

The journey to Dalry was the furthest Nairo had ever traveled since enrolling in the school, requiring a quick train ride, as far as their first and second mission combined. But it was also far less awkward, as they were on much better terms than previously. After their tense and personal conversation earlier, they had room to talk about more enjoyable topics, such as different video games, TV shows, and books they enjoyed.

Alas, “room” in a metaphorical sense; poor Tyr looked rather cramped in their cabin. Nairo did the best he could to make things easier on the plus-sized reptile by opening a deck of cards to play games with. Nairo believed himself to be quite adept at most card games, but Tyr had one hell of a poker face, which made Nairo overthink himself into his own loss again and again.

To his credit, he hadn’t played cards against someone other than himself in quite some time.

As much fun as he had learning how to play with actual other opponents that weren’t himself for once, Nairo was looking forward to hopping off the train to take in their environment. Tyr, probably more so, given the noisy sound of the dragon’s back popping once he finally stood to full height.

The rain persisted nearly the entire way to their destination, only letting up as they approached Dalry, leaving behind a thin mist along the ground. The temperature had plummeted too, causing the ferret to let out an involuntary shiver when he was free. Oh, but it was absolutely worth it just to take in the area! The fresh rainfall, combined with the surrounding towering pine trees mixed into a delectable scent Nairo wished he could bottle and keep with forever. *This* was his peak aesthetic, he reckoned. Tall buildings and modern civilization had plenty of amenities to enjoy, and the ferret was fairly certain he couldn’t live far from a television screen for long, but the great outdoors was, for lack of a better word, great! No smell of smog or smoke to be detected!

And Dalry was certainly an outdoor-focused town (much to Tyr’s delight, Nairo reckoned). There were extremely few, if any, buildings within the village, with practically everything out during all hours of the day. The only places with walls and a “roof” were the hundreds of tarps and tents used for changing rooms and beds, along with the much larger ones to be used as inns. Everything else; furniture, tools, even electronic appliances were set up in what could be considered their yards throughout the large neighborhoods, with borders marked with a string of colored flags. Of course, the rain would pose an issue for such an outdoor-centric town.

But today, a large tarp had been raised to cover everything, each end with water-repellant wards and completely see-through from the bottom.

What allowed the citizens of Dalry to live such a unique lifestyle were, well, its citizens, the vast majority of whom were proficient in magic in one way or another. Most were older

magicians who had retired from battles to live a cozy life in this secluded town with their families and loved ones, but there were a few younger ones who were forced into early retirement due to magical injuries or curses, or those who couldn't finish the battlemage school, but discovered other passions and abilities with their magic, such as potion brewing and ward crafting.

In fact, it was one such person who had requested the assistance of two battle magicians.

Stepping into the borders of the town, Nairo felt the rainwater and dirt accumulating on him from walking the muddy trail slide right off of him, as though he'd passed an invisible screen. Immediately he was impressed with the potency of the wards placed around the town's borders; he'd love to meet whoever designed them!

The smell changed instantly as well; the fresh rainwater scent vanished, unfortunately, and the pine smell was more muffled and secluded. Instead, Nairo could smell the strange scents of potions brewed out in the open, of laundry being folded and hung on various driers, of textiles weaving magic into clothes.

Even further in, and he could smell food, the ferret feeling a bit peckish all of a sudden. The train meal wasn't much, and watching Tyr devour his so eagerly made the ferret's appetite vanish, for the time being. The main road was full of shops and whatnot, much like a bazaar, but Dalry's streets were wide enough to support a variety of tables and benches just out in the open, like in public parks. Many magicians could be seen sitting and eating at a variety of them, whether it's a quick snack or a full meal. From what Nairo had read, these tables would all be laid out together and form a massive dining hall stretching all throughout town during holidays and festivals, where everyone would gather for a big feast. Sadly, they weren't here during one such day, but Nairo was certain he'd see it one day. After all, this was the town he told Tyr he wanted to establish his perfume and cologne shop should he be forced to retire as a battle magician.

Tyr had made it as far as the smell of food and then was off to barter, approaching one of the tables and making a bit of chit-chat with one of the locals about getting something to eat. The smells of food were overwhelming to the growing dragon, and the townsfolk seemed amenable to someone new trying their food. In fact, Tyr had barely gotten three words out before one of the dishes was thrust upon him to try. It was savory and heavy, a stew dish that made his tail swish behind his plush rear as he ate it down in a few bites; the thing was just a sample after all. The next, a pastry that had local apples in it, was similarly tasty and disappeared just as fast. Tyr gave as much feedback as he could, but word of him and Nairo being battlemagicians from the college spread about as fast as they could be seen... And so the snacks started coming for Tyr.

The dragon knew the delay would bother Nairo, so he tried to at least take a few steps with every meal, complimenting them all as there was really nothing bad to say. A town of alchemists and potion makers galore would of course have good cooks; the two needed the same skills as any chef after all. So the food was outstanding... And Tyr wanted to try it all. He did have to work though, so he always was polite and took what was offered, but made it clear

he had to at least keep sight of Nairo and that they were headed in to help someone in the town with food. That... Might have been a mistake, as helping the town out? Full battle mages? The whole town looked after one another, so battle mages coming meant even more difts, and since it was clear he was the big eater of the pair, those gifts came in the form of even more food. In fact, since he was the biggest part of any pairing the town had likely seen, attention really came just for him. Tyr figured this was okay since Nairo wasn't much for attention it seemed, but Tyr did try and stay with the ferret while eating each and every snack that came his way.

