

Tip of the Iceberg

By Bartan Tirix

Perfection. Everything seemed to be perfectly in place, from the soft waves of the shore, to the faint snowfall coming from the sky. The air was the perfect temperature, the crowd was non-existent, yet dragons were seen at a distance going about their daily lives. After everything that's happened lately, one would have to ask how they've grown to accept such a thing. This includes the bear himself.

But it wasn't the status of the town or the planet that concerned him, causing him to leave a bit early that morning without more than a single note. An idea that a certain black dragon used before when he would randomly disappear for a day or two. He knew that would make others worry, possibly even disappointed, but he still just couldn't be there.

So instead, he spent the day outside. Knowing they all would've attended the gathering and likely not go after him until later. Honestly it would be any minute now that a flier of sorts would land behind him-yep. Just like that. But the question was, who? "Everything okay?" Female. As strange as it was to hear, she sounded like bananas. As in: yellow. Not actually crazy or anything. Really, she was rather stable compared to- "Bartan?"

A sudden muzzle shake. Time to get out of my head anyway. "Y-yeah. Everything's... Alright, Adine. Nothing terrible."

"So the note said." An awkward grunt from him. "Yes, we were all told about it, and read it ourselves to be sure you were the one who wrote it."

"You can tell that?"

"Well, you have a very distinct way of writing."

"I believe the word you're looking for is *Bad*. I have very **Bad** Handwriting." She giggled at him as the wyvern got close. Accepting his arm around her shoulders and holding onto her.

"You're cold."

"Just on the outside, I'm fine otherwise. Natural coat and all."

"I suppose. I don't get how you can like this weather, I'm freezing my ears off."

"Frisled ears seem to be rather sensitive." A little nudge and lick towards hers made them flick and nearly growl at him. "I wish Bryce had them."

"By the sounds of it, they would've been bitten off some time ago."

"He's told you that much, has he?" A giggle from her. "I'd hardly call him a closed person."

"True, but even Maverick is opening up a little towards it. It's almost weird to see them hug in the other room."

"Admit it, you want to see them bang." A laugh that time. "It's quite entertaining, really."

"If only it were that simple."

"I mean, you could always ask." Bartan shrugged, making the yellow one nearly flabbergasted. "That's easier said than done, I suppose. But I'm more than positive you could convince Maverick to perform for you."

"Not... Bryce?" She tried to catch her breath.

"Bryce has already submitted to the idea before he's even heard about it." A snout toss. "Screw that. He's already in bed, presenting himself, and fully erect." A large smirk from him as the female was nearly incapacitated at the thought. Losing her balance and nearly pushing the bear down on the pier as she recovered. "You're one weakness."

"Something you enjoy taking advantage of." They shared a small kiss, but her red eyes saddened afterward. "Bear, why are you out here?" That nearly cracked his mask, instantly recalling why and forcing him to take a deep breath.

"I... I detest parties, Adine. Celebrations, events, reunions, you name it. I can't be part of it."

"What do you mean?"

"I suppose it's an issue that I still battle with to this day. A form of fear or anxiety isn't quite the right term to describe it. The idea of a gathering of sorts is discomfoting, so I've always identified it as a form of pain." A deep breath as those brown eyes looked towards his home for the past few months. "And of course they're once again occupying my nest."

"Nest?" She half teased, getting a small smile from him.

"A figure of speech. I can only imagine the thought of a male getting somewhat egged amuses you to no end." Another series of giggles from her. "But that's a conversation for a different day. I know how these things play out... So, let's get home."

"So willingly? I was hoping for a little bit of resistance."

"I've learned that I just can't quite fight these things. As if some pair of large hands are just commanding me to eventually take those steps towards the party, dragging me into it. And a lot sooner than one would think, considering how long of a walk it normally is from there to the police station, for example." He grumbled, helping the wyvern up before getting up himself. Adjusting her red scarf a bit to better protect her chest. "You should really get a poncho or something."

"It's rarely this cold here, so I barely have anything to protect against it. A bit strange, really."

"Hardly, that's his doing, I'm sure." A pair of perked frilled ears as they walked. "Have you seen him yet?"

"You'll have to be a little more specific. Many people ended up coming to the event. So many that some... Adjustments had to be made. At least, I think. It's been a while since I seen the inside of Bryce's place."

"Nope, you're on the money." A noise in question. "Remember that party I told you about after your first massage?"

"The one that was interrupted because you teased the chief too much-?"

"And ended up getting impaled in the rear towards the end of such a session, yes." Several laughs. "This is the party that was hosted by the Counterweight. The one his sons kidnapped me in a burlap sack and forced me to tend."

"Your family is so dysfunctional."

"Tell me about it." A deep breath. "But I'd be lying if I said I didn't love them, regardless of how little I tend to show it and complain about my stupid problems during 80% of these things."

"These things?" She asked, slyly.

"We've flipped the meta switch already, Adine. You know what I'm talking about."

"I guess I'm still getting used to it."

"It's more of just a habit of mine to think without a fourth wall." He grumbled. "Anyway, with the many... Colorful cast of characters-

"Including the one that was changing colors." A giggle.

"Yes, that's Dia. He'll do that with moods, unwillingly at that. But the one I'm talking about specifically is the six legged furball."

"So, the one that's supposed to be... You?"

"In the future, yes. In the far, far, far future apparently. He tends to make things... I suppose you could call them 'Perfect' for me." A gesture to the weather.

"Why?" A puzzled and half irritated look from the bear made her laugh. "N-not that your...!"

"I love you too, Adine." He snorted. "Probably because he knows how hard and uncomfortable this makes me. Doing his best to make it a little easier, likely by getting others to handle the responsibilities of hosting." A deep breath. "He's done this nearly every year. I'm just unsure about the second year, because I didn't go."

