I'd just learned. They probably had a short window of time with which they could physically interact with the fuzzy, little blue potato, though it might get the ability back at any moment.

To say they pounced at the chance to tickle and cuddle a god would be a gross understatement. It was seriously cute, and giggled when touched under its stubby little arms. Only Ivy appeared skeptical. Soon enough the little thing was in Tara's hands, being

snuggled by Tweedle Dee, dancing around the campsite with Fairy Poppins, and riding around on Isabelle's head. Regina even buried her face in its blue fur, though it promptly vomited up a small hoop earring on her face.

In the meantime, Alan and I got to work on the cure for Severe Confusion.

This cure was quite different from the glowing, singing, feel-good juice we sprayed all over the eggs and on the townsfolk once Cinzy had left.

We needed gingko biloba, first and foremost. Thankfully it was an infusion from the leaves as opposed to the orange fruit, which smelled like someone had shat and vomited in the same bucket and then stirred it all up with a dead fish.

Okay not the dead fish part, but the first part was true. It was gross, let's just leave it at that.

Now, this wasn't something that could be found in this world easily, so while I had a stockpile of it, I needed more from HQ. They had access to the portal.

"How are you doing on that portal spell?" I asked Alan, hoping we could get back to HQ for some of the rarer and more difficult ingredients that we couldn't get here on this planet. When he started stuttering more than usual, it was instantly clear he wasn't high enough level to do it.

"Okay then, we're going to need to request a stockpile. I think this entire cloud is a Severe Confusion effect from whatever the god is. We're going to see a lot of it."

He nodded and frowned. I knew he was trying to progress through his levels by doing wizard spells; he'd done a lot of enlarging and shrinking of the clay tablets that gave us the majority of the known illnesses and cures. He practiced a number of other minor spells constantly as well, though I hadn't kept track. There was the cold ray, the light making spell, the water breathing spell I no longer needed, the mending spell that put things back together, and a host of others.

It was only a matter of time before the little god got its divinity back momentarily and inflicted the girls with it. While the girls played, and all of them got divinity poisoning when the God of Lost Earrings went through a lapse in its ailment, I worked my butt off getting this cure up and running.

This one needed pure water, which wasn't difficult to get normally, but all of the water flowing out of Glumpdumpkin was potentially tainted. This meant sending Airaconda off on a scouting mission one way, Chrysta another way, and getting the pure water later.

In the meantime, I separated out the gingko biloba, got the snake's head fritillary, the ginseng root, and the St. John's wort as ready as I could.

Soaking the gingko took a few hours, while the girls all eventually ended up staggering in, complaining that they weren't feeling good. Several doses of **Healer's Breath** later, they were sprawled out on my laboratory tent floor, moaning 'are we there yet' with respect to the cure.

"I did warn you that its power could come back at any moment, didn't I?"

They all moaned that yes, I had told them so. And no, none of them regretted their regrettable actions.

Some of these cures took absolutely ages, but this one was over in about six hours.

Develop Cure (small/Unique/Beast) check: *This check is Difficult. You may spend 2* Tokens in order to succeed. Would you like to spend these Tokens?*

Total Tokens: 0 Affinity and 7 Free Tokens.

Hard At Work: *Your Tokens are worth double given you are engaged in your class duties.*

I did not decide that spending the Tokens was in order, and promptly succeeded at the check. This one had much less in the way of steps: stirring this way and that, deeper stirring, shallower

stirring, collecting and discarding the scum, temperature changes, color changes, mana addition slow or fast, or done in a specific pattern… by contrast, this one was easy peasy.

I only had to steadily add mana for a good thirty minutes, without requiring a specific shape to the mana. The stirring was constant and slow, no problem there.

"W-w-what if it's th-th-th-th-the humpal-l-l-l-l-lumpagus?" Alan asked.

"Hmm?" I asked, as I was watching it make its only color big change, from black, oil slick iridescent to a more opalescent white with threads of pink, pale green and robin's egg blue.

"Th-the big bad," he said. "Th-th-the god. W-w-w-what i-i-if the problem—"

"Ohhhhh sorry," I said, watching the pastel colored threads dissolve until the mixture was just a shiny pearl-white. I sighed. "Yeah, if the actual problem is the gigantic creature that the whole town is sitting on, I guess we're relocating thousands of Glumpdumpkin… ians. Glumpdumpkin… ites. What do you think?"

Alan blinked his confusion at me.

Success! *You have crafted a magical cure for a unique creature.*

"You like Glumpdumpkinians or Glumpdumpkinites better as a term? By the way I finished the cure."

"WHAT?"

"Yeah, let's go douse the little guy so these girls stop writhing on the floor and moaning."

"Yes… please…" Regina groaned.

This is Christopher grinning in satisfaction.



Chapter 30- The Standard DRC Workweek

With the night air growing slightly cooler than was comfortable, and the clouds lowering to the ground into a mysterious and awesome fog, I knelt down and coaxed the walking, furry blue potato over to me. Then, it stuck out a tongue that seemed bigger than itself, and accepted drops of the cure. The Administer Cure check was a resounding success, and all the girls (plus Trent, who had somehow not clued in that the girls were suffering from the touch of a god) were immediately healed.

I gained another level in Healer, which seemed amazing, though for the first time I didn't receive the favor of the god. The girls did, which was another story.

Level 18: Gained Ability: Verdant Rejuvenation

"Okay," I muttered. "Lay it on me."

Verdant Rejuvenation

(Special Ability, uncommon, passive)

Herbs and plants harvested by you and stored by you will last twice as long as normal.

By placing cuttings of plants in the soil, watering and tending them, they will sprout if they remain within half a mile of your location over the course of 24 hours.

"Holy crap," I muttered. Never mind the HQ import-export situation, this made everything easier. Had the system somehow known what it was I needed most and made that happen for me? "Strike that," I added, "I still need glycerine and other bases. Not easy to get oil… though not impossible."

And then I went and ‘planted’ some gingko biloba, St. John’s wort, and others.

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The next day, I found a swarm of insects that were divine, called the God of Dust. With Isabelle and Larelle’s help, we were able to corral all of them into a sack, bring them out of the city, and bring them over to the camp, where I diagnosed yet another case of Severe Confusion, brewed up another batch of the cure, and set the tiny gods free… to do whatever it was they did. Grab dead skin flakes off people, most likely.

This was how it went then.

We ended up taking weeks to properly insulate the whole team against what was going on inside the town, and the method went like this: Every morning I would go and harvest some of the plant life necessary to make more and more of this cure. I’d spend a full day or two meditating to regain Tokens, manage one or two a day, and then use those to insulate myself and one other against the divine damage. In the meantime, everyone was tasked with make work or their own class actions so they could continue to level. With every level that included skill points, they were strongly encouraged to develop the skill Divine Resistance.

My other job was to locate the malfunctioning gods around the town and with the help of the Guardians, get the situation sussed out and hopefully fixed up.

“How are we certain that we shouldn’t be going after the big kahuna first?” Trent asked.

“That’s a fair question,” Ivy said. “If we fix up the small fries, couldn’t they just malfunction again? You might as well work from the top down.”

“No can do,” I said. “First, I’m very low on Tokens, and the last big guy took most of what I had. Getting the lay of the land took another six.”

“You want to get to the next milestone,” Regina said, nodding.

I pointed at her. “I would like to hit level 20, and once that happens, look into going after the big guy. Progressing in my class will be a big part of having the capability of going after an even bigger god than before.”

“Meaning we’ll be transporting them out of the affected area before healing them up, I hope?” Isabelle asked.

“That’s right,” Chrysta said.

“Right now, Larelle is going to be in charge of who can and can’t go into the town. She’s a psychic aspect and therefore immune to the effects. If you can’t, just see me and I’ll set you up with some orders so that you can get xp towards level ups. And remember—”

“We know,” Drat said. “We increase Divine Resistance.”

The others rolled their eyes at Drat being Drat.

The only other pertinent information was that psychic aspect Nakamamon were immune to this, so it was almost certainly a mental ailment blanketing the town. Since Larelle was a psychic aspect herself, she could freely enter and move about the town. Everybody else would need their gas mask, supplied by yours truly.

Now, the town of Glumpdumpkin was divided up into a couple of districts that I wouldn’t get to know for some time. The city just wasn’t functioning well enough for me to care about whether it had a place called the Narrows or a place called High Falutin. For now I was calling the gigantic swoosh-shaped place Low Rise, High Rise, and Central Middleton. I hope you’ll forgive the unimaginative names, but there was a lot of work to do and almost nobody who was ready to give me a history lesson on how the town came to be the weird shape it was.

If you imagine the famous swoosh logo, but flat, about a mile across, and covered with buildings of various sizes, you basically have Glumpdumpkin.

We worked into Central Middleton first, identifying and then clearing out the defective gods first. All of them, once healed, would simply cease to exist to our eyes. I couldn’t be sure what actually happened to them; they could have turned around and gone right

back into the town to end up snared again.

We'd work like this for four days at a time. Every fifth day I called a halt and we'd have an R&R day. If they wanted orders for xp I would give them, but they were encouraged to go out into the surrounding area to sightsee, or read some of the books Alan had brought along, have a dance party, or any number of other fun activities I couldn't really think of.

For me, this was getting down and dirty. Healer wasn't the only class I could progress with xp, and every day off, I spent ranging with one of the Rangers, training with two of the lovely guards, or exploring the environs with my gorgeous bonded Nakamamon Vellenia.

Now, the rest day wasn't the only time I was getting to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh. Some evenings ended up with me completely exhausted, only to waked up with someone entering my tent. It was like a guess who game of who wanted to drain my balls. Other times I'd lock eyes with Ivy and she would come sit next to me as per our agreed code. Lastly, sometimes I'd finish meditating, feel the urge, and give Vellenia a wicked grin. That would mean heading to the tent for some alone time, or risking exposure by having a little fun on the grass.

Those days off though… they were principally for celebrating four hard days' work.

The first day off I had was spent with Regina at a secluded stream a good distance from the town. She'd found a waterfall with a hidden cave behind, and after we'd found a bunch of fish-like Nakamamon and identified a few, she stripped off her clothes and dove into the pool. I shucked my clothes and went in after her. It wasn't long before we were fooling around in the shallows of the stream, kissing and fondling one another. Her legs wrapped around me and me holding her up in the water by those oh-so-squeezable butt cheeks of hers. And she'd soon climbed onto the muddy banks, looking mischievously over her shoulder and begging me to mount her.

I went to town on her, getting her hands and knees all muddy,

then pushing her down onto her stomach to continue pounding her hard. When we got up, she was mud all over. Face too. We had a good laugh over it before she pushed me down onto the bank, dunked her face under the water, and kept right on fracking me.

It was so odd to keep having sex out in the wilds. Regina didn't have a single problem with this. She wanted me deep inside her everywhere. That tree over there? She wanted me to grab one leg so she was doing the splits, and she held herself against the tree so I could smash her good and hard. She wanted to be up at the top of that waterfall, in the water with her legs wrapped around me again, both of us seated in the shallows with the water rushing around us. She wanted to get up on a boulder beside the waterfall, sun ourselves in between our second and third sex session, after some hours had passed, before sucking me back to hardness and riding me under the strong light of the sun.

The second one involved Tara, and Vellenia actually caught us in the act on that one. Tara and I had wandered off back toward the rolling hills east of town, and we'd started playing strip hide and seek in the tall grass. Every time I caught her, she was forced to remove some clothes, and every time she caught me, I got a bit more naked.

It wasn't long before I was laying naked in the shadow of a boulder, and Tara shot around to the side, catching me. Oh, how terrible, now I was forced to perform oral sex on a gorgeous bronze-skinned beauty. Kneeling there in the grass, sun bathing us both, with my tongue buried deeply between the folds of Tara's delicious pussy, I felt like the luckiest guy on the planet. She then bent over and told me I needed to get behind her and lick at her clit the other way. After that, she lavished attention on my already painfully hard cock, before leaning up against a tree and begging me to put it inside.

Now, Regina was a bit shorter than me, but Tara was a bit taller than me, so I can say with certainty that certain positions are just easier with girls of different height. Standing up sex was a lot easier with Tara; I didn't need to crouch down at all. Instead I was looking

her in the eyes, watching her bite her lip and give me that lust-addled stare that told me she needed to be filled up.

We had sex for well over an hour. She wanted me to blast off inside her, of course, because that was Tara's kink, but I backed off just before climaxing, and demanded a position change. By the time she pushed me back into the grass and mounted me, her eyes were blazing with frustration and need, and when I told her I was going to cum, she didn't even slow down at little.

We were cuddled up and enjoying the weird sensation of tall grass framing us on all sides, pure blue sky above, when Vellenia's head appeared.

Tara hadn't been involved with Vellenia at all, and was initially shocked to have been caught by my bonded companion. It took some time and effort to get her to relax before she agreed to lay back down… without her clothes. A minute later, Vellenia reappeared —this time nude—and curled up on my other side. From there it was only a matter of time before Tara got turned on from watching me make out with Vel, or watching Vel get between my legs and use those tongues to get my cock back in fighting shape.

When I asked Vel to show Tara the tongue situation, she was mortified, and incredibly turned on. She didn't want to have sex with a Nakamamon, but she desperately wanted to know what it was like to have Vellenia's tongues writhing around up inside her, and over her clit. She both didn't want to be involved with another woman, because she wasn't into girls the way Ivy was, but she had to admit that being with Regina had its fun points. She also felt Vellenia's caresses up and down her body, and gave in to the possibility of being treated like a princess.

Eventually she relented and allowed the Nakamamon to settle between her legs for what became a very vocal session. I took Vellenia from behind, holding her tail against my torso, and watched as Tara went through an unbelievable amount of orgasms. One after another, it seemed. Vellenia learned with eerie speed what did it for Tara and what didn't. She found the g-spot on the inside of the leggy blonde's pussy and lashed her tongues over it again and again.

Finally Tara needed to take my load, inside, as always. She begged for it, but couldn't even move while Vel had her in the grips of continuous orgasms for over fifteen minutes. I watched with supreme satisfaction. Every time Tara tried to speak, she would convulse with an aftershock or a fresh climax, and it was incredible to watch my bond companion reduce her to jelly. Instead, I gave my insatiable Nakamamon my seed and grinned as Tara weakly protested.

In between this and the next off day four days later, I was drained dry by Vellenia twice, visited by Regina once, and had a session with Ivy and Isabelle while the others stared into the campfire and told stories.

Now, Isabelle was always the initial focus. I couldn't let her get upset with the way things were going. If that happened, the couple might break up, and if the couple broke up, I would have disharmony in the group. Since we've established Fletcher is all about harmony even to his own detriment, it follows that Ivy and I spent a lot of time and energy rocking Isabelle's world.

She loved to have the two of us sucking and licking at her nipples. Ivy and I would often finger her while going to town on her nipples, but just as often it would be the two of them making out and caressing one another while I ate out Isabelle. I'm sure it was just my imagination, but as the days went on without more of the anti-magic pills, she started to taste more and more like cotton candy.

Inevitably, Ivy would coax Isabelle onto my shaft, and we would make sure Izzy wanted me inside her, so it was less about me mounting her and more about her backing herself onto me, or lowering herself down. Once that happened, she was fine, so long as Ivy was there running her hands over her whole body, or making out with her. That meant sometimes Ivy would be straddling my legs and fondling her girlfriend's hefty boobs. And other times she'd be sitting on my face, swapping tongues with her girlfriend while I tried to reach all the way inside her with only my tongue.

Once Isabelle was satisfied, it was my turn to take Ivy and give

her a vigorous forking. She was a Guardian, and that meant I couldn't keep up with her physically. I did end up raising Physicality to a 5, but she was rated above 8, easily. I'm almost certain she could handle everything I dished out, even putting my hand on her throat for a little breath play.

She would ask for it harder, and once I gave it to her harder, she would ask if that was all I had. Lucky for me, I had a bonus +2 on all my stats once I'd had sex with Isabelle, so I was that much closer to a match for Ivy. She wanted me to rail her while she held her ankles up around her ears. She wanted me to flatten her against the ground and slam down into her with as much force as humanly possible. Or superhumanly possible, since I was beginning to believe we were passing out of human maximums.

The weird problem I didn't have to worry about for very long ended up being the convergence of my classes on level 20. Once I was there, I'd get a full Token refresh. As a Healer, I was quickly approaching. We found and healed up several other small gods who were all suffering from Severe Confusion. As a Pleasure Seeker, I was quickly approaching level 20 also.

Now, the weird dilemma—again, I worried about this some days even though I didn't know I didn't have to—was that if I wanted to avoid hitting level 20 as a Healer, I'd have to tell the others why. My four lovers knew about Pleasure Seeker, but Drat, Alan, Trent, Chrysta, and Larelle did not. And if I wanted to avoid hitting level 20 in Pleasure Seeker, I needed to give up arguably the best part of being in this world: the frequent carnal delights.

This was unacceptable to me, though it wouldn't be for long. I ended up grabbing levels 17, 18, and 19 in Pleasure Seeker, and levels 18 and 19 in Healer.

And then Cinzy showed up and ruined everything.



Chapter 31- The Mindala

Given the plethora of fornication I was doing in between my Healer duties, I was able to reach level 17 and then 18 as a Pleasure Seeker.

Level 17: +1 Likability, +1 free attribute point

Level 18: Gained Ability: Drive In Deeper

I'd been meaning to add to Physicality, so I did that. The change was subtle, but once I knew what to look for, it was noticeable. More power thrusting, nice, more stamina walking, nice, and I could now faintly see a six pack if I leaned back and sucked in a little. My frame now appeared lean and toned.

The special ability was really something.

Drive In Deeper

(Special Ability, Rare, Passive)

While having intimate relations with a partner, you and your partner gain increased mana and health regeneration rates.

After having intimate relations with a partner, provided you both achieve orgasm, you and your partner replenish a Token based on your partner's highest attribute.

No way was this going to be a bad thing. Achieving orgasm had never been an issue for any of my partners, thankfully. The increased mana regeneration sounded great, though I wouldn't need the health regeneration. I hadn't been seriously wounded yet… unless you counted being poisoned by sheer divine power.

I still had the three skill points from level 16, and I was torn about how to spend them. On one hand, I wanted to sink more skill levels into all my Healer skills, but on the other hand, I could just increase my capacity to bone. With the Qualities, like Adaptability, I

could fulfill Chrysta's wish to have some intimacy. Since she couldn't touch anyone without damaging them, her only option was ghost sex. And since I'd just made that up, I didn't think she could actually do it.

The problem plaguing Glumpdumpkin was enormous, and I'd need all the help I could get to deal with a more difficult god than the God of Apparel.

And lastly, I'd promised to put points into Divine Resistance. Sure my new item from the God of Apparel gave me bonus ranks in the skill, but everybody needed it given the situation we were facing.

So I compromised: one point of Adaptability, one point of Divine Resistance, and one point to Healer. I left it for now, because there was no knowing what size the god was. It might be large or even huge. There was no way of knowing.

So it was time to review my character sheet.

Christopher Fletcher

Healer - Trainee 18

Pleasure Seeker - Novice 18

attributes:

Affinity 6

Durability 6

Ingenuity 8

Likability 6

Physicality 6

Healer Skills:

Diagnosis (physical 3, spiritual 3, magical 3, mental 3)

Treatment (potions 4, salves 3, tinctures 3, elixirs 3, unguents 3)

Develop cure (swarm 4, small 4, medium 2, large 1)

Develop cure (unique) 7

Administer Cure 8

Pleasure Seeker Qualities:

Girth 1
Load 1
Stave Off 2
Length 1
Tongue 1
Adaptability 3

Other Skills:

Identify 5
Hiking 3
Cooking 1
Persuasion 1
Meditation 2
Divine Resistance 3
All other skills unranked
Unspent skill points: 1

General Special Abilities:

Hard At Work III (Uncommon, Passive)
Wild Lore II (Uncommon, Active)
Beast Talker II (Uncommon, Passive)
Stalwart II (Common, Passive)
Fierce II (Common, Passive)

Healer Special Abilities:

Healer's Endurance II (Common, Active)
Healer's Resistance II (Uncommon, Active)
Healer's Breath (Uncommon, Active)
Verdant Rejuvenation (Uncommon, Passive)

Pleasure Seeker Special Abilities:

Blissense II (Rare, Active)
Post Sharing Clarity (Rare, Passive)
Drive In Deeper (Uncommon, Passive)

Some three weeks had passed since our arrival in Glumpdumpkin. The teensy soft winter had given way to a series of warm and rainy and wet days that could only be called 'misty' if you were being charitable. The soft, glorious kind of rain that makes you want to go out and get wet, then stomp in some puddles, go back inside, and read a book for several hours.

I had worked hard during our four day workweeks, had some really fun nights, and four exceptional days off. I'd cured some seven minor gods, and sent them on their ways.

All that changed when Cinzy showed up.

I was in Glumpdumpkin when it happened. I'd been speaking with the psychic Nakamamon who ran the smithy, the one with the large metal guy, the Alloyum. Shakindria was her name. Gosh, it was a pretty name. And also, she was a very pretty creature.

She was pleased to see me coming and going, and pleased to hear I was handling the profusion of small gods who had been caught up in the town's… condition. I was pleased she thought so, and told her.

I wasn't entirely clear on how to ask a girl for her digits, though I was considering ways to do so. Although my dance card was very often full, I knew Vellenia was supportive of me mating with others.

Oh crap. I chided myself for thinking impure thoughts… with a psychic aspect Nakamamon. Don't be a complete idiot, Fletcher, she can probably hear your thoughts loud and clear.

In the meantime, Chrysta and Larelle were corralling yet another small god, which I had identified as the God of Flagstones. We hadn't noticed it because of the **Severe Confusion** condition, but when we passed by it this time, the flagstone shaped beetle was moving around of its own accord.

"I'm pretty sure I'd tripped on that on one of our other journeys through here," I told the psychic aspect Nakamamon.

She floated before me, still in her semi-transparent, gauzy blouse thing, her flowing pants, and her too-many-bangles. I did what I hadn't done previously, and used Identify on her.

Mindala

First Stage Nakamamon

The Mindala are a species of psychics, ascetics, and artisans. They are known to use their telekinetic and illusion powers to inspire, entertain through several types of illusory theatre, and craft high quality items.

Typical length: 3-6 feet (medium)

Typical weight: 80-150 pounds

Gender: female

Aspect: psychic

Transformations: unknown -> Mindala -> unknown

***Mindala** has been added to your Nakamadex.*

Okay, there was hope yet, that she couldn't just break into my thoughts and know that I was lusting after her. It wasn't a definitive no, she couldn't, but it seemed less and less likely the more I read about her.

The floating psychic creature floated towards me slowly. *I'm grateful to have someone to talk to after this time,* she told me mentally. And I could… feel the gratitude radiating off her, along with something else. That something was… attraction? Interest in me as a person?

"That's my pleasure," I told her, and gave her my best warm smile. "You've been so helpful to our cause. I would like to speak with you more deeply regarding what's happened."

I would like that very much, she said. *If you have time away from your busy schedule, you are welcome to enter my workshop and home.*

I just needed to see if my handlers would give me a moment's peace. I had a good ten hours of exposure to the contagion here in town before I would contract it.

I looked around, to find myself alone aside from Shakindria the Mindala. Larelle and Chrysta were transporting the God of

Flagstones. The bug with the broad, stone plate for a carapace was really heavy, and it was taking their combined efforts to get it moving. I was on my own.

"Oh, it looks as though my coworkers are gone and I'm here all on my own." I gave her a mischievous smile. "I'd be happy to join you inside."

Shakindria's house was just up a spiral staircase she had built herself, with the Alloyum's help. She didn't need it, and simply floated up to the hole in the ceiling, and I followed after, staring up at her backside through pants that had a slight shine to them.

Now, Shakindria's skin was almost identical to mustard yellow. I liked the contrast between this and what appeared to be an amethyst embedded in her forehead. Her jewelry was mostly silver, with purple gems in a few of them.

The house she occupied was spartan, but decorated tastefully, like she spent almost all of her time down in the workshop. The furniture was made of wood, warm tones, and she had several warm, abstract tonal paintings on the walls. It definitely struck me odd, like an alternate world where she worked as a blacksmith would have color field paintings by Rothko.

Shakindria made tea and we chatted about how life was like normally in Glumpdumpkin (generally pretty great, though the governance was not without its faults), and how she felt about the humans arriving (again, generally positive, very interesting and funny). When I asked about the funny remark, she responded with the names of the towns and the moons.

Shagnasty, she snickered. *A silly name. When the Grand Council for the Naming met, we decided unanimously to adopt these names.*

"And… these places just didn't have names before the humans showed up?"

Oh, they had names, she said. *On the other hand… I can't recall what they were. So far as I know, Snuffletrouser von Zipyankee is the only name for the other moon.*

She went on to explain that the Renaming had effectively blotted

out the past names of these things. It was a magical renaming.

One of the things I was excited about when your earliest emissaries was the granting of permission, she told me.

"The… what?"

The granting of permission was an open and honest look into the mind of another. It was permission to probe psychically into someone's mind. This was only done, she claimed, if one wished to be mates for life, and their whole personality might be laid bare to one another to avoid serious problems one might have with the other.

This is done between us psychic aspects. I would not ordinarily see it among a mouth speaker, but your early emissaries were happy with the concept, and they allowed us to see their full selves.

I had so many questions.

Were you capable of psychic communication, I could grant you partial permission, she said, and there was an undertone to her words that I didn't get at first. I came to realize she was being coy, and flirtatious.

"What would that mean?"

You could enter me, she said, and that undertone was heavier now. *Understand a lot of what it means to be Shakindria. See my deepest self.*

That sounded rather sexual.

Sadly, you cannot probe me in such a fashion, she went on.

"Sadly," I told her.

The humans explained that quite often, you are creatures of the short term, and of desires. This appeals to me and my kind.

This sounded a whole lot like it was time to get some Pleasure Seeker experience.