Three years of binge-eating his way through higher school had made his stomach voluminous, and the snacks did little to affect his hunger. The train ride had worked up his appetite too, so Tyr was incapable of saying no. He had been for a while; if there was food in front of him, he would eat it. That was as plain a fact as eating for the tubby drake. But with so much food and so many choices slowing him down... He finally had to at least say he would take it and eat it as he walked towards where they needed to go. This stopped no one, doting grandmothers and eager young mages alike offering up their treats.

Nairo tried to keep an open mind; however, with every stop the large dragon took, the ferret felt himself getting more and more agitated. They were on a special quest, after all, and could do their sight-seeing and sampling *after* taking down the beasties bothering the quest giver. Yes, Nairo promised no more fat jokes or remarks, but even he found himself clearing his throat after the ninth or tenth stop Tyr made to snack on an offering for him.

Finally, the ferret reached his limit, and gently patted the dragon's side to get his attention. "Why don't we grab a real meal first? Something more invigorating and filling than these little snacks?" He suggested, pointing towards a stand selling a roast ham. The constant stop and go was grating to Nairo, who also didn't want to be embarrassed greeting their client with his tubby companion carrying a dozen snack platters in his fat arms. Something rich and filling, enough to fill Tyr and get him to stop snacking.

"Okay, that sounds fine," Tyr said, giving a few nods of thanks and then trotting along with Nairo over to the stall that had the ham. Tyr was a sucker for ham... Well, any meat really. He was a dragon after all, and it was something just built into him. He wanted that ham, and he looked over the little but very generous menu with a small lick of his teeth. He was still eating the snacks, a few left from the small pile he had been given, but the ham was now all that he was thinking of. He wanted more to eat... A full stomach was best to think on after all, right? So he looked from Nairo to the menu and then back again, knowing the ferret would judge him for his order. The dragon was already feeling quite judged for the snacking, but he was hungry! He couldn't help that he was given loads of food because of his size and shape, nor that he needed more food than the tiny little ferret. Spoilsport...

"Uhm... You know what you want, Nairo?" Tyr said, a bit sheepish with his words. The last of the snacks were working their way down into the large ball gut of the dragon. Tyr stifled a small belch and then looked even more sheepish, hoping that the ferret would order something so that he could order without having to get that judgmental look of ordering too much. Why

worry about that? Well, the 'Whole Hog' on the menu just looked too inviting to say no to, and Tyr still wasn't about to say no to food.

"Hmmm..." Nairo rubbed his chin thoughtfully. The food smelled amazing from his vantage point, which was immediately a big plus in his mind. The cafeteria at school wasn't bad, but it wasn't amazing either, so smelling meat with the greases still bubbling was actually enough to wet his tongue. Granted, the ferret typically ate to satiate his hunger and fuel himself more than for pleasure, but he could see himself making an exception.

"If I can make a suggestion," the butcher behind the counter offered; a large gator with a stomach that may have even rivaled Tyr's, if he were proportionally taller as well as wider. "The 'Pot Belly' is our most popular pick, and for good reason, if ya don't mind me braggin'. Can't get a better deal on tasty meat anywhere else! 'Course, you can always go with the 'Piglet Package' if it's too much."

Nairo frowned at that remark. Yeah yeah, play into his insecurities for his size so he'll buy a larger portion of meat, the ferret was too smart for that. However, what frustrated him was that it actually worked; the meat smelled *delicious*, even if the 'Pot Belly' portion was still surprisingly hearty, and the name and gator's figure made the ferret a little self conscious...

"Yeah, let's go with that. I'll have the Pot Belly." Nairo ordered. Screw it, if he can't finish it, he'll feed it to Tyr. At least he didn't order the 'Whole Hog' like some fatass.

"The Whole Hog for me," Tyr said right after, looking almost excited to order it. The gator let out a loud belly laugh and reached across his counter to clap the dragon on the shoulder. Tyr blushed, and then looked along the menu with a bit of drool pooling at the corners of his mouth. "It all smells so good, so like... I can't not get that, can I?"

"Damn right friend, best cuts and a whole pig's worth of meat. You got one heck of a figure to maintain now don'tcha?" The gator said with an eye on Tyr's gut. The dragon nodded, cheeks a bit red in a blush, and then he straightened just a bit and put a paw on his stomach almost with... Pride? Was it pride? He wasn't sure, but there was definitely less embarrassment he felt from the gator recognizing his size and not chiding him for it. It was a quick moment, but Tyr felt that moment and held onto it for a long few moments after that.

"Maintain and expand," Tyr admitted after a second, his voice a bit quieter and wistful almost as he spoke. The gator nodded and let out another bright laugh, patting his own stomach with true pride.

"Expand that gut out then! I'll make sure to toss in some extra for ya there, draggie. Man after my own heart with tryin' ta get that belly bigger. Can't be as big as us unless it's on purpose now can we?" The gator said, and then got to work on cooking the two orders, with Tyr pulling out some money to pay for his portion from his shoulder bag... And then paying for Nairo's because he figured paying for the ferret would mean there would at least be a little less

teasing. A little. Maybe.

For a moment, Nairo simply assumed the big bellied gator was just trying to butter up Tyr with his comments about growing their guts, to get the drake to order more on top of it. Yet, he was proven wrong when the butcher offered to toss in some extra, which threw the ferret for a real loop. The two fattest mages he recently met both wanted to grow even more so, but why? There had to be more to it than just pleasure, right? Something to make them into better fighters? Make their organs harder to puncture with sharp weapons, perhaps...

But there was no denying that bashful smile on Tyr's face regardless, and even Nairo felt happy for him that there were more people out there just like him. Maybe Tyr wasn't that weird after all. Nairo smiled at the drake. "Maybe if you're lucky, the seamstress here is also a fan of fat guys like you. It would make constantly adjusting your clothes a lot cheaper and easier, if you're serious about growing."

