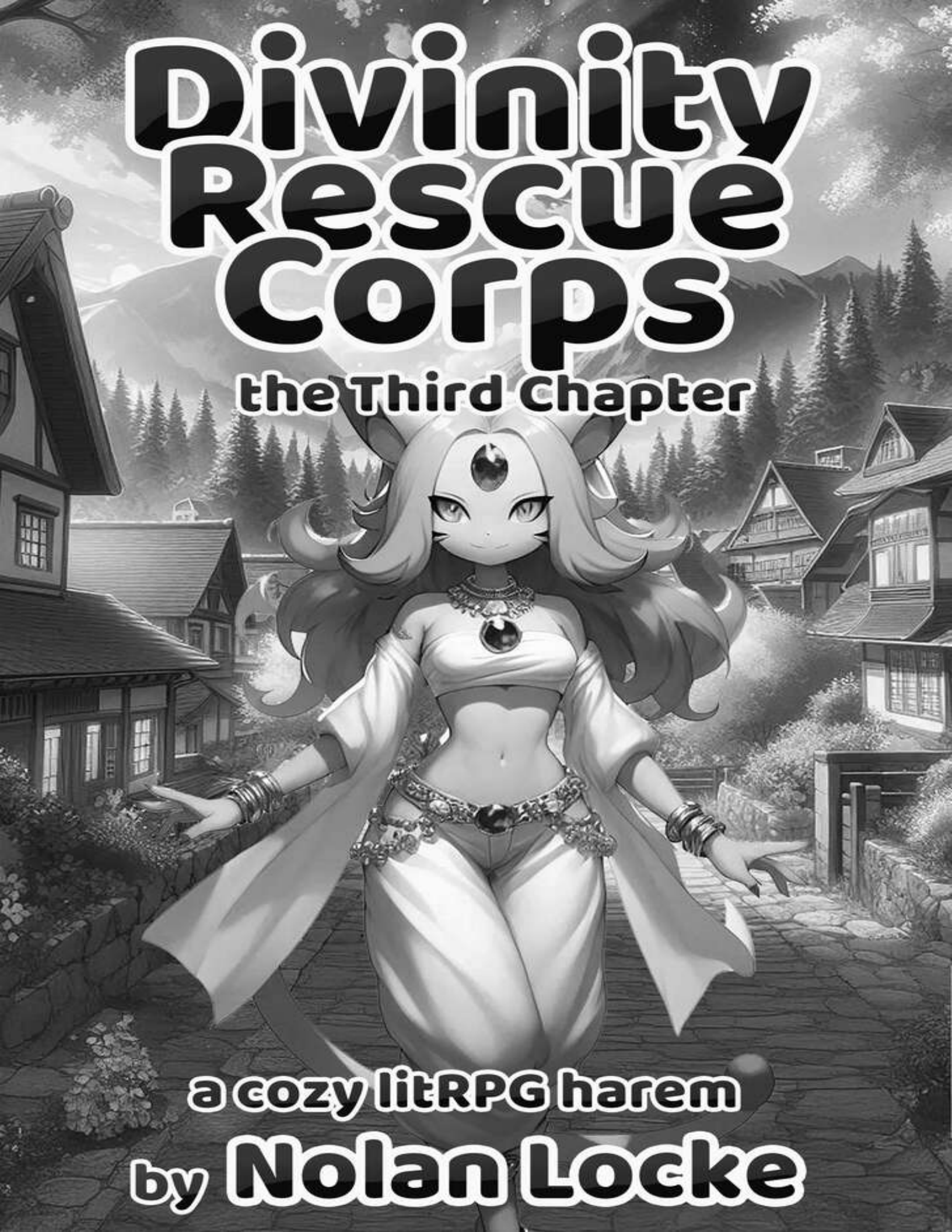

Divinity Rescue Corps
the Third Chapter
a cozy litRPG harem
by Nolan Locke

DIVINITY RESCUE CORPS

DIVINITY RESCUE CORPS

Chapter the Third

by

NOLAN LOCKE

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Chapter 1- Hitting The Road

You know how you only see people at work, in their work clothes, and you see a certain version of them that's not the whole truth? Like, Cheryl from accounting always has those sweater vests on, and she always has those cute earrings and absolute tons of makeup. She's pungent with the overwhelming scent of perfume, and she has a smile for everyone.

And then one day you're out at a state park, digging the serenity of nature with your significant other, and who should you run into but Cheryl. Except, it's hardly Cheryl at all. You barely recognize her. Where's the makeup? Where's the perfume? She had only ever worn those sweaters (cardigans in the summer, thicker vests in cooler weather), but now here she is wearing a tank top that shows off a sliver of a belly you have literally never seen before. And never thought you'd see, for that matter, since you have a significant other. She has on form-fitting yoga pants and a backpack stuffed with easily forty pounds of gear. Rather than those spotless conservative heels, she has on rugged hiking boots, caked with mud. You've never seen her without a pen or a clipboard in her hand, and now she has those walking sticks.

And you think: what in the world is happening right now?

That's how it was having the girls on earth.

Possibly the weirdest thing about having the Divinity Rescue Corps girls on earth was sharing a full size rental van with them, and having them not wear leather armor and such.

Now, it wasn't a case of them dressing differently, though they did, it was a case of seeing plain old humans interact with plain old earth stuff: the vending machines, the guy at the gas station counter, the waitresses, and of course all the young men trying to hit on them.

And also having them sing pop songs.

There is something odd about going to another world, and returning months later. The first thing that happens is that the world both moves on and stays exactly as you remembered it. Most of the buildings and people are in the same places. The cars look like the cars that left. Clouds? Check. Trees, forests, mountains, fields of corn and wheat? Check, check, check.

But there are new movies out. New songs on the radio. New insane shizz happening in the halls of power that people are talking about. This celebrity has appeared out of nowhere, their rise a surprise explosion, like a volcano suddenly erupting. This celebrity has died, or worse, their name has been tarnished by some wacky or awful scandal, and they've retreated back into the shadows.

This guy has been elected president while you've been gone, Christopher. Remember the old boss? Oh yeah, he's back.

Cinzy desperately wanted to sing the entire catalogue of Genera Pops, which Ivy put to death the moment we took a pee break. With Ivy in the pilot's seat and Isabelle running copilot, we got the rock stations and the occasional rap station. With Regina driving, she demanded something lighter, so Tara put on the oldies station.

All of them laughed at me for singing along to all my dad's favorite music, and some ribbing ensued. Ivy and Tara only made fun of me until I started singing more loudly. That was when Cinzy got involved, and boy could she sing.

I don't know what special ability Cinzy used to harmonize with me, or make me sound better, but suddenly we were sounding better than the singers on the radio. Then the laughter turned to astonished—and dare I say horny—giggles.

With me in the pilot's chair and my mom copiloting, she turned the music down and we went over the entirety of the last six months from five different perspectives.

"Yeah I'd been working the portal noobs for about three months before Fletcher came through," Regina said. "They were really cutting down on the number of new hires coming through at the same time. Fletcher was the first single send we had."

“Oh? Why is that?” my adorable mother asked.

“Uhh…” Regina started.

It was because the other cohorts were all flinging aside any sense of propriety and normality, and flinging their clothes off at the same time. The new world was exciting, and all these young people in the same place, and with magically enhanced bodies involved, it felt like Vegas. Everyone was just getting their freak on with any and everyone who was game.

“There were no rules and no restrictions, no parents looking over their shoulders,” I said.

“Also they could enhance their bodies by pumping up Physicality,” Ivy said.

“And Likability,” Cinzy chimed in.

“Which was how we ended up with so many Guardians,” Ivy said.

“And Bards!” Cinzy added. And Sorcerers too, since for some odd reason Sorcerers relied heavily on Likability and Affinity.

Which begged the question of what Ivy had looked like before coming to the other world. Or the rest of them, for that matter.

“Oh,” my mom said. She knew. She had figured out my reasons for coming home after six months, she had figured out why I told her the whole story: me entering a new world of magic and fantastical beasties, me taking on the role of Healer, me helping in my basic training with the healing of a minor god called the God of Footfalls. She knew about the task force I’d been given leave to create, how I’d come to select the ten members of the Divinity Rescue Corps, of which these five ladies were only half the members.

“Don’t be so blunt about it!” Regina said, wide-eyed.

“What, you think us old folks have never had sex?” my mom joked.

“You’re not supposed to say the s-word with your son in earshot,” I grumbled.

“How do you think I made Christopher?” my mother asked. “He wasn’t a virgin birth, let me tell you.”

“Mooooom! Quit that.” No one likes to be reminded that their mom… forks.

“His father was a real hunk,” she said, putting her hand up against her cheek like that would prevent me from hearing. “Still is, if I’m being honest.”

All the girls were laughing, watching me squirm. I gave my mom the side eye but let her have her fun. It was honestly the best two weeks of my life on earth, being pain free and giving my family the good feels. I could withstand some harmless fun at my expense.

“Okay so I have to know… what happened with Fairy Poppins once you came back to the team?”

“Ohhhhhhh!” the rest of the girls said in sync.

“Oh… is it bad? Something terrible happens to Fairy Poppins?”

“No she’s fine,” Cinzy grumbled, folding her arms over her spectacular chest. “Everything’s fine. We’re fine.”

***

I don’t know if you know this, but the word ‘fine’ when used by a woman indicates the situation is anything but fine. It actually means the situation is a fracking catastrophe, and God help you if you are that girl’s boyfriend or husband.

Cinzy and I did indeed return to a joyful reunion with the remainder of the team. Drat was nowhere to be found, which was for the best. I wanted to violate the no violence rule right about now, and give him a piece of my mind. And my fist.

Fairy Poppins had been put on night’s watch duty over the last month or so, and was a stalwart companion at her task. She’d refused any of the others when they offered to take her place, instead dancing around in the air like a ballerina, trailing streamers of fairy dust in her wake. She slept most mornings through either in my laboratory on a small cushion Alan had devised, or just settled in on my pillow like it was a swimming-pool-sized bed.

She had been close to me ever since Cinzy showed up.

So when Cinzy returned from our extended absence, it was a

blow up of epic proportions. Epic for Fairy Poppins because the little fairy was only about five inches tall. Epic for Cinzy because she spent the whole time in conversation with something we couldn't hear or understand. It was just like watching a schizophrenic—or a child for that matter—have a conversation with an imaginary friend.

"You're out of your mind if you think I'm going to apologize to *you!*" Cinzy could be heard shouting from far off. "Well yes! Yes! If it means getting through to you, I will call you crazy. You can't, okay? You can't. It's just not going to work. You can't. I'm sorry you can't, but you can't."

And what was it Fairy Poppins wanted to do? None of us had any idea. Even Drat couldn't figure it out… or he refused to tell me.

The two of them had developed something of a friendship during the Blake Situation. Sometimes I'd see them walking along the edge of the town, talking. Sometimes she'd stop and cry, and he would stand there awkwardly, staring at her. They never touched. Drat wasn't that kind of person.

And the fighting went on day after day.

"How long are we gonna do this?" Cinzy would demand. "Forever? Well we're fracking bonded, so tell me how you think this is gonna work, okay?"

And it would make no sense to me, or Vellenia, or Ivy or Isabelle.

Isabelle had a thing about daily scrubbings. Her Nakamamon Muppin was a gentle giant who stood guard over the entrance to Glumpdumpkin and accepted all scratches from all interested parties. Vellenia had taken to this, scratching at every inch of Muppin she could reach. Behind the ears? Check. Behind the spiky echidna-like plates? Check. On the belly? You better believe it. I'd head out of the lab after healing up a minor god, or come back from town with Tara or Regina in tow, and find Vellenia on her back in the dirt, scratching at Muppin's belly with both hands and feet. I'd find Muppin rolled over on her side with Vellenia just raking her fingers down all six feet of exposed rock belly. I'd find Vellenia seated on a special saddle Izzy had made, reaching forward or back to get the very top plates

nobody but Larelle could easily reach.

"We're totally in sync," Isabelle said. "I don't know why anyone would fight with their bond."

"Actually that leads to a question I've had for a while," I said, and turned to Ivy.

"Ohhhh no, no you don't," she said, holding out her hands to ward off the question. "I'm not a pet person."

I gestured over toward Vellenia, eyebrow raised.

"I'm also not a… I'm in a relationship! I don't need a butt buddy." The last part was hissed out in a whisper.

I continued to raise my eyebrow, but this time made sure Ivy knew just how much that pissed me off. She wasted no time apologizing.

"I didn't mean that," Ivy said. "My apologies."

"Thanks," I said. "She's a delight. She listens and helps. She's getting really good at identifying the herbs and flowers I need at any time.

"Look, I get it!" Cinzy was shouting from a good ways off. "I get it! And I'm sorry! We want the same thing. But, you know, life isn't fair sometimes."

The tiny ball of light in the distance that was Fairy Poppins must have said something that Cinzy didn't like, because the Bard threw her hands in the air.

"I'm sorrrrrrrreeeeeeeeeeee," she said, not sounding sorry any longer. It was the third day of trying to confront her bond, and her patience had run dry. With both hands slapped against her face, she drew them slowly down until the gross red bits under her eyeballs were visible. "Ugh! You're impossible!"

She stalked off, again.

Isabelle and Ivy chuckled over it. I was starting to get the impression the situation was less jokey and more serious than we'd first imagined.

Now here's the other thing: the bonding of Nakamamon is one of

those ‘you’ll know it when you do it’ sorts of trainings, like throwing you into the deep end and watching you flail or begin to drown. I was given zero explanation aside from ‘you can bond starting at level 12’. No ideas on which might be the proper Nakamamon to bond, how to tell if one could be bonded, the bonding process, none of that. Thankfully I’d had a sentient one ask me for the honor, then show me how it was done. After that, she had gained some powers off me, and I had gained some powers off her.

I had used **Dazzle** on Blake’s second in command to attempt to hypnotize him, only to have him power through it by spending a plethora of Tokens. In one way, it was extremely useful. Tokens represented the potential to do amazing things. They were literally magic stored in your body. I had also used the water breathing power to help search for remnants of the God of Apparel. I was rather enjoying the bonuses it gave me, though they hadn’t come up much. More than that, I was rather enjoying the presence. Vellenia offered physical touch, something I was really enjoying, good humor, which I enjoyed almost more, a positive and inquisitive attitude toward the world outside of her home village. All these were wonderful.

There was the sex. That was nice. Nobody else had a bonded companion they could fool around with.

All those things aside, there was still a lot about bonding and bonded companions none of us knew. I didn’t know if the bond could level up, if it could be increased. I didn’t know if the abilities from the bond could level up. I wasn’t even sure if Vellenia was going to stay in her Marshin form, or transform into a Marshmellow. That would make things difficult, since they were essentially mermaids.

Most of all, I wasn’t sure what happened when you and your companion Nakamamon had a clash like Cinzy was experiencing.

“That,” Ivy told me later,” is one of the reasons I’m not about to go hunting for a pet.”

“They’re not pets,” I told her. Fairy Poppins wasn’t a pet. On the other hand, Tweedle Dee was sort of a pet. He sort of wasn’t. The

little flower fox surely acted like a pet at times. Garnet wasn't a pet… he was some kind of power amplifier for Trent in a way I didn't understand. I wasn't a Sorcerer. I wasn't about to become one, either.

Still… it appeared as though I might have a secondary healing mission to undertake, and thankfully I had the tools to do it. Fairy Poppins was a humanoid Nakamamon, meaning that my **Beast Talker** ability only gave me a +2 bonus to all attributes and skills when interacting with her, but it was a much better bonus than zero, which was what most everybody else had. Understanding Nakamamon and the bond was important. I had to figure out how important.

This was another situation that would play itself out given time. I was advancing in level, both as a Healer and as a Pleasure Seeker, and that meant **Beast Talker** would also progress in level. I just needed to cultivate the power, stay alert, and hopefully we could heal whatever rift had opened between Cinzy and her bond.

This is Christopher banking on optimism and the old adage that time heals all wounds.



Chapter 2- Letting The Girls Do The Talking

The West Coast of the United States has its own set of climates, like an ornery relative who shows up now and again from far off. We're not entirely sure how we're related to this ornery relative, not sure why their life and political ideas are so different from the remainder of the family, but they've been part of the family for years and they keep showing up with presents, strange stories, and they smell all wrong.

So even despite the season, we had amazing clouds rippling like bubble wrap in the sky. They went scudding along at a high speed, giving us glimpses of the sun, and even more views of fantastic sun rays shooting down distantly at all angles. The only constant was the wind blowing in from offshore.

It was heavenly.

My mom was not content to just enjoy the drive; she wanted to know literally everything that had happened while I was in the other world for six months. She seemed to drink it up, insatiable for more information on what we were attempting to take her into.

Luckily I had five lovely ladies who appeared to be up to the task.

And so I was able to luxuriate. Put my head down in Tara's lap in the back bench, enjoy the softness of her thighs, and get a bit of shuteye while they talked and talked.

"Hang on, so how did you go about choosing all your team members?" she asked.

"I forced him to take my girlfriend Isabelle," Ivy called from in the back. Izzy was leaning against Ivy's shoulder, and every time Ivy announced her as her girlfriend, Izzy got extra touchy feely. They started covertly kissing in the back back seat.

“I forced him to take the newest recruit, Alan,” Regina said. “He chose to be a Wizard but he had a stutter, so I was worried that the other Wizards were going to dunk on him and make him miserable.”

“I forced him to take me,” Tara added. “I was bored of doing make work in the castle headquarters building—”

“The anti-gravity one?” my mother asked.

“Correct.”

Regina took up the thread here, swiveling and smiling down at me from the middle bench. “The other Wizards are all sick and tired of playing admin secretary roles and doing boring experiments there. The Guards are all sick and tired of playing fetch to grab people when they’re needed, and sick of standing watch on the walls, when nothing will ever come and attack.”

“And the Rangers are all sick and tired of running around outside the castle,” Tara said.

“So you have your Guardians, a cute girl girl couple, the tall muscly orange one with all the hair, and the slim icy ghosty one,” my mother said.

“Correct.”

“Your tall bored Ranger, and your shorter freckly redhead who guides people from the portal to the castle.”

“Correct.”

“Stuttering Wizard, not sure how that works, and then there’s a rat one and a rock one.”

“Rogue and Sorcerer, right,” Regina confirmed.

“How did you choose them?”

I got over to the right where the faster cars could pass us, while I tried to concentrate on the road, take in the sight of the West Coast ocean passing at sixty miles an hour, and keep the conversation going.

“They weren’t buddies with the guy who freaked out when he first saw me.”

Blake. The guy who turned into a Nakamamon. The first ever

fighting aspect Nakamamon.

That topic had been mostly dealt with, in the play-by-play, but it was the aftermath that my mother wanted to handle. However, since I wasn't really responding—Tara was running one hand up and down my torso and beginning to get me aroused—she began asking after their families and situations here on earth, and what got them hired by the Agency.

Tara and Cinzy mostly took over, after the girls sketched out their own situations. We sailed right through Isabelle's 'I also had a bad boyfriend experience' and through Regina's 'I had a really bad experience that was illegal for the guys' until we reached Ivy's 'I got doxxed and assaulted at school' story.

Tara had been from a rather large family who all seemed to want to make the worst choices, while Cinzy had been from a small but very wealthy family. While Tara excelled but had to continually bail her family out of problems, Cinzy excelled under the oppressive thumbs of her overbearing parents. She also yearned to be free of that thumb, and that meant acting out, getting into bad situations, doing some drugs… and none of that existed over in the other world, so that was just *amazing*. Plus, Fletcher hadn't known any of that, he'd only seen the capabilities of the girls through their interviews and their special abilities.

It took us a good few hours to get all the way up through California, switching drivers, taking breaks, grabbing meals and fuel and snacks and stretching out. We even took a beach break, with me and the girls enjoying some of the gorgeous waters, while Tara stayed with my mom. It was clear that Tara wasn't even through all of her insane, gigantic family stories, but she had moved on into aunt and uncle territory, then into cousin territory. My mom eventually claimed exhaustion, and I sympathized. I also laughed uproariously at the notion my mother couldn't take anymore Tara.

There are over eleven hundred miles of coastal highway from the very south of California to the border with Oregon, and thankfully we weren't starting out in San Diego. We only got onto Highway 1 after lunch anyway. From my place to Oregon was well over miles, and we

weren't exactly moving at a blistering speed. Morning turned to noon, noon bled into the starker evening colors, and before you knew it, dusk was closing in.

"Few more miles," I said. We had gotten on the 5 to skirt around San Jose and San Francisco, enjoying the palms, the scrubby hills, and once we got back on Highway 1, the Shoreline Highway, it was the coastline once more. "We'll stop just outside of San Rafael and find a restaurant."

"And a motel," my mother said.

When someone with cancer says something in that definitive tone, you don't question it. They know their limits and you follow along. Honestly, I was astonished we'd made it north of San Francisco as it was.

Since I was driving, it was back to me answering the questions. The girls had been terrible at keeping the plot moving forward, which you can't really fault them for doing. This was their vacation, after all. Only I was engaged in work during my rest and relaxation weeks. They had essentially become bums who could not be bothered to be productive, even with regard to thinking.

I was having trouble turning Productive Fletcher off.

"We were talking about how Blake transformed into a Nakamamon?" My mom asked.

"Yeah that was weird," Isabelle said from… Ivy's lap? I couldn't see her.

"Be sure to take your anti-magic vitamins, people," Ivy added. "Or else you could end up being an eight foot mountain of muscle who only wants to fight everything it sees, and you can no longer be classed as human."

When we pulled off the highway for dinner later, Ivy got out a very good watercolor sketch of the thing Blake had transformed into, a Brawldar.

"Don't spoil her appetite!" Isabelle admonished. We had chosen a nice Mexican place. "That thing gives me the creeps.

"Thank you for looking out for me, dear," my mother said. She

smiled warmly at Isabelle, seemed to melt, before taking a closer look at Ivy's painting. "Well that is something. And this person used to be a human, huh?"

"Not a very good human," Cinzy muttered.

"She's upset because Blake almost killed her brother."

"We skipped past Slinktrickle entirely," Regina said.

"You guys made me skip past Slinktrickle almost entirely," Tara muttered with mock affront. "And then you almost made me turn around and do it all again once my backpack vanished and I lost all my clothes.

"Yeah you missed most of the naked shenanigans from the God of Apparel," Cinzy said.

Tara again muttered something that sounded surly but didn't have any venom.

"Who we resurrected," Ivy added.

That had been weird, first finding and collecting together the god's clothing, then giving up offerings to the divine being and bringing it back to life.

"Do you remember Drat's face when we told him he had to sacrifice some clothing to it?" Regina asked, then snorted.

I grinned. Drat had hated to be forced into anything, and more than that, he hated being forced to pray to a god. And who knows, maybe he hated the idea of praying to a dead god. Regardless, after he'd done it, the dead god's body had incorporated and we'd made a major discovery: if a god was suffering from a Spiritual illness as well as another illness, you could believe them back to life.

Insanity, right?

So we went through the very difficult process of bringing the god back to full health, meaning we needed a ton of Tokens on my part to develop the cure, and more Tokens to administer it. Since it took so long—

"You forgot a part," Cinzy droned, the exuberance suddenly drained out of her.

By now we had ordered our tacos, burritos, chimichangas, and fajitas, and were chowing down.

My mother paused, food in her mouth. "Oh, Christopher told me all about it. You got a tip from the Drat fellow about Blake's operation, which included your brother, who's also named Christopher! It's so lovely that you would stick up for your brother like that."

"The Christophers must be protected at all costs," I muttered.

Cinzy stared at her, then glanced to me. I gave her a micro-shrug, like 'what? How am I supposed to tell her that I've had sex with every human female on my expedition?' And furthermore, how was I supposed to tell my own mother that Cinzy had left in a snit when she'd discovered me having sex with the two bisexuals in a committed relationship… at the same time? I had skipped over a lot with my mom. Of course, she wasn't stupid, so she assumed whatever she assumed, and neither of us had to explicitly speak about it.

No. Thank you.

She had already, bless her heart, not told Cinzy or the other girls that I'd called Cinzy the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen in real life. My mother was the soul of wit and discretion.

"Yes of course," Cinzy continued smoothly. I heard from Drat that my brother was being held captive outside of Glumpdumpkin and I demanded Fletcher help me take care of it immediately. Which was silly, of course… he couldn't just drop this god situation and run off that way."

"Thankfully we found our way there after Fletcher administered the cure to the God of Apparel."

"Guys," Tara said, leaning forward. "Are we… gonna get in trouble talking like this?"

"What, are you assuming the Agency has our phones tapped and are listening to everything we say?" Ivy asked.

"Yeeeeeaaaaahhhhh," Tara said. "Aren't you?"

"Me too," Ivy said, "which is why I'm not traveling with a phone."

"Oh," Cinzy said. "I'll just turn mine off then."

Everyone stared at her while she pulled her phone out and slowly switched it off.

"I volunteer Cinzy to charm the guards out of killing us when she shows up," Ivy said, deadpan.

"Let's get back on the road and hit a motel soon," I said. "For now, we're getting caught up, right? What did we miss?"

It turned out we had missed the travel to Glumpdumpkin, discovering the townsfolk under the influence of an even stronger god than before, and beginning to investigate the town itself.

Most everyone in the town had fallen unconscious, though there were notable exceptions: some people reacted the opposite way, by going into manic work frenzies. A few of them staggered around as if drunk, and forgot how to live. The last group were the psychic aspect Nakamamon, who were totally unaffected by the god's presence. Which meant the god's affliction was a mental one.

"The effect created by the god was strong enough to blanket all of Glumpdumpkin, and also affect the local gods."

"Oh!" Tara said, and began gushing. "There was furry little blue thing, the God of Lost Jewelry, and it was just the most adorable thing. Every once in a while it would vomit up an earring, but since it was all confused, it forgot it was a god, so we could play with it. Eeeeee!"

Regina joined her with the "Squeeeeeeeeee!"

Like the two of them were fourteen year old Swifties instead of in their early twenties.

"And we healed up several of those before the Blake situation exploded."

"Cinzia helped them capture you, and Drat was also there," my mother said, nodding. Again, Cinzy ducked her head, embarrassed. "Oh don't do that, honey, you were concerned about your brother. And as I understand, Drat let you in on the plan to help heal up and free the Wizards under that awful Blake."

"That was the plan," I said, "except it didn't include other

Wizards.”

“Until Fletcher went off script,” Cinzy explained. “He summoned a stampede of Nakamamon.”

Not sure how he did that, her tone said. Which I did not need. If my mother only knew that I got abilities from having sex, she would start putting a lot more pieces together. Right now she just thought we all slowly developed powers by spending time around one another, like the magical bonding I’d done with Vellenia, the native of Slinktrickle.

“Blake lost his mind so much that he went buck wild,” Ivy said. “Tried to kill your son here.”

My mother turned a startled look my way, as if to say that I had downplayed the danger Blake represented, and by the way if I ever did that again, I would be so grounded.

I may have exaggerated the intensity of the look slightly.

“So Blake becomes a Nakamamon, the first ever fighting aspect, and since he’s not a psychic aspect, he falls right to sleep.”

“That’s where I left off with my family,” I said.

“Awesome, that means we get to tell the next part,” Regina announced.

“First we’re going to get some sleep,” I said. My mother had cancer, and until I could get her into the other world, there was basically nothing I could do to help rid her of that cancer. She looked like she’d been in an airplane for fourteen hours nonstop, rather than in a car for no more than two hours at a time.

I ended up paying for a motel room for my mom, and another for myself. After wishing my mom a good night, and coordinating with the girls on when we’d get moving in the morning, I settled in for a good night’s sleep.

This is Christopher one hundred percent kidding.



Chapter 3- The Five Of Us

A soft knock on my door announced that I wasn't going to have a good night's rest after all. Or maybe I'd have a great night's rest… just not the whole night. Giggling outside the door meant I wasn't going to spend the night alone, and judging by the amount of giggles, I wasn't even going to spend it with just one partner.

The moment I opened the door Cinzy shoved her way inside, followed closely by Ivy and Isabelle. I thought that was it, until Regina poked her head inside and then entered.

"Um…" I said.

Tara came in last of all.

Of the five of them, Cinzy had clearly taken care of her look, having put on makeup and changed into a pale pink matching sweatsuit. She did a twirl, and that let me read the block letters stitched into the ass of her sweatpants, PRINCESS.

Tara and Regina were both in pajamas. Come to find out, they'd heard a commotion down the hall and followed along after. Still, the thin pajama pants—Regina wearing pink unicorns leaping over rainbows and Tara in flannel plaid—looked good on them. The thin tank top sleepwear without bras underneath both told the tale of it being a bit cool outside.

Lastly, Isabelle and Ivy. Sheesh. These two were skirting disaster here. Isabelle had on a black trench coat with her hands jammed into the pockets, while Ivy had on a pleated, red plaid skirt that barely covered her ass, along with a black tube top over a fishnet shirt. Oh, and knee high combat boots.

"What are you… I share a door with my mother," I whispered.

"You shouldn't have gotten the adjoining door then," Cinzy said.

"Can we at least go to one of your rooms?"

"Nope," Cinzy replied.

"Nuh-uh," Regina said.

"I don't know guys, his mom is really sweet—" Tara said, and I was pleased to have at least one ally. It didn't do any good, though.

"You don't have to stick around," Cinzy said. "I am here for a little reunion, and I have some demands I…" she trailed off when she spotted my raised eyebrow. "Some demands I hope you'll agree to."

"Ivy's been just fiending," Isabelle said, grinning and rolling her eyes.

"You're the one in a trench coat and nothing underneath," Ivy shot back, and everyone's mouth immediately dropped open.

Once we'd gotten over the shock, and convinced Isabelle not to flee the scene, we had chairs pulled up and sat down to figure out what the heck was going on here.

"So what the heck is going on here?" I asked. I was not looking up into the space where Isabelle's skirt should've been. Definitely *not* looking up there.

"Ivy wants the old reliable," Isabelle said, but… um. She wanted, um. She um, wanted, um—"

"I wanted to talk with you privately about sex stuff," Ivy said coldly. "This one intercepted us on our way over here."

"And I just wanted to see some of this with my own eyes," Cinzy said sweetly.

All eyes turned her way. I could feel the disbelief radiating off all four of the girls.

"Look," I said, "we had our little talk about this. We're all okay with doing this, right? None of this is infuriating one of you and causing jealousy to bubble up that will break the team. You all promised."

This was just like what had happened immediately following my return from imprisonment under Blake. I hadn't gone over it with my family, even though Sarah had cornered me and forced me to confess that I'd had sex while in the other world.

When I'd returned from the Blake situation, it had been to a serious amount of getting down and dirty, and negotiations

regarding what was and wasn't okay.

Regina had never cared. She just wanted to try out everything once. She'd entered into a situation with Tara first, and later with Vellenia just because she was a horny little minx. She appeared to be even more bisexual than Ivy, or rather she was just sexual.

That first night she had found her way into my house and woken me up with a blowjob, which naturally woke up Vellenia, who joined in the fun. It was a solid chunk of time just gasping and moaning and thrusting and slurping. All that had gone on for who knew how long, until Tara also found her way into my house. From there, Vellenia took care of Regina while I gave Tara a serious punishment for intruding on my private space.

And by punishment, I mean I folded the flexible beauty in half and pounded her hard until she was going through orgasm after orgasm.

Somewhere in the middle of this, Regina fell unconscious while sitting on Vellenia's face. My bonded Nakamamon had six flexible, muscular little tentacles in her mouth instead of a tongue, and those were far longer than the typical human tongue. Regina literally fainted from too many climaxes.

Afterwards I made Tara worship my companion Nakamamon. Both of us gave her oral at first, lavishing attention on her curious disappearing, reappearing nipples and genitalia. And after that, Tara enjoyed a nice relaxing sixty-nine session with Vellenia, while I took my time giving it to my companion the slow, deep and hard way.

I couldn't be sure there was a companion connection track like the Relationship status with the girls, but I wasn't taking any chances. I would use physical affection and sex any time we had an opportunity to strengthen that bond, assuming the system had such a thing. Just for the sake of safety, obviously.

So it was, having slow and sensual sex with my Nakamamon standing up, that Tara ended up licking the place where the two of us were joined, providing the clit stimulation while I teased and twisted Vel's nipples and drove her wild.

The next day both Ivy and Isabelle cornered me by 'taking me out on a walk to view the perimeter' of the town, purely for security's sake.

Once we were out of sight of the tiny village Trent had constructed, Izzy tore Ivy's clothes off and bent her girlfriend over on one of the gigantic spherical leaves on the trees. She then demanded that I 'pound the complaints out of this cock-hungry slut', and proceeded to spank Ivy dozens of times.

Apparently Ivy had grown used to having me every week or so as a way to fill the void Isabelle's fingers couldn't quite reach. So as I took her by the hips and gave her a vigorous pounding, Izzy kept demanding apologies for her being so whiny about missing my cock. And if Ivy didn't apologize fast enough, it was spank time.

Ivy couldn't apologize fast enough, apparently. I watched as the welts appeared, and listen to Ivy's pained grunts turned into yelps of shock, then pleas for Isabelle to stop.

Isabelle started whispering about how, if she wasn't careful, next time she'd have to watch Fletcher fuck only her and not Ivy. It would be forced chastity. Ivy's only response was a mournful, orgasm-laced 'nooooooo'.

And in between all these was Cinzy, who had raged at me, left, then helped trap me into the Blake situation, only for her to apologize by offering herself up to me wholly. Now, she *claimed* she didn't care who I slept with, or how often, she only wanted me from time to time.

I put that claim to the test by inviting her to my place and flirting with Vellenia the whole time. Initially, she seemed fine with me kissing and licking the Nakamamon's neck, and playing footsie under the table while we ate dinner. She wasn't.

Cinzy practically attacked me, begging to be included. She didn't care, she would lick our feet, she would suck Vel's toes, just so long as she wasn't ignored.

This hadn't been a good sign. I needed her to be okay with me engaging with the others, yet here she was, unable to watch me kiss

my bonded companion. All of our clothes were still on. How was she going to handle knowing I was slipping Regina's clothes off and licking her bare skin? I doubted it would go well.

In any event, I gave in to Cinzy. It was hard not to, given just how desirable she was. I laid her on my bed and once I'd gotten her nice and lubed up, slowly forced myself into her ass. This time she was facing me, or rather lying on her back on my bed, so I got to watch her face go through contortions. From bewilderment to disbelief, pain to ecstasy, she appeared to have a religious experience taking my full length. She'd held her knees, but as I fed her the last inch, she slipped and went boneless.

She liked it even more when I spent the Token to enhance the pleasure using **Entwined Ecstasy**. I worked a thumb over her clit again and again, delighting in the way her eyes snapped back into focus and she coiled down into a magnificent orgasm not a minute later.

It had been a continual issue trying to deal with Cinzy's jealousy, Regina's neediness and Isabelle's feelings of inadequacy. Tara… had the same old Tara problem, and I wasn't certain what to do about it. Thankfully, whatever magic did to the human body, it didn't increase my potency or her receptivity. Or with the constant breaks we ended up taking from being apart so often, she just failed to conceive for a good six solid months.

In all honesty, I was low-key anxious about the situation with Tara. Every time I got with her, the sex was so passionate and so intense that there was no controlling myself. She was as insistent that I finish inside as the first time we were together. The first four times, that was.

"So to be clear, we are not telling Fletcher's mom all about the, uh, the you know, all the fornication," Tara said, and ended off the sentence with just enough inflection to turn it into a half-unsure half-question. "I mean when we tell her about the Glumpdumpkin stuff."

"Um, of course we aren't," Cinzy said.

"I will say in her defense," I said, "that she is very sharp, and has

probably figured out some of what's been going on, but on that point, no. No, no, a hundred times no. I would really prefer she never hears a detailed accounting of me swapping bodily fluids with anyone, please and thank you."

"Okay," Regina said. Such a simple word. The rest were nodding along, and I heaved a sigh full of relief.

"Are we finally going to have the talk?" I asked.

"If it involves you going to town on our two Guardians here, I'm all for it," Cinzy said, hands on hips and chest thrust out. I had to say, the matching pink sweatshirt reading PRINCESS looked amazing on her. "Our two Rangers don't need to be here. Not sure why they came, honestly."

"To… also have some time with Fletcher, obviously," Regina said, and plastered herself against me. She made a show of sniffing over my chest and neck. "I could be down with some Isabelle and Ivy time… if they'll have me." She sobered. "I don't want to get in between you two either, but I'm, you know, down to, uh… to do. Stuff."

"I wish this could be more awkward," I said.

"Yeah that doesn't seem possible," Ivy said, a wry smile on her face. "You should see what Izzy looks like under this coat. You *all* should see."

"No!" Isabelle shouted, and clutched the trench coat even tighter against herself.

"Um… my mom is on the other side of that door right—"

There came a knock on the door.

One huge, exasperated sigh later, I went and opened the adjoining door. Figuring it would be better to rip the bandage off the wound as fast as possible, and hopefully get my mom looking at all the girls in my room at once. Surely, I reasoned, there was no way she would assume I was banging all of them at once if she saw the whole team at the same time.

Surely not.

Well, not *all*. Izzy was hugged tight against the wall nearest, and

now slowly sliding down, out of view of my mom unless she marched into my room.

"Heyyy Mom," I said. "You want to come in and join the planning session?"

"Oh, heavens no. I thought you were all having a party in here. I just want to be sure one of you will be sober enough to drive us tomorrow. I would offer, but…" She held her arms out and looked down at herself. For all her good spirits and happiness, she was still bald from the chemo, thin as a broom handle and frail to boot. The robe seemed to hang wrong on her chemo-ravaged frame, and I fought against the surge of pity and misery I felt looking at her. She looked as though a stiff breeze might blow her over.

That said, I needed to remind myself that we were driving her to salvation. All we had to do was smuggle her into a highly secure facility with armed battalion of armed mercenaries, cameras everywhere, and through a portal to another world. Then, and only then, could we begin the magical healing process. No big deal.

"We'll take the party to my room, Mrs. Fletcher," Cinzy said, grinning one of those patented Cinzy grins. She seemed to glow in the gloom. "Once we get this meeting taken care of, that is. Then we'll drink ourselves silly."

Ah yes, alcohol, the old standby. I loved my mom both for her knowledge of what was going on, and for her ability to purposefully miss the mark. She knew I wasn't a big drinker.

Moreover, I hadn't gotten drunk at all over in the other world. It hadn't seemed necessary. It was like, in my mind, alcohol was a balm for the awful conditions of your life… but if you didn't have awful conditions in your life because the world you were in was so wonderful and magical as to clear all the bad stuff away, what need did you have of alcohol? Why fix what ain't broken, in other words.

"It's a pajama party," Tara added lamely, looking down at the fuzzy pink slippers she had on, with the googly eyes.

My mother chuckled. "Well, I'll be getting some shuteye now. You kids keep it down to a dull roar."

Something about being with my mother really made me feel less like a responsible adult and more like a child. ‘You kids’ indeed. Well now I wanted to go grab several bottles of the worst and cheapest alcohol available, and get shipfaced.

“Just don’t end up in the hospital,” she said.

“Yes Mrs. Fletcher!” all five of them said in unison.

My mother chuckled and gave me a not-at-all-subtle wink, then shut the door.

“What in the heck?” I breathed.

And this was how I ended up being dragged from my hotel room down the hall to Cinzy’s room.

This is Christopher about to face five women all suffering from two weeks of withdrawal.



Chapter 4- Ivy's Show

Although the other world was in basically every respect better than earth, there was a stillness to the roadside motel we had gotten that just didn't exist on the other side of the portal. Magic, the mysterious and malleable force that shifted the landscape around, meant change at all times. It also meant the life it enhanced as everywhere. There were constantly insects of every type, and plenty of types that never had been, everywhere. Birds as well, calling and hooting, frogs peeping and croaking, and bigger things snuffling through the darkness, or howling at the darkness, or in some cases shrieking.

While Izzy and Ivy roomed together, and Regina and Tara got a single room with two beds, Cinzy had gotten her own room. Like all the others, it had the identical maroon paint up to hip level, then a robin's egg blue from there to the ceiling. Tasteful paintings of the West Coast were placed one per wall, and two flanking the large television. It had a couch, coffee table, dining table and two solid hardwood chairs.

But most importantly, it sported a huge king sized bed.

The way Cinzy's room felt right now, you could very well hear your own thoughts… and the occasional eighteen wheeler passing a hundred feet that way.

"We're not… having a planning meeting… are we?" Isabelle asked.

"Oh you sweet summer child," Cinzy breathed. "No, we're going to talk about… about, you know, the uh…"

"The elephant in the room?" Ivy asked.

Cinzy took a deep breath. "I… had hoped… to put this whole situation… behind us." More like put this whole situation in her behind.

"The whole situation being your difficulty with Fletcher having sex with anyone other than you?" Ivy asked quietly.

"It's not my fault, okay!" Cinzy all but shouted. She'd dramatically thrown a hand over her face. "You guys don't understand, we did this ability where I got to see into his soul, all right?"

"Oh, the Blissense one, where you see his past and his deepest desires?" Regina asked.

Cinzy's head snapped up and stared at her, then at me, then back at Regina. "Wait, wait wait wait wait…" Eventually it became clear that I'd used **Blissense** with all the others. Some of this had happened after the Blake situation. "You mean you all… with him?"

"Had sex? Or did the Blissense thing?" Tara asked. "I don't know why I asked it like that, because the answer is yes for everybody. For both questions."

"Ugh!" Cinzy said, fists balled and body tensed, like she was willing reality to be otherwise.

"I mean, it showed you his true heart, how he cares for people, how he wants to help everyone, the depth of his compassion. I totally get why you want to be with him. I get the jelly legs every time he smiles at me," Tara went on.

"Thanks!" I told her. It was awkward, but lovely at the same time.

"And then of course all I want to do is get down on my knees and start sucking—"

"We get it," Cinzy said, deadpan.

"Maybe it would help if we just ripped off the bandage," Regina said. A hush fell over the room. "Yeah. Why don't we sit Cinzy over there, and then Ivy can get what she needs, and of course Izzy is involved, and then maybe Cinzy will stop freaking out."

Tara was nodding. Cinzy appeared to be incredulous at the very notion that my having sex with other women in front of her would somehow assuage the jealousy and possessiveness.

"Yes please," Isabelle said. "If I have to listen to her go on about Fletcher's dick one more time I'm gonna scream."

"I'm sorry, babe," Ivy said. It was funny watching her face go

through regretful contortions while she wore this slutty outfit. The fishnet shirt, the tube top, the short skirt, they all combined with the shaved head, the piercings, and the tattoos to create a badass look… and the knee high combat boots helped that look along nicely.

"Me too," I added, and opened my arms for a hug.

Isabelle shuffled her embarrassed way over and opened her arms for a hug. She was burning with embarrassment, but I hadn't shaken the lust I'd felt, knowing she wasn't wearing anything underneath the trench coat. I mean, if she was nude under there, hot. If she was going with a short skirt, long jacket combo, also hot.

"I'm sorry Ivy's been giving you trouble," I muttered to her.

"That's okay," she told me, leaning into the hug. "You guys always pay such good attention to me."

"You ready to be the center of attention?" I asked.

"Huh?"

"If I peel this trench coat off in front of all these girls…"

She shivered. "It's really supposed to be Ivy's show." Even though she had been naked for weeks in Slinktrickle, we all had really, the old shyness had returned almost immediately once we got the ability to wear clothes again.

I leaned forward and pressed a soft kiss on her lips. I heard a gasp of amazement and another gasp of lust. Adding tongue to this made the gasps increase in volume, and a low 'mmm' of appreciation followed.

I didn't mind, but instead slipped my hands into the trench coat. I found exactly what I expected: bare skin.

Isabelle was soft and round, despite being a Guardian she had just a bit of fat on her to hide the muscle and grit. I played my fingers up and down her hips, the hint of ribcage available, and then her boobs. Up and down, over her plump ass, and then back up to the lovely pair with the already-hard nipples.

"Hmm," Isabelle said, and didn't move to stop me when I got inside the shoulders of the coat, and slipped it over her bare shoulders. Now, rather than cross her arms over her chest and

prevent me, she held them straight down and closed her eyes so she wouldn't have to see anyone's reaction to this.

I kissed my way down her body, slowly pulling the coat off. I revealed that she was indeed stark naked, and that the rug matched the brown drapes. Stark naked save for a harness for a strap on dildo, which she held in her hand.

"Oh," I said, by now on my knees and kissing my way over her nipples and lower. "What were we planning to do with this?"

"Ivy wanted you… in her ass," Isabelle got out shakily.

"Excellent," I said, and settled between her thighs, where I held her by the hips and went to work just below the black leather with the silvery rings separating the leg strap from the waist belt.

"Hey," Ivy said from just behind me. "That's my job."

"You don't mind, do you?" I asked.

"I'm the one who needed this," the butch, pierced, tattooed girlfriend complained. "Not Izzy."

"Oh, I think she needs peace of mind more than you need the D," I said, and slithered my tongue back and forth over her girlfriend's slit.

Now, I had gained a number of skills that enhanced my body purely for sexy times. One of those increased the length, girth and strength of my tongue, and I used that one to get all the way up inside Isabelle's tight channel, forcing her to get her fingers into my hair and grab on so she didn't keel over in a faint. Ivy eventually huffed out an annoyed sigh, knelt down, and took care of the other side, licking and kissing Izzy's thighs and butt. Later she swirled her tongue around Isabelle's nipples, until Izzy began to undress her, audience forgotten.

Isabelle had a thing about her sensitive nipples. She could be made to climax with just tongues on her nipples and someone playing with her clit. So when we got her on the bed and I continued to eat her out, she came the moment Regina knelt over the other side and latched onto the one Ivy wasn't working.

Isabelle had slowly collapsed in on herself internally until I felt

her muscles attempt to grab at my tongue. The shudders and explosive moans came a few moments later, with her digging one hand into my hair and another into Regina's.

"That was awesome," Regina whispered, and came down to get a mouthful of Izzy's juices by kissing me. Ivy soon joined her, kissing me and licking down Isabelle's thighs. She even brushed lips with Regina, froze, and stopped to stare at the two of us for a second over Isabelle's glistening thighs.

Innocent, freckle-faced Regina stared at Ivy of the pierced tongue and lip, and the shaved head. Ivy stared right back. The moment was charged with tension and lust, and spun out when Regina bit her bottom lip in that cute and sexy way Ivy and I loved.

"C'mere babe," Izzy slurred. Soon the two were cuddling and whispering that mushy stuff to one another. The two lovebirds made out, with Isabelle slowly removing the remainder of her clothes, including the boots, while Ivy shoved her tongue in deep.

"Now go and get that cock, babe. You need it."

"I want you more," Ivy said. "I'm sorry, pet. I keep complaining… we'll bring a strap on back through the portal. We'll get a polished wood one, or metal."

"Well he's here, and he's ready, and we're doing this fantasy of yours."

Ivy suddenly adopted some Isabelle, and became unsure. "I don't know… I'm not sure if I'm—"

"Hey Fletcher," Izzy said, and Ivy hissed in warning to her. Izzy ignored her. "Did you know Ivy's been training her booty hole for the whole time we've been on R&R?"

"Oh my God!" Ivy hissed. "I can't believe you told everybody."

"Oh!" Isabelle's head rose and she regarded Cinzy and Tara, over there in chairs with their legs spread and their hands in their pants. She swung her gaze over to Regina, who smiled and gave a half-embarrassed little wave, as if to say 'sorry for sucking on your nipples without permission and sorry for almost kissing your girlfriend.'

She turned back to Ivy. “Whoops.”

“I want you to fuck my ass, pet,” Ivy said. “Not him. Okay also him, but you first.”

“Actually I think that might be possible,” I told her. “Like for realsies.”

“Wait… what?”

“I think if I get my Pheromones skill high enough, you might be able to go futa. I’d still have to be there, but you could theoretically get a Length and Girth when we have sex, so… yeah. You could get a boner. I think.”

“Oh… oh my God,” Cinzy muttered from her chair, and I could tell by the flush and the twitching that she’d just tipped over the edge into orgasm. Her hand moved spasmodically under the pink sweatpants. Mouth slack, eyes unfocused, and chest heaving, she eventually slumped down in her chair.

“Until that happens I want Izzy in me. And Fletcher, you can have whatever hole she doesn’t pick.”

“That’s so frackin’ dirty,” Regina breathed, “and great.”

Isabelle was looking around. Regina’s words had clearly rattled her out of the fog of lust she’d been in. “I… don’t know. I don’t know if I can… with you all watching. I don’t—“

Ivy shushed her, and got down on her hands and knees, ass up. “It’s okay, pet. All eyes on me. Now put that big rubber cock in me.”

Which was how, not a minute later, Isabelle had the strap on set and lubed up, and Ivy had her head buried in her shoulder as she attempted to relax. And Isabelle pressed forward, shoving a pretty big dildo up in her girlfriend’s back door.

I watched in fascination as her face contorted in discomfort. Inch by inch, the dildo pierced her.

“Is it… is it all in?” a breathless Ivy asked.

“You’ve got about half,” I said.

“H… half? Are you effing serious?”

Coaxing Ivy up on her hands, I slid beneath her and grabbed my

raging erection. All the ladies liked this one, where I slid the head over the slit, bumping against the clit again and again. Thrusting upward with my hips, I tried it now, and was rewarded with the groans and gasps of pleasure. Ivy began rocking herself forward and back, rubbing her pussy on the head, while getting her ass used to the strap on.

A loud smack resounded in the still, breathless quiet, and Ivy's eyes shot open.

"You've been a bad girl," Isabelle said, apparently forgetting once again that she had three other girls watching her every move.

"I haaaaaaave," Ivy moaned, and her eyes flew open again when Izzy spanked her other ass cheek.

"Bad girls need a spanking," Izzy said, and spanked her twice more in rapid succession. Ivy kept rocking, forward and back, lips brushing mine and nipples raking up and down my chest. She kept groaning in ecstasy, and at some point she reached down between us to guide my cock into her pussy.

"You bad girl," Izzy repeated, and gave her another sharp one. "You're having sex with some other guy."

"I'm sorry babe," Ivy moaned.

The weirdest thing is, I could feel the rubber cock stretching Ivy's insides. It was rubbing against the underside of my shaft, pressing against me too. Ivy was already in the midst of a low intensity, slow-rolling orgasm that caused her to tremble continuously, even as she shoved her body backwards and forwards.

"I'm cuh… I'm c…" Ivy couldn't speak any more than that. She collapsed onto my chest.

"You don't sound very sorry," Izzy said, and several more sharp reports followed.

I snaked my hands down and grabbed a handful of Ivy's ass in each hand, then pulled apart.

"If she needs to be punished," I suggested, "you know what to do."

Isabelle picked up what I was putting down, and pushed in

further. The pressure on my cock intensified, and more importantly, Ivy hissed out in pain.

"You like that, you horny slut?" Isabelle demanded, shoving forward and pulling out, only to thrust further in. "One cock isn't even enough any longer?"

"Suh…" was all Ivy could manage. Maybe the beginning of 'sorry' but Isabelle didn't stop to listen. She started fucking Ivy's ass with sharp, fast strokes that I could definitely feel. It was a unique sensation, and I added thrusts of my own when I could.

Ivy had never really stopped orgasming. Her eyelids were fluttering and her mouth was working open and closed, but her whole body had been in a state of continuous climax for a good minute or two now. She tensed up after another few minutes of pounding, and gave a breathless shriek. I felt for the first time as a warm fluid surged out onto my crotch.

"Did she… just squirt?" I asked.

Ivy certainly wasn't answering. She just went right on shivering, shuddering, and trembling with orgasm. Isabelle initially stopped, but the moment I started thrusting again, Ivy grunted and cried out, and flooded me again.

"She definitely squirted," Regina muttered.

As Ivy had sort of passed out, we pulled out of her and the couple began cuddling again.

I expected it would be Regina to clean me off, but it was actually Cinzy's mouth I found trying to force my whole length down her throat.

"That was the hottest thing I've ever seen in real life," she muttered in between deep sucks.

Over on the couch, Regina now knelt between Tara's long thighs and was busy licking her to orgasm. Tara had her legs clamped around Regina's head and was heaving breaths. Regina had one hand in there next to her mouth and was strumming along nicely.

Cinzy didn't have to demand to be forked with words for me to know what she wanted. So while Ivy and Izzy went into the shower,

Cinzy had her clothes off in a flash, and was on her back moments later. With her knees held out to either side, she exposed a glittering gem at the end of the butt plug embedded in her ass. This girl would have made a model, an influencer, a porn star, and here she was begging me to get inside her.

"You're so beautiful," I told her, and grabbed onto the base of the plug. The bullet shape emerged, and Cinzy gave me a sigh.

"Please, Fletcher. Ivy was just fantasizing… Cinzy needs you in her ass."

"She needs to talk about herself in first person, too," I told her, and rested the head against her tight opening.

"Please, Fletcher, please fuck me," she breathed.

I nearly came just from the pressure of forcing my whole length into her asshole. Cinzy's head fell back onto the pillow and she let out a long, relieved groan. Once I started working at her clit, the orgasms began in earnest.

It was going to be another two hours before all five of them were satisfied. Isabelle wanted Ivy to watch me do her without touching. Tara wanted me to fill her with my seed after a good athletic pounding. Regina lapped at her pussy after I'd deposited what felt like my hundredth load inside her. Regina wanted to try anal but then couldn't handle it and asked me to do her the regular way instead. So we toyed with her butt while she rose and fell on my hard pole. Cinzy was fascinated to watch all this happen, and then join me in the shower to get me stuffed up in her pussy for once. She wrapped herself around me, and came extra hard when I put my fingers in her rear entry. She then got down on her knees in the shower and took yet another of my large loads on her face.

Eventually the party wound down. After Isabelle's stunt with me, she and Ivy made their nude way back to their room, giggling about how they could be caught. Regina and Tara did likewise when I was in the shower with Cinzy.

Cinzy came over to me after she was done toweling herself off.

"I'm… sorry, Fletcher."

“Sorry?”

“For being jealous. I said I was yours completely. I hoped you were mine completely too.”

I held her.

“But it’s okay. You can give me what I need. You can give the others what they need. It’s… kind of amazing actually.”

This is Christopher thinking the very same thing.



Chapter 5- On And Off Mission

Although we had all been through a lot the night before, and I'd ended up boning with Tara and Regina after Cinzy, and then spent the night with Cinzy after having some unbelievable shower sexy time, the mood wasn't what I'd hoped it would be.

Oh, we were freshly rested. No problem there. Energy wasn't an issue. In fact, everybody seemed to have been topped up in terms of their physical needs.

So, the night before had felt frantic and desperate, like we'd spent too long apart and were ravenous to get a taste of one another. Although the Cinzy situation had calmed way the hell down, and that was a good thing, the rest of the girls were on edge now for a whole host of new reasons.

Isabelle was mortified that the others had seen her. Ivy had a sore ass, literally, and kept shooting distrustful glances Regina and Tara's way. Probably only Regina, on account of Regina touching her girl and kind of kissing her, but I wasn't an expert on the many feelings ladies had going on. I also caught Regina sneaking glances at the pair of girlfriends when they weren't looking. What that meant I couldn't fathom and didn't want to. We had a serious task ahead of us, and it would require group cohesion. I wasn't about to accept the failure of my mission based on hurt fee-fees.

"We need to go over a few things," I told my mother, grabbing up my toast from the continental breakfast buffet.

"I know we do," my mother said, scooping basically all the fruit cocktail into her bowl. "Like what happened in the aftermath of five of Blake's people getting the worst kind of punishment you can get. The end of the Glumpdumpkin saga, and why it took another two months for you to finish it. And then the HQ reaction to finding out they'd lost five people… oh and also the HQ reaction to Blake turning into a magical creature, and a fightey one instead of any of the old

kinds. Ohhh I wish he'd been a Brawlerina. A fighting and fairy kind would have been so cute."

I frowned, trying to square the idea of Blake being both cute and ferocious. Also trying to square the idea of my mother making up much better names for things than I could. Brawlerina was excellent.

Cinzy leaned in, in the middle of waiting for her bagel to toast. "Headquarters did not like, at all, the situation with Blake's team."

***

"We do not like—"

"At all."

"—the situation with Blake's team," the first voice finished.

In front of us, two heads floated in a circle of magical energy. One of these was Allie, the woman who had been in charge of my orientation session. Although she hadn't done a ton for me, the stern woman had left an impression. Brusque, no-nonsense, and bereft of humor, Allie was imposing and felt like she would be a good head of House Stickinthemud, at Frogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

The other was Rus, who seemed to be the opposite of Allie. He was goofy, affable, and rode around on a flying manta ray when he got the opportunity. He made sure he got the opportunity often.

Which was how it surprised me to hear them both so violently against the Blake situation.

Their two heads were presently in a sort of holographic projection created by Alan, who had reached level 15 in his class while I'd been Blake's hostage. The old spell that allowed him swift communication over long distances had been in written form only before, basically pulling open a tiny portal and sliding a clay tablet through with news, requisition requests, and orders. He couldn't open the portal for very long, so a single clay tablet popped through each day, and sometimes when they were busy at HQ, none at all. They had a window of about five seconds to locate his portal, get the response they had readied, and throw it through.

At least one of the clay letters had barreled through the portal and clocked Alan directly in the face. More than one of the clay order letters had been flung through and ended up broken.

And last, if he hadn't been careful about the amount of spells he'd cast that day, such as in the case of emergency, there was no opening the portal on this side. All in all the first few months on assignment were kind of wonderful, being free of the stifling oversight that a lot of other teams had to endure.

We should have returned after Glumpdumpkin, a job that was supposed to take around two months if we had done our jobs well. We were halfway through month four now, and Glumpdumpkin still hadn't been taken care of.

All that was to say, now that he had this far-speech spell going, we were delighted with the admin sticking their noses directly in our business.

Delighted.

"You should have reported back in at headquarters after the situation in Slinktrickle," Allie said.

"I think we can gloss over that. The natives and the security chief have both confirmed your conduct in Slinktrickle was exemplary," Rus said.

"I'm less concerned that they did well, and more concerned that a great deal of time was spent out there. We have two months on and two weeks off for a reason." Rus seemed to be staring a message directly at her, and she sighed before going on. "However, I am pleased that you handled the situation without major injuries or fatalities."

"Well done, in other words," Rus said with a toothy grin.

"We would have probably ended up with Blake's team in a much worse situation if we hadn't headed out this way," I protested.

"Noted," Rus said.

"We are quite concerned by the reports you have regarding Blake's team—"

Rus took over here. "We are delighted to be back in contact with

the expedition that included Blake. That team had officially gone rogue as of a month ago."

I cast a dead-eyed glance at Cinzy, who nodded in resigned and grim agreement. We were really lucky to have been drawn into that fustercluck, so more people didn't die.

"Ordinarily I would be delighted to learn about the existence of a new aspect of Nakamamon," Rus charged on. "Fighting is not one that I want to have on this planet, ever. This needs to be contained."

Alan, standing next to Cinzy and I and straining, gave off a groan. "Hurry," he grunted.

"We will be sending a team," Allie said. "You are to collect casualties and the remaining members of Blake's Guardians for detention or burial and take no further action until we arrive. You will be put under the authority of the expedition leader."

"I'm afraid that definitely won't work," I said. No way was I going to be hunting down anyone who'd run away in the stampede.

"Excuse me?"

Allie didn't appear happy, but I thought I could hear Rus's snorted laughter. The connection wasn't clear.

"Two things: one, most of Blake's Guardians came to me begging with their hands out for the anti-magic serum so they wouldn't end up transforming into Nakamamon. You only have Archie to worry about. Two, this situation with Glumpdumpkin is bigger than Slinktrickle, ma'am, sir, and we're going to do what we set out to do, which is resolve it."

Alan groaned again.

"Connection is failing," I told them.

"Expedition leader Fletcher, you are hereby ordered—"

Sadly I wasn't able to hear those orders, because I elbowed Alan in the arm and caused him to lose his concentration. The spell dissipated in the blink of an eye, with the blue heads winking out.

The orders themselves did end up coming in on my system UI, just later. I could issue orders to the expedition members, and those orders came up in the little menu. The menu I had as part of the

Agency literally read:

Divinity Rescue Corps

Medical Expedition

Your mission is to boldly go out into the world in search of the sick and afflicted, and heal those who you come into contact with.

Prime Directives of course still apply:

1- If at all possible, strive to do no harm

2- Represent humans in a manner that instills confidence, faith, and goodwill in the natives of these lands

3- Advance the knowledge base of the Agency

4- Progress in levels in order to better fulfill mission objective(s)

One meeting later, I laid out the situation before us: the admin was going to charge in here and try to take over our operation. They wanted us to collect up any dead bodies for transport back to earth and wait. They wanted us to hunt down Archie, Blake's right hand man, so he didn't turn into a Nakamamon like Blake. All of my team members looked about as you would expect, upon hearing this news. They looked like they'd rather strap toasters to their bodies and jump into a gorge filled with ferrosaurs than follow these crap orders.

"This whole town needs to get back on its feet," I said. "Everybody is keen on this mission even if it means going off book?"

"We're technically staying on book," Trent said. "Just much later and longer than anticipated."

That was the spirit.

This we agreed to do. The first job was to waylay all the Nakamamon who seemed drawn to the town, and were just falling into comas or acting like morons once they were inside the town limits. The second job was to relieve the town of any affected gods found inside, and heal them up so they could continue on their way doing whatever it was gods did. A byproduct of this second step was getting me levels in my Healer class, so I could attack the main

threat. The third step was to figure out which god was affected here, and get the healing process underway.

"It shall be called Operation Glumpty Dumpty," I announced thrusting a finger into the air. "And we shall put Glumpty Dumpty back together again."

Great cheering went up, along with some laughter.

Step one would be handled by Ivy, Isabelle, and Chrysta. All three Guardians kept getting xp for meeting people at the town's edge and turning them away. In essence, they were guarding these natives from harming themselves. Whatever magnetic force kept drawing them in was still working, so we needed to help handle that.

Sure people didn't like it, but it was easy to point into the town and show them the dozens of Nakamamon lying comatose there. Trent was going to be on step one as well, to organize housing for these folks. He could only really bring some simple houses into being without exhausting his mana reserves, but it beat having a tent city in our midst. He worked on aqueducts to bring the river in and worked with Alan to purify the water going out through the simple street gutters.

Steps two and three meant heading into town itself. Fortunately for me, this meant utilizing my Divine Resistance skill, along with the already-immune Larelle, and whoever I loaned my **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.

I had used it just the other night, since the item returned to my possession with a thought, to strip Cinzy naked and give her the relentless, dominating sex she so often craved.

Now I would grant it to one of the others who was best suited to help identify the god in question. I wanted to say one of the Rangers would be best suited to the job, but I wondered if perhaps that wasn't my libido talking. If I had all the time in the world in a ghost town full of comatose individuals who couldn't tell on me, we could have shameless public sex wherever we wanted… while Larelle was over there hauling folks out of the affected area. She was bringing the ones who were barely functional, because the fully comatose ones didn't seem to need food or water.

Instead, either Alan or Trent would probably do. They had the highest Affinity scores and were best suited to finding magical nonsense. Drat was also a better choice than the girls, because Rogues worked better in cities than Rangers.

And that was why I handed the **Prismatic Apparel** over to Tara.

"You've got eagle eyes," I said, convincing myself. "Let's head in and see if we can find us some traces of a sick god."

Drat was staring at me with an expression of full knowledge on his face. He had told me he would be better at finding the answers we needed in this town, and I told him that, if he wanted, he could describe to me his special ability set and I'd be the judge of that.

As always, Drat despised giving away his secrets. I couldn't tell if it was a Drat thing or a Rogue thing. Perhaps there was some overlap. Until that happened, I was going to enjoy partnering up with Tara.

The town wasn't small. Sure it looked to have been perched on a check mark of land some two miles long and half a mile across, but

that was plenty of space for hundreds of houses, and dozens of larger buildings. With all those houses having nooks, crannies, basements, cellars, attics, and hidden rooms besides all that, we were basically looking for a needle in a haystack.

During this time, Tara told me literally everything about her life. Now, I'd been with her in larger group settings, when she would barely say a word, but just vibe off what was going on. She seemed content to allow Cinzy or the others to hog the spotlight, while she enjoyed the atmosphere. In one-on-one situations though, she could not stop speaking.

I learned that her parents had made bad use of the money she'd earned and gifted them when she'd joined the Agency. I then learned she had stopped that flow of money when her parents bought stock in a video game store that tanked so hard the federal government got involved.

We only took one break that day to have a little fun in a derelict jewelry shop. The fun had gotten a bit out of hand, when we realized it had gone on for almost a full, sweaty hour.

We returned without a single god on the first day, and I was left to treat the many, many inhabitants Larelle had brought out of the affected area.

"What about the rest of us who have Divine Resistance?" Drat wanted to know when we returned at the end of the first day.

"How much do we have? This is going to be Durability checks throughout the day, so of course you're welcome to come in, but you'll have to watch carefully so you don't end up like Blake."

Or rather, the thing that had once been Blake. Headquarters was sending someone to pick up that particular capital S Situation, and I was very glad just to be a low level grunt with no particular stake in how that went.

I had a bad feeling about Blake's transformation into a Nakamamon, and even worse about the existence of a 'fighting' aspect. If it could break Rus out of his usual jovial joking, it was bad news.

Still, not my circus, not my monkeys.

"I have it at level 3," Drat replied, after no small amount of hemming and hawing. Man, getting information out of this guy—about himself—was like trying to perform dentistry on a toddler.

"Well, I have it at level 3," I told him. "On the other hand, I have a special ability that allows me to resist these kinds of illnesses, more than tripling the onset time. It gives me about twelve hours off the first Durability check."

He sneered; his Durability must've been low. I knew he had a high Physicality and Ingenuity, because he had to. Both would be useful in helping him to stay off people's radars, socially and otherwise.

"If I had that item," he said through gritted teeth, "I could be a much bigger help."

I blinked at him, nodding. "Well if I knew exactly what your stats and special abilities were, I could make the most effective use of them. For now I'm going to give the item to the people I know to have enhanced senses abilities."

"Great," he fumed. "Great. I'll just… be… here."

This is Christopher not minding one bit.



Chapter 6- The J Word

The search didn't conclude until after the HQ people showed up and started using the J word.

"We have jurisdiction now," they said.

"Jurisdiction over who gets healed and who doesn't?" I asked.

They were two dozen people strong, and it wasn't just newbies like my team. I mean, most of us were now up around level 20 in our classes, but these people were beyond even that. They had been here more months, had adventured out into the wilds more, and I could see it above their heads.

The leader, Jacoby, was a Ranger, and that pleased me a great deal. She wasn't a Guardian, though she had eight big hulking Guardians with her.

The remainder of the team was a strong mix: a bunch of Rangers, a handful of Wizards and Sorcerers, with one Bard and one Rogue. Though one of the Wizards or Sorcerers could've been a Rogue. They were sneaky like that.

Jacoby stood a few inches taller than me, an Asian girl with a tight black ponytail that seemed to wreak havoc on her face by stretching it out too far. She was dressed in the sort of outfit that screamed assassin: black, form-fitting, with obvious armored bits, and pockets for all kinds of assassin-ey stuff. There was not an iota of color on her anywhere, except in her reddening face as I gave her the new Fletcher special.

They landed off a pair of large flying Nakamamon mounts and immediately began issuing orders, like dicks. Jacoby, for one, operated like this was a military operation, which it one hundred percent was not.

"The first thing we're doing is shutting down your operation until such time as we've debriefed your people."

"Permission to speak, ma'am," I said, giving her a bit of sass. She deserved more than a bit of sass, honestly.

"Denied," she said.

Unacceptable. And, see, when Cinzy had left the team, there'd been a serious issue in which I attempted to be everybody's friend. I worked hard at group cohesion, and that was mostly by attempting to please everyone. Well, I'd been abducted, deserted, betrayed, ordered around, beaten up, and Mr. Please Everybody was no longer in the building. My interaction with Rus and Allie showed me that I was going to have to fight for the Divinity Rescue Corps's mission. Essentially, I had to save the DRC's life.

"Well then I'm going to go ahead and speak anyway. We have—"

"That's enough, expedition leader," Jacoby tried, but I steamrolled her. Her pale complexion began to redden from here.

"—hundreds and hundreds of patients in there. We will have hundreds more if you pull my people off their duties."

"You need to stop talking, expedition leader."

I didn't. Instead I followed her around as she and her people scoped out my camp, informing her of exactly what I thought of her team's interference. Maybe there was a tiny chance that her operation was more important than mine, but I was a Healer. I wasn't going to stop doing my job just because they had a manhunt to conduct. I kept going, and going, describing first the state of the Nakamamon inside the town, and then the fact that we had found and liberated some ten different minor gods from the town.

At first, Jacoby tried to shush me, to stop me from talking, to get my people to stop working, but every time she issued and order, I went right on ahead and issued an order countermanding that one, which they had to follow or else they would lose experience points. They shrugged and went right back to work: Trent to his temporary housing outside of Glumpdumpkin, Alan assisting him in getting them access to clean water, the Guardians turning away Nakamamon before they got into the city. I was proud of them, and my heart swelled at knowing we were tight knit enough for them to work on

DRC business before Agency business.

Most importantly, Jacoby's people were on cover up duty, while the DRC was directly helping real people.

I failed a Persuasion check, which I found amazing. This gave me a temporary Physicality and Durability Token, using the **Fierce** ability from Ivy.

"Enough!" Jacoby said, whirling on me. "I thought you were a team player, Fletcher. I'm conducting a manhunt here, and that means I don't have time for your malarkey. I need to get my people on assignment as soon as possible, and that means a full debrief."

"Conduct your debrief while my people are on task," I said. "I'm here putting Nakamamon society back together."

"This is for the good of humanity, Fletcher," she said, and all at once I understood.

This wasn't about helping the people of this world; this was about Agency shenanigans. They wanted to keep Blake and other new fighting aspect Nakamamon from spreading. They wanted this perfect world for whatever it was the Agency was doing here, not to save the lives of this world's natives.

"Humanity can eat my butt right about now," I said. Honestly, I was beginning to like Nakamamon more than humans. I kept using the word 'people' for a very good reason: Nakamamons weren't human.

"You are well out of your depth," she said, "and approaching out of line."

"I… don't care?"

"If you keep going like this, I will have you incarcerated and shipped back to headquarters under armed escort," she said.

"I'm going to need a word with you in private, expedition leader," I said, pointing to my house. Finally, I scored another Persuasion check, got myself another Physicality and Durability Token, and grinned in satisfaction. I wasted no time in stalking all the way there.

She was furious, and I couldn't really blame her.

"I don't know if you people came here to intimidate me, but it's not going to work."

"This is the fate of the world we're talking about here!" she urged.

"Cool, then let's get this debrief over with and get your people out of here."

Her face twitched. "Fine."

"First, could you shoot me with an arrow? No? It was worth a try. Okay. Ask me anything."

She grilled me for what seemed like ages. We went through practically my entire time since the creation of the Divinity Rescue Corps: setting out, hitching an unintentional ride on a water dragon that doubled as a lake, finding Slinktrickle, the no-clothes for weeks situation, resuscitating a god, healing that god, getting all our clothes back, facing Cinzy's leaving, heading here to Glumpdumpkin, and then the whole Blake debacle.

"I'm just trying to help these people get back to a semblance of normality," I said. "We're going to have to rebuild some of their houses when the god is back to normal."

"I get that," she said, "I do. You don't have—"

She froze, and stared at the doorway.

"Leader Jacoby, this is Vellenia," I said. "Vellenia, this is the leader of the clean up crew from headquarters, who want to find all of Blake's former people."

Vellenia swept gracefully into the room and took Jacoby's hand. She then bent and pressed a kiss to one knuckle. "Hello, friend Jacoby. It is such a pleasure to make your acquaintance! I could not be happier that you are here with this objective in mind, for Blake and his people are bad emissaries for humanity."

Jacoby, for some reason, seemed to have been struck speechless.

"What… this is your bond?" she asked.

"That's correct," I said. Vellenia flowed around the table, the long way, with Jacoby's eyes tracking her the whole way. She came to a stop directly behind me, and placed her very non-human hands on

my shoulders. Wasting no time, she began to massage my traps while giving Jacoby a benign smile and those adorable Nakamamon eyes.

"I wasn't aware it was possible to bond a humanoid, sapient Nakamamon," Jacoby said.

"I wasn't aware it was relevant to your mission." Oof, I really needed to dial the sass back a bit in order to have Jacoby and her people lay off, and let my team do their jobs.

"Vellenia," Jacoby said, as though she were tasting the word.

"That's right," my bond mate said. "My bond mate was in distress so I came to soothe him. Have you caused him distress?"

Jacoby reacted as if she'd been slapped. "I… probably, yes. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to cause that, but our mission is very important." She kept her eyes resolutely glued to Vellenia's face. At first I couldn't figure out what the deal was. It wouldn't take long. The uptight Asian Ranger stood, eventually. "I've taken up too much of your time. My people are going to be around the town, out searching for Blake's associates. We are sending the Wizards back to HQ. We may need your assistance on matters related to getting into and out of the town."

Her whole demeanor had changed in a heartbeat, and all it had taken was Vellenia batting her eyelashes at her. Huh.

Vellenia came out from behind me and wrapped Jacoby in a tight hug. "It was such a pleasure to have you come and visit, friend Jacoby."

Jacoby locked gazes with me, and I could tell she was confused. "Uh, thank you. It was great meeting you, uh, Valennia. I'll try to have my people out of your way, Fletcher."

It was great meeting you, *Vellenia*. It wasn't great meeting us both, and it wasn't great meeting you Fletcher, it was great meeting you *Vellenia*. I grinned at that.

"If you need to commandeer the services of my earth Sorcerer," I told her, "I think I can spare him to generate a couple of these adobe houses each day."

Jacoby nodded curtly.

"It was lovely meeting you!" Vellenia called.

***

Jacoby apparently felt as though we'd gotten off on the wrong foot. I couldn't agree more. She waited some twenty-four hours before approaching me again.

In that time, I'd been out to tend the plants. I had **Verdant Rejuvenation**, so any cuttings I made and tended to would automatically sprout.

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.

It was one of Vellenia's greatest joys to behold. Since gaining the special ability, she had taken to spending hours watching the plants mature. Every morning we had a fresh harvest, so long as I stuck around. This needed some careful planning, as it was easy to get too far away while scouting the town, but I could count on Vellenia's pure, joyous grin to lift my spirits whenever I returned from scouting with Tara or Regina.

"Look at how big they are!" she gushed.

The sundrinkers were some of the most spectacular to behold, since like sunflowers they grew big disk faces to point at the sun. They weren't nearly as tall as sunflowers, but a even a small garden of them popping up in a matter of hours was really something.

"I am told size matters," I said off-handedly.

"It's wonderful," Vel said, and leapt onto me for a full-bodied hug.

For about the third time since the team had arrived, I was

informed by **Blissense** that someone was having thoughts about me. The second level of the ability explained that if someone nearby was thinking about me, I had the opportunity to spend an Affinity Token in order to single out who that was, and get a glimpse into those thoughts. Now, this wasn't an ability I had any use for… yet. Now might be the time.

Before I spent the Token, the person in question announced herself.

"Expedition Leader Fletcher," I heard from off in the direction of the capital J Jurisdiction people.

Marvelous. Jacoby was on her way over here. I considered spending the Affinity Token anyway to get that read on what Jacoby was thinking. Ultimately I decided against it since I had a lot of ways to spend Tokens and I needed to hang onto them.

I didn't ask Vellenia to detangle herself from the way she was wrapped around me, but instead slow walked out of the magical vegetable and herb garden to meet Jacoby.

"May I have a word with you?" she asked.

And boy did I ever want to petty my way out of this one. If I rudely said 'well you've had your word, good day now' it would only sour her against me. Better to use whatever Vellenia had done with her to our advantage.

"I have my morning brief, if you'd like to join in and see what we're up to," I said.

"I… that would be lovely," she said, and I caught another glance at Vellenia. Although I wanted to ask Jacoby about her bond mate, or lack of one, I didn't know her well enough to go prying. She was back in her too-tight ponytail and black covert ops suit this morning, pale skin contrasting against hair, eyes and clothes. Still severe, though something was measurably different.

The team was clustered at the central cook fire, which Trent had turned into a grand fire pit. Chrysta was presently on door duty, but the flow of natives trying to get into town had wanted.

"Team," I said, "this is Jacoby. She's part of the crew who's been

tasked with cleaning up the mess left over by Blake." After cursory introductions, I told them we were going to go about the morning brief as normal, to just pretend Jacoby wasn't here.

Trent presented his results first, explaining that he'd put up six identical small one room boxes for the refugees yesterday and would create some for Jacoby's people if that was required. She seemed a tiny bit surprised by this possibility.

I once again thanked my lucky stars for choosing Trent to be on my team.

Drat complained that he was having trouble searching through the town in a thorough manner, because he had only about an hour of safe time before the god's power would begin to influence him. However, he had discovered a minor god amongst the homes, a God of Secret Spaces, so once I got that god healed up, he would be able to find all the secret compartments, hidden doors, and secret passages in the town. Right now those were somehow offline.

"Magic," he said darkly, while stroking McCauley Skulkins, who was literally made of the stuff.

He'd picked his moment with care, and I respected that. I ordered the Rangers to give over the **Prismatic Apparel** to Drat today, so he could search more thoroughly after I took care of this new god. First though, Larelle would have to accompany him to fetch said god.

After that, there was no news from the Rangers. They had been working mostly on the town, and everything they knew I already knew.

Alan stuttered his way through explaining that the water filtration system wasn't his best work, it would need to be replaced every few days, and that would take up a lot of his time and spells.

"The pit toilets are nowhere near full," Trent said darkly, "thank the gods." Alan did not have a short range teleport. Yet.

"With the number of people we have settling here, we might need to add several more," Chrysta said.

Nakamamon didn't poop, exactly… they didn't fart candy-flavored

sprinkles either. The magical bundle of stuff they excreted did glitter, but was not especially nice to smell.

The Guardians shrugged when I asked if they had anything to add. Larelle was permanently on body moving duty, where she rounded up the comatose people of the town and settled them inside, where they wouldn't face the elements. For whatever reason, the town hadn't seen any rain since we'd arrived.

"Anybody need new orders so they feel happy about their experience gains?" I asked.

No one did, which was excellent. Most of us were cruising toward that first big milestone of level 25, when I was informed that Things Changed.

"Cinzy?" I asked.

The Bard looked haggard. For the first time, the gorgeous supermodel appeared as though she hadn't spent several hours doing her makeup and choosing the perfect outfit combo. Still gorgeous, of course, but you could tell she wasn't having a good one.

"Liaison to Jacoby's people?" she asked.

All eyes fell on the Ranger and Expedition Leader. "I… am not certain. I'll confer with my people."

I nodded to Cinzy. "See me after the meeting, why don't you?"

This is Christopher breezing through five minutes of morning briefing and getting everyone on task.