So often we are creatures of the mind. Our desires are for knowledge and understanding, and in the short term, we seek to expand our experiences by knowing the experiences of others. I have never been with a creature in the flesh. In fact, Mindalas hardly

ever use the sense of touch.

"It's maybe my favorite sense," I told her. "Tough to decide though, I like taste a lot. But what you say seems sad, to rely on one way of doing things can be a bleak way to go about things. There's a lot you're missing out on."

Expand on this, if you would.

"It would be just as simple to show you, and prove what it is I'm saying… if I were to take your hands, or give you a massage, or cook a meal for you."

Oh!

I reached forward and took her hand. "I won't hurt you," I told her, and hoped this was true. Nakamamon were not the same as humans and might be fragile. Still, I began squeezing at the soft flesh of her hands, running my fingers in and out of hers, and enjoying the feel of her skin on mine. The bright yellow coloration felt just like flesh of humans. Different than Vellenia, but only slightly, with hints of purple all over, starting with the gem embedded in her forehead.

"Now, if you can relax those psychic senses, just focus on what I'm doing. You might want to stop floating… up to you."

The UI gave me an opportunity to make a check here, Likability with Persuasion, and added the bonus from my **Beast Talker** ability from Regina. It then informed me that Shakindria had not opposed the check.

She slowly lowered down, but floated closer so that she was sitting on my lap. She'd uncrossed her legs in order to fit better, and ended up curling them around my back. I scooted forward in order to accommodate her.

The atmosphere had been inquisitive before, open and interested in what I had to say, but she'd quickly moved past that and into

Our faces were very close now, and I gave her a reassuring smile while pressing and massaging her hand, and then her forearm. She wasn't heavy, and my stirring member really enjoyed the soft butt pressed against me.

"Here," I said, and took her hands. This was a bit of a gamble, but I figured it was worth it. I placed both of her hands on my face and left them there, then began caressing the next set of hands that appeared. It seemed the disappearing-reappearing arms ability wasn't limited to ice ghosts.

Shakindria sighed and began running thumbs over my face.

I could simply touch your body with telekinetic force, she told me.

"I'm aware," I said, "but you wouldn't be feeling this, would you?"

It is a different sort of sensation, but—

And I darted in a lick against her palm.

She actually giggled. For the first time since I'd met her, she made a noise from her throat. The sound seemed to shock her, and she jerked back a bit.

"That's all right," I told her. "Would you like to try something else?"

What do you mean?

"If you lean forward, you can smell me."

She leaned forward, and with the two teensy nostrils above her mouth, inhaled the scent of my scalp.

This fragrance, her mind said with definite wonder, *What is this?*

"We have shampoo and soap with our traveling supplies," I told her.

She spent the next several minutes just smelling me, proving that smell is one of the most powerful senses when it comes to wonder. In the meantime, I kept up the soft massage: over the wrists and forearms, and then her upper arms as well. She was sitting on me, so my instinct was to yank my clothes off and impale her, but I didn't want to spook her. But there was something intoxicating about having a beautiful woman's breasts right in your face while she smelled behind your ear and ran her thumb over your other ear, as if feeling it for the first time.

"It may smell good," I told her, "but I wouldn't recommend a

taste. Nothing about hair tastes good, and least of all soap.”

The amusement came through psychically. She chuckled in her mind, and it radiated warmth in my heart.

This is Christopher reveling in naivety and novelty.



Chapter 32- Sideswiper

Friend Fletcher, Shakindria said psychically, *I feel that you are a trustworthy creature.*

"I should hope so," I told her, and considered using **Blissense**.

I can sense that my body would like to invite your body inside. To mate. I know we are unable to mate to create offspring, so this is confusing.

"There are plenty of ways for us to show each other affection," I said, "and physically is one of those. You haven't had the opportunity to mate previously?"

It turned out she was the only one of her kind in town. Shakindria was running her lips over my forehead now, and had one set of hands down the back of my shirt, feeling the smooth skin and the beginnings of muscles. Another set of hands, these ones psychic and telekinetic, went gliding up and down my pecs and abs, which still weren't amazing. Another point or three of Physicality would do it… if I ever got that many attribute points.

"You can remove the shirt if you like," I told her.

My shirt was gone about half a second later.

Her ardor and excitement for this were getting to me, and I ran my hands up and down her thighs, around her ass, then up her back.

"I have… to tell you something," I said.

Don't delay, she told me. The urgency in her tone told me we were about to dock in her port. *The tactile sensations have caused something to bloom within me.*

"I have an ability granted to me by a god, The Lovers." And I explained as quickly as I could about **Entwined Ecstasy**: how it granted powers.

You mean if I share my body with you, it will be possible for you

to grant me the powers of a Healer?

As soon as I nodded she levitated me off the chair and began to yank my clothing off. It was like being held in a giant's hand, though much softer than I would have imagined possible. When her hands couldn't do the job, a telekinetic fist grabbed hold of my pants and pulled them down over my legs and off, where they flew across the room.

Her own body straightened and her pants exploded off her without a visible sign. Next, her shirt unknotted itself and fell to the floor.

Opening Affinity to see the magic at work, I began to detect a purple current of power emerging from the gem at her forehead, and the swirl of power coalescing throughout her body.

Whatever change took Nakamamon when they were aroused, it was in full effect now. Nipples had appeared, darker yellow that was nearly brown. The juncture of her thighs was already slick with moisture, running down the insides of her thighs in rivulets.

This… There was hunger in her mental voice, on seeing my erection bare. One hand drifted over it, while several other hands reached out and traveled over my thighs and down my calves. One more hand cupped my balls, and she peered at it in fascination. *This is what accomplishes the transfer?*

"It will need to go inside you," I told her. Although floating, I felt I could sit up and move against the cupping platform she'd created telekinetically. "But I simply must kiss you…"

She swam forward through the air and locked lips with me, eyes closed and humming into my mind. Contentment, hunger, interest, and other emotions slid over my brain and caressed my emotions, while hands encircled my shaft and her legs slide along my thighs. Her tongue slid over mine and we began to rotate midair while we kissed.

What I wouldn't have given for extra pairs of limbs. I tried getting my hands on every part of this goddess, touching her legs, her ass, cupping her perfect breasts.

One hand lined me up with her slit and she pushed back against me.

As soon as the head sank into her tight confines, her eyes flew open and a gasp came from her throat. It was the first sound she'd made that traveled to my ears.

And what a pleasurable music it was. I drew out slightly and plunged back in, delighted at the second gasp of pleasure and shock. At the same time, her feelings came into me: surprise, the shock I was hearing, and the velvety sweet feel of pleasure overtaking everything else.

By rotating us midair, I was now on top, and I pulled on her ass while driving downward to sink in further. Throwing back her head, she let out a loud moan.

The special ability appeared, asking whether I'd like to bring Shakindria into the fold via Entwined Ecstasy, and I gave my consent. The Likability Token appeared, went *cla-cling!* and vanished a moment later. The sparkles left over sank into the two of us, and the pressure on my cock seemed to double.

"Ohhhh," she groaned. More pleasure and wonderment flooded through the bond she had with my mind, telling me exactly how good I was doing. *This is beyond compare.*

"That is definitely true," I ground out through gritted teeth.

One minute of passionate sex became two, two became five, and all the while Shakindria's hold over her telekinesis wavered more and more. The signals I was receiving in my mind became erratic as the pleasure intensified. Finally I grabbed onto her as her climax approached, and reached out with my feet to get hold of the floor. It was all I could do, as the climax washed over this gorgeous creature's body. Her pussy clamped onto my shaft and nearly caused me to cum deep inside, but I was far from finished.

Next, I had her on her hands and knees, and took hold of one of her pairs of arms in order to keep her from collapsing onto her face. I loved the feeling of her clutching at my full length, but more than that, I loved the ability to make this silent vixen cry out with her

actual mouth, and lose control of her powers. Several more minutes passed, with the only sounds being our flesh slapping and her ecstatic gasps.

"Uh, again!" she gasped, and clamped down on me with her abdominal muscles yet again. That was the final straw; with a shout I blasted her insides with my seed.

***

The floor of Shakindria's apartment was warm, and not unpleasant, being a smooth hardwood that was treated and varnished. Shakindria's body was pleasant to touch as well, and with her head resting on my chest, I was able to smell the natural scent of her scalp. I was willing to bet she used peppermint oil or something like it.

She hummed into my chest, like, "Hmmmmm," a sound I felt in my brain. That feeling was chock full of ease, satisfaction, and a complete lack of any anxiety or negative emotions.

Will you return? she asked with her brain.

"I will definitely try," I said. "It's my understanding that this town has quite a few afflicted gods, and also, I might be able to treat these people." I'd probably need to.

Now that I had my fifth special ability for growing the remedy plants I needed, I could probably spend weeks treating a great deal of the townsfolk… what they would do once they got their minds back I had no idea. They couldn't just camp out outside the town like we were. They didn't have homes or access to any of the basic necessities. Water that wasn't tainted… well, Regina and I had found that, but it was miles away.

It would be better if I could find the source of the affliction and take care of all these people at once. That would've been next on the list, after healing all the minor gods, except somebody was about to throw a monkey wrench into all my plans.

I had just received enough experience in Pleasure Seeker to help me level up to 18, but first, I needed that sweet new special ability

from Shakindria. I ignored the level up for now.

This UI message that arrived pertained to bringing her into the fold.

Entwined Ecstasy: *You have brought Shakindria the Mindala into the fold. She has gained the ability Healer's Breath. You have gained the ability* ***Psyspeech*** *from entwining with Shakindria. Entwine more deeply with Shakindria to unlock further abilities.*

Last time I'd maxed out the amount of abilities… but not this time. Further exploration told me that this ability was linked to Affinity instead of Regina and Cinzy's, which had been Likability based.

Okay. **Psyspeech** was identical to what I thought it was going to be.

Psyspeech

(Special Ability, Uncommon, active)

Communicate to a sentient creature using Psyspeech as a skill, plus Affinity. The effective range is 30 feet, and it can be used for up to one minute each time the skill check is passed.

Note: Psyspeech is taxing. Each successive use of the ability on the same day raises the difficulty by 2.

That was definitely awesome. I was curious about a few things, but decided to test it out right here and now. The initial check was Easy, with a difficulty of just 1 success, and my level 6 Affinity plus 1 level of Psyspeech was enough. After this it would be more challenging.

I thank you so much for your time, for this experience, and for the ability, I told her with my mind.

Oh! the response came back. *What a curious sensation. Another in a long line of delights you have gifted me, human Fletcher.*

"You're very welcome."

We lay and cuddled for a time, until I told her that, regrettably,

this was a work day and I was on the clock.

Man, being my own boss was awesome.

She continued to trail the fingers over my bare skin for a time, before allowing me to sit up. She grabbed my pants and shirt with her mind and floated them over to me, so I could get dressed, but didn't bother with her own nakedness. *It cannot be helped, I suppose,* she told me mentally. *I see that you have already bonded. You must go, then. Please, Fletcher, do not forget about me.*

I made a promise I wouldn't be able to keep. "I'll definitely be coming back. Count on it."

Then I left. For a good long while.

Out in the town, I still had to be careful not to trip over people who seemed to be either spaced out or in a coma. Without the red haze, everything here seemed plain old again. Just a town, nothing to see here, some of the buildings appear to be made of crystal, sure, and others undulate when you walk by them, like you're the t-rex. I was wondering if Larelle and Chrysta would return to retrieve me when I heard it.

"Fletcher…"

My head snapped around at the whisper that somehow carried on the breeze.

"Cinzy?" I asked. The voice was unmistakable all on its lonesome, but she also had an ability to throw her voice like this. And her using that ability was probably bad. She was either trying to trick or lure me, or she was in trouble.

Fletcher? Shakindria asked, and my head snapped around again. She was leaning out of the second story window of her smithy, still nude save for her silvery jewelry, and I had a strong urge to head back up into the house and have another antigravity frack session.

"I'm sorry," I told her, and headed over in the direction of where the sound seemed to originate. "I heard something…"

Do you need assistance? she asked.

"It shouldn't be necessary," I told her. "I'm hoping that voice doesn't mean there's danger."

Was that her face peeking out from behind a building over there? I narrowed my eyes, and with **Eagle Eyes** I found myself looking at Cinzy's ear and hair. For only a moment. She disappeared behind the building.

"I will… speak with you later," I told her, and began pelting off before I could hear her reply.

"Fletcher…" Cinzy's voice came again.

The town wasn't large; only a good twenty minute walk from front to back, though it was wide on the enormous flaps of the wingy-thingies of the Humpalumpagus. Since I was heading through the town and not up either side of the swoosh shape, it wasn't long before I came to the end of the buildings and spun in a circle.

"Cinzy? Is that you?" Silly question; it was definitely her. But people do and say some pretty silly things when they don't think anybody is watching. Hell, they say some pretty silly things when people are there and their brains aren't working properly.

There. I caught sight of her off to my left, towards the smaller swoosh wingy-thingy. She disappeared behind another building, and I rushed towards it like a very smart person would. This was clearly a trap.

I hadn't ever been in danger from anything other than a sick, divine entity. I'd been protected by a thick layer of time.

I ducked into the first alley I came to in order to try to head her off, and when I was a block down, I skidded to a stop, looking around.

"Fletcher…"

Cinzy was just one building away, staring at me, though she had a morose look to her, like she was doing something distasteful.

"Why are you doing this?" I called. Two steps took her out of sight, and I gritted my teeth. I knew I needed to head back, to grab the girls. Tara could get an aerial survey with Airaconda, Regina had a fast movement ability, and the Guardians obviously had their abilities to keep me out of harm's way. What did I have? The ability to grow plants fast.

But here's the thing: I'd been in this world for a good three months now, and nothing, I mean nothing, had made me feel like I was in actual imminent danger. The only time that came close was when I stared down Blake and felt the Intimidation power pour the fear into me. I'd been up in the air on a flying lake dragon. I'd been deep underground with the threat of drowning on the table. I'd been in a town where all the natives were turning into sadness zombies. I had *actually* nearly died, though I didn't know what I was doing at the time, from touching the divine, and I hadn't been scared.

Honestly, even seeing the Scorchomp, the draconic flame lizard that was probably the size of a medium bus, I'd only been amazed at the size of the thing rather than afraid it was coming to eat my face. Fire aspects probably ate crystals or creatures like Trent's Nakamamon Garnet, which was nothing more than a huge gem.

Last, I was much stronger than when I entered this world. I was possibly four times stronger, if the attributes mapped like that. I had tons of abilities, and plenty of Tokens, even if I didn't want to spend them. I had tools in my toolkit. What did I have to be afraid of?

So when I tell people that my sense of fear was wasted and withered, and I wasn't scared, they might rightly accuse me of being a damn idiot, but at least they understand that there was nothing I thought was going to try and kill me. I might find Cinzy afflicted with some illness that I could get her out of, which projected psychic images and sounds into my head. I might find a Nakamamon that was using the image of Cinzy in my brain to get me to see something, like a faithful dog trying to point humans toward something hurt. It could've been anything.

When I came around the corner, I ended up ensnared in a net.

"Cinzy!" I called, not realizing what was going on or why.

"There we go. Don't hurt him," someone was saying.

"I'll hurt him," another someone said. "I don't mind one bit." I recognized that voice.

"We need him," the first someone said.

"We need him alive," the familiar voice said. "Boss didn't say we

needed him totally unharmed. Go on, Wendell."

The first voice got as far as "Look, man, I didn't—" before I got zapped.

A strange sound pelted through the air and my whole world went dim for a second before I understood what had just happened. I was on the ground and nursing a bruised tailbone before I could identify the sound—electricity—and the super-fast blackout feeling. Another thing that happened was a hood was placed over my head, or rather someone's t-shirt being used as a blindfold, now tied behind my head.

I'd been electrocuted. This would be the work of Wendell the storm ferret, or whatever his Nakamamon was actually called, and his human Ranger buddy, Timmy.

"How much do I need to dance for you, Timmy?" I asked.

"How does he—"

"Shut. Up." The second voice said. "We're not doing names, okay? You're boss and I'm…"

"Timmy," I said. "You're Timmy, Ranger, you were level 16 when I interviewed you. You've got a storm ferret called Wendell. And right now I'm really glad you aren't on my team."

Another quick zap shorted out my ears. I had no clear idea of how long I was out of commission—a few milliseconds or a few minutes—but when I could hear again, it was an argument.

"—hurt him. That guy is a jackass and he can eat farts. What I just gave him doesn't even begin to cover that he deserves. Fuck him, and if you're gonna get on my case, fuck you too."

"Walk away, Timmy."

"I told you not—"

"Walk. Away." Boss had used that intimidate ability on him, that much was clear by the mana-infused words. I felt their power, but I wasn't the subject of the special ability, so the deep and resonant boom that turned Boss into a being of terror didn't affect me. This made it crystal clear Boss was a Guardian.

Timmy made a frightened sound and turned to run off. I heard a

clatter, which I'd later confirm was Timmy scrabbling, knocking into one of the makeshift houses, and clawing at the walls in an effort to get away just as fast as possible.

"You guys running a team out here?" I asked.

Boss sighed. "You're not in a position to be asking questions, are you? Look, man, I don't know why I'm under orders to capture you and blindfold you. I don't even know how you can go into this podunk without contracting the sleepies. What I do know is that my orders are to bring you in, so that's what I'm gonna do."

"Cinzy?" I called. "Cinzy, are you there?"

"Don't—"

"I'm here, Fletcher," I heard, from further off.

I turned my blindfolded face towards her to simulate that I was talking to her. Then, I engaged **Psyspeech** so I could make this private. Boy did it suck to need to use this so soon after I'd gotten it. Boy was I happy to have the ability.

Thankfully, I succeeded the difficulty 3 check.

Cinzy, listen, I told her with my mind, even though she couldn't listen. The words just appeared in her mind. *When you have a chance, I need you to come talk to me in private, okay? We'll sort this out without anybody getting hurt… more hurt than I already am. Please. I'm sorry about what happened.*

There was no way I would succeed the next attempt, so I'd have to try again tomorrow. And there was no way for Cinzy to communicate back with me to show me she got the message, except…

A gasp followed.

"What just happened?"

"I got a splinter," Cinzy grumped. "The one wooden house on this block and it had to be the one I put my hand on."

She sounded convincing to my ears.

"Let's move out," Boss said, and two people helped me to my feet, then started marching me away from the town of

Glumpdumpkin. I made sure not to help them out.

This is Christopher in his new role as a hostage.



Chapter 33- Who Gets Humperdinck?

When the hood was removed and I was shocked at the bright sunlight still streaming down on me, it was to a completely different scene than before. I took a look around, tried to anyway, until a hand clamped onto my face and steered me back toward the gigantic and furious visage of Blake. Only gigantic because it was inches from mine, and only furious because that was Blake's resting birch face.

"Oh," I managed, through his iron grip smooshing the sides of my face. "Hey Lake."

If Blake was a mountain of muscle before, he was the Everest of muscle now. His muscles had muscles. His neck had been eclipsed by the biggest fracking trapezius muscles I'd seen outside of a comic book. He looked impossible, like humans shouldn't be able to manage this.

Because aside from his missing neck and gigantic traps, his trunk tapered down to a stacked and chiseled eight pack of abs.

"This little putz," Blake hissed. "This is the Healer from the other team in town?"

"That's right," another familiar voice said from behind me. I started turning my head again, only to have Blake's iron grip squeeze a little and begin what would certainly pop my head like a grape.

"Rat? Zat you?" What the hullabaloo was Drat doing here?

So Blake was the first person I'd met here who wasn't enamored with the job and didn't love seeing newbies… or he was just a dick. He had a thing for Regina, and she didn't have a thing for him. That had made him real angry for some reason. It wasn't like a guy with

this kind of physique should have a problem getting women to sleep with him.

Drat's soft curse was the confirmation I needed. He was here.

Okay, to put things together in my head: Blake had been given some kind of awful assignment after he'd used a special ability on me. When Timmy hadn't gotten the job on my team, he'd either applied to be on Blake's team or just deserted his post at the HQ. Which meant Timmy's friends could be here too, the ones who did not like me much. They weren't thrilled to be forced to clean up my mess in the saga of the God of Footfalls.

Fact: I had been taken, which meant they needed me alive. I doubted this was specifically so Blake could pound my skull into a paste on the ground here, but that was one possibility. What was far more likely was they needed something healed. They had someone who was ill or broken bones and needed that person fixed right away.

"Lake?" I asked, my face still very smooshed. The one thing I did not want was to antagonize the unstable and very muscular douche canoe. "Han oo eggo I hace?" Or, *Can you let go my face* in 'unable to talk properly'.

"You are going to do what I ask, or things are going to get really ugly for you," he breathed. His breath did not smell of peppermint and joy. "The number one thing you will not do is ask questions, or attempt to go running off."

"O-hey," I said, attempting to look as cute and harmless as possible with my face squished on either side and head immobilized.

"The number two thing you're not going to do is begin to ask stupid questions. There are a couple of dangerous questions going around getting people hurt. Badly."

He released my head, and I spent the next few seconds massaging my jaw.

"You… need some meds, Blake," I told him.

He scowled, his head tiny against the inhumanly huge trapezius and shoulders.

"I can make some up. You got too much magic in you."

His scowl deepened into a sneer. Then he pulled back and flexed his muscles. Schwarzenegger would've been taken aback. Even the guys that juiced would've stared in shock. "It is magic, isn't it?" He asked, and turned so I could see his back… and his butt. He flexed again like he was on a stage at a competition, an inside some straining sweatpants his butt flexed too. I couldn't take my eyes off it, until someone else made an amazed sound.

Blake did not look human.

"I'm serious," I said. "I can whip up a batch—"

His hand was on my face again, destroying my ability to talk.

"No questions, no talk. Just following directions. Got it?"

No questions… for a second I considered the possibility that there was a god of asking questions and that this was yet another thing I needed to heal up, then gave myself a hard mental slap. What he meant was, asking questions around Blake was going to get me hurt, and that I should keep my trap shut. The less I understood and knew, the better.

Which was obviously bullshirt. I was going to find out everything I could as soon as I could.

He released my face, causing me to massage it. "Now, this is what you are going to do. We have a member of our team who has himself some injuries he got while adventuring in this wild and dangerous land. You're going to heal those injuries."

I opened and closed my mouth several times.

"You know that you could have brought him to my team's camp and I would have been happy to deal with this, with a fully stocked laboratory, heating element, cauldron, herbs and plant materials, and more importantly the solutions I need—"

Blake scowled down at me.

"—for creating potions, elixirs, and tinctures and such that can't be easily made in this world and have to be imported from earth."

"Rainer could just heal someone by touching them," he said.

“Rainer is also level one million. You can take your injured team member back to him if you want instant healing with a touch, because I can’t do that.”

Baring his teeth at me made Blake look feral. Eyes narrowed, face pinched, muscles bulging, he appeared like a cornered animal. How long had it been since he’d taken his pills?

In that moment I knew he was up to no good. Something bad was happening and he was going to just have me along as part of his group for now. Maybe they would steal all my lab materials from the camp, maybe they would just try to get me to work without them, but Blake was off the reservation on this one. He was going against whatever HQ wanted him to do.

First, this meant he had no intention of letting me go. I could (and would) do the work he wanted me to do, but as long as I knew he wasn’t playing by HQ rules, I was a liability that would be better dead than spilling what I knew to anyone outside this circle. Now that I knew who he was, I wasn’t going to be allowed to go anywhere.

“How long has it been?” I asked.

“What are you talking about?”

“Since you took the anti-magic pill,” I said. “A full week? Longer?”

Blake’s ham fist crashed into his other hand with a sickening crunch. He then picked up a piece of firewood and literally crushed it with his bare hand. “I will not have you misunderstanding me, Fletcher. You are going to heal my people. Not ask questions, not make demands. Heal.”

What was his Physicality? Above 12, like Cinzy’s unbelievable Likability? Higher?

“Sure,” I said. “But we should maybe be talking about the anti-magic medicine. We don’t know what happens if you fail to take it.”

He flexed, and muscles that definitely didn’t exist in humans bulged outward. He looked like a tank character out of a superhero comic book.

“If I can. These are checks made with my skills and attributes,

and those are made a heck of a lot easier with all the tools and materials."

"He has an ability where he can breathe healing onto someone," Drat said from somewhere behind me. Since Blake was the size of a barn door and he'd forbidden me from moving, I couldn't see my Rogue, but I recognized his voice anywhere.

Blake's open hand slap sent me to the ground. It was upside my head before I could register the motion. I wouldn't be surprised if it broke the fracking sound barrier. I lost a good chunk of my HP on that one. I gritted my teeth and spent an immediate Durability token with **Healer's Resistance**. I gained an immediate 3% to my physical damage resistance. Which gave me a plan I didn't like much, but one that would work in the end.

"Should've led with that one, Healer. Would've saved you some pain. Now, let's get you healing."

***

"Who gets Humperdinck?" my father demanded.

I blinked at him. "I don't understand."

"Who kills Humperdinck?" he repeated. "Who?"

"Nobody," I said, quoting one of my favorite childhood movies.

"At the end, who kills this Blake bastard? Is it Chrysta? Does she freeze him to death with her ghost powers or something? Does Larelle rip him in half from nuts to nape?"

"Nobody kills Humperdinck," I repeated.

He threw up his oily, greasy hands. "Come on, kid! You can't just have a gross and irredeemable villain character who doesn't get his comeuppance. How'd you get him in the end?"

"Dad, I was there for weeks. You have to know, this is only three months into my stay. I've been there for six months… when I left Sara was just finding out she was pregnant, and now she looks like you could pop her with a pin. I have weeks with Blake and his people. They're not fun weeks."

"Not my son," he muttered, low enough that he thought I wouldn't hear. But somebody didn't have **Eagle Eyes** any longer.

"Hm?" I asked.

