

THIS ABOVE ALL;  
TO THINE OWN  
SELF BE  
ZOO.

Vol. III

No. 3

Autumn Equinox 2025

In this issue,  
a king communicates about zoophilia,  
and a survey is given.

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*To Thine Own Self Be Zoo*  
*Vol. III No. 3*  
*Autumn Equinox 2025*

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## KING'S CHATROOM

CASTLE - DAY

KING and his three advisors, in no hurry, are walking through a sunny passageway in the castle.

LAURA

I mark you will be very pleased, o king.

KING

Wonderful! I love being pleased!

LAURA

This new technology arrived from the mouse kingdom just two nights ago. It has taken some setting up, but works exactly as they have said.

KING

Huzzah! My tail is wagging already!

LAURA

So it is, o king, so it is.

ROLUSEIR *aside to Benethedes:*

I mark we are lucky, to be advisors to a king so filled up with huzzahs and wonderfals.

KING *Did not hear that.*

Ha haaaa! Is that a falcon outside! Delightful! What beauty!

BENETHEDES *aside to Roluseir:*

Indeed, wise Roluseir. We are dealt a lucky lot indeed.

LAURA

Here, o king, behind this door.

Laura opens the door, and KING and his three advisors proceed through.

KING

Ohhhhh how magnificent, what an extensive number of buttons there are in this room! I've never seen so many! So through these buttons, at mere presses of them with my fuzzy lupine fingertips, I may communicate to other kings and such across the world?

BENETHEDES

Any at all who have the same technology arranged, king or not. The number who have it is growing rapidly.

ROLUSEIR

You will certainly find no shortage of company when operating this apparatus.

LAURA

Indeed, through this technology, there are many fantastical rooms in which to chat about any topic you like—

KING

Such as zoophilia?!

Pause.

LAURA

Yes, my king.

Here, KING blathers on, meanwhile ROLUSEIR and BENETHEDES share an aside.

KING

Ahhh, wonderful, wonderful zoophilia! You know, I have often found, that the four legged are such captivating creatures, in their beauty, in their movements, in, why, in their amount of legs! Four! What a splendid notion! More paws to balance on! More paws to run on! What different worlds we come from, and I think that is the heart of it, the contrasts, the four legged seeing beauty in the two, the two legged seeing very much beauty indeed in the four!

ROLUSEIR

Well THAT was the most predictable thing that's happened in my entire life.

BENETHEDES

We knew he was going to ASK, I didn't know he would do it THAT fast.

ROLUSEIR

I did.

The aside ends.

KING

Please, o advisors, wise council, bring me forth to speak on zoophilia with the world.

LAURA

Benethedes, be you prepared at the dials?

BENETHEDES

I am, Laura.

LAURA

Navigate us by way of the path of six thousand and six hundred and sixty and seven, room hash zoophilia.

A chime sounds.

BENETHEDES

We're on!

ROLUSEIR

All looking good over here!

LAURA

Our tether holds. It appears that in the room to discuss zoophilia, we have three other users of this technology. First, her highness the queen of cats.

KING

Oh what a joyous surprise! It's been ages!

ROLUSEIR (*"Ovathi the Eleventh"*)

Second, I see that in the room there is Ovathi XI.

KING

The inventor?

ROLUSEIR

Yes, o king.

KING

The one doing all of that work on, ah what is it called...

BENETHEDES

Pornography.

KING *pleased:*

Pornography! What an idea. Ahhh.

BENETHEDES

Lastly in the room, is Mike7.



KING (*“Michael the Seventh”*)

Ah, yes! Michael VII of... ah...

BENETHEDES

At times, in these rooms, some unknown person gets on and assigns themselves an arbitrary name. Mike7 is not nobility to my knowledge.

KING

Speaking to the people! Any people! I love it! How do I proceed?

LAURA

All you must do is press the button of any word you wish to say, and it will be conveyed to the others in the room we have joined.

KING makes a series of single button presses as each word is found.

KING

Are... any... of... you... also...

(*Can't find the next one.*)

Where is zoophiles?

BENETHEDES *projecting from far away:*

Over here, o king!

LAURA

Let's bring that button closer to over here, Benethedes. Give it a press yourself for now?

The button is pressed.

LAURA

Thank you.

ROLUSEIR

The answers have come in.

LAURA

Her highness the queen of cats answers, Yes. She has added a purring as well. She says, O wolf king! When last we embraced in each other's arms, I believed you when you said it would not be the final time we would meet. It is a delight to happen upon one another here now. I hope someday to know the scent of your coat once more, and the feel of our muzzles brushing together, yours the longer though mine the prettier.

KING *Happy sigh.*

It is truly her, I am certain. She also... conveyed all of that very, very quickly, I think. Does she have the same kinds of buttons as we do?

BENETHEDES

She does. Cats are known to be very prolific upon these buttons.

ROLUSEIR

Ovathi XI answers, regarding if he is a zoophile, Yes, I love four leggers.

BENETHEDES

Mike7 answers, Yes, animals are hot. I am a human.

LAURA

If you wish, o king, you may commune further, at your leisure.

KING

What... do... you... all... like... about...  
(*Again, missing a word.*)  
Where is zoophilia?

BENETHEDES *projecting from far away:*

Over here, o king!

LAURA

Benethedes, please just, bring all of those over here.

BENETHEDES

But they are arranged in a logical and—

LAURA

I—I understand, but, we will be using those ones. Just, all of those, yes, that entire set that you're looking at. Just—Thank you.

ROLUSEIR *to Laura:*

We could have foreseen this.

LAURA

Mm. Truly.

BENETHEDES *arriving with the requested buttons:*

Here you go!

KING

Ha haaa!

Click!

KING

Zoophilia! There, I have asked them, “What do you all like about zoophilia?”

ROLUSEIR

So you have, o king.

LAURA

Her highness the queen of cats answers, Bears. Mice. Robins. Whales. Otters. Giraffes. Dolphins. Sharks. Wolves. Dogs. Variety. Spice. Familiarity. Sweetness. Different. The same. Interesting. Compatible. What else might one want?

ROLUSEIR

Ovathi XI answers, When you have filled a jar with marbles, you have not filled it with matter utterly. Into the jar of marbles you pour in sand, and still, you have not filled it with matter utterly. Into the jar of marbles and sand, you pour in water, and although you cannot think of what else might go in there, you now have the inkling that the jar, somehow, still, is not filled with matter utterly. Horses are filled with compassion utterly. Dogs are filled with compassion utterly. I have seldom seen two two-leggers so immensely conductive to one another's needs and desires as I have when observing six or more legs live life as one entity, in big ways and in little ways and in ways so small that I cannot even describe them, other than to state that their importance, for completeness, is great and awe-striking.

BENETHEDES

Mike7 answers, I've never been around them enough to know about romance or all of that. I just don't think two leggers look as good as four leggers. Like, I just like looking at a feral wolf all face-down-ass-up glaring playfully and wagging. The way their body torpedoes forward when they run, the way the legs all kinda pass by each other when they walk and trot. And I think the shafts and pussies and stuff look better than human ones, way more interesting, way more like what I would want to imagine if I can imagine anything. Why not imagine cool wolf shaft.

KING

Wow. What a spectacular, captivating piece of technology. My thanks to you all for arranging it and showing it to me.

BENETHEDES

We serve, o king.

ROLUSEIR

You are a king of joys, and here seeing a joy we may bring you, we pounced. We are glad, truly, that seeing it has pleased you so.

KING

Truly well you have served, and truly pleased I am.

LAURA

Of course, it should be known, o king, that others prowl in rooms unlike this one, others who do not share such a kind outlook on zoophilia—

KING

Boooooooooriiiiiing! Come, advisors, let's bake pie! And eat pie! And perhaps see a play afterwards if anything good is on!

The advisors speak over one another slightly:

LAURA

Yes, o king.

BENETHEDES

So we shall.

ROLUSEIR

Of course.

The king goes on as they exit:

KING

You know, I once baked a pie that had BLUEBERRIES in it! Can you imagine? Blueberries, a-ha ha ha, in a pie? It came out splendidly! I asked the bakers if they had considered this ingredient before, and they had! You can purchase blueberry pies from quite a number of bakeries, in fact! I think that's wonderful. I think it's wonderful that we all can invent blueberry pie, and partake in blueberry pie. It was very good to taste and to invent...

## SUN GOD

Johnny came in in the passenger seat, seatbelt on, as Kasston was in the driver's seat telling a story. Johnny looked down, and saw they were holding papers. Some kind of photocopy job, duplicates of something written in their own handwriting. The artsy comic-book-y lettering that maaaainly Jillian used, although to be honest that talent seemed to be stored in the hand, not kept by any particular alter, but, Jillian was the only one who used it like always. Leafing through the pages, it looked like some kind of fill-in-the-blank forms? With some copies partially filled in already in different colored markers, and some not. Their eyes wandered to the top of a particular page, and only then did they notice that it said at the top of *every* page, with yellow highlighter behind it, "NO CHEATING! THIS PAPER IS FOR: ..." with a different name at the top of each set of papers.

Johnny paged through and found their own papers midway through the stack, and moved their pages up to the top, five single-sided sheets.

The first page was titled "Survey" and had a paragraph that read, *Brief: Some of us want to better understand the others' orientations. We know that some of these questions may sound stupid, but please answer them honestly, and then provide further relevant detail at your discretion. Err on the side of infodumping, liberally use the backs of the pages for more space, or extra loose leaf if needed. We trust in all of your judgment and honesty.*

And then a little note saying that this was collaborated on by Jillian and Bun. Yeah that tracked.

Oh Kasston was still talking.

And they were driving somewhere, like, somewhere *far*, maybe? If they were on the highway.

Kasston was saying, “And it’s like, look, dude, you can watch Fox ‘Newwwwsssss’ all you want in your room, nobody is going to stop you, lots of people do that. Does it make me happy? No. But that’s fine, I’m at work, I’m here to do my job, not to pick up where your mom failed, *that* ship has already sailed, clearly, so I let that go. You can watch Fox ‘Newwwwsssss’ in the media center. You can watch Fox ‘Newwwwsssss’ on your phone outside, lots of people do that too, seems like a waste of outside to me but whatever, I’m out there to smoke, I’m wasting outside too. BUT. You know where you CAN’T watch Fox ‘Newwwwss’ Mandy?”

“Johnny,” Johnny corrected, with a strongly implied tone of, *but please go on I love this*.

Quickly, “Oh I’m so sorry.”

Quickly, “You’re fine, just happened,” *keep cooking dude*.

Kasston continued, “So, I don’t know if you heard, but this patient, one who tells me about ‘Buh, these DAMN immigrants,’ has been watching Fox ‘Newwwwwwwwwwssssssss’ on his laptop, in the *hallway*.”

“Oh my titty fucking christ.”

Kasston snort-laughed, and said, “Exactly! Um...” Kasston snapped his fingers as he tried to remember something.

What time of day was it? It was cloudy.

The sky was just grey all around. Johnny leaned forward over the dash turning to look upwards through the windshield, looking for the sun. Turned fully around to the back, turned to look out the side windows. No sun anywhere at all, what the fuck, weather.

