

NIGHT CREW

As Denver unzipped, Ana leaned back against the wall beside the urinal so they could keep chatting.

Crossing her arms and making liberal use of eye rolling, Ana continued on her rant, saying, “Who in management has ANY contingency plans for what’s in those crates? Hm? Who? Rhodes thinks they’re full of food reserves and water filters and sunshine and fucking rainbows.”

Denver, also rolling his eyes and nodding at Ana, said, “The queen’s agents personally delivering eleven crates... eleven crates bigger than our own forks can even pick up, might I add so that we don’t forget that little part of it... barely fit through the front cargo door, in fact had to knock down an internal wall and collapse a big bite of the floor just to get them into the basement properly... totally just normal supplies. Stuff they could’ve just unpacked, carried in, and repacked again, but felt like blowing up our concrete instead.”

“Right!” Ana said. “It makes no sense for it to be anything REMOTELY normal sized, let alone anything REMOTELY NORMAL!”

“S’fuckin ridiculous,” Denver said, and then his piss stream petered out. Feeling like there was more to come if he waited a little bit, he waited.

Denver and Ana were the night crew at Portcullis 77 in The Grand Partition. A somewhat busy post during the summer, but now that the ice had well and solidly set in for the year, Portcullis 77 was just about the most desolate post in existence.

To the north was Hel’kaimavesh: though in the summertime a dense jungle, now the winter spirits had taken over, and the entire land had been petrified and cursed, the trees turned to stone, and massive clouds of noxious gases tumbled across the frozen land, leaving travelers suffocated at best and detonated at worst—the flash and the sound of ‘bombs’ going off to the north was a regular occurrence throughout the days and nights. The winter spirits made ice giants: beginning with a tree, a spirit would shamble about, and take pieces off of the other petrified creatures—the head of a boar, the teeth of fifty snakes—and affix these other organs to the tree, layer after layer, until an amalgamate hulking monstrosity had been made. Once made, the winter spirit would release the ice from all of the creatures who had gone into it, leaving the likes of decapitated boars thawing into life again and collapsing over immediately, slithering toothless snakes—or skinless snakes, or skinless baboons, or whatever the case may actually be—and, in the wake of these maimed creatures, the ice giant itself would begin to sprint over the hills with no need to ever rest, tasked to roam this land of stone and cold and kill anything that was unafflicted by the ice—any travelers that were warm and alive—so that, dead, the travelers’ corpses would cool and solidify, freeze over, and then the ice spirits could have them to take pieces off of as well, if they so chose, for the next ice giant they made.

To the south of Portcullis 77, beyond The Grand Partition’s hundreds (and hundreds, and hundreds) of feet of concrete, steel, lead, and runes, was Yonell: a rocky land, mostly dry and barren, dotted with the occasional lake, around the bigger of which, fishing towns did spring up.

There was a highway connecting the metropolises of the far south past Yonell with the metropolises of the far north past Hel’kaimavesh. This highway went through Portcullis 77. While the ice was upon Hel’kaimavesh, the portcullis was closed.

Talking about the huge and mysterious crates in their basement, Ana continued, “Mathews’s entire policy is that he doesn’t want us to speculate.”

Denver nodded, as his piss stream started again.

Ana continued, “I’m like, ‘Well are YOU speculating at least?’ And he’s like ‘duhhhhh I can’t get into it,’ like, great, so that’s a

NO then. HE doesn't have a plan for anything that might be in these."

Denver finished peeing, shook off, put his dick away, and zipped his fly back up.

He and Ana walked out of the bathroom and back into the concrete corridor they had been going down.

Once in the hall, Denver felt the familiar heat of Ana igniting herself in magical fires beside him. She sounded like a campfire and smelled like volcanic hot springs, sulfur, steam. She floated on her back, lifted by the flames, and left a faint trail of vapor behind her.

