

I leaned against the railing of the library balcony, night sky stretching out above me. A chilly wind danced past, but I didn't shiver, simply staring upwards at our moons instead. The largest one, in particular. Huge and round, it was full in the sky above us now, with its light bleeding out the stars for control of the night's sky. It consumed my entire vision, the shapes and craters across its surface starting to stir and swim before my eyes.

A whisper in my ear. Blank nothingness and white static, like snow falling in my head. The voice was female... The moon flickered, or maybe it was my mind. Huge expanses of great cities. Buildings that kissed the sky, constructed all box-like and mechanical. My eyes widened almost imperceptively. There was... Something was there.

The moonlight illuminated the bleached bones under me, arms and limbs intertwining and grasping to form the rail I leaned against. The light cracked in the sky high above, and was almost too bright now as I stared intensely through it. The moon stared back. Another flicker. A distant, shrill scream of pain whispered on the wind past my ears.

Black tendrils of nothing tore out of the ground, and the massive city buckled in my vision. A billion screams ending, as void-like blood spilled from the appendages tearing out of the earth. Everything ruptured, cataclysmically so as the plates of the planet buckled, then huge chunks of mountain and crust tore upwards in an explosion of pitch-black tentacles and energy... revealing a deep red crimson core as everything was dragged upwards, towards the...

The moonlight blazed around me, snowflakes falling against the palace of bone. My breath caught, ice forming in my lungs as luminescent blue tears slid down my cheeks. It was so bright...

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My eyes opened, mind in a haze. Fuck... The room was in a haze too, and one breath inwards caused me to shudder, suddenly aware of how painfully hard I was. The haze... Right. The entire room felt like a sauna set up in a swamp, only the noxious gas had been replaced with powerful pheromones, and the water was cum. We were a pile of bodies, all three of us entirely naked and sprawled against each other. Exia was upside down, with my head resting on her right hip and giving my nose a lovely smashing of her scents. Her head was what I was resting my groin on, her muzzle buried right between my balls and tailhole, where she'd fallen asleep slowly licking at me through the oncoming sex coma. Mmmph.

My paws slid down, and I just grabbed the sides of her head, repositioning it under me before I pulled back and pushed my desperately hard cock into her muzzle and right down her throat. This was her fault anyway. Well, Yimir's too. Exia jerked awake with a muffled noise of surprise, then shuddered under me, turning it into a heated moan. She just opened wider, letting me bury my full length in her tight, squeezing tunnel, even as I pushed my muzzle right up close to her plush spade and inhaled deeply of the scents. Ripe, blazing fertility, mixed with a big helping of *me*, I realized. Some of it probably due to the six or seven times I'd flooded her womb with seed yesterday.

Yimir stirred to the slight rocking of the bed as I fucked Exia's throat. My sister's arms slid around my waist, pulling my ass tighter against her face as she started helping me thrust downwards, gulping my pre down as fast as I pulsed it into her. Fuck! Yimir grinned, one eye opening to watch us, while her paws slid down to her own pussy to start to play.

Such was life during Estrus, when you had mates. Instincts took over and their libidos went entirely out of control. As their mate, I was practically obligated to make sure they stayed sated and stress-free. Back in the day, a lot of males used to make jokes about Estrus in the tribe, about how lucky those bastards were to have a female mated to them.

That... was only partly true. Sex was great, but after nine or more hours of it in a single day, things get sore and sensitive. The spirit was willing but the body was tired. Though I'd woken up fresh and rock hard, so... Long strands of Exia's saliva mixed with my pre connected between my groin and her face. Coupled with the wet 'palp'ing noise every time I slapped against her muzzle and squished my balls over her eyes, it was more than saturating my groin now as I ground and dug into her.

It didn't take her long to start leaking again, hips trembling and spasming against my muzzle. I just nuzzled her however, lightly kissing her navel as she shook there, trying to push her spade against my face. My right paw kept her hips at bay though, even as the left held her head in place. Her moaning spiked as she writhed under me during a particularly hard grind. My paw slid upwards, thumb teasing over her throat and tracing the pushed-out bulge of my cock in it. Mmm, fuck. Sis was so sexy... Especially gasping on my cock.

Her nose was clear of course, which used a separate airway to get to her lungs. But that also meant every delicious inhale she took while writhing there was pumped full of my musky pheromones. Drool and pre slid down her muzzle now, coating her throat as I held her by it, grasping and brushing the top of my cock inside her. Wet 'schlicks' were coming from Yimir as she eagerly watched, eyes glued to where Exia and I were connected.

My sister was getting desperate, whining through my thick meat as her legs tried to flail upwards, wrapping around my head. But I just moved back, kissing and nuzzling her thigh as she shuddered again. My knot ground up against her muzzle and she tensed, entire body shaking as my eyes closed, blissed out at the sensation of her swallowing around the upper parts of my length. Her lips opened wider, and my eyes snapped open too, widening as she got a third of the knot into her muzzle. Oh... fuck, she was...