Kasston didn’t have the time displayed on his car radio display cuz he was a fucking psycho apparently. Johnny wasn’t wearing a watch right now. They patted their pockets. Markers, hehe, a Zippo lighter, two condoms, a Swiss army knife, some loose change, probably a receipt and maybe some other crap, but no watch. Wallet in their ass pocket.

What the *fuck* time of day was it? It could literally be 5 AM or 7 PM or anything in between.

Kasston remembered. "Mandy!" he said. "Mandy said she was fronting before you just now."

"Oh thank you," Johnny said. They had already gathered that. But cool.

"When we left it was Jillian fronting and Bun as an observer, and then for about the last... hour? What *time* is it?"

Oh my fucking god.

Kasston poked his phone that was in the cupholder, and it lit up and showed, 19:13.

Thinking aloud, Kasston was like, "We stopped for gas 6:30, and *Mandy* showed up *then*, so for the last forty three minutes, it's been Mandy. Until you, *Johnny*, now."

With a charismatic laugh, Johnny went, "Yeah-hah, thanks."

They didn't really care as much about the minute-by-minute, but, they knew others, whose names rhymed with Shmillian and Shmun, would want to encourage this kind of datakeeping, getting an outside source to share exact deets on when switches happened.

"So anyways," Kasston went on, "Johnny. You know where you're not allowed to watch Fox 'Newwwwwwwssssss'?"

"In the FUCKING hallway?"

"IN THE FUCKING HALLWAY!" Kasston affirmed.

"How— wh— like— Just on the floor?"

Kasston did huge nods. "YUUUP. He just SITS there, in the— okay are you ready for this?"

"What's up?"

"He does not sit, I don't know, *against* a *wall*. No he sits *in the middle* of the hallway, with his laptop, Fox 'Newwss' on, volume must be on max, and I mean, it's a laptop, he's not shaking the walls with all of the noise, but there is an echo in this place, yknow, it does carry a ways. AND ALSO HE'S IN THE MIDDLE OF THE HALLWAY."

"Fuck that bro what the fuck."

"It's. I remind myself. These people are not here because their entire wellbeings are perfect."

"Right."



“It’s just, yknow what it is, it’s *fascinating*. It’s like—no I shouldn’t say this. Johnny should I say this?”

“No.”

“Ohhhhhh but I want to. Ohhhhhhhhhh but you’re going to take it the wrong—well—no I *think* actually you would agree—well—hm. Well now I want to know. *Should* I say this?”

“No,” Johnny maintained. “If it’s HIPAA I really don’t need to hear it it’s fine.”

“No it’s not HIPAA.”

“Oh then whatever.”

“It’s like I’m in a *zoo*,” Kasston said.

Johnny wheeze-laughed, tilting over.

Kasston went on, “Like, isn’t it? Not like I’m in a zooPHILE—fuckin em from behind doggy style to remind them of good times—right, like I KNOW, but that’s not what I mean, but a... zoo place?”

Johnny began, “A zoo, uh,” and then couldn’t actually think of it. “A zoonaseum?”

“Maybe.”

“Anyways, it’s like that,” Kasston went on. “It’s like I’m in a zoo location. And I’m just watching animals. And if I see them excrete, or make lots of noises, or stand in places that seem rude for the other animals, I can’t even really morally judge them, because they’re animals. They are living beings with basic living being needs, *everyone* poops, and, they are just, going to behave in whatever ways these specific kinds of animals behave. I *probably* should not have said that.”

Johnny shrugged, and said, “No I mean, I feel. I do not disagree. I think that’s a good metaphor.”

“Is it distasteful to zoophiles or to animals?”

“Nnnnnno, not reallllly. You said it fine. If we were saying it we would maybe try to... re-emphasize or re-contextualize it to extra-extra highlight that these animals probably have *their own* standards of what’s polite or not, or that they don’t but that they don’t have to, rather than, like, it sounds like all of them are just blanketly gross and have undesirable characteristics, the way you kinda said it, or maybe you didn’t say that but that’s just the territory you were in, but I get what you mean.”

“That’s fair.”

Johnny asked, "Is there a Taco Bell near here?"

Kasston yanked the steering wheel to the right to make an exit. Someone behind them gave a bunch of angry honks, and Kasston held up a hand to wave for the other driver to see out the back window, saying, "Sorrriiiiiiyyy! Had to do it!"

The other driver gave a long, still-angry honk.

Johnny was gripping the handle above the window. They said, "I take it you saw a sign for Taco Bell on this exit?"

Kasston said, "No, *but*, my aunt used to live here, and I happen to know that unless it closed, there is a Taco Bell in town here."

"Oh a *secret* Taco Bell."

"That's right, the illuminati does not want you to know about this Taco Bell. Stick with me and you'll learn some things."

"Pff."

The exit went up a hill, and soon Kasston and Johnny were driving through some woods, highway no longer visible behind them, really nothing other than pine trees, the road, and the red car behind them where the driver was still mad.

Kasston said, "Okay, up here there's going to be a stop sign and we have to go left or right. Either way we can get into town, so, get a load of this plan, this high-level thinking. I am going to put on my left blinker, and *then*, if this gentleman also puts on *his* left blinker, I am gonna swiggy-diggy switchsies to my *right* blinker, so that we are *not* going to keep being in front of him, because he is *angry* at us, and haha I don't want to be alone on the road with him."

"Cunning. Genius," Johnny said. "What if he follows you right still?"

"Hahaha then we're gonna die."

"Cool. Awesome," Johnny said. "Where are we going?"

Kasston gasped, and said, "Oh I'm so sorry, that's right, you don't know. We are going to Ugly Jenny's wedding."

Johnny started wagging, or like, *felt* like they were wagging. They were wagging in their mind, but their mind was stuck forever in a human body that did not have a tail, unfortunately. They were sometimes surprised by how much other humans found being a human optimal. Like, what? You only want to lose weight or gain muscles or have softer skin or something, but

your goals end there? You DON'T want to be an 8 foot tall robotic anthro wolf with a metal scorpion tail and four arms and all kinds of different visual sensor modes? A giant robotic anthro wolf who can FUCK like a MONSTER, and then wags their scorpion tail when they get headpats? Humans: weird fuckers for still wanting to be humans, and not giant robots, or dragons, or mermaids, or literally whatever else.

But Ugly Jenny's wedding: hype as fluff.

Johnny asked, "So we got invited, or?"

"Yes," Kasston said, "very last minute. I was on the phone with her this morning telling her congratulations, and she was super happy to hear from me and said she would love it if we can make it. It's *tomorrow*, and I was like, yo, what if we book it to Vermont, say hi, maybe eat some cake, leave before your husband kicks both of our asses, and yeah, she said it isn't like that at all with her husband, the dude genuinely sounds super nice and would have like no weird jealousy about it, well, *understandable* jealousy to be fair, but anyways the word 'jealous' is not in this man's vocabulary, and I'm like, I ain't doin anything this weekend, it sounds like a lot of the people we used to know are gonna be there who I would love to see, and I asked Jillian if she had any plans or wanted in on this too and she said fuck no she did not have plans and she went and got straight in the car and buckled in. I was like *bring a bag* girl, and she ROLLED HER EYES AT ME, and so I packed your bag for you while she sat there, I *hope* I thought of everything, if we need to stop into a CVS or something we can do that, let me know."

Kasston and Johnny had both dated Ugly Jenny in high school.

Like, separately. Kasston in the summer before Freshman year and then into like... halfway through Freshman year? And Johnny for a month or maybe two in Junior year.

Ugly Jenny was a name that she called herself because in middle school in the bathroom somebody wrote in nail polish "UGLY JENNY" on the mirror and she thought it was the funniest shit, like she was in the bathroom scream-laughing and peeing, and then she started putting "UGLY Jenny Farley" on her own notebooks and papers and on the scoreboard when they went bowling and stuff.

After rounding a bend on the road, they came to about a quarter mile of straight road that had a bunch of stop signs at the end of it, and yellow-and-black signs with arrows indicating that you could go left or right.

Kasston said, “Allllright, here goes nothing. Left.” He turned the left blinker on.

Kasston and Johnny both looked into the mirrors to see what would happen.

As they neared the stop signs, the red car put on their right blinker.

Kasston exclaimed, “Yeah!”

Kasston came to a full and complete stop at the stop signs, looked both ways—it was still just them and the red car as far as Johnny could see through the woods—and then Kasston accelerated and went to the left.

Looking back in the mirrors, the other car did indeed turn right instead, now heading away from them.

Johnny said, “Well that’s really cool, it sounds like her husband-to-be really shares her philosophy, good for them. Thanks for bringing us with.”

The name of Johnny and Jillian’s system was Ra, like after the Egyptian sun god; they weren’t literally the sun god or anything, but, the way they sometimes viewed the system as a solar system, with the sun at the center, the name just kind of fell out of that and seemed to really fit. “Ra” as the overall name, the sun at the center of it, the body whose gravity all of these personalities orbited around; Johnny they/them and Jillian she/her as the primary habitable planets, who typically spent the most time fronting; Some far-out dwarf planets, Mandy and Lilly and Rena; A couple of rogue entities like clandestine spaceships darting through the system on missions, Dagger and Cutlass and mmmmaybe more but, to be determined; And some moons around Jillian, three of them, called Bun, Lisa, and Kex.

And anyways, Ra spent a lot of time on the road. Sometimes Johnny would come in while driving at night on the highway and just continue going in silence, watching the headlights eat the passing road stripes, and then the next thing they knew they were in a hotel bed in Idaho or Ontario or freaking Texas.

So, far from feeling abducted by coming in as Kasston's passenger, it was actually nice to learn they were on an adventure with their bestie.

One time Johnny came in in a snow fort and had last remembered it being 104 degrees out with sweat positively drenching their "SL\*T MACHINE" tanktop.

One time Johnny came in in a camping tent where themselves and like eight other dudes were having sex, and later they were like, that was probably a dream, and then they wrote it in the query book, and later when they were fronting again, they saw that Jillian had written "real" under it.

One time Johnny came in eating Dippin Dots at a water park, sharing a towel on the grass with a trans woman who was half spooning them, half rubbing sunscreen onto them, and Johnny was like "Do you wanna fuck in the family restroom" and she nodded and the two of them ran and did that, and Johnny during the whole time they were pumping inside of her good good booty was thinking, "Ha, killsteal."

Jillian was a zoophile.

Right! Those papers!

Johnny looked down at the survey that they had been given by Jillian and Bun.

The first question, after the preliminary preamble, was:

*Are you sexually attracted to humans?*

Johnny pulled the blue marker from out of their pocket, uncapped it, and on the underlined blank provided, they wrote:

*yes*

They then looked up, and saw that they were driving in like a little commercial district of some place, and the tall Taco Bell sign was within sight on the road ahead.

"Oh shoot," Johnny said, "pull into this lot here before we get there."

Kasston yanked on the wheel, eliciting an angry honk from one of the cars nearby them.

Johnny, hanging onto the handle above the window for dear life, went on, "Yeah just park somewhere. Can I drive?"

Kasston asked, "Is your order *that* complicated? Do you want to order on the app?"

"No no no, for sure not," Johnny said.

Kasston parked and he and Johnny got out and switched sides and Johnny and Kasston both buckled in again.

