

Trial By Vial

In the dark underground of the city of Aurora, a tall, slender dragon slinked around silently on the crowded streets. He was a newcomer to this illustrious, grand metropolis, from a planet known to only a select few astronomers and scientists. He didn't mind the mystery behind his past, he wasn't too keen on being reminded of it; preferring to look ahead instead of behind. Standing at nearly eight and a half feet tall, he stood out in every crowd he encountered. He consulted his omni-tool for the directions to the nearest clothing center. One of the things he preferred to do on days off was go shopping for himself. He liked his wardrobe to consist of rich, upscale clothing, preferring what would be considered a slightly dated look by the standards of the time period. His suit vest, tie, and dress shirt were considered overly dressy, his suit pants about the only moderate thing. He wore a brown suit coat to hide most of his outfit, only his tie showing above the collar. He liked his neat and tidy appearance, straight-laced was far preferred for him. His lazy days were in t-shirts and jeans, never anything less.

"Oh for the love of..." He sighed, shaking his omni-tool a bit as he looked at it with a frustration. He was always one to judge his tool's accuracy very harshly. He wasn't dependent upon the tech he used like so many around him, but it was necessary for him to navigate the literal maze of a city that was home to tens of millions, though with many vagrants, that number was easily inaccurate.

As he rounded a corner, he continued heading down the street, his long tail dragging slightly behind him. His tail was just as long as he was tall, and his brown mane with two purple stripes stretched from atop his head to all along his tail. It served as a convenient pillow when needed, and he made sure to keep it clean often. Even city streets and sidewalks made out of fancy futuristic polymers were still prone to collecting dirt and grime. But self-maintenance for him was a breeze now; a wrist device he owned had, among many different features, a small cleaning instrument that made keeping his tail and mane clean akin to wiping dirt off of your shoes. He held his wings in close to himself, not wanting to be a hog on the sidewalk. He didn't use his wings much, since there were so many options of travel available, but alas, genetics are a strange thing.

"He's still on the streets." Came the voice from a figure hunched over a computer monitor cluster, a security camera center of the future. While robots were far more efficient enough to be able to replace the need for human security guards, it still helped keep jobs in the city.

"Good, where is he at?" Responded a much deeper, booming voice, coming from a heavy-set man in a pin-striped suit. He chomped on a lit cigar as he glared over at

the security guard, his slicked back, greasy hair and rather dark-colored suit giving him a rather sinister appearance.

"Uhh, Seventh and Main Street, sir." The security guard finally responded.

"Hmph, that's far too many people. If we're taking this weirdo down, he needs to be out of the way. Have his omni-tool redirect him elsewhere."

"Yes sir!"

The rotund man then took a few puffs of his cigar and looked over in the dark corner of the room. "Is the serum ready?" He asked.

"It has been perfected, sir." Responded a very astute voice, his enunciation of vowels pretty on point.

"Well then have my team take it and go exterminate this bastard. I don't know what he is, but he's not of this Earth, or any planet I've ever seen. We know what happened the last time an unknown creature visited us. He isn't to stand a chance."

"That's what the serum is for, sir!" Responded the man as he stepped into the light, revealing his spectacles and long black coat. His dark hair was short and neatly trimmed, his outfit rather concealing as his right hand played with a small pocket knife.

"Then what are you doing here? Go fetch it, you ingrate!" His boss bellowed with disapproval.

The man nodded, used to his boss' anger and antics, so they didn't startle him much anymore. He walked off, heading down a few halls into a huge, white, sterile lab room. Loads of equipment could be seen all over the room, several different technicians performing various tests and processes. It was a state of the art research facility, and just about anything one was to explore or investigate, they'd find the tools they'd need here.

He walked up to a small corner of the room where a man stood at a computer beside a wall of vials. "He wants the serum." The spectacled man said sternly to his coworker.

The man grunted, reaching over to his left on the shelf of numerous different colored vials. It looked like months, or maybe years worth of research had been put into it all. Only the scientists knew to time and effort spent on it all. He grabbed a blue one and put it inside a small attaché case, with plenty of padding so that it wouldn't break. "Here." He muttered, his gaze never quite leaving the computer screen.

The man then returned to the security room, small case in hand.

"Is that it?" Their boss muttered. "Excellent. Then let's be rid of this pest."

Aether looked at his omni-tool again, sighing as it blipped and started to lead him in another direction.

"Oh for the love of... now where?!" He exclaimed, his frustration mounting as he followed its instructions. He darted around another corner, heading away from Main street, further away until he was in a slightly less populated area, then down a small alleyway on the side. "This... doesn't look promising." He said as his eyes darted around.

Suddenly, a few shadows dashed around him in the alleyway. He tried to focus on them, his tail quickly coiling up and whipping back out, attempting to stop one of the quickly moving objects. The shadow suddenly redirected itself around Aether's tail. He blinked in astonishment, his arms raising in a guard as he prepared to fight. Before he could react to even throw a punch, he was suddenly swarmed, being slammed against one of the walls. His arms, legs, and even his tail were pinned by several large, burly figures in black outfits, with gas masks covering their faces.

"I see you are a well-equipped fighter." Came the voice of the slender, stringent scientist, his glasses glaring off of several different light sources.

"W-What the hell is this?" Aether stammered, struggling to break free from the hold. For his size and strength, a dragon should have no trouble breaking free from this hold, but he couldn't find the strength to. This much power holding him down worried him immensely, as all he could do was lay against the wall.

"Well, I could ask you the same question." He remarked with a smirk. "Coming to a different planet, trying to blend in when you clearly stand out. We'll not have your kind invading us." He said with a devilishly evil grin spreading across his face.