He moved deeper into his workshop and pretended to rummage through tools looking for the one he needed. "Injustice like that in front of your nose, my son wouldn't let that kind of nonsense go unpunished."

My heart ached for him a little there.

He took to wiping the engine grease off his hands and pointed at me holding the formerly blue rag. "You skip past all this nonsense with your mother. In fact, you might as well get through it all with me, and we'll condense it all down to a couple sentences, then boom you're practically back home."

I pursed my lips in thought. "I… guess."

"And then you tell me how long it took before your Rangers figured out where you were, and the team snuck you out of there under cover of night or what-have-you."

"Dad—"

"And you also tell me how many people got really messed up in the fight between your people and Blake's, and we'll figure out how to soften the blow when your mother and Sare-bear hear this part."

I didn't think Mom and Sarah needed the blows softened. They were tough as hell, what with Mom going through chemo several times and Sarah having her ass kicked by at least one of her sleazeball exes.

I realized too late that my father was calling her Sare-bear again. Like she was twelve and hadn't yet declared that she hated them.

***

The special ability **Healer's Breath** worked like this.

Healer's Breath

(Special Ability, Uncommon, active)

Make a Treatment check with Affinity (or spend an Affinity Token)

and breathe on the target in order to administer a temporary treatment for any damaging ailment. The target is healed by 3-18 hit points over 6 seconds. Symptoms of the ailment are reduced in intensity by 50% for a day. May only be used on a target once per day.

The ability was specifically created so that it didn't eliminate symptoms all together. If you had, let's say, a coronavirus that ravaged the whole planet for a couple of years, my ability would keep people alive on a day-to-day basis. It would not cure them. It would not stop them from being miserable. It would heal them up, just a bit, and make their bodies capable of handling another day sick.

Luckily for a sickness like a coronavirus that ravaged the whole planet for a couple of years, the recovery was generally going to happen within two weeks. The human body had some defense against a coronavirus, even one that would kill millions worldwide.

This was not earth. These were not earth diseases, and the human body was not equipped to handle the sorts of diseases found on this planet. Lucky for us, infection from damage sources on this world were rare. Nakamamon didn't typically poison, envenom, or inflict illnesses on us humans. They would if they had to, but this wasn't hunt-or-be-hunted world, this was cute-and-cuddly-creature world.

They could affect humans with their emotions, like what had happened to the natives of Slinktrickle, and they could use mana to make all kinds of things happen.

Then there were the gods.

Divine beings had some pretty unique ways of self-destructing. As I'd seen so far, they had a short radius where their sphere of influence went haywire. From the mundane and ignorable—the God of Footfalls—to the embarrassing and mortifying—the God of Apparel—most of these were harmless, silly, and sometimes saucy. But they could bring some more serious problems, like whatever was going on in Glumpdumpkin.

This was why being a Healer was so important. And also do dangerous.

"Drat," I said, "Report what's happening here to camp. That's an order."

This time I wasn't swatted on the side of the head—which hurt, if anyone was wondering—but kicked in the middle of the thigh. This one smarted. I clutched at it, not caring about the pain so much as the second opportunity to spend a Durability Token to grow my physical damage resistance. I was going to have to space these out, and somehow get my Durability Tokens back, or else I was just going to be a punching bag they wouldn't allow to die.

Still, the damage was done. Now if Drat didn't carry out my express order, he was going to have a lot of trouble getting experience points. Right now, this was all I could manage. In the future, if I had anything to say about it, he would find himself before Rus and the other high level HQ people.

What a cuntaluntagus.

After laying there and trying to ease the pain for a few minutes, I was 'helped up' by several people who had better control over their prodigious strength.

Now that I could actually get a look around, it appeared that Blake had more than a few other high Physicality Guardians with him. A lot of these were big white boys, but two were big black fellas, and one was a woman almost as thick and brutish as Larelle. They were all human. Or as human as they could be without taking the anti-magic pill for an extended period of time. The way Cinzy's skin went every-available-color and Regina's freckles turned sparkles turned magical skin flowers.

What I recalled hearing about Blake was that he was sent out to do land surveys or magic surveys or Nakamamon surveys as part of a group of Wizards. Wizards were the ones who grabbed up xp from cataloguing things.

Weird that I couldn't see a single Wizard.

Yet.

And I was pretty sure there was no way Blake had come out here with ten Guardians I could see. The question of Timmy remained an open one. Had he deserted his post as a runner of messages in HQ, or had he been ordered to bring the rest of Guardians out to rendezvous with Blake and company?

My money was on 'something I couldn't imagine yet' going on here, and I just needed to keep my eyes open to suss out what.

And with that, I got to the first Wizard.

The first one I was taken to see was bruises all over. He lay there staring up at the ceiling of his tent and pointedly ignored what was some kind of awful wound on one leg. Blake wouldn't fit in this tent, so another figure came into the large dome tent with me, the guy who Timmy called Boss.

"What happened here?" I asked.

"He doesn't talk," Boss said. Not that he was physically unable to talk, Boss delivered the warning in a tone that suggested he could talk, but wasn't allowed.

Forking. Yikes.

Peeling away homemade bandages, sopping blood, made my patient hiss out several pained breaths. He also did that thing where he reaches out in an attempt to clutch at his wound, but also doesn't want to touch it, so it looks like he's trying to *Kamehameha* his wound back to normal with the force of a high-ranked cultivator.

If only I were a Battle Healer. Pff, if that were the case I'd be teleporting around the place and blasting these people to pieces by igniting their internal stores of mana. Also it wouldn't take days to heal things, but minutes.

I pulled myself out of fantasy land and got to work on the Wizard. Something had bitten him, and I would've laid money on it being one of those Geodiles.

"I'm a Healer," I told him.

"I said he doesn't talk," Boss snapped.

"Well then we'll have to be narrating all this to myself, and to give my poor mute patient some peace of mind, because one of the

things I do when I’m stressed and in a pickle is talk a lot.” This was a lie but it came out smoothly. Still, there was a brief moment where I panicked, seeing the Deceit check come up.

This is Christopher about to earn himself a punch in the face.



Chapter 34- Darkest Days

Likability Check: *You do not have the associated skill for this check.* This check is an opposed one. Since this is a Deceit check, it will be made without the target's knowledge. Bear in mind that some classes have a way of detecting Deceit checks made against them. Would you like to spend 3 Tokens to lower your target's Deceit and Ingenuity by 1 for the purposes of this check? You may not spend a Token to retry this check.*

Total Tokens: 5 Likability and 7 Free Tokens.

Note: **Fierce II has given you a temporary Deceit skill of 7. You have gained a temporary Physicality Token and a temporary Durability Token.*

Wow. First, I was simply astonished that I hadn't been forced to make a single Deceit check before now. This world was so pure and wonderful and awe-inspiring that I hadn't been put in a position where I had to lie to save my skin or do my job. That fact alone made me like this world all the more, present circumstances aside.

Second, it amazed me that this opposed check system was made like this. I'd only done maybe two opposed checks… and one had been against Cinzy when she tried to make me abandon the eggs in Slinktrickle. I wanted to go back into the UI system message logs and see what that had looked like, but didn't have time… because now I was on the opposite end and time was running thin on the little Yes/No spend Tokens timer.

Third, I had sort of forgotten about the **Fierce** ability, since there had been almost no need for it in weeks and weeks. It presence, again, was a blessing and I relished having it. And all it cost was extreme pleasure from successfully sexing Ivy and Isabelle.

The check succeeded without me spending 3 Likability Tokens. I likely needed them, and since I got a temporary Durability Token, I

needed Boss here to strike me again regardless. Or for Blake to do it, though I was worried he would snap me in two with a single attack. Since I was just over two thirds of my hit points left, I wasn't thrilled with the idea of having Blake do it.

Blake's hair was falling out. He was walking around, literally flexing like he was in a bodybuilding contest, at all times. I'd have to figure out a way to trick him into taking the anti-magic drug.

"I have a special ability," I told the Wizard. "It requires me to breathe on the wound, and you will regain some hit points. If there is poison, it will reduce the effect."

"Nnn…" the Wizard said.

"No poison?"

"Shut. Up. Enough talk." Boss was done playing around. Gods, how was it that people lived like this, with a constant waterfall of shit raining on their face, obscuring their view of a decent and fulfilling life?

The Wizard shook his head slightly, just the tiniest negative. It made sense that a Geodile wouldn't have any poison, seeing as how it was made of rock and gems. Then again, magic.

I bent and breathed out onto the Wizard's ragged leg. The Affinity check for **Healer's Breath** hadn't failed me yet, and I was pleased with that. I had no wish to spend Affinity Tokens, just like I had no wish to spend Likability Tokens. In all honesty, I had no will to spend Tokens of any kind on this… whatever this was. Press-gang situation.

The wounds began closing up immediately, though I didn't get through all of them. The Wizard relaxed and let out a shaky sigh.

"I'll see if I can't rustle up some ingredients to make you a salve," I told him. "Just get some rest and don't put weight on it."

The Wizard reached out a hand and clutched my knee. "Thank you."

"I got you, fam," I told him stoically, and he wheezed out a rasping chuckle.

That did it. I found myself dragged out of the tent and then

kicked in the ribs.

"You. Don't. Listen. Do you?" Boss snarled. I watched my own HP drop to about half, and I faithfully applied my temporary Durability Token to **Healer's Resistance** to boost my physical damage resistance even further. I gained another level of Physical Resistance, just like Divine Resistance.

I would've said nice, but it felt like I bruised a rib. At least my plan was working, even through the pain.

After this, I was told to apply the healing to three more Wizards. One looked to have been stung a good twenty times by things that left small holes but large welts. **Healer's Breath**. Then antagonizing.

"You and Blake are pretty fracking terrible at your jobs, aren't you?" I chuckled, even though this hurt like the dickens. "Jeez, how many Guardians does it take to change a lightbulb? Or keep a guy from getting chewed up by—"

This earned me a Taunt check, which was again boosted by **Fierce**, and again gave me Durability and Physicality Tokens. My Taunt skill was suddenly 7, and my Likability was 5, I somehow scored 5 successes. Even though he tried using his Durability to counter it.

He failed. I could hear him breathing heavy now, and in my periphery could see him clenching and unclenching his fists over and over.

"This is probably going to contain some kind of poison. I'll need the creature itself, or the poison, to begin synthesis on an antidote."

"He'll get over it," Boss growled. "It will just take time."

"One of us sure is a hulking brutish Guardian who knows frack-all about how healing goes, and the other is has levels in Healer, doesn't he?" I said, this time unable to help myself. But I sure did score another Taunt success, another punch to the kidneys this time, and another Physicality and Durability Token. So I put the Durability Token into **Healer's Resistance** for the fourth time in under an hour, got more Physical Resistance, gritted my teeth against the

abuse, and started using Physicality Tokens.

I had to spend 2 of them to get back up on my feet. I stared him down, hoping for an Intimidation check, but he definitely had that skill. In either event, for some reason the system didn't want to give me one. Maybe it was the visual appearance of the two Physicality Tokens going 'cla-cling!' into existence one after another and disappearing into my body. The red-orange magic suffused my battered self and let me get up, but I was smiling.

Boss was like an evil version of Ivy: ropy muscle, shaved head, tattoos. He wore more armor than she did. He wasn't a hulking colossus like Blake, but looked like he had a lot of speed, plus a whole lot more power than it first appeared. I really was messing with this guy at my own risk.

"The human body wasn't meant to exist in this magic-saturated world. It also wasn't designed to 'just get over' the poisons and diseases of this world. That's why there aren't many Healers. People are afraid of getting hurt and poisoned and chewed up."

Maybe his single Ingenuity point scored a success by now, because he grudgingly harrumphed and didn't bother arguing my point.

"Look, my only job is to heal people. If you send Drat to gather up stuff from my lab and bring it back—"

"Nope. No. Not a chance. You ordered him to report to your team," he said.

"I did that as an xp penalty," I admitted. "I don't know why he's here and I don't really care, but it's a punishment. As you can see," I gesture off toward the cook fire, where Drat was sitting in a ring with Blake, Timmy, and the other Guardians, "he's presently ignoring my orders just fine."

Boss appeared to think this over, before nodding towards another tent. "Next patient is over this way."

Would you look at that? I was limping for the first time in months.

***

You know, I would've thought that, given the disposition of Boss, Blake, and Blake's people, that it would've been easier to get the snot kicked out of me over and over again. That's not the case, however. After that first day, they seemed more immune to me pushing their buttons, and they forced me to just get down to business healing up these poor Wizards. The next few weren't in nearly as bad shape as the first two, but there was evidence of old injuries that were in the process of healing, either badly or just fine. The rest of the day was spent using **Healer's Breath** over and over again, in lieu of having a single plant, herb, hunk of beeswax, or vial of oil.

I would have drummed up some anti-magic medicine, but again, I didn't have my ingredients or workshop. No Magmamander to keep the temperature just how I needed it. Blake and Boss both needed to get back to normal.

The special ability did me a world of good, I'm pleased to say. I only failed the initial check once, got the free retry from **Hard at Work**, and passed on the next attempt without having to spend Tokens. The 3-18 hit points healed was enough to cause many of these minor injuries to heal completely. The bite wound to the thigh of the first guy needed a second breath the next day. Then, aside from the bee venom victim—big assumption here on my part—I wouldn't have to concoct any special salves, potions, and elixirs.

The remainder of the Wizards didn't try to communicate with me other than intense eye contact. I knew what that meant: *do something about the Blake situation*. *Get me out of here.* Yeah buddy, I would if I could…

For now, I couldn't.

One of them had a burn healing up pretty nicely, though he would end up with a scar over a good chunk of his shoulder and neck. One of the things Diagnosis (Physical) told me was that if he'd gotten a burn all the way around an affected limb—or the neck—it could mean amputation. All the way around the neck I didn't even

know.

The burn reminded me of the Scorchomp, that big ash lava dragon thing, and Flameingoes, along with their Kindlets. It also reminded me of Larelle casually handing me her Magmamander, not thinking I was going to burn half to death.

I healed them, slept badly that night out under the stars, and once that happened, The Boys (and the gigantic Guardian female) left me alone. I mean they still prevented me from leaving, and had somebody watching me at all times, but I was allowed to walk around the camp, sit where I wanted, and look at what I pleased.

Whether Boss felt he'd gotten his point across, they'd gotten bored of it, or Blake had ordered his people not to attack me any longer, the beatings did not commence again. I was disappointed to find I couldn't needle these people into hitting me again, even though I wasn't ready to lose more HP.

My plan had been absurdly simple: heal up as fast as possible, goad The Boys Plus One to hurt me over and over, collect the physical damage resistance levels using the Durability Tokens received by taunting them into violence. After some few days of doing this, I'd be all but immune to physical damage, and able to get away. I'd use the Dazzle ability I'd gotten from Vellenia to hypnotize my guard and slip out, back to the town.

Never mind that I didn't know the direction the town was in, since they'd put a hood over my head. I'd… figure things out. Use **Beast Talker** hopefully and get some information out of the nearby Nakamamon. Or something.

Now, the Cinzy situation had taken a completely different turn than I expected, but didn't move forward at all that night. I'd barely seen her at all that day. Instead, it was heal, heal and heal some more, then get tied to a tree to sleep out one of the worst nights of my life.

Now, I ended up staying at camp the next day, still tied to the tree. **Fierce** gave me the ability to talk my way out of my bonds, but I couldn't use Persuasion to get them to let me go. Their fear of the

monster Blake had become was worse than the well-reasoned arguments I was putting together. Untie me? Difficult. Let me go back to my camp? Nigh Impossible.

Blake and several of the Guardians left that morning with two of the Wizards and stomped off for several straight hours, only to bring back a Wizard in far worse shape than he had been, and one fully unconscious.

I had used the time to gain a Token back through Meditation, which leveled up to 3, but sadly it was only an Affinity Token and not one of my Durability Tokens, which I needed. Since time didn't mean much when I was meditating, I could only say it was just after breakfast when I went in, and sometime after lunch when I came out again. I was ravenous, since no one had offered any food.

The Wizard's robes were soaked and torn, and dripping blood. He was draped over the woman Guardian's shoulder, and she placed him down on the ground before me.

"He's untied?" Boss screamed. "Which of you idiots untied him?"

"He couldn't have gotten anywhere," one of the other Boys said. "We would've gotten experience anyway, I think."

Several of the others nodded, which added a piece to the puzzle of what was going on here, though I didn't quite understand it. Why would they gain experience for capturing me? And why was that important?

Boss surged forward and grabbed the Guardian who'd talked back by the shirt, easily lifting him into the air and sneering at him.

"It's fine," Blake said. "He might be right anyway."

And I noted, right before Blake turned my way, that Cinzy was behind him, behind all of them, giving the whole scene a sour look. She clearly wasn't getting whatever she wanted out of Blake's team.

"Heal him," Blake ordered.

"What did you do to him?" I asked.

A brief flash of absolute fury came over his face. The expression vanished quickly, but I could tell he had been on the verge of blasting me a good one. And honestly, if a bop upside my head

could do about ten percent of my health, I shudder to think about what a full-on punch could do.

"Just make sure he doesn't die. He's lost some blood."

After using **Healer's Breath** on him, and performing Diagnosis (Physical) using just my hands, I could tell he was still at a fraction of his total health.

Not a large fraction, like 15/16 either, like under a tenth.

"He needs more than just this one ability," I told them.

"Shut up."

"He might have internal injuries I can't suss out without tools, and that means he might die tonight."

"Just dose him again," Blake called over his shoulder.

"It's one a day," I said, shrugging. I was already feeling tired of this, and it hadn't been two days. "Now, here's what I suggest—"

Boss was in my face a second later, close enough for me to smell the onions and garlic on his breath. "I don't need any suggestions from you, squishy. If you want to keep the gag off, you shut your mouth."

"You mean to say, my only options are to not talk, or have a gag in my mouth that prevents me from speaking?"

"That's right," he said, completely missing my point.

I threw my hands up in the air. "I don't make the rules of my class. You can ask Timmy about the lab back in the castle. I need stuff to heal people. A lot of stuff. And time, and fire to boil it all together."

I noted a conference later, between Boss and Timmy, while Cinzy continued to regard the whole situation with a look like she was thirsty and had just tried to drink water, but found it was low quality tequila instead. I tried not to be upset with her choices, and failed. She was on my shirt list.

Today I tried Drat, and activated my **Psyspeech**. Since it was a new day, it was easy enough to pass the first check. *You need to listen to me really well, Drat*, I told him, and watched his head snap

up. *You are going to free me, tonight, and help me sneak out of here. We're going back to the camp at Glumpdumpkin, and that is a fucking order.*

His head swiveled towards me and his eyes locked onto me with a look of incomprehension that bordered on terror. Was he hallucinating? Was it the guilt and shame over what he'd done?

I nodded, and watched all the calculations begin to run through his mind. Even though he might have some inkling of the sex shenanigans I got up to, there was no way he could know that I had sextra powers from doing it. I'd kept that a close secret. Not even Cinzy knew about these, because I hadn't 'brought her into the fold' using Tokens. And I definitely wasn't regretting that choice right now.

This is Christopher blowing someone's mind.



Chapter 35- Temporary Physicality

So Drat couldn't know how I'd gotten the **Psyspeech** ability. He would only know two things: one, I knew how to speak directly into his brain, and two, I just swore at him for the first time ever.

Drat got up, prompting Blake and another of the Guardians to follow after, asking what the hell he was up to.

"You don't want the xps?" I heard Blake demand.

Drat touched his temple and scanned the place, looking everywhere but at me. He mumbled something, probably about a headache.

"I don't care. We're getting it, *tonight.*"

Another dry remark from Drat.

"I don't care if they have floodlights and a security team with them, you're a Rogue with a Rogue's familiar. You go fucking *invisible*. You get his test tubes and his little flowers and oil vials and bring it back here. Take who you need to carry whatever the Healer needs, they stay out of sight outside the camp, and get it done."

"Yeah good luck with that!" I called.

It turned out they didn't need luck.

That night I was given a tent. They crammed the Wizards in together and forced me into the smallest tent available.

All the Wizards were in a state of disrepair. The Guardians were taking them out each day, and bringing them back wounded. It was shady as hell. What was out in the wilderness that was hurting these Wizards so much? There were far more Guardians than necessary to keep them safe.

Before I went to bed, I tried to find Cinzy and send her another **Psyspeech** communique, but she was already gone. She hadn't

spoken a single word to me since she'd lured me in here, and I was hoping that her guilt and shame over using her special ability on me were stronger than her anger with me over sleeping with people without her knowledge.

I slept fitfully that night. Someone appeared in my bed sometime between sundown and sunup, and I have no idea when. If I was expecting a nice, comforting blowjob, I was sorely mistaken. I got kicked in the ribs again (the same spot, I you can believe it), and though I had only recovered like a single hit point, I gritted my teeth and tried not to cry out… and thanked my lucky stars. The Physical Resistance check yielded a success and reduced the damage by half.

Spending my last Durability Token gave me another level of Physical Resistance.

Not sleeping well after that was understandable, but it sure did impede my abilities. If I'd known someone was going to come in and interrupt my beauty sleep I would've just used **Healer's Endurance** to stave off the effects of sleep.

The next morning a small group of Blake's people escorted me to another part of the camp, where my lab equipment now sat. Drat stood there impassively, not making eye contact, while Timmy leered as if he'd put a bag of poop on an old man's doorstep, and the old man was me. Boss came over and clapped a hand on my shoulder, which hurt, but only just a little. A good sign that my Physical Resistance leveling was working. I dutifully slapped a Durability Token on it to build up yet another level of Physical Resistance. This one had only done a single hit point of damage, which told me the damage resistance was already working.

I mean, don't get me wrong, I liked damage resistance, I just wished I didn't need to get my butt kicked so often to build it up. I was just lucky **Stalwart** was generating a Durability Token each morning. Very lucky.

Two of the guards were busy building a rudimentary shelter to house all of my equipment and samples. They'd already used their prodigious strength to ram four enormous logs into the ground, and had fashioned a frame by lashing more rough lumber onto those.

The roof was coming along nicely, and I had no doubt they'd figure out walls by the end of the morning.

"There we go!" Blake said, spreading his freakishly huge arms wide. "No more whining about your herbs and spices."

"I will need to go out hunting for my herbs and spices periodically," I said, but Drat was there again, reminding him that if I just planted clippings and took care of them, they'd grow into an herb garden by magic.

"Oooohhhhh," Blake said, grinning broadly. "Somebody's not good at keeping secrets from his Rogue. Rookie blunder."

"I'll mix up a batch of anti-magic potion for you first," I said.

He scoffed. "Just top up the Wizards."

Like they were beverages at a bar and not people.

"I don't know what's going to happen to you if you don't get it," I told him.

And before I could attempt to get a temporary Durability Token using Fierce to taunt him, he shot a fist forward and blasted me right in the solar plexus. I lost half of my remaining hit points in that single strike, damage resistance or no. Several of the other Guardians let out amused calls of 'oooohhhh' or just cruel laughter. I sat there struggling to breathe, feeling for the first time like I was back in middle school.

The UI had informed me that the strike had dealt 46 physical damage, and my Physical Resistance check had succeeded in dealing with nearly 20% of the total. Not enough.

That night, I announced that I had the anti-magic drug and they should all take it, because the alternative was not something they wanted. Sure it tasted like the worst medicine I'd ever had as a kid, but it worked. I took it, and the antiseptic hospital color drained out of my hair, eyes, and fingernails. The Wizards all got theirs after they had a tray of food, but none of the Guardians tried it.

They were being serious buttheads.

This repeated for several days: get fed badly cooked slop made by one of the Guardians, Blake and some Guardians taking the

Wizards out, the Wizards coming back injured or near death, and me expected to work my magic. Every day I watched, I waited, I brewed health potions, and I hoped the team would find me.

I knew they had been canvassing the town first, wondering if I'd gone into one of the buildings, lay down, and just gone comatose like most of the rest of the inhabitants. It would only be today that they'd have a search party going, with the theft of my lab materials.

My hope in my friends rescuing me was waning.

***

The world of Dorfilialtos still lit up with cleansing sunlight most mornings. The sky still glittered with a sheen of roiling magic that made the cobalt shimmer and twinkle, like you could still see the stars in the full light of day. The fresh scents of grass, dew, and impending rain were still a thousand times fresher and more invigorating than earth.

If only I didn't have this annoying problem of being pressed into service to a gigantic lunatic.

I did learn an important lesson: meditation was good for recovering hit points as well as Tokens. I averaged about a single hit point a day normally, but that was sped up massively while in Meditation, and by massively I mean it tripled! My current skill level was 3, and I soon reached level 4. So I was getting 3 hp an hour, but that boosted to 4. My rate of Token recovery went from one every six hours, to one every four hours. Roughly. I didn't have any way to tell the time other than the movement of the sun. And Token recovery was easy to do now between breakfast and lunch, and another one between lunch and dinner.

Still no luck with taunting or teasing my handlers into kicking the crap out of me. They left that job to their leader's discretion.

The other thing I decided to do was communicate with Drat every day using **Psyspeech**. It was a slim chance, but if more orders caused him to lose more experience points, I wanted to stack as many orders as I could on top of him. Cinzy continued to be a no-

show.

I had plenty of time to observe, so observe I did.

One, they had the Wizards cast some kind of spell I didn't know each morning, and that was a huge swirling dome around the whole camp. My guess would be a concealment spell of some kind, because several times I saw Chrysta and a far-off Airaconda, but they never swooped down to investigate further.

Two, none of the Guardians had a Nakamamon bonded to them. Drat and Timmy were the only two with companion creatures.

Three, try as I might to use **Psyspeech** on Drat to get him to dose Blake and Boss with the anti-magic medicine, he never reacted like he had the first time. I didn't know whether he'd gotten some resistance to my ability, or more likely he was good at ignoring me. Blake got even bigger, and could no longer fit into his tent. Also all his hair fell out. I knew this because he went shirtless every day now. No more dusting of chest hair, no more eyebrows, no stubbly beard, and not a hair on his head.