"Why not?"

"I'm sure those ears just aren't for show." Bartan grumbled, but she took it positively. "Well, didn't help I was kidnapped a few days before that by Dia's father." A strange look from her. "Arson and Beo knew about it beforehand."

"This is going to be a recurring theme, isn't it?"

"Just about. All because they know I'll disappear if I know about the party. Yet, if they try to just drop it on me, I just might ruin it by snapping at them." A paw tended to the space between his eyes. "I rarely act aggressive towards anything, yet for some reason..." He grumbled, gesturing the house in the distance. Making the yellow one almost frown. "It never made sense to me how people could enjoy such a thing without feeling pain. Towards the end of it I came up with two answers: they never felt it."

"Which is true for the most part. I've never looked at it as... Painful?" A half shrug from the white one. "What was the other answer?"

"They were a bunch of masochists." A few giggles from her.

"I swear, everything is sex in that head of yours."

"Not *entirely*, but I actually mean that in the non-fetish way."

"You think they enjoy the 'Pain' of social activity?"

"How else would you describe it, Adine?" He grumbled, only making her chuckle. "It's been said that Hell Is Other People."

"Who said that?"

"No clue." Another giggle. "But my point is, I don't really like interacting with other people. Especially in person. It literally drains me, everywhere but here." A deep breath as the bear overlooked the town. "But this is fantasy. It isn't real. As much as I kinda wish it was, this place, a town without a name-

"This place has a name, dummy." She tossed her snout.

"Then what is it?"

"Now-here."

"...Nowhere. As in, No-where."

"Not No-where. Now-here." A white paw covered his own eyes as he grumbled a bit, making her laugh at his expense. "How did you live here for months and not know the name of this town?"

"I'm just special, that's all."

"Speaking of special." She chuckled, getting the white one to make a noise in question and spot a rather colorful raptor that was clearly out of place. Dark blue with a light grey underside, all covered in many orange tattoos that were almost done too perfectly. Such a sighting made the bear grumble as it came towards them, embracing for the inevitable invasion of personal space, yet still taking a step back from it regardless.

"The writer! Ohhhh, how exciting is it to finally meet you!?"

"Hi Naught." The bear half grumbled, getting studied for a moment, then pulled in for a large hug.

"You sound absolutely thrilled to be here!" The yellow one giggled at the enthusiasm.

"Glad to see that you're starting to understand sarcasm."

"I'm developing a sense in understanding such negative humor, yes! It's been quite fun so far."

"Fantastic. Can you let go of me."

"Not until your heart warms, about... Now." Yet, the raptor didn't let go. "You should dress more warmly when your older self comes to visit."

"I can't read minds, Naught. Including my own apparently." That time, the dinosaur let go and greeted the wyvern with a hug as well.

"I suppose that's understandable. And you, Adine, are very cold! You should dress more warmly when the climate changes as well." She giggled at that.

"It doesn't normally get this cold around here."

"It is a rather interesting event, isn't it? Normally most people would appreciate having their natural climate to be changed for them for a couple of days, like the bear does!" Another giggle from the female. "How was that, young Bartan?"

"Close enough to sarcasm. And it's not that I don't appreciate this, it's..." A breath from the white one as they broke the hug and started walking beside him. "I think it's the idea of Celebration as a whole. I've been doing these stories for over four years, I understand why the giant furball does these things. I just don't see it as Celebration worthy."

"What would be then?" The yellow one asked.

"That, I... Can't answer. I don't know what would be." The two looked at him puzzled. "There's this gap in my brain, like a pit when it comes to the idea of celebration. Everything around it is missing, it always has been. I've tried to just act like it didn't exist, mimic what others were supposed to do, but it never worked."

"What do you mean?"

"How are you supposed to feel when you celebrate something?"

"I would actually like to know the answer to this as well, Adine!" The two males studied the dragon for a few moments, and she chuckled.

"Well... It mostly comes from the fact that you're celebrating with other people. Being part of an accomplishment of some sort, something you've all worked together to achieve."

"That would explain on some of the origins, yes." The theropod pondered.

"Let alone why I'm missing it. I never really felt like part of a community growing up, and often lacked that entire aspect." A breath from the white one. "Even when surrounded by people, I often felt alone. Unable to truly fit in or become a part of what them. What they stood for, what they achieved. Thus, what they celebrated." Another breath was interrupted by a hug from the dinosaur, then one from the wyvern. "You're not helping, guys."

"Actually, we are." The raptor said happily.

"You belong to us, bear. Don't forget that."

"Actually, that's an issue, Adine." A noise in question. "You don't belong to me. You're not one my characters, you're part of a Fanfiction series-"

"Angels With Scaly Wings, yes. I know." She tossed her snout. "But you still picked up where the series left off. In some ways, everything here is still part of you and your creation. Even Now-here-"

"No-where." She giggled at the furred one's grumble.

"Now-here is a place that you've created."

"Please don't give me credit for the laziest town name in existence." The other two chuckled.

"I don't know, Townsville was pretty bad."

"Placeberg!" Naught joined in, making the white one groan.

"GameMap1.png!"

"You guys are killing me." Bartan whimpered, getting another squeeze from the two before breaking the hug. "But you can now see why I don't like these parties?"

"Not in the slightest." The larger one chirped happily, getting a glare from those brown eyes. "We are your creations, some more than others. We are the closest things you've had to a real family, even if it isn't us specifically."

"Don't you even call a few of them your mates?"

"Yes, but they don't understand the whole Celebration thing either. Let alone throw parties for

me during actual human holidays, because they know how uncomfortable it makes me."

"So, what do you do during them?" Adine asked, seeing the white one shrug.

"I don't do anything different, aside from avoid celebration."

"I suppose that's something." The raptor pondered again.