They were on the highest floor, not counting the roof, and heading north, towards an observation room facing the petrified icy wasteland of Hel'kaimavesh. This was their typical night: observing to the north for any incoming trouble—A torch-bearing army of ghouls? A mythical storm?—and occasionally making the walk over to the south-facing observatory, to more briefly check for anything that way as well—perhaps an approaching visitor, though, this time of year, such a thing was now very unlikely.

Ana, floating along, asked, "What do *you* think is in those crates?"

Denver, sauntering along, hand resting on the handle of the sword in his scabbard, shrugged. "War."

"Elaborate."

Denver shrugged again. "Super armor, guns, sigil stones."

"So you think it's the advanced shit," Ana said.

"Queen's agents delivered it themselves? I don't think it's anything cheap or easily replaceable."

"Fair," Ana said.

"What do *you* think it is?" Denver asked.

"I'm an optimist," Ana said. "I think it's something medicinal, a big fat load of science to cross-pollinate to the cities in the north."

"So like, new progress on antivirals, new kickass arthritis meds?"

"Man I don't fuckin know, I'm an optimist not a scientist."

Denver snickered.

Ana, with a magically amplified volume, pursed her lips and made a fart noise, just for fun. It echoed forward into the observation room that was nearly at hand, and backward down the corridor the two of them were going through.

Banshee, was Ana's call sign on the radio. On her left hand, a magic ring to conjure and control fires; On her right hand, a magic ring to greatly amplify the volume of her voice if she so chose.

Ana wore two magic rings, and Denver wore seventeen—all of his fingers and doubling up on many of the digits. The magic ring on Denver's right pinky finger turned his cunt into a penis and balls, as long as it was on. Eight of Denver's other magic rings, by using similar magic, kept shut gaping wounds in his body that by all rights should have killed him: gunshots through the chest transformed into regular skin again, as long as these enchanted metal bands remained on his fingers. The mastectomy had been done by a surgeon, no magic, some years before any magic rings at all had found a home on his hands.

Grower, was Denver's call sign on the radio. Rhodes and Mathews hated it. Denver loved that Rhodes and Mathews hated it. Ana also loved that Rhodes and Mathews hated it. Banshee requested Grower's assistance by name every time she got the slightest opportunity, even if Denver was just across a vault room and she could have by all rights shouted loud enough herself to call him over without the radio's assistance.

The two arrived at the observation room. The entire north wall was made up of a sheet of very thick, very magically enhanced glass. On the outside it appeared to be just another rectangle of concrete, with only the most keen-sighted observers having any chance of noting that it was a bit more shiny. On the inside looking out, it served as a magnifier—it took quite a lot of getting used to, and indeed often made new users lose their lunch to motion sickness, but once one got the hang of it, it was possible to observe the entire landscape through the glass with no modification, or, one could quirk their head just-so and zoom in 2x, 8x, 128x, an adept spy with the glass could look down to the highway below and read the fine print on a dropped sheet of paper, if they had the desire to. Besides the glass north wall of the observation room, there were cushioned chairs and couches,

a pair of desks, and some bookcases that contained practical materials as well as fictional things to pass the time. Out on one of the desks was a chess board. Denver and Ana had been playing quite a lot of it lately.

Ana hovered over above a couch, let her flames go out, and dropped onto the couch, her body bouncing after she'd landed. She cupped her hands behind her head and looked up at the ceiling.

Denver unstrapped his sword, set it scabbard-and-all on a rack between two of the bookcases, took a seat in a chair that faced the window, and kept watch.

Far off, over the hills, quite a bit right of the highway, there was a flash of light as a gas cloud went off.

Some seconds passed, and then, eventually, the sound of a muffled boom arrived.

And then quiet again. Moonlight shining on the ice below.

Denver used to create games. Card games, board games, things that got printed and sold huge numbers and gained incredible followings, towards the end he had been doing a lot of work in the new tech gimmick, computer games. Then he had gotten wrapped up with Camden and a lot of shit had gone sideways quickly.