It must have been quite a stretch, admittedly. I'd been a little concerned about her canines, but she used her lips to shield them, even as she opened her maw fully and took my entire knot in. My mind blanked as I groaned, instincts firing off and causing me to slam my full cock into her throat. She gave a spasm under me, screaming around my length as her lips closed against the flexible root behind the knot.

White light sparked behind my eyes, and I slammed down against her, pushing her head down into the blankets as I ground my cock into her muzzle, letting it pulse and buck inside of her, against her tongue. With each throb, seed started to pour down her throat, and she shook again, moaning wantonly around me, even as her legs started to tremble. Mmm, yes!

She spilled over as I pumped her stomach full of my seed. Her legs started to spasm, and her scents tripled as fluids gushed out of her spade. It worked! I made her orgasm only from my cock fucking her throat! My muzzle moved in, giving her even more blissful relief as I caught the fluids she spilled out, chasing it back to the source before burying my tongue into her clenching, gushing depths. Her moan turned into a squeal, body bucking against me as I let her legs capture my head.

Spasms, tremors, and shakes later, I lifted slowly from her spade, drenched in fluids and breathing hard. My own legs were locked around her head as I sat on her face, shivering as I felt her just... suckling my full length, tongue kissing and lapping around my knot in her muzzle like it was a lollypop. Both paws slid under her, to her back, scratching her fur and kneading into her ass, getting her to shudder again. "Mmm, good girl, Sis. You spoil me..."

She clenched at 'good girl', then slid her own paws over my rear, getting me to thrust deep into her throat a few more times. Each caused me to give another throb, and I shivered, unloading more seed into her slowly, at a churning chug. A glance to Yimir showed she looked blissed out herself, and was panting there, both paws soaked as they remained pressed up against her own plush spade. Mmm, she smelled like she needed some relief too, though.

I gave a tug, and Exia opened her muzzle again, carefully using her tongue to roll my knot, combined with her lips to avoid any sharp, pointy teeth. A little bit of a stretch later, there was a wet pop as her lips let go of the swollen bulb of flesh. I shuddered, slowly sliding my length out of her as she kissed and licked around it, cleaning it as I moved back again. Her entire face was red when I lifted myself off of it, and she gave me a heated grin, licking her lips, even as I slid over onto Yimir instead.

"Mmm, fuck, bro. Wake me up that way every day!" I shot her a wink, and she squirmed, grinning after and sliding around so she could at least look at us not-upside-down now. Yimir... There wasn't really any permission asked there, either, as I just moved on top of her. She grinned, eagerly spreading her legs for me as I settled in against her plusher form. Paws groped her breasts, and she shivered again, even as my rapidly stiffening length came back quite quickly, and I ground it up against her pussy.

They'd been... insistent. Almost frustratingly so, in trying to encourage me to do certain things. I mean, I knew what they were doing. But flying under my radar I don't think was one of their objectives in the first place. They'd encourage me to do something more and more bold, then put a huge emphasis on having super enjoyed it after the fact. Picking my own sexual positions. Not asking them permission. Not being afraid to enjoy myself with their bodies. Of course, I insisted in return that they have optimal enjoyment too. But that just seemed to make them all the happier, as that's what an alpha was 'supposed' to do. I guess they were right...

Yimir moaned happily as my tongue slid into her muzzle, at the same time my cock spread her slowly open inside. She'd already pre-lubricated herself readily enough, after all... I'd already made a huge list of notes in my head about what each female liked. Exia loved fast, rough, visceral, and energetic. Yimir was almost the opposite, and loved slow and sensual, with a focus on feelings and physical contact. Her legs wrapped around my hips as I sank fully into her, settling my body against hers and letting her breasts squish between us. Both paws cupped her head, thumbs rubbing her cheeks as we kissed and I shared Exia's taste with her.

"Mmm, mine...?" I asked, finally backing off and kissing along the side of her muzzle as she shuddered hard and rapidly nodded.

"Mmm, fuck! Y-Yes... definitely all yours." She seemed to melt under me, and I gave a showy, deep thrust into her core, feeling her clench around me at the same time. She loved being 'claimed' and 'owned', and me reminding her of that set her off like no other.

I gave nuzzles and gentle kisses along her neck, then another lick before continuing. "All mine. My lover... my pet..." Another spasm. I told her yesterday that I was considering getting a collar for her and she just about died. Then consented fully. I suppose collar and leash was a part of BDSM or pet play, but there definitely wouldn't be much 'punishment' with a good girl like her.