"W-What? You think I'm... part of some group?" Aether replied, trying to quickly piece together the man's train of thought to understand what he was saying. "I'm with no one. And if I wanted to blend in... I would have."

"That is why we have to expect everything and anything here; no surprises." The man chuckled as he held up the small attaché case in his hand.

"W-What's in that?" Aether asked nervously, knowing the situation was already uneasy for him.

The man laughed a little, his voice sounding a bit more sinister as he looked at Aether. "It shall be your undoing." He grinned, opening it up to reveal a needle with a small container holding a blue substance inside of it.

Aether looked at it, a few beads of sweat forming on his temple as he knew what was about to happen wasn't going to be easy in the least bit. "Y-You're not killing me h-here, a-are you?" He asked, hoping that perhaps he was perceiving this entire situation the wrong way.

His question was met with an evil laugh. "I'm afraid so, my dear creature." The man grinned slyly, pulling out the syringe from the case and slowly walking towards the pinned dragon.

"P-Please, don't. W-We can talk about this, right?" He stammered, trying to find some other way out of the situation.

"I'm afraid we cannot allow any alternatives." The man said, slowly bringing up the needle within Aether's field of view. He could see a few drops of the liquid dripping out of the end of the needle.

The dragon knew he had magical abilities that he could otherwise use to defend himself with, but he had no formal training or knowledge of how it worked. The most he could do was levitate small objects, like chips or maybe a burger. Tried as he might though, he wasn't stopping the needle that was in the man's hand. He tried to struggle more, squirming his arms and legs, his tail twitching violently as he tried to free himself. The grip on his limbs tightened, his situation growing more dire as he began panting, his mind turning quickly growing frantic. The man grinned at seeing Aether's discomfort, knowing the creature was struggling within his last few breaths of life. The man then noticed a vein on Aether's neck, quickly and swiftly plunging the needle in. He began to push down the plunger as the dragon tried to squirm more, but the pin on his head prevented him from moving, his pupils dilating in horror as his body surged with adrenaline. His 'fight or flight' instincts were going mad, but he couldn't even move an inch as the contents of the syringe were emptied into his veins. He could feel the strange substance coursing through his bloodstream with horror, scared of what would happen next. The man retracted the needle and grinned, putting the syringe back in the suitcase.

"Release him, he'll be dead within moments, anyways." The man laughed. His couple of cronies let go of Aether, the dragon dropping to the ground, his back against the wall as he put his hands up to his neck over where the needle had just been. The man stood over the dragon, watching and waiting to see the dragon's life slowly drain away.

A few brief moments of tension passed as the dragon's pupils suddenly began to widen. All of the adrenaline and pent up tension he felt slowly began to melt away. He feared this was the beginning of the end, wishing he had done something differently to prevent this. Wishing he hadn't fled from home, wondering why he had to choose this planet out of all the ones in the galaxy. Why did he believe his omni-tool? Was there any warning signs that he could've been alerted to? Soon he began to feel a bit light-headed, possibly from the poison. He wondered how this thing would kill him, but at the same time he thought it would've melted his insides or something more sinister.

"Why's it taking so long?" One of the henchmen asked. As he spoke, Aether noticed that the man's sentence seemed to drag on longer than expected. Was... was his perception of time growing distorted?

"Hmm, I don't know." The spectacled man replied. "Perhaps he has... stronger... antibodies." Aether felt like the sentences he was hearing were being spoken over minutes, his every thought and every question began to feel like an internal

monologue, an hour-long conversation. Instances of observation felt like watching a day pass; was he slowly dying, or was the drug having an adverse effect on him?

Slowly, another sensation began to creep up on him... Hunger? How could he be hungry at a time like this?... Oh what did it matter, hunger is hunger anyways. And boy, was that feeling getting stronger. How long had it been since he had eaten last? It felt like a month ago, maybe longer still. While he didn't quite notice, his face was growing more relaxed, a smile slowly spreading across his face. Then his tongue began to hang out of his slightly open maw, his brain completely derailed on food; thinking of burgers, steak, ribs, fries, pork, beans, mashed potatoes; every food under the sun, he wanted to eat it.

"What's going on?" The spectacled man said, staring at Aether. "Why are you smiling like that? Never seen someone go with a smile." He responded, with a bit of concern in his voice now.

Aether looked up at the man, laughing a bit as he slowly braced himself against the wall, his head leaning down as he pushed himself up to his feet.

The man looked in astonishment as he stepped back. "W-Why are you standing? You s-should be dying." He stammered.

Aether lifted his head up slowly, and his eyes now looked like purple and black bullseyes, almost seeming to pulsate with energy. A dumb grin was now plastered on his face, his tongue lolling out to the side. He let out a childish giggle as he stood upright as best as he could, staring down at the bewildered henchmen, whom he far out-measured in height.

"S-Stop him!" The spectacled man bellowed, stumbling back a few paces.

One of the larger henchmen jumped at Aether, but without even looking, the dragon threw his hand up, knocking the man back with a blast of energy. He wasn't even paying attention to man, or even mentally registering that he was defending himself. He didn't seem to notice how powerful his magic was, either, or that he could even do it, as the man was knocked hard against the cement wall. Two more henchmen jumped at him from the other side, only to be met with a sluggish flick of his other arm, sending them backwards with alarming force. The last henchman paused a bit, looking at his boss before drawing a knife and running at the dragon. Aether then made a brushing motion with his hand, knocking the last guy clean off his feet, the knife in his hand exploding into a fine cloud of metal dust. He still had the same dumb, plastered look on his face, his tongue drooling a little as he looked down the alleyway, seeming to lose interest in the current affair. It was like he never even knew that he was in the middle of a fight, but his reflexes were saying otherwise. He then walked past the man in the glasses, his gait slightly disjointed as he rubbed over his stomach a bit.