Exploring sex with him had been transcendental. Neither of them had been a complete virgin going in, but it was a threshold into another world completely, that week they were crashing at a very sex-positive friend's apartment and they had spent so much time in the dark, on the couch or on the friend's bed, rubbing their cocks together, making out, smooching each other's necks, shoulders, biceps, pits, pecs, knees, calves, toes, everywhere. Sometimes being watched, sometimes just their own private two-person world.

The very sex-positive friend mainly just got mounted and fucked by his dog husband. Pretty cool.

Whatever.

All of that had been unforgettable, in a good way. But, that had just been one facet of the die. Sometimes, when the 'Denver & Camden' die was rolled, the result was something new and elated as fuck. Most of the sides of that die though? Most of the sides of that die had "Terrible idea, you're really going to do

this?" written all over them in big red warning letters. Trafficking Camden's cursed sigils through Denver's board game drivers. Political assassination and narrow getaways. Making or losing more in a day than Denver ever had the first twenty years of his life.

Whatever.

Denver *had* gotten away with all of it, and Camden very much didn't. And now Denver was here, about as far away from everything as you could possibly get. A self inflicted punishment of exile? A buffer in case the things he had done ever did get exposed after all? A retreat to recenter himself before moving on to a new city, and resurrecting the board game shit all over again?

Whatever.

There was no plan. No goals anymore. No grand scheme, no imagined pile of gold, no nirvana, no earthly heaven. There was the night shift with Banshee, stocks to cook nice enough meals with in the chow hall, and in spite of the nightmarish winter spirits down below, the concrete of The Grand Partition was very thick, the gate of Portcullis 77 was very heavy, general knowledge of the highway being unpassable in the wintertime kept visitors away very effectively, and nothing ever *really* happened here.

Denver rubbed his cheek in thought for a moment. He then shot Ana a question: "If it is medical shit, why are the crates so *big*?"

Ana said it again: "Man I don't fuckin know, I'm an optimist not a scientist."

Denver snickered at that answer again. It *was* the right answer.

Ana was always basically going to have ended up being in some kind of military type shit, according to her. That was what everyone in her shitty, tiny fishing town ended up going into, if they didn't stay there forever, and Ana wasn't staying there forever. When she had been there, she had been the drummer in a local band. 'It wasn't anything that cool' was what she always told Denver about it. And then later she would talk about doing the coolest shit after shows, parties with the craziest stories, snorting drugs that Denver didn't know were snortable. In the

chow hall, anything other than fish was always her first choice from the stocks.

Looking out of the window in the observation room, Denver sighed. Looking down at the nighttime petrified jungle below, covered in snowdrifts and ice, Denver zeroed in on a random tree beside the highway; He zoomed in on it as much as he could get the window to zoom, finding just the right angle to hold his head at to make it come into as close of a focus as possible. He stared at the stone twigs. He stared at the buildup of snow atop the stone twigs, the way that the drifts of snow forming along the bumps and elbows of a twig were like a microcosm of the way snowdrifts formed at larger scales against ridges and valleys.

Out of the corner of his eye, Denver saw a flash of blue light.

He reeled his head back, backing up way-way out again, looking at the entire landscape. His eyes darted all around the outstretching moonlit hills, trying to spot where the flash had originated from—a gas cloud going off was always a great big blast of yellow-orange light; this blue flash had been something different.

The jungle below didn't move at all.

No sound came following after the flash, either. Denver realized he had been holding his breath, waiting for a muffled boom, to help place what direction the light had come from. No such luck.

Stillness in the jungle.

Quiet all around.

Metered breathing.

A blue flash through the trees, left of the highway; Denver turned his head and looked straight into it; The blue light dissipated before Denver could even properly tell what he was looking at, but by the moonlight alone, he saw some type of shadow darting over the glimmering snow and into the cover of the stone foliage. Denver scanned over the surrounding area, trying to catch another glimpse of the figure, or anything else moving, but the petrified jungle was still again.

Under his breath, Denver muttered, “Fuck,” and then he said to Ana, “We’ve got an unknown presence outside.”