Magic must have been involved in the preparation of their food, for it was ready far quicker than any normal eating establishment. Nairo watched with folded ears and a curled up tail as a *monster* of a platter was presented for Tyr. Sheesh, the gator wasn't kidding about using the whole pig, and that pig was a real *pig*! His own meal was half that size, probably less than even that, and just holding it in his arms made him fear about how heavy it'll feel in his gut.

"You two enjoy now, and do come back for seconds if you're still hungry for more!" The gator grinned, that last comment mainly focused on Tyr, just like his next comment was on Nairo. "Don't worry about starting small, lil guy. You'll get there soon."

"H-hey! I'm not... shut up!" Nairo grumbled at the look Tyr gave him, his face reddening as he sauntered towards the nearest table.

"Heh, don't worry, I'll eat what you can't," Tyr said with a small chuckle, making sure not to laugh at Nairo's expense. The ferret had made a comment, but it was one that was likely just something that was meant to help rather than hurt. Nairo was as subtle as a train wreck with his words after all, so the comment about clothing... Well, it may be helpful rather than harmful when the dragon thought about it. Sure, the reaction to being asked if he wanted to get fat was a bit much, but it was just a thing for some and not for others. Tyr just shrugged internally, and carried his platter of food over to the table where he placed it, and then himself, down onto the creaking bench under his wide rump.

Looking over the spread and hearing the bench creak... Tyr felt fat. Like, actually fat, and not the heavily chubby that he was. Maybe he actually was proper fat now to most, but to him? Mentally? He still had a quite a ways to go, and meals like this would help him out. The dragon picked up a large chunk of hog meat with the serving fork he had been given and popped it into his mouth, his eating less than refined to put it lightly as he chewed up the hunk of pig and then swallowed it down. The meat melted in his mouth like butter, and oozed juices and spices as though cooked for hours, and not minutes. It was sheer perfection of a pig, and the

dragon quickly took in another bite with a noisy snort as he got down to shoveling in all of that pig meat. He knew Nairo wouldn't approve... But the food was too damn good!

Nairo mentally rolled his eyes at the sight. He still could not understand how anyone would want to become so heavy and sluggish. It was nice to see Tyr look so happy and proud of himself digging through that greasy, fattening food, but it was just... it'll take a while for Nairo to get used to it. Tyr was large, but a few extra pounds wouldn't hurt much, which was perfect as a few extra pounds was the minimum of what that meal would do to him. The ferret made a mental promise to tell Tyr to cut back a little if the dragon wound up *too* fat. It'd be hard to be useful in battle when his stomach reached further than his hammer after all.

Ah, but first, he had his own plate to deal with.

Nairo took a sniff of his own meal, savoring the aroma. The savory, salty aroma was adequately paired with the various spices cooked into the meat itself, giving it a powerful smell that made the ferret taste his bite before he even took it. It was a little too strong, maybe, as he preferred much more delicate scents, but either way, he took a bite.

And then a second.

And then two more just as quickly.

Goodness, this was *good*! The fatty, buttery texture felt great to stuff into his mouth, and it hardly worked his jaws! Not to mention the flavor, oof, what a flavor! Nairo actually forgot to sniff every bite as he found himself going for more, now suddenly wishing the school's cafeteria carried meat this delicious! The noisy scarfing and gulplings of his partner beside him started to fade as he ate, discovering that taste is as powerful a sensation as scent!

Alas, he was a small ferret, and this was a large serving. Nairo could feel his stomach tightening when he reached the halfway point, but he *really* didn't want this meal to be over. He was allowed to eat just a little more than usual once in a while, right? It was extra energy for their battles ahead. It's not like he was Tyr who wanted to turn into an enormous stomach with a dragon attached to it, right? No, he was *totally* valid in taking just one more bite... Maybe another bite... maybe one more-

Nairo's fork clattered with his plate.

His eyes went wide as he looked down at it, faint scraps remaining of his meal. Oh no, he actually ate the *whole* thing? Especially when Tyr offered to help eat whatever he didn't eat? Oh man, he was *stuffed*! A paw quickly went to his stomach, now oh so slightly rounded with a hearty meal tucked safely inside. Dammit, he knew this is what'd happen when talking himself into ordering more than he should, but it was soooo good! Hopefully Tyr didn't notice how quickly Nairo ate. The last thing he needed was for the dragon to think he was a closet gainer...

As fast as Nairo ate, Tyr ate faster. The dragon was an experienced binger, having been known to take on eating challenges the last year of their schooling when the cafeteria had something rather unsavory to eat. The dragon only had an hour to eat as much as he could, with students betting him whether he could or couldn't finish the plate. This, plus just the time pressure of school had created a vacuum for food, and Tyr was showing this in spades. His fork clattered down onto an empty, bony plate just moments before Nairo's, and the dragon looked immensely satisfied. He belched and leaned back, his bare stomach exposed and looking even rounder than it had in the train as he sat there and rubbed it with his clean paw. His snout had the sheen of fat around his mouth one would expect from such rampant gluttony, but the dragon didn't pay attention to that as his eyes settled on Nairo.

And the empty plate in front of the ferret.

Tyr immediately grinned broadly, but said nothing. He had said no teasing, so he wasn't going to break that rule, but in his mind he was howling with laughter. The ferret had made such a point of moderation to him, of not overeating. Of how food was just fuel and wasn't to be eaten in excess. Of how getting fat would just make him slow and lazy. Nairo was eating like that was a lie though, that much was clear. The dragon continued to grin, and then reached on over and slid Nairo's plate on top of his own. He didn't say anything still for a long moment, just stacking the dishes and then hefting himself up as though he hadn't eaten a good dozen-plus pounds of pork. He looked down and shook his head, and then headed over to the stall to turn in the dishes.