The Guardians resolved, once they lost another Wizard, to take me with them on their away missions. This happened on the first day of the second week.

"You're coming with," Boss said that morning. "Bring whatever stuff you need to make health potions."

I was with three other Guardians I didn't know, Boss, two Wizards, and for the first time, Cinzy. My first instinct was of course to use my **Psyspeech** to get into her mind and start to work my magic, but the last week had taught me to observe first, form a hypothesis next, and act on that hypothesis afterwards. Although exhaustion had a hold of me, I was carrying a whole backpack full of my herbs and such, and I was still down over sixty percent of my hit points, I made sure to stay sharp in the face of whatever new info I was about to find.

So I played the watch Cinzy game.

Cinzy had reappeared at some point, though she stayed well clear of me. She did, however, sneak a lot of glances my way when

she thought none of the Guardians were looking. The sour grapes face was still on, which made sense. We'd stayed a full week in a hidden camp in the middle of nowhere, some distance from Glumpdumpkin and any other civilized place, and that meant she hadn't been able to utilize any of her Bard skills to any effect. Plus, I'd slapped her with a direct order she was currently disobeying, so she was being penalized xp.

I went into the team leader menu of the UI as we walked, since I couldn't meditate and walk at the same time. The eight team members who I lost contact with were grayed out. Their status was currently unknown. Drat and Cinzy, however…

Cinzy was laboring under a direct order, and the menu said her xp gains were cut by 25% so long as she continued to ignore this order. She had also been ignoring this order for weeks, so while the UI didn't explain the exact amount of the penalty's increase, it did say that the longer this order went ignored, the steeper this penalty would become.

Drat was a different story. I hadn't been wrong to assume that more orders would stack up, but not right either. He was currently -40% xp gains because of repeatedly ignoring direct orders given by his team leader. So while each order didn't count for a massive increase in xp reduction, it did count for something. I'd take something over nothing.

Worse, the UI noted (with orange highlights) that Drat had acted in direct opposition to the team's mandate, so unless I lifted these orders, his xp reduction would be doubled. Since the Divinity Rescue Corps couldn't do anything for the moment, Drat was sitting at an 80% experience reduction.

"Serves you right," I muttered. "Now give Blake his stupid medicine."

I wasn't going to labor under the assumption that Blake and his second in command were just going to pitch over onto their faces one day. Something else was going to happen, and I thought none of us would like it.

Still, there was a lot I didn't know about this situation, so I kept my eyes and ears open.

A forced march of a good few hours led us out of the forest cover, to where it opened out to reveal an enormous basin of water surrounded by sheer mountains. Gorgeous as it might be, the water still looked deep and cold, the mountains high and treacherous. Also one of them was in the process of moving. It wasn't fast, but it was definitely sliding out from behind the nearer mountain. You know, how rivers definitely don't migrate on earth.

"Holy," I muttered.

"Shut it, peanut gallery," Boss snapped. "Now, we're on mission, and you're on healing duty. When we bring these two back your way, you make sure they don't bleed out."

Um… what?

But instead of flapping my gums to get answers and beat up more, I watched. While watching meant not Meditating, this was the first time I'd been able to get a look at whatever operation this team was up to. Cinzy stuck around, along with one of the Guardians. Boss and the other two frog marched the Wizards down the slope toward the lake.

"What are the chances the Wizards are going to need healing?" I asked, watching them go.

"A hundred percent," the last Guardian answered, chuckling darkly.

"Oh. In that case, Cinzy, I need to prep a fire and turn out some healing potions."

The gorgeous Bard stared at me blankly, then slowly approached. In the meantime the Guardian chuckled about how I'd been holding back the whole time, and he knew I'd been faking it.

"Fairy Poppins is back at camp," I breathed, when she had brought back some firewood.

Her breath caught.

"Yeah. She's fine." I glanced over at her. "How about you?"

"I'm fine," she lied. That was a check I didn't have to make.

"You got my message on that first day," I told her, "and you didn't come to see me."

She let out a shaky breath. "I thought I was going crazy."

So I concentrated and used **Psyspeech** once more.

Tell me what's been doing on… or better yet, come talk to me when we both have a moment. You clearly aren't happy doing whatever it is they have you doing.

She nearly started again. "How—"

I pretended like nothing was going on, often switching to giving orders as a Healer so Blake's goon wouldn't get suspicious.

"I'll explain as soon as you help get me out of this hellhole. I don't need any more kicks to the ribs, thanks."

I could use a few more actually, but just like she didn't know about **Psyspeech**, she didn't know about **Stalwart** or **Fierce** either. The former was providing me with a Durability Token every morning, a pretty good way to stack up the physical damage resistance using **Healer's Resistance**… which might be good pretty soon, or by the time I was 40. All that was contingent on Blake's ability to one-shot me with his boulder fists.

"How do you expect me to get you out of here?" she hissed.

"You use your Bard abilities to scare them, persuade them, lull them to sleep, I don't know. Throw your voice to create a distraction. You know your abilities much better than I do."

There were a couple of my newer, unused abilities I hadn't used much yet. One was the Water Breathing, from Vellenia. I'd done a couple of test swims but always got freaked out. It was an automatic thing: you pulled your hand away from a burning stove the same way you got your head out of water. I'd make it work if I had to. It would be the impetus for me finally taking the literal plunge.

Assuming the water was safe from man-eating Nakamamon, I could disappear under there and they'd consider me drowned. I could escape back on foot.

The second possibility was Dazzle. I looked over the description in the UI just to be sure.

Dazzle: By concentrating, you may spend 1 Affinity Token to hypnotize a target with 7 automatic successes. This is a contested Likability + Persuasion roll, and the target knows they have been hypnotized. While under the effect of hypnosis, the target will be much more truthful and compliant, though they may not be ordered to harm themselves or others.

It probably wouldn't work on Cinzy, because she had a Likability of 12 when last I checked, and she definitely had a Persuasion skill, so if she didn't have the skill check of 7 successes, she could spend the Tokens to break free.

But she wasn't the only one in close proximity…

I'd need time to come up with my plan, and a few more hit points. I was still around a third of my total, and I wasn't getting anywhere towards my max by jabbering with Cinzy.

With that in mind, I made several healing potions, drank some of the first one, and felt instantly better. Yes, magical healing was incredible and I loved it.

The best option would be Boss, who could command the others… that he would escort me out on a special mission. No, that was a terrible idea.

Eventually I shelved the plan and got down to meditating. I suggested to Cinzy that she do the same. Though she looked at me funny, she settled in next to me, cross-legged, and zoned out the same way.

This is Christopher handling things by himself.



Chapter 36- Saving Lives and Using Leverage

I was just getting my Token back after only three and a half hours of meditation with the skill when a cry went up, and the Guardians were sprinting up the hill with the Wizards over their shoulders.

"What the—"

I started unpacking the backpack I'd brought along, frowning at the scene. One of the Wizards was soaking wet, and blood ran down one leg visible under the robes. The other was also pale with shock, though he hadn't been harmed.

An application of **Healer's Breath** didn't do enough, so I gave him the potion Cinzy and I ha whipped up, using Treatment (Potions) with a few of the herbs I'd brought. Afterwards, I asked either of them if they could cool down the potion, and the shocked Wizard just blinked at me.

"Frost spell," I said, getting in his face. "Now."

He chanted the words and made the motions with his hands, and as soon as he touched it, my boiling potion in the tin cup cooled enough for me to feed it to the other Wizard. He was unconscious, so that meant ordering the Guards to hold his head a certain way. When that didn't work, because I wasn't Boss or Blake, Cinzy came over and got the dying Wizard into position.

I dribbled the healing potion into his mouth, and the throat did its work automatically. Thankfully, I watched his hit points stop dipping from the blood loss, and begin to tick up. They'd been about to hit zero.

"How are you two so absolutely terrible at your jobs that this guy nearly died?" I demanded. "There are three of you. What in the devil is wrong with you?"

Taunt check success. Nice.

Only one of them had the good grace to appear ashamed. The other two snorted, and the one, a guy with curly strawberry blonde hair and a few freckles, casually shoved me backwards. I was about to go sprawling, but the temporary Physicality Token helped me roll and come right back up on my feet. The one damage I'd suffered was enough, and I sank my temporary Token into physical damage resistance.

"They're doing it on purpose," Cinzy said.

"Doing what on purpose? Throwing the Wizards to the sharks?"

"Exactly."

I rocked back on my heels, and looked at the Guardians in a new light. These… people, these pieces of shirt, were deliberately pushing the Wizards into danger. But for what?

"Oh yeah," the one Guardian said, "you go ahead and judge us. Go on then." He took several menacing steps toward me. "You get your experience points the easy way, you just find things that are sick, and you work on makin' em better. I bet I'd be level forty-some if I were healing in a world that's sick."

Level… forty-something? Did they think experience just fell out of trees? I worked my butt off and wasn't even level 20 yet.

"Guardians get fuck-all," he snarled. "You think life is so grand, makin' people love you every time you give em a potion. Not grand, not for us. Nothing attacking us on the journey. No marauding armies we gotta hold back. There's no xp to be found anywhere."

"Should've been a Healer then," I told him. "Then again, you might be running around giving the natives diseases just to have a chance to heal them up."

The Taunt check was very successful, and I knew that because the other Guardian barreled into this freckled one to keep him from tearing me apart.

"We can't," he was grunting. "Boss says we have to keep him alive."

"And we don't kill," the third Guardian said.

“Fletcher, what are you doing?” Cinzy hissed.

“Oh come on,” I continued. “You can’t change your class to Assassin? Because you’re the worst Guardians imaginable.”

The two who were holding back Freckles both looked my way, as the Taunt succeeded. “You need to shut the fuck up, Squishy. We’re all that’s keeping Todd from tearing you in half.”

“You kill me,” I said, “all these Wizards die, and then the only xp you’ll get is trying to protect Todd from your Boss. Not a point of Ingenuity between the lot of you, is there?”

“Fletcher, stop it!” Cinzy tried again.

Another Taunt success. Another Durability and Physicality Token for just an hour. Cinzy wasn’t entirely wrong; what was I doing here?

Todd and the other two all reacted… poorly. The two who were holding back Todd released their grip, and Todd gave a mighty roar. He charged, a mutated, overly muscled linebacker closing in on someone who, at best, had a climber’s build.

Cinzy let out a squeak that was both adorable and filled with concern over what my condition was about to be.

I had to wait for the last moment before using my temporary Physicality Tokens, along with one of my regular ones. When I did, it was to launch myself up into the tree at my back, and heft myself onto the branch just in time to hear Todd slam face first into the trunk. The thud had some crunch in it, and also some wetter sounds. Both the other two guards and Cinzy all went ‘Ohhhhh!’ with horror and dismay.

I peered down to see Todd’s face a mass of red. He was out cold, the big dumb idiot.

“Fletcher!”

I was not fast enough, nor did I have the Physicality Tokens to avoid the big grabbing hands clutch my body and wrench me out of the tree.

This is how I knocked my chin on the branch and got knocked the F out.

***

Temporary Durability and Physicality Tokens lasted an hour.

I came to and figured out the situation with only about three minutes to spend my temporary Durability Token and boost my physical damage resistance yet again. This had come at a high cost, though later factors made up for the pain and loss of health. In a big way.

They'd rigged up a bier for me out of sleeping bags and tree branches, so although the going was bumpy and I had a bit of a headache, I was pretty comfortable. More comfortable than being tied to a tree, that was for sure.

Todd was next to me, still unconscious. I had a look over his condition with Diagnosis and found he only had a handful of hit points left. He must have taken some serious damage 'guarding' the Wizards, and then even more face planting into a tree trunk.

Cinzy walked behind, and far behind her, the last Guardian checked the area for threats. I blinked at Cinzy and tried to use **Psyspeech** again.

Success.

I'm glad they haven't been using you as an xp farm, I told her, and again her eyes widened. *No, I can't hear your thoughts with this, only project them. Anyway, it would be pretty awful if they used you as bait every time they wanted to level up. I can see by the look on your face that you're not pleased to be here. I'm sure they don't give you much xp out here either, and I'm sure Blake hits on you constantly.*

She nodded at this.

Help me get out of here. We'll rescue these Wizards with the help of the team. Sadly I ran out of time on **Psyspeech**, or I would have talked longer.

A doubtful look grossed her face, and she literally chewed over this idea by biting her lower lip. Now, Cinzy was undeniably the most beautiful person I'd ever met, and her chewing on her lower lip was

enough to drive any man out of his mind. I closed my eyes and tried to get some meditation done, so that I'd have some hit points by the time we reached Blake's camp.

***

"You do get out of this," my mother said.

"Yep," I confirmed. "It's not fun, and it gets pretty tense at some points."

"Like this one," Sarah said. "Ugh. Drat *and* Cinzy?"

"That's what I thought, at first," I said, and let the realization sink in. *At first* were the key words in that sentence.

***

Things were not all what they seemed. Sure Blake and his cronies were using the Wizards as xp farms. Yes they were marching the Wizards into danger, only to snatch them out at the last minute to save their lives.

But no, I was about to find out that what I thought I knew about Cinzy and Drat were wrong. Dead wrong.

The first thing that happened, once the Wizards and their captive Healer were once again shackled up, was Blake and Boss approached their Guardian buddies and conferred about what had happened.

After some roaring laughter and swearing, they stormed over to where I was holed up in my wood shelter, and Blake ripped the door off.

Shoddy craftsmanship are two words I definitely didn't say.

"You. Up on your feet."

"I'm pretty tired," I told him.

"Up. On. Your. Feet."

I turned to behold him. Blake might be too big to fit through the doorway, but he could certainly make his own way. He could tear this house apart without any trouble.

“Aren’t you guys tired of kicking the snot out of me?”

“You hurt Todd. You heal him up.”

Now I did stand. “I’ll heal any Wizards you guys throw in the jaws of the lions, but I’m not healing any of your guys.”

“Is that so?”

“That’s so.”

“A Healer that won’t heal is just an extra mouth to feed,” he said.

“I think we’re agreed then, you can let me go.”

Now he threw back his head and laughed. “Get your ass out here and heal up Todd.”

“No.”

“Archie?” he said.

I heard a sigh, and a muttered curse about how nobody was supposed to call him by his real name. Then Boss edged his way in, past Blake’s gigantic bulk.

“Archie?” I asked, with perfect innocence.

“Yeah. You interviewed me.”

“You look completely different,” I confessed. “Shaved head, tattoos, and a whole lot of extra Physicality.”

He grunted and untied my wrists, then heaved me over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes. “That’s what happens when you actually have a chance to level up.”

I was then taken out to one of the tents, where Todd lay in the waning light, and set on my feet.

“Heal him.”

“I already refused.”

“You’re low on hit points, Squishy,” Boss said, “Don’t make me—“

“Kill me? A Guardian is supposed to protect, not kill.”

“A Healer is supposed to heal, not allow people to suffer.”

I just arched an eyebrow at him. “Yes, it’s weird that I pushed Todd into an oncoming tree and he bashed his face, just so I could heal him up to farm some experience.”

He scowled at the implication that he was putting people in harm's way deliberately, so he could save them and get the experience points.

"Okay," I said loudly, "I'm definitely not going to pull a weapon and attempt to murder this guy. That's what a Healer doesn't do. I'm not going to shove him into a cloud of poison gas either, because that's what a Healer doesn't do, and I'm—"

Drat slid silently into the room, sighed loud enough that both Boss and Blake stopped being blockheaded idiots, and snatched up the healing potions I'd brewed up. He shoved one in my face and took the others.

Then almost immediately I leveled up in Healer.

***

In the deep of night, I was awakened by a light touch. My eyes shot open and I prepared to defend myself. I half-expected Drat to tell me just what in the heck he had been thinking killing one of those guys.

Instead Cinzy was right in my personal bubble, inches from my face. She was only wearing a v-neck t-shirt, so far as I could tell, and I got quite the view down her front with her bent over like this. She caught me looking and smiled.

I darted a look out toward the entrance of my makeshift laboratory.

"We're safe," she said. "He's sleeping." She had no trouble hypnotizing the guards or putting them to sleep. I just hoped we had enough time before the guard's shift ended and someone came to replace him.

Cinzy then returned to her position a half inch from my face, close enough that I could feel the warmth radiating off her. "What you did today…" she breathed.

I nodded. I had lured that Todd guy into a trap, baited him, and it had been painfully obvious. It was just good luck that Todd and the other Guardians were too stupid to see that trap laid right in

front of their eyes.

"You're something special, Fletcher," she murmured, eyes half closed. I wasn't entirely sure what to say to that, and Cinzy saved me from saying anything by continuing. "I was right to give you my… to let you…"

"You were right to let me bend you over and shove my cock up your back door?" I breathed. I still wasn't happy with her for luring me into a trap.

"I knew you were a good guy."

In order to be quiet enough, we had to be close. Real close. Cinzy had straddled me and her hair hung in a curtain around my face.

"A good guy wouldn't let a girl get cold, would he?" she asked.

"I'm not pleased with you."

"There's more going on here than you understand. Please?"

I opened up my sleeping bag and she shuffled in, pressing herself against me. Gods, she wasn't wearing a bra. My arm got nestled right in her cleavage, which was bountiful, smooth, soft, and perfect. I needed to use better adjectives when describing this goddess.

"Thank you…" Better than nothing, I guess. "I've been thinking about you ever since. I can't get my mind off you."

She was going to say more but I leaned forward and kissed her. Her eyes went wide only for a moment, before she kissed me back. This wasn't a peck, this was passion. She pressed full lips to mine and was soon licking everything she could get her tongue on. Then she had her hands on my shoulders and my chest, rubbing around my body.

"I don't care if you were doing Ivy and Isabelle. One of them probably knew you were so good, and they knew you could give them what they couldn't give each other… they took advantage of what a good guy you are."

Swinging one leg over, she straddled me and continued kissing. Now she added grinding to that. Before long she had slid one hand

down between us and was rubbing my full, very hard length.

"When we touched, I saw the kind of guy you are," she whispered, and kissed me again. "But I… forgot. When you talk back to Blake's goons, I see it again. It turns me on so much."

One hand slithered into my pants and took hold of me. The kissing continued. She poured all her passion and longing into my mouth, and slid her body against mine.

"And then you really messed up that jerk." Her shirt went flying off, and I was grateful to have **Eagle Eyed**, because her naked body was glorious to behold. Curves were soft, over strongly toned muscles. My free hand drifted up to them automatically, gently teasing at her nipples and kneading her flesh.

"Cinzy, we need to get out of here," I told her in between kisses. My hormones really wanted me inside her, but my brain really wanted me free of Blake and this insanity.

"I… do you trust me, Fletcher?"

What kind of question was that? She had done a fair amount to erode trust. She was sleeping, if not with the enemy, then *near* the enemy.

"There's a plan," she whispered anyway. "Drat has a plan." Still she slowly stroked up and down, teasing, maddening.

"Then untie me," I told her.

She scrambled to comply. As much as I didn't want to go along with this plan, if she and Drat had a way to save these poor Wizards from getting repeatedly sacrificed, I'd do it.

Hands freed, I stood and backed her into the laboratory's log wall. I put her hands up and held both wrists in mine.

"I'm sor—" she didn't have time to say, before I kissed her again. Hard. My newest ability **Drive In Deeper** had activated and I was rejuvenating hit points at a furious pace. Once we both came, I would get a Likability Token back. It would do.

"There's something I need you to know," I told her quietly, while stroking the junction of her thighs. I slipped my hand further down and into her panties, where I found her shaven smooth, and already

wet.

"I don't care," she breathed. "If it's Regina, if it's Tara, if it's Larelle and Chrysta. I don't care. I need you."

"You can have one of my abilities," I told her, skimming her panties down her thighs and off her feet, one after another. I proceeded to squat down before her and run my tongue over every available inch. She pressed one hand against my head and began humping my face. I put my enhanced tongue to work, slithering it up inside her while raking the broad part over the little nubbin of flesh. She cried out, then was forced to clamp a hand over her mouth when I used **Entwined Ecstasy**.

With the bonus to pleasure, it only took her two minutes to begin shuddering with climax. She began to melt against the wall of the lab bonelessly, and I turned her around so her ass was pointed directly at me. Gods but she was delicious. She still had the piebald patches of light and dark skin everywhere, but the shape of her was perfect: thin, toned, with a nice heart-shaped ass. She wanted me stuffed in there.

I raised one of her feet and placed it on the makeshift work table Blake's people had made, and worked a finger up into her back door.

"You get an ability," I told her, "I get an ability from you."

"Oh… okay," she breathed. She clearly didn't care about anything but the sensations I was giving her.

"You want my cock?" I breathed.

"Mmmm," was the only response.

"In your ass?"

Her mouth opened and closed, again and again, until she seemed to realize sound wasn't coming out. Instead of speaking she nodded.

"This can't happen again," I lied, and she made a petulant whimpering sound. "Not here. You help me get out of here, and I'll do this whenever you like," I whispered, and pressed forward. I expected more resistance, but her backside opened up to allow the head in, and from there it was only a matter of adding lubrication before slowly thrusting in and out.

And then, with my health some two thirds full, she was jamming herself back against me, slapping her cheeks against my abs. With one hand clapped over her mouth, she forked herself onto me.

I luxuriated in this for a time, loving the sight almost as much as the incredible tightness of her ass clamping against me.

"Did you give this incredible ass to anyone else?" I demanded quietly.

"Nn… nnn…"

With a thought, I told the Adaptability Quality to relax, and my cock swelled outwards to its full size. She gave a squeak so adorable and pathetic, I was tempted to tell her I had feelings for her.

"You promise?"

She nodded, then leaned back when I relaxed the enormous pressure of my full size back down a bit, and kissed me hard. I don't know how long we remained like that, with her jamming her ass back onto me and kissing, with me running my hands over her boobs and down to play with her clit. She came once, slumped to the wall, and came again when I didn't stop the assault.

Every time her ass smashed into my abs it rippled in a delicious way that sent me closer to the edge. Every time she smashed it down she squeezed onto me and gripped my whole cock tight. Every iota of movement only served to drive me crazier.

Part of me wanted to recreate the mental image of Tara waddling around in the kitchen, seriously pregnant with my spawn. I wanted to pull out and blast up into the right place, make her mine forever. Instead I grabbed her hips and shoved upwards, then pumped everything I had into her bowels.

This is Christopher using his favorite kind of leverage.



Chapter 37- What Is Drat's Deal

I was glad of the weather change, and for the night being comfortable. I was also glad for Durability, because it was almost certainly helping me to stay comfortable in the current weather. It would have been too cold for the old me.

After absolutely rearranging Cinzy's understanding of pleasure, we lay there cuddling. I had hopes for another Pleasure Seeker level, but it was not to be.

The first thing I did was produce the **Prismatic Apparel**. "You'll need this," I told her.

"What? Why?"

It came off me as a shirt, but quickly transformed into a slinky cocktail dress. Cinzy looked at me and arched an eyebrow.

"I didn't mean to make it do that," I told her. She continued staring. "Okay I definitely want to see you in that. Anyway, the reason you'll need it… just identify it and you'll see."

She did, and her eyes lit up. "Holy moly, Fletcher. Thank you."

"Welcome," I said, and began to go through my system works.

First up, I'd spent 3 Likability Tokens to boost Cinzy's pleasure, and also to induct her into the fold.

Entwined Ecstasy: *You have entwined with Cinzia Graham. Your relationship status is* ***acquaintances****. These two are familiar with one another but still have a ways to go.*

Pleasure from intimate acts between ***acquaintances*** *is boosted a small amount.*

The next UI message that arrived pertained to bringing her into the fold.

***Entwined Ecstasy**: You have brought Cinzia Graham into the fold. She has gained the ability **Healer's Breath**.*

*You have reached your maximum capacity for abilities gained through Entwined Ecstasy. You may choose to strengthen the associated ability (**Beast Talker**) or gain **Cinzia's Entrancing Ululation**.*

I stared at the screen in fascination for several minutes. The new ability ***Cinzia's Entrancing Ululation*** was common, worked off Likability, and was active. It would require Tokens to activate. On the other hand, it would affect a large amount of people, anyone who heard the wail.

Meanwhile, **Beast Talker** was already uncommon and also passive. It granted me bonuses with Nakamamon. I'd already used this to identify and befriend a number of Nakamamon, including Shakindria.

I decided that this time, I was going to strengthen **Beast Talker**, just to see what happened. Right now it was nebulous. With luck I could get another chance at gaining ***Cinzia's Entrancing Ululation***.

***Beast Talker II** has advanced to **Beast Talker III**.*

All right. That was quick.

Beast Talker III

(Special Ability, Uncommon, passive)

I- Your Likability is considered +4 when dealing with non-humanoid Nakamamon found in the wild. You gain a Persuasion skill of +5 with them as well. Your Identify is considered +7 when used on a new species.

II- Your Likability and Persuasion are considered +2 with all Nakamamon.

**Note: these bonuses are lost if you take hostile action against any Nakamamon.*

Okay now *that* was a serious increase over the last level. Although it might not help me out of this situation… actually it might. I needed to give it a think, instead of just relying on my Healer abilities to make me punch and kickproof.

Entwine more deeply with Cinzia Graham to unlock further abilities.

Earlier in the day, I'd reached 19 in Healer, though. When you used **Healer's Breath** a lot, negotiated on behalf of your patients and brewed up quick potions, that was enough.

I hadn't dealt with it, because of meditation and then being interrupted by Cinzy.

Level 19: +3 skill points

Yes! Another three skill points.

I quickly put one into Divine Resistance, and froze looking at the screen. There were so many. My Potions skill had increased without me spending points on it, so it was possible to just practice my way into leveling up. For now those would remain unspent.

The last thing was the Great Replenishing. Once I reached level 20 as a Healer, all my spent Tokens would come back. This meant I could (and would) go all out in the short term, spending like a maniac, and grab all my Tokens back one level later.

Escape wasn't just possible, it was within reach. What I needed was a plan.