Ana got up from the couch. Taking a knee beside Denver's chair, looking out of the window alongside him, she asked, "What do you see?"

"Intermittent flashes of blue light, at least one entity on the move."

"Copy."

Denver and Ana observed.

It would be easy to believe Denver had just been imagining shit. As one minute crept by after another, the moonlit jungle below looked the same as it always did. Snowy. Still. Maybe some of the snow blowing in the wind. Maybe a bit of the moonlight had caught Denver the wrong way, as the loose snow was blowing around in the wind, and he was seeing things.

Still no more sign of whatever shadow he had seen passing through.

And then another blue flash, *much* closer, nearly almost out of the jungle and onto the portcullis's snowdrift-covered lawn.

Denver started to say "There" but Ana spoke over him to report "I saw it."

The trees were too dense.

Denver asked, "Could you tell what the fuck made—"

"No," Ana said.

And then, a shadow tumbled out of the woods, and it became like an inky black blot upon the snowy lawn.

Denver and Ana's views both snapped straight to it, and they zeroed in.

Nonhuman. A canid with a void-black coat of fur, bounding over the snowdrifts, straight towards the heavy closed portcullis.

Denver looked back and forth between the canid and the tree line, waiting for more to follow. He imagined another black canid, a whole pack of shadows. More strongly, he imagined a hominid, presumably a spellcaster or a tech wiz who had been making the blue lights, running after their dog.

Nothing else came following after the black dog. The creature appeared to be coming to them alone.

Policy was never to open the portcullis, lest they risk the entire peaceful lands of Yonell and beyond to the claim of the evil winter spirits of Hel'kaimavesh.

The dog neared the gate.

Denver and Ana looked to each other.

They spoke over each other, Denver saying “I care—” at the same time as Ana was already saying “We’re getting him.”

She then stood up, yanked Denver up by the nape of his grey jacket, hugged Denver in a tight squeezing hug against herself, and ignited her magical fires, and the two of them were then flying back through the concrete corridor. At a closed door to a stairwell, Banshee pressed her boots down onto the ground and made countervailing fires, skidding to a halt, dropping Grower as she got her balance. Grower yanked open the door and ran in, leaving the door wide open for Banshee to follow, and grabbed at the keyring chained to his belt. Banshee did follow him in, yanked him up in her arms again, and rocketed them upwards, up to the roof access door. She held Grower up to it: Grower, appropriate key already in hand, thrust it forward into the door and turned the lock open. Banshee swung open the door, leaving the key behind in the lock, and with her fires she brought them into the air, over the edge of the rooftop, and then rocketing down towards the snowy ground, towards the black speck.

The two landed in front of the portcullis as the dog was arriving.

Besides the black coat of fur, the dog was also outfitted in black canid garb, some of it hard black shells, other parts loose black cloth blowing in the wind. The dog halted, looked at Banshee and Grower.

Banshee dropped to her knees in the snow and extended out her arms.

The dog approached at a great speed, and climbed up into her arms.

Banshee said to Grower, volume raised in a command, “Hold onto me.”

Grower clung onto Banshee’s shoulders.

Banshee used her fires to lift all three of them up and up before The Grand Partition’s concrete face, ascending dozens of feet by dozens of feet. As they ascended, the dog clung slightly to Banshee, leaning close against her.

Banshee deposited herself and her two passengers on the concrete rooftop, and then before anyone could go anywhere,

with washes of fire and steam, she created a room for them: four very tall walls of fire, the nighttime sky overhead, and a floor underfoot of concrete adorned in half-melted sludgy snow clumps.

The dog laid on her back in a puddle of the snow sludge, front paws held politely together, hindlegs splayed apart wide, nose wiggling as she sensed the air. She—now that Denver could see the dog’s coochie on proud display, ‘she’ felt apt, even if some concept of transmasc dogs did cross his mind as a cool possibility—She didn’t look to be injured or otherwise too bad off from the journey through Hel’kaimavesh. She was outfitted with boots, some kind of body armor, some kind of coat. Now and then, a snaking blue wisp of light slithered around her, especially over the uncovered parts of her body—her face, her tummy, the aforementioned coochie. A warming enchantment, of some kind? Denver figured it would have to be, to explain how the dog had made it so far.