"W-What are you?" The spectacled man stammered, looking on in horror, realizing that the drug was clearly not going to kill him.

The dragon turned around slowly to look at the man, grinning widely and letting out another childish giggle and licked his lips. "Hungry." He cooed, turning back around and slowly heading towards the street.

The spectacled man grew angry, reaching into his coat pocket and pulling out a small laser pistol. "Eat this, you dirty lizard!" He bellowed as he pulled the trigger. Before the gun could even fire, Aether suddenly whipped around in a flash. His right hand then made a small twitching motion, which abruptly yanked the gun out of the man's hand, and into Aether's. He held up the gun and examined it, then suddenly it burst into all of its small components before his eyes. The disassembled gun floated in mid-air in front of him, as he stared at it with an almost blank look on his face. He suddenly realized what he was staring at, and what magic he was using.

"Oh... so I can do that." He giggled, poking at one of the pieces, as then the entire remnants of the gun fell to the ground. He turned around sluggishly, slowly staggering towards the street once more. The spectacled man he had suddenly pilfered the gun from stood against a wall, shock and fear paralyzing him absolutely. He stood in complete silence until the dragon rounded the corner, his tail flickering out of sight. He finally gasped for air, panting and shaking as he looked over at his henchmen, who were all in various states of pain.

"H-How can... one creature... do that?" He muttered to himself, unable to piece together the slightest idea of what he had just witnessed.

As the dragon stumbled along on the street, he looked around curiously, eyeing the different food shops around. People dodged around him as he stumbled along semi-aimlessly. As he wandered along, he rubbed his stomach, overly aware of how hungry he was. He wanted a lot of food, more than he knew these small side shops had available to him. He needed a factory, a warehouse, a production plant full of food. How long had he been walking on this street? It felt like ages.

"Need... food." He muttered, looking around with a sigh as his tail idly dragged about. He then noticed a small tech shop down the street. It advertised itself to have every appliance and device you'd need in your home or apartment. Perhaps they had one of those... food makers... anything out of water... He started stumbling towards it, his stomach turning in disgust as it was still as empty as ever. He nearly fell over walking in through the door, his eyes darting around the store from object to object, none of them matching the item he was hoping for.

"Can I help ya, there?" Came a slow voice from a smaller, alien gentleman. He was a member of that species that were plant-like... whatever they were called. Very smart species, long life spans and lots of intelligence. They could adjust their body size and everything at will, and used water as their main energy source. Oh, his brain was derailing again, he was in fact asked a question.

"Yeah... I'm looking for... one of those... food processor things." Aether stammered, trying to keep his train of thought going as he looked over at the gentleman. He was wearing a yellow pin-striped vest, a white undershirt, and red pants. His skin was a dark green color, his hands looked like small, knotted tree branches. His head was a bit narrow and elongated, his chin slightly pronounced. His facial appearance made him seem to be a bit older, his eyes showing both age and wisdom as he looked back at the dragon. As he stared, Aether noticed the man's glowing yellow eyes, which were somewhat warm and inviting; a treat considering how often people of his species were so ru-

"Oh, you mean like this one?" The man asked, pulling up a screen on his counter and scrolling through it quickly, before pulling up a gizmo with the name 'Food Genie 6000'.

"Y-Yeah, that's the one!" Aether smiled. "It can make you food outta water?" He asked, looking at the man.

"To simplify the explanation of the process, yes." The man replied, eyeing the dragon curiously. He certainly was a strange customer, and he had never seen one with eyes quite like his before. Could be contacts, though. Loads of people do weird things in the universe. "You know how much this thing costs, right?" He asked, tapping his fingers on the glass countertop.

Aether sighed a bit, before remembering he had some money on him. He dug into one of his inner coat pockets, digging through it and around other small items before he smiled, having found what he was looking for. "Here!" He exclaimed happily, before he pulled out a bundle of money, a couple marked stacks of 500 dollar bills. Five of them, to be exact. He slapped them on the counter with a bit more force than he intended to use, jumping a bit at himself as he looked at the man with the same dumb, absent-minded smile, his tongue still hanging out to the side.

The man looked at the pile of money and stared in astonishment. "S-Sir, I appreciate your gesture, but you're overpaying me for this." He said, being rather polite, as Aether had actually given him about twice as much money as the unit cost.

"So? It's all yours." Aether smiled. "I'm just... really hungry." He giggled, rubbing his stomach again as he looked at the man.

He quickly tried to process why this creature stood before him, offering him so much money for the unit. His expression and motor skills seemed to indicate he was a bit on the slow side, perhaps not all there. Though he seemed genuinely nice, and that money was definitely real. He picked it all up and inspected it a bit, before shrugging and turning around to put all of it in a small safe he had behind the counter. The dragon stood there patiently, smiling all the while as his tail idly dragged about on the ground behind him, just avoiding bumping into any shelves or display stands.

"Here, come with me." The man said, beckoning the dragon to follow him towards the back of the store. The dragon stumbled and followed along, his gait his slightly off-kilter as his head bobbed around to avoid the overhead ceiling fans. He followed the man into a small storage room in the back, loads of shelves holding boxes of varying sizes on them. They held an innumerable amount of different electronics and appliances, from gaming units and blenders, to refrigerators and task robots. "You do realize how big this appliance is, right?" The man asked Aether. "You'll need a truck or something to take it home." As he said that, Aether noticed the box that they were walking towards. Plastered on the side of it was a big, fancy logo, with 'Food Genie 6000' so visible, one could almost call it obnoxious. The box was just about square, six feet in all dimensions. It had a few labels on it marked 'Warning: heavy object', and other things that didn't concern him.

Without thinking much, he looked over sluggishly at the man. "So this is mine?" He smiled.

