

Ain't A Hero – Episode 18

by Bryan Schuder

Golden eyes peer over the front passenger's seat head rest in the humvee. Straight, dark red hair waves with the wind venting through the lowered door window and strays over horns. The head rest conveniently obscures Sotalia's ear to ear, highly amused smile as she sits knees into the seat and gazes upon Bach in the seat behind her. Nearly fully reclined back in the seat, Bach exaggerates a breath into a groan and winces from the last tap of Aristespha's gloved hand. Aristespha settles into her seat across the aisle from Bach, slowly shakes her head to rest into her hand with an eye roll, and puffs. "How you haven't even managed a concussion is astounding."

Sebastian's ethereal voice resonates from the sword resting next to Aristespha's seat. "Honestly, it's genetic. At least that's what mom always said about dad. Then again, dad said the same thing about mom. Depends who you asked and when."

Dretphi carefully lowers a plastic cold pack onto the red, lightly swollen patch in the middle of Bach's forehead. Bach slowly raises his hand up, grasps onto the pack, and secures its position upon his head. "Thank you."

A few lights pats from Dretphi's hand contact Bach's shoulder and she rests back into her back seat. She picks up Bach's helmet next to her on the seat, carefully rotates it around to examine the fading crackle in the magical barrier, and eyes Bach with a humored smile. "I tried to warn you they headbutt. Did not intend for you to respond in kind."

A long groan mumbles out from Bach with a withering sigh punctuating the embarrassed upwards wave of his hand. "I know. I- Uh... I... Got caught up in the whole moment...? I... I don't know. What the hell was I thinking?"

Sotalia slides her hands over the top of her seat, wraps her arms around the head rest, and plops her head upon the top of the head rest with a radiant, smug grin. "Well, there's a gross assumption right there. Thinking?"

The cold pack gradually shifts back up Bach's head and clear of his line of sight of Sotalia. He manages a weak glare at her and deflates as she continues her grin right back at him. "At this point, I'm not even going to argue. It hurts too much."

Sotalia unwraps an arm from the head rest, flips open a pouch on her belt, and retrieves a vial. She holds the vial in the air over the aisle, waggles it in sight of Aristespha, and directs her attention at Aristespha. "Is it safe for a simple anti-inflammatory?"

Aristespha glances up from the windows of text upon her tablet, briefly quirks a brow at Bach, and rests her smirking gaze with Sotalia. "Yes. Go right ahead. I'm sure our brave hero of the hero will appreciate it."

Sotalia cranes the vial over above Bach, taps it upon his knee, and offers it to him. Bach flutters his eyes open under the shadow of the cold pack, spots the vial, and drifts his free hand to grab the vial. "Thank you, too."

He briefly lifts his hand from the cold pack, uncorks the vial, tilts the vial into his mouth, and replaces the cork. One hand returns to securing the cold pack, and the other hand presents the empty vial back to Sotalia. "I'm not going to live this one down any time soon..."

Sotalia giggles to herself and dramatically shakes her head side to side. "OH. No. Of course not. What was the one liner? Fuck you. Chicken?"

Bach cringes and exhales defeat. Aristespha closes her eyes and pinches the bridge of her nose. "You are certainly Sebastian brother."

Sebastian's voice calls out from the sword. "Hey, I don't know how to feel about that. Anyway, I think it was pretty fucking awesome, bro! You beat that bird at its own game. Seriously, fuck that overgrown chicken."

Dretphi leans forward, rests a hand on Bach's shoulder, and smiles at him with a slight bite on her lip. "You have earned a rare honor. Few challenge a thudkicker. None previous have won. None were sober."

Sotalia chuckles to herself and crosses her arms back around the head rest. "I still can't believe you won! Doesn't that mean he becomes the pack leader or something?"

Dretphi sits back into her seat, searches her mind with her eyes, and simply shrugs. "Yes. If the pack had been awake to witness."

The driver's side door opens and Cideeda hops into the driver's seat. She looks down the aisle from her seat and scans her gaze between everyone else. "So, how's patient?"

Aristespha draws a corner of her mouth into an amused half-grin and eyes over to Bach. "He'll live. Hard head intact, pride defended, sanity questionable, and ego shrinking."

Cideeda nods, gives a toothy grin to Bach with a quick wink, and turns forward into her seat. "Well, the thudkickers are in the hands of relocation folks. I got our restraints and rope back, and..."