Cinzy rested her head on my chest and ran fingers over my hip bones and abs. "We need to talk," she breathed.

"I'm listening." I needed to know what was going on with Drat. Did she know? Was she in on it? While this could've just been about feelings, or the Ivy and Isabelle situation, I doubted it. Cinzy knew I wanted out.

"I'm sorry," she muttered. "When I saw you with those two, I couldn't… I didn't… it was this big… deal. It was a big deal, okay?"

Without a clear idea what she was talking about, I just waited.

This was definitely one of those times where waiting was going to be better than opening my mouth and butting in.

"I don't let just anyone…" she motioned around between her legs. "…get in my business. It was special to me. I thought, you know, it was, it was special to you."

This was the same girl who could talk as smooth as she pleased at any given time. This was the hottest girl I had ever seen. She knew she was, too. She had anyone and everyone wrapped around her finger if she wanted. Yet here she was, tripping all over herself, getting in her own way.

"Listen to me," I told her. "Are you listening?"

She nodded.

"I should have told you. In the heat of the moment, I just wanted you. That was my mistake. I should have told you about the others. I tried to, but there wasn't a right time."

She nodded. "I get that."

"And if I'm being completely honest, I'd like to avoid dying more than I would like to have this conversation. I want out of here."

Her face twitched. "I… can't."

"You can."

"You don't understand."

"Make me understand."

"One of the Wizards… is my brother."

Okay. That was fine. Fine like that meme of the dog in the burning kitchen. *Everything's fine. This is fine.*

"Which one?" I asked, knowing it didn't matter. If I was going to save one of these guys, I was going to save them all. But it mattered enough to Cinzy to being me out here.

"Chris. He's the… he looks like me."

No, he didn't. If I'd noticed a male version of a bikini model cover girl, I'd remember it. However, I did clock the blonde hair I was pretty sure Cinzy had, along with the facial structure.

Well this was a new issue. Cinzy would clearly do anything to get

her brother out of this situation, which made a lot of sense. Just because it made sense to keep me tied up here and at Blake's mercy did not mean it was right.

"Fletcher, I like you," she said. "But he's my brother. I can't have him die. And Drat…"

There it was. Drat what?

But she fell silent. "I can't yet. I'll tell you when it's time."

"The more I know, the more I can help." Right now I was penalizing both she and Drat with orders they weren't fulfilling. If she let me in, I could rescind those orders and put new orders into place that gave her experience points. More Bard levels would help her influence these idiots. Blake's people might think there was no way to level up unless you dangled your friends over the Sarlacc pit's gross open mouth, but Ivy and Isabelle had leveled up several times under my leadership, and they were hardly guarding anything.

It didn't matter about the experience, obviously. She had found her brother out here, figured out what Blake and the Guardians were doing, then worked to get me here. Had she met Drat and showed him first, or after? I wanted to imagine Drat made up his plans and they included telling my team what was going on.

Seeing Tara's bonded Nakamamon out on a search patrol told me Drat and Cinzy were working this plan by themselves. However, without me there to mix up more of the anti-magic serum, she'd have to speed back to HQ for a second time.

"There's… he's going… we're going to get all of them into the city." I gave her more time to explain in further detail, but there wasn't any. A sound outside had us jumping up, had us dressing in the dark.

I motioned to my rope restraints, but didn't say anything. After all, I wasn't pleased about her just leaving the team when things didn't go her way. Nor was I pleased about her brother being a Wizard on this expedition, and that steering her actions. She quickly tied my hand back to the post where I'd been tied before.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, and snuck out the window.

"I know," I told an empty room.

A face poked itself in, and then one of the Guardians snorted and entered. He was a smaller version of Blake: like a mountain had turned into a human. His head brushed the ceiling, and the doorway was only about three feet wide, so he had to turn sideways a bit to get his shoulders in here.

"Go put a bandage on it yourself."

"What?"

"I'm not healing Guardians," I told him.

He looked around the little shack, then brought up a small piece of paper and traced a shape on it. The mark, a magical sigil, burned the paper from the middle on outward, and Alan's light spell ignited in the small space.

Suddenly I was squinting.

"What—"

The guy swiped his hand about the room as though he were clearing spiderwebs. He madly thrashed about a few times, and poked his fingers up into the rafters as well, before grunting and leaving. The hovering ball of light followed after him.

The moment he was gone I noted Drat there in the corner.

"Idiot," he commented drily. As a Rogue, the beaky-nosed bastard had the unique ability to speak and have almost no one hear him. Cinzy had to whisper because her natural speaking voice attracted everyone's attention, but Drat seemed to naturally fade into the background. I'd been like that for basically my whole life after the accident.

"Who's the idiot? Me or him?"

"Both of you, obviously."

I nodded in satisfaction. That was the Drat I knew.

"Why didn't you tell me about this plan of yours?" I asked.

"Yeah, you'd have Tara or Regina watching at all times, or all four of the guards on standby so the first time you got punched they would rush in… and get themselves killed. Blake is not a joke."

"Why do it at all?"

He rolled his eyes. "I had to make sure Cinzy got somewhere safe. She didn't. She went around the town and ran into these chucklefucks. Blake won't let her leave. She's almost as much of a hostage as you. Good thing she can persuade them not to rip her clothes off and get after her. But she'll run out of Tokens eventually, with the xp penalties you've got her under."

"And so then what?"

"Pretend to betray you to gain their trust, get Cinzy to get you out here so her brother doesn't get killed by accident. You know they had nine Wizards when they started? They're down to eight."

Okay it was hard to argue with that too.

"You get xp and replenish your Tokens for doing your job. You stand a good chance of breaking out of here." He wasn't wrong. Tokens were good for getting done anything that was really fracking hard. "I needed you to throw these people off their game and you did that today. One down, eleven gigantic assholes to go."

I sighed. "I'm not looking to get all these people killed off, Drat."

"I don't think we have a choice, Boy Scout. If you get another one to take a nose dive into a tree I'll handle them."

"No you won't."

"Don't do that," he said, scowling. "These guys have to die."

"This isn't a movie, Drat. We don't have to murder our way to safety. That's not how this world works." In fact, there was evidence to make me think Blake and his people had caused the Slinktrickle situation just by being like they were being. "They can get fired and have their powers stripped and end up back on earth. This is an HQ decision. Neither of us get to play judge, jury or executioner."

Come to think of it, I wouldn't be astonished to discover that the Glumpdumpkin issue originated with Blake and his people being jackasses in the town, then moving out before everything got worse for them.

Drat shrugged. "So long as you're locked up, I keep doing things my way. It'd be nice if you dropped the xp blocks with the orders

attached, but you do you. I ain't the boss and I'm not about to start trying to get the position."

He popped off the wall he'd been leaning against and gave me a small clay tablet. Etched into it were infinitesimally small words. He then produced a piece of paper like the one that had just created the light spell and traced the runes with his finger. While the paper burned itself out and released a hidden cache of mana somehow, the tablet expanded until it was newspaper sized.

"Are you still in contact with them?"

He leveled a look at me that said 'what kind of amateur do I look like?'

"What about the anti-magic formula?" I asked. "Are they getting it?"

"There's a stockpile from the last batch you made," he said. "Also, Blake and his people have a stockpile." Meaning, I guessed, my team had a stockpile. Because he was a sneaky sneak thief.

"You need to give Blake a dose, tonight. Right now. That's an order."

He gave me a look, and sighed.

He pulled out another sheaf of paper. "From our captive Wizard pals. This one was from Cinzy's brother." He pointed down towards the tablet he'd enlarged. "That there is an experiment."

It was a list of orders. The first one was *Guardians should train in hand to hand combat at least two hours a day, and that's an order.* Next was: *Rangers should train in archery or dual wielding melee weapons at least two hours a day, and that's an order.*

"What am I doing with this?"

"The idea is that if you issue the order, and it works, they'll get xp for doing the things that need doing, to help prepare for the final part of my plan." Again he shrugged. "But of course it's up to you, being the boss man. If you don't want to do it, don't. We just have to plan on losing people."

He stared at me for several moments.

I couldn't believe I was doing this. First, I lifted the blanket of

orders that was on him, and then the one Cinzy had been given. In the current orders list, a whole host still remained as ongoing:

**Guardians maintain the camp and provide firewood.*

**Guardians patrol during the day and set up watch at night.*

**Rangers hunt and gather what is necessary each day to boost food reserves.*

**Rangers collect a short list of herbs.*

**All members are to expand their Nakamadex entries when possible.*

**Wizard is to learn and cast a variety of new spells.*

**Sorcerer is to create and maintain stone houses, including ventilation and sewage systems, establish a tunnel system linking these to a safe redoubt, and create an escape tunnel from the redoubt to a place of significant distance from any potential threat.*

The last one was entirely to give Trent a lot of busywork so he could advance his Sorcerer level doing his earth magic. And because of what had happened in Slinktrickle.

There were a bunch of others: for Trent to look for and catalogue earth aspect Nakamamon, to bring those specimens to the others of the team if possible, for Alan to maintain daily contact with HQ and compile a daily report. And on. And on.

I'd even had orders for Trent: to scout, mostly, to find any secrets the townsfolk might have if possible, to alert the team of danger so they had sufficient response time.

"I'll try this, but I want it to be known that I'm still not happy with you," I told him.

"That's good," he said, dismissing me with a shrug. "I wouldn't be happy with me either."

"Why are you doing this then?"

"One, it was the best way to get the fewest number of our people killed. Two, I have to do things through skullduggery, secrecy or deception in order to get Rogue experience. It really does advocate me to act like a bastard."

I stared, and he stared right back. The staring contest only concluded with him giving me a creepy smile. Like 'Well? I don't make the rules, I just live by them.'

I mumbled out the first order to the team, and was amazed to find that the order sank into the menu. I thought the team was too far away; I'd been wrong.

That done, I cleared out the old orders and rattled off these new ones. Drat nodded, grabbed out another spell scroll paper, and shrank down the clay tablet when I was done with it.

"A pleasure doing business with you," he said.

This is Christopher both not pleased with his Rogue, and weirdly proud.



Chapter 38- Saving Your Butt

I ended up using **Healer's Endurance** to handle the effects of sleeplessness for the day, and meditated through the night. Now that I could get a Token every three-ish hours when under ideal circumstances, I used the time to grab up two more Tokens by the time the camp roused. This was, sadly, not ideal circumstances. I had a good ten hours between Trent disappearing and the remainder of Blake's team getting all up in my business, which gave me time to get two Tokens: one of the Physicality I'd used to handle Todd, and one Likability I'd used in bringing Cinzy into the fold.

Meditation specifically told me with window prompts that having my hand tied like this had a negative impact on my ability to meditate, and I wholeheartedly agreed. I had to stand up to get blood flowing to my wrist and hand. Meditation should not be done while standing, the UI informed me.

Still, it was the best I could do.

I didn't have an opportunity to get away according to Trent's plan for another several days. First, they were taking the severe incapacitation of Todd quite seriously, and had me on a short leash. Second, now that they knew about my special ability **Verdant Rejuvenation**, Boss and Blake made sure somebody watched while I planted all the cuttings and gave them some water.

If I watered them later in the day, they'd essentially grow themselves. Beyond that, I couldn't be sure what else needed doing. Could I just lay them on solid stone and water them there, without shoving the cuttings into soil? Could I do it on the back of Muppin while we traveled? These were the kinds of experiments I wanted to do, not play nurse to a bunch of megalomaniacal gym bros.

The heightened security meant we headed down to the lake only briefly, and they used a single Wizard between the four Guardians instead of two. This meant training two of them, while two stayed

stuck on my butt like ticks. Imperil the Wizard, save the Wizard, gain experience points.

In those times, I used **Beast Talker** to engage with any Nakamamon I saw. I was able to befriend a Shrubbet, though the process wasn't simple.

Any time I took any action, Blake's Boys would stop me. First I had to Identify a creature, then see if I couldn't silently beckon it to me. I had to reach out with Affinity and make contact. This meant channeling some mana and drawing it up into my third eye, the place in my forehead where the casting happened. The first time, it was by cooking up what looked like a potion. It was instead a tasty vegetable concoction.

The Shrubbet broke out of its foliage illusion, drawing the leafy parts that were the backs of its enormous ears so it could peek out. It then collapsed back the leaves a second later, and became nothing more than an innocent bush before anyone noticed.

It peeked out several times before taking several hesitant steps forward.

"That's right," I breathed. "Good. Gosh you're cute."

It was shaped something like a regular rabbit, really big. Nearly three feet high. It had brownish gray skin that mimicked bark, and big amber eyes. The ears had to be at least three feet long… they went up and then down, and when they were draped along its back they looked like a cloak.

It crept forward until it smelled what the Healer was cooking.

"Atta girl." Identify had told me this one was a female.

"What. In the hell. Is that?"

"It's a Shrubbet," I admitted. "Harmless. Don't kill."

The mana-infused concoction I had cooked up was nothing more than vegetables in a soup.

The cutesy thing twitched its nose several times, regarding the Guardians. I'd succeeded with a Charm check using Likability, with my Charm skill boosted from zero to five using **Beast Talker**.

"What's it doing?"

“Probably wounded,” I lied, and scored 3 successes on a Deceit check using **Fierce**, the ability I’d gained from Ivy. I silently thanked Ivy for needing that D, and for giving me the tools to navigate this situation. “It wants some hp back.”

The boiled and mana infused vegetables were only good because creatures liked getting mana. They would, of course, help hp generation along a little, as all food did. Mostly though, it just liked the scents of the herbs I put in, and wanted some carrots, potatoes, and broccoli infused with rosemary and oregano.

“You’re all right,” I told the creature while it ate. The Guardians hadn’t moved, but were instead just watching it in fascination.

Once it finished, I tried to coax it over to me for a pet or two. I wanted to know if the bark looking skin was fuzzy and soft like I hoped, or bark-like and hard, like I suspected. Just as I was succeeding an Animal Handling check, the other two Guardians came thrashing through the brush, up from the lake, holding a Wizard who looked mostly dead.

“You know,” I said, before breathing on him and restoring some hit points right off the bat, “I would be willing to bet those Nakamamon you’re baiting have figured out there’ll be free Wizard on a hook every day about this time. They’re probably not happy about having them snatched away every day.”

“Nakamamon don’t think,” the one retorted. “The ones in the towns are so stupid, can barely build houses, don’t have technology…”

“The ones in that town just walked in, laid down and slept,” another one said. “And the ones behind them didn’t get what was happening, so they did the same thing.”

“Blake and the Wizards had it figured out in minutes,” the third one said.

“Dumb as hammers,” the first one confirmed.

My job was Healer, not Teacher. I just shrugged and brewed up another healing potion.

***

The next day wasn't out to the lake, but a rift in the ground. The Guardian in charge this time was a guy I was coming to think of as number three behind Boss and Blake, one of only two with wiry climbers' builds instead of hulking rocks with arms and legs. He had a mop of curly light brown hair and a nose with its own elbow. You could call it aquiline, but for followers of Blake I'd call it a camel hump.

This guy's name was Nate, and he was even worse than Blake and Boss because he was a super bro.

"Yo this is gonna be sick. We've never gotten a proper look down in the gorge before, bro."

I kept my mouth shut, even though I wanted to give a deadpan 'bro' and arch an eyebrow in his direction.

The other three Guardians were on his wavelength, chatting excitedly about how lit this was and how sick it was gonna be to see a really massive and dangerous creature.

The Wizard they had with them, I could now identify as Cinzy's brother. Although he wasn't nearly as gorgeous as her, I noted the resemblance right away. They had the same color eyes, same hair, and an identical face shape.

I was not, right now, being listened to by any of these mammoth idiots. I was also, as a Healer and a decent human being, wary of anything the Guardians were up to because I had a vested interest in keeping the Wizards alive.

Knowing what I now knew, I had a little extra motivation to keep Cinzy's brother alive. She was known to flip out over these sorts of things, and I sure would've flipped out if my sister were about to be dangled in front of lions, only to have him yanked away at the last second.

Or after the last second, when the lions started munching on him.

We arrived at the gorge, a rent in the earth that seemed like a

disaster waiting to happen. First of all, it was a good long way down, like thirty to fifty feet. Secondly, I could already see a collection of bones down there. Third, large shapes moved out of sight when the lanterns started floating down.

It seemed to widen out as you went down, so it would be rough to climb up or down. Also, it allowed anything and everything to hide down there in the copious shadows. Worse still, the gorge itself was hardly twenty feet across at the top. They'd be dropping straight down, a long way, and into what? Absolutely no way to know. And almost no way to climb out.

If only Trent were here.

The Guardians, led by head bro Nate, used the light spell from the Wizards, attached to small paper lanterns. These floated slowly downward, illuminating all the handholds and little cavelets in the walls. I had no idea what carved these, but they were jagged in some places, and the mini-caves looked like perfect hiding spots for all sorts of dangerous Nakamamon.

"You're Chris?" I asked Cinzy's brother.

His head swiveled over away from the danger toward me. "Huh?"

"Chris, right? That's your name?"

"Yeah. Yeah. Chris."

"I'm Fletcher."

"I know. I've seen you around. You've been healing the guys up."

"My name's also Chris. Christopher."

He stared at me, but I could tell I wasn't getting through. He was sickly pale and trembling, contemplating a future without himself in it.

"Yeah well I'm not a fan of Blake or this insane scheme," I told him. "I'm gonna keep you alive." A promise I didn't know if I could make.

"Hey, Healer," bro Nate called. "You best get some potions and shit ready in advance, yo. This could get pretty ugly."

"It is so weird," I muttered under my breath, so only Chris and I

could hear, "that Guardians keep failing to do their jobs." Meanwhile, I cracked open my pack and got to rummaging around for the right ingredients. We didn't need a torch, since the Wizard could just create fire using a spell.

"They need greater and greater danger for the same amount of experience," Chris told me, just as quietly.

I nodded. That would do it.

"It'd be really nice if we could level them up to wherever they want to get before we all die," he said. The bitterness in his tone made me wince. The Wizard who'd died was undoubtedly his friend.

"I've got your back," I said.

He nodded toward Nate and the Boys. "That should be *their* job." Then he blew out air in a sound like 'pfffffffff.' I totally got it.

They began by having Chris use a 'feather' spell on them, and himself. Chris protested that this would slow them down from coming to his aid if he was attacked, but Nate just stood there, arms crossed. Chris cast the spells.

Afterwards, they took up positions, and Chris was ordered to jump. He locked eyes with me, and I nodded. *You got this*, I tried to tell him with my gaze.

Then he jumped.

I hadn't understood until this moment, when the last piece clicked into place. It wouldn't work if one of Blake's Boys pushed him. My specific xp triggers worked if I healed somebody. They didn't work if I made someone sick just to nurse them back to full health. They had to guard him from danger, not place him in the heart of danger. Chris had to jump into the jaws of the beast himself, and then Nate and company needed to wait until he was in real danger before getting him out for the biggest xp gain.

If Chris didn't jump, they would kick the crap out of him until he agreed. If he was down hit points when he jumped in, that lowered his chances of survival.

It was insane. Blake was insane. All this for level ups?

That said, my body had been largely cured of my shattered legs,

growth plate injuries, and the issues that followed, just by grabbing some points of Physicality. Cinzy was practically irresistible from her enhanced Likability. Isabelle and the others had shrugged off terrible injuries with Durability. The attributes just made you *better*.

Of course Blake wanted what he considered his fair share. He had to watch Wizards research their way to high level, Sorcerers cast their way to high level, and Rangers literally just wander the land their way to high level… and this world didn't know violence.

Nate and the other three Guardians took up a box formation, ready to get down in the gorge at any angle.

The moment I had my first doses of workable healing potion, the Nakamamon showed itself. I had just taken the mixture off the fire when the earth-rumbling growl drifted up from above.

One of Blake's Boys swore under his breath and began backing away in fear. Nate was the leader here, and flicked a hand out toward his underling, but the Guardian fled. He noped right out of this bad situation.

"Don't move, bro. Don't make a sound," Nate said quietly.

Chris wasn't the type of person to freeze in place. He backed away from whatever was down there. It resolved into a huge shape with three rows of glowing eyes on either side of its blunt head.

Identify gave me some insight.

Ferrosaur

First Stage Nakamamon

Ferrosaur live in underground caverns, gorges, and some river valleys, where they feed on other earth aspect Nakamamon, and veins of metal. These are territorial creatures, and won't abide their mating or hunting grounds being invaded.

Typical length: 20-40 foot from nose to tail (large)

Typical weight: 1500-4000 pounds

Gender: unknown

Aspect: Draconic/earth

Transformations: unknown -> Ferrosaur -> unknown

***Ferrosaur** has been added to your Nakamadex.*

The creature was built a bit like an alligator, but with more legs. It looked very earthen: craggy and cracked, with sharp ridges of metallic and rocky stuff running down its back. It also had thick, trunk-like legs ending in shining metallic claws easily dagger-sized, possibly longer. It was pretty far away; things always seem smaller from up high.

"Fuuuuuuuuuuck," one of Nate's buddies said.

"We need to get down there," Nate said, and the creature paused at the sounds. I noted that none of them moved. Shocker.

"That thing's going to bite him in half," the third Guardian said, like he was just watching an amazing dinosaur movie for the first time. There were only three Guardians now, a fact that didn't fill me with confidence.

"Get down there," I urged.

The Ferrosaur took another testing step towards Chris. A long forked tongue flicked out and tasted the air. None of the Guardians moved.

"Chris!" I called down, and got the attention of the dinosaur made of metal. Several eyes fixed on me, and it made a grating noise like two rocks crunching together. "Does that spell make you jump real high?"

He shook his head.

"Bro, shut up," Nate hissed. "We're—"

"But it reduces your weight?"

A tiny nod this time. Chris wasn't looking at me, but instead was staring at the creature easily the size of two of the world's biggest crocodiles mushed together side by side.

"Can you run wide—"

I stopped. Another Ferrosaur had just poked its head out into view… behind Chris.

"Aww come on!" I shouted, and immediately grabbed up my backpack. "You fracking cowards, get down there and save him!"

I was gratified to grab a temporary Durability and Physicality Token using **Fierce**. It had caused a Taunt check, though it still hadn't caused any of them to grow enough balls to challenge the creatures. The Tokens were very fracking great, because I chose the best point I could, threw some of my Healer paraphernalia at the beasts, and jumped down.

Now… you might say to yourself, what kind of idiot would do such a thing? You'd be right in assuming that. My parents and my sister were looking at me like I'd just transformed into a Ferrosaur before their very eyes.

My aim was to hit the far wall and stop myself. This was a Very Difficult Physicality check, so I immediately burned four of my five Tokens doing that. With muscles bulging, I slammed into a ledge and hung on.

The Healer stuff was having its intended effect. The cook kit, the pot, and the tin cups were all tasty little morsels for the metal and rock dragons. It sniffed at the first pot that landed near it, then gobbled it right up.

"Left, Chris!" I shouted.

He went left, just as the second creature trundled forward after my scattered offerings. Ignoring him completely, thank the gods.

"Okay," I muttered to myself, and burned another four Tokens getting to the bottom of the gorge. There went my last Physicality Token, along with three of my Free Tokens. One after another they went *cla-cling! cla-cling! cla-cling! cla-cling!*

Nate and his two remaining friends were having kittens. They were yelling and frantic now that the only Healer in the party had put himself in the lion's jaws. Blake was going to rip their skin off and wear their faces like a mask, according to Nate's panicked, swear-filled shouts.

Good. Frack them. They needed to get their butts down here, or better yet, not put innocent and harmless Wizards in these kinds of

positions.

"What are you doing down here?" Chris demanded.

"I'm saving your butt, you butt. Obviously."

This is Fletcher just feet away from the jaws of death.



Chapter 39- Drunken Confessions

The air down here was damp and cool. It smelled distinctly of minerals. That said, I didn't dislike it. Bones of unlucky creatures aside, it would've made a pretty cool place to chill out. Back on earth, with my busted body, I'd never had a chance to do anything cool like spelunking or jet skis or surfing or anything like that. Now all of a sudden I could leap down fifteen feet and just use a concentrated burst of magic.

It didn't take long for the metal dragons, the Ferrosaurs, to finish off the meager meal I'd provided for them. They chomped down on the tin cups, the pots, the cook kit, and all my silverware in seconds. In those seconds, though, I'd led Chris around behind the first one and towards where the gorge opened out. It did not provide much in the way of advantages, but at the end of this tear in the dirt and soil, Chris found a place that looked climbable. Treacherous, but climbable.

"You got any Physicality Tokens?" I asked.

"Two," he groused.

"Free Tokens?"

"One."

"You got a spell you can use? Invisibility? Flight? Teleport?"

"Um…"

Of course he didn't. The Guardians hadn't allowed them to have any of the material components for their spells. Not the *good* spells anyway, the ones that would allow them a chance to get away.

Above us, Nate and his two remaining Guardian buddies continued to not do their jobs. They were shouting at one another to do something while not doing that, and trying to get us up by sheer

force of will.

The one dragon was lumbering in a circle to try to face us again, while the second one merely crawled overtop its mate to get at us.

It was hard to see what this place could possibly give the two metal dragons as a habitat, until you saw the holes in the earth at the bottom of the gorge here. They burrowed tunnels to and fro—in order to feed most likely—and it made a lot more sense for the gorge to be a place where they might hang out, and get a hint of sun now and again.

The second Ferrosaur opened its mouth and darted a tongue out over its chops that scratched and screeched, and created sparks. The tongue had barbs of metal on it, and so did its face.

There was nothing left to do now…

"Heyyyyy you," I told the gigantic creature, one hand out like that famous Chris in the movies. I kept my tone even and gentle, like I was just about to produce another tasty treat. "You don't want to do anything you'll regret."

The **Beast Talker** ability gave me a whole lot of goodies in this sort of situation. +4 Likability and +5 Persuaion for non-humanoids like this, plus a stacking bonus of +2 Likability and +2 Persuasion for all Nakamamon. Right now my Likability was on par with Cinzy's, as far as Nakamamon were concerned.

