

One's misfortune can be another's gain. So it was with the three charr that tried to shift quietly down the lightless hallway. They were captives, prisoners of the Inquest who ran this facility where an errant experiment had caused an overload, knocking out the power for long enough that even the backup power to the gate holding Severa had buckled under her powerful shoulder barges.

From there she'd affected to make an escape, before finding two similarly charged cells with other charr behind them. She'd "Mmmfhed" through the tight, jaw stopping muzzle to get their attentions, rousing one from slumber and giving the other a second wind in bashing at the gate until it was drained enough. The final door broke under the assault of the trio with still not even a flicker returning to the lights.

Freedom from their cells was all they could get for the moment. Despite their paws being on display from the matching sandals, Severa's claws had been trimmed down and the other two charr seemed to lack them entirely. From ankle to neck, the three all wore a bright orange, slightly baggy jumpsuit, with a harness of straps, linked at the ankles and crushingly tight over their arms, holding the hands tucked to the opposing side with the forearms crossed at their waists.

A thick collar capped off the outfit, stitched into the fabric with a synthetic lining that was inflated to press around their necks, defying any attempt to slip anything in. A sturdy mechanical lock kept that on and by extension the entire straitjacketed jumpsuit which only had an opening at the neck and upper back. Still, the three charr tried, sharing a moment under a dim light they found to try and hook toes to tug, or horns to disrupt any of the straps.

Chaz, the first of those that Severa had broken loose, interrupted them with a start, a sound came from further down, accompanying another dim light, this one moving. The activity showed them that not all of the facility's automated security had been disabled by the surge. With a shared look they managed to creep back the way Severa had come, finding another path.

Chaz and Severa seemed the most lost, yet the third, Varius, was able to recall at least some of the paths they'd been led down for 'testing' even though their captors employed blindfolds to transport the subjects they'd classed as high threats.

They crept together as quietly as they could. Being truly silent wasn't an option, their uniforms were restrictive enough that no matter how softly they tried to tread the sandals would thud or creak, all while the canvas they wore shuffled and whispered against itself.

"Mmmhg!" Varius grunted, as they stopped abruptly, their tail had already been frizzing up as they realised how close they were getting to some of the test labs that had been burned into their memory. Yet their hairs were standing fully on end as they saw something glistening.

Unfortunately the abrupt stop sent Chaz stumbling into their back, forcing Varius to take several steps forward, the floor going from metal and stone clanks to a softer wetter slap. In

apology Chaz had tried to bounce back, instead colliding with Severa with all three of them ending up stumbling forward into the wet patch.

The trio let out a muffled groan of recognition. A thick, sap like substance had spilled on the floor and all three of them had stumbled until their soles were embedded in the stuff. “Mmuh-mmhmh!” Chaz tried to mumble in apology to Severa, yet she was already straining, her mind focused on moving as quick as she could to break loose. Varius meanwhile was acting in the opposite way, their feet planted intentionally.

“Mmmhh! Mmhhf.” They tried to warn her. She however was mumbling back as if urging them to join in.

Chaz looked confused, not understanding the meaning of their actions. Both of them had experienced similar glues in their tests with Severa’s getting stronger if she dared wait, while Varius had been conditioned in a different way, to move as little as possible.

The ground creaked and groaned under all three of them as even the low-motioned Varius still had to twist their paws to keep balance. Chaz felt too restless to stay still, trying to stretch the goo until it broke, only to have her foot wrenched backwards until she nearly fell from the sudden grasp.

She turned to see Severa’s progress, she was focused on taking small deliberate steps that left a tangled trail of strands, a pathetic distance made for the effort but still some actual distance.

Severa felt Chaz’s eyes on her, looking up for a moment before she noticed the other charr was no longer looking at her but past her, with widened eyes.

“Mmmh?” She twisted her neck to look before she saw the problem; a security drone had rounded the corner and was approaching them. Its scanning light was dipped as it checked a short distance in front of it, navigating in the darkness.

