

The cave was riddled with traps and monsters alike. New perils were presented to Valoriel at every new turn, all of which were overcome by either the griffon's sharp brain, or his sharper blade. A pressure plate that released spring-loaded darts from the wall? No match for his incredible reflexes! A disguised pitfall leading to a row of spikes dozens of feet below? He had wings! Not even the minotaur at the end of the perilous dungeon proved to be a match for the dexterous warrior, who felled the beast with his doublesaber after mere minutes.

"This was supposed to be a three-person job? Maybe for three weaklings! Peh." Valoriel spat on the corpse of the minotaur as he stepped over his felled adversary, hoping a real challenge would appear before him next.

Alas, he was disappointed to find his objective waiting for him towards the end of the tunnel. Shackled to the wall, a battered and bruised old tigress lifted her head as she heard her savior strode over to where she stood, a toothless smile spreading across her face. "A-ah, you've come at last!"

"At last?" Valoriel snorted, frowning as he approached the elderly feline. "Maybe I would have gotten here faster if you offered more than a paltry 50 gold for your return."

"Excuse me?" This time, it was the tigress' turn to frown. She grunted as her 'hero' grabbed her wrists roughly, prying them free from the metal shackles in a painful, albeit effective manner. Rubbing her sore wrists, she glared up at the towering griffon. "I specifically wrote on that parchment that this was to be a three-person undertaking, no less. You were foolish to have undergone this trial alone!"

"You were foolish if you thought you'd get more than two people with that paltry reward!" Valoriel spat in response. "This 'test' of yours was nothing more than a waste of time. The only thing it tested was my patience. I expected to be confronted with formidable monsters and cunning traps, not some of your conjured weaklings." He glared at the fallen minotaur, watching the beast fade back into mist.

“This was to test your teamwork and communication skills, as well as-” but the tigress warlock was cut off as the griffon turned and walked away. Shaking in anger, she bellowed out after her rescuer. “-as well as your chivalry, and you’ve failed on all accounts! Until you’ve fixed your *overinflated* ego of yours, I curse you to live a shameful, humiliating life!”

“Unlikely.” Valoriel didn’t even look back to acknowledge the spellcaster’s “curse.”

The flight back to town was slow and tedious, giving the griffon plenty of time to stew over that recent exchange. That stupid tigress warlock had put up that challenge as a way of training new adventurers, yet Valoriel cleared through it by himself with practically zero effort! How dare that warlock deem him a failure! On top of that, she actually thought she could curse him into living a humiliating life. He thought spellcasters were supposed to be smart! How could his life be anything other than spectacular?

Griffons were exceptionally rare in this land, and even then, Valoriel was a prime example of his species. His strong muscles shone through his light blue tunic, flexing as he glided through the air. The avian’s chestnut-colored wings beat down powerfully against the air, his body a flash of white streaking through the sky. He didn’t need any training; he was the role-model for any trainee. Powerful and mighty, yet light and nimble. In fact, he swore he was feeling even lighter as his flying continued. No doubt a testament to his incredible figure, of course.

At last, he touched down at the edge of town, sending dust scattering where he landed. The nearby pedestrians stopped to gape at the magnificent griffon in awe, yet Valoriel strode right past them. He wasn’t in the mood to be ogled at; at least not as much as usual. Rather, he made a beeline for the tavern, hoping to at least drink away his troubles. Perhaps a round or two of ale would help him relax a bit. Maybe he can bully that scrawny dragonborn bard into singing more praises about him.

Of course, he should have known that his fame and notoriety preceded him, for the moment he stepped into the tavern, he heard his name called out from the bar counter. “Valoriel! Yo! You took yer time, didn’t ya?”

Valoriel couldn’t help but chuckle. If anyone else were to have told him that, he would have strangled them on the spot, but for this individual in particular... “Peh! I finished it faster than it took you to put on your pants, Toko!”