"What do you mean 'Avoid'?"

"Well, an example is that we couldn't often afford candy to hand out during Halloween. So when the cars start coming around, we bunker down and keep all the lights off. Signaling that no one's home. I suppose in a way that's doing something different, but not like the way normal people celebrate." A moment in thought. "I guess something we did do once in a while, regardless of the holiday, was play Silent Hill 2. But I haven't done that in years now."

"Why? What stopped you?" A shrug from the furred one towards the dragon.

"I just had other things to do. Games to play, things to watch, stories to work on. Holidays are just normal days to me. I gave up many of the benefits that came with them, aside from maybe having something different to eat once in a while."

"Like pie?"

"Exactly, Naught. Even then, I get sick of the seasonal foods quite quickly. After one or two small pieces, I'm good for another year or even two. Honestly, once a year is almost too much. I'd likely go three without having them before I start to miss it."

"Three years without pumpkin pie?" The bear nodded at Adine.

"Without peanutbutter balls?"

"Yes."

"Peppermint Paddies?"

"That would be correct."

"Turkey dinners? With canned cranberry?"

"See Above Answers." Bartan grumbled. "I don't miss things so often. It takes a lot for me to."

"Until it's something you're used to having." The wyvern teased.

"Mortals do tend to miss those that they can no longer have."

"I suppose *some* things I tend to miss. Like when Beo and Dia go out on their own for a bit." Another giggle from Adine. "Yes, yes. You know what they're doing together."

"And you miss them?" It took a moment of thought, but the bear nodded at Naught's question. "That is highly 'normal' for someone like you!"

"Thanks?" Bartan grumbled.

"You're welcome! But really, for you to miss someone close to you is indeed expected for someone in a relationship status as yours."

"Which would explain why the bear wants so much tail around here." The dragon snickered.

"That's for a different reason entirely." Those colorful frilled dinosaur ears and bright smile stared at the furball for several moments, getting him to sigh. "Walked right into that one-"

"Do tell!" A snout toss from that white muzzle made the other two chuckle. "I never expected the writer to be such a sourpuss!" Naught chirped.

"It's because I never got any said 'Tail' growing up. I wasn't interested in humans, I was barely interested in anthros."

"So, what started your interest in such creatures? As well as wanting... 'Tail'?" The raptor overlooked the near flabbergasted wyvern to make sure he used the correct word. Seeing her nod, then taking a moment to study his own colorful tail, which only pushed her laughs to a louder level. "I'm afraid I do not quite understand the tail fetish that you're speaking of."

"It's not about the tail itself, Naught. It's about what's under it." The larger one's head tilted in puzzlement, then once again looked at his own.

"The ground? A soil fetish, how interesting-"

"Not the ground-!" A paw over those brown eyes as Bartan grumbled. "Your tailhole. Package. The works-"

"You mean the anus-?"

"Don't call it that." Another grumble.

"That is the term for it though."

"I know, but it's such a bland term that it makes it sound unappealing. Just like many other words that people use-"

"And by people, you mean-"

"Humans. Yes, Adine."

"Shall we make a list?" The theropod chirped out loud, nearly getting attention of the dragons long the streets.

"Please don't-"

"Penis, dick, vagina, pussy-" The white one cringed harder after every word Naught came up with. "Anus, ass, gay, homo, does fag count-?"

"Stop!" The white one hissed. "Just... Stop. Please."

"This must be how some people react to the word moist at times." He observed closely.

"But yes. You made a point. My vocabulary is very different from the norm, but I'm not the only one who does this."

"You have met a couple who've used more appealing words, according to you." The yellow one added.

"Yeah, and even shared each other's vocabulary a bit too. Gave each other a few more ideas of what to use in the future. But I do tend to go towards my default."

"So, tell us then..." The two males studied the dragon for a moment. "Back to that previous subject; what was your ticket into, let's say, the furry fandom?" A groan from the white one. "You almost got away with it too."

"You want to hear this that badly, don't you?" A round ear flicked in irritation.

"I would like to know as well-"

"You're interested in everything in existence! That doesn't count!" Bartan hissed, but only got a smile from the dinosaur. Another grumble and a deep breath. "Alright, promise you won't laugh?"

"Nope."

"Of course not."

"Right, you can trust Ms. Giggles here to restrain herself." A bit of a shy look at both of them. "First one non-sexually: Draco from Dragonheart. That's who Exile was half based on. Should've been slightly obvious with the ability to lift up his chest-plates and reveal the area which should house his heart."

"Have you used this Exile in a story yet?"

"Yes. He's in Anthem of the Lonely-"

"Okay, sexually this time!" The female encouraged, getting a laugh from the white one's expression and another worried look.

"...Renamon from Digimon Season 3." A head tilt from both, then a slow nod. "I never watched the show at the time, but... I ended up stumbling upon some porn of her."

"And finally something clicked in your pants-?"

"Stop laughing!" That even got Naught to chuckle a bit. "I'll be one-hundred percent serious with you guys: Honest. Truth. It wasn't about her sexy bits-please stop laughing." The massive amount of giggles in the area was starting to attract attention, making the bear grumble a bit. "But it wasn't about that."

"What... Wh-"

"Remember to breathe, love. Remember to breathe." A snort from the white one. "It was actually about her tail and her fur. I looked at it and suddenly thought: I bet that feels very comfortable. Then looked at her chest and thought: I would like to snuggle up to-stop. Just..." The yellow one lost her balance and started holding her sides. Causing the other two to stop and wait for her recovery. "You asked."

"True. But what I find strange is that most people who end up liking such things and making a lot of characters end up..." A white paw stopped him.

"You're wondering who is likely based off of Renamon?" An excited nod. "Stratacaster."

"Stratacaster is a species you've made up, yes." A motion to go on. "One that looks like a fox, mouse and rabbit. Which put together would likely look like..." A few nods from the bear.