The man nodded, scratching his head a bit. "Y-Yeah, you got a way to transport it?" He asked.

Aether turned back to look at the box, with the same blank, absent expression on it. He stared at it for a few moments, before remembering about shrink rays and those silly guns from old science fiction movies. "Gee, that'd be great." He said to himself, though the thought was out loud.

"What would?" The man asked Aether curiously, completely lost as to how this dragon operated. He certainly seemed a bit daft in the head to him, but no punk of a kid or anything.

"Oh, if I could do this." The dragon responded, walking up to the giant box and poking it. Before he could finish his thought, the giant box slowly began to shrink in size, as if it were being miniaturized. It slowly shrank until it was about the size of a Rubik's cube. The alien stared at Aether in complete bewilderment, taken aback by the sudden magical prowess he was witnessing. The dragon gazed at the now easily manageable box on the ground for a few moments, in absent-minded silence again, before blinking and reacting. "Oh... I guess I can do that." He giggled, reaching down to gently pick up the object. It was pretty light, thanks to its now much smaller size. He carefully tucked it into one of his coat pockets, looking over at the store owner. The same dumb smile returned to his face as he swayed while standing a bit.

"How did you..." The man responded, his sentence trailing off as he failed to find a reasoning behind any of what this dragon just did, especially with THAT look on his face. How could he forget he did magic like that? Was he that thick? He's met some pretty dumb ones, though he was certainly looking at someone special.

"I promise I'll take good care of it." Aether smiled happily. "Thank you, you've made my... month? Year? Oh, you've just made me the happiest." He giggled,

turning and heading back to walk out of the front of the store, albeit in his still stumbling and tipsy manner.

The man scratched his head as he watched the dragon saunter outside. "I can't help but feel I'm being played a trick on." He muttered to himself as he sighed and looked around the store, wondering if there were hidden cameras about on him or anything. He didn't like practical jokes, especially ones played by people who weren't quite all there.

"What the FUCK do you mean he just walked away?" The heavy-set man in the suit bellowed, chomping his cigar down and puffing it heavily. "That drug was supposed to kill the bastard, dead!"

"Which was precisely why I had the needle taken back to the lab." The spectacled man responded calmly. "With a few small traces of his blood on it, we can see just what kind of body chemistry this creature has."

"Well how do we know he isn't going to tell every damn idiot in town that he was almost assassinated? We'd be fucked for sure, then!"

"Sir, look." The man responded, pointing to a computer screen where one could see Aether meandering down the street, rubbing over his stomach and looking like he was mentally higher than a kite. "Ever since I administered him that... vial, he was talking about nothing but food. He's all but forgotten about what we've done to him."

"That still doesn't explain why the fucking thing didn't work! It's concentrated poison in a tube! It'd kill cockroaches faster than you and I can breathe!" The man then got up out of his seat, grunting with anger as he turned to head out of the room.

"Uh, s-sir, where are you going?" The man asked, knowing that his boss' fury only led to worse things for everyone around the sector.

"I'm going to find that fucking medicine geek and wring his neck!" He bellowed, storming out the door with rage in his eyes. "This shit shouldn't be happening." He muttered angrily to himself. "This'll undo our entire sector!" And of course it would, especially for a sector known for its corruption and numerous shady practices. As he got into the lab, several of the employees there turned, their eyes widening as they saw who had just entered, knowing he only showed up when he was about to ream someone out. "Where is he? Where is that idiot?" Their boss bellowed, soon seeing the man over in the corner, next to his wall of vials and staring blankly at the computer screen. He stormed over to him, his eyes seeming to grow white hot with rage as he grabbed the man by his lab coat, wheeling him around and nearly strangling him with his own jacket. The man blinked in shock, surprised to be suddenly reeled around, though his fear was reaffirmed once he realized who he was staring at. "Do you know what you've fucking done?! You fucking moron!" His boss nearly screamed at him. "Because of your dumb ass, shit is going to hit the fan!" He screamed.

"B-B-But sir!" The man stammered, trying to sit himself upright. "The vial s-should've killed him." He stammered, looking over at his stand of vials, trying to figure out what went wrong.

"So then explain to me how it fucking couldn't!" His boss bellowed back, feeling seconds away from strangling the man himself.

The lab tech just barely slipped out of his boss' hands, sliding over to the wall of vials. His brain began to frantically try and solve the issue at hand. As he kept looking, he noticed that there was another vial next to where he had pulled the one from, and it was the exact same blue color. His heart sank as he slowly reached over for the other vial. His boss looked onwards, the silence in the room so great that even the small clicking of a pen from across the hall could've been heard. He pulled the other blue vial out, examining the top of it, since that was where they placed labels on things. There was a small skull on it, indicating that it was in fact the poison that he held in his hands.

He couldn't help but let out a small "Oh my god..." as he realized which serum he had given.

"What?" His boss asked angrily, his face now so bright red with anger that one could've likened the shade to that of a ripe tomato.

"He didn't get the poison... he got something much worse." The lab tech said, his heart sinking more as he turned to look at his boss.

"WELL HOW THE FUCK COULD IT BE WORSE?!" He boss roared, his knuckles whitening as he was feeling even closer to strangling the man.

"The other serum was... a theory... But we shelved it before we could even test it."

His boss raised an eyebrow, wondering why his lab tech was looking so worried about something else. "Well fucking spit it out, you moron! It's what I fucking pay you for!"

"It tests a theory about the way our brain is wired! How there's so many different drugs that affect the chemical makeup of your brain, how your brain operates, controls things. We wanted to try and make one that could alter the chemical makeup of the brain, but we felt there was no research behind what w-we were doing. We had already made this small batch, based on a few theories and some analyses. But we had no idea what we were doing with it, or how it would even affect a person's brain, so we d-decided to keep it until... we knew what it was capable of doing."