Chapter 7- Cinzy vs Fairy Poppins II

I held up a hand at the end of the morning briefing. It seemed important to get this over with while Jacoby was here, trying to siphon off my team members for her own gig.

"Listen, hey, everybody, sorry. One last thing."

I peered around at their faces. Hopeful and bright from Isabelle and Tara, stolid acceptance of literally anything that could come their way from Larelle and Ivy, polite interest from Trent and Alan, rapt attention from Vellenia and Regina, and bored disregard from Drat. That last one was to be expected; it was physically painful for Drat to show emotion.

At least that was my running hypothesis.

"I know we've been here for a while and it doesn't seem like we've changed much. That's not true. Right now, we've made ourselves able to walk the streets. Larelle has made the streets safer to walk. We have information on the god situation, though it't not much."

A soft humming was emanating from Cinzy's throat, and it laced the air with a warm and comforting feel. All of them perked up a little more. Even Drat paused in picking the dirty from under his fingernails to actually look at me.

"I want you to think about this town as a chronic patient. The whole town is bedridden. We've already found that some of the people in their house, the little gods, are also sick. We've cured them. We've cleaned up the insane mess the house used to be in order to get better access to our patient."

I paused, blinking.

"I know you're used to stone floating around and houses

appearing two or three a day. You're used to magic delivering letters over miles and miles instantly, but healing isn't like that, even magic healing. If you went into the hospital and the doctor just injected you with whatever he felt like, you'd be screwed. And even if it was the right thing, if the doctor didn't operate, or injected you with too much all at once, it would be just as bad."

"Go on," Cinzy whispered. "You're doing great."

"Our patient is hiding somewhere in this house and we're going to find him. Or her. And once that happens, we have to figure out exactly what's got this patient sick. After that step, the next is collecting up the necessary materials, cooking up the cure, and delivering it. None of those steps are going to be instantaneous. They might each take days or weeks to accomplish. But we're talking about putting thousands of people's lives back together."

Vellenia was literally glowing. Even in the early morning glow, tiny pink sparkles were shooting off her body. She had fists clenched under her chin and was wiggling her shoulders, looking like the most adorable thing you've ever seen. Her tail was also flicking back and forth.

"If any of you want to accompany Expedition Leader Jacoby, please come talk to me. We'll see if we can make it happen, and give you orders to assist her or take orders from her until her own mission is done."

I peered around at them.

"That's it. That's all."

None of them ended up going to go with Jacoby. In fact, Jacoby wasn't going to stick around either. She would leave a Wizard here to communicate with my team and watch for Archie to try to enter Glumpdumpkin and perhaps rescue Blake. The real reason was, she expected Archie to try and abduct me so I could manufacture some anti-magic pills for him.

***

Some two or three minutes had passed with us walking. Cinzy

had gone through a lot. We reached the bridge that spanned the river running through and over Glumpdumpkin, a construction of stone with carved stone railings. I admired the intricate braid pattern the railings were carved, and the strange creatures that topped the railings at the bridge's entrance. I now noticed, on leaning over, that faces were carved into the sides of the bridge proper. There was a bridge in Paris… I wanted to say the Pont Neuf, that had gargoyle faces carved every six or ten feet, but I couldn't be sure.

I had been worried about Cinzy's state of mind. She had a lot of work to do with handling the refugee problems. Newcomers were often disoriented because something drew them here, so there was no shortage of helping them with their minor confusion. Most didn't want to turn around and head back to their home villages, and the ones that stayed had to be convinced periodically to stay out of Glumpdumpkin.

In point of fact, she'd already had a special ability usage with Muppin, Tweedle Dee, Airaconda and Larelle's unnamed Magmamander, to convince them not to amble into town.

"How long do they have before they start wandering into town again?" I asked.

"A couple of days," she said with a sigh.

We continued on in silence. Whatever was bothering her, she didn't want to come out with it, and that was okay. People moved at their own paces, and I just had to respect—

"She doesn't want me to be with you," Cinzy blurted.

"I'm sorry?" I asked. "Wait… Fairy Poppins?"

Did nobody consider Fairy Poppins to be sapient? Apparently they didn't. Jacoby seemed to think bonding Nakamamon like Vellenia was unheard of. If you spent more than a day with Fairy Poppins you knew just how sapient she could be. Sapient and quite willful.

Cinzy turned to me. "She doesn't know what I know, okay? You didn't do the special ability with her. She doesn't understand."

Hang on, several of the stone faces on this bridge appeared to be the Divinity Rescue Corps members, but making silly faces. That one

was definitely Chrysta, based solely on the eyes, but she had one lip pulled back and her tongue stuck out in a comical, rude way. The one next to her was definitely Ivy, from the piercings, except her nostrils were wide open and with squiggly little hairs poking out. She was looking cross-eyed down at her pig nose.

I pulled my attention away from what was obviously Trent's handiwork.

"She doesn't… she doesn't think I'm good enough for you? The other way around? Or is it something else? Like she doesn't like the idea of me having other partners? Like she thinks I'll hurt you?"

Cinzy's face darkened a little. She was still having trouble coming to terms with the idea of me just casually bedding Ivy and Isabelle. Well, I was about to rock her world a little farther.

"A little of… a little of this and a little of that," she said. Evasively.

Trent hadn't built this entire bridge. I was ninety-nine percent sure this had been here when we first came to town. If he was using it for practice, that didn't seem so bad. Then I caught sight of the face that was modeled after my face, and rolled my eyes at the expression I found there.

"All right, well… I don't want to push. If you want to tell me, I'll be here. If you want me to speak with her, I c—"

"No!"

I should've known right then what was going on. A few things got in the way of this.

One: I was barely into my twenties. I didn't have a whole lot of experience regardless.

Two: I had had only a single relationship with a girl, and it didn't count. She had been with me on a dare from her friends. I had been too thrilled with the attention to see she was way out of my league and not genuine. Meaning my experience and judgement on girl-related matters was extremely limited.

Three: I had this Glumpdumpkin situation on my mind, this Jacoby situation on my mind, and more besides. The girls, and also Drat. Drat was always a low-key concern, considering how he got

experience.

Four: Fairy Poppins did not, presently, speak English. Or I couldn't communicate with her the typical way, since she was just a few inches high and I was just shy of six feet. Although… now that I had **Psyspeech**, I could put messages into her little fairy mind.

In short, I hope I can be forgiven for not realizing what wasn't being said in this moment.

***

"You're fine, dear," my mother said.

Of course *she* would forgive me.

California had fully morphed into Northern California by this point. We weren't quite halfway to our destination, but we'd be over halfway there by the end of the day today. There was still a lot of story to get through, and luckily we'd be spending ten or twelve hours on the road to get through it. In the meantime I watched the redwoods appear, the biggest fracking trees on the planet. Stretching up toward the sun, like the boogie trees didn't do.

I caught a bit of my mom's smile when I glanced in the rear view, and knew that telling her about the sex stuff was never, ever going to happen. On pain of death it wouldn't happen.

Oh… oh no. I froze at the wheel and resisted the urge to look over and see the knowing look written all over her face. My mother knew exactly what I hadn't figured out some two and a half months ago.

I still wasn't about to go there. I wasn't ready to face that whole ball of yarn with my own mother.

***

I tried to comfort Cinzy, letting her know I would help her corral the refugee population if there was anything I could do. They were swelling by dozens per day, and though I wasn't the social niceties expert, I didn't want her to have the job alone. I had **Beast Talker**, after all.

She shook her head, told me she would get her act together, and put Fairy Poppins in her place.

Although this seemed like absolutely the wrong way to go about the Fairy Poppins situation, it also wasn't my rodeo bull to ride. Cinzy could sort out her own dirty laundry. She could deal with her own shirt. I didn't want to sort out all of the Divinity Rescue Corps's problems like I had been trying to do with my family. Doing that had made me the target of a lot of anger from both sides, even if it had been the right thing to do, and worth it in the end. Sometimes people don't see that they've made you into their punching bag.

The remainder of the day passed in relative ease and normality. I worked up a treatment for the god Drat had discovered, the God of Secret Spaces.

Luckily for us, the God of Secret Spaces wasn't large. In fact, it was a swarm of tiny humanoids even smaller than Fairy Poppins, each the size of my thumbnail with dark purple skin and shocking yellow hair. You could barely see them or make out what they were until you got the magnifying glass nice and close, and then you saw they weren't insects at all.

Larelle had been lucky enough to get them when they were suffering Severe Confusion, and forgot they were gods. She'd swept them up into a dustpan and deposited them into a box. She presented the box to me, and frowned at it when I slid the drawer out of it. Drat also furrowed his brow when I slid the drawer out.

That didn't have—

"I don't know what I'm looking at," I told them.

The drawer was empty.

"There was no drawer in that box," Drat said. "It was a cardboard box." Then he took it, closed the drawer, squinting at it the whole time. After a grunt, he turned the knob and slid the drawer back out, revealing the whole lot of the tiny gods inside.

"Secret catch in the box," he said. "They must've made it while we brought it here."

Most of the teensy people were sleeping, but a few staggered

around the drawer's bottom, many leaning on one another like girls in their twenties after a night at the club.

"This is Severe Confusion. I have to do the Diagnosis check," I told them, "in order to get the bonus on the Treatment check."

Drat just stared a look at me that conveyed a shrug. He didn't need the explanation. It was wasted on him.

"Best keep them in the secret compartment. The God of Secret Spaces probably needs to feel like it can't be found."

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?

Hard eye roll. At least I know how to have fun once in a while.

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.

I grabbed the bridge of my nose and marveled at the UI's sudden and inexplicable turn to the bizarre. This was apparently Rainer, the lead healer, and someone called Dickens, who I'd never met. These two, somehow and some*when*, created all the UI entries for the Healer class, at very least.

"We're not letting anyone touch those," I told him. Not after the God of Lost Jewelry situation, with all the girls getting divinity poisoning. "In fact, you hide it until I've got the treatment made up."

When I looked at him, Drat nodded. The box was already gone.

He got extra xp for that kind of thing.

Just like with the God of Lost Jewelry and the other handful, I needed a concoction to deal with Severe Confusion.

The original one had required gingko biloba leaves, infused. After the first time, I'd begun growing it using **Verdant Rejuvenation**. Which was amazing, because over the course of 48 hours I could grow an entire tree, including its stinky, stinky nuts.

They were everywhere. The mature tree was gorgeous, especially because for some reason, in the 48 hours it took to grow into a fully formed tree, it went through an autumn phase and dropped its fan-shaped leaves. Before that happened they turned a gorgeous gold color.

I couldn't be certain that the same recipe would heal the swarm god like it had for the God of Lost Jewelry, I was cautiously optimistic. If it didn't work, we could rummage through Alan's collected encyclopedia of everything Healer. If it did, there was no reason to waste hours or days looking.

We had Tara and Airaconda go grab some more pure water, while I separated out and began the hours-long infusion for the gingko leaves. Afterwards I turned my attention to dealing with the St. John's wort, ginseng root, and snake's head fritillary.

The last was an odd, checkered flower with purple and white petals. As soon as I'd made the last treatment this had gone right in the garden too, and bloomed in little pairs of downward-facing flowers. The petals went into the infusion next, increasing the heat and working in more mana than before.

Following this, the ginseng root. Now, ginseng is famous because it's vaguely people-shaped. Ordinarily it's incredibly difficult to get a good one, because they take forever to grow underground.

No problem with **Verdant Rejuvenation**. I did some five or ten years of growing overnight, and it didn't even require me to locate a plant and follow the stem through shady hillsides to the actual root, which could be hundreds of feet away. Instead its tiny red ring of berries grew right in my garden, surrounded by plain old

inconspicuous leaves. And every time I harvested one, it had the weirdest root: almost exactly humanoid, and all of them in fun poses. We're talking jumping jacks, the dab, one that looked like it was twerking, some yoga poses, warrior one through three… it was the most wonderful part of having these powers. I started planting and tending a lot more ginseng after this.

The root needed to be finely chopped, which Vellenia graciously volunteered to do.

Something like six hours later, the treatment cure was ready.

Develop Cure (swarm/Unique) check: Your Develop Cure (Unique) skill is at level 8, Develop Cure (Swarm) at level 3, and your Affinity is at level 7. This check is Extreme. You may spend 4 Tokens in order to succeed. Would you like to spend these Tokens?*

Total Tokens: 3 Affinity and 7 Free Tokens.

Hard At Work: *Your Tokens are worth double given you are engaged in your class duties.*

There was both no way my 18 skill levels were going to give me 8 successes, and no reason not to give it a shot. I pressed No.

One failed check and free retry later, I thanked **Hard At Work** once again and spent the 4 Tokens.

This is Christopher smiling, sighing, and healing up yet another god.



Chapter 8- Bri & Steph

Administering the cure for **Severe Confusion** required a fine mist yet again. The particles inhaled by the tiny god swarm—godlings?—needed to be as small as possible to incorporate into their bodies with all available speed. We couldn't drown the little guys in even regular droplets.

I was saved getting the cure into my mouth and spitting it out by Vellenia, who showed me her water aspect ability, Mist.

It was a good thing I didn't, too, because just a tiny bit of the bitter, milk white cure got on me, and it was like coffee times a hundred. I immediately went on a manic, workaholic rampage, convinced I was working at my absolute peak efficiency. I cleaned up the workshop according to a new filing system I'd just invented. I tore up half the garden and replanted all of them in a new pattern that I was convinced was more aesthetically pleasing and better alphabetically. I then rushed back to the others and ordered them to try the cure, only to be super embarrassed later when I fell unconscious for several hours. Waking up hung over, I staggered around, apologizing to all of them.

I was laughed at, and I deserved it.

Vellenia misted the God of Secret Spaces with several waves of her hands. The whole thing came out in an antigravity blob of liquid, flattened out into a sheet, then subdivided into teensy misty droplets before my eyes.

"You will have to blow on them," she said, smiling warmly at me.

"You are the cutest and most gorgeous-est," I told her, only to have Tara and Cinzy react as if they'd been slapped.

"Why thank you!" she said, giggling.

Blowing on it allowed me to make the Administer Cure check, which succeeded, given the difficulty had lowered by 4 from

Vellenia's water skill.

I of course did it wrong, and dosed myself. She followed this by lightly and gracefully blowing the sheet of mist over the open secret drawer.

I was already inside my laboratory, high out of my mind.

Curing the God of Secret Spaces now allowed Drat access to the hidden spaces in Glumpdumpkin: all the hidden stashes, the secret passages and the hidden rooms. As these were the coolest possible things to find, I was annoyed when he vanished basically all day, every day.

He immediately disappeared into town on the hunt for what me, and the Rangers, could not find. He left, I should add, without permission to go alone.

For the millionth time, it seemed, I was both thankful and annoyed to have a Rogue along.

Afterwards it was back to tending my garden, speaking to Vellenia about the world of Dorfilialtos, a word which I still couldn't say properly.

What Vellenia taught me was largely rumor. She hadn't been outside of Slinktrickle and had met only a few other humans, or Nakamamon for that matter. She knew a bit more about the functions of mana and the aspects of Nakamamon. She knew, and this was fascinating, about the system.

According to her, the system had simply appeared before her one day. It declared that she was a first stage Nakamamon. Marshells were basic Nakamamon. Marshmellows were second stage Nakamamon. She was water aspect, along with fairy aspect. These things she knew and understood instinctually as natural. They made sense, and they were right.

"It must have been a function of a high level spell," she said, shrugging.

"Wait, wait… hang on a second. You're telling me the system just wasn't a thing until one day?"

She nodded.

"And when was this?"

She shrugged. "Only a few days after I threw off the shell and dove into the waters."

"And what were you before that?"

"Oh, we didn't have names for the stages that day," she said. "The humans came through and began naming things."

***

When Jacoby's people showed up at the lab a handful of days later, I was in the process of trying to heal up one of the comatose Nakamamon from town. Treatments had failed. They gave me the same notification every time:

This check is rated impossible. Do you not have the capacity to attempt this check given your current skill level. You do not possess enough Tokens to automatically succeed this check.

No matter how I tried, I got the same. Sure I had 7 Free Tokens and 8 Ingenuity Tokens, but that meant the difficulty rating was more than 30. I hadn't come across anything like that before, but it made sense.

"I guess we're going to try to move on to one of the drunken ones," I said, sighing. This wasn't something I liked to hear or see. Powerlessness had been a thing of the past, the earth past. My mother's cancer, my sister's weird insistence on doing things that were bad for her just to spite my parents, these were out of my control. The failure of my streaming job, and my getting fired from the video game store were marginally within my control, but that was different and irrelevant here.

The hope was that the drunken Nakamamon had some resistance to the divine effect and might be easier to treat. If I could treat them, then I might be able to treat the manic ones who refused to stop doing their jobs, without rest or sleep, for weeks on end.

That was the hope. In the meantime, I was really hoping Drat would find the key to the god's whereabouts. After the God of Secret

Spaces had been found and gotten back to their normal self, I had hopes Drat would soon succeed and get us moving on the path towards Glumpdumpkin's salvation.

All that was put aside when a series of frantic shouts split the silence. Following that, a strangled scream split the air. That cry of pain meant I was needed.

Vellenia was there before me, breathing out and getting healing energy into the victim. He relaxed immediately.

I was in time to see a broken leg un-break. The bone knit itself back together, the slight wonkiness of the limb disappearing before my eyes. Immediately on the heels of this, the contusion faded.

Our victim was one of the Wizards from Jacoby's team. She had wheat gold hair tied in a loose ponytail, and a pixie-like face. She also had actual emerald eyes; the pupils themselves were crystalline, and the whites of her eyes had gone diamond. Identify told me she had lost the vast majority of her mana, but she was now over one third of her hit points.

Standing just behind those holding her was a Guardian. A sheepish and miserable Guardian, missing just under half his hit points.

Using Identify, I could see that the Wizard (Evoker) had suffered a number of body blows and blunt force trauma all over her body. Her hands were bruised and bloody, along with several bloodied fingernails.

"You're safe now," I told her. "I'll whip you up a Healing Potion and you'll be just fine in a minute." I gestured to the Guardian. "You too. You're getting the healing breath too… from my bond mate or from me, your choice."

The thickly built, squat fellow gestured to himself in question. He had bloody knuckles and fingerprints around his neck visible, along with a black eye, split lip, and misshapen nose.

"The longer you delay treatment, the more likely your body is to remember the wounds and keep them as scars. If we act fast, you go scar-free. Your call."

The guy, who seemed almost as wide as he was tall, considered this for a time. The rule of cool was to let scars stay. He was also at war with himself, probably over whether he deserved to be healed or not.

"I'm the Healer," I called over my shoulder. We were moving his charge into my home. "Everyone who gets wounded gets treated. Faster you're at max hit points, the faster you can be out there to get back in the field. And make sure this doesn't happen again."

He trotted right over, proving my guess true: Archie had done this.

Larelle's Magmamander had a dedicated space in my new home, basking in the light of several large windows. This large metal tray held the gigantic salamander Nakamamon, which barely did anything except sleep. The Guardian came over at my gesture and hefted the two wooden poles effortlessly. I had to strain, since the metal block was something like fifty pounds, and the Magmamander was another fifty at least. They'd rigged this up like a palanquin, so a person in front and a person in back could lift it and move it around.

The Magmamander yawned and stretched its stubby legs, surrounded by a shimmering heat haze. One eye opened and regarded me with reptilian dismissal. It licked its eye like a gecko while the two of us repositioned the creature where I needed it to heat some oil.

Then I busied myself chopping and steeping herbs. Icebalm to kill the pain and the old standby, mender's fern. Soon the medicinal scents of pain relief wafted up.

I had the healing potion mixed and the check passed in another ten minutes. The blonde Wizard lay there groaning, while the Guardian stood stoic.

"This is from a fight with your target?" I asked, pouring some healing potion out into two cups.

"Don't answer that," Jacoby said, entering.

"Really?" I asked. "Operational security?"

She sniffed. "It's just a function of my team and my mission; it's

not personal."

"Feel like a doctor for the fracking Mafia," I grumbled. Like she hadn't watched me have sex with Vellenia. Like she didn't know I'd been instrumental in breaking the Blake situation in the first place. Fracking paranoid Jacoby.

So instead I worked in silence, adding the mana to the potion as I added in the herbs and flowers. After a good minute or two of being quietly frustrated with Jacoby, I started whistling while I worked.

This put some pep in my step, and I danced around my lab, preparing a potion she couldn't get anywhere else, unless she decided to send someone to and from HQ every three to five days. I didn't need gratitude, I was doing this because I loved helping people. And I especially loved helping people that were trying to snatch up my people for their own ends, and display zero gratitude when I performed a valuable service—

"Thank you," the Guardian grumbled, after I'd healed up his Wizard. "Guy came out of nowhere." He took the Wizard's hand and got down on one knee. "I'm so sorry, Steph."

"I'm still alive, Bri," she said gently. "You did your job."

"Did he get your pack?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I put it in the dimensional space." Then her eyes fell briefly on Jacoby, who was looming over my shoulder.

Bri, the Guardian, kissed Steph's hand and she pulled him toward her, so they could start softly making out.

I could feel Jacoby percolating with anger. Maybe for them spilling 'secrets' or possibly for them displaying affection for one another in an unprofessional manner, when their team leader didn't have someone who valued her like these two obviously cared for one another.

"Second healing potion," I called, and handed it to Bri the Guardian. This saved Jacoby from clearing her throat.

"I'll whip some of these up for your people when they go out on assignment, but you need to remember that I've got my own

mission. These also have a shelf life of only about a day. I don't magically preserve them. That's not a thing I can do."

She pouted, but grunted a perfunctory 'thanks.' I then explained that the base, oil, was not something I had in limitless amounts. She promised to get one of her Wizards, a Transmuter, on the task, to see if he could whip up some.

Some ten minutes later, I had finished with a half dozen more potions, handed them off to Bri and Steph, and Jacoby's people left.

Daily healing potions for Jacoby's team… I could probably add in mana potions, and see if Alan had the recipes for an all-around restorative potion, to give both mana and hit points back.

For now, I'd need to plant more icebalm and mender's fern in my little garden.

As I was planting and tending those, I got the level up ding. After healing up and setting free the God of Secret Places, I'd also received a level up, but wanted to do at least two at once. I was using my Healer abilities less, and I also seemed to have hit a plateau, where I could handle the routine and every day healing situations thrown at me. This was definitely hubris, and I knew it. The looming situation blanketing the whole town was a long term project, and not one I could make progress on quickly. Stacking up level ups and their bonuses was okay, until we started looking at putting a god back together again.

Level 22: Ability upgrade: Healer's Resistance, +2 skill points

Level 23: +1 Ingenuity, +3 skill points

Now that was a surprise. A very welcome one. In the past I'd gotten upgrades and a single skill point, or an attribute point and one or two skill points. Three and an attribute point felt like Christmas.

First, I needed to check out Healer's Resistance.

Healer's Resistance III

(Special Ability, Uncommon, active)

I- You may spend a Durability Token to resist damage from any source. Long term effects are reduced by 90%. Onsets of all diseases, venoms, poisons, or other afflictions are quadrupled, as are intervals. Lasts one day.

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

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

III- Spend 3 Durability Tokens to make yourself immune to a damage source for one day. Does not cover divine damage inflicted by gods.

The first big change here was that my target could spend the Token instead of me. Nice. The second was that the effects had been reduce further, from 75 to 90 percent, and the onsets were now quadrupled.

And then there was that level three ability. It seemed unbelievable. Maybe with more level ups, it would also take into account god damage. It was a hope, but likely a vain one. I doubted it would get so powerful as to negate all damage from gods. However, I could… dive into a volcano? Hug Larelle's Magmamander? Go skydiving without a parachute?

I shuddered at the thought of it not working. I'd have to do some tests.

As for the rest of my level up bonuses…

Ingenuity at level 9! Awesome. Sure, I didn't *feel* any smarter, but then again, I never did. The physical changes were the easiest to track: less pain in my hips and thighs and back were from Physicality, and less fatigue from a day's work was from Durability. Also I could sex longer.

I chuckled to myself. "Perv," I muttered.

Affinity was also something I'd been able to track, the flow and

feel of mana having changed into the ability to glimpse it sometimes, when I concentrated.

Likability and Ingenuity though, those were much more difficult to see progressing.

Regardless, I had skill points to spend. The first one went directly to Divine Resistance. That one I needed.

I peered over the list of Healer skills again and frowned. It never, ever seemed like enough skill points. For now, my Develop cure was still low. Treatment, especially Potions, had leveled up on its own, from the frequency of using the skill. I wasn't developing cures on the regular though.

"Let's try to get everything to level 4," I told myself. That meant two in Develop cure, for Large and Medium, and then two in Diagnosis.

Christopher Fletcher

Healer - Trainee 23

Pleasure Seeker - Novice 20

attributes:

Affinity 7

Durability 6

Ingenuity 9

Likability 6

Physicality 5

Free Tokens 7

Healer Skills:

Diagnosis (physical 4, spiritual 4, magical 4, mental 3)

Treatment (potions 4, salves 3, tinctures 3, elixirs 3, unguents 3)

Develop cure (swarm 4, small 5, medium 4, large 3)

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 6
Stealth 1
Mana Affinity 1
All other skills unranked
Unspent skill points: 0

This is Christopher about to say ‘all in a day’s work.’



Chapter 9- BOOF and SNORC

Thankfully the California sun was still high in the sky when I woke from a nap. The girls had stopped for lunch and left me in the van, but when they returned, giggling and chatting, they asked what kind of takeout I wanted.

I just want to stop and quickly review what I was looking at:

Cinzy had on these baby short shorts in purple and a gradient tank top over a string bikini top only about one percent of the population can pull off. I know you see them all the time on the television and the internet, because they're like one in a million, but you don't see a million people in your day to day life, so believe me when I say that from her painted toenails and matching flip flops to her expert dye job, Cinzy was almost impossible to look away from.

Regina was a ginger and complained about the sun in a good-natured way while dressing like something out of an impressionist painting. She had on a wide-brimmed straw hat and a sundress that showed off how little she was wearing underneath when the angle of the light was right. She had a parasol.

Tara dressed as she always seemed to: yoga pants and sneakers in a medium brown color, along with a lime green t-shirt, a little too large, cut so that it was more like a tank top. She had to wear a bra because her nipples were simply huge, and it created mind-boggling cleavage. There she rivaled Cinzy.

Ivy had somehow talked Isabelle into dressing far less conservatively than normal; she had on jean shorts that showed a bit of her butt cheeks. She was constantly on edge about people seeing, so she was constantly picking at a wedgie and drawing people's attention to it. From there, the crop top showed off her belly button and a decent amount of cleavage also. She wasn't as well-endowed as the others but was still sexy.

And Ivy. Good gravy. She was in that see through fishnet shirt

with a bikini under it, the tall boots again, and right now, jean shorts cut short enough that it looked like a bikini bottom. I could see almost her full butt, her thighs, and the whole of her trim upper body. She'd added a Stetson to this, and it made her look even sexier, somehow.

"What did you go over with my mom while I was out?" I asked.

"Not much," Regina said. "We asked her what she's been up to the last six months while you've been gone."

"What? Why?" It had been all chemo and throwing up and hair loss and dizziness and shirt like that.

"She took up knitting," Cinzy said. "And she promised to make us all DRC hats and scarves."

"Um." Well that was certainly news to me. I'd been too wrapped up in my own stuff to.

Which is how I ended up getting my mom to talk at length about the knitting she'd been doing. She had shipped a lot of it off to pet shelters so they could dress up the good doggies and kitties to get people to adopt.

And it had worked. She was kind of a badass. Instead of convalescing like she could have, like many other people would have chosen to do, she got herself a nice hobby that filled the painful time and made a difference.

"I donated a couple of hats and scarves up north."

She said up north like we had gone to visit my aunt and uncle in Idaho ever. I was pretty sure there was a disagreement that was political in nature, but I hadn't ever gotten into the weeds because I didn't know the Idaho Jessens. My mom really liked the Fletcher side of the family much better.

All fueled up on salads, wraps and one falafel plate, we hit the road once again.

"Okay!" My mother announced. "We're going back to Dork fleeing post."

"It's Dorian flying roast," Cinzy said, then started and looked down like she could stare at her own betraying lips. Why couldn't

anyone say the word Dorfialialtos, the name of the other world, was unclear. It was definitely a mystery for another chapter of this story.

"Can we tell the Agency naming story first?" Tara asked.

"Ugh!" Regina said, but she was grinning.

"It's my favorite story!"

"Fiiiiiiiiine-uh," Regina said.

She probably knew that this part of the story with Vellenia lead to Jacoby's involvement… sexually. But we can save that for when Christopher comes up with a plausible way to explain why Jacoby was so nice to me.

***

"You have got to see this memorandum," Tara gushed. "This is so amazing."

She had just returned from her job for the day: heading out to link up with Jacoby's people, dropping off potions, and making sure nothing out there had become problematic. None had, and we were thankful of that. They had left one of their high level Wizards, a guy named Wayne. This guy could deliver and receive messages directly from HQ on the regular. These came on shrunken clay tablets that the Wizards would then enlarge with their *Engorgio* spells… or whatever they were called. For now, Tara had hold of two tablets, the size of playing cards, waving them at us and crying tears of laughter.

Cinzy, being the self-appointed spokesperson of the group, snatched the tiny clay tablets from her hand and read over the tiny script. She burst out laughing, replacing Tara's look of annoyance with one of genuine delight again.

I won't bore you with the entire thing. Suffice it to say that, in the very beginning, the Agency did not exist in any official capacity. It was a little subsection of some little subsection of the government budget. It was discretionary spending at its most discretionary.

You know, the sort of five thousand dollar hammer and twenty-five thousand dollar toilet seat type thing. Kind of makes you wonder

how much of that budget is for intergalactic flight and extraterrestrial management affairs.

Back to the story.

Now, as time had gone on, the Agency was beginning to realize at least one of its goals, and so in order to move forward, the Agency was going to reveal its existence to the president. This would all be very hush-hush, very closed door. We still weren't about to start existing. The Agency was not about to begin flooding the world with cute Nakamamon pets so everyone could have a flower fox, or open a zoo so people could see the rochidnas, and whatever sentient crystal thing that Garnet was. That wasn't happening, and probably would never happen.

Emphasis on the word 'probably.'

However, they wanted to name the Agency so it could be presented to the president. As usual, the people in charge were people like Rus.

Cinzy waved the paper. "Do you want to know what they're thinking of calling it?"

"Just tell us," Drat said.

"You are not at all fun," Cinzy said. "No sense of drama."

"I have an excellent sense of drama, for things that matter."

Cinzy sighed. "Well just know that we have been invited to vote on these, because Rus is a maniac. These names were put forward by regular employees like us, and they passed several rounds of voting while we were cut off from most communications."

"Let's do it," I said.

"Drumroll please!" Cinzy called, and everybody—except Drat—obliged her. I started rolling my tongue and patting my thighs, just like in National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation. I could tell a lot of people hadn't seen this movie, but I soon had everyone following long. Except Drat. Cinzy could create an actual drumroll sound with her powers, which was so, so odd.

When Cinzy opened her mouth again, all 'drumroll' cut immediately off.

"They want to call it either BOOF… or SNORC."

"Oh yeah. Yeah," Regina said, already laughing. "Yeah, I'm on board with either of those. Don't even care what they stand for. I like it. The Agency has outdone itself."

This was the general consensus.

BOOF stood for Bureau of Otherworld Operations and Facilities. The name in no way made it clear what the Agency did, aside from operate and facilitate things here in the otherworld, but that was all right.

SNORC gave us more, but not much. This stood for Strategic Nexus Operations and Resource Command. The words 'strategic' and 'resources' implied that the other world was going to be mined for something, and that something was loosely connected to national defense.

Well, if Blake hadn't become towering slab of Physicality, he would've made a rather amazing soldier.

I froze.

The realization that the Agency was using us as a guinea pig group for future super soldiers was a sobering one. Because, honestly, there was no way they weren't doing that. They were cultivating super soldiers, super ninjas like Drat, and super talkers like Cinzy, and only beginning to consider showing those results to the big brass in Washington.

"Strategic," I breathed, "and resource."

What they wanted to harvest out of this world and bring into earth was immediately evident, but so far as I understood, extracting magic out of Dork Fiddle Toast wasn't possible.

"Dorm feely host," I said angrily. "Seriously, why can't I even say the name of this fracking world? Anyway it doesn't matter. Tokens disappear after twenty-four hours." Regina had said her special abilities all dried up after about a day on earth.

Right now anyhow. If it's one thing we can all agree on regarding humans as a species, it's that we figure out how to do what we want to do. Usually what we figure out is how to kill one another, but

when we wanted to get airborne, we figured that out too. When we wanted to touch the moon, we figured that out.

For now it didn't matter. We had jobs to do, and my job was healing. Nobody in their right minds stopped a Healer from healing. Nobody went to doctors and told them to cut that out.

"I'll vote… BOOF," Regina said.

"I recognize that word from somewhere," Trent said.

"Y-y-you should," Alan said, and described how that word had been part of a highly televised Supreme Court justice's confirmation hearings at the time. People had debated what the word meant, and that didn't matter either.

It may or may not have been perverted in nature. Again, didn't matter.

What mattered was the word sounded silly. Would it be a lot easier for the president to accept the news that there was another world out there? Maybe if it was handled by BOOF. Would the public be okay knowing that resources in their homes were coming from another world? Maybe if they were BOOF resources.

But hell, what did I know? I was only a kid in my early twenties, and the people attempting to reassure the government that another world was good, well they had decades and decades of experience under their belts. All I needed to do was stay on target, plug the leaks faster than new ones were springing to life.

***

Ugh, I'm getting things out of order trying to avoid telling my mom all about the wonderful and unbelievable sexual shenanigans I got up to in the other world.

I'd been quietly making love with my lovely ladies for the whole week. It had been a relaxing and pleasurable time, just reveling in their bodies and making them gasp, and hearing them cry out as their bodies tipped over the climax point. We'd gone out walking during the day, away from the camp, we'd gone out walking at night, nearer the camp, and one of the things I now knew I was missing

was hand-holding.

In the wake of numerous sexy time activities, the system apparently awarded extra experience points, and put me at level 20 in Pleasure Seeker. I was overjoyed to take the next step towards the milestone: whatever the hell happened at level 25. Changes were on the horizon, and I couldn't wait to hit level 25 to see what the next thing might be.

The first thing that happened was all my Tokens replenished. The second thing that happened was I received the level up bonuses:

Level 20: +1 Durability, +2 skill points

There would be no complaints when it came to new attribute points and new skill levels. I was thankful that, the further I got from level 1 and the closer to level 25, the more points I appeared to get. On previous level ups I'd received a single skill point with most attribute increases.

Waiting for Drat do search out all the hidden spaces meant it was time to prioritize Pleasure Seeker. It was also time to consider just what I was doing with the Qualities. One of those priorities, now that I'd touched Chrysta, was increasing Adaptability. She might be a ghost aspect, and she might be an ice aspect on top of that, but she was a valuable member of my team who craved physical contact. Next, Pheromones would transmit whatever Qualities in Pleasure Seeker to my partners. I hadn't used it yet, but practically I thought it meant an increase of Adaptability for partners who needed it, and other Qualities for those who didn't. And to me, that said I could grant Chrysta Adaptability too.

I already understood Adaptability allowed me to avoid hurting my partners. Size allowance for smaller girls like Regina and Vellenia, and for times when Cinzy wanted to take my full length in the other hole. It also transformed me into a more ghostly being for purposes of touching Chrysta. The full scope of Adaptability was far beyond my understanding… for now.

So one point went right into Adaptability. The other one I couldn't

be sure about. I needed to see how Pheromones worked before I sank more points in. Meaning I needed to have a quick heart to heart with Chrysta and see whether it really did pass Adaptability onto her.

I read over the Pheromones description again.

This Quality grants one point of your other Qualities to your sexual partner while in the act. Each level of Pheromones can enhance your partner by one level.

I spent that time listening to Tara—and Cinzy butting in—to tell the BOOF and SNORC story. I also spent that time trying to figure out how to tell my mother how I gained Jacoby's trust and assistance, and get to the trials we'd run with the different types of afflicted citizens from Glumpdumpkin, while Drat tried his thing.

Then I told the part where I'd gotten tired of waiting on Drat, gotten tired of Jacoby's insistence that I was better off being her subordinate than a separate team leader, and got down to the business of trying to help the citizens in town, one at a time if I had to.

First, cleansing the second type of Glumpdumpkin citizens of their malady was… difficult.

Alan's handbook on healing had been shrunk down to playing-card sized. We had large magnifying glasses to help us go through them with relative speed, and find some that might be helpful. He had an index blown up to newspaper size that Trent had embedded in his wall using earth magic. The two of them had worked together to make a notation system that was… insane.

Imagine your typical study of a scholar from a hundred or two hundred years back, books open all over the place, notations scrawled here and there, notes in the margins, and loose pages sticking out of books, or hidden under other books, or tacked to the walls.

Now imagine that in stone form. Since magic had a strange effect on both ink and paper, they were forced to score letters and words

directly into soft earth or clay. Trent was there to turn the earth to stone, and to separate out those notated areas. He could press them into the walls of Alan's house… and he had. Some had to be taken out, and replacements tacked up instead. But between the binders full of clay trading cards, larger newspaper-sized clay tablets, and the stone bricks where they made notes, it was a mess of epic proportions in there. Alan's house was nothing more than one of those conspiracy theory boards, but set in stone.

We required a lot of clay tablet resizing, and then a lot of parsing through the notes we expanded through the use of Alan's spells. Alan was steadfast, though I could sense his exhaustion after only the third resizing spell. When I told him to take a break, he refused, and instead doubled down. He would last another hour before falling asleep at his spellbook.

Yes, I know what you're thinking: spellbook? Ink on paper, but didn't I just explain how ink and paper didn't work in a land of magic? Well, Alan's spellbook had been specially created by the order of Wizards to withstand magic. After all, it had to be spellproof in order to survive Alan frequently casting spells within inches of it. Alan learned spells through level progression and choices, and whenever he learned a spell, it would appear in his spellbook, indelibly printed there by some substance that wasn't ink, but looked exactly like it.

He told me the pages were made of stone, specially spellcrafted for them to be both ultra thin and unbreakable. And yes I'd seen the advertisements for the notebook back on earth, made of literal stone on the internet, but I couldn't believe they engineered stone to be paper. I just couldn't.

After several hours of research, we had a decent enough formula for a **severe confusion** treatment.

This one required a calming agent: morning dewdrop was the name of the flower. Following that, we needed blue crocuses, and a lot of them, for renewing thoughts and for concentration. The third bit we needed was a moss native to this world, called Grandfather's Beard. I only had a bit of the crocuses and the moss, so that meant

immediately planting some and using **Verdant Rejuvenation** to help grow them at hyper fast speeds.

From there, it was time to check on my Treatment, of Medium creatures. I had never bought any of the aspect-specific skills, and didn't exactly regret it. There would never be enough skill points for that. We treated a sapient-looking tree Nakamamon, getting a check difficulty that was still far too high… but possibly manageable.

Develop Cure check (medium/plant): *You have the Develop Cure (medium) skill at level 4, while Ingenuity is at level 9. This check is Nigh Impossible, requiring 14 successes. Would you like to spend 7 Tokens* for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 9 Physicality and 7 Free Tokens.

Note: This check falls under the ***Hard At Work*** *special ability.*

Nigh Impossible was better than 30+ difficulty rating, but not by a lot. I still didn't love the idea of spending 7 Tokens, since my 13 levels would yield an average of three or four successes… out of fourteen. This was possible, but not ideal. I cold regenerate Tokens now in a couple of different ways, but it would still be a day or two in between each stumbling, severely confused patient, and there were dozens.

This is Christopher about to do it anyway.



Chapter 10- Apothecary's Diary

For the next two hours, I boiled blue crocuses in a mixture of water and oil. This allowed the Grandfather's Beard and the morning dewdrop to grow at incredible speeds in my garden. Vellenia happily chipped in, singing as we worked with an otherworldly voice. Meanwhile, the crocuses turned the whole mixture a deep indigo color, and made my whole house smell… indescribable. It was an eye-watering, sneeze-inducing indescribable, so not a horrible type of indescribable, even if we were laughing half the time.

We eventually moved the operation outside, where the smell could be carried away—or right into my face—by the day's breeze.

After the whole mixture had been temperature regulated, and distilled down, we added the Grandfather's Beard. Indigo became a dark sort of turquoise. After another hour, the morning dewdrop was ready to be added.

With the addition of the white flower, the thick syrup went from turquoise to an opaque white, followed closely by disappearing entirely.

Treatment check (Unguents): *You have the Treatment (Unguents) skill at level 3, Develop Cure (medium) at level 4 , while Ingenuity is at level 9. Other applicable skills are unranked. This check is Extreme, requiring 10 successes. Would you like to spend 5 Tokens* for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 9 Ingenuity and 7 Free Tokens.

Note: This check falls under the ***Hard At Work*** *special ability.*

"Hang on," I muttered. I had been about to spend 7 Tokens to

treat this creature… now it was giving me 16 levels, and possibly 5 or 6 natural successes, to work up this treatment.

"What's the matter, bond mate?" Vellenia asked.

"I think I was just about to attempt to cure this individual with the force of my magic alone." Brewing up an unguent automatically lowered the difficulty and gave me access to stacking my skills.

I decided to try it; **Hard At Work** would give me a free retry, and would grant me more information. So far, for months, I'd had about a 3:1 success rate. Sometimes it had been as high as 5:1. I still wasn't going to succeed at 10 successes with 16 total levels, but… if I had sex first, I'd have 18 levels. The thought gave me a snort of amusement.

My 16 levels gave me 5 successes, about what I thought I'd get. I did go for the retry, and spent the 5 Tokens to succeed from Physicality. Meditation, and the **Drive In Deeper** ability would help me to regain Tokens. It wasn't a permanent solution, but it was just as important to see what was happening here.

The sapient tree had been babbling incoherently, until I smeared the unguent onto the place above where its eyes were located. It immediately stopped weakly struggling, froze, and began looking around in confusion.

"Regular confusion… or severe confusion?" I asked, snorting with laughter.

"Where am I?" it asked, the first understandable words it had said since we'd brought it out of the town hours ago. Then, in a tone of increasing fear, "Where am I? I don't remember this place… what happened to me?"

"Just outside the town of Glumpdumpkin, dear," Cinzy said from the front door. "I'll take it from here."

She gave me a tired smile.

"Thank you," I told her.

"Just let me know when you're going to have confused and scared individuals to calm down next time," she said, and gave me a wink. Then she guided the walking, talking tree out the door and

showed him where his old home was, calmly explaining that we were on the case and that it was only a matter of time before we had the town healed up.

I appreciated her optimism. There was not nearly as much confidence stored up inside me to project that kind of reassurance.

In order to gain more skill levels, I would need to level up and get skill points, or do the same thing constantly and hope for a level up in what I was doing. If I'd stayed in Slinktrickle, I had no doubt I would eventually end up with levels in water aspect and fairy aspect Cure generation skills. If we were here long enough, I could ask to get the same type of Nakamamon again and again, and see if that worked.

I still needed 5 successes the natural way to make sure this worked, and that meant 15 skill levels to complete it comfortably. Well, I was, after all, a Novice at this, trying to be a full-on surgeon when I should be patching scrapes, burns, and stitching wounds closed at a real doctor's side.

I had magic on my side, thankfully, because 15 relevant levels weren't going to come quickly.

Vellenia gave me a massage of the shoulders and told me I should give myself some grace. She was right; I was new to this. A few months was a drop in the bucket compared with most doctors.

Our third test was initially the most difficult. I asked Larelle and the Guardians to try to get one of the constant workers out of town and into my lab, where I could try to treat them as I'd already done.

First of all, simply getting one to the lab for treatment was much harder than anyone anticipated. Drat had the **Prismatic Apparel**, so only Larelle was immune to the effect of being in town. The others only had Divine Resistance at level 2 or 3, which wasn't enough for longer stays trying to wrestle a supernaturally strong individual out of town.

So I had to head in, and try to treat them there.

The manic workers were rare: we only found about a dozen in total working and working and working. They were supernaturally

protected from starvation; they didn't eat. They were supernaturally protected from exhaustion; they didn't sleep. They were also supernaturally protected from the the ravages of their jobs; they didn't get callouses, rope burns, or the normal bumps, bruises or injuries that come from doing manual labor. Somehow, they didn't run out of raw materials either; one of them had been making salads and pasta dishes for weeks now, and we'd been grabbing these until he threatened to get us unless he was paid.

Also, once Larelle started trying to get in their way to make them give up baking bread 24/7, she found them to be supernaturally strong. The baker woman was only about two feet tall, a round ball of a creature with stubby arms and legs, but she threw Larelle aside like she weighed no more than a loaf of sourdough. And continued on her way back to the kitchen like nothing strange had happened.

It was an odd situation, to say the least. Before we tried it, we were already ready to give up the game and let them continue indefinitely.

I decided that wouldn't do, though. The baker always baked. The chef always prepped and cooked and plated meals, which somehow simply vanished when he filled up the kitchen with uncountable plates. They weren't going anywhere, except out to the market to get more materials for their trades. I could study them so long as I took care not to get in their way.

It is folly to do this, Larelle told me, in that same psychic speech directly into my head.

"Not folly," I told her.

They will be fine until the broken god has been repaired.

"I know, but…" The Hippocratic Oath wasn't exactly a thing for me. It wasn't a requirement for me to be a Healer. It was, however, a good way of doing things. Yes, I'd turned away people who were doing others harm. These were victims, not perpetrators, and they deserved help if I could supply it. Also, I might learn more about the god when the time finally arrived for me to handle it. After all, the divine underwear and shirts and socks and pants might instead be

these poor workers doing their Red Shoes dance, a dance they couldn't break free from. I hoped that by healing them, I'd get the god out in the open, then heal him next.

It didn't work, but a guy can dream.

So the first thing I did was try the easy route, and smear their heads with my new unguent, then let them Vape-o-Rub themselves out of their fugue states.

The unguent wasn't the way to do it. Sadly, these ones weren't suffering from **severe confusion**.

So I watched the baker lady for most of a full day, using Diagnosis to learn that she was indeed suffering from a divine ailment. The Diagnosis check was done at Extreme difficulty as well, and since I didn't have Fire Aspect Nakamamon as a type I knew well, I was back to using Affinity and Diagnosis.

And that meant spending Tokens.

It took another 7 Tokens to deal with the Diagnosis.

I went with the divine diagnosis first, praying for answers and wafting the censor around the baker lady as she baked. When the incense smoke stuck around her, I knew I was right. Still, I needed to spend the Tokens to know exactly what it was and how I could help.

The result was called **Labor Mania**.

*This could also be called **workaholism**, though my colleague doesn't want to use it because it sounds like it doesn't take the condition seriously.*

*Are we doing this again? Call it **workaholism** if you like.*

Oh, we are doing this, because you entered the name and there's no edit function, and secondly because you are nothing but a wet blanket. The soppingest, wettest, drippingest blanket there is.

*I am not. These are supposed to be official write ups to help future generations. And I refused to name it **Worksy til you Dropsy**.*

Well, whose fault is it that we got off track, you moist towelette?

If you chose not to fight with me, these wouldn't become messes of useless text, now would they? If only you had agreed with me and put in an edit function—

Urgh. Those suffering from ***Labor Mania*** *may exhibit physical symptoms of overwork, and require physical remedies as well. If they do, this is a mental condition and they can be restrained if you are ready with a mental remedy. If they do not, it is a divine condition, and you should not under any circumstances attempt to confine the subject physically. The divinity will lend them holy strength in order to throw you off and continue about their work.*

Excellent work, you soaked dishrag, you managed—

Write up over.

This was getting weird. First the other write up, and now this. These system messages had all been made by someone, and while it wasn't at all my business to figure out who, or what it meant, it sure was tempting.

I had a lot of tasks in front of me, and a whole bunch of relationship entanglements besides.

With all that in mind, I got to work attempting a divine remedy.

I went with olive oil, because it was sacred and considered holy by many. Next came bamboo, which was also considered sacred for East Asians. The resilience and humility associations fit here, as far as I was concerned. Resilience for working for days without a rest, into weeks… and now months. Sage… halo sage here, a variation from this world with a white rim around the edge of the fuzzy and aromatic leaves. Lastly, I added lotus blossoms.

I know. My garden was so, so weird looking. Once I got the dried lotus petals out, I had to tend them using Verdant Rejuvenation. The strangest thing was seeing lotuses bloom over the course of a single day. They're one of the biggest flowers, with massive leaves resembling lily pads. Following that, the flowers themselves can rise up on tall stalks, really huge. I was forced to dig tiny ponds for them, and water them throughout the day in order to get them, but you'd typically see these things in Asia, on small lakes or ponds,

rising six feet in the air with their enormous leaves. Then the flowers themselves would seem to be as big as your head.

I really loved the way they appeared to glow from within, with bright yellow in the center and petals that were white at the bottom, fading to bright magenta at the tip. It was easy to see why people had lanterns that looked exactly like these things.

On the second day I had a crop of lotuses, halo sage, bamboo, and I used the olive oil given to me by HQ. After meeting with Cinzy to put in a request with Wayne to requisition more oil, Vellenia and I went into the lab and got our elixir on.

I wanted to go with an elixir because they were oil based, but generally more difficult because they took longer. The recipe I had on hand was full of temperature changes, stirring changes, removing the frothy scum that came to the top, and mana infusion over the course of some six hours. It wasn't a full-fledged cure like we'd made for the gods, but it was close.

I thought we'd failed at the outset. Adding the ground bamboo leaves to the olive oil and infusing it with mana took a long time, and created a sticky black sludge that seemed unworkable.

Vellenia and Alan checked the notes we had for this concoction.

"It says it's correct," she said, and turned to me with her perfect. "'Mixture will be like molasses' is what's written here. Does molasses look like unholy slime?"

I had to grin. "It does."

"Does molasses smell like an abomination?"

"Not… really."

She nodded ruefully. "We may have failed after all."

I continued to feed the unholy concoction mana and requested more instructions as they were written. Once we added the boiled halo sage in, the stench of evil left it, and over time the clinging black sludge evened out into more of a sauce consistency. Best of all, the gleaming black void coloration began to shift.

Afterwards came the sacred lotus petals. Those went in whole, and had to dissolve individually before adding the next. Each one

pushed back the darkness just a bit more.

With drips of mana applied to each lotus petal, a burst of music slammed into being, like a gigantic pipe organ in a cathedral. The type of sound you feel reverberating in your soul. I knew we were on the right track then. Nice and distracting, the type of thing you need when attempting to put together a magical elixir over the course of hours with precise instructions. Further lotus petals hit with other sounds reminiscent of worship: chanting and the strike of wood on wood, a chorus of singing, and wailing in a language that sounded like Arabic.

The coloration began changing with each explosion of holy sound, but like oil and water. The black was shoved back by a pure, colorless clarity, until I could see the bottom of the cauldron.

It was at the very last lotus petal that the UI message for the proficiency check burst into my field of vision.

Treatment check (elixirs/medium): *You have the Treatment (elixirs) skill at level 3, Cure (medium) at level 4, while Affinity is at level 6. This check is Very Difficult, requiring 7 successes. Would you like to spend 3 Tokens* for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 6 Affinity and 7 Free Tokens.

Note: This check falls under the ***Hard At Work*** *special ability.*

As it happened, I did not. With 16 levels, 7 successes was a serious long shot, but theoretically within reach.

"Do you have any Affinity Tokens?" I asked Vellenia, furiously concentrating on adding just the right amount of mana to the last lotus petal. It hit the water and a deep thrumming sound went all throughout my body. The whole mixture quivered, and the countdown timer for me to make the check was faster than I'd ever seen before.

She spent 6 Tokens to lower my difficulty by 2, and I told the UI to make the check.

This is Christopher finally feeling like he knows what he's doing.



Chapter 11- Take the Shot

I sat back and felt the blades of grass tickling the back of my neck, and my forearms. You know how often you touch grass? I can tell you, in my time before the other world, those moments of grass in my hands were few and far between. I know that because it felt so good, filled me with such relief, that I seriously considered stripping my shirt off and just laying there, staring at the clouds as they went by.

Congratulations! *You have crafted an elixir.*

We'd been outside, working on this elixir for a good half a day, and I was grateful, delighted, and also pooped. Durability gave me peak human level stamina, but doing a job for a good six hours without a rest, concentrating the entire time, no breaks, was apparently the limit.

Still, I laughed and wrestled Vellenia when she crashed into me, also laughing. We kissed several times and rolled around on the grass, all the tension drained away.

We had enough elixir, most likely, for all dozen of the afflicted residents. Assuming we could get them to drink this mixture, they would be cured… of something that wasn't truly a problem for them.

We next had to weigh the pros and cons of attempting this.

Pro: we would know if these people were in fact charged with the power of the god and, like the holy underwear in Vellenia's village.

That should've been all it took, but the initial con was also a strong one.

Con: Larelle could get seriously injured by a creature with divine strength while attempting to administer this treatment. She didn't have the Administer Cure skill, I did. I could just see a marshmallow fluffball creature pitching me through the ceiling of her house

because I tried to play airplane with her and get her to open wide. The check difficulty for this was going to be through the roof. Ugh.

Con: this Nakamamon wasn't actually being physically harmed by their ordeal, and bringing them out of this state was adding to the refugee crisis Trent couldn't keep up with. He had done a heroic job thus far trying to keep up with demand for houses, expanding drainage, and getting fresh water to where it needed to be. He could build a well, but it took him a solid several days of repeatedly exhausting his mana reserves. In the meantime more and more people showed up at the town's gates hoping to join the sleeping god's cult of sleepy sleepers.

But the pro of gaining knowledge and potentially dealing with the god situation meant going ahead with this. If it worked, we had enough elixir to handle the remainder of the busy bees. If it didn't, we could leave the rest to their seemingly painless fate until we solved the situation completely.

I was too exhausted and stressed over this to think logically. After sleep, and waking up with Vellenia draped over me, she helped me to remember that we could inject the elixir into our worker bee and treat her that way.

Duh. We had a good laugh over it. Although we might have really enjoyed seeing Larelle get body slammed by a two foot marshmallow painted sky blue, the danger to Larelle (or myself) would've been very real.

Look, you work a full shift with no breaks or meals, steadily draining your mana supply with an effort of concentration you can't even comprehend, and then come back to me and tell me you would be immune to the occasional brain fart.

Armed with the knowledge and slightly embarrassed about not remembering the injection thing, we marched forth into town, past where Larelle had arranged the people into unconscious rows by the sides of buildings, and to the bakery in question.

The weather was again delightful. I was glad the god of weather wasn't malfunctioning. I can imagine that brewing up a cure for that

would be pretty difficult, what with the constant downpours and cyclones and rising floodwaters. Instead we had singing bird Nakamamon, chirping bug Nakamamon, and a bright sun shining down upon us.

So it was that we found her happily baking—whistling as she worked, no less—after filling the syringe and navigating the streets.

One of the things Trent's house now had, it should be noted, was a scale map of the entire town. It was a good twelve feet long and three feet wide, but that's neither here nor there. It was to scale. He had recreated all the houses out of stone, and some of them out of crystals he'd found while bringing up houses or digging wells. Street names were etched into the ground, and pebbles now stood for sleeping individuals we'd painstakingly relocated out of the way. So we could plan our approach and know exactly where we were going without having to make a check to shrug off the divine influence.

It didn't take long to find her, and like before she was oblivious to our presence. Unless we touched one of her expertly-crafted rolls, cakes, cookies, or other baked delights, she didn't acknowledge us in the slightest. If we paid for what we took, we would hear a chipper "Thank you, dearies!" It didn't matter if she was in the other room rolling out dough or singing to herself, the moment we touched the goods, she began to react.

It was simplest to just walk in the bakery and inject her.

Simple doesn't mean easy, Larelle rumbled in my mind, a sullen complaint. *This is a security matter and I take your security very seriously.*

"Thanks, I guess," I said. I was pretty confident this couldn't go wrong, at first, until she described the baker woman turning and splattering me all over the walls of the bakery the moment I tried to stick her with the needle.

She determined to load up the syringe into a specially-crafted blowgun. I would attempt the first shot, I argued, because I had the Administer skill and she didn't. After an hour of blowgun target practice outside, I was reasonably confident I could hit a two foot

spherical target from a distance of ten feet.

I was also winded; who knew firing a blowgun over and over again could take it out of you like this? I mean, with the syringe the size it was, there was absolutely no way I'd do this at all without Physicality and Durability being as high as they were. I'd been making Durability checks at the end there, with increasing difficulties. She'd filled the syringes with water, but later she had Trent slot stone into the glass tube, after he'd crafted it with his Sorcerer powers. The extra weight helped—with heavy air quotes on the word 'helped'—to get me ready for the actual shot to come.

I was a pretty decent shot, though, which was good. I could hit near the center of the target from ten feet, and hit the target ten times out of ten from fifteen feet, though my placement was erratic.

Finally set, we marched into town, blowgun in hand, with Larelle holding the case containing all dozen syringes. By now it was getting toward lunch, so we stopped at the bakery, paid with coin, and I helped myself to a jam-filled pastry.

Indecision and trepidation were creeping up on me through the walk and then as I chewed the flaky, buttery pastry. This was the first time I'd be attacking a Nakamamon. It wasn't an attack, really, since the elixir was in the syringe. Still, I hadn't shot at anyone here. I was a healer; you know, stirring things, growing herbs and flowers, burning myself on the Magmamander or the adjustable tray we used to hold the cauldron when it needed moving up or down. I took damage, sure, but it was all in service of the patients. In one case, with them literally unraveling before my eyes, I had to push through divine damage and administer a cure.

But I'd never shot someone. Until you do, there's a real sense of uncertainty for most non-psychopaths. And this goes double for targets who are minding their own business. I felt a hot rock settle in the pit of my stomach, weighing me down, telling me this wasn't good. My conscious mind fought back; I wasn't hurting her. This was to help her.

Yet, she would continue doing what she was doing without harm coming to her. I could enjoy donuts and cakes, so long as we

coughed up the coins.

In the end, I took the shot. I wasn't in love with the idea of doing it, but it needed to be done. For intelligence gathering purposes, and not so we could plunder all her baked goods without paying.

Honest.

I lined up the shot just outside the room where she was happily rolling dough. Larelle wouldn't help me get closer, because she was being a butt. From here it was a good twelve feet. I could make it.

The rich smells of butter and baked bread wafted out at me. Why hadn't we chosen one of the other workers? It was because I wanted jam pastry before we did this heinous act. But we could have just gotten a pastry and moved on.

Well, I told myself that if we cured her, I'd order Trent to set her up a bakery just outside our camp and supply her with everything she needed. Larelle could just…

What was I doing?

I took a deep breath, a must for any blowgun attack, and steadied myself. My heart was pounding, and my anxious mind filled with awful scenarios of this adorable little Nakamamon turning into a lightning fast killing machine, filled with divine energy and divine wrath. I could see her rolling over here and springing off her tiny little feet, rocketing upwards to slam one teensy fist into my jaw, before rebounding off the wall and striking Larelle from behind.

Instead, she continued to work as I counted between heartbeats, and took the shot.

Administer cure check: *You have the Administer Cure skill at level 8, and Physicality is at level 5. Other applicable skills include Fairy aspect Nakamamon, which is unranked. This check is Very Difficult, requiring 5 successes. Would you like to spend 2 Tokens* for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 5 Physicality and 7 Free Tokens.

Note: This check falls under the ***Hard At Work*** *special ability.*

I let it go by itself, not expecting to get 5 successes out of 13

levels. I was right, and only scored 3 successes, fewer than I thought. The timer to confirm Token spending on my free retry appeared as well, and wound down faster than any other timer I'd seen yet. In the millisecond that followed, I confirmed that Yes, I wanted to spend the Tokens.

All this seemed to happen in a heartbeat. The system had a way of slowing down time so that the time between me blowing out the held breath to propel the dart and me spending Tokens after my retry were half a moment apart. The dart hadn't even left the blowgun when the system check happened, the failure was registered, and the new timer counted down.

I was once again astonished by the system itself, but only a brief moment. The dart hit her center mass, and the clear liquid gave out a brief holy sound, that of a choir all raising their voices in a single harmonious note at once.

The small, ball-shaped Nakamamon turned to me, looking just as betrayed as she ought to have, and took a single righteous step forward with eyes blazing white, before slumping down on her face. I imagined a comical fart sound as the tiny ball of sky blue just went splat and stopped moving.

"It worked," I muttered, just as Larelle spoke those same words into my mind.

Without a moment's hesitation, she moved me aside with her gigantic muscles, darted into the bakery, and carried the baker off like a football under one arm. She bounded off out of town, while I breathed a sigh of relief, took another pastry, then reconsidered.

I dropped a coin to pay for it.

The baker wasn't the key to finding the divine pieces of the god malfunctioning in town. It wasn't too surprising, though it was disappointing. As for the baker herself, I made good on my promise to myself, set Trent to the task of creating a bakery in the town's outskirts, and set Larelle to the task of grabbing all the bakery equipment necessary to run the thing.

The poor little puffball had apparently known, the whole time,

that she'd been doing nothing but baking. She hadn't been able to stop herself, but instead just fuzzed out of consciousness from time to time. In her waking hours she watched herself go in amazement, but grew tired of this. She hadn't been able to let us help her, but she was very thankful afterwards.

This led to us stalking and then darting eleven others who were working without pause. If they could see and understand what they were doing, and weren't in a mind-controlled state, they needed the relief and rest of being given the elixir.

They would need the same elixir to be made for them periodically, so the ingredients we'd used, the halo sage, the olive oil, the bamboo and the lotus petals, all went into the pile of things to grow daily with **Verdant Rejuvenation**.

So the work of finding the pieces of divinity fell to Drat.

Drat didn't waste much time in finding bits of a god. He found the first one just two days after we had cleansed and set free the God of Secret Spaces. In the meantime, though, we had plenty of work to do.

That afternoon I headed in to check on Chrysta. I hadn't had the opportunity to really understand what my Qualities could do, and it was time. She had time to rest, though she never used it. Ghosts apparently didn't need to sleep. I took her away from where Isabelle and Ivy were now fending off the trickle of Nakamamon trying to get into the town.

"There is a problem," she said.

One of many, I thought.

"A slight problem, but a problem regardless." She motioned behind her, to where Isabelle's Nakamamon companion lay comatose in the street.

"Muppin!" I said. "Shift."

"The town itself has a pull on us that grows stronger the longer we are in proximity. I am not immune. I have informed the other team members that they should hold tight to their bond mates, as should you."

“Thanks for the heads up,” I said. “Did the system require you to make a check?”

I really wanted the answer to be no, but knew it was yes.

She nodded. “Your Divine Resistance skill works in concert with Durability… though I am certain the difficulty will increase as time goes on. Unfortunately my Guardian abilities do not yet cover divine influence.”

I nodded.

“Does Isabelle know?”

She nodded. “She was upset, but is certain you will save her bond mate.”

Yep. I could do that. I mean, I had to do that. I didn’t love the extra added pressure of having Isabelle pushing me to get this over and done, but her being upset was totally understandable.

“What has brought you?” She asked. “This one hopes it is better than my gloomy news.”

“I have a new ability to try out,” I told her. “If you’re still interested in attempting to make physical contact.”

Chrysta floated beside me, characteristically quiet.

“I still don’t know how much it will take, so it may be a few more levels before I’m no longer taking damage.”

Still, she said nothing. More to the point, she was staring at the ground. Now, I was used to the idea that she wasn’t talkative, but she’d been very pleased with our first sweep of Glumpdumpkin, and how we had been able to interact physically. It eventually let to me taking damage, but the thrill of success, even partial success, had been worth it. I assumed she’d jump for joy at the chance to try it again.

“Is something wrong?”

The look Chrysta gave me was so naked, so vulnerable, it broke my heart a little. I would soon learn that as a ghost, she wasn’t capable of tears.

“Fletcher,” she said, “I am touched. Truly, you have ignited

something in me I thought was gone forever.”

This is Christopher wondering if he’s about to have sex with a ghost.



Chapter 12- Ghost Touch

Sure it might be cold, but my heart was thudding in my chest, standing there close enough to reach out and embrace.

"Fletcher," she said, in her quiet and ethereal voice, "you must understand, this quest you embark on… it is costly for you. You must divert your resources away from the mission objective."

It was like she'd slapped me. "What?"

Didn't she want this? She had told me explicitly that she wanted to be touched, held. She couldn't touch the living without damaging them, and she couldn't touch other ghost aspect Nakamamon. This was literally what she had been craving.

"At every level you gain a finite amount of skill points, and to spend those on me alone is not something I can ask of you."

"Oh, is that it? Pff!" I waved her off.

"Do not be so flippant," she said, and here was the first time I'd ever heard the ghost aspect really come into her voice. The air grew still around her, and the tone of her voice shifted, deepened, and grew… distant. Like she was speaking to me from heaven, or more likely hell. "This mission you have embarked upon is of vital importance to my world. I will not have you throw that away on account of one such as me." A number of arms appeared from behind her back, ghostly and floaty ones that didn't visibly connect to her body, and they were all the Nakamamon fingers, thicker than human fingers and pointed, like claws.

The voice raked over my soul and caused me to shiver, but Stalwart came into play again, and I gained 7 levels of Fear Resistance for the moment. Paired with my Durability, I now had 14 levels. I could reasonably expect 4 successes from that, but I couldn't be sure if that would be enough.

***Durability Check**: You do not have the associated skill for this*

check. You are under the influence of the special ability **Terrific**. This fear power will force you to freeze in place or flee in terror. You may resist by spending 5 Durability Tokens. Would you like to resist?*

Note: This is a contested check, and you may not pay a Token to retry.

Current Tokens: 7 Durability, 7 Free Tokens

Note: **Stalwart currently grants you a Fear Resistance at level 7.*

The timer to react and choose to spend the Tokens or not wound down very quickly. Far quicker than any other ability.

Five was a stretch, but I could make it. Five Tokens was an unthinkable amount considering I needed them to work on healing the dead god.

There was no time.

I chose not to spend the Tokens.

Luckily, I got the *Success!* notification. I actually scored an unbelievable 7 successes out of 14. I'd never had a 50% success rate before and that was amazing in and of itself.

I stepped in closer, which certainly confused her. I'd just shrugged off her power even though I wasn't a Bard or a Guardian. How could I have done so?

"Listen to me closely," I told her. "You are now under orders never to use an ability against me, ever again. Or the remainder of the group, unless they're a specific danger to anyone. Buffs are fine obviously, but that Terrify power right there is off limits. You're a Guardian and you're not guarding me from my class and skill choices, Chrysta. That's the first order."

She shrank back, as though I were the one being terrifying.

"Secondly, how I spend my points is not your concern. So far we've done pretty well handling the obstacles and objectives that land in our path. And I don't want to brag, but our team objective is tied directly to me being a healer, and there's only one Healer in this party."

I could see she wanted to protest the point. If I put all my skill points towards the Healer class, I could be better! I could get through this Glumpdumpkin situation faster or with less chance of failure! And she wasn't wrong, even though neither of us knew it definitively, but it wasn't her job to make my decisions. It wasn't her job to scaring me into making the decisions she considered the right ones.

I reached out and took Chrysta's hand. She suddenly seemed very small and weak. Her body was typically substantial down to the hips, where her legs disappeared. Right now she disappeared up above where her belly button would be. She also had thick strands of hair-like stuff from her head, but they faded from view also. All the other hands and arms faded from view, and even the edges of her face went transparent. This was as close to tears as she could manage.

"You're going to be okay," I told her, speaking as gently and as reassuringly as I could.

"You should remove me from the team," she whispered. "What I've done—"

"Is totally forgivable. You'll survive this. We will move on from this."

I pulled her into a hug, and she didn't resist. We stood there together, me hugging onto Chrysta and feeling her waifish form completely for the first time. I'd increased my Adaptability, but I could sense it wasn't going to be enough. My breath was already puffing out in a thick cloud of vapor. Whatever the skill did to my body, it also did something to my mind, and what it gave me was the knowledge that we weren't quite there yet.

Drat. Not the team member.

After a good thirty seconds, I started getting the warning that I was taking damage. Chrysta must have gotten this as well.

The first test attempt failed. Hugging did not count as sexual contact and activate the level of Pheromones. Neither was Adaptability up to the task.

Fiddlesticks.

"It will work if we kiss," I told her.

"I… Fletcher, can you be certain—"

I leaned forward, but only close enough to get her to bridge the last half inch. The words died in her throat and she kissed me.

There. Freezing cold lips warmed. The damage slowed to a trickle. Adaptability began working again, making me more ghostly, and Pheromones made her more alive. She stared down at herself for a moment in awe, then at me, then at my hands, which were on her waist.

"Sit with me," she said, and sat on the ridge. It felt very close to what I'd call a cliff.

We sat and watched the waning light of day, with my arm wrapped around her waist. We kissed periodically, several more times, whenever Adaptability and Pheromones started wearing off, and had me taking damage again.

The skills and the knowledge inside those skills told me not yet. My level wasn't high enough yet to either manifest me as a ghost, protect me from the ice damage, or turn her human enough to stop those from being a problem. It wasn't far, but it also wasn't yet.

"I love what we do," she told me, breathing freezing air into my mouth after a kiss. She rubbed my hand where it ran up and down her slim body, and leaned against me.

"I wish it went faster," I told her. "The townsfolk are asleep, the refugees are getting restless, and it seems like we're just sitting here."

She kissed me again.

"You have already healed almost a dozen gods trapped in town," she whispered, and slid my hand so it covered her breast. "You have worked to heal Jacoby's people."

It was true; making health and mana potions every day took time out of my mornings.

"Even if we get this guy put back together," I started.

"You feel unworthy of the enormity of the task at hand," she said.

"Yeah."

In response her lips met mine again. The cold receded. The calming aura of being dead stole over me, as Adaptability tried to make me compatible with Chrysta.

"You have already advanced far," she breathed. "You will need the experience. There can be no rushing this task, Fletcher."

She kissed me again, and slipped her tongue in. I responded, even though I was taking damage. Massaging her breast, sliding my other hand over her thigh, making out. It felt wrong, like we shouldn't be doing this. We were coworkers. She was a fracking ghost. But the wrongness also lit me up from within.

"We will bridge this divide," she said. "Conquer this task. Together."

Her eyes flew wide when she realized I'd taken damage from the kissing. She stood and floated away, only to return when I called out.

"We shouldn't," she said, but I took her hands. She darted forward and kissed me, once more making sure I wouldn't take damage from being in contact with her. "That will be the latest time. My job is to keep you safe, not endanger your life. And your job is to focus on the mission, slow as it might feel."

I pulled away but held her by the hands. "Chrysta, one part of my mission is to ensure the comfort, health and happiness of the people on my team. It's not part of the mission directives, but I'm making it my priority."

She smiled a wan smile. "I am already in your debt. You have already done an immeasurable service to me and my kind. If we are to live as ghosts, I would be overjoyed for you to be in contact with the others."

Her smile warmed, and the rest of her body became more solid-looking. She even materialized down below the hips, as she had done in Slinktrickle.

"I will refrain from using the words 'insist' and 'must' toward you,

Fletcher. Please understand though that I do not feel worthy of being your priority. If I may entreat you, or beg, it would be to beg for you to enhance your healing abilities."

And here, Chrysta dropped to her knees. Her thighs and knees materialized, and she fell to the ground, not letting go of my hands. For a being that had appeared utterly terrifying not five minutes ago, she now had a pitiable vulnerability to her.

"Think on this," she said, and looked away.

"You don't want the daily hugs I have planned for you?"

She looked away, and did what I could only assume was the ghost version of a blush. Her whole body went mostly transparent, save for her cheeks, her ears, the sides of her neck, and the tops of her breasts. The barest outline remained.

I gently touched her chin, and urged her to get up. "Maybe one day soon… a kiss?"

Her eyes widened, and she disappeared entirely.

"Fletcher," a whisper drifted toward me. "I… I would like that very much."

We could try today, I wanted to tell her, but I knew the moment had passed. With my next level up at the very latest, and hopefully sooner than that.

***

While the girls spent time asking my mother how difficult it was to take up knitting, and how difficult it was to handle chemo, and how difficult it was to raise a hellion like her son, I formulated a plan for how to handle telling my very sharp mother what happened further into the story.

"Don't encourage her!" I called.

"He was a real handful," my mother said. "You've never heard a baby cry so much in your life."

"Oh, haha," I called. "You think I won't pelt you with burger wrappers just because you're my mother? Think again."

My mom leaned towards Cinzy, who was presently driving. "And the spit ups. You'll never believe the rainbow of colors he vomited up when he was just a baby."

Laughter erupted.

She then ducked as a burger wrapper flew at her head. I was foiled on the next few throws by Ivy and Isabelle blocking me, the jerks. And then Cinzy was telling me she would turn this van around, young man, and the full oddity of what I was doing struck me hard.

I was in a van with my mother and five women I'd had sex with—and was still having sex with—on the regular. I was already the luckiest man on the planet, regardless of whether or not I could save my mother.

Everybody was having a nice laugh at my expense, which was fine. I was no longer that baby. The last time I'd thrown up… was alcohol-induced.

Same puking, different bottle.

I chuckled.

"What's that laugh for?" Isabelle asked.

"I was thinking about puke," I said.

***

Heading over to camp, I quickly located Drat and manifested the **Prismatic Apparel**.

"I'm gonna go out on a limb and say we're going to spend a significant amount of time finding and collecting these pieces. This is yours until such time as we've got them all."

Drat's face twitched, and I got the distinct impression he wanted to ask me about my female companions, and whether I'd given the yellow Nakamamon in town what I'd been giving the others on the regular.

I had to assume Drat knew my secrets, at least some of them, because that was kind of his thing. The xp triggers for Rogues pretty much entailed finding all hidden information and objects, so he was

motivated to sneak around and eavesdrop. They also dealt with being deceptive.

"Oh, hey," I told him. "I need whatever pertinent information you have regarding the mission, regularly, and that's an order." I held up a hand. "Wait…" I tried to think of anything that might also cover another Blake situation, but I figured the Blake situation fell under 'disrupting the main mission' then he would be given xp for letting me know if anything like that ever happened again. However… "Oh, I also order you not to withhold information from me regarding the mission, and not to lie to me outright regarding mission-specific information. Does that cover it?"

He pouted a bit, then brightened. "Actually that frees me up to stop holding out, which… fork you very much, expedition leader."

I narrowed my eyes, trying to figure out how serious he was. His sense of humor was so dang dry. I decided he was joking by the twitch on one of his lips… it might have been a smile.

"You're going to need a new pair of tongs each time we need to handle the material." I showed him the tongs I'd used, and how the grabber parts had already blackened with exposure to the divine. They might survive another use, but they might not.

"And what makes you so sure I'm going to be handling the material, as you call it?"

I stared at him.

"I'm not touching the stuff, gloves or tongs or no. Just not happening."

I cursed inwardly, but schooled my expression. It was a continual and marvelous tight rope walk every time I interacted with Drat, where the drop off was a murky abyss I hadn't yet seen and didn't care to. Why did this person keep me on my toes like this? Why couldn't he be eager to please and joyful every time he got it right like Alan?

"You'll need Larelle or myself with you any time you find material, then," I told him. "I'd like to get it all rounded up as soon as possible."

"Is there anything else, Expedition Leader?"

"Nope, that's it," I said. "XP for information the class route, and the orders route. XP for keeping it from me… you're covered either way."

"Joy." He rolled his eyes, which was about as expressive as he got. He tended to display disapproval much more harshly than a simple eye roll.

I thought that he might be legitimately happy, to be honest. This freed him up not to be a dick, when his class tried to get that to be a thing at all times.



Chapter 13- Overflowing

It was another day later when Cinzy approached me. I'd been tending to my garden with Vellenia, making up the usual batches of anti-magic 'pills' and hoping to get some news from Drat about the next pair of holy underwear.

It was good work, the tending. I assumed it was much easier than real gardening; just plant and water throughout the day. I planted long and wide, using a long strip of land that had been someone else's farm before they fell asleep and didn't get up.

We'd had a little trouble from birdlike Nakamamon coming to eat the leaves and berries, but Vellenia cheerfully chased them off, giggling and laughing.

When I informed her what an amazing scarecrow she was, she laughed and kissed me.

From there, we had a few bug-like Nakamamon attempting to eat some leaves. I just planted more, after Vellenia and I spent time picking the little buggers off and flinging them as far as we could.

Overall, it was good. Just grow things magically, create potions, enjoy bedroom bliss every single day with one of like six different women. There was nothing I'd change… except for the ever-present problem of a town full of sleeping people.

Cinzy always made a striking appearance when she arrived… except this time. She looked great, as always, but the fatigue was showing. Still, she was dressed in a low cut tank top with a hoodie unzipped to show off her exposed midriff and cleavage, along with sweatpants slung low on her hips.

"Jacoby is complaining about her team being cut in half," Cinzy said.

"Oh," I said. We'd had very little contact with them once I'd started making up daily healing and mana potions. Wayne the

Wizard kept to himself mostly.

"She sent the Wizards and the captive Guardians back to HQ," Cinzy said.

I learned that the expedition had originally been in the hands of another Wizard, not her brother Chris, and that Blake had 'convinced' him—with his fists—to hand over leadership of the expedition. I now knew that was a thing they could do. I knew I didn't have to worry about either Isabelle or Ivy, and I was ninety-nine percent certain I didn't need to worry about Chrysta. Larelle, too, had never struck me as someone who would take that sort of initiative. She struck me as someone who might prefer to remove her clothes and test me out sexually because the others had, a very go-along-to-get-along type individual.

None of the rest of the team seemed like they would be inclined to mutiny and try to take command like that. Only Drat felt like he might do something like that, but Rogues never made good leaders.

Ever. Never ever. Even among a group of Rogues, you'd have to have another class running the show.

While both Tara and Regina could probably overpower me, both had reasons to stay on my good side. Good, sexual reasons. Last, there were Alan and Trent, both of whom were far more focused on perfecting their craft than ordering anyone around. Alan was too inexperienced to do it. Alan couldn't overpower me physically, or at the moment magically. Trent… well, Trent could probably handle taking me down. He'd just need to encase my body in stone, up to my neck, and threaten violence. Despite that danger, I didn't think he wanted to. He gave off an air of being intensely focused on his powers.

So long as I kept him neck deep in orders to use those powers, he wouldn't use those powers to put me neck deep in the earth.

Tara came off her shift as a scout and herb collector, hanging off Airaconda with feet dangling. She was actually pumping her legs back and forth, swinging with all her might off the huge air snake's body. As they closed in, she actually did a full backflip fully around

the snake. She lost her grip though, and came flying off at a strange angle. Although she was well up in the air, she managed a slow descent, flipping backwards several more times. Finally she landed in a perfect superhero crouch.

"Showoff," I said, grinning, and couldn't help but give her a stirring round of applause.

"Thank you, thank you," she said.