She reaches into a vest pocket, pulls out a folded piece of paper, and lifts it over her seat to Aristespha. "A delivery confirmation receipt."

Aristespha plucks the paper from Cideeda's hand, opens it up, nods, and positions it out in front of her tablet. "Excellent. I'll get a photo of it and send it along with the rest of the paperwork."

Cideeda quickly examines her immediate area of the cab, inserts a fob into a port on the humvee's dash, and glances over to Sotalia, still sitting knees into the seat. Sotalia squeaks as she startles, tenses up, and reflexively throws her arms down to protect her sides. She searches the region next to her side to find the finger point of Cideeda and follows it back to

her stare. Cideeda lifts a brow, twirls her finger, points down, and gestures towards Sotalia's seat belt. Sotalia blinks, pouts, but eventually spins around to sit down properly in her seat. "Aww..."

Cideeda flips a series of covered toggle switches on the dash, locks them in place, and presses the ignition switch solidly. "That's enough for now."

A low whirl spins up to a high pitched whine and a muffled pop erupts to muted roar as the system status lights upon the dash flick to green. Cideeda lowers her head to angle her view up into the sky. "I I want to get home. Walking back, the clouds looked really off. I don't want to be driving in whatever they're bringing."

The constant sound of rain drones throughout the house. The intensity wavers with the gusts of wind and rattles of drops upon the glass windows fill in the audio void. A snore rolls out from Bach as he unconsciously draw up bed sheets. The room lights up brilliantly as white flash beams in through the windows. Bach's eyes stir and crack open to thin slits as his pupils drift side to side aimlessly. The explosive, house shaking boom launches Bach's eyes wide open. He waits with muscles tense and surveys the situation. He watches the eerie ambient dim, green glow radiate from the windows above the head of his bed and erratically pulsate. Eventually, Bach sits up in bed, groggily failing to catch the warm cold pack as it flops off his forehead onto his bed sheet covered lap. He pulls off the sheet, pivots his legs out onto the floor, and stands up to face the window. Outside through the window, the rain falls in sheets upon the glass. Dark green, omnipresent light oozes through the clouds over head and flickers of purple, pink, and orange streaks through the same clouds. Bach slowly blinks, clears the sleep out of his eyes, and freezes as a distant low, rumble vibrates the windows. He continues to scan the scene through his bedroom window and only manages to mumble as his mind provides no answers. "What the fuck is this?"

In the living room, the television casts a glow onto the couch and coffee table while a single light in the kitchen illuminates the area. The kitchen door opens from the garage to reveal Cideeda pressing a button on garage side of the wall. As a mechanical groan of the garage door cycles, the chorus of rain gradually loses out and eventually subsides to the background noise when the garage door seals up. Cideeda closes the kitchen door, releases a satisfied breath, and brushes back her wet short, multi-colored hair back with her fingertips. After a few moments of twirling the humvee's key fob with her other hand, she glances down at her water soaked nightshirt, pulls away it away from her figure, and sighs as it resumes clinging the moment she releases it. Sotalia stirs within her house coat, turns her head towards Cideeda, and speaks quietly. "You know we have rain coats, right?"

Cideeda steps forward across the kitchen floor, her bare feet barely sounding out a light, wet pats with a click from her claws. She puts her hands up to the sides with an acknowledging smirk. "I know. But, honestly, I don't think it would have helped much. I'll be right back. I got to get a new shirt and wring out my tail."

Sotalia resumes her attention to the television, lifts up a remote, and aims it at the screen. Pressing a button, the on-screen display shows the volume increasing, and the audio from the broadcast climbs out of the background storm drone.

“... we are currently still getting confirmation from the Greater Azure Alliance Department of Meteorology. But, from all observations and our equipment, a Maelstrom Warning is very likely for cities within the project path of the storm. Amaranth Valley and surrounding areas are presently under Severe Storm warning for the remainder of the night and...”

Bach wanders groggily out from the archway leading to the hallway as Cideeda casually slides pass him. Cideeda quickly pats him on the shoulder as she passes. “Morning.”

Bach yawns and nods towards her. “Technically... I guess.”

He pauses and notices at the wet sheen the kitchen light casts upon Cideeda’s hair. “You’ve been outside.”

Cideeda nods and sighs with a shrug. “Didn’t want to risk our only ride to this mess outside. Got it in the garage, along with couple liters of water in my tail alone.”