Nose to tail, the dog looked like she was doing just fine.

Denver reached out and rubbed the dog’s wet belly fur. The dog’s wagging intensified, and she wiggled back and forth.

Denver couldn’t feel his goddamn fingers they were so cold.

Oh that was actually a huge fucking problem, if he lost any of his fingers? Lost any of his fingers to the cold—the magic rings keeping his wounds shut—oh shit—oh shit he could pretty much literally explode if—

As if sensing his exact concerns, the dog then spoke: “Your fingers feel so cold and fumbling. Shall I help with the same magic that has kept me warm and well on my walk through the woods?”

With no hesitation, Denver said, “Please.”

The dog rolled off of her back, got onto her feet, raised a forepaw, and spoke a collection of syllables that did not sound like any language Denver had ever heard before: as the black-coated dog spoke the syllables, a swirling ball of blue light grew and grew around her forepaw, and then, she bapped the ball of light against the ground, and a blast of blue light shot out, enveloping all three of them for a flash.

When the light went away, Denver could see that Ana’s walls of fire had all been completely snuffed out without even a trace

of lingering smoke or vapor; the concrete underfoot was dry and warm, no more sludgy cold wet snow for about a dozen-foot radius around where the dog had bapped the ground with the magic; and Denver, much like the ground underfoot, found himself pleasantly warm, as though all of the clothes he was wearing had just come straight out of a dryer.

He curled and uncurled his fingers in the air in front of himself; the fingers were no longer stiff. He crossed his arms across his chest and tucked his hands into his armpits, lest the cold come back sooner than he realized.

Ana conjured a ball of fire in her hand, and then let out a sigh of relief that the dog's magic hadn't canceled out her own permanently, or anything like that. She flicked the fireball off into the sky, where it flew for a while and then went out in a gust of wind.

The rooftop was very cold—even after the pulse of warming magic, a single gust of wind brought all of the icy chills of the air back in full force.

Ana made an out-loud observation to the dog: “You can talk.”

Denver had never met a talking dog before either. There were rumored to be such things in very very very far away lands, but he had always taken that kind of stuff as make-believe.

He felt weirdly completely unsurprised about the whole thing though.

The dog stood proud, and said, “Agent Boreal, here before you in the flesh and fur, though merely passing through tonight, to some of the queen's matters which have beckoned me down to the cities to the far south. And, although my designation on this journey is Agent Boreal, my identity need not be a secret: you can call me Alisson if you like.”

Alisson then sat, and with one of her hindpaws, reached up to her side and kicked open a compartment in her hardshell armor. With a hindclaw she lifted a golden amulet out of the compartment, handed it from her hindpaw to her teeth, and then stepped forward and dropped it into Ana's hand, which was outstretched down to the dog to receive what the dog was offering.

Ana examined the golden amulet closely in the moonlight. Denver also looked at it, over her shoulder. There was absolutely

no question to Denver that it was genuine—his skill for instant judgment on the matter was aided by the fact that he had taken an amulet of the queen off of a high judge’s bleeding corpse before, and had had plenty of time with it in the days after to look at it as much as he pleased. That amulet back then, identical in all ways to this one now, bore an image of a vixen whose legs drooped limp, and who was actually suspended by eight large spidery legs. Precious stones (and one non-precious stone) were imposed a short distance below the end of each spidery leg, in the queen’s correct order: from left to right, True Emerald, Onyx, Pearl, Jade, Hell-Widow Emerald, Sweet Emerald, Insanity Emerald, and Slate.

Ana handed the golden amulet back down to ‘Agent Boreal.’ Alisson gently took it in her teeth, handed it back to her hindpaw again, dropped it into the compartment, and then reached up with the hindpaw and pulled the compartment’s top shut again. Dexterous little bitch. Denver thought that seeing her do these precise tricks was incredibly hot.