Johnny went on, "This isn't a food thing."

Baffled, Kasston asked, "Whyyyyyyy are we going to get fast foood thennnnn..."

Johnny explained, "I need to chat up the manager."

Kasston asked, "Okay but whyyyyy..."

Johnny backed out of the spot they were in, and put on the blinker to get back onto the road when there was an opening. They explained, "I just have the best charisma in the world, *specifically* as it relates to Taco Bell managers, and if we're in a new place I need to get some information from them."

"Johnny are you a fucking sleeper agent."

Johnny smiled, and said, "Not exactly. Uh, you know the LinkFreakz game that's been really popular lately?"

"OH MY GOD."

Johnny cackled, and then pulled out onto the road, and then got on the other lane to be able to pull off again towards the Taco Bell drive thru. As they sat in the left turn lane with their blinker on, waiting for an opening, Johnny was like, "Okay so but like, you know the idea of it."

Kasston said, "Yeah it's pokemon basically, but a fan hack of it, on GBA cartridges with link cables and stuff, and you can trade your pokemon to breed stronger ones."

Johnny waffled on agreeing with that description of it, being like, "Mmmmmmmmm nnnnnnnnnnaaaahhhhhh no. You are in the ballpark but that's missing some."

"Okay what is different from pokemon?"

"Firstly, and this is the best," Johnny said, and then paused for a sec as there was a huge opening in traffic and they casually pulled forward to turn into the Taco Bell lot. "So, you're not actually breeding them to make new creatures. You have your one guy, and fucking other people's guys increases both of your powers permanently."

"What! Okay that is amazing."

Johnny went on, "And it's kinda this whole ARG thing too, like, you have to send in to get back a cart in the mail, and they load it with data that's related to your location but also some other stuff, and there's a whole intricate system that preeetty

much stops people from gaming the system. I mean the datamining happens within an hour of each new drop, and people go DEEP into these things, it's really fascinating to read the breakdowns. But. Like, hacking the ROMs doesn't entirely get you too much more than you would've seen just from playing the game, there's all kinds of encryption and validation and red herrings that have really fascinating in-universe implications, they really were ahead of this from the get-go."

Johnny came to a stop. There was one car already ahead of them at the speaker where you order.

Kasston said, "So you've been playing this, and you want to fuck the manager's pokemon."

"Haha, no it's dumber than that. I know... That the manager is going to know... Who else around here plays this. And so after this we'll go to them, and make that happen, and then we can get back on the road again."

"Okay so." Kasston paused, holding up a finger in thought. He then went on, "So *you're* not even getting your dick wet, or your booty drilled or whatever you're more into. We are here at Taco Bell so that *your gameboy game* can find a hookup and smash before we leave town."

"Yes exactly."

"Fucking christ Johnny, this is why I bring you places, who the fuck else would I get to experience this with."

The car ahead moved forward, and Johnny pulled them up to the speaker.

The speaker said, "Hi there, will you be using the mobile app today?"

Johnny, with a smile and annunciating clearly and projecting exactly correctly to the speaker, said, "Ah not today."

The speaker said, friendly-ly if a little bit bored-ly, "Alright what can we get going for you today?"

Johnny gave a thumbs-up to Kasston, and then said, "Could I get a black bean Crunchwrap and a bean burrito?"

"Suuuure thing. What else can I getcha?"

Johnny turned to Kasston and mouthed, "Do you want anything?"

Kasston said under his breath, "Two taco supremes with a baja blast."

“Sauces?”

“No.”

Johnny turned and said to the speaker, “And then for my passenger if he could get two tacos supremes and a large Mountain Dew Baja Blast, that’ll be everything for us. No drink for me, oh and some Mild sauce for us to share.”

The speaker said, “Alllllright, one moment... Does everything on your screen look correct?”

It did.

“Yes it does!”

“Do you want to round up to the nearest dollar for the help hunger fund?”

31 cents. “Yeah we can do that.” At any self-checkout, the same question would have gotten a fuck no I’m not going to help your company’s tax breaks, but, schmoozing, charisma, making connections, no brainer. Yeah you can have my change I have Freakz to fuck and burritos to eat.

“Alright, your total will be exactly twenty even at the next window.”

“Thank you!!”

“No problem, thank *you*.”

Johnny eased off the brake to ease them forward, and said, “That went *really* well.”

“Yeah?”

“Oh yeah. Firstly, manager, for sure. Secondly, loves me. Thirdly, when we get to the window, he’s gonna call me ‘man’ and you just need to let that happen, okay?”

“I will keep my lips sealed.”

They got up to the window.

The manager inside said, “Hey man. That’s gonna be twenty even.”

Johnny handed over their debit card, which had a picture of an alligator photoshopped to have anime-style blushing.

The manager held the card in both hands and looked at it beaming and wheeze-laughing. As he turned to run the card, he said, “That’s great. I love the card.”

“Haha, thank you. I tried to get it with Nicholas Cage blushing, but the bank said I can’t use humans without their permission.”



“Ha! That’s awesome man. Here is this back, we should have that out to you pretty soon. Any fun plans for today?”

“We are on our way to a *wedding*.”

“Really!” the manager said. Kinda pointing back and forth between Johnny and Kasston, with a tone that he expected the answer to be ‘no,’ he asked, “Either of you the groom?”

“No but we actually both separately, at different times, dated the bride in high school.”

The manager snort-laughed, and said, “Yeah, well. No I figured if you were getting married at the sunset you wouldn’t be getting Taco Bell in the evening.”

“Heh, well, it’s not until tomorrow, but yeah no. Hey, question for you.”

“What’s up?” the manager asked—game as fuck to humor Johnny. Good, good.

“If I tell you that I’m a pollinator bee, do you know anyone that would want to know I was coming through?”

The manager gasped and leapt for their phone that was over by the cash register, and said, “Monica is going to flip out.”

As the manager was typing on the phone, Johnny turned to Kasston and said, “You did bring my gameboy right?”

“Yes, it is in your bag, with the link cable.”

“Thank you so much.”

“Of course.”

Johnny turned back to the manager.

The manager said, “Okay I just sent her, ‘a pollinator bee is in the drive thru.’ She’s typing... she sent back all caps, ‘AAAAAAA!’”

“Haha!”

“She wants to know if you want to meet at the blue park.”

“Oo, what is the ‘blue’ park?” Johnny asked.

“Oh! Right, not from here. It’s just a playground about a mile and a half or so from here, the slides at that one are blue.”

“Gotcha, gotcha,” Johnny said. Turning to Kasston, they asked, “Do you have time for this or are we in a hurry to be anywhere?”

Kasston was like, “I could not possibly get in the way of whatever the hell you and your new friends are doing.”

A bag of food was set down next to the manager. The manager started to grab it, and then was like, "OH my gosh your drinks. Mountain Dew Baja Blast, andddd right, just that one drink. Here's that, and let me ask if Monica can meet you there right now. Oh hey, we've got an extra few tacos someone didn't want, if I throw them in the bag would you be upset about that?"

In very short order, the manager confirmed Monica would meet them at the blue park ASAP, and then he told them the directions to get there, and also put the extra tacos in the bag and handed it out to them.

Johnny said, "Thank you so much!"

"No problem, enjoy the rest of your evening and have fun at that wedding."

Johnny pulled forward. After they were well clear of the window they put the car in park and got out quick, so that Kasston could drive again.

Kasston was like, "How do you talk to strangers like that??"

"It *only* works with Taco Bell managers."

"Does it?" Kasston asked. "Don't you fuck like twenty people a week?"

Johnny snickered.

Kasston was like, "Ohhhhhh are they all Taco Bell managers?"

"Pff, no."

Kasston guessed again, "Ohhhhhh do you just like kidnap them?"

"Oh my *god*, no!!"

Kasston was like, "Hey I won't judge!"

Johnny was like, "You should judge more than that amount!"

Kasston giggled, and then went "Oo food" and started getting into the food that was in the bag.

Johnny was like, "That's Jillian and her posse that can flirt with people. *I* typically am not fucking anybody unless..." Johnny sighed. "I basically only get laid when it's already something that's been set in motion."

"Huh."

Johnny shrugged, and said, "There are worse ways to wake up."

"Oh! Did you see the survey that Jillian gave you?"

“Oh riiiiight, yeah I should *do* that. Right after LinkFreakz business with Monica at the blue park. And then um. What was the plan for tonight again, where are we staying?”

“I booked us a hotel.”

“Gotcha, gotcha. Do I owe you, or?”

“I mean, I’m willing to cover most of it, buuuut if you wanted to chip in forty bucks my bank account would thank you.”

“Yeah of course.”

“Thank you.”

“Yeah no proBLUE PARK!!”

Kasston pulled them into the little parking lot that adjoined a playground that had a really big blue slide, like, Kasston and Johnny were both like “yoooooo” it was legit taller than a house it seemed super unsafe and like the most rad thing. There were also swings and monkey bars and like a wavey plastic rock wall. And all of the plastic parts of the different stuff were blue.

Sitting on the foot of the slide was Monica probably. She waved to them and held up a gameboy over her head with the link cable also in her hand.

Johnny got out of the car, and sheepishly held up their gameboy too. They noticed Kasston was staying in the car. Cooooool.

Monica stood up, and the two of them met at the edge of the parking lot, Monica standing on the curb, making herself taller-taller than Johnny, even though she definitely already would have been taller anyways.

She said, “Did you bring me any T Bell?”

“Oh uh, haha actually if you want, we have extra—”

Monica tapped Johnny on the top of the head. “I’m joking.”

“No I figured but we actually do have extra.” Holy fucking crap that tap had Johnny’s mind flashing through an avalanche of different times getting touched and feeling ways—good ways? Sometimes it was pretending that it was good just, to not interrupt the flow of like... just to go along with it. Like getting smacked had a time and a place where it actually did a lot for Johnny, but it did only work in those certain times and ways, like, someone telling them that they weren’t worth the effort of getting them off until they had gotten to hit them around enough? Yes. Somebody halfheartedly slapping them and

seeming to then feel weird and bad about it? No. Multiple people debating among each other what they were going to do with this traitorous scum they captured? Yes. Hitting someone else and then they flip it around and start hitting back? Yes. Something that was supposed to be foreplay or afterplay or an interlude and has just completely become a fight? Yes. Something that—

\*~%+` :3 LORE :3 MONTAGE :D \*~%+`

**8 years ago**

**Lore Severity: Core Foundational**

One time Johnny was getting on a flight and they saw the cycling slideshow of pre-flight info that was playing on all the screens on all the seatbacks and they sat down and pulled part of the screen back and plugged in a thumbdrive to install linux on their screen for the flight and instantly every electronic connected to an airplane cabin in any plane on the entire national airline got nuked. All the screens blackscreened, cabin lights turned off, intercomms off, everything, 342 airplanes, regardless of on the ground or in the air.

And nobody probably would have ever found out it was Johnny except right away when it happened they yelled “Oh NO. It wasn’t supposed to do THAT.”

