

Ain't A Hero – Episode 16

by Bryan Schuder

Bach brushes his fingers through his long brown hair and tilts his head back into a yawn. He rubs the remaining traces of sleep from his blue eyes and pauses a moment as he spots a stray gray hair hanging prominently in front his eyes. He switches his focus between the gray hair and white hairs part of his normal streak. With a quick clamp of the fingers and pluck, he tosses the gray hair off to the side and returns his attention to his bowl of cereal on the dining table. “Damn, it’s been FOREVER since I binged on Zone Runners.”

Kaleb loses a fight against an infectious yawn and shakes his head afterwards. He scoops up a spoonful of cereal from his bowl and holds it midway up. “No shit. That was nice. Wish I could have stayed up longer.”

Bach shrugs, chews a few times before swallowing, and nods his head back to the coffee table. “Well, that third run was too good to risk sleep deprivation on. I think it was better we saved it for later.”

Kaleb nods in agreement and cracks a slight grin. “Well, it gives me a reason to stop on by again.”

Sebastian floats in through the kitchen door and drifts out to near the dining table. He glances to Bach and Kaleb and then eyes behind at the kitchen door with an amused smirk. “Despite how big he’s gotten, Lagi is still the spoiled little dragon we used to chase around the campus.”

With a snort, Kaleb shakes his head of blonde hair and rests his spoon into his cereal bowl. “Well he’s still just as thrilled about baths as he ever was, too. What is he getting into, anyway?”

Sebastian scratches his chin and briefly pivot towards the kitchen door before returning his focus to Bach and Kaleb. “Oh, he’s doing a bunch of tricks for pieces of jerky.”

Kaleb rolls his eyes and sighs with a partial smile on a side of his face. “Can’t believe he’s even thinking about treats after all he drank yesterday.”

Bach perks an eye brow and stares at Kaleb. “What DID he drink? In fact, what ARE you feeding him these days?”

A chuckle erupts from Kaleb as he eyes Bach with a sinister grin. “Used cooking oil. Leftovers. Whatever plants that aren’t part of the landscaping. Small children that get lost in the woods. But, mostly used cooking oil when doing long flights.”

Bach blinks a moment, drifts into a long thought, but eventually nods in a strange acceptance. “You know. I’m really not that surprised. After a few of the things I’ve seen him eat... or at least attempt to.”

Sebastian crosses his arms and widens his eyes as another memory arrives at the front of his mind. “Especially after the synth diesel incident... That residential director was PISSED.”

Kaleb rests back into his chair with a smile. “Well, his stomach hasn’t gotten anymore indestructible and destructive. Shadeesa keeps track of his nutrition for anything he needs. But after all my research, those Pre-Cataclysm scientists covered all the bases for all the biological basics when it comes to Lagi’s ancestors. He just needs a food source dense in energy and his metabolism will do the rest. Just mapping out the digestive processes going on will probably get me enough material for my doctorate.”

Bach sweeps the bottom of the bowl with his spoon for the remaining milk and cereal, and looks to Kaleb. “Does he still eat rocks?”

A low grumble sounds out from Kaleb and lifts his hands up into the air. “Occasionally. I kind of wish he would stick with that instead of what he’s been doing lately.”

Bach places the spoon into his bowl with a slight clink and focuses on Kaleb. “Shrubs?”

Kaleb groans and throws his head back. He sways his head shoulder to shoulder with annoyance and drops his into a hanging nod. “YES. Gods... Shadeesa was out picking some wild berries with Lagi following her around. She fed him a few and went inside. Well, let’s just say the next morning there were A LOT of uprooted half-eaten bushes and shrubs in the area.”

He props his arms upon the tabletop and rests his head between his hands with an unamused expression. “He’s on this one dragon quest to find other tasty shrubs, bushes, and hedges. Thankfully, most places I stop at are willing to overlook their landscaping getting eaten and are quite happy with the free disposal of cooking oil and customers a dragon attracts.”

The kitchen door opens up to reveal Sotalia and she steps forward to the refrigerator. Wearing confusion fighting contemplation upon her face, she opens the fridge open, retrieves a plastic bottle of a fruit flavored shake, and strides over to the dining table. With a firm grasp, she pulls back the chair, sits down, quaffs some of the fruit shake, and eyes Bach, Kaleb, and Sebastian. “Okay. That dragon outside is unlike any I’ve ever read about or seen. Let’s start with the basics. How the hell did a biology student get a dragon?!”