Even Exia was pulled along and into the heat, snuggling up against us and being hugged to Yimir's body. Her scents mingled in with Yimir's, and she leaned in to kiss and nuzzle along the *other* side of her muzzle. Her jaw went slack as both Exia and I reached the front of her mouth, and she let us both in at the same time into a messy, sloppy, three-way kiss with our tongues playing together. Exia's right paw found my rear at the same time, and it didn't take her long to tease under me and start gently massaging my balls as I rhythmically pushed up against Yimir's groin. I pulled back, kissing her neck instead and watching as they made out with each other, chests grinding together now as I pulled Exia closer, and used her breasts to rub Yimir's. They both groaned, shivering against each other, and I pushed in again, grinding my knot against the spade surrounding it. Mmmph!

Sensations from two ways was far too much for Yimir. I slowed, pushing against her hard as I felt her start to spasm. Exia's other paw I realized, a moment later, had been playing with Yimir's breasts, and tweaked her nipple into her paw pad, rubbing and lightly twisting it as the girl under her writhed. I shivered, enjoying the sensations of her clenching around my shaft, even as my muzzle pushed up against the back of her neck and lightly bit. She gave a jerk, groaning outwards after as I held her in place from the side, her scruff in my teeth. Two more pushes, and I managed to actually knot her while she was still gushing, and she squealed into Exia's muzzle, an arm wrapping around both of us and hugging us to her.

Being knotted in a pussy was pure bliss. My jaw clenched, holding her tight as I sank fully into her body and just let myself go. She reeked of being fertile, and I angled her hips upwards and just pumped seed right into her womb, bucking right against her cervix with each ribbon I shot. For a long moment, we just writhed together, keeping as much of our fur touching as possible, with her navel started to slowly swell against my own.

I think it was a side effect of constant use of the vitality tinctures. My fluid output had almost doubled from what it normally was. I'd have to do some research on it. Not that it was really a bad thing, or even that high up on my priorities. I had much bigger fish to fry in that case. This though... Snuggling into my two females took full priority now, and seemed to for them, too. Exia nuzzled Yimir's neck, even as the other female shivered, then widened her grin.

"Gods above, thank you, Exes. You're amazing... Mmmm, fuck. It... It would be even more amazing if I weren't on suppressants right now. Just... *think* about it! You could be breeding a kit into my stomach *right now!*" She sounded almost delirious about it, and I simply nuzzled and licked the side of her neck.

"Mmm, maybe next year, Yimir. After we get a chance to legit talk about it... While you're *not* in heat." She pouted at that, then slowly nodded, and I relaxed into her again. That was a downside of not talking to her about it before Estrus hit. I didn't want her body's own produced substances to influence her actions in any way, and having a kit was a *huge* deal! It... was beyond frustrating having to be the only rational one thinking through Estrus. It really would be *so nice* to just say 'fuck it' and breed her...

“Mmmph... y-yes Alpha. You’re... right of course. I got carried away...” Her voice came out as a murmur, and I pulled her closer now, nuzzling her forehead while Exia rested against her neck from the other side. This was... very nice. But...

I hesitated, then chuckled softly. “No, you’re okay, Yimir. Though uh, I think we all need a shower...” Both females gave a sheepish grin to that, and I snickered, then leaned in and gave Exia a soft kiss against her muzzle.

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The energy bar made a light crunch between my teeth as I took another bite, absently holding it in my right paw while my left held Chronak’s journal open. He’d indeed left it for me. It wasn’t so much his own journal, as it was a collection of his considerations for my own training in True Alchemy, that he just had kept adding to. He organized it however, into basics, intermediates, and difficult lessons. Of course, I ended up reading over the preface for it three times or more.

“Well, if you’re reading this, either something fucked up, or you were off with your estimate about how long I had left. Damn, feels weird to assume I’m a corpse coolin’ on the ground while writing this! Well, no, I suppose I’m probably burned up already, and my soul moved on to... wherever it is we go when we’re used up.”

I shivered lightly, images of that field of frozen corpses flickering into my mind. I’d examined my memories of the ritual over and over again now. For a while I’d just hid from them, but now that life was slowing down again... well, apart from having two mates in heat... Was that... real? I didn’t think it was ‘real’ as far as I currently understood it. It definitely didn’t sync up with Calien’s or Nara’s version of events. Nara had at least not shied away from the details in order to be polite, thankfully.

Something was wrong, they realized, the second they unbound the circle. The field generated connecting the tablet to the area under the extractor magnified in power, and my stress levels spiked on their medical readings. That was built into the tablet too, it seemed. The Keyhole, once unbound, reacted outright antagonistic towards me. Like an animal stalking prey, as it tried to claw its way towards me. It practically tore Chronak apart trying to separate from him, killing him almost instantly.

It... survived though, completely outside of a host. The support mage tried to dump more energy into it, both to restrain it using the extractor, and to try to keep it sustained. But it was single-minded in jumping forward and latching onto me instead. The pull tore the extractor out of the ceiling, further assuring Chronak was beyond saving by crushing him and the bed under about a four hundred kilograms of torn metal and broken concrete.