She walks down the hallway to her bedroom and goes through the door. A few seconds later a rolled up, wet nightshirt flops onto the floor just outside door. Bach blinks, returns his head forward, and moves next to the nearby arm of the couch. “A maelstrom? I thought we were too far out for those.”

Sotalia shakes her head with an uneasy twist in her mouth. “So did I, but I guess if the storm picks up enough from the weird zone, it can stay near maelstrom stage long enough.”

The dim green glow through sliding glass door flickers pink with bright flashes of white. Bach and Sotalia snap their heads to gawk outside as flashes pulsate to many individual constant glows. The dim green drifts between a strange range of colors as the sky paints itself with a fading rainbow of streaks. Mixing with the torrents of rain, orbs of magical light pelt and bounce off the ground. A low distant hum resonates through the structure of the house and a lightning strike in the distance erupts to spidering swirl of expanding miasma. The concussion wave of the strike warps through the walls of rain and impacts the house, shaking to a long rumble. Sotalia stares in awe with her jaw agape. Bach slowly blinks as he stretches his facial muscles in search for a properly impressed expression. Cideeda’s wide eyes and narrow pupils reflect the barrage of lighting from outside as she peers out from the hallway archway. She holds up a finger, points down the hallway, and uses her free hand to pull down her dry nightshirt the rest of the way. “I’m going to wake Dretphi up, if she isn’t already.”

Sotalia places her feet squarely on the ground, quickly stands up rigidly, and nods slowly. “I’ll get Aristespha up, she’ll want to see this.”

“This is an update from Greater Azure Alliance Department of Meteorology! We have confirmations from multiple sources that the storm is now classified a Class One Maelstrom! Residents in the path of the maelstrom should seek shelter within an interior room, basement, or dedicated storm shelter...”

The picture on the television shifts, shudders, skews, and distorts as the alert scroll overlay attempts to display. Aetherphones throughout the house fire off loud emergency alerts. Finally, a chorus of sirens across the country side spin up to a haunting wail that echoes in to swirling glows of the sky above.

Bach feels a tug on his foot. A quick grumble and turn in the sleeping bag upon the living room floor, he tries to continue sleep. Another harder pull on his foot stirs him from slumber and he groggily cracks his eyes open to see Dretphi holding onto his foot through the sleeping bag. Dretphi nods to Bach. "I apologize. I need your help."

Bach flutters his eyes and slowly sits up feeling the haze of sleep drift begrudgingly away from his body. He rubs his eyes, yawns, and scratches his emerging beard. "Sure. What do you need?"

Dretphi pivots her head towards the sliding glass door and points to the golden magical barrier encasing the entire door. Bach follows her direction and blinks as his brain loads in the information from last night. "Oh, right. I remember. Let me get that down."

Bach unzips the sleeping bag, steadies himself up on his feet, and examines the area. Cideeda snores quietly on the couch. She unconsciously wraps blankets up around her from another resting spot on the couch and flicks her tail from underneath the sheets. Bach glances at the other spot on the couch and the chair, and quirks a brow at Dretphi. "Aristespha and Sotalia are up I guess. Investigating outside?"

Dretphi confirms with a nod. "The house is intact. Both checked for lingering magic. They are now outside to assess the property."

Bach stretches his neck side to side, fights another yawn, and scratches his side. "Probably a lot of trees down. That was something else last night."

He looks over towards the dining table, which rests against the wall to make room for the collection of patio furniture originally from outside. "I'm glad we got the patio stuff inside. After that first chair tried to float away, I'm pretty sure it all would have been gone."

Dretphi slightly grits her teeth and gives a slow nod as she stares at the furniture. "With our rental deposit."

Bach stands idly looking around in a near daze. Eventually, he catches Dretphi gazing at him. He matches her eye contact, thinks through a moment of confusion, and remembers his original task as he rubs his eyes again to mask embarrassment. "Oh, right, the barrier. I'll get that real quick and help you with the patio stuff."

Dretphi crosses her arms and smiles as she watches Bach groggily step to the sliding glass door. "Coffee has been made. Do you require a cup?"

With slow, exaggerated motions, Bach confirms. "Y-yes, please."

Dretphi steps over a fallen tree in the forest and scans into the distance, deeper in. Bach follows suit and guides his foot over to the other side and studies the torn, snapped roots laying above the ground. "This is impressive. I knew the wind was powerful, but... Wow."