Kaleb blinks and bites the lip around the corner his mouth. He takes a long breath in. “Well. Here’s the quick version. I needed to take an elective at the last minute to keep my scholarships. There was this selected topics course in dragon biology. Turns out it was mostly military guys taking the course for credit, so they meet requirements to ride dragons. I was really the only one interested in the details of the biology, and the professor and I got to know each other. Due to the death of mother dragon, there was a clutch of eggs and I got one. Bach, Sebastian, Shadeesa, and I hatched it and raised Lagi during his early years. Now, he’s a big dragon and I’m furthering a whole new field of study.”

Sotalia pauses in thought, narrows her eyes, and points at Kaleb. “Okay. First question of many. Who the fuck was your professor that even had ACCESS to dragon egg that could spawn a beast like Lagi and even give it to you?!”

Another long breath pulls into Kaleb's lungs and he grits his teeth into a wary smile anticipating Sotalia's reaction. "Well, a Commander Blaureiter."

A distant gaze takes hold of Sotalia face as her recognition of the name solidifies in her mind. She pulls her head back slightly, refocuses upon Kaleb, and her eyes widen. "Wait... The? Commander Blaureiter?!"

Bach nods slightly and looks around to everyone else before settling on Sotalia. "I guess. He didn't care to be called commander most of the time. He really liked professor more."

Sotalia slowly and firmly rubs the temples of her head before sliding her hands through her dark red hair into a grab on each of her black horns. "Are you- Really?! You guys know Commander Blaureiter?!"

Her vision locks onto the floating ethereal visage of Sebastian and she snaps her face to a glare right at him. "Why the FUCK didn't you EVER tell me this?!"

Sebastian darts his eyes to either side of him, drifts back a bit, and throws his arms up in the air. "It never came up! I didn't know you were a fan of his! We just treated him like a good friend most of the time and really awesome guy for teaching us how to take care Lagi."

Kaleb glances at Bach, who returns the glance, and both share a bit of wary trepidation. Kaleb sighs and works his mouth to a firm smile. "I got to know Blaureiter. He was very interested in having an honest student for once and I learned a lot about the Pre-Cataclysm, First Period, and Second Period histories when it came to dragon biology. I even got to meet... Blaureiter's dragon..."

Sotalia's jaw slowly drops and shock claims her face as all the other possible expressions are too dumbfounded to act. With a quick head shake she regains her senses and gazes at Kaleb with a genuine interest. "By the gods... You met the Night Terror."

Kaleb nods, exhales as memories arise in his mind, and squirms a bit in his seat. "Yes. That was quite a harrowing experience. Just the stare she gave me the whole time. But, as Blaureiter said, she was just being defensive of her eggs."

With a flit of her golden eyes, Sotalia straightens herself in the seat and floats her hand to point towards the kitchen door. "Wait... No..."

She bounces her gaze to the door and gathering of Bach, Kaleb, and Sebastian a number of times. "That goofy, playful, child-like dragon, through that very door and just outside the garage, is the son of THE Night Terror?!"

Bach, Kaleb, and Sebastian exchange glances, eventually direct their attentions to Sotalia, and nod in unison. Sotalia sinks back into her chair and drifts her gaze around. "The Night Terror. A winged weapon of mass destruction. A creature that once broke out of her military containment to destroy a twenty kilometer stretch of anti-air batteries, because she felt insulted that one took a shot at her."

She covers her mouth in thought, pulls her grasp down to her chin, and eyes Kaleb. "I just can't believe it. The terror that took both the arms of Commander Blaureiter and could breathe fire so hot it melted stone... But, wait!"

She pivots in the chair and leans towards Kaleb, narrowing her eyes. "I remember reading about The Night Terror's death! A positive lightning strike in a maelstrom? They said all four of her eggs were donated to different nations' research facilities as part of an old peace treaty."

With a nod, Kaleb agrees with Sotalia and stares at her. "She broke out of containment in a strange fit and she wanted to get out for some reason. And when flying around, she got hit with positively charged, magic empowered lightning strike."

He pushes back into his chair with a serious expression. "She was dead and her first clutch was in trouble. They couldn't find another dragon to tend her nest. Most fled in sheer terror when they caught scent of it."

Sotalia rests her elbow on the table top, props her head up with the back of her hand, and ponders in thought. "But, most attempts to hatch an egg without a parent usually results in a pseudo-dragon or whelp."

