

Ain't A Hero – Episode 21

by Bryan Schuder

Aristespha's faintly glowing, violet eyes examine and study the four remaining swords as Stalwart Sword representatives urge passersby to try their luck at pulling one out. She guides back her very long, silvery blue hair, allows it drape wavy runs upon her back, and refocuses her vision to the empty rocky pedestal. She idly runs her fingers along her extremely long, pointed ears, and brushes stray hairs off the tips behind her head. She rest an ivory skinned hand upon one side of hip, shifts the weight of her athletically thin frame to another foot, and contorts gray and blue hints of color upon her face with an intrigued eyebrow quirk. "Interesting..."

Sebastian's ethereally transparent form pivots in place to gauge Aristespha's reaction. He briefly squints his blue eyes at Aristespha's face and directs his gaze to where her stare concentrates. He folds his tan colored arms across shirt his covered muscular chest and tilts his head to a side. The loose pompadour on his head settles and a number of short brown hairs break free to hang in front of his face. The free hairs distract his eyes long enough for his mind to recognize the issue, and a quick hand rakes them back in place next to the white streak. Sebastain scratches the back of his head and leans next to Aristespha. "So. What do you see, my dear?"

A finger from Aristespha directs Sebastian's eyes and she draws in a breath hinting suspicion. "The empty pedestal's magic is gone. Some residue remains, but I believe the locking enchantment is on the swords rather than the pedestal."

Her eyes wander towards the center most, largest pedestal, and stop upon it. Sebastian darts his glances between the center pedestal and Aristespha. "Makes sense. So, what's wrong with the one in the center?"

Aristespha gradually pulls her head back, slides her posture, and rests her hand underneath her chin with a critical stare secure upon the center, sword-housing pedestal. "Originally, I thought the different pedestal explained the slight difference in that enchantment's aura. But, if the enchantment is on the swords, then that means the enchantment is different for the same thing. Unfortunately, the obfuscation and shielding they've used makes it extremely difficult to discern."

A Stalwart Sword salesman locks his gaze at Aristespha and waves happily. "Hello! I see you have a keen interest in our latest and greatest model. And, judging by the sword at your side, you most certainly have just as keen tastes, that Stalwart Swords aims to please. Please, come over, and let me help you find the sword for YOU."

Aristespha blinks, directs a smile, and starts to wave off the representative. Sebastian echoes a cough and grins with a sly shade. "Well, let's see what he can offer."

Aristespha halts, lowers her hand back down with an awkward stare to Sebastain, and she lifts a brow. Sebastain lifts a similar brow and eyes over to the rep, still grinning. A slyness cracks the smile on Aristespha's mouth and shes nods. Aristespha and Sebastain calmly

walk over to the booth in front of the salesman. He smiles happily and bows in greeting to Aristespha. "Thank you for coming over and granting me your time. First, I must say..."

He examines Sebastian up and down with honest amazement. "That is a most impressive illusion you have with you!"

Sebastian puffs his chest out, postures proudly with a heroic flair, and winks at the salesman. "I know."

The salesman blinks and slowly returns his head to Aristespha. "Amazing. I can already tell you have particular desires in the swords you acquire. If it is not a problem, I would like to inspect your current sword and see what Stalwart Swords can do to exceed your needs. Do not worry, I am allowed by the convention to undo and redo peace bindings."

Aristespha and Sebastian eye each other with developing mischief in their respective smiles. Aristespha releases the scabbard's lock upon her belt, and gently rests the Sword of the Spirit Realm upon the table in front of the salesman. She awaits with Sebastian for the salesman's response. The salesman respectfully nods, aptly releases the convention mandated peace binding, and professionally slides the sword out from the scabbard. As his gaze takes in the details and workmanship of the sword, his mind processes the attributes to arrive at a very shocking identity. The salesman's smile wavers to building astonishment as his eyes widen to the artifact in his hands. After seconds of silence, he slowly slides the sword back into the scabbard, rests it back upon the table, stands up straight, and releases a composure regaining sigh. A different genuine smile appears upon his face and he looks to both Aristespha and Sebastian. "This is a very gracious, surprise honor you have bestowed upon me. To even examine such a fine blade is an amazing experience... As high as I hold Stalwart Swords, a unique blade as this is beyond us..."