Kneeling down, Dretphi examines the forest floor soil and traces a channel worn by water flow with her eyes. "Tremendous amount of water contributed. These water ways lead towards the stream."

Bach stares off in the distance, squints his eyes, and perks a brow. "That thing must have been river last night."

Dretphi stands back up, walks off towards the background babble of the stream, and checks the area as she travels. Bach follows behind. Both wander through the forest as their footsteps sink more into the ground within vicinity of the stream. Mud and dirt coat the banks of the stream as a constant flow of water rolls over the stones in the creek bed. The stream fills out into a wide, shallow pool section of silt slurry. Sunken into the middle of the pool, a large tusked creature lays on its side with a complete covering of murk on its hide. Dretphi stops as she spots the creature and a frown drags down on her face. "Oh."

Bach notes the change of mood, looks out in the same direction, and develops a similar expression. "Damn. Poor thing. Must have worn itself out and drowned."

A labored breath struggles to get inside the lungs of the creature and it releases a grunt. Dretphi's eyes flit wide open and she jogs over to the edge of the pool. She halts, lowers herself down, and cranes her head to examine the creature carefully. "It is alive. Do not know if dangerous."

Bach stops next to Dretphi and shrugs with uncertainty. "Umm... Well, even if it is dangerous, I don't think it can put up that much of a fight. I've got your back."

Dretphi glances over with a reserved smile, nods, and steps into the pool. Her hiking boot sinks into the pool and touches solid ground halfway up her calf. She cautiously squats down next to the meter long creature and gently rests a hand upon it. She feels the rise and fall of its breath and moves her hand along its side. Bach works his way through the pool and stands nearby. "How's it looking?"

Petting its fur, Dretphi twists her mouth as her eyes analyze the boar. "Do not know. It is weak. Dangerous to treat a boar of this siz-"

Her hand stops. She presses her fingers into its thick coat around its upper back and follows an outline of a small boney bud. Dretphi's eyes slam wide open, her jaw drifts open, and her hands scoops water onto the thick fur. Each handful of water washes away more of the dirt coating to reveal hidden patterns and colors of the fur. Dretphi gasps in shock, dives her arms underneath, and attempts to dredge the boar up from the mud with no progress. "Help. Get him out!"

Bach drops down to his knees and digs through the mud. After a few more attempt to lift the creature, Bach growls and slaps his hands on the surface as a blue glow flashes from his eyes. "To hell with this!"

A sprawling mesh of magical energy strands erupt from Bach's hands across the surface of the water to the boar and dive underneath the surface. Within seconds, the muck recedes from the body of the boar against an expanding lattice energy, creating a clearance underneath and around its legs. Dretphi quickly slips her arms underneath, hoists the critter up, and rushes back to the house with Bach right behind.

Aristespha covers her mouth as her eyes dart around to various parts of the boar. "I can do the basics, but I specialized in humanoid medicine. Any specific spells may do more harm than good on him."

Dretphi gently props the boar's head upon a folded towel and exhales full of concern. Sebastian floats over gathering and works through his thoughts until one hits him solidly. A smile cracks on his face and he points to Bach. "Bach! Call Kaleb and Shadeesa."

Bach meets his brother's gazes, thinks, and roll his eyes at himself. He reaches into his pocket, pulls out his aetherphone, and concentrates on the menu interface. "Dammit! That's right!"

He taps a few on screen buttons and a rhythmic chirp sounds out from the speaker. Moments later, Kaleb's voice calls out from the phone. "Hey! What's going on? We were wondering how you guys weathered that maelstrom."

Bach holds his phone out and speaks out. "Well, we're all fine. But, we've got a veterinary emergency on our hands. I'll turn on the video."

Kaleb's voice drifts with tinges of confusion. "Okay... Well, Shadeesa just got out of the bathroom, let me get her over here."

Bach aims his phone towards the boar with Dretphi and Aristespha to the side. The phone screen displays Kaleb sitting down and adjusting his view closer to his face, just as Shadeesa comes up behind wraps her arms around his neck. Shadeesa stares into the screen and squints. "A veterinary emergency? What kind of-

Kaleb scrutinizes the image of the mud-caked boar and hems as his mind flips through possibilities. "Well, it looks like that boar has been through a lot, but that coloration on its fur..."