The Keyhole had become a three-dimensional object, with tendrils of energy coming off it, and stabbed into my chest multiple times, trying to, as far as they could tell, actually kill me. My life signs plummeted, but they couldn’t get through the energy field to actually reach me. They tried pulling the power to the entire tablet, but even with the batteries torn out, it still maintained its energy flow, seemingly from nothingness. The Key had wanted me to stay bound, and as far as I could tell, started fueling the tablet itself while it attempted to murder me.

Then... its tendril got stuck inside of me somehow. And over the course of about twenty seconds, it had thrashed about, trying to haul itself away from me as it got sucked into my gored open chest. When it

finally snapped fully inside of me, my torso was suddenly completely repaired, with only the thin and clean scar lines of the actual rune array and warding circle, seemingly functioning perfectly. The tablet died instantly afterwards, and they pried the manacles open to get me out of it manually. The only thing really wrong with me however, despite dozens of scans of my torso, was I'd lost over thirty percent of my blood supply. They'd given me a transfusion and blood regenerative potion on the spot, then transferred me up to the upper hospital with guard. Then they sectioned the room off and repaired the structural damage, and did their best to investigate what had happened.

Predictably, we had no fucking clue. I hadn't shared my visions with anyone else. As far as they knew, I blacked out after it stabbed me. Which left me in an... interesting position of realizing if the stab coincided with it stabbing me in my... mind? Dream? There was a gap where I was still conscious in the real world, while also seeing utterly fucked up shit that definitely wasn't happening. Or was it? I sighed.

"The more I think about it, the more I realized exactly how much I fucked you over. Knowing Calien, she's probably going to try to strong arm you into becoming the next Grandmaster. But... in a way, she's right. I don't have the strength to fix what I ignored for so long now. People are dying because of me. It's a terrifying thought. And now you're the only one in the entirety of Aion that's anywhere close to being able to use True Alchemy when I kick it. Wow. I utterly fucked you."

The words were definitely Chronak's. Crude, to the point, yet... Until he apologized to me that day, I'd never known him to actually regret anything in his life. Maybe he just hid it well behind the asshole exterior. Maybe I'd be doing the same thing in twenty years, using magic to stop myself from rotting while still alive.

"It's kinda sad that there's nothing I can do about it at all now. I apologized, but even that feels hollow in the scope of it all. The best I can do is leave you all of this. This journal is what I penned the entire time I taught you, trying to make increasingly more advanced lessons about True Alchemy, while learning about how you learned best. I hope I've customized them pretty well to you. You'll need to get caught up and learn fast, but fuck if you've ever had a problem doing *that*. I wouldn't even be surprised if you crack the mystery of the Keyhole by your first summer with it, and live out a full hundred and seventy years, just to spite me! Hah! But really, that's what I'm hoping for. Live as long as you fucking can, even if just to raise your middle finger to the rising sun every morning!"

I smiled, relaxing on the couch as I finished the energy bar off. He'd obviously written the preface literally the morning of his death, after I'd left him to rest. The rest of the book was definitely written in a less morose fashion. I'd already skimmed through it, realizing he was teaching me a plethora of Demonic words as he went through the lessons. But in the introduction, he also talked about his suitcase, which was... That was definitely another one of those tip-of-the-iceberg things.

He called it a 'folded spatial field'. The inside of the suitcase was... a lot larger than the outside. It's where his alchemy table had come from. He had four more in there too. Along with a huge collection of alchemical reagents, and a small library's worth of books and scrolls. He kept a tight ship too, with it all neatly organized and catalogued. You just tipped the suitcase on its side and treated the top of it like a door to open instead. It was big enough for you to just duck a little and walk inside. Gravity was... fixed to the inside of the suitcase, no matter how the suitcase itself was positioned outside. It was... weird. Definitely weird.

Both the journal and suitcase were also keyed directly to the, well, Key. Anyone else trying to open them was met with a level of force not so insignificant in violence, that was for sure. Calien admittedly had indeed not tried to open either of them, but I learned after that was *technically* with the existing knowledge that the cleaning crew already *had* tried to open the suitcase. It put the Illan girl into the far wall hard enough for it to collapse the rest of the brickwork there that Mom had done a good number on. She was, uh, hospitalized for a bit there. There was no blocking it either. It had attacked her using True Alchemy. Chronak treated his secrets seriously.

I was on lesson four now. The first three had been purely about syntax and gave me a few low-level words I could use. It was... strange learning them. The most important tool the Grandmaster had at the start was a set of goggles. They had a soft, leather strap for wrapping around your head, and entirely covered the eye in a single plate of crystal, sort of shaped like alchemical safety goggles. The crystal was tinted amber however in color, and thick. Things through it were blurry to see... at least until you wound the key on the side of the goggles.