Over my shoulder, I said, "Come on, Chris. We need a spell, or you need to start climbing."

"Uh… uh… right."

The creatures had several rows of metallic spines on their scales that made them appear practically invulnerable. Likewise their claws could've been used by a blacksmith to produce a short sword each. And though their reddish eyes were all fixed on me, and their tongues darted out to get a taste of the air, I thought maybe this was going to work.

"We're good," I soothed at it. "We're all friends here. We're not the food you like, and we definitely can't hurt you."

The first Persuasion check came.

***Persuasion check**: Normally, you do not have the associated skill for this check, but due to Beast Talker your Persuasion skill is boosted to 7. Your associated attribute, Likability, is likewise boosted, and sits at level 12. This check is Extreme. Would you like to spend 6 Tokens for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 5 Likability and 6 Free Tokens.

This was not, however, part of my duties as a Healer. No free retry, and no double Token effect. At 19 levels, I could perhaps grab 5 to 7 successes… it was a gamble, but that was life.

I pressed 'no' and let the check go about its business.

***Success!** You have persuaded the Ferrosaurs not to attack.*

Both of them stopped and raised their heads, licking out at the air with their metallic, barbed tongues again and again, though the flicking was lazier. My Affinity, and sensing the mana moving through them told me their focus shifted to Nate and his goons.

I breathed a sigh of relief, though the job wasn't over yet.

"Great," I cooed at the creatures. "That's great. You guys are amazing. Boy would I love to be your friend."

"What did you do?" Chris asked, voice thick with bewilderment and awe. He'd clearly sensed something had happened.

"Would you focus on doing something for once?" I snapped in a hushed whisper. "Come on, man."

Nate and company had finally decided they were going to do something. If one of them had the power of inflating their bodies to double in size, it wouldn't help much. Instead, Nate wrapped himself in stone armor, one of the goons wrapped himself in steel armor, and the third one manifested one of those blue magic shields like Isabelle had used.

For just a moment, I felt the first Ferrosaur seeking me out with its mana. The touch wasn't something I understood well, and it wasn't crafted expertly as much as it was instinctual to the creature. The thin thread of Affinity or mana leapt out of its mind and crashed

into the center of my forehead. And instead of a word, what I got was a questioning in bestial terms: *Danger? Friend? Food?* It asked all these questions with a single growling noise from its throat.

The other one made the noise for *food?*

"They're not our friends," I told the two creatures, hoping that 'our' in this case meant Chris and I… and the two Nakamamon.

It turned out, when Nate and Chris had had their little argument over the 'feather' spell that let them float slowly down… Chris had been right. Nate and the Boys took entirely too long to get down, and gave the Ferrosaurs plenty of time to turn around and face the three Guardians.

They also, unlike true Guardians, hadn't tried to place themselves in between danger and the people that needed saving. Instead they had jumped down behind the Ferrosaurs. Cowardly.

Nate's eyes widened from inside his stone armor. "Oh fu—"

***

Nobody under the age of eighteen should be reading this accounting, but a lot of people aren't fans of bloody violence, so I'll pull that shade over and say that the two creatures left Chris and I alone to climb out of the gorge, and didn't extend that courtesy to Nate and the other two Guardians.

"That's Blake down four of his people," Sarah said, nodding decisively and with a great deal of satisfaction.

"I am assuming," my father said, "that since several weeks haven't passed, you're not done being tied up at nights and healing up near-dead Wizards?"

"You assume correctly!" I declared, from where I was tossing a ball back and forth with Brayden. Mostly he was failing to catch it, but he'd get it once in a while. And he wasn't terrible at throwing as much as he was wildly inconsistent. He got in plenty of excellent throws… that way. Or that way. And once in a while, in my direction.

"How does this go then?" my mother asked.

"It starts with Blake freaking out."

***

As the top level Guardian, Blake needed a lot more xp than the others in order to level up. To get that much xp, he needed more people to be in more danger. It also meant he was leagues stronger than any of the other Guardians in the group. If my Physicality seemed impressive, going from a broken kid who couldn't walk properly, to a person beginning to show abs, Blake had gone from a Chad frat bro who hit the gym every week, to a person who might've been able to punch the lights out on a Ferrosaur.

He punched trees to produce firewood. The team didn't need firewood, as it was stacked up ten feet high and twenty feet long over to that side of the camp, and another ten feet high and ten feet long over on that side of the camp.

So when I say that Blake lost his cool, I mean everything went haywire.

"What do you mean Nate and his fellow Guardians didn't make it?" he roared.

I had thought it was a pretty self-explanatory sentence, but apparently it needed repeating.

He leapt over to where the firewood was stacked up and punched at it. Several pieces of firewood simply exploded into matchsticks. Other pieces rocketed out toward the camp, where several pieces blasted into their makeshift homes and tents, and tore the place apart.

"They floated down using a feather spell, and coated themselves in metal and stone, to face down a creature that eats metal and stone."

"But that's the dumbest thing I've ever heard!" he shouted. I didn't disagree with that one bit.

As if it would make his point, he grabbed up the roof of my laboratory shack and collapsed it just by pulling. The whole thing caved in. I was given an Intimidation check and eked out a pass, thanks again to **Stalwart**. I really needed to thank Ivy and Isabelle for needing a surrogate boner from time to time.

I needed to live through this first.

"Unbelievable!"

Unfortunately for them, Drat's plan was sort of working itself out, and they were down four people. Todd was still quite injured, since you could only take one healing potion at a time. One of Nate's underlings had gone running off. Then again, I noted Drat off to one side, leaning against one of the trees with the firewood pile stacked between them. He shook his mouth side to side just once.

Had Drat backstabbed the guy? If one thing Rogues always had in every video game system ever devised, it was an insane backstab ability. It was either a one-hit kill, where you did a cinematic throat slitting or heart stabbing, or a crazy multiplication of regular damage, like quadruple your highest damage with your weapon. Or higher; I couldn't be sure. I hadn't played Rogues, but I knew that the damage multiplier only got more and more insane as they leveled up.

I could easily imagine Drat waiting in a tree not far from where Nate and his guys were getting ready to dangle Chris down into the gorge, and seeing his opportunity when the first guy booked it. Whether he appeared from behind a tree, leapt out of a tree, or simply became visible before doing his coup-de-grace, it was not difficult to imagine. It wasn't so easy to put out of mind, though these people were torturing the Wizards into agreeing to play the victim with dangerous creatures, with no way to properly heal them up.

It also wouldn't surprise me to learn that Blake had 'convinced' the lead Wizard to hand over control over the expedition. Using his fists, obviously. He could easily ignore the xp penalties and keep punching until the leader relented.

Blech. Writing this down and telling my family have both left a bad taste in my mouth.

"All this started once you got here," Blake shouted, and whirled on me. "Nate, Belter, Reebok, and Big Willy."

Big Willy? Was there bound to be an innuendo name at every

level? I shouldn't have had the thought, given that the guy was dead, but jeez Louise.

I held up my hands. "Hey, man, you brought me here to heal people, I healed people. I haven't raised a hand to anyone."

"Cinzy!" Blake snarled.

"Huh?"

"Get your ass over here."

I considered telling him he couldn't talk to her like that, but Blake seemed likely to punch a hole in my chest, and I was pretty sure there was no surviving that. Cinzy sauntered over, still managing to look like she'd just left a mani-pedi after shopping at some luxury boutiques.

"What do you need, Blake?" She asked.

"You make him tell the truth," he said.

I took a deep breath and sighed it out. There wasn't really anything she or I could do to stop him.

"I have to do it the sexy way," she said.

"What?" both Blake and I asked simultaneously.

"His abilities from his bonded Nakamamon make him hard to hypnotize and persuade," she lied smoothly. "So I have to use my own ability, and it's… not pretty."

Blake's face twitched with fury. "I don't care! Make it happen."

So Cinzy did the Cinzy saunter: she started to strut and shake her hips, flipping her skirt up to show off a bit more leg, holding her hands together before her and enhancing her cleavage, or holding her hands behind her back and shoving her boobs out extra bigly. All the while, she put on a cutesy smile and batted her eyelashes, and talked to me like I was the guy at the bar she'd picked for tonight's one night stand.

"Well there Fletcher," she practically moaned, strutting slowly around me. "What really happened, eh? I know you want to tell us." She reached out and raked a single finger from my collar bone to my shoulder, then across my back to the other shoulder as she slowly

circled me.

You are under the influence of a special ability! The UI informed me, adopting the guise of Captain Obvious.

And though she had to spend two Tokens on account of **Fierce**—thank you so much Ivy—I didn't bother to try and counter it with the use of Tokens. Cinzy had me convinced that she was on my side. Even though we were in front of the whole group of Blake's remaining Boys, she wouldn't go so far as to get me punched into paste.

I hoped.

"You want to tell us all about what went down, when you… invaded that hole."

The feeling of being under the influence of the special ability was… literal drunkenness. I felt goofy and good and like maybe I'd had one too many, but that was okay! One too many wasn't ten too many, right?

"Invaded… the hole…" I muttered.

"Yes… what happened?"

And, because it was totally cool and there was no pressure whatsoever, I told him exactly what happened: the four guys getting the feather spell, Chris the Wizard floating down into the jaws of certain death, the appearance of the Ferrosaurs, one of Nate's bros running off—I hadn't seen anything happen to him—and then the other three dithering while I got shirt done. I told him happily, smile on my face, how I was forced to listen to Nate and his bros get crunched up.

And this was how Blake grabbed up another Wizard, took off for the gorge immediately, and almost killed the Wizard with his own two hands. Half of the remaining Guardians sped in pursuit, while the remainder had the unenviable—but funny—task of rebuilding the camp after Blake's tantrum. They didn't remake my laboratory structure, but instead built a lean-to. Not an improvement over the original.

“What really happened?” Cinzy asked. Drat hovered nearby, and I gave him a dopey thumbs up.

“Whaddaya mean?” I asked.

“How did you get down there and then keep those things from tearing you apart?”

“Oh!” I said. “Easy. I burned a bunch of Tokens to get down there, and then talked the dragons into not eating us.”

Cinzy and Drat both stared at me.

“I think somebody’s been naughty,” I said, giving Drat an exaggerated wink. He rolled his eyes and left before I blew his cover as a secret helper.

“Is that what happened? You didn’t resist my ability, did you?”

I waved a floppy hand at her in dismissal. “No waaaaay,” I slurred. “That’s how it went down. I’m very persuasive when it comes to the wild Nakamamon. They like me.”

Cinzy stared at me, searching my face for the lie. When there wasn’t any to be found, she shook her head and muttered something I couldn’t hear. I didn’t mind, and instead inspected several trees for their fascinating bark textures. That was, until one of Blake’s Boys came back, hoisted me over his shoulder, and took off for the gorge.

“Byeeeeeeee!” I told Cinzy, waving. The confused, super sexy Bard waved back.

This is Christopher drunkenly keeping her, her brother, and Drat safe from the Big Bad.



Chapter 40- Pain In The Ass

Blake returned with his arms and legs all gashed up, and demanded healing. The look on his face clearly conveyed that if I said no, I might just join the Ferrosaur—or *Ferrosaurs* plural—that had given him those scratches. This was how I applied **Healer's Breath**, followed by making up a quick healing potion with one of the Wizard's supplies, since most of mine were in the Ferrosaurs' bellies. I worked in silence, not looking at the moron.

He squinted at me, eyes narrowed like he was deciding whether to pull a Chewie and rip my arms off.

"I killed those things," he told me, with quiet venom.

"Good," I lied, and scored another Deceit success.

"Pain in the ass, the both of them."

I wondered if he got any xp for that, if the Wizard had refused to go down into the gorge and face down the two dragons. Or had Blake just jumped down there and given it his all, xp be damned?

I didn't know, and I didn't care. Part of me knew I needed answers about what he got up to, and his level of power, so my people could take him down. That said, every time I interacted with him, I had to bite my tongue to keep from saying something that would get me torn apart.

They got one of the Wizards to lock me in place this time, a band of rope that glowed with weak magical light in the oncoming dusk. I frowned at the magical binding.

Blake and Archie went over to the campfire that night and drank a whole lot of alcohol. Where they had gotten it I don't know, but they got good and sloshed.

***

It is very easy to imagine that Cinzy was very grateful for both

saving her brother's life, and also not ratting her out as a secret conspirator trying to upend Blake's psychopathic operation. She hypnotized the guard on duty to fall asleep, then came into my new digs.

Now, that she had the **Prismatic Apparel** that the God of Apparel had gifted me, she always had an amazing and different outfit. The **Prismatic Apparel** was presently a backless shirt in a navy blue fading to white, with a high neck like a choker. She went with a white pleated tennis skirt. I wasn't certain the Prismatic Apparel could be two articles of clothing or not, so if she'd come across a white pleated skirt in her travels, that was amazing. This ended in fluffy white socks reaching to her knees and comfy white tennis shoes.

I kept not trying to rake my eyes up and down her body, and failing. The open leg above her knee and below her skirt was doing it for me, as were her bare arms and the glimpse of her back I'd gotten when she entered. The band wrapping around her throat like a choker was really doing it for me.

Cinzy was always really doing it for me. That was a function of Likability, I thought.

"Drat's not going to try it with Blake," she muttered. I didn't know if she meant he wouldn't try to kill him, or dose him with the anti-magic medicine he desperately needed.

"I know," I said. I was tired.

"He's too dangerous. Too strong and too fast."

"I know."

"If Drat doesn't get him on the first strike, Blake will…" She didn't finish her sentence.

"I know."

"You did a really good thing today," she said.

"I'm glad you think so."

Seeing that I wasn't in the mood to make chitchat, she went over the plan. Blake had seven out of his twelve Boys left. That was good, but not enough. Any one of them could—and would—wreck

havoc on the Wizards, and her, and me, if any flaw crept into the plan. They had the Physicality, and the Wizards were tied up, so they could easily tear the innocent members apart, or hold them hostage. They still had double the numbers of the Divinity Rescue Corps' contingent of Guardians, and Blake was a ridiculous level. He'd also reportedly killed both of the Ferrosaurs.

He could probably take on at least Larelle, but probably more than just her. Having watched him punch, I could safely say he was a danger to all four of our Guardians by his lonesome. Whatever plan Drat was making up needed to be absolutely foolproof or innocent people were going to suffer. Because I didn't doubt for a second that he could, and would, order them to take human shields, and use the advantage to plow through my team in heartbeats.

"You used up all your Physicality Tokens didn't you?" she asked.

"Yep."

"Damn."

"You wanted them for… doing it?" I knew immediately that this was the wrong answer, but sitting here in my lean-to on the single stool they'd provided wasn't helping my brain work any. What I mean to say is that being in the same room as Cinzy was giving me a hard on.

She frowned, then laughed under her breath. "No, you boob, I wanted them so you could sprint out and get back to the town. The plan is to have you lure the meatheads to the town." She held up a hand to stop me from interrupting her. "Of course there's more to the plan than that… but you need your Physicality Tokens. Now we have to get them back."

I'd spent a lot of Tokens today. Free Tokens on top of the Physicality ones, on top of Temporary Physicality Tokens. There were never enough of the darn things.

"We need to wait a little longer," she said. I sighed, not liking it, but believing her. Yes, we did need to wait a little longer. And in the meantime my hand was chained to the tree that made up the corner of my new laboratory.

"You need to convince him to take his medicine," I told her.

"What? No."

"Blake is in serious danger," I told her.

What would happen to him when the mana in his body became too much? Would he explode into sparkly mana and drift up into the air, or melt into a mana puddle? Something else worse?

"Drat's not going to risk it, I'm not going to risk it. He's over level 25, so he had his class evolve into something else. He has powers I don't even know about."

I sighed. He was huge, high level, powerful, and worst of all, unpredictable. We didn't know exactly what abilities he might have gotten. This was another downside to the Agency's policy of 'find out as you go' with regard to abilities.

Cinzy left for just a moment, and I felt a pulse of soothing mana not directed at me. She'd drugged the guards with her abilities again. When she returned, she had already changed her outfit with Prismatic Apparel: fishnet stockings led to bare thighs, which reached up to a thong made of cut off jean shorts. Her ass cheeks were fully visible, as was her tummy. Up top she had on that backless blue shirt that accentuated her cleavage. It revealed more than it covered up, little more than a rectangle of fabric tied behind her back and neck by thin strings.

She fell to her knees before me, her hands sliding up from my knees to my thighs. "In the meantime, may I thank you for saving my brother?"

"You don't have to thank…" I trailed off. The expression on her face told me she wanted me, and badly. She didn't have the typical half-lidded eyes and parted lips, but a vulnerable expression with wide open eyes and a pensive smile.

"You want to frack."

She nodded.

"Okay," I told her. "We have to be quiet though."

Her fingers continued to creep up my thighs. "May I… suck your cock?"

I have to say there is something so weird about having an absolute ten squatting before me and asking for permission to service me. So weird and so welcome.

"Kisses first," I said.

She got up on her knees to press her lips to mine. That alone was heaven. It was like her body had its own skincare routine without needing anything. We kissed several times, her hands on my thighs and my free hand roaming. I ran it hand up and down her exposed back. The touch caused her to shiver and moan into my mouth. Sliding my hand lower, I played over the edge of this ridiculous cutoff jean thong before caressing both cheeks in turn, then pressed two fingers against her back door.

That did it. She looped both arms around my neck and lavished attention on my mouth with her tongue. She nibbled, licked and rubbed to show me I was doing what she liked. And I could tell she wanted me to slide the shorts and panties aside—what panties she could possibly be wearing under these shorts I didn't know—and finger her ass, but I broke the kiss.

"Now," I told her, with quiet force, "suck my cock." The flush in her face was impossible to miss. The biting of the lip. The ardent need in her eyes. I proceeded to watch as she removed my pants and slipped them off one leg, then the other. She was methodical about it, too, folding my socks and pants. Reminded me of the geisha stories, where some demure Japanese woman, eyes downcast, would take care of absolutely everything.

I cupped the back of her head and loved the silkiness of her hair just for my own gratification; Cinzy shuffled between my legs and took me in hand, then began licking with long strokes.

Her blowjob technique lacked something. Regina seemed to have the hang of it instinctively, while Cinzy did not. She would need coaching. Not today though. For now, in the dim flickering light filtering in through the lean-to, I watched her worship my rod, watched it disappear into her mouth only to make her gag and begin to choke.

“How is it so delicious?” she asked in between licks and kisses, and of course trying to stuff the whole thing down her throat. She took the head into her mouth and sucked until she gagged, then slowly backed off before trying again. The sensations, and the knowledge that she didn’t do this regularly, were heaven.

She started really working, and all talk disappeared. I luxuriated in the sensation of being served, and when my hand fell away from the back of her head, she dutifully retrieved it and placed it back there. She alternated encircling my girth and playing reverently with my balls.

“Ugh, you feel so good,” I muttered, and was rewarded with a gurgling sound.

After a while, I felt myself wanting to paint the back of her throat. Fill her mouth. Pull out and spray all over her face.

That wouldn’t do.

“Hold on,” I told her, and she froze with her mouth full, staring up at me. “Panties off. Climb up on here.”

“You don’t want to cum in my mouth?” she asked playfully.

“I don’t want to repeat myself,” I said, again with that gentle force. Since using **Blissence**, I knew exactly who Cinzy was and what drove her. She wanted someone to be in control, sexually speaking. Just as Isabelle needed reassurance and Tara needed my seed inside her, Cinzy needed to be told what to do.

She pulled away from where she’d been licking and sucking, and I didn’t miss the string of saliva connecting her lips to my shaft. “Okay.”

She had her bottoms off in a flash, and straddled me.

“Am I well lubricated?” I breathed.

“Yesssss,” she hissed.

“I could use a little more.”

Reaching down, she nestled my shaft in between her lower lips and began grinding her body forward and back along my full length. The heat and the pleasure were incredible; the bottom of my cock was especially sensitive.

"You want me in your butt, don't you?"

"Please," she breathed.

I reached up and took her slender neck in my hand, gently. "You're a dirty girl, aren't you?"

She nodded into my shoulder, still rocking her hips forward and back.

"Tell me what you want then."

"I want your cock in my ass," she whispered without hesitation. It was almost enough to make a guy climax all over himself.

Spending the Token to boost our pleasure was easy right then.

"All right then, put it in. Then I want you to lean back."

This wasn't easy to accomplish, but she was athletic and supple enough to first impale herself on me, then use both of my knees to hold herself up. She groaned in exertion and in pleasure, and I got to see the place where we were joined.

The pressure was intense. The sensations were intense. I kept Adaptability working with conscious effort, so I wouldn't hurt her.

"You're so… big," she breathed.

"I can be bigger," I said casually, as if it were no big deal, before thumbing her clit with my free hand.

Positioned like this, Cinzy had to do all the work. Her toes barely reached the ground, so she placed her feet on the stool and began fucking me. At first she had been staring down at me, but now her head fell back as her whole body rose and fell, rose and fell.

"Fletcher," she groaned.

"Quiet," I admonished, but I also smiled and let Adaptability slip a bit. My length and girth both increased deep in her ass, and she froze before pulling up off me, and thrusting back down hard.

"I… can't…" She moaned again and again in response to the work my thumb was doing at her pussy, and loudly. It was only about three more minutes of thrusting me deep into her asshole before she came, quietly shuddering, her foot slipping off the stool to jam her even further down on my length.

"Turn around," I told her. "Lay against me."

A spinner is a girl who can rotate around on top of a man with his cock buried inside her, and I had only seen it happen in porn before coming to this weird world. Now I saw her slowly and with care turn around so I could see her dynamite ass pumping away at me. Soon though she lay against my chest and placed her feet on my knees.

"I want you to get three fingers inside yourself," I ordered, not stopping my work at her clit. In this position, I'd have to release it and lift her up under her ass in order to thrust upwards, but it worked.

She came again when she had only a single finger inside herself. She came yet again the moment the third finger got in there, a good five minutes later. Every time she went through another clamping, shuddering fit of climax, the pleasure ramped up from ten to twelve, and I had to strain to keep from filling her up.

"I'm going to cum on your face," I told her.

"Oh… my… gods…" she managed. I didn't know if she'd heard me.

"Your eyes will be closed and your mouth will be open. And I will make you look like a whore."

"Oh gods."

"Then you're going to scoop all of it up and into your mouth, and swallow it."

"Oh gods," she whispered, "Oh gods, *oh gods*."

"When that happens, you'll be mine entirely, understand? No matter what happens, I will make time for you and give you the pleasure you need, and treat you like the princess you are when I can."

She just repeated her prayer.

"And sometimes I will have sex with someone else. That doesn't mean I like you less. It just means others have needs that I can fulfill. And when I come back to you, it will be to make you feel amazing."

She kept repeating the same words again and again, frigging

herself and filling herself with full of me.

"Cinzy, do you understand me?"

Her head laying limply against my shoulder, she nodded just a fraction.

"If you don't want to be mine completely, you just have to stay where you are."

"I—"

"Hmm?" I asked.

Her hips rose and fell, bringing me right to the brink. "I'm yours. Completely."

"Good girl," I said shakily, "because I'm ready."

The hottest girl I'd ever seen in real life scrambled up off me and got down on her knees between my legs, mouth open and eyes closed. When I came, it was like a river. I blasted off into her hair, over one cheek and then over the other. My seed pooled on her closed eyes, it got up her nose, and in her mouth.

After that, I watched in astonishment as this supermodel girl did exactly as ordered, using her fingers to get all of it she could, and licked her fingers before going back for more.

Those few minutes watching her was enough to get me hard again. I was twenty, after all, not fifty. This time I clamped a hand over Cinzy's mouth while I bent her over my single stool, and railed her ass until I lost track of time and orgasms. The second load took time in getting there, but get there it did, and I let it all out up her ass.

She collapsed on top of where I sat on the provided sleeping bag, head on my thigh and holding onto my leg like I might suddenly teleport away.

Things were so crazy.

This is Christopher not believing his luck, both good and ill.



Chapter 41- Wait For The Signal

It was three more days of Boss and his buddies going out to hunt for ways to 'save' their crop of Wizards. Three days of following these people around to their destination, meditating while they convinced the Wizards to put themselves in danger, and then brewing up potions to keep everybody from dying.

The Nakamamon predators were scarce and generally fed on mana, but there were some that would attack intruders or tasty snacks. Or even gross snacks. And I wasn't wrong, they were getting smarter.

I wasn't about to tell Boss and the Boys they were wrong. I was having to do more work, and faster, to ensure that mangled Wizards didn't become dead Wizards. The Guardians were doing their job, as twisted and wrong as that job was, since they had put the Wizards there in the first place.

Guardians are so dumb. I'd lucked out with my choices for my team. Ivy and Isabelle for obvious reasons, including the fact that they weren't stupid. Ivy was hyper competent. Then Larelle, obviously, and Chrysta because she was a terrifying and somehow also cute ice ghost. None of those four seemed concerned with experience points; they wanted to help out, get the job done, protect and help people.

Now that several of their buddies had unfortunately perished due to the dragons, they were taking no chances. I was guarded by two of them at all times, who watched my every move. They didn't like the meditating or the replacement gear I required, after the Ferrosaurs.

On the third day, I hit level 20 as a Healer.

***

"Nice!" my sister said, uncharacteristically cheerful that I was getting out of the Blake situation. I knew they all wanted Blake to get his ass handed to him, or have Larelle cut him in half with a gigantic axe, but it wasn't to be. Drat had a knife, but none of the Guardians had weapons. "Now let's see my brother get his dumb butt out of this nonsense."

***

Cinzy let me know that Drat would give the signal. At that time, I would need to make a break for it. They told me which way the town was. Her brother was slated to join me, somehow. Drat didn't care about Chris, so it was up to Cinzy to make sure he was both safe and with me.

"And the rest of the Wizards?" I asked.

"What?"