Shadeesa's head leans forward, her face gradually getting closer to the screen. She eventually reaches a hand out and directs their screen. Kaleb curiously eyes Shadeesa as she hang over him and watches the pupils of her eyes expand. She bites her lip with an ear-to-ear grin and excitedly stammers. "That's baby dire boar. An actual dire boar piglet. The coloration of the fur, the size,... Does he have the start of any horn, bones, or spurs along his back?!"

Dretphi lowers her head to look into Bach's aetherphone camera, nods, and parts some of the boar's fur to reveal a boney bud. Shadeesa's full attention locks onto the phone and her excitement curbs into determination. "Okay. Aristespha, could you start giving me basic vitals and information? I'll instruct on what you need to do to make sure he's stabilized until we get there."

Kaleb turns his head towards Shadeesa and cranes it back with a raised eyebrow. "Uh? Get there? We aren't leaving to convention until tomorrow. Our hotel reservations aren't until tomorrow night, Thursday night. It's Wednesday, today. I don't feel comfortable with you doing that long of a round trip either and..."

The explanation halts at the same moment Kaleb feels Shadeesa's arm around his neck tighten by a minute, but important amount. Shadeesa aims her gaze at Kaleb and the two maintain eye contact for a few seconds. Minor shifts in expression exchange between the two, before Kaleb sounds out a long sigh. He smiles at her and nods. "Okay. I want to help the piglet, too. I just want to make sure everything is in place for you."

Shadeesa pecks Kaleb on the cheek with a loving smile. "I'm only three months along. You have my full permission stop me in the future when I get too crazy with traveling."

Kaleb shifts his eyes to the camera on his aetherphone and cracks a smirk. "Bach? You hear that? I need a witness here to call up in the future."

Shadeesa narrows her eyes briefly at Kaleb and flashes a pout. Bach awkwardly smiles. "Uh, sure. Well, anyway, I'll offer my bed for the night if there's no objections. I think the couch will be clear since we aren't taking shelter from any maelstrom."

Sebastian judges the agreeable reactions in the room from Aristespha, Cideeda, and Sotalia. He rests his gaze upon Dretphi as she continues to pet and comfort the baby dire boar, her concern and attention far from the current conversation. Sebastian smiles. "Well, since you volunteered, Bach. I don't believe anyone has any objections."

Kaleb gives a thumbs up through the display as both of Shadeesa's hands take hold of the phone at the other end of the call. "Thanks. I doubt we'd be able to book a decent hotel at this point. Well, I'll hand the phone over. Got to get Lagi loaded up and ready."

The display shows Shadeesa's face in full as she settles down in the chair and dons an expression brimming determination and focus.

Breaths of condensation form on the outside glass of the sliding door from the nostrils of the black and blue dragon, Lagi. His eyes follow the activity inside the living room while pressing his head against the glass. Sheesda lifts her head back, rolls her shoulders to stretch, and sighs with a smile. "If he's this goofy and worthless now, I think he'll be just fine to stay the night inside."

Dretphi holds another handful of cereal loops in front of the baby dire boar's sniffing snout. He casually licks up the cereal and munches down with a constant, happy wag of the tail. Aristespha props her arms back and leans herself back on the floor next to Shadeesa. "I hope I'm not asking too much, I would love to get the recipe for that nutrient paste you have. Didn't know of that was a trade secret or not."

Shadeesa shakes her head, brushes her apron off, and giggles. "Oh no! It's a something I've worked on for cases like these with exhaustion, starvation, and so forth. It very similar to the standard nutrient mixes, but I put a few fast absorption spells on it. I'll warn you, it's really potent, so only use very little once a day. The side effects are annoying and messy."

Kaleb sorts through items in a medical pack on the dining table and grumbles loudly with a sarcastic ring. "And make sure you label it clearly when put it in a cream cheese tub."

Aristespha, Dretphi, and Sotalia glance over to Shadeesa, who momentarily grits her teeth in an embarrassed frown and bites her lip. She quietly whispers. "I changed up the binder and flavoring after that... incident."

Sebastian slides next to Kaleb, pulls his gaze away from the gathering around the dire piglet, and whispers to Kaleb. "Any more details to that story?"

Kaleb sighs and shakes his head. "Three hours at a rundown truck stop bathroom."

Sebastian lifts his hand up and slow nods with a tight smile. "I know your pain. On and off, half a day, camp ground with an old outhouse."