"As for a character who first started getting the spotlight like that... It's one that supposed to be in the next Memory's Fragment and that I've mentioned before: Deaneil, pronounced as Denial. Or, as my more cringy self started spelling it: DeaNeiL. Because back then, no one really did that... That I seen."

"And she's where the term Deny comes from in your stories! She's the first one seen with the ability to do so!" Naught chirped through the onslaught of giggles.

"Yeah. I'm not going to spoil too much here, but I've already explained her background in False Freedom. I'm not sure if I'll even do so again in Memory's but I'll likely throw a mention that it's in FF." A puzzled look from the dinosaur.

"Why would her story be...?" A blank stare at the theropod, and he suddenly lit up. "Stratacast is in there!"

"Yeeeeeep-"

"Who is named after the species that she-ooooh..."

"Yeeeeeep."

"Well, she doesn't sound like a very pleasant person."

"And you can see why she wasn't invited to the party. Can't promise you about next year's though."

"Everyone is invited to their yearly party, bear. Regardless if they were written in that year or not."

"I suppose you're an example of that rule, aren't you?"

"Exactly! And so is Karmu, who's around here somewhere. I believe talking to the blue one."

"Lorem?" An excited nod. "Probably half reminds him of Sassel."

"Only due to his size, I'm sure." A bright smile as the two overlooked the recovering female. "All done?"

"I think so."

"It wasn't that funny." The white one grumbled, seeing her try to keep her muzzle shut. "Moving on before-" A few giggles escaped, but she composed herself. "Just stop thinking about it." A long stare and another giggle escaped. "Naught, advance the plot before she breaks again."

"Okay!" He happily chirped, causing the three to suddenly pop out of existence and reappear in front of Bryce's large home. Now covered in several feet of snow, letting many of the guests have a large snowball fight in the front yard. "We made it! Oh, and you might want to duck." He said specifically to Adine, getting her to crouch for a moment before a white ball nearly got her. Barely missing the furred one in the process. "Oh, how exciting! A frozen water fight! We should participate!"

"Go at it, I'm sure I've got eight thousand guests to speak to-"

"Ten." The dinosaur corrected him, taking the wyvern off to the side and joining in the small spot. Getting the bear to sigh before charging through the bullet hell that was the pathway. More like a trench he was taking cover in until he got to the porch, seeing several white projectiles hit some sort of barrier around the house to protect it from the sport.

"At least he thinks of everything." Bartan grumbled, turning to walk inside the house but got a gentle pull to the end of the porch. Being dragged by an invisible force until he was between two dragons: a brass wyrm, and a dark brown drake. Instantly holding the furred one, nuzzling and purring, though one much louder than the other. "Easy you two-"

"Don't ruin this for us, bear." The earth dragon grumbled.

"We've missed you." It honestly put a smile over the white one's face as he tended to each of their jaws. Licking at the white furred neck several times before getting some resistance. "I think it's missing something."

"None of that yet, you two. And by the smell of it, you've already went at it a bit." A shrug from those red wings.

"That was my fault bear." Bryce admitted. "I finally got some enhancements myself, and..." A loud purr from him.

"He got a little too excited to try it out." Beo chuckled.

"You were the one licking at it until-"

"Details, drake!" The brass one snorted, though sharing a playful nuzzle with the other dragon.

"Still, I've got your Crossmas gift for you, bear." A thick purr as the white one double taked. "But you have to get it open-"

"Crossmas...?"

"He means Christmas." The larger one corrected, hearing the drake curse in his grumble.

"I guess it would make sense that you guys didn't have that holiday here." A round furred ear flicked. "Maybe this one I can finally enjoy without needing to pick it apart."

"What holiday do you have at this time, Bryce?"

"You mean Winter's Eve?" The two looked at him.

"Not Winters...Day?" That brown head tilted a bit at the bear.

"Not sure what we would do during the day of it, but no. It's an evening thing." A gesture to go on. "It's basically a big Barbecue and feast with some fireworks towards the end. We dress the town up a bit in the theme and-"

"Theme of what? White?" The brass one curled his neck.

"Actually, the town looks more like someone sneezed Valentine's Day all over it." That time both dragons curled their necks at Bartan.

"What the hell is that, Bear? -Wait, isn't that the name of your first Maverick story?"

"My Bloody Valentine, yes. But V-day is basically a commercial holiday where your mate gets mad at you for not loving them enough, or shows how alone you are in the world if you don't have one." The bear grumbled, getting the two larger ones to share a glance and shrug at each other. "They state it's a theme of love, but it's really not. It's about how much you're willing to bankrupt yourself for another person. Same could be said for Christmas, really."

"Really? Because that's our theme-"

"Bankruptcy?" The furred one and Beo asked together, getting a snout toss from the chief.

"No! Love!" Bryce hissed, getting the three to chuckle. "We buy small gifts for those who we like, usually for the hatchlings, but really it's about the love." The two looked at him for a moment, then each other. "And sex. It's often about sex as well."

"Good to know."

"Something to look forward to then, bear." The drake grinned deviously. "It's going to be a *very busy* time of year for you, I'm sure."

"I'm pretty sure he's telling you to prepare your tail." The brass one teased.

"Yes. Yes, I got that." Another series of purrs and nuzzles from the two. "Easy guys, I know you want it but I still have others I need to see today."

"You can see them later. Maybe in the upcoming orgy." A grumble from the bear that time, placing a paw over his eyes until a brass one pulled it down. "None of that, you! You don't need to write this one."

"This one?"

"Yeah, last year he recorded several sessions of the Sex-Shuffle." Beo purred, getting the brown one to as well. "Nearly played himself out."