Tara had gone with a short haircut courtesy of Ivy, who was something of an artist. She'd gotten several paintings done in the weeks we'd been here, mostly watercolors. She also had a sketchbook. I'd assumed that someone with a shaved head wanted to save themselves time and effort styling, but it wasn't like that at all. She took to the challenge of haircuts with relish.

She wore her customary yoga pants, today a deep indigo, along with a cropped halter top that was essentially just a rectangle to cover her breasts, tied behind the neck and lower on her back. This was light gray and made her pale skin seem radiant somehow. She was beginning to go metallic again, though now her skin was turning more yellow gold and less bronze.

"How far did you fall?"

"Oh, only about thirty feet."

"You have a fall damage ability from your bond mate?" I asked, and she nodded. It would be an incredible gift, thought the water breathing from Vellenia had already come in very handy.

"You're just the person I was hoping to see," I said.

She smiled knowingly. "A guy's got needs, does he?"

"It's not like that!" I lied.

Tara arched an eyebrow. "Okay expedition leader, why don't we have a discussion regarding professional matters here in full view of anyone who might happen by."

"I uh… I was hoping to uh…"

She burst out laughing and jogged over to my house, beaming. "Oh you poor thing, you adorable poor thing. I'm flattered that I was just the person you wanted to see, and not the first available pair of

boobs that fell out of the sky into your lap."

She was definitely fucking with me. A lot.

"How about…" she said, and marched up the first few steps of the staircase attached to the side of my house, "we have our little tete-a-tete on the roof. And you get all up in my guts, and leave me leaking."

"Uh that's… that's fine."

"Fine?"

"Wonderful," I told her. "A dream come true."

Tara accentuated her considerable assets on the short walk up the fifteen or so feet to the rooftop. I watched her ass sway the whole way. Encased as it was in the yoga pants, I wouldn't ordinarily be able to see anything, but she had given me **Eagle Eyes**. With those, I definitely detected a hint of camel toe as her hips rocked back and forth.

I couldn't help but shiver. And drool.

She turned a knowing smile over her shoulder. "I asked Trent to make sure the retaining wall up here was at least waist height."

I nodded dumbly. Watching as she began to skim those pants down over her hips, she reached the top of the stairs and headed to the rooftop.

It wasn't a lot: just a rectangle of empty space with a couple of skylights. Trent had installed a round table over to one side, and several chairs commandeered from Glumpdumpkin ringed it.

The wall was indeed just about three and a half feet high, and about four at the corners. Unless someone was flying over, nobody would be able to see what was going on up here… assuming we kept our shirts on.

Tara kicked off her shoes and removed her pants by bending over at the waist. She had on a t-back g-string of a matching indigo that bisected her luscious ass and hid nothing. A tiny silver heart held the three strings at the top of her butt. Now, bent fully over as she was, she looked at me from between her stockinged feet, still smiling smugly.

“What did you need to speak with me about, expedition leader?” she asked knowingly. “Maybe the recon route?” She straightened after slipping the pants off, followed by her socks. “Unfortunately I didn’t catch sight of any rogue Guardians in danger of transforming into a Nakamamon. I did notice a particularly delicious bulge with my enhanced senses, and detected a hint of heightened arousal coming off you when I approached.” She ran one sleep foot up her calf, then slipped her hands over the hamstrings and up over her gorgeous round behind.

I grinned. “You got me. I’ve got major blue balls.”

“I have to confess, I’m a little interested in what happened with Jacoby,” she said. “I’m more interested in getting a big snake nestled between my thighs.”

“Um…”

She grinned again, and began walking towards me. “Yeah… but I need the naughty version, stuffed up into my tight… little… pussy.” She sun was gleaming off her bare shins, her knees, her thighs, and she spun slowly twice on her saunter in my direction.

“This is torture,” I breathed.

“Is it torture if I tell you I’m going to drain your balls?” she asked sweetly. “I’m going to need everything you’ve got stored up, and I’m going to need it right… here.” She pointed down to the small indigo triangle of fabric covering her pussy.

In the middle of the roof here, where it was more difficult to see us, she ran her hands over the crotch of my pants and breathed on my neck.

“I’ve been waiting for this,” she murmured, and I kissed her.

From there it was all animalistic passion. I massaged the soft center of her through that small strip of fabric, and felt the heat grow in the span of seconds. My hands were all over her: her thighs, her ass, up her back, and in the sides of her halter top. Encouraging words came out of her mouth in an unending stream.

“That’s right, Fletcher,” she said. “Ohhh yes, Tara needs her pussy massaged. I’ve been waiting for this. I don’t know what that Lover

god did to us. I don't care. I want you inside me. I want all the seed you make inside me. So deep. All the positions. Everywhere. Every time of day."

She humped against my hand, and cooed when I slipped the g-string off.

"Fuck, that's right… higher," she breathed. "There, there's my clit. Gently. Ohhhhh yes. Yes yes *yes!*"

Later she'd be flicking it back and forth, mauling it, but it was always very sensitive early on. Now though, I detected the first of the moisture, which quickly became a flood the longer I strummed and stroked.

"I want your cock in my mouth," she breathed.

I steered her to the wall not far from the stairs and she slid down the smooth stone before engulfing me.

Pheromones has given Tara Harkonen a level of Adaptability.

Her technique had certainly improved in the last few months. She rubbed her tongue along the sensitive underside, eliciting a groan I couldn't contain. And then it was off to the races.

Boosted Physicality and Durability make it possible to take sex to the next level. Tara took my whole length into her mouth, then to the back of her throat, then forced herself forward and shoved me down her throat. Her throat convulsed and she opened teary eyes to stare at me while her nose pressed against my abs. It was surreal, heavenly, and kind of wrong, but in a hot way.

Drawing out and taking a moment to breathe, she gasped, "Hold my head." When I was too slow for her taste, she grabbed my hands and put them where she wanted them. Then she sank down again, gagging and deep throating me.

Now her hands went to mine and squeezed before she grabbed onto my ass and held herself there. More tears threatened. She made another strangled sound, and I came close to trying to pull her away before her eyes locked onto mine. In challenge.

Don't, she was saying.

And although her throat constricted on me again, and then again, she still didn't push away. Finally her eyes began to flutter. In the meantime her tongue kept writhing against the underside of my cock, flexing and slipping back and forth, back and forth again.

Finally she sprang free, coughing.

"Are you—" She held up a hand to stop me, then turned around and presented her amazing bubble butt to me. Sinking myself down into her was so good, so unbelievable, that I nearly came immediately after spending the Tokens to enhance our pleasure using **Entwined Ecstasy**. Her insides spasmed and squeezed; she was already mid-climax just from entering her.

"Ugh," she groaned. "Already…"

When I drew back, her lower lips clung to my shaft, bright pink, trying to keep me rather than let me go. I leaned over and got two handfuls of her perfect breasts, then started working her nipples with all the skill I could muster.

She came again, only a good two minutes later. She pulled away some few minutes later, staggering and then stumbling, holding onto the wall.

"Hey there Fletcher!" Trent called from below. I looked up from where Tara had grabbed onto my cock and was guiding me back in, and found he, Alan, Regina, and Ivy there.

I'd forgotten I still had my shirt on.

"H-hey!" I called back, trying to stay natural.

"Getting some sun?"

"Just…" I tried to think of something, some lie, while Tara shoved herself back against me and impaled herself on my spear. "…haven't taken the opportunity. Seeing the… the setup. Up here."

Tara's sweaty hair hung down limply, and her ass quivered as she slammed herself back into me. I had the strong urge to smack her on the ass, to chastise her for this, but that would give the game away.

"A-again," Tara muttered, shivering and shuddering.

I hoped it was my imagination and that Regina and Ivy didn't

look suspicious.

"You want some shelving in there?" Trent asked, heading to the foot of the stairs.

Meanwhile, I watched my dick appear and disappear up into Tara, the best magic trick there was.

"No, no no, you did an amazing job," I told him, while watching Tara shudder and shiver in orgasm, but still shove herself back onto me again and again. When she slipped and gave a soft sigh, I clamped one hand over her mouth and ground my hips into hers. "Shelf would be no good in the… rain. It's perfect."

"Thanks, man!" Trent called. "Really glad you like it."

I pushed forward, slowly squashing Tara into the wall he'd built. Listening to her and watching her orgasm continuously made my blood boil with need. I needed to flood her with my seed. I needed to pour it down her throat until she choked. I needed to fill up her ass with it, and leave her in a puddle of what she kept draining out of me.

This whole scene was so naughty and erotic that I couldn't help but climax myself. I thought the girls' gazes lingered on me for a second too long before they walked off along with Trent.

I came for a long time. All of it went right where Tara wanted. She continued to orgasm throughout the whole thing, groaning and shivering and shuddering, but also grinding that amazing ass back into me.

This is Christopher filling a girl to overflowing for like the thirtieth time.



Chapter 14- Class Warfare

Tara sighed from beside me in the back bench of the van. She had been stroking my crotch for a long time, chin in one on the front bench, the other hand slowly working me into a frenzy. She was so flexible and limber, she could sit cross legged on the bench seat of the van and not complain about pain in the hips.

Initially, as we watched the increasingly gorgeous and unique landscape of Northern California flow past us, I had given her several capital L Looks, which she had deflected with blank gazes, even as her hand traced the length of my shaft through my pants. I followed this up with some side-eye, but was met with more uncomprehending staring. Finally, I leaned in.

"What do you think you're doing?" I asked. The rumble of the engine, and the sound of the tires on the freeway would mask my words from reaching my mother.

"Getting my fill while I still can," she replied sporting a lazy smile. She then licked the center of her upper lip, smiled, and yawned.

"We talked about this," I warned, to no avail. Not in the van, had been the rule. Not where my mother could find out. "Tara."

"Oof, I am tired," she said, loud enough that everyone could hear. Then, faking like she was about to use my leg as a pillow, she instead got me free of my pants and slipped my fully hard cock into her mouth. She was doing it again!

"I think I'm gonna be tired after our next stop," Regina said from her place on the front bench.

Regina couldn't reach well, with one arm casually slung over the back of the seat, but Tara moved her butt up. That put her ass right in Regina's hand, thankfully still out of sight. In a practiced motion she whipped Tara's yoga pants—that wonderful skin tone—off her butt and down her thighs, where she encountered no panties.

She slid one questing hand down between Tara's long, sleek thighs and began playing with her pussy.

Both Cinzy and Isabelle noted what was happening as well, but Cinzy began to smoothly control the conversation. While I leaned my head back and tried like hell not to make a sound, and Tara quietly blew me, Cinzy told the next part of the story, about the hunt for divine objects in Glumpdumpkin.

***

The collection of the divine artifacts in Glumpdumpkin inched along day by day. The town might not be huge, but even a single house could have a staggering amount of secret places. Add magic into the mix, like the first house he had discovered, and it was a recipe for a glacial cure.

Trent and Alan had more than enough to deal with, in terms of housing those who'd shown up. Regina and Tara helped out as they could on top of this, and we even got the off-duty Guardian in on this, to help transport lumber in once the Rangers had it chopped down. With Trent and Alan's irrigation and sewage system set up, a project that took weeks, the Wizard could finally relax. He'd nearly overtaken me in class level by now.

Although I had two classes, I still needed things to heal in order to level up at a good pace. I had, however, taken things up a notch with Tara. I reached level 21 after the near-debacle on the roof. The very pleasurable near-debacle, it must be said.

"Lay it on me," I told the system.

Level 21: Ability Upgrade: Post-Sharing Clarity, +2 skill points

Okay, that clinched it: skill points were coming in faster, and the rewards for leveling up were even higher than before.

"Yessss," I said.

Now the dilemma: I had instructed everyone to attempt to put a skill point into Divine Resistance at each level up if they could.

First, I needed to check on my ability.

Post-Sharing Clarity II

(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. All past sexual partners within range (10 feet) gain +1 temporary bonus on all attributes for 1 minute. This bonus does not grant additional Tokens.

The duration increases by 10 minutes and range by 10 feet for each relationship level above base acquaintances.

"Hang the phone," I muttered, not certain what I meant and not caring. All past sexual partners? *All*?

I chewed on this for a time, while collecting the day's herbs and planting the new ones. I needed to tend them several times throughout the day for them to magically grow using **Verdant Rejuvenation**, but the tending also helped to calm and center me, and get thoughts flowing a bit better.

It was clear now that I would be better off surrounding myself with a dozen partners, raising my relationship level to that of Radiant Touchstone. In that distant eventuality, it would mean having almost two hours of boosted attributes spread out over a hundred feet.

For all the complications this would bring emotionally, the increases in stats over such a long time were incredible. And while I'd considered stacking the attribute buff by having sex with first Regina and then Tara, it only refreshed the duration rather than boosting my stats to temporary +4 all around.

I'd looked into the Relationship levels, to get a better sense of why I was stalled out with Regina and Tara. They were arrayed like this:

Acquainted

Trusted Acquaintances

Confidants

Close confidants

Devotee
Beloved
Intertwined
Soulbound
Touchstone
Radiant Touchstone

There were ten, from **Acquainted** up to something called **Radiant Touchstone**. So far, I'd graduated only to **Close Confidants** with any of my ladies here. The information from the system didn't elaborate well on what exactly caused Relationship levels to increase, but I thought I understood.

At first, it was all about the surface level: your small talk stuff, and the lust that came with basic physical attraction. At least, that had worked with Regina and Tara, getting me from **Acquainted** to **Close Confidants**. We knew one another, from families, music and movie preferences, food likes and dislikes, to the sorts of positions and intensity they liked during our more intimate moments. Regina liked to slowly work up an orgasm, while Tara wanted just as much thrusting and pounding as possible. Regina wanted me to spend serious time eating her out, while Tara was impatient and wanted to jump straight to the part where I came inside her, repeatedly.

I was convinced that a deeper emotional intimacy, trust, and time would all serve to enhance the Relationship level beyond where I had plateaued, but I didn't know how. Was it a matter of getting one of them to say 'I love you?'. Which was kind of a terrifying prospect, to be surrounded by five casual sex friends and thinking they might all be in love with me. It was bad enough trying to get Cinzy to accept the notion that I was having sex with others, but love carried a lot more weight than using a guy as a sex toy when you felt the urge.

For that matter, did I love them? The Relationship rating might only increase when the bridge was accessible to both parties. A spike of anxiety shot through me, making my thoughts race. It was a lot of worry: would the Beloved or the Devotee feel a sense of

ownership over me and attempt to act as gatekeeper to others I'd been with? Was I only going to be able to advance to Devotee with one of them, ever? I vaguely recalled one game where you had to choose, and once that choice was made, there was no inviting another potential mate into your bed.

I didn't hate the idea of settling down… in the future. Just not now. There was too much to do and too many places where that needed to happen.

I was getting way ahead of myself and worrying over events that might never happen.

For now I looked over my skills. At present I was satisfied with Divine Resistance, though I knew deep in my heart that I would do well to increase this non-class skill. I wasn't satisfied with Pheromones or Adaptability. I wasn't on a mission to have ghost sex with Chrysta, honest, I just wanted to give her the full reassurance that she wasn't alone and that she could look to me for matters of physical reassurance. That meant if she needed periodic hugs… or possibly sex… I was her man. Ghost. Temporary ghost. Part-man-part-ghost. I was something anyway.

There was always the myriad of skills I had with my Healer skill, and they weren't quick to level up by themselves. On the other hand, I was advancing in Pleasure Seeker but stalled out in Healer. One could look at it as an opportunity to grind some levels of Pleasure Seeker to make myself a more formidable Healer, but I kind of wanted to split the different classes, and use their respective level up bonuses for the class itself. I wasn't about to spend Healer points on Pleasure Seeker.

Before I could talk myself out of it, I put one more point into Adaptability. The next one could've gone anywhere. No man wanted to stay the same size when he could enlarge his length or girth. Also, if I grabbed up Pheromones, I could transmit multiple levels of Tongue to Isabelle and Ivy and further enhance their ability to go to town on one another. No straight guy would turn down the opportunity to have two gorgeous women invite him to watch them pleasure one another.

And then there was Load. Again, no man would refuse this increase either. The only one I wasn't presently interested in was Refractory Period, since I was twenty and I'd never had an issue getting it up. Sure, I'd had an issue getting up immediately after a second orgasm, but who wouldn't? Okay, that Quality could use points too… eventually.

After several minutes of anxious consideration, I sank the last point into Divine Resistance. I didn't know what caused me to abandon the line of thinking, but when the prompt came up to confirm my choices, I quickly pressed Yes before I could talk myself out of it. It was the plan, everybody was under orders to do that, and by doing that, I'd given myself some bonus xp just for spending skill points as I'd directed the whole team.

I further wondered what the level 25 changes might entail. I didn't do myself any good… though I considered asking Jacoby or her team. They were above level 25. Ultimately though, I abandoned that. Abbie, Rus and Rainer had been pretty explicit about the joy of finding things out on my own, and I couldn't say it was a bad way to look at it. I was just… itching to find out.

Which I guess probably would've been blunted a lot if I'd known exactly what was coming.

For now I ventured over to where Isabelle and Chrysta were holding down the fort… or rather the front gate of the city. The stream of Nakamamon to the city had slowed, but not by a lot. Some turned away and went grumbling back to wherever they called home. Some got into arguments with Chrysta and Izzy, but most simply turned over to the tiny new village over in that direction. The tiny *yet visibly growing* new village.

"How are we doing here?"

"I'm told by Drat that he wants you to come move an awl," Isabelle said.

"Is that right?"

"He said it's three houses skyward of your booty call, whatever that means." My eyebrows rose, and I stared at her with some

intensity until she caved. "Ugh, sorry! I know I shouldn't have said that, I just wanted to say the the words booty call."

"What is a booty call?" Chrysta asked, floating nearby and coating the gate and fence area in a thickening layer of frost.

"Um… it's, well, you know that booty is another word for treasure," I tried. "The booty call is where we found the last, uh, divine artifact." Since I wasn't forcing a contested social check, **Fierce** wasn't available to turn me into a deceitful powerhouse. Chrysta had led this charge. Instead, **Stalwart** came into play to give me the skill at level 7 for the time being. Weird how **Stalwart** could give me the power to turn my pathetic lie into something that sounded even somewhat plausible.

Chrysta seemed to buy this. "Good luck with this booty call," she said seriously.

"It's not… this isn't…" I gave up. Drat summoning me in to find a piece of a god was now officially dubbed a 'booty call' and that was just that. I rolled my eyes after I'd passed her, turned, and shot a **Psyspeech** towards Isabelle.

Good one, Isabelle, I told her mentally. *Now everyone is going to refer to this activity as a booty call.*

I could just about hear her apologizing mentally, or perhaps I just imagined it.

I found Drat not twenty minutes later by heading towards Shakindria's house and then past it. I had a strong urge to head up to her house and see if she was up for a friendly tumble, but Drat was starting to stick his beaky nose into my personal business.

The problem of course: I had a great deal of personal business.

This was just past the midpoint of this side of Glumpdumpkin; not quite far enough to make you feel like you were walking on a tree branch that might break at any second, but getting there.

Drat was at least standing in the middle of the narrow alley, not quite tapping his foot, though I felt the annoyed urgency coming off him.

I ignored it. "What have we got this time?"

"It's an awl."

I thought I'd heard him wrong. He wasn't willing to play 'who's on first' so I told him to take me to his find.

Drat ducked into a house constructed of plastic-ey, semi-transparent bubbles. Whoever lived here was Yoda short, and I almost immediately felt my back beginning to complain at walking hunched over. We had to crawl on hands and knees through a short tunnel, like the entrance to an igloo, which ballooned out into another large bubble-shaped chamber. Then another.

Thankfully the material itself was soft enough and had enough give that I could play with Brayden in here without destroying my knees.

In the third bubble-shaped room stood a bubble about a foot high, with several other spheres attached to the top with sea plants on them. I assumed the other large piece of 'furniture' in the room was a bed, because it was somewhat flat, a large bubble about three feet across that had been compacted down a bit. Judging by the two other flat-esque bubble pillows, I was right.

"I love this kind of place," I said.

"Yeah yeah," he grumbled, but without any of his usual rancor. He pressed down on the first piece of furniture from the top, and two small drawers slid out, sized just right for a wise, yet tiny, green puppet. "Still not sure how this is supposed to work if you only want one of the drawers to come out."

He stopped and looked at me.

"Took me days to find this, you know."

"I'll bet. On the other hand, your Find Secrets skill is probably up about levels."

"It's Detect Secrets," he grumbled. "And I've only gained two levels."

"I've only gained two levels," I said in a mocking voice, then snorted. "Okay so what am I—"

Pushing the top drawer back in, he peeled back the bubble substance in the bottom of the bottom drawer.

“A false bottom,” I said with wonder. Then the full force of divine energy hit me, a blast of very detectable radiation. Inside the hidden compartment lay a tool for punching holes in leather, a handle with a sharp spike protruding out of it.

This is Christopher wondering if maybe all his skill points do need to go into Healer skills.



Chapter 15- A Breed Apart

I had to pretend like Tara was asleep and that I would wake her up when Cinzy stopped the van for a rest break. I had a few moments of terrified certainty that my own mother was going to walk back and press her face to the window, but the moment I whispered to Tara that she was gone—they all were—she whipped off her pants and laid back on the van's bench.

She was so gorgeous: immaculate tan with hints of tan lines, perfectly sculpted abs, hips, and her legs… she outdid even Cinzy in the legs department. She had them grasped at the ankle, showing me her sopping wet center that was begging me to get in.

I had very little choice in the matter. Between the hypnotized, sex-crazed look on her face, the way her legs gleamed in the light shining through tinted windows, and the sex on display, I just turned to the side, lined myself up, and sank down inside.

There was no time to tease her; my mother would do several laps around the rest stop, go to the bathroom, and get concerned that I hadn't emerged.

I leaned down and kissed her, passionately. She moaned into my mouth.

"I need this," she moaned, in between kisses. "Need you so bad, Fletcher. Slow and deep and hard."

In response I supplied her demands.

Tara's body was physically capable of squeezing me again and again. She worked her abs and legs enough that she had muscle control a lot of women can only dream of. Gritting her teeth, she bore down, clamping me like a vise. It was only when I pulled out and thrust back in that I got a hint of a break. By blissing her out, I forced some relaxation into her.

For a time, it was just the slap, slap, slap of my body on hers.

Slow at first, but then explosively slamming into her at the end, as deep as I could manage. No Adaptability here, thought somehow Girth and Length had remained at their enhanced levels.

Tara had gotten used to the punishment last night.

"I want your whole load," she whispered. "Down inside."

This again. I growled down at her. "Then get on your knees."

Tara's eyes lit up and she scrambled to obey. In seconds she was face down, ass up, and reaching back to spread her cheeks open.

"You've been a serious pain in my ass," I told her, pressing my dark helmet against her rear entrance, "violating the rules. Maybe I should be a pain in your ass."

"W-wait—" she said, but we didn't have time to go slow. I couldn't just ram into her ass and plow down in there, it would seriously injure her. We were in the wrong world, where there was no Adaptability, and she'd end up hurt. Instead I scared her a little, before slipping lower and sliding deep inside.

"Tonight," I growled, leaning over her body and pressing my chest to her back. "Tonight I punish you."

We might be seen. The knowledge that we could get caught did its work, and enhanced the pleasure. She gripped me tightly and didn't want to let go, moaning each time I slammed down deep, and holding her breath when I pulled out for another hard, deep stroke.

"Play with your clit," I ordered, and wrapped one arm around her shoulders to pull her up, kiss her neck, and listen to her bliss out. She immediately got to work between her legs while I drove into her again and again. She was perfect. She was athletic, toned, exuberant, and naughty.

"Ohhhh," she moaned. "Fletcher, I'm—"

"No!" I ordered, and pulled her hand away. Even as I thrust into her again and again, I kept her from the precipice. She made a strangled, confused sound.

"You've been a bad girl," I told her.

"I've… been bad," she repeated. We kissed again, and she shoved her gorgeous ass back and down to swallow up every bit of me she

could. The others had experienced some discomfort from my enhanced size, but not Tara. She took me like a champ.

I pushed her forward and got back into doggystyle, then ordered her to get back on her clit once more. This was one of the best views, with me watching my girth spread her wide open, watching her lips attempt to grip me and keep me from leaving, watching her cheeks ripple with each hard thrust.

It wasn't easy with the van's bench not being a bed; we both had one foot down on the floor. She used the armrest for support while she went back to work on the pleasure button. In the meantime I had to strain to keep from exploding inside her.

She wanted my seed pouring into her. She'd gotten it many times, too. I had no idea what was happening inside her body, but we hadn't yet gotten her with child. The idea of it drove her over the edge every time, but she hadn't conceived. I didn't know why.

"Today," she breathed, as if reading my thoughts.

"What's that?" I asked, not breaking.

"I'm… today, I'm… ugh… ovulating."

Once again I got down, pressing chest to her back, reaching and tweaking her nipple. "You want that?" I hissed. "You want my baby in you."

"Ohhhh…" she moaned, nodding almost imperceptibly. Her pussy was clamping against me again, on the verge of orgasm again. I pulled her arm away once more.

"Answer me," I told her.

"I want it," she groaned.

Every time we'd been together she had wrapped her legs around me and pulled me in tight when we came to the point of no return. She'd been on top of me and bore down so I couldn't escape.

"I'm almost there," I whispered.

Her hand immediately went back to her clit, and her whole body shuddered, hard. It was like she was a music box, winding the key so the spring got tighter and tighter and tighter, only to finally let it go.

"Inside," she begged. "Please, pleeeeeaase."

She came in the middle of that second please, and that did it for me too. I blasted off as deep as I could possibly get. Her spasming body and obvious ecstasy helped me to pour an enormous amount into her.

An awkward shuffling later, I was on my back and Tara was laying on me.

"You've never questioned it," she told me quietly.

"I always questioned it," I told her. "I just thought you knew what you were doing… I thought maybe it would be a sensitive subject." At her confused and questioning look, I continued: "I thought perhaps that you had an… issue. An infertility issue. And you wanted to, I don't know, live out a fantasy. If it was sensitive for you, I could be poking at a wound. And then I wondered if the magic in the other world was messing with the situation."

"That was it." She was dressing, and I followed along. "The magic was continually giving me xp for each time you did a Jackson Pollock all up inside me," she said.

I stopped pulling my pants on and blinked at her.

"What?"

"Did you say Jackson Pollock? The abstract painter?"

She grinned. "That's right."

"But there's no system here," I said. "There's no way you're getting xp. You want to have… you want to get…"

"My family is big, Fletcher," she said.

"And?"

"Every time I speak to them it's 'oh Tara haven't you found a boy yet?' and 'Oh Tara, you should be married by now, you should be popping out the kids,' and you know what? I like kids. There are a lot of kids at every family get together. Like a lot. I love playing with them, taking them out to the creek for swimming, taking them out into the woods for scaring up little critters and getting mud on themselves. I love it. I love them. And I… don't like pressure."

I blinked several times on the way in to the rest area.

"But there's a lot of pressure in having and then raising a child," I countered. "I don't know that I'm going to be able to be there for any child you have like they need. That's not… it doesn't seem fair."

"My family will have it covered, and my pay from the Agency will have it covered."

"SNORC you mean."

She snorc'd a little, then laughed. "What a stupid name. I love it so much."

Regina was already on her way back.

"You're supposed to look sleepy," she said, grinning, "Not freshly fucked."

"Oh shush," Tara replied, and gave her a playful shove. "You'll have your turn with him."

"I'll have my turn… for what?" Regina asked. "My turn begging to be filled to bursting with Fletcher's cum?"

Tara's eyes bugged out. "You can't say that out loud!"

Regina snorted laughter and fell in step with us, heading back to the rest area. My mother was thankfully taking her sweet time, and Regina assured me both Ivy and Isabelle had her taken care of. I was glad of their companionship.

"Anyway listen," Tara said. "I'm okay, okay? I want this, my parents and family are happy to help, my salary here at the Agency will take care of things. I can keep working—"

"Caaaaaaaan you?" I asked. "You already said there were problems conceiving in the other world. Neither of us know what work conditions will be like for your child over there."

Or if something strange would happen to her pregnant self while in the other world. Magic changed people.

She appeared thoughtful. "Yeah, I guess you're right."

Stupid me. I still had my mom on the brain, and the impending issue of trying to get my mother into the Agency's facility, then through the portal. Add to that the complication of trying not to tell

her that my trip was a sex-fueled romp with essentially every female I met over there, and let's just say my brain was pretty full. The truth of what Tara was suggesting wouldn't hit until it was too late.

Now, rest stops around the US are not ubiquitous. I've been to rest stop cities in New York, where there are multiple floors, restaurants, gift shops, the works. I've also been to wooden shacks along the highway with two bathrooms and a vending machine.

This one was much more the latter than the former, with a single building holding a pair of bathrooms and a bank of vending machines, but immaculate landscaping. The flowers around the sidewalks, and a sizable picnic area off to the other side, for getting in a little exercise or walking the dog.

"No, no no no no no no!" My mother was laughing and shouting as Isabelle and Ivy jogged by with her held in fireman's carry. She looked like she was on a throne, with her arms looped around their shoulders and her feet straight out.

After checking for traffic, they rushed across the parking lot to the grassy area, where they deposited her up onto the nearest picnic table. She stood there laughing uproariously, while nearby bystanders watched and chuckled at the antics.

My mom had been dressed in mostly house robes while I'd been home with them, explaining the situation. Now, dressed in linen pants and a comfy sweater, she looked overdressed for the heat, but like a normal person again. The cancer might be in remission this time, but it certainly wasn't going to be gone long. This was the second time it had appeared, spreading into places where it shouldn't belong. It was nice to see her looking like a normal person again.

When my mother seemed unsteady at the prospect of climbing down, she laughed and waved off Ivy's offer of grabbing onto her to lift her down. When's the last time you willingly jumped off a picnic table and into the arms of someone you'd met just days ago?

"Let's get this show back on the road," I told her, when she accepted a hand to steady her on her climb down.

“And get this tale back on the told,” she said.

“That was awful,” I said, unable to contain my groaning laughter.

“That,” she said, “was what this situation needed.”

***

My tongs melted after only about a minute of exposure to divine energy. First they heated up, bleeding from red to orange hot, then yellow, before I couldn’t hold them any longer. My magic sense was going haywire, because it wasn’t a divine sense, but also because divine energy head packed with 13 essential vitamins and minerals… of arcane energy.

Every iota of the holy object was like a gigantic battery of magic. I didn’t know what Alan or the Wizards would make of it, and didn’t much care. This Glumpdumpkin situation was a serious thorn in my side by this point, and it looked like we might have a serious issue on our hands. Err… tongs.

I dropped the tongs before the glow of radiant holy energy ended up touching me, shaking the heat and discomfort out, and watched in fascination as the tongs shattered into a bunch of molten fragments.

The awl stuck point first in the floor of this place, and a reddish spot slowly bled to white around it. It sank in about an inch, then stopped. No idea what switched off the divine lightsaber and allow the leather punch to go Excalibur in this aquatic person’s house, but I knew it would switch back on it I moved to grab for it. It might even melt through the floor and possibly into the basement, if there was one.

I’d barely gotten them out of the secret compartment in the bubble dresser. Now they were just lying there, on the floor of a house, some ten minutes walk (seven minutes’ brisk walk if I hurried) from the adze.

This was going to take forever.

“What’s the matter?” Drat asked.

“You know exactly what the matter is, my good man, and your

sassypants routine is not presently appreciated."

"Removing sassypants and replacing with a less sassy version," he said sardonically.

"Good call."

I considered how to fling this thing in a way that I might consider safe. It didn't seem possible to use the words 'fling' and 'safe' in the same sentence. I thought of a specially built slingshot, where the rubber band would be replaced each time I used the damn thing, or scooping it up in a shovel and launching it in the preferred direction, but that wouldn't work.

"I need to consult with a local," I told him. "She may have the power to move these with her mind."

He nodded, hands behind his back, lips pursed.

"Head out and prep for your next search at your leisure," I said. "I assume this is going to take as many or more pieces than the God of Apparel." That had been shirt, pants, individual socks, and holy underwear. Five pieces in total. We were at least three short, and I felt that it would probably be more.

"You uh… you can't read thoughts with that psychic talking power, can you?"

I arched an eyebrow at him. "What? You thinking something you don't want to share with the teacher?"

This is Christopher very much enjoying Drat's frown, then sneer, then dark mutterings as he stalked away.



Chapter 16- I love…

Shakindria was happy to attempt to help me. The yellow-skinned humanoid with her purple gems embedded in her forehead had a price, though. It would be a steep one.

We walked as we talked, through the town's barren streets. The ghost town feel was odd and oddly comforting. Every time I looked over to make eye contact, Shakindria was smiling at me.

I wish to bond you, Healer, she told me, directly into my brain. *I am told the bond will grant me insights and powers undreamt of. You are agreeable, easy to look at, and you make me feel special. Yet you are bound.*

"I'm sorry," I told her.

She gave me a pained smile, along with a mental image and feeling of apology. *No need to be sorry, of course. Your Vellenia is the luckiest of all Nakamamon.*

"Why don't you come with my team once we're done here?"

Another pained mental image. She relayed to me how she had come to work here, and ended up bound to the town itself. With her own village in danger, she had agreed to a magical bonding here in Glumpdumpkin.

"What kind of danger are we talking about?"

Dark forces, was all she would say. *The bond allowed my people a great deal of land, and I do not bemoan the bonding… at least I did not for years. Yet I have tired of toiling for the people here. Some of them see me as a product. I work for free, yes, but I work for the satisfaction of knowing I help people. If I could receive a kind word or any gratitude it would lighten my heart.*

I could see that. "Well, I think you're special." It wouldn't be much comfort.

A surge of affection came out of her. *If only you were not bound*, she lamented.

"I'm really sorry."

I considered asking Alan, and promptly reconsidered. There was no way I was going to have Shakindria around if I couldn't have all kinds of raucous and steamy sex with her. There was also no way I'd stand by and watch as Alan did that instead. I understood that I was being possessive, but that possessiveness wouldn't just go away with me recognizing it.

Asking Ivy gave me no better results. She swallowed and said she was already on thin ice with Isabelle having me in their bed. There was no way she'd get a sexy psychic creature attached to her and have a relationship with Izzy. Isabelle was sweet and wonderful, and also didn't want to be cheated on.

"What makes you want to bond me? You don't know anything about me."

Nonsense, she told me. She knew I was a Healer, and she knew I was an expedition leader. I had come here to help and I had stayed even though the going was slow and rough. After this place, I would inevitably head to another place where I would do good works, heal the sick. She would assist me.

The craft of healing is noble and good. Again, she looked crestfallen. *No matter. Let us venture forth to find whether my powers will help interact with this divine fragment you have discovered.*

We made our way to the place where the leather punch was stuck in the floor. Shakindria peered around the place; she'd never been in this house. Like most inhabitants, she'd only been in a handful of the houses in this town.

Your Rogue must love this situation, she sent, with a sly smile. *The secret lives of the people are laid bare before him.*

"Oh, he does," I replied.

It turned out she couldn't dislodge the awl from the floor with her telekinesis. She didn't seem discouraged, but instead informed me that if I did the dislodging, she could handle the floaty part.

"Here goes then," I said, and pried it up with one of the mallets

we used to pound in tent stakes… when we still used tents. Now that Trent was coming into his powers more and more, the tents remained in their cinch sacks, and the stakes with them. The only thing we needed these for now was a very bad version of croquet involving a lot of lower back pain.

The moment I got the tool free, it hovered in the air. I could feel the mana flowing through the air between Shakindria and the piece of a dead god. I still wasn't ready to think like that, so I tried to think of it as merely a divine tool. Not the thing between my legs that caused a surprising amount of girls to call out to God, but for some reason an actual device imbued with the essence of a god.

My life was so weird.

"It… is very difficult… to maintain," Shakindria said with her actual voice. I nearly dropped the mallet and stumbled into a hovering godly device. Instead, the thing trembled in the air, and began to move like it was drifting through molasses.

The head of the rubber mallet had melted a good third of the way through, though melted was the wrong word. It had somehow been changed by contact with the divine.

So there are relics, pieces of the holy people of history, which have been kept by churches because religion is odd. The bones and teeth and even slivers of what people think of as the cross are, in some people's minds, filled with divine energy. The church has, and this is true, created vessels to contain these relics. In my art class in high school I'd seen an arm made of bronze and wood and copper and gems, which supposedly contained an arm bone of a saint. It might've been odd, creepy, macabre, or even humorous if you weren't a Catholic.

It might've been a humerus anyway.

I groaned to myself at that joke. "That was way too much work for way too little pay off," I told myself.

Anyway, if you ignored the fact that the reliquary arm was pointing finger guns at people, and ignored the fact that the priests probably touched people with this throughout history in order to

answer prayers, it was a similar deal here.

For believers, contact with these relics could change your life. Heal the sick, answer your prayers and reverse your fortunes. Maybe it would make someone stop torturing you, or cure your habit of picking your nose, or remove the cancer from your long-suffering mother. Just as a totally random example.

This was divinity without the guesswork. Instead of hope, you saw and felt the reality of what 'divine' meant. The head of the mallet had been warped in shape. Some of the rubber that made it up had drifted away as sparkly things. Some had transformed into random liquid… from the smell, maybe iodine. The part that had touched and been close to the holy object was altered in color: no longer black, but iridescent green-purple.

"Wild," I muttered. Metal was just as strong or stronger than this, but reacted differently.

Nope, wrong. Metal was way stronger than this. The mallet was still being affected. As I watched, the iridescence crept up over the head of the mallet, where it hadn't touched the awl. It eventually closed over the other side, and then touched the wooden handle. I started to feel the heat, see the mana shifting, and see the soft but gathering holy light climbing up the wood of the handle.

I dropped it, of course. The mallet thunked to the floor of the house and finished out its transformation. When it was done, I had an item, though it was all messed up.

Divinely Touched Mallet

Item, Divine, Common

This mallet has come into contact with a godly being and is forever changed.

This item has the following properties: divine

Divine: The item radiates divine energy. It belongs to a god.

I had to laugh. Common! As if there were divine mallets lying around everywhere.

Shakindria didn't like the look of that. I, meanwhile, received

another Achievement.

***Achievement**: Divine Artifice*

Wow! You've found a way to infuse an object with divine power. Not everybody gets the chance to take others on the path towards holy power.

Reward: +2 skill points

Shakindria confirmed that she, too, had no idea what I'd done or how I'd done it.

She took the awl and then the mallet outside and into the late afternoon sunlight, then slowly walked it toward where I indicated we would gather the holy hardware.

So she could do it. More importantly, she could do it without—

She fell to the ground and grabbed onto her head.

"Ohhhhh," she said with her voice, rather than directly into my head. I stepped up and looped one arm around my neck, then pulled her up.

"Are you all right?" I asked, rushing over toward her and kneeling. I was once again reminded that she was very feminine and wore very little in the way of clothing. The filmy and billowing robes she had on gave me an unlimited view of her, as she'd fallen with her skirts bunched up.

"There's… a limit," she gasped, speaking out loud. "The divine energy… overwhelming."

"It's all right," I told her. "You did great." She would be the key to getting all the divine bits together… I just had to be prepared to leave her to

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After helping an exhausted Shakindria home and conferring with her about our plans, I headed back to camp. She wished to have yet another chance to connect in the most intimate way possible, since there weren't any beings in this town she found attractive like she

did me, but lifting shards of a dead god wasn't easy. Instead I left her off at her house, with her blearily promising to get the mallet and the awl over to where I'd indicated. I tried to tell her that wasn't necessary, but she'd fallen asleep, robe spilled open and showing off her vibrant yellow skin, and very feminine form.

After another handful of conferences and notices, nothing my people couldn't take care of, I met up with Regina, and Tweedle Dee.

In just ten minutes, we were beyond the outside of the town and its outskirts. Out of sight of the camp and the refugee village that had popped up, among nothing but densely packed forest with clearings full of tall grasses and wildflowers. For most of this walk, I simply appreciated the frolicking of the Vulpetunia. I hadn't paid a lot of attention to Dee lately, but I was glad to see him just as lively and adorable as my first few minutes in this new world. He accepted head pats, ear scratches, and tail strokes. He also wanted to be chased around, and we played tag.

With the warm sun filtering in shafts through the trees, I slowly began to forget the worries plaguing me: how was I going to handle Shakindria's proposal? I couldn't just give my word to a powerful Nakamamon who could wreck me and the world with her telekinetic powers. So lying to her about bonding was right out.

And right now, I was not willing to leave Vellenia in the lurch. That wasn't going to work out well. It would be a betrayal, and it would crush her. She didn't deserve that treatment.

So what? I approached Regina. She'd asked me to come over, and it looked like she had a picnic ready.

"I need to ask you something," I told her.

"Nope!" She chirped, and bounded ahead, twirling like it was a dance. "The first thing we do is have our picnic."

She didn't mean we were going to eat sandwiches on a blanket. The first thing she did was locate a ring of mushroom-shaped Nakamamon and scare them into fleeing. The plant aspect creatures scuttled like crabs but were made of twigs and leaves for

camouflage. They puffed out spores as they scattered, and Dee bounded directly into those clouds.

"Is he—"

Regina held up a hand to forestall me. She'd skidded to a halt just outside of where the spore clouds were expanding.

"Slumbershrooms," she said.

I identified them. They were indeed Slumbershrooms, a common plant aspect that made their getaway from predators by putting them to sleep. It was the same tactic they'd use against smaller creatures they preyed upon, to feast upon them once they were sleeping. Yikes.

"Now," she said, smiling fondly at the sleeping Dee. "You and I do need to talk."

She fell to her knees and pulled my pants down. The freckled face was beaming with joy at seeing what she'd unleashed, and actually ran her face back and forth over my flaccid member, first one side and then the other.

Then she slurped the head into her mouth and began sucking.

I grabbed the back of her head, and once I'd hardened I began pumping forward and back.

She pulled free, gasping, eyes alight. "Someone's lively today!"

I bent and whipped her shirt off over her head. "I wanted to speak with you about something important," I growled.

"Instead you're getting your dick sucked," she said, licking it up and down. Gods, I couldn't deny how amazing it felt to have women looking up at me, adoring my body, wanting to please me. It was awesome.

Her freckles were back to glittering with magic like sequins. In the shade of the clearing, twenty feet away from a sleeping Tweedle Dee, I watched her nipples harden and her mouth turn up in a smile as she worked.

She had really gotten a lot better at this. If it weren't for the skill levels of Stave Off I'd bought, this would've been too much. Add to that the adorable view of her with her lips straining to wrap around

me, and it was enough to make any twenty-something erupt immediately.

Instead I urged her to take a breather, and kissed her. I couldn't be sure what possessed her in this moment, but she was frantic; she undressed me and shucked the rest of her clothes, then wrapped herself around me while we kissed.

"I need you," she breathed. "Those two weeks without you…" she didn't finish her sentence, but instead kissed me again.

"I'm here now," I told her, and lifted her bodily in the air.

Legs wrapped around my back, we kissed again. These weren't the heated, frantic kisses of the uninitiated. These were passionate and deep, full of longing. Why? We'd been together only a few days ago.

"I want you inside me," she told me.

"How about I climb between your legs—"

"Now," the demanded. "Fork me now, Fletcher. I need you *now*."

I did, and lined myself up to slip between her sopping lower lips, still holding her up. There, she told me when I'd gotten it right, right there. She wriggled and sank several inches of me up into her, groaning like she was under a steaming hot shower.

"I needed this," she sighed, then kissed me again.

We commenced to a slow, unhurried, and fully passionate lovemaking. It was warm and insistent, more than before. Something had changed. Each stroke up and down my shaft seemed tighter than before. Slicker than before. Hotter also. When I captured one nipple in my mouth and continued pulling her body up and down the length of my shaft, she was soon crying out in pure bliss. She was soon in the throes of an orgasm and calling out my name.

"Fletcher," she gasped. "Fletcher, fu— don't stop… keep… ugh!"

Then she buried her face in my shoulder. We stood like that for some time, with her wrapped around me and me supporting her entire body weight like it wasn't a big deal. I began to tire, but the old me wouldn't have had a single moment like this. Instead I

listened with my whole body as she went through a series of orgasmic aftershocks, body spasming and jerking with the pleasure. Her insides clamped onto me and relaxed, again and again.

"Never…" she mumbled.

I continued long, deep strokes, with occasional flicks of the nipple with my overly long tongue.

"What's that?"

"Never before…"

She went through another series of aftershocks, and I comforted her with sweet nothings, telling her how wonderful she was, and how much she meant to me, and how much I enjoyed doing this. With her, to her.

"I love…" she started, but her eyes flew open.

"Hm?" I asked.

"This. I love this."

I had a feeling she had just slipped up and nearly confessed. I didn't push it though.

"I want it from behind," she said.

I obliged her: from behind, her on top of me, and me on top of her, with her legs lying up on my chest. The pleasure built up in me, watching her go through orgasm after orgasm, shuddering and groaning.

I'd done this. Nobody else. I was responsible for rocking her world and bringing her to heights of passion no one else had.

With that in mind, I told her what I was going to do.

"I'm going to make you feel like you've never felt before," I told her. I began slamming into her with my full might, grabbing my UI and putting a skill point into Girth right this moment, and she cried out. I experienced that spring tightening feeling of her whole body winding down to a spectacular orgasm, and chose that moment to expand out our pleasure by spending the Tokens. Not a moment later it washed over her. Cries and shaking sounding somewhere between ecstasy and pain.

She begged me to stop, breathless whispering full of half-formed words and twitchy swats at my arms.

I ignored her. Instead I pounded down into her body relentlessly.

She sprang into another orgasm right away, arching her back up and screaming soundlessly. She clamped down on me, body bucking, and came again. This one had a rush of fluid with it. A croak emerged along with warm, clear liquid that splashed up my body and over her thighs and abs.

This is Christopher, triumphant.



Chapter 17- Inextricably Bound

Making love to Regina had brought a certain warmth with it. I basked in this lovely feeling, or just the post-coital bliss. Between pleasing another and being pleased, I felt complete. Her fingers threaded into mine, and we lay on the grass in the nude, snuggled up against one another. I felt her periodically turn to regard me with warmth and affection.

Regina and I, in the sun, watching clouds inch their way across a blue sky periodically shimmering with other colors. The only sound was the rustle of the Slumbershrooms wanting to get back to their places in the sun.

There wasn't anything else. Sun in the sky? Birds flying high?

Yeah. It was that good.

"Hey, Fletcher," she said eventually.

"Hey, Regina," I said.

She snorted. "How long do you think we have left at this place?"

"Dunno… you're concerned about the R&R they owe us for going over the two month mark?"

"A little," she admitted. "I'm actually more concerned about being apart from you. If they give us more than two weeks stateside…" She trailed off.

"I'll miss you too."

"I don't think 'miss' is the right word for it," she said. "It's easy and natural and good."

"What is?"

"Being around you. Being with you. Having the other girls want you, and being the perv I know I am."

"You are a perv," I said.

"You're way more of a perv than I am," she said, giggling. "You're insatiable."

Somebody had given me literal sex powers. Though to be honest, I was trying to make up for never having had a girlfriend in high school, never being able to use all the hormones I had coursing through me.

But I did like Regina. We had discussed movies, and she was into Star Wars, amazingly. She preferred the new TV show stuff and the newest trilogy, which I couldn't really agree with, but I didn't meet a lot of vocal Star Wars fans these days.

She liked being out in and among nature over being in a crowded city. As did I. She liked a more relaxed day over a rigidly defined day overstuffed with things to do. Me too. And we both enjoyed petting adorable fuzzy companions, like Tweedle Dee.

Congratulations! *You have joined in the flesh with Regina Hampstead. Your relationship has increased to* ***Devotees****.*

Partners devoted to one another are something special to behold. Friends, family and even bystanders will remark upon how good they look as a couple, how natural.

This is the fifth level on the Relationship track, and brings with it the first tangible system benefits.

**You lose Relationship points with Regina more slowly.*

**You gain a Meld ability.*

Regina might not have said the words out loud, but I understood what she had meant when she held herself back. Her affection for me had grown into a force of its own. I mean, to be fair, my affection for her was equally as strong.

As for the new thing we'd gotten, I had a look over it.

Meld Ability: A powerful fusion of class abilities, this will replace your current ability shared with Regina Hampstead, **Beast Talker**.

Choose from among the Ranger abilities:

*Wilderness and Herb Lore
*Movement abilities
*Archery abilities
*Dual Wielding abilities
*Beastmastery abilities

Herb lore was already something I couldn't do on my own. Movement seemed tempting, as we were doing a lot of traveling between assignments. However, I had **Golightly** from the God of Apparel, and nothing was going to beat magical footwear. Both combat abilities were right out. I didn't want to fight, I wanted to heal.

It was possible my healing abilities could work in tandem with, say, the archery abilities. In that case, I would be firing healing arrows. Although it sounded cool, I didn't think it would be anywhere near as cool as convincing a metal and earth dragon not to eat me or Cinzy's brother.

In the end, I decided to stick with the Beastmastery stuff.

Your abilities are as such:
Hard at Work (Healer/Pleasure Seeker)
Healer's Resistance (Healer)
Healer's Endurance (Healer)
Healer's Breath (Healer)
Verdant Rejuvenation (Healer)
Blissense (Pleasure Seeker)
Post-Sharing Clarity (Pleasure Seeker)
Drive In Deeper (Pleasure Seeker)

*Please choose an ability to meld with **Beastmastery**.*

Now, I had rarely suffered from a glut of choices like this. In general my situation didn't allow me too many options. When I'd chosen my class, the choice was a simple one: a way to heal my mother, to make the world a better place through the elimination of

pain. A force for good.

Now though… I had no idea what would help me. And my anxious mind tried to imagine what it was that I'd be getting if and when I ended up melding these two powers.

None of the others had a meld ability, so far as I knew. I'd seen nothing about this when I looked through the handbook at the start. Wild speculation was fruitless… pair **Beastmastery** with **Blissense** and… what? No amount of wondering about it would help.

In the end I decided using the best metric: the most useful ability. **Healer's Resistance** and **Endurance** had helped, for sure. They were useful in dealing with this divine god sickness job I had. **Healer's Breath** was of course a game changer. I didn't need to put together complicated salves, potions and unguents when I could just exhale healing energy into people. **Verdant Rejuvenation** meant I would always have a good stock of healing herbs and flowers.

Among my Pleasure Seeker abilities (not sure I wanted to seek pleasure with beasts that I mastered but I wasn't about to turned options away completely) I didn't see anything that immediately screamed 'choose me!' Although **Post-Sharing Clarity** and **Drive In Deeper** had been a little helpful, and **Blissense** had paved the way for me to give Cinzy what she most desired. But it wasn't like sensing what Nakamamon wanted most was going to prove very useful.

It wasn't possible to choose without more information… which Regina would have. She'd get a Meld Ability too, so maybe hers would help inform me on my choices.

Beside me, Regina was also gasping in wonder.

"What…" I asked, my mouth suddenly dry, "what did you get?"

"It's something called a meld ability," she said. "I'm trying to figure out which one I should pick. You have resistance to infection, endurance abilities, I guess for working through the night…"

"That's right."

"The other one is for the healing breath, I think. It's called

Treatment, and then this one is growing and maintaining ingredients."

"Healer's Breath is for treating the sick. That's what I used on Dee when he touched the holy underwear."

She chuckled at that. Tweedle Dee must have shrugged off the effects of the Slumbershrooms because he perked up, yipped, and came bounding over through the tall grass towards us. I grinned, watching his fuzzy and flower-covered form appear with each jump, eager eyes fixed on us, and disappear back into the thigh high grasses.

"And a job class power?" she asked. "What does that mean?"

"It's called Hard at Work, and it doubles Token use when I do the really difficult checks."

She accepted a fluffy, many-petaled furball to the face, which bowled her over. Laughing, she gave Dee some belly rubs and soon had a stick to play fetch with him.

"Did you say it doubles Token use?" she asked, astonishment clear in her voice.

"Only on class-dependent checks," I told her, nodding. "The second level made it easier to assist others with their checks, and the third level gave me a free retry instead of spending a Token."

"Holy crapamoley!" She shouted, then accepted another flying furball to the face. Dee tackled her and knocked her over yet again.

"You mean I could have double Tokens when sneaking, tracking, trapping, and foraging? That's dope as hecky Becky."

She sounded like such a dork, but I didn't mind. Things sounding cool or awesome didn't really vibe with this incredible, vast, and wondrous place, where you could bond a snake made out of air, and fly on it, or a fox with flowers in its ears and tails.

"Oh em gee this is the coolest," she said. "I decided to go with the beast powers for this meld thing, and it gave me the ability to befriend Nakamamon, like bonding them but without the power sharing. Oh this will be so fracking cool. I want a whole menagerie! I want a big lumbering sleepy boy like Isabelle has, and a sneaky snek

boy like Tara has, and a sharp quilly boy, I guess also like Isabelle… and, and…" She went on to describe how she wanted fairies and fire ones and more plant ones and water ones and earth ones, maybe a gemstone one like Trent, and a floppy hoppy boy with silky ears, and… all of them, essentially. She wanted all the pets.

The downside to this was that her Herb Lore ability had been replaced by the new one. That was not a welcome sign. Although more abilities meant possibly losing track of all the things I could do, more was generally better.

My teacher back at HQ, Allie, had given me the correct knowledge about abilities. If they weren't passed on directly from a god, I maxed out at five.

I still had way more than other people, with five from my two classes. On top of that, I had the five passed to me by my partners. And to top all that off, there was still the matter of Vellenia, who had given me water breathing and the power to dazzle the enemy. Most everyone would have five, seven if their bonds with their Nakamamon were like mine. Some weren't, and would have deepened the bond with their bond mate. A stronger bond meant stronger powers.

So while most people had seven abilities, eight max, I had *seventeen*. Eighteen if you included the one from the Lovers.

For the time being, all was the feel of Regina's skin on mine, the sticky feeling of her juices coating me until we had a dip in the nearby stream, and then the feel of her body in my hands once again in the midst of our bath.

"I can't believe you made me squirt," she hissed.

I looked around, wondering why she was whispering. Luckily, **Blissense** hadn't given me the notification that someone's thoughts were fixed on me. So Drat wasn't anywhere nearby.

"Is that…"

"That's never happened to me before!" she insisted. "You're something else, you know that? You'd better not leave me for Miss Perfect Face."

"Who? Cinzy?"

"The fact that you know exactly who I'm talking about is a bad sign," she said. "And you'd better not leave me for Miss Perfect Butt."

"You're being ridiculous," I said.

"It's Tara," she said. "I was talking about Tara."

"I know who you were talking about," I said. "I just don't get why. We just had sex and I just spent skill points to make you feel like you've never felt in your life."

Her eyes flew open. "You… you did? Well sheep dip, now I can't even use the Miss Perfect Girlfriend line I was preparing."

I took her by the hips and drew her close. I then began peppering her cute face with kisses. "You don't have to worry…" Kiss. "I'm desperate to get all up in your business at all times." Kiss and kiss and kiss. "I'm not going to leave you for Ivy and Isabelle. I'm not going to leave you for Tara." Several kisses. Regina got into this and pressed herself against me. "I'm not going to leave you for Cinzy, or even Fairy Poppins if she somehow grows to human size and demands to have my—"

I froze. Holy shirt.

"That can't be it."

Tweedle Dee reappeared and yipped several times at the bank, then caught sight of his tails and began running in circles, trying to catch his tail. I watched him go and go, mind whirling.

"What? Fairy Poppins wants you?"

"That's… not it… right? Just tell me that's ridiculous."

"It's not ridiculous," she said. "Poppins watched you having sex. She reported back to Cinzy. Don't forget she stuck with us instead of going with Cinzy when she had her freak out and left."

"No… she clearly… she wanted to keep Cinzy away from me, because… I'm a womanizing, insatiable perv."

Tweedle Dee lost interest in his tail when he spotted a butterfly, and began yipping and hopping around after it.

"You are an insatiable perv, but not a womanizer," Regina said,

slowly rubbing her nipples back and forth across my chest.

"But there's…" It wasn't possible, was it?

"Just admit it," Regina said, "she wants you, and that's that. Chrysta wants you…" I hoped she missed the way I twitched. She didn't know, did she? But she went on. "Larelle wants you. She's a big old muscle mommy who needs some of that good dick."

Okay that clearly wasn't right. Larelle… okay, if we were being perfectly honest, Larelle had been willing to throw her clothes off with no provocation when she'd seen Tara do it. She might be just as free about sex as Regina.

"So why wouldn't Fairy Poppins want you?"

"There's… we're… there's no way."

She drew me in close and kissed me. "Oh, sweetie," she said, "as if wanting what you can't have has ever stopped anyone. I can confidently say it never once stopped me, back when I liked boy bands at the tender age of way too young to legally mention in a book." She shuddered.

Young people have hormones. This is a fact.

Dee had returned, yipping and yipping.

"You don't have to worry about it," she told me. At my visible confusion, she went on. "She'll get over you. She'll find someone who's compatible."

I blinked several times. That didn't sound very Fairy Poppins.

"Now… I'd go for round two with you, but my poor little pussy is telling me I'll die if you do anything like that to me again. Since I don't want to die, I'm going to play with Dee."

She played fetch with Dee after getting dressed again. Now that the Fairy Poppins issue had been raised, I had a lot to think about. She'd come to the forefront of my attention, but there was Chrysta to think about, there was Shakindria to think about, Jacoby to think about, Vellenia to think about.

It sure would be nice if attention-grabbing problems came one at a time.

I thought we could confidently shelve Fairy Poppins and Jacoby. The expedition leader out looking for Blake's second in command wanted what she wanted, and when the time came, I could give her that. As for Fairy Poppins, I could let her stew. She hadn't been kind to Cinzy and didn't deserve me spending time, effort, or skill points on her. Finally, on the Chrysta front, she didn't expect me to spend time, effort or skill points to sexually satisfy her. All the more reason for me to spend them preparing to help her out.

The last thing was something I could take care of right now, but was possibly the most vexing. The Meld Ability situation was going to replace one of my abilities. The one I wanted to keep was probably going to be the one to get the axe. **Beast Talker**. The question now was whether to keep it and grab an ability from Regina I had basically no interest in, or replace it and hope it was better. To be fair, **Beast Talker** had been a huge improvement over **Wild Lore**. There was a good chance the replacement would be a significant step up.

I was quietly despairing that if I chose **Beastmastery**, it would turn out the same as Regina's new ability. I did want pets, but now that I had this Shakindria situation in front of my face, I didn't want pets. The ability to keep big dangerous Nakamamon from killing me, yes. The ability to be a Divney Princess, no.

It was that good for a time, anyway.

I remembered the reason I was here, and what I needed to ask her.

"Okay," I told her. "Before I choose my own, I need to ask your opinion on something."

I gave her the extended version of the situation with Shakindria.

"I don't know…" she said.

"I don't really want to leave her behind, not if she's going to help us in a way no one else can."

"She's not doing it out of the goodness of her heart," Regina said. "She wants you to dump Vellenia."

"That's… not possible," I said, dumbstruck.

"I heard that someone dismissed their bond mate and got a different one," she said, then seemed to realize what she'd said. Her eyes shot wide open. "But you're not going to do that."

"Of course I'm not. I didn't even know it was possible, and Vellenia is amazing."

"Right. So forget I said anything."

"I will." I would *try*.

This is Christopher wondering if there's a solution.



Chapter 18- Avoiding Choices and Their Consequences

The sun rose and fell. Sometimes the smells of frying eggs or bacon woke me. Sometimes the smells of a savory stew. Sometimes the cool, misty mornings had my eyes opening early. Those days mostly went the same: on work days, I delegated with morning briefings, hoped for another sighting of a godly artifact from Drat, and had them disperse. I spoke with Cinzy and Wayne about how the refugees were doing and what Jacoby's team was up to, and if they needed anything from us.

I found it slightly annoying how Wayne or Jacoby's people were completely unable to help us in our main task, but Tara was often conscripted into searching for Archie, Blake's second in command. I told myself it was good they stayed out of our way and only asked for minimal assistance. So this cloud had a silver lining after all.

On some days I ended up in camp, doing the cooking and washing up. I'd chat with whoever my partner was on camp cleanliness duty, and if it was one of the girls, we could get up to some shenanigans. Ivy convinced me after I was done with dishes to come back to her place and give her a complete and thorough forking. I first headed to where Isabelle was on door duty to confirm that Ivy had permission. The whole way back to their place, Ivy complained about how embarrassed she was asking permission to frack, and how we were wasting time just *walking,* when instead we could be *forking.*

As for what day it was, that no longer mattered. This wasn't earth. The seven day week wasn't a thing if we didn't want. Still, Wayne's other team job was that of chaplain, which was odd. Every so often our rhythm got interrupted by Isabelle, Trent, Tara, and surprisingly Drat wanting to attend their weekly devotional service. I

wasn't much of a believer. We had four days on, one day off. The only thing that mattered was the thing I now dubbed The Shakindria Issue.

First, she was good at transporting divine objects. The practice was paying off. She was already increasing the time she could spend doing so. Second, she was being nicer to me, showing me the sights and explaining all about how this or that neighbor was kind or silly, this or that shop had excellent wares or wonderful drinks, and how this place looked in different weather. Although the seasons were all messed up, the town occasionally got snow, and it turned the whole place looked, in Shakindria's estimation, much more beautiful. She'd also taken to dressing in sexier and sexier outfits. Today's outfit included gauzy lavender material in an x pattern across her front and around the back of her neck, where it looped around a simple brassy hoop. That hoop contained a short length of semi-transparent loincloth in the front and back. It barely covered her pert bubble butt.

And today was windy.

Over the course of the next few days, I was made a series of Social checks that got increasingly hard. They always began with a pleasant greeting and a touch of the hands. She clasped mine in hers, and expressed how lovely it was to have me near. I couldn't disagree; it was wonderful to be near her.

Then she would ask if perhaps we had time for a good forking.

We had options when it came to forking. One, she could join our minds and have a completely psychic experience. It was a vision that the two of us shared. She could set the scene, like at the base of a waterfall, or in the middle of a bustling town, and then she'd suck me off or float over so I could eat her out. Or she'd float over to me while turning upside down, so we could do a freestanding sixty-nine position.

After that I'd spread her legs on a smooth river rock and plunge into her, or I'd pin her to the wall of a bustling market building, seemingly unnoticed by the passing crowd, and hump up into her willing body.

We could have sex in a scene that I set, mentally. She enjoyed being drawn into the cityscape of USA where I was from, and seeing the Southern California landscape, the houses, the humans. And then I could rock her world sexually… in public, in my childhood home, in my old high school history classroom, in the video game shop where I'd worked just prior to getting this job. The possibilities for this boning of the minds was limitless.

The second option was a good old-fashioned forking. She'd draw me in close and tell me she wanted that monster shoved up into her. She wanted my essence blasted into the depths of her. She walked around in a state of arousal all day, every day now, and that meant she really did need to cover herself. Her lady parts were always dripping and slippery by the time we met up. I could see the juices dripping down the insides of her thighs.

From there we could find any of a dozen abandoned beds and spend the next hour going through a series of orgasms. As much as she liked having me fill her up, she wasn't opposed to witnessing the raw animal power of my release on her chest.

In any event, we could (and did) have sex all over the abandoned houses.

The third option was my favorite, and it involved floating using her telekinetic powers while having sex. It wasn't true zero gravity sex; my blood still rushed to my head if we were upside down, but there was something magical about thrusting my hips up into hers while floating five feet off the ground. Of course it was literally magical, but this was a different sort of magic.

Shakindria wanted variety of location. We had sex in a house that was a hollowed out tree. We floated up to a house on stilts and stuffed her full of me while floating some twelve feet in the air.

I had plans for her, like taking her on a mental ride to a night club I'd been to just once. We could have sex amongst the throbbing rhythm of the bass and the gyrating, scantily clad club goers. She'd twerk that ass back into me while I went at her from behind among glittering college girls. We could head to the beach, and have sex without ever getting sand up our butts. We'd go on the movie studio

tour and have sex on the set of a sci-fi movie. We could do it in front of the Hollywood sign.

I couldn't get a bead on what the Social checks meant exactly. For now, the bonuses I got from **Beast Talker**, **Stalwart** and **Fierce** allowed me to triumph. Triumph over what, I couldn't be sure.

During that time, she helped secure the divine objects Drat kept finding, always quiet when it was time for us to part. I began to grow guilty at the prospect of leaving her attached to this town that didn't appreciate her.

I had already gone over the logistics of trying to use Trent or Alan to gather up divine objects. Neither of them had Divine Resistance at the levels I did, and even with the **Prismatic Apparel**, swapping it between them and Drat, neither were as good as Shakindria.

First, Alan. His telekinetic spells were far weaker than the psychic Nakamamon's. He wasn't yet at the level where he gained a better version of the spell, and being in the town was difficult for him. I hadn't wanted to use his spell for fear of pissing off my psychic Nakamamon fork buddy, but he insisted on trying.

It was a disaster. He had the same issue that Shakindria had at first: the divine energy backfired through the mana he was using and put him on his back. He spent the remainder of the time getting daily doses of **Healer's Breath** from me, and then after a week of slowly worsening, he needed elixirs made.

After getting touched by divinity, he stopped recovering mana as quickly, grew weak, and essentially stopped functioning as the group Wizard.

After the failure with Alan, Trent was reluctant to give it a shot. He routed a lot of power through his bonded Nakamamon, Garnet. The orange-red crystal pulsed with light while we talked, and Trent frowned.

"I'm sorry, Fletcher," he said.

Garnet wasn't willing to take the chance of getting the same

divinity poisoning while working the stone beneath the divine artifacts. He still had a lot of work to do to ensure the relocation camp for the Nakamamon drawn here was enough. It needed irrigation ditches dug, it needed drainage and sewage that were separate from the irrigation. No, he was needed and that need was important. No way he was going to end up on a sick bed like Alan, unable to cast spells, and no way was he risking his bond mate.

I couldn't fault him for that, frustrating as it might be.

Each day I returned to the camp and reunited with Vellenia.

Regina's remark stuck with me. I hadn't once considered actually breaking the bond, and I had no idea how to do so anyway. Thinking about it got me down, from the guilt of both event thinking about it in the first place, and the guilt of being forced to leave Shakindria to the town sometime in the future.

Vellenia caught wind of my despondent mood and grew concerned. She would massage my shoulders, offer to rub my feet, offer to go find Regina or Tara or Ivy and Isabelle, or Cinzy. She would strip off my clothes and try to get me in the mood.

For the first time, I was having trouble. Now, it wasn't sexually. Vellenia could still get me hard, could still satisfy herself several times over, and then satisfy me. But when she cuddled me I felt the pressure I put on myself.

Vellenia was a delight. She admired what I was doing, and was actively helping. She knew of underwater plants and herbs that were used in making remedies, and we'd been planting and tending them together as part of **Verdant Rejuvenation**. Some of these plants were used in remedies in Alan's collection of books, while others weren't. I was interested in getting to know these plants better in order to see how they could be used in healing.

If there was one positive aspect to the week spent with Shakindria and Vellenia, and randomly entertaining Regina, Ivy, Tara, and once with an exhausted and distracted Cinzy, it was my level increasing in Pleasure Seeker.

By the end of the work week, I'd gained three levels, bringing me

to level 24.

Level 22: +3 skill points

Level 23: +1 Likability, +1 free attribute point

Level 24: Gained Ability: Raw Connection

"Ugh," I told myself, then stared around and tried to get an idea of what was wrong with me.

It had rained but it was a light, warm rain. The sun was now shining and throwing rainbows up practically everywhere you looked. Nakamamon had come out to drink and bathe in the precipitation, showing me strange bugs and fairies made of air or glittering points of light. Drat had found two more pieces of divinity, bringing the total to four (plus the one I'd made), and was off searching for yet another one.

Yet I was not pleased with myself.

It wasn't like I was upset at the way I was progressing, but I still felt like I was doing it the wrong way. Like I was doing something bad every time I went into town to be with Shakindria.

I spent the 3 skill points, one on Divine Resistance, one on Adaptability, and one on Pheromones. I'd still had one from the Achievement, and put it aside for Healer skills. I felt like I would need it; we were at another level with this town situation, and I'd need to be a higher level to match.

The additional free attribute point was another bright star in my fraught mental state, and I finally put this one into Physicality. I'd basically cleared up my leg and spine problem, and was building towards an actual physique I could be proud of. I needed it the least for my classes, but everyone needed a healthy body. I felt that one more point would give me body builder muscles, or at least rock climber or runner muscles, the lean build you associate with healthy people. The knowledge came by instinct, based on the way I felt; right now I could carry weights I'd never been able to, and only after doing that was I feeling any soreness in my hips, thighs or back. I was pain free almost every day.

As for the newest ability…

Raw Connection

(Special Ability, Rare, Active aura)

Activate by spending a Likability Token. Auras affect all targets within range. Effective range is a radius your class level in feet, presently 24 feet. This effect lasts for 10 minutes, plus 10 minutes per relationship level of the highest level member within range.

Relationship points gained through social interactions are doubled.

Relationship points gained through sexual activity or Social checks are boosted by 50%.

Note: this includes both positive and negative Relationship gains.

This… was good. Like really good. The bonus from getting to Devotee with Regina promised to be great; she loved her ability to gain lots of Nakamamon buddies. She'd already befriended the Slumbershrooms and one Shrubbit that I knew of. She disappeared most mornings to go be among the creatures and attract them, then play with them, which was her right… though the DRC did need her for team-related duties occasionally.

She had gotten an amazing deal from her Meld Ability, while I… continued to balk. I still hadn't taken the leap and gone with the Meld Ability from Regina telling me she loved me, but abilities like that weren't going to be garbage. This ability would send my relationships with Tara, Ivy, Isabelle, and Cinzy shooting up quickly, I hoped. And that would mean boosted power levels, and reaching Devotee level faster.

And possibly what lay beyond with Regina also.

"You need to just get it over with," Regina told me that night. She was snuggled up on one side of me, with Vellenia's spot being on the other side. She was out playing with Regina's new gaggle of creatures, but would be in for snuggling and maybe more soon.

"Get your ability," Regina went on. "Go on, get it."

"But Beast Talker is so good," I complained. It was helping me

resist the problem with Shakindria. Though if we were being perfectly honest, the problem with Shakindria had become just a tad more problematic.

"Do it," Tara insisted, like she always did. "When my family knows there's some kind of problem and you're dallying, they sit down and find out why you're stuck, then everybody goes 'do it!' Always helps me and my folks."

This is Christopher not doing it. Not right now at least.



Chapter 19- Calls For Progress

I felt like forward movement needed to happen. Instead of wallowing in my indecision over the Meld ability, or wondering how to get Shakindria free of her bond, I needed to get back to the work at hand. The people were demanding it. Cinzy warned that the refugees were restless and wanting to see some progress. It would go a long way toward showing we were working in good faith and not just partying around a campfire every night.

The next divine artifact Drat found, a pair of tongs, rose up into the air and flew over toward the entrance to town. Now that my Affinity was getting higher, I was able to see the faint purple aura of her mana Another use of telekinesis later, and it was in the circle we had designated for this kind of thing.

Cinzy stood there, looking not herself even more. Fairy Poppins was nowhere in sight. I sighed.

"Good people!" Cinzy's voice boomed out toward the refugee town. "Those of you who wish to have your questions answered only need come and witness!"

"Come and witness?" I asked quietly.

"One needs the proper sense of grandiosity," she responded, and yawned. "Ugh. I'm not tired, you're tired."

"You want to talk about it?" I whispered.

"Not particularly," she said.

As the leader of the team it was my duty to do something about problems my team members were having. But if Ivy and Isabelle started having a spat, what was I supposed to do about it? And now, with the problem clearly being Fairy Poppins, and Cinzy specifically telling me no, I remained in this wonderful position of watching a glacier come and bury my friend by slow aggravating inches.

I huffed, and Cinzy ignored this, and we got on with the

demonstration.

"We have discovered a piece of the dead god that plagues this town," Cinzy called. I could feel the interest she was arousing, and the soothing calm beneath, like a layer cake. Both layers were delicious, but had very different flavors. Somehow, with her abilities, those two worked well together rather than contrasting one another.

"We invite you to come and see what we have, ask questions, and rest assured that we are working as hard as we can on this issue."

What followed was something like a town hall, something like a funeral, and something like a press conference. I stood before the artifact and next to Cinzy, with Shakindria standing just inside the town limits a few feet away, while Ivy and Isabelle flanked the thing. We'd placed a fence around it, to give everybody the very correct impression that it wasn't to be touched, and was dangerous.

The refugees came in a slow and shuffling procession, like they were viewing the body of a dead king or queen. They radiated solemnity, though the children among them had faces filled with wonder. All of them got a good look at what we had brought, before moving on so the others could see it.

They could feel it. I could feel it.

A little jostling and inconvenience followed, where the hundreds of people all wanted to see and hear what was going on. It was a motley assembly of rock creatures, octopus creatures, tiny bird Nakamamon. Some had grass and twigs, one looked to be entirely made up of leaves and vines, some were molten, some were made of crystal or glass or diamond. A handful were fleshy, with non-human features, like one with a strange prehensile tail with what looked like a hand on it.

Once they'd gotten back around to the spaces where everyone could see and hear, Cinzy cleared her throat and activated a different special ability. This one turned her voice into a bullhorn, so everyone could hear.

"Thank you for being here, and thank you for lining up in an

orderly manner to view the artifact."

Ivy and Isabelle clamped their hands over their ears and backed up behind Cinzy.

"Yes, to answer your first question, this is a piece of a dead god. We are the Divinity Rescue Corps and we've dealt with this previously."

"Today, we will go over what we've been up to, what it means, and how long we expect it to take," she explained in her ability-boosted voice. She went on to tell the story of the God of Apparel, smiling at the chuckles she received at the thought of us working on a cure while nude. She emphasized that these things took time, and went over the process in a quick, step by step overview.

At the end, she took a step back and introduced me.

"And this is our glorious leader, Fletcher."

Some interested and polite noises emanated from the crowd.

"We will open up the floor for any questions you may still have."

No one moved at first. Finally, one of the big rock people stood up, looking like a gorilla with no neck, but made entirely of different strata of stone.

"How many pieces?" it asked.

"Probably around a dozen," I said, and I was super wrong.

"How many you got now?"

"Four… five."

Muttering and speculation rippled through the crowd.

"How long we have to wait?"

"Unclear," I said.

Cinzy turned to the assembled Nakamamon. "A few weeks, we think!"

"Cinzy?" I asked. "What are you—"

"What about my mother and her family?" A purple feline thing with a lot of tentacles called out.

"What about my brother and his children?" Another asked.

This set off a domino effect of cries regarding family members.

They were growing agitated. A pulse of anger spread outward.

"This again?" I growled.

"We are getting to these problems!" Cinzy called out. "As we have mentioned, healing these kinds of things is not an instantaneous—"

"I want my children back!" One creature wailed, and it might've been a green lion.

"They are safe, just in a divinely induced slumber!" Cinzy called, but even she looked upset when her thing failed.

A number of Nakamamon stood, pointing, shaking fists or flippers or feathers or tentacles.

And then the divine awl rose smoothly up out of the small circle we had put down, into the air, slowly rotating end over end. It retreated back towards the city and behind the nearest building.

"We will make progress as steadily as possible!" I called out. "And my Bard will keep you up to date on all progress we make. When we know, you will know."

"Fletcher!" Cinzy hissed.

But it was done. The UI message appeared.

Persuasion check: *You have Persuasion at level 1, and Likability at level 7. This check is at Extreme difficulty.* Would you like to spend 12 Tokens for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 7 Likability and 7 Free Tokens.

**Your ally Cinzia Graham has spent 9 Likability Tokens. This check's difficulty has been lowered by 3. Would you like to spend 9 Tokens for an automatic success?*

**Your ally Shakindria has performed an inspiring act, which has lowered this check's difficulty by 1. Would you like to spend 8 Tokens for an automatic success?*

I sighed and spent the 8 Tokens. I felt the flood of magically-enhanced charisma flow through me. I felt and almost saw my words flow out, then resonate with the townsfolk and the refugees.

They dispersed, some of them shooting distrustful glances our

way.

"Well, that could've gone worse," Isabelle said.

"We know," Ivy said.

"A lot worse."

"We know," Ivy repeated.

"Last time they turned into grief zombies and tried to infect the eggs with their grief—"

"Izzy!" Ivy snapped, and Isabelle fell silent.

Cinzy stood there, looking halfway toward becoming a grief zombie herself. She had a haunted look.

"You're going to be okay," I told her gently. Thankfully this didn't prompt a check. Cinzy nodded absently.

For the remainder of the day, Shakindria and I worked in town. With me feeling like I was using her for her abilities, which of course, she dutifully flexed her telekinetic muscles and moved all the artifacts we'd found over to a central location, relatively close to the town's entrance.

That was tense, Shakindria said, shortly after Drat found another artifact and we made our way to get it. *I am glad no one allowed their emotions to overcome their judgment.*

Me too. I don't know how well I could handle moving forward on this god problem if I had to cure hundreds of Nakamamon of a condition like **incurable depression** or something. And it would be a ton worse if that condition was **unstoppable rage**.

"Cinzy's been under a lot of stress lately," I said.

Shakindria and I chatted throughout that day, getting to know one another more. She had done a stint as a shoemaker in a town that had bonded her similarly. She had done a stint as a weaver before that. She had done a stint as a candlemaker before that. We didn't talk about how she wanted to get free of Glumpdumpkin. She didn't mention Regina's cryptic message of breaking bonds. If she knew how to do that, she wasn't willing to mention it for Vellenia's sake.

She also proved to be an excellent listener. Vellenia was cheerful and wondrous, but wasn't much of a help in the thinking department. She wasn't stupid, but seemed to expect me to make all the decisions and do all the thinking. Shakindria, in comparison, made suggestions. She had ideas for what to do with Cinzy and Fairy Poppins, but made it clear she wasn't an authority on human-Nakamamon relations.

There wasn't any clear indication of her age, but I was starting to get the impression she wasn't just older than me, but a lot older than me. Together, we moved through the town joking and laughing, with her having a sense of humor I couldn't put my finger on, and her snickering every time I missed the punchline.

"How did you um… break free of the magical bond, if I may ask?" I obviously still felt like a jerk. She couldn't leave and was helping me anyway.

She explained that they had contracts, and that the contracts were for a certain number of years. This latest contract: 25 years.

But there was no more work to do, so we headed back out of town and to my garden of **Verdant Rejuvenation**. It was always lovely to see the plants having grown or blossomed while you were away. There was something so innately wonderful about helping things grow, live, and thrive. I knew there was magic in it, that I was only helping a tiny bit, while my special ability did the rest. Still, I got to have fresh berries, smell exotic flowers, and experience the supreme pleasure of having the materials I needed when I needed them.

Shakindria was once again swarmed by teammates and Nakamamon who wanted to play using her telekinetic powers. She was able to get right to the edge of the town's limits and hover there, smiling in what I thought was a forced way. Nearby, my teammates didn't seem to notice. They wanted to be thrown up in the air, spun around like pizzas, play tug of war, and float around like they were swimming.