Hot? No, cool. Incredibly cool, neat, impressive.

Actually yes, hot. Incredibly sexually attractive. Alisson was an incredibly sexually attractive hyper-functional talking dog.

Whatever.

Denver was like, “I love your suit.”

Alisson was like, “Thanks man,” and wagged a little. She then sniffed the air in his direction, and damn near seemed to fucking wink at him.

Denver, gesturing to himself, mentioned, “Denver, he/him/his. Sentinel.”

Alisson spoke some unknown word, and a wisp of blue light floated up into Denver’s face; as it hit him, it felt like getting a big slobbery dog lick right on the mouth.

Denver giggled, and shuddered.

Alisson said, “Well met, Denver, o sentinel.”

Ana said, “Ana or call sign Banshee, she/her/hers, sentinel who would LOVE for the non-temperature-regulating among us —DENVER—to get A MOVE ON before he gets HYPOTHERMIA THAT IS ALL HIS FAULT.”

Alisson said, “Oh! Yes, of course, my apologies for keeping you. If I could trouble you to fly me down on the Yonell side of the partition, I will not stay you any longer.”

Ana said, “GIRL it is LATE and we have plenty of room for you, come spend the night, spend a week if you like. Everyone, inside, chop chop let’s go.”

Alisson let out a charmed “hmhm!” and bounded towards the (still open) door that lead into the stairwell.

Denver started to doubletime it back that way as well, but Ana caught him by the arm, and got right up against his ear to whisper to him, “I see you. I am going to wingman this so fucking hard bro. I wanna HEAR it tonight.”

Ana then slapped Denver against the chest. Denver gave a bunch of pat slaps against Ana back, and then the two of them ran towards the stairwell door, to catch up with the queen’s candid agent who was now already in the doorway.

Once they were all back inside, at the top of the stairwell, Denver closed the door shut behind them. He struggled with the key, his hands already surprisingly stiff, nonresponsive, from the cold. Fuck, the idea of going miles (and miles, and miles) through cold like that... It was no wonder visitors were such an anomaly. But, Denver did get the door shut and locked, and—not wanting to fumble with the keyring—he stowed the key in his pocket.

Alisson created another burst of warming blue light.

Immediately, Denver felt better again, and he expressed as much, saying, “That. Is SO useful, and, actually it *also* just *feels* really nice.”

“Well, thank you,” Alisson said. “It’s something I studied in Ket’tek. The people there *do* use it for pleasure and relaxation, as a matter of fact. After getting a knack for it in those capacities though, there was nothing stopping me from more practical applications, such as protection during direly cold-weather travel.”

Ana and Denver began down the stairs, and Alisson skipped ahead down to the next bend in the stairwell, looking back up at the humans, waiting.

Denver asked her, “What about the ice giants?”

“I’m faster.”

How the fuck could one dog be so sexy?

W-whatever.

Alisson elaborated, “Well, I’m faster at weaving through petrified trees and bushes. Those things are *nightmarishly* fast out in the open tundras. I couldn’t outrun them in a fair race. Not even close.”

Ana mentioned, “First door down this next leg of stairs,” as she and Denver made it to the bend Alisson was paused at. That door had swung back shut behind them on their way out, it looked like. Ana added, “Unless you want an audience with management. Or a bite to eat. All of that is gonna be down at ground level.”

Alisson weighed the choices. “HmMMM. I imagine management is asleep, this late?”

Ana confirmed, “Big snoozin.”

Alisson stretched, sticking her forepaws out before her, haunches in the air. And then she yawned, and said, “I will shadow the two of you.”

“Right this way,” Ana said, and then added, as they all began down the stairs, “I hope you like staring at snow, because ohhhhh boy if you do, this is the job for you.”

“Hmhm.”