Kaleb and Sebastian exchange nods of commiseration. Dretphi brushes the clean hair ridge of the dire boar with her finger, a smile ever present on her face as she puts forth another handful of cereal in front of the critter's snout. Aristespha shifts her eyes over to a paper notepad between her and Shadeesa and lets her eyes study it. "I see the similarities between our professions, but the differences are fascinating... And, I'll admit, quite challenging."

With a happy smile, Shadeesa shrugs and places her hands on her lap. "Some days, I don't know why signed up for it all. There are many days I would really LOVE to have the wealth of premade spells, potions, and procedures humanoid medicine has. But..."

She reaches her hand under the chin of the baby dire boar and scratches underneath with her long nails. The boar happily releases a series of short, muffled grunts with tail wags. Shadeesa chuckles to herself. "I'd miss opportunities like these."

Bach walks out from the hallway entryway and sniffs the air. "I still can't smell anything out here."

Cideeda steps past him with a shake of her head. "Don't worry about it. You don't have my sense of smell. The bathroom and tub are back to normal enough."

Bach wipes his hands with a towel over his shoulder before rolling it up and placing it in a nearly full laundry basket. "Well, at least the big piglet cleans up nicely. I'm amazed how well simple baking soda works for that."

Shadeesa glances over to Bach and Cideeda and then returns her head towards the baby dire boar. “I tend to use it to not upset the natural oils in the hair and disrupting any natural scent too badly.”

Cideeda lightly sniffs the air and stares at the dire piglet. “It’s certainly a bit stronger than it was before.”

Shadeesa shuffles her legs underneath herself from a sit and works her way up to a stand. “That’s good. I think the mother is still alive and well.”

Mid-way through, Kaleb moves to her side and offers assistance which she lovingly accepts. She steps over and lowers herself onto a chair next to the dining table, stretching her legs out inside her scrub pants. Dretphi looks up from the large piglet and perks a curious eye brow at Shadeesa. “What makes you say that?”

Shadeesa settles back into the chair and thinks her theory out loud. “Well. It’s theorized that dire mothers not only use natural means to keep track of their children, but a lot of magical means, too. I think the little one got separated in the maelstrom. The mud blocked the natural scent and magical chaos disrupted the magical tracking. And given how calm and friendly he is... He still thinks his mother is still around and has nothing to worry about.”

She rests her eyes at the dire piglet with a smile. “Hopefully, if he’s outside long enough, his mother will pick up the scent and find him. As happy as he seems, I believe the mother will be amicable. But, we might keep our distance to be safe if she shows up for him.”

Sotalia ponders about the theory and her eyes catch Lagi’s long stare. She pivots in place to meet his gaze. He eyes her and then glances at the handle of the sliding glass door. After a few seconds, he repeats the gesture, slower and exaggerates the individual motions. Sotalia tilts her head to the side and blinks at the antics of the dragon. Lagi blinks slowly, sighs with a slight droop of his shoulders, and lifts a clawed paw up. With claw tip point, Lagi aims at Sotalia. Sotalia directs a finger to her chest. Lagi nods, moves the claw point to the sliding glass door handle, and pantomimes sliding it open with his paw. Sotalia gawks in astonishment and directs her voice behind her towards everyone else. “Um? Is there any reason the dragon would be asking me to open the door for him? I think he could do it himself, if he wanted?”

Kaleb exchanges humored glances with Bach, Sebastian, and Shadeesa, and laughs. “Oh, don’t mind him. He’s just trying to work the system... Again. He’s been told HE can’t open doors unless they’ve been specifically marked.”

Sebastian shakes his head and hovers over to catch sight of the patiently waiting Lagi. “Still following that rule. Huh? You certainly left some mental scars on him, Shadeesa.”

Shadeesa crosses her arms and puffs up. “Listen, first few times he opened the door to the dorm apartment bathroom and stole my clothes and towels while I was in the shower was cute. Everything after the tenth time was aggravating. I had to do something.”

Bach lowers his head into his hand and rubs his eyes into a pinch of the bridge of his nose. "Oh. That summer he learned he had opposable thumbs. That was rough a one."

Cideeda twists her mouth in thought and eyes over to Bach. "He can pick locked doors?"