"Damn good eh? Ya like it? Want more?" The gator said, taking back the dirty plates and then eyeing Nairo with a bit of a smirk. "Either of you?"

"I think he's tapping out, but I wouldn't mind some more. What he had if that's okay, and a couple of drinks if you got them?" Tyr asked, getting another plate of a few pounds of pork meat in moments, and two large drinks placed on the counter for himself and Nairo. The drinks were cool and made of fruits from around the forest, each looking a dark purple.

"Guava an' blueberries. Helps with digestion... So I gave ya some extra on there, friend. Definitely come on back now, yeah?" The gator said, getting a nod and a grin from Tyr before the dragon carefully carried back his haul to Nairo at their table. The dragon slid the drink on over to the ferret, a sympathetic grin now on his face as he saw the light discomfort from overeating on his face.

"It's just a smoothie. The gator said it helps with digestion... And should cool you off. Wasn't expecting you to eat like that, so this should help." Tyr said, sympathy rather than mocking in his tone.

"You got more?!" Was Nairo's first response when he saw Tyr return with more food. There was no maliciousness behind his voice, it was just out of pure disbelief that the bloated dragon planned on eating even more; the same amount of food that made Nairo feel green to

the gills, even! But Nairo realized he said that a little ‘too’ loud and quickly back pedaled. “I-I mean, yeah, that’s totally fine. Absolutely if you want to grow a huge gut. And that food is... dangerously good.”

Nairo thanked the dragon for the smoothie and sniffed at it, sighing. Fresh forest fruit, with a hint of pine surrounding the village; this was much more his speed when it came to scents. He tried not to worry about the viscosity of the smoothies, deciding to just assume it was... something outside of heavy cream or ice cream, and took a sip.

Refreshing! Soft and cool down his throat (although he was still a little chilly from the weather), and light and easy on his stomach. Apparently the gator really knew his clientele if he had smoothies like this prepared for those who accidentally overeat like himself. A few good sips, and Nairo already felt his mood lifting, relaxing his body-

“Bwuurwwrp!”

*Dammit!* Nairo buried his face into his paws. This was getting too much. Burping was crass and rude! Yes, most people call it “compliments to the chef” but it was just loud and annoying... and burps smell bad! He was thinking about explaining this to Tyr, actually, as he was horrified at what a belch from the enormous dragon would be like, when he noticed someone walking towards their table: an elderly corgi half a foot shorter than even Nairo!

“Excuse me, dears. I couldn’t help but notice your uniforms. Are you, by chance, the two gentlemen I requested to hunt zwein?”

Nairo felt his stomach drop. “You’re... Gregor?”

The older corgi chuckled. “Gregor is at home. I’m Jane, his wife. I was doing a little shopping of my own when I noticed you eating. I hope I’m not bothering-”

“Not at all!” Nairo sat up straight before wincing. Damn stuffed stomach. “Our sincerest apologies for not arriving at our arranged meeting point earlier, madam. A-as you can see, my partner and I wanted to fully prepare for our zwein capturing, so we ordered ourselves a very nutritious and hearty meal to ensure we can hunt for hours without rest!” Yes, he was absolutely saving face for the empty plates and his own slightly dirty muzzle.

But Jane didn’t seem to mind at all. In fact, she chuckled softly at the ferret’s proud speech. “My my, well I certainly hope it doesn’t come to that. You young ‘uns these days keep getting thinner and thinner, I’m afraid one of you will slide through a crack in the sidewalk and vanish! Please, take your time with your meal, I don’t mind waiting one bit.”

Tyr had frowned at the comment about getting more; he was over twice the size of Nairo! Of course he was going to get twice as much food. One bite in though, and the anger had subsided to pleasure from how good the food was. The smoothie was thick and yet had no

cream, just fruits and juices and a little bit of spice to it to make it oh so refreshing, and the perfect pairing with all that pork. He ate with glee again, almost ignoring Nairo and the little ferret's surprise at eating so much. Tyr wasn't even full yet, and likely would need another dish to get to that nicely stuffed feeling he loved so much. Sure, fat was his hoard, but there was just something so enticing about a full belly that made the dragon want for more.

The thought of that feeling was quickly cut short when the corgi they were questing for showed up. Tyr stiffened up as well, and slowed his eating. He looked a bit of a mess, a few bits of pork and spices on his lips and grease running lightly down his chin. He reached for one of the napkins on the table and quickly wiped himself up so that he didn't look a total slob, but that was only for a moment. He had to stifle a belch right after, a deep and guttural sound that rumbled for just a moment too long to be anything but subtle. His cheeks burned, and his belly growled for more, but Tyr ignored it... No, he was looking sheepishly at the corgi and the ferret across from him.

"Heh, s-sorry ma'am, I'm trying to make sure I don't go slipping through the cracks," Tyr said with a bit of a smile, getting a loud belly laugh from the gator behind them in the stall. Tyr went redder, and then redder still when the gator spoke.

"He ate a Whole Hog and wanted more Jane! He might just be able ta keep up with every yer cookin'!" The gator called, getting a bright smile from the elderly corgi, and a bit of a confused look from Tyr. Her cooking...?

Jane chortled at that, looking at the large dragon with admiration. "Oh ho ho! It's about time your school produced someone with a proper appetite! Maybe we'll put it to the test later!"

It was amusing, Nairo figured, watching Tyr stiffen up and get flustered at the attention he was receiving. Better him than me, right? However, he couldn't help but feel a tad frustrated at being glossed over. They had a quest to do after all, right? "S-so, about the zwein..."