I spent some of that time tending to my garden, some of that time watching the fun, some of that time feeling a creeping shame

at being unable to help Shakindria, and the remainder of that time conferring with Cinzy. She had been in contact with Wayne, and by extension, the people hunting Archie.

"It's not going well," Cinzy lamented. "Jacoby is probably worried HQ is going to put her back on desk duty. She keeps asking Wayne to ask me to ask you to send her more people."

That wasn't possible. I already had Tara and Regina on deliveries, and when they got out to wherever the Archie hunters were presently camped, to do some scouting. I didn't love being down a teammate, but I also wanted Blake's second in command brought back before he turned into a fighting aspect Nakamamon and beat the crap out of everyone in sight.

"I'll keep fending her off," Cinzy said with a sigh.

I once again offered to help her with whatever was bothering her, but she only waved me off. No, it wasn't a big deal, she lied.

When this meeting concluded, I pointed Cinzy in the direction of Shakindria, who was taking Ivy and Isabelle on a sort of telekinetic roller coaster. They zipped up and down in the air, through tight turns, and through several loop de loops. The couple were screaming in feverish delight, and I could tell they were close to the breaking point, because Izzy started calling Shakindria off. The Nakamamon set her down without either of them mid-air vomiting.

They staggered off, meaning the vomiting could've happened afterwards.

Afterwards was a nice dinner provided by Vellenia and Tara, who had taken to whistling and beatboxing together. Vellenia, with her six tongues, could whistle like no one on earth could manage. Like a bird almost. She whistled in harmony with herself. Tara sometimes played the kazoo, a metal one, sometimes banged on pots and pans while Vellenia whistled, and other times made mouth sounds.

It was supremely adorable.

Afterwards I did the dishes with Cinzy, while the others went about their own business. Regina was due back soon, so for now the bond mates were keeping Tweedle Dee occupied. Garnet was

presently acting as a whack-a-mole game, with Dee, Vellenia, and Airaconda all trying to grab at the basketball-sized gem. Eventually Garnet was torn out of the ground by telekinesis, and all three of them piled onto the glowing orange gem, laughing and yipping and the strange airy hissing sound made by Tara's bond mate.

"She's pretty great, huh?" Cinzy asked.

"You don't like her?"

"I like her just fine," she said, and side-eyed me. "But she's… locked in the city?"

"She's in a magical binding, like our bond mates. For the next twenty-some years."

"Holy frack!" she shouted. "What are you going to do about that?"

I shrugged. Shakindria had entered into that contract willingly. There was no one on my team I was comfortable with her bonding. And there was no way I was going to un-bond Vellenia, as Regina hinted was possible. Vellenia was amazing.

"Maybe… maybe one of Jacoby's people can bond her?" I suggested.

Cinzy calmed. "Maybe. And how will that feel?"

I sighed. "Not great. But if I can get her free, any way is better than nothing."

"But you don't want her to go off with some other guy."

"Is that ridiculous?" I would treat her right. I would give her the freedom she wanted and deserved. She could play these telekinesis games every day with our people. I wouldn't feel like an ass for using her to fix the broken god of this town.

I shrugged. "It's not just that. She's curious, kind, helpful, and whatever she sees in me, she seems to genuinely like. We're becoming friends. She's not bad people… she just knows what she wants and then goes after it." I also liked her because when I stroked her ears she could purr and orgasm at the same time.

She stared at me, eyebrows falling. "You do know there are girls here who like you already."

“I know that.”

“You don’t have to catapult into bed with every one you come across.” The image of me being shot out of a catapult and toward Shakindria’s house was a magnificent mental image and I chuckled.

“I know!” It had kind of just happened the first time. And also I had the hormones of an early-twenty-something, because that’s exactly how old I was.

“On the other hand, I really want you inside me right now,” she told me matter-of-factly. The dark circles under her eyes made the words seem just a tad too desperate.

“Does the thought of me being with a Nakamamon turn you on?” I asked lightly, with a hint of sass. It sounded just the right amount of horny, and she shivered.

“She is cute,” she said, “not that I play for that team. She deserves to be happy, just like everybody else, even if they already have a girlfriend and for some reason feel the need to have supplemental dick on the side.”

“You’re jealous,” I said.

She shrugged. “A little.”

“Shakindria’s got smooth skin all over,” I told her.

Her eyes shot open. “Already?”

I gave her a tiny nod. “And she’s delicious. Almost as delicious as you.”

This is Christopher about to enjoy the Cinzy platter.



Chapter 20- Peace Treaty

Cinzy stamped on the ground in annoyance, looking supremely cute. It was one part Bard and one part unbelievable good looks. She already had Likability well over level 10. It didn't help that everything she wore suited her and showed off her considerable… assets. Cinzy had roped Isabelle and Muppin into carrying far more clothing than she should otherwise have… or she had magic clothes that just appeared out of nowhere.

And a lot of it was super impractical. Case in point, she had on a sort of cardigan sweater on that was high cut, showing off her belly button and accentuating her cleavage. Full, fluffy, comfy sleeves, and nothing covering her midsection. On top of that, she had a jean skirt on sandblasted near to oblivion, with the pockets hanging down below the cutoff point, and stringy holes at the bottoms of her butt cheeks. Those fashionable, clompy leather boots came up to her calves, and all the way up above her knees were white stockings.

And this girl, this uncommonly gorgeous girl with a fabulous personality and good looks, wanted me to order her around, get her horny, then spread her cheeks and take her anally on the regular. In other words, unbelievable.

"How do you want to be forked?" I asked in a low voice.

"Fletcher…" she whined. "I can't. Not right now." She looked so utterly hopeless now, and I felt bad for her. Fairy Poppins. The situation with her bond mate was worse than I thought. She threw her head back and stomped one foot like a three year old about to start a tantrum.

"Is it that bad?"

"I feel like I'm being held captive by a three inch tall, tiny nightmare," she blurted. "And also, I have a sex drive. It does exist."

She'd been so cautious and slow with me in the beginning. I

could believe she got horny and took care of herself. But with Poppins always around? Had she kicked Poppins out some nights to have a little time with her hand? I would be willing to bet the answer was yes.

Right this moment she had the air of a captive animal seeking for some means of escape. Like a tiger prowling around its enclosure at the zoo. Some biological need had risen up and it made her look wild and dangerous.

"Where do you want me?" I asked lightly.

"Everywhere," she said, pouting. She blew an errant strand of hair off her forehead. "Outside, inside, on the roof under the stars, in a dark S&M dungeon in San Francisco wearing a mask so no one knows who I am—"

"Do you want me to eat you out while you suck my cock?" I asked in that same light, conversational tone. Already I was getting turned on. We were sitting on a stone picnic table Trent created just outside my house, facing one another, while Vellenia and Tara chatted and made music some fifty feet that way in the grass, and played with their Nakamamon. In the meantime, Shakindria laughed from her place at the edge of town, while Ivy and Isabelle's weak pleas to never again do that a few feet closer.

Cinzy's eyes shot open at my dirty talk.

"Fletcherrrrrrrrr," she moaned in agony. "You can't talk like this in public…"

"Why not?" I asked. "None of them can hear us." Regina and Tara maybe could, with their enhanced senses from their Ranger abilities. And Drat wasn't pinging my **Blissense** by focusing on me from within earshot. We could talk about fracking and sucking all we wanted. Tara hardly cared, Drat wasn't listening, and Regina would leap at the chance to get into bed with Cinzy.

She'd talked through an entire sex session about what she'd like to do to Cinzy if and when the opportunity ever arose. She really liked Cinzy's big boobs and slender figure, her blonde hair and those very kissable lips. Pornstar lips, Regina called them. And honestly,

the thought of my sexy redhead lip locked with my sexy Bard was another huge turn on. Cinzy still had such insecurity as to make it farfetched, or impossible. For now.

"You want to have sex standing up? I can kiss that beautiful face of yours while holding onto your throat, and thrust up into you. You want me to give you something for that amazing butt of yours while I slide my cock in and out of your tight, little pus—"

She hunched over, hands splayed on the picnic table's top, looking utterly frazzled, then shot to her feet. She looked like a cornered animal. She couldn't meet my eyes, but instead stared down at her impeccably painted fingernails and the stylish thin rings on several fingers, heaving breaths.

"Fletcher," she said quietly. "…are any of them staring at us?"

"Well now that you made a sudden movement, yes."

"I want it…" she whispered. "I want it so bad. I haven't had you in so long… I can't with her always watching."

"Go into your house," I told her. "I'll be there in ten minutes."

Her head shook slowly back and forth. "Fairy Poppins is always around, and—"

"Well then go into my house, right now," I told her quietly, in a firmer tone. "Strip off all your clothes and lay on the bed. Spread your legs and get both your holes ready for me."

She was already shaking, like all our clothes had suddenly disappeared and a chill wind swept through. It was as cute as it was alluring. "Fletcher—"

"Right. Now. Not another word. Ten minutes."

After staring at me for another long went, and I watched the tiny bits of her visible butt cheeks flex and bounce as she went.

It wasn't as difficult to find Fairy Poppins as I thought. I got up onto the roof of my house, peered around, and found the little speck of glowing light.

"Come on then," I said, making that come hither gesture with one finger.

Fairy Poppins zipped over toward me, brightening the glow she was emitting.

"I am told you want me," I said quietly. The tiny glowing ball with the shape of a woman inside it intensified, a lot. It then bobbed up and down frantically. "And I've also been told you've been having some trouble with Cinzy." Here she froze midair, the glow growing a lot weaker. I leaned forward, drawing in close. "Listen very carefully."

Voice as velvety soft as I could get it, I explained.

"We can have our time. I can lick and kiss and make love to you." The glow brightened and flickered now. "I can get deep inside you, like you wouldn't believe." Brighter she glowed, brighter than before. "But I can't do it today… I am working on it. I have to level up."

Uncertainty radiated from her. The glow was weaker, flickering.

"Give me a couple of days," I cooed, still keeping it soft and what I hoped was seductive. "Give Cinzy a couple of days. I promise, it'll be worth the wait. It'll be an all night situation, okay?"

She bobbed her assent again.

"Good," I said. "Because Cinzy really, really needs a night off. And I'm going to give it to her. And if you interfere, we can't have our special night in the future, okay?"

Poppins hung in the air for a moment or three, deliberating. Eventually, reluctantly, she flew off. I couldn't be sure if she was okay with it or too upset to communicate further.

Cinzy's condition was bad enough that I just wanted to give her some sweet relief.

"I'm he-ere," I sing-songed, entering my place.

I heard quiet sounds of desperation and lust from my bedroom. The idea of a gorgeous woman already naked and waiting for me was incredibly arousing.

When I went in to my place, I found Cinzy splayed out on the bed with one hand furiously frigging herself, and the other stretched behind her and fingering her ass. Her eyes were tightly closed, and she was already breathing heavily. Her whole face, the sides of her neck, her ears and down the top of her chest had flushed bright red,

and her nipples were erect. One stocking still hung off one foot, like she couldn't wait to get her fingers into herself. Or she couldn't wait to follow my orders.

"Fletcherrrrrrr," she whined, chest heaving. The last light of the slowly setting sun landed on her nipples and showed off everything, down to her shaven pussy.

"I'm not going to make you wait," I breathed.

"Ohhhh my gods," she moaned. "How did I let you talk me into this? What are you doing to me?"

Without waiting for me to respond she arched her back and brought her ass up off the bed, two fingers working both holes. It was so wanton and needy; I couldn't help but stare at her perfect body writhing on the bed, pushing out toward me, trying to get me into her.

"I'm giving you what you want, and what you need," I said, and dipped down to kiss her. In that instant, I paid the Tokens for **Entwined Ecstasy** to boost her sensations. Her eyes immediately flew open and her pupils dilated. Her whole body jerked in surprise as the orgasm took her, and she cried out.

Just a kiss and she'd climaxed.

She was boiling with lust, and soon had my tongue in her mouth, sucking on it while she pleasured herself. She let me finger her and focused more on her clit, and for a while I just enjoyed the furious passion that drove her to hump the air and moan uncontrollably. I could feel the fingers in her ass through the thin membrane separating them from my fingers, a weird but deeply erotic sensation. Soon though, I had discarded my clothes, and climbed up onto the bed to straddle her head. She got the idea immediately and opened wide to suck me as well as she could.

In the deepening twilight she looked perfect. Already her horniness had caused the bags under her eyes to disappear.

"Does Cinzy need to be violated?" I asked her quietly. She bobbed her head up and down, nodding just a fraction, as much as she could manage.

She choked a bit, until I used Pheromones to increase her ability to handle my Girth. With Adaptability, I could now shove my whole length into her mouth in this strange angle, and revel in the sight of her nose pressed against my abdomen. She'd never been able to handle my whole length, and I'd already increased the size once since last we'd had sex. I still triggered her gag reflex, but she was able to push past it and stare up into my eyes.

She radiated desperate lust. I had her get on top of me next, and I took over opening her backside while I licked at her. Meanwhile, she engulfed my shaft and forced herself down the final inch. With her thighs in my hands, I could feel her quivering the whole time, on the edge of an orgasm that had started the moment I laid my hands on her.

I spent the Tokens just as I thrust my tongue up in one hole and my fingers into the other. She came instantly, and hard, squashing my nose and putting her full weight down onto me. Some thirty seconds of spasming continued, until finally she fell to her side on my bed, gasping.

"You want me in your ass, don't you?"

She nodded.

"You have to say it."

"Please," she whispered.

"Not good enough."

"Please… put your cock… in my ass."

She was begging me now, her tone plaintive. This was the Bard, the negotiations expert, with one leg draped over my shoulder and ready to take my cock in her back door. I watched as my shaft disappeared, slow thrust by slow thrust, again and again, deeper and deeper.

We switched up positions several times over the next hour: on her feet with her hands flat against the wall, on her knees on the bed, one leg extended up the length of my body, and me lying on the bed while she slammed her ass down onto me again and again.

"Have you been a good girl?" I asked.

She nodded slowly, mouth hanging slack. Magically induced orgasms had become her whole world. She'd watched in fascination while I played with her clit, resting herself on my knees, and she'd gasp as I got up on my elbows to get my enhanced tongue around her nipples.

This was the most gorgeous girl I'd ever laid eyes on orgasming before I'd even bottomed out in her bottom. This was Cinzy chain-climaxing one after another, just from me slowly sawing in and out of her, while pressing one thumb against her clit to drive her out of her mind. Long minutes this went on, until she couldn't cry out any more and showed me a face contorted in pleasure, and wonder. Gorgeous crystal blue eyes stared up at me in the waning light of the sun like I was someone special, and I tried to be that person. Her mouth hung open while her entire body rocked with each thrust.

She tried squeezing me dry, but my Stave Off coupled with my Durability held me back from filling her ass.

"I love this," I breathed. Her legs were wrapped around me. "I love being buried deep in your ass. You're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen in my life—"

She groaned and shuddered.

"—and I can't believe I get to have you in my bed. Every time I feel like the luckiest man alive."

"Oh my God," she breathed again and again, to the rhythm of my deep thrusting. "Oh my God."

"Nobody from my life would believe me if I told them," I said. "They'd have to watch me sink down deep into your ass to believe it."

Her arms gave out and she sank slowly down onto my bed, face first, before I lowered her flat and continued sawing in and out.

"Fletcher…" she said, but couldn't manage anything else. For long moments she fingered her own clit and came, and came. I felt like we were on the brink of a love confession, but it never came. Still, something told me we were right there.

These facts drove me to heights of pleasure I didn't think were

possible. I held off, only thanks to my enhanced Durability stat, with Stave Off. I folded her in half and held her ankle next to her ear, kissing her, feeling my own orgasm looming.

"Now," I told her quietly. "Tell me."

"Huh?"

"Tell me where you want me to cum."

When she couldn't, I growled and slowed down the speed of my slow, deep thrusts. It was glacial now.

"Tell me."

She whined, high in her throat, and shook her head.

"Tell me, Cinzy," I whispered, "or we don't do this anymore."

"Inside," she finally said.

"Inside… where?"

"Up, up my ass. Cum in my ass," she whispered. The mixture of lust warring with dread over saying those words aloud really stirred up a dark part of me.

This is Christopher grinning and giving her what she asked for.



Chapter 21- My Glorious Butt

By that time, Drat announced he'd found yet another piece.

"You've got to see this," he said, and almost had an inflection in his tone.

He led us to a small brick building, where he pulled on a wrought iron fire poker. What followed was straight out of a movie: a circular section of the floor began to slide down and form into a spiral staircase, complete with spooky light drifting up from below.

"I assume you didn't enter?" I asked.

"No way. Need a Guardian, or a cognitively challenged and foolhardy Healer."

I frowned at him, then grinned. "Good news, since I'm both."

The staircase was cramped, for a smaller creature, but manageable if you didn't mind a bit of lower back pain. It opened out into a low tunnel that didn't just head in one direction. It was like Glumpdumpkin had a sewer system. The walls were brick, for a little while, until they were sculpted earth down one direction, and became bubble material in the other direction. Small sconces lit the way.

"I guess we're going dungeon delving," I told him.

Back in camp, we discussed the situation with the team.

"I know I've been asking you all to level up Divine Resistance when you can. I also know that I don't get skill points at every level up—" I was willing to bet Drat got skill points at every level up. "And you don't have my Healer's Resistance special ability. We need to go through your current levels anyway, because this is not a one or two person job."

All of them had Divine Resistance at level 3 or 4. The Guardians, save Larelle, had only 3 levels because they'd only gained that many levels since the order came down. Trent had it at level 6, like me,

since he had been working his stone sorcery all day, every day. He had, in fact, made the level 25 jump, and become a Journeyman.

He didn't share what kind of rewards that entailed, because that was who Drat was. Now more than ever I wanted to take him by the shoulders and shake the crap of out him so I could get information on my own upcoming Journeyman ascension.

I was on the cusp, and I could just about taste the rewards. I'd been promised… something. Everyone was real cagey on the details because they didn't want to spoil the excitement.

"Here's the deal," I said, "I can lend you Healer's Resistance now. It will delay the onset of divinity poisoning by 90%, and it only costs an Ingenuity Token… from you."

Hushed conversation started up at this.

"Meaning we can all go in together, and we can all take care of this." The plan was to head down into the secret passage tunnel in pairs, and map out the place. Obviously Drat was the most important mission member, since he had bonuses to spotting secrets. Next came Trent, who could search inside the stone using his Sorcery abilities and Nakamamon bond mate Garnet. The rest of us would just keep our eyes peeled, including supernaturally the sharp vision abilities of the Rangers, and slowly build out a map of the underground maze we'd uncovered. Alan was out of commission presently, and we'd have to without his many and varied utility powers.

For the first time in days and days, the chugging machine of work felt charged with a new enthusiasm. This was like an adventure!

Shakindria was the pivot point, around which all events would rotate, since she could move our god pieces into position and none of the rest of us could. Drat wanted to go alone, because of course he did. I tried pairing up a Guardian with a non-combat person, so Ivy went with Cinzy, Isabelle with myself, Shakindria with Larelle, and Trent with Chrysta. Regina and Tara had their Nakamamon companions and had both combat abilities and enhanced senses, but Regina would take Vellenia.

One curious absence was Fairy Poppins. She remained at the camp, or so Cinzy said. I still worried about her, and the weird situation we now had. Fairy Poppins was a problem, but she was also a problem for another day.

I'd never watched **Healer's Resistance** activate before. But each time I pressed Yes and the recipient spent their Ingenuity Token, I watched as an orange glow built in a circle at their feet, then reached light tendrils up in a helix pattern, until it made a sort of striped column. The glow built, and then exploded outwards in a silent shower of orangey sparks. After that, they had a sigil overtop their heads, a complicated Mandela of flower petals and leaves in a circle. It rotated and threw off tiny orange sparks as it went. Smiles lit up the room as much as the glowing halos of flowers and leaves.

"This is a new thing?" Tara asked.

"Brand new. Level 24, babeeeee!" I told her, and earned myself a high five from a giggling Tara.

The hunt began. We headed down into the dimly lit tunnels. For the first fifty feet or so, half the pack traveled together. We were scattering differently colored pebbles that Trent was fusing into the floor, into arrows indicating the exit. Once we branched off, we'd have to scatter our own pebbles.

I stuck with Isabelle, and carried a lantern with a glowing crystal in it. This was enchanted by Jacoby's Wizard attached to our camp, Wayne. It was a small help in return for patching up their people and going out on patrol with them, but I didn't bother complaining. All was well. We were about to make some serious progress.

The tunnels changed composition frequently. We were passing through tunnels that looked like mine shafts, supported by thick wooden beams, and we had to figure out a situation to cross a ten foot patch of jagged crystal. Beyond, the tunnel transformed again into barrel vaulted stone, like you'd see in a thousand year old European monastery. Isabelle generated her shield on the floor and with me on it, pushed the glowing blue magic shield into the center of the patch of hallway. Afterwards, she leapt onto the shield, scooted past me, and leapt the rest of the way. I did as well, trying

to jump and duck at the same time like she had, so as not to brain myself on a crystal stalactite. Behind us, the shield vanished into blue motes of magic.

"You know," she said after a time, "you could have picked anyone to pair with. Why me?"

"Oh, that's easy," I told her, "I wanted to stay on task and not have my eyes on my partner's butt the whole time. Which is not to say your butt is less desirable to look at than any of the others—"

"Aside from Cinzy or Tara."

"—aside from Cinzy or Tara," I said, then scrunched my face in confusion. "Wait…"

She laughed. "I can be attracted to anyone I want," she said. "Oh my God, don't tell Ivy I said that. She'll freak out if she thinks I'm going to hit on the others. I'm not." I promised I wouldn't tell, while grinning internally. Isabelle's habit of blurting things she shouldn't say was both cute and endearing. "You don't have to worry about me turning all your sex friends into lesbians," she said. "That's not how it works."

"Fair." I hadn't been concerned about that in the slightest, and still wasn't. I wasn't about to burst Isabelle's bubble though. She seemed confident she could get any of the others to play for the other team, and I wasn't about to crush her spirit.

"And that doesn't mean I run off and have sex with everyone and anyone at any time."

I looked at her, and again she burst out laughing.

"You're making me sound like a sludge," I said.

"I mean if the foo shits," she said.

"Ouch."

"Is that why you've been in the lead position?" she asked, smirking. "Don't want to be tempted to look at my glorious bisexual butt?" She turned and wiggled it at me.

"Is that why you wore the full uniform down here?" I asked, "so you wouldn't have someone looking at your glorious bisexual butt?"

“That’s correct.”

She was so danged cute. I was glad she’d found happiness in Ivy, who truly did dote on her whenever they weren’t working.

“Don’t look now,” she said, “but I think we’ve found another divine artifact.”

Like the other Guardians, Isabelle had a number of different powers specifically for guarding her charge from danger. With a team member nearby, she had a danger sense, which triggered when the danger came close enough.

We couldn’t see the thing, but it was close enough to ping her danger sense. I couldn’t be sure if we were talking some kind of pressure plate and trap situation, but I doubted it.

The tunnel here had been used as a cellar. A number of crates, scraps of tarpaulin, and other miscellaneous items lay around all over. We soon had a pickaxe uncovered, which glowed slightly with divinity in the dim gloom.

“Wow,” I breathed. “That was easy.”

In total, the team uncovered another sixteen divine items throughout the next six hours. We all took a breather outside of town, where we wouldn’t contract divinity poisoning, and updated the map. That meant retiring to Trent’s house.

Trent had really gone all out with his house. He’d been the interior decorator and exterior decorator for all our houses as well, giving me the lab space I needed, a nice sized bedroom, and a working shower with hot water. I couldn’t have asked for more… was what I would have said until I saw Trent’s house. Or what we thought of as Trent’s house before he revealed its true form.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” I said, and laughed. He’d removed the top bits and showed us the real thing.

First, it was recessed. It didn’t look any bigger on the outside than our houses, but it went out and down. You could walk down stairs, or take an actual slide. Sculpted out of pure stone with magic, it was the smoothest slide I’d ever traveled. It let out into a large chamber that led into other rooms. He had a sauna and a spa,

complete with jets.

But in the center of a large meeting room with a wraparound couch, sat the map. This wouldn't work for our purposes anymore, not exactly…

He grinned. "Watch this," he said, and made a motion with his hands. The whole map was sliced in two, and rose up on several pillars of stone so the v-shaped subterranean section could be accessed. The secret room's entrance was one such pillar of stone.

Using the sketches we'd made into a piece of clay, he began hollowing out the chambers and passages roughly.

Soon he had the subterranean passageways and cellars and basements with or without hidden passageways to crawlspaces or tunnels. I was blown away by the quickness and detail, but mostly by his ability to take messy scrawls and notes on crap clay tablets and turn them into a functional 3D map.

"Incredible," I breathed. I didn't think it was my imagination that some of the strain and weariness fell away from Trent's face at the words. When Cinzy patted him on the shoulder and used an ability, he perked up much more visibly.

Finally he took a handful of fist sized rocks, concentrated, and morphed them into chips of crystal. After that, more mana flooded out of him and he transformed the chips into tiny versions of the tools we found. These floated down and went on to rest in the underground passages and hiding places where we'd discovered them.

This is Christopher's team being fracking awesome and making some headway.



Chapter 22- It’s Happening

The ‘objects’ in question were all tools, as it turned out. We’d found the awl, the adze, and the pickaxe, and in transporting them, I had created a magical mallet. The search turned up a shovel, a belaying pin used to anchor sailors to the ship’s lines so they didn’t fall to their deaths, a screwdriver, a hammer, an adjustable wrench, a cake server, a flat metal slidey thing used to grab large trays out of huge, deep ovens—which is called a peel if you can believe it— and more. We’d found stonemason’s tools, like the chisel, woodworker’s tools, like a hand-cranked drill, leatherworking tools like a super thick needle… shears for sheep, bellows for stoking the smith’s fire, and a whole host of blacksmithing tools.

And then there was the anvil. This thing must’ve been easily two hundred pounds or more. Hopefully it wasn’t going to be a problem.

Initial tests showed that the Guardian magic shield could not, in fact, be used to scoop up and toss divine objects like we’d hoped. Well, they could be used once and threatened immediate divinity poisoning. Isabelle went right over to scold Ivy for moving the shovel about ten feet and nearly passing out from the effort.

It fell to Shakindria and I to handle the situation.

Shakindria reminded me telepathically that underground, we wouldn’t need to catch them. Still, it felt disrespectful to scoop them up with telekinesis and huck them down the hallway. She sighed and assented, but I could tell she was pleased I wanted to keep us together rather than separate us. My job would be to stand there, look pretty, give her access to **Healer’s Resistance**, and feed her a series of potions to help recover her stamina.

And also slowly work myself into a lather considering how to help her escape the confines of the city. She had been so good to me and my team, and it felt like a betrayal to just leave her here.

Barring the gnawing guilt, working like this meant at least a week of slowly transporting objects down halls. And since I'd set out four day workweeks with two days in between, it was going to be quite some time at the task.

"Unless…" Cinzy said. All eyes turned to her, which of course she liked. That attention-grabbing was her style of doing things, and the self-satisfied smile that appeared confirmed it. "We've been doing Jacoby's team a lot of favors lately, and I think we could call in one of those favors."

I doubted it.

"What did you have in mind?"

"They have a number of Wizards, and those Wizards should have a short-distance teleport spell. Working together, you could toss those items directly to the surface, to a predetermined spot. You treated all the drunken inhabitants, right? We shouldn't have any free roamers."

Not only had we done that, but we'd been working on setting up the twelve workaholic craftspeople in their own shops outside of town. We weren't yet fully ready for all of them, because Trent was only one man, but once he had workshops ready, we'd make sure there were no more free-roaming wakeful townsfolk at all. They'd all be comatose after that.

There were still the tireless maniac workers, but they kept to certain paths. These we could avoid.

Cinzy finished up her amazing plan. "If we finish taking the craftspeople out of town, there will be nobody to accidentally trip or bash into with killer divine objects."

"If you can do that, I wouldn't mind Shakindria tossing them," I said.

"We'll powwow on how to make the negotiations fruitful," Cinzy promised with a wink and smile. I definitely saw a knowing smile cross Regina's face, and she elbowed Tara before whispering something in her ear.

While I was glad Cinzy was feeling better after our little session

the other night, I wasn't thrilled at the prospect of Drat, Alan or Trent figuring out how much action I was getting. I knew Trent had a Nakamamon he was seeing in town, while Alan mostly just convalesced with the help of some Nakamamon from the refugee camp—

Wait, were they both getting their freak on and I didn't know about it? I mentally dismissed Drat as impossible to know, since secrets were his whole thing and this wasn't mission related. I'd never know with Drat and I was coming to terms with that.

We were eventually forced to have this meeting on the very outskirts of town, where the influence of the god faded and Shakindria could be within earshot. Her magical bounds were not so inconvenient logistically, but all of us felt pretty terrible that she was trapped like this. Still, she bore it with a stoicism I probably couldn't have mustered.

"Okay," I said, after briefing Shakindria on the plan. "That's plan A. If we can't get a Wizard to help teleport all these tools into one place, it's plan B. Shakindria and I will take them one by one. It would be one or two tools a day, so anywhere from two workweeks to four. Down through the subterranean tunnels to the secret stairway—"

"Up the secret stairway will take some fancy handling," Shakindria added. "That will add time to our task."

"That's way too long," Tara complained.

"We have been here for roughly five hundred years," Trent said.

"Yeah, well, we haven't even talked about the anvil," Drat said, face impassive and hands jammed in his pockets. "I have this crazy feeling this one," he pointed at Shakindria with one thumb, "is going to be able to lift that, let alone throw it."

She had, in fact, lifted the two of us up in the air so we could have strange and unique sex, but I didn't feel like spilling that kind of tea at this moment, with the entire team present and listening.

"I know things are taking a long time," I told them. "Jacoby's team and Archie's situation have added complications to that.

However, I want you to think of this town as a single patient with a long-term ailment. We've all been trying to make them comfortable for a long time, while we run some tests and find out the best way to go about treating our patient. The key word here is patient, okay? In both senses of the word. I know magic seems like a shortcut to getting anything we want whenever we want it, but that's not how healing works in this world, or back on earth. Slow and steady wins the race."

They couldn't argue with my logic, but they still didn't love being stuck here for weeks on end with progress inching forward. Finding all these tools had been a serious morale builder, but it also made them antsy to be done with the task at hand.

"Fletcher's right," Cinzy said, and she must've used an ability on us at that point, because the only thing I remembered coming after that was the general feeling that *Wow, she was so inspiring!* And *I'm so glad to have the amazing super genius and sexy, magnificent Bard Cinzy on my team.*

It turned out she'd overcome my social resistances using **Stalwart** and **Fierce**. Oof, I hadn't been the only one leveling.

"All right," I said. In the unlikely event we couldn't pry the anvil out of the floor down here, we'd just make it the meeting point."

When the team worked together, we'd accomplished an absolute ton in a very short time. For now, Cinzy had convinced all of us we'd done an amazing job and we could expect more amazing progress soon.

It was time to go to work.

***

Although we were getting the bucket line started at dawn, the girls and I were up in the dead hours before dawn, collecting up and replanting more blue crocuses, more Grandfather's Beard, and more morning dewdrop.

Morning dewdrops get their name from the way the flower looks: hanging straight down on a bent stalk, the flower faces the ground.

The petals are raindrop—or dewdrop—shaped, along with the leaves.

We collected hundreds of these, and I set Vellenia to the task of drying out the Grandfather's Beard while we got the water boiling for the distilled blue crocuses we already had from the night before. We also started up another batch. Vellenia could handle the stirring and the mana addition even though she wasn't a Healer, because of the bond.

Now, I'd gained aspect resistances. Vellenia couldn't hurt me or affect me with her aspect-based elemental powers, and I had considerable resistances to those aspects from other Nakamamon. I also gained a power from both of her aspects.

She, in turn, gained abilities from me.

Healer's Assistant: You may add mana into a Treatment or Cure that your bond mate has worked on. You gain 3 levels in the appropriate skills to do so when assisting your bond mate with healing.

Apothecary: You gain xp to your species or class for assisting your bond mate in Healer-related tasks.

Pleasure's Bounty: Each time you engage with your bond mate sexually, you gain experience points to your species or class. The amount gained is based upon your relationship level with your bond mate.

O Face: each orgasm you or your bond mate achieve while engaging with your bond mate grants additional Relationship points. Each one grants an increasing chance of regaining a lost Token. Once a Token is regained, the chance reverts back to zero.

I had a feeling that the abilities were more watered down they could be, since I had two classes. The Healer powers could've been stronger, had I only the one class. I didn't dislike the Pleasure Seeker abilities, far from, but I did wish they had a better Healer ability for times like this when I needed a whole lot in a very short amount of time.

It would have to do. My beautiful assistant got to work adding mana to the blue crocuses in order to distill them for what came next.

By the time people started rousing and eating a hastily prepared breakfast, we had the first punch bowl full of the finalized treatment ready.

Treatment check (Potions): *You have the Treatment (Potions) skill at level 4, Develop Cure (medium) at level 4 , while Ingenuity is at level 9. Other applicable skills are unranked. This check is Extreme, requiring 10 successes. Would you like to spend 5 Tokens* for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 4 Ingenuity and 7 Free Tokens.

Note: This check falls under the ***Hard At Work*** *special ability.*

I tried to go it alone with my 17 levels, and ended up with an incredible 7 successes… which was sadly still not enough. Still, I'd neared a 50% success rate, which was practically unheard of.

So I took the free retry from **Hard At Work** and spent the 5 Tokens. This blasted through the remainder of my Ingenuity Tokens and one of my Free ones, so I was once again silently thankful for almost killing myself on that first day in this new world.

Success! *You have crafted a magical treatment for a mental ailment!*

"That's right," I told the system.

We had several hundred people working for us, but that number was about to skyrocket. All I had to do was, for almost half an hour, allow the Nakamamon who were assisting to grab the use of **Healer's Resistance** by spending their own Ingenuity Tokens. After all, I didn't have any left. It was one flare of orange energy coalescing into a leafy flower pattern over the head after another, after another.

My team, who all had Divine Resistance, would be roving up and down the line to make sure everyone stayed under the aegis of

Healer's Resistance. The Guardians had their own special abilities for taking some of that on themselves, which they would do if necessary. The plan was for them to take the burden onto themselves, sprint out of town, and get a spoonful of my treatment.

"Okay people!" Cinzy called. "You were given your assignments yesterday! If you feel the effects wearing off, tell your team leader and get out of town as fast as you can. No one drops unconscious today, okay?"

The moment the last person got their dose of **Healer's Resistance** with complementary cool orange halo of floral incandescence, I leveled up.

"That's what I'm talking about!" I called, grinning at the congratulations message. *You have reached level 24 in your Healer class!*

Level 24: +4 skill points

I immediately threw a skill point into Potions, one into Medium, one into Large, and then the last… that one would need to go into Develop Cure.

That still didn't put me over the edge into level 25, which was something I now needed. A punch bowl's worth of potion would handle healing up a good number of folks, perhaps 500 if we rationed the cure a bit. We could use one of the metal straws like a pipette, clamping a finger over the end in order to get a bit from leaking out. Antigravity at its finest. Vellenia had been blown away when I showed her this trick.

Vellenia and Alan were in charge of administering the cure, since Alan had gone and gotten himself divinity poisoned. They raced to open the mouths of all these weird creatures being brought to them, get the straw in there, dump the potion, and clamp their mouths shut so they could swallow it.

Fifteen seconds per patient had been a pipe dream. Crafting a potion enough for thousands of patients had been just as insanely ambitious. This wasn't going to work…

Cinzy was in charge of using their Bard abilities to get batches of people un-confused and over to me where they could get **Healer's Resistance**.

They loudly called out the situation: they had just been awoken through the efforts of a dedicated Healer; see that guy over there? He's the Healer in question. Once you interview with Alan about your stats, you need to get **Healer's Resistance** from that very same Healer, head into town to join the bucket line, and hand your fellow townsfolk down the line until they got here, just like you. If your Durability or Ingenuity was only level 1, you should stick around here.

The people came to me while I was in the middle of getting together the second batch of potion, spending their own Ingenuity Tokens and head into town.

It wasn't happening fast enough. I didn't have enough mana. I couldn't divide my concentration well enough between consenting to give these people my ability and threading my mana down into the potion. It was a conveyor belt and it was speeding up.

What I hadn't counted on was the acceleration.

The whole process began to speed up as more and more people awoke from their comatose state. Cinzy got them up and out of their stupor, Alan got them processed and sent them off to where they needed to go, and pretty soon where some of them needed to go was right back to Cinzy and Alan, in order to process incoming patients. Vellenia came over and stirred the potion while I gave everyone **Healer's Resistance**, over and over and over again. Dozens turned into hundreds, until the Potions check came once again. When that happened, I dashed from the **Verdant Rejuvenation** garden to where Vellenia was finishing up her task of adding mana.

Treatment check (Potions): *You have the Treatment (Potions) skill at level 4, Develop Cure (medium) at level 4 , while Ingenuity is at level 9…*

I tried, and once again failed, to whip up the gigantic batch of potion just with skill alone. I had only 6 Free Tokens left, and that would take care of this batch…

Success! *You have crafted a magical treatment for a mental ailment!*

I breathed out a hefty sigh. Using my abilities hundreds of times wasn't as taxing as simply pressing **Yes** hundreds of times in the UI while also trying to channel mana. Now I no longer had any Tokens to make the next… four batches.

I kept right on pressing **Yes** mentally. I had already pressed it some two or three hundred times, but that meant we weren't even a quarter of the way done. Exhaustion was already threatening and it wasn't even ten o'clock in the morning…

I was able to slog through another several hundred more Yes's to grant people the use of my ability before I suddenly froze.

Congratulations! *You have reached level 25 in Healer.*

You have graduated from Apprentice to Journeyman!

"Guys…" I muttered. No one heard me. It didn't matter. "It's happening…"

This is Christopher muttering to himself.



Chapter 23- High Five To The Face

By now me administering **Healer's Resistance** to townsfolk and refugees was just reflex. Just press Yes, Yes, Yes over and over again. The day was creeping on, and the entire area outside the town was abuzz with activity. We had some folks helping to tend and harvest plants from my magical garden, some folks tending to those who had just received their treatment, another few teams of people giving them interviews with little clipboards Alan had gotten from gods knew where. Those ones were acting as little Sorting Hats.

And the vast majority they sent along to the Bucket Line. Some remained inside the town, because they had a decent Durability, while others needed to remain outside. The Bucket Line continually passed comatose subjects out of town and right to the administration zone where they could be roused out of sleep, comforted, quizzed, sorted, and join the workforce.

You did it! Give yourself a high five, but not on the face.

Could you not for like five minutes?

Someone's being even more of a wet blanket than usual. It's cause for celebration!

There is so much *to get through. I would prefer it if we could avoid this inane kerfuffle each and every time a window is opened.*

Have it your way…

Ahem, where was I? Oh yes… Reaching level 25 is a significant milestone in the journey of each and every adventurer. You have stood tall in the face of sickness and then stooped low over your cauldron to craft many a potion, salve, unguent, elixir and tincture. You have burned the midnight oil in search of the difficult answers, fought off exhaustion to diagnose the problems, and carefully

crafted cures over the course of hours and hours. You have discovered that healing is as much an art form as it is a science.

As such, you may evolve your job class from Healer. Though your base class of Healer will still be visible to others, you and you alone will know your real, actual, verifiable, true—

GET. ON. WITH. IT.

Please choose amongst the following class evolutions:

**Reclusive Herbalist*

**Apothecary of Nightshade & Toadstool*

**Battle Medic*

**Cleric of the Divine*

**Godsbane*

**Arcane Mender*

"Um… what?" Unconsciously, I pressed **Yes** each time someone came to see me regarding **Healer's Resistance**. I then cursed each and everyone who had ever thought or uttered the words 'it's more fun to find out' when it came to this kind of thing.

Instead I opened up the first option, Reclusive Herbalist.

As part of your travels, you have learned that people are the worst, and silence is valued higher than gold. The Reclusive Herbalist knows that his patients will seek him out, and not be too chatty when he uses his powerful healing magic on them.

You have reached level 25 in your class, meaning you have traveled far, healed many, and learned the secrets of the healing arts. The Reclusive Herbalist gains advanced healing skill progression, advanced special abilities and bonuses when acting alone.

Note: some class abilities will be overwritten if you select this class.

That sounded… terrible. There was no way I was going to forego being part of an awesome team, which I was. I clicked on the next one, Apothecary of Nightshade & Toadstool.

Plants are not simply made for eating and healing. In fact, many of the plants and animals of every world defend themselves with poisons, venoms, and toxins of many sorts. The Apothecary of Nightshade & Toadstool knows this fact intimately.

You have reached level 25 in your class. You also have advanced knowledge of plants and flowers, both beneficial and harmful. This knowledge allows you to craft poisons with which to lay low your enemies.

The Apothecary of Nightshade & Toadstool gains knowledge of how to brew poisons in addition to typical remedies, treatments and cures. They also gain advanced skill progression and bonuses when healing or poisoning their patients.

Note: some class abilities will be overwritten if you select this class. New skills will be made available.

"Great googly moogily," I muttered. Just what in the hecky Becky had I stumbled onto here? I clicked **Yes** a handful more times for **Healer's Resistance**, and ignored the bright flash of orange light surrounding more and more people as the ability took hold. Shaking my head once more at the thought of a poisoner class, I proceeded to click on Battle Medic. If this was just as terrible as the first two, maybe I would just stay Healer and be level 25 forever.

The Battle Medic is part of an elite fighting unit that requires some on-the-fly remedies. Poisoned in the heat of battle? Party members turned to stone? The Battle Medic has you covered.

You have reached level 25 in your class. You have been made the leader of a team, and helped others to gain more than 50 total levels. You have been in combat, and have a physical damage resistance of at least 10%.

The Battle Medic gains select combat abilities, select leadership abilities, instantaneous healing abilities, and an advanced skill progression.

Note: some class abilities will be overwritten if you select this class. New skills will be made available.

Now this… this didn't look terrible. Luckily all three of these new classes listed something called an advanced skill progression. They also seemed to be listing more and more impressive prerequisites that I'd accomplished since beginning my tenure as a Healer. Battle Medic didn't seem as bad as the first two, given that there were instantaneous remedies like an enhanced Healer's Breath I could look forward to. That said, I hadn't raised my hand to anyone in this world and wasn't about to start. Combat abilities would be wasted on me.

Cleric of the Divine was next on the list.

This world, as you well know, has more than its fair share of gods and divine beings. The Cleric of the Divine knows that this holy energy can be harnessed to far greater feats of healing than using mere herbs and plants. Simply turn your face up and fold your hands in prayer, and healing will come unto those you ask. And woe be unto your enemies, lest you pray for your god to smite them down.

You have reached level 25 in your class. You have healed more than 10 gods. You have prayed to a god.

The Cleric of the Divine gains selects a god from which to derive power and gains divine miracles per day based on level. This includes instantaneous healing abilities, blessings, and other gifts based on your god of choice.

Note: some class abilities and skills will be overwritten if you select this class. New skills will be made available.

This seemed, on its face, like a step down. Sure holy smiting abilities sounded nice, but so many gods were on the fritz in this world… what if that happened with my 'chosen' god? It seemed from the write up that my regular herb-based healing abilities would be lost and replaced with holy stuff.

On top of that, no advanced skill progression here, making this an automatic no.

No, no thank you.

While clicking **Yes** to grant people my ability (which existed for

now and who knew how long thereafter), I looked at the last two options: Godsbane and Arcane Mender.

Yikes to the first.

The gods don't deserve such power. What they need, instead, is a righteous avatar of their destruction, to seek them out and put them out of their misery for good. No more poisoning the land with their sickened and corrupted touch. You, Godsbane, are an instrument of their annihilation.

You have reached level 25 in your class. You have survived divinity poisoning from at least 3 gods. You have the Divine Resistance skill higher than level 5. You have healed more than 100 creatures that have suffered from divine influence.

Godsbane has powers strictly limited to identifying, nullifying, resisting, and purifying divine influence over this world. You gain xp when tracking, hunting, and destroying the gods.

Note: your class abilities and skills will be overwritten if you select this class. New skills will be made available.

"Nope!" I said, causing several townsfolk to flinch. "Not you. You're okay. I'll give you Healer's Resistance."

I sighed. So far, the only one that seemed remotely good was Battle Medic… the rest had awful restrictions, and the last one was a hundred percent the opposite what I wanted to do with my life here.

I mean sure, I could understand why someone might want to seize the godslayer blade and run around killing gods until Thor showed up to stop them in a situation that was way too dark to be funny but also far too light in tone. The gods were indeed on the fritz, and they had indeed killed people. Other Healers if you believed what the admin superiors told me. But I didn't think that killing them was the answer, when I'd already had success healing them.

After taking a deep breath, I clicked on Arcane Mender.

Healing is a science. Magic alters science in select, limited, and

impactful ways. Therefore magic can assist healing in select, limited, and impactful ways. Whether this is speeding up the process of knitting flesh, increasing the body's ability to fight infection, or other ways, magic is one tool a healer has at his disposal to bolster the science of healing.

You have reached level 25 in your class. You have created at least one salve, potion, elixir, unguent and tincture. You have healed Mental, Magical, Spiritual and Physical ailments. You have treated patients of at least 8 different aspects. You have treated humans, Nakamamon, and gods.

The Arcane Mender has a rapidly accelerated skill progression, as well as a boosted mana pool for utilizing arcane magic more fully in pursuit of healing.

Note: some class abilities will be overwritten if you select this class. New skills will be made available.

I breathed out a hefty sigh of relief.

With just the sun on my face and a near limitless progression of people ready to spend Ingenuity Tokens so they could have some time in the town they called home, I basked in the feeling of finally having progressed to my new class evolution.

Arcane Mender Christopher Fletcher. It just rolled off the tongue, if for instance you first vomited all the words into your mouth. And now, without further ado…

I pressed **Yes** another fifty times to let people join the bucket line. Then I watched as the bucket line passed more and more and more Nakamamon from the town of Glumpdumpkin out of the town limits. It was lovely to see the unconscious lumps lovingly passed from one person to another, having been placed on stretchers Larelle had cobbled together. They floated into our cure distribution area, where the weak ones without much Durability and Ingenuity learned how to distribute the cures to the sleeping, and worked in pairs to make sure the comatose patients didn't choke on the micro dose of potion… that we were running out of. Some helped the patients to stir, helped get them processed, some of them even helped in my

herb garden under Vellenia's direction.

I couldn't think about that now. I needed instead to see Cinzy, our Bard comforting the newly awakened and telling them all was well, that we were awakening the whole town for purposes of ending this whole situation once and for all. All they had to do was see Alan over there, the stuttering one with the clipboard and the stylus. Several other Alans now existed, each with their own clipboards and styluses, marking down on soft clay where they were sending people.

From there, they'd list out their Ingenuity and Durability, and either head off to join the line to see me for **Healer's Resistance**, or the team leads around us for various and sundry other tasks. Pulling and drying herbs from my garden, joining the out-of-town-limits bucket line, joining the potion distribution teams, and more.

We had already begun ramping up the speed of production, meaning Cinzy was no longer the bottleneck… I was.

I needed to get through the class evolution stuff fast, and start spending my Tokens on the remaining gigantic punch bowls filled with potions we needed to keep this train a-running.

Level 25: You have gained the following:

+20 skill points.

An increase of HP per level.

A large increase of MP per level.

The following are now class skills: Mana Affinity, Meditation, Spellcasting (Abjuration), Spellcasting (Transmutation), Spellcasting (Evocation), Spellcasting (Conjuration), Mana Shaping, Instinctual Casting.

Diagnosis skills have been combined into a single skill renamed Diagnostics. An average of your skill levels has been used.

Treatment skills have been combined into a single skill renamed Treatments. An average of your skill levels has been used.

***Verdant Regeneration** advances.*

***Healer's Resistance** advances.*

Healer's Endurance *has been replaced by* ***Mender's Focus.***
Healer's Breath *has been replaced by* ***Mending Aura****.*
Hard at Work *has been replaced by* ***Arcane Alchemy****.*
Arcane Alchemy *advances.*
Mender's Focus *advances.*
Mending Aura *advances.*

I'd been almost all the way through these, salivating at all the wonders they were going to give me, and how I planned on spending my skill points. No more individual skill points going into salves or tinctures or unguents! No more individual skill points needed for magical diagnostics or physical! I was practically rubbing my hands together, in my mind at least.

But then **Hard At Work** had disappeared.

"Oh no," I breathed.

My first and most consistent ally, the sole reason I'd been able to handle such high level challenges, diagnose and then heal up gods when I was just an Apprentice Healer. Doubling my Tokens was insanely powerful, I had realized. I counted on it to be my bedrock in the days to come, when I'd need to handle this God of Productivity. Had taken it for granted, apparently. Now it was gone.

I rushed mentally to where the new ability was written down.

Arcane Alchemy II

(Special Ability, Uncommon, passive)

I- Any time you undertake a class-related check, you may exchange Tokens at a rate of 1:1 from one attribute to another. You may exchange a number of Tokens equal to this ability's rank (presently rank 2).

II- Up to three times per day, you may instead exchanged Tokens at a rate of 1:2.

I smacked myself mentally for doing this now. I had grown to love the doubling of Tokens from **Hard at Work**, and the free retry. This was… probably great, when I sat down to think about it.

Turning one Token into two was really good…

…and I could do that for 2 Tokens at a time. Meaning I could take 2 Durability Tokens and turn them into 4 Ingenuity Tokens. It said from one attribute to another, so that most likely meant Free Tokens were right out.

That was pretty great, three times a day. I'd need to be careful about how I did this.

I gave my consent another dozen times while spending skill points. Twenty was a lot, making me grin. While I had a metric ton of skills and it didn't typically feel like enough, a huge grin spread across my face. I had to be careful; I could raise each skill once per level. With that in mind, I would soon need…

"Diagnosis…" I put one into each of those. Another one into Develop Cure (Large), and then I paused. I needed to know more about the new skills, the spellcasting stuff.

First, some of the spellcasting I knew from my days playing assorted roleplaying games and video games. Abjuration was protection magic, principally for resistances, but there were a handful of circles of protection that stopped someone or something from entering that circle. It might be useful to make a divine protection circle when working near the body of our God of Productivity. Not incredibly useful unless there were poison Nakamamon or fire Nakamamon that needed saving. So… possibly useful.

Conjuration was creating something out of nothing. I already had it on good authority that conjuring materials wasn't as good as having the real thing. Although I needed glycerine and oils as bases for my treatments and cures, they wouldn't work if they were magically conjured, so Conjuration was going to take a backseat, if I bought it at all.

Evocation harnessed the forces of the planet, so that would allow me to create fireballs and lightning bolts and such. Not initially, but once my level got high enough, the classic explosive fireball was possible. That put Evocation into the not necessary pile, as I could

just as easily get some fire going with firewood or a Magmamander.

The last one was Transmutation, or changing one material into another. I knew this could eventually work on living things, but I thought it might work very well for my purposes. Unlike Conjuration, which made a material strictly out of magic, Transmutation took a real thing and made it into a different real thing. I put a point into that one.

Mana Shaping I wasn't entirely sure on, but once I focused on it, the pop up explained (in two different bickering voices) that it was about pulling mana together and threading it into the necessary shape to cast into spells. Like with my treatments and cures, I'd be staking the Spellcasting skill with Mana Shaping in order to cast. That one got a skill point too.

And last was the new skill Instinctual Casting. The write up on this one was long, and explained essentially that casting spells was incredibly complicated, difficult, and wonky for people who had never done it before or didn't have training. But, like Trent's instinctual mastery of stone and his ability to shape it, make it float, soften it up, and so forth, this skill could blunt the limitations of not knowing what I was doing. Each point of Instinctual Casting would be used on spellcasting checks.

"Hm." If I had spellcasting, I wouldn't need to generate treatments and cures in order to use **Arcane Alchemy** to redistribute my Tokens.

When I put a point into Instinctual Casting, a pop up appeared and I didn't swat it away this time, like I had with Transmutation and Mana Shaping. I was glad I did, too.

New skills may be purchased up to level 7, as if you were a starting character.

I pressed **Yes** a whole bunch of times to grant people **Healer's Resistance**, which thankfully had remained my class ability.

Okay, with level 7 being the cap for new skills, I immediately put Instinctual Casting at 7, a single level into each of the Spellcasting

skills, and then a single level into Mana Shaping and Mana Affinity. Meditation I'd already spent a ridiculous amount of time leveling all on its own. Okay, that was 13 points from new skills, 4 from Diagnosis, and 1 for Large Cure Development. Already only 2 left.

"Hmm," I mused. Although the first few weeks I'd kept skill points in reserve until I could see where they needed to go, that was clearly not going to work.

Instead, after furiously pressing Yes for what felt like another fifty times, I put one into Administer Cure, and another into Mana Shaping.

This is Christopher getting a huge boost.



Chapter 24- Arcane Alchemy

There's a curious time-dilation sensation that happens when you're leveling up. I'm sure the two nerds who created the system, whoever they were, worked some kind of magic into these complicated times when a lot is coming at you all at once.

The flow of people out of town had slowed, the flow of people coming to me for doses of my ability had slowed. I cleared out the two dozen requests in a handful of seconds and returned my focus to the task at hand: figuring out all that had changed.

I thought I had most of it pretty well covered, though I was still devastated at the loss of **Hard At Work**. The monsters who created this system were bad, bad people for taking that away. I waggled a mental finger at them in reproach.

Jerks.

I got out of the UI's expansive system, but not before noting that Alan's health was getting dangerously low. Muppin remained comatose in the town, since we didn't have enough people to lift a multiple ton creature out of the affected area. Isabelle had been an absolute trooper for keeping on even despite Muppin being right there for her to see day in and day out. It wasn't easy for her to handle. She deserved an award for pushing through the way she had.

"Whew," I said, and got to work doing the next batch of potions as treatments for the hundreds and hundreds of townsfolk being ferried out of the town.

There's something happening, Shakindria told me mentally. Turning and squinting toward the town, I thought I could see her floating above the bucket line of people. But too many people were passing in front of me, passing me a punch bowl full of distilled blue crocuses for me to tell. They stood watching me as I placed them into the huge cauldron.

What's that? I asked, through my new psychic ability linked directly to her, but I was also beginning to feel it now that I was not so closely focused on the UI.

The 'it' in question was a rising level of ambient divine energy. Hours had passed before I hit level 25, morning giving way to afternoon. The background hum that hit my third eye that I usually ignored had ramped up a level. Normally, that background radiation of divine power was easy to ignore; like the drone of a far off freeway, you don't even think about all the traffic that passes by, until the horns start blaring or all the cars start going by your house at faster speeds. This was like that. The hum was humming along louder now, except it was magical in nature, so we 'heard' it through our Mana Affinity skill and Affinity attribute.

Does this mean it's working? Shakindria asked.

It probably meant that, and I let her know as I went about refilling the potion vat and brewing up the next five hundred or so doses. The potions check came again soon enough, and I was annoyed to discover I hadn't leveled up my skill in Potions or Medium cures at all.

Treatment check: *You have the Treatments skill at level 5, Develop Cure (medium) at level 4 , while Ingenuity is at level 9. Other applicable skills are unranked. This check is Very Difficult, requiring 9 successes. Would you like to spend 9 Tokens for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 9 Ingenuity and 7 Free Tokens.

I despaired that the asterisk and the note that this applied to **Hard At Work** was missing. The number of required Tokens was a whole different animal than before. The saving grace was that hitting level 25 automatically refreshed all my Tokens, so I went from no Ingenuity and a single Free Token to 9 and 7.

On the other hand… the difficulty had dropped by one, and I'd also gained a level of the Treatments skill by making literally hundreds of doses of the same potion. Nice! I had 18 attribute and

skill levels, which still didn't feel like enough, and no more free retry on top of that. On the other hand, I had hit 50% success rate once or twice in the past. Did I chance it? It would cost me a Token to get to the check again.

I decided to go for it. I pressed No, I didn't want to go for the auto success.

You have scored 8 successes, which is a failure. Would you like to spend 1 Token to retry? Y/N

I mentally commanded **Yes**, I would like to retry, as the clock for making the decision raced by and I began to note the slightest hint of a burning smell coming from my vat of confusion treatment potion. This time, I paid the 9 Tokens for the automatic success, and finished off adding the mana required.

Success! *You have crafted a magical treatment for a mental ailment!*

One weak smile and about a hundred mental assents to give people my **Healer's Resistance** later, I had another several punch bowls full of the potion off the fire, poured out and left to cool. Another ten minutes and infinity mental presses of the Yes button later, the strangest thing happened: I leveled up again.

Congratulations! *You have reached level 26.*

"Holy…" I muttered, and looked toward the town. The holy presence was indeed strengthening. I was pretty sure all this concentrated effort by us, by the townsfolk, and by the refugee camp occupants was working. It wasn't done, not even close, but we were making progress.

And I had hit level 26 in less time than it takes to explain that I'd hit level 26, all down to crafting hundreds of doses of potion, and giving out hundreds of instances of **Healer's Resistance**.

Level 26: +10 skill points

Another whistle. The UI hadn't been messing around when it said there'd be a great increase in skill progression. Okay, effective immediately, +1 Develop Cure (Medium), another for Develop Cure (Large) because the God of Productivity was no small fry, and a third one for Treatments.

With 7 more skill points to burn, I placed one into Instinctual Casting, one into Mana Shaping, one into Mana Affinity, and the other four into the other three Develop Cures: Swarm, Small, Huge, and Unique.

My character sheet had been transformed. For now, I just wanted to look over what I'd become as a Healer.

Christopher Fletcher

Healer - Apprentice Arcane Mender 26

Pleasure Seeker - Novice 24

Attributes:

Affinity 7

Durability 6

Ingenuity 9

Likability 7

Physicality 7

Free Tokens 7

Healer (Arcane Mender) Skills:

Diagnostics 5

Treatments 6

Develop cure (swarm 5, small 6, medium 5, large 5, huge 1)

Develop cure (unique) 8

Administer Cure 9

Instinctual Casting 8

Mana Affinity 3

Mana Shaping 3

Spellcasting (Abjuration 1, Conjuration 1, Evocation 1,

Transmutation 1)

Meditation 4

Healer (Arcane Mender) Special Abilities

Arcane Alchemy II

(Special Ability, Uncommon, passive)

I- Any time you undertake a class-related check, you may exchange Tokens at a rate of 1:1 from one Attribute to another. You may exchange a number of Tokens equal to this ability's rank (presently rank 2).

II- Up to three times per day, you may instead exchanged Tokens at a rate of 1:2.

Healer's Resistance IV

(Special Ability, Uncommon, active)

I- You may spend a Durability Token to resist damage from any source. Long term effects are reduced by 90%. Onsets of all diseases, venoms, poisons, or other afflictions are quadrupled, as are intervals. Lasts one day.

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

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

III- Spend 2 Durability Tokens to make yourself immune to a damage source for one day. Does not cover divine damage inflicted by gods.

IV- Spend 5 Durability Tokens to make yourself and all allies within 50 feet immune to a damage source for 10 minutes. Does not cover divine damage inflicted by gods.

Verdant Rejuvenation II

(Special Ability, uncommon, passive)

Herbs and plants harvested by you and stored by you will last twice as long as normal.

I- 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 18 hours.

II- By placing cuttings of plants together in an enclosed space and tending them they will sprout a hybrid plant if they remain within half a mile of your location over the course of 48 hours. Hybrids may not be bred with other hybrids.

Mending Aura II

(Special Ability, Rare, Aura)

Make a Treatment check with Affinity to immediately begin healing all wounded beings within range. Targets are healed by 5 hit points for each success you scored on your check, per second. Symptoms experienced by targets are reduced in intensity by 75% for an hour, per second of exposure to this aura, to a maximum of two days. Targets may only benefit from this aura once per day.

Mender's Focus II

(Special Ability, rare, passive)

Your incredible endurance and attention to your work makes class-related checks easier.

I- All checks that use your class skills have their success rated boosted to a moderate degree.

II- All checks that use your class skills have their difficulties lowered by 1.

The day shaped up to be a bright and beautiful one to be outside. Which was good, because I was outside. Unfortunately I'd been working for the last seven hours without a single break.

Achievement: *Team Player*

You've been involved in a single undertaking involving more than a thousand individuals. That's not nothing!

Reward: +1 skill point

I immediately shoved this into Pheromones, and pressed Yes before I could second guess myself. I was receiving skill points by the bucketful from my new class, and Pleasure Seeker always seemed like it was lagging.

Of the hundreds and hundreds of people who had been awakened by the potion we'd worked up, none were able to boost the resistances of others to get them to walk back into the town of Glumpdumpkin. Where Alan or Cinzy had been the kink in the hose of the whole operation, slowing down the work we needed to do today, now I was that person. Not only was I the best suited to completing the potions—with my lovely assistants Vellenia and almost a dozen others now—but I was the only person who could give **Healer's Resistance** to the masses.

On the other *other* hand, it was working. We were actually serving up more doses of the potion faster than we had anticipated. It had come down to an administrative godsend in Alan and whoever he had chosen. Their team was efficiently sorting and sending off workers to work. Some of them were helping Vellenia harvest. Others were cooking up a hearty lunch and distributing it up and down the line. And mostly, it was that the hale and healthy bodies from town were bringing the townsfolk down out, spreading them out into the potion distribution area, and then the Bard was helping them shake off their initial confusion so Alan could play Sorting Hat.

At some point, Jacoby's team must have returned to town, because Jacoby's ever-smiling Bard Jacoby had joined Cinzy.

The clearest sign that we were doing it was that the divine power in the town was intensifying. The feeling was palpable now.

"How many people?" I called to Alan, even as I granted Healer's Resistance again, and again, and again.

He held up a finger, then made the sign for a zero, then another zero, then another zero. A thousand already. We weren't giving out a dose of potion every fifteen seconds, that was for sure.

I made sure to slurp up some potato soup filled with herbs and

vegetables, which was just what the body needed after hours and hours of potion brewing. Sometimes, when you work incredibly hard and finally eat or drink after a long time, the stuff you put in your body literally coats the inside of your empty stomach, and you can feel that. That happened here, which struck me as very odd, but not unwelcome.

Now what to do for that fourth batch of potion? I had just wasted all my Tokens on a single batch.

No, there was a way to do this. I needed to make a check, then swap around my Tokens to get 4 Ingenuity for the cost of 2 whatever else.

Okay, it was time to make a check. That meant spellcasting.

Glycerine. I had a very limited supply, and had used almost all of it to make a tincture. Well, I'd need some serious equipment in order to distill glycerine out of alcohol, which wasn't easy to make here anyway, since the inhabitants didn't drink spirits either. What I needed to do was essentially turn something into sugar alcohol.

Spellcasting (Transmutation) Knowledge check: *The best way to perform this action is known in the annals of Transmutation lore. You have the Transmutation skill at level 1, and Ingenuity at level 9. This check is Very Difficult, and requires 5 successes. Would you like to spend 5 Tokens for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 1 Ingenuity and 7 Free Tokens.

No! This check was supposed to help me regain my Tokens via **Arcane Alchemy**, not spend even more of them just to know the best way to do this.

I had 10 skill levels and needed 5 successes.

"No," I grumbled, but pressed **Yes** on another two dozen **Healer's Resistance** activations.

Congratulations! *You have succeeded this check.*

"Hang on, what?" I checked the UI, and found that my 10 skill levels had produced the 5 necessary successes. That was not

normal. I should've gotten 3 successes, maybe 4. Well, I wasn't about to look a gift success in the mouth.

A broad smile spread across my face and I pulled the most awesome, dorkiest pose imaginable.

"Booyah!" I cried. Whether people on earth shouted this or not was irrelevant, because I shouted it, like a boss.

It seemed like my other new ability had worked the odds in my favor, taking me from a roughly 33% success rate to a roughly higher success rate. Sure **Hard At Work** might be gone, but now I'd be relying on my skills over my Tokens more.

Cross fingers.

You have succeeded a check related to your class. Would you like to use Arcane Alchemy to transfer Tokens from one attribute to another? Y/N.

"Yes I would!" I informed the UI that I wanted to turn 2 Likability Tokens into 4 Ingenuity Tokens. The system did this with a flash, preserving my good cheer. This was going to work. I was going to make this work.

A grin spread over my face.

This is Christopher about to cast his first actual spell.



Chapter 25- Going By Instinct

Your knowledge of Transmutation informs you that a grain or bit of animal fat boiled down into water is the closest and simplest action to undertake in order to employ a spell to turn it into glycerine. The amount used will be equal to the amount of glycerine created.

That seemed unrealistic at first, until I realized we had teams and teams of assistants helping at all levels of our operations. It was the God of Productivity after all, and we were being very productive.

I commandeered one of the Nakamamon helping in the field to nurture plant growth, and also cut down the stalks of plants already grown. This was a greenish blob of vines and leaves with two eyes peeking out, and two woody feet beneath.

Identify told me this was called a Shrubber-Nee! complete with exclamation point.

"Well, hello there," I told it, while fielding more and more requests for **Healer's Resistance**. **Yes**, always **Yes**.

I half expected the thing to growl 'Kenobi!' before slashing outwards with laser swords in its four viney arms. Instead, one of the vines separated from the vine ball and waved at me.

After explaining what I needed, the Shrubber-Nee! went off to fetch what I'd asked for.

This would be a great place to attempt my first ever Instinctual spellcasting. I knew I had underutilized some of my abilities and skills in the past, and that was over. I might not throw too many fireballs, but I could…

"I could do this," I muttered, and tried to recall what Alan had done the first time I made a potion on the fly.

Somehow the knowledge came to me. Mana coalesced in my body, starting at my core and flowing up into my head. Where it emerged, I tried to envision the same thing Alan had used.

Instinctual Casting (Evocation) check: You are attempting a tier 1 Ray of Frost. You have the Evocation skill at level 1, Instinctual Casting at level 8, Mana Shaping at level 3, and Affinity at level 7. Since you have never cast an Evocation spell and never shaped mana, this check is Extreme, and requires 9 successes. Would you like to spend 9 Tokens for an automatic success?

Total Tokens: 5 Ingenuity and 7 Free Tokens.

I did not want to spend the Tokens… there was no real danger of this having terrible repercussions if it failed. Also, I had 20 levels of skill and attribute. I needed to know if it would be enough to handle 9 successes.

The diagram of how to shape the mana formed into my mind. It was complex, a crystalline structure with layers originating from a single hexagonal point. My hands had to trace this dual pattern, while the mana needed to follow those along.

If anything, I looked like a kid at a rave in the early 2000's. My dorkiness knew no bounds whatsoever, and I couldn't have been happier. And when all was done, the system showed me the results of my efforts.

I was astonished to find that my 20 skill levels produced 10 successes.

Congratulations! *You have cast a spell.*

The spell shot a small bluish beam of light out from my clasped hands and extended fingers. This crashed into the punch bowl and spread frost around the exterior. The crystals rapidly swarmed over it, while I whooped like a loon.

I stopped doing so to find some fifty Nakamamon staring at me.

"Oh stop it," I told them, and pressed **Yes** a whole host of times for **Healer's Resistance**. With the sparklers of energy beginning to coalesce around them, they marched off in the direction of the town.

On the heels of casting Ray of Frost without any preparation whatsoever, I once again engaged **Arcane Alchemy** with the intent

of turning Tokens into other Tokens. This time I tapped 2 Durability Tokens and turned them into 4 Ingenuity Tokens.

I also realized I might not need to.

When the Shrubber-nee! returned, I used Transmutation to turn an infusion of boiled grains into glycerine. Again, this involved threading my mana into a twisting series of much stranger and more fluid, naturalistic shape than the crystalline structure of the Ray of Frost. And, this was weird, I needed to grab the whole mana formation and twist it with my hands when it was done, so it instead resembled a different shape entirely.

That done, I ended up with 9 successes out of 9 needed, barely succeeding. I knew instinctually that had I used a larger amount of mana, or done a more complicated material, the difficulty would have been higher. The knowledge was just… there.

It was also basic knowledge. For the deeper info I'd need to increase my school-specific Spellcasting skills. Instinctual casting would take me far, but the Spellcasting skills would bring down the base difficulties, because I'd know more of what I was getting into before it erupted in front of my face.

Overall I was pleased. Today was turning out to be a gold mine of progress, information, and it made the weeks and weeks of stagnation feel worth it.

I continued to agree to the requests for **Healer's Resistance**, work continued going forward, and still they came. Potions were administered, confusion and fear were soothed, and still they came. Another batch of potion went on the fire and through careful infusion of my mana, we came out with yet another batch. By now I really was the cause of the traffic jam, because these potions took time to craft, and there was no speeding up the process.

That would have to be okay.

Over the remainder of the day, the number of townsfolk we freed rose to 2,000, then higher. We had to stop briefly and stare at Fletcher while he got the last batch of potion cooked up, which he of course did. People were now flooding out of the town, while I used

Ray of Frost again and cooled off the potion enough to make it usable. A mob of folks went after the final batch, distributing the final five hundred or so doses in just a few minutes.

Alan came over, disbelief clear on his face. He explained that he hadn't accounted for the growing numbers, and how that would speed up the situation.

"I personally thought it was going to slow everything to a glacial crawl," Cinzy said, grinning. She then promptly passed out and was taken to one of the beds to recover.

Several others had also exhausted themselves, and lay on some of the cots reserved for the comatose.

"We should have the God of Productivity back to life as we speak," I said. The administering of the potion was like a New Year's Ball drop countdown, with everybody cheering and counting once there were only ten left. They were going nuts.

"Three! Two! One!"

I had been hoping for a message from the UI about how we'd brought a god back to life, but it never came. I sensed more than understood that we were close, so close.

"What happened?" Shakindria asked.

"More like what didn't happen?" Tara said. "It didn't work."

"Who didn't participate?" Isabelle asked.

"Huh?" Trent asked. "We all—"

"Last time it was on Drat," Regina added. "He didn't want to add a piece of clothing. Isabelle's right, someone didn't work with us today."

All of us seemed to make the same leap, and turn in the same direction simultaneously. Toward the only person left.

There was only the one guy from Jacoby's team left: Wayne. Half her people had taken Blake's Boys and the Wizards back to HQ, and the other half were hunting down Archie or just enjoying a backwoods camping vacation.

Except, when I got there, I found the team. Jacoby, the Asian

Expedition Leader and Ranger, her Guardians and Wizards, her perma-smiling Bard, and others I didn't have names or classes for. They stood not far away from the assorted townsfolk and refugees who had all taken part today.

Everyone gave way as I headed over toward them. The effect of having people part like the Red Sea before me must have been a bit intimidating because Jacoby stepped back as I approached.

"Quit that," I told her. "Wait, what are you doing back?"

"Not that it's your concern, but we apprehended our quarry, and we are here to take custody of the other one. Wayne informed me that once the god reconstitutes, he may immediately wake."

I nodded, wheels turning in my head. Having them here didn't have to complicate things. All could be well. "Probably not until the final cure has been administered, but it's possible."

"Why have you come?" she asked, not earning herself any brownie points. Sheesh, the abrasive and paranoid team leader act was old and she'd only been back a handful of minutes. She'd been out in the woods without much help and without much luck for weeks, I told myself. I'd been in town tending to an herb garden and collecting McGuffins. She was well within her rights to be annoyed.

And actually, it turned out worse than I imagined. I didn't know what the result of Jacoby's mission was, but in time I would learn.

"Listen, we need your help."

This she clearly did not like. "What is it?"

I told her.

I watched the disbelieving expression replaced by consideration, then acceptance. She could be reasoned with and reasonable after all.

So, one final time, I consented to giving out a whole bunch of instances of **Healer's Resistance**, got everyone in position (including the Guardians), and took a deep, calming breath.

"You're ready for this," I told her, trying to sound encouraging.

"We most certainly are not ready for this," she said.

I turned on **Psyspeech** and made the next declaration directly into her head. I promise no ulterior motives here, nothing other than getting this solved.

Jacoby narrowed her eyes for a second before turning a harsh glare on me. She blinked at me several times before clenching her fists.

"You owe me one," she said through gritted teeth. "Another one."

"Oh… okay."

"I'm going to claim it too, don't think I won't."

"Oh," I said, "I believe you." I did. Would I wake up with my hands already tied above my head, with her naked and shoving her crotch directly in my face? Or something more erotic?

Oh, woe is me.

Together, we ascended into a completely empty town, and up to where Blake was the sole remaining slumbering individual.

"We have to do this, don't we?" she asked.

"You're not afraid of him, are you?"

She gave me such a Look it had a capital letter, and prompted an intimidation check. Waving her hands as if to banish the check from in front of her UI, I was pleased to see it disappear.

"Okay people, we planned for this! Let's do it!"

Her people all got to work, and at that moment, we reconstituted a god.

By bringing these parts together and praying to the god with your time and with your effort, 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.

A clock began ticking away, signaling how much time I had to create and administer a cure. I say a clock, but it was essentially a circle in my user interface already ticking. Luckily, it wasn't an ugly

red, but a soft powder blue with a sliver of yellow beneath. Concentrating on it, it explained how the circle would empty every twenty-four hours and leave behind another colorful clock circle. Red would be the final color.

We had a week.

Well, we had to inspect the god itself, and see what we were dealing with. I needed diagnostic tools, a long nap, and maybe a roll in the hay with one or several young ladies.

The nap would wait. The young ladies too. Right now, it was crucial for us to consolidate our gains and ensure we kept momentum on our side. With all that in mind, I announced my intent to head back into town, see the god, run my diagnostics, and then call it a day. Letting the rest of the team know they could have the rest of the day off, I grabbed my tools and set off.

It had been over nine hours of work for all these people, with hardly a break or a breather anywhere in between. I had channeled a mind-boggling amount of mana. The typical shift that came over my body, which gave me green hair and pale skin, had receded from me using it all up.

It only took us five minutes of heading into town, and then five minutes of walking the streets before we saw it.

The god appeared as a man festooned with a number of piercings and littered with hundreds of tattoos. All of these were glowing white, and would have come across odd, except that his skin was nearly pure black. They depicted people at work: cutting down trees, standing in fishing boats and hauling up nets, setting up traps or racks of drying skins or stocking shelves with potions. There were smiths hammering amorphous metal somethings on anvils, people shoving spears into training dummies, casting lines on their fishing poles, and these were just the ones I got a load of on my first scan.

He wore a fur loincloth, fur-lined boots, ornate leather wristbands, and a whole lot of tool belts, some with pouches. The divine tools we'd found before were all hanging off these.

Also, and no biggie, he was at least twenty feet tall.

Tara's mouth dropped open. "Holy—"

"You gotta not do that," I said. "It literally is holy here. So it doesn't matter whether you say 'mackerel' or 'crap' or 'shift', it's going to be on the cusp of blasphemy."

She smiled at me.

"I know, I'm an atheist too… or I was, or at least agnostic. But…" I gestured vaguely at the gigantic man-shaped thing. "You can touch it, it's real."

Tara laughed.

The Diagnosis skill required me to use a complicated series of individually wrapped and mana-shielded stones to detect the probability of mana… issues. There were so many problems with mana, it was its own eight school profession, with all of them having different ideas on what worked, and all of them being correct. You might think it made no sense to have eight different theories of relativity, where each one worked, but clearly you'd never experienced magic before.

Each magic diagnosis crystal needed to be run over the form of the god from head to toe, close enough to His body that if He moved, I would be swatted aside. If I survived the physical damage, there would be hefty divinity poisoning to handle.

So far, He hadn't moved though.

Over the course of the next very tense five minutes, I did the diagnostic check, including rewrapping and replacing the crystals so their detection energies didn't overlap and corrupt the gems into uselessness. It was another one of those Healer-does-this-the-slow-way situations, while around me everyone held their breath.

"Fletcher—" Regina started, but someone shushed her.

We will be here to catch you if the god should stir, Larelle's implacable voice told me directly in my brain. A comfort, but a small one. I was the Healer… who was going to heal me?

Oh wait… Regina, Tara, Vellenia, Cinzy, Ivy, and Isabelle had all gotten healing powers from me once they were 'brought into the

fold' using **Entwined Ecstasy**.

I gave a low whistle while I worked, thinking about how I had spread the seed of being a Healer, the rumored most dangerous class to be, by getting freaky with a whole bunch of gorgeous and willing women.

This is Fletcher about to go to Hard Mode.



Chapter 26- No Big Deal

Tending to an actual god, some twenty feet tall and very clearly not the same type of thing the God of Apparel had been, it really made the problem in this world feel much more real and pressing. And there were a shortage of healer people in this world.

Somehow I'd gotten sex powers, surrounded myself with amazing and wonderful companions who gained a little of the Healer in me when I gave them what they wanted, and I got what I wanted. Like a virus, spreading more healing ability around to the humans of this world, when none of them wanted to be Healers.

It made me think that The Lovers, the god who had shown up and 'blessed' Tara and I once upon a time, had a plan in mind when gifting me these powers.

Although my main task was to keep my eye on the ball for the magical diagnosis, my Ingenuity was now high enough that I could multitask reasonably well. Without losing focus on this important challenge, running the crystals up and down the god's body, while ruminating over the unique and bizarre situation here on this world.

A couple of special factors: gods were falling ill, they had only started falling ill when humans figured a way into this world, the system hadn't existed until humans entered and started mucking around here, and the two people who had purpose built the system were in a sort of feud with one another. Oh, and also there hadn't been any fighting aspect Nakamamon until Blake had become one.

With all this in mind, I got on with my diagnostic, and, nearing the end, the system UI came up with a check for me.

Diagnostics check: *You have the Diagnostics skill at level 6, while Affinity is at level 7. Other applicable skills are unranked. This check is Extreme, requiring 9 successes. Would you like to spend 9 Tokens for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 7 Affinity and 7 Free Tokens.

This again. Unfortunately, if the check failed and it was a Magical ailment, I'd have an even higher difficulty on the Develop Cure check. Thanks to **Mender's Focus**, I could now count on about 50% success rate on these class skills, or 6 successes.

I slapped myself upside the head. **Arcane Alchemy** would help in this regard. All I needed to do was get my Tokens back through Meditation, making class checks, and at least one of my Pleasure Seeker abilities.

I paid the 9 Tokens, breathing a little lighter anyway. This god was enormous, and the task seemed enormous. As I finished my sweep of the magic stones around the god's head, I—

The gigantic tattooed man groaned, and his eyes blinked several times.

Success! *You have succeeded a Diagnosis (Magical) check! The ailment in question is indeed a magical ailment.* ***Mana Misalignment*** *has been identified as the most likely culprit.*

I wasn't able to read this at the time, as I was furiously yanked back away from the god by my trusty Guardians. The first danger appeared to be a rain of nails out of one of the side pouches, which all glittered with divine energy. The arm sweeping through the place I'd just been was the second one. It landed on the front porch of the nearest house, which groaned and then splintered with the weight put on it.