Honestly, it kind of reminded me of a music box, in the way you wound it up. After, extremely fine vibrations would start to go through the crystal, and... well, seeing through it became rather easy, oddly. Just... don't expect to see what you're actually staring at. I'd grown accustomed to encountering fucked up things at this point, and it was only three and a half weeks into my training. The goggles had an odd habit of presenting their perspective not lined up with where they actually were. Also, I swore they had a mind of their own and were, in fact, complete dickholes. Dickhole? Goggles was plural but... arg! Forget it!

The first time I used them, I put them on and instead of seeing the page in front of me, I got a lovely view up the skirt of a female Keld studying in the library across from me. That was... surprising. The second time I tried it, I was pretty sure I was seeing the inside of the nearby Inaga servant's ear as he wiggled back and forth, wiping one of the tables down. He really needed to clean...

It took me until try three before I realized if I looked right *at* a demonic word with them on the page, they'd snap right to it as if it was a sexy female stripping in front of them. That... worked surprisingly well. Of course, by then I'd forgotten all of the other warnings I'd read about before using the stupid things, and almost blacked out as it felt like a spike was rammed through the front of my forehead.

Learning the words utterly sucked. Looking at them through the goggles... expanded them. Right into your mind. Not only did you understand fully how to truly 'pronounce' them, in a way that produced the effect you wanted, but their usage was engrained into you as well. You 'understood', as Chronak's notes explained it.

Three words later, I had a headache that just wouldn't quit and kind of wanted to die a little. I had to take a break, and realized it felt like my eyes were *aching*. Ugh. Of course, learning the words was pointless if you didn't know the syntax on how to string them together in your head. The actual lesson book Chronak had referenced talks about all sorts of stupid grammar things like pronouns, verb activators, and meta chain structures, but Chronak's notes called it all fancy bullshit written by someone who loved to sound fancy.

The first part was targeting. That included meta targeting for things not necessarily 'nouns'. A noun being literally any subject around you that you could consider as a target. I guess things that... weren't

that, were more abstract things. Like invisible things such as the air itself, or magical effects and whatnot. The second part was supposed to be 'adjectives'. But Chronak just explained it as helper words. Words that changed the way the actual sentence behaved, and fine-tuned control over what you were doing to reality. Made sense really. The third part was for the verb, and optionally, a linkage to a new sentence they called the punctuation. Also bullshit, as Chronak stated. He explained it as simply the action of what you wanted the sentence to actually do, and if you were planning on adding more sentences or effects, those just get tacked on afterwards in a chain. Also made sense. But... he'd gotten really good at explaining things to me.

I'd worked with structure through three lessons now. Resting on my back on the couch, I read over his notes while bouncing an alchemic rubber ball next to me, off the library tiles. Ball, stasis. It was a simple exercise, as the ball froze as it touched down against my finger, without me looking at it. I ran the command again, which countered itself, and the ball fell into the pad of my paw once more. Amusingly enough, I had people watching me with fascination the entire time, but I didn't give them much thought. I had to learn all of this as fast as possible.

Another bounce and freeze, this time with the added adjective of 'rotating', and the ball slowly spun around in midair over my paw, like a miniature planet or moon. A glance to my left showed my illusionary screens still functioning, and monitored the precise usage of all my extra bodily vita. The lesson book had suggested I learn to 'feel out' how much vita I had remaining like a warrior would. But paranoid me had written a medical enchantment program to attach to myself that literally monitored the vita usage of every portion of my body, then compared it to the overall vita levels within me at any given moment. It gave me a neat 'map' of the fluctuations that would go through me every time I activated a True Alchemy command.

These simple commands barely caused any fluctuations at all. What I'd consider a cantrip, had I been considering magic. Something to cast that didn't really even beat out your natural regeneration of the power you were using. That would probably change though as I started moving up to more advanced usages, and I didn't want to accidentally fuck myself by not being able to keep track of my own vita!

Another ball bounce, and it started swaying through the air in a lazy figure eight pattern, while I started playing with the mental visualizations involved with the stasis-freeflow series of commands. It was like a super inexpensive version of levitation! Fun! I just broke the universe a little each time I used it was all. "Whoooooa..." My ears perked up at the sudden voice, and I looked to the right, spotting dark-brown furred, green-eyed friend, Kada, as he hopped up. His eyes followed the ball through the air with fascination, and he grinned. "There's no magic there. Is that... True Alchemy?"

As far as a lot of people were concerned, True Alchemy was synonymous with magic. You could 'mimic' magic with it. Anything magic could do, it could do more efficiently. I guess the real 'secret' behind it was how it was actually done, and what it really meant. Well, until you got to the stuff where it started doing things magic had no hope of accomplishing. I nodded to Kada, however, and sat up, floating the ball back into my paw.

"Yup! Hey Kada! Thanks for coming." I'd sent him a comm about half an hour ago, and he'd said he got off work shortly.