And Johnny got taken into custody and spent 8 months in custody looking at life in prison. A judge one day seemingly out of nowhere dismissed the case based on the argument that if some twerp dweeb could do this without meaning to, then this was more like an act of god than an act of terrorism, and they all tried to keep Johnny tied up in the court proceedings as the focus shifted to the network engineers and stuff who had allowed such an enormous flaw to be in their system that this could even happen, but a lot of that slid off and Johnny just wanted nothing to do with it anyways and had a lot of issues after that with questions from doctors like “Do you ever feel an inability to hope?” like, my government actively chewed me apart and failed to digest me but would have gladly killed me, I can just be some guy and then that happens and that’s how the

world handles it, they try to lock you away forever, and they're allowed to do that? And they used to have bright colorful vibrant mohawks at the time that happened, and ever since they always kept their hair short-medium and messy and as unassuming as possible because they did not like the idea of being recognized, contactless grocery delivery probably saved their life.

### **sporadic occurrences**

**Lore Severity: low, just weird**

Sometimes Ra would go through periods where all of the members would keep coming in at Denali National Park in Alaska, with none of them fessing up to being the one who had brought them there. When trying to leave, they would go into amnesia and just come in again inside the park again. Usually they would be stuck there for about ten days, and then leaving would just actually work one time, and Ra could go elsewhere in the world again. They usually had really bad stomach cramps and diarrhea while they were there. Nonexistent libido across the whole system. The park was beautiful at least.

### **don't remember when, doesn't matter**

**Lore Severity: low**

One time Johnny asked the query book "mile high club?" And got back "no but we did fuck one guy on his airplane bed" and Johnny since then started trying to imagine what that scene looked like every now and then as an idle thought.

—

### **Right now**

Johnny didn't tell Monica any of that.

They said, "What kind of world did they give you, what's your personalization?"

like, in the game. Everyone's cart had a different setting, sometimes with really minor differences from others, but some people got wildly unique ones.

“I’m at a beach,” Monica said. “It’s a really interesting aesthetic, it’s almost greyscale but there are little touches of blues and pinks that kind of just sneak up on your feels, you know?”

Johnny could probably make some kind of metaphor or joke or something about that if they and Monica were already best friends who knew each other really well, like, blue pink, trans, grey, depression?

—

## **Right now**

Johnny came in while themselves and Monica were swinging on the swings.

Monica said, “And it wasn’t based on anything, at least, I don’t thiink. Just when I was alone playing, I always imagined that I was continuing my adventures being stranded on this beach, waaaaiting for the perrrrfect handsome guy to show up. I would stand there, gripping a tree or a pole on the playground, and wistfully lean away from it, staring off into the grass and imagining it was the sea and that sometimes there were passing ships far away, but some days there weren’t even that.”

Oh. She liked them now.

Pass.

Like, if it were another time, then sure, but Johnny probably was supposed to get back on the road with Kasston.

They looked to the parking lot to make sure Kasston was actually still there.

Kasston was in his car, on his phone, looking bored but then he scrolled and then started laughing. Cool.

So yeah, LinkFreakz, road, Taco Bell while on the road, hotelllll that Kasston already booked, Ugly Jenny’s wedding.

Johnny said to Monica while they were both on the swings, “Um, I’m so sorry, I don’t know if I already told you this, but I have really severe short term memory issues.”

“Oh! Okay,” Monica said.

“Did we already do LinkFreakz or not at all?”

“We did not link. If you HAVE to get going, we cannnn...”

“Please.”

Johnny and Monica both stopped swinging, got out their gameboys, and linked them together.

The process involved being shown questions on the screen, and the other person answering them, and you select what they answered.

Johnny asked, “Be ye a servant of the Corn Mage or the Queer Mage?”

Monica said, “Oh come on, that’s not even a question. I serve the Queer Mage, of course.”

Johnny selected QUEER MAGE.

Monica asked, “How many pillars stand watch outside the village temple?”

Johnny answered, “Five and a half.”

Monica was like, “I have whole integers only.”

Johnny closed their eyes in thought, and then was like, “Sixteen.” That was really neat to learn, actually, that five and a half was an invalid answer. Outside of the temple in the village in Johnny’s cart, there were five standing towers, and one half collapsed one, and eleven piles of rubble. They were probably going to find out that the half collapsed one and the fully collapsed ones were actually still standing in the ghostly ether, or something.

Johnny and Monica’s guys fucked, and they both got really good permanent stat boosts, and Johnny got a new move.

Johnny said, “Thank you so much.”

Monica said, “Oh of course. If any other pollinator bees are coming through, send them my way, I can hardly get anyone here to play this.”

“Haha, yeah, I will point them to the T Bell for sure if I catch wind of anything.” Johnny didn’t personally keep in touch with any other pollinator bees actually.

Johnny got up from the swings and walked quickly away back to the car, pretending to be deeply focused in looking at something on the gameboy on the way, but actually their game was just paused and they were flicking the menu selector up and down. When they got to the car they got in the passenger side, buckled up, and put the gameboy back in their bag.

Kasston asked, "Soooo, how was your pokemon fuck session?"

Johnny said, "Um, successful. Were we keeping you waiting for a long time?"

Kasston was like, "I dunno, when I saw this was going to take more than like one second, I just started looking at my phone."

"Okay cool. Let's get on the road again."

As Kasston drove through the town towards the highway, Johnny ate the Taco Bell that was in the bag: the stuff that they had actually ordered, plus the extra tacos the manager had thrown in. Yummy. Tacos.

As they finished eating everything they crumpled up the wrappers and put them back into the paper bag, which sat by their feet on the passenger side.

When that was done, they burped really loud.

Kasston was like, "Six out of ten, love the effort, but the duration could've been better."

Johnny was like, "Yeah yeah I'll work on it. Uh. Do you want to talk through this survey with me? Like, I can read the questions and we can see what Jillian wants to know with this, and I think doing it with you would help me focus a little. So far, to give you a taste of what we're working with, the first question is 'Are you sexually attracted to humans?' and I just put down 'yes,' and that's as far as I've gotten."

Kasston was like, "I need to know your answer to question three, so let's please do two immediately so that we can get there."

Johnny was like, "Were you and Mandy working on hers?" Oh that was why they were holding it when they came in in the car, probably.

Kasston was like, "We kept getting a little off topic, admittedly, but yes, me and Mandy were working on hers."

Johnny said, "Okay so, question two: 'Have you had sex with animals before? Explain thoughts. Give examples.' Oh wow, um." No never, they weren't a zoophile, so, no. Well. Wait. Well. Okay yes. Yeah okay that had bigtime happened more than once. Johnny asked Kasston, "You're okay with knowing this?"

"It's fine."

Johnny pressed, "Even if the answer is yes?"



Kasston was like, "I am a nurse, Johnny, you'd have to try a lot harder to scare me."

"Okay, so. I'm not a zoophile. But most of the rest of the system that isn't asexual is zoo. Including Jillian, who, as you know, gets around. So like. Seeing someone walking a dog down the street, I don't really see anything sexually desirable there. It's like if a grandma was walking down the street."

Kasston interrupted to be like, "No love for the older ladies, damn okay."

Johnny explained, "Yeah my knees quiver at twunks, what can I say to GILFs except get away from me."

"Tsk tsksk."

"Anyways, so, animals aren't sexy to me. But they are to Jillian."

"And sometimes you wake up where Jillian left off, which is nuts deep in Lassie."

"LITERALLY."

"Hey sometimes you gotta fuck a dog."

"NO BUT LITERALLY THAT HAS HAPPENED. HER COLLAR SAID LASSIE AND I WAS T MINUS THREE SECONDS FROM NUTLAUNCH."

Kasston vaporlocked himself with laughter, stuck frozen in place bent over the steering wheel, fighting to keep his attention on the road.

Johnny went on, "DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE WHERE IT HURTS TO STOP PEEING SUDDENLY? IT WAS THAT BUT BEING ABOUT TO CUM IN DOG PUSSY FOR THE FIRST TIME. NO TURNING BACK, MIGHT AS WELL MAKE IT GOOD, FULL SPEED AHEAD, CHOO CHOOOOOOOOOOO."

Kasston swerved them to a stop on the shoulder, put the car in park, and fell off of the steering wheel and shook with silent laughter against the window, tears falling down his face.

Johnny was like, "But yeah it's basically stuff like that."

Kasston started getting his breath back, getting in a little gasp at a time before laughing it back out. Eventually he was like, "AAAAAAAAAAHAHAHAHAHA. HER COLLAR SAID LASSIE???"

"YEAH DUDE."

Kasston, regaining more composure, was like, “Ohhh fuck, that’s banana sandwiches.”

“So yeah it’s pretty much stuff like that, when bestiality happens.”

“What are all of the kinds of animals you’ve had sex with?” Kasston asked, and then looked back on the (empty) highway, put the car in drive, and sped onto the road again.

“Ummmm... it was pigs twice—”

“Where did you find pigs!!”

“You think I know?? One time me and a twunk were licking a horse boner together.”

“Oh hey you like twunks.”

“I DO, yeah, that led to fun. Um. Okay so with these times. I usually just keep going if it’s already happening. Like, okay, I can just tune out and more or less it’s like a really hot masturbation sesh.”

“Right, right, a hot ‘masturbation sesh’ with other genitals you’re masturbating into, totally not sex.”

Johnny explained, “Okay no. Sorry that was unclear. I don’t mean hot as in sexy, I mean hot as in temperature.”

“Oh.”

“Dogs are warm.”

“Noted. Interesting.”

Johnny went on, “But yeah it’s like, okay, I’m not a zoophile, but animals deserve to be treated well, and I don’t want to leave them needy, and it’s not like it feels baaaad it’s just weeeird, but, I can stick my weenie in weird, I’m not above that. The um. The main time that stands out to me, as far as all of that, is when I came in and me and a yellow lab were walking through the woods. Like, she wasn’t on a leash, but we were definitely together, she kept circling back to me and was going with me. And showing me she was in heat. And I was like. Uh. Sure. Yknow what. I’m game. So *one* time I initiated the sex part.”

“Interesting. You *do* have to write all of this down on the survey you know.”

“Fuuuuuuuuck, yeah okay, give me like a million minutes.”

Johnny flipped over the paper and started writing down the response using the blank back side of the paper, not even bothering to try to use the smaller space provided under the

question on the front. They wrote down all of the stuff they said to Kasston, more or less word for word to the best of their ability to remember.

When Johnny was done, Kasston was like, “Okay okay, now do question three.”

Johnny read, “Okay, question three: ‘What genitals would you like to have?’ Oh not even joking, I obviously want like a 2ft long chrome penis and buzzsaws where the nuts would go.”

“FUCK YEAH.”

“Right???”

“THAT’S SO METAL.”

“Yeah!!! I want that!!! For my dick!!!”

Johnny wrote down, *like a 2ft long chrome penis and buzzsaws where the nuts would go (serious)*

—

## **Right now**

Johnny came in lying in a bed in a dark hotel, while Kasston was talking from the other bed. They weren’t fronting though. Which, it wasn’t a first for Johnny to be present and not fronting, but it was uncommon. Big sleepy hours?

Ra yawned.

Huge sleepy hours.