The gigantic, coal-black man with the glowing tattoos—and eyes by the way—radiating holy, soft white energy, got His feet under Him and slowly stood. As He did, a sort of afterimage trailed after him, a bluish white ghostly aura that slowly absorbed into His body. If there was one saving grace to him being at least twenty feet tall was doing things in a ponderous slow motion.

"Holy—" Tara said again.

"Quit that!" I barked, but also laughed. What we were watching was miraculous, it was astonishing, it was…

…super dangerous.

Fletcher, we need to vacate the premises, Larelle said. Before I could react, I was already in her beefy arms, cradled like a football, or a princess. I was being princess carried. *Chrysta has your tools*, she told me, when I tried to crane my neck to get a look at the force of nature in action.

Luckily, it didn't appear to have registered our presence at all, let alone see us as a threat. Instead it groped around in its own godly stupor, using house roofs as crutches. Two of these held; one did not. Noise and dust shot out in all directions as one roof collapsed.

The god groaned, a sound that actually pressed against the sides of my head from the inside somehow, threatening to burst it. I ended up getting a Divine Resistance check using Durability, and passed it, but several others cried out. The God of Productivity then took two staggering steps, stumbled, shaking the ground near us. Putting hands to knees seemed the most human thing the god had done, but only for a moment.

He then vomited.

The stuff that came out of him was gold colored. At first. It was also much larger than a punch bowl's worth of sick up. Some of us were not fully out of the splash zone, but Isabelle produced a large magical shield to deflect it from hitting any of the rest of us. Jacoby's team finally got the message and retreated, while Alan, Trent, Regina and Tara were far enough away not to need the save.

"New orders!" I called. "We keep eyes on it nonstop. Rangers organize watches. Guardians and Drat are on that duty but follow our new squad leaders." Tara and Regina immediately veered off to get in conversation with one another. I caught a brief glimpse of Jacoby running alongside us, with her team members not far off. Several of her Guardians were hefting their blazing magical shields as well, and pulling a controlled but swift retreat. "Trent, what's the chance you can erect a wall to keep Him in the city?"

Trent pulled up next to me, with a look of utter incomprehension. "Are you… what?"

"Containment," I said. "Can we contain it?"

"No!" He said, indignant. "Even if I could make a wall like thirty or forty feet high, and at least… six or eight feet thick, there's no way I could make it all the way around town."

"Dissuasion then. Can you make it at the entrance closest to the refugee camp, and our camp, and Jacoby's team camp? We want to make that thing stay away from people it could touch and kill."

His face twitched in annoyance, with a side of hefty weariness. "I'll need a day or two." Once upon a time had wanted to get out of the HQ and really flex his powers, and boy had he gotten so many chances to do so.

"You're amazing. Make it happen."

I could also make it happen, theoretically. Conjuration was what I'd need, and I had it. My mana pool was still a lot smaller than his or Alan's but I could—

No, what was I thinking? I needed a cure in record time, and I needed to administer that to make this walking nightmare go away. Trent could make a wall, but nobody else could whip up a cure to stop a twenty foot tall god from rampaging across town and country.

My workload for the next few days was crystal clear.

Well, *mostly* clear.

***

Larelle and I entered the laboratory just as the sun was beginning to set. Nestled in Larelle's big arms, I got to see the whole sky lit up in a burst of lovely colors. What a long and eventful day it had been, and it was only halfway done.

"I need to—"

I was bombarded on all sides by female companions. Vellenia, Cinzy, Ivy, and Regina were all there. The only one missing was Tara, who had chosen to take first watch, along with Chrysta and Isabelle.

I was hugged first by my Nakamamon companion, but Ivy soon squished in and made it a group hug, with Cinzy following along.

Regina grinned and hugged on next, darting forward to put a kiss on my cheek.

Cue the kiss outbreak. Before Larelle could even turn the group hug into a massive groaning bear hug, my Nakamamon beauty had taken Regina's kiss as permission, and began kissing me as well.

"Come on," I chuckled.

Cinzy even got one in before all that stopped.

Then it was everyone's turn to groan and feel their feet lift off the ground. All the bodies were compressed into mine, and Larelle was picking all of us up.

"Okay," I said, voice strained. "Down, down!"

That was most wonderful, Larelle told me. *I'm pleased to join the group squish.*

All of us were gasping and giggling.

From there, we got settled and had a bite to eat, then went over the next steps. Alan was too tired and sick with divinity poisoning to deal with more, so I set Cinzy to the task of informing him of all the steps to come, and his place in the team.

"What about me?" Drat asked.

"Well, you've earned your reprieve," I told him. "Unless you want even more non-class related work orders, you get some rest and relaxation coming your way."

"I'll take it," he said, nodding toward the girls, and headed out.

Jacoby's team was with us at the nonexistent bonfire just ten minutes later, demanding a debrief on what the heck had just happened. I told them what I knew, which included an update from Tara: presently the god was drunkenly wobbling around the town. It had several times taken a knee, groaned in a way that hurt the brain to hear and see, and vomited golden stuff onto the cobblestones.

I then treated several of the team members for divinity poisoning. This was nothing like the potion we'd mass produced earlier that day. Luckily for me, we'd made a longer lasting elixir than the potions, and there was still enough left to treat everyone.

"Listen," I told them, still able to stifle a yawn. **Healer's Endurance** was no longer part of my special ability repertoire, meaning there was no overcoming the effects of sleeplessness, or in this case fatigue from overwork.

I'd already succeeded the checks, and doing so again wasn't necessary. That was good, because I felt like there wasn't enough left to handle even one more check.

Several members of Jacoby's team had been too close when the god exerted its divine presence, so they got treated. Ivy carried over and offered up Chrysta, the only member of either team to have been too close to the splash zone. The gold stain of divine vomit had revealed her leg, and the divinity poisoning caused her to seem fully corporeal for the first time ever. She had always been waifish and slim, but now turned sad eyes my way.

I coaxed her to lay down into my lap, and I scooped a dose of the elixir up for her.

"Do not fuss over me," she said. "I have already passed on."

"I'd rather not find out about some final annihilation." Divine power trumped everything. I liked Chrysta, honestly. She needed to stick around. "Drink this."

"Fletcher…"

"Drink this," I commanded, and pushed the elixir on her.

"I… can't."

"You can. We're not going to play this uh-huh, nuh-uh game like we're brother and sister."

She blinked at me, then hissed in pain.

"You can feel pain? That means you can drink, and that means you can heal up." I pushed the elixir to her lips and she obediently opened up, then swallowed the glowing thing. The mixture played a soft harp melody, along with some voices lifted in song.

The light suffused her body, and allowed her to fade back to semi-transparency. The sticky gold patch of vomit disappeared, and her slim leg disappeared shortly afterwards.

She reached up and caressed my face. "You have done me a

great kindness, Fletcher. I will not forget this."

"You're very welcome, and try not to get vomited on again. Since there are no night clubs in this world it shouldn't be difficult."

Her hand fell away the moment she realized we were surrounded by others. Vellenia was distributing the other elixirs to the other members of Jacoby's squad. The **Healer's Resistance** hadn't been enough for those without the Divine Resistance skill.

As soon as they knew they were coming back every day for a re-up of their treatment, until the God of Productivity was no longer an issue, their faces fell a little. As for the timeline on that… hopefully less than three days.

I tried, and failed, to stifle a huge yawn the moment we switched gears.

"You need rest," Ivy said.

"We all need rest," Cinzy said. I was glad she no longer looked a good ten years older, what with the Fairy Poppins situation currently in a holding pattern.

I fell asleep in the middle of protesting that he doesn't need any sleep. This was the kind of sleep people only dream of: dark, vast, and restful.

***

I awoke to the smells of breakfast cooking somewhere outside. Heavenly scents of bacon, eggs, and cinnamon wafted in. I was in my bed, but when I opened my eyes, I only caught sight of something humongous and orange in my field of vision.

Larelle sat propped against the door, mouth open and snoring softly. She was fully nude. The Nakamamon Guardian typically wore a gigantic and loose-fitting martial arts gi style uniform, and it was practically impossible to tell anything specific about her body shape underneath. Well, that was over.

Given her regular clothing, she might've seemed big and padded, or even fat, but she was anything but. Thickly muscled, yes. Fat, no. She wasn't human, so her body didn't have to work like humans

anyway. For instance, she literally had no wrists or ankles, her lower legs sloping down to toe-like things. Up higher, her enormous forearms just… became hands. They were incredibly strong, too. To add to all that, she also had a simply unbelievable amount of hair. It draped over half her face and body, but the other side was open for my eyes to behold. Fully open.

Well, that was something I both hadn't seen and wasn't expecting to see at all. Larelle struck me as someone who had an innocence and naïveté that was absolute, complete. Advancing on her seemed like it would be taking advantage, like I'd be committing a sin.

Yet at the same time she was undeniably adult shaped. She had big, heavy boobs with darker orange nipples, one covered by silky brown hair, though that nipple was big enough to poke through the cascade of her hair. I also had an unimpeded a patch of hair down between her legs.

Another form squirmed at my side: Vellenia.

"Someone is lusting after our Larelle," she said quizzically, half a question.

I was curious about her, and I shared that information with my bond mate. I didn't know what had caused her to stick around my place, why she had her back to my door, and why, for the love of Pete, she had removed all of her clothes.

"*Well, she was only following what she saw us do*," Vellenia replied in a barely audible whisper.

She was nude, curled around me. Vellenia draped one white and mint green leg over my midsection.

"Perhaps she wants to take you as Shakindria and I take you." A hand drifted up and down my torso, smoothing its way over my brand new pecs, then up to the side of my face. I allowed her to turn my face toward her for a kiss.

She didn't appear to have any qualms about the fact that I'd had sex with yet another partner, this one a Nakamamon.

"Hmm I like this very much," she breathed.

"What a coincidence," I replied. Her tongue darted out and we kissed deeper, until her roaming hand found me fully hard and standing at attention.

"*You do like it*," she told me, complete with a giggle and a blithe, smiling undertone of sensuous lust. "I think you would like it more if you put it there… but I have a request for you."

"And what would that be?"

This is Christopher about to be surprised.



Chapter 27- Spectral Style

I have to say, when you wake up to one sexy, interested, nude partner and staring at another sexy, nude being, you'd have to concede that life is good. Especially when you're surrounded by at least five other sexy, interested partners, who might or might not be nude presently.

Vellenia, Regina, Tara, Ivy, Isabelle, Shakindria, Cinzy… oh, and Fairy Poppins as well. And probably Jacoby. She had watched me get my freak on with Vellenia, and while her interest was focused mostly on Vellenia, it was watching my cute water fairy take it deep and hard in the middle of the woods.

Yes, life was good. I mean, there was the nagging question of how to handle Shakindria being unable to leave the town, enforced by a magical bond, but that was not the question of the day. It still struck me as super unfair, that she'd done so much work to free the people who held her captive when she didn't have to, but again, not the question of the day.

Vellenia, the first sexy, interested, nude partner, currently held my throbbing member and nuzzled my neck while the other sexy, interested, nude potential partner, Larelle, snoozed nearby. I could have sworn Vellenia was about to tell me that Larelle needed me. She was going to tell me it was okay, and she'd like to watch… maybe participate, and show Larelle how it was done because she was something of an exhibitionist.

Instead she flipped the script on the one member of my team I hadn't considered in the last few minutes, and the one who had expressed the most need to me.

"You need to attend to Chrysta," Vellenia said.

An image of a desperate Chrysta appeared in my mind. Quiet, rock steady Chrysta, the thin ghostly Nakamamon Guardian. She had done her job without complaint, never mentioned rations or the

taste of the food as cooked by the least capable among us—me—never challenging my commands, always being the bedrock upon which the team stood. Beautiful Chrysta, with her powder blue and white body, her thick four-fingered hands, her extra arms, her transparent lower half, and her aura of freezing cold. Forlorn Chrysta, who hadn't known the touch of a living person until days ago when I had used Adaptability to make myself more intangible and spectral, and her less.

Vellenia wanted me to seek out Chrysta.

"This one clearly wants to be with you and needs the touch only you can supply. Please give her that."

Although I was confused about why my bond mate might want to have me mate with yet another partner, I didn't question it. Vellenia had been in the camp with the other team members for most of the time while I'd been in town shagging Shakindria, and that meant most likely she'd picked up information that I could only guess at. She also had some of the fairy empathy powers.

On the walk over, I went through a few of the notifications and tried to pare down the ones I didn't need. I had actually leveled up to 27 as a Healer, and only realized it in the aftermath of the momentous day of putting the God of Productivity back together.

Level 27: +12 skill points

I gave a low whistle, but soon reached Chrysta's house. I could afford to wait on these skill points. Instead I got down to the business of satisfying whatever itch Shakindria thought I should scratch.

The reason for my visit became clear right off the bat.

"Knock knock," I said, knocking on the already-open door, and peeked my head in. The door was wide open, resting against the other wall. Chrysta, like Larelle, didn't see the point in having them, or locking them if the weather was nice.

The house itself was sparse; Chrysta didn't own anything. She didn't eat, hardly slept, and needed no creature comforts. Aside

from the standard stone creations Trent had left as basic furniture, there was nothing. The sofa, easy chairs, ottoman, end tables and coffee tables were essentially all blocks of stone, and the bedroom contained a slab of rock to function as a bed frame that she never used.

No sleeping bag, no pillow, no clothing… no clothing. Vellenia preferred not to wear clothing. I realized that some of the bits of Chrysta I took for clothes were just part of her body. She was nude, all the time.

Chrysta hung in the air in the living space, visible from the waist up, though I would've said she had her legs crossed in a meditative posture. Affinity told me they were there. Her eyes had been closed, but they opened and regarded me.

"Fletcher," she said. "What brings you here?"

What was I going to tell her? I blurted out the quickest explanation I could think of, "Just checking to see your divinity poisoning doesn't spread." Did that sound as stupid as I thought it did? Why was I so concerned with appearing stupid?

It was, of course, the old high school and college Fletcher still at work in my mind. Why would anyone want him? He had a physical disability. Those were ugly.

"It is well. Your craftsmanship is superb. I am thankful for your support and attention."

With a little coaxing, I got her to make herself visible from the legs down, and I was able to see that the golden splotch from the god's vomit had indeed receded most of the way, but was still faintly visible. Her legs were slim and pretty, tapering down to feet that didn't have toes.

"Actually, I just wanted to see how you are."

"I am…" she trailed off. The naked look she turned on me was not a positive one, honestly. Her eyes reflected uncertainty. "I am… not well, Fletcher."

"What's going on?" I placed a hand on hers.

"Ever since making contact with you, I have missed it. That

touch, the feeling… you cannot understand until you too have been a ghost." She stared down at my hand, and where it made contact with hers.

"I'm sorry," I told her. "If you like I can make time for you more often."

She seemed to be rendered speechless at this. "It hurts…"

"I can also leave you alone if you would prefer that."

But she was quick to clarify. "It hurts to be without a connection." She took my hand in hers and stared down at it. "You and I… kissed." She said this as though it had happened to another person, or in a time long, long ago.

"We did," I confirmed. "It was nice. I hope you don't have any regrets, because I certainly don't."

The space now seemed charged. She stared at my lips, and at her edges she went transparent.

I should have closed the door. I considered escorting her to my house, where the conditions were more homey and comfy.

"I would like to kiss you again, Expedition Leader."

She brought her face close, and the cold helped me to remember I had skill points. I thought to pump two of my Healer skill points into Adaptability and Pheromones. I promised myself I would put two of my Pleasure Seeker points back into Healer skills when I next leveled.

"What a coincidence," I breathed, "I'd like to kiss you too."

"Often," she added, before moving forward to bridge that gap.

I wanted to tell her that it was fine, and also that I had other partners. I needed to tell her that I couldn't be her one and only, but she knew. She knew I had Vellenia. She probably knew about the others also. She wasn't a fool.

Her lips pressed against mine, soft and insistent, before she moaned.

The cold had receded. Warmth hadn't replaced it, but a darkness. It was difficult to explain; the lust and arousal I was feeling

deepened with the Adaptability changing my body.

I was going ghostly.

Chrysta's lips pressed against mine, and when she nibbled at my top lip, she let out a spooky and horny sound no human could've made. She licked at my lips with an ethereal tongue at the same time she straddled my body.

"What is this?" she whispered, staring into my eyes.

Chrysta's face was ice blue, her eyes huge, black and glossy. Seeing my own face reflected in them, I noted that I was now partially transparent.

"I have Adaptability," I explained lamely. Instead of going on, I ran my hands over her coltish, invisible thighs. They were springy and pert, as were her hips and her waist. I could nearly encircle her whole body with both hands; only a few inches remained between my thumbs and the tips of my fingers.

"Ohhh," she said, and seemed to get it. A moment later she had my head hugged in a tight embrace, and was rubbing her body up and down over mine, and my face. She hugged against me and cooed.

I wasn't taking damage… yet. The moment I did, I engaged **Healer's Resistance** and grabbed up a bit of permanent damage resistance to whatever I was feeling with a single Durability Token. Then I engaged Pheromones and gave three levels of Adaptability to Chrysta.

The effect was immediate: the pain vanished, and Chrysta became fully visible for about the third time in our several months together. Her thighs were a snowy color, tinged with a hint of blue, and had an almost imperceptible crystalline pattern over her skin.

Chrysta gasped in surprise, amazement, pleasure, and froze for a moment before understanding set in.

She continued to rub herself up and down over my face, moaning loudly.

"Fletcher," she gasped. "It feels… I feel…"

"Me too," I told her. I assumed she was going to say 'amazing' or

‘wonderful.’

“I can feel again. Oh… it has… been… ohhh… so long…”

I kneaded her butt cheeks and ran my hands up and down her thighs, her butt once again, and then the whole length of her back. At the same time, her breasts rubbed over my face and I stuck out my tongue to get at them as they passed. Just that sensation set her off, and she was soon crying out as the pleasure built. Nipples appeared immediately, frosty blue in color, but just as flexible and nice as those on the living.

She came after only a minute like this, halting and shivering at just the right height for me to get my mouth on her nipple.

I was neither cold nor warm, but instead possessed of a powerful lust that made me want to do… things. Dirty things. Wrong things. My spectral body meant I was part ghost, and the loss of physical sensation brought out something strange in me.

When I pressed at the junction of her thighs with one and then two fingers, and she opened to accept, I also pressed against her back door with my other hand. I was rewarded with more gasps, more cries of pleasure, and more of Chrysta writhing against me.

“Fletcher!” she called out. “Fletcherrrrrrr…”

“I’m here,” I told her, grinning with satisfaction. Her body was clenching against my fingers. She grabbed my head and jammed her tongue in my mouth from above to keep from screaming out. Her whole body pumped up and down several more times into my fingers, then froze as another powerful orgasm swept through her. The seconds passed, and I kept slowly pushing my fingers into both available holes, while she clutched my head to her chest and went through one orgasmic shudder after another.

“Un… believable…” she groaned after it was done, then kissed me several more times. “I must… repay you… your kindness.”

“Helping you is all the reward I need,” I told her, though I was painfully hard and the oddness of becoming somewhat ghostly made the words difficult to force out. This part of me wanted to satisfy all my wants, no matter what they were, using her body.

Some of those desires were twisted and wicked: I wanted to do was slap my cock against her cheek again and again, then take hold of her head and fuck her face until she was choking and crying. This dark part of me wanted to put a collar around her neck and attach a leash to it, then parade Chrysta around the camp on all fours for the others to see. This part of me wanted to make her beg for the dirtiest things I could do to her. Pummel her hard from behind while telling her how worthless she was. Spank her ass while I drilled her asshole. Tie her up and force her to watch me please other women with gentleness and kindness I wouldn't show her. Make her grovel at my feet.

Another part of me wanted to simply satisfy myself with her body. Pull her back and forth on my shaft, uncaring whether she felt good from it. So long as I came, what did it matter? Mouth? Yes. Both other orifices? Either worked.

The human part of me knew this wasn't right, but right now I wasn't all human. Part of me knew she didn't deserve to be treated like this, and part of me didn't care.

I stood; she weighed nothing in my arms. Kissing her, I felt every ridge and bump inside her inhuman mouth, loved the desperation in her cold exhalations. When I came to the wall, I pushed her against it harder than necessary. Was she blissed out at the feeling of a cold stone wall pressing up against her back? I didn't care, but instead shoved myself up into her impossibly tight hole.

Chrysta had ridges coming off the top of her head, and she placed my hands there. "Pull," she told me. I did, forcing her to look at the ceiling.

"Harder," she ordered, while shoving herself down onto my cock.

This time when I pulled, she grunted and arched her back. Pushing her breasts out at me, making her growl deep in her throat.

"Hard," she breathed, staring up but not seeing. Her eyes fluttered. "I want it hard."

I gave it to her, hard. In the meantime I kissed and nipped at the skin of her neck, her ears, around her collar bone.

She came. Again, crying out and scratching at my back. It wasn't two arms that were holding onto me, but four. No, more. So I rocked her world and reveled in the dark pleasure I was getting.

Howling, she clawed at my back and left wounds there. For my part, I rutted into her like it was my job. Nibbles at her neck when I wanted to bite.

"Yesssss," she shouted, and I clamped a hand down over her mouth, only to have her bite it. I stared at the ectoplasm welling from my fingers and hand, and slapped her forcefully. "Yes, Fletcher… hurt me."

Instead, with one hand around her throat, I began to apply pressure. Even as my thrusts never stopped, I began choking her. She couldn't choke, of course. A rasping sound came out of her, though, somehow. She came again, rasping out my name over and over. What a massive ego boost.

When I came, it was all over her face. I pulled out and shoved her down onto her knees, exploding all over her upturned face and open mouth. The look on there was so full of bliss, so checked out from the world that it made me want to do even dirtier things.

For me, the post-nut clarity was real: the special ability boosted all my stats and gave me even higher resistance to what was happening, and a higher Ingenuity to figure out what I'd just done.

"Are you all right?" I asked. "Did I hurt you?"

She sat there in a puddle of her own juices, knees dirty on the floor and hair soaked with my seed. Her expression had gone distant, dazed, but I noticed her hands clutched onto my thighs to keep the Pheromones and the Adaptability from diminishing.

At last, she licked her lips and said, "I'm… amazing." Her eyes fixed on my softening cock. "I feel almost alive."

"Can we do it again? Harder this time?"

And this was how, three minutes later, I was grinding her face into the stone of the bed and slamming my hips down into hers, while she begged me to do it harder. Alternating spanking her ass and slipping a thumb in there. She wanted to feel the cold stone of

her house pressed over her whole body? I could do that. She wanted to have me slam myself into her tiny body again and again, scraping her back and forth against the stone, she wanted to be choked and spanked and slapped. And finally, she wanted to open her mouth and get a face full of my improved load.

I gave her all this, and she wiped my seed all over her body, sliding her legs together to feel it, pressing her hands against her breasts to feel it, grinding her ass against the floor to feel it.

To feel something, at long last.

This is Christopher about to feel very conflicted for the rest of the day.



Chapter 28- Biggest Littlest Confrontation

I returned to my place with head swimming. Had I really just unleashed my dark side on Chrysta like that? Poor, sweet, hardworking Chrysta, who never asked for anything and never complained? Had I really folded her over the arm of the sofa, face plastered to the floor, and fucked her senseless? Had I really muttered even darker things that I might do to her?

I shivered and tried to clear those thoughts by getting down to the research.

"Where is everybody?" Cinzy asked, sauntering in with a rare hoodie on. She hadn't done her makeup or hair, and the hoodie had her covered down past… whatever she wore down below. Short shorts? Panties only? Was she going totally commando? The only thing I saw from the hoodie down was creamy skin, interrupted in places where the mana build up was happening and those patches were different skin colors.

And she had on cowboy boots.

The whole look made her appear incredibly cute and girl-next-door, and it definitely worked on me.

"Uh… hi. There. Hi, there, is what I meant to say, clearly."

Was this a new Bard ability, one that made me incapable of speech?

She smiled, and there for the first time I saw bags under her eyes.

"Uh, everybody. Well…" Everybody was gone. Tara was first on godwatch, presently, meaning Regina was sleeping. They were on strict, difficult, eight hour shifts along with Shakindria. I hated it, but I couldn't change it.

"That tracks. Tweedle Dee and Muppin are playing outside with Airaconda and your girls." Then she frowned again.

Trent had a humongous, thick wall to build to discourage the God of Productivity from stomping our camp or the refugee village to bits. Garnet, his Nakamamon companion and basketball-sized orange crystal, was of course helping him in his task.

Ivy and Isabelle were on watch, on top of what was presently a ten foot tall and three foot thick wall, in the little crow's nests Trent had created for them. Larelle was getting some rest as well, since her shift on the wall was coming up soon, and Chrysta…

"She's resting too," I said. With the way Fairy Poppins was getting to Cinzy, I didn't think she noticed the obvious spike in my heart rate or the slight blush.

Alan was down with the sickness. He had divinity poisoning from trying to use telekinesis spells on divine objects and it was slowly getting worse. It had stopped him from drawing in more mana, and I theorized it was because the God of Productivity was the cause of the divinity poisoning. If he couldn't gain mana, he couldn't work, and he couldn't work because he'd touched the god of work.

The rules here were… always in flux.

"And you gave Drat the day off," Cinzy said, coming to have a seat.

"Week off… or as long as it takes to make a cure and deliver it, I guess." We had about six days.

"So you're looking for cures now," she mumbled, waving a hand at the clay tablets arrayed before me. A lot of them were in miniature form still, and couldn't be enlarged because Alan couldn't cast the spell. And also Jacoby didn't want me poaching her people.

Kind of a dick move for someone who had supplied her with everything she needed all the time, including some pretty awesome orgasms, if I could be allowed a boast from time to time. I wasn't about to say anything, though. She had the authority to run her team like she wanted.

"Cool," Cinzy said, and for the life of me, she looked like a mid-

forties housewife with three kids after a long day of cleanup vomit, crayon all over the walls, lipstick in the carpet, and screaming kids. She had never looked like anything but a supermodel that had just popped out of an advertisement in your screen and into real life.

The urge to confront her over this Fairy Poppins situation was growing. I had vowed not to get involved in her business, but she just looked so sad. So unlike her typical self. I didn't need her to look gorgeous and hot… nobody was required to be that. I'd settle for happy, and that didn't even mean she had to look happy all the time.

"You want to lend a hand?" I asked, hoping the distraction would snap her out of this funk she was in. "We got our magical cures here, and here."

The hope with the God of Productivity was that I had diagnosed its only ailment already, and there was nothing besides **Mana Misalignment** that had it in its grips. As the god was now, there was no good way to get close to it and diagnose it for any mental or physical issues it might have.

If I was unlucky or wrong, concocting a cure would not work. It would be hours and hours, perhaps days of cultivating materials, creating the cure itself, and then somehow administering that cure only to find out I needed to cure something else on top of that. The Mana Misalignment cure might take, and it might not.

If I was lucky and correct, the magical affliction was the only one. Since an additional diagnosis could get people killed, I was not going to chance it.

Mana Misalignment was the same affliction that had gotten the God of Footfalls back in my HQ days, training under the man with the toothbrush hairs for eyebrows, for a mustache, and a really long one wrapping around his head, Rainer. This was good in that I thought I knew how to create a cure from jaln oil, henge grass, mountain mist lilies, and purple morpheus root. It would actually be pretty simple if that's what I needed to do.

It was not what I needed to do at all, according to the tablets.

"Well shucks," I said, slapping a knee. So much for the easy try.

"You didn't honestly think it was going to be that easy, did you?" Cinzy asked, not making eye contact.

"A guy can hope," I said, grinning, then realized she was staring at the floor.

"The first god you worked on was a pair of shoes, and this new god is a million times the size of that one. I didn't expect that same cure to work on this enormous tattooed hunk of a man, and I only have the bare bones of a knowledge base."

I had figured, the moment we started in on the search, that it wasn't going to work. With Alan battling his own divinity poisoning and for much longer, it wasn't possible for him to enlarge and shrink all the trading cards, meaning either I had to do it with my fledgling spellcasting powers, or we needed to use high powered magnifying glasses.

The Transmutation Spellcasting attempt failed when the difficulty to put together an instinctual spell was 11. After that, the check got even harder.

"Okay," I told her, trying to ignore her misery. This Fairy Poppins thing was really getting to her. "I'm going to try the enlarge on a blank card that we would use to record our briefings and such, so if I mess it up, this won't make too much of a mess."

Instinctual Casting (Transmutation) Check: *You have the Instinctual Casting skill at level 8, Mana Shaping at level 3, and Affinity at level 7. You have failed the knowledge check using Spellcasting (Transmutation), increasing the difficulty of this casting. This check is Extreme, requiring 12 successes. You do not have 12 Tokens with which to receive a free success. Would you like to lower the difficulty of the check?*

Total Tokens: 0 Affinity and 6 Free Tokens.

"I would not," I breathed, and sighed. Spellcasting was going to be a bit harder than I'd anticipated. In the end, out of my 18 levels, I managed 8 successes.

Frack.

The results were, well, fun. I started weaving the mana before the check results came in, trying to follow an insanely complicated pattern of mana shaping with my hands and the trickle of mana appearing from my third eye. Which was weird, because it was supposed to split into three strands that, I'm pretty sure simulated height, width, and depth of the object. This was not transforming a blob of stuff into a blob of similar quantity, but different chemical properties. Transmutation was kind of a lot. I definitely wouldn't be trying to turn my friends into goats or toads as a laugh.

It quickly became clear that not only did I not know how to split a single strand of mana into three effectively, but I couldn't have each of those three strands follow along the complicated diagram that my brain was trying to put together.

The playing card made of clay jiggled, rattled against the table, and then shot out in size until it was the size of a beach towel, only to spread larger at one corner, while the others quivered.

"I'm going to go out on a limb and say it's not supposed to do that," Cinzy said, with a very Drat kind of tone but a darkly amused look on her face. I'd take it.

The corners of the huge clay tablet jerked and juddered, larger and smaller, until it exploded and sprayed clay chunks and shards and dust all over the place. I took some damage from the flying debris, and made sure to spend a Durability Token using **Stalwart** to improve my damage resistance permanently. It was the least I could do after this little, pretty funny frack up.

"You were right, it was not supposed to do that," I told her.

Cinzy snorted laughter, before asking for and receiving some **Mender's Aura**. The new ability spread out from my feet in your typical minty green magical light, the kind you think of as the antiseptic color. Somehow, instead of having the mana leak out of my third eye, this one came out of my guts, my core. It emitted pulse after pulse of healing energy—with accompanying shockwave-like pulse of light—every six seconds. It also felt nice, which I appreciated.

"Ohhhh that is new," she said, basking in the waves of healing that came out away from me. "I am liking that. It's like being in a sauna, but for your cuts and scrapes, and your soul." She actually did a little ballet dance move, and I loved her a little for it.

She no longer had the drawn look of someone who was looking at a life sentence in prison for something they didn't do. She turned a smile my way, and began dancing around slowly. After a few minutes, I ended the effect and she sank down in her seat with a pleasant look on her face. The bags were gone, which was nice.

She went for the magnifying glasses after I failed the enlarge spell, still giggling as she swept the debris off the workstation and got a handful of the cards.

"Tell you what," I told her, "I'm going to go deal with something, and I'll be right back. I'm pretty sure the magical cures are stacked on that shelf right there, if you don't see Mana Misalignment for large gods in the stack you've got."

"Okey doke."

I headed out into the evening air and straight for the twinkling light skulking at the edge of the camp. The bonfires had been canceled indefinitely, until we finished with our slight twenty foot god situation. We all needed to work extra hard not to muck this up. Now only Drat stared into the flames of a small campfire, surrounded by Tweedle Dee, Muppin, Airaconda, and his own ferret-like creature, McCauley Skulkins. I noted Vellenia and Shakindria lounging at the fire as well, the former stroking Tweedle Dee's fur, the latter absently scratching at Muppin.

I tipped Drat a wave and he waved right back before turning his gaze back to the flames. Vellenia perked up, smiled, and I told her I needed a moment. Gracious beauty she was, she gave her assent without a single question.

"Now," I muttered to myself. "Where are you?"

Most times, especially in the daytime, it was easy to miss Fairy Poppins. She was so tiny and the bright sun diminished her glow. Since we were now living in a tiny village, with gear arrayed

everywhere, the little fairy had a million places to hide if she so chose. Any plant in direct sunlight. Any out of the way place people didn't normally look.

But it was getting dark, and her tell-tale glow was easily visible if you knew where to look.

"I know you've been watching me," I said. "I know you've been watching us."

I kept tromping through some of the taller grass, towards the trees. The dew forming early soaked me up to my knees, then the middle of my thighs.

"Come on out," I said, keeping my voice gentle. "We need to talk."

The tiny fairy flew up and out, to head level. She appeared much the same as before, until you got really close. I could see the grumpy look on her ordinarily adorable face.

"I don't know what the deal is," I lied, "but what's happening can't continue. The two of you are bonded. Cinzy barely got through the day yesterday, on our most important day ever. She nearly passed out multiple times. Right now she's miserable."

Fairy Poppins crossed her arms over her chest and thrust her chin out to one side. The meaning was clear: she didn't care.

"How are you a fairy if you don't care about what's going on?" I asked.

The check succeeded using **Beast Talker**. Her level of upset and anger were just too high to convince her; whatever had been going on, it was going to take more than a single social roll to handle it.

I ended up with a tiny little finger poking my face. Then she opened her teensy little mouth and started in with the accusations… or insults… or angry exhortations. Honestly the only thing I could tell was she was upset and I had no real idea.

The problem was I couldn't hear her. When she opened her mouth and spoke, only a tinny little squeak emerged, all blending together. It just wasn't possible to understand the way I was.

With great care, I explained what Adaptability could do, and what

Pheromones could do by extension. It had worked on Chrysta, though I was a little concerned with the results. If she wanted me to understand her, I could adapt to her. That would mean… kissing. At least.

"It would mean I'd have to kiss you," I told her.

She stiffened and nearly fell from where she was fluttering. *Yes!* She nodded enthusiastically, then flew down towards my mouth and kissed me without a second's hesitation.

Adaptability was good, but there was only so much it could do. The phasing into a ghost with Chrysta required more than 7 levels to offset, along with Pheromones giving her 3 levels of Adaptability to offset in the other direction. Ten was the magic number.

It wasn't going to be enough with Fairy Poppins. It was, however, going to give us a lot of leeway.

Now, it's difficult to explain the sensation of shrinking if you haven't done it. Being a property of a magic class inside a magical world meant that my clothes came with me. I shrank down, a lot.

At once, I knew I was smaller, but everything around us felt a lot bigger. The thigh-high grass now towered above me, practically blotting out the night sky. The whole place went nearly pitch black, with only a bit of indigo above me twinkling stars down. Light from the camp fire illuminated red orange off the canopy of trees high, high above.

And Fairy Poppins was locked onto my face.

She was still small, though not so tiny as before. Applying Pheromones had only given her about an inch to her height, making her some four inches tall. She was about the size of my head now… bigger, but not quite big enough for sexy purposes. Arms spread wide to hug my cheeks, while her legs tried to hug onto my neck, but didn't have the right angle.

I continued kissing her, feeling a little tongue run over my upper and lower lip, until she broke off.

"You're still too big!" she said in a little voice. On the other hand, I could finally understand her. My hands drifted up and caught her

lower half, and I took the opportunity to get a look at her.

She had pixie features, obviously. But where Cinzy had that perfectly proportioned face, Poppins had sharp features: pointy chin, upturned cute little nose, an Asian angle to her eyes but more, and pointed ears. The important thing was that she had the full bust and hips of an adult.

She'd just been so tiny it hadn't been possible to even get a close look at her.

"This is the extent of my skill level…" She pouted. "For now." The pout disappeared and she immediately brightened.

"You're so… kissable," she cried, then kissed me again and again. Lips, nose, and then around my mouth.

Carefully massaging her thighs and cute little tush, I brought her away from my face so she wouldn't be subjected to my breath over and over. If I set her down, I doubted she would come up to my knee… but the size she'd been before, I could've fit her entire body into my mouth, wings and all. Also if I set her down, she'd immediately revert to her normal size, and me mine. Physical contact was enough for foreplay, and that was enough for Adaptability to go to work.

"I'm sorry we haven't been able to communicate before," I told her, "but we need to—"

Fairy Poppins lay back in my hands and spread her little legs. One hand dove down between her thighs and massaged the junction, and she gave off a sigh I could just hear.

"You better show me that dick, right now!"

This is Christopher at a loss.



Chapter 29- You Moist Towelette

The day had been pleasant and breezy, and the night kept pace. Although dew had appeared all over, it wasn't yet too cool. Fairy Poppins certainly didn't think so, the way she was splayed out spread-eagle in my hands and working at her clit furiously while giving me the most wanton face imaginable.

Holy shirt.

"Poppins," I said, "we can't—"

"You don't know!" She grunted, continuing to plunge fingers into herself and work her clit in circles. "You don't know what it's like. You're so… fracking… big… and you're always fracking the rest of them… all the… fracking… time. Ugh. You're balls deep in all of them, and I can't do anything but watch, and… ohhhhh. Poppy needs that cock, Fletcher. Now that you can finally understand me, you're gonna give… me that… big old dick."

"Look, I promise we will, but not like this." I was five times her size. It just anatomically wouldn't work. I was using all my Adaptability just to be under two feet tall. No amount of stretching was going to result in anything but a massacre.

"At least let me see it. I need to see it." Her hand continued to rotate around her pussy in small circles, and her ass rose and fell like she were forking a phantom cock.

I wasn't entirely sure what I was doing right now, but the lewd act and her words were having an effect. My body was responding of its own accord.

"If I do, will you lay off Cinzy?"

"Ugh…" she grunted. Arching her back brought that tiny little pussy up closer to my face, and I could now make out a blonde

thatch of hair. "Just lemme see it. Right now!"

"You need to promise," I told her, "otherwise this stops now."

"No! No! I'm close…" She trailed off into a series of groans and grunts, and I could feel her body gyrating in my hands. She started whining. "Poppy never gets any relief. Nobody ever comes after Poppy. Or gets horny thinking about her."

"I've been raising my stats for you," I half lied. "In a few levels I think we could be the same size."

Honestly, I did not want to satiate this little monster. She was being really selfish in taking out her frustrations on Cinzy when the Bard couldn't do anything about the situation at all. What she'd done instead? She'd run off to tell Cinzy I was having sex with Ivy and Isabelle, getting Cinzy mad at me. You could argue that 'Poppy' was the reason Cinzy had freaked out and left. Then, she'd hung around me, essentially abandoning her bond mate. I couldn't imagine what had led to that decision; if Vellenia wanted something, I wanted it. If Shakindria needed something, I was there to give it to her. The mere thought of breaking my bond with Vellenia had caused me actual distress. Was I really about to devote even more of my skill points to this selfish, horny little fairy?

Compare this with Shakindria: even stuck in a town she didn't need to save, even knowing that saving her town would mean they'd put her back to thankless work, she'd agreed to help without any kind of reward. I couldn't—wouldn't—break my bond with Vellenia in order to bond her, but bonding me was the only thing she wanted. She was using her reprieve from a life of joyless work to make sure she could do more of it.

"Show me!"

"Promise," I hissed. The memory of what I'd done to Chrysta, who absolutely didn't deserve that treatment, invaded. "Promise me you'll wait."

She frowned, but couldn't stop herself from humping the air "Fine! Fine! I promise! Now get out that big, fat, juicy cock for Poppy."

I couldn't believe I was about to do this. The disconnect between her cuteness and her words and actions was so sharp and severe it was really messing with me.

Fishing around one-handed, I finally got my pants undone and got myself free and in the open.

"Now," she gasped, once I told her I'd done it, "get me down there. I want to see that monster. Ohhhh… ohh Poppy's close."

Shrunk down as I was, and enlarged a little as she was, it was still kind of wild the size difference. My member was still about half the size of her current self.

"There it is! Oh my gods that is enormous. And gorgeous. Ohhhhh," she groaned, and started thrashing in my hand. Her climax came on suddenly ended with her languidly snuggling my one finger.

I found myself annoyed with her. She was being pushy, like a fracking Karen trying to get her way at a store, badgering the workers even though they didn't set prices or policy.

On the other hand, I did not have a single solitary clue what it meant to have no one who could understand you, no one to touch you, and the only person who could communicate routinely having sex with someone and griping at you. That had to be unfortunate and hard to handle.

"Poppy…" I said.

She got up, flung herself forward, and wrapped her body around my shaft. Locking her ankles around it and snuggling the head, which she began licking. The wrongness of it was even more than what I'd experienced with Chrysta. My full size was bigger around than her whole torso. To her this was like hugging a tree trunk.

"You need to remember your promise."

"Okay," she said in a wistful tone. "Just give me a minute with Mr. D."

"I'm serious."

"So am I!" she called up at me. "All the other girls get to sample this, and so do I! You better do whatever skill point stuff you need to, and fast."

Reluctantly, she let go and I got myself presentable again before going full size again. An insistent Poppy zipped up in front of my face, pointed at me, pointed at herself, and mimicked humping in midair. It would've been hilarious if not for the last few strange, aggravating, and weirdly arousing minutes.

"You have to keep your side of the bargain first, for at least a week."

She crossed her arms over her chest and flew off. I could see why Cinzy could get into fights with her.

Back in my place, Cinzy sleepily let me know that she'd found something. At least, she thought she had. Without the enlarge spell, it would take some doing.

"We'll etch it into wood."

"Can Trent—"

"No," I interrupted. I had a bad feeling Trent was one new order away from abandoning ship. "Trent's overworked. He's not thrilled with me asking him to make a wall in front of the town entrance in order to fence our patient in."

"I can convince him," she said.

Cringing internally, I tried the gentlest way possible to refuse this offer. I knew she wanted to use her abilities, but for stuff like this it felt like cheating. Once the ability wore off, Trent might not take magical manipulation well, and the result could be the same.

Congratulations! *You have reached level 25 in [unique class]!*

You have graduated from Initiate to [non-established tier]!

This again.

"What's that stupid grin for?" Cinzy asked, smiling tiredly.

"Oh nothing… I just reached level 25 in my second class."

She shot up from where she'd been laying on my couch. "Whaaaaaaat?"

It was class evolution time.

[standard UI greeting for class evolution: true]

You did it! Give yourself a high five, but not on the face.

Could you not for like five minutes?

Someone's being even more of a wet blanket than usual. It's cause for celebration!

There is so much *to get through. I would prefer it if we could avoid this inane kerfuffle each and every time a window is opened.*

Have it your way…

Ahem, where was I? Oh yes… Reaching level 25 is a significant milestone in the journey of each and every adventurer. You have [insert several sentences detailing actions of unique unknown class here]. You have discovered that [inspirational and profound statement about previously unique and unknown class].

As such, you may evolve your job class from [unique and previously unknown class]. Though your base class of [unique and previously unknown class] will still be [will not be] visible to others—

The window fuzzed, pixelated, fuzzed again, and vanished. In its place were a pair of new windows, but not UI windows. Instead these were magical portals, or scrying windows. Yes, that was definitely it… the kinds of communications windows Alan was trying to learn.

In one, a gruff and clearly no-nonsense elderly man's face. The other showed a woman's face. She had kinky and poofy brown hair with a single shock of white, severe features, and a nose that could've been used as a knife.

"Who are you and what's just happened?" The man started, before baring his teeth in a snarl. "JOCINDA!"

"Claudius," she said, grinning.

"Where are you?" He squinted, as if looking behind her for clues as to her whereabouts from the background.

"Excuse me?" I asked, and was roundly ignored. I was about to witness a mess of historical proportions.

"When I find you," he snarled, "I will put you in a circle of infinite

torment, do you hear me? For every single idiotic thing you ever said when we were making this insane—"

"Ohhhh don't give me that nonsense, Claudius," she replied, beginning to curl her lip in a lazy smile. "You needed the best, and I was the best. We made this whole insane and beautiful monstrosity work, and without me you'd never have been able to do it."

"Excuse me," I said, louder this time.

"Don't give me that!" He barked. "We could have been finished with it weeks before you declared the damnable thing done, if it weren't for your insipid jokes and play acting at being a god."

"My gods," Jocinda said, with accompanying hefty sigh. "Will you ever dry out?"

Claudius pursed his lips which made them fully disappear into his mostly gray beard. "What in all the heavens and hells are you on about, you dread harpy?"

"Excuse me!" I called, still trying to maintain a shred of civility. These two were clearly the two different voices from the UI messages.

Wouldn't you know it, they just kept right on ignoring me.

It wasn't difficult to gather that she was some kind of system-building guru, but she'd wanted to enjoy playtime while she did. Claudius, meanwhile, had no time or energy for what he saw as her nonsense.

"Ever the moist towelette, Claudius," she sighed theatrically. She added an eye roll so slow, so pronounced, I could practically hear it. And given the way her eyes were sunken back in her skull but also bulged out somehow, it was quite the eye roll indeed. "Go back to my castle, why don't you, you sopping dishrag, the castle I specifically built with my vast knowledge and power, and pretend like you're doing a shred of good up there."

"The Devil's shriveled testicles I will! Consider the hunt resumed! I'm sending every single agent to root you out—"

"Would you two stop it!" I shouted.

They froze and seemed to realize I was there.

"Now," I said. "You'll need to tell me why you're here and what we need to do to make you go away. I'm busy, you're busy doing… whatever it is you do, and you're busy trying to find her for whatever reason. Let's do the thing and I won't have to look at you, or listen to you jabber."

Jocinda grinned, her eyes hooded. It seemed I'd just earned her respect… or at least amused her. The bearded old man huffed in annoyance with one cheek twitching.

"I just reached level 25 in my class."

Jocinda brought up a pair of wire rimmed spectacles. "A class that didn't formerly exist, eh? And the name of this class… oh." She threw back her head and began laughing uproariously.

"What? Hm, hrrr, ah…" Claudius burned red in the cheeks and fell silent as that same knowledge got to him.

"Well, it's all yours, dear Claudius," Jocinda said.

"I don't, well, that is to say, erm, I…"

The frizzy-haired woman just laughed and laughed. I could hear her feet slapping against the floor over and over. She laughed until the tears came, and she massaged her cheeks.

It took some hemming and hawing before the two of them admitted that my class didn't need the pop ups dealt with. It was five minutes of her trying to needle Claudius, and him just making noises like 'hrf' and 'well' and 'hrm' and such. Another minute with him explaining that maybe they didn't need to do this after all. Surely my class was unique and was going to be forever, so there was no need to explain in vivid description what I'd done to reach level 25. Finally, they broke this strange magical Zoom call.

The whole ordeal had been so surreal that I hadn't realized Cinzy's complete silence. I came out of the experience amazed, and in a bad way. Amused also. Those two hated one another. They had worked together, and the feud seemed to be an everlasting one.

Cinzy blinked. "Fletcher? Did something just happen?"

"What do you mean?"

She explained that it was like a time skip in movies, or bad

editing. Suddenly I'd shifted in position just a bit, and the sounds went weird. I gave her a quick rundown of what had transpired, and we concluded that the two system architects had literally stopped time to allow that bizarre exchange to drag on for far too long.

Finally, I turned back to the UI message and explained to Cinzy what I was looking at.

Please choose amongst the following class evolutions:

**Sultan of Swinging*

**Indulgent Consort*

**Master of Puppets*

**Phantasm's Mask*

I'd be going through all four of these in detail, just to be sure I wasn't overlooking anything, but already I thought I had one I'd cross right off the list, Master of Puppets. Instead I opened up the first option, Sultan of Swinging.

Your pleasurable journey has been one of climactic peaks and luscious valleys, and in that time you have discovered that people come and people go. Pleasure is what links you to them. Friendship, love, and the dependence that comes from working with one another never lasts. Thus, you can embrace the fleeting and derive even more from it.

You have reached level 25 in your class, meaning you have traveled far, seduced and pleasured many, and learned the secrets of the turning on those whom you find attractive. You have engaged in sexual relations with more than 3 partners once and only once. You have engaged in sexual relations with more than 6 partners without officially declaring a relationship status with any of them.

The Sultan of Swinging gains advanced special ability progression and bonuses when seducing new partners, and additional experience for letting them fly free.

Note: some class abilities will be overwritten if you select this class.

Nothing about this option appealed to me. In fact, the insinuation that I didn't want to be with any of the girls long term, and that not calling one of them my girlfriend was in some way a bad thing. This class evolution felt like something I'd only take if I was interested in myself and no one else.

"Big fat no there," I muttered.

"Good call," Cinzy said after I'd described the class to her. She placed a hand on my leg. "That sounds awful."

Next was Indulgent Consort.

Pleasure might just be your middle name. You've swum in sensation, orchestrated orgasms, and practically bathed in bliss. Like you, the Indulgent Consort knows that partners are like a fine wine: the deeper the connection, the stronger the flavor.

You have reached level 25 in your class, meaning you have traveled far, seduced and pleasured many, and learned the secrets of the turning on those whom you find attractive. You have deepened relationships with at least 6 partners, and given those partners far more climaxes than you have received from them. The Indulgent Consort is adventurous: you have engaged in sex in a variety of locations and positions.

The Indulgent Consort gains advanced Qualities progression and relationship progression with pre-existing partners. Lastly, you and your partners gain bonuses when acting in concert, in and out of sexual pursuits.

Note: some class abilities will be overwritten if you select this class.

Okay that sounded far better. The third paragraph, with the bonuses I was about to receive, listed three different good things, and keeping my partners around was good for everybody all the time, if you excluded the Cinzy blow up. I was tempted to just choose this one straight away, but held off. I needed to see how crazy Master of Puppets might be.

They call them partners, but in reality they belong to you. These

sexual servants are here to be guided, and you are that guiding hand. Your puppets may require praise, and at times they may require punishment. In one hand you hold the carrot, and the other the stick. Your slaves are yours, full stop. They exist to serve you. They are to be bent to your will.

You have reached level 25 in your class. You have given orders and those orders have been obeyed. You have engaged in punishment activities with sexual partners, withheld sex as quid pro quo at least once, and succeeded in getting partners to bend to your will through sex. You have engaged in rough sex.

The Master of Puppets gains advanced Quality and special ability progression. You gain additional benefits each time your sexual partners follow your commands.

Note: your class abilities and some Qualities will be overwritten if you select this class.

"Holy Moses," I said. I could only stare at it, instead of reading it aloud to Cinzy. It was yet another class evolution that made me feel like a douche for it even appearing.

No, no, no no no. No thank you. Nope.

"What?" Cinzy asked.

"Nothing… this third option is definitely a no go."

"What is it?"

"It's… what you could be if you went real bad as a Bard."

She wrinkled her nose in disgust.

I mean, obviously it would've been useful to simply take command of people and have them do whatever I wanted. No doubt about that, I'd have an easier time dealing with Fairy Poppins, and wouldn't have the Cinzy situation repeat itself, where she just quit the team and ran off for weeks. But that would be at the cost of trust, and them liking me. Also, I wouldn't be able to face myself having done it.

That didn't even take into account the fact that all my current Pleasure Seeker abilities would be overwritten. Language in this UI

was clear: all my current abilities would be gone, and replaced with gods knew what.

No, no way. I'd take the first one before I took this one.

"One more," I said, and mentally clicked on Phantasm's Mask.

As a seeker of pleasure and one who grants orgasm after orgasm, you have learned to be a little of everything. Pleasure Seekers know that with each partner, what constitutes ecstasy is a little different. As a Phantasm's Mask, you learn how to fill the role in every partner's fantasies. You fill it full to bursting.

You have reached level 25 in your class. You have satisfied the sexual kinks of at least a half dozen partners. You have engaged in sex acts with no fewer than 10 partners, each of whom you successfully brought satisfaction through pleasure. You have cultivated reputations with a humans and Nakamamon, and a wide variety at that.

The Phantasm's Mask gains advanced Qualities progression, with both Illusion and Divination magic tied to satisfying your partners. Lastly, you gain bonuses when adopting the fantasy of your amorous partners.

Note: some class abilities will be overwritten if you select this class.

"Oh geez," I breathed, and relayed what I might be getting to Cinzy.

This is Christopher reaching a fork in the road.



Chapter 30- The Hard-to-say Words

Cinzy and I discussed the situation for some time. I had already discounted the screw-and-run class evolution, and the slave-maker one as well. The two who remained were called Indulgent Consort and Phantasm's Mask.

Indulgent Consort seemed like a more basic evolution, on its face. There were more prerequisites for Phantasm's Mask, and more clearly defined benefits. Magic benefits. On the one hand, it seemed pretty amazing to be slinging illusions, though I had this feeling I would be slinging illusions very little outside the bedroom. The class was for Pleasure Seeker, not Rogue or Sorcerer. Divination magic, too, seemed an awful lot like **Blissense** but for even deeper exploration of what my sex partners wanted from their bedroom activities.

"What I don't get is," Cinzy asked, "why do you have to change into something else in order to fulfill a girl's fantasy?"

I'd imagined myself wearing the illusion mask of some swarthy, sculpted Adonis with long, wavy hair and high cheekbones. Exactly the kind of guy you'd see on a pulp romance novel cover.

Cinzy's question struck me though: what would be the point of that? So far, my partners saw me, liked what they saw, and that was enough. I didn't have to have long hair or be a sparkly vampire or anything. I was enough.

She'd hit the nail directly on the head.

"Thanks, Cinzy," I told her.

"You're welcome."

I chose Indulgent Consort for a number of reasons. One of those was that I really enjoyed the 'group work bonus' it described in the

summary.

Level 25: You have gained the following:
+8 skill points.
An increase of HP per level.
An increase of stamina per level.
The following are now class Qualities: Seduction, Group Play

You gain ***Man Enough.***
Blissense *has been replaced by* ***Eromancy.***
Raw Connection *has been replaced by* ***Coming Together.***
Eromancy *advances.*
Post-Sharing Clarity *advances.*
Drive In Deeper *advances.*
Man Enough *advances.*
Coming Together *advances.*

Post-Sharing Clarity III
(Special Ability, Rare, Passive)
After having intimate relations, all participants gain +2 temporary bonus to all attributes and skills 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.

Coming Together II
(Special Ability, Rare, Aura)
Engage this aura by spending a Likability Token.
I- While this aura is engaged, Relationship rewards are doubled. This applies to both positive and negative rewards.
II- Activate while engaged in intimate relations with a partner by succeeding a Very Difficult Likability + Pheromones check (5-8 successes needed). Non-participants within range may choose to spend a Likability Token to experience your present sensations,

including touch, smell, sight, hearing and taste. Magical senses are not included.

Man Enough II

(Special Ability, Rare, Active)

I- While having intimate relations with a partner, make a difficult Durability check, difficulty 4. If you succeed, your attributes are boosted at least equal to your partner's.

II- While having intimate relations with a partner, you may spend 5 Affinity Tokens to clone yourself. The clone has all your attributes but reduced by 2. A maximum of a single clone is possible.

Drive In Deeper II

(Special Ability, Rare, Passive)

I- While having intimate relations with a partner, you and your partner gain increased mana and health regeneration rates.

II- After having intimate relations with a partner, provided you both achieve orgasm, you and your partner replenish a Token of your choice.

Eromancy III

(Special Ability, Heroic, Active)

I- You automatically detect arousal, passion, erotic thoughts and feelings, and their points of origin, to a range of Affinity x10 feet. You may spend a Token to home in on those thoughts and experience them. Targets will immediately detect your presence in this case. Unwilling targets use Psychic Resistance and Durability to force you out, versus your Pheromones and Likability. The subject may spend a Token to eject you.

II- Spend a Likability Token: You may bring a target you are touching into your mind, to experience a psychic delving of your choosing. This could be memory or imagination. The target will know truth from fiction instinctually. The subject may exit your psychic projection at any time.

III- While inside these fantasies, you may influence them or take

control. Spend a Token to begin shaping these thoughts, daydreams, or dreams. You may attempt finer control using additional Tokens or by Pheromones and Likability checks. As before, the subject may spend a Token to oust you from their mind.

Okay, so the Seduction Quality was not what I imagined, and neither was Group Play. Seduction's description listed that it 'assisted in knowing the right moments to make an advance' and 'when to work a partner's kink'. I was naturally suspicious of the Bard abilities and anything called Seduction on the off chance they bent people's will. It was too close to coercion for my comfort.

Group Play was another thing entirely, and I was thrilled to have it. It was essentially Pheromones, but for situations where there were more than two of us in action simultaneously. The description read 'extends the range of the Pheromones Quality out two feet per level, in the event you engage with more than one partner, or you separate from your current partner. You may also gift Pheromones to an additional person per level of Group Play' A nice way of saying I could, ahem, have an orgy.

Thinking of a tangle of limbs surrounding me, with everybody writhing and moaning, was one to harden the most jaded of people.

I mean, with the new ability **Man Enough**, I could literally be a one man orgy. The possibilities were a delight to consider. I wistfully stared up at the ceiling and considered investing points—

"Points!" I blurted. Skill points time.

Okay, two points were supposed to be reserved for Healer skills, because I'd skimmed off and spent them on Adaptability and Pheromones.

I put those two into Divine Resistance and the last one into Transmutation, because I couldn't invest in the ones I really wanted until I gained another level. The next two went to Adaptability and Pheromones, leaving four. This Group Play one seemed awesome, so I put one in there… then remembered that since I'd evolved my class, I could shove a bunch of points into the new Qualities.

I didn't want to, though. Adaptability and Pheromones were my

target Qualities. I put another into Group Play in case it came to a bunch of threesomes with Ivy and Isabelle, one into Length, and one into Stave Off. I had a feeling the sensations were going to be nearly overwhelming, and I wasn't getting more Durability like I had in the past.

"Do you want to share with the class?" Cinzy asked.

I responded by grinning and engaging **Man Enough**. Sure it took 5 Tokens, but the results were spectacular. All at once, there was a separate version of myself sitting on the other side of Cinzy on the sofa.

She yelped, looked at me, looked at the other me, then swung around and gaped in astonishment. "Is this… are you… what?"

Two Tokens later and I had enhanced her pleasure both with **Eromancy's** third ability, a boost of roughly ten percent, and from **Entwined Ecstasy**. She gasped as the fingers running up and down her skin seemed to drive bolts of pleasure directly down to her pussy. And I knew all this because **Eromancy** fed me information on the sensations she was feeling.

I smiled languidly and licked my lips. "I have a feeling you're going to enjoy this almost as much as I will. Mr. Fletcher, would you assist me in fucking this young lady's brains out?"

"Why, I don't mind if I do, Expedition Leader," my second self said. In the meantime I made sure to perform the check for my second self, using **Man Enough**, so that I could boost my lowered stats up to at least Cinzy's stats. On one hand, some of her stats were lower than mine, but the second me boosted up to at least a 12 Likability, making my clone a radiant sex god with a dazzling smile.

"Oh dear," she breathed, but only raised her hips to let my first self slide her panties down her thighs and to the floor. The cowboy boots followed shortly after. In the meantime, my second self kissed her neck and unzipped the hoodie, then assisted her in removing it while the other me parted her thighs and licked my way between them.

"I am going to fuck your ass," I breathed in her ear, "and bury myself in your tight little pussy at exactly the same time. What do you think of that?"

She gasped, nodded just a fraction of an inch, and merely watched through lidded eyes as I fondled her exquisite body and traced her lower lips with my tongue.

"I… I… ohhhhhhhh…" She couldn't even finish the thought, with me flicking at her clit with my tongue, circling around it with deft strokes even as my fingers played with her holes.

I really made sure to savor all of her this time. I had my second self standing on the couch and sliding my shaft between her perfect lips not long after, even as I lapped her whole pussy with my tongue and penetrated her with two fingers, slow and easy.

Cinzy didn't seem to be able to comprehend what was happening to her, but instead just went with what I was doing. What both of me were doing. Her hands fluttered up and down my ass, over my head where it was buried between her thighs, over her own nipples.

She came some two minutes later, and the thought of me doing this, with a girl as gorgeous as her, nearly sent me over the edge. I held back, disengaged, and got a bit of a breather by subbing in with my other self.

Fletcher Prime paused in his ministrations and grinned at a shocked and bewildered Cinzy. I stood and leaned forward to kiss her gently on the lips.

"You're going to be okay," I told her, but she just shuddered and shivered like she'd been caught out in the cold.

My hand had found its way between her legs and was beginning to open her up. I heard her heavy breathing and felt the encouragement reverberating from inside her. **Eromancy** was telling me how much she was enjoying this: immensely. Cinzy had always been the subject of affection and arousal, though she'd never been approached by anyone who she felt deserved her.

"You're going to be all right," I soothed her, even as I worked a finger around her wet entrance, even as I licked the insides of her

thighs and licked her sensitive nipples at the same time.

She ended up clutching my head and climaxing again before I got even one of me up into her. Five more minutes of attention paid to all of her sensitive spots at the same time did it, and she made a low moan for a good thirty seconds, clamping onto my head with perfect thighs and another hand pressing my head against her breast.

Some ten minutes later I had her on all fours, shuddering with climax. I paused in the middle of forcing more of my shaft up her back door, and also mildly choking her on my other shaft. She'd ridden another soft orgasm a few minutes ago, humming around my shaft while her backside clamped onto my cock, eyes fluttering.

"You like it?" I asked.

"I love it," she gasped, just before engulfing me again. "I c-can't believe you…" Her eyes fluttered closed again as I dragged myself out of her back door and pressed back inside.

"The main event starts now," I told her. Special abilities were working: enhanced pleasure, an awareness of the feelings coursing through her whole body, bonus Tokens, enhanced recovery. I shoved it all aside and stood with Cinzy in my arms.

She was spread out before me, staring at me in incomprehension. She watched me walk up to her even as the other me held her under the knees and flexed forward into her ass.

"You look glorious," I told her.

"F-Fletcher," she moaned. "I've n-never…"

"Me neither," I told her, though that wasn't quite true. Ivy and Isabelle and I had sort of done this.

"N-no," she said, and wrapped her arms around my neck, kissing me. This went on for some time, and I had to make the first Durability check with Stave Off to keep from unloading up inside her.

"I've never… h-had plain old v-v-vanilla sex."

"May I be your first?" I asked quietly.

She nodded. Tangles of sweat-soaked hair framed her gorgeous face, and she bit her lip against the pain she knew was coming.

Adaptability helped out here, just as it did with her back door. The size of me now… I couldn't just unleash all of that on her ass. I did relax Adaptability a bit and allow more Length and Girth to invade her. She gasped, head falling back onto my shoulder, even while I kissed at her neck and collar bone. She was exquisite and I wanted to appreciate her.

Eventually it was time. She'd ramped up toward another climax, and better, her anxious thoughts about pain had subsided with the increased pleasure. I lined up and pressed forward, up.

Slowly, I sank into her.

"Fuhhhhhhhhh," she groaned, and her eyes had shot open, staring at the ceiling, staring at nothing. In the meantime she accepted me in, accepted my control over the situation.

"You're doing amazing," I breathed in her ear. "You feel incredible."

"So. Full," she grunted.

"Just wait until I get going."

Once again she came, and this one was harder than all the rest. Her body clamped down on me, making me unable to continue without exploding up into her.

"I love that you've given your body to me," I whispered. "I promise I'll take good care of it."

"Huh," was all she could manage. It was going to be like that for the next ten minutes: her suspended between me and my clone, powerless to stop us from doing anything she might not want, fully trusting me and giving herself over to the pleasure I offered. I held this perfect woman in my arms and gave her all I had.

"I love that you trust me," I whispered.

"Huh… huh…"

"I love that you're giving me control," I whispered, and strained against the sensations of her tight confines.

"I love your body."

"Oh… oh gods…"

Running my hands over her arms, over her shoulders, down her trim stomach and over her belly button. “Love this, and this, and this.” Ran my fingers over her thighs where I still held them, over her calf muscles and down over her feet. Massaging them a little, my clone and I alternated thrusting up into her and rendering her incapable of speech.

I bent and took one nipple into my mouth, then switched to the other.

“Love these.”

She came again.

“Love this ass,” I said, and flexed my cock inside her. She squealed. “Love this tight little pussy of yours.”

My orgasm was on approach. I could feel both of them, and I strained to hold them at bay just a little longer.

“I love everything about you, Cinzia Graham,” I told her.

She started to make a mewling noise deep in her throat, and her head snapped up to look at me. A furious make out session ensued, with her kissing me like she was trying to devour me.

“Fletcher, you’re, you’re…”

“I love everything about you,” I repeated in a low growl. “And I’m going to fill you up now.”

“Yes!” she gasped, and I released my hold over my self-control. A torrent came from me, up into her, both at the same time. “Ohhhhh… I can feel it! Oh Fletcher, I love it… I love it I love it, I LOVE IT!”

Afterwards we took a shower, just one of me this time, languidly making out and feeling one another up. Soaping one another up and rubbing our soapy bodies together. It wouldn’t take long before she was on her knees and trying her best to coax me back to life.

“Was this the one in my ass?” She asked in between licks.

I grinned. “Yes and no.”

“Well I love it, even though it’s a little too big sometimes.”

“It loves you too,” I told her.

We had more unhurried sex in the shower, with her bracing herself against the shower wall and waiting while I lubed her up with shampoo. This time I forked her behind slowly, and let her shove herself back against me. I watched as the whole shaft slowly disappeared into her, then became visible again, only to disappear again. Later, she closed her eyes and took my load on her face, then stood and washed it off.

"There's sooooo much," she laughed with her eyes closed, trying to get it all.

She dutifully toweled me off, then herself, and led me to her bed. There we cuddled and listened to the bug Nakamamon chirp in the night.

"Did you… mean it," she asked.

"I don't say things I don't mean," I said.

She shivered. "I love… what you do to me, Fletcher. I love your abilities and the orgasms. And I love that you're not simping for me, or just bringing me expensive shirt to try and get in my pants, or my parents' choice. And I'm glad you don't have drugs and you're not trying to hook me."

"Except for the dopamine hits," I told her, grinning.

"It's true… I love the orgasms. I love it all…" Then she grew real quiet, staring down at my chest and running a finger back and forth over it. "Fletcher?"

"Hm?"

She didn't answer, but instead stared at the bit of moonlight coming in through the shutters on my skin. Seconds ticked by. She seemed to be at war with something mentally. The seconds turned into a minute, and then another.

"I know," I told her.

"What do you know?"

"I know it's hard to say."

She squeezed onto me, scrunched her eyes shut, and took a deep breath. "I love you, Fletcher."

This is Christopher, wondering if he should make another Christopher for round three.



Chapter 31- Ability Alchemy

I awoke the next morning to birds chirping, the breeze sighing through the gigantic spherical leaves of the trees and the grasses, the sun warming the place, and lots of supple flesh pressed up against me.

Cinzy hadn't wanted to sleep separately and followed me to my room, where we had yet another unhurried round of sex. Finally she and I drifted off to sleep on my bed, only to be joined sometime in the night by Vellenia, Regina, and Tweedle Dee. Also for some reason Isabelle had joined in? A typical morning meant Vellenia snuggled up on my left, sometimes Tara or Regina on my right, and that was it. Right now Cinzy was draped over the left half of my body, while Vellenia snuggled in on my right. Tweedle Dee was curled up in a ball between my legs, and Regina lay down there with an arm draped over so she could sleep pet her bond mate. Isabelle was spooning Vellenia, and slowly running her free hand up and down the pure white skin, with its minty green and pink highlights. The other was tucked under my pillow.

Also everybody was naked. Tweedle Dee was also naked but that was the default setting for a flower fox.

For a long time, I just lay there and enjoyed the springy, toned bodies in my arms. I noted Vellenia's eyes open and we smiled quietly at one another. It was time to get to work, but it was also time to soak up some good old fashioned cuddle time.

Now I don't know about you, but I figure few people have had naked cuddle puddles with more than one person. I would say, so long as you love and trust all these people, I'd recommend it. Sure you can't really go anywhere, but you might have a gorgeous sleeping woman run her thumb back and forth over your nipple, while another partner stares lovingly into your eyes. Then, after a minute of that, she shifts up and sticks out all of her tongues for the

weirdest kiss imaginable.

Cinzy's confession meant a second of my ladies had pushed past the Relationship plateau and up to the next level: **Devotee**. The trust she had displayed was enough, apparently.

The Relationship level up also brought about another change, and I was presented with it while laying there in the mass of snoozing ladies: first, whether I wanted to overwrite one of my shared abilities with a Bard ability, or level up one of my existing shared abilities.

Presently, I had **Psyspeech, Stalwart, Fierce, Eagle Eyed**, and **Beast Talker**.

The first and last were too valuable to get rid of. **Stalwart** and **Fierce** gave me unexpected social check leverage I had used to get out of some sticky situations. **Eagle Eyed** was also excellent for spotting, problems, and not being snuck up on. In a world of ambush predators, I liked that one.

Fierce probably got used the least. It relied on me pressuring people into social checks.

The other option was using Cinzy's level up to level up any of these powers. Right away, **Beast Talker** was the obvious choice, but all of them had come in handy at various points. That was like taking your highest level ability and leveling it up even higher. Sure your other abilities are kind of meh, but you never use them so who cares?

I hesitated there, because any replacement from Cinzy would be pretty great, and work more often than **Fierce** at least. It would be a social power.

With all that in mind, I decided to chance it and grab a new ability.

Congratulations! *You have joined in the flesh with Cinzia Graham. Your relationship has increased to* ***Devotees****.*

Partners devoted to one another are something special to behold. Friends, family and even bystanders will remark upon how good they

look as a couple, how natural.

This is the fifth level on the Relationship track, and brings with it the first tangible system benefits.

**You lose Relationship points with Cinzia more slowly.*

Your shared abilities advance.* You have gained ***Intrinsically Convincing Oration Atop Simple Soapbox III.* *Cinzia Graham has advanced* ***Healing Aura*** *to level III. If you choose this ability,* ***Beast Talker*** *will be lost.*

**You gain a Meld ability.*

And as soon as it appeared, I laughed, remembering that all of Cinzy's abilities had long, overly-elaborate names. My upgraded Affinity and the skill Mana Affinity allowed me to know for sure what I'd be getting if I chose to replace **Beast Talker**.

Intrinsically Convincing Oration Atop Simple Soapbox III

(Special Ability, Uncommon, passive)

I- Any time you use a non-intimidation Social check, you gain +2 skill levels. If you are at an elevated position when speaking, gain an additional +1 level.

II- When addressing more than one target for a non-intimidation Social check, gain +1 skill level per target beyond the second, to a maximum of your Likability attribute. If you are at an elevated position when speaking and you succeed in your check, regain a Token at random.

III- Difficulties for non-intimidation social checks while addressing more than one target are reduced by 25%. If you are at an elevated position when speaking, difficulties are instead halved.

Unreal. Okay, there was no way I was replacing **Beast Talker**. This would turn me into a mini Cinzy whenever I addressed up to… 10 people. Meaning that social checks got much more difficult the more people who participated, and I had a defense against that. The need for a literal soapbox was so funny to me. It didn't seem like a bad trade off, and the ability to regain a Token was a good one. I

just wasn't about to start rattling off oration on a soapbox or tree stump whenever I wanted a Token back. It seemed ethically questionable.

I lay there enjoying the flood of new information, possibilities, and abilities.

The next thing my UI did was inform me that I also had another Meld ability.

Oh boy. I hadn't even dealt with the first one from Regina yet. And, sure, Regina was running around with over a dozen Nakamamon pals at any given time, frolicking like a princess who could sing to birds and deer and bunnies, but I still hadn't been able to bring myself to replace one of my abilities with another. The future held uncertainty.

Cinzy would also get a Meld ability, but she only had a single ability from me. She would take **Healing Aura** and apply it to one of her abilities. As for me, I had to consider how I wanted to combine any of my four abilities from the ladies with any of the ten I had from my two classes. How would **Arcane Alchemy** pair with **Eagle Eyes**, or **Stalwart**? What would happen if I put **Man Enough** together with **Psyspeech**?

There were a total of forty different combinations I could pick from.

I laid out a mental list, beginning with abilities I'd gotten from the ladies.

Psyspeech
Stalwart
Eagle Eyes
Fierce
Beast Talker

You could map these onto the Attributes, sort of. **Stalwart** could easily fit into Durability, the long name from Cinzy would cover **Likability**, and **Eagle Eyes** and **Psyspeech** both seemed to favor Ingenuity, or Affinity. **Beast Talker** also felt like it went there.

Fierce was the one to match with Physicality.

My new Arcane Mender abilities could do likewise.

Arcane Alchemy: Ingenuity
Healer's Resistance: Physicality… or possibly Durability
Verdant Rejuvenation: Likability
Mending Aura: Affinity
Mender's Focus: Durability… or maybe Physicality?

It wasn't a perfect fit, it would do.

Some of these would make no sense in how they might fit. How would **Mending Aura**, which was a great ability and I could definitely see myself copying, mesh with **Eagle Eyed** or **Psyspeech**?

And that didn't even take into account the Indulgent Consort abilities, which mapped to the attributes as well.

Eromancy: Ingenuity
Post-Sharing Clarity: Affinity
Drive In Deeper: Durability
Man Enough: Physicality
Coming Together: Likability

Again the possibilities seemed endless. **Man Enough** allowed me to clone myself, which only worked in the bedroom. If I melded it with one of my abilities from the girls, I doubted it would work outside the bedroom. I just get an even more erotic thing, which seemed hardly necessary. Or if I wanted to further enhance Token generation, could I meld together **Drive In Deeper** with one of my gift abilities? And that didn't even take into account **Coming Together**, which I hadn't used yet… if allowed my partners to experience my sensations. The options were mind boggling.

When I placed the abilities into the little UI window's oven to meld them together, I got a vague sense of how the melding was going to end up. This was a strange sensation: when I placed **Eagle**

Eyed with any of the Pleasure Seeker abilities, they all felt gross and wrong. Only the **Eromancy** one gave me the impression it might be okay, like **Blissense** all over again. I repeated the process, and got the feeling that the ability from Cinzy was equally as weird and off-putting. The sensations from **Stalwart** or **Psyspeech** were much more compatible. The vibe from them was that I'd last longer in bed, or be much better at sensation. Whether that was my partner's feelings or their erotic fantasies was unclear. Heck, it could mean that my erogenous zones were a lot more sensitive.

It was a very different situation when comparing the gifted abilities to my Healer abilities. **Arcane Alchemy** paired well with both **Psyspeech** and **Eagle Eyed,** but much less so with **Fierce** or **Stalwart**. A diagnostic tool? It could be incredibly useful to be able to find the scattered parts of a dead god, or diagnose problems with the help of an ability.

Verdant Rejuvenation already seemed like more than enough… but paired with **Eagle Eyed**, again the feeling I got was a sensing ability. Would I get a plant sense, to help me find ingredients? Pairing it with **Stalwart** gave me a strange impression… hardy plants. Like they would keep longer once I cut them.

Mending Aura was the most useful in the short term. I could bring people back from the brink of death just by spending Tokens. So if I got another ability like that… could I though? The UI gave me some very strange vibes once I slotted in my three choices. Adding **Stalwart** was the most right feeling option, sort of like I could extend that willfulness out to others. Pairing it with **Psyspeech** felt right too, but I couldn't place why. It felt like it would assist with mental illnesses.

I tried not to feel smothered by all the options and potential. The real question was what I wanted or needed.

So what did I want? Clearly, having sex and driving my partners wild needed to be secondary to my actual job. The trouble was, I was getting some wild abilities out of Pleasure Seeker. I could create a forking clone myself, and do Ivy and Isabelle at the same time.

Now when I enjoyed some time with Cinzy or Regina, my attributes were boosted for almost an hour afterwards. I regained Tokens and boosted Relationship rewards even faster.

Pleasure Seeker was also the reason I was in this position to begin with. It had been a gateway to the abilities that helped me overcome all the problems with Blake's people. Fending off the Ferrosaurs? **Beast Talker**. Enraging Blake's people into making mistakes? **Stalwart** and **Fierce**. Gathering a whole host of creatures to stampede the camp? **Beast Talker** again. I wouldn't have any of those if it hadn't been for my abilities in the bedroom.

On the other hand, we had a god to bring back to life and then heal, and it was ramping up to be a big one. I definitely needed to meld a Healer ability with one of my abilities from the girls.

"Ugh," I said, quietly, so as not to wake the girls.

In the end, the clearest and best sense I'd gotten from the UI was **Mending Aura** and **Psyspeech**. Trouble was, just like **Beast Talker**, I didn't want to give up **Psyspeech**.

"Here goes nothing," I breathed.

At the very last second, I switched out **Psyspeech**. I waffled between **Stalwart** and **Fierce**. Finally, I put **Stalwart** together with **Mending Aura**.

Congratulations! *The UI gushed. You have melded your second ability!* ***Stalwart*** *has been replaced by* ***Mender's Soothing Mental Balm****.*

Okay that… sounded good. I felt the muscles in my body relax.

Mender's Soothing Mental Balm II

(Special Ability, Rare, Aura)

Speak soothing words to those within range suffering from mental or emotional distress to help ease their torment and anguish.

Spend an Affinity Token. Make a Treatment check with Affinity to immediately begin healing all beings within range. All mental illnesses suffered by nearby non-divine creatures are healed so long

as this aura is active. Once the aura ends, all creatures previously affected by mental illnesses regain them at half strength and half duration.

Range: 60 feet. Duration: 1 hour.

This was… good. Very different from Stalwart, but auras as a rule were excellent, and this was no exception. This one worked differently than **Mender's Aura**, which healed hit points lost and that was about it. Instead, this would give me time to work up a cure while providing an umbrella of perfect calm for those around me.

I thought back to the emotional distress of the Marshins in the first village we'd come to. The people of Slinktrickle had been mortified that their entire clutch of eggs would die, and that ballooned out into a zombie-like fervor to get at their eggs. It wouldn't have helped, and they'd have only destroyed their eggs, but the emotions had been so overwhelming that they wouldn't know or believe us. Instead we were just meddling outsiders who were just like Blake's people.

This would have obviated all of that. In its place, the eggs would have seemed perfect and healed faster. The cure would've been much easier to brew up. The blow up with the entire village wouldn't have happened.

And likewise, perhaps I could've activated it and saved Cinzy from leaving. Hell, maybe I could've convinced Blake to take his damn medicine and stop being a piece of shirt.

This was a good thing, no two ways about it. I snuggled into the comforting feel of many women and luxuriated in knowing I'd done the right thing.

Almost everything about Cinzy was amazing, except for her difficult position with regard to me and other women. Oh, sure, she was in a naked pile with them now, but she still looked around with apprehension, then at me. What was she doing, being with a guy who was definitely having sex with almost every woman within shouting distance? That was a recipe for getting seriously hurt…

which had already sort of happened once. It had also been sort of her fault.

But it wouldn’t happen again, now that I had my new aura!

I stroked her cheek, her ear, the line of her jaw, and when her eyes met mine, I smiled at her with what I hoped was placid reassurance. I didn’t know how the Bard could be so commanding and in control of the emotions of others, yet still be such a mess internally, but we would get through it together.

This is Christopher with the right tool for the job.