Kaleb twists his mouth and grumbles. "Yes. But, I had a theory. Many younger breeds of dragon have various genetic and magical protections to prevent stolen eggs from becoming viable weapons. A few protections even manipulated genetics, so you couldn't really copy anything useful. It was very common in the second Post-Cataclysm period."

He places both elbows on the table, intertwines his fingers, and rests his chin on his hands. "For what she was she HAD to be descended from a much older, untouched bloodline. And, I bet the mate she found during her two week absence from a previous escape was from an equally old bloodline."

He lifts his head up, separates his hands, and grins deviously. "So, before the authorities came to take count and claim the eggs, I asked Blaureiter for the fifth one."

A few stray red hairs fall down off Sotalia's horn as she tilts her head to the side. She quickly sweeps them back over the horn and raises a very curious eyebrow. "Fifth? But, all the news outlets and government reports said there were four."

Kaleb slowly nods with a proud grin. "I know. And, I had the fifth one. So, there was only four left."

He takes a long breath in with a smile and explains. "I theorized there was a good chance those eggs didn't have all the biological protections and could be hatched into proper dragons without a parent. So, I explained my theory to Blaureiter and he agreed. When the officials came, they took the decorated war hero's word, since he was also the only person who could have ever gotten close enough to count the eggs. They continued to believe him well after they never found him caring for an egg or running around with a dragon hatchling. After a year, they never really checked further. And since each nation part of the peace treaty got one egg, no one really cared."

Bach chuckles with a smirk and tilts his head back. “Those were some crazy months. Still remember keeping that big egg between Sebastian and me on the couch when we played video games.”

Sebastian crosses his arms with a smile and floats down to a seat upon a chair. “That freak winter storm, too. Heaters couldn’t keep up and we nearly destroyed the clothes dryer warming blankets to cover someone while they held the egg.”

Sotalia blinks and covers her agape mouth. A wicked grin settles down onto her lips. “If the results weren’t outside in the front yard, I would never believe this. Your theory was correct, he hatched to proper dragon.”

Kaleb snorts and draws a long breath with a tight smile. “Well, turns out hatching was only the first part... The easy part. The stories to be told and the many to never be told.”

Bach coughs, leans next to Kaleb, and speaks out the side of his mouth. “By the way, did that sorority ever stop hating us for when Lagi chewed up all their laundry?”

Scratching the stubble on his cheek, Kaleb laughs with a roll of the eyes. “Yes. Eventually. When Lagi got big enough to walk people around on his back, I helped with a few fund raisers. Plus, they thought he was pretty charming when he wasn’t trying to eat elastic out of their underwear.”

Sebastian draws a wicked grin and sighs in pleasant remembrance. “I’d had almost forgotten how much attention I got when taking little Lagi out for walks. So easy.”

Bach eyes Sebastian across the table. “And so many numbers?”

Sebastian shrugs with an upward, guilty glance. “Well... You know. When they come to you.”

Aristespha squints her eyes into the distance over the tree tops of the forest next to the field. “I think I see them. It looks like they’re coming this way.”

She lifts up her arm and points out a huge creature flapping his large wings. Lagi speeds over the green canopy, the sounds of the forest intermittent through the rustles of leaves. He clears the forest into the open field near the house and aims himself to an area next to the picnic table. Bach, Aristespha, Sotalia, and Sebastian wave to the passengers riding the dragon. Lagi opens his wings out wide just short of the landing zone and air brakes to a gentle drop upon the ground, his claws grasping the grass as they make contact below. Kaleb pats Lagi on the side. “Alright. You’ve terrorized them enough, left them off.”

Lagi crouches down onto the ground. Cideeda quickly dismounts from behind Kaleb with a graceful landing and springs up with exuberant excitement with her hands up in the air above her head. “That was AMAZING! I can’t believe you do that for a living!”

Kaleb turns his head back towards Dretphi with a concerned smile. "You need any help? Lagi can squeeze down a bit more if you need it."

White knuckled hands release from handles on the large harness rig on Lagi's back and Dretphi slowly and purposefully draws in wary breaths of air with careful exhales. She guides her blonde braids roughly back with a free hand and blinks her wide gray eyes. Her calm, stoic demeanor reassembles itself bit by bit and she eventually shakes her head. "No. I will be fine. I can step down. Thank you for your concern."