The smile upon the salesman's face morphs gradually to previous variant. "But... A unique discount for a sword to compliment that fine blade is well within the capabilities of Stalwart Swords."

Sebastian crosses his arms and grins at Aristespha. "Ooo... He's good."

Aristespha lifts the scabbard and sword off the table, locks it back onto her belt, and smiles at the salesman. "I think we will take you up on that discount. We do need a training blade and a weapon grade blade that's roughly the same size, weight, and shape of my current one."

Sotalia stares expectantly at the fvalian woman behind the table. With a delicate grace, the woman signs her name "Ardere" on a Tinkering Tina comic with an artistic flair and a small drawing of the lead character Tinkering Tina. Ardere looks up to Sotalia with a smile. After many seconds of silence between the two, a toothy grin springs on Ardere's face and she tilts her head just enough to shift a number of auburn hairs loose from underneath the large bandanna on her head. "I'm so sorry. You're just going to have to wait until the next issue. I already gave away too much at the last panel."

Sotalia draws in a large breath and strains a long sigh as she lifts her gaze up to the ceiling of the long hall comprising Personality Alley. “Really?!”

Ardere shifts a curious glance to Cideeda while tapping her large black claw tips together on both hands. “New to the series?”

Cideeda shakes her head with a humoring smile at Sotalia’s frustrations and nods slowly at Ardere. “Yes. She binge read the series recently.”

Ardere pats down the bandanna on top of her head near two solid bumps underneath and tightens the knot in back. “Oh... That explains it. She just got through the Great Contract arc, didn’t she?”

Sotalia lowers her head down, crosses her arms, and pouts. “Yes, I have. And, I have SO many theories and not evidence to neither prove or disprove them.”

The pout gives way to a mischievous smile and Sotalia focuses her eyes upon Ardere. “But, I do have one theory that I do have evidence for.”

A brow quirks up on Ardere’s face and she squints with a scheming smile. “Which is?”

A giggle escapes Sotalia and she alternates her gaze between Ardere and Cideeda. “Tina and Byron are SO going to be couple in the future.”

Ardere’s eyes flit open in shock and quickly narrow to honest examination of Sotalia’s theory. “Really? That’s an interesting theory.”

Cideeda laughs and nods to Sotalia with a tight smile. “I have to agree. There’s something there between those two.”

Sotalia counts off points with her fingers and lets her eyes hunt through her mind. “Despite all the times Tina’s has practically kicked down the door to Byron’s place, he’s never mad at her for being there. Despite all the questions she asks, he’ll always answer them... Even if he’s grumpy about it. And don’t forget the Embargo Arc!”

Cideeda places her hands on her hips and thinks out loud. “He forgets about collecting rent on her shop when business was bad, she’s the first to check on him when he hasn’t left the house in a few days, and he’s the one that pushed her to lay down the contracting law upon that general.”

With a quick pivot, Sotalia points at Cideeda. “And! Don’t forget who he calls FIRST when he finds some crazy technology.”

As both Cideeda and Sotalia contemplate the growing fan theory, Ardere tracks the conversation with great interest. A muffled buzz and phone chime startles her, and she retrieves her aetherphone from a pocket. With few taps of the screen, a text message from “Jasper” appears on the screen.

“Hey, sorry about the silence. Just got enough signal from a radio relay tower of all things. Found something from the zone you might like when you get back from your convention. After I get this to transmit, I’m heading to back to Gateway. Here’s a picture of the find.”

Ardere eyes focus upon the image and she fights back a wave of giddy delight. She covers her mouth briefly with squirm in her seat. Moments afterwards, she lowers her hand down, the giddiness fades to welling revelation in her expression. She reads the message one last time with a warm smile, returns her phone into her pocket, and resumes paying attention to the fan theory between Cideeda and Sotalia.

Sotalia rolls her eyes at Cideeda. “Self worth issues? He was the designer behind major innovations in robotics! How could he feel like he’s not worthy enough for her?!”

Cideeda sighs and shakes her head. “He lost it all when that competitor company won that ridiculous lawsuit. He’s got some royalties, the plot of land his house is on, and the shop that Tina is renting from him... For half market average.”

A groan sounds out from Sotalia and she shrugs. “Well, I don’t think we’re proving it today.”

With a quick nod to Sotalia, Cideeda pulls out her atherphone with a toothy grin. “Before we go... Are you still interested in seeing fan findings of ancient technology?”