"Oh, right, of course! I'm sure you two are aware of how to capture zwein, yes?"

Nairo nodded vigorously. Zwein were large, boar-like creatures covered with thick hairy and hanging, curved tusks, almost like a wooly mammoth. Their stout, fuzzy bodies were notoriously durable; even most firearms couldn't penetrate their hide, as their bullets would get wedged in the hair. Thankfully, their intelligence wasn't nearly as impressive, as when provoked, they would typically charge in a straight line towards their aggressor much like a raging bull would. Simple to avoid, although they're still intimidating with their horrifying roars, not to mention they're larger than bulls!

Jane continued. "They're quite useful, you know, just not in life. Their hair can be stitched into cold-resistant coats or sleeping bags, or can be melted down into elixirs that cure simple ailments. Their hide is twice as tough as leather, yet no less flexible or heavy. Even their tusks

are valuable, as they're quite conductive of magic, making them cheap yet effective for mage staffs.

"They're valuable, but those zwein breed like damn rabbits, and each one eats like a herd of 'em! They used to stay in the mountains, but lately they've been pouring around the local area and sucking up everything into their greedy lil snouts. 'Course, that's partially what makes their meat so exalted, ya know; they're so dense with nutrients and calories, a single steak from them can keep a man's belly full for two days! Not just steak either; dry 'em up into jerky, and they become the perfect traveling snack. You may venture into the most dangerous territories in the world, but with a few strips of that, you won't be dying of starvation, that's for sure!"

Nairo nodded along. She was a rambler, but he saw himself in Jane for that very reason; she was just passionate about her job!

The older corgi continued. "Normally, my husband goes out to cull their numbers a bit, but they've gotten meaner; nearly broke his ankle last outing, and now he's bedbound. I'll only ask for about one or two zwein from you, if that's no problem. But given how strong and capable you two look, I'll make ya a deal. Catch any extras, and I'll cook 'em up into meals so tasty, they'll make that big-mouthed gator's food taste like cardboard in comparison!"

Tyr stood up rapidly, faster than someone his size and weight should have been able to, and conjured up his hammer from the wrist-mounted holder on his arm. Gone were the days of mounting hammers or weapons on backs... No, everything happened with progress, and hiding weapons to keep everyone feeling safe was something of a commonplace thing with mages now. So the dragon pulled out his ornate hammer, enchanted and designed by himself to be something of a work of art just as much as a weapon, and placed it on the ground. He leaned against the tall handle lightly and grinned, looking down at the corgi with a toothy smile and glee in his eyes.

"You'll get plenty of extra, don't you worry. Just make sure that you're ready for all that we bring in. How many should we cull to make sure you can cook for a while, and your husband gets a chance to rest?" Tyr asked, looking almost excited for the hunt more than the food. There was violence in his eyes, just as much as hunger... Something that came from his training, and his past. He wasn't a good dragon, he knew that. He wasn't a good soul, a redeemable story with a heart of gold. No, Tyr knew what he was, and what he could do, so he just decided to enjoy things rather than worry about trying to save himself. When one knows what they are... WHy fight it, right? So Tyr didn't. He embraced it, and the violence.

"Oh a couple dozen at least, but I could never ask you to do so much work," Jane replied, looking from Tyr to Nairo and back again. Tyr grinned at the challenge, cracking his knuckles and turning to Nairo with a toothy smile. "You two could do as many as you can though, the more you hunt down the less work for us to worry about later. I can dry out so much meat and make some new clothing for the both of you... Or even send the hides to Mirian; she

knows how to sew even better than these old fingers.” The corgi said with a laugh, getting more of an urging nod from Tyr for Nairo to be okay with this.

Nairo sighed audibly. From his perspective, it looked like Tyr was just doing it for the extra food. It really was hard not to bring attention to how fat the dragon was.

But, the chance to do a good deed for two elderly mages was there, and Nairo would never pass that up. He’d look good doing it, offsetting their failure earlier. Maybe they’d be assigned harder missions after this if they received a stellar review?

The ferret nodded, and returned his own smile. “You can count on us, ma’am. We’ll do our best to capture as many as we can, and then some! Just point us in the direction and let us do the rest!”

Jane let out an endearing “awww” as though speaking to a child, which, yes, did hurt Nairo’s pride, but it also bolstered his resolve to catch as many monsters as his magic can carry. “Thank you so much, dears. Just head through the north exit of the village, right along the path. You should find signs of the beasties within ten minutes, maybe even five. They travel in large herds, so look for clearings and you’ll most likely spot them.”

Nairo nodded along. Ignoring the tightness in his stomach, the ferret stood up and began to stretch, eager than ever to begin their hike and walk off the insane amount of food already eaten. The sooner the better, as when he stretched back, he swore he felt his shirt lifting up slightly, showing off his furry middle.

That middle was indeed shown, but Tyr said nothing. He spotted it, smirked, but said not a word. He instead just let his bare middle, one framed by a vest that hardly fit, out in the world and stretched as well. He grinned to Nairo and then turned to Jane, giving a light nod. “We will get as many as we can ma’am. Ready Nairo?” The dragon asked, picking up his hammer, one that weighed as much as Nairo, with ease and throwing it over one shoulder like it was little more than a towel. The dragon wasn’t showing off there; he had the strength for it and he was the damage of the two, so he was going to act like it. He stood off to the side of the table, still flexing his fingers and getting his shoulders rolled so that he was ready to go.