He gave a squeak and a little hop before going rigid and saluting me, of course. "O-Of course, Grandmaster Exes! You s-summoned, of course!" I rolled my eyes, and he flinched lightly.

"Kada, it's just Exes. You know that. I have a fancy title now, but really... I'm still me. And I still want to be your friend." His eyes slowly widened as I told him, and a light flush came to his cheeks.

A nervous swallow, and he finally slowly nodded. "I mean... I knew you'd be the Grandmaster eventually. I just... I thought you were just being polite that night and that I'd never hear from you again." His ears lowered a little, but I smiled and shook my head to him again.

"Nope. I really do want to be your friend. I'm... sorry for taking so long to get back with you. I never realized what it was like to have mates in heat, and everything with Chronak's farewell and meeting a bunch of people afterwards..." He quickly held his paws up and shook his head however, relaxing a little.

"N-No, of course! You're busy of course. I'm just happy you contacted me again! Um..." He took a few sniffs of me, then his flush deepened a little. "My... friend definitely wouldn't make the mistake *now*." I snorted, and he grinned at that. No, I definitely smelled like Exia and Yimir now. And they smelled like each other and me in return.

"Uh, yeah. I wasn't really worried about that anymore anyway. They both kinda made it pretty clear they were sticking around." He gave a snicker and nod at that. I perked however, then patted the couch next to me.

Another blush, deeper red this time, but he hopped up on the couch anyway and looked towards me with a curious expression. "I... did actually have some reasons I contacted you. For one, I know you said you studied in the academy. I'll be starting there this winter for a geology and economics course, and well, I was kind of wondering what it was like."

His large ears perked up at that, and he nodded excitedly, relaxing into the sofa finally. "Oh! That I can *definitely* tell you about. I've gone there for a year now. The last four years of basic schooling takes place in the academy here in Laridia, as sort of an attempt to smoothly transition more students into advanced studies after school. That includes living in the dormitories. Though uh, I imagine you'll keep living in the palace?" Err, right. The dorms.

I coughed at that, then nodded. "I don't think the dorms would want to put up with the amount of security overhead I seem to require now." I gestured to the left, causing him to look over at the two honor guards casually leaning against the nearby library columns, looking like they were resting. They most definitely weren't. If I concentrated, I could feel their vita detection constantly up and locked onto me in particular while also scanning for 'aggressive vita' nearby. Turns out, if you were skilled enough at vita sensing, you could pick up 'intent' to some degree. Scary!

"Oh, right! You're uh, kinda a massive global celebrity now." That one got a groan from me, and Kada winced. "Ah! Sorry, I didn't... mean it in a bad way!"

I shook my head though and sighed. "I'm just... not used to it. I kinda wish I was just a normal tribal still. It doesn't feel like I'm ready for any of this at all..." I turned and tossed the bouncy ball again, skipping it off a nearby table edge and letting it hang in the air on its way back to us, doing a little dance while floating there.

Kada watched it quietly before smiling and nodding. “Well, if anything, I think you’re handling it really well! I saw you at the old Grandmaster’s farewell, and you were amazing! I... really don’t think you’ll have a problem with the academy either. It’s a lot like basic school, in that there’s classes in the lecture forums that you sit in on. Then work labs for practicing the application bits.” Right. If he was year one, that put him as a year younger than I was. Eleven, then. And he seemed to handle it just fine.

I relaxed a little and caught the ball again before nodding. “I... I figured it was like that, honestly. What are... the crowds like? That’s one thing that has me nervous.”

He snickered again. “Before or after your honor guard escort cuts a path through them?” Ugh! I shot him a pointed stare, and he gave an impish grin in return, at least relaxing around me finally.

I got him to talk about the dorm life still, and what it was like studying there. It was as packed as I thought it would be, with literally over a hundred students per lecture. The dorms were pretty compact tower apartments that stacked the students not unlike what I’d seen in some of those commercial fish containers in the market. Smelled tasty, but I wouldn’t like to be squeezed in like that. Especially not with two horny mates.

He liked it though. Illan burrows were underground, and tight spaces made him feel... comfortable. I could understand that, at least. Then he hit me with a curveball, however. “Um, I meant to ask by the way... Call it an academic interest? What exactly do you do for... fun? I mean, I know you have mates and do uh, m-mate stuff... and stuff...” He blushed furious after, but I blanked for a moment. Fun...? I must have asked it out loud, because he nodded. “Yeah. For fun. Entertainment? I know you’re kinda stuck in the palace, but I know for a fact that there’s lots to do inside. I helped set up more than one of the gaming tables in the lounge, and I know each room has hookups available for personal entertainment centers.” I blanked again at that, slowly blinking his way.

“Personal... entertainment... centers...?” His eyes widened, mouth falling agape like I just admitted that I liked kicking strider puppies, or enjoyed the taste of fish paste lasagna.