Ardere’s ears perk up and her expression brightens. “Of course! What do you have?”

Cideeda presses a few commands in the phone screen and turns it to Ardere without saying a further word. Ardere’s eyes lock onto the screen and almost reflect the image of the security bot head. Her smile grows into an ear to ear grin the longer she studies the picture.

A toothy grin forms on Cideeda’s mouth. “Would you like to hold it?”

Ardere blinks, lifts her head up, and nods slowly with a smile. “I think I can take a lunch break.”

Sotalia releases the collar of Bach’s shirt when he drifts closer to her from an aborted escape attempt. She lifts a hand and points out a row of stalls and platforms with a variety of arcane markings and electronics intermingling the structures. “Here they are! These are the magical energy measuring stations I told you about!”

Bach adjusts his shirt collar back in place and turns his gaze upon the magical measurement equipment with an uneasy smile. “Neat. Um, reminds me of the one back in school. Must be showcasing the newer models... Well, that’s pretty cool...”

He watches warily as Sotalia maintains a sly grin with her stare at Bach. She straightens up confidently and rolls a waving gesture towards two empty platforms and stalls, and concentrates on Bach with an evil tinge infecting her grin. Bach pivots in place to examine the stalls briefly and returns to face Sotalia with a pleading expression. “I can’t beat you in raw power.”

Sotalia places her hand on her chest with a happily amused smile and giggles to herself. “Oh, I know. I figured we could compete with efficiency.”

With an alternating glance between the platforms and stalls, Bach catches the hints of the excitement Sotalia presently suppresses and sighs with an eye roll. “I guess it couldn’t hurt. I’ll take the one at the end.”

Sotalia rushes off with glee to one of the attendants next to a “Merlinatech Magical Machinations” logo. The human woman gives a quick nod, directs Sotalia and Bach to the platforms, and explains the system. “With new revisions in the detection algorithm and energy flow sensors, Merlinatech has been able to reduce the size of our professional line flow meters to allow easy home installation! A mere corner of room is all that’s needed where a whole room once was! All you have to do is stand on the platform and cast your spells. The system will measure the flow to, from, and within the space of the platform and calculate energy usage, among many other useful statistics. But, for demonstration purposes, we’ve put big displays to show energy usage.”

The woman smiles wide and directs Sotalia and Bach’s attention to the nearby stalls. “If you have any projectile, beam, or other types of spells, please feel free to use our containment stalls. We ask that you just keep it simple and moderate for safety reasons.”

She steps back toward another group of interested people with a slight bow. “If you have any further questions, please ask. But for now, I’ll let you put our equipment to the test.”

Bach thanks the woman and swings his head over to witness Sotalia stretching her arms up and cracking her intertwined fingers. “Simple and moderate, now.”

The grin assumes an almost seductive air and Sotalia bites her lip with a long breath in. “I’ll try...”

With a few fast, hand gestures she flicks out a small training bolt of magical energy. It flies from the tip of her pointing finger into the space of the stall, impacts a barrier at the back, and dissipates. A few seconds later, a status message pops up on a flat screen monitor near her platform, and a colored bar highlights around the fifty unit range on a sliding number line. Sotalia puts her hands on her hips, sways them with a confidence nearing pride, and eyes Bach with a flitting quirk on an eyebrow. Bach sighs, shakes his head, pulling a smile, and holds his hand palm out towards his stall. A magical bolt forms immediately in front of his palm, darts out into his platform’s containment stall, halts in the middle, and disperses into a mist. Bach and Sotalia pour their undivided attention to the display near Bach’s platform. A status prompt appears on the screen and a similar sliding number line charts a much narrower range within the teens just short of twenty units. A zealous ear to ear smile expands upon Sotalia’s face. Bach’s jaw drops lower with each moment his mind analyzes the results. “How the fuck does that shitty of a bolt register so low?”

Sotalia’s smile collapses to a neutral confusion shifting towards an extremely suspicious glare at Bach. “Shitty bolt?”

She crosses her arms, leans her head back, and bares her teeth in a sneer. “Oh, don’t you dare flub these on purpose... Now give me a REAL one.”

Bach blinks, droops his shoulders in defeat, breathes in, and projects another bolt from the palm of his hand. The smile returns in full force as Sotalia witnesses the display showcase a narrow bar hovering just below the ten unit range.