*Creak, groan* the glue on the ground shifted as the three of them suddenly felt urgency. Severa’s sandals had gotten covered in the thick gunk as her steps caught up on her, yet she noticed Varius’ actions, they were stepping carefully, using the glue to keep the sandal on the floor as they wiggled their foot free from the straps.

It seemed the only viable choice, Severa’s path might have won eventually but the drone would catch up before then and none of them wanted to discover what happened when it did.

With grunts and shakes of her head she directed Chaz to observe and follow Varius’ example, and then the trio of self-hugging squirming felines were working out of the footwear they bore.

Having been so cautious, Varius was the first to escape from their sandals, squinting into the darkness and believing they spotted the edge of the careless spill. They hunched down as low

as they dared before taking a leap, tense and worried that they wouldn't have made it. Though a scholar rather than a soldier, Varius' strength proved sufficient, letting them leap to the ground on the other side. They turned, shaking the shaggy tuft of hair from their eyes to see how the other two were doing, Chaz had gotten out of one sandal, while Severa's wading had made it physically difficult for her to part with her own.

Slowly they watched, grunting the little encouragement they could manage. Chaz had escaped the sandals shortly after but seemed nervous about making it that far in a jump. As if to give her further confidence, Severa grunted to pull her attention back and then, as she had finally made it out, she launched herself forward, sailing over the glue to land beside Varius, who moved to help steady her. The drone was catching up as Chaz hesitated, both the other charr egging her on.

It was now or never. Chaz tried to mimic the others in leaping free from the goop coated ground, eyes squeezed shut as the air whooshed by.

Severa's eyes widened, she saw the arc Chaz was taking, it wasn't going to be enough.

Before Varius even realised what she was about, let alone with time to stop her, she hopped back into the glue in a crouched pose, wincing and growling as her now bared paws slapped in the sticky mass, Chaz dropped, angled to land beside her and so Severa rose, her back and shoulder connecting with the airborne charr, propelling her the extra distance needed to land safely.

Chaz fell onto her front, helped to a stand by Varius, clear of the glue, with Severa doing her best to once again wrench her tired legs out of the mire and stomp back to safety. She knew as well as any that she wasn't making it in time, though if even one of them made it to freedom, they all had a chance to make her sacrifice worthwhile. A thought she tried to communicate with a grunt and a tossing of her head, bidding them to go.

Behind her the drone let out a pulse, its eye had fallen on her discarded sandal and it scanned the area. "Gmmhhh!" She yelled, prompting the two to start moving despite the guilt they felt at leaving her.

Slowly the drone moved nearer, she faced it down, wishing her arms were free so she could at least try to rip into it. It let out a chime as it detected her motion, armoured plates sliding out of the way to reveal nozzles.

She shrank back reflexively, knowing from other 'tests' what was likely to happen. A hiss sounded as pressure built up to launch a solid stream of liquid from one while another mixed a chemical into it as it flew. The resulting reaction made it swell and expand while also shifting to a more solid and thicker state, splattering over the charr.

Varius and Chaz could hear the attack, the noise spurred them on to run so their colleague's inevitable fall wasn't wasted.

Thick globs of the spray rained down on Severa's neck and shoulders weighing her down, pulling her toward the ground in a bent posture. The drone began circling her, shooting in a slowly lowering spiral, coating every angle. Even if the glue pool were to suddenly vanish the automaton would catch her now. Her prison clothing felt all the weightier as the flow dropped to her thighs, plastering thick enough to link them and then drop her to her knees.

The drone reacted to the fall by hovering over the charr, swapping from a spray to a simple dumping, pouring more of the thickening goo over her until the definition of her body began to vanish, rounding out and softening.

Severa moaned as she struggled to rise up, the muzzle made of something or reacting in some way that at least stopped the goop from sticking to it. The rest of her though, from eye to tail tip was a vague blob. The slopping liquid stopped, replaced with just the chemical spray as it ran along the edges, inflating them up.