From the counter, the one called Toko snickered, his great scaly belly rippling against his lap. “Aye, fair enough. C’mere and tell me all about it. Knowing you, it was a piece o’ cake, huh?”

Valoriel’s beak curved upwards into a grin as he joined his friend. Normally, the bar counter was packed full of patrons ready to drink away their troubles, although no one dared take a seat next to a large, obese alligator. Well, that and said gator needed two barstools just to (barely) contain that flabby rump, with a large pile of broken wooden fragments stored in the barkeeper’s closet as a reminder that his biggest patron needed no less than two stools.

The griffon happily took his place next to his fat friend, already feeling better looking up at the gator’s dimpled face. “It was a ruse, if anything. A complete waste of my talents. That spellcaster was an arrogant blaggard; I completed her trials far better than anyone could have hoped, yet she had the nerve to tell me I failed. No doubt she was just embarrassed and wished to take her anger out on me instead. Contemptuous woman.”

The girthy gator laughed heavily, slapping the side of his wobbling tum. “Hah! I hear ya there, bud. My old drill master was proolly just jealous of how damn good I look with this here gut. No wonder he kept trying to make me run around and work it off. He stopped yelling at me once I ate him, though,” he snickered. Valoriel could never tell when Toko was joking.

Toko elbowed the avian’s thinner sides. “Hey, but you still completed them, right? At least you got some gold out of it, right?”

Valoriel snorted. “I’m afraid not. That old hag refused to pay me.” He didn’t have the nerve to tell Toko he had forgotten to ask for the money and had simply left her due to his bad temper.

The gator frowned. “Well that’s just not fair! All that work and no coin? I woulda just gobbled her up on the spot, making me go that distance for nothing!”

Valoriel suddenly realized why no one liked sitting next to Toko.

His scaly companion waved over the barkeeper. “Hoy! Can I get a couple rounds of mead for my buddy here? He could really use the drinks!”

The tabaxi behind the bar nodded, soon producing a large mug for the two adventurers. With a sigh, Valoriel lifted his mug, smirking at the gator. “Thanks for the pick-me-up, mate.”

Toko beamed, clinking his own mug against the avian’s. “No problem!”

Valoriel felt himself relaxing further every time that mug touched his beak. The rich and savory flavors, combined with the effects of the alcohol, helped to put the avian’s mind at ease. It wasn’t long before he forgot about that obnoxious old hag, or her pitiful attempts at a curse. How could his life be anything near shameful when he was currently surrounded by caring friends and adoring fans?

Sometime during that day, Toko tricked Valoriel into a drinking contest of sorts. Valoriel was powerful and mighty, but even he knew going against the heavyset gator was a foolish decision. Still, it was a fun and silly way to pass the time, especially considering Toko was the one paying for the drinks. It was also a way to keep the large gator happy, in case all of those jokes about eating people weren’t actually jokes.

And with one heavy swig, Valoriel sighed and slammed his mug onto the counter, slumping back into his stool. “Alright...I concede. You’ve bested me, Toko.”

The obese alligator giggled as he wiped the foam off his fuzzy muzzle, patting his squishy sides. “Naaaaw, don’t say that, Val! You’ve barely even begun!”

“Aye, but I’ve had enough. I’m...feeling somewhat drained, after today.” Well, more like he was feeling a bit more bloated than usual, even after only a few mugs of mead. Again, he didn’t feel the need to share that information to the gargantuan gator. He chuckled. “That just means more for you, my friend. Soon enough, you’ll be on three bar stools instead of two.”

The gator waved a chubby paw. “Haw haw. Yer just saying that cuz yer afraid of all those empty calories stickin’ to yer gut, huh?”

“Unlikely.” Valoriel rolled his eyes. “I’m afraid I don’t share your lifestyle of sitting around all day, stuffing my face with whatever’s at hand. It will take more than a round of drinks to ruin my handsome figure, I’ll have you know.”

“Yeah, sure it will,” the gator snorted. “Then what’s this, then?” Leaning over, Toko poked a finger into Valoriel’s belly.