A small gathering murmurs a mix of conversation with a few occasionally pointing towards two displays near the platforms Sotalia and Bach stand upon. Sotalia squints and grimaces with intense concentration upon a forming ball of energy in her hands. She glances up at the stall for her platform, releases the ball towards the area within the containment stall, and watches the ball burst on the surface of the back target. Bach unrolls his hand out with a near mirror match of the energy ball. It drifts on its own into his designated stall, halts midway through, and bursts on its own. Status messages appear on the displays. Sotalia momentarily grabs onto her horns in frustration and growls. “Argh! How?! Just how?!”

Bach attempts in vain to contain an exceedingly amused grin on his face, and he turns his head away from Sotalia’s eyesight. “Just a lot of practice, I guess.”

The few technicians behind a collection of electronic and computer equipment stare in bewilderment as the readouts continue to vex and baffle their knowledge.

“Is it a calibration error?”

“No, we just calibrated it a few hours ago. Are they just less powerful versions?”

“That’s the weirdest part! They’re actually slightly more powerful, from the stall sensors...”

From around the corner of the intersection, a small horde of recording equipment hauling personnel orbit a singular lone emin woman. Tassilda proudly struts across the floor, granting a small wave to those that notice her along the path. Her ears detect the spike in noise from the small crowd around the Merlinotech demo space, and her head centers upon the source. Her eyes open wide the moment she spots Sotalia forming another energy ball and Bach idly flicking, very familiar glowing light orbs into the containment stall. A sneer flashes on her face and she dons a superior, dominant posture and steps with intent over to the platforms. Sotalia flings out another energy orb into the containment stall, studies the number, and groans as it barely improves over the previous. “Oh, you stop smiling already and start telling what I need to do!”

With a cleavage lifting cross of the arms, a condescending tone floats into the air from Tassilda’s mouth. “Maybe consider a career in stage magic? You seem quite capable of drawing a crowd.”

Sotalia stance snaps rigid and she pivots with a similarly dominant posture to glare with the faintest hint of a grin at Tassilda. “Oh, you flatter me. But, I can’t compete with your demonstrable abilities upon the stage. Such a fine comedy yesterday!”

A light twitch tugs gently at the corner of Tassilda's eye and she cocks her head to the side, letting her long black hair sway along her revealing outfit. "Interesting. It seems strange for someone of your obvious experience to be instructed by the intern of your group? What deficiencies could you possibly be addressing?"

An evil grin creeps onto Sotalia's mouth and she lifts her head up with a shake of her dark red hair. "Refinements, really. As for the intern, I saw you've learned plenty from him yourself..."

She gestures with her eyes and swaying head towards Bach. The shift in attention from Sotalia, Tassilda, the crowd, and the camera crew stuns Bach clueless to action, as he holds a light orb in his hand with many floating in the containment stall for his platform. Sotalia rotates her head slowly to face Tassilda. A wave of unease flows through Tassilda's body, but a spark of insight from memories boils her confidence. "Certainly to be expected from a lady of your exceedingly refined age..."

A noticeable cringing grit cracks Sotalia's facade, and Tassilda delights in the sight. Tassilda walks to a platform next to Sotalia, stretches and flexes suggestively to the crowd, and magically gestures a small bolt of energy into that platform's stall. Sotalia responds in kind with a slightly larger bolt. Bach leans out from his platform to a better view of the events unfolding. "Ah, shit."

Sotalia and Tassilda continue their jabbing conversation while each produces a slightly more powerful spell to edge out the opposing. The number ranges on the displays grow with each round. Double digits, low triple digits, and moderate triples digits shift and sway on the screen. Both maintain respective airs of superiority and near sneering smiles at each other. A break in the action occurs as both build up their finales. Sotalia scoffs and forms the magical energy in her hands. "Let's make these count."

Tassilda dramatically, with an extravagant flair, opens her hand palm up to reveal a growing ball of green fire. "Yes. I agree."