Tyr too was ready for a walk, energized and properly sated after a good and heavy meal of pork. The dragon looked ready for a fight too, slowly spinning his hammer on his shoulder. With one last nod to Jane, he set off at a heavy but slow lumber, not going too fast so that Nairo could keep up, and the two of them could talk plans. The pair got a wave of farewell from the older corgi, which Tyr returned with a light flick of his hammer. The dragon sighed gently though once they were out of earshot of the corgi, looking down at Nairo with a small frown.

“I don’t want to hunt just for the food you know... I could see you judging me that whole time.” Tyr said, sounding a bit annoyed. “I want the clothes too. Zwi leather clothes are worth a small fortune, and coming back clad in that along with crushing our contract? We’d get

promoted early and our first mission would be forgotten. I want that too. The food... Yeah, I want that, I won't lie, but I want to get promoted just as bad as you do."

Nairo blinked at the accusation. "I-I know that! And I'm not judging you! I said you can get as fat as you want, so even if you were doing it just for the food- which I know you're not- then it's totally fine!" The ferret felt flustered about being called out like that, especially because it was true. However, by that point, he'd already begin thinking of ways to get Tyr to perform chores for him for food. "Can you reach that book on the top shelf for me? There's a cookie in it if you do!"

Quickly, perhaps too quickly, Nairo brought the subject back around to the Zwein. "We're lucky the weather's on our side. Hopefully, they'll still be wet from the rain, and your lightning will be extra effective. I know it goes without saying, but you should try and knock them out in one shot, to avoid riling them up further. I suggest either the tip of their snout or right under their forehead, as they're used to their tusks and forehead taking the brunt of impact, and not those sensitive areas. I'll entangle as many as I possibly can before you go in, since it's their momentum that makes them dangerous, but if they break free, I'll try casting any paralysis spells I know. Perhaps we can use the mud to our advantage, since their traction will be severely reduced, and..."

Nairo blinked, and looked up at the dragon. "Sorry, I'm rambling. I didn't mean to leave you out. Let me know if you disagree with anything I've said so far. You're just as vital in this as I am, perhaps even more so, since you'll be the one within striking distance."

Tyr frowned at being snapped at like that, and then lectured on how to attack. He knew all of these things, likely better than even Nairo did. Yet he was being talked down to after being snapped at, so he was rather short with his reply once the little apology came though. It was something, and it did help assuage some of the annoyance with being spoken to like that, but the dragon wasn't about to have that. He filed that away for later... Something else to annoy him with the ferret. Clearly the two still had a lot of work to do to be partners in magical work. It would be a struggle, that was for sure.

"Fine," Tyr said flatly, continuing on quietly and starting to take lighter steps as the snorting of the zwein reached his ears. "Keep them still, and let me work," He said again, his voice a whisper so as not to be heard by the zwein. The drake continued on walking quietly, crouching down and slowing as he wielded his hammer in one paw and a fist in the other. The sheer power of the dragon was shown in that moment, something that Nairo had likely never seen. Muscle bunched up on his shoulders. His wings flared low and flat, but ready to pounce. The aura of sheer power came off Tyr like it was the air around the two of them... And then he was off. There one moment, gone the next. How someone over 500 pounds, with a hammer that weighed another 100 plus, just vanished with a quick plant of his feet and then a swift movement was impressive, no matter who you asked. But Tyr did it; clearly there was a lot of strength under all that fluff.

The first zwein was dead before Nairo could even blink. The hammer came up from under its head, dragged just millimeters from the ground, and then cracked under that skull and sent the neck snapping with a sickening crack. The other hogs were suddenly aware that there was a predator there and began to look around, but Tyr was already off to the next, twisting and using his weight to help propel his momentum along so that he moved even faster. Once he got going, he wouldn't stop without some significant effort... And now it was Nairo's turn to help.

Nairo sighed in frustration at the display. Something told him he annoyed Tyr, again. Not only that, but he'd hoped the dragon would give him time to work on entangling the monsters first, before starting the fight. Halting that momentum was much harder than stopping it from gaining in the first place.

However, Nairo was ready. Last time, he worked too hard trying to improve Tyr's combat effectiveness, which simply wasn't needed. The dragon was a monster on the battlefield, and any aid was almost certainly going to be a hindrance. His goal was subduing the zwein before they could attack.

And that was exactly what he did.

The boar-mammoths closest to Tyr began picking up that there was a predator picking them off, and began to charge, stomping their hooves into the ground. Alas, it wasn't mud they stepped in, but a thick undergrowth that sprang up and wrapped around their legs, an easy target to knock down. Nairo worked as quick as he could to entangle the next one, and then the next, his brow already starting to sweat. Keeping up with Tyr was damn near a challenge; any other mage would have collapsed by now, but not Nairo. He was proud of his efficiency, of how well he can cast low-level spells without wasting any mana, and he was determined to prove that he was just as effective as a battle-crazed dragon.

With the whirlwind of carnage happening before him, the ferret moved towards those further in the back, who weren't quite aware they were under attack and were more curious at the source of the noise. Before long, their eyelids drew drowsy, and they soon slumped into a sleeping position, their snoring masking their own inevitable demise. Before long, they were working in a rhythm; a well oiled machine. Nairo began to smile, pausing briefly to wipe sweat from his brow. Everything was going perfectly.

And then he noticed the zwein charging right at him.

The ferret felt his breath get caught in his throat. It completely slipped right past Tyr, who must have managed to dodge the oncoming beast. Yet, said beast continued running, locking eyes on Nairo and targeting yet another intruder.

He threw everything he had at the monster. Sleep, paralysis, entangle, anything to halt its movement, yet he just barreled on through. Nairo's aura spiked, no longer able to be as

efficient as he liked in his panicked state trying to stop the creature. For gods sake, he noticed the zwein's eyes were closed. His sleep spell worked, yet it was still charging at him!