The wet sounds of liquid dripping and pooling ceased, replaced with a tight creaking noise around the charr, rivalling her sense-deprived grunts as the drone marked its task as done and went back to its patrol, abandoning her. It already knew that the charr captive would have no chance to squirm even a toe free before the security golems came to collect the escapee.

Up ahead Varius and Chaz moved in the unfamiliar halls, they tried to deduce the way out yet even the small signage on the walls was vague, using terms only the Inquest would readily understand.

Chaz took a few steps forward, she moved to peek around a corner, turning to let Varius know it was clear only to be caught off guard as light flashed all around her. Chimes, hums and whirrs sounded as the facility's power abruptly returned and with it a solid door slid down between the two charr, before either of them could run to it it was closed. An alert sounding throughout.

Varius' eyes were wide, they tried to bonk their snout on the small glassy panel embedded in the barrier between them to warn Chaz, yet before she got the clue to turn the automated security turret fired.

A solid lump of sticky glue struck her across the back, the force lifted her off the ground winding her and crashing her chest-first into the door. She couldn't even pull up or away from it as the glue stuck immediately on both sides. Varius only got to see the muzzled cheek stuffed against the window, shifting lightly despite the power that Chaz put into trying to flail free.

One foot kicked desperately in the air, the knee caught such that it couldn't connect with the ground, leaving Chaz with insufficient momentum to pull loose. A second splat struck her lower down, catching the standing leg, enveloping it between goo and solidly built metal. Two

more shots followed after, further thickening the spread, coating her head to block out the light from her side of the door, able only to see through the one eye nearest the window.

As abruptly as it had fired it had secured and finished its task. Chaz was helpless and the only release for the door that Varius could see was a keypad, something they couldn't touch even if they could guess the code. With a defeated and forlorn look they bobbed to Chaz, yet - as they hoped she understood- if they stayed for the last few moments it could all be for naught.

As much as she hated to be left, she did know, watching until Varius was out of sight. Through the mass over her head, she heard a whirring getting closer as well as a rhythmic thud of footfalls. A muffled asuran voice, one of the Inquest, laughed at the sight he saw, moving to prod the only revealed part of Chaz; her helpless, raised leg, with the toe beans on full display.

"Oh wow, I've gotta show the others the camera feed of this. Maybe we should store you all like that!" He said with another laugh. "Alright machine, pack this one up." He directed the golem, walking back and supervising it, leaving Chaz with a worried thought, he didn't seem at all bothered that they'd tried to escape and that one was at large.

Varius ran on for a longer time. The lowered security could only mean that they'd made it out of the heart of the prison and testing area. The lack of Inquest could also mean that they'd evacuated as part of emergency procedures when the power failed.

With guesswork and intuition the scholarly charr made what felt like definite progress, hearing a few drones and even the echoing of boots but managing to hide and avoid being seen, even by the few turrets and cameras on show.

More sounds echoed ahead, with several Inquest moving as one but with a noteworthy glow on their backs, daylight! They turned the opposite corner, moving away from the quickly hidden charr. With a gulp, Varius moved the way they had come from sprinting up a ramp to squeeze out of the doorway to the air while it was in the process of closing.

Wind whooshed past, the bright radiance of the warm sun blinded and soothed the charr as they had made it out to the open sky.

As their eyes grew accustomed to the light, their mood fell immediately, they'd not emerged to freedom but to an enclosed courtyard, and more concerning was the full squadron of Inquest asura arranged in a curved formation around the charr, each with projectile weaponry pointed squarely at them.

"Nice try, prisoner but your escape attempt ends here. We knew we'd flush you out eventually." A voice crackled over speakers in the walls. "Surrender and we won't open fire. I'm sure you know that these aren't just the glue-based weapons we've been testing."

Varius gulped, eyes flicking to them, they recognised some as non-lethal but still painful stunning weapons, yet others looked more wicked and potentially deadly. They doubted that even with Severa and Chaz, they'd not have a chance of getting past this squad, alone it was hopeless.