The two continue to glare at each other, the magical flow condensing in their hands. A few technicians glance over to the containment stalls with nervous expressions. Bach follows the uncertain looks to the stalls as his eyes glow blue. He squints to examine the stalls, rears his head back, blinks, and steps off his platform. Sotalia readies her energy orb and waits. Tassilda directs her palm out towards the target in her stall. Both stare intently at each other and pause in silence as the cameras and crowd anticipate the moment they will release their potent spells. Sotalia flexes her arm muscles and Tassilda flares out her fingers- And Bach walks right between the two of them, snatches Sotalia's energy orb with one hand, and yanks Tassilda's green fireball away with the other. "Okay! I think that's enough right now. Looks like they need to let the stalls cool down a bit."

Sotalia's energy orb shakes for a few moments before puffs out into a cloud of energy, fading into Bach. Tassilda's green fireball flickers and snuffs out in a haze that drifts into Bach's hand. Sotalia grumbles and seizes Bach by the collar of his shirt. "Damn it, Bach! What are you doing?!"

Tassilda stands up straight, carefully examines the hand that the fireball once hovered near, and blinks in absolute, sheer bewilderment as to the fate of her fireball. Bach narrows his

eyes at Sotalia and points to the stalls. “You were about to overload the system. So, I stopped you.”

Sotalia glances over to stalls, squints as her eyes flicker golden for a few moments, and embarrassment washes over her with the release of Bach’s shirt. “Oh. Right. Good call. Sorry.”

Bach shrugs with an eye roll. “No problem. Can we get out of here? Away from the cameras? Please-”

He halts mid thought and feels the fingers in hand that seized Tassilda’s green fireball. “What the hell? There’s something on my hands. A powder?”

He moves the hand closer to his face and Sotalia quickly grabs his arm. She directs Bach’s hand close to her eyes, squints, and puzzles. A sudden flash of shock erupts on her face and she cover her mouth before rearing back in a cackle. “OH. MY. GODS! It’s copper powder! She’s using material components in her magic!”

Sotalia continues a loud echoing laugh and looks to Tassilda with an incredulously amused expression. “Really?! You couldn’t manage to use magic to make the flames green?!”

She takes a long breath, exhales to calm herself down, stands up straight, and walks near Tassilda. “So, I have to ask... Which kit do you use? I have to admit, back in high school, I used them, too. I liked the one with black candles myself, but you know how all the emin girls go through that doom and gloom stage.”

Tassilda’s normally gray complexion darkly reddens rapidly to a twitching furious death glare upon Sotalia. When Sotalia moves close with an expectant smug grin, a harsh spouting of the emin language escapes just above a whisper in volume. Sotalia halts, process the words, crosses her arms, and chuckles darkly as her eyes widen with a triumphant smile. “Oh! So, that’s what you think of me! Mind saying that lovely term a bit louder for everyone else! I haven’t heard that one in a while. Did your racist grandfather teach you that one?”

Tassilda whips around without another word, rushes away in an angry huff, and nearly knocks over a camera woman along the way. Sotalia waves with a delightful smile. Bach slides next to her, glances at the irate Tassilda in the distance, and glances over to Sotalia. “Um... Everything okay?”

Sotalia sways happily around. “Yes. I, SO, knew it!”

Loud impacts of padded training swords sound out into the high ceilings of the enormous warehouse. A few loud crashes of people hitting soft mats on raised platform resonate with grumbles and frustrations of defeat following. Dretphi converses with two other older grath. Both casually wear old grath military uniforms with many prominent awards and ranks sparsely decorating sleeves and front pockets. A few words laugh out from one man, he pats his the empty folded sleeve of his shirt using his only hand and shrugs with a nonchalant smile. Other man shakes his head with an eye roll, buries his face in the palm of his hand,

and rocks with a chuckle. Dretphi stifles a reflexive laugh with a happy smile and continues speaking.

Behind her, a very old grath slowly steps forward with solid crane presses on the floor preceding his footsteps. He maintains a warm smile and gaze at Dretphi as he orbits around her to stand next to the other two men. Both men immediately recognize the very old grath, rigidly pause, and salute. The elder grath eyes the two. With some effort, he straightens his posture to properly fill out his uniform, stands taller than everyone else, and lifts a strong but shaky hand to his temple. With a nod, he releases his salute from the short white hair encircling his bald head, relaxes his back with a playful groaning eye roll, and chuckles. With a sly grin, he turns his head to Dretphi, shifts his support to the cane in front of him, points a finger her with a slight wag, and smiles as speaks a short sentence. Dretphi blinks in confusion and her mind sorts through memories in a rapid, desperate attempt to identify the man before her. The elder grath laughs, gives a comforting wave of the hand, and shakes his head with a smile. He taps the side of his head a few times to punctuate his words, and shakes a point to Dretphi before carefully lowering his hand down near his knees, and gestures a certain height. He draws himself back up, and joking references a topic that immediately causes Dretphi to blush in sympathy to her childhood. The other two grath snicker in fun and prompt another topic of discussion.