"Well, between that, Holiday, and 1989, I was a little exhausted from writing." Bartan snorted. "It's a wonder I'm still going honestly, let alone after that month and a half break."

"You mean the one that nearly stopped you from writing altogether?"

"Yes, but not as in a demoralized type of way. It just took me nearly a month of writing one small short story to get back into the groove of things." A breath from the white one. "Seriously, that was a terrible decision. Two weeks tops for a break from now on, never again with such a long period of time."

"Really...?" The earth dragon overlooked the two. "You almost didn't write the greatest thing you've made this year because-"

"You better be talking about Self vs Self." The brass one grumbled.

"What? No! Somewhere Out There, obviously! It's got the biggest fanbase of all his stories-"

"One that's riding the success of a popular game, keep in mind." Beo snorted, getting the bear uncomfortable between the two dragons.

"Please, there's enough of it to stand on its own now. It's just giving the people what they want, what does Self vs Self have?"

"Guys..."

"It has me!" Beo growled a bit. "...And Siggy, I suppose. And the Bear-"

"Ours has a lot of the bear too!"

"Guys..."

"Fine, let's settle this by getting *his* opinion then." The two looked over Bartan for a quiet moment. "Tell us, bear. Was Fear Is The Weakness - Self vs Self the greatest thing you've written this year-?"

"Or was it the obvious Somewhere Out There? ...Specifically Boys Will Be Boys. Either version will work." A long stare at the white one, as he shifted back and forth between the two dragons with a bit of a sour look.

"Guys..."

"Give us an answer, Bartan." Beo grumbled, hearing the white one sigh.

"...Neither." The two curled their necks.

"Neither? Oh, you're counting Arms Of Sorrow as this year's-"

"Or a different act of SOT." The two dragons growled at each other's response.

"No. Neither." A double take from both of them. "Don't get me wrong, you guys have good points about each series-"

"It's those damn frilled ears, isn't it?" Bryce grumbled, seeing the brass one smile proudly while fluttering his own. "I need to get me a pair-"

"It's not..." They looked at him again for a few moments.

"Ultra Heavy Black? Because that's kinda part of Fear-..." A shake of that white muzzle interrupted him.

"...1989? Really?" A head shake.

"Counting Stars Act 2? Because I was in that as well." A groan from the bear as he covered his eyes with a paw.

"Oh, you mean that very short one with the winged snake-"

"Guys..."

"Well, out with it, bear." Beo snorted, seeing the white one glance at each, then out at the sport in the front yard.

"Arson, puppy, what was the best thing I've writt-"

"Anthem Of The Lonely - Day Of The Dead." She answered very quickly and he gestured a paw towards the wife. Getting both the dragons to look at her, each other, and the bear several times.

" ● ● ● What?"

"Act 4: Day Of The Dead." The white one repeated, getting the same puzzled reactions.

"...Bear, what even is that?" A groan from the white one at Bryce's question.

"Seriously, what is that?"

"It's Thea's story." Their heads tilted the other way and Bartan tossed his snout. "Thea'daisis." A couple of blank stares. "The blue one."

"...Zi-Zi-?"

"The blue male!" A sudden slow nod of realization from the brass one.

"Ohhh, the one that got paired up with Zhai during last year's shuffle."

"Yes. It was the end of his story."

"And this was better than...?" Bryce started, looking a bit disappointed.

"In my opinion, yes. But 99% of people will never read it because it doesn't have sex in it. As in, the entire series is a clean one." A breath from the furred one. "Don't get me wrong, I love Fear Is The Weakness. Death March was damn mean, but very entertaining. Down With The Fallen probably has the best Romance I've ever had in a series, considering Zhai's tale was based off **That** romance. Arms Of Sorrow was a mix of both, really showing the softer side of a very damaged dragon..." The drake sadly looked towards the brass one. "Not him. I won't say who, but I'm not talking about Beo."

"Then...?" The larger wyrm nudged the bear.

"Self vs Self was... Alright. A lot of it was due to how little you were in it, Beo. It was barely about you, and more towards Hatchet and October. I even question sometimes if Dehoken had more screentime than you did."

"He did have a lot..." The brass one mumbled, as the bear turned towards Bryce.

"And SOT...? Beo's right. The only reason why it's really popular is because it's riding off of the success of Angels With Scaly Wings. If that game never existed, and I somehow made up everything, ask yourself: would it be this 'popular'?" A sad look from those golden eyes. "Keep in mind that I'm trying not to become too attached to the series, because I am doing this without Saunders permission. Even using screenshots from the game. If he asks me to take the series down and cease working on it..." A

defeated sigh from the chief.

"That'd be the end of it..." A furred paw on both their shoulders.

"Even if it's considered Fanart or Fan-Fiction... It doesn't really feel like it's mine. In some ways, like Adine said to me earlier, the series is somewhat my creation, but is also kind of... Not mine either. Stuck in this strange limbo. But people enjoy it, so I continue it. I encourage those who like my works to look at my more original titles." A slow nod from Bryce. "You're not mine, you're even being played by this guy in the background of my writings." A motion towards the brass dragon. "As a result to that... Anyone can do whatever they want with you. They could have Maverick somehow swallow you whole for some reason." A neck curl from the brown one.

"Vore is strange." Beo snorted.

"Yet I've been getting a lot of people watching me who are really into Vore. Possibly more than anyone who's never done *anything* to do with vore." A couple of blank stares at the bear, and he sighed. "Yeahhh, that's not true. My point is-" Some scampers were suddenly heard as several wyrmlings and a wolfling stormed out of the doorway and double taked at the three males.

"Target Aquired!" The small brass one chirped as they all charged towards the group.

"A crapbaskets-" Bartan started as he was suddenly tackled and quickly trapped in a burlap sack. Being pulled off by the group of children.