Chapter 32- Sundrinker Oil and Other Ingredients

When all of us were awoken and moving, it was Isabelle who seemed embarrassed by the whole thing. Cinzy was mortified but hid it well. I don't think she hated having Regina's face so close to her butt. On the other hand, I wasn't able to ask or get a definitive answer.

We chuckled a bit and several body parts were squeezed and fondled before we got the mess of clothes sorted out, and people dressed. Then, breakfast was quickly wolfed down so we could begin crafting the cure.

"What's our status?" I asked.

Tara had just sauntered in, looking tired but pleased.

"We have six godly vomit puddles and only one semi-crushed house," she said. "Ivy and Larelle only had to pressure Him to back off once, to stay inside the town limits. It seems like our boy is content to stay within city limits."

Shakindria was presently lending a psychic hand when necessary, taking one of the three eight hour god watches to give Tara and Regina some rest time. She had abandoned a steel golem-looking thing, and would get it on the task as well.

Tara then yawned and sleepily grabbed up some breakfast.

"Anything else to report?" I asked.

"Aside from Fletcher's new amazing spit-roasting, DP-ing sex powers?" Cinzy muttered from beside me. I gave her a sharp look that I hope went unnoticed.

"Trent's wall is twenty feet tall and six feet thick," Chrysta said. "It spans the large central entryway and another eight feet to either side. It is a marvel."

“I’ll make him up a batch of simple mana potions for today,” I said. “Let him sleep in and nobody bother him. He’s been doing great.”

Also, thankfully, Cinzy had found the cure I needed to heal up the God of Productivity.

Now, when I’d found the cure for the God of Footfalls, it had required summer mist lilies, purple morpheus root, jaln oil, and henge grass. The much larger God of Productivity required different materials, being humanoid, and being so freaking big. Only the purple morpheus was duplicated for this recipe, unfortunately, because we still had the other three among my supplies. Well, we had a bit of the root, but it was dried and for this, I needed the whole plant: root, stem, leaves and flower. I had tried planting the dried root, but it wouldn’t take, not even with **Verdant Rejuvenation**. I could cause seeds to sprout and turn into plants overnight, and I could turn cuttings into full-fledged plants in the same timeframe, but I could not reanimate the dead. The root was definitely dead.

“You think you can bring it back?” Vellenia asked me sweetly.

“It’d take a miracle,” I said, and she furrowed her brow in confusion over the Billy Crystal voice I did.

The purple morpheus was a flowering plant with a very stable magical aura, but was also quite rare. I’d used it up before getting **Verdant Rejuvenation**, sadly, or else I would’ve made sure to always have some on hand. It was magical and grew only in specific swampy areas along ley lines, and only revealed itself to open at dusk and dawn for a short period of time.

“What’s a ley line?" Isabelle asked, then gave Ivy a dark look when she swatted her on the shoulder lightly.

Alan explained that it was a powerful line of magic that ran around the planet. Inside the line, you’d see a lot more plant life, it would grow faster, and all creatures absorbed mana faster, including us. Rare plants were easier to find inside ley lines.

Alan pointed up to the sky. “I-i-if y-you c-c-c-c-can see that sh-

sh-sh-shimmer i-in broad daylight, we're i-i-in a ley line."

"And also you'll need to take your anti-magic medicine more often," Ivy said, to groans of misery. The anti-magic medicine I brewed up on the regular was not cherry flavored for kids.

"So we need to find a purple morpheus then," Regina said. "We'll look in Alan's library for what it looks like exactly."

"Strike that," I said. "We need to find…a lot."

"Strike that," Vellenia announced, to chuckles, "just one. After that, my Fletcher can grow more using his rapid garden growth ability."

The others chuckled. I gave her a mock flat glare and enjoyed the radiant smile I received in return.

"Can we ask Airaconda…" Regina started, "oh, Tara's already asleep."

The second flower was called the passionflower. Earth had a purple passionflower, perhaps the strangest or most unique flower to not be an orchid. Dorfilialtos had a number of passionflowers, and we needed the blue one. It had mana condensing properties, so the purple morpheus could cleanse more and more mana.

"This thing climbs up trees or along the ground, and the flower looks like something out of a sci-fi movie. It's got a stemmy bit in the middle with five points, but the rest of it is striped with pokey looking petals in a big circle. The flower is going to be about as big around as your face, and it grows in warmer regions."

The third thing we needed was bluegrass. The blue was in the name on account of the mana saturation; the blue passionflower and the bluegrass were also used in mana potions if you were making mana potions for about a zillion mana. This one I would search out because it was just… grass. It wasn't easy to tell what the heck might be bluegrass and what might be any type of other grass. Meaning I needed to head out over meadow and dale and grab up some instead of anyone else.

We needed sundrinker oil, and thankfully we were growing sundrinkers in my expanding hyper-fast garden. I could transmute

the flowers into the oil, hopefully. I'd also ask Jacoby's Wizard attached to our group, Wayne.

Finally, we needed bits of a hardwood tree, black cherry to be precise. Of all the things… the system informed me that black cherry did not exist here in this world, normally. I set Isabelle and Chrysta to the task of trying to find a hardwood substitute, praying that one hardwood might be as good as another.

"Are we all good on the cure situation?" I asked everybody.

Drat raised a hand. "You didn't give me a job."

"You want one?" Grinning, I was challenging him to care.

"Yeah, I'd rather be out of this place and back on the job. Gimme something."

Amazing. I was pacing around the camp fire and cooking area, rubbing my chin. "See if you can't find any black cherries. I might be able to grow a tree if we get one." That would be something to see, an entire tree grown overnight.

He stared at me. "You're… serious."

"Yeah I'm serious."

"You want me to head all the way back to HQ and rummage around there, or go back through the portal specifically to get black cherries?"

I shrugged. "You're the Rogue. I have faith in you."

His glower intensified. "Fine. I'll be getting xp whether I find any or not."

"That's the spirit!" Vellenia gushed. Now I don't know about you, but it's hard to stay mad at a cute water fairy with a bright smile. Drat nodded to her, the slightest hint of smile playing over his face. I wanted to razz him about it, but I knew it would only result in him sulking away and promising some kind of prank-based revenge.

"Okay," I said. "Let's move out, and hopefully we'll get plants tended in my little herb garden here." I gestured out at the expanse of land just beyond the camp, where a whole lot of strange plants grew right next to one another, not in their native environment. Good old magic.

Regina was on the day shift with Isabelle and Chrysta, going to check on the whereabouts of our sick god and keep Him from breaching containment.

"How's Alan doing?" I asked Alan.

He turned a sluggish face up to meet mine. He was at about a third of his HP, and his stamina wasn't much higher. He was still unable to recover mana, and I knew that feeling well. No bueno. When I put on **Mender's Aura**, he healed up to half his HP and stamina, then instantly fell asleep on the fireside bench. Tara sighed in her sleep and slumped further in her camp chair, long legs spreading open enough to get my libido sending the wrong signals. Everyone else cooed at the light show, the feelings, and the faint scent of antiseptic that emanated up from my aura. Larelle lifted him carefully and deposited him in the cube house Trent had built him.

"What are we going to do about the thousands of homeless refugees we just extracted yesterday?" I asked.

The others blinked at me. "You didn't know?" Cinzy asked.

"Didn't know what?"

"Well, there was some general outcry about their town, but most everybody was really happy to be themselves again. The refugees in their little town," she waved a hand over to the west, where the many squat buildings sat, ringed by some huts, and now a lot of tents. "The newcomers welcomed them in, and it's cramped. The ones who complained I settled down with a little Bard cheer… the check difficulty is going to get higher every day as they get riled up to move back home, but then Tara and Airaconda flew a couple of them up over the city to see the situation with the, you know."

"The God of Productivity, drunkenly stumbling around the city and vomiting holy ichor everywhere?" I asked.

"Yeah. That."

"Anyway between Tara showing them and me calming them down, we should be fine for a few days."

"Then let's get to work."

My job was to first turn sundrinkers into sundrinker oil. I felt this

probably wasn't an impossible task. Just refine the thing using magic.

Transmutation wasn't a simple spellcasting art, and fought me on it.

Spellcasting (Transmutation) Knowledge check: *The best way to perform this action is known in the annals of Transmutation lore. You have the Transmutation skill at level 1, and Ingenuity at level 9. This check is Difficult, and requires 4 successes. Would you like to spend 4 Tokens for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 9 Ingenuity and 7 Free Tokens.

I indicated I wanted to attempt the check without spending Tokens, and was awarded with the following notification:

Success! *You have scored 5 successes and recalled the knowledge of how to turn sundrinker flowers into sundrinker oil.*

Now, there's an odd fact that comes with 'knowing' something through a Spellcasting knowledge skill, and 'remembering' it through a successful check. When I'd taken the skill, a whole lot of knowledge just ballooned out in my brain, like someone had uploaded all that knowledge in the blink of an eye, and I could go 'I know Kung Fu' in a breathy, amazed whisper.

But the knowledge was so vast, so intricate that it needed to be brought back up from the depths of my brain with this check.

The moment I succeeded the check, the knowledge was there again. The basics of Transmutation were there, along with a quick innate understanding of how to extract only the oil from the flower and discard the rest. The mana shaping construct looked intimidating, but they all did.

The construct appeared before me and showed me where I needed to attach mana from my third eye and… from my core?

I'd never shaped mana from two different spots before, and the going was difficult. I needed to keep the correct amount of mana flowing from two different points on my body, which I don't need to

tell you, like rubbing your head and patting your belly at the same time, isn't easy. But the two different streams of mana didn't simply need to be patted and rubbed in a circle, they needed to be woven into a three-dimensional construct that moved and twisted around with each correct hand movement.

Slowly, ever so slowly, the construct came into being around the flowers. They and the construct rose up in the air at the same time; I had remembered to have a container for the resulting oil. Oh yes, one does not have an Ingenuity of 9 and then just forget to bring along a container.

Or if one does, his glorious bond mate of the fairy and water aspects cheerfully brings one over while dancing like a ballerina… or like she was doing some performance art. It was almost enough to put me off the end of the spell.

Instinctual Casting (Transmutation) check: *You are attempting a tier 1 Transmute Material spell. You have the Transmutation skill at level 1, Instinctual Casting at level 8, Mana Shaping at level 3, and Affinity at level 7. Since you have never cast a Transmutation spell and shaped mana only a handful of times, this check is Extreme, and requires 8 successes. Would you like to spend 8 Tokens for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 9 Ingenuity and 7 Free Tokens.

I told the UI to perform the check without requiring Tokens, and wonder of wonders, I succeeded yet again. The construct shrank down, constricting around the flowers and compressing them until they glowed with power too. The construct seemed to wring them out like a dishrag, the oil dripping down into container currently in Vellenia's cute little hands.

"Thank you, my dear," I managed through gritted teeth.

Her response was a wink and a pirouette away from me, holding the earthenware jug. Her tail swished as she went, and she glanced over her shoulder several times. Each time she found me still staring, she did another few dance moves. It caused her skirt to

flare out and show me her smooth little Nakamamon booty and the smooth expanse where her nether regions appeared and disappeared when she got aroused.

I'd need to create a lot more oil than that, but we had a whole lot of sundrinkers blooming in the **Verdant Rejuvenation** garden.

I took a little walk around the garden, rubbing my fingers along petals and bending to smell the flowers. Bee-like Nakamamon were buzzing here and there, nuzzling the insane collection of flowers that had no business being in this part of the world, near one another, and out in the sun. Some of these were shade-lovers, some water plants, some bloomed in summer or fall, yet here they were. It was a riot of color, and gave me a great deal of peace just walking the rows with my hands out.

No need to be a dead gladiator on his way to the Elysian Fields to enjoy the pure bounty of nature. I rubbed my hands along the different flowers, stopping to water them and clip any dead leaves. Again, the knowledge was simply instinctual.

"Thanks, by the way," I told the open air. I hoped the first god I'd ever met heard me. It wasn't the first prayer I'd said in my life, but it was probably the most heartfelt. I want to say that the air warmed, and I felt the presence of the Goddess of the Meadow beside me, but I didn't. None of the UI triggers gave me any info. No figure made of pollen appeared, or in the clouds, or anywhere else for that matter. No breath of the Goddess on my neck and whispered 'You're welcome' or anything like that. Just warmth and peace.

I was standing with my hands vaguely outstretched to touch flowers on either side of the row, at the edge of my magical garden when a body bowled me over, laughing. I went into the tall grass, which soaked up the impact well with a sound like *shush*.

"Are you just going to stand there and admire all your flowers, my bond mate?" Vellenia asked, hugging me from behind.

"I was thinking about it."

Several tongues licked my ear, before she giggled. "Go on," she said. "Go find us some bluegrass and return to me."

This is Christopher following orders.



Chapter 33- It'll Be Our Secret

Searching for bluegrass took me out and away from the town, and away from the others. I sensed myself being followed, through **Eromancy**, and thought it best to return my attention to the ability. I hadn't played with it like all the new spellcasting skills and the really dirty abilities, like **Man Enough**.

Eromancy III

(Special Ability, Heroic, Active)

I- You automatically detect arousal, passion, erotic thoughts and feelings, and their points of origin, to a range of Affinity x10 feet. You may spend a Token to home in on those thoughts and experience them. Targets will immediately detect your presence in this case. Unwilling targets use Psychic Resistance and Durability to force you out, versus your Pheromones and Likability. The subject may spend a Token to eject you.

II- Spend a Likability Token: You may bring a target you are touching into your mind, to experience a psychic delving of your choosing. This could be memory or imagination. The target will know truth from fiction instinctually. The subject may exit your psychic projection at any time.

III- While inside these fantasies, you may influence them or take control. Spend a Token to begin shaping these thoughts, daydreams, or dreams. You may attempt finer control using additional Tokens or by Pheromones and Likability checks. As before, the subject may spend a Token to oust you from their mind.

I whistled a low tone for a moment, and read over the ability again. Just like **Blissense**, there was definitely a sensing power for sexy thoughts. Some people had a spider sense for detecting spiders, I had a horny sense for detecting horny old goats.

Chuckling to myself, I kept on. This power wasn't limited to sensing though. It gave me the power to enter people's daydreams or fantasies and get my fingers all up in their business.

This was going to make Stave Off even more important.

More pressing was the line of desire stretching toward me. I was pretty sure Jacoby and company were closing in on Archie, Blake's rogue second in command. They had been trying to bait him into coming to take the anti-magic drug that kept you from transforming into a Nakamamon. I hoped they had succeeded… it would be bad to have another Blake out there.

Although Jacoby might want to watch me get freaky with someone else, she prioritized her work over anything else. It wasn't her, and it wasn't her people.

Also, I would've felt the Affinity signature of the person from my own team. It was a mana thing, like how my personality influenced the type of mana I had. If I cast a spell, people could sniff around it and tell that it was mine, or recognize me by that Affinity aura if they found me later. Trent's mana signature was dusty, solid, earth colored, and smelled of damp earth to my third eye. Cinzy hardly used any mana at all, but hers was fluffy like cotton candy, sweet in a cloying and bright way, like it was difficult to look at directly. It also smelled of jasmine but only to my mana senses.

It's the best day I can describe this sort of thing to a non magic user.

Anyway I knew the aura signatures of Vellenia (soft and smelling of rain) and Shakindria (purple and like you were having an allergy attack in your sinuses), and the others. This wasn't them.

"You can come on out," I said. "I'm not going to hurt you."

Unless it was Archie. I didn't want it to be Archie. Ugh, I wasn't ready to do literally all of Jacoby's job for her.

Something moved near a bush, that slowly stood. It resolved into a creature I'd seen during the big push to resurrect our guy, the God of Productivity. The Shrubber-nee!—no idea why it had an exclamation point on the end—was like a tangle of vines and leaves

with a pair of huge, unblinking eyes in the middle. When it stood, some of the vines had to be its legs and body, meaning a semi-humanoid figure began to emerge. It had wide, pointed ears and a somber expression.

"Oh, hey," I said. The write up hadn't mentioned anything about them eating people or being dangerous. Instead they photosynthesized most of their food direct from the sun, and gathered up moisture to drink. They were also vegetarian if they had to be, eating fruit, nuts, or vegetation.

"Do you have a name?" I asked.

The creature slowly shook its head.

"Do you want to come along and help me hunt down some bluegrass?"

It cocked its head, and the drawing in of the vines made it taller, and also made it appear more humanoid. More female. Leaves were hair, though it seemed to have a lot of arms. And nice curves, if I was being honest. Barky curves, but curves anyway.

"I'm searching for bluegrass… it's a shorter type of grass that'll be in a sunny meadow and further away from trees."

The creature's leaves all shook at the same time, a bit like a dog shaking itself when coming out of the water. Then it hunched down into its shrubbery-looking form, with only eyes and the tips of ears peeking out of the greenery. Otherwise it just looked like a mass of vegetation.

It started galumphing out away from the town, looking like a shrub version of Cousin It from the Addams Family. It didn't move very fast, and I just marveled at it as it went. A whole lot of it was little more than vines and leaves. In fact, aside from the head, I didn't know that it had a body in the conventional sense.

I thought I knew where we were headed, but the Nakamamon veered into a tough section of woods. It obviously had no trouble flowing in, under and around all the thick vegetation blocking our path. What I couldn't slither, stoop, stomp, or sidestep around, I had to slap side. On my way through I received plenty of scratches for

my trouble. Entirely too many s-words for my liking.

"Saber!" I muttered, a little testily, in a Sean Connery accent. Getting upset with this thing wouldn't do. Maybe it didn't understand me, I thought, pulling a bough up so it didn't clothesline me. Maybe it made a different gesture that I didn't get.

But the minutes wore on, and my grumpiness grew. I had work to do. There were ingredients to collect and then to plant, tend, grow, pick, dry, boil, distill… lots of processes.

I sighed. "This had better be—"

I was just regretting not investing more points into the Ranger skills from the weeks of travel, scouting and ingredient hunting we'd done together, when the vegetation fell away and I was left with a secluded waterfall cascading off a sheer cliff some fifty or more feet above. The roar hadn't registered, I was ashamed to admit, because I'd been too preoccupied swatting branches out of my face and trying not to fake curse.

Instead I beheld a picturesque pond ringed by exotic flowers I hadn't seen elsewhere in this world. The trees gave way to a nice even spot of grass, bluegrass of course, to either side of the creek's bank. The whole place radiated calm.

"This is… amazing!" I said, hopping up and down, and bending to pick a flower here and there, and a big sample of the bluegrass I needed. Not only was the bluegrass here, but tucked back in the hollow of the falls, I found some purple morpheus as well. With one of those in hand, I beamed giddily at the Shrubber-Nee!

"Thank you so much," I told it. "I shouldn't have groused at you. That wasn't cool."

The creature rose up on its vines until its face appeared, and a shy smile spread across it. The two glowing eyes regarded me with serene warmth.

"It was very kind of you to escort me here," I said. "Will you do me the honor of helping me find my way back?"

One vine reached up, forming into a hand of sorts. Four branchy fingers appeared, with some leaves on the outside like the fine layer

of hair on the top part of my arm. It raised the hand up to about shoulder level.

"Uh…"

For a long moment I wasn't sure what it wanted, until I remembered it had been brought out of its god-induced slumber just yesterday. It had been there when we finally brought the dead god back to life, and we'd been celebrating. A lot of hugging had gone on, along with a lot of high fives.

I slapped the vine hand, smiling cheerfully, and the whole thing shuddered in delight. The leaves gave off their *shush* sound as it jiggled.

It formed another hand and stretched them out to either side.

On the one hand, I was alone and this thing was utterly silent. It had only been helpful so far, but… oh, who was I kidding? I didn't need to be afraid of a walking vegetarian bush in a world that didn't have violence before Blake had gone and created the whole aspect.

I walked into its arms and gave it a hug.

The sensation was surprisingly pleasant: hugging a tree is something I'd heartily recommend. It had glossy, cool leaves and the branches and vines were just as flexible as they appeared. It fashioned a vine-filled body for me to press tight against.

"Thanks again," I told it.

Once we'd broken our embrace, the creature rustled again, making its leaves flutter and dance. It seemed incredibly pleased.

"We'll have to get back so I can plant these and grow them in my garden. Could you help me find the way back?" I wasn't entirely sure where we were.

It shivered again and headed back the way we'd come.

I ended up being gone for some three hours all together, and people were wondering where I'd gotten off to. Vellenia was sadly nowhere to be found. I thanked the Shrubber-Nee! again and asked it for a high five, which it readily did. It then raced forward and wrapped its whole self against me, a good twelve arms and legs in total, nuzzling its face into the hollow of my shoulder.

"Somebody made a friend," Ivy said.

I cocked a thumb. "You could bond yourself a Nakamamon," I told her. "You're practically the same, you know? It's basically made of ivy… you could call it viny. Or Ivy Junior!"

Her face was a mask. "You're looking to get punched."

"Come to think of it… why don't you bond one?"

"Eh," she said, shrugging and snapping out of her mild annoyance. "Not really my thing. I'll keep an eye open. I'd like a loyal companion or something to aid me in my abilities, maybe, but it seems weird pressing something into servitude."

"Makes sense," I said, though really, it didn't. You could have a giant frog that spit lightning. Why wouldn't anybody want that?

"Besides, Isabelle is always jonesing to get back here when we're on R&R. We can't hardly fly around the world and see everything with Muppin miserably waiting next to the portal, you know what I mean?"

That made a lot more sense. I certainly couldn't envision leaving Vellenia at HQ where they would be swarmed by gods-knew-who while I was nowhere to be found. People like Timmy or Blake were at HQ… as well as people like Rus, who I liked a lot.

Ivy followed along and made small talk while I planted the bluegrass and the purple morpheus I'd just collected, then watered and got them tended.

From there it was on to manufacturing a whole lot of sundrinker oil. The sundrinkers we had were all blooming, but the recipe for this cure called for a fracking gallon of the stuff. I'd gotten several cups out of the Transmutation spell.

The spells drained stamina along with mana, leaving me tired after each casting, and recovering. Workers came and went. The townsfolk were volunteering to help, or put up temporary shelters, lug water around, wash the laundry, empty what needed to be emptied and cleaning what needed to be cleaned. The whole town itself was abuzz with activity.

"Hey Ivy," I said later. She was lounging around in the camp chair

outside the house she shared with Isabelle.

"Boss?"

I was too embarrassed to ask outright. "Is, uh… are you and Isabelle looking to, uh… what are the chances you and Isabelle might, you know, need a third?"

She smiled lazily. "Honestly, if I had my way we'd be in the living room right now with me bent over the sofa and you just railing me."

Her legs slowly opened and scissored closed again, and I could see the lust rise.

"Izzy's on the opposite guard schedule right now, so she's with Larelle. So she'll be back, and it'll be my turn to replace her."

"That's no good," I said, already trying to hide an impending erection. The mere thought of just heading into Ivy's house and folding her in half before getting down deep into her was making my mouth water.

"Can't though," she said. "No Izzy, and no agreement, no Fletcher. That's the rule."

"I get it," I said, shrugging.

She tapped her foot against the ground and her thighs parted once more, only to close again. She bit her lip and looked around.

"Maybe we could… just this once. You know, she wouldn't know, right?"

She popped the button on her shorts and dragged the zipper down. Black lacy panties came into view, and I lost the fight against my erection. It was doing its thing despite my mental protests.

Eromancy was giving me choices in my UI, and I dutifully ignored them.

"I don't…" I said, and trailed off when she stuck a hand down her pants.

She kept biting her lip, and staring at me with such intensity that I swallowed. Her hand started working between her legs, setting off a flush of pink.

"I could just suck your cock a little, and then you could just ream

me out for a little bit."

"Ivy…"

"She doesn't have to know, Fletcher. Neither of us are gonna tell her." She gasped at whatever she was doing to herself, and grunted. "Nnn… fork. I could use a big stiff cock right about now."

"You'll get in trouble," I said, watching her hand move under her panties. Her other hand had drifted up and was squeezing one breast.

It would be cheating. That wasn't okay. We were always on the razor's edge with this… arrangement, and I liked Isabelle. I didn't want to be the one to break her heart.

"I'm already wet," she told me. "Five minutes. Just a quickie."

"We can't," I croaked. We could. There was a house right there.

"I want you inside me, Fletcher," she said.

"I know," I breathed. I wanted it too. She had a rocking body, like a bodybuilder, and her tattoos were so badass. When I was with her, it was almost like I was a cool biker dude too.

"Fle-etcher," she said in a sing-song tone, "You've got a girl begging you to do her. She'll even open wide and take your load all over her face. You can watch me shovel it into my mouth and lick it all off my fingers."

Beneath all this, the UI was giving me pretty good rolls on my Persuasion + Durability, with bonuses from **Stalwart**.

I coughed, apologized, turned, and fled. She called after me, indignant, but I didn't look back.

Not long after, Tara returned from her patrol. She dismounted Airaconda, gave her bond mate a companionable pet on the scales, and told it to go play.

She'd taken two steps toward me when concern crossed her face. "What's the matter? Do you… have a gigantic boner? Holy shirt balls you do have a gigantic boner. Fletcher you and I need to have a chat."

This is Fletcher about to have a chat.



Chapter 34- A Fletcher Break

The day was wearing on as Tara invited me into her house and quickly ran both hands over my engorged wood. Her adorable, round, girl-next-door face had a wicked smile, and her hazel eyes gleamed with mischief. She tucked her hair back behind both ears and noticed me glancing down the neck of her scoop necked sweater, at her cleavage. With that, she pressed her elbows in, accentuating it.

"Now, we can get into what's got you upset, have a little heart to heart," she cooed, "or we can deal with that stress, have a little nether-to-nether, and handle the discussion afterwards."

She kissed me, and I kissed right back. Thank heavens for someone who wasn't risking her relationship by doing this. Tara soon had my pants off and was working her lips and tongue over every available iota of my shaft, head, and balls.

"I want to do you too," I told her.

It was almost comical watching her straighten and then fling all her clothes off. A few days without the anti-magic drug and she was turning into a bronze statue again. Her normally flawless skin had a metallic sheen to it now, which I really liked. She even tasted a little coppery, which was weird and wonderful.

"Bed?" I asked, and quickly spent a Token to enhance her sensations with **Entwined Ecstasy**, and then the third level of **Eromancy** as well.

"Fork that," she breathed, and steered me directly to the floor.

In seconds she had my cock out and adorably tucked a bit of hair behind her ear just as she slurped the head into her mouth and began bobbing up and down. I fell into heaven, watching the girl who'd helped me start it all get into a seriously intense blowjob.

I'd been in disbelief for a long time, and counted myself lucky a

lot of times before, but I think the angle of the sun, bouncing off the motes of dust as Tara whipped her shirt and bra off, made me appreciate how far Pleasure Seeker had brought me.

"I want to… frack your boobs," I told her.

Tara giggled and, with her holding them, she made a nice sheath. Pheromones somehow gave her boobs extra size, and she goggled down at the way she'd ballooned from a comfy C-cup to a double D. Even her already long nipples lengthened a little. I noticed her squeezing them again and again, kneading her own breasts as the titjob started in earnest.

"Oh my gods, Fletcher," she breathed, giggled, then squished her enhanced tits around my shaft.

I hadn't done this before and hadn't expected it to feel as good as it did. It was a unique experience, with a strangely nice feel that wasn't anything like a blowjob, regular sex, or the hot extreme tightness of anal. It didn't compare, but the knowledge of getting someone to do this for me was extra erotic.

Tara dipped her head down to lick and suck at the head when it appeared, and began riding up and down, again and again. Pheromones also increased the length of her tongue, meaning she could wrap it around my cock several times and lick it in ways only I'd never dreamed of before.

"This is amazing," she told me, with shining eyes. "I didn't know you could do this."

I hadn't either. Instead I luxuriated in the understated, sexy beauty bending all her will towards pleasing me. It was usually the other way around.

Some ten minutes later, I told her that I was on the verge of an orgasm. I wanted to please her, but instead she pushed me back onto the bed and began to shimmy out of a pair of white yoga pants. I loved the trimmed blonde bush that appeared, and the way her lower lips were already shining with moisture. She straddled me, and plunged down onto me.

"Give it to me," she breathed, cheeks rosy and still squeezing her

larger breasts. “Go on, give Tara that jizz.” I watched as they slowly shrank so my Adaptability could be used to stop her from battering her insides on my enhanced size.

She slammed herself down again and again, eyes rolling back, still playing with her hard nipples. She was just giving herself an orgasm when I tipped over the edge and grunted with release. All my worries ceased. The problem of Ivy disappeared. The weird issue with Fairy Poppins was gone. Not even the lingering guilt over Shakindria was a problem right now. Instead I poured all that energy into blasting Tara with as much as I could muster.

After that, we lay panting on her bed, with her leaking copious amounts of my seed and making amazed sounds when she touched herself.

“How much do you make?” she asked, aghast.

“Enough,” I said. Maybe I was too proud of myself, but she’d made a puddle between her legs.

“I’m going to need more,” she told me.

This was how she ended up riding me reverse cowgirl some ten minutes later. Just like the first time I’d ever had sex with Regina, something about this needed to be safely stored away in my visual cortex. Everything was on full display now: her pert butt cheeks, her pussy stretching around me and accepting the shaft over and over as she shoved backwards. Even her puckered back door was open to me. I saw her grinning over her shoulder.

“You like that?” She asked. “You like having me ride you?”

I liked this very much, and told her so.

“Good,” she said, “because I like it too.”

“You like this?” I asked, pressing my thumb against her rear entry. My only response was more moans and groans, until she began cupping my balls and kneading them gently.

“You’ve got what I need, Fletcher.”

As much as I wanted to know where this kink of hers came from, I was okay for now not knowing. After a good ten minutes, she stiffened and began shuddering. With the ecstasy washing over her,

she froze. I guided her back down until she was laying atop me, head on my shoulder and kissing me on the side of the neck. Breasts on full display and me with a hand empty.

"You frack me so good," she whispered.

I held her butt up and used the leverage to thrust up into her.

"You know," she went on, "you well-endowed guys can do this position."

"Um… thank you."

In the moment, my whole problem with Ivy was forgotten. There was only the soft, supple flesh of Tara's long legs and firm butt, the incredibly soft feel of her breasts in my hands, and the feel of her pussy trying to wring all it could out of me.

We were in the middle of getting Tara yet another orgasm when the door banged open. I was expecting Ivy to charge in, or even for Fairy Poppins to furiously flit towards me, but instead I found my bond mate staring wildly at us. Her sundress was gone even as she stepped into the room, puddling to the floor and showing off what happened when she got turned on.

She was fully turned on.

"Vel?" I asked.

"You two," she mumbled, "you feel so horny."

She fell between our legs and began licking at Tara's clit with all of her many tiny tongue tentacles. I naturally enhanced them using Pheromones and my new Group Play Quality. These longer, stronger enhanced tongues also rubbed up and down the base of my cock, titillating my balls.

Tara lost her mind. She began to orgasm instantly.

It was time to use **Coming Together**. I put on the aura, and whispered in Tara's ear. "You can taste yourself."

I didn't need to tell her how; she spent the Token automatically and her orgasm almost flung her off me. Arching her back, she cried out loudly as the sensations from Vellenia invaded. The feel of our skin on my bond mate's fingers, the feel of the bed beneath her, the heat coming off the two of us, and lastly the taste and feel of all her

tongues were available to Tara in the same moment. Shuddering hard, she needed me to hold her to keep me buried down deep.

Vellenia must have figured it out too, because she cried out the same way. She was experiencing all of Tara's feelings: her back against my chest and abs, the sensation of being full to bursting, all the friction of having me slide in and out, the pressure of my embrace, and the feel of our lips dancing.

"She is so sweet, bond mate," Vellenia told me.

"Ohhhhhh!" Tara wailed.

"You will breed her now?"

She could feel my climax threatening.

"Yes!" Tara gasped. "In me. Inside!"

Who was I to deny a beautiful woman?

The three of us made love for another good hour. The girls were locked in a double sensation situation by experiencing each other's pleasure, and that drove them into a languid sixty-nine. Vel made sure to extract all of my seed she could lick up, which clearly pained Tara. This was followed by me taking Vellenia doggystyle. Tara was astonished to watch my cock stretch the Nakamamon's anatomy out, and further astonished to feel it stretching her out at the same time. Vel took her turn riding me next, while Tara stood and allowed the Marshin to lick all of her insides and give her yet another climax. Finally, Tara couldn't handle the idea of not being filled to bursting, and needed me to cream pie her one more time. Vel sat on my face, and the two experienced both sex and being eaten out simultaneously. They made out until both climaxed simultaneously.

The aftermath was a bed in Tara's house that couldn't be slept in, at least until it was thoroughly washed. We lay on top of the sleeping bag, the side that wasn't sodden, and discussed the Ivy situation while cuddling.

I explained what had happened with Ivy. "It wasn't like her to get all horny. And getting in between her and Izzy is the last thing I want to do, you know?"

"It's not okay for her to put you in that position," she said.

"Agreed," Vellenia added.

"Right?"

"I'm glad you came to me," she said, and giggled. "And came in me."

"About that…" I said, but she waved the matter away.

"We need to get on that cure of yours," she said. "You came here because your abilities ramp up our stamina and mana regeneration and such, right? You needed a little Fletcher break, right?"

I stared at her. "What, pray tell, is a Fletcher break?"

She shrugged, giggling. "Pretty much what you think. Regina and I made up the term, I think right after Dee got divinity poisoning and she, you remember, she got upset and swore off sex with you." She frowned. "I don't think she would have a problem with me telling you this but, just, you know…"

I gave her a reassuring smile. "No problem. My lips are sealed." I did the zipping gesture, then locked my mouth with an imaginary key and tossed it away.

Tara's bubbly, talkative self might have annoyed the curmudgeon I used to be, but the positive vibes coming off her were undeniably cute and endearing. I really enjoyed her animated way of talking, the way she used her hands—especially the dirty parts, where she'd make a circle with her thumb and forefinger, then try to push her entire fist through it. Her face was constantly in motion along with her words.

"Anyway when she finally got that glorious dick of yours inside her, she said all the tension just, whoosh, you know? Melted away." I laughed at the way she made the tension fly away with her hand like it was an airplane. "She said it was like she'd been tied up in a knot, and the first orgasm after that just untied that knot." She clenched up her fists full of bedsheet, but then released it, and pulled it so it lay flat. "So how, if we ever see the other isn't doing okay, or we have a problem, sometimes we just have to jump in the sack with you, unclench our brains with some really good sexy times, and then deal with whatever was bothering us."

"That is…" So weird, I didn't say. "Genius."

She rolled her eyes. "Of course you would say that. You're insatiable." Here she put on her worst Fletcher impression. "Any time you're not feeling great, Tara, just make sure you jump into bed with me and let me fork your brains out, okay? And maybe sometimes you won't realize you're upset, so I'll let Regina and Cinzy know the Fletcher break policy. That way I'm sure you'll get that good dick as often as I… uh, as often as you need."

"I was definitely not going to say that."

"Uh huh, sure." She gave me an exaggerated wink. "Keep telling yourself that."

"I'm glad you gave me a Fletcher break," I said, grinning. I had received a Token of my choice from **Drive In Deeper**, and I placed it into Affinity. Chances were good I'd need it soon enough. Like right now.

"Let's go get that cure over and done with," she said, jumping out of bed. I stared at her lovely ass and those incredible legs, and she rolled her eyes as she caught me.

"Can we put on clothes first?" I asked.

"I believe we can all go without the outer wrappings," Vellenia offered, but I gave her a look and she acquiesced. "I suppose your mating organs don't retract and need to be covered for the sake of hygiene."

Tara just rolled her eyes and laughed. "Well, I guess. But be quick about it. The people don't care if your shirt's on inside out or not. They want their town back."

They really did. A lot of them were gathered around the team's camp, Shrubber-Nee! included. Cinzy had Ivy standing with her for some hopefully unnecessary backup. There was some grumbling going on.

Thinking about my mom and my plans for her future magical healing, I nodded. "Agreed."

In the next few hours I had several more batches of sundrinkers transmuted into sundrinker oil. This engaged Arcane Alchemy, and I

used my three double up uses to turn Likability Tokens into Affinity, then Durability into Ingenuity, and finally Likability into Affinity Tokens.

This is Christopher about to brew up another cure for yet another poor, sickly and needy god.



Chapter 35- Cure For What Ails You

Performing the instinctual spellcasting, which took a good ten minutes of casting, was sort of like exercise: it would tire me out and require an extended rest. Exhausted and out of both breath and mana, I'd be bent double with hands on knees.

In the middle of this, Vellenia showed up and cheerfully dragged me into the bedroom for a roll in the hay. I started to protest until I mentally slapped myself. What was I even thinking that for? If a young fairy and water creature wanted to help me relax and recover my mana and stamina through vigorous licking, sucking, back arching, penetration, moaning, groaning, cries of bliss and finally release, who was I to stop her? Luckily, **Drive In Deeper** gave me what I needed, including another Token to help replenish my stores.

After the thirty minutes of vigorous sexercise and the twenty-odd minutes of cuddling, I felt refreshed. More oil production ensued, along with cultivating all my odd flowers, herbs, and other plants.

We still needed black cherry wood pulp to lend the strength the cure would need to course through the large god's… bloodstream? Gods didn't work like organics like you and me… most Nakamamon didn't even function like you or me. The black cherry wood pulp was necessary to fight through whatever divine immune system it had. That wasn't the perfect comparison, because again the god didn't work like you or I. However, it was too strong and would simply reject the cure without the hardwood to weaken it.

I briefly wondered what it would take to weaken a huge god's immune system… petrified wood? I was glad I hadn't worked on a huge one yet, or been subjected to its influence. The area affected by the God of Productivity was rather enormous, so it stood to reason that huge gods could blanket, what, a whole country-sized

area? Something the size of France maybe?

As always, it depended on the god in question. The God of Footfalls had affected the whole HQ, though it was small.

I let my thoughts drift like this as I worked, tending to my plants. We had enough oil, and by the next day we'd have the bluegrass and the purple morpheus. Then, after drying, we'd commence with the soaking. Bluegrass in the oil, purple morpheus needed grinding.

The blue passionflower appeared the following day, lazily placed in my hand by none other than Drat. He still had that same look of utter disinterest verging on mild contempt, but I certainly detected some smug self-satisfaction.

"There we go," he said.

"Any luck on the cherry?" Fletcher needed to chop down his cherry tree, George Washington style.

He arched an eyebrow. "How's this?" He produced a chewed-on pit and grunted in amusement.

It was definitely a cherry seed.

"That should work," I said thoughtfully.

He snorted again, louder this time, before he straightened and stared at me. "What, you're serious? How in the hell are you going to get hardwood out of that?"

Transmutation, followed by **Verdant Rejuvenation**, was the answer. The special ability mentioned 'plants and cuttings' planted and tended by me, and I hadn't tried seeds yet, but I thought it would work. The other option was to send Tara on another away mission, something nobody wanted. Airaconda wasn't a commercial jet, and took time getting places, then time getting back.

The check for Transmutation was practically identical to the one made for converting sundrinkers into oil. It was really hard, but I passed by the skin of my teeth.

Instinctual Casting (Transmutation) check: *You are attempting a tier 2 Transmute Object spell. You have the Transmutation skill at level 1, Instinctual Casting at level 8, Mana*

Shaping at level 3, and Affinity at level 7. Since you have never cast a Transmutation spell and shaped mana only a handful of times, this check is Extreme, and requires 11 successes. Would you like to spend 11 Tokens for an automatic success?

Total Tokens: 6 Affinity and 7 Free Tokens.

I blew out a huge sigh. I didn't think it would be possible to handle this with my current skill level, but I wanted to give it another try for the sake of compiling data on my success rate. Between Instinctual Casting, Mana Shaping, and my Affinity, which needed raising, I had 19 skill levels. Hopefully I would average 9 or 10 successes, with occasional spikes and troughs.

I was right… I only scored 7 successes this time. It was still higher than the 33% success rate I had had previously.

So I ended up spending a Token to retry the check, along with the 11 Tokens to succeed the check.

And by the gods, the Tokens did the job. A whole cascade of tinkling golden circles appeared, going *cla-cling* one after another in rapid order. They all had the same fairy on one side, and all of them puffed out of existence and into pure mana.

That pure mana directed my hands and the flow of my internal mana out into the seemingly impossible construct I was supposed to create in order to turn this regular cherry pit into a black cherry seed. The thing coalesced in a fraction of the time. I could barely track its formation as it drew my mana out of my belly button, and out of my third eye. I just managed to see how it split into four tendrils that all created the three dimensional construct. Those tendrils literally wove down in and around one another.

Hell with increasing my Affinity, I needed to boost my Ingenuity so I could handle splitting my attention a bunch of different ways at once. Right now I felt like it would take extra brains to handle this kind of task, and Fletcher currently had only the one.

When some minutes had flown by and my mana flowed away, I was left with a strange peanut shaped constructed that sucked my cherry pit from one side, through a funnel-like center, through to the

other side. At the other end, it still appeared like a cherry seed, but much smaller and differently shaped.

"Let's hope we can plant this bad boy."

"I'll do it!" Vellenia shouted, and grabbed it from my palm before racing off. One of the things she could do was act like a squirt gun, channeling her mana through her body to expel a forceful jet. She filled up the watering can, planted the seed, and passed it to me with the sweetest, most enormous grin on her noseless face.

I thanked her, watered the area, and spent some time with the other herbs and flowers in my garden.

"Now we wait," Vellenia said.

We did not have to wait.

Now, **Verdant Rejuvenation** helped plants and flowers to grow over the course of 24 hours. To maturity, in a single day. That meant we were getting a fully mature black cherry tree in a single day. These things could take decades to grow to full size; we'd be getting that in a matter of hours.

The shoot appeared in under a minute, and sprouted leaves in another two. It continued to lengthen and soon had a teensy trunk with dark gray bark in under ten minutes. It went from zero to five inches in about 10 minutes.

Naturally, this drew a crowd. Drat sauntered up to me. "That's some hard wood you got there."

I snorted. "Yeah, and it's only going to get harder, thicker and longer."

He peered around at the magical garden. "I didn't think you'd actually be able to do it," he told me.

"What? Why not?"

"Alan's always complaining about how hard spells are to learn. He has to spend hours, or days, practicing all the hand motions and words and stuff." He shrugged as if he didn't care. "Anyway you just turned a seed into a different seed. No biggie. Not like you made a dragon out of nothing."

"Right. Just a seed." Just transforming one species into a different

one, rearranging it at the level of DNA.

The sapling would soon double in size, and it would have a trunk and branches by the time evening came. But there was still a lot to do.

Vellenia reappeared, and wrapped herself around my arm and side. "Oh, Fletcher, how wonderful! Did you need another break? And afterwards a nice, relaxing nap?"

Do not look at Drat, I told myself. *Do not.*

"I'm okay," I said, though I knew that wasn't entirely true. I was down to a single Free Token, and needed all the Tokens I could get if I had a chance of synthesizing this cure successfully.

Thankfully I had more options when it came to regaining them.

We headed back to my house and laboratory, and spent the time separating out ingredients, placing them in bowls, drying out the ones that needed drying in the tiny heat room. This was where Larelle's Magmamander normally lived. We could handle a whole lot of herbs and flowers at any given time, but they needed near constant supervision or else they'd eventually burn. The room had a sort of metal hammock for the creature, and we could raise and lower it while it slept. Which it basically did all the time.

The cure was coming together. This time tomorrow, we would be able to harvest the necessary amount of hardwood. With any luck, the girls would find the blue passionflower—

"Fletcher!" Regina came racing up. "Look at this."

Tweedle Dee bounded up, his ears and tail full of blue passionflower. They had the same five-fingered greenish protrusions from the center, the same rings of color and white. Instead of purple, though, these were a light blue, like a cloudless sky. And also, they were enormous. The five flowers we saw were essentially the size of Tweedle Dee's head.

"Okay hang on a second," I said. "How… what… I don't even know how to begin."

"I showed him a picture from the clay tablet where you guys had the cure written down, and described it. He can grow almost any

flower you can think of."

"Umm… is it going to hurt if we clip those flowers to use in our cure?"

She froze, then turned. "Uhhhh… I don't know."

"You were so preoccupied with whether or not you could," I said, smirking. "You never stopped to consider whether or not you should."

She waved a hand. "Aww I think it'll be okay."

Well, I set up **Mending Aura** to handle any pain that Dee might feel. Indeed, the adorable fox with the flowers on his ears and tail yelped and turned a betrayed look on his bond mate, but quickly healed the tiny pinches of pain when she clipped the single flower we needed. It began to grow back under the influence of the healing aura.

"Okay," I said. "If you don't want us to take anymore flowers, it'll take a couple of days to make cuttings and go from one flower to the amount we need."

Regina wiped the threatening tears from her face. "What do you think, buddy? Can you be brave?"

All his fluffy tails wagged, and he put on a brave face.

"I think he can do it." Regina said, sniffing. We couldn't have done more than a single point of damage to the little guy, but she was acting like we were about to put him down. "Fletcher, can you… can you do it for me?"

Well, I certainly didn't want to. Causing pain was not in my Healer wheelhouse.

No animals were harmed in the making of this cure. I also planted clippings from the blue passionflower and got them on the path toward growing for the next day. The black cherry still had a crowd of onlookers, including the little Shrubber-Nee! It inspected the cherry tree from all angles, literally putting its face inches from the ground and staring at the burgeoning root structure.

Achievement: *cultivate over 100 plants*

You really have become a cultivator, haven't you? Using Verdant Rejuvenation, you have cultivated plants for use in cures and treatments over 100 times. Incredible!

Reward: +1 skill point

I spent the remainder of the day in meditation, regaining a good three Tokens. It felt good to sit in my garden and feel the mana of the earth flowing up into it, bolstering the plants to grow out of their natural environments.

The girls had been instructed to leave me to my business now, though Shakindria couldn't help but interrupt several times in order to project dirty thoughts my way. Every once in awhile I'd get a mental moan of pleasure, along with a flash of Shakindria's naked body pressed against me. A little mental pressure of her springy butt up against my abs and my thighs impacting against her hamstrings as I thrust up into her.

It was getting onto dinner time when she did the last one, and I grunted in annoyance.

"You need to quit that," I said quietly.

It was just me, the Shrubber-Nee! and the cherry tree by now. The cherry tree that was at least fifteen feet tall, and probably taller by now. You know how traffic lights are way bigger than you imagine when you see someone working on them? It's because distance and size gets really hard above a certain point.

The sentient bush had been pressing its face into different flowers and inhaling deeply, and when I spoke, it looked over and cocked its head curiously.

"Not you. You're just fine."

It stood up to its near-human height and 'walked' towards me. I also stood.

"Tomorrow I have to cut down this tree," I told it, "but I'll plant some more saplings to grow a couple of trees over the next few days. Do you like that idea?"

It bobbed its way toward me, created a couple of arms by

twisting its vines up, and hugged me again. I chuckled, enjoying the weird feel of it, and its adorable mannerisms copied directly from watching us.

Over dinner, it was clear that Ivy hadn't had a good day. She avoided eye contact and ate her dinner in silence, then cleaned up in a hurry and went off to start her watch.

With the god alive and drunkenly walking around, vomiting all over the town and damaging houses, we were working as fast as we could to get this cure going. And that meant we were working day and night. The shifts situation split the team in half, and that wasn't awesome.

Trent was currently back at work raising the wall to keep out a god, slowly expanding it outward and filling up the hollow part from below. The God of Productivity had stumbled into it just a few hours ago and damaged it, putting him in a sour mood, but it was a war between being ticked off and being exhausted. Exhausted kept winning. Also, Alan was suffering. He'd had divinity poisoning for entirely too long. Cinzy now had the unenviable job of explaining that healing took time. They wanted to know why would couldn't just steer the sick god out of their town and get them back to their lives. Cinzy was patiently explaining, again and again, that letting the God of Productivity roam the countryside was a bad idea.

That night, stopped by Regina's house to tuck her into bed. It turned into a make out session, which turned into caressing and groping, and that turned into lubing her up with my saliva.

The higher my Affinity and skills got, the more I could taste mana on my partner's body. Regina's body had a floral scent and taste that I associated with springtime, warmth, and newfound post-winter freedom. Regina also had this habit of being extra appreciative at times like these, and vocal. She cried out my name while I got my enhanced tongue all up into her, and then when I got my enhanced girth spreading her lower lips.

She told me I was bigger than before, that I needed to keep doing that, yeah, that right there.

We enjoyed each other's bodies a grand total of three rounds. Before the third one started, Shakindria entered the house and joined in the fun.

We all knew the situation with the ramped up difficulty and the Token expenditure difference by now. I'd briefed them on my evolution of primary class into Arcane Mender, and what **Arcane Alchemy** meant for Tokens. The only ones who didn't know the full truth about my Token replenishing situation were the boys and Larelle. The task was to regain Tokens.

And though Cinzy was a little disappointed to learn it would cost me some 5 Tokens to manifest another me, she admitted she couldn't be angry at missing out on something she'd only had the once. She would begrudgingly put up with satisfying me any time it was called for, with the full blessing of all six of the others.

This is Christopher about to get a whole lot of Tokens the very pleasurable way.



Chapter 36- Doing God’s Work

Which was how I ended up with a nonstop stream of visitors in my bed. And more often, in the laboratory where I’d be working on the cure. Anyone not bent over the worktables and grunting at having me repeatedly slam my hips into their asses were tasked with making sure the coast was clear. It wasn’t too difficult, what with shift rotations.

The situation went on while the black cherry, the bluegrass, the purple morpheus, and the blue passionflowers all sprouted, grew, and blossomed under our care. While we prepped the ingredients for the task, I had a gorgeous woman on her knees with her back to the workstation, diligently sucking me off.

I have to say, the transition from the Divinity Rescue Corps operating as a cohesive unit to half the Divinity Rescue Corps willingly servicing me constantly was an unnervingly fast one.

So while Vellenia ground up some of the purple morpheus root and I chopped the stems up for another phase of the cure, Chrysta lay flat against the table nearby groaning and writhing in the afterglow of yet another furious session. The Pheromone-induced Adaptability slowly wore off, causing her to become more and more transparent, and the frost to spread further and further from her body.

Vellenia reached a hand over and stroked Chrysta’s face. “You did well!”

The ice ghost only smiled weakly before sliding to the floor in a heap. It took her another few minutes to recover and float off.

Some hours later, it was Tara’s turn, and Shakindria had to float several items away from her to keep her from knocking them off to shatter on the floor. Her dark blonde hair spilled out all over the workstation, and she kept her ankles locked tight around my waist.

It was some three or four minutes after I'd unloaded another huge load into her, and she still hadn't let me go. Instead she got up on her elbows, big breasts still bare and nipples pointed at me, grinning lazily.

"This is hands down the best way to gain xp," she announced. She'd asked me to order her; although it wasn't a comfortable proposition, ordering a woman to have sex with me, she'd forced the issue. "Foraging for berries in the forest? Tracking and identifying new creatures? Navigating the terrain using a map? No way, I'd much rather it be Fletcher giving me a nice big present."

Does she not understand that mating here in this world only grants magical benefits, without the proper spell or ritual? Shakindria asked.

I think it's just her kink, I told her. Also Tara might not know that there was zero chance of fertilization. I hadn't been brave enough to ask, which in a way was silly and in another way super irresponsible.

The Mindela's big purple eyes widened a little, and regarded Tara in a new light.

Now, we need to boil the purple morpheus flowers in an infusion of bluegrass, stirring twice per minute, and add mana at a slow rate from the edges. The temperature needs to be a rolling boil, no foam at the top. If we hit foam, lower the temperature.

She nodded and got to work. Finally Tara let me go and went to have a nap in my room with a still-napping Vellenia, who I'd had earlier.

How many eggs are in a clutch? Shakindria asked, while I took over the task I'd given her.

I'm sorry? I asked in return, showing my confusion in my emotions.

How many eggs do humans produce each time you mate? She sent along a mental image with this, which caused me to throw my head back and bray honking laughter. This was a picture of Tara squatting down, her belly distended, and from between her legs she produced a large white egg. In her mind, Tara was squeezing out

egg after egg into a fur-lined nest, squatting not far from where Regina, Ivy and Isabelle were doing the same.

Ivy completely avoided coming to help me, which was actually a problem. I had not yet filled my entire bank of Tokens for all my attributes.

Isabelle came in to visit while I was in the midst of soaking up the purple morpheus in the bluegrass, stirring, and adding in the mana, radiating confusion. **Eromancy** told me she wasn't sure what was going on and desired to know what problem she and Ivy were having.

"I can't really…" I muttered, carefully extracting the pot of mixed flowers in oil to cool. "Bit busy here… but if Ivy also wants to come talk about it, you two are welcome to come."

I was some 18 hours into the process when I earned the next level of Arcane Mender.

Level 28: +6 skill points, +1 Affinity

"That's just what I needed," I muttered, and set about spending points.

The first thing I needed was Transmutation. One skill point there. If I wanted to cast by instinct, I needed to first have the constructs figured out. It was a two-check process, I knew now.

Next, I needed more Develop Cure. One point for Large cure developments. After that, another point for Unique cure development.

Three left.

Instinctual Casting needed a point as well. After that, Mana Affinity said it would lower the cost of recalling the requirements for my spells, which included Transmutation. It also helped when I added mana to my herbal treatments and cures. One point there too, definitely.

And for my last point… I went searching through the UI. Even as my hands automatically did the job of cutting, grinding, stirring and infusing with mana.

“There,” I breathed. Develop Cure had a whole list of aspects and types of patients I could potentially work with. Fire, water, ice, ghost, dark, holy, and more beyond. But the one I wanted I hadn’t thought existed… until I specifically searched.

Develop Cure (human). My final point went there.

It was some six or eight hours later when all hell nearly broke loose. I was getting all the ingredients together, and about to scrape off, crumble up, bake, and then add the hardwood of black cherry tree, when Isabelle reappeared. With Ivy in tow.

“Hey Fletcher,” Isabelle called.

I regarded the two of them, while stripping bark from the cherry tree. It had grown to maturity over the course of only twenty four hours, going from tiny sprout to a good forty feet in no time. The creaking and groaning of the wood were easy to hear during that time, and had fallen silent since it stopped growing unnaturally fast.

“Izzy, Ivy,” I said, and showed them the basket full of bark. “Just heading in to put the final touches on this cure.”

“We can just talk as we walk,” she said with a shrug and a strained smile.

We did just that, heading through my garden in the early morning and getting our pants full of dew. Fairy Poppins had been lighting the way, and was almost certainly rapt with attention over oncoming drama.

“So someone broke down crying when I went to confront her,” Isabelle said with forced cheer. “She wouldn’t tell me anything else though.”

“Is that so?”

“Yep!” she chirped, but her voice fell down to a deadly, venomous quiet. “Did you fuck her?”

“I did not,” I said.

She regarded me. “You willing to let Fairy Poppins give you the lie detector fairy dust?”

“Yeah,” I said.

"Ugh! You got Stalwart from me so I can't just figure out if you're lying easily."

"I'm not."

She whirled on Ivy. "Who was it then? I can't for the life of me believe you'd shack up with Drat, and Alan's too sick… Trent? He doesn't do anything but sleep lately. I know you cheated on me, you just come out with it and it'll go better for you. Was it one of the other team guys?"

Ivy was sobbing now, face buried in her hands, slowly shaking her head back and forth.

"I don't think she cheated on you," I told Isabelle. Then I put on **Psyspeech**. *She offered, but I turned her down. You were on shift and I told her no.* Along with that, I tried to lace the words with a mental image of Ivy with her hand in her pants, frigging herself with legs spread. *I guess you guys haven't had any time together since we started working on shift, and she's been horny.*

"Is that true?" Isabelle hissed. "Did you go to Fletcher for a little fucky fuck time, huh?"

Ivy, shaved head and tattoos and buff, lean body, slowly nodded with her hands over her face and sobs wracking her body. Meanwhile Isabelle, with cotton candy pinks and blues creeping over her skin, soft and cute, swore like a trucker.

"Izzy," I warned her. "Emotions have consequences." I shouldn't have had to tell her what Blake did in losing his cool back in Slinktrickle. "We need to take a step back and cool off before we take this any further."

"Yeah, maybe we need to take a step back, rethink our relationship entirely."

"That's clearly not what I mean," I said.

She stared at me, the fury clear on her face. "And what do you mean then, huh? Ever since you got involved—"

I took a quick step toward her, and she faltered. "What has happened ever since I got involved? Have you two enjoyed a closer relationship than ever, or are you going to say something that's

patently false? Did I supply something Ivy said she needed and then get out of your way so you two could have your relationship?"

Her mouth worked open and closed. I'd sent the fury off course and it had thankfully crashed into a wall of indecision and doubt.

"You two seem really cute and really good together. And if you want, in a couple of levels, I don't really even need to touch you two in order to give you what Ivy wants."

I pointed the bundle of black cherry bark toward the strange v-shape of stone rising out of the ground.

"We're close. Pretty damn close. Now, I'm really sorry we only have four Guardians, because right now when you guys are getting a lot of work, it seems like you don't have time for each other. Two ships passing in the night kind of thing. I'll assign Chrysta and Larelle to be together, you two can… work this out I hope. Or whatever you choose that doesn't involve getting in the way of saving this god, getting all these people back in their homes, and having a big afterparty."

The UI gave me a Persuasion check, and told me that since it was a contested check, I wasn't allowed to use Tokens. So be it.

"There's a Persuasion check," I told her. "I'm sorry."

Not a fan of the sullen look of indignation I received, but that was that.

***

I found out later that Ivy ended up sleeping alone in Regina's house, while Regina 'helped me out' with the cure. She and the other girls still involved with helping me replenish Tokens were taking turns sleeping in my bed or on unused workstations. Isabelle had disappeared in her pretty justified rage, though I wasn't sure how justified. Ivy was miserable and it was this kind of split in the party we couldn't really handle.

Still, for now, it was not at the forefront. Instead, the God of Productivity was. It had started attracting holy aspected Nakamamon, which was a bad sign. He was also leaking more divine

energy by the day.

The day might've been a balmy one, just a bit too hot outside, but it was getting stifling in here. Larelle's Magmamander helped ensure that. We'd moved the operation outside, and I was lagging enough to consider growing coffee beans in my special garden so I could have a continuous stream of caffeine for times like this. I'd been awake now for around 24 hours, and it was enough to make a man surly. The 24 hours of constant work had also give me blurred vision, and a pretty constant yawn.

I'd also had sex about seven times over the course of the day, and replenished almost all my Tokens. I thought I probably needed more than what I had, sadly.

Larelle lumbered around the corner and struck up a pose. All seven feet of thickly built, quiet hulking Nakamamon stared down at me, a thin smile playing across her face. She crossed her gigantic arms.

I have been informed that you are mating in order to gain back your Tokens, she said telepathically.

I let out a shaky sigh and continued fueling mana into the cure. "I… didn't think you were interested in mating with someone so much smaller than yourself."

Nonsense! She thundered into my mind, almost making me lose concentration on the final step of the cure. I had a long wooden paddle and was stirring the thing. It had become a gelatinous glob of awfulness.

It had started off as a thin, oily substance with sparkles floating on the top like bubbles of water here and there. The clear yellow of the oil had deepened to first indigo and then a deep violet, with the sparkles expanding into threads of light. They'd appear and disappear like shooting stars, zipping to life and exploding into different colors before vanishing again.

That had been with the addition of the purple morpheus, I thought. The flower petals, probably. I couldn't keep track.

At some point the distilled essence of passionflower was

introduced, which caused the whole thing to boil uncontrollably and suck in the surrounding mana at an alarming rate. I hadn't needed to infuse it with any mana, because it had gone insane all on its own. I'd ordered Alan and Trent to get clear of the area, which had led to a mad scramble to get Alan on Airaconda and evacuated from a potentially terrifying situation.

Thankfully that had only gone on for a half hour, because mana deprivation is not a fun feeling. I hadn't been there for a while, but the feeling of having your soul ripped away was emotionally draining. This had been part of the instructions and I'd prepared a mana potion for myself and those working in the lab, but the ambient mana was stolen from nearly a quarter mile in all directions. Also, it went on longer than I imagined, so we all took little sips of mana potion together as the horrible sensation stretched on.

From then, I'd needed to add the purple morpheus root. This caused the whole thing to go cosmic black, complete with pinpricks of light sparkling through. This temporarily reoriented the local ley line to veer over and spill mana over the whole area. Instead of deprivation, it was now mana over saturation, leading us to take our anti-magic pills almost five days earlier than necessary. We'd come pretty close to turning into Nakamamon there. Drat was nearly invisible when he took his pill, and Cinzy's face had not been her own. Whatever Nakamamon she was destined to turn into, it was probably a shapeshifter, because her nose and ears and cheekbones kept changing shape, and her hair went through lengths and styles every few heartbeats.

Finally, once all the different parts were swirled together and the temperature had been lowered, intensified, then lowered again so it could simmer, it needed the hardwood.

The black cherry wood pulp turned the damn thing from a liquid into a big ass ball of play dough. Only sticky. It became almost impossible to stir, since we had a glob of it some three feet around. It probably weighed almost as much as I did. Sure it shimmered with a coruscating oil slick of neon pink and green, and sure it gave off a low hum of power. Sure, it couldn't be touched without imbuing

you with so much mana that you'd go Nakamamon instantly… but it was so hard to work with now. It wanted to stick to the bottom of the cast iron cauldron, and needed to be wrenched up, then folded over constantly.

Also the *smell*. It was, if I can possible describe this, two different smells that had nothing to do with one another, mixed together. Like the hellspawn lovechild of peppermint and jet fuel. Or lemon juice and cordite. Or bubblegum and cumin.

Alan had recommended a spell to make it impossible for me to smell anything, but I didn't have the ability to perform the spell, for one. It was an abjuration, and a simple one, sure, but it required me to concentrate on the spell the whole time. I couldn't have the spell going and make the cure at the same time.

Also I'd been stirring the bloody thing on and off, in between bouts of mind-blowing sex, for a full day. I was exhausted.

"I'm so sorry," I said, and yawned. "I can't handle this right now, Larelle. I'm just about to—"

The UI appeared for the final Develop Cure check.

***Develop Cure (Large/Unique) Check**: Currently, you have the Develop Cure (Large) skill at level 6, Develop Cure (Unique) at level 8, and Affinity at level 8. This check is Nigh Impossible difficulty. You to not currently have 18 Tokens with which to succeed the check automatically.*

Would you like to spend your 15 Tokens to lower the difficulty to Develop Cure by 5?

Total Tokens: 8 Affinity and 7 Free Tokens.

I looked frantically at Larelle. "Will you help me lower the check with Affinity Tokens?" I blurted.

Whatever she saw on my face—the exhaustion, the frantic desperation—she nodded. A load of Tokens appeared in a halo around her head, only to go *cla-cling!* before puffing out of existence.

Your ally has spent 15 Affinity Tokens to lower your difficulty by 5. Would you like to spend 13 Tokens to succeed automatically?

My overtaxed brain pressed the wrong intention button, and I lowered the difficulty by 3 instead, with 9 Tokens.

Now I needed 10 successes. I had 22 skill levels and an enhanced chance of success, but I'd done worse than 40% before.

I was about to start swearing when the message came up.

Congratulations! *You have succeeded in crafting a unique cure.*

I let out a shaky breath, ignore the UI's question about spending Durability Tokens to remain alert and awake, and sank to the ground.

Great big hands picked me up and brought me inside my house, then into my bedroom. She hardly fit. I watched as her head nearly skimmed the ceiling, and how she ducked low to get through the bedroom doorway.

Several yelps followed, as nude girls leapt out of my bed and scrambled for their clothing.

Larelle broadcast a calming message, and they all stared at the unfolding scene.

"Thank you," I whispered.

I will mate with you to regain Tokens when you've gotten some rest, Larelle told me. *I will not be denied, Fletcher.*

I went to tell her something else, but the softness of my pillow hit my head and I was sucked into unconsciousness.

***

When I woke it was, oddly enough, Tweedle Dee cuddling up to me and that was it. The little scamp had curled up on my chest and had been dozing, but the moment I let out my sigh, his head perked up and he let out a yip.

"Hello to you too, Dee," I said. I felt tired, but otherwise amazing. This had been one of the best sleeps of my life.

After a couple of face licks I couldn't defend against, since my arms were trapped under the blanket, Regina's bond mate hopped off my head and scampered out the door.

The girls joined me later around the campfire. Ivy was still nowhere to be seen, and both Isabelle and Chrysta were on godwatch.

"We need to administer this cure," Cinzy said. "Ivy and Larelle reported that our big guy is starting to come apart. More frequent vomiting, some mana surges that feel all wrong, more stumbling into buildings. He vomited up a sledge hammer, but your Nakamamon was there to telekinetically slap it into His body."

"Uh… what? And also, her name is Shakindria and she's incredible."

The hammer was reabsorbed into the god. I shuddered and nodded at the news and the mental image. Gods were fracking metal.

"All right."

The cure was ready. It had congealed into a paste that was thick with potent mana. You couldn't get too close to it because it started turning you into a Nakamamon in a hurry. Touching it shot my mana up so high I took damage, which was perfect. I spent a Durability Token using Healer's Resistance to gain some permanent resistance to it, before burning off some of the mana.

Then I touched it again.

"Ow!"

"What… are you doing?"

"Building up my Arcane damage resistance," I said matter-of-factly. I got through all 6 of my Durability Tokens before I stopped. The typical gain was 3% permanent boost each time, though I sometimes got only 2% instead. The system made sense, only the way the English language made sense: the more you peered at it, the more the rules were more like guidelines.

With a 16% Arcane damage resistance and several doses of anti-magic, I set off with the girls.

“This needs to be applied to the chakra points,” I told them. “We need to smear liberally around the crown, the third eye, the heart, the guts, and somehow we need to get some around the, uh… taint… area.”

Snorts of laughter came with exasperated groans, followed closely by gasps of wonder. How in the hell were we going to pry up His holy jockstrap and smear this difficult-to-touch paste around a god’s holy dong, or around his holy butthole?

It was a question I couldn’t answer.

We had the cauldron hanging Chrysta and I, on a long wooden pole and strung across our shoulders.

“How are you feeling?”

“Drained,” she said. “This divinity poisoning is not to my liking.”

“Sorry,” I said.

“Nonsense. It is my responsibility to get clear of the divine attacks… such as they are.”

“Well as your doctor, I advise you to be even more vigilant in the future.”

She gave me a thin-lipped smile that was half pain, and half reluctance to acknowledge how terrible my joke was.

“Let’s go heal this thing,” I said.

This is Christopher heroically leading the charge with a jar full of goo and a wooden spoon.



Chapter 37- His Holy Guts

The town of Glumpdumpkin was still a wonder to behold: like a great big checkmark had sprouted buildings, mostly houses, but one large meeting hall and several other central buildings. It looked like some great creature with colossal wings had died here and turned to stone, and now the whole town was for some reason perched atop those huge wings.

Now, of course, it had attracted divine aspect Nakamamon. Our old friends Glimmerflies, Glowverns and Angellies were now swarming the place, just as they had with the God of Apparel. This had happened when the God of Productivity originally sickened and then died here, but they eventually fled. Now they were back, the Glimmerflies hanging in the air like fireflies, the Glowverns swooping up and around, and the Angellies slowly descending from the heavens looking wonderful and silly with their glowing white jellyfish bodies and their angel wings and halos. The tiny first stage ones, Glimmerwisps, created a galaxy of tiny glowing motes high above.

All shone with holy light in the deepening twilight, surrounding the town.

"Okay!" I called. "Steer clear. This is my job." They all agreed, though reluctantly. Only Drat was ready with his agreement; he was keen to watch me get killed and possibly eaten.

We couldn't tie it down because the ropes would burn with holy fire and infect the holder with divinity poisoning. Instead, Shakindria and I had discussed another plan.

We didn't even have to turn the corner before the giant's head came into view.

"Shields!" I shouted.

Isabelle and Chrysta were there. While Shakindria lowered the cauldron to the ground, I grabbed the big wooden spoon and got a

healthy dollop of gooey blue cure.

Administer Cure check 1 of 5*: This check has fallen under the Physicality attribute due to your approach. You have Administer Cure at level 9, and Physicality at level 6. This check is Extreme. Would you like to spend 7 Tokens for an Automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 6 Physicality and 7 Free Tokens

Nobody could make 7 successes on a check outside their class, not even with Physicality at level 12. It was my task alone.

I bellowed a war cry at the exact moment the God of Productivity fell to its knees and projectile vomited all over the place.

Before I could even move, two huge tower shields of blue energy slammed down in front of me and deflected the golden liquid. A silvery, glowing, two man cross cut saw slammed against the shield too, but went flipping directly back at the god and smacked Him in the forehead. All this courtesy of some telekinetic control by Shakindria.

For several long moments, a confused look passed over His face, as a saw some ten feet long slowly sank into his head. You have never had such a surreal experience in your life, until you've watched a divine being reincorporate a glowing saw blade back into its forehead inch by inch.

Now, Shakindria had been in telepathic control of a thing called an Alloyum, a golem made of metal, and it appeared at that moment, clutching at the God of Productivity. It was almost laughable how little good it did; the god stood, dangling from His neck before getting golden vomit all over it.

And that was the end of that. The Alloyum crashed to the ground near me, a smoking ruin of melting metal.

I dashed aside, succeeding my check with 7 successes, and plastered the goo on the top of the god's head. I had to really reach, and I did slip on the puddle of metallic golden vomit, but Chrysta was floating there and wrenched back on me to keep me from going down.

"You're a lifesaver," I told her.

"Thank me later," she whispered, "by pinning me to the floor and fucking me as hard as you can. With my hands tied behind my back."

It was hard to know if she was just naturally kinky as hell, or ghost aspects were all like that. It wasn't the time to delve into it.

Isabelle slammed into us the next moment, and got completely covered in godly vomit for her trouble. Her shield had already been dissolving, and was more of a buckler by this point when she got it full on side. Her HP plummeted.

"No!" Ivy shrieked.

I had divinity poisoning potions created, but threw on **Mender's Aura** immediately anyway.

"Come on," Chrysta said. Larelle was already getting her own dose of divinity poisoning from dashing forward to grab Izzy.

"Get it… done," Isabelle wheezed.

Shakindria floated the cauldron over to me, and I got another spoonful of the mana intense goop. The only good news in all this was that the first dose sort of froze Him in place. The god swayed drunkenly on His feet, reaching a slow hand up to touch where he'd been slathered.

I passed the next check to spread the paste all over the gigantic god's chest, but failed on the next check to get some on its stomach. It retched and puked directly down on me the moment I stepped up to do the job. I was sprinting to get away, but a Physicality of 6 is not a Physicality above 10. Chrysta manifested yet another shield directly above us and tackled me aside yet again, getting some metallic gold stuff splashed on her legs in the process.

"You've… got this…" she wheezed.

***

I couldn't appreciate the unearthly sight of holy Nakamamon creatures suspended in midair. A new type, a gigantic winged boar was zipping around through the sky with a heavenly chorus blaring

from its body. I learned later that this was called Seraphig.

There was no time, because the twenty foot tall God of Productivity was continuously puking His holy guts out all over the cobbled streets of Glumpdumpkin, which produced a viscous metallic gold substance (and divine tools, which were literally His holy guts), while I tried like hell to splat him with mana realignment paste.

Not like hell. Bad turn of phrase.

As situations go, this was perhaps the most ridiculous to relate to someone who hadn't been there.

"Oh, yeah, well, the tattooed God in the loincloth needed to take His medicine, but He wasn't in His holy right mind. And every time He vomited I had to dodge away or get burned to a crisp by divine damage."

Congratulations! *You have succeeded in administering the cure (3 of 5).*

I'd gotten him on the forehead. Now, when the god stood, His hand reached up to touch the blue-purple goop I'd placed there. He blinked several times in confusion, threw up again, then staggered and fell to His knees. The cure got on the cobblestones and not me, which was fortunate. The god wasn't the only thing that could deal me a whole lot of damage in a very short period of time. You've got a big, potent, divine problem, you need a big, potent, magical cure.

The next check went without a hitch, and involved me essentially flinging the stuff off the spoon and landing it on the god's stomach. Splat went the cure.

I chanced a look back and saw to my dismay that Isabelle was down to only about a quarter of her health. Larelle had also gotten hit, and was losing health rapidly as well. Chrysta was already afflicted, but now got hit again. Her ghostly, immaterial, incorporeal self didn't help her here: the divinity poisoning ate into her health total rapidly.

The big problem was how to administer the cure to His holy testicles. First, they were covered by a holy loincloth that appeared

to be made of fur but was just more divinity.

It was Token time. This time, when the check came, I spent my Tokens and watched all of my Physicality Tokens, and three of my Free ones, twinkle into being before disappearing.

Unlike with Affinity Tokens or Ingenuity Tokens, the mana infused my body. I felt the swelling in every single muscle in my body, like I'd just gotten some good pump from a series of heavy bench presses… but in every single muscle in my body.

So when I say I launched myself forward and slapped the huge wooden spoon up between His legs, it was the fastest and most agile I've ever been in my life, hands down. I ended up brushing against His holy knee at the same time, and fell in a puddle of His holy vomit a second later.

Congratulations! *You have successfully cured a divine being.*

I lay there, with divine energy beginning to soak into my body. This was, what… the fourth time I'd touched the divine? Each time it was excruciating. Each time it was sublime.

Sublime in both the good and bad ways: the most exalted and high, but also the sure knowledge that you're going to die and that's that.

The god froze. All the pain in my body stopped. I watched in agony as the purple sludge I'd slapped onto its different body parts seeped rapidly beneath the skin. There'd been a sort of golden, a metallic gold rimming its eyes and threading through tendrils over its face and head. Those were now gone.

It looked down at me, directly below its feet on the ground.

You have cured me, it said into my mind.

"Correct," I groaned.

My demesne is that of work, healer. I know all that you have accomplished. Such trials and tribulations you have gone through in seeking out my scattered remnants, bringing me back to life, researching your goal, seeking after the components, crafting the cure, and now bringing it here to me. This effort is to be

commended.

"You're… welcome? Just… my friends helped a lot."

The enormous form of the god leaned down, taking up my whole field of view. Then it reached up one gigantic finger and booped me gently on the nose.

[God of Productivity] appreciates your efforts in saving it. You have been gifted the boon of tools. You will always have the necessary tool for the job when engaged in the work of your Healer class. [God of Productivity] appreciates the efforts you and the people of Glumpdumpkin have made in concert, and individually. Your hard work is to be appreciated. Although disappointed in the lazy ones, [God of Productivity] sees that not all humans or Nakamamon are worthless freeloaders. [God of Productivity] has seen your effort and the difficulties you went through in crafting the cure, and has bestowed upon you +1 Physicality. You gain 1 Physicality Token.

When my vision cleared, I saw far more than I wanted to: the God of Productivity was squatting down over Isabelle's prone form and giving her a little nose boop with one index finger that was nearly as big around as her wrist. And by squatting down I mean I got a full view of what was going on behind that holy loincloth.

I blinked and looked away from the holy hammer I'd witnessed there, trying not to shudder. Goodness gracious, I thought the gods were supposed to be genderless.

Something… happened.

One second I was looking at a god's junk, and the next second it seemed like the god had teleported several feet away. Which I assumed He could do, but I had an odd feeling something strange had just transpired.

"How are we doing, everybody?" I called out, trying to shake the feeling and failing.

"We're good over here," someone called. It was Regina, and she was with Ivy. I got a chorus of 'okay' and 'all's well' from all

participants, including an out-of-breath and stuttering Alan, who'd recovered the moment the god was cured, and raced out of bed, into town, and to where we were.

"Isabelle?" I asked. She was splayed out, arms and legs akimbo on the ground, still staring up at the sky. "Status report?"

"I'm okay," she said, unconvincingly.

We'd address that ball of wax soon enough. First though, I had several UI messages to plow through: divinity poisoning, damage taken after Divine Resistance checks and such, and then this little gem.

Achievement: *first large god encountered*

Of course they're big, they're gods! Really takes the definition of the word up a notch when you've seen one this big with your own eyes. A healthy one anyway, in command of its faculties.

Reward: +1 Free Stat level

I grinned, odd feeling discarded. First large god encountered? I guessed the gigantic lake dragon that carried us out to Slinktrickle didn't count, then? Then again, looking back though my achievements, I saw that there'd been one for a huge god. Amusing that I should get a huge god before a large one.

I put the stat level into Affinity. A lot of my spellcasting was down to Affinity now, and the Healer stuff as well. I was pleased that my stats were well-rounded. The others had serious deficiencies, though they had spikes where their main stats and secondaries got over 10.

The other result of the cure was that I'd leveled up in Arcane Mender. The UI message came up, along with the notification of the level up benefits I'd be receiving.

Level 29: Ability Upgrades: Verdant Rejuvenation. +6 skill points

First, I needed to head over to my special ability to see how it had progressed.

Verdant Rejuvenation III

(Special Ability, uncommon, passive)

Herbs and plants harvested by you and stored by you will last twice as long as normal.

I- 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 18 hours.

II- By placing cuttings of plants together in an enclosed space and tending them they will sprout a hybrid plant if they remain within half a mile of your location over the course of 48 hours. Hybrids may not be bred with other hybrids.

III- Plants you have tended and grown personally have enhanced recuperative properties, and grow 33% larger than ordinary plants of their species.

That sounded amazing. I know, compared to the video games I'd played, where you'd get a gravity bomb that dealt incredible damage because nobody had resistances to it, that 'grow plants good' sounded pretty lame. On the other hand, my potions would heal more hit points and mana points. They would beat back the poisons more effectively. Also, the idea of having even bigger flamboyant flowers was intoxicating. Lotus flowers were huge, and growing even bigger ones was ridiculously exciting. Sundrinkers were likewise fat round satellite dishes of soaking up sunlight, and having them be even bigger filled me with joy. I wanted one so big I could pretend to be an insect and laze away on it. I wanted a forest of eight foot tall, eight inch wide irises, and super fragrant jasmine flowers, and even bigger, weirder passionflowers.

In fact, I could create hybrids… I immediately planned to hybridize the passionflowers with everything available because they were weird, and I wanted the weirdest possible.

We were all fine, as it turned out. Larelle, Chrysta, Isabelle and even Regina had all gotten some divinity poisoning, but that all vanished the moment I finalized slapping this big guy on the taint and getting him cured in all the necessary chakra spots. Yep, the job can be dangerous. And yep, the job can be gross. However, as I

watched a god straighten and turn a warm smile my way, I knew it was totally worth it, even if I had been forced to grease His holy ballsack and then see His holy nethers just a few minutes afterwards.

I gave a weak chuckle and spent my skill points.

This level was going towards the base skills, which I'd been neglecting for a while. Diagnosis needed more. I'd gotten lucky with the God of Productivity. If it had more than a magical ailment, there would be even more to do now, and I wasn't sure if it would've been possible with the level of divinity poisoning half my team had gotten in such a short time.

A feeling of lightness had come over the team. Save for Trent, who seemed to have a never ending supply of work to be done, everyone was beaming and throwing fists in the air.