Across the way, a camera crew catches the thudding crash of an opponent upon the mats and a triumphant Trakenthin standing above with a practice sword end tapping the fallen opponent's chest. The referee witnesses and confirms with a hand gesture towards Trakenthin. "Winner by vital hit, Trakenthin!"

A small crowd applauds and cheers, and Trakenthin absorbs the praise as he holds his arms out and up during his circuit around the mat. Cameras focus upon him and Samantha flips through notes on her clipboard as boredom assaults her. "Again, he beats yet... another opponent."

Trakenthin scans out around the area, his eyes scrutinizing each person for a possible opponent. His search expands outwards and further out in the warehouse full of practice mats and rings. With a brief double take, he finds his next target with a hungry grin spreading across his mouth and his eyes settle upon Dretphi in the distance. With a loud bellowing shout in grath, he snaps a strong point to Dretphi and issues a challenge. Dretphi cringes with low grumble and sighs. The one armed grath quirks a brow at Trakenthin, the other old grath sidesteps around to block line of sight between the rest of the group and Trakenthin, and the elder lifts a brow at Dretphi and asks a question. Dretphi shakes her head and narrows her eyes with her pupils gesturing to Trakenthin. She looks to all of them and points to the ground to highlight her query. The old grath men nod with the elder waving her to leave for now with a nod and an understanding smile. Dretphi respectfully bows, steps away, pivots, and power walks straight towards the nearest exit.

Trakenthin's expression sours as he watches Dretphi move fast towards the exit. He narrows his eyes, slides his stance back, and thinks. With a few moments, a mean grin crackles upon his face, and directs his full focus to Dretphi. He calls out to her, his words mixing with arrogance and contempt. Dretphi maintains her stoic demeanor and keeps her attentions forward. A long pause follows Trakenthin's last statement. He dismissively snorts and exaggerates the emphasis on a slow, purposeful grath sentence with anticipation in his eye.

Dretphi freezes in place. A subtle twitch flexes her cheek, she lifts her stance, and draws in an angry breath through a grit peeking through her lips. The three old grath concentrate stoic, harsh glares at Trakenthin, with the face of eldest leaking out his boiling ire.

Dretphi's twists her head to a side to crack her neck, pivots to face Trakenthin, and powers forward cracking her knuckles along the way. The elder grath smiles, examines a nearby rack of training weapons, spots a weapon, and secures his footing. With a strong grip his crane, he lifts up a training sword with the end, feels out the weight, calls out to the one armed grath, and launches the weapon. The one armed grath effortlessly snatches the weapon out of the air, gives it a few test swings and swipes while he marches over to the side of Dretphi, and presents the weapon to her. The other older grath moves along side her and carefully whispers into her awaiting ear. Dretphi nods in confirmation with each paragraph of information and gradually shifts her mindset to a serious state. Samantha finally catches sight of Dretphi approaching the ring and her jaw drops in astonishment. "Holy. Shit. Everyone check batteries and storage drives! I want every bit of this covered!"

Trakenthin and Dretphi stand near the middle of the mat and wait with their padded training blades ready. The referee glances at either of them, holds his hand in the middle, and then lifts his arm up with a step back. "Fight!"

Trakenthin launches a flurry of strikes upon Dretphi. Each impact hits solidly against the defending blade of Dretphi. The two circle around the surface of the mat, Trakenthin aggressively assailing Dretphi with barrages of swings and swipes. Occasionally, Dretphi attempts a strike upon an opening but Trakenthin proficiently blocks. As the constant exchange of attacks continues, Dretphi's blade rocks back more and more with the next wave from Trakenthin, who begins to intermix more banter and derisive words between his attacks. Dretphi's serious, concentrating expression never wavers. Samantha studies the combat and cocks her head with an emerging suspicion as she catches the stoic amusement of the older grath nearby. "What's going on?"