“You... You’ve never gamed on a personal entertainment center?! Oh Gods, Exes! You’ve never experienced true joy in life!” He gushed it out like a Priest might a prophetic statement from a God, and my ears flicked back and forth. Wait, ‘gamed’ was a word?

I shook my head and he gave a squeak of despair. “Oh gosh! I should bring mine over from the dorms and let you experience it!” I winced at that.

“I dunno, Kada. That sounds like a lot of effort to haul something over here...”

“No! It’s worth it regardless! Gaming is life!”

Idly, I started wondering if I’d accidentally blundered into a cult. “Uh, no, I more meant... I dunno. Maybe Calien could look getting one for me or something from the market? Though I don’t know the details of... what it...”

We both slowly looked to my left, at the excited looking, light-gray-furred Illan maid scribbling in her notebook. Uh...? She gave an excited squeak, looking up from the book with light blue eyes, then nodded rapidly. “Order taken! Don’t worry! Queen Calien will set you all up with a personal

entertainment device in your suite! Off to report to her!” The fuck?! Who was... How long had she even been standing there?!

Kada seemed unbothered. “Ooo. W-Wait, what games are...?”

“All of them!” The Illan gave a grin and hop, then burst off towards the exit of the library as fast as she could bounce. Which was admittedly way faster than I could have even tried to keep up with. I was so confused. Games? Were they individual things then? Wait, no, who the fuck was that?!

Kada snickered, then looked back to me with a shrug. “Well, I guess that worked out well. I forgot the Grandmaster gets sort of a blank cheque everywhere.” I... didn’t know what that was, but I assumed it would become apparent after my economics class. Still...

“Well... I’m considering all that at least partly your fault. So now you’re going to have to visit and help me figure out how to use this thing. Oh, and obviously stay and help extensively test it.” I nodded sagely, and Kada grinned, giving a little bounce on the cushion, followed by at least half a dozen nods.

“Of course! I’d... love to, Exes! It would be an honor!” He saluted again, albeit more playfully this time, and I just rolled my eyes and bapped him lightly on the snout with my paw, getting him to snicker. Oy. He still didn’t match how bratty Exia could be. His was more of a ‘sweet’ and ‘gentle’ brattiness, by my estimation.

Then, he dared to stick his tongue out at me. My whiskers bristled at that, and he paused, perhaps realizing he made a grave error. I tossed the ball up into the air to him, with a simple ‘Catch.’ request. He caught it, and I stasis-ed it into the air, along with his paws stuck to it. His eyes widened as he tried to pull them off the ball, but only hung there in the air with his arms stuck.

“Uh, E-Exes, I can’t get my paws... free...” I grinned as I slid over next to him and nodded, causing him to turn pink again.

“Oh, I know. But now I’ve realized exactly how bratty you can be. This is a technique I’ve only ever used on my little sister, Exia, to work with her brattiness. I’m sorry...” In hindsight, he might have gotten the wrong impression from that, knowing that my little sister was my mate, which may have explained why he went crimson. Especially when I lifted up the bottom of his shirt tunic.

All misconceptions however were clearly evaporated once my fingers mercilessly dug into his fur, sending dancing tickles up and down his stomach and sides. His muzzle seemed to puff up as his eyes swelled in their sockets, and he burst into laughter as he squirmed under my ceaseless attention, flailing now as he thrashed against the floating ball. Eat it! My irritation, my boredom, and all of my amusement! Ancient magical tickle technique! The mana finger!

Well, actually it was a massage technique for physical therapy, but I’d discovered it was absolutely lethal in conjunction with tickling. I also discovered that when you’re the Grandmaster Alchemist, people are way too polite to remind you that libraries were supposed to be quiet. Further, I also discovered that when really ticklish Illan are mercilessly tickled practically in your lap, without any lower paw restraints, it’s *entirely* possible for them to accidentally kick you through the side of a couch. Fun times! No, wait, I deserved that one...

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“Admittedly, I kinda wish I’d been there to see that.” Exia grinned after chirping, and I rolled my eyes as one of the in-palace nurses finished bandaging around my torso.

I huffed. “See what I have to put up with...?” I gestured over my right shoulder to the smirking Exia, but Kada was still busy squirming at the end of the bed.

“I’m still sorry, Exes! Aaaaah! I didn’t mean to kick you!”

“I said it was my fault! I was tickling you...” I crossed my arms at that, and Yimir snickered on the other side of me.

“Yeah, Illan have really strong leg muscles. Really, a bruised rib was probably the lightest of injuries you could have gotten!” I... yeah, that. Kada looked bashful at that and fidgeted where he sat, cross-legged in our suite.