While Kasston was still talking, Bun said, *Thank you for your answers. We got a lot of what we wanted from that.*

Johnny was like, *Oh, yeah, sure. Um. Did we do all of them—*

*We mainly wanted to know about the bestiality part.*

*Ah, Johnny said. The rest was just what, for fun?*

*Yeah pretty much, I mean, we already know a lot of it.*

*Cool, Johnny said. So you just wanted to know, what, how the hookup stories end, or?*

Bun said, *We just wanted to understand how you feel being coupled to zoos as a non zoo. We’ve been bouncing around the metaphor that this is like a romantic relationship where you’re a non-zoo partner, but you’re extremely supportive of us and our interests.*

*Oh, Johnny said. That sounds kinda like how it is, ish?*

Bun shrugged, and said, *Kinda. Doesn't account for everything.*

Johnny said, *Well, yeah, obviously. But yeah, bestiality, like, have fun, don't blueball yourself worrying what I think, I don't mind what you do. It's good. I want you to get to be yourselves, live your peak lives, I guess.*

*Nice. Thank you.*

Ra yawned again.

Kasston was like, "Big sleepy hours?"

Bun was like, "Huge sleepy hours, sir."

Kasston said, "Well, in that case, I wish you a good nighty night."

"Nighty night."

*Nighty night.*

"Johnny says nighty night."

"Nighty night Johnny."

Bun pulled the blankets closer around herself, getting maximum comfy.

Johnny said, *Have a good time at the wedding tomorrow if it's you, zoophile.*

Bun said, *Oh we meant to ask, does Jenny know?*

Johnny said, *Yes, Ugly Jenny knows. She's cool.*

*Okay. Thanks.*

*Mhm.*

Ra thought for a little while longer, and then fell asleep.

## TELLTALES

“That shouldn’t matter... *but*... I’ve been surprised before.”

As they got deeper and deeper into the humid, hot, black-leaf forests of Mu’siir, the telltales became decreasingly forthcoming.

“One thing’s for certain,” said Faern, the rainbow-furred raccoon. “Whoever fashioned this was tasked by the fates to waste our daylight and our holy water, or, he or she or it or zee was an imbecile.”

Kosk, the black-furred fennec fox, said, “Patience; Wisely, and Slow. It is Here. It will Serve as all the others have.”

The raccoon and the fox stood together at a fork in the old road. Presently, the raccoon with the rainbow fur stood on its hind legs, and tapped one clawed hand rapidly, rhythmically, against its grey leather jacket; It drew a dagger, twirled it about its digits once, twice, thrice, and a fourth time, as the other hand tapped, and then it dropped the dagger back into that dagger’s sheath, on the hip; Its other daggers (all three in sheaths sewn along the back) called out to their puppetmaster, their maestro, singing, “Dance with us, Dance with us; Let us dance, Let us dance;” The raccoon ignored the other daggers for the time being, and in fact stopped tapping its clawed rainbow hand against its grey jacket. The fennec fox, plumed in black fur, clad in a black cloak, helmeted with a black, wide-brimmed, and pointy-topped hat, ornamented with a necklace of black bones strung together on black cord, seeing with black eyes, smelling with a black nose, hearing with black ears, and standing against a forest of black leaves and black dirt, was invisible; She stood

on all fours, black pawpads standing on black dirt; The infinitesimal liminal space between her feet and the ground was as though four soft moons orbited a fertile planet in a universe without suns; She sniffed, and, by the smell of lilac flowers in the air, she was reassured that their work on the telltale was accomplishing *something*; Their work on the telltale was not, yet, sadly, accomplishing what they *hoped* for, but, even still, it was clear to the fennec fox that the stones laid out before them were not dead and unpetitionable things.

All around Faern and Kosk, the woods were not silent. The chirping of insects was a thick blanket over the rolling hills. The birds (singing, shouting, shouting, waiting,) came across as eager for all with ears to know them well.

Kosk, as much as possible, preferred to observe, and not to be observed; Earlier in their journey, when they had trekked across a desert and Eric had still been in their good company, Kosk had made her hair, cloak, hat, and so forth, to be the colors of the sands. Playing with the pigments of her personage was an easy form of magic, and truly quite fun.

Faern refused to consent to camouflage; It wanted to be seen by all with eyes.

There at the fork in the road that the raccoon and the fox had come to, there was of course the path behind them, and a path ahead veering left around trees and hills, and a different path ahead veering right around different trees and different hills; And, in the center of the available ways, there was this fork's telltale.

Telltales were things often found at forks in roads, in the many parts of the many worlds that had ever been populated by magically adept craftspeople; engineers; hobbyists; contractors; passionates; the bored. A telltale was like a guestbook, signed by all who passed by it; A telltale was, in effect, a collection of ghosts, each ghost sliced apart and its pieces categorized into different metaphorical drawers; To the magic user in the possession of even some intelligence and wits, it was nearly always a casual matter to arrive at a telltale, ask it a question, ("Who has passed through here in the last twelve days?" "Has a hatchling dragon called Eric spoken any messages in any language for a raccoon named Faern and a fox named Kosk?")

“Where did the hatchling dragon go next?”) and then draw out the appropriate ghost piece from the appropriate metaphorical drawer, and observe the ghost’s answer.

Ghosts spatially, not mortally; Echoes from those no longer here at this location, not Echoes from those no longer alive. (Well, with the telltales existing for decades to centuries to millennia to longer, it is true that a ghost could often be both.)

The telltales of the worlds could take any and all shapes: an idol on a plinth, a spinning wheel, a cone with a smooth and undecorated face, a cone with a face interrupted by recesses and colorful patterns, a mosaic, a model of a fortress, a fortress at a full scale or greater, a book, a sundial, a sword set into a stone, and so on.

The telltale before Faern and Kosk was a black boulder, at the top of which was a tiny black cup; The stone of the cup was of one piece with the rest of the boulder; The cup could hold very little liquid, about a thimble’s worth, before it would overflow down the sides of the boulder on which the cup stemmed. Nearby the boulder were three additional black stones, one positioned at each direction a road continued in; Each satellite was significantly smaller than the parent boulder, and each had a small recess on top of its otherwise domed figure.

The fox’s intuition, upon arriving, had been that she should pour a dram of her holy water into the cup atop the center boulder, ask which way Eric had gone from here, and then, she marked, she would witness the holy water drain from the cup’s bottom, witness the holy water fill in the recess of whichever of the satellite stones was closest to Eric’s road, and also, she marked, she would witness a ghost of the hatchling dragon passing through.

She was meticulous, though, and as best as possible, acted with foresight so as to rarely find regrets in her hindsights.

So, upon arriving at the telltale at the fork in the road, she had halted before getting too near to it, and had bid Faern to halt likewise. Standing at a distance, Kosk duplicated her eyes; spectral black orbs floated forth from her, one after another, and began circling around the telltale, swooping closer to squint for any details, sweeping outwards to examine the woods surrounding. The fennec fox then swept the place with

duplications of her black nose, taking in the scents of the dirt, the surface of each stone, the air generally, the foliage. At the end of her preliminary observations, she did a pass around the place with duplications of her ears as well, though the telltale proved to not be speaking anything at that present moment.

With all of this done, she arrived with a sound knowledge of the prior state of things; How all had been before any of her and Faern's efforts. And so, when, with a spectral hand, she had poured from a vial a dram of her holy water into the cup atop the black boulder, she knew very precisely what effects the action had not had, and had had. The holy water had *not* drained from the cup and appeared in the recess atop a satellite rock; The satellite rocks *had* each gained a perfume of lilac; Kosk was certain of it; No such smell had been near here in her preliminary observation, and only upon adding the holy water to the cup had the scent of lilac flowers arrived.

The fennec fox went on to try various other acts, one of which entailed pouring the holy water into the recesses of the stones and asking her questions, another of which entailed dashing the holy water against the boulder's side and commanding the boulder to reveal any who had passed through here of late. Faern pitched in an effort occasionally, the most bawdy of which, and, sadly, also the most likely to have worked, was standing atop the boulder and pissing into the cup, after it had first slurped out the holy water that had been in the cup prior, and had rubbed the inside surface of the cup dry with a finger as best as it could.

Pissing into the cup had *not* revealed which of the ways Eric had gone from here, though it *had*, like the first use of the holy water, re-intensified the scent of lilac in the area.

The fennec fox's most reliable connection to magic was in the use of symbols. She could do much with her thoughts or with small utterances, but she had first learned by way of symbols literally drawn, and found them to be very dependable. She pawed symbols into the dirt before the telltale, used dirt to draw marks upon the boulder itself, but even exploring it this way for some time, the telltale remained shut off from her inquiries.



As the sky overhead was dimming noticeably, the rainbow-furred raccoon was becoming quite noticeably irritated with their lack of progress.

FAERN

Maybe this one was built in a fitful tantrum of romance, and will only open to those seeking true love or already possessed by it.

KOSK

That shouldn't matter... *but*... I've been surprised before.

FAERN

One thing's for certain: Whoever fashioned this was tasked by the fates to waste our daylight and our holy water, or, he or she or it or zee was an imbecile.

KOSK

Patience; Wisely, and Slow. It is Here. It will Serve as all the others have.

FAERN

Is it like the others, for a fact? Do we know for a fact that this isn't just the beginnings of a telltale?

KOSK

The beginnings?

FAERN

Ay me, it's a thousand and ten years ago, I'm an enterprising little apprentice I am, let me spread paste onto the foot of this cup and stick it to this boulder, oh that's very pretty, now to design the enchantment, oh bugger oh bugger oh bugger this enchantment business is puzzling, let me go ask daddy how it is that I make a telltale again, oh what's this tickle in my chest? Cardiac arrest, at my tender age? And even after I ate all of my peas and cabbage? Oh, what a woeful fate it is to journey to the grave so early due to a hereditary condition, OH I fall to the ground now and perish, rather than finishing my very first telltale, OHHH, AGGGGKKKK, GAHHHHKKKKK, AAAAAGGGGGHHHHHHKKKKKKKKK.

KOSK

I see.

FAERN

He then writhes in agony for twenty minutes but no one is near enough to hear his screams for help, and then he dies.

KOSK

I see.

FAERN

His telltale was begun, he had put the farting cup on the shitting rock, but he never actually made them more than a cup on top of a rock.

KOSK

I see what you mean by the beginnings.

FAERN

You sound unmoved by the theory.

KOSK

There is an enchantment here for a surety. We know that when liquid is placed into the cup, the surrounding rocks begin to smell of lilac.

FAERN

Oh well I am so very sorry to have left that fact out of my theory, let me begin again. This time I will take it into account. Ay me, it's a thousand and ten years ago, I'm an enterprising little apprentice I am, here I am setting this cup on this boulder, that looks very nice, this will be a very good telltale I'm sure of it, and now to design the enchantment, oh bugger I've bollocksed it to pieces and done the enchantment that makes the surrounding rocks smell of lilac when a raccoon pisses into the cup or when a fox pours in holy water, let me go ask daddy how it is that I make a telltale again, oh what's this tickle in my chest, cardiac arrest at my tender age, oh, oh, ack, gahk, agghk, I now writhe on the ground in agony for twenty minutes, and die having intended to make a telltale, but in fact I only got as far as making a set of rocks that smell of lilac when liquid is placed into a cup.

KOSK

The theory has merit.