"What happens to the rest of the Wizards?"

"Look…" she said uncertainly. "This is hard enough with seven of Blake's goons, and the four Guardians on our side, but there's also Timmy and Wendell to worry about. Sure Regina and Tara aren't useless, but… ugh, Fletcher, don't make this harder than it has to be."

I looked her dead in the eye. "No, look, we save the Wizards or I'm not going."

"You… what? No, Fletcher, no, don't. Don't do this." She was massaging her temples, pinching the bridge of her nose, and looking just exquisite while doing it. "We don't…"

"Tell Drat to help get me into the wilds," I said. "I have an idea."

Drat gave me the customary nonsense about how this was his plan, how it was calibrated carefully to ensure my survival and the survival of the team members, and how he had worked really hard on it.

I just shrugged and told him tough titty, said the kitty. I was still

in charge of the expedition, I was still the leader. I had the leadership menu.

When the time came, I got to see Drat's companion Nakamamon, McCauley Skulkins, up close and personal. I got to experience what the weird weasel creature was, and what it could do.

Sneaksel

Basic Nakamamon

Sneaksel are elusive creatures that dwell in dense forests, foggy marshes, and shadowy caves. Known for their uncanny ability to disappear and evade detection, they are masters of stealth and subterfuge.

Typical length: 2-5 feet from nose to tail (small)

Typical weight: 8-20 pounds

Gender: unknown

Aspect: Dark/Creature (beast)

Transformations: Sneaksel -> unknown

***Sneaksel** has been added to your Nakamadex.*

The creature appeared before me, standing on four of its ten legs, before it dropped to the ground, raced towards me, and wound around my one leg. In a flash it was around my body and peering out at the world from over my shoulder.

"Hey there, Mr Skulkins," I muttered, and reached behind myself to pet him a little. I succeeded a Likability check using **Beast Talker**.

It chittered happily, though the sound that came out of it was strange and otherworldly. Like the chittering was coming from the other side of a void.

"You're so soft," I told him. This was… a lie. Kind of. It was like petting something made of cast iron, cold and unyielding. Somehow it was soft, in its own way, but the creature was a dark aspect. I hadn't seen a single one of those before, and I definitely hadn't petted one before.

"Shall we?" I asked it.

It chirped yet again, from the cold void, and a second later an envelope of mana expanded and covered us.

Now that was something.

Congratulations! *You have gained a level of the Mana Affinity skill. Employ this skill whenever you wish to perceive the flow of mana around you. The stronger the skill level, the clearer impressions you will receive.*

"Huh," I said.

McCauley Skulkins has used ***Without a Trace****.*

The Mana Affinity skill informed me that **Without a Trace** was a dark magic ability that canceled out different methods of detection. This included sound, infrared, and even most magical means. Holy magic, otherwise known as divine magic, would cancel this out.

"Stay away from the holy jellyfish," I muttered. "Got it."

Now, I don't know if you've ever gone invisible before, but it wasn't like immediately clear that I was invisible. I could still see my hands and body. I could still see McCauley Skulkins.

"Fletcher?" Cinzy whispered. "You didn't leave yet, did you?"

"I'm still here," I told her.

A second later, she was still looking around. "Ugh, this is annoying. Fletcher? Are you there?" Finally, she rolled her eyes and stomped. "I'll just assume you're still here, and maybe… maybe looking at my butt. You perv. Okay, you're supposed to get far enough away from camp to make a break for it, and turn the invisibility off, so the Guardians can try and chase you. Far enough away to make it to town, but close enough that they'll catch sight of you. Ugh, I hope you're still here. For all I know you could be touching me and I wouldn't know."

I did not try this. After all, I had my own plan to enact, and neither she nor Drat would like it.

It did convince me that the invisibility effect worked. I hopped around right in front of where Cinzy was standing, but she never even batted an eye. I then walked out of the 'laboratory' lean-to and passed several of the Wizards and Guardians without having a single person look my way.

Therefore McCauley Skulkins and I set out.

After some hiking, I felt secure that I wasn't being followed, and ready. The forest had thickened, then thinned, and I got near enough to the lake to be sure I was not far from the gorge. Scanning the area, the presence of several Nakamamon stood out. I gave McCauley Skulkins a friendly head pat, tried not to feel weirded out by the unnatural sensation of his dark aspect head against my hand.

Without a Trace dropped. The envelope of invisibility fell away. I thanked Drat's companion, turned to the Shrubbet and several flying creatures some distance overhead. Then I made a megaphone shape in front of my face and shouted for all I was worth.

***

It was some three or four hours before I returned, hungry and a bit tired. McCauley Skulkins remained wrapped around my upper body, and the thin envelope of mana was back.

The camp appeared out of nowhere, because it was in the same sort of mana envelope, but much larger, as cast by one of the Wizards. They cast it daily.

Blake's shack had been improved each day using pure Physicality, until it resembled a log cabin. Several of the others also had their little shacks like they'd built for me, the original laboratory. As for the Wizards, they had large dome tents with those flexible wooden poles. Those were sequestered over to one side and watched, in case the Wizards tried anything.

So far, the Guardians controlled the Wizards and their ability to cast by simply restricting the material components. There were only a few spells they could cast with grass, tree bark, flower petals and

the like. All that stuff was much more useful to me. This rendered the already weak Wizards completely impotent, not that they would be any danger to Blake and his people even so.

Their spells, so far as I understood it, were all about utility. There were travel spells which would've allowed them to escape, but those required material components, and took time to cast. By the time an ambitious Wizard got the component and began loudly casting the spell to teleport away, a Guardian would've been able to do whatever single violent action necessary to disrupt the spell.

A single punch would incapacitate or kill them, while a flick could send the material component flying, or mess with their vocal cords. It

So the Wizards either milled around or sat in their tents and read the tiny clay tablets they had with them. Any time they began discussing things, the Guardian on duty would lumber over and listen in. But since I'd showed up, the Wizards had been even more resigned to their fate, so they put up zero resistance.

I ducked into one tent, and saw the person inside scrunch up his face in confusion. When I asked McCauley Skulkins to drop the ability, he nearly yelped, but instead goggled at me.

"When I give the signal, we're getting out of here, okay?"

"What signal?" he asked.

I nodded and gave him a knowing smile, then pressed a finger to my nose. "Trust me, you'll know."

I advanced to the next tent, with Chris in it, without forcing Drat's Nakamamon to activate its ability again. If it was anything like **Psyspeech**, eventually the poor little guy would tucker himself out.

"What…"

I held my hand up to my lips in the classic 'shush' motion, and he cut right off.

"Just get ready for the signal," I said, and when he began to ask 'what signal' I just left the tent.

I grinned, trying to imagine what was about to go down.

I earned a level of the Stealth skill for hugging to the tents and

keeping out of view of the on duty guard. Four tent visits later, I asked Drat's companion to cloak me in his invisibility power yet again, and we headed out.

All six of the Wizards who had been in their tents now exited, and were gazing around, waiting for word. Several of them seemed to get that they should be making a break for it, and ducked back into their tents in order to collect up whatever belongings they were allowed to have.

Blake's Boys seemed to know that something was up by now. That was okay. Their discomfort and anxiety made this far more satisfying than it would've otherwise been.

"Where is he? Where?" Boss—Archie—was demanding. Cinzy stood there looking stricken.

"I-I don't know," she said, with tears threatening. I couldn't be sure if those were staged for the benefit of lookingmeekand small, or if she really was afraid of a douchebag called Archie, but it didn't matter either way. Not a fan of watching people get bullied, not when I have the tools to stop it.

I stalked up to him and dropped the Sneaksel's invisibility power, staring defiantly up at the muscle-head.

"Picking on a girl?" I asked.

I used **Dazzle**.

Dazzle: By concentrating, you may spend 1 Affinity Token to hypnotize a target with 7 automatic successes. This is a contested Likability + Persuasion roll, and the target knows they have been hypnotized. While under the effect of hypnosis, the target will be much more truthful and compliant, though they may not be ordered to harm themselves or others.

Immediately on the heels of the Likability Token materializing and then evaporating into pure mana, twinkly fairy dust shot out of me and got all up in his eyes and nose. He sneezed.

For the briefest of moments, I experienced the pure terror of knowing you are about to die. Archie's face was twisted into such a

mask of pure hatred that I thought it might not work.

It didn't. A whole host of Tokens appeared near Archie's head level, spinning once before exploding into mana.

***Dazzle** has been resisted.*

"Skulkins?" I asked.

Archie roared loudly. It was a colossal roar. It was full of righteous indignation. How dare I get out of captivity? How dare I go against whatever Blake and the Boys wished for me to do? What insanity possessed me right this moment? It was a magically enhanced roar, from Physicality, which reverberated outward in waves. Everyone around felt it, even if they weren't the subject of the special ability.

This was the signal. These people were so fracking predictable. They could always be counted on to rage out of control.

*You are under the influence of the special ability **Fury**. You may resist by spending 7 Durability Tokens. Even after resisting, you will suffer 50% of the ability's effects. Would you like to resist?*

Current Tokens: 6 Durability, 6 Free Tokens

I burned the Tokens even as I turned invisible, and darted out of the way when Archie's eyes went wide. He lashed out with a broad haymaker but narrowly missed.

The effects I was suffering from: a morale debuff if I wanted to attack Archie the terrible-at-his-job Guardian, and a speed debuff if I wanted to run away.

Well, this ability had both fight and flight covered. It might have seemed impressive if it wasn't so obvious and easily overcome by simply hiding.

"You're going to condemn all these Wizards to death, Healer!" he thundered. "Is that the Healer way?"

I wanted to counter with the obvious: was this the Guardian way? I stopped myself though, because I wasn't supposed to give away my position.

I remained silent, waiting.

"Well? Coward?" he screamed, then forced out a bitter laugh. "That's it? Cut and run?"

Again, I waited.

So far, nothing. I was beginning to sweat, thinking maybe I had gone about this wrong. Maybe this really was going to result in the deaths of Cinzy's brother and the other Wizards. Whatever happened now, there was no going back. I couldn't simply put myself back in the hands of the people who had kept me here for weeks. Not after doing this. They would cut off one foot any time I used a healing potion to regrow it. I'd spend every single day dragged around by one of Blake's Boys, beaten and bloodied and never able to see Cinzy or any of the others again.

Now, the only chance I had was to get all the way back to the town, through it, reconnect with the team, convince them to attack a superior force on little intel and a weak plan, and pray that somehow they would succeed. That had to happen before Blake and his people pulled up stakes and left for a new location, or they summarily killed any of the Wizards.

"I'm going to go and punch a hole in the first Wizard I find," Archie thundered, and began stalking off towards the cluster of dome tents. "Watch one of your people die, Healer, knowing you could have prevented it, and carry that on your conscience. Watch, you sniveling—"

He caughed a large verdant shrub directly in the face.

The Shrubbet scrambled for several wonderful seconds, trying to climb his body and failing. But only for a few seconds. After that it managed to find some purchase, get its one foot on his shoulder, the other on his head, and leap off to freedom.

Archie was completely bamboozled, and I can't say I blame him. Having a bush smash into your face, having it be a furry creature, and having that creature then launch itself off you couldn't have been easy. He turned to watch it hop away from him, and vanish into the shrubbery not ten feet from where he stood.

When he turned around, it wasn’t a Shrubbet that barrelled into him.

This is Christopher’s plan coming to fruition.



Chapter 42- New Aspect Discovered

A creature made of stone got Archie the evil Guardian directly in the cojones. This one was a pillbug the size of a sofa, and as it scuttled by, it made a sound like sand rubbing against stone. I have to say, it sounded a whole lot like dry laughter.

I had recruited owls that manifested little tornadoes to catch prey, flamingoes and salamanders made of fire, gigantic frogs that spat poisonous goop, turtles with clouds under each of their four feet, and much, much more. There was a swarm of bugs that literally zapped lightning between them, several of those Geodiles with the gemstone teeth, and butterflies that teleported here and there. A whole big ash bunch of them.

And they. Were. Everywhere.

Centipedes with flowers growing out of their backs crawled up the Guardians' legs, and Magmamanders set the place aflame just by casually galumphing through the campsite. Flameingoes flapped in, landed nearby, and also set things on fire.

Blake came out of his already-burning hut to find the place chock full of Nakamamon. Geodiles were chasing two of his people off that way, one of the pillbugs nearly crashed into another two, and the fifth one had his pants set on fire. The chaos was glorious.

"This. Is. Awesome," I muttered.

The Wizards were skedaddling, and so was Cinzy. She raced right by where I was, missing me by mere inches. I was pleased to hear her softly cursing.

"Draaaaaat!" Blake bellowed. "Come on out and get yours, you backstabbing little prick! I know you're behind this."

Whatever special ability he was using, Blake's call made Drat

appear, knife in hand. He actually slashed Blake across the back of the leg before pulling back, surprised at himself. It had been an enhanced Taunt power, different than **Fury**.

When Blake whirled, he was far faster than Drat. He had a hold of the Rogue's shirt in a heartbeat.

It wasn't fast enough. He got three Flutterbys in the face, a Shrubbet using him as a launching pad, a Magmamander directly underfoot, and one of those gigantic pillbugs casually making its way past, bumping him aside. The pants tore and Drat sprang away.

"How… what the hell…" Blake said, and swatted several of the teleporting butterflies away.

"It was me!" I shouted, from far away.

"I got him, captain!" Archie said, but didn't get three steps before skidding to a halt. The Ferrosaur's transformation had appeared.

Metallirex

Second Stage Nakamamon

Metallirex rarely venture out of the deeper caves, except to mate. These larger and more dangerous versions of the Ferrosaur chew through vast amounts of minerals and veins of mana-infused metal. These creatures mate for life and have no tolerance for having their mate taken from them.

Typical length: 40-75 foot from nose to tail (large)

Typical weight: 4000-10,000 pounds

Gender: unknown

Aspect: Draconic/earth

Transformations: unknown -> Ferrosaur -> Metallirex

***Metallirex** has been added to your Nakamadex.*

"I thought you said you got them both!" I called to Blake.

The gigantic muscle man stared at me, hard, then back to the gigantic dinosaur made of earth, metal, and crystal. It was like a tyrannosaurus, but with longer arms and more spines running along

its back. The enormous creature homed in on Boss, who had been the loudest at the time, and charged after him. The ground reverberated with every stomp.

The panicked Guardian, suddenly not worth his shaved head, his tattoos or his bulging muscles, immediately turned and ran.

It had worked. Cinzy was over there with her brother, but none of the creatures were paying them any attention. Only the Guardians, who had beaten the tar out of them for weeks now, had giant bugs crawling all over them, or giant bugs flitting around in front of their faces, or fire birds burning their stuff. Sure it wasn't an orderly stampede, but it was a stampede nonetheless.

Blake kept batting creatures aside even as he tromped toward me, so I turned and ran.

Now, with Golightly on my feet, I had five free levels of any skill that needed feet. Right now, that skill was Run. I put on a burst of speed, and heard him roar out in anger.

It was time. I knew it was time when the prompt appeared in my vision.

***Physicality check**: An opponent has made you his target. You are being pursued on foot. Your equipped item Golightly provides you with 5 levels of Run, along with your level 6 Physicality. Do you wish to spend Tokens on this check?*

**Note: This is an opposed check. You may not spend a Token to retry this check.*

Total Tokens: 6 Physicality and 6 Free Tokens.

"Healer!" he screamed. "I will rip your spine out and ram it down your throat!"

"All of them," I panted, ignoring the fact that what he was suggesting was physically impossible.

I had high hopes that Blake was as arrogant as he seemed. He knew my Physicality was nothing compared to his. He wouldn't spend Tokens on this check. Why would he need to? In his mind, my Physicality couldn't be much higher than 2 or 3.

Also, none of my compatriots had Free Tokens like me. Luckily for me, I'd nearly died trying to be nice to the God of Meadows, and it had gifted me 5 Free Tokens.

I wanted my team back. My old life back. The sky needed to be a shimmering blue, the clouds needed to twinkle, and there were five women back in the camp who I needed to satisfy sexually on a regular basis. Okay three on a regular basis and two intermittently.

So when the Tokens came *cla-clink!*ing into being and disappearing in puffs of rainbow mana glitter, the muscles in my legs surged and I put every Olympic runner to shame. Ever. All of them. I didn't bother looking over my shoulder, but I would've seen the disbelief all over Blake's face as he slammed down on the place where I'd just been… and I took off like a roadrunner.

"Meep meep," I said darkly, then laughed.

Blake still didn't think he needed twelve Tokens worth of speed, so he took off after me. Which was great, because that gave me the time I needed to get the town in view, and then reach it. I had traveled some five miles in the space of about five minutes.

Math went through my head the whole way through: if he had a Physicality of 12, and he had a Run skill like I had Diagnosis or Treatment, then he'd have some 15 to 18 levels, and that meant he could expect 5 to 6 successes on average. Around half my speed.

Chancing a glance over my shoulder, I caught sight of Blake in the distance, closing. He was truly monstrous like this, huge arms and legs pumping, and his head buried so far in mountainous shoulders it was hard to see from this distance.

The roar that came out and met me… less difficult to detect from a distance.

I waited until he was much closer before stepping into the town. Not far off lay dozens of Nakamamon, both humanoid and bestial, that were in a sort of trance.

Cinzy had gotten in here without falling prey to the god's influence, and when I'd been black bagged, the Boys had gotten in here. They had used Durability, and perhaps another skill to resist

falling into a stupor. I wasn't out of the woods yet.

Without Physicality, I needed to make sure there wouldn't be any way for him to grind me to paste in one swift strike. I ducked back into the first alley, and peeked out just as Cinzy had done.

I heard him and felt the ground shake at the same time. He barreled into a wall and right through it.

"Whoa there, cowboy!" I called, and **Fierce** scored an immediate Taunt check, which I passed. Temporary Physicality and Durability Tokens. I then moved another house away, just in case he came through the building and spotted me on the other side.

Moving up towards the center of the town put me under the influence of the god situation. The first Durability check came up, and I was bewildered to see I'd only barely passed it.

"What?"

I'd leant my **Prismatic Apparel** to Cinzy, the same item that boosted my Divine Resistance skill by 5 levels. However, Healer's Resistance made sure I wouldn't be making another Durability check for some twelve hours.

"Fletcher!" Blake shrieked. "Come out here and fight like a man."

Two things here: one, this was the stupidest, most moronic thing a person could say when one person was a plain old guy, and the other was an entire gym's worth of muscle. Two, Blake had both a Taunt skill, and a Taunt ability, so things like stupidity hardly mattered. This was magic. The ability, as I was about to learn, was called **Provocative**.

*You are under the influence of the special ability **Provocative**. This Taunt power will force you to attack Blake, Brawldar. You may resist by spending 7 Likability or Durability Tokens. Would you like to resist?*

Note: This is a contested check, and you may not pay a Token to retry.

Current Tokens: 1 Durability, 6 Likability, 0 Free Tokens

If I went out there and took a swing at Blake, he would flick my

face and take my entire head off. I was already almost out of Tokens, and I desperately needed them.

"Spend the Tokens," I muttered, and again heard Blake's roar of fury from too close. All seven of the Tokens appeared, *cla-cling!* one after another, bathing me in the mana necessary to resist marching out there only to have him kill me instantly. Six of them bore the Likability sigil, while the last one showed the bent back of a figure carrying a heavy pack.

"Blake!" I called. "Something's wrong, buddy!"

"What's wrong is you won't get out here and have your head smashed open like a ripe melon."

I kept strafing between alleys, trying to judge where he was. I'd gone through the abilities of the four Guardians on my own team. There was growth, manifesting extra limbs in order to fight, intimidation or taunt social abilities, another ability for resisting social checks and being tough, the manifesting a shield ability, and an interposing power where the Guardian could take the damage instead of a nearby allies.

"I'm gonna kill you, Fletcher!"

"No I mean something's really wrong."

I caught just a sliver of the gigantic son of a birch. He was hunched over, his enormous hands clenching and unclenching. The fingers on his hands were easily three times as wide as they should've been. He looked more like Larelle now, honestly, with his neck totally buried in trapezius muscle and his shirt splitting down the back.

"You can't trick me again, Healer! I'm gonna…"

He leapt in my direction and brought down a house. Crashed right through the corner of the building. Before I ducked aside, my UI did the strangest thing.

Brawldar

Basic Nakamamon

No information has been added to the Nakamadex about this

creature. Observations thus far include:

Fueled by rage and the need to fight, this creature exists only to match its physical prowess against others, to come out on top.

Typical length: unknown. Current specimen stands 8 feet

Typical weight: unknown. Current specimen weighs 450 pounds

Gender: male

Aspect: fighting

Transformations: Brawldar -> unknown

***Brawldar** has been added to your Nakamadex.*

What in the boogie trees was happening here? Fighting aspect Nakamamon did not exist.

Or so I thought. The achievement that popped up on the heels of Identify told another story.

***Achievement:** new Nakamamon aspect discovered*

Before now, there were no fighting aspect Nakamamon. Unprecedented! Curious! The world at large may never be the same.

Reward: +1 Class level (both classes)

"Or apparently they do exist," I muttered. "Now anyway."

Blake hadn't been taking his anti-magic pills. More and more magic had seeped into his body, transforming him like it had been transforming the rest of us. While Isabelle had been changing into a marshmallow and cotton candy bisexual Guardian, defender of right and goodness, Cinzy had been slowly changing into…what? A shapeshifter? And Regina had clearly been transforming into a flower creature, glittery and beautiful.

Drat I hadn't seen, but I had definitely seen the tattoos spreading over Ivy's body and beginning to swirl around, plainly moving under her skin. I'd seen the earth patterning creeping over Trent, and Tara turning a literal metallic bronze. My own hair had gone verdant green, and I'd noticed that my veins weren't bluish any longer either, before I whipped up a batch of the medicine. Maybe I would become

a sort of nature druid, a tree thing.

Reading through the windows and thinking through the implications froze me in place for a moment too long. Blake landed on the rooftop of the building directly next to me, and I turned only to find him jumping down on top of me.

"You did this," he said, "you caused all this."

And then… he backed off. He stood up and motioned with his hand. No ripping my spine out or tearing me limb from limb.

"Come on then, let's see who comes out on top."

"I can't fight you, Blake. I can help you." I was not sure about this.

He threw back his head and laughed. "You think I need help? This is the best I've felt in my entire life. I could take on a dozen of you. Two dozen. I could take on a hundred copies of you, you little weakling. Come on, I want you to throw the punch. Then you take my punch, and we see—"

A thud behind me announced that Larelle had landed. The enormous orange-skinned Nakamamon towered almost as high as Blake, looking amazing in her martial arts gi outfit.

Can you take me on? she called.

Blake cracked his…three knuckles… and then cocked his head side to side, cracking it as well. Since when did he only have three fingers and a thumb on either hand? And since when was his skin orange, no… blazing crimson?

Chrysta was floating nearby. "What is that?" she asked quietly.

"Fighting aspect?" Isabelle asked from behind Larelle. She and Ivy came out. "Is that… that's Blake, isn't it?"

"Don't hurt him," I called. "I think we can fix it."

"Fix!" Blake roared. "You think I need to be fixed? I've never felt so good in my life. Okay now, who's first?" He slammed a huge fist into his other hand. "One at a time or all together, I don't care."

"Oh my gosh," I heard Regina say from her perch on a roof not far off. "Blake?"

"Good!" Blake rejoiced. "More for me to fight. Now COME ON!"

I got as far as, "Don't—" before things went into melee mode.

Isabelle zipped forward with shield raised, and grabbed onto the back of my shirt. She and Ivy wrenched me backwards along the cobbles while Larelle leapt over and met Blake. Both of them crashed huge fists into one another.

"No!" I shouted.

It was too late.

I will say this for Blake: he went down hard, and he went down fast. You know, the bigger they are and all that. But it wasn't Larelle's right hook that did it. He'd just pitched her over his shoulder and put her through the wall of the nearest building when he stopped, staggered, and started to say something. He got out a mush-mouthed half word before slumping to the cobbles.



Chapter 43- Over the Moons

I was over the moon—moons—to see my camp again, though it looked nothing like I remembered it. Trent had really gone all out, expanding the earthen igloos into squarish adobe houses made of dirt, rocks and clay. He'd created an aesthetic of sorts, with three wavy layers: darker brown beneath, reddish clay above, and then a yellow-white top layer. In places he'd placed chunks of crystal or stone that looked especially cool. These had windows and doors with wooden shutters both inside and out. Not only that, but I noted cool skylights when I entered my new place. They had somehow gotten panes of actual glass, though it was the thick and bubbly kind you would see from medieval times, since they were making the glass via Magmamander and the process wasn't perfect. Still, a lot of natural light got in, and it kept the worst of the weather out.

I quickly relayed orders regarding Blake's former team. They definitely weren't his any longer, not with him being a freaking Nakamamon. While Larelle, the Guardians, and the Rangers went off in search of Cinzy, Wizards, Drat and the others, Vellenia plastered herself against my body and hugged me tight.

Trent stared at the gorgeous companion creature, and frowned down at his large gem Nakamamon, Garnet. I motioned him to continue the tour, and merely walked on until Vel detached herself from me and held my hand like she would never let me go.

Trent was beaming as I peppered him with looks of amazement and frequent compliments.

"This thing has multiple rooms?" Once I had picked my jaw up off the floor, I continued. "Working plumbing? How? When?"

"Alan and I had a lot of time on our hands," he said. "The spells aren't simple by any means, and it took a lot of mana for me to move that much earth and shore up the tubes with baked clay pipes. None of this is perfect, or even permanent, but water is drawn in

here, temperature is regulated with these two crystals, and you have the choice of water pressure. Alan wanted to put those top down sprinklers because they're modern. I nixed that; my mother had one of those installed and it super sucked."

I blinked and shook my head. What was even happening? This building had a large area set aside for the laboratory, another study and sitting room with a small desk and several of the camp chairs, a bedroom, and a small bathroom.