She finally relaxes the muscles in her legs, lifts one over with a pivot in the saddle, and slides cautiously down to the ground. Steps stagger as she directs her body towards the picnic table bench. Sotalia walks to her side, pats her back, and holds her hand. Sotalia's amusement breaches into her smile, fighting to be a grin. "You screamed A LOT."

Dretphi nods slowly and gently places herself onto the bench with Sotalia's guidance. Kaleb hops down onto the grass and pats Lagi again. "You okay, Dretphi? I'm sorry, he's a bit of a show off with new people."

Dretphi rests her hand on her chest and takes another long slow breath. She cracks a grin and turns her head to Kaleb. "I am okay. Despite my outbursts. I had an absolutely exhilarating time."

Kaleb laughs, puts his hands on his hips, and gives Dretphi quick wink with a sly smile. "Well? Want to go again?"

Lagi cranes his head around Kaleb and gazes at Dretphi as toothy smile draws itself upon the open mouth of the dragon. Slow, careful airflow halts midway before it resumes and Dretphi's grin shrinks to a nervous smile as her eyes flit wide open. "Another time. Eventually."

Cideeda dons a toothy grin and struts around with a flex in each step. "How much do you usually charge for that long of flight?"

A loud snort comes from Kaleb and he chuckles out loud. "Multiple thirty minute rides?! I should show the price list Shadeesa wrote up. You should see the ten minute cost alone."

Kaleb feels his shirt pocket, flips the flap, and retrieves his aetherphone. "Speaking of... Her ears must have been burning."

With a tap on a screen button, Shadeesa's bright green on black eyes, white freckles on her gray face, and upward swept horns appear on the screen. "Hey! Good. I caught you before you left. It looks clear today, by the way. I also looked up on the guild system and found an aerial survey job on your way back."

With a quick nod, Kaleb rotates the phone screen out to everyone else. "Sounds good. Just got done doing a few flights with everybody, so Lagi is ready to go."

Shadeesa waves with a glowing smile to everyone through the screen. "Hey everybody! I'm glad you got a chance to fly. Unfortunately, I need them back now. You know how it is."

Aristepsha perks an eyebrow, lifts a tablet off the picnic table, and steps over next to Kaleb. “So you two are in the guild system? Would you mind sending me your ID number? I’ll send you ours.”

With few taps on another device off screen, Shadeesa returns forward to the camera and Aristespha’s tablet chimes. “I completely forgot! If we see any work near us, we’ll definitely let you know.”

Bach crosses his arms and eyes Kaleb with a quizzical expression. “So, what types of missions do you take from the guild?”

Kaleb’s eyes search his mind and he twists his mouth in thought. “Ah... Well... Mostly surveying, aerial photography, and exploration near weird zones. Nothing too crazy. Just flying around. Occasionally, we get search and rescue. The nice thing is that Lagi can go where a lot of planes, helicopters, and drones have problems without any trouble.”

He scratches underneath Lagi’s chin. Lagi purrs lowly, closes his eyes, and angles his head to guide Kaleb’s hand to the right spot. Kaleb shakes his head with a smile and gazes back over to the rest of the group. “That’s the nice thing about creature that can manipulate magical flow and put up defensive barriers. So, those contracts pay pretty good. There’s even a good market for delivery to remote locations. I once delivered food to a science team researching some hard to reach mountains.”

With a final pat on Lagi’s head, Kaleb rolls his shoulders in a stretch, and straightens up his posture. “So, we are totally exploiting the big goofball.”

Lagi’s attention shifts to a number of small bushes nearby. A long sigh comes from the aetherphone speaker and Shadeesa lowers her head with a bit of embarrassment. “Showing Lagi off pays the bills really well. Hopefully, in the future, I’ll get my veterinary practice set up, and we’ll live off that. And let Lagi, just be Lagi.”

She rolls her eyes with a shrug and tight smile. “But, I can’t ignore how much people are willing to pay to be near a dragon that won’t attempt to eat them at first sight and who knows a bunch of cute tricks. Anyway, Lagi doesn’t seem to mind it at all. Oh! That reminds me! Kaleb?”

Kaleb pivots the phone to his face with a curious look. “Yes?”

Shadeesa’s voice cheers up and she clasps her hands in front her. “The convention we’re scheduled for? I checked the location again, and it’s nearby Amaranth valley! We’ll be in the area this coming weekend!”