Bach shakes his head and grits with a pull at the corner of his mouth. "No. That actually would have been cheaper. He used to either rip the door knob off, chew a hole into the door itself, or try some kind of magic upon it if it was locked."

He glances over to Kaleb with a knowing smirk. "Never got that deposit back on the apartment I bet."

Kaleb snorts into a dry chuckle as he places a hand on Shadeesa's shoulder. "No. Of course not. We were lucky after you and Sebastian left to not have to pay extra."

Shadeesa places a hand on Kaleb's and sighs with slow shake of her head. "I'm just glad we found something else before he got his first growth spurt. It took FOREVER for him to realize how big he had gotten and not get stuck in everything."

Kaleb directs a whisper to Sotalia with a sly grin. "You want him to be your friend forever?"

Sotalia looks quickly over her shoulder with a perk in her brow. "Sure, I guess."

With a wink and obscured point to the door, Kaleb continues. "Open the door for him. He just wants to stick his head in for a bit, anyway."

Sotalia walks over towards the door. Lagi's eyes open wide and he scoots over towards the side with handle on the sliding glass door. Sotalia grasps the handle with the full attention of Lagi upon it. She clicks the lock open and pulls the door open with a slow slide. Lagi watches the door open, wobbles in anticipation, and halts as he waits with his eyes upon Kaleb and Shadeesa. He gradually moves his head through the doorway, constantly checking for any objections. After a minute, he nuzzles his face on Sotalia's side and purrs. Sotalia smiles, shakes her head with her eyes looking up, and scratches underneath the dragon's chin.

Sotalia walks on the noon sun lit path leading from the back patio towards the picnic table with her aetherphone pressing against her ear. "Yes, mom. I know I should have called you sooner, but yesterday was pretty crazy. But, I'm fine. When the maelstrom hit, we put up some wards and camped out in the living room. Quite the light show, but didn't do too much damage to the area."

She casually strolls and rocks her head side to side with the other side of the conversation. "Well, Bach and Sebastian's old college friends are here and I think later they're going to head off to their hotels for the convention happening in town. Some science fiction, adventuring fandom thing, I don't quite know. We're going to go to it."

A smile cracks on Sotalia's face with the response through the phone as she closes the distance between her and the picnic table. "Don't worry, you know I'll get all my nieces and nephews souvenirs. They've sent me plenty of messages about the last ones. I still don't think they should have aetherphones at their ages."

She bites her lip into a satisfied grin and stands next to the picnic table. "Well, we'll just have to keep our opinions away from Maelvia and Talelia won't we?"

Her grin softens to a smile and she takes a long breath in. "I love you, too, mom. I'll harass dad later when I think he's near a phone of some kind."

With a quick few Emin words, Sotalia finishes the conversation and hangs up the call. She examines the gathering at the table. Kaleb kneels down on the ground with a high end camera, aims the lens at the dire boar piglet hunting through the high grass for cereal loops, and clicks a number of pictures. Shadeesa and Dretphi take turns reaching into the cereal box between them and each tosses a few loops out into the grasses in front of the piglet. Shadeesa scratches a few more notes onto the pad of paper next to her and props a grinning face with her arms upon her lap. "I can't wait write up my notes. Not many people have ever gotten this close to a dire boar piglet, and this young."

Dretphi holds open a hand full of cereal which the piglet happily presses his snout into. She pets it on his head and ruffles the bristly ridge of fur on the back of his neck. "A rare honor. Possibly unique. How long will it take for the mother to find him?"

Shadeesa tugs a corner of her mouth and exhales uncertainly. "I don't know. I don't think long. The few people that have been crazy enough to trap and remove a baby from any dire mother usually had the mother showing up within a day or two, despite dozens of kilometers."

With a scan along the treeline surrounding the clearing, Dretphi nods, sighs, and returns a smile at the cereal crunching creature. Kaleb stands back up, presses few buttons on the camera, and hovers the device in front of Shadeesa. "These came out pretty good."

Shadeesa lifts her head up, hoods the view screen with a hand, and giddily shakes on the bench. "Those are going to be great! I know I shouldn't be thinking business at a time like this, but damn if documentation of the treatment of a dire boar piglet isn't going to get some attention for my future practice!"

Kaleb nods and rests the camera upon his chest from the attached neck strap. "Hopefully, we'll be going to conventions for the sake of going to them more in the future... Despite how profitable presenting a dragon is."