His boss then began to understand just what was at stake now. "So... What you're saying is... We gave a drug with unknown properties to-"

"Sir! The test results came back!" The spectacled man butted in, running into the lab as he carried an electronic clipboard in his hand.

His boss turned around looked at him. "Well talk about timing, for once. Now what the actual fuck kind of person are we dealing with?" He asked, the anger in his voice slowly lessening.

The man adjusted his glasses, panting as he looked at his coworkers. He walked up quickly to his boss and showed him the chart. The two of them looked over the results, the lab tech peeking over their shoulders to examine it as well. There was another long bout of silence, as the three read over the report. The boss' face went from angry to surprise, and soon he gasped a bit as he looked at the charts.

"So... He's a test tube baby..." Their boss finally spoke.

"It would seem so, sir. It's the only way we can explain this many pieces of his DNA identifying as so many different other-worldly species."

"There's... at least four or five there... But what's this one labeled as unknown?"

"We don't know what race this is. It's nothing we've ever encountered before, sir."

Their boss paused, putting a hand on his head in frustration. "Shit... This is bad. We have no fucking clue how this stuff will affect him."

"For all we know, it could make him some kind of super soldier." The lab tech said softly.

Their boss looked over and glared at his lab tech. "Get fucking reamed." He growled. "This guy is a high priority now, find him and stop him."

"B-But sir, our security team said he isn't a threat. He hasn't caused any violence, hasn't fought anyone... He's acting... mostly normal." His other crone said, adjusting his glasses more.

"He ain't normal. He's the scariest motherfucker I've ever seen. Watch him, and if he so much as lays a hand on anybody, stop him immediately."

"Yes sir..."

Aether finally stumbled back to his apartment complex, giggling like an idiot with his tongue hanging out of his maw still as he was just barely able to find the handle on the front door. He didn't remember his walk home being so long. Since when were the city blocks so long? He shrugged as he headed inside, slowly wandering over to the elevator. He sighed a bit as he hunched down. His apartment complex was first built with the intention of only housing humans, but was much later renovated to accommodate all of the alien species that came to live on Earth. Though this still left the ceiling at about seven and a half feet, which was far too short for the dragon. Soon the elevator doors opened up, this one fortunately empty as he stumbled into it, falling onto his knees. The elevator's height was only seven feet tall, which always made the trek up to his floor a bit of a pain. He giggled like an idiot even more as crawled into the elevator, leaning up against a corner as a few other people quietly got in. He figured they were silently judging his rather idiotic

display, but paid it no mind. He thought he was acting about as normal as he could, though his stomach growling loudly didn't help his case much.

"It's a shame this place is so tiny, I feel like I'm in a funhouse." Aether couldn't help but say aloud, making one of the other occupants chuckle a little under their breath. "Oh! Could you hit floor eighteen for me, please?" He finally said, remembering that he had to get to his own apartment. They were already up on floor five by this point.

"Yeah, sure big guy." One of them responded, hitting the appropriate floor button.

Slowly, a few of the other occupants got out as the floors went up. Aether sighed as he sat in the corner of the elevator, wondering why the stops were taking so long, today. Maybe the elevator needed maintenance, all things did at some point. How much maintenance would his new toy need? He hoped not much, he wasn't too fond of fixing things, though he was moderately capable at doing it. Though that's what technicians were for. He noticed there were a lot of technicians in the city that were robots, too. Were that many people so lazy that they couldn't pick up technical jobs? Or were robots just that much better at it?

Suddenly the elevator bell went off, they had reached the eighteenth floor. Aether smiled as he crawled out of the elevator, slowly standing up to his full height. This floor, and plenty of the ones above it, were built specifically to be higher-class, though Aether really needed it for the height. The floors were a soft, cheap carpet, with a mildly tasteful red and tan floral pattern on them. The walls were made of a dark stained wood, most likely mahogany or cherry. There was plenty of elaborate molding along the baseboards and the ceilings. It was definitely on the nicer side, and he felt it kind of suited him well. There wasn't much riff-raff in a place this; plenty of good, hard working people. Most were friendly, though he liked to keep to himself some days. Most of his fellow tenants that knew of him felt that, apart from his slightly enormous height, he was a nice individual.

He stumbled down the hall slowly, his tail dragging behind him as he swayed about from side to side slowly. Was the hallway really this long? It kind of sucked that his was all the way around the corner. He headed down it, feeling as if his feet were working independently from the rest of his body. Was he walking slower than normal, or faster? This messing with his perception of time kind of sucked, though him eating was far more important at the moment. He wandered around the corner, continuing to head down the long hall. As he got near his door, one of his neighbors was just walking out of their apartment. A rather young female, she saw Aether walking up and smiled, waving to him. Aether stared at her blankly for a second, before blinking and waving back.

"Hi Aether." She said pleasantly to him. "How are you?"

He giggled gleefully as he licked over his lips a bit, rubbing his stomach more as he looked back at her. "Starving." He said as he fiddled around in one of his pockets, trying to find his keys, his eyes darting down to his pocket as he grunted a bit.

His neighbor noticed his eyes, and then blinked as she looked up at him. "You okay? You don't seem like yourself... And what's with your eyes?"

"...What?" He said, slowly processing what she was saying as he looked back at her. "I didn't think... I haven't noticed." He stammered, not quite realizing just how differently he was acting.

"You sure you're okay?"

"Y-Yeah... Just really hungry." He smiled, finally finding his keys as he pulled them out, staring down at them as he slowly fiddled through them until he found the one to his apartment. His tongue was still hanging out to the side of his mouth as he put the key in his lock and turned it, looking over to his neighbor and smiling some more with the same big, dumb grin he had.