Valoriel’s bloated, spherical belly.

The griffon’s eyes widened. What the hell was this? He drank even less than he typically did, yet his middle was bulging out of his torso, hanging over belt. When did that get there?! Tentatively, he rubbed his claws along the curve of his middle, feeling the taut gut against his fingers. No, this was undoubtedly real.

“It’s...just a bloat,” Valoriel responded after a moment’s hesitation, although he didn’t sound all too convincing. “I-I had a big meal before coming here.” A lie. In fact, he had been considering getting some food here before heading home, despite looking as though he just polished off a 5-course meal on his own!

The gator snickered next to him. “A bloat? Bah! I’ve been eatin’ practically all day, yet you don’t see this thing lookin’ any bigger, do ya?” He patted the side of his lap-filling gut.

Valoriel frowned. “You’re already massive to begin with, my friend, while I am lithe and thin.”

Toko blinked, rubbing his soft chins. “Aye...I guess that makes sense.”

The griffon leaned upright, winging as he felt his belt dig into his middle. “I-in any case, I should get going. I’d like to find a new job that can properly test my abooooOOWAAARRP!!!”

Valoriel went red in the face as he felt all eyes shift towards him. Toko, the oblivious fat-headed gator he was, roared with laughter as he slammed his paw into the griffon’s shoulder. “Haaaahahaharr! Phew, that was a good ‘un! Sure ya don’t wanna stay for another round? Sounds like you made some room with that!”

Feeling the feathers on the back of his neck prick up, Valoriel quickly shook his head as he climbed down from his stool. “N-no thanks...you take care, Toko...farewell.”

And with that, Valoriel scurried home, his face heating up with every step he took. Toko was right, that belch sounded like he had made more space in his stuffed stomach.

In reality, he felt more bloated than ever before.

Valoriel went straight to bed that night, hoping his bloated middle would recede after a good night’s rest. When he awoke the next morning, he was greeted with the sight of his middle bulging out before him like a feathery white hill. Horrified, the griffon grabbed and squeezed at his gut, surprised to find that his belly had practically no give to it. It wasn’t soft, flabby, or squishy like Toko’s belly; it didn’t roll around his thighs, or give him a pair of thick love handles. No,

instead it jutted out directly before him in the shape of a perfect sphere, firm and unyielding.

No, he wasn't getting fat. He was getting...something.

What was happening to him?!

"I-it's nothing," Valoriel stubbornly told the bloated griffon in the mirror, forcing himself to smile at his reflection. "I-it's just...some trapped gas. I...swallowed too much air last night and- BRUWWWWARP!"

Confounded belches!

Stubbornly refusing there was anything wrong with him, Valoriel forced himself back into his usual attire, immediately meeting resistance once he tried forcing his belt on. To his humiliation, the avian realized he had no choice but to tie his belt on beneath his swollen gut. The result was a very...round-looking griffon, resembling someone who spent more time on their rump around a dinner table than one out on the field of battle.

In other words, like Toko.

Taking a deep sigh (and suppressing another belch), Valoriel stepped outside his house. He was determined to make it through the day, certain that his bloating issue would resolve itself eventually. All that trapped air had to find an exit at some point, right? Even if it was through uncouth methods such as burping and...passing gas, he had to slim back down eventually, right?

However, as he walked through town, Valoriel couldn't help but wonder if the opposite was happening.

With every step he took, his belt buckle dug tighter into his torso, further exemplifying his top-heavy figure. Not only that, but he found he couldn't walk like a proper griffon, forced into a bit of a lumbering, waddling gait. Damn, just how bloated was he?

Once he properly entered the city square, the avian's face lit up like a christmas tree as his tunic suddenly shot up, no longer able to be properly contained by even his failing belt. Soon, his creamy-white middle was on full display, preceding the griffon wherever he went. His round, bulbous belly, giving him the impression that he ate an oversized cannonball!