"Careful you." Beo just smiled at them, waving goodbye to the bear as he was dragged inside by the children.

The several little ones continued to pull the occupied sac through the large house until they stopped in the kitchen. Parking in front of a six legged white wolf with a polar bear's head. "Mission accomplished!" They all chirped, getting the several adults in the area to just chuckle.

"That was very quick." The white furred one smiled. "But you better watch out, I hear the ghosts of winter are out to prey on little wyrmlings tonight." They all gasped, playing along with the large bear's story. Then he suddenly double taked behind them. "There's one now!" They all screeched loudly as a rather slim silver dragon covered in icing sugar playfully roared at them. Getting the small group to start scampering out of the home, only to encounter a slightly smaller white wyrm with glasses and a red tie to make the same playful roar and give chase with the silver one.

The scene but a bright smile on the larger bear's face as the smaller one clawed his way out of the sac. "Must you encourage them?"

"To be fair, I thought you were still on the other side of town."

"Sure you did." The younger one grumbled.

"Regardless. Welcome to the party, Bartan One! I'm glad you could make it!"

"Yeah, yeah. Who's next on the list?" The bear brushed himself off, seeing the hexaped's sight find a shy blue dragon nearly sitting by himself in a corner of the home. A breath from the younger one as he grabbed a tray of treats. "I'm taking these." He grumbled, heading towards the lonely one.

"Thank you."

"In return, find Maverick. He's got something he wants to ask you, and I want to make sure he gets to ask!" A solid nod from the Counterweight, smiling brightly seeing the younger one just grow to accept this.

The blue wyrm was staring off into space, those spines raising up in alarm when the bear heavily sat in a chair beside him. Getting those maroon eyes to double take and observe the bear eating an earth dragon shaped cookie. "They're brown like him, but they don't taste like him." The white one mumbled.

"...What?"

"Bryce. He kinda tastes like polished wood with the side of cinnamon." A blank stare from the larger one. "Expense." Those frilled ears perked. "Last time we talked, I couldn't think of what you were. What counterpart of my real self was nearly personified as you."

"And it's expense...?"

"As in, how often people seem to take from you. It sounds stupid selfish to even speak about it, and this isn't really a complaint. More of an observation of the ratio of them taking, but not giving back in return."

"What does that...?"

"This might go over your head a bit, but a good example of this is how often links and videos are sent to me over a chat program. If there's something directed to me, I will open it 90% of the time unless it's suspicious. Yet, whenever I send somebody something, there's only about a 35% chance they will actually bother opening it at all. And it irks me, because I'm not sending them something to waste their time. I'm sending it because I'm sure it will be entertaining or it will help them in some way."

"Hence the give and take...?" A nod from the furred one. "It makes you feel unheard."

"Or sometimes even ignored. And I get it, people are busy. They have a limited time to do the many many things in their lives, and looking at what I send them can feel like a waste of it. I *understand* that. I often feel the same way, hence the 90%. The difference is I'll often at least see what it is rather than just assume."

"What does that have to do with me, exactly?"

"I'm not going to go into too many details, because only about one person in the maybe five that will read this has actually read Anthem. So, I'm leaving out spoilers, but you are always wanted, Thea. Sometimes needed. But how often have you gotten what *you* want out of the series?" The dragon was quiet, giving the bear a bit of a sad look as he was offered a cookie. "This is what I mean by Expense. Yours is exaggerated for the sake of storytelling and symbolism, but it's still the main core of what we have in common."

"But... People are made to be useful to others, right?" Half a shrug but a nod from the bear.

"Does that justify the ratio though?" A bit of a sour look from the wyrm. "I've already stated what I thought about humans to you. It's no surprise that as a blanket statement; I find that they're often very selfish and greedy. Just like Krow said to you, they will constantly keep taking from you for as long as you're willing to give. Yet, almost lash at you, if not feel uncomfortable if you're the one who needs to take something. That's their nature."

"Not everyone is like that."

"I know, I know. Hence 'Blanket Statement'. They're never 100% true. But the amount of times that I've given advice, suggestions, or outlook on the future of certain choices..." Bartan took a bite into another cookie, though not stopping his rant. "Only for it to be tossed aside, barely looked at or considered, and watch them do the same damn mistakes time and time again...! It makes me want to kick a puppy." The bear grumbled, seeing the small wolfling from before suddenly stop before them, looking like he was in trouble. "Not you, Rev. It's an expression." Still, the white pup looked at him sadly until Bartan gave up one of his treats. Scampering off excitedly afterward.

"I swear, you're almost heartless like Krow."

"Getting pretty damn close to it sometimes." Another bite into a cookie as he passed one over to the dragon. "And you wonder where he gets it from." The white one snorted.

"I-I figured it was from you..." Thea was quiet for a moment. "...You must get tired of feeling used."

"I do. Yet sometimes I can't help but jump at the opportunity to be useful. To do things for others, especially those who've helped me out. Who've giving me forms of thanks... I enjoy helping those people. Not because that they 'might give me more treats/gifts/read my stories'. Because they're people who I call Friends. Fans... Almost Family, I suppose." A breath from the bear. "They're those rare people in the world that seem to give a damn about my existence. Thoughts and opinions. Let alone, deal with my misanthropy and soapboxing."

"...Soap...?"

"Basically just throwing or projecting my thoughts through another character that identifies with the same mindset. It's something I've always done, with Eman, Rixxix, even Zhaiothe." A slow nod in understanding from the blue one, as well as a hint of purple in his ears. "As much as I feel like it's just

me shouting at the world for it to finally change and get its taath together... It also reminds me that maybe I'm just being a child, screaming at the top of my voice."

"Just trying to be heard..." A faint nod from Bartan. "There's nothing wrong with wanting that."

