

Chapter 66

“And so, CatamountCon II is coming to an end,” Sublime Green announced on the stage. The crowd expressed dismay. “But what an incredible second year thanks to all of you!” The crowd cheered. “And to our Guest of Honor, Pistachio!” The roar of the crowd was deafening as Rick took a bow on stage. And then waved the crowd to silence.

“I am honored and humbled by the experience and how all of you have treated me. But I can’t take any credit for this con. Those that really deserve it are the hard-working volunteers and staff of CatamountCon!” The crowd roared louder and cheered for over a minute.

Sublime stepped back up to the microphone. Stash ducked off stage and behind a curtain. “We’re still adding up donations for our charity, Northern Kingdom Humane Society. You have been extremely generous. We’ve surpassed \$10,000!” The crowd cheered loudly again. “We’ll post the final amount on our website as soon as we’re done tallying.” He paused as crowd applauded again. “And the final three announcements you’ve been waiting for. First, our final attendance came in at,” Sublime paused a moment. “Well, there was a five, a seven, and a one in the final figure.” He paused a moment. “Oh, and a zero, too. We had 1,057 attend and roughly 250 in the fursuit parade!” Again, there was loud cheering. “We nearly doubled last year’s attendance figures! That’s incredible and we have all of you to thank for that!” Sublime waited for the crowd to quiet down.

“Unfortunately, due to that rapid growth, we are faced with a tough decision for next year. This venue’s maximum capacity is 1,300. Provided, many attendees only come for a day or two instead of the entire weekend. But, if we grow again as much next year as we did last year to this year, we would be forced to cap daily attendance at 1,300 and possibly turn away furs who don’t know until the last minute whether or not they can attend.” There was some hissing and calls of dismay in the audience. “Or find a bigger venue. We have chosen the latter as an attendance cap doesn’t sound right to any of us. We have no qualms with Snow Mountain Resort. They’ve treated us well. However, thanks to you, we’ve outgrown it rapidly. Alas, as you may know there aren’t a lot of large con facilities in Vermont or New Hampshire. Especially, searching for one last minute as our team needed to make the decision this weekend to sign for another year with Snow Mountain Resort or go elsewhere. Fortunately, a facility came through at the last moment. And this new facility for next year will be quite different.”

Rick rejoined him on stage. He was now wearing one of his maroon WMSU polo shirts. *Pistachio, Goodwill Ambassador* was embroidered in gold above the left breast pocket. Sublime Green stepped aside and turned the microphone back over to Rick.

“Sublime Green granted me the honor of announcing the new venue. But I’m a little biased as I will admit that I helped secure the location.” Rick paused a moment. “I’m now stepping out of my role as this year’s Guest of Honor, and into my role as my employer’s goodwill ambassador. Why? Well, you’ll be coming to visit me at White Mountain State University this same weekend next year! The theme will be obvious, COLLEGE DAZE!” The crowd erupted in cheering yet again as images of WMSU’s campus appeared on screens to either side of the podium.

“This will be a different kind of con as Sublime Green said. As WMSU is a university, not a hotel, you’ll be looking at sharing a dorm room with one other fur in most cases” (images of various dorm rooms appear) “with shared baths. So, don’t forget a bathrobe. You’re not going to be able to crowd 6 or 8 in a room as I suspect some of you have done here. The room fees will be reasonable and reflect that. Dorm rooms come equipped with two beds, two desks, and a small fridge. There is a common kitchen on each floor with an ice machine. The campus has fiber-backed Wi-Fi. There will be an optional meal plan.” Images within the university’s cafeteria appear on the screens “The cafeteria’s summer schedule is 8am to 8pm and is all you care to eat including vegan, kosher, and halal options. Of course, you don’t need to purchase the meal plan if you don’t want to. Downtown Groton is within walking distance with a dozen different restaurants and take-out stands, some open as late as midnight.” Images of Groton appear on the screens. “Many of them offer a discount to those who show a WMSU conference badge. In addition, as an attendee at a conference at WMSU, you’ll have full access to our athletic center whose hours will be extended for the con. It includes an Olympic-size swimming pool, basketball court, racquetball courts, an ice rink, gym, and an indoor rock-climbing wall.” Images of the facility appear on the screens. “If you like to golf, there will be discounted greens fees during the con at the 18-hole Groton Community Golf Center.

“In addition, we’re a short drive to the White Mountains proper and all the outdoor recreation opportunities that the mountains offer from site seeing to hiking to mountain biking to tubing down the Pemigawasset River. If you want to extend your time with us by coming early or staying later, you can. Attendees can arrive as early as the Monday before the con and leave as late as the Wednesday after at the same rate to be posted on the con website soon. If you prefer to stay off site prior to or after, with your paid con membership, we can provide you a special discount code to the areas hotels, motels, and inns.” Images of all these appear on the screen and then change to a map of the campus with various buildings marked: dorms, main events room, auditorium, panel rooms, artist alley, dealers den, game room, etc. “As I said at the beginning, you will be in dorms, so be prepared to walk outdoors between your room and the various con facilities, which will be in a few different buildings on campus. It will be different than a normal hotel con, but hopefully, you’ll find it to be a good kind of different. And if you like us and CatamountCon choses to stay and grow with us, we have enough on campus housing for 4,000. I hope to see you at CatamoutnCon III at WMSU next June!” The crowd cheered again as Rick stepped away from the mike.

“We’ll announce the Guests of Honor soon.” Sublime Green jumped back in. “With that, it is with great sadness that I must declare that this year’s CatamountCon is officially ended. There will be a Dead Critter Dance this evening starting at 8pm. Pistachio will be there for a short time. As many of you may have noticed he’s not a late-night squirrel. Thank you again for making this a very successful con. Goodbye, all, and may you have a safe journey home!”