And with his shirt now forced to conform around the curves of his middle, there was hardly anything left to hide what a bloated bird he was becoming. He was used to the crowd standing in awe of what a magnificent griffon he was, yet Valorel wished they would gawk at someone else for a change, his arms subconsciously reaching down to hide at his middle...

Valoriel's heart nearly stopped in his chest. Were his *arms* bloating out, too?!

The avian's ears wilted as he heard the hushed murmurings of the crowd around him; it wasn't much of a surprise who most of those comments were directed at.

"Hey, isn't that the one griffon-cat guy who's always bragging about how great he is?"

"Yeah, it is. Looks like he's really, erh...put on a few."

"A few dozen! Look at the size of him!"

"Assholes," Valoriel spat under his breath. One bloated day and he had gone from an amazing hero to a ridiculous zero in these fickle people's minds. He was still just as great of a fighter as he always was, he just had a bit of a bloating issue, that's all! He'd get it under control soon. Once he was finished waddling, erh, walking to the assignment board, he could start flying towards his next job and leave these obnoxious people be-

“Hey, buddy.” Valoriel blinked as he felt a paw on his shoulder, turning to see a sneering weasel staring at him. “Congratulations. When are they due?” The weasel smirked, slapping his oversized paunch.

That did it! Shaking with rage, Valoriel opened his mouth to bellow nasty insults when-

“BWAAAAAWAWWWORRRRP!”

-when something other than an insult left his muzzle instead!

It must have been quite the belch; the weasel looked incredibly taken aback, the fur on his face completely ruffled. He didn't say anything after that explosive outburst, nor did anyone in the Town's Square. It was a palpable, unsettling silence.

The wide-eyed weasel continued to glare up at the avian, then smirk. The smirk turned into a chuckle, followed by full on laughter.

All around, Valoriel could hear the laughter of dozens of citizens. He didn't need to look around to imagine everyone pointing at the bloated bird, their heads leaned back in hysterical mirth. Valoriel's white face flushed bright red when he realized just what was so funny.

His belt had blown clean off his spherical body, and his pants had fallen to his feet.

Valoriel didn't even bother trying to lean forward to pick it up. How could he even reach it, past a belly that big? Gritting his beak shut, the humiliated griffon waddled as quickly as his stumpy legs would allow him all the way back home, past rows of laughing pedestrians. Once there, he slammed the door shut, vowing not to open it until his situation was finally resolved.

He heard a knock on the door.

“Go away!” Valoriel cried out, glaring at the front door from across the room. He knew better than to open it; the first few times he did, it was just so others could mock him.

He heard another knock. “Valoriel, it’s me! Toko!”

“I said go away!” Friend or not, he didn’t want anyone to see him like this.

“Val, c’mon! You haven’t left your house in days! I’m really worried for you, dude. Please just let me in.”

The griffon knew better. All instincts told him to just shut the gator out, but he couldn’t bear the thought of being completely alone. With a sigh, and another belch (he had given up trying to contain those), the former hero waddled forward, standing towards the side in order for his stumpy arms to unlock the door.

No sooner did he do that did the door swing open on its own, revealing his very heavy gator friend. Naturally, said gator friend’s eyes widened at the sight of him. “W-woah...you’re fatter than me, now!”

“I’m not *bwurrarp* fat!” Valoriel shrieked. Despite his flash of anger, he wasn’t surprised Toko thought he was fat. After all, he was, for lack of a better word, a total blimp.

Valoriel couldn’t lower his arms anymore. The tube-like appendages were stuck in an awkward angle on either side of him. His legs faired little better; it was a struggle just to even bend them at the knees. Even his wings looked comically swollen, like they belonged on a child’s pooltoy and not to an actual griffon.

But Valoriel knew his middle was the real star of the show, here. His brown chest and white belly had practically merged into a single massive sphere on his torso, one that engulfed his neck, shoulders, and even his upper thighs. In a sense,

he really was just 80% belly; Valoriel knew if he tripped and fell, it could take entire minutes before he stopped rolling, and that's if he fell on an even surface!