Everyone exchanges cheerful looks and interest grows. Bach smiles and eyes Kaleb. “Well, I guess we’ll have to go now. We’ll HAVE to see your act.”

A groan of comedic dread emanates from Kaleb as he looks up to the skies and lets his arms droop down. “Oh gods. Be warned, I’ll be wearing an old knight’s costume.”

His glare locates Bach and Sebastian, and alternatives his focus between them. “If you can keep the peanut gallery commentary to a minimum, I would REALLY appreciate it.”

Shadeesa voice calls out from the phone with playful defensiveness. “Hey! I think you look good wearing shining armor. And, I really love my princess dress. Unfortunately, it’ll probably be the last time, for a while, I’ll be able to fit in it. So, I want to enjoy it while I can.”

Sebastian lets out an ethereal snort and gazes at with genuinely happy smile. “Well, we’ll definitely try to make it out. With a dragon there, I might actually stand out the least for once.”

Kaleb glances over at the phone screen and holds it out one last time. “Okay. I’d better get up in the air. Say bye, Shadeesa.”

On the screen Shadeesa waves through the screen. Kaleb aims the screen at his face and grows a loving smile as he watches the screen. “See you in a few. Love you.”

A softer tone of Shadeesa’s comes through the phone speaker. “Love you, too.”

Before the connection closes, Shadeesa quickly drops in one last remark. “Oh! Don’t forget the stop by somewhere and get some milk! Breakfast was really rough this morning.”

Kaleb give a simple, confirming nod with a wink, and presses the close button on the screen. He walks up the group, shakes hands, and exchanges goodbyes. A loud crunch and a series of snaps gets everyone’s attention. Lagi swings his head back and lifts it up, with a number of small branches and leaves filling his mouth. Kaleb grumbles and musters his parental prowess. “Lagi! Spit it out now!”

In the front yard of a two-story house, camera crews move about and keep their attentions upon Chad, Tassilda, Deedri, Trakenthin, and Modoran. Chad carefully combs his coiffed light brown hair, adjusts his collared, down-down shirt, and brushes off his designer blue jeans. As the camera man levels the tilt of the camera and pans the aim over, Chad almost instinctively assumes a heroic pose and makes sure his well defined, tanned physique hints through his clothes. A boom mic finds its way in the air space above Chad. Samantha emerges from the mass of crew, inspects the scene, checks her clipboard, and points to Chad. “In three. Two. One.”

With a final wag of the finger, Samantha signals Chad and he directs his gaze right at the camera. He takes in a long breath, places his hands on his sides, and puffs his chest out. “I have been thinking greatly about how to improve our group. I, along with my party, have the talent. We have the burning desire for adventure that only the Flames of the Phoenix can show to the world. But, I thought... We are still lacking something.”

Chad casually, but purposefully, struts over towards a shiny, new, and black sport utility vehicle. He pivots slowly, rests his hand upon the front fender, and straighten his posture. Brown eyes lead the rest of his face to the camera and present a wink with a gleaming, white smile. A near seductive undertone hints within Chad’s voice. “And, I figured it out. What

better thing for a promising adventuring party to have than a means of transportation befitting them. When the quests come in, we need the ability to venture out to them... In style."

Behind the camera crew facing Chad, another team maintains a watchful focus upon the other Flames of the Phoenix members standing underneath the front porch overhang. Modoran rests his back against the front door frame with his arms crossed and rolls his dark blue eyes away from Chad's monologue. He lightly taps the back of his short, white haired head against the door frame in a futile attempt to distract himself, feigns an arm stretch to cover his long, dusky bluish gray ears, and mumbles to himself. "We get it, Chad. It's a fucking nice car. Can you stop the info dump and take us somewhere in it?"

A furry, tuft tipped ear perks away from Modoran and Deedri glances over with her auburn eyes, as a long braid of red, white, blonde, and tan hair slides from her shoulder. The medium length fur on her long, tapered tail brushes against the other side of the door frame underneath her skirt. She holds her claw-tipped hands together in front of her on her blouse, breaths in long, and releases a hopeful sigh. "Well, I'm just happy we'll have a working air conditioner. Those vans were pretty dreadful."