Cideeda slides next Kaleb with a blue-black dragon scale in hand and a sly, scheming expression on her face. "Speaking of which, do you have anymore of these?"

A brow perks, Kaleb gives a nod and directs Cideeda over to Lagi. "Yes, I do. He typically looses a few when new ones grow underneath. But, I often pluck them before they get too roughed up. People pay more when they look nicer."

Cideeda rolls a hand gesture with the flit of a brow and gazes at Kaleb. “So, how much trouble would it be get a few more?”

Kaleb laughs with a wry smirk. “Not hard at all. There’s a few overdue that have been bugging him. Any particular reason? Going to try to magic up your own dragon?”

Aristespha disgustedly scoffs and rolls her eyes. “Oh gods! Do people still believe those myths and legends?”

Bach slowly, dramatically lifts his head up and down and groans. “Oh yes. There’s whole aethernet forums dedicated towards finding the secret, forbidden formulas and forgotten spells to summon all kinds of things. Good for a cheap comedy reads.”

Sebastian shrugs with his hands out to side. “Well, you can’t exactly blame them. It’s kind of hard to sort out the fact from fiction with a lot of this stuff.”

He waves over his ethereal visage. “I mean, I can’t say anything. I’m stuck in a magic sword with a number of mages around to me, a dragon over there, and a baby dire boar eating breakfast cereal in front of me.

Aristespha narrows her eyes at Sebastian, huffs as she returns to look forward, and grumbles. “I still question the sanity of anyone expecting to spawn anything other than biological hazard with household cleaners and projecting a few magic sounding words out of their mouths.”

A loud crackling snap echoes into the area and silences all conversations. Out from the treeline through a wide gap between trees, a huge two meter tall creature walks effortlessly through a large bush. Bony armor plates cover parts of her head, large tusks gleam in the daylight, and a ridge of back spines rustle with each shift of her shoulders. The dire boar moves with pride and purpose in each step, leaving a strange barely visible miasma wafting out. With glowing green eyes, she scans her head around before settling upon the picnic table and focuses upon the dire boar piglet. In her pause, five piglets of similar size with similar fur patterns trot out from the cleared path and wander around her. Wide eyes from everyone at the picnic table quickly find the dire boar mother. Lagi cautiously steps next to Kaleb and Shadeesa, lowers down to the ground, motions with his head back to the saddle on him, and whines a series of low tones. Kaleb rests his hand on Lagi. “Good thinking, but let’s not jump to conclusions yet.”

Shadeesa gawks and her hand pat around to find Kaleb. She speaks out the side of her mouth and pokes him in the side to punctuate. “Kaleb. Camera. Record. Now.”

Kaleb lifts the camera up, aims, and presses the recording button. Sotalia steps carefully behind the picnic table, kneels down next to Aristespha, and maintains her watch. “Are you feeling that?”

A violet glow radiates from Aristespha’s eyes and she finally remembers to blink at the sight before her. “I’m seeing it.”

Cideeda retreats back, putting the picnic table between her and the dire boar. Sebastian glances over, nods in agreement, and drifts forward. "Okay everyone. Let's be ready to run if needed."

Bach regains his attention long enough to notice the dire boar piglet still sniffing through the grass for cereal. He leans over the table, reaches over, and pats Dretphi's shoulder. "Hey. Point the piglet at his mother. I don't think he's paying attention."

Dretphi blinks her mind back into focus, glances down at the piglet, and rattles her head in confirmation to Bach. She puts her arms on either side of the piglet, gradually eases him to rotate around, and directs his facing right at his mother. She slides her hands back onto his back legs and pushes gently but firmly forward. The piglet lifts his head up from the grass when he no longer sniffs food, searches around, and stops his head in the direction of his mother. With a series of delighted grunts and a constant vigorous tail wag, the piglet trots down the slight hill and straight towards his awaiting mother. She lowers her head, meets her snout to his, and sniffs. She raises her head up and focuses her eyes at the gathering around the picnic table. The stare takes time to rest upon each person present, an odd flicker of the eyes each time. With final snort and sniff, she blinks long to a final gaze before turning around and marching off with piglets in tow. Everyone watches as dire boar mother disappear into the forest. Sotalia glances over the general area before striding off towards the house. "I'm going to go inside for awhile, anyone is welcome to join. I'm... a bit... thirsty."

The group arrives to a quick agreement and soon make their own ways towards the house, including the dragon.