With an elaborate overhead slam upon Dretphi's sword from Trakenthin, she drops to a knee. A flare of eagerness ignites Trakenthin's eyes and he steps forward to power down his blade against Dretphi. She maintains the shaking deadlock above her with both hands on her sword's handle. Trakenthin glares at Dretphi with a gritting grin expressing his unyielding desires for her defeat. As Dretphi locks eyes with Trakenthin, the serious expression shatters to reveal a wide tooth bearing grin and a fire of sheer confidence in her eyes. Trakenthin's bewilderment barely gets a chance to manifest when he feels something different about the blade deadlock.

New lines of muscle definition emerge upon Dretphi's arm as she powers her blade up toward Trakenthin. She draws up her knee from the ground to put that foot underneath her and a hand frees itself from holding the blade to sweep forward a clawing grip around Trakenthin's ankle. Dretphi roars upwards with the defiant flex of every muscle in her body, and she yanks out Trakenthin's foot from underneath and up in front of him. Following the guidance of his leg, Trakenthin drops flat on his back to loud resounding echo of the warehouse. He attempts to blink, but his eyes flit wide as he feels Dretphi lever his leg forward. As he opens his mouth to growl, the pain of a boot pressing weight upon his sword wielding fore arm interrupts. Finally, Trakenthin recovers from the seconds of chaos to the pressure of a padded training sword on the side of his neck. Dretphi beams a furious glare upon him and slowly traces the

tip of the training weapon symbolically across Trakenthin's neck. The referee examines the action, nods, stands up, and gestures towards Dretphi. "Winner by vital hit... Excuse, what is your name?"

Dretphi releases Trakenthin's leg, exhales calmly with an air sheer satisfaction, and respectfully answers. "Dretphi. Dretphi Prakkenten Reti Veranattin."

The referee confirms with a hidden contentment. Dretphi calmly exits the ring, returns the training sword to the smugly smiling old grath men, bows, and leaves quickly to the exit. Trakenthin sits up from the mat floor, blinks in sheer bewilderment, and stares silently attempting to comprehend the situation. A camera gets to close and suffers the full ire of Trakenthin when he backhands the lens right off it.

A large, loose crowd hangs out near the Stalwart Sword huge demo with the major topic being the last, remaining sword still in the large center stone. The other four sword stones remain empty with names and locations card in front to showcase the new owners of the swords. Bach steps up to the center platform at the direction of a Stalwart Sword representative. He carefully and firmly grips the sword handle, shores up his stance, and readies himself. With a strong attempt, his arm muscles flex, his body strains, but the sword remains in the exact spot without a single shudder. He shakes his head, looks up to Aristespha, Cideeda, Dretphi, Sebastian, and Sebastian with a nonchalant shrug and an accepting smile. "Oh well. Guess it's not for me."

"A valiant try! Quite impressive. Really..."

Bach stands back up and glances over his shoulder to see Chad Bosch waving to the crowd. Camera crews disperse into the area, while Samantha and Gerald maintain a professional distance away to oversee the impending operation. As Chad steps up to the side of the sword containing stone to work the crowd, Bach quizzically stares at the sword with a strange curiosity. He glances at Chad and returns his gaze to sword in thought. Bach's eyes glow blue as they search through his mind. A seconds later, his eyes flit wide and then narrows a quick glare to Chad. The glare fades with a scheming smile and the glow in his eyes dims back to normal. Chad maintains a bright heroic smile and eyes Bach. "If you don't mind... I'd like to give it a try. Sir..."

Bach nods against Chad's intimidating, demanding stare contrasting his smile, steps away with a welcoming gesture, and returns into the crowd. Chad keeps the stare upon Bach and only breaks off when he receives a variety of other stares and glares from Aristespha, Cideeda, Dretphi, Sebastian, and Sotalia. Bach slides in behind the group and Aristespha directs her voice back. "I sensed something strange about that sword's locking enchantment. Did you feel anything?"

Bach grins with a dark tint and laughs quietly. "Oh yes. When Chad walked up, I felt something stir. I think it was some kind of remote trigger stirring. I bet he's got a key enchantment or something on him."

Cideeda shakes her head with a dissatisfied sneer. Dretphi crosses her arms with stoic glare forward to Chad. Sotalia leans closer to Bach to participate in the conversation. "Fucking figures. I wonder how much the cheat paid for the privilege?"

Bach chuckles with an evil color and perks a knowing eyebrow. "Too much for what he's going to get."