FAERN

Shall we pick a way, and with luck find out at the next telltale proper that we are indeed still in pursuit of our truant hatchling, or, failing luck, find out that we are in fact in flight from our truant hatchling dragon, and double back so that we may arrive here again and take the only path remaining, which, by necessity, will bring us closer back to the hatchling's company?

KOSK

A proper telltale or not, many things speak; I suspect I can find an answer at this fork, by this same time tomorrow.

FAERN

Tomorrow! Make it a week and I would set up my tent! A year and I would build a hut! A decade and I would erect here a cozy home of bricks! Tomorrow is only enough time to cause me pain, knowing the trail cools by the minute.

KOSK

Someone approaches.

FAERN

Yea, verily.

As the silver rabbit approached, Kosk walked off to stand along the edge of the woods. Faern paced about, making obscene remarks to itself.

FAERN

Go in the direction of the fucking cup? What sense in the name of all of the gods and their whores up and down and left and right does that make? Do you want me to sprout wings and fly, you stupid map? Enough. I won't be the hapless little plaything of some little piece of paper. Map o mine, I give you death.

With that, Faern clapped its claws together, and caused a very large ball of fire to appear in the air before itself. The bulk of the fire went away almost instantly, and left a ring of grass burning red at foot. Faern began stomping at the ring. As the silver rabbit arrived, the last of the glowing blades were going out.

RUESUFF

If you'd kept the map a moment longer, I could've lent another pair of eyes to figuring it out.

FAERN

Oh!

The rainbow-furred raccoon brushed some bits of ash off of its grey jacket, and turned to face the new company.

FAERN

No, good swift one, I warrant that map had been seen quite enough. Less of a map and more of a list of riddles.

RUESUFF

Oh, a list of riddles could have been great fun. Do you know of the orange valley tavern? I was on my way there.

FAERN

A tavern is hereabouts? Ale? Beds? Strangers?

RUESUFF

Yeah.

FAERN

Oh swift one, how I love thee! Though the day waxes dark, your presence brightens all that I see! Truly I have never known love until now, and I only wonder, whither did Eric go from here, this I ask, only so that I can go tell him of my newfound love!

With a gaping grin and sparkling eyes, Faern looked to the boulder with the cup of piss, and paused, awaiting a response.

The fixture continued to smell faintly of lilac, and birds nearby continued in their conversations, but no ghostly image of a hatchling dragon appeared to show which way he had walked.

Faern shrugged, and said, "Worth a shot. Maybe it can tell if someone is faking."

Ruesuff asked, "Trying to use this old thing? The ah..." Ruesuff stood on his hind feet, and swiped a front foot in the boulder's direction.

Faern conjured a flame in its claws, and threw it at the boulder. The fire snuffed itself against the boulder's side. "Telltale," Faern said. "Do you know how it works?" Then it also

turned and called out into the black woods, “KOSK! I SAY, KOSK, COME MEET THE LOCALS! THIS ONE IS A BIT BLAND, I THINK, BUT IT PROMISES ALE IF WE FOLLOW IT!”

Kosk cringed from head to toe at Faern openly bullying the rabbit—even if she did not disagree, from hearing the conversation thus far, that the rabbit did not seem to be all too much for conversation. In their travels so far, the locals of any given place were often very strongly hit or miss for conversation, it seemed; Some had all of the skills of listening and chiming in and twisting ideas around with cunning and good humor and novel insights and there seemed to be a fire burning within them, knowledges and passions that wished to spread, wished to increase to greater intensities by sharing the company of others with great knowledges and passions; Other locals, when Faern and Kosk talked with them, seemed in no way vile, but also in no way interesting. The rabbit seemed very much the kindly disinteresting sort, already at the outer limits of his skill to make small talk; To Kosk, this left the rabbit as someone to share agreeable politenesses with; To Faern, this left the rabbit as a blank canvas on which to paint absurdities, until such a time as Kosk was able to come in and help the poor thing.

Kosk quietly padded along the edge of the woods, and then hid herself behind a tree, and waited, with the intent of emerging, in a moment, as though just arriving when Faern had called.

Ruesuff, in reply to being asked if he knew how to work the telltale, explained, “I only come through here to get to and from the tavern, and sometimes to visit Lilin.”

Faern bounded up to Ruesuff on all fours and then stood upright beside him, threw an arm around the standing rabbit’s shoulders, and said, “Well, that makes three of us that don’t know how to use it, which is really no better and no worse than when it was just two of us—me and Kosk—who didn’t have a clue.” Projecting its voice to the boulder, the raccoon berated the stones, “Do you work in threes, is that it? Three guests before you, three rocks around you, three liquids all from my body I’ll fill your cup with, three miners’ instruments I’ll use to make you into powder, three breaths after you’re gone is the time that it

will take before all in the world will have forgotten you were ever here—do THREES satisfy you, oh telltale?”

Kosk emerged from behind the tree, her fur brown, darker on the back and lighter on the chest, as unremarkable a presentation of countershading as she could get it, without the benefit of spending an hour in front of a mirror fussing over the details. Her hat she had changed to a greenish drab, her necklace of bones off-white, her nose and the insides of her ears pink, her eyes—she had forgotten her eyes! As she walked towards the rabbit and the raccoon, she blinked rapidly; her eyes, just seconds ago uninterrupted black, filled in with big brown irises.

She stooped her head and arranged the placement of her paws in a curtsy, and said, “Charmed, and well met.”

The silver rabbit got down on all fours again, and said, “Hello, you’re Kosk?”

“Yes, and this raccoon, if it hasn’t introduced itself, is Faern.”

Faern remarked, “We were getting to introductions.”

“My name is Ruesuff.”

“A pleasure, Ruesuff.”

Faern asked, “That way to the tavern?”

“Yeah, that way about a quarter of a mile, and then on the right side of the path, there’s a trail that leads down a hill, and that hill is the orange valley, that the tavern is in.”

“Then let us go, we brave three! Noble Ruesuff the bravest of all! With one whisker, Brave Ruesuff lifts kits out of wells; With swift hops, Brave Ruesuff rescues cubs from burning burrows; When there is a brawl, Brave Ruesuff defends the peace—AH!”

To shut up the raccoon’s barrage, Kosk had used a spectral hand, two fingers extended, to squarely give the raccoon’s tailhole a jab.

Faern immediately turned its head and spit a glob of fire at the fennec fox; The fennec fox bowed her head, and the fire hit her hat, and was snuffed. While the rabbit was looking at her and not Faern, she took a moment to have a spectral hand stick a finger in the raccoon’s ear, and then to have another slap the raccoon’s behind.

“Kosk, I am going to hatefuck your carcass tonight, okay?”

“It jokes,” Kosk said to Ruesuff.

Faern, to Ruesuff, said, “It can joke and bite simultaneously.”

“Well, um, the tavern is this way, if you two want to go to it.”

Indeed, the three proceeded onward, taking the left fork in the road. They walked for about a quarter of a mile, passing over a couple of bridges along the way, and then took a footpath which connected to road’s righthand side. Down the footpath the three walked, and soon, a tavern could be seen in the valley ahead, warm lanterns lighting wood walls and stone chimneys.

## **Duluth, Minnesota**

JANE

And THAT... is where we will close for tonight.

TEAGAN

Bravo! We accomplished pretty much nothing.

JANE

You asked me to run it by the book, I am running it by the book.

## **In-Universe, Earlier**

FAERN

Ah!

KOSK

Stay, Stay; Calmly, Calmly.

ERIC

No, wait, do that to it again.

KOSK

Hush, Eric; Calmness, Calmness; Big breaths.

On their way out of the port town that morning, Faern had purchased a pair of grey leather boots.

Now, after a day of hiking in them—forced to walk upright the entire way, and feet fitting oddly atop the soles—the raccoon had collapsed suddenly on the trail, and been unable to stand again; Its legs, back, and most of all its feet, were stuck curled inwards; Carefully, Kosk had used her spectral hands to lift the raccoon to a nearby pond; So, now, the raccoon laid floating on its back at the edge of a pond, vile boots up on the shore,

accompanied in the water by a green-coated fennec fox, and a blue-scaled hatchling dragon. By the fox's magic, no insects pestered them, and by the dragon's magic, the water around the raccoon was warmed to a very pleasant, relaxing degree of heat.

As the raccoon floated on its back, the fox's spectral hands did gentle work; Massaging, and carefully doing what she could to help the raccoon through recovering. When the raccoon tensed or gasped, she minded the pain, and did not provoke it.

"Stay, Stay; Calmly, Calmly..."

In time, Eric and Faern both fell asleep.

Gently with her many hands, Kosk lifted Faern out of the water and laid the raccoon on the shore.

In the morning when she stretched and lifted her head, she saw that Eric was most of the way done with turning the tall boots into a jacket.

## **Duluth, Minnesota**

Teagan felt like someday she was going to look back on it and miss hanging out on Lidia's roof. It was nighttime, and hot. Lidia was sitting cross-legged, while Teagan was lying face down, head towards the edge of the roof, like she was going headfirst down a slide; Teagan was covered in sweat, and the grit of the shingles pressed into her arms, and in her mind she kept replaying feelings—tactile, physical feelings—sensations—from about two minutes ago, when she and Lidia had just made out for the second time ever. That had been on the other side of the roof, on the slope that faced the back yard.

Lidia said, "I'm not gonna lie, I tried picturing you as a dog for some of that."

Teagan felt her cheeks fill with embarrassed blood. "Wow. Of course you did. And?"

Lidia used a finger to toy with the edge of Teagan's Blue's Clues t-shirt's sleeve, and said, "I was enjoying you as a dog a lot, but then I was like, why stop at that, you could be a cute furry who just got disowned because she told her parents she thinks she might be gay, and I found you on the street and gave you a couch to crash on for a while, and now you're stuck in this random hot bitch's house—I'm also a furry for this—"



“Of course.”

Lidia went on, “and you have all of these conflicting feelings about wanting to show your gratitude to this random hot bitch—who is me, I think you’re a yellow lab and I’m a cheetah—but anyways, you want to show your gratitude to this random hot bitch, but you don’t want to make it weird, and you also don’t want to risk getting kicked out and being homeless again, even though you kind of are homeless cuz it’s not like you actually live here, but you do highkey want to fuck this hot cheetah, and you kind of feel sometimes like she’s flirting with you but you can’t tell?”

“And then we make out,” Teagan finished.

“Yeah. But then I was like, why stop at furries either, I could imagine you as a dragoness.”

“Uh huh.”

“But then dragoness wasn’t as hot, and then I was like ‘I should stop thinking about all of this’ and then you were Teagan again. And I was like, I like Teagan, this is new to me still, humans, and I should freaking pay attention and enjoy it for what it is. And I did enjoy it. Five stars. Ten out of ten.”

A while ago when Teagan and Lidia were driving to a thrift store, Lidia had been like, “What’s one thing I don’t know about you. Like, give me a BOMBSHELL, right now.”

Teagan thought of it instantly, and the two of them then drove in silence for a little while, before Lidia was like,

“Cmon, say it.”

And Teagan admitted, “I used to write erotic Blue’s Clues fanfiction.”