"Especially when you feel like you could make a difference. But the question is, can you?" A sad look from those dark red eyes. "This is why I've given up on the world. Why I don't help it consistently support itself through means of invisible walls." A perked ear and eyebrow. "Borders. As in, for countries. In SOT, I joke about being Canadian due to my strange habits that the cast sees here. I was born there, and lived my entire life in Canada, only leaving it a pawful of times. Yet, I *don't* consider myself Canadian. I don't help the country, I don't vote, and don't follow politics in the slightest. This system they've got setup is a damn mess, and they refuse to change it over the course of decades."

The bear continued. "Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not the type of person to 'Only Look Out For #1'. If people I know are in trouble, damn right I'm going to do what I can to help them. It's wired in my damn brain to, thanks to Deago." Another perked ear, and Bartan quickly scanned through the room of people. Pointing out towards an orange tiger-sized feral panther with a red mane and some tattoos. "Deago."

"Oh, he looks kinda like Krow."

"Well, he should. That's Krow's father." A double take from Thea, looking back at the Tirix and then the bear several times. "Yeeep."

"He's the one that they had a... Falling out or something?"

"Kinda. They didn't like each other that much, but they've since then made up." A breath from the white one. "Honestly, me and Bryce are very much the same. So willing to give ourselves up to help others, be it in the line of Duty or not. I have the damn mindset of a soldier in that sense, and I almost detest it." A breath from the furred one as he handed the last treat to Thea. "Moving on, how did you enjoy your time with Zhai?" A whimper from the large one as he almost chuckled shyly.

"It's... It was very... Nice."

"...Nice." Bartan repeated, getting those frilled ears to fall. "You got to spend a night with that tight tail..." A gesture to a red dragon that was quite large in build. "And all you can say about it is that the experience was *Nice*?" Another whimper from him. "...Right, that was your first time, wasn't it?" A faint nod. "I often keep forgetting that you don't really act like a dragon."

"What do you mean by that?" The blue one snorted.

"As in, you're always so shy about these things, whereas every other dragon here is opened. I'm sure you've heard stories during those downtimes between sessions with Zhai-

"I-I've read... His tale before..."

"Which is why you were so excited to have him." Those maroon eyes half fell. "What's wrong?"

"...Did you have something to do with that?" A noise in question from the bear. "As in... Did you know that I wanted...? So you...?"

"Not really." A double take from the dragon. "There was only one I planned on during Holiday part 2, and that was the Fey's session."

"Who?"

"Kveldulf." Those ears perked and his head tilted. "Ever seen this two-headed white creature on all fours walk around?"

"Ohh..." The two glanced around the room, but it couldn't be seen.

"Anyway, everything else was a roll of the dice." Thea looked at the white one. "You could've very easily gotten Dia." A whimper from him. "Or Beo." A louder one. "Or even me." A whine in question. "Yep, even I was on the list."

"...We almost...?" A slow nod from the bear as those blue scales started morphing into purple in a blush.

"Don't turtle up-" A pair of blue wings covered the wyrm's head, making Bartan toss his snout. "Damn wings, sometimes." A whimper of something he couldn't make out. "...So, green and pumpkin spice, huh? Interesting choices-" A louder series of whimpers that was kind of made out to be I Didn't-something. Giving the dragon a few soft taps on those wings. "There, there. I'll likely get a taste of it tonight. They're having an orgy sometime, and I want you to be part of it. Understood Thea?" Sharp whimpers. "There's nothing to be ashamed of, they want you there. *I* want you there." When there was no more responses, that white paw just pet him a little bit before leaving to the next room.

"This is nice." The pink runner said, gazing outside at the small backyard. Wrapped in the makeshift coat of a grey wing while she was sipping at the hot drink. "Kinda reminds me of that one winter." A large nod from the larger wyrm.

"When the streams in the forests froze over?" Anna chuckled at his half grumble. "And you had the bright idea of trying to go skating across them?"

"It *was* a bright idea, you." A playful shove.

"For a runner maybe."

"You weren't being forced to try it." She snorted, getting a neck curl from him.

"...Yes!" That broke the female into chuckles. "Yes, I was! I remember you holding a certain action hostage if I didn't at least attempt it!" Maverick snorted loudly. "And I kept telling you that with

my weight-"

"Stop talking." A playful growl from the larger one as he licked at her frilled ears. "And that 'action' was for females anyway. To help them get out some extra milk. It just so happened that your tip could fit inside so..." She lowered her voice when a group of children scampered across behind them. Finding themselves just smiling at each other after they were gone.

"...I wish we could go back to that, sometimes."

"Yeah, well... Too many things happened, Mav." A slow nod from him. "And... I'm not sure if I can give you what you need."

"Doesn't mean we have to limit ourselves." A strange look from her. "We can have both. More than just one."

"...You've been hanging around the bear too long." The wyrm blushed a little bit as those green eyes looked passed him, smirking. "Speaking of which..." A noise in question, as those instincts made those grey scales click loudly. Lifting those wings up a bit as if to make himself look bigger at the sudden sighting of a six-legged white creature with a polar bear's head. Larger than nearly everyone at the party, aside from perhaps a brass dragon that was around somewhere.

"Enjoying your evening?" The Counterweight asked with a friendly smile, putting Maverick at ease a little.

"Your food is amazing." The runner stated. "Who does your cooking?"

"The wyrms, usually." Bartan smiled at them, giving them both a hug at the same time. "Beo and Dia was in charge for this year's kitchen duty. You should take the time to thank them if you can track them down."

"Will do." Anna replied, taking another drink as the bear nuzzled against the grey one a bit.

"The smaller furball told me you had a request, Maverick." A double take from those red eyes, as he shyly looked over towards the female for a moment. Getting a snout toss from her.

"Fiiiine, Kresskre. I wanted to find more sweets anyway." A few taps on that furred shoulder. "You better be right about none of this effecting our weight tonight."