Muppin lumbered up the streets carrying Trent and Cinzy with Tweedle Dee and Airaconda following along.

Dancing followed in the streets. The Nakamamon who lived in this place all surged in, cheering and dancing and singing. It was like straight out of the weirdest anime movies you've ever seen: weird frogs and weird giraffes and weird orange blobs of slime and living shrubs and rabbits made out of pure darkness and such all boosting us onto their shoulders and shoulder-adjacent regions, and began parading us around.

Except Muppin, who might have had a special ability for immovability. Muppin simply lumbered on around the town with tiny Nakama-kids seated on his back.

We were taken up to the pinnacle of the town, which was at least fifty feet in the air and possibly higher, turned around, and taken all the way to the pinnacle of the other side, slightly lower but still a long drop. Some flying Nakamamon launched themselves off the edges and glided along, singing and shouting, before returning to the town. As for me, my feet never touched the ground in the entire hour-long march around the streets. It was quite some time before we stopped jumping around, accepting flights on the backs of some

townsfolk, or dancing in the group of literal thousands.

Because in addition to the townsfolk, several hundred immigrants had come as well, drawn by the holy power gone wrong. They were also in attendance, singing and dancing and congratulating, and also throwing elemental blasts up in the air every which way.

Once we'd all gathered up around the campfire, I asked the most pressing question on my mind:

"I am aware that we are way over the regular two month time limit before heading home on two weeks of rest and relaxation. With that in mind, I assume there will be further celebration in the town and people will attempt to get back to normal. So my question to all of you is whether you would like to pull up stakes and head back to HQ for a debrief, followed immediately by rest and relaxation on earth, or if we will be sucking around here for a short time. For this, I am happy to take a vote. And this will include our bond mates."

Drat coughed into his hand. Then he also said the following words: "Cough, unfair, cough!" Followed by another couple of regular coughs that weren't him speaking aloud.

"You just said 'cough' and then unfair, and then 'cough again," Cinzy noted drily.

Drat blinked at her innocently.

The assembled members, including Airaconda, Tweedle Dee, Fairy Poppins, Garnet, Muppin, McCauley Skulkins, Vellenia, and Shakindria all started to discuss the matter. Poppins and Cinzy communicated however they did, as did Isabelle and Muppin. She put her head against the great stone face of her hippo-sized Nakamamon bond mate.

I approached, and gave Muppin a scritching in one of the spots I knew he liked. "How are you doing?"

She looked to me, a complicated mix of emotions all vying for space on her face. "Oh, you know… feeling betrayed."

"Understandable. Though nothing happened. I removed the possibility of that by leaving."

She chewed her lip and peered out into the distance. "It's not me

she wants though, Fletcher. She showed me that."

"I feel it necessary to add that you, however, came and tested me out once upon a time, in my tent. After dark."

She looked abashed.

"You two have a lot of fun, you have chemistry. You seem good together… except for a few inches of flesh." I grinned apologetically. "I recall you both professing your love for one another."

She winced and frowned.

"Right, boo?"

She snorted laughter. "Shut up."

After Isabelle departed with her thoughts and her decision, I turned back to my character sheet.

For skill points, the choices were easy. Now that Diagnostics and Treatments were just one point each, I put one in each. I put another into Transmutation, since I'd already used that one several times. Another went into Develop Cure for Medium, another for Huge, and finally, one more for Develop Cure (Human).

"I can't believe there's one for human," I told myself.

Christopher Fletcher

Healer - Apprentice Arcane Mender 29

Pleasure Seeker - Initiate Indulgent Consort 26

Attributes:

Affinity 9

Durability 6

Ingenuity 9

Likability 7

Physicality 8

Free Tokens 7

Healer (Arcane Mender) Skills:

Diagnostics 6

Treatments 6

Develop cure (swarm 5, small 6, medium 6, large 6, huge 2)
Develop cure (unique) 9
Develop cure (human) 2
Administer Cure 9
Instinctual Casting 8
Mana Affinity 3
Mana Shaping 3
Spellcasting (Abjuration 1, Conjuration 1, Evocation 1, Transmutation 3)
Meditation 4

Pleasure Seeker Qualities:

Girth 2
Load 1
Stave Off 3
Length 4
Tongue 3
Adaptability 7
Pheromones 4
Group Play 2

Other Skills:

Identify 5
Hiking 3
Cooking 1
Persuasion 1
Divine Resistance 9
Stealth 1

This is Christopher getting closer to his ultimate goal.



Chapter 38- After Action Report

It was a short time into the celebrations when Regina sidled up to me. The townsfolk had been overjoyed to learn that their town was no longer being slowly demolished by a giant, tattooed god. After general rejoicing, which included me crowdsurfing over a wide variety of different creatures made of different materials and sizes, the people flooded back into their town to find most of it intact.

It had been several days after reconstituting the god when we finally cured it, and the damage was not minimal. Some of the Nakamamon had lost homes. Most were okay. For now, the town would begin the process of picking back up the pieces, and then constructing new homes for those who had lost. But first, it was time to party!

The Nakamamon of different species had their own songs to belt out at the top of their lungs or whatever passed for their lungs, dances to get down and boogie to, and other ways of celebrating. Fire Nakamamon set off sparks here and there like fireworks, capable of creating different colors; electric Nakamamon zapped lightning of various different colors up into the sky. Even the water Nakamamon sprayed out mist to create little rainbows glinting off the bright afternoon sunlight.

Regina sometimes dressed in her dyed green leather armor, but just as often she went around in casual clothes, like now. Today she had on a pleated skirt in brown with bright orange stripes peeking out when she moved, and a simple white t-shirt snug against her taut body. She noticed me looking and smiled easily.

"We're almost ready to head back to HQ," she said, and took my hand. "That means…"

"Yeah," I agreed. That meant we would be enacting a dangerous

plan that the Agency wouldn't care for, not even a little bit. They'd try to stop us by any means. We'd skirted around the danger so far, keeping it mostly at bay. This was the first time we'd be inviting it.

She followed my eyes to where Shakindria was hovering above her workshop house, watching the proceedings. When her eyes met mine, I couldn't hold her gaze. She had been about to smile, but I felt like such an asshole leaving her here, after all she'd done.

"You gave her some moments of enjoyment," she said, and I heard the regret in her voice as well. She wasn't wrong, but that wasn't anywhere near enough for what Shakindria had done. She deserved her freedom.

"She gave this city its life back as much as me, or more," I said. "None of the leaders gave her so much as a thank you." Me they'd boosted onto their shoulders and paraded around down, where the divine vomit puddles had vanished. As for Shakindria, they'd started giving orders for replacement parts, to begin the work of repairing the town. They'd had her lifting some of the rubble out of streets before that. She had already filled out some of those orders.

"Hey," Regina said gently, one hand on my upper arm. "Listen, you haven't done that Meld ability, have you?"

I looked at her, confused for just a second. I'd chosen the Meld ability… the one from Cinzy. That wasn't the one she was talking about though. The first one, from Regina, I'd skipped out on, and forgotten about. We had healed up literal thousands of people; it hadn't seemed significant. I'd put it in the back of my mind, and then completely out of mind.

"I guess not," I said.

"Give it a shot." When I continued to give her a skeptical eye, she rolled her eyes. "Look, the system is intuitive, I think. When I hit level 25, I found what I wanted there. When I chose the Meld ability… it was what I wanted."

She'd gotten the ability to gather beast Nakamamon to her side like a literal princess out of an animated movie.

"You mean I'm going to find a way to break Shakindria's magical

servitude contract," I said, the flat disbelief too sarcastic and dark for me to feel okay using. Still, Shakindria's predicament was finally, well and truly getting me down. I didn't feel much of the party atmosphere.

"Yes, actually," she said, and gave me a playful shove. "And don't be like that."

The earnest desire to help was clear on her face and in her tone, and I stopped myself from pouting. Brooding was the old Christopher.

I took a deep breath and considered the Meld ability once again.

Maybe **Beast Talker** could help work on the minds of the townsfolk and convince them to let her finish out her magical contract early. None of the others would do: **Eagle Eyed**, **Stalwart**, and **Fierce** didn't feel like they applied. The one I'd already melded couldn't be melded again.

The question was then what to pair it with. On the surface, none of my Healer abilities seemed to fit. I had **Arcane Alchemy**, **Arcane Focus**, **Healer's Resistance**, **Verdant Rejuvenation**, and **Mending Aura**.

Now, when I used Affinity and the Mana Affinity skill to suss out which of my Pleasure Seeker abilities might work, I got two different hits. **Eromancy** definitely didn't feel right, and neither did **Man Enough,** along with **Post-Sharing Clarity**.

The new ability **Coming Together** seemed a great thing to meld with **Beast Talker,** as did **Drive In Deeper**. The connections between **Beast Talker** and these two felt strange, and my Mana Affinity skill wouldn't come right out and explain what was going to happen—

"Fletcher, I'm surprised at you," Regina said.

She didn't have any stakes with her choice to form a Nakamamon menagerie. She didn't have a hero to let down.

"I know," I told her, sighing, though I was in no mood to be nagged. Vellenia entered the house, beaming.

Fork.

Coming Together might improve my relationship with the people of the town, enhancing my Nakamamon interaction bonuses. **Drive In Deeper** might improve my relationship with one of the townsfolk to a high degree. Or they might just not fix my problem at all.

This was ridiculous. I concentrated on my objective: helping Shakindria out of her situation. That was what I most desperately wanted. If Regina was right, the system would see my intent and build the ability around it. If she was wrong, I'd be forced to leave Shakindria behind. With that firmly in mind, I chose **Coming Together**, and pressed the **Confirm** button when it appeared.

Congratulations! *The UI gushed. You have melded your first ability!* ***Beast Talker*** *has been replaced by* ***Bondsealer****.*

"No," I breathed, my heart sinking. It wasn't going to work.

"Yes!" Vellenia chirped. "I'm here!" She practically threw off her clothes, to Regina's 'wow' of appreciation and lust. I hoped that staring in bewilderment at the UI was seen as slack-jawed amazement.

Beast Talker was an amazing ability that I'd used to get out of a jam and certain death. Replacing it was not something I'd wanted, even a little bit, but it would be an acceptable price to pay if it got me to convince all the town leaders to give me Shakindria's contract. I scrambled through the menu until I found the tab containing the shared abilities gained from **Entwined Ecstasy**.

"I am going to finally deep throat you, bond mate," Vellenia said, grinning. "Regina has explained the process, and I feel confident!" She even clapped her hands together soundlessly, bobbing up and down on the balls of her feet.

Bondsealer

(Special Ability, Rare, Passive)

You gain +3 in all attributes and skills when dealing with your bonded Nakamamon.

You gain +1 in all attributes and skills when dealing with unbonded Nakamamon of any type.

You may bond an additional number of Nakamamon equal to your ranking in this ability. The ability's current rank is 1.

"Impossible," I breathed.

"Very possible! Well, not possible before, but today is the day!" Vellenia opened her mouth and pointed. Inside, her many tiny tongues wriggled and undulated.

I stared at the ability write up, gaping at it. Bond additional Nakamamon? The ability had a similar bonus for interaction that **Beast Talker** had, but that last part… holy frack. That made my mind whirl.

Regina laughed at struck dumb Christopher.

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Sometimes the clouds above you are the most glorious things you've ever seen. They seem like they're about a thousand feet tall, and extend up into infinity. And when you see this in the early dawn light of day, the sun can paint all this the soft creamy orange and pink of sherbet.

I whistled while I walked. All the worrying I'd done was for nothing. I could bond a second Nakamamon! The freedom and wonder swept through me.

I liked Shakindria. I liked her work ethic, the amount of horny she was, and she had these big rabbit ears on her head that were very sensitive. She was knowledgeable, adventurous in and out of the bedroom, and was fun to talk to. She'd been a tireless worker, doing the thankless tasks no one forced her to do.

Shakindria must have seen my good mood and understood at least some of it from the roof of her home. She came floating down off her house and hovered just a few inches off the paved street, gazing at me in wonder.

You… will be staying a few more days? she asked. Her tone

radiated a subdued hope.

No, I told her mentally, using her own power to attempt to reassure her. The **Psyspeech** conveyed my feeling as well as the words. *However, I have good news.*

When I took her hand, she didn't resist, but she seemed to deflate a little.

What is it you wish, then?

We passed many of the townsfolk still milling around and partying, though the partying slowed to a stop as we approached. staring at me with the yellow-skinned psychic Nakamamon. The uncomfortable stares from the people of the town seemed enough, and she tugged against my hand.

If you won't be staying, I have work to do.

"I promise, it's good news," I told her, heading up toward the very edge of the town's top, where several houses clung to the edge of the huge stone check mark.

As we got there, I told her about the ability **Bondsealer**, and what it meant. Whatever else it meant, it meant I could support two different bonds. Eventually, I would be able to bond yet another Nakamamon, but that wasn't important… and wouldn't be any time soon.

"Do you approve of this?" I asked her. "You can travel with me, empower yourself and me, and be free of the town… but you'll have to share me."

"You need to meet Vellenia," I explained.

I'd made the mistake in the past of not extending truth to my companions, and inviting discussion to avoid misunderstandings and mistrust. This was going to be different.

What needed to happen now was that Shakindria and Vellenia needed to meet.

The Marshin leapt up as soon as she heard my voice. The white skin with the mint-green hair and the pink accents to her body, clad in the white dress. The cheerful expression layered with serenity.

"Hello!" she greeted Shakindria warmly.

Silence.

"Oh, well it's great to meet you!" Vellenia said. "I have never met a Mindela. I am a Marshin."

More silence. Shakindria was clearly using her own **Psyspeech** to communicate, and I wasn't privy to that.

"I'm sure it will be fine. Why wouldn't it? Fletcher has a number of human bond mates, and I think he'll have our Frostling in his bed before long. He's a Pleasure Seeker."

I laughed awkwardly, looking around for Alan or Trent, who weren't supposed to know that info. There would be no detecting Trent, that was for sure. I'd stopped worrying about what would happen when he found out. I couldn't imagine the reaction from HQ when they learned I was having sex with essentially the entire team. When that side played against my record of healing Nakamamon and this world's gods, the worst that could happen was they reassigned all the girls to different teams, and put me on a team of all guys.

While that would suck, I'd still have Vellenia… and hopefully Shakindria.

There was still the Mindela's reaction to all this. She could still back out, though I was hoping her wanderlust and her promise to help outweighed any reluctance she might be feeling.

"What else do you need to know?" I asked her.

Nothing, she replied. *Allow me to deliberate a moment.*

That I could do.

Vellenia wrapped herself around my right arm and snuggled one cheek against my shoulder. She was short, about a head shorter than me, and the feel of her hair on my skin was no longer odd. I liked the sensation, honestly.

Is it true you have bedded the female humans attached to your expedition? the Mindela asked.

"It's true," I said. "And not in past tense. It's an ongoing situation."

More searching consideration followed, with Shakindria staring at me and then around me in thought.

This one adores you, Shakindria said, indicating Vellenia with a flick of mental imagery. In her mind's eye, Vellenia's eyes were hearts, and little explosions of glitter surrounded her any time she looked at me. She clasped her hands and swooned against them, sighing in contentment. I could tell it was meant to be an annoyed series of images and sounds, but I laughed.

"Look," I told her, "You know me already. You know I've never had this in my past. I don't know how it started exactly, I'm not sure why it's been so successful so far, and while I love it and I'm flattered by it… I don't really get it."

I couldn't say whether it was the Qualities that made me bigger and thicker than others, or if it was something else they needed that I was giving them. Possibly some of both. It could also be that they didn't have better options. I had inadvertently chosen Drat, a loner recluse, and Alan, who was a bit of a newb like my sister said. Trent had a high Likability, but was utterly focused on his craft. He rarely joined in the fun and festivities. The situation with breaking Isabelle's ankle and destroying our original supply of anti-magic pills hit him hard.

And while I considered what it might be that drew the girls to me and kept them coming back, Shakindria continued to regard me silently.

"You are welcome to meet them, if you like," I said. "The girls."

She would like, and she did, as it turned out. We met Regina and Tweedle Dee just returning from a potion delivery mission to Jacoby's people, and Shakindria liked the red-haired and freckled Regina immediately. She liked Tweedle Dee just as much. Regina, for her part, kept looking a question at me that I refused to answer. But the longer I refused, the more certain she became that Regina might be getting some exotic psychic aspect Nakamamon booty in the near future.

What a perv.

Shakindria then joined Regina for a rousing game of fetch with Tweedle Dee, followed by a rousing game of tug of war with the flower fox, followed by telekinetically lifting both of them and laughing as they swam through the air toward one another.

Sometime during this play, Tara and Airaconda scouted them in the field below, and swooped down to join them. Here Shakindria got to meet them too, fly around with the other Ranger and her bond mate while Tara jabbered a mile a minute about life back on earth, her family, and answered any question Shakindria might have, along with plenty she didn't.

She had time with Ivy and Isabelle, and enjoyed juggling them by throwing them up in the air, releasing the telekinesis, then catching them again. It was like a trampoline, but without any surface to bounce on. She even conferred with Larelle and Chrysta.

You are aware, Shakindria told me, *that once we bond, my magic becomes more potent, and you will gain some of my psychic abilities.*

I knew some of that already.

She lifted the awl and flung it toward the point where we had chosen.

This will become even easier once the bonding is complete.

Although Shakindria was ready to do the bonding, I wanted to hold off until the evening came. I liked the idea of performing this particular ritual under the stars.



Chapter 39- Bound Here, And Here, And Here

Vellenia consented to the bonding without a second thought. And really, she told me, who was she to get in the way of what I wanted. Which was a kind sentiment and all, but warred with my people-pleasing side. I needed to know there wouldn't be any trouble with me bonding Shakindria.

I'd been on the precipice of disappointing a potentially powerful ally, and now good friend: I would have been forced to tell Shakindria no, then explain all that to my. That whole situation had been hard for people-pleaser Fletcher, and I didn't like being in that rock and hard place of a dilemma.

And, as I stood with Shakindria on the roof of her house, holding hands, I reflected on how lucky I was to avoid disappointing her, and setting my team back months in work.

"I am the luckiest man on the planet… on either planet," I breathed. All the guilt over her help and the restrictions placed on her had welled up into a fierce ball of shame. But we were close to unraveling that and setting the tightness in my chest free.

You are too kind, she responded. She was beautiful, adventurous, sensual, and capable. Any man would be lucky to bond a sentient humanoid-yet-still-non-human creature like her.

I thought not for the first time about what it would be like to take my leave time back on earth. It wasn't going to be easy to separate from Vellenia and Shakindria.

This led naturally to the next thought: this was by design.

Some human had made the system. They made the system messages. That person wanted to keep us here, and what better way than to literally tether us to one of this world's inhabitants?

I shook myself; I was being paranoid. Bonding Nakamamon was a natural consequence of coming here and opening ourselves to magic. It wasn't some nefarious plan by someone at the Agency (BOOF or SNORC, whichever they called it) to give us Stockholm Syndrome and never want to leave.

Your mind is fluttering, Shakindria told me.

"Sorry," I said.

I wish to bond with you, Christopher Fletcher. The bond will be of mind, body and soul, she said. *As we bond here*—here she touched my forehead to indicate the place where I channeled mana—*we will bond here as well*. And she touched my chest, just left of center. *But we will be bound here throughout the entire process, start to finish.* Her yellow, four-fingered hand slid down over my cock, rousing it.

Her mind had taken on a naughty tone, and I got flashes of mental imagery, with us having sex all over the place. An airplane, a concept she'd just learned about, by the side of the road, in a dingy public restroom, and more.

Let my mana intertwine with yours, she said, and I felt more than saw the flow of mana emerge from the amethyst gem in her forehead. It took some doing, but I was able to match the action, drawing mana up and out of the wells in my body to where I could mingle it with what she was offering.

It shimmered in the air and began to twist and spiral around hers. I caught the barest hint of color, or Affinity translated our mana into colors for my mind: mine a minty green, hers a twisted braid of lavender.

As our mana began to twine together, she took my hands and brought them up to her breasts. Stepping forward, she slid my pants off and then took care to slip out each foot in turn. The moment she slurped my cock into her mouth, the psychic projection enveloped us.

I was standing beside a rocky, mountainous pathway worn down by many feet, while Shakindria sucked me deeper into her mouth. In the meantime, hikers passed by with hefty backpacks strapped on,

grinning and gasping at us. Some had those ski poles for walking sticks, but all of them had their eyes locked on what the Mindela was presently doing.

Her eyes opened lazily and locked onto mine, and a smile spread across her face while she sucked me off.

We can do this and more, she told me.

She stood and leapt into my arms. She was lighter than she looked; like Vellenia, she couldn't weigh over a hundred pounds. The moment I caught her, we were standing in a shallow pool while a waterfall thundered nearby.

A vision, a psychic projection into my mind.

Again, a whole host of people stood around in bikinis and swimsuits, young people having fun in this secluded tropical place. As soon as we arrived, the hushed conversations started, along with the pointing and the giggles.

Their discomfort, jealousy or their own lust wasn't going to get to me; they weren't real and I really was just about to be deep inside my second different Nakamamon species.

I lifted Shakindria slowly up and down, and she helped by positioning my cock to get maximum friction, to drag it up and down the length of her slit. She clutched her other hand around my neck and stared into my eyes.

Do you feel their attention on us? she asked. I didn't, but that didn't matter, she explained what was going on. *They want you*, she told me. *They secretly wish to have the lack of inhibitions you have, to have you slide into them—*

She positioned the head at her entrance and I lowered her onto me. She was tight, incredibly tight, and already soaked from the dirty talk.

—and the others want to be you. They want an uninhibited partner. A 'freak' you call them. Is that what you wish to have, bond mate? A freak in the sheets?

"Yes," I told her through clenched teeth.

I held on tight and began to rock my hips, loving the way this

vision fuzzed at the edges when she started to have the lust overcome her focus. Her nipples had emerged, a darker shade of yellow but also much wider than Vellenia's small pink ones. Much wider. These were what you'd call pancake nipples and they were not bumpy like the human ones I'd had my tongue all over the last several months.

Suck them, she told me. *Lavish me with your tongue and your cock, bond mate.*

The sensation of being watched and lusted after was a very new one. All of the girls had wanted to do this in private, to keep the knowledge of our pleasure a secret. Right now, out of the corner of my eye, I watched in amazement while young women's lust-filled gazes locked onto me, and they started surreptitiously running their hands down between their legs, up over their breasts. It mattered less that they were a figment of our imagination and more that they were sexy and they wanted what I had.

I clutched onto her ass and forced her to ride my pole, loving the tightness of her and the way those nipples felt on my tongue. She was glorious: headstrong, no inhibitions, and an exhibitionist.

I wanted to break her concentration, to give her so much pleasure she had to focus on just what I was giving her. Yes I knew that would break the mana binding us together, but we could do that again. It didn't require me to set her down on a sand bank and plow into her with dozens of people watching in fascination.

Still she fed mana into our connection, even as I folded her in half with my hands behind her knees. I reciprocated, trying to keep my focus on the mana rather than the exquisite and different feel of Shakindria.

Here I could really thrust down with a lot of force, and each time my abs slapped down the whole vision wavered, like a rock dropped into a pond. Her orgasm was approaching; I could tell from the way she'd fallen silent, the way her pussy gripped onto me, the way her yellow skin had a slight orange tint to it around the cheeks and ears, and the way her whole body had begun to clench.

"Your… thing… is so deep…" she gasped.

The scene wavered as the dam of the orgasm broke and she cried out.

"Fletcher, something is happening!" she said, astonishment clear in her voice.

I locked lips with her. To keep my focus on the bonding, we switched positions. She stuck her ass out at me, feet planted firmly on the ground, with the vision wavering around us. We were in a plane bathroom now, with one flight attendant staring with shock at what she was seeing. Shakindria flashed her boobs at the stunned attendant while her body jerked with every hard thrust.

"Ah!" she cried out, unable to concentrate enough to maintain psyspeech. The scene wavered again, and I felt her wind up toward another orgasm in record time.

Two hands on her boobs from behind, I pulled her back toward me and locked lips once more, slamming into her while our mana coalesced into a single strand.

Once our bond was complete, I waved away the UI message telling me that we'd bonded and that we gained powers from being bonded to one another. Instead I spooned her on my bed. Her body felt warm and comfy in my arms, pressed against my thighs, and fit against the contour of my neck and chin.

We lay there in the quiet, fingers intertwined and me stroking her belly absently. Later I kissed her again, and this led to her grinding herself against my midsection.

You're insatiable, she communicated telepathically.

I could not argue with that. Somehow I had a whole host of women okay with sharing me.

She took my hardening length in hand and rubbed it up and down over herself, grunting and groaning.

It has been so long since I've given up control, she told me. *I could not help it. The sensations were too much.*

Are you… an exhibitionist? I asked mentally. **Psyspeech** might be an ability but I liked using it. When her inquisitive, questioning

reply started up, I gave her some mental pictures and a definition of the term before the **Psyspeech** ran out.

Is that… a bad thing? she asked.

"Oh, no," I whispered to her. "You are what you are. But if you really go crazy with other people watching, then we can engineer that sort of situation."

A shock of icy terror flowed through her mind and into my mind, though I could sense strong desire laced in there. She wasn't ready, but I could tell she really wanted to. The visions were a series of fantasies she might one day want to make a reality. Just not today.

"It's okay," I soothed. "We'll take it very slow. One day perhaps we'll find someone who's a voyeur. I have an idea but no proof."

Your other bond mate?

"No… but don't worry. When you're ready, or if you're ready. Not before." Then more kisses for reassurance.

She slowly pushed herself back onto me, until the head popped into her and she gave out a great groaning sigh.

This time the sex was slow, sensuous, and wasn't complicated by the need to form the bond of mana between us.

With Vellenia it had been uncomplicated: extend out the mana, twine it together, boom done. What I hadn't realized was that with Vellenia, we'd gone from practically strangers to very comfortable with one another in a millisecond.

I want them to watch us, Shakindria said in a quiet voice in my mind. *I feel so beautiful like this.* In the meantime her hips did more of the talking. She was soaking wet, and when I took her by the hip she groaned with lust directly into my mind.

The bonding had made us intimate and comfortable with one another, I was realizing. The sex had helped, but intertwining your mana with someone else just made you comfortable being with them. It was like you were on their wavelength, even if you were different people.

You're so big, and they'll be amazed that I can take all this without being broken. Her words dripped with arousal. *They'll be*

jealous, and they'll be turned on.

If you were the artist and she was the engineer, it didn't matter. If you were from Germany and she was from the Philippines, somehow that didn't matter either.

They'll know that I am yours and you are mine, she went on.

"You're mine," I repeated, half amazed. .

And you are mine, she said. *My king and my slave, my conquerer and my servant. By the gods you are so deep inside me. I had only ever imagined mating might feel good, and in my fantasies it was never like this.*

I sawed my hips back and forth, tweaking her nipples, She wound tighter towards yet another seismic climax, while I felt my own second climax building.

"You… are my queen… huh?" I asked, panting from the effort.

Your queen must have her desires… filled…

She cried out yet again, both in my mind and in my ears. The climax washed over her and she projected the feeling into me. That was like a domino falling, because I had her overwhelming sensations layered onto my own. I jerked forward and came, deep inside.

When Vellenia came home that night, she snuggled onto my other side, and roused me, and silently sucked me clean before apologizing for getting me hard. With a slow smile, I tried to convey that it was not a problem. With my fingers, I tried to convey that I needed no apologies, but might like to have some play time now that I was ready to go.

Shakindria woke not long into my languid lovemaking with the Marshin. The white-skinned beauty with her mint green hair had her eyes fixed closed and her face pointed at the ceiling, orgasming continuously for some ten minutes as I held her hips and pistoned up into her again and again.

My new bond mate watched with keen interest, and eventually reached out to stroke Vellenia's thigh. The Marshin took her hand and intertwined their fingers together, still not looking, while her

mouth worked and no sounds emerged.

Finally when I came, Shakindria's face was inches from my joining with Vellenia. She caught my cock as Vellenia slumped to one side, and slurped it into her mouth to clean it off.

The two Nakamamon locked gazes, and I could see a problem there. They might enjoy their time with me, they might love having me stuffed up into them and rearranging their guts, but they weren't used to having one another around.

I realized the problem and the solution the moment Vellenia sleepily said the words. "We will need to bond as well."

Intertwining their mana wasn't something that was easy to watch. Shakindria consented, but what happened next was largely invisible. My Affinity and skills weren't up to snuff. I did get wisps of the lavender magic coming off her, and some glimpses of the pink and adorable magic Vellenia had within her, but as for the two strands coming together, the only indication it happened was a vague feeling in my forehead that things were better. As with Vellenia's bond with me, there didn't need to be any lovemaking going on. Instead they both visibly relaxed, and settled in on either side of me, snuggling against my shoulders and chest, and touching one another's fingertips.

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Of course, I was overjoyed to receive the bonding benefits from Shakindria that I'd expected.

Congratulations! *You have bonded with a Mindela.*
You have gained the following:
**Psychic Resistance*
**Unlimited Psyspeech with your bond mate.*
**Basic Telekinesis*

The descriptions proved out what I expected.

Psychic resistance: You are immune to psychic aspect damage

from your bonded Nakamamon. All psychic aspect damage has a 50% chance to be reduced to zero. Any psychic aspect damage taken is reduced by 50%. This functions identically for status effects derived from psychic aspect damage.

Unlimited Psyspeech with your bond mate: Psychic communication to your bond mate no longer incurs a check. Range and duration are both defined by your relationship with your bond mate.

Basic Telekinesis: By concentrating, you may spend 1 Affinity Token to lift an unliving object of up to 10 pounds and move it. This costs moderate mana per minute. Range and duration are both defined by your relationship level with your bond mate. Fine manipulation of objects is not possible.

By contrast, my bond with Vellenia had produced two resistance abilities, along with a single special ability for each of her two aspects. Shakindria provided me with two abilities. Granted, one of them was strictly limited to communication with her.

Interestingly, I hadn't been able to use **Entwined Ecstasy** with Vellenia in order to gain a special ability through sex. I'd already gained that with Shakindria, and it hadn't been revoked when we'd bonded.

I set to work immediately testing out Basic Telekinesis, which proved to be just as incredible as I'd hoped. I was able to lift basic tools and then drop them where I wanted. The mana cost was pretty steep, as my Healer class didn't focus heavily on mana; I had an Affinity of less than half of Alan and Trent, and after about five minutes of moving objects around, I was drained in a way I'd never been before.

Mana was like soul. Like a literal manifestation of that thing people claim to have on earth but don't really have solid evidence to prove it's there. Like morale on a battlefield, or willpower to resist hardship, it's almost impossible to know who has it, how much, or how long it'll take to exhaust your supply. When using it up, I'd expected to get mentally tired, but it wasn't the same.

Instead, I grew emotionally and spiritually tired. By the time my mana pool was at about a quarter of its full potential, I noticed that I was irritated, and had a deadness of emotion that I definitely disliked. It was like I couldn't see the point in continuing to do what I was doing, or anything else for that matter. The world felt desaturated, like the colors had been leeched out of it.

The mana of this world was everywhere's and seeped into our bodies faster than we could deal with it. The feeling left me after only a few minutes, and as my mana pool climbed back up, the good feeling returned, along with the colors around me.

Shakindria and I made quick work of the divine objects Drat discovered. None of the objects was over ten pounds, and when I began using it, I encountered this.

Divine Resistance check: *You have the Divine Resistance skill at level 6, and Affinity is at level 6. This check is Moderate, requiring 3 successes. Would you like to spend 3 Tokens for an automatic success?*

Total Tokens: 1 Affinity and 7 Free Tokens.

I loved that I had 12 levels to combat the problem, but I knew the difficulty of the check was only going to go up with time. With that in mind, Shakindria and I tested the limits of our bond. As Confidants already, we were at the third Relationship level, and that seemed to give us about 30 feet of range. Like the plan before, we would lob the objects to one another and ensured we knew where they landed. I could lift and object, succeed at a Moderate test, and she could likewise succeed at a Moderate test to catch it and set it down. With breaks, we were able to bring all three of our objects near to the town entrance in only a few hours.

This is Christopher, one happy Bondsealer.



Chapter 40- Seeking Pleasure

In the aftermath of the God of Productivity situation, Ivy eventually crawled back on hands and knees, begging Izzy to take her back. For days, they both disappeared from my sex radar, since Isabelle didn't want me involved and Ivy would do anything to keep her girlfriend happy. They both continued to do their jobs efficiently, though there was little to protect anyone from. They felt it was a decent change of pace from turning away Nakamamon who were trying to turn into Rip Van Winkles inside the town.

That was over. The town was getting back to normal. Trent and the rest of us of course partied with the jubilant town, but in the immediate aftermath it was clear the town needed repairs. All of us helped out then: cleaning up rubble, Alan mending together what could be mended with his spells, Trent of course working his magic on buildings and damage roads, so long as they were made of stone. The Guardians used their strength, on orders from me, so they could accrue experience. Everyone helped out on the same orders: the Rangers, Cinzy, and even occasionally Drat, when he could be bothered to show up.

People came to me with injuries and got healing, but I also helped cart away wheelbarrows of broken building, helped get things where they needed to go, and accepted a whole lot of thanks and praise.

The only good part about dealing with another god situation was that the divinely radioactive vomit automatically vanished from the area. The god left, and puddles of golden sick up just drained and were gone. Cue up more cheering from the townsfolk.

Jacoby's people stuck around precisely zero minutes after it was over. Her team had apprehended more than just Archie and now Blake, but I wasn't privy to any of that at the time. Instead, they had just decamped the morning after the god was cured, and that

was that. No more Jacoby, with her awkward staring and smoky eyes.

Wayne the Wizard tacked a clay tablet to my door explaining that they were under orders to get the fighting aspect Nakamamon back to HQ for tests and to figure out if Rainer could heal Blake back to being human, or at least change him from being a fighting aspect and into something less… world shattering. He thanked me for the opportunity to work on a really big and important project, and wished me well.

Good guy, Wayne.

After that, it was mostly just feasting, festivities, and forking. So much forking. When I convened the team I could sense a lot of hungry gazes on me, interestingly from Chrysta and Cinzy as well as the usual suspects: Regina, Tara, Vellenia, and Shakindria. When I asked the three gents what they'd like, they all made excuses about staying a couple more days. It turned out Alan was seeing a young Mistillion, which was like a flower person made of fog, and Trent had an interested young lass, who was oddly enough made of stone. She was like a living statue, made of a marble-like substance, with the veins being rainbow colored and glowing.

I was pretty sure he had done something with his powers to make her into that shape, but I couldn't say that a hundred percent.

Drat? Drat did whatever Drat did. That fracking guy.

And then there was me. The Pleasure Seeker, the Indulgent Consort. Doing my duty to earn xp and gain levels the best way possible.

Tara needed to be filled to the brim at every opportunity when we were together. She ended up getting involved with me and Vellenia, me and Shakindria, and also me and Regina, as well as having me to herself. But in every case, all my orgasms went in one place: as deep inside her as I could force them. It never mattered if I was taking Regina from behind, or if I had Vellenia folded in half with her ankles up around her ears and her tail sweeping back and forth across the floor, Tara was right there ready to receive my full

load inside her when the time came.

Although Tara did initially seem bothered when Shakindria explained about how she couldn't conceive, she asked me to make some magic medicine to eliminate the interference of mana in the process. I eventually agreed, and though she didn't know what was in it, she took what I gave her and then shucked her clothes for an immediate creampie.

As odd as it might be, it was incredibly hot. None of the other girls were like 'I want to bring a little Fletcher into the world!' I couldn't say why the danger and the excitement made it hot, but just imagining beautiful, long-legged girl-next-door Tara with a swollen belly was enough to push me over the edge a number of times. Right where she wanted the contents of my climax, of course.

And while Cinzy didn't love sharing me with a bunch of others, she couldn't stop me from mating with my bond mate Nakamamon, nor could she really stop me from doing what I liked. If she wanted a slice of Fletcher, she had to just suck it up and accept Fletcher had a lot going on.

It helped that she was a submissive, and wanted me to tell her what to do until she was worshipping my cock, before I forced it right up her tight rear end. The only stipulation was that nobody else could watch her submission or humiliation, and that was a condition I would happily abide. After all, it wasn't often a girl came to your door and nervously joked around, playing with her hair while silently hoping you'd get her on her knees, frack her face for a while, then lube her up and violate her ass. All the while, you'd tell her how perfect she was, how beautiful she looked with her mouth full of cock, how amazing her ass looked, how gorgeous it was stretched out around my shaft, and how her lower lips tried to grip me and keep from letting go. It would only take a few minutes of breathing praise at her and stroking her clit before she'd moan and climax with me deep in her ass.

Regina just stayed over at my house now. She loved this new sexual freedom that had blossomed within her. She loved sucking my cock just as much as she liked holding and stroking Vellenia's tail

while eating her out… while I thrust in and out of her from behind. She liked going into 69 with Shakindria, especially if I was also clinging to her and driving into her from behind. She even watched what I had going with Chrysta once.

Using Pheromones, I could give Regina a little cock just like I sometimes gifted Isabelle. However, what she wanted was to have Vellenia or Shakindria get one of those, so she could end up with the spit roasting treatment, or get some double penetration on. She loved looking into my eyes with me all up inside her, then have Vellenia push into her backside. Then, she'd only break eye contact with me if she couldn't manage it any longer, and had to get a mouthful of Vellenia's wriggling tongues.

Of all my new abilities, the most popular with Regina was the new **Coming Together** ability. By spending a Token she could experience everything I was feeling while I got down and dirty with other partners. She would hide under the bed or just outside and pay the toll to share in what I was doing with Vellenia, Shakindria, Chrysta, Tara, and eventually even Poppins. Cinzy didn't want to use it when I was with her because, and I quote, 'I'm not a fracking AllMyFans performer.' She made it clear she was strictly off limits. She did, however, let me double team her on my rooftop under the twin moons. Regina may have whined that she wanted to know what it was like to be a dude, and double team Cinzy… who she really wanted to seduce. For the time being, though, Cinzy wasn't okay with that.

I can't count the number of times Regina professed that she loved me while stuffed full of me, or feeling what I was feeling using my new ability. On her hands and knees taking me from behind she loved me. On her back with Shakindria sitting on her face, she'd get some air to tell me she loved me. Watching me rail Tara and blast yet another load into her, she loved me. Watching my discomfort as I refused to tell her details about meeting up with and getting inside Cinzy, she loved me.

Shakindria didn't mind being with others, especially when she learned that my abilities performed better with more than one

partner. She especially loved the new special ability **Coming Together.** She wanted nothing more than to know the feelings that I got from being inside her. Experiencing both her feelings and mine at the same time made her climax time and again, until she could handle no more. She also loved to have Regina, Tara, or Vellenia in my bed, and compare how different each of them felt while I had sex with them. She liked staring into their eyes while she slammed her hips down onto me, riding me cowboy. She'd caress her curves and stroke her ears and climax over and over again if they were watching. She was a freak in the sheets, in that she was adventurous to the max.

I did level up several more times in the next few days, gaining skill points that I fed into my Pleasure Seeker Qualities, and that allowed more frequent visits with Chrysta. The shy ghost never approached me, but also never turned me away when I reached out to hold her hand, or gently turn her face my way for a kiss. With my Adaptability and Pheromones raised up, she was turning more and more human, and I was becoming more incorporeal. We met in the middle, and made the magic happen. The sex was brutal and involved me pressing down on her windpipe, swearing at her, pounding her with every bit of power I could muster… and also having her choking me while slamming herself down on me repeatedly. The session would end with both of us bruised and gasping for breath, until we broke contact and she no longer needed to breathe. Then I'd heal us up, and she would apologize needlessly for giving in when the void rose up in her.

Fairy Poppins was another who benefited from my increased level and better Adaptability. At this level, I could finally shrink down to about a foot, and get her to about the same size.

"Oh. My. Goddess!" she shrieked, clapping and flapping her wings.

Now that we were both about a foot tall, things got odd. My small camping pillow was like a bed in and of itself, and my bed was the size of a park.

Fairy Poppins had glowing golden skin and wore a skirt made of a

leaf, along with a sort of vest made from another leaf. It didn't close in the front, but the back, tying at the top and bottom so her wings could do their thing. No underwear. I knew that because when her clothes flew off a second later, she was totally nude and leaping on me.

I caught her, laughing.

"You really—"

She silenced me with a kiss that included tongue. A lot of tongue. She made moans of pleasure as I held her up, flitting her fingers through my hair and down the back of my shirt, then over my face.

"Ohhhh," she groaned, grinding herself against my abs. "Finally!"

I responded by slipping one hand beneath her and working to arouse her even further with my fingers. I didn't need to bother; she was soaking wet. I got two fingers up in there with no trouble, and pressed another finger against her engorged clit.

"There," she gasped. "Right there." Then went right back to kissing me.

I'd never had one of my partners react so quickly before. She bucked and groaned, then broke the kiss and with her head thrown back, came on just my fingers. Her moan of pleasure was long and throaty, and the moment it ended she slumped back onto the bed, the glow of her body pulsing intermittently with each spasm of her body.

She watched while I pulled my shirt off, exposing my Physicality enhanced body, followed by my pants.

"Ooh!" she chirped. "A strip tease! Mmm yes, Daddy, dance for Poppy."

You can take the tiny out of the fairy, but apparently you can't take the adorable with it. Or the perverted. I did turn it into a little dance, running my hands up and down my body while she gaped and grinned. She watched in fascination as I stripped down and my cock came into view. At this point, she squealed in delight, got up and started twerking directly into me.

I don't know if it's all fairies, but Poppy had the tiniest little

breasts. Even on her slender frame they were small. They were, however, capped with thick, protruding nipples. She wrenched my hands over them and showed me how she wanted them squeezed and pinched, all while she pressed her wings against my arms and shoulders, and ground her ass into me.

"I've dreamed about this," she told me over her shoulder. "Every night I watched you with someone else, sliding this beauty up into them, I went back and dreamed about this moment." She grabbed onto my shaft, lined me up, and sank slowly down on my full length. "There w—"

She came again just having me inside her. Another cry of ecstasy, another full body spasming, and this time I held her up to keep her from face planting on my sleeping bag.

Poppy came another six or eight times before passing out on the bed. It only took a good few strokes and she was back to the full body fit. It made sense, too, once I started thrusting: something about her pussy was pure magic. It encased all of me perfectly, and little tingles of magic seemed to lick at every bit of my shaft, from all different angles, at once. Still, I had Stave Off and could succeed at the checks, gritting my teeth and bearing down in order to keep from unloading inside her in under a minute. Finally I laid her out on her stomach and slowly, gently thrust up into her.

She just came and came and came, yelling out with her tiny voice, shivering and shaking, eventually with tears in her eyes. Over the course of five minutes she came so often I thought she just hadn't stopped.

"Oh Daddy," she told me. "I'm so, I'm soooohhhhh…" And she came again.

Her magically enhanced body did the same to me. I could hold back no longer, but when I tried asking her where she wanted me to cum, the magic clamped around my shaft intensified. That was that. I let out a cry and came deep inside her, but she had passed out from the sheer bliss of it.

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And that’s it. That’s the end of the story. Everybody’s happily passing old Fletcher around like a virus born in a wet market in China.

Bad simile, but you get the idea. Here is where the story ends. Everyone in the other world happily gets on with their lives, I definitely have served out my first work rotation here with distinction, hazard pay, and plenty of overtime. We march through a cheery world with smiles on our faces, back towards a thankful HQ that welcomes us back with open arms, asks no questions, and pins awards on my chest. The rest of the team gets awards too, and there’s no Chewy situation where Larelle and Chrysta stand by like faithful pets; they get the full recognition they deserve. The same goes for Vellenia and Shakindria, who definitely don’t get put under the microscope for the weird phenomenon of sapient Nakamamon not typically bonding humans, or humans being able to bond more than one Nakamamon at a time. They also get commendations, get recruited into the Agency.

And all is well.

The end.

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This is Christopher blinking away the fog of the past and getting back to the reality at hand.



Chapter 41- Mama Heist I: The Suspensening

The weather had gotten quite a bit colder as our road trip headed further and further north. We went through the border to Canada, further north, and then back through the border into Alaska. It took days of driving, because when you look at maps, it's always the case that people underestimate how big both Canada and Alaska truly are.

We ended up taking five days to drive the van all the way toward the portal. The story took time to tell, especially with me attempting to water down all the sex that was going on, and how my Pleasure Seeker abilities and levels impacted the events in question. In the evenings I got visitors to my room, or requests to head to the girls' rooms.

We gleefully talked about the party scene after the god had been cured, and it was wonderful to hear those perceptions that were different than mine. Parties all night, singing, dancing, music playing, more dancing…

"That sounds lovely," my mother said. "Very romantic."

"Uh. Yeah. Romantic. I mean, Ivy and Isabelle here reunited after a… difference of opinions," I said lamely.

"We had a pretty serious fight," Ivy said. "I made a bonehead decision and nearly lost her."

Isabelle nodded. "She almost chea—uh… forget I said anything."

Ivy buried her face in her hands, burning with embarrassment.

"Now, we need to discuss what happens next," I said, and turned to Cinzy. "You got them?"

"Them who?" My mother asked, probably knowing. I think my mom was a lot more perceptive than she let on.

“The boys,” Cinzy said, and gestured to the phone, which was calling. “We have to stop here because there’s residual mana bleeding through the portal.” She paused. “Yeah, we made it. Are you at the rendezvous?”

My mom leaned close. “Ohh, very spy movie.”

“I’m afraid it’s going to get rough,” I said.

“Oh.”

The Agency building on this side was heavily defended, with security measures nobody on this earth would be able to handle, even with a serious heist planned. There were guard stations, those mirrors you used to check the undersides of cars for bombs, x-rays and infrared imagery to check over incoming vehicles, all kinds of future tech here. There were a couple of stories about hires who’d tried to get their families or significant others into the portal building, only to be caught, stopped, apprehended, and finally disappeared.

If the Agency did not exist, then making you vanish from the planet was not going to be even a slight issue for them.

“We are taking a huge risk here,” I said. “But you’ve already been diagnosed and then in remission several times. It’s clear that your cancer is going to pop up again, and it’s just a matter of when.”

My mother placed her hand in mine. “Christopher—“

“I know exactly what you’re about to say,” I told her. My chest was already tight. “And it’s nonsense. You haven’t lived a full life, it’s not in the cards for you, it’s not destiny, it’s not your time. God isn’t calling you home.”

She blinked and pulled back at the venom in my tone.

“I’m furious with cancer for choosing you. I mean nobody should have it, but you have it. You and Dad love each other, and the only thing messing with this is a clump of cells growing out of control… and the ridiculous cost of healthcare.” My parents had lost their entire savings due to the chemo. I threw my hands up in the air. “Anyway, I had the same talk with all the girls, they said they were ready to do this.”

My mother regarded them, and each of them nodded.

"I had the same talk with the boys, and all three of them agreed too."

"Even that Drat character?"

"He agreed first, if you can believe it," I said.

"That… somehow doesn't surprise me."

First, we had to get my mother through security.

"The good news is that Alan now has a spell for that."

"Wait…"

"They're already inside." The plan was to have them camp in the temporary barracks inside the Agency portal compound, go into the portal, and emerge back after filling their mana full. Mana required only a few short minutes to refill. They'd also bring a cache of magic items through the portal.

"Once they do, they will have an extremely limited amount of time to use their spells and abilities on this side. Tokens we use fizzle out in about twenty-four hours."

"All of us will head into the Agency, go through the portal, and come through with Trent and the boys." Cinzy looked over at Regina, giving her an extra little expression I didn't understand and I wasn't sure I liked. "We will initiate the operation minutes after we re-emerge from the portal, but we will call you first."

"Hang on—" I started.

Cinzy shook her head. "I just notified the boys. They're making sure everything's ready on the other side. The clock's ticking, Fletcher. We have about five more minutes to go over the plan before all of us head inside."

I bared my teeth at her, and then at the slightly guilty expressions on the faces of all four of the others.

"What the—"

"The rest of the operation goes like this," Isabelle cut in, steamrolling me again. "We come in with the boys, notify you by phone, and you drive to the entrance. At this point, Alan and Drat

will join you and perform the illusion spell to disguise you as Drat."

"We chose Drat because he will be undetectable once he comes through the portal," I explained. "I also cooked up some potions that I hope will help everyone keep their magic powers for a little bit once they come through." The rate of mana loss was fast, and I wasn't sure Drat could even get out to us with any magic intact, let alone cast an illusion spell or keep the two boys invisible once the trick went off. With any luck they'd keep their magic for at least an hour.

"With all the coming and going, we expect to raise some suspicions," Ivy went on, picking up the thread, "but Cinzy should have that handled. In addition, we will be creating a small distraction."

"We did not discuss a small distraction," I said. What in the frack was happening here? They were changing the plan… no, they'd done more planning without me.

Isabelle patted me on the shoulder. "It's okay, sport. Everything should be fine."

Plans with a lot of moving parts generally fell apart. That was why 'put a mask on my mother and get her through the compound and portal as fast as possible' was the plan we'd settled on.

"What about you?" She asked me.

"I stay with you," I said. "I don't have any special abilities or mana since I've been on earth for several weeks. But I do have some Tokens and I can use them if it becomes absolutely necessary." I shot the girls a look. "Which it one hundred percent should not."

The girls gave me looks that didn't make sense. Pitying looks. Like 'oh, poor Fletcher, too stupid to cotton on to what's really happening here.'

My eyes shot open the moment the beep sounded and the girls exited the vehicle. Apparently my Ingenuity was up to the task after all… finally. I recalled the several days of fun and sexy times on the way up to BFE Alaska, and what Tara had said.

"I want to do this with you while I still can," she'd said.

They didn’t expect to make it through the portal with me.

They were out of the car before I could voice my fury.

I turned to my mom. “I think my friends are about to do something reckless and stupid for you.”

***

Mom and I sat in silence for a time, with me thinking about what was about to happen and how stupid I’d been not to see that, and her placidly accepting the way we’d set things up. Or rather, the way they’d been planning this heist behind my back. To be fair, I’d mostly been concerned with my mom and with getting her through, with the need to evade the HQ people once we got through, and then how to make up the cure when we had her somewhere safe. I berated myself for allowing Tara’s remark to slip by unnoticed.

There was every chance that people might be taken into custody, but I’d talked through the plan with them, and we’d all agreed that nobody was going to do anything to get the authorities to open fire on us, or activate any of the other defensive measures they had in place if something crazy happened. Like Nakamamon suddenly being able to exist on this side and pouring through in numbers, or super strong people like Blake making trouble on this side.

The way we’d structured the plan, absolutely no one was supposed to get hurt. But that was *my* plan… and we weren’t doing my plan any longer.

“I told them no one was worth sacrificing for this,” I said, staring at my hands.

She put her hand on mine. “It sounds like you care about these girls a lot.”

I nodded numbly. “We’ve been through so much.”

“You saved their lives,” she said gently.

“They…” They had saved mine too.

“Nobody lasts long without their healer,” she said. She seemed to know the truth of RPGs without ever having played one: every group had to have one, and every player needed to keep them happy and

healthy.

"Ain't that the truth," Drat said from behind us.

Well, after both of us jumping about a foot, I looked in the rearview to find Drat there, and not just that.

"Skulkins?" I breathed. "What the heckabaloo? Where's Alan?"

The very long weasel with the charcoal fur chirped at us and waved one of many paws.

"Oh my goodness," my mom said. Introductions were quick, because my mom was fascinated to lay eyes on her first non-earth creature. She mumbled quick 'pleased to meet you's before reaching up automatically to scratch at the creature. "May I?" she asked Drat.

"Skulkins is his own man," Drat said.

"I'd like to pet you," my mom said, addressing the Nakamamon. "Will that be all right?" In response, Skulkins crawled across the space between them, onto the armrest, and paused to let my mother get used to the idea that it was more like a snake than a mammal. Or rather, something like a weasel-centipede hybrid. She didn't hesitate though, to her credit, and instead petted Skulkins several times before scratching him behind the ears. Skulkins seemed to love this treatment. He curled up in my mom's lap and exposed all of his long, silky furred belly for more scratches.

"We'll just cloak her," Drat said. "It'll be easier that way. And to answer your question, Alan has a different job. We're going with Plan Epsilon."

"Do I dare ask what Plan Epsilon entails?"

"I made it up," Drat responded.

Well that answered precisely zero of my questions.

Skulkins already had an air of weakness about him, like he wasn't at full health. This was a creature composed of mana. Like the way people were 70% water, McCauley Skulkins was at least 70% mana, and that was leaking away from him. Drat told me he'd already consumed a few drops of the potion I'd made, and it worked.

I gritted my teeth and shook my head instead of arguing. They had all been scheming without me, because apparently my

stipulations hadn't been to their liking. Stay safe, I told them. Nobody dies, and nobody is denied re-entry into the portal, I said. The only one taking any serious risk is Fletcher, I insisted.

Apparently they weren't cool with this.

"So we'll just be getting out then," Drat said. "Good luck, you guys."

Alan echoed this in his typical stuttering way.

I nodded stiffly, not trusting myself to say anything nice. Alan and Drat both exited the van and gave a friendly wave, standing there on the side of a dirt road in the middle of nowhere in Alaska. They started walking back south.

When the beep came from the girls, I put the van in gear and drove to the Agency's compound. Skulkins immediately snuggled further into my mom's lap, and the two of them went invisible.

"Keep absolutely still and quiet," I told her.

"Of course, dear," she responded from next to me.

"I'm serious. I don't know what they've got in terms of listening devices or detection systems, but I'm in danger just talking about this kind of thing right now. So I'm going to stop. All I'll say is no sounds, no matter what people say or do around you. Stick right by my side."

They called this a campus, but it wasn't a campus. A campus doesn't have tall barbed wire fencing running the perimeter, or countermeasures everywhere. A campus has several buildings, free entry and exit, and that's it.

By contrast, the compound housing the Agency's portal building had tall fences, easily twenty feet high, guard towers, and several small prefabricated buildings at the electric gate. The vegetation of backwoods southern Alaska had been peeled away from the compound, and in its place was a stretch of grass to either side of the newly paved road. It seemed artificial and wrong.

I felt my chest and stomach tighten with anxiety as we approached the gate. The gate containing several armed men in digital camouflage, complete with helmets and guns hanging off

their necks.

After passing the gate guard my ID lanyard, my mother waited with Skulkins, and I forced myself not to tap on my leg or the steering wheel or the driver's side door, where I'd lowered the window. Instead I tried to keep still, fly casual, not arouse suspicion.

"Fletcher?" the gate guard asked, returning my lanyard to me. "Christopher Fletcher?"

"That's right," I said, sweating.

"Heard good things about your work," he said.

"Uh… what have you heard?"

He shrugged. "You healed up a lot of people. Did the god of the weird footsteps. And somebody said something about flying around on a lake?"

I tried to make my chuckle sound natural, but my voice cracked. "Yeah. Insane."

"You're only two weeks into your R&R?"

"Bonded Nakamamon," I said. "You know how it is. Can't stay away long."

He smiled, but his smile disappeared the moment he heard a soft snort from the passenger's seat, followed by what might've been a weasel making a coo.

"What was that?"

Mentally, pushing past the panic, I tried to manifest my Likability. Distantly, I heard the *cla-cling!* and saw the twinkle of the coins out of my peripheral vision.

Let this work, I told the universe. *Let this work, let this work.* The tests using Physicality Tokens had worked: I'd been able to bench press my dad's work in progress out in the garage. But I'd never tried to use Likability Tokens on people here. Instead I prayed to all the gods I'd resuscitated that I could still boost whatever amount of natural charisma or people-person-ish-ness I had. I didn't think it was a lot, but you never know.

"I didn't hear anything," I said smoothly.

This is Christopher lying through his teeth.



Chapter 42- Mama Heist II: Everything Changes

You've seen television, and you and I both expect something when we walk into a secure government black site that does not officially exist.

You expect to have a paranoid guard order you to step out of the vehicle and then go through an exceptionally thorough pat down. This happened.

"I don't know what you're looking—"

"This will go smoother," the guard said, "if you don't talk or ask questions."

He brought out a small plastic baggie and arched an eyebrow at me. "What's this?"

"Seeds," I said.

"Seeds for… what now?" He fished out a second plastic baggie. "And what is this?"

"Flowers and berries."

"Flowers and berries," he repeated in a flat, semi-suspicious voice.

"As a Healer I need all the plants I can get for my potions and salves and unguents and such."

"I… am aware of that," he probably lied. "Remain here with your hands against the van."

A short discussion with the higher ups later, he reappeared and handed me back the suspicious baggies. He snorted. "You'd better not be bringing marijuana into another world," he said. "It's legal in some states but not this one. And not legal federally. The top brass told me to relay that to you."

I chuckled. "I promise I won't be doing anything like that." That

was a lie too; marijuana had some medicinal properties and I was going to have access to that. I'd come from California, so getting access was easy. But just the seeds.

Now, when you enter a government black site, there are also things you don't expect to see. You don't expect to first park your full size rental van in the large and sparsely populated parking lot outside of the building, then go through sliding doors that are motion activated. Just like he local community center in nowheresville USA.

You don't see that same old drop ceiling you've seen everywhere else in your entire life. You know the ones I'm talking about, the ones with the eighteen inch white tiles with the little holes in them, interspersed with that soulless halogen lighting that doesn't create shadows.

My heart was thudding out of my chest walking down the hall with the nondescript offices. And we're talking literally nondescript: no name plates on the doors or above them on signs. No inspirational posters telling you to hang in there. No posters of any kind actually.

I couldn't see if my mother was behind me, and I was terrified to ask her in case this facility had the sorts of high-paranoia tech systems I thought it did. Instead I forced myself to saunter at a medium pace, and hope that my mother didn't get too caught up in scratching the full extent of Skulkins's belly. If she stuck with me, this wouldn't be a problem.

One drab gunmetal gray hallway took the place of the last, in a place I'd visited only briefly. The HQ had debriefed the whole team at the castle after the Glumpdumpkin debacle. This had gone on for a week, where all our experiences were taken down by teams of bored Wizards and a few other assorted employees who were stuck at their desk jobs. We obviously omitted all the alarming personal stuff, such as the sheer volume of sex I'd been having with almost all of them. The only other important bit that needed to be dealt with was Cinzy's defection from the team. Short-lived as it was, the top brass would have been not okay with the situation. Instead we

lied and said she'd been very emotional at one point, set off a short-lived crisis that I had needed to clear up with a fast-acting treatment and cure before healing up the God of Apparel. She had, however, been so overcome that she had disappeared into the wilderness for a few days while we took care of things. It was there Blake's team found her and picked her up.

From there, a lot of the debrief centered around my Nakamamon bond situation. Nobody had two bond mates. Nobody had a sapient bond mate, unless you counted Larelle, the sapient one, bonding a non-sapient Nakamamon. That was also an oddity, but not unheard of. So for several days, I appeared before this committee and that to answer questions. They tried their very best to rope Vellenia and Shakindria into the debrief, but the two of them weren't employed by the Agency.

From there, they tried to get tricky; first, they attempted to offer my two bond mates employment contracts, with lucrative deals. Since neither of them truly understood the value of money, having worked under a barter system and goodwill payback in this alien world, neither of them knew or cared about the perks or bonuses.

The only time they were tempted was when Vellenia came back to me in the castle and explained that they had offered a better deal for me back on earth, and my earth family.

It had been a hard eye roll for me, and a refusal. My family was set. With the overtime pay I was getting, the hazard pay from several different instances, I had already gotten more than my full year's first salary in just five months. Vellenia gave me a reassuring hug and said she would be thrilled to give me anything I needed back on earth, just say the word. I told her I was grateful but it was completely, totally, wholly, and in all other ways unnecessary.

The psych evals and debriefs continued for a good week before I started to demand my R&R time. When they started to pull military regulations out of nowhere, I had to remind them that I had read them all, remembered them all, and Alan had helped me recall any of the other ones I missed. Yes I had filled out the appropriate form. Yes I had filed it with the appropriate clerk. No I wasn't willing to get

additional monetary bonuses for participating in further debriefs. I was overdue, and though I wasn't going to take a full month off like I was owed, I was going to take the damn R&R.

All that stopped when I got through the portal and landed on earth again.

More debriefs commenced. More questions 'just to make sure they understood my story'. They were cross-referencing my story against Regina's, against Alan's, against Drat's. This was some nonsense, and I put up with it only for a few hours before I asked to talk with Dick Johnson about how I might go about terminating my contract under several of the harassment clauses. It would mean a monthly payout for the rest of my life and a retirement bonus, so long as I wasn't found to spill any state secrets, but it would also mean a release from my job, as Healer.

And the one big thing I was, in the other world, was in demand. Between healing up several different troublesome gods, saving the clutch of eggs of possibly an entire species, and saving fellow agency members' lives, I'd proved my worth to the Agency. Yes they probably suspected a bigger problem with Cinzy, no they couldn't prove insubordination, abandonment of duty, or going absent without official leave. Nor could they figure out the Nakamamon bonding situation I had going on. Both of these things bugged them.

The other thing that bugged them was the fighting aspect Nakamamon situation. I'd been in the middle of that, fighting for my life the entire time, so clearly I wasn't responsible for it. The Agency didn't try that route, but they did get pretty close to making that insinuation. In the end I had to squint at them and ask them if they were insinuating what I thought they might be, and they backed right off.

Turns out Blake was a bigger problem than I thought.

What I hadn't known until this round of debriefing was that Blake —now a brand new Nakamamon species called a Brawldar—had escaped confinement. Before he'd done that, several of the Nakamamon bond mates on Jacoby's team seemed to have become

infected with some unknown condition or illness, because they went feral also. They had apparently gained the fighting aspect. Archie went fighting too, and Jacoby's team ended up capturing over a dozen fighting aspect Nakamamon. Which was clearly both a problem and a situation a lot of Guardians were loving.

All this debrief time took more than two weeks and caused me to show up just about the time that Sarah was celebrating six months of growing a baby. I'd been done in about four and a half months, but we'd partied in Glumpdumpkin a whole extra week, took our sweet time traveling back to the HQ castle, and then once the lengthy debrief ended, it was another two days' travel to where the portal now sat.

It slowly changed locations, as it happens.

Narrating this whole sordid mess of lost time to myself, I hoped to keep my mom in the loop and cover for any noise she made. I didn't think Skulkins allowed for his invisibility-cloaked subjects to make sounds, but I wasn't going to take chances. I'd only been under the cloak once, and too much had gone on since then. Too much was still going on.

"That's how these people here caused me to lose over two weeks of time," I finished. "Which is why I'm so glad to be back, obviously! Love this place. Love you guys, and you."

I shot finger guns at two very confused soldiers in what I want to call 'desk uniforms', and then the guard standing at attention next to the portal room door.

"Guard that portal well, soldier," I said.

I was directed by a bored lackey to a waiting room, little more than a tiny bedroom with an even tinier bathroom.

"What's the hold up, if I may?"

"Agency personnel transferring in and out, sir," he said.

I chuckled. "I forgot you guys made me a lieutenant. Love that you did that, even though it doesn't make sense. Probably not for the lols."

"No, sir," he said, but wouldn't elaborate.

“Are we talking about anyone I know?” I asked. “My team members?”

“I’m afraid I don’t have that information, sir.”

“When can I get back through?” I asked.

This kid was not a good liar. And listen to me, calling him a kid. He was my age, maybe a year or two younger. “We’ll have you through just as soon as we can.”

That wasn’t going to work. My mother would reappear anytime, perhaps minutes from now, or gods-knew-how-long. Nobody had brought Nakamamon through the portal to the other side. You weren’t supposed to be able to.

I sat for approximately one minute after the guard was gone before getting up and pacing the tiny room. Then I realized I could bump into my mother and stopped doing that.

“Frickity frackity forking forks,” I muttered darkly. Hearing my mother snort for real this time let me know she was here with me, of course.

“I hope Skulkins looks okay,” I told a supposedly empty room. “If he begins to appear ashy or seems lethargic or glassy-eyed, we will force the issue.”

I didn’t know how we were going to do that.

I swallowed, disliking the powerlessness on this side of the portal. In the other world I had clearly defined skills, special abilities coming out of my earholes, and Tokens.

Tokens.

“This might help tide someone over if they were feeling drained,” I said, and manifested an Affinity Token. A moment later it was snatched out of my hand, and I smelled a hint of that usual magic smell as it dissipated into sparkles of rainbow mana.

Approximately one more minute passed, one that lasted six thousand years in my mind. “That’s it, we’re—”

The door didn’t burst open, but instead slid slowly back into the wall. Standing there was Cinzy, blinking at me.

"All is well?" she asked. This was our prearranged code phrase.

"No all is not fracking well!" I blurted. "You guys mucked with the plan. Let's move."

She didn't move and kept a straight face, somehow. "So… all is well?"

I pursed my lips. "All's well that ends well." All I could think was, *this had better end well*.

One sharp nod later and she whirled, setting off at a brisk pace towards the portal room. She didn't look back, but I did, and to my dismay I noted a mom-shaped blur moving through the corridor behind me, looking a bit like an alien predator that was never able to kill Arnold. That meant Skulkins was getting low on mana, and him getting low on mana meant he might be close to death. No one had a single shred of data on the physiology of Nakamamon in this world, the effects of mana desaturation, or any of that. We were in completely alien territory.

That went double for the scene we stumbled into. One curving passageway and one right turn later, we entered the portal room.

Several dozen Nakamamon had burst through the portal a moment before we broached the room. We had Shrubbets, Cyclowls, those centipedes brimming with flowers, a couple of Geodiles, and even more. Several flaming bugs fluttering around head level, while terrified soldiers shouted like soldiers always do. One of them was shouting about what they should do, while several others were shouting about how the flaming bugs and centipedes needed to get down on the ground, and freeze.

Tara stood there, screaming at the top of her lungs, while clutching against another soldier. He was wrestling with his weapon. Ivy and Isabelle had relieved another soldier of his weapon, and his consciousness. He slumped in Isabelle's arms while Ivy pulled the magazine and ejected the round from the chamber.

I heard the words "Condition Ragnarok" shouted, and noted a soldier talking into an intercom phone against one wall.

Ivy hucked the weapon across the room and it crashed into a

soldier about to fire.

It was pandemonium. I had to admit it was cool even while strongly disapproving of what was going on here.

And there, in the midst of the insanity going on, was the portal. The reason I had the job of Healer in the first place. A ramp led up to the circular ring of stone some twenty feet across. The stone itself was easily four feet thick and deep, and had been etched with runes so expertly and perfectly that it had to be magic. The gouges were filled with silvery metal, but nobody spent more than thirty seconds in the portal room typically.

In times like this—strike that, there were no times like this—ordinarily when the portal was open, those runes glowed with energy. They'd done that by injecting the ring with ludicrous amounts of power until the glowing peaked and caused the ring to fill with bluish energy, which resolved into a blurry image of the other world.

In the moments before shots rang out and "Condition Ragnarok" destroyed the portal completely, I noted the blurry forms of Muppin, Tweedle Dee, Vellenia, Shakindria, Garnet, and Airaconda on the other side. And… Alan?

"Mom—"

Finally, shots rang out. I didn't have to say more, but I also wasn't able to. I shot through the room at a fast clip, ducking as though it would help me avoid stray bullets.

The first explosive charge went off when I set foot on the ramp, and threw me to the floor. I looked back, saw my mother there holding a sickly-looking weasel creature, and grabbed her hand.

"Let's go!"

That wasn't necessary, as it turned out. Shakindria stepped through the portal with hand outstretched. Both my mother and I floated up into the air and through the portal. In the nanoseconds I had before I was through, I surveyed a moment of absolute insanity.

Regina had grabbed my ankle and was flying through the air like a space station astronaut.

Tara had succeeded in completely distracting her guard, who had helped her get to the room's entrance.

Ivy had another soldier around the legs, and he was the one firing wildly into the air at several flaming bugs and a rabbit with shrubbery camouflage.

Isabelle had manifested her shield and leaped in front of a Geodile ready to chomp down on yet another soldier. It had his gun chomped in two already.

And in the middle of the whole chaotic shenanigans my friends created was Cinzy, standing amid Nakamamon of all stripes and colors. She was staring at me and waving. I'm positive my enhanced senses saw clearly the misery on her face and the tears brimming in her eyes.

The second explosion went off far later than the first. A full two or three seconds. Shakindria launched the two of us through the plane of the portal an instant before it flickered and disappeared.

For a few long seconds I continued viewing the world in bullet time. Someone had piled up sleeping bags and pillows on top of Muppin, in a sort of cup shaped landing pad a good ten feet across. I thumped into it, followed by my mother and finally Regina. Behind us, since I was pointed that way, I saw the fire roiling over the portal. On this side it was slightly pinkish instead of blue.

For a brief second the portal remained, but then the third explosion detonated and it blinked out of existence.

Time slowed back down to normal.

"Mrs. Fletcher?" Regina asked. "Are you all right?"

The stone echidna made an inquisitive sound. The forlorn noise told me all I needed to know: Muppin knew that Isabelle wasn't coming through the portal. There wasn't one. The big adorable lug also knew Isabelle wouldn't be joining him any time soon. I felt a pang of guilt join all the other discomfort I'd been feeling since the team told me

"That was a hoot!" my mother replied. "Though I can't say I'd like to do it again. Oh!"

She began floating up in the air and landed lightly on her feet near where the portal had been just a moment before. Vellenia was there, and immediately wrapped her in a warm hug.

"I'm very pleased to meet you, Lady Fletcher," Shakindria said, floating over to meet her. She offered up a dainty four-fingered yellow hand for my mother to shake.

"Ohhh Fletcher's mother, it's such an honor to meet you!" My mother was there for it, too, hugging right back. "We have all been so excited to finally meet you, and…" She trailed off, looking around. "Where are the rest of the team?"

This is Christopher not having his cake and eating it too.



Chapter 43- Absent Without Official Leave

Healing my mother was a piece of cake. I'd already researched the problem using the tablets in Alan's care, gone to scout for and then replant the ingredients I needed to grow, had already dried and distilled the ingredients necessary, and all that was left was to combine them into a cure using a clearly laid out Develop Cure check. There weren't any problems, and she lived happily ever after.

These are the sentences I'd very much like to write in my diary, but I can't. Although my notes were guesses and I had magic on my side, there was no foolproof way to know what the cure for cancer was. After all, if thousands of scientists on earth hadn't developed one after working on the problem for decades, it wasn't feasible for me to just create one out of thin air.

The cure wasn't in Alan's tablets, though we had a starting point using some of the physical cures.

We didn't have the proper plants scouted, though I always had some. Since I had **Verdant Rejuvenation** and a huge stone echidna monster, we'd taken to soiling Muppin.

"That is funny," my mother remarked drily. "Not as funny as you'd like it to be, but funny."

I packed more soil onto Muppin's back, because it seemed to be in constant danger of falling out. In all that soil, though, was a wonderful herb garden that made Tweedle Dee excitably dance around Muppin, like they were suddenly siblings. A forlorn Garnet helped too, when Alan got out a spell that paled in comparison next to Trent's abilities.

I stared off into space when I should've been packing dirt onto Muppin's back.

Trent was gone.

Drat was gone.

Ivy and Isabelle were gone.

Tara was gone.

Cinzy was gone.

It shouldn't have been like this and the pressure on my chest was hard enough and hot enough to make me wonder if I needed a doctor. Tears threatened.

The only thing I could say to save myself some misery was that they weren't dead. The explosions in the portal room weren't the size to bring the whole building down, only destroy the ring. They were on earth. They were alive, and it was even possible they were safe. Maybe Epsilon Plan included escaping the Agency compound.

But they weren't here.

Arms wrapped around my chest, and I felt a face snuggle into my back. That felt better… I don't know about a lot better, but I couldn't have felt much worse right at this moment.

"I miss them too," Regina whispered.

"I'm not sure what we're going to do."

"It's going to be okay," Regina said, her voice muffled by her pressing herself into my shirt. Running my fingers over her soft skin and lacing my fingers into hers helped, but again, not enough.

I also felt a tiny presence alight on my shoulder and press against my neck. Fairy Poppins too. I didn't know if the little deviant was trying to comfort me or exult that she still had me here to bone.

Alan cleared his throat. "A-a-a-actually w-w-w-w-w-we n-need to g-g-g-g-go."

"Alan's right," Regina said. She stood beside me and kept our fingers laced together. I peered down at where our hands were together, but there was too much going on in my brain to process this. "The Agency will have people here soon, and they are not going to be happy that we've destroyed the portal. We need to get as far away as we can."

I allowed myself to be steered away from the place where the

portal had stood. I cast it a regretful glance back over my shoulder. The ring itself lay in a number of huge chunks, and as I watched the glow inside the runes faded back to that metallic silver. Chrysta floated next to one of those chunks, and banished her glowing blue shield. She had deflected the stones away from hitting Muppin and the rest of the Nakamamon bond mates.

Pretty soon my mom was captivated by the boogie trees with their huge spherical leaves, and the rainbow shimmer of magic that slid across the clouds or slithered through the sky. Regina showed her the place where I'd made contact with the Goddess of the Meadows. It was now a lush, flower-filled expanse of grass. We went on, avoiding the HQ, where they were hopefully slow to respond to the portal cracking.

Who was I kidding? They had dozens of Wizards, Rangers and Guardians, all capable of finding us with magic or tracking.

"Was that… the only portal?" my mother asked, breaking my defeatist reverie.

"Will you be upset if the answer is yes?" Regina asked.

She shrugged. "Not particularly. If they had one, they could have another."

Fairy Poppins had flitted over to her and landed in her hands. She then began preening once my mother extolled her cuteness and shininess and wonderfulness. This prompted Airaconda to slither around my mother, hug her tight, then lick her with a cloudy tongue.

Cinzy wasn't here to do this, so it would have to be me. I cleared my throat.

"We've all lost someone," I said. "I'm really sorry. I wish they hadn't gone with whatever that new plan was, but they did. We can't change that now. What we can do is find a way to reach them. We can help my mother beat a disease that can't be beaten on earth. We can… find another portal. Get Regina and Alan and myself back to earth, where we can bring our friends back through."

I didn't have the Oration skill, so the system used my Persuasion skill at level 1… it then said since I didn't have the proper skill, I'd be

-2 skill levels, leaving me with nothing. On the other hand, at least for the assembled Nakamamon, I'd get the bonus from **Bondsealer**.

Bondsealer

(Special Ability, Rare, Passive)

You gain +3 in all attributes and skills when dealing with your bonded Nakamamon.

You gain +1 in all attributes and skills when dealing with unbonded Nakamamon of any type.

You may bond an additional number of Nakamamon equal to your ranking in this ability. The ability's current rank is 1.

Ugh, apparently not. All these Nakamamon, save Chrysta, were bonded, technically speaking.

Still, my Likability wasn't zero… even if my chance of success dropped back to around 30% without the aid of **Arcane Alchemy**.

I took another deep breath. The stats didn't matter. I put my hand up to my chest.

"I'll do whatever it takes to get your bond mates back," I said. "I promise. I got them into this mess, sort of, and I'll do my best to get them out of it."

They all stared at me. Including Muppin, they were focused intently on my face.

"Your bond mates mean a great deal to me. We will get them back."

But for now, we were in evasion mode.

Alan opened his mouth, and for a long time it seemed like nothing was gone to come out. Finally, he began, "I th-th-th-th-th-think w-w-w-we can… do it."

"Get the others back?" I asked.

He nodded.

"Open another portal?"

He nodded.

"Dynamite."

He explained that he'd have to get at least to level 50, and probably more like level 75.

As for me, I'd reached level 28 in Pleasure Seeker with all the 'partying' I'd done with the ladies.

Level 26: +6 skill points

Level 27: +1 Durability, +3 skill points

Level 28: Ability Upgrade: Drive In Deeper, +3 skill points

I silently pumped a fist in the air and went to spend my 12 skill points. With three class levels, I could boost Adaptability and Pheromones by 3 each, which I considered to be the best use of 6 skill points. However, Group Play was a new Quality I liked: the ability to give Adaptability to someone I wasn't currently having sex with. Seduction was another one I hadn't spent a point on yet, and that one had been described to me as 'assisting in knowing when was the right time' and 'knowing how to appease a partner's particular kink'. It seemed like a good Quality to have.

First, my improved ability.

Drive In Deeper III

(Special Ability, Rare, Passive)

I- While having intimate relations with a partner, you and your partner gain increased mana and health regeneration rates.

II- After having intimate relations with a partner, provided you both achieve orgasm, you and your partner replenish a Token of your choice. A partner with Close Confidants relationship level or higher will allow you to replenish an additional Token.

III- While having intimate relations with a partner of Close Confidants relationship level or higher, your attributes and Qualities are considered +1. This does not grant a first rank in unranked Qualities.

Well that settled it. This ability right here was the impetus for buying up a first level of any Quality I'd been neglecting. That included Refractory Period, the one that let me get ready for another

round quickly. That one had always seemed so unnecessary given my age and hormones.

One point went there.

Next, a first point in the other Quality I'd never bought: Flexibility. This was also exactly as it sounded, a contortionist's ability to bend and flex just a little further. In considering this, it was clear I could've used it all along with Adaptability. Now that I had Adaptability so high, I could use it to gift my partner some of my newfound Flexibility.

One point went in here too.

Next, a first point in Seduction. It probably wouldn't do much—or anything—but it was better to have than not.

Next, I put one in Load. This was a vanity thing. I couldn't get over the feeling of satisfaction it gave me to really paint up any of my super hot girls. Or in Tara's case, fill her to bursting. Every time it happened, I was left feeling astonished. I couldn't get over how utterly different my life had become, and in how short a time. I'd entered basically a virgin, with no ability to attract women, and half a year later here I was with an actual harem. Those women could've gotten their kicks anywhere, from anyone, but for whatever reason I was now the avatar of an actual sex god.

With 8 points left, I split them between Adaptability, Pheromones, and Group Play. 3 for Adaptability, 3 for Pheromones, and 2 for Group Play. Before pressing Confirm though, I took a look at what I was leaving out. I wanted more of everything, but there was no way to pay attention to all the things.

Girth and Length both made me feel amazing. Stave Off also helped, and would continue to help more if I raised it. And did I really need Adaptability this high?

I sighed.

The answer was yes. My points so far were barely enough to handle Chrysta and Poppy. The former deserved some loving, and the latter was demanding more. Still, instead of 3 points, I took one out and fed it into Stave Off.

Now I stood back with folded arms and looked at my character sheet from only the Pleasure Seeker side.

Christopher Fletcher
Healer - Apprentice Arcane Mender 29
Pleasure Seeker - Initiate Indulgent Consort 28
Attributes:
Affinity 9
Durability 7
Ingenuity 9
Likability 7
Physicality 8
Free Tokens 7

Pleasure Seeker Qualities:
Girth 2
Load 2
Stave Off 4
Length 4
Tongue 3
Adaptability 9
Pheromones 7
Refractory Period 1
Flexibility 1
Group Play 4
Seduction 1

Pleasure Seeker Special Abilities:
Eromancy III
Post-Sharing Clarity III
Drive In Deeper III
Man Enough II
Coming Together II

I sighed. I had to remind myself that I could have some serious fun with these new toys. Regina, Vellenia, Shakindria, Chrysta, and Fairy Poppins all wanted their share of Fletcher whenever they could. I would miss Cinzy, Tara, Isabelle and Ivy in the meantime. I just had to hope that Drat making plans behind my back had included some vague idea of what to do on their side of the destroyed portal.