Sebastian blinks, and hovers his head near to whisper to Bach. "What did you DO?"

Bach merely grins. "Oh. We'll see. I'll have to apologize to Kaleb later."

The group watches with less than kind, anticipating gazes as Chad secures his grip around the sword for his attempt. Chad calms himself, concentrates with a dramatic flair, and flexes his muscular upper body in an exaggerated display of strength to draw up the sword. The display eventually shifts towards genuine straining effort as the seconds wear on and the sword remains in place. Just as the determination upon Chad's face cracks to desperation, the sword gradually slides up to the silence of the crowd. The sword travels sluggishly out of the stone platform, ignoring the shakes of Chad's arms stressing against some force. When the sword arrives half out of the stone, it slams back into place and leads Chad's forehead to tap unceremoniously into the handle. Chad releases the sword, stands up, and assures the crowd with bold, heroic gestures. "Do not worry. It's just a little shy with such a wonderful crowd witnessing."

He squats down, carefully grips onto the sword tight, pans a gaze to the crowd, and traces a glare to Samantha and the confused Stalwart Sword representative that Samantha discreetly berates. He waits for crowd to quiet down, preps himself, and waits. With all the power he can muster, he puts all his strength into pulling the sword. It gradually moves up and rewards Chad's outstanding effort, up until the halfway point... When the binding force completely disappears. The large crowd cheers a chorus of laughter and applause when Chad flies backwards onto the ground and crashes out onto the floor. Sword still in hand, Chad summons all his being to contain the irritation swelling out onto his face behind his trademark heroic smile.

Kaleb doubles over from laughing and rights himself back up to face Bach. "Nicely done! That arrogant prick deserves all he gets. I wish I could have seen his face. It was probably just as bad as when you asked about his car."

Shadeesa shakes her head as she relaxes in a chair and pets Lagi's head at her side. "We need to be careful. If they keep it up, they'll put our act out of business."

Kaleb glances with a shrug to Shadeesa and Lagi. "They still don't have a dragon. I think we still got them beat."

The entirety of both groups converse about the events of the day, exchanging various stories.

"MYLO! Stop running! Get back over here!"

Mylo rushes toward the groups, waving his glowing wand around, and calling out. "Dragon!"

Mylo's evuukian mother runs after him with another human man beside her. The man calls out. "Come on, son! Slow down!"

Mother and father split out to either side, and close in on Mylo as he close in on the other two groups near Lagi. Eventually the parents manage to capture the excited Mylo. As Mylo's mother turns to apologize, she immediately recognizes Bach. "I'm so sorry for him- THERE YOU ARE!"

Bach blinks and weakly waves. Mylo's mother smiles and bows slightly. "You disappeared before I could thank you. Again, thank you so much! You've saved the day for all us and kept our sanity intact for a little while longer."

The human man, with the same dirty blonde hair color as Mylo, steps forward and extends a hand out to Bach. "Hello! The name is Mason Anderson. Just wanted to say thanks for helping my wife and son out."

Bach shakes Mason hand. "It wasn't a problem, really."

Mylo's mother lowers Mylo back down with a hand securing him from wandering too far. "Oh, that's right. I never got your name. I sorry to have been so rude. I am Lalyanpha and this is Mylokia, or Mylo."

Lalyanpha lifts her head up towards Bach with a smile and notices Aristespha. The smile tinges with unease as nervous energy seeps out. Aristespha's eyes widen and she raises a hand comforting hand to Lalyanpha. "Do not worry. I do NOT share those biases. You do not study proper medicine without seeing the fallacies behind those prejudices. You two have a beautiful son."

A great weigh leaves Lalyanpha and she sighs with relief as Mason wraps an arm around her. "Thank you. That's one of the reasons why Mason and I come to these type of events."

Mason grins and winks out to the group. "Also, I get free tickets from the organizers. Helps when you're the guy they come to fix everything that likes to fall apart around here."

Mylo looks pleadingly to his mother and points to Lagi. Shadeesa meets Lalyanpha's glance with a happy nod and gestures for Mylo to comes over. Lagi enjoys the new attention from little Mylo, and the gathering converses more about the events of the convention. Eventually, the groups go their own ways as the night sky in the above skylights wears on. Everyone takes great care to not disturb a sleeping Mylo from cradle of Lagi's front legs.