"Well if you don't feel well, you should get some rest." She responded politely to him.

"T-Thanks, I probably will." He smiled back to her, nodding his head afterwards as he then slowly trudged into his apartment, closing the door behind himself.

His apartment was a fairly decent size, even for a dragon like himself. He sighed in relief as he took off his jacket, pausing before reaching into the one pocket and pulling out the shrunken box of the Food Genie.

"Can't forget you." He giggled to himself, licking his lips as he put his jacket in the small closet that stood next to his front door. He then meandered over to his living room, which had a couch and a cozy chair tucked in the corner. There was a coffee table in front of them as well, and a TV sat at the far opposite wall. He also had a bookcase where he stored all kinds of books. Some on cooking, some on machinery, technology, history and cultures; he was a curious dragon, and he preferred physical books over digital screens of text. He set the box down on the floor, staring at it for a moment before blinking and giggling. "Oh yeah, I need to do the thing." He smiled, realizing that it was still the size of a small puzzle. He leaned down and poked it again, causing the object to slowly return back to its normal size, six feet square. Aether smiled proudly as he looked at the box, then behind himself to where he conveniently had a full-length mirror. He stared at his reflection, giggling at his own overly relaxed and gleeful expression, before he noticed his eyes. They did in fact look different, with several rings of purple and black, his widened pupils also worth a note.

"That's weird." He said to himself, before turning around and looking back at the box. "Buuuuut, I need food." He giggled, rubbing his hands together. He reached up to the top of the box, tugging on one of the taped down flaps with his hands. "Huh, this thing is really packaged tight." He said, frowning as suddenly his antennae

began to glow a bit. Suddenly all of the cardboard tore apart into pieces, and in response he flung all of it behind himself towards the front door. Now stood a large contraption, wrapped up in a load of plastic and styrofoam. "Aww, this is no fun." He whined, pouting a bit as he began tugging at the plastic. Suddenly all the plastic and styrofoam came apart, and he smiled as he tossed it over to the side with the cardboard. Now in front of him stood the stainless steel box that housed all of the internal mechanisms and tools. It looked rather plain and unassuming, a fashion sense of the future. He wasn't too big on it, but if it worked, that was good enough for him. There was a small table in front of the object, with a chute leading from the box. He looked around to the back of it, where there were a few cables wrapped up in plastic. One was obviously for electricity, one was for the water, and there was a tube that was clearly designed as an exhaust port. Well an object like this clearly needed some ventilation. He grabbed the mass of cables and wires and fumbled with them, trudging into his kitchen area. He looked around before remembering a spare appliance outlet in the corner. He stumbled over and plugged it in, hearing the machine whir up to a quiet start. He smiled widely as he then waddled over to his sink and stuck the hose for the water onto it. Perfect fit, actually! He was rather impressed with the fitting, himself. The less work he had to do, the better. He then tossed the exhaust hose over towards the window, then rolled his eyes and used a bit more of his magic to open up the window, and placing the vent so it hung out of the window a few inches.

"Perfect!" He smiled, stumbling aimlessly back into the living room. He giggled as he saw that a screen lit up on the side of the large unit. He smiled and began to scroll through the list of available foods. He licked his lips once more, scrolling through a list of dinner items, before seeing the option for cheeseburgers. His eyes lit up in delight as he pressed the quantity button, jumping it up to a dozen. "Mmmm, make them all triples!" He said happily, and suddenly the item changed from single cheeseburgers to triples. "Ooh, that's perfect!" He giggled happily. If this thing was voice activated, he'd definitely use it often. He then pressed the 'make' button at the bottom of the screen. There was a quiet hum, as he heard water pumping through the pipe. He licked his lips again, pulling his sofa over magically, right in front of the little stand where the machine would eject the food onto the small stand. He sat down on the couch, rubbing over his stomach some more, blinking as he realized he had forgotten fries. "Oof, I need a load of fries with that, too!" He said. Suddenly there was another ding, and he blinked, pausing as he wondered if the machine had heard his request. He wanted to check on the screen, but he didn't want to get up. He continued to lie there on the couch, waiting patiently until four of the triple cheeseburgers popped out of the chute, onto the little stand. He stared at them, examining the quality of them, as he had never had food given to him from a boxy machine before.

His stomach protested to the pause, gurgling and groaning at him as he picked one up, the warm cheese dripping onto his hands as he sniffed it a bit. The beef patties smelled very rich, they looked plenty thick and juicy, and there was cheese between all the patties as well. The bun was nice and crisp as well, in fact there wasn't really any part of the burger he could criticize enough to hate, except perhaps they'd need a few toppings on them. He looked up at the machine curiously, his maw suddenly taking a huge bite out of half of the burger. It was like he couldn't stop himself, but as he tried to process his action, he stopped as his mouth was met with the warm, delicious taste of the cheeseburger. The texture of the burger was incredibly realistic. It could've almost fooled him into thinking it actually came from the cow. The cheese was fantastic, soft and gooey like warmed up cheddar cheese should be.

"Mmm, these are delicious!" He smiled, polishing off the first burger as four more burgers popped out of the chute. He blinked and giggled as he looked at the machine. "I should've asked for lettuce n onions on these, too. And some ketchup and mayo." He smiled, licking his lips clean of the bit of grease as his stomach grumbled in delight, the burger finally landing where it needed to be.