As a sign of submission the charr slowly got to his knees. "Heh, good start. But we need you walking. Move it!" The voice barked, the inquest falling back to clear an obvious path forward. Whatever they had planned the charr didn't want any part of it but they couldn't refuse.

Bare feet felt the sun-warmed stone as they walked as directed to an edge of the courtyard. Two asura fell in behind Varius, one keeping a weapon uncomfortably close. They thought it was a needlessly barbaric show of force until they drew closer to the planned destination. That same, thick sappy goop was ahead, yet rather than some kind of spill it was a wide pool. The charr hesitated only for there to be a magi-technical whirr behind them as the gun was fired. Not a projectile weapon but a kinetic surge that shoved the hapless charr, sending them through the air to splat ungainly right into the middle of the pool.

A chorus of laughter echoed around them as they tried in vain to pull an arm or leg out of the goo, each attempt stretching thick strands that snapped back to settle the struggling limbs further inside than before. The pool gurgled and bubbled around them, cloying to their shins and chest, their straitjacketed body dense enough that the top of them was sinking faster than the rest. Even as they tried to peel back it was of little use. "Looks like it's thicker than expected." One of the asura murmured to a colleague, clipboard in hand. "See if we can't adjust that, we might need a faster rate of catch in the field."

"I wish it had landed closer to the edge so we could just shove it in better..."

The loud announcing voice crackled out over the speakers once more. "Alright, experiment over, once subject three is fully incapacitated do any scans you have left and return it to its chamber."

"Mmmh?!" Varius mumbled, seeing the security staff relaxing and mostly drifting away with a few more sadistic members staying to watch. It started to dawn on them, just the kind of twisted thing the Inquest would try; their escape had been an experiment. The power malfunction was likely faked too. They let out a groan which turned to a concerning gurgle as their nose fell below the line of the goo. "Mmmh! MMMMMHH!" They tried to speak out and get attention.

The asura didn't move. Watching with a range of expressions from malicious to outright impassive. Varius tried to hold their breath as long as possible, before they couldn't resist only to find that, somehow, they were fine. Despite covering the nose the gooey liquid was breathable? The charr whimpered, no wonder they didn't care how they landed nor bothered to right them.

No, for Varius, the newly developed goo was to be their fate, transparent light showing their progress as their upper body started to drop below the surface, followed ever so slowly by

the hips and legs. They could see the depths of the pool which ultimately made it even worse, knowing that they would be totally submerged before they stopped sinking.

Long before the scientists had finished their notes, Varius' head was covered to the point all they heard was the shifting viscous liquid around them. The base of the pool remained out of reach though, with equilibrium balancing out or perhaps the substance thickening in some way they didn't know. Two feet were all that remained in the unfiltered touch of the sun they'd desperately craved, with the asuran team all just walking away, with Varius able to see as they abandoned them for the clean up crew to tackle later.

The thick fluid prevented them from even kicking properly, only allowing impotent wiggles as the afternoon sun dipped to turn the shadows long. Only a scant few asura remained watching as the golem emerged to fish the final subject out of the unwitting test they had been put through long after the exertion, coupled with whatever was laced in their entrapping surroundings, took them into sleep.

When Varius' eyes next opened, it was surrounded by the too familiar walls. Yet rather than being returned to the exact cell as before they felt themselves compressed from almost every angle. From the muffled grunts to their left and the twitching they could just see out of the corner of their eye, they knew that they weren't alone. Chaz and Severa shared this newest prison, each pushed into a squared off hole in the wall, just about big enough for a charr, which itself was packed with a thick, paste-white glob of congealed glue.

They couldn't even stretch to look properly as the glob was tight over their muzzle, creaking and forcing them to look ahead if they relaxed for even a moment. The lightly stirring air current brushed over their exposed toe-beans and tail with only the top of their head on display, whether for humiliation or practical identification it was impossible to guess.

It seemed that the trio's desperate escape had never been in their control and such an attempt was now far beyond their reach. With valuable data collected to ensure that such 'high risk' subjects were even more under the thumbs of their captors.