The nurse gave a snicker, then shook her head. “Well, you should be good to go. Just no drastic movements for a few hours at least while the regeneratives kick in.” Right... She scrunched her muzzle after, averting her eyes before coughing. “Not that... you didn’t know that already. Sorry. Habits.” I chuckled and held a paw up too her rather assuringly.

“Thoroughness is a good habit to have. Thank you, Nurse.” She gave a little curtsy to that, then padded towards the door to our room.

I’m pretty sure Calien must have put in some sort of executive order for that entertainment center thingy. It was already being installed by the time we got back up to the suite, with Yimir already here giving it curious paw nudges while a mechanical alchemy specialist set it up. It was... definitely odd. Fundamentally, it was sort of an ovaloid, about a meter wide and half a meter thick at the base, extending upwards about a quarter of a meter into a half dome. Made entirely of a rich sapphire crystal, I was informed that they came in custom colors and the queen had decided I’d probably like the blue one the best. They were basically an incredibly complicated enchantment pattern all housed inside the crystal rock, that acted as sort of a meta program for running other things you inserted into them at the little slot in the front.

‘Games’ were loaded separately from little magical cartridges. The control system for the device itself was an illusion projection screen that hovered over the dome, but in order to actually play the games, they had these helmet things you could slip on. A circlet basically that covered your vision with a projection field, then synced your upper body movement to controls inside of the game. There were also mental commands and stuff you could access through the basic telepathy magic installed in the helmet. It was kinda neat! I never even knew something so sophisticated existed, for just entertainment purposes!

“Well, there’s only three of us, and clearly, a ton of these games are four players! Guess that means Kada’s gonna have to stay and play with us too!” Exia grinned as she announced it, looking to Kada almost predatorily. Uh... He shrank a little, but rapidly nodded back to her.

“O-Of course! I already promised Exes I would...” I lifted my eyebrow to her, but she and Yimir looked at each other for a second before they both nodded, then slid up level with me. Uh...

“Perfect! I guess the only question left is, what do we try first...?” Oh, right.

All four of us perked and looked towards the... large... pile of cartridges sitting on the table next to the entertainment dome. Apparently, the seller had simply opened up their warehouse and flat out donated one of every game they had to me. There was a note that came along with it saying they were 'amazed' that I'd taken an interest in their gaming system, and would be delighted if I could give them a review of it after I tried it out sufficiently. Well, that I could definitely do! I'd never really 'reviewed' anything before, but I think that just meant they wanted to know if I liked it or not. That was easy!

Ears perking, Kada rotated to look the cartridges over. "Mmm, we could do one of the games I already have in my room. Maybe something cooperative? What do you guys think of fantasy?"

"Uh, fantasy?" Exia questioned, tilting her head curiously at that.

Yimir frowned. "Like... the book genre? For books, it means a focus on adventure and fanciful settings and stuff. Usually in worlds that aren't Aion."

"Exactly! One game series in particular I really like. Mmmm, ah, here it is!" Kada pulled out one of the cartridges entitled 'Chronicles of Na'ard', and showed it to the three of us. I'd obviously never heard of it but...

Yimir's ears perked up rather intensely. "Wait, like the book series?! Aaaah, they're so good! Though uh, don't they focus quite a bit on the uh... romance stuff?"

The Illan boy's eyes widened at that, and a full-face flush shot over him. "I m-mean... maybe? It's not I-like I get into those parts of the, um, game! That requires... more than just one player..." He... didn't have any other friends to game with?

"They made the romance multiplayer?! Let's do that one!" Well, Yimir was excited now.

Exia hesitated, then slowly nodded. "So long as we can choose. I'm not going after any male who's not Exes..." My turn to flush a bit. She grinned at my reaction, then slid over and hiked herself upwards, before plopping down into my lap instead. Well, this was undoubtedly a great position to game in.

Kada watched us for a moment before flushing more and looking away again. "I mean, obviously. I wasn't going to get involved in *that* anyway. At its core, Chronicles of Na'ard is a very sophisticated adventure and roleplaying game! While multiplayer romance is innovative, it definitely stays true to the source material..." He nodded twice to that, and I smiled softly to him.

"We wouldn't force you to do anything, Kada. Anyway, you'll have to show us all how to play of course. Plug it in. Oh, could you get us some food ordered, Yimir?"

She perked at my request, then nodded enthusiastically. It *was* quite close to dinner, and while those energy bars were great for keeping my vita levels up, they weren't very filling at all. Kind of the opposite really. They heavily boosted the metabolic rates in order to function properly, which actually made you hungry faster.

"Of course! Let's try some more pasta! That was tasty yesterday. Is that okay with you, Kada?"

He gave a startled squeak at being addressed, in the middle of plugging the cartridge in and manipulating the hovering menu. "Ah! Um, o-of course! Pasta's good." She grinned to him and

noded, then dropped to all fours and dashed to the wall comm, which had the full palace menu system available. Well, this was going to be a fun evening, I suspected!