Once inside the hallway, out of the stairwell, the three of them briefly went to the Yonell side, to check on that window—there was nothing—and then they completed the circuit to the Hel’kaimavesh side. On the way, Ana had mentioned the enchanted observation window, and what a knack Denver had for using the tricky thing. Alisson had said, “Oo, please, show me. I wanna try it.”

And so, upon arriving back at the cozy observation room, with the window and the couches and the bookshelves and the desks, Denver and Alisson went up to the window.

“So,” Denver began, and then he got down onto his chest on the floor, beside Alisson, right nearby the window. Alisson laid down on her chest too, and scooted up to the edge of the room where the bottom of the window met the end of the floor, and wagged. Denver and Alisson tucked their heads in with one another conspiratorially, neither looking into the window head-on just yet. Denver said, at a gentle but easily audible volume to

the good girl dog he had an enormous crush on, “So, it’s kind of like a river, or like arteries webbing out into smaller and smaller blood vessels. *Most* parts of this window, when you look out of them, will be the big river, the big artery, the big your-analogy-of-choice-here. You look out, and it just looks like looking out of a normal window. But, move your head and look through the glass from a slightly different place, and you can find your way into one of the smaller tributaries, or smaller blood vessels, or that kind of thing; and the smaller the piece you get to, the more magnified the view will be. People new to it a lot of times wayyyy overshoot the adjustments, and get crazy motion sickness from adjusting from 1x zoom to 64x to 2x to 32x all in a tenth of a second. But, if you find where you are, and then gently ease yourself into neighboring parts of the glass, you can find your way pretty readily, once you get kinda used to it.”

Alisson licked Denver’s mouth.

Denver leaned in and pecked a smooch on the front of Alisson’s fuzzy canine lips.

Alisson wagged quite a bit, and then turned her attention to the window.

She held her gaze on the glass for a few seconds—Denver’s insides sank as he could see it in Alisson’s eyes, that the canine was getting intense vertigo right away.

The dog stood, backed away from the window, and then turned and buried her head against the back of one of the couches.

Denver crawled after her, and sat with her, and pet her gently.

Alisson groaned, and said, “Oh I hate that.”

Denver took his hand away, stopped petting.

“Oh, not you,” Alisson said. “Please, keep doing that.”

Denver went back to petting the dizzy Agent Boreal.

They stayed like that for a long time.

Being there. Petting.

Alisson asked, “You just... look into it? There’s no missing step?”

Denver offered, “For what it’s worth, it might’ve just been an unlucky starting point. If you do *happen* to begin right in the weeds... yeah.”

Alisson stood up, and nuzzled heavily into Denver's chest, leaning her full weight forward against him. Denver took the canine and cradled her, rubbing pets against her—well, largely against her armor, but the rocking motion created by the jostling didn't seem unreceived by the canid.

The canine then walked to the window once more, and stood and faced it.

This time? Way better.

She stared forward, leaned in, leaned a little to the side... quirked her head... leanedddd... stumbled, scrambled to catch her footing, closed her eyes and looked *away* rather than trying to keep her place, saving herself from vertigo round two.

Yeah, no, this dog had it. Maybe a few more sessions to get all of the mastery down, but, basically on her sophomore-ever try, she got it.

And she knew it. Lightly stepping away from the window, she circled back to Denver for praise. He did pet her, giving her rubs on the flank and on the throat where her armor didn't cover her. She stood there very proud, receiving the attention, as Denver's fingertips sank into the depths of her fur and rubbed the roots and skin underneath; she stood leaning into his touches...

Ana picked up Alisson and flew away with her.

As Alisson and Denver were parted, they both reached out into the air for each other, but, Ana continued to carry Alisson away, down the hallway.

Ana stopped at a broom closet, opened it up, and deposited Alisson and herself inside.

Ana said, "Girl," or, got about as far as "G—" before Alisson interrupted,

"Exclusive? Poly? Bestiality?"

Ana said, "He is my friend, we never fucked, very here for you and him fucking while I am right there in the room, I didn't ever know him to be a zoo but he's definitely into you hard."