The bird yelped, and burped, when he felt the gator's paws grab either side of his ponderous paunch, ruffling the tight feathers. "H-how'd ya do it, mate? Did ya just sit and stuff yerself silly, like you said I did? I mean, I'm not complaining, or anything. The extra chub looks good on ya!"

"I just said, I'm not-" Valoriel was interrupted by another belch. He groaned, trying to flick the gator's paws off his gut. Unfortunately, those paws were quite a distance away from his own. "It's all air! I-I keep *bwurrrp* bloating out like a freakin' balloon! I can't even grab my own paws anymore!" To emphasize his point, Valoriel tried reaching around with both stubby arms. But alas, there was just too much feather and fluff in the way.

Slowly, Toko began nodding, taking in the sight. "I see...so you're not fat."

"Toko!"

"I'm just making sure!" The tubby gator snorted, placing his hands on his broad hips. "Do you know what's causing it?"

"No!" Valoriel growled, throwing up his stubby arms in exasperation. "If I knew, I would have fixed this mess by now!"

"Alright, alright! No need to get short with me!" Toko jabbed Valoriel's chest at that remark, before quickly waddling forward to grab the bloated bird as he started rolling back. "Sorry, sorry."

Valoriel's bloated wings flapped rapidly as he struggled to reorient himself. "Toko, if you're not going to help, please just...leave me so I can figure out how to deflate myseerRRRRARRUP!"

"Phaw!" Toko winced, fanning the air with his hand. "Right in my face, too! If you're gonna dispel gas like that, can't ya dispel it somewhere else?"

“How in bloody blazes am I supposed to...” Valoriel froze. “Dispel...like, Dispel Magic?”

“No, dispel gas. You’re a stinky blimp, Val!”

“Shut up, Toko!” Valoriel snapped back. Whether he intended to or not, Toko just gave him a great idea. “Toko, can you do me a favor? Can you go into town and bring back someone who knows Dispel Magic? I think someone put a curse on me!”

Toko blinked, tilting his chubby head. “Why don’t you just go?”

“I can’t go back out there!” The griffon yelled, horrified at the implicat “I can’t...I can’t fit through the door anymore.”

The gator chuckled, slapping the side of the bloated bird’s belly. “Hah, cuz you’re so big! Right, right. Alrighty, buddy, I’ll get ya someone! Be back in a jiffy!”

Valoriel wasn’t so sure how fast a “jiffy” was, but he was fairly certain it wasn’t too quick, given he had hardly seen the gator move faster than a lumbering waddle. Beggars can’t be choosers, unfortunately. Right now, Toko was his only chance at fixing this mess he was in. “Hurry up, Toko! Don’t stop for anything!”

Shutting the door, Valoriel waddled his way back inside, sloooowly shifting one foot in front of the other. His mobility was dwindling by the day; he predicted he wouldn’t be able to walk on his own within the next week, at this rate. But, that shouldn’t happen; Toko may be a little thick-headed (and thick-bellied) but surely he’ll find someone who’ll help him. He’ll do anything it took to slim back down, even if it cost him every last gold coin he had.

So, with nothing better to do, and because Valoriel couldn’t climb the stairs anymore, the griffon rolled onto his back on the couch and waited. And waited. And waited. Soon enough, he ended up falling asleep on the couch.

And waking up on the ceiling.

Valoriel opened his beak to scream, an enormous belch forcing itself out of his mouth instead. The griffon was propelled back until he bounced off the wall, slowly rotating in midair before rubbing against the ceiling once more.

He was huge!

Just a few hours ago, he could waddle about fairly well; now, he could barely wiggle his hands or feet! The bird was a total sphere of brown and white, unable to move an inch! Even turning his head was an impossibility, although he didn't need to do that to see the top of his belly was now eye level with his beak. His limbs were completely sunken into his spherical self. Buried. Swallowed up. Lost.