Tassilda tosses back her raven black hair around her swirling backward pointing horns, narrows her blue on black eyes at Chad, and raises a brow. She places her thick, black nailed hands on her hips and shifts her shapely figure into a more revealing posture. With a quick pass, she adjusts the waistband of her tight fitting yoga pants and arches her back just enough to reveal more gray, patterned skin through her equally conforming top. She cocks her head to the side with a slight sneer, as her small pointy ears break through her hair. "So, I have to ask. Is there a Grath word for... this... display?"

Dark bronze arms flex their muscles while Trakenthin keeps his arms crossed. His hazel eyes leads the rest of his face to look down at Tassilda, the sunlight reflecting off and through his short styled, dirty blonde hair. He quirks a brow and slowly returns his gaze ahead. Muscles idly flex upon his large, very muscular frame through his gym shorts and tank top, many small scars apparent upon his arms and legs. With a grunt and tug of the corner of his mouth, he directs his voice to Tassilda. "Yes. It translates. Large surrogate manhood."

Tassilda cracks a sly smile and crosses her arms with a lift underneath her ample cleavage. "You will HAVE to teach it to me. Chad doesn't know Grath."

Samantha calls out to the camera crews and members standing on the porch. "That's good. I want some promo photos of the SUV right now. Alpha Crew, I need you to setup inside around the table for mission planning."

Modoran slowly rises his face towards the heavens and closes his eyes in grim anticipation with a groan. "Gods, what I wouldn't give for something to come up to put that off. My aetherphone is still charging."

Deedri's ear flicks and she blinks. She takes a step forward and squints up to the skies with hand shielding the sun from her eyes, as her ears scan above. A loud, low shriek cries out distantly from above. Gerald immediately freezes and then hoists his camera up to the sky, frantically making adjustments as he searches the sky. Another similar shriek starts but abruptly halts with sickening hacks and retches. Deedri's curious puzzlement tinged with

disgust and she places her hand over her mouth. Faint, low powerful sounding thumps of air resonate from above in a strange pattern. The distant hacks and retches continue with wet gurgling and loaded coughs punctuating the moments between. The noise visibly upsets the crew and hampers their desire to find the source. Tassilda pulls a frown heavy by the corners of her mouth, places a hand firm upon her chest, and exhales fighting nausea. "Oh. My. Gods. What is that?! It almost sounds like when one of my mother's cats hacks up a hairball."

Trakenthin curls a lip in a snarl and grits into a frown as he scans the area. "It reminds me. When my dogs would vomit a bone."

With a sudden final, muted retch, the sickening noises stop and the thumps of air fade away. Modoran's eyes dart around and he puzzles the situation even more. "Well, it's stopped. But, I don't know if that's a good thing."

Deedri's ears lock onto a strange new source of sound and mumbles to herself with odd bewilderment. "A whistling... Getting louder?!"

An explosive, wet splat echoes out, as a spray of viscous, gel erupts outwards from the hood of the shiny, new, black sports utility vehicle. Bits of glossy matter plaster the hood and windshield of the vehicle along with many people nearby. Crew members examine themselves to see what now resides upon their bodies. Samantha lowers the clipboard from her face and inspects herself to find nothing. She glances at Chad in front of her. He glares distantly, an absolutely unamused expression in full control of his face. With a gradual pivot, he beholds the minor disaster behind him. A gelatinous mess of mucus, chewed up leaves, and small gnawed branches coats the front of the sports utility vehicle. The now not-so-new, questionably shiny, green on black sports utility vehicle. A similar pattern stains the back of Chad.

Deedri blinks in sheer astonishment as she keeps her mouth covered by both her hands. Modoran hangs his jaw open absolutely speechless and only manages a wide-eyed stare at the scene. Tassilda lifts one arm up, places the hand in front of her mouth, and gazes in wonderment, her eyes scanning the devastation. Trakenthin tilts his head to the side, then sways it to the other side. A grin rips across his mouth and he erupts into a booming guffaw. Chad's back straightens and he spins in place with a hand pointing quickly to Trakenthin. "Shut the fuck up, Trakenthin! I REALLY don't need your shit right now!"

Camera crews quickly clean their lenses, find their new marks, and ready themselves. Trakenthin continues his laughter and only pauses to call out to Chad. "Correct! You have plenty now!"

A low growl crawls out from Chad's mouth and ceases as a devious grin overtakes his face. "Well. Since YOU are so amused by this, MAYBE, as party leader, I should task with you cleaning it up! We'll see how amused you are afterwards. I did pay for this for the group, and you've been slacking on your chores!"