Soon the machine let out another ding, and Aether smiled as he practically inhaled another burger. It was then that he noticed that the burgers were actually larger than the ones he was used to. At least... two... no, three times as big. "Oooh, these are big burgers." He exclaimed happily. "You really are a genie." He giggled to the machine. He then reached down, grabbing a burger in each hand, and stuffing the two of them into his gullet greedily. The food was tasting better with each bite, and he could help but sigh with content, as a few drips of grease trickled down his chin. He then reached for another two, scarfing them up with haste as suddenly the machine spat out a good few pounds of fries. He blinked and happily reached for a huge handful, stuffing them into his maw as a few fell onto his lap. He looked down and picked them up, eating them as well as he rubbed over his belly happily.

All of the food was incredibly pleasant, and so convincingly real that it made him even happier. He sat back a bit more and got comfy, staring at the machine with great pride, knowing he had made quite the worthwhile investment. He reached over and grabbed another two of the cheeseburgers, swallowing them almost whole, his stomach still feeling anything but satisfied. "Time to fill up, then." He cooed with a happy smile. As he finished off the pile of fries, suddenly the machine spat out another four triple cheeseburgers, these ones with several pieces of fresh, crisp lettuce, a few onions, and ketchup and mayo dripping off of them a bit. His eyes widened more as he sat upright and looked at them. "Ooh!" He said excitedly, grabbing one eagerly and stuffing it into his maw. This one tasted even better, the extra ingredients making it taste damn near perfect to him.

"Oh my god, that is good." He murred, his tail swishing about happily. He stretched out a bit, his wings spreading across the length of the couch as he grabbed another one of the lovely cheeseburgers and ate it up. As he continued his pace, he didn't noticed that he was starting to develop a bit of a belly. All of the cheeseburgers and fries were numberless to him and his stomach, which still felt as empty as ever. On his lithe frame, one would easily see it underneath his shirt and vest.

As the last burger of the dozen he ordered entered his maw, he licked his grease-laden lips clean and looked over at the machine. "Hmmm, what should I have you make next." He pondered, then blinked in delight. "Fajitas! Big steak fajitas! With all the bell peppers, and BBQ sauce!" He said excitedly, wondering just what kind of complexities this machine could handle. The machine whirred for a few minutes, and he sat there patiently, rubbing his small bulge of a stomach.

Suddenly, the machine spat out half a dozen of the huge steak fajitas, with plenty of bell peppers and BBQ sauce slathering the insides. His eyes could've easily been compared to dinner plates, they grew so wide. "Damn," He exclaimed, taking one immediately and shoveling it into his maw, chomping down on it and swallowing it up hungrily. "Mmmm, oh boy am I gonna love you." He giggled, looking at the Genie as his tail thumped on the couch arm a little. He devoured each and every fajita up as quickly as the previous one, his belly slowly inching outwards more as he ate. He was still unaware of his slowly growing gut, or perhaps he was. He didn't care if he gained a bit of weight now. He was famished, and he needed plenty of sustenance anyways. He had a long day, and dealt with some pretty unpleasant people.

"More fajitas, please! Exact same way... A good dozen!" He exclaimed, licking his lips hungrily as his stomach bubbled at the thought of having more food in it. He was completely possessed with hunger, no doubt, but he was enjoying himself far too much to care. Soon, the machine spat out another six fajitas, and he just devoured one after the other, belching loudly in between bites to make space for more. The machine soon brought the rest of the fajitas within the dragon's sight, and he grinned more as he continued devouring the delicious morsels. His gut slowly inched out a bit further, his vest starting to look a bit snug on his belly.

"Mmmm, give me a few racks of ribs! F-Full racks, with a sweeter sauce on them." He murmured, the last fajita still in his maw as he belched again. "A-And give me some mashed potatoes along with... Oh, and some soda. I'm really thirsty." He giggled.

Soon the machine whirred again, sputtering out plenty of ribs, potatoes, and even dispensed a pitcher from the side of the small stand, full of a caramel-colored soda. He reached for it and took a gigantic gulp, downing almost all of the fizzy pop in an instant. He licked his lips and patted his belly happily. "Mmm, that was super good." He smiled, reaching over for the racks of ribs next.

He kept up this pace for hours, endlessly devouring food as he called it up, even repeating a number of the dishes. He even tried a number of foreign ones too, even from other planets and species, and yet the machine simply kept pumping them out, as if it were a galactic cookbook.

And his body definitely took all of the food in stride. As he ate, his belly bulged out further and further, straining his vest until finally the buttons popped off, one after another. His dress shirt underneath was finally exposed, which was also looking quite strained as he continued to devour plate after plate of food. His arms and legs were starting to look a tad thicker, a few pounds packing on here and there. He tugged at his tie, his neck growing a bit girthier as well. He finally undid his tie and tossed it aside, sighing in relief as he continued eating. The belt on his pants was also starting to bemoan its predicament.

Aether was ignoring everything, his mind all too focused on eating, more and more food to pile into his gullet. As he ate, his belt finally gave way, snapping apart and falling to the side. He ignored the tightness growing in the now ill-fitting clothing he was wearing, eating still as the buttons on his dress shirt finally began to bust apart, his golden yellow belly spilling out onto his lap. It looked quite a bit doughier now, and it was clear that his body was working quickly to digest the food so he could make room for more. Soon the seams on the sides of his pants gave way, splitting apart as his legs were starting to look quite like tree trunks, covered in a good layer of blubber.

He could easily be considered fat by this point, now really just left in his underwear as the rest of his dress shirt was torn apart by his swelling frame. His arms and legs were now positively flabby, his neck looking quite a bit chunkier, as even his cheeks were looking a bit fatter. His hips were widening out considerably as he continued eating, his rear end slowly pushing up against the couch more.

Soon his belly slowly began to develop a few rolls, taking up more and more of his lap as his lovehandles inched out wider. He began to feel a tad lethargic, but chalked it up to his long day, intent on getting his fill. He piled in more meat, veggies; dish after dish of the most filling things he could think of. He was growing twice as wide as he once was, and still getting larger. Every mouthful of food traveled down his esophagus and into his swelling stomach. His tail grew thicker with fat, as more droplets of grease trickled down his now handful of chins.