He was helpless.

“Help meeeee!” He tried calling out, another belch exploding out of him. He was nearing his limit; he could feel, could *hear*, his body creaking and groaning as it struggled to contain so much gas within him. No wonder every other breath he took was interrupted by a burp; his body was trying to expel as much gas as possible. Yet, unfortunately, it was replaced quicker than it was dispelled.

“Why not say please, first?”

Valoriel blinked. Beyond the horizon of his middle, he could see the elderly tigress standing in his house, looking up at the avian. The griffon saw only red. “*You!* You’re the one who did this to me, you miserable, cantankerous, wretched haAARRRRUP!”

He was silenced, not just by his own belch, but by something far more chilling. The avian had swelled out several inches further, his body ballooning wider and rounder than ever before, until his wrists and ankles were swallowed up with the rest of his limbs!

The tigress tut-tutted. “Now now, that’s no way to talk to an old lady, now, is it?”

“Go to hell!” Another belch, another inch wider. The creaking was growing louder; the tight feeling in his body was growing unbearable. He was reaching his literal breaking point!

The tigress shook her head. “I told you, that trial of mine was to test communication, among other important traits. And yet, you can’t even ask for what you want without making such rude, snarky comments. Poor Toko; he was quite upset when he left your house. He doesn’t like being yelled at, you know.”

Valoriel scowled. No wonder the fat gator was taking so long! “What did you do to Toko!”

The old woman waved her paw. “Relax, he’s fine. He just so happened to find a large knapsack full of gold on his way to get you help, containing exactly 50 gold coins. And, of course, I was nearby to convince the lad to reward himself by spending it on a big feast.” By the way she spoke, Valoriel knew she did more than just “convince” Toko.

“He’ll be eating for quite a few days, now. 50 gold is quite a lot, and shouldn’t be overlooked for the sake of pride. Of course, I’d imagine he’d have trouble moving on his own once he’s finished, much like you’re having difficulties.”

Valoriel couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Every inch of him trembled with rage. Or, perhaps trembling to contain so much air within him. “You let Toko go, you horrendous old bi-”

The griffon swelled out by nearly an entire foot, enough to force his jaw completely shut! His eyes widened, wincing at just how unimaginably uncomfortable it felt to be so tight.

“That’s enough out of you!” The old woman snapped; Valoriel whimpered when he felt the tigress reach up and pinch at his overblown behind, shocked that he was big enough to be reached from the ceiling. “I’ll do no such thing! In fact, you’re the one who owes Toko an apology, as well as myself! Look at yourself. You finally resemble your ego: overblown and inflated, full of hot air! Despicable! Imagine if the whole town could see you now; a shadow of your former self! You’d rather worsen your situation than admit your folly!

“Now, I’ll give you one last chance.” The old lady stepped back, glaring at the drifting griffon. “Apologize. Admit you were wrong. Ask kindly for my assistance.”

Valoriel panted; suddenly, he found himself unable to belch anymore. Perhaps the tigress was giving him a chance to finally beg for forgiveness.

Well, she’ll be mistaken.

“Return me to normal...lest I sever your limbs and feed them to the gulls!”

With that, Valoriel no longer found it possible to speak, or even to burp! His body swelled out before him, his head sinking into his rising mass. He could barely make out the magic user’s words from the sound of his own body creaking. “Unfortunate. No matter. The least I can do is let you return to the skies. Your kind enjoy flying, do they not?”

Valoriel yelped as the ceiling he bobbed against suddenly vanished. With nothing holding him down, the griffon was free to float into the air, higher and higher. He was helpless to watch the ground drift farther and farther away from him; soon, he wasn’t even allotted that luxury as his vision was encroached by his growing mass, swallowing his head entirely. Larger and larger, rounder and rounder, tighter and tighter, Valoriel was helpless as he felt himself bloat up bigger than his room, bigger than his house, bigger than the town....

That night, the locals all watched as a new moon hovered above their town.