Now what I desperately needed to do was find a way to do what no one on earth had been able to do in the last hundred years and cure my mother of cancer. Then we needed to level Alan up enough to do something only one other person on earth had ever done, period: open a portal to a completely different world.

This is Christopher with a long road ahead of him. Still, this is Christopher surrounded by people he loves.



Postlude- An Absolutely Destroyed Ring

Tara's head was pressed to the floor. She couldn't see anything, but she could hear everything. This was what heightened Ingenuity and Physicality did for you. Also, the rush of mana coming out of the portal had done the unthinkable: it had recharged their mana. Which was again draining out, but slowly. Right now, she had her passive perception ability, and could hear everything with total clarity.

Boots clomping. The men discussing in low tones just what in the hell had happened here, and how anyone from the other side had allowed it. Also speculation about who called the Ragnarok and why.

Ragnarok was clearly a doomsday scenario call, necessitating the explosive devices stuck to the portal ring to blow it apart. Someone had panicked and thought all the Nakamamon were coming through from the other world, and they were all gonna die, because apparently people didn't read the material or listen to the briefs. Some idiot in charge had lost his nerve, called the code in, and now

the portal was done.

Tara counted them lucky to have gotten Fletcher and his mom through, then incredibly lucky to have gotten Regina through as well. Tara really liked Fletcher, but Regina was in love with the dumb idiot and his big, giant, orgasm-inducing penis.

The Agency personnel had known the moment Drat went through with McCauley Skulkins that things were going wrong. Their enhanced hearing told them that the mana signatures had spiked, that they were dealing with a possible incursion, and to lock down the compound. Fletcher was prepared to languish in a cell with his mother, and watch her slowly succumb to the cancer, but the team was not. Drat, Trent, and all the girls were prepared to do whatever they deemed necessary to get Fletcher and his mother through that danger portal. His mother had brought Fletcher into the world, and she deserved to live. Fletcher had chosen to be a Healer, and he deserved the chance to continue doing that all-important work.

"We'll be okay," Cinzy whispered over and over again. "We'll be fine."

Tara wasn't so sure. Sure their enhanced stats were good compared to the majority of the soldiers here, but they didn't have guns, didn't have the biometric access or the intel on where they'd be taken.

And then there was the problem of the destroyed portal ring. So far as they knew, there was only the one. Cinzy and Regina had both been convinced that was nonsense, but without any proof it was hard to take them seriously.

Ivy was crying somewhere off to her right. Loud sobbing. Wailing. Tara knew it was Ivy because the soothing sounds of Isabelle's voice kept being interrupted by the soldiers shouting "Shut! Up!" at her. Also "No talking!" and "Head on the floor!" Followed by "That's enough!" or "No more of that!" and finally, "I'm not gonna tell you again."

Which, of course, required him to tell her again.

"It's fine," Cinzy muttered, over and over again, from Tara's left.

“It’s all fine.”

The concentrated mana potion from Fletcher was already done wearing off. The initial depressing shock of losing out on your mana began to fade to normal. She’d been here before, once, on R&R, disliking the feeling in the first few minutes but then getting used to it. She imagined the feeling was like being on caffeine, then coming off caffeine cold turkey. After the headaches and the simmering aggravation, life was basically just dull, gray, and less exciting.

Not that she drank caffeine, so it was just a guess. People on caffeine always gushed so hard about drinking coffee and how incredible it was. Come to think of it, she’d never met anyone who’d gone off caffeine, period. Did they all die? Or did they just fail, and get back on the wagon?

Once the Agency goons got her up, handcuffed and ankles chained together, she resorted to her Tara specialty: just blabbing.

“You should’ve seen you guys freaking out. Not a single casualty and you still destroyed the portal ring after about ten seconds of being under attack.”

“Shut up.”

“You couldn’t even take my two younger brothers in elementary school. Or my cousins, and they’re in diapers. You guys were totally unprepared. I guess I don’t really blame you, because there’s never any kind of—”

“Shut. Up.”

“—dangerous activity. But I mean I can’t believe they didn’t get you guys over there and at least level you up some.”

“Enough.”

“You can’t possibly have a Physicality of 7,” she said. “My boyfriend could take you down without even breaking a sweat, and he’s a forking Healer.”

“Um, he’s not your boyfriend, Tara,” Cinzy said. “He’s my boyfriend.”

“He’s nobody’s boyfriend!” Isabelle called from behind. She was in tighter shackles than the others, including a mask. “Dick like a club,

too," she mock whispered to the guard escorting her. "We're talking one hit from that thing would've laid you out. I wouldn't doubt he could beat you to death with it."

"Babe?" Ivy asked over her shoulder.

"Sorry, I shouldn't have said that," Isabelle told the guard, who was giving her the oddest look. "I should've said talleywhacker. Makes it sound more like a weapon."

"Most embarrassing way to be killed though, wouldn't you agree?" Tara asked. "Honestly, I get it. You probably got a look at him when the shenanigans kicked off and you saw what he had packing in his pants, and went 'oh shirt, it's Ragnarok, there's no way we can compete with a guy who's packing that kind of equipment in his pants. Destroy the portal ring with him on the other side.' I get that. It makes perfect sense. Whenever I look at him, I think 'holy shirt, I'm so forked' while getting down on all fours. And then he starts stuffing it inside me."

"We can all hear you," Cinzy said, louder than necessary.

As for the guards, they'd been somehow shocked into silence. They marched the girls into cells. The guard had stopped trying to shush her, which is why she kept right on talking a mile a minute. This was the Tara way: get into a new situation, defuse all tension by just gushing forth with tons of talk. She told them all about how she was pregnant for sure with his child, and once she was out of here she was going to take the newborn to meet her family, and she was going to spoil it completely.

The guard looked vaguely horrified. He exchanged several disbelieving looks with the others before vacating the holding cell area.

They were taken, one by one, to interrogation rooms. The Agency's people informed Tara that she was in a great deal of trouble. They were looking at court martial, they were looking at jail sentences, and these were federal prisons they were talking about. They had the whole situation with the portal room on tape, and that was damning evidence.

Yeah, she thought, *good luck trying to get that in front of a military tribunal when your Agency doesn't exist. Pffft, these people were stupid.*

They were bluffing. The only thing they could do as of now was hold her in a cell. She'd been through worse than having meals delivered to her, unlimited reading material, visits to the yard for exercise, and plenty of time to work out. It would also give them the time and opportunities they needed to plan and execute their escape. They had Tokens.

One of the guards tried his best. He really did. "You must also know that we are considering Christopher Fletcher, Regina Hampstead, and any other associates to be AWOL. Do you understand that that means?"

"Absent without official leave?" she asked. "I'm vaguely aware of the term and the consequences." She remembered reading through the manuals, or skimming them, but her heightened Ingenuity had brought her recall up several notches.

The man on the other side of the interrogation table sneered behind his not-very-intimidating sunglasses. He looked like a bad ripoff of Agent Smith due to the twenty extra pounds around his face, neck and midsection. As in, not nearly as scary as he wanted to be.

She yawned. "What's your next question?"

Eventually the four of them were reunited, and then left alone after the one guard couldn't handle anymore graphic descriptions of her taking potent loads from Fletcher in the other world, and on the road trip up here.

"Good, he's gone," Isabelle said.

"Tara," Cinzy said in another mock whisper.

"What?"

"I thought you were just… I don't know, kidding? I thought you knew we couldn't get pregnant over in the other world and were fulfilling some kind of kinky fantasy."

"Ugh, no way. I mean, yeah, he really filled me up. Like, a lot."

"I don't know that we need *all* the details," Isabelle grumbled.

"Okay Missus 'I Shouldn't Have Said That,'" Cinzy added, chuckling.

"Dripping down my leg, dripping on the floor, so much," Tara muttered, her mind adrift. "It was awesome."

"Okay really though," Cinzy said. "You don't have to take it that far."

"You got them to leave," Ivy said, before sniffling. "We need to discuss a plan."

"A plan? Great! What've we got going for us?" Cinzy asked.

"Ivy and I thought this kind of thing might happen," Isabelle said, "which is why having a little spat was so stupid. I'm sorry, boo."

Another sob was the only response out of Ivy. Tara peered out of her cell and tried to see what was going on to her left. She regretted being the first one marched out. Cinzy could probably see whether Ivy and Izzy had snaked their hands through the gaps in the bars and were awkwardly holding one another. She imagined they were. Love was so good. Tara loved love.

She was pulling for them to get married, decide they wanted kids, and then have Fletcher get them both with child. Then her little one could have a few half siblings to coo and burble with, to be sneaky little buggers, to write all over the walls with crayon, and get into mischief together. Sure a lot had to happen in order for that fantasy to become a reality, but a girl could hope. Tara wasn't as hardcore about her bisexuality as Isabelle or Ivy, but she thought all women looked even more beautiful when they started to get with child.

"Hmm," she told herself. Maybe she did have a bit of a problem. An addiction. She wasn't certain you should find your friends more attractive if they were full to bursting with baby. That was not a normal thing people wanted, right? She decided it wasn't.

Well, now that she'd admitted it to herself, she had successfully conquered it! Awesome!

"Fletcher worked out that you can still use Tokens," Isabelle said

after a time, at the end of Tara's internal revelation.

"That… is all we've got?" Cinzy asked.

"Uh, yeah. We're going to wait for our moment."

"What about the portal?" Cinzy asked. "Do you guys have any idea what the portal situation is? Will they just repair it?"

They all fell silent. On the list of things that needed to happen, apparently 'Fletcher fixes the portal' was also up there.

"You think he'll cure his mother?" Ivy asked.

"Pfffffft, Psssh," Tara said. "I'd be more surprised if he hasn't already."

This is the end of Divinity Rescue Corps: The Third Chapter



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.













Also by Nolan Locke

If you liked the spicy flavor of this book, you're gonna love EEE. Full series available here.



1- Drifter

Hi there, I'm Evan, and welcome to my city. Take in those tall towers, the floaty parts that slowly spin, with the artillery in them. Powered by the finest mana crystals. Walls are sturdy, reinforced with powdered mana crystals of silver and gold tier. I'm working on getting in a stock of diamond tier mana crystals, which is going to make the sort of weapons that could vaporize an enemy battalion in the blink of an eye.

Get a load of the central spire over there, with more floating crystals. Those are the shields. The blue crystals anyway. The red, yellow and orange ones are all… not shields. Heh. Excuse me if I don't give away the entire civil defense strategy to someone I just met.

And over here, behind me, you'll note the construction. Right, it's nestled in the town square, not directly in the middle, but tucked away a bit. That's where my shop used to be… I'm changing its name to the Eldritch Emporium, because Evan's Pawn & Curiosities Shop was a mouthful. It was just too much.

Also I absolutely adore alliteration. The women here find it endearing.

"Evan!"

Oh jeez. The ladies. Excuse me a moment.

"Hiiiiii Evan!"

"*Master* Evan."

"Are you going to *master* me later?"

"Thank you, ladies! I believe I'll see *you* later."

Love those giggles, am I right?

It wasn't always like this… I didn't own literally everything you can see before you. And hell, I mean I'm strong, but not the strongest person in the city. I've got good endurance, but I'm definitely not the hardiest person living here. Good looking, but not

the most chiseled adonis around. I'm powerful, but… well, okay, I'm probably the most powerful person in the city currently. My ass goes in the throne, after all, but it's complicated because magic and the society here are both byzantine. But once upon a time I was nothing more than your average trucker. I stuck around my home state of Michigan when I could, but did some work down into most of the midwest.

So of course, the question becomes: how the hell did I end up in charge of this city surrounded by magic, body molded to perfection by the vast mystical energies of this world?

You'd have to start at the beginning… you'd have to know how I became a Drifter.



I was working hard, like overtime hard, and for truckers that's saying something. You roll seven days a week for three straight months and complain to me about your desk job. Near the end, before I plopped into a different world entirely and began the slow process of complete ownership, I was starting to fade out of consciousness. I'd tie my head to the air horn, so if I started to nod off, I'd get blasted back awake. I was running with the windows down in minus ten degree weather to stay conscious.

It got to the point where I was seeing things. I was literally hallucinating in blobs of color dancing before my eyes. I'd pull over, rip my pants down and dip my balls in a snowdrift in order to stay sharp.

Only that one time. The wet ass was uncomfortable, to be sure, but I will say this: it was easy to keep your eyes open sitting on that for several hours.

It was also only a week before I left earth.

I was somewhere off I-75 and headed west towards Traverse City, Gaylord I think (maybe Grayling), when I started drifting again. Not skidding my tires in a souped up race car, but drifting off to sleep. Only this wasn't like your ordinary, average sleep; I was

seeing green grasses and big puffy cloud banks rising up into a sky I'd never properly seen, not in Michigan. Michigan is almost a hundred percent trees by the side of the road.

Exhausted, hungry, and now delirious, this is what ended me up in another world.

I'd spent another short break rubbing snow into my face, scrubbing it raw so I could stay awake, and I was maybe sixty miles outside Traverse City when that hallucination sprang back into being: a line of tall trees like you'd see in Africa in the distance, miles and miles of waving grasses, great big boulders floating (*floating!*) near the ground, with some of them much higher up. And the sky so huge, so fundamentally massive it made me think about going to church for the first time in years. It honestly looked like heaven.

I stared at it, driving my Mack, and stared at it, and continued staring at it. I was certain it was going to disappear at any moment, and I didn't want to lose this. I didn't know where it had come from, or how racked my body needed to be to imagine a full-on fantasy landscape, but I wanted to memorize every detail of it.

It turned out I didn't need to. That world invited me in.

It wasn't a subtle invitation either. The colors of the Mack's interior went apeshit, with gleaming rainbow like bands peeling off the chrome, drifting a weird, smoky lightshow towards me. My hands were going all multicolor also, with the steering wheel melting like Superman ice cream in my hands.

Whatever was happening was over in a burst of weird color, and I was left staring out at that wondrous landscape for real. The Mack jounced, hard, and I laid on the brake. Superman ice cream steering wheel snapped back to its usual faded black self.

I was probably dying, I thought, I'd careened off the road and plowed into a sturdy tree doing ten over the speed limit, and this was the everlasting moment you experience before being snuffed out. That had to be it.

I put her in park (this felt real, between the feel of the stick shift and the grinding resistance of the gears) and stepped out. Again,

the door squeaked on opening, the steps were still there, and when my foot hit the ground, it wasn't oblivion I found, but waist high grasses waving with the light breeze.

I peered back at my haul. Mack was fully here, surrounded by grass, but had the full trailer load still hitched. She wasn't on a road any longer.

It was a lot to take in, and I was still wrecked. My eyes felt like they were boiling out of their sockets, and I couldn't stop tonguing the fuzz on my teeth from all the energy drinks I'd been pounding. If I really was here, I didn't know anything about it, and therefore Mack was the safest place to be while I got some much-needed shuteye. If I was dead, well, that was all right. I wouldn't know it anyway. This surreal moment would be a nice end. If I was really here, I wanted to be refreshed and very ready for whatever was out there… I'd gone from rural sprawl to absolute wilderness, and that meant it was good I kept a shotgun, a handgun, and my trusty baseball bat in the cab.

Plus, the cab was equipped with one of those tiny apartments in back: bunkbeds, a hot plate, a mini-refrigerator stocked with caffeine and taurine, first aid kit, pictures of my ex I hadn't had the heart to throw away or burn. I was still in the numb with shock stage.

I ascended the stairs again, and climbed in. "Okay, facts. There's no way to haul cargo to a place you can't see. There's no sense in trying to keep going forward, since there's a big floating boulder about a hundred feet ahead of you. Even if they dock your pay, it's better than trying to steer through a hallucination."

I slapped my face lightly a couple of times. "You're going to wake up on the side of the road. Maybe she's overturned and it'll be an ambulance, or the firefighters coming to jaws of life you out of here. Maybe we pulled over in time and we're just on the shoulder, and all this will be a dream I'll forget about in a few hours." Patting the dashboard. "You don't seem broke… yeah I probably pulled over. You're okay, sweetpea."

People call their vehicles all kinds of weird shit. I don't judge.

I paused.

"And I'll stop talking to myself like a fucking lunatic."

Doors locked, I got in a quick brushing of the teeth, then thought it over for a bleary second. Peeing the bed wouldn't do. I hopped out once more to take a leak, and climbed back in to head to get some shuteye. I was asleep before I could wonder any more about this weird place.



I slept like the dead, but I wasn't.

The bathroom break convinced me it was all real. People don't pee on a place in their dreams, and I'd wager money people don't spend the last fleeting moments before death thinking, 'I need to drain the lizard'.

When I woke, certain it was all real, it was still the other world outside, only dusk was falling. The temperature I hadn't noticed before, but it was certainly cooler. Still, too hot for my parka, so I stripped it off and tossed it in the truck. I had an internal frame pack suitable for hiking and mountain climbing, but it wasn't hiking I was thinking about doing, so I dumped out everything unnecessary to my upcoming fact finding mission, and put the baseball bat in there. I tested out the quickdraw capability, and the results weren't great. Still, if I tilted one way, I could grab out the baseball bat and perform a wide haymaker if absolutely necessary.

Of course, if I needed to use it, especially against a wild animal, I was probably as good as dead.

A message popped up in front of my face.

So it begins…

Greetings, traveler! Now that you've begun to acclimate yourself to your new surroundings, it's time to begin your journey toward understanding the world around you, and your place in it. One of the factors at play here is your abilities.

You have seven attributes, and you've been awarded a free star

in your Tough attribute for simply making the journey here. Your first ability, Drifter, has increased your Attuned and Tough attributes as well!

You are free to allocate an additional seven stars between these, though you can't go above three stars until leveling up.

I tapped at the words floating above me, and they disappeared. In their place, it now read **Evan Westfield, Drifter. Normal tier**. Under Base Attributes, it read:

Attuned— Normal*
Clever— Normal (no stars)
Charming— Normal (no stars)
Fierce— Normal (no stars)
Sly— Normal (no stars)
Quick— Normal (no stars)
Tough— Normal**

Okay, I was hallucinating myself into a video game. An RPG apparently. Turn-based combat would be way better than being ambushed.

"Shut up," I muttered to myself, and grinned.

Seven more stars sat off to one side, waiting to be allocated. I started by putting a single star into each of the ones that didn't have a star yet, just by dragging a star over near the attribute name, where the star snapped into one of the three depressions. It was a problem for me not to be Clever or Charming in the slightest.

That left me two more stars to place. I thought of myself as a pretty Clever person, generally, so I put another star there. Since I knew games in general always valued being fast and acting more often than your opponent, I put the last star in Quick.

It now looked like this, which was a little better:

Attuned— Normal*
Clever— Normal**

Charming— Normal*
Fierce— Normal*
Sly— Normal*
Quick— Normal**
Tough— Normal**

I made it go away by tapping the **Confirm** button. The bizarre game-style pop up windows didn't bother me again, so after a moment of waiting I continued to get ready for my first excursion.

"Better add the old first aid kit," I muttered, and stuffed it in as well. Ammo would also be an issue, and I only had a box of shotgun shells left. On the off chance this place had a reloading machine, I could probably remember what my dad had taught me back in scouts, but that info was buried under four years of being an adult. I had a cross bag specifically built to keep pickpockets from getting at your wallet while traveling abroad, and that served well enough to add extra eight shotgun shells. Again, if I needed all eight, I was definitely in serious trouble.

Regardless of the possibility of meeting my doom out here, I was feeling refreshed. Sure I was hungry, but the floating boulders and floating rocks in the distance, and that wide expanse of just insanely huge sky all perked me up. I felt pretty great.

I was as ready as I could get. Then, with an added energy drink and a packet of beef jerky, I grabbed the twelve gauge and headed out.



The idea was to get to where I could only barely see Mack, check what lay beyond in this direction, and head back. I'd head out in the four cardinal directions: where Mack was pointed, directly to the left of Mack, directly to her right, and then straight out from the loading door. Of course, it being near dark, I could only manage one of these runs now, so I decided left was the way to go.

The setting sun lay off to my right, so the truck was still pointed

west, the direction I'd been going on earth. Also, not far off, one of those floating boulders waited for me to inspect it. I was getting, for the first time since being a teenager, butterflies in my stomach over it. You only saw this kind of stuff in video games and animated movies, not something you could touch with your bare hands.

It was at least a mile off, and only grew in size as I approached. I had figured it was the size of a suburban two floor house, but it was at least three of those side by side by side.

"Holy shitballs," I muttered to myself, craning my neck to get a look at it.

It was floating only about four feet off the ground, meaning I could lay a hand on it. I did so, and got a thrumming feeling out of it, like someone was playing a song with real heavy bass through a surround sound system, maybe on top where I couldn't see.

It wouldn't… suddenly fall on me if I went beneath it… would it?

That was a bit of a terrifying thought. Hmm, how about not now? Maybe there were people on this world. If so, they would know whether or not this giant rock would suddenly get an angry face and try to squash me to death.

I don't know why that thought occurred to me, but it came. Still, the thrum vibrated through my body and turned my knees a bit jellylike. It was honestly awesome, in the purest sense of the word.

It wasn't going to be easy to climb the thing, and another thought occurred to me: I was average weight, and this thing was tons and tons of rock, but if I tried to climb it, would it suddenly begin to rotate in the air, and dump me off on the grass? Honestly, I couldn't see what was holding it there, so maybe it was just an anti-gravity rock.

That was something I could try and test out. I grabbed onto a handhold with both hands and reefed on that sucker as hard as possible.

Nothing.

"Fascinating," I said, doing a bad impression of Spock.

Okay, my mission had been to scout beyond, so I needed to get

beyond. Daylight was a-wasting, so it was necessary (but a bit sad) to leave the floating boulder behind, and see what was going on out this way… south, if the sun was setting directly to the west.

In that direction, I noted the barest hint of a mountain range amid the deepening indigo. Big rocks, big enough to see tens of miles distant, floated near the peaks, and above the peaks. Rocks that you could say were more like floating islands, almost floating mountains.

I also spotted two things of interest: one, big shaggy grazing animals, far bigger than buffalo, almost the size of houses themselves, and two, a big cat silently slinking in to pounce.

Cat… is stretching the term. It had six legs, was black striped with wheat gold like a tiger, and had a mouth that opened sideways. A mouth like a shark's, but without lips, so all the teeth just stuck out there, like a horror movie. It also had several whiplike tails ending in what looked like feathers, but it was also getting dark, so they could've been little spines.

"Fuuuuuuccckkk,"I breathed.

Mistake. The thing (far bigger than any cat on earth, too big to fit on Mack's twin size bed) turned its head and sighted me in. The grazing animals lowed in a weird way, and also began glowing softly with blue white magic.

Running wouldn't help, I told myself, even as my body began to turn to soup and my instincts screamed to get away. Instead I slowly lifted the twelve gauge and settled the butt against my shoulder.

I kept repeating my curse over and over, willing my body to stay standing.

The cat thing disappeared into the grass and began stalking toward me. I could hear a bit of displaced grass, but otherwise just the gently blowing wind.

The moment that thing sprang up, I blasted it in the face with my twelve gauge. This was certainly one of those times. The buckshot hit it square in the face, splattering shark teeth all over the place, and glowing purply blood, and it flinched back. But not before raking

me down my leg with two of its claws. It ended up landing just shy of me, where I was convincing my body to do the thing before I got disemboweled and eaten. First thing: step carefully backwards and don't fall over.

The noise of the blast had done something to the big shaggy grazers though. They shot blue white energy out away from them with mooing calls, which buffeted the cat and knocked it off balance.

That did it. I racked the other cartridge into the chamber and blasted it another good one in the face.

The cat stayed down after that, and it was a good thing it did, because a bright yellow exclamation point appeared in front of my face. Sort of in the periphery, but my blood was up and I swatted at them like they were evil alien insects. Several more of them followed, pushing the original one down, until there were four exclamation points.

The grazing animals roar-mooed again, charging with more bluish whitish magic, and this convinced me it was better to limp back to Mack, sort through everything I'd learned, apply some first aid, and get. These. Stupid. Exclamation. Points. Out. Of. My. Face.

2- First Contact

I made sure I was safe in the truck with the doors locked before I peeled off my ragged jeans and inspected the wound. The pants had acted like armor, at least a little, but I still had some nasty wounds that needed taping up. The first aid kit had some gauze, so I packed it all in there and taped over it. If I couldn't stay off my feet (and I couldn't) I'd end up with some nasty scarring, but probably really cool looking scarring.

"Infection," I muttered, considering that this land didn't have a single building I could see, let alone a hospital. I tore the bandages off before dousing the whole thing with hydrogen peroxide. After that it was time to clean the whole situation up carefully, dry it off, and reapply the bandage I'd just made.

I hadn't touched any of the exclamation points. I didn't want that thing's mate to come after me. That involved sticking close to the gigantic floating boulder, checking everything out closely, and sneaking the hell back to the truck lickety split.

The exclamation points were messages, similar to those of tutorials in video games I'd played as a kid, then as a teenager, then sometimes as an adult. Technically an adult. I wasn't yet thirty and wasn't looking forward to turning thirty, ever. Twenty-three was just fine for now, thank you.

All I had to do was survive the night.

You have slain a striped jiddara! the message burbled. **You've gained a tier in the Hunt skill. Although you cheated**

with your kill stick, you learned a valuable lesson about hunting, and being hunted. You've also gained experience toward your Quick attribute, which remains at two stars.

I tapped the confirm button and made the message disappear, then tapped at the second one.

You have discovered system messages! the second prompt read. **There are many menus, windows, and settings for both. You should become acquainted with these in order to better understand the world around you and your capabilities in it. Tap here if you would like a full tutorial.**

Shaking as my hands were, I accidentally tapped elsewhere, and the message disappeared. I swore. Now that I was thinking about it, I noted the interlocked gears icon, which read Settings when I concentrated on it. There were a couple of other icons, but the life or death situation had really rattled me. I was shaking enough to make navigating all this stuff practically impossible.

"Come on, Evan. Matter of life and death, okay? Get it together."

I tapped at the third message.

You've discovered your first skill! the third message explained. **There are a myriad number of skills, though each one will be tied to a specific attribute. You may practice a skill to level it up. Skills can be one tier above your current tier, but can't advance farther.**

I wasn't sure what that meant, but the Settings menu would help me after this fourth message.

You have successfully sneaked back to your home base. The fourth message read. **You've gained a tier in the Stealth skill. Information is a weapon, and you deny your enemies that information when you skulk around. You've also gained experience toward your Sly attribute, which remains at one star.**

There. Now I could have a little panic attack about being in the open with giant cat predators all around me. I knew I needed to get there, mentally. I needed to suck it up, man up, get over the idea that I was here. There was no changing that.

Knowing it and accepting it were two different things.

Some time and some breathing exercises helped calm my nerves. The world could be good. It had magic. I could get behind that. So what if I never went home, I reasoned. No more bills, no more bullshit expectations from a girl who'd betrayed me almost an entire year ago. My only family was my parents and my older brother, who'd ramped up the bullying from age eighteen to figure my shit out, stop driving a truck, get settled, marry a girl, produce children for my parents to dote on. I was nothing more than a cautionary tale to them by now.

"Cut that shit out," I told myself quietly. "Figure out what needs to be done, do it, feel sorry for yourself later."

Below my attributes it read **Relationships**: and in a painfully tiny font below that, it read **none**. Harsh. And below **Relationships**, it read **Intrinsic Abilities**. Here I had **Auto-translate, Map Function, Evolving UI** and **Male.** Under this, **Special Abilities**. The only word there was **Drifter**.

That was a lot, especially the **Male** part. I wasn't sure how being a male was an ability, but it was definitely intrinsic.

Okay, it was time to start at the top. The first two seemed self-explanatory, and I was proven right.

Auto-translate (intrinsic ability)

All spoken and written languages are automatically translated for you. In addition, your spoken words are automatically comprehended by those you meet in their first language. Others may not automatically understand your written language, however. Training in those languages and written symbol systems will be required for you to write in a legible way.

This first proved that there were other people on this world,

which was a relief. I hadn't met anyone yet, and was beginning to wonder if I was the only person in the whole place. It was a comfort to find out that not only would I be meeting folks, I wouldn't have to spend months or years signing, grunting, or speaking extra slowly before I adapted. It would be extremely convenient, until it was time to, I don't know, write orders for the left flank to follow at the correct signal, to help my marauding army secure victory.

"People? Check. Understanding? Also check. Nice."

I moved onto **Map Function**, which was exactly what I expected out of a video game map, plus a little extra.

Map Function (intrinsic ability)

The world around you is largely unknown, but exploration and instruction will fill in this visual map. The map takes up no space in your inventory and may be accessed at any time. Clouded places are are too far for you to view and are obscured by the fog of war. Known place names will be added when you learn them.

This map may be annotated with pins and notes.

The map only really displayed a big field of green, with an icon of a floating rock, and off in one direction, a range of sharp, stabby purplish mountains where more floating rocks hovered. The mountains were obscured by this fog of war, while the space around me was a brighter green.

I played with the pins for a while, and found them in nine different colors: black, a brownish color, white, yellow, and a more metallic silvery color in simple circles. This was followed by an actual diamond, followed by a purple gem, an orange gem, and a white halo looking thing.

Notes looked exactly like my phone notepad had, a small square with several lines. I tapped at it, and added the note: *landed here. Big ass floating rock. Killed the jiddara. Wounded by jiddara. Hopefully not infected. Need to close out this note*

I chuckled to myself and moved on to the third ability.

It was still pretty much what I expected, but it was kind of a lot.

Evolving UI (intrinsic ability)

The functionality of magic and your growing abilities will be displayed in a series of menus, pop up notifications, and windows akin to a video game. This is a magical construct that responds to your will; messages and notifications can be accessed and dismissed with a thought. This can be adjusted to fit your specific needs, and will do so as time goes on. Use the settings icon to set your preferences.

When I dismissed the window, a woman was standing before me.

"Well, shit," I muttered. I'd gotten caught out twice now for not paying close enough attention.

She was willowy and strong, dressed in translucent linen pants and a loose shirt. The shirt was also white and half see-through, but was almost entirely sleeves. It was tied in between her breasts, but cut high enough that I could see her entire midriff. She had red brown skin, reminding me of terracotta. That wasn't exactly right, but it was close. The contrast between the translucent clothes and the color of her skin made it very clear she was going commando.

It was laundry day, maybe.

She had white face paint smudged on there in a cool pattern, and stark white hair ending in rainbow shimmers. It's difficult to describe, but the last two inches of her hair was a soft rainbow color.

And of course she had a bear crossed with a porcupine, with six legs and a snout like an anteater. A big beast, with spines like literal spears sticking off four or five feet, and a long flat tail with even more spines. Each of the six legs was short and powerful, ending in claws that looked like knife blades.

She stared at me for a long time. I stared back, since she had the spear, the glowing necklace, and the giant friggin companion animal.

Her hair blew a bit in the breeze, and when she cocked her head, I noticed her eyes were startling green. Like no one on earth green, but of course we weren't on earth.

I'd accepted that I wasn't in Michigan anymore, Toto, and in a

hurry.

Eventually, after more moments of regarding me with serious, wide, very green eyes, she slowly walked toward me. Her creature followed right along, always two steps behind and to her right. She did a complete circle around me, and I kept her in sight the whole time.

If I had to, I'd blast the porcupine thing first. It wouldn't endear me with her, but it looked like it had several ways to murder me, while she only had the spear and the odd glowing necklace.

And the full body of a young woman in her prime. Jeez, it was distracting, with the curves and the hips and the cleavage and the nipples and the patch of white hair not covered by her pants.

Finally, she completed her circuit and jammed her spear into the dirt. The beast returned to its haunches, which gave it the appearance of sitting on a chair.

"You're a Drifter," she said, with definite emphasis on that capital D. And half a question.

"I think so, yes."

"You killed the jiddara."

"Definitely yes."

"You just arrived?"

"In your world?" I asked. "Yes. A day and a half ago."

"Have you met any other people?"

"No. Just some big shaggy grass eating things that the jiddara was hoping to eat before it saw me."

This gave her serious pause as well. I tried to look her in the eyes, not because I wanted to steer clear of offending her, but because I wanted a hint as to her intentions.

"You are magical," she said, and didn't explain.

"Uh… thank you. I'm actually Evan."

"What?"

"Evan, my name. My name is Evan."

She stared at me, blank faced. She'd tensed a bit, which added to

the confusion, as if I was going to lash out at her.

"Could I ask a favor of you? I assume I don't have much in the way of money, but I guess we could crack open the trailer and see what I could give you as a gift for your help."

Her hand drifted to the spear.

"I'm definitely not wanting to hurt you, trust me. I just need to know more about this world, so I don't die tomorrow."

"Ah," she responded.

"What… did you think I was going to ask?"

"It's not important."

"Oh… kay. In that case, would you like to follow me? I'll just show you what we've got back here."

She clucked her tongue and the beast made a chuffing sound, then followed along after her.

"Aren't you worried, about getting attacked?"

"Why would I?" she responded.

"You're not wearing much in the way of armor." Nothing was left to my imagination. It was worse than distracting, honestly. It was getting uncomfortable, like high school me finding porn on the internet for the first time.

"Neither are you," she returned.

I laughed. "I just landed here from another world somehow. Of course I'm not prepared to fight off attackers."

"This armor is adequate for the task," she explained, by not explaining anything.

"Okay," I had no choice but to accept. Maybe her clothes were magical, and the more they revealed the more she was protected. Or maybe the magic necklace did all the work.

She once again looked me up and down, from hiking boots, up my dungarees to my t-shirt to the Detroit Tigers baseball cap. I felt myself reacting to her gaze just as it was doing with her outfit. "Is this clothing… how everyone from your world dresses?" she asked.

"Yes, I'd say most of the people. There are more formal suits

and…" I hissed with pain.

"What's happened?"

"Nothing. The jiddara got me, but I'll survive."

"I will inspect the wound," she said.

"Nah, no thanks."

"What?" she demanded, affronted.

"Don't take this the wrong way but… I don't even know your name. I might take off my pants for someone I was on a first name basis with, but… yeah." I shrugged, as half an apology. "We don't know each other."

She hadn't given me the impression that she wanted anything from me, and was only satisfying curiosity about my being a Drifter.

She stopped walking, and the beast again got up on its haunches, taller than the girl, about my height.

"Auralla," she said.

"That's your name?"

She nodded.

An exclamation point appeared in my periphery, but I ignored it for now.

"Well it's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Auralla, and if you know anything about healing, I'd be grateful. I still don't know if I have the means to repay you, but—"

"Think nothing of it," she said. "Now, I will inspect the wound."

I laughed, but she was deadly serious, so I let it go. "Okay, pants are coming off. I don't want you to get the wrong idea though."

This finally earned a hint of a smile. "As you say, Evan. I will not get the wrong idea."

God, but she smelled nice too, some soft scent I couldn't place. I couldn't get my body to obey me. I was getting turned on, and she was going to be within striking distance of my erection.

I slipped off my jeans, and received yet another odd look from Auralla. She peeled off the bandage and poked at the wound, then squeezed at a bead on her bracelet. A moment later, some goo

appeared in a small jar, and she applied some. It hurt, but I held off the hissing and bore through it. Another exclamation point joined the first.

"And this is normal too, where you're from?" she asked, and poked my boxers directly. I almost groaned, but stopped myself. She had a killing machine looming over me right now, but I was hard nonetheless.

"This is normal," I said. "Would you say it's abnormal where you're from?"

"Oh yes," she said. "Covering the body is extremely odd in my village."

I met her eyes and thanked her, and the moment became intense, charged.

"Would you feel more comfortable if I removed this?" I indicated my boxers.

That seemed to sober her up, or flip a switch, or something. She continued to melt me with her twin emerald eyes and the rainbow accents of her hair, for just a moment, before that guarded expression came over her face. Still, she didn't move away.

"You're a Drifter," she said.

"We've been over this."

"I am your first contact." I nodded. She continued, needlessly. "You have yet to meet any other in this place. I am your first."

She got within kissing distance, and flecks of gold began to appear in her eyes while she appraised me in some way. I could smell her breath, but also more of that indiscernible nice smell her body gave off.

"If you agree not to dominate me, I should like to give you the use of my body and share in my power."

3- Auralla of Sunspire

She was proposing sex. There was no other way to twist those words. She'd met me, talked to me for about five minutes, rubbed my leg, and offered to screw my brains out.

"I… am needing some clarification," I said.

"You spurn me?" Affront and surprise were both instantly clear on her face.

"You are lovely," I told her, "absolutely gorgeous. I love the amazonian goddess look, the kind of native vibe, the outfit is spectacular, I know you've got some nice childbearing hips and all, but we've just met. I don't know anything about you, and I especially don't know if it's a good idea to bed someone I just met."

"No bed," she said. "We join together here in the grass."

That wasn't exactly what I was worried about. I had an ex for a reason: she'd gone ballistic with worry every time I went out on a long haul. Then, when I got suspicious and popped in unannounced to surprise her, I found her doing the person I figured she'd be doing.

Not me, obviously. She'd been sleeping with a guy from her work.

This wasn't a place I needed to go mentally… I looked at the barely-clothed young lady offering me a party in her pants, and all thought of my cheating ex vanished.

I cocked a thumb. "With your boy watching? I'm not super thrilled at that idea."

She clucked her tongue in a slightly different way and her beastie

plopped down on all six legs, then lumbered off. It only got about twenty feet away, but was pointed away from us.

Auralla touched my boxers again. Touched *me*. "I find you very agreeable, Drifter Evan."

"Okay but there's a lot I don't know. How old are you?"

"Nineteen summers," she said, and inched closer. Her eyes were absolutely hypnotic.

"What's the deal with domination?" I asked.

She snarled and reared back like a snake about to strike. "You agree not to, that is all."

I stood up, held out a hand for her to take so *she* could stand up, and placed a hand on either shoulder. "Let's start over."

"What—"

"Thank you so much, Auralla, for your skill and your willingness to heal a complete stranger. Your compassion is very sexy, just like the rest of you."

Her look of puzzlement slowly disappeared, and in its place was the beginnings of lust: the hooded eyelids, the pursed lips. I leaned in and whispered, "It's such a gift for me to make you squeal with delight. Joining with you will be an honor."

In the meantime I untied the simple knot holding her top together. It opened in the front, and slid back off her shoulders easily , drifting to the grass . From there, I knelt and found her long shorts tied the same way. Soon they were gone too, and that left her bare except for the necklace. She was breathing shallowly, and trembling.

"You must agree," she insisted quietly. "You must promise."

I'd begun with soft kisses all over her, homing in on the ultimate target, from her belly button on down.

"This is not the way to share essence," she explained, as if to a child. She pointed, first at me, and then at herself. "The male puts that… in here."

"Trust me, I know how 'sharing essence' is done," I told her. I hadn't stopped the kissing and licking, and my roaming hands

slipped up the back of her legs. This must've been a place she liked, because she moaned again. "You've got to climb the ladder first, otherwise your dive in is always going to be a belly flop."

"What?"

I didn't explain further, but let my hands and tongue do the talking. She groaned, but got a fistful of my hair and pulled back, though her expression told me she hadn't wanted to. I looked up into her thoroughly lust-filled face, with its hint of fury. "You must… you must…"

"All right," I told her. "I promise." I headed back in and began my slow, thorough mission to make her squeal with my tongue.

If there's one thing my ex and I agreed upon, it's that I'm good in bed. Size-wise, good. Technique-wise, very good. I made sure Auralla knew this, until she was first making the noises I thought she ought to make. Soon she was leaning against the side of the trailer, and then until her knees gave out and she slowly collapsed into my arms.

Those emerald eyes stared into mine. "What… how…"

"Are Drifters pretty rare around here?"

"You are the first I have met. We hear stories."

It felt strange to kiss her, before going out on dates, before having her laugh at my lame jokes, before leaning in over dinner at a restaurant and going 'I want to eat you more than this dinner. When we get home you'd better watch out.' But I ignored this and dipped in for a kiss. She was just as soft and warm as she appeared.

"I want you very badly," I breathed as our lips parted.

"Remember your promise."

I remembered the Intrinsic Ability labeled **Male** and wished I'd had a chance to read up on it. That wasn't going to stop me though; I lined up the head and entered her.

It was exhilarating, nearly to the point of pain, that even though I'd gotten her ready for at least one powerful orgasm, she was tight enough to make entry a serious difficulty. Her face scrunched down with the pain but she didn't cry out. Hell, she barely made a sound.

Another exclamation point appeared, and I thought about the section of the screens labeled Relationships. The workings of this game interface had known I would get into relationships long before Auralla made her appearance. They were a function of the world itself, or at least the menus and windows I hadn't had time to begin navigating.

The sex was almost more than I could handle because of her incredible fit tightness. She was a warrior, and her body had zero evidence of softness or fat outside of those perfect lips, but I also doubted she'd done much of this in the past. I might even be her first, which I would consider a surprising honor.

I hoped she would come back for round two. I hoped I could hold out long enough to give her the kind of pleasure I was getting. I hoped I could be good enough for her to want the sequel, or maybe even a series.

She made appreciative sounds and bucked against me, hard. I'd find bruises on my torso in the days to come, and soreness all throughout my midsection. This was animalistic, sweaty, and intense. After some time, I realized I was getting close. Either Auralla realized it also, or she just got in the mood, because she locked her feet behind my back and refused to let go. Even when I informed her through gritted teeth I was about to come, she just glared at me with her uncanny green eyes and grimaced. Overwhelming lust mixed with fear in her eyes and the message was again clear: uphold your promise, don't dominate, whatever that meant.

It wasn't an exclamation point this time but a full on window that blasted up in front of my face, demanding my attention.

You have joined in the flesh with Auralla of Sunspire. Will you take the power offered to you, or share in the power with her?

The window offered me two options in the form of buttons, one of which said **Establish Dominance & Take of Her Power**, the other read **Remain Equals & Intertwine Your Powers**.

With her under me like that, spread out before me, vulnerable, and with the choice mine to make, it was tempting to say screw that promise made in ignorance. This place had magic, and maybe the dominance was a form of magic, which would make her my permanent magic slave girl. That option had its appeal, and I could instantly imagine a group of gorgeous young women all sitting in practically no clothing around my pillow-filled harem complex. They would gossip about me, teach each other how to satisfy me, and fulfill my every sexual wish, no matter how twisted…

But the fear and trepidation she'd shown me in making this happen, and her repeated insistence, drove me to select **Remain Equals.** Plus, she had a gigantic quill bear. On pressing the button, the pleasure of her wrapped around me intensified. She let out a satisfied groan that could only mean one thing, and her eyes opened to take me in. I went down to get into her face, and soaked up that woozy, orgasm-induced smile. Still she held on, with interlocked ankles begging me to release inside.

With no choice left to me, I unloaded with a roar loud enough to get her companion beast's attention.



We spent time in the tall grass just lying there, with Auralla's body half draped over mine. Clouds drifted by in a sky bluer than I'd ever remembered seeing, and the swishing of the grasses lulled me toward a doze.

"I didn't dominate you," I told her.

"I know," she sighed, contented. The guarded tone in her voice had fallen away. "I could feel it."

I noted she didn't say 'the menu window dialogue thing informed me.'

"Do you know what would happen if I did?" Her head rose up off my shoulder and she made a disgusted face. I chuckled. "Sorry, okay, I won't mention it. I wasn't entirely clear on how that was supposed to work. Where I come from, folks dominating their

partners is pretty rare. And definitely not…" I trailed off, unsure how to continue. Not magical? Not a gaming choice?

"It happens all too often here," she said. Something occurred to her. "The way you spoke… in your world, the womenfolk… can also dominate?"

"Oh sure. Some tie up men, some tie up other women… I guess I'm talking about bondage play. Dominance is different I guess. I don't know a lot about it. I'm not into that scene: no time, no money." I laughed. "And I'm in the wrong world."

But I thought then, with breasts pressed up against me and a beautiful woman nuzzling into my chest, that I was not in the wrong world at all.

"Are you?"

I grinned at her. "I was just thinking that! Haha. Maybe I'm in the right world after all." If I'd just drifted into sex world, I was definitely down to live here.

Speaking of down, I caressed Auralla more, feeling the springy tautness of her skin before tracing a finger up her jawline and bringing her up to kiss again. This she accepted much more readily this time, and her own hand drifted back down, to find me beginning to stir for round two.

When we broke, she seemed confused. "Uh… again?"

"Naturally. You think I would let you go without another roll in the hay?" I was twenty-three, not seventy-nine.

"But, the essence is shared. Another coupling would… not result in more power." Power indeed. She had a small tattoo on the side of her neck where I had kissed before… it definitely hadn't been there before we 'shared essence'. It showed a cloaked figure walking toward the viewer, with runes encircling it. Wait… those weren't runes, that was English.

It read **The Drifter's Mark**.

It was the most intense hickey I'd ever seen.

I grinned again. "Is that what you were after, huh? The power? And you risked getting dominated?"

She searched my expression, her face neutral. "I… you didn't know. Being a Drifter." This had the tenor of an apology, and I understood. I also knew I was flattered by the first offer, punching up way out of my league with an absolute stunner of a partner, and hornier than I'd been when first flooded with hormones as a teenager.

I rolled her over onto her back and started heading southward again, leaving a trail of kisses and caresses. "Sure, but it's okay to just enjoy ourselves now, right? How's that sound? Or better yet, how's that feel?"

I started before she had a chance to answer, getting in a few licks.

"It feels… oh! It feels good."

She wasn't thrilled with the idea of returning the favor, meaning she didn't like the idea of going down on me, since (she explained) that's what The Dominated were forced to do. I talked her into it, earning a star next to my tier 1 Sway skill. She'd obviously never given head before, so I stopped her not long into it, and took her from behind.

This time it was almost better, with her body used to me, and me getting into the groove. She was better, with none of the apprehension over her domination phobia. Although she was puzzled about the purpose (why in the hell would I be engaging in this with her if there was no power swap involved) she quickly got into it. She made more noise this time, all of it appreciative.

I rubbed at her clit until I was sure she shot off like a rocket, legs shaking, groaning uncontrollably and body nearly going limp against the side of the trailer. I then kept hammering at her until it was my turn to climax. This being the second round, I had a great deal more stamina, stretching out the sounds of grunting and flesh slapping for some time. This time I had the choice not to come inside her, my preferred method of not having to deal with unwanted permanent consequences, and unloaded onto her toned ass.

This time, and for a long time after, there was no speaking. Instead we just basked in the afterglow of some seriously good sex,

with the occasional murmur of satisfaction, until she dozed off and I felt the urge to follow suit.

Before doing so, I decided to have a look at the powers. I hadn't gotten a close look at what Drifter meant for me, and I was curious about the new tattoo that was partially hidden by Auralla's white and rainbow hair.

In addition to **Drifter**, I now had a second power, **Beastmaster's Mark**.

God, there was so much to learn in such a short amount of time. If I'd done this wrong with Auralla, I might be at a disadvantage going forward in a place that was obviously very different from earth.

My body urged me to get a little sleep after that session, but I concentrated and took a close look.

Drifter

Special Ability

Normal tier, two stars

By pushing yourself to the point of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion, you have awakened the magical potential within yourself to travel between worlds, as well as learn magic.

Your Attuned and Tough attributes are enhanced to a moderate degree, permanently.

This ability is tied to your Attuned attribute.

Beastmaster's Mark

Passive ability

Normal tier, one star

Normal: Your Clever, Sly, Quick and Attuned attributes are boosted moderately. While in the wilds, they are instead boosted significantly.

You gained this ability after joining with Auralla of Sunspire. This ability's tier is tied to your Relationship with Auralla of Sunspire.

Oh… kay. That sounded pretty good. I wondered what an

enhanced ability from dominance might look like, if it was better than this, but this was already good. I had two stars in Attuned now, and an extra star in Clever, Sly, and Quick that hadn't been there before. Also, the ability told me Auralla was a Beastmaster, which was good info to have.

Oh and also, I literally had a mark on my body that hadn't been there before we spent some enjoyable time swapping fluids. The actual mark was like a tattoo, a bit tribal in shape, on my left pectoral muscle just above the nipple, and it seemed to glaze over with a sort of oil spill iridescence if I saw it out of the corner of my eye. It didn't hurt, but it was also permanent. Not a sticker, not a temporary tattoo.

But that wasn't all. A couple of exclamation points sat next to the new ability.

Congratulations! *Your relationship with Auralla of Sunspire has progressed. Respecting her request meant a great deal to her, and increased her trust in you. Your abilities associated with Auralla have also progressed.*

Congratulations! *Your relationship with Auralla of Sunspire has progressed. Taking more time with her has surprised and delighted her, and not just physically. Of course, you did get something out of the deal as well, you sly dog. Your abilities associated with Auralla have also progressed.*

I peered at the write up and saw that **Beastmaster's Mark** was now three stars. It also read differently.

Beastmaster's Mark

Passive ability

Normal tier, three stars

Normal: Your Clever, Sly, Quick and Attuned attributes are boosted significantly. While in the wilds, you deal hand to hand damage as though you had claws. While wearing fur or leather, you gain a minimal intimidation bonus, and minimal damage reduction.

You gained this ability after joining with Auralla of Sunspire. This ability's tier is tied to your Relationship with Auralla of Sunspire.

This ability has reached its maximum stars for Normal tier. In order to rank up this ability, your tier and relationship with Auralla of Sunspire must increase.

This puzzled me, but not enough to keep me from drifting off with a girl snuggled up against me.

Her beastie woke us up sometime after with a snort and a bristly nuzzle. She leapt up and snatched at her spear, but didn't locate any threat nearby. I squinted, and weirdly I could make out the mountain range to the south much more clearly than before. My eyesight was significantly sharper, or the atmosphere of this world was very fucking weird. Also, I noted a swarm of some kind on the approach.

Auralla snarled. "Brood swarm."

Hopefully not actual zerg.

"What are they?"

"A hybrid of avian and insect. Voracious. Out in the open we'll be torn to pieces." She shook her head. "There are too many for me to influence."

"How do you normally deal with them, back in Sunspire?"

Her hand crept to the necklace, which glowed with fiercer light. It reminded me of the big shaggy cow things and their bluish energy blasts. "We pool our power, and surround the weak to blanket them in protection. I should not have ventured this far away from the village."

The hopelessness in her voice was troubling. She clearly considered herself stupid for coming out here to check out this otherworld guy and get power from bumping uglies, only to be eaten by a swarm of giant locusts.

"I've got an idea," I told her.

If you liked the spicy flavor of this book, you're gonna love Get Lucky. Full series available here.



Also, have a preview on the house.

1- The End of the World Arrives

Friday, Day 1

Ashley was unlucky to have front row seats to the apocalypse. Most apocalypses happen on a Tuesday, but this one arrived on a Friday morning, of all things. On Tuesday, the worst day is over but Friday's still far off. You could also, to try and stay optimistic about things, and argue that an apocalypse Tuesday means you're still relatively fresh off a fun weekend.

Friday, on the other hand, means you've trudged through the four workdays, picked up the things that needed picking up, put them down in the places they needed to be put down, nearly got clipped in the head by a forklift twice this week, had your boss curse at you for resting your head against the shelving unit because your girlfriend said some nasty shit to you by text, and the weekend was still a full day's work away.

Meaning that, a hard week's work and in anticipation of heading out for a good time, Ashley woke up to the world as he knew it ending.

Not awesome.

It was exactly 6:27 a.m. on that Friday. Ashley cracked an eye at the light show starting up outside, and sat up in bed. This involved detangling arms and legs from Ashley, his girlfriend.

Ashley (the boyfriend) had led a pretty unfortunate life up until the point where the world ended, firstly by being named a typically girl's name. Ashley was in fact a guy. This had grown old near the end of elementary school and caused him to get into quite a lot of

trouble in middle school, and by high school he was big enough that he joined the football team as a linebacker. Nobody was stupid enough to call him Ashley by then. They called him Ash at that point, because although he would get suspended for punching people, he would lose his temper pretty easily and then suffer the consequences. He found a character from a movie played by Bruce Campbell, and old movie, and he put on an Ash impression from Ash vs The Evil Dead. He liked Bruce Campbell's square jaw and take-no-shit attitude. He took no shit, and was regarded as a brutish asshole by pretty much anyone not on the football team.

Oh and his teachers. They quickly got over the impression that he was a dim-witted lunk capable of growing a beard at fifteen years old when the first test came around. Because while comic books had established the hulking guy who was fifty percent trapezius muscles was also the dumbest member of the party, Ash was not stupid. He could pull off a B+ in basically all his subjects without overdoing the studying.

On the day the world ended, Ash got out of bed, stretched his whole body, and grimaced at the way his sternum popped like a knuckle. The light show outside couldn't have been a fireworks display, as it was late September, and also wasn't making the firefight and cannon blast noises. He stepped up to the window, yanked up the blinds, and then his jaw dropped at what he was seeing.

He was, in fact, a pretty hefty fella, standing at over six feet and pushing two forty because he couldn't afford much more than Fresh N'Ready subs from Jiminy Jeepers, the sub place a good mile's walk from his apartment. And while Fresh N'Ready subs were pretty big on the Ready part of Fresh N'Ready, they weren't so much on the Fresh. They were also dripping with Italian dressing. Also he wasn't playing football anymore, and his job lifting things and putting them back down again didn't allow him much time or energy to hit the gym.

He had this fondness for beer and this girlfriend with expensive tastes, see?

Girlfriend Ashley, by the way, would survive for only another twenty-seven seconds. The end of the world was the end of Ashley, but not Ashley. He immediately yelled, sprinted out the door, and headed outside to where the the end of the world was starting.

So here was the issue: she worked for a law firm as a paralegal, and essentially enjoyed Ash's endowment. Not his Pell Grant or his scholarship from the government. She had this slight issue of enjoying the most expensive drinks a bar or restaurant had on the menu, and mixing with a crowd that was well above Ash's education level. He got backed into a lot of corners at these soirees listening to people mocking other people about their prevarication for pontificating. They'd also mock one another regarding this or that cello player they were shtooping, this or that poetry reading full of the most depressingly banal doggerel, this or that unflatteringly cliched and unoriginal gallery debut, this or that publishing contract for, get this, genre fiction.

In time and given reflection, their stiffness and pettiness had made him smile as soon as the earth he knew was shattered into a million unrecognizable pieces.

Then she would get miffed that he didn't really want to head to the next soiree of bankers, lawyers, district attorneys and their paralegals, etc etc, and hate fuck him all over the house. She'd broken one of his favorite Funko Pops that way, kicking it aside so he could bend her over in the entryway and rail her like she needed to be railed.

While she cursed him out for being a useless, uncultured twit. It was not exactly role-play.

Ash knew what you're thinking right now: why not just dump her and trudge on without a girlfriend? Surely he didn't need one, and even if he did, he was a burly enough fella that he could land a random girl in a little corner bar some Saturday Night. Phoenix, Arizona had little corner bars, and thus it also had random girls.

For about the next three minutes, anyhow.

Alas, Ash was presently falling prey to Sunk Cost Fallacy, and also the laziness conundrum. They both were, truth be told. Although he

could expend effort to go out and find a girl, there was already one in his bed. And although she was awful to him on the regular, she did also pay half the rent and give him some sexual stimulation he really needed. She might've been thinking something similar, along the lines of 'this man is a useless barbarian who doesn't know his Tolstoy from his Kandinsky, but he does get the job done in bed. Also he has a job moving things from one place to another, and that gives him both muscles for bedroom activities and the dollars necessary to pay his half of the rent.'

The laziness conundrum is where the party in question already has a life full of difficulties and stress, and it's easier to be miserable than to break up and be alone. There's far more effort involved in dating, and a whole lot of uncertainty. The bitchy, snobbish overspender you know is better than the ___ you don't.

Well, now nothing was the thing you know, and everything was the ___ you don't.

Ashley beheld a dazzling display of magic roughly two hundred meters across, hanging a good hundred meters in the air, like a sphere of roiling energies between blue on one side and red orange on the other. Where they met, sparks and explosions sent streamers of falling white hot light that should have started fires.

They didn't.

Where the streamers touched down, things grew or transformed. He watched a car touched by one of the things, turn into a lizard the same size as the same car. It was lizard adjacent, since it had six legs and tusks protruding up a good half a meter from its lower jaw. Another streamer hit the house near the edge of his apartment complex, which blossomed into a mushroom a good three meters higher than the house had been.

These both happened near simultaneously. The last one went right into his window on the second floor, which exploded outwards in a ball of purply-reddish flame. Some of those flames transformed into magenta and maroon butterflies twinkling in the dawn gloom.

Faster than Ash could process, the apartment ballooned outwards and swelled into a hillside, complete with tufts of grass, clusters of

shrubberies, and soon towering trees. Outcroppings and huge half-submerged boulders shoved their way out of the grassy exterior all at once.

The hill kept growing, until it ripped free of the ground and started to float away into the sky. It rained some dust and clods of dirt, but then those too hung in a no gravity field.

Ash wanted to reach out and grab onto it, but refrained. It seemed as though everything touched by the magic bubble was being transformed or violently destroyed and that was not how he wanted to go out. As much as floating up int the sky seemed like a fun idea, he knew that in a no gravity zone, you needed something to push off, or else you just hung there, possibly flipping end over end until something moved you.

The type of thing that would move you would probably kill you.

One of the butterflies fluttered up and landed on his arm, and this was followed by a hot flash of agony. He cried out loudly and started swatting at it, but only succeeded in burning his hand. The butterfly dug its way in, under his skin, flapping less and less of its wings until all that was left was a bit of twinkling fairy dust. He would soon find a series of blisters and a scar in the shape of a butterfly. It would serve as a reminder.

Instead of running or being one of only a few dozen humans to try out zero gravity, he turned back toward the bubble of surging, competing color. Not Hollywood special effects, not a flash mob situation. The loss of his apartment building had only just registered as a fact so far and nothing else. Ashley's likely death wasn't even a blip on that radar.

His shout had caught the attention… of one of the silhouetted figures inside the tempestuous bubble of magic.

Ash counted some eight of them, seven arrayed on the red pink side, and one on the blue side. Although they were humanoid, he got the distinct impression they weren't human, and it was because the voice coming out of one of them was like no human he'd ever heard, like it was produced by different mouth parts, and Ash wouldn't be able to reproduce it.

He also couldn’t understand the language.

A tiny object flew out of the bubble and toward him, streaking with yet more magic, and Ash raised his hand to block it out, only to find himself encased in a blue dome of force similar to the one occupied by only a single figure. The other object crashed into the force dome and sprayed out what looked like a deck of cards.

They were. Ash found himself looking through the bubble at a number of cards for a collectable card game. Picture on top, along with a little title above that, and a box on the bottom half describing the card’s effect. He was too far away to read any of them, but some had pictures of coins on them.

After a shocked moment of silence, the other seven figures laughed. Several more of them joined in, and what followed were a host of cards tossed in all directions. The single figure in the blue side of the magic bubble threw out cards of his own. Some intercepted the cards from the seven, while some weren’t fast enough.

More magical explosions followed where the cards connected midair, along with more showers of cards. The ones that didn’t smash into one another instead cascaded down to earth and blew the whole world apart.

Already the landscape surrounding Ash’s neighborhood was radically different. Patches of grass were growing bulbous forms straight out of the ground, which hardened into cocoons that soon burst open to reveal beasts and monsters of legend and imagination. One pack of them burst open to reveal a troupe of giggling hyena-faced people already in armor made of scraps of clothing, wielding clubs, daggers, slings and one of them with a large woodsman’s axe. They laughed the hyena laugh maniacally, cast one appraising glance Ash’s way, then loped off at surprising speed. Another of the cocoons burst open and out climbed a dog-shaped figure made entirely out of constantly cascading mud. Like the type you’d see at a bubbling mud pit, only walking around like a doggo.

“What the—”

The moment the hyena-faced men had locked eyes with Ash, a

pair of cards popped to life over the leader's head and drifted down to the ground. Another card appeared over his own head inside the bubble, and fell to the ground while whatever was happening inside the magic bubble kept on happening.

It was growing.

Several other cards streaked toward his magic bubble and bounced off, or just sizzled to death against it. It was great, as shields went, so he bent to have a look at the card.

Ten of Staves

This card grants experience points towards the Staves skill. Consumable.

Holofoil Uncommon

On the card, two Monks faced off against one another with a staff held like a weapon, as though they were about to start fighting one another any moment now. Eight more fighting sticks hovered in the air behind them in a pattern, forming two sort of diamonds. When he tilted the card, it did indeed have a holographic foil effect, making the two Monks seem to stand out away from the background, and the background to slide back behind them just a bit as he tilted it this way and that.

"Ohhhkay."

A window appeared before him, as in a video game. *Consume this card? Y/N.* Two buttons sat below the question, with a large, bold **Yes** and **No** inside. Ash chose **Yes**, and was confused to see the card dissolve into nothingness in his hand, and a tingle travel through the back of his mind. It wasn't unlike the time he'd gotten high with his buddy Travis from work. A little concerning but not exactly unpleasant.

He hadn't anticipated this could be some kind of drug, or that the whole area was saturated in hallucinogens. He could be having a really bad trip off something he'd eaten, something he'd drunk, or something someone had given him and he merely didn't remember.

On the other hand, the pain had felt incredibly real. That tingle

inside his mind told him he needed to stop speculating and learn as much as possible as fast as possible, or else he would be in serious trouble, so he looked about.

Other cards lay scattered around. He picked up the next one nearest him, with a photo of a chip of purple crystal on it.

Naturally Occurring (Uncut) Amethyst

This card represents one small chip of amethyst as found in a mine or quarry. It glitters with the potential of knowledge, both freely allowed and forbidden.

It is worth approximately 15 coins.

Common

He wasn't certain what to do with this, so he turned his attention back toward the… magic battle. Whatever was happening inside the bubble was nearly at an end; the reddish orangey side was nearly finished enveloping the blue side, and several chains or tendrils of blurry stuff now held the single figure who had saved Ash's life with the blue shield dome of pure magic power.

As soon as the red orange power of the magic closed out all the bluish, the single figure, with his wrists and ankles ensnared by something Ash couldn't see clearly, screamed. That scream reverberated through blue magic shield, and shook trees. The mud dog splashed briefly into a puddle, then rose up to its regular shape and cast a quivering glance over at the ball of magic.

Something called **Even the Odds** had been cast. He wasn't sure how he knew that, or how the mage had cast it, but there was another thing he knew. The figure who had started off the fight in a blue dome of magic was indeed a mage, and a powerful one. Too powerful to guess his level.

Apparently mages had levels. This with another thing Ash knew instinctively. Acid trip or not (though he wasn't sure where he'd have gotten acid or done it, since he refused to do it in the first place) this was one hell of a sight to behold. Because the bubble of magic in which they'd been battling disappeared and everything got far

clearer. Clearer in a way Ash didn't like.

The seven other mages had been somehow reduced to one, but the mage who had saved Ash's life was still bound at the wrists, ankles, and the neck. They'd cast several spells of **binding** he didn't know the names of, which included a **silence** effect the blue mage was currently resisting, and **mana drain** to kill his ability to cast more cards.

Ash was astonished to realize he not only recognized those words, but understood their meaning. **Binding** was literal, and here meant to keep the mage from fleeing, while **silence** was trying to stop him from casting magic through the cards. **Mana drain** sought to empty the mage's reservoir of available power and return it to the red mages. A slight blue glow was being sucked from the one mage into the other.

"You're going to regret this," the red mage, "for a long, long time."

The blue mage began screaming, and Ash was astonished to discover the mage was a woman.

Ash didn't like bullies, and seven on one was clearly that, even if the blue mage had thinned out their numbers. She was clearly still going to lose this fight, which pissed off Ash even more. He gathered up all the cards inside the blue magic shield, and flipped through them in rapid order. He got a good twenty before a huge computer window enveloped and overcame everything in his vision.

<Welcome, New Player!>

2- Having Your Wishes More or Less Granted

Friday, Day 1

<So you've joined Darkheart, the Earth That Was, the fully immersive planetary game system of total domination! As your Guide, it's my job to acquaint you with the world of Darkheart. You'll have a lot of questions, but don't worry! So long as you're here with me, Guide, you're invisible and invulnerable. That pack of ravenous beasts over there can't detect you or harm you. So take your time with this tutorial, learn everything you can about Darkheart, and go forth with the courage to survive.>

<I see that this is your very first arrival into Darkheart, the Earth That Was. Your stats have been set to Beginner, Level 1. You will be able to select a class following this tutorial. To give you a fighting chance, you have been awarded one Full Revive card! I sure hope you don't need it! **wink**>

*You have received one **Full Revive** card!*

<Once you begin playing, every time you Revive, you'll have the opportunity to revisit me, your Guide, and create your character again, or bypass it as you wish. For now, we recommend watching the full tutorial.>

<Would you prefer to build an NPC character [stuck to a singular

location or vehicle, giver of quests, non-combatant] or a PC [free to roam and gain levels, take quests and face both perilous peril and rewarding rewards]? NPC/PC>

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<You've chosen PC! Great! All the world is your oyster. You're a mover, a shaker, a builder of stories and a hinge around which the events of the world turn.>

<Continue with PC character creation? If No, you will have a character randomly rolled for you, including a rare chance at . Y/N>

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<Great! Let's take a look at the tutorial! Here is an example of character creation.>

***

Ash read this in confusion, before a disembodied blue ghost

person appeared.

Now, he wasn't entirely certain how to classify this thing, somewhat like a genie had sex with Casper the friendly ghost and had a baby. It was chubby, with no legs, and a huge smile.

"Hi there, new player!"

"Uh... hi?"

"I'm in charge of your character creation. Oh, I see you've already consumed a card and advanced your Staves skill. Wow, you have a lot of cards already! Lucky you."

He wasn't really sure how to respond to this, so he went with, "Thanks?"

"You'll find that cards come in a series of rarities and types, starting with common and plain old art. The Architect modeled these after your CCG earth cards in order to speed the process of understanding along. Higher rarity is of course more desirable!" His very expressive face fell. "Unfortunately higher rarity cards will be locked until you gain sufficient level."

"Sufficient… level."

"You're Beginner, level 1! It's the lowest possible level, of course, because you haven't even made your character, silly. So of course anything with a level requirement will be beyond you."

"Wait wait wait, hold up," Ash said. "What's… are they… what's going on over there?" He cocked his thumb over toward the two mages, who were frozen in place.

"Time is presently frozen!" the Guide explained, dodging the question. "You will be safe here while you read up and make choices. Unfortunately we do not have forever to complete this character creation." A large digital timer appeared over the two mages, ticking down from fifteen minutes. "Once the timer expires, outside time will resume."

That made sense. "Okay then, what's the first step?"

"You'll want to choose your race, gender, and class."

"Choose… my race."

“Yes!” The genie ghost chirped, as if this was the most natural thing in the world.

“Like… my choice. Not chosen at birth.”

“Your departure from this character selection will be akin to your birth. Any time you use a revive card, you will return here!”

Ash felt a little allergic to the bubbly being and wanted out of here soon. He wanted to go help out that blue mage, if that was at all possible. Figure out what had happened to Ashley, and bury her if necessary. Find his parents and make sure they were safe. Ditto some of his friends.

“So… race then.”

The Guide nodded enthusiastically. “Select your race.”

“Wait… can I change my name?”

The Guide paused. “I believe you can.”

In the end he decided to stick with Ash. It was a type of wood, which elves did. They were forest-ey people, he thought. He’d played Spellcraft: World Dominion as an orc and an undead, so he knew a bit about elves and all this fantasy stuff.

“Ash… Phoenix?” the Guide asked.

Ash Phoenix sounded a bit too edgelord, but he decided to go with it anyhow.

He had wasted time. “Okay. Race?”

Race and gender had a wild variance of importance and complexity, at first glance. When races appeared, they did so with gender options. The first were humans in a variety of skin colors, essentially what you would expect from all the different peoples of earth. These were dressed in crude fur bikinis, the males in loincloths. Next to the line up read:

Human

*specialize in land-dwelling and seafaring classes, not adapted to night or underground.

*no class restrictions or favored classes, though humans are slow in pure magic classes. Most humans naturally favor channeling

innate mana into special abilities and attacks.

*balanced Attribute spread, but low Lucky and Sly Attributes

*mammalian: typically male or female

Okay it felt strange to have restrictions on humans. Every video game Ash had ever played gave humans basically nothing special, and made them "adaptable" with heavy air quotes, so you could make humans into anything.

And low in Lucky? What was with that?

The next was Half Elf, which Ash stopped at for a second. This spectrum of half-elves implied elves had sex with—and made babies with—all kinds of other races. There was a half-elf half-dwarf, half-elf and half-orc, half-elf and half-human, half-elf and half-nellwyn, and others. This hit a little too close to home, so he said fuck that. The only thing he caught before he went to Elf was 'very low in Lucky' on the Attribute mention. Nope, hell with that.

Ash wasn't high on patience, and was on a timer, so he flipped through the next several races without reading much about them. He went through Elf, Dwarf, Orc, and Half-Orc in rapid succession, before getting to the little people races: Gnome, Half-Gnome, Nellwyn and Half-nellwyn. Several others existed here but were grayed out: Avian, Drow, Felinian, Sylphaen, Cephellian, Naiadic, Volcashic, Dragonite, Orren, Golemite, and the list went on.

Avians were humans with bird heads and wings, which was mildly disturbing based solely on the gigantic sparrow head staring at him. Drow was like an elf but gray of skin, and he'd heard his friends talking about them from books. Felinian was a cat person, just a girl with cat ears, a tail, and a thin layer of fur in your typical cat patterns: tiger, lion, leopard, and jaguar came first. Sylphaen was a cloud person, Cephellian was like a jellyfish and a cuttlefish first had sex, then tried to be a humanoid, Naiadic was just water but in humanoid form, Volcashic…

Ash's eyes widened.

The Volcashic looked like someone had taken a bunch of lava, obsidian, and volcanic rock, and just slapped it together to form a

person. There was only one, with the gender being asexual, but more grayed out ones showed a Volcashic mixed with a Sylphaen, a Naiadic, or an Orren.

Orren was a golem person. Or a person made of rocks, with gems instead of facial hair and fingernails. The one he looked at briefly had no hair, but instead crude features and chips of crystal for eyes. And there was Golemite, but he was running out of time. He only had ten and a half minutes to go.

"You won't be able to choose any of those until you level up, grab an achievement, die, or ascend to a higher existence!" The chipper tutorial genie said.

"I guess not," he mused, wanting to ask a lot more questions but also wanting to get on with this. He headed back to the basic ones.

Elf

*specialize in land-dwelling and cloudfaring classes, not adapted to seafaring or underground

*no class restrictions or favored classes, though elves are quick to learn magic and channel mana into spells. Few elves specialize in heavy martial classes, favoring dexterity over strength

*balanced Attribute spread with boosted Attuned, but low Fierce and Tough Attributes

*mammalian: typically male or female

A lot going on here, including 'cloudfaring classes' being a thing, Attuned probably being linked to the elf affinity for magic. We now had Attuned, Fierce, Lucky, Sly and Tough as Attributes. He also found mention of Clever, Charming, and Quick. That seemed to be it.

Dwarf had boosted Tough but lower Sly. Nellwyn had a whole lot of boosted Attributes, including Charming, Lucky, Quick, and Sly, but 'much lower' Tough and Fierce than other races. Gnome was pretty similar, having higher Attuned, Charming, and Quick, but much lower Tough and Fierce. Orcs had enhanced Fierce and Tough, but had lowered Clever, Lucky and Sly.

Environments were a thing, where Dwarves favored underground

and land-dwelling, but weren't suited to seafaring or cloudfaring lifestyles. Gnomes had no favorites, which was interesting. They could live literally anywhere.

All these were mammalian, and basically all of them had **male** and **female** as the two choices.

It was all pretty overwhelming, so Ash just chose what seemed cool. He went with elf, and because he was a male, chose male.

Ashley Phoenix
Elf, male, unclassed Beginner- level 1
Attributes:
Attuned- (Beginner level 3)
Charming- (Beginner level 2)
Clever- (Beginner level 3)
Fierce- (Beginner level 1)
Lucky- (Beginner level 2)
Quick- (Beginner level 2)
Sly- (Beginner level 2)
Tough- (Beginner level 1)
Skills:
Staves- (Beginner level 2)
All other skills- unranked
Free points: 3 Attribute levels, 5 Skill levels
Elf Abilities: Keen Senses, Mana Attunement, Ageless

He took a look at the skill list first, which he hadn't yet seen, then glanced at the clock. Okay, five minutes and fifty-five seconds.

The list of skills was as odd as it was short. On one hand, he enjoyed its simplicity, but on the other, he really wanted it to be clearer.

Skills:
Cups

Wands
Staves (Beginner level 2)
Coins
Swords
Arcana
Hearts
Clubs
Diamonds
Spades

"What do each of the skills do?" he asked, not willing to spend his free points until he had some information. The Attributes seemed mostly clear: Fierce was for attacking people and doing damage. Sly was for tricking people. Probably in social terms but maybe also sneaking around, hiding in the shadows, stuff like that. Attuned… magic. Elves were high in mana and magic, and he'd gotten a level 3 in Attuned. So magic.

Skills were very unclear.

The genie ghost waved its hand and little explanations appeared next to each of the skills, blotting out his level in Staves. He got as far as Wands before he realized this could all be done later, he needed time to go through classes

Skills:

Cups- principally used for socializing and carousing with large numbers of people. Also includes endurance when dealing with toxins. *How far into your cups can you get?*

Wands- principally used for knowing the right course and potential consequences of actions. Also useful for resisting magic effects and cutting through the magic resistances of others. *How long is your wand, hero?*

Staves- principally used for knowhow, and using your brain to perform crafty actions. Also useful when navigating long distances. *Grab your staff and let's hit the road.*

He snorted at the odd innuendo jokes in the write up, then waved his hands. "Okay, let's move on. I'll look at this later."

"Of course! You have chosen elf, male."

Ashley, his girlfriend and probably deceased ex-girlfriend, caused him to avoid turning himself into a sexy female elf. Deep down, he was a guy. He'd never go with a female character.

Maybe once he revived after being killed. That sounded both interesting and terrifying. He didn't especially want to be killed, and find out what the revive felt like, or what happened.

On the other hand, it did say he'd come back to life…

Better not chance it. Live as long as possible, hardcore mode, and jump off that bridge when he came to it.

It wouldn't be long before that bridge arrived, and he wasn't going to be jumping off it, but he'd instead be thrown off it.

He would have gone through the classes with care as well, but he was running out of freeze time time. Besides, he was only given three choices: Caster, Adventurer, and Specialist. The Guide wasn't exactly helpful in this regard.

"Your class may change depending on your deck," it explained.

Ash wanted to know if there was any way to help the woman who'd saved his life, and didn't press the issue.

"Casters typically become Wizards, Sorcerers, Warlocks… classes that rely on a high mana pool, channeling mana into direct magical effects. Some Casters who pursue the divine will become Clerics or Healers. These will be low in health and focused intently on spellcasting. Adventurers are more martial focused and will usually level up into Tanks (called Knights here), Barbarians, Rangers, or Monks. While they have higher health and stamina, and deal damage through the use of weapons or special attacks, they have a low mana pool and can be outplayed by certain spells or abilities. The third class is the most various. Specialists rely on skill use to support Adventurers or keep the focus off Casters. They have an even distribution of health, mana or stamina and branch quickly off into a more focused class, such as Bard, Rogue, Assassin, Ranger,

Druid, and many others."

A lot of things weren't clear: one, how one went from being, say, an Adventurer into a Barbarian, which sounded awesome. Two, whether he could change his mind when he discovered an awesome spell card or something. He supposed that's what the death and Revive cards were for, which still freaked him out.

"You have two minutes remaining, Ash Phoenix. Which class will you select?"

"Let's do an adventurer," he said, and immediately regretted it. Specialist sounded incredibly useful… and this was a new environment in which he might need to be useful in a different way at every turn. Then again, Casters could theoretically get a spell for everything. Spellcasters in Spellcraft were incredibly powerful at later levels.

It was too late. Right next to his name, race, and gender, the word **Adventurer** now faded into being. Another box appeared below his Attributes and his lone Skill, an Inventory. It was a four by eight square grid he was familiar with from Spellcraft. Adventurer's clothing, a backpack, dagger, short bow, quiver with arrows, and a buckler about a foot in diameter were all inside.

"Would you prefer a sword, axe, mace or spear?" Guide asked.

"Uh… axe?" His thought: it could cut wood. And if he was going to be a barbarian, he'd need a badass axe.

The one that suddenly existed in his inventory was not the worst, but was essentially a woodsman's axe with a bit of extra blade at the bottom, like a hook. He reached out and grabbed the axe from his inventory, and it became an object in his hand. He put it back, and it took up a three by one square section of his inventory. He placed his stack of cards in there, and they hung in one of the empty squares remaining.

"Huh," he said, showing off a certain level of genius.

"Your time has expired, Ash Phoenix!" Guide said.

He had about a thousand more questions, but time resumed. It resumed hard.

***

The woman who had saved Ash's life began screaming again, while the man in charge of her torture began laughing. Grabbing out a card from apparently the back of his shirt, the red mage tossed it up into the air. It hung there for just a moment before exploding into a portal of swirling red purple magic. The card was called **Portal to Nowhere** and it was too high level for Ash to know the specifics, but it was at very least Rare, because a hovering bit of text explained that he was able to identify cards at either Common or Uncommon rarity, but not Rare or higher.

As for the portal itself, the whole thing had to be a large oval shape a good five meters high but perhaps three or four meters across. Beyond the ring of maroon and magenta energy, Ash could make out a castle. A floating castle with a bunch of floating islands surrounding it, each with a guard tower standing on it.

All the bindings keeping the mage woman prisoner snapped into the man's hand, and when he wrenched on them, the woman screamed out loud.

The red mage cast a glance over at Ash.

"Guess this is your origin story, kid. Don't go after the end boss in the tutorial, right? That's how you get yourself killed off in the first two minutes of play."

How in the—

"Endricor," the woman gasped, her eyes locked on Ash's. The red mage frowned and flicked another card at her, this one called **Magus Quietus**, which wrapped her mouth up in more magical bindings. Even more blue magic surged out of her and into the red mage.

"Make yourself a challenge and come get me some day, kid," he said, and yanked. "Looking forward to a good fight."

The woman had been floating a foot or two off the ground, bound up in magic ropes, but those all wrenched her through the portal and out of sight. He winked, and stepped through the **Portal**

to Nowhere, which rapidly dissolved down into nothing.

Not yet seven in the morning on a Friday, and already he had to deal with a dead girlfriend, a damsel in distress, and becoming an elf.

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