He finally graduated on to desserts, calling up banana splits, tubs of ice cream, fried oreos laden with fudge, stacks of brownies, piles of cookies. He wanted to eat everything, numerous times over.

The machine just kept whirring quietly, pumping out course after course without so much as a hint of strain. It was definitely state of the art, and mechanically powerful. He wondered why he hadn't heard of this thing sooner.

Soon there was an audible tear, his underwear shredding around his much wider hips and rump, leaving him completely naked in his own living room. He giggled and shrugged more, not really concerned about anything other than the food in front of him. He didn't notice as one of his hands reached down and gently began rubbing over his engorged, bloated belly. He was starting to feel quite at home with himself, even though he wasn't consciously aware of how obese he was growing. He would've broken most conventional scales by this point, and his couch was even starting to protest in Aether's expanding size. He frowned as he looked down at the couch and poked it a bit.

"No, you're not breaking." He giggled, a bit of fudge smearing on the arm of the couch. He then returned to smothering his face with all the different delights, his hips inching closer and closer to the arms of the couch. He was growing absolutely enormous, and he'd need a whole new wardrobe of clothes to fit his frame into. But his stomach still wasn't satisfied, his hunger keeping him going and going like an unending dream.

"Mmm, more." He belched loudly. "Give me more, I don't care what, just more." He grunted, staring at the machine. It began to chug a bit louder, pumping out item after item, the quantities growing as the dragon continued shoveling everything into his gullet. His ass was growing positively massive, his thighs so huge that they'd rub together with every step he'd take. He had a fat set of moobs on his chest now, and even his neck had numerous flabby rolls on it.

And he kept this pace up, until he finally passed out from the biggest food coma one could've recorded in history, or at least recent history.

After about three days since he stepped into his apartment with his new device, he finally awoke from his slumber, blinking and yawning as he scratched his gut. He suddenly noticed that his hand sunk deeply into a soft... warm... stomach. He looked down, and in complete surprise he suddenly realized what was going on. He had an enormous set of moobs, and an even larger gut, his legs all but completely vanished from his field of view.

"H-Holy shit... what?" He stammered, suddenly belching thunderously as he felt his wide hips pressing up against both arms of his couch. "Oh hell... how fat am I?" He stammered.

He was now fully aware of himself and everything that was going on around him, his mind now pretty much back to normal. Or so it felt like. He slowly tried to get his enormous frame up, but was finding it incredibly difficult.

"Oh come on, I need up!" He grunted. Just then, his antennae began to glow, and suddenly his body was brought upright, and he almost immediately fell back onto his couch, which creaked and groaned heavily with the landing of his whale of a

frame. "Damn... I'm... huge." He finally admitted, belching again as he tried to stand upright once more. "Come on, now. A bit more muscle this time." He panted.

Soon he was finally upright, his antennae glowing quite brightly. He blinked and looked up at them, poking one of his antennae with a very fat hand. He began to examine his fat paws, and even his forearms looked like the size of tree trunks. "How much... did I eat?" He asked himself curiously, then remembering his full-length mirror. He slowly tried to waddle over the few feet to look at himself, his thunder thighs protesting his every movement. Even his tail felt like it weighed a ton. He had to weigh over a ton... No, he couldn't be that big.

As he got into view of the mirror, his jaw dropped. There in front of himself, he saw his enormous body, a gigantic frame where every single limb and digit of his body was fatter than a stuffed turkey. He noticed though that his eyes had returned to normal, now just his purple irises and black sclera. And his pupils weren't dilated anymore either. At least something was normal again, though all of this fat...

"Ohhhhh no, this isn't good." He muttered, hefting up his mammoth gut. "I need to... weigh myself." He panted, huffing as he slowly turned and headed towards his bathroom, where there was a computer with a digital scale that he hoped would be able to read his size. Every step he took, all of his frame wobbled and jiggled about like a huge tub of jello. He felt incredibly lethargic already, the question of how he got so enormous still ringing in his mind. As he approached the bathroom door, his hips got squeezed against the doorframe. He pouted and whined as he tried to fit through, the doorframe cracking a little before he finally pushed himself through. He slowly headed up to where there was a small computer screen sitting on the wall. He pressed it and looked at it.

"Computer, how much do I weigh?" He asked it, the question he was dreading the obvious answer to. The computer beeped up, then a small loading icon appeared as he could hear the machine calculating. Analyzing his rotund frame, and it sure did take a while. He blushed red as he looked at the computer screen, worrying just how big the number would be. He had to be about a ton, that'd be a... number he could work to go under. He'd just need to work out a little. He then thought about the fact that his antennae were glowing quite brightly when he mysteriously uprighted himself with ease. How was he suddenly able to do that?

His thoughts then went back to when he was in the alleyway. He surprised himself upon remembering what he did to the four crones, and a small hand gun. Did whatever he was injected with affect his brain so that magic was easy? It couldn't have been that cut and dry. There had to be a better explanation, though he really couldn't think of anything better anyways. He had to find someone who was an expert with magic, to learn what kind of powers he had and how he could control them. He needed to understand what all had happened to him, and just wha-

The computer finally beeped, interrupting his train of thought. "Your calculated weight has been estimated at approximately-" and then the numbers flashed on the screen, and his eyes suddenly grew incredibly wide- "Three thousand eight hundred and sixty five point two pounds."

He paused quietly, before staring down at his enormous paunch and groping at his gut some more. "Oh..." He said quietly. "So... I guess I need to figure out what to do about this, I guess." He sighed.