"I *do* want him in me hard more literally."

"Please, do it. Heat?"

"Always. Spellcaster bitches pretty much begin at regulating these things. Some go chaste. Some go fun."

"Imagine me slobbering all over your needy heat."

"Mmmmm?"

Ana didn't.

Alisson gasped, and said, "Biiiiitich..."

"Get it from him."

"*Oh it is on.*"

Ana and Alisson did a cool handshake basically, paw and hand, and then Ana picked Alisson up again, and more gently flew the two of them back into the observation room, where Denver was still sitting there on the floor, his back against the back of a couch.

Ana set the dog down, and said, "I haven't seen enough fuckin snow today, my turn in the snow watching chair," and then she proceeded to the chair that faced the enchanted window, that Denver had been in when he'd first spotted Alisson's blue flashes of light earlier. Ana sat, leaned back, got comfy.

Alisson went up to Denver, and grabbed his hand in her teeth, and leaned back like she was pulling on a rope toy, pulling on his hand, coaxing him up.

Her teeth pressing down between the bones of his hand... And, her tongue on his palm...

Oh fuck also he would super completely die really painfully and bloodily if his rings slipped off of his hand in her playful pulling.

Denver got up, very diligently going along wherever she wanted. Alisson kept hold of his hand, and, taking little steps back and wagging, started bringing them over to one of the couches against a wall to lay down on.

Letting go of his hand, she said, "I want a snuggle friend. Pack behavior kinda thing, y'know?"

In his imagination, Denver saw visions of himself and the black dog snuggled up together in a cave for warmth and comfort during cold nights; petting, kissing... him railing her dog cunt—

Alisson, while looking at him, slapped a paw onto the couch, commandingly.

Denver hopped onto the couch and laid down, and Alisson hopped up after him, wagging. She snuggled right up with him, body to body, tummy to tummy, one of her hindlegs curling up over his thigh.

With her magic, Alisson rested a wisp of blue light against the front of Denver's throat; it felt so, so warm. Gently, she moved the light around to the back of his neck, and it felt like a warm, caring hand sliding across his skin.

She ran the wisp of light down his body, and he felt like he was being pet.

Gently, over and over, she ran the light down him again and again.

He moaned, and said that it felt so good.

She kept petting, over and over.

She started petting him with more than one wisp, running two down his body simultaneously, and then one rubbing back and forth on his chest, one rubbing back and forth on his back, one sliding up his legs...

Lost in the exciting touch that the dog was giving to him, Denver kissed Alisson's muzzle: not just a playful quick thing, but passionately, aroused, horny. In a matter of seconds, Alisson was domineering the kisses, practically sticking her entire snout into his mouth, lapping at the back of his throat.

In the midst of all of it, Alisson freed herself from her armor, letting it fall back from her, onto the ground; as soon as the armor was gone, Denver's hands were all over her, stroking her fur, rubbing fingertips up and down the depths of her coat.

Denver slipped out of his clothes, and he and Alisson fucked there on the couch, completely giving themselves to each other, each one's pleasure making the other's pleasure burn hotter.

Gasps of breath, facefuls of fur, reveling in the odors of a human body, waves and waves of genital stimulation, excited swears at the tops of their voices...

Denver felt that the dog he was fucking was orgasming, and he followed very soon after her, cumming inside of her.

In the afterglow, Denver and Alisson both laid limp on the couch, covered in each other's fluids and scents, catching their breath.

Alisson pressed her nose against Denver, and began, "I think..." and then sniffed him a little bit. Rather than finishing what she had to say, rather than sharing what she was thinking, she just let out a happy, contented sigh, then went "mmmmm,"

and then was resting on Denver's shoulder as though nearly asleep, and then she was indeed snoring on him.

Denver felt himself falling asleep as well. He wondered, very briefly, what next? Was this a one night stand, or the start of a very exciting partnership? What would the morning hold?

Denver, under the weight of this dog he had just climaxed with, fell deep asleep.