And Lidia was like, “GIRL.” And then banging on the steering wheel to punctuate her words she was like “WHAT. THE. FUCK. I. D-M. YOU. E-VERY. DAY. ABOUT HOW MUCH I’M DAYDREAMING. OF. DOGS. FUCKING. ME. SILL-Y. I. D-M. YOU. ABOUT HOW FUCKED UP I AM ABOUT MARCUS. I. D-M. YOU. ABOUT ZOOPHILE HOCUS POCUS. HIJINKS. THOUGHTS. AND VARIOUS ZOOPHILE MUSINGS. AND I AM ONLY JUST NOW HEARING. YOU. YOOOOUUUU. USED. TO. WRITE. BLUE’S. CLUES. FAN. FIC-TION. THIS—wait, featuring Blue?”

“Yeah usually.”

“THIS. IS. ACTUALLY. INSANE. WHAT. THEEEEE” (for theeeee she drummed repeatedly on the steering wheel with both hands) “FUCK. GIRL. DO. DOGS. MAKE. YOUR. PUSSAY. AS. WET. AS. THEY. MAKE. MINE. E-VER-Y. NIGHT. WHEN. I. TOUCH. MYSELF. WITH. ZOOPHILIC. INTENT.”

“I mean, I’ve been there with Blue.”

“GIRL. THAT IS A-MA-ZING. AND I. APPRECIATE. HEARING. THAT.”

Marcus had been Lidia’s soulmate. A dobermann.

And anyways Lidia ordered Teagan a Blue’s Clues shirt online and gave it to her, and Teagan wore it a lot.

There on the roof, after their second time making out, Teagan was like, “Do you think Kosk and Faern would ever start dating?”

And Lidia said, “I think the way it is with them is that everyone thinks they’re secretly fucking, and they encourage the allegations, but actually they have never fucked and never will and they are not even that good of friends.”

And Teagan said, “As Faern: I agree completely. I wasn’t sure if Kosk saw it the same way.”

Lidia slapped Teagan’s arm, and then said, “Mosquito,” and then wiped Teagan’s slapped arm with her hand, and then said, “Kosk is not stupid. She very much sees Faern as... something between an obligation, and a really useful killer robot.”

“Yesssssss. That’s great.”

“She would actually be relieved if it finally died,” Lidia said. “She would not avenge you.”

Teagan said, “Faern would avenge Kosk in a blaze of glory like the multiverse has never seen before and it would never get her out of its mind for as long as it lived.”

## **In-Universe, at some point**

ERIC

I miss him.

KOSK

Tell me about him again.

Eric and Kosk laid in the midst of a wide open field, late into an Autumn night.

Eric, like most dragons, was not originally from this world, but incarnated here whilst midway through living a different life.

ERIC

He had eyes like angels' haloes, and the cutest flopsy ears...

## **In-Universe, at some point**

Faern had never felt better in its entire life; Throat sore from intense panting and muscles screaming from physical exhaustion; The raccoon laid floating on its back in a hot pool of dragon blood; So far down in the depths of these caves, Faern could see its own breath as it laid there, floating, panting, its body overheating in the blood, the fur on its face freezing, literally stiffening with ice crystals, in the cold.

Kosk, from some unseen vantage elsewhere in the cave, summoned eleven spectral spears, and thrustured them at various calculated locations in the chamber's ceiling.

An enormous portion of the ceiling fell, and crushed the dragon's head, making sure that she was truly done with.

As the portion of the ceiling collided with the dragon and ground, Kosk created temporary barriers around her own fennec ears and around the raccoon's ears, to prevent the two of them from being deafened by the sound.

Kosk and Faern were still catching their breath again when they saw that an egg was beginning to emerge from the dragon's cloaca.

## **In Another Universe, Much Longer Ago**

Blue voiced, "Bow, bowwww," as Mr Salt grinded his glass body up and down the outside of her pussy, his metal top poking at the pit of her tummy with every upwards movement, getting salt in her soft little strands of blue hair. Blue wrapped her mouth over Mrs Pepper again, the shaker's glass body a nice

cool feeling against her slobbery jowls, the taste of pepper getting onto her tongue.

Mr Salt released an intensely pleased moan as he grinded, and said, “Blue... you feel wonderful.” He began pressing on her vulva with his hands.

Mrs Pepper slid out of Blue’s mouth, and, stroking through the hair on the outside of Blue’s jowls with her hands, said, “I cannot believe how arousing this is, the two of us having sex with this dog together. I am glad we broke our promise to Mailbox, that someday we could help him lose his virginity by allowing *him* to be our first ever third. Imagine that we almost said no to *this*, and for what, just to make him happy?”

Blue held Mr Salt tight against her canine body.

## **In Another Other Universe, A While Later Than The Blue’s Clues One**

Lidia added another 9x9 set of diamond blocks to the wall of the passageway that she was working on. Her whole subterranean base was a display of wealth and waste.

She had said to Jane in text chat at one point, “It’s all in tribute to him.”

Jane had said, “I can see it. That makes sense.”

## **Duluth, Minnesota, Presently**

Jane looked up from the notes that were hidden behind her GM screen, and said, “When we left off, Faern and Kosk, along with a silver rabbit named Ruesuff, were in the orange valley, bound for the orange valley tavern. The tavern had just come into sight, with its cozy exterior decor, a few circular glass windows, some chimneys with thin lines of smoke billowing out, birds chirping and flitting around on the branches of the trees outside. The sunlight is not yet gone for the day, but it will be definitively nighttime before too much longer.”

## **In-Universe**

Kosk said to Faern, when they were nearly at the orange valley tavern's front door, "None of your side quests."

Faern answered, "Above all, I am in need of a good night's sleep."

Kosk, Faern, and Ruesuff entered the orange valley tavern through the front door.

### **SOMEONE AT A TABLE MID CONVERSATION**

A hard day thanks to—

With a series of cartwheels and tumbles, Faern landed itself in the one remaining empty chair with the other patrons at the table.

### **FAERN**

When I'm having a rough day at work, I always imagine an abusive mate is waiting for me at home, and that it's my one and only hope to spend as long as possible at work before having to get back to being put through it, emotionally, physically, I really get imaginative. Name's Faern. If you've got a problem, I will fight it, fuck it, or find it out, or some combinations of the above, for eligible customers.

### **SOMEONE AT THE TABLE**

A problemsolver, you say you are—

The innkeeper, a dire wasp named Locke, interrupted from behind the bar.

### **INNKEEPER LOCKE**

Miller Argus, does this one truly look to you like it's the type to want to help you clear out your grandmother's knickknacks? The O'Maisa girls are asking a fair price, and you won't find that you'll get this one to help you for any less.

Kosk, immediately noticing that Locke had used Faern's correct pronouns, it/its, without such a thing having come up

yet, began covertly sensing at the dire wasp, for any signs of magic.

Kosk got her answer very promptly, when the innkeeper's voice appeared directly in her head, saying, "We can talk of magic and telltales if you wish."

Kosk thought her response: "I do wish. I also hope you'll understand if quite gruesome images appear in my mind's eye, or that of my companion; If I see myself slitting the throats of all at this inn, it is not because I find it likely to happen, or desirable; it is merely one eventuality that one thinks about."

The dire wasp, facing the countershaded fennec from behind the bar, nodded.

Kosk went on: "I hope you will also understand if I endeavor to put up barriers."

The dire wasp said into her thoughts: "I would find it quite understandable, and indeed a commonality from visitors adept in the magical arts. For my part, I will make no concerted effort to pry, and I anticipate your barriers will be effective. If you wish for a sample of any of our food or drink offerings, I can preview it for you through this avenue."

Kosk offered a response freely in her thoughts: "Really! That is delightful! What is your favorite drink, and what is one you think would be my favorite, and what is one you think Faern would like?"

The fennec fox, while still standing nearby the front door, her mouth closed, and having not drank of anything inside of the inn thus far, felt a taste form on her tongue: something *very* sweet, much like a sugary syrup, with notes of apple. Her mouth watered, and she felt a shiver resonate through herself. That taste went away—seemed, in fact, washed away, as though she had just rinsed her mouth out with bubbles, though again, her mouth still remained closed.

That had been Locke's favorite drink, then. Next, for a drink that Locke thought would be Kosk's favorite, came a very bitter tasting beer; *exceptionally* bitter; *sour*, one might say, especially just after the previous sugary taste.

That taste, too, washed away.

Kosk waited for the last taste, something that would be Faern's favorite.

By this time, Faern itself was enmeshed in a card game with the others at its table. Kosk realized that she was unsure as to whether this card game had already been taking place, or if Faern had spurred it to happen. Which, subsequently, made her realize that she had not yet gone through her typical procedure, of thoroughly investigating any place that she was newly arriving at. She would have to do so, momentarily.

She thought to the dire wasp: "Well? For Faern's drink?"

Locke answered: "You would enjoy your stay better if I did not tell you, and instead, that knowledge from Faern's mind remains unknown to you."

"Give me the taste."

The taste of vomit mixed with urine appeared on Kosk's tongue.

Kosk fainted.

When the fennec awoke, she was seated at a booth, that was tucked into one corner of the inn's common room. Faern was seated beside her; she on the innermore side of the bench, against the wall, and it on the outtermore side of the bench. On the table before the two of them were two large cups of water, hers still full, its nearly empty.

Kosk reflected on the taste again, and with no time to think as she felt a violent heave coming on, she snatched Faern's cup, and a second later was throwing up into it.

"Rude," Faern said.

"You owe me," Kosk said, as she brought the cup below the table. She began covertly pissing into it, masking the sound from the other patrons using her magic, and also magically cleaning any that missed. She set the cup of vomit and urine on the table in front of Faern.

"Have you utterly lost your mind?" Faern asked.

"Drink up. And thank the psionic innkeeper."

LOCKE

Truly, I wish it hadn't happened.

FAERN

Huh.

Faern lifted up the cup and started taking big gulps.

Kosk, keeping up her magic to muffle sounds from the other patrons, doubled over against the table, dry heaving.

Faern took little, thoughtful, careful sips as it stared at her.

Soon Kosk could endure the raccoon's company no more, and left the booth, getting out by crawling under the table past the raccoon's legs. With no energy to give the commonroom a thorough examination like she wanted to, and with no energy to put up barriers towards the dire wasp in the slightest—she was dizzy, nauseous, and could barely keep a train of thought going—she went to the bar counter, and said aloud to the dire wasp, “We travel in pursuit of a friend and cannot figure out the nearby telltale. It has been a long day, and.”

The dire wasp answered, aloud, “Rooms with beds are down this hall. Any door that is open is available, your lodging is free as a token of my apologies. For the telltale, I will explain more tomorrow, but be assured I know how to use it, and we should plan to awaken very early for the best odds of it working.”

“Thank you.”

“Shall I bar Faern from retiring to the same room as you tonight?”

“Oh I don't care. Wait. Yes, actually. Yes.”

Kosk shambled down the hall that Locke had indicated, stumbled into an open door, kicked it shut behind herself, collapsed onto a bed, and fell asleep immediately.

The next morning, pre-dawn, Kosk and Faern both awoke, and at the same time, exited their rooms, which were opposite one another in the hall: there, across the hall, they met one another's eyes, by the light of a lantern that sat on a small table nearby.

KOSK

You're gross.

FAERN

You're scrumptious.