Trakenthin crosses his arms tightly, puffs out his chest, and dons a defiant sneer. "I will NOT clean."

Chad puffs out his chest in response, narrows his eyes at Trakenthin, and tilts his head back. "That's probably for the best. Given how much you stink most the time, I think it'd be worse off."

Tassilda fails to contain herself and a titter escapes her lips. Chad snaps his head in her direction and puts forth a mean grin with a condescending tone. "Well, Tassilda... You have any 'useful' tricks for this or are you just going to stand there and let everyone else do the work?"

Tassilda places her hands firmly on her hips, levels a death glare at Chad, and growls out to him. "I'm sorry! Maybe if our glorious leader could pick missions better, we wouldn't be in situations facing creatures without minds to charm! You have an Enchantress! Not a—"

Chad interrupts quickly and dismisses the rest of what Tassilda plans on saying. "Useful mage? I'm fully aware of that, along with everyone else!"

Tassilda marches out to Chad, swearing in her native tongue. Trakenthin follows her after another quip offends his ego. The three engage in a three way stand off argument. The camera crews morph around and hunt for ideal angles and perfect positions. Deedri draws a long breath in and exhales as she lowers her head with a sad frown. Modoran glances at Deedri, pulls the corner of his mouth in thought, and eyes the front door. He grabs hold of the door knob, opens the front door, and directs his voice. "Hey! They're fighting again! Might want to get out here."

Seconds later, a number of crew members rush out with equipment hastily in tow. Modoran gives them a quick nod and waves as they pass through. When the last one clears the doorway, he gazes at Deedri and puts on a nice smile. "Hey? Deedri? You want to get a look at missions before everyone else?"

Deedri startles back to attention and pivots to face Modoran. She glances behind her at the fight, just in time to see Chad scoop up a congealed blob of goop from his back and focus upon Tassilda. Deedri returns her head to face Modoran, gives simple nod, and musters up a happy smile. "Yes. I don't feel like watching another fight, right now."

Modoran smiles slightly, bows, and gestures with a wave towards the door. Deedri walks forward through the doorway, and Modoran follow behind her. He steps to her side and glances over with a bit of curiosity in his expression. "I have to ask. Do you KNOW what that was?"

Deedri halts in place and nervously darts her eyes around the room. "I, uh... I... Um..."

A light chuckle comes from Modoran and he holds a hand up. "Later, where the cameras aren't?"

Deedri smiles and quickly nods. "Yes."

Modoran nods in return and scans the large dining table with various papers and documents across it. "Understood. Let's what they got in store for us."

Outside a loud shriek of disgust blasts from Tassilda. “AHHH!! You fucking asshole! It when down my top! EEWWW!!”

Bach squints at his aetherphone and reads a message out to himself. “Next week’s episode will be interesting... Looks like THEY got some new wheels to drive around in.”

He shrugs and puts his aetherphone back in his pocket. Sebastian glances curiously at Bach. “What was that again?”

Bach gestures with a wave in the air in front of him. “Ah, it was Kaleb. Looks like the adventurers next door got a new car. He must have seen it on his way out.”

Sebastian nods and briefly eyes out the sliding glass door of the living room. “Well, good for them. Hopefully, it’ll take them on some missions far from us for a while.”

The television flickers on and Bach rests the remote on the couch. “Well, they haven’t bothered us yet. Maybe if we ignore them, they’ll leave us alone?”

A low ethereal, echoing grumble sounds out from Sebastian’s visage. “I don’t know. They might be fine with doing their own thing, but I get the feeling the people behind the show aren’t going to leave it alone.”

Bach throws his hands up in the air and shrugs. “Oh well. At this point, after dealing with cyber-zombies, a spirit commanding teenager, and a super battle bot... I doubt they’ll be much trouble in comparison.”

Sebastian crosses his arms, lets his eyes trace his thoughts in his mind, and pulls a corner smile. “Ah, your right, bro. And, if they get too annoying, we’ll figure something out.”

Bach flips through the wasteland of channels upon the television and leans his head towards the dining table. “So, what’s the agenda this week?”

Aristepsha lifts her head up from the arrangement of papers upon the dining table and leans backs into her chair. “Well, first thing Monday, I think we should schedule a meeting with Captain Hackle and see what he’d would like to discuss with us.”

A wave of unease flows through Bach and he twitches a sneer through a slight frown. “Okay. Just make sure it’s somewhere public? I don’t know. I guess I’ve just read too many rumors about how some nations have handled some adventuring groups in the past.”