Nairo fell back. He shuffled back, hardly able to breathe. He couldn't stop this creature, and his legs just wouldn't work. This was a nightmare, right? It had to be! The ferret felt as though he were about to vomit, whimpering as the creature's scent became apparent. Its hideous, disgusting, dirty scent.

Nairo also smelled his own fear, and his own frustration and being so small and helpless...

The zwein then was wrapped in lightning, a bolt coming just from Tyr's hammer just steps before the zwein crashed into Nairo. The bolt didn't stop the hog's charge, but it did zap the thing enough to stun it and send it off course. It smashed into a tree right near Nairo, the loud bang enough to get even more of the hog's attention around Nairo. Tyr vaulted back over to Nairo at this point, running full-tilt towards the smaller mage with legs pumping, gut bouncing, and arms swinging. He jumped over one charging zwein and almost fell, using his hammer to catch himself on the ground and then running on still. More zwein were seeing Nairo and starting to charge, and it wasn't until Tyr was within steps of the frozen mage that the dragon could feel those auras.

Nairo's aura showing up at all had given Tyr the knowledge that something was wrong. He had seen that, snapped a zwein's neck with his free paw on one of its tusks, and then used his magics through his hammer to shoot a bolt at the charging beast. It was a hard thing to do in combat, most of his magical energy going to his muscles to keep him as charges took a lot out of him. It was part of his big appetite; his magics were electric, and the body runs on electrics. It wasn't well known around the school, but battlemages who focused on battle were best at putting spells out on themselves, and not projecting. Tyr could, but it was more work... And it was a lot more when he had to put enough power into a spell that could deflect a zwein.

Still, he came towards Nairo, spun to a stop right in front of the ferret, and then swung his hammer hard to deflect the two closest zwein. "Stop them now!" The dragon shouted, his wings flared and his hammer coming down again to smash on top of a zwein's back, snapping its spine and killing it as it got close enough. "Get back and stop them now!" Tyr yelled again, still using his body and his hammer to shield Nairo, getting hit by one of the charging hogs and, while staying standing, clearly hurting from the blow to one of his legs as he hefted the zwein up by one of its tusks and hurling it back into the group. The dragon was a machine, a demon... And he knew it. He knew it well, and he was going to do his job right there to keep Nairo safe. "Sleep, mud, so something!"

It was all such a blur, Nairo wasn't sure what to even do anymore. The small, helpless feeling was overwhelming, and a part of the ferret wished the dragon hadn't saved him at all just then. However, the shouting stirred the ferret back into action, and with a few shaky breaths, began to calm himself down, his aura gradually erasing.

He wasn't sure how to stop the beasts at first. They still charged even while sleeping, and mud would just make them crash into the two mages. Entangling roots may as well not even be a spell at this point, they were moving far too fast for those vines to catch them...

But what if they caught themselves?

Nairo hated himself for even suggesting this idea, but it really was do or die at this point. Between the stampeding horde and themselves, he grew a new pair of vines, wrapping around each other again and again, reinforcing them into a powerful net. A net growing out of the very Earth.

A net with holes big enough for the zwein's hooves to step into and get caught.

The sound of legs dislocating and pained squeals filled the air, and Nairo felt for the second time he was going to lose his lunch. Watching the massive boars lurch back as their legs were captured in the reinforced net was sickening, but it was effective. It kept them alive, and Nairo rationalized it was the zwein's own fault for not watching where they ran. One by one, they were caught, and Nairo collapsed, breathing heavily. Finally, it was over...

His ears picked up. The ferret still heard a single pair of hooves charging at them, the ground still rumbling. The hooves ran right through the net, trampling it and the other zwein captured. Nairo didn't want to look; he knew it was a massive one, so large that its feet didn't even fit into the net he casted! He looked up at Tyr worriedly. "Sorry... I think I'm spent..."

Tyr turned, bent down, and grabbed Nairo around the waist. He didn't ask. He didn't say what he was doing. He just scooped up the ferret and then jumped, a powerful flap of his large wings sending the pair up into the air. It wasn't true flight; Tyr was too heavy for flight nowadays in muscle alone, let alone his belly, but it did shoot them up a solid twenty feet. The dragon then grabbed onto the tree they had been next to with one arm and dug in his clawed feet into the bark, acting like almost a shelf for him to stand on. The dragon wordlessly placed Nairo on a branch up there next to the trunk gently, and then reached into his sack. Inside was a strong mana potion, one enough to recharge most any mage and would likely fully refill Nairo given how small his mana pool was. The dragon pulled it out once Nairo was safe and passed it to the ferret, a quick wink coming from the dragon.

And then he was gone, just off the tree and hopped down to face off against the charging, huge zwein. Clearly it was the brood mother, it's matted furs and heavy, low-hanging belly, protruding nipples, heavy stride... Tyr didn't think he had much of a chance against this alone. However, the howls of the broken zwein, the snores of the asleep ones, and the thuds of the approaching hooves made him want to fight. He had to fight. Nairo was safe now, ready to fight and ready to help once that potion took hold. It would take likely a minute or so, so Tyr just had to hold off the charging, angry mother for a minute. He didn't know if he could, but he was going to try. He had to try, because his other choice was hiding up a tree like Nairo and getting

that tree knocked down where they both would wind up gored or worse.

The first step was dodging the incoming charge. And then, go from there.

Again, Nairo needed a few moments to process the fact he was held like a doll by Tyr, and now sat more or less safe in the tree. He looked at the mana potion in his hand, a brief thought about how they were made with monstract extract. Gross...