KOSK

Ugh.

FAERN

I didn't *ask* you to actually do any of that. I was literally never going to bring up the idea for as long as I lived.



KOSK

Well. Sometimes things come to light anyways. Now we know.

FAERN

Know... what exactly?

KOSK

That you're gross.

LOCKE

Ahem. If you're both up, we should begin at once to the telltale. We will want to be there at or before sunrise, ideally.

The three left the orange valley tavern together, and traversed the trail through the black forest, in the nighttime. Each of the three kept nearby them a small flame of their own conjuring. Here and there in the woods, other tiny fires swooped through the treetops—some of the birds kept conjured fires as well.

LOCKE

I am going to place a small amount of water into the cup atop the rock that stands in the center of this fork in the road. The air will smell of lilac. Find a comfortable way to sit or lie down, as we will then have to remain still for some time; You may breathe, and adjust your seating a little if you are uncomfortable, but we must not make any hasty movements, and it is paramount we not make any noises even so loud as speaking. We should put away our flames now, as well, before we get there. When some time has passed, with these instructions followed, the telltale will arrive, and you may speak with it, and ask it your questions.

When the black fennec, the rainbow raccoon, and the dire wasp arrived back at the fork in the road, the sky was just beginning to illuminate with the morning sun.

The dire wasp waved a spindly arm over the cup that was atop the stone, and conjured a trickle of water to fall into the cup. Kosk nested down in a ball at the foot of the boulder, while Faern sat leaning back against the boulder.

The morning progressed along, as the birds chirped, and the sky overhead brightened, bit by bit. Calmly, calmly, Kosk and

Faern both remained as they were, taking slow, full breaths, and feeling the wind occasionally ruffle their fur the slightest bit.

Eventually, a red bird flew down from the black forest, and stood before the fennec and the raccoon.

Kosk asked, “When a hatchling dragon passed through here the other day, which way did he go?”

The red bird hopped in place, and turned, and was facing the path that Kosk and Faern had yet to explore—not the way they had come originally, and not the way to the orange valley tavern, but the remaining way. Along with the red bird’s pointing, a ghostly image of a green hatchling dragon could be seen walking, exiting the fork in that direction.

Green. Not blue. This was not Eric.

Faern asked, “Has a blue hatchling dragon passed through here, that you have ever seen?”

The red bird hopped in place, and then buried their beak down into the black grass at foot.

“Oh?” Kosk asked. “Then... hm. What times has a fox or a raccoon passed through here?”

The fork became dense with ghostly images passing through, but among the crowd, Kosk was indeed able to spot herself and Faern, doing as they had done both yesterday and even earlier today.

Kosk remarked, “Are we to deduce, then, that Eric never in fact made it to this telltale?”

Kosk and Faern, with Locke’s help, and the help of many friendly birds, began to sweep the black forest, in the direction the fox and the raccoon had come from.

Eventually, a bird excitedly flew to where the fox and the raccoon were searching, and loudly chirped, “I found him! I found him! I’ve never seen anything so blue!”

Following after the bird through the woods, over black hills and around many trees and areas of dense bushes, the party arrived at a large blue egg resting against a tree.

FAERN

Oh.

KOSK

Dragons do have a slippery relationship to ages. I had heard of a coarse and wizened dragon fleeing to new, fresh environs, and appearing gay and youthful again. This is the first dragon *I* know of to slip from hatchling back into his shell.

Right at that moment, the shell began to crack, and soon enough, Eric spilled forth from his shell once again. He beheld Kosk and Faern standing before him.

ERIC

I was with him again.

The re-hatched dragon began to sob.

ERIC

I was chasing after visions of him until I came here, and fell asleep. And then I was back home again, WITH HIM again. One day. One day, I got to spend back there again, WITH HIM, and now I'm back here again.

The blue dragon grabbed at pieces of his shell, and feebly tried to put them back onto himself.

## **Duluth, Minnesota**

JANE

And THAT... is where we will close for tonight. Bravo, you two. Lidia, you spotted the innkeeper was psionic IMMEDIATELY, you got that way, way sooner than the book thought anyone would, there were clues ALL over the tavern that we did not need ANY of, amazing.

TEAGAN

So, IF you can tell us now, what WAS the rule with the telltale?

JANE

Get ready, I am going to read this from the book directly: For this telltale to work, the player must first place an offering suitable for a bird into the cup, such as a splash of water or a morsel of food, and then wait in place for one continuous hour, not making any startling noises or sudden movements. The clearing will smell of lilac for one hour after anything is placed into the cup. The telltale is not the cup itself, or any of the stones, but is a red bird who remains within a 2 mile radius of the cup. If there is a startling noise or sudden movement in the clearing, the bird will not approach until the dawn of the next day. For the bird to have any reason to appear, the player must be visible to the bird. If the party is arriving without prior knowledge of what has transpired in the clearing throughout the day already, make a percentile roll to determine if the bird has already been startled: the odds begin at 0% at dawn, and for every full hour of daylight that has passed, the odds increase by 3% that the bird has been startled prior to the party's arrival.

LIDIA

Oh my GOD.

TEAGAN

Thanks I hate it.

JANE

I was like OH NO, are they going to spend weeks on this? Is this actually just how the adventure ends, even? But you two nailed it today.

## **Madison, Wisconsin**

Mattie and Shayna do not get high and watch cartoons together sometimes. Shayna does not ever explain to Mattie Rocky Horror. Mattie does not ever say to Shayna, "This is probably a crazy idea, but do you want to try to rent a house together?" Shayna doesn't get food poisoning when Mattie makes both of them dinner for the first time, and doesn't spend hours throwing up, and then hours lying in bed with Mattie, and Mattie is feeling like an asshole and Shayna is feeling like a half-

zombie, under comfy blankets, trying to just keep every sensory experience pleasant but not overwhelming.

Mattie and Shayna do not play card games and shoot the shit. Mattie and Shayna do not ever get really into the weeds of discussing LOTR and Star Wars and Star Trek and Yu-Gi-Oh and MLP and different fantasy worlds like that, talking about what is confirmed canon, what is fanon, what is kind of technically only ever expounded upon in the fanon but is really strongly implied to exist from the stuff that's openly shown in the canon. Mattie does not ever, based on some random tangent from a conversation with Shayna, get soil and clay pots, and start gardening. Shayna does not ever taste a weirdly delicious, huge green pepper from Mattie's garden. Mattie does not ever attend a funeral with Shayna for emotional support, and then listen and play along as Shayna tells stories reminiscing on the drive home. Mattie and Shayna are never driving together and pass by a German Shepherd and Mattie is like "Would" and Shayna is like "Oh my GOD, pull over I will actually ask the owner," and Mattie doesn't pull over because Shayna actually would ask the owner. Mattie and Shayna do not know that their birthdays are two days apart, which isn't anything that has any particular significance, but like, that's the kind of thing you *could* know about somebody else, if their birthday was two days apart from yours.

Mattie and Shayna do not wear zetas on their accessories, or any shirts with anthropomorphic characters on them, or anything with pawprints. Mattie and Shayna do not go online looking for new friends. On the rare occasions that one of Mattie's friends makes a joke about bestiality, Mattie does not laugh, and does not expand upon the joke. The one time one of Shayna's friends was talking about some news story about a man being caught having sex with a dog, Shayna did not suggest that the news might not have entirely represented the story fairly.

Mattie and Shayna do not find out that one another are zoophiles. Mattie and Shayna do not have a conversation out loud, with anyone, for their entire lives, about zoophilia, or about the depth of the relationships that each of them had with their respective family dogs growing up. Mattie and Shayna do

not ever think of one another as anything more than someone who is basically a stranger who they went to high school with back when they were teenagers, and they sat in some of the same classes together. Mattie and Shayna do not do more than nod and say nothing when they pass by each other some days in the grocery store.

## **Duluth, Minnesota**

Teagan and Lidia were lying in Lidia's bed together. Teagan had surrendered her phone to Lidia, with her old erotic Blue's Clues fanfiction pulled up. She had read snippets of it to Lidia before, carefully selected excerpts, but this was the first time Teagan was allowing free range access. Teagan laid with her head buried against Lidia's side, against the fabric of Lidia's shirt, as Lidia was reading.

Lidia eventually commented, "Ohhhh my god you so get it. This is zooey as hell."

"Yeah I mean, zooey, but also just a fixation I had on a show that happened to be about a dog."

"Well, the way that you write your dogcore aesthetic is very pleasing to me."

"Thank you."

Teagan wrapped her arms around Lidia's middle, having to burrow one arm between Lidia's underside and the bedsheets, and gave her favorite zoophile a hug.

Teagan in all honesty couldn't even remember when she learned that Lidia was a zoophile. She did vaguely remember the first time Lidia had used that word, "zoophile," in a text chat, and she had selected the text, and pasted it into Google, and been like, "Oh, I didn't know there was a word for that," but like, sure, of course Lidia was that. She remembered the time like a year after that that she was sleeping over and saw Lidia and Marcus kiss, and it clicked that they were kiss-kissing, but that wasn't like, surprising as far as "Lidia is a zoophile," it was surprising as far as "Lidia has a BOYFRIEND?"

Lidia turned on the bed towards Teagan, and licked Teagan's face in one long trail, starting at the chin, going up past the lips and over a cheek, around the nose, really pressing in against the

tear duct while passing by the eye, up over the eyebrow, and ended the lick with a kiss to Teagan's forehead.

Lidia then looked into Teagan's eyes for a while, and eventually said, "You're really fun to spend time with, in character and out."

"Oh my gosh, that's so nice. You too."

Lidia then requested, "Tell me the DETAILS of who is fucking who in Blue's Clues and what all of their fucked up kinks are."

"Oh my god. Okay, so..."

Teagan and Lidia stayed up really, really late, talking.

## CHARACTERS

A trans male lizard man who is a freegan obligate carnivore and loves the aroma and taste of decaying flesh.

A cartographer whose lush descriptions of the landscapes she visits reveal her zoosexuality.

A perpetually horny goat who speaks only in riddles.

A sculptor who is not sexually attracted to dogs and frequently writes letters to people denying the allegations.



A government agent who can see up to one year into the future,  
but can only see bubbles of the future that are within a 100ft  
radius of acts of bestiality.

Hank, 28 F, single.

A beekeeper who desires revenge.

A father of six who loves lasagna and beer and watching sports,  
and all of his children are zoo exclusive.

A pirate who can transform into a dolphin, and has a secret  
crush on the fellow pirate who presents the food.

A tree who has a healthy and in-heat dog pussy, positioned 4'3"  
above the ground.

## POEMS

### **Black**

I hope that heaven is a road.  
In my life I have been blessed  
with the best driving companions,  
one still around  
and two too many departed.  
Stops for gas and restrooms,  
stretching legs, passing strangers,  
sometimes getting food.  
Conversations that we did get to have  
and conversations we didn't.  
I would like for the eternal  
to be mornings and days  
and dusks and long nights,  
cloudy with passing showers,  
radio, music,  
talking, enjoyed silence,  
with her, or him, or him.

## **Q+A**

Q: Imagine a world without dogs...

A: No thanks :3

## **Darker Grey**

I  
love  
that  
my  
shadow  
has  
a  
tail.