Aristespha turns in her chair and gazes a Bach with an amused grin. “Don’t worry. We’ll disavow any evidence of your handiwork if they pry too much. Anyway, I think Captain Hackle just wants to have a nice chat and know who is in the group. Even the military has a hard time getting information from the guild.”

Sebastian eyes Bach with a smile. “I wouldn’t worry about it too much, bro. Usually, they just want to know who is in their territory and chat. And they might have some useful information

about Noxian. It wouldn't be first time some official has passed along intel unofficially to us to help us out. They don't care much for what Noxian has done either. A lot of containment and cleanup most don't want to have to do."

The sound glass vials rattling around rings out from the kitchen. Moments later, Sotalia walks into the living room carrying a handful of small vials. She quirks a brow at Bach, with a sly grin. "Don't worry. You're only an intern, they won't expect anything of you. Knowing how some military groups are, they probably won't even want to talk to you."

She hands a small vial to Aristespha, moves next to Bach, and holds one out to him. Bach carefully pinches the sides the glass container and examines it closely. "Fair enough. If nothing else, they'll probably blame all the crazy stuff on you."

He squints closely at the red fluid inside the small vial and shifts his stare to Sotalia. She hoists up a similar vial, shakes a few times to the attention of Bach, and uncorks it with an eye roll. "I'll try it out first. I'm sure this batch will taste right this time. I made sure to recopy my notes with functional pens this time."

She places the mouth of the vial to her lips, tips her head back, and displays the empty vial with a gaze to Bach. Aristespha levels an examining eye to Bach and waits with her vial at the ready. Bach inspects Sotalia's expression for a number of seconds before he opens his vial and drinks the solution. His eyes wander around his head as he gauges the response from his taste buds and eventually gives a satisfied nod. Aristespha tilts the vial back into her mouth and comes to a delightfully similar conclusion. Sotalia grins proudly and confidently strides back to her alchemy setup in the kitchen. "See! I know what I'm doing. I'll get the rest of the batch portioned out and bottled."

She walks through the doorway and almost immediately spins back around with a hand pointed generally towards everyone else. "Oh! If Bach keeps on doing any more crazy magical stuff, we might want to get him reclassified as something other than an intern."

She flashes a devious grin to Bach and winks. "As much as I'd love to make claims to some of your more interesting feats, there's some credit I think you solely deserve."

Bach narrows his eyes and twists his mouth with a series of various uncertain expressions. "Why do I not feel exactly good about that?"

Sotalia shrugs with a flippant smile and slides the rest of the way through the doorway. Sebastian gazes over Aristespha shoulder and scans through the listing of athermail messages. "Any word from Nash?"

Aristespha sighs and cracks a half smile. "He's still working on it. He sent an athermail about what he's done so far. They've found a system that should run the software, but now they are trying to get it either running on the actual hardware or figure out how to emulate it."

She taps a title line in a list and the full body of the message open up to fill the entire screen of the tablet. Sebastian's eyes traces the words on the screen and snorts in a laugh. "Damn, he's got a way to describe his day. Whipping graduate assistants into shape and press-ganging student workers. Testing the limits of tenure? Look at this line... I found some old

network cable, so I should have a new whip ready tomorrow. If the free coffee and donuts doesn't get them motivated, this will?! He must be hilarious to work with."

Aristespha's neutral expression pours into the tablet and her eyes follow the same lines slowly over and over again. Sebastian notices the strange gaze. "Um? You okay? Dear?"

Aristespha blinks and turns a loving smile to Sebastian. "Yes, I am, Sebastian. I'm trying to figure out which bits are facetious and which are actual. He purposely mixes them up to keep the administration guessing. So far, I think the network cable whip is real."

Sebastian blinks and snaps his eyes towards the screen. Aristespha continues to smile and she points out a line. "Don't worry, the coffee and donuts are too. He usually gets a few boxes of the really nice selection of specialty shop ones. He actually treats the students a lot nicer than most of the faculty."

Bach contorts his face and glances at Aristespha. "There's something worse than the possibility of being whipped with a networking cable?"

Aristespha slowly turns with a dark grin and shadowy eyes towards Bach. "Oh. Yes. Someone has to be the target of an induce vomiting spell when you are learning to cast it."

Sotalia groans from the from the kitchen with heavy disgust in her tone. "Ewww..."