Now wasn't the time to be picky, not when Tyr had done so much already. The ferret uncapped the cork and drained the liquid, grateful it was at least flavorless. Before he even finished drinking, he felt his mana return to him swiftly, almost overcharging him even. Finally, he could fight.

Alas, it wasn't much of a fight.

With adrenaline pumping and mana as full as can be, Nairo was in peak performance. With Tyr dodging the first charge and the broodmother turning around in a broad circle, the ferret stirred up the mud in its path, causing it to lose traction, slipping onto its side and slamming into a tree with enough force to crack the trunk. The ferret quickly got to work in summoning more vines around its legs, spreading those hooves out as far away as possible. More and more came, wrapping around the legs, then the middle, then the neck, restricting as much movement as he could. Finally, with the beast subdued, Nairo cast a sleep spell upon it, for even as vicious and violent of a monster it was, it still deserved a peaceful killing...

Nairo slumped back where he sat on the tree, sighing. This was too close. Way, way too close. What's worse, it was his own damn fault for not paying attention to the zwein charging him until it was almost too late, and then forcing Tyr to save them and break formation. Had that not happened, neither of them wouldn't have nearly been gored. He owed Tyr big time now.

Having caught his breath, Nairo slid off the tree and rushed over to Tyr. "Are you hurt anywhere?" He asked, readying a healing spell.

"Pretty sure my leg is broken," Tyr replied gruffly, though not in anger. There was pain in his voice. Yup, definitely broken. Adrenaline was one hell of a drug, but it was fading and the pain was quickly making itself known. The dragon didn't let it get to him though, going from sleeping and injured zwein and snapping their necks. He wasn't about to let them wake or get back up; the hogs were known for their healing, and he was going to make sure they were all taken care of. He was limping, clearly favoring his right leg and using his hammer as a crutch of sorts to move around. He still moved though, even as pain really started to make itself known.

Totally ignoring the fact that he had a crack in the bone in his leg, the dragon went through and snapped the necks of the thirty or so zwein in turn. Each was a hard twist and then a snap, with the struggling and broken ones getting the treatment first. Tyr had no desire for them to suffer anymore than Nairo did, and he looked almost hurt with every one that he had to

put down. Still he did it with a grim look on his face. The dragon worked and snapped each one in turn, the sickening crack of bone and cartilage the only sound in the clearing as he hobbled from one to the next and then the next. He saved the brood mother for last, spitting at the large mother and frowning before he leaned down, hefted up the head, and cracked that neck too.

38 deaths. A full hoard. And it had just been the two of them.

“Good work Nairo,” Tyr managed to grunt out, slumping down to the ground and stretching out his broken leg off to one side. “That was a lot more than we thought, and we did it. I’m sorry that one got past me to you, that was my fault. And I think next time we should freeze them before we attack... Which I’m sure you were cursing me for when we started.” Tyr admitted, his voice tense and flat with pain. “But we did it, and we’re alive, so we made it work.”

Nairo quickly knelt down beside the dragon, holding his arms over the injured leg. First aid and quick recovery were more his specialty as a battle mage; broken bones were far more complex. Still, he did the best he could to ease the pain as he spoke. “You were busy fighting an entire horde by yourself. It’s on me for not overlooking the battlefield properly. Had I simply dodged out of the way, you wouldn’t have had to throw yourself in danger like that. So, I basically broke your leg...”

He was being obvious again; Nairo had a hunch that was what Tyr found infuriating about him. The ferret put on a smile. “The mana potion definitely saved us, on top of all of your other heroics. I should be able to bring most of these back no problem, and I’m sure someone in town won’t mind fetching the rest. You did great, really.”

Pulling his arms back, Nairo offered a single paw to help Tyr up. Honestly, it was more of a gesture than anything, but he wanted to help regardless. “I reduced the swelling and eased the pain as much as I can. I can also cast Featherweight on you if you think it’ll help. If not, I can make a splint for you from the branches nearby.”

“Cast it, please,” Tyr said, letting out a long sigh. The dragon didn’t take that paw, but instead balled up a fist and bumped it against that outstretched paw. “Don’t go forgetting that my job is to take the damage and do the fighting like that. You’re here to do the traps and heal me up after I’m done being a brute.” Tyr said, a small nod from the dragon. The failures of the fight were clearly forgiven, but the dragon figured he should say that too just to make extra sure that Nairo understood. “You didn’t break my leg. The zwein did, and you just had a panicked moment. It happens to everyone... You aren’t trained like me. So next time, we put you somewhere we know you can be safe, and I go and do the damage once we have a better game plan. We both made mistakes; I rushed, and you froze. So the zwein broke my leg, not you. But we still got this done.”

Tyr knew there was more fault with Nairo on this, and he didn’t want to say it. He didn’t want to try and beat down the ferret, because well... He needed a partner he could rely on, and the ferret was good when he was on. When he was confident and in his wheelhouse and

comfortable, Nairo had cast those nets in an instant; a brilliant plan. But he needed that brilliance, and he bet that building Nairo up and playing to his ego would work better than expressing his frustration at getting injured because the battlemage had forgotten the whole battle part of that title. The dragon figured some forgiveness and having him be owed a big favor was better than getting his anger out, so he just sat there for a few long moments before trying to stand, and then frowned. "Uhm... Think you can make me a crutch to lean on? I don't want to just use my hammer for it."

"Yeah, no problem." Nairo nodded. He was surprised at how gentle the dragon could be, especially after such a brutal and intense battle. He recalled how carefully he was handled when Tyr flew him into the tree, how warm the drake's grasp had been...

He turned towards a tree to strip its bark, hiding his blush. As he got to work in crafting the crutch and cast, the ferret couldn't help but smile at their accomplishment. Wait until everyone sees what they've done together!