We had been peeing in a quickly excavated ditch for the majority of our time here. Now not only was there a toilet (formed out of white ceramic care of Trent and Larelle's Magmamander) but I had a sink with running water, and my own shower.

He showed me, amongst the clay tile floor of the laboratory, where the group of tiles could be lifted quickly for escape tunnel access.

"And these tunnels…"

"They all connect, but they only lead out. There's a sort of doggy door that's locked from your side. You couldn't break into someone's house during the night."

We would see about that.

"You can also lock it behind you. You press the little gem in the ceiling and it will collapse the several feet of access. Took Alan and I a couple of days to work out the details."

"I'm flabbergasted. I can't believe the level of detail… and style. You've outdone yourself."

Trent shrugged, though he was obviously pleased with his achievements. "There's a stairwell on the outside of the building that leads up to the roof. I thought there would be a chance we could have cookouts or just lounge around up there if the weather is good."

I peeked around the corner and saw the stairs leading up. Unbelievable.

"I mean… don't expect this level of workmanship everywhere we go. I'll try to whip up this kind thing faster and faster going forward,

but you've been gone for two weeks and we've had time… before you changed up the orders we weren't really sure what to do."

Yeaaahhhh. I felt a twinge of guilt over this, but Trent didn't seem to hold this against me.

"That look says I've just said something wrong," he said. "Uhh... no no, don't be upset for running the show. I'm glad to be along for the ride. It's a good team, it's a good cause. These are good people. I like it here. And honestly, I'm getting a lot of practice with the stone magic."

I clapped a hand on his shoulder. "Glad to hear that… because we're about to take on a bunch more charges. Whenever you're ready, we're going to need a crude bunkhouse for at least seven. Probably more than that if my hunch is right."

His eyes flew wide open. "Seven? Seven more?"

"Yep. I'll add it to the orders menu. If Alan wants to work on it with you, great."

Trent nodded and wandered off, already muttering specs and plans to himself.

After my ordeal and the lingering question of how to deal with Blake, I went immediately to bed. Vellenia lay with me, but didn't ask any questions.

"It's so nice to have you back," she said, slithering onto me so we could be touching in every possible way, from her head resting in the crook of my neck, to her foot looped as much as it could be around my ankle.

I reassured her by touch alone, and got down to the level up rewards I'd gotten from my Achievement: Completely Upend the Natural Order of the Known World.

Pretty sure that was the name of the achievement.

At level 20 in Healer, I'd received an attribute point and a single skill point. The obvious choice had been to put it into the same place I'd ordered the team to put theirs: Divine Resistance, and though I'd wanted to branch out, it really was the best choice.

The attribute point had been harder, though my familiarity with

magic was making me think that Affinity was the right call. At least for now, being able to channel magic would help in all ways. I was beginning to see mana in casting form more plainly. I was getting used to the idea of a pool of magic sitting in my chakra points, and channeling that magic up to the center of my forehead, where it manifested in every imaginable way.

Although I had other designs for myself, the expedition I was on was not about only me. I needed to consider the thousands of Nakamamon who we were turning aside from Glumpdumpkin and telling to head back to their points of origin. The people still in the town were a wild mix of maniacally, sleeplessly going about their work, stumbling around as if drunk, completely comatose, or the psychic aspects trying to live their lives like nothing was wrong.

The result was still an even spread, ranging from a Physicality of 5 to an Ingenuity of 8. I'd always been more of a generalist at heart. Of course I wished for more attribute points, but they were only coming ever 3 to 4 levels, and that was that.

Now, level 21 of Healer and level 19 of Pleasure Seeker both yielded the same result: +3 skill points. It felt like Christmas, suddenly having so many, though I knew I could very easily empty out this bank account.

I was pleased to see my shiny new Stealth skill, as well as a bump in Physical Diagnosis, from 3 to 4, without me having to spend any points. The levels could come from enough practice, and I sure had gotten plenty of practice working on the Wizards over the last two weeks.

The first point had to go into Divine Resistance. No question there. As for the others… Adaptability meant helping Chrysta with her wish for meaningful physical contact. I put one point in there. Next, I threw a point into Develop Cure for Small, Medium and Large. The hope was that this god in Glumpdumpkin wasn't going to be a huge one. Still, cross fingers, **Hard At Work** would see me through this, because at level 20 in Pleasure Seeker, I'd just replenished all of my Tokens.

Finally, I wanted one more in the nine Qualities that made up my

second class. I hadn't touched several of these, and I wanted to see if any of them would help me in my journey, such as the Pleasure Seeker journey was. The nine were Load, Refractory Period, Length, Girth, Stave Off, Flexibility, Tongue, Pheromones, and Adaptability.

"Refractory period," I breathed.

"Mmm?" Vellenia asked, half asleep. I was getting there too. Rather than answer, I stroked her cheek and she hugged tighter against me.

Refractory period was the length of time between being able to generate another load. It also shortened the time in between climax and being able to get hard again. I couldn't imagine that…but I was also twenty years old.

Flexibility seemed like a pointless choice, as I was already pretty flexible. I couldn't touch my toes to the back of my head or anything, but who needed to?

It was only when I read through Pheromones more closely that I understood. Now, my assumption was that Pheromones were going to be kind of… coercive. Gross. Like 'oh Fletcher, I'm not really interested in you' and then I'd raise my arms so the smell could waft out of my armpits, and I'd go 'oh yeah, I think you'll find that you're feeling pretty attracted to me after all' and that sounded like I was taking someone against their will. Gross. No thanks.

Because we all know what pheromones means. Ants use them to communicate to one another. Mammals use stank trails to warn off competitors or attract mates. That's the meaning of pheromones. There is no way I could justify having them, and then have the conversation after sex that involves 'why did I agree to this? You're not my type, and I would never do you.'

And then I read the description.

The Pheromones skill allows you to pass on your other Pleasure Seeker Qualities to your intimate partners. For each level of Pheromones, one available point of your Qualities is passed on to your partners while engaged in intimate acts.

"Hold the phone," I said. "Hold the fracking phone."

Would this… give Regina some Length and Girth? That wasn't possible. Staying power, like Stave Off? Or would it always default to Tongue? I had a lot of questions, and the description only added them. If I initiated with Chrysta, would she gain Adaptability also? There was also the question of threesomes… I had had a number of these, and thanked my lucky stars every time, but there was more I didn't know regarding this Pheromones situation.

I sank a point into Pheromones right away, fully intending to see whether this skill applied to a single romantic partner at a time, or would apply to both if I were, say, involved in a threesome with a couple of romantically involved female Guardians, and whether it would enhance their tongues for more exciting oral adventures.

Hypothetically speaking.

"Hmm," Vellenia said, and snuggled in closer.

Eventually I drifted off, and when I awoke it was to a great big party happening in my command building.

I shot up in bed. "Wha—"

Everyone was now in my… house. Trent had literally made me a house. Not a tent, not a lean-to, not a hastily cobbled together and drafty shack. They had transformed the laboratory into a party. The workbenches were decorated first with ribbon and bunting, and topped with plates of nachos, cookies, cakes, bowls of punch, and… cans of beer? Not many, mind you, but enough that each of us could have at least two.

"How did you guys…"

Tara sighed heavily, and explained that, once again, we didn't have the anti-magic medicine to stave off whatever happened as our bodies accumulated too much mana… which I now understood would cause us to become actual Nakamamon. After failing to search for my whereabouts, she agreed to head back to HQ and pick up some things, and she was much quicker about it. Also, there was no longer a danger of having her backpack—and the rest of her clothes—vanish on the return journey.

We all raised a beer to Airaconda, whose head poked in through a window, and proceeded to party. Throughout the next few hours, Airaconda received a lot of pets and head scratches. As Tweedle Dee, Garnet, McCauley Skulkins, and even Muppin joined the party, there was a lot of yipping, chittering, and belly rubbing happening.

All the Wizards were there, and Cinzy as well. While some of them got out spells for ghostly sounds, Cinzy did an amazing job harmonizing with herself and playing her oboe, which she had promised never to play, if I recalled correctly.

Still, somehow the oboe continued playing itself when she took it from her lips, and she grinned at me before beginning to do a kind of beatboxing I didn't know was possible. She literally made the sounds of the rest of the band with her vocal cords.

And it was like laying down a track on repeat: the beat, the bass, the accompaniment from the oboe and a flue, a bit of funky guitar, and then she began singing. Somehow she managed all that at the same time.

"It's Tokens," Regina said from beside me.

"Huh?"

"She's using abilities. That has to be it."

We'd already hugged it out, but I turned to find myself in another hard embrace.

"I'm so glad you're back," she whispered.

"Oh yeah?"

"I've been spoiled for sex for the last several months," she breathed. "Then suddenly starved for weeks. Don't ever go and do that to me again."

I chuckled, and she let me go. As she did, I caught sight of Cinzy giving me a questioning look. I twitched a hint of a smile at her and shrugged just the tiniest bit, as if to tell her she'd made promises. She said she wanted me no matter what, no matter who else might be involved.

The moment of distraction allowed Tara to wrap herself around me in another huge hug.

“You idiot,” she said. “No going off by yourself again. That’s an order.”

“Oh, you think you give the orders around here?”

Again I locked eyes with Cinzy, and this time her questioning look held a bit of incredulity. I mimicked the earlier hint of smile and shrug. Her eyes widened.

She had caught me with Isabelle and Ivy… and now she knew how deep the rabbit hole went.

Vellenia stood in the corner, where one of the Wizards was attempting to talk with her. She brightened as soon as I took her hand, apologized to the flirty Wizard about my bondmate being uncomfortable outside the marshes, and took her to the dance floor.

“Are you certain?” she asked.

“Am I certain of what?”

“Are you certain… you wish to spend time with me alone? Your other partners wish to mate with you. I have heard them complaining without cease about the lack of Fletcher.”

“Have you been… listening in on their conversations?” I hoped they were just complaining about how they didn’t have a dedicated Healer.

“Oh, no… they seem to disregard my presence. Tara and Regina talk about your…” she looked down at my pants, “um, I am not supposed to refer to your genitals in open conversation.”

I burst out laughing.

“It is much the same with Ivy and Isabelle,” Vellenia confessed.

“Oh boy,” I muttered. I had not wanted to get in between those two and cause relationship problems.

The music changed tone and became more of a slow dance, so I twirled my partner and briefly enjoyed how her billowing dress flared out like a gigantic flower. Then I pulled her in tight. She immediately rested her head on my chest.

“Ivy needs the deep dicking,” Vellenia whispered.

“I probably shouldn’t be hearing this at all,” I muttered,

chuckling.

"Oh!" Vellenia said. "If I am being inappropriate, I can refrain from sharing their desires."

"Just make sure you only mention it when other people can't easily hear us."

"As you wish," she said.

For some reason those words really struck me. Vellenia was here to help fulfill my wishes.

This is Christopher feeling that everything is right with the world.

Christopher Fletcher

Healer - Trainee 21

Pleasure Seeker - Novice 20

attributes:

Affinity 7

Durability 6

Ingenuity 8

Likability 6

Physicality 5

Healer Skills:

Diagnosis (physical 4, spiritual 3, magical 3, mental 3)

Treatment (potions 4, salves 3, tinctures 3, elixirs 3, unguents 3)

Develop cure (swarm 4, small 5, medium 3, large 2)

Develop cure (unique) 7

Administer Cure 8

Pleasure Seeker Qualities:

Girth 1

Load 1

Stave Off 2

Length 1

Tongue 1

Adaptability 4
Pheromones 1
Other Skills:
Identify 5
Hiking 3
Cooking 1
Persuasion 1
Meditation 4
Divine Resistance 5
Stealth 1
Mana Affinity 1
All other skills unranked
Unspent skill points: 0

General Special Abilities:
Hard At Work III (Uncommon, Passive)
Wild Lore II (Uncommon, Active)
Beastmaster (Uncommon, Passive)
Stalwart II (Common, Passive)
Fierce II (Common, Passive)

Healer Special Abilities:
Healer's Endurance II (Common, Active)
Healer's Resistance (Uncommon, Active)
Healer's Breath (Uncommon, Active)
Verdant Rejuvenation (Uncommon, Passive)

Pleasure Seeker Special Abilities:
Blissense II (Rare, Active)
Post Sharing Clarity (Rare, Passive)
Drive In Deeper (Uncommon, Passive)



Chapter 44- Meet The Fletchers

The doorbell rang, and all three of my family members darted glances to a sleepy Brayden before looking at me.

"Of course, there was still the situation in Glumpdumpkin to deal with, but I'm going to put that away for now. I'll get it."

My mother had a look of hopeful terror written on her face that broke my heart. She knew exactly what was coming, and how it would change our lives forever… again.

I hopped up off the sofa in my parents' cozy living room and opened the front door. The girls all stood on my small concrete slab of a front porch, crammed shoulder to shoulder.

"I'm so glad to see you guys," I said.

"Well?" Regina asked. "You gonna invite us in or not?"

"I didn't get to the part where I tell them the plan," I admitted. "I barely got me back to the camp and the afterparty after the Blake incident."

Cinzy rolled her eyes and patted me on the head. "We'll take over from there, I guess." Then she pushed past me.

"Been taking your time then," Tara said, and also strode past me. She immediately fixated on Sarah and her big round belly, and began asking questions. Seconds later she was kneeling and had her hands all over Sarah, including putting her ear up to her belly button. The look on Tara's face was kind of scary, and now that I looked at her… she seemed different. She normally wore some bulky leather armor over earth tone clothes, for camouflage, but… in this scoop neck t-shirt, she seemed bustier than before.

My mouth began to drop open.

"Did you tell your parents…" Ivy asked, "…everything?"

"Of course not!" I said.

"He was just enjoying the chance to be back among his family," Isabelle explained, and gave me a companionable hug. Every time Isabelle did something reassuring like that, both Ivy and I would lock eyes and smile in relief. "Now let's see your adorable toddler nephew."

I strode back into the living room to find Brayden already balanced on Regina's feet. She was on her back and giving him the airplane treatment, while Sarah watched in astonishment. Cinzy was chatting animatedly to my mother and father, while Tara was studying all the family portraits on the walls and the fireplace mantel.

"Sarah," I said, "This is—"

"Ivy!" Sarah said. "And Isabelle. It's so nice to meet you!"

Unexpected. But welcome. Also… worrisome?

Both of them were careful to avoid smashing into Sarah's pregnant belly, but a lot of hugs went around. "I can't tell you how grateful I am that all of you are really real." Some laughter followed. "I knew it couldn't be just a figment of his imagination, but you know… sometimes people have, like, schizo things. They make up stuff. So, you know, I was a little worried about my brother's mental state."

"We're all worried about his mental state," Ivy said.

"I'm glad you're worried about my mental state and all, but I'm quite sane, thank you."

All the girls stopped and arched eyebrows at one another. Then they all burst out laughing.

"Oh yeah, laugh it up. I'm going to be in the kitchen devouring some cheese puffs."

I knew a spot where I could hang out in the kitchen and watch pretty much everything in the reflection of a large watercolor landscape painting that hung in the living room. It was flanked by an army of family photos and old school artwork, and bits of the rest of the room were visible there too. For now, I just let the girls do what

girls inevitably did: charm people with their energy and enthusiasm, and make instant connections.

Tara and Regina were presently arguing over who would be a pony for Brayden to ride, with Regina saying that 'coltish thighs don't mean anything in a game like this' and Tara shoving her away, then hurrying Brayden along. Pretty soon she was scrambling away from Regina with the boy riding piggyback. Both Brayden and Tara were laughing like lunatics.

Cinzy continued to chat up my mother and father. She was so, so good at it, and I didn't even put a stop to it when Cinzy asked for baby albums and embarrassing childhood stories. There were plenty, and my parents were thrilled to provide.

Sarah let go of Ivy and Isabelle's hands, where she'd been getting them to feel the baby kick. I wondered, briefly, if that was her only reason for grabbing onto the hands of the girl-girl couple from my team, but I let it go. There was no way I was asking that series of questions.

Ivy and Isabelle took up a single easy chair, with Isabelle in Ivy's lap, while Cinzy grabbed up the ottoman and sat with her elbows on her knees, chin on hands.

Eyes alight with interest and mischief, all of them listened to my mother explain: in first grade, I'd cried while trying to pin the tail on the donkey, because I couldn't see what I was doing.

I'd been frustrated. Kids cry when they're frustrated.

Oh, and there'd been the time I cried when the babysitters planned a surprise party. My mother was coming home with the new baby, see… and I was three fracking years old. Everything had been so overwhelming and I had no idea what was going on at the time.

There was no need to defend myself. I was not that kid any longer, and I wasn't even the impressionable teenager I'd been just a couple of years ago. Nor was I, and this was important, the defeated nobody who expected everyone to tease him over something that wasn't even under his control. It was amazing what a steady supply of sex with a series of incredible looking women

could do for your self-image.

Regina trotted back into the room, breathing a little heavily. “Can we hear about what happened to Fletcher’s legs?”

A hush fell over the crowded living room. Now that was a topic of some debate.

“Fletcher, why don’t you come in here and tell them the story?” My mother called.

“I’m just finishing up my cheese balls in here,” I called back.

“Come in here so I don’t have to keep yelling at you.”

That was Mom code for ‘get your butt in here before you get in trouble’ and I successfully stopped myself from rolling my eyes. You couldn’t just pretend everything was normal with your mother having cancer. So even with the little things, you sucked it up and made sure you were a model son.

“Hmm?”

“Your friends,” my mother said, giving it just enough inflection to let me know that she knew they weren’t just my friends, “are asking what happened to your legs.”

“I didn’t know he had a problem with his legs,” Isabelle said.

“Weird,” my father said. “Growth plate injuries and bad scoliosis are the type of thing everyone notices and nobody forgets seeing.”

“What?” Isabelle cried.

“Scoliosis as a result of osteomyelitis,” I said.

“You didn’t notice the limping after a long day’s march?” Cinzy asked.

“I most certainly did not.”

“The wincing pain?” Regina asked.

“Nooooo,” Isabelle said.

“The way he massaged his thighs and hips around the campfire?” Tara said, face pressed against Sarah’s pregnant belly, with Sarah rolling her eyes and grinning.

“No, okay? No!” Isabelle cried, hands fluttering. “Isabelle is not observant, okay? I was too busy watching the clouds shimmer and

the butterflies flutter by and the giant dinosaurs eat the leaves off the weird dancing trees."

"Forgivable," Ivy said, eyes twinkling.

I held out my hands. "Two kids were messing with me at a cliff's edge, pushing and pulling at me, and I fell down. I managed not to die, but I broke both my legs."

"Snapped like all the bones," Sarah added. "The ones that have your growth plates. And that can mess up your ability to grow when you hit puberty."

"Oh…" Tara said, her hand over her mouth.

"I mean I never was that big to begin with," I added.

"Oh tell them the other part," Sarah said.

Now I did roll my eyes. My sister didn't have cancer, so I could be annoyed with her. "And these two kids were just being bullies the whole time. They'd been picking on an even smaller kid, a third grader maybe, big thick glasses. So I told them to knock it off, and they went after me instead."

"Aww, my hero!" Cinzy gushed.

"Are they both in prison for the rest of their lives?" Ivy asked.

"Who would do something so horrible?" Isabelle asked.

"They were kids, and they didn't know any better, and their parents made them come and watch all the surgery videos. Scarred them for life. They got expelled from school, parents had to move out of state, everything got bad for them."

"We still get letters," my mother said. "Apology letters. Every year on Christopher's birthday."

"Who the heck is Christopher?" Cinzy asked, and everyone laughed.

"Well around here, everyone is a Fletcher," I said, grinning.

"You poor thing!" Regina said, using the conversation as an excuse to come over and give me a big hug. Tara followed along, and Brayden was hugging my leg by the time Cinzy was also hugging me.

"Ahhh that's enough, that's enough!" I called. "Anyway it's over, it's ancient history, and since I went through, I basically fixed myself up with Physicality points. We're here to talk about another topic that's sensitive in more ways than one."

All eyes fell on my parents.

It was Sarah who broke first. "What?" she cried. "What's happening right now?"

"I would've thought you'd have figured it out, Sare-bear," my father said gently.

"Pffff," my mother said, laughing. "You hadn't figured it out until I told you yesterday."

"Um… what? I have not figured it out, unless you're talking about…" She threw a pointed look my way, and then scanned the whole room. Now it was the Divinity Rescue Corps' turn to glance around in embarrassed silence, like… 'did she just convey what I thought she conveyed?' I nodded to each of the girls in turn, and they all found other things to look at around the room. Oh, what fabulous midnight blue carpeting you have in this living room, Mr and Mrs Fletcher.

"Your mother is going with them," my dad said.

"You talked it over with him already," I said, nodding my mother's way.

"Um, I don't even know what that means. You spoke a sentence, sure, but it's not a sentence that means anything." Sarah turned her eyes to Mom. "What in the hell are they talking about?"

"Your brother chose to be a Healer for a reason, Sarah Lynn," Mom said softly.

"You know why," I said. "All you have to do is think about it for a second."

Sarah had stood and made her way around the outside of the room. "You… and your band of… teenage girlfriends…" Sarah said, indicating me and the ladies. "You all are going to take my ailing mother… where? Through a fucking *portal*? Where even is it?"

"Language," my father warned.

It was too late. Little Brayden opened his mouth and went, "Fucking!" with some special language homing sense, that allowed him to know when a swear word was being said.

The girls erupted in giggles, though Sarah waved them down. "No no, no no no no no, we are not encouraging him to repeat words he's heard based on the laughter he gets. No son of mine will be a stand up comedian, that's for g… sure."

She whirled.

"Now you tell me exactly what is about to happen, and how long she will be gone, and when she will be back."

"We can't tell you that," I said. "The less you know in terms of logistics, strategy or specifics, the better."

"No! Not good enough. You told me the whole story—"

"A story no one would believe," I added.

"Shut up. You told me the whole story, and now you think you can just, what, abduct our mother to some strange monster world so you can cure her cancer?"

The girls were silent, but Ivy and Isabelle, then Tara, had stood up and come to stand next to me. Regina and Cinzy got the idea a moment later.

"That's exactly what I think," I said. "It's not going to be easy… the agency has tight security on the facility, but we have literal magic on our side."

"Pff," Sarah scoffed. "You said magic doesn't work here."

"For a brief moment it can," I told her. "And anyway, it's not your problem. We're headed out tonight—"

"She's *my* mother!" Sarah roared. "She's Brayden's grandmother!"

"She also gets to choose," my mother said. "And she's choosing to be Brayden's grandmother for a lot more than the next few months. I have another grandbaby I want to meet."

Tears were threatening. "But I just got you *back*."

Sarah put up some more protests, but they were mostly just the stammering, 'but but but' kind. She and Mom hugged it out, and the

girls took turns occupying my nephew with silly games, and my father with questions about cars, until the situation was defused.

It took some time, during which my father pulled the dust cloth off the car he'd been restoring for Ivy and Regina and Cinzy to behold. He started going on about cams and tweaking the suspension, and the fact that he couldn't get the tires because they didn't make them any longer. In the meantime Isabelle figured out that she could swing Brayden around in circles.

Which, now that it was introduced to his life, he wanted to do for*ever*. Tara was forced to spin him once Isabelle begged off, claiming that she was going to puke. I even got in a few turns, before Sarah returned.

"I have demands," Sarah said, watching Brayden totter around and fall on his butt from the dizziness.

"I'm not sure—"

"Do you know what the word *demands* means, dweeb?"

"Go right ahead," I said, holding up my hands in defeat.

"You will feed her and keep her absolutely, one hundred percent safe, to this facility, and more importantly inside the other world."

"I can't guarantee—"

"You will do this, or I will cut your balls off with gardening shears," Sarah said.

I snorted with laughter until I saw the look on her face.

"Christine and Heather will hold you down."

They would not be able to hold me down, but I continued to raise my hands in surrender. Then I dipped my head in acknowledgment.

"Safety guaranteed," I said. "There are two Guardians waiting near the portal with a rochidna, a tiny fairy, a flower fox, a water fairy, a Rogue, a Wizard, and a Sorcerer, who all have companions of their own. And some characters you haven't even met yet."

"That's more like it," she said.

"Dad stays here," she demanded.

"Your lawn requires him to stick around."

Now she really did smack me upside the head. Then, before I could make any other annoying jokes, she had surged forward and wrapped me in a tight hug. I hugged back, flooding with relief and pride, and also no small amount of regret. I hadn't been able to see her for months. For Brayden, that was an awful lot of growing up I hadn't been here to see. It wasn't easy on me either.

"I'm serious," she said, choked up.

"I got you, fam," I told her, trying not to choke up myself.

"You are such a dork," she muttered, while laughing and crying.

—The end

Of

Divinity Rescue Corps: Chapter The Second



About the Author: Nolan Locke

Nolan Locke is a real human being and not a figment of anyone's imagination. Nolan started roleplaying at the tender age of twelve, in Ninjas and Superspies, and has since gamed almost everything: D&D, Rifts, 7th Sea, Shadowrun, Star Wars in three different game systems, and plenty of others. Recently he's been gaming A Familiar Problem, Kids on Bikes, Blades in the Dark, and Teens in Space. He has also played Magic: the Gathering in various forms, with huge gaps in between, since middle school.

Nolan presently resides outside Seoul, South Korea, where he teaches students, rides his bike around looking for shady picnic tables where he can write, exercising to keep the kidney stones away, and laughing at jokes very few people think are funny.

Past titles from Nolan include EEE (Evan's Eldritch Emporium) books one through five, ARSE (Augmented Reality System

Apocalypse), Douchemage, Dungeons & Dillholes, and Ultimate Grimdork, which make up the Glitchworld series, Aethermarked books I and II are Dark LitRPG without a lick of smut. Nolan has also appeared in several LitRPG anthologies, including GitGud and Mystery Box.

This is his third foray into NSFW writing, and once he takes a quick shower, he'll get back at it.

Always shower afterwards.

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