"I am, Mistress." A sly smirk from her as she left the two males alone. Those brown eyes looking over the dragon again, and he couldn't help but study them back.

"...You really are him, aren't you?" A slow nod from the hexaped. "It's hard to believe..."

"That he was telling the truth?" A bit of a shy look. "It's farfetched, I know. You're not the first to stare, and won't be the last. How are you lately?"

"...I'm..." A breath. "Actually doing well. Thanks to... You?"

"Younger Bartan, yes." The larger pillow gave the dragon a full hug, nearly losing himself in the forest of white. "He's a little rough around the edges, but his intents are for the greater good."

"I've seen some... Bad parts of him, but only very rarely."

"Humans?"

"Humans." Maverick grumbled, getting a chuckle from the furball. "I wanted to ask you..."

"If you could change, like Bryce?" A whimper from the grey one. "That's not a problem, any specific flavor in mind?"

"A-actually, I meant..." The wyrm pawed out of the fluff in order to look into those brown eyes for a moment. Seeing those four round ears perk a bit. "I want my taste back. My sense of taste." They fell a bit as the surreal creature gave him a bit of a sad look. "You... Can't do it?"

"I can, but you must realize that your lack of taste is..." A breath from Bartan. "It's a requirement. For your future."

"What?"

"To repair it will only alter things later on that need to be done." Maverick sighed a bit quietly, taking the answer as a No more than understanding what the large one meant. "If you were in my own universe, I could change things farther ahead. Here, too many things will need to be changed, and I don't have permission to do much."

"Whereas this isn't..." The wyrm looked off to the side, getting a gentle white paw to cup his muzzle and bring it back. Meeting the sad smile of the bear's.

"Though, this is for your basic sense of taste as a whole. If you like, I can do something that won't change those future requirements." A noise in question. "I can allow you to taste Release, if that's what you wish." An embarrassed whimper from the dragon.

"You... Mean...?" A slow nod.

"But you'll have to take the good with the bad." Another whine.

"I've... Never really had..."

"The bad?" A shy nod. "It's not as terrible as some make it out to be."

"Like Bryce?" A chuckle from the two, as Maverick looked around towards the inside of the home. "...I'll take it. If it means I can taste..." A shy glance back at the white one, then his lower area as that blush invaded his grey muzzle.

"Yes, it does taste the same."

"Is there...?" The dragon almost whined, unable to take his eyes off of the bloated bag within

the forest of white. At least, that's what he thought it was.

"A difference?" A shrug from the larger one. "Other than overall size and amount released, no. Not really. Though, with enough work..."

"He can..." Another whimper from the grey one as he was once again hugged. Feeling a paw stroke his lower back, then haunches. Then a heavy sting made him hiss loudly and grunt. "That...!" Another stressed groan.

"I know, I know. It hurts-"

"Hurt!!" A chuckle from the bigger one as the pain soon faded. "Here I was expecting for you to just wave a paw magically then-" A sudden white hand in his maw, and another shock against the pink tongue made the dragon hiss loudly. Taking a few steps back and shaking his head violently. "-Whyyy!?"

"Because-"

"Don't answer that!" A chuckle from the white one as he stepped forward to hug the grey one again. "Please tell me that's all of it."

"It is." A sigh of relief. "Unless you want anything else-"

"No!" Maverick cleared his throat. "No, no thanks. This is... Enough." A smile from six-legged one as he let go, cupping that grey muzzle and looking into those red eyes softly.

"May I?" Bartan asked, getting a look in question. "Have one for old times sake?" A slow nod and that white muzzle came in for a gentle kiss, one that definitely reminded the dragon of a larger version of that bear. Eventually stopping at what felt likely only seconds, even though it was nearly a minute. "That brings back memories, thank you."

"Pleasant ones?" A slow nod, yet the grey one couldn't help but feel sorrow. Like he was finally realizing his own mortality. "I suppose not many live forever."

"Not even Counterweights, I'm afraid." Another half hug and a lick around the side of the wyrm's head. "I should really get you some ears as well."

"I've spoken to the bear about it. Odds are he would chew them off." A chuckle from the two. "What... Flavor?" He half asked, looking down at his lower end before back at the bear. Just giving the dragon a sly smile before leaving. Likely telling him that Maverick would have to find out for himself. And since he couldn't very well tend to himself...

The smaller bear started heading out, passing his larger counterpart in the hallway and giving the younger one a solid nod. "Thank you."

"Very welcome. Enjoy." That made the two chuckle, soon enough letting the present Bartan meet up with the grey wyrm. Giving him a hug in the middle of the hallway.

"I... He..."

"Gave you a surprise, I'm sure." A shy nod from Maverick. "We'll see what it is later. Likely along with Bryce's session."

"Which will lead to everyone else in this building and out of it." The grey one grumbled, getting the bear to chuckle. "I'll see you then. I need to pull Anna away from the sweets."

"Grab a few for yourself. Beo is an excellent cook, when he isn't making something weird." A stare from those red eyes.

"...Meatball popsicles?"

"Meatball popsicles." Another shared chuckle and a few taps as they passed each other, seeing that grey tail slightly lift as if to show off something and nearly sending the bear into laughs. Barely catching a glance of that grey muzzle smirking from a reflective surface before the furred one headed outside.

The cool air of the evening greeted him, swearing that he wasn't inside for that long, yet it was already dark out. The backyard seemed to extend greatly into acres of a frozen lake, completely smooth aside from the faint claw scratches. Well, some larger than others. A specific set reminded him of a red behemoth, likely the dim light moving in the distance with some cheers of something small coming that way. It actually made the white one smile a bit as he leaned against the railing, watching the snow slowly fall into the light coming from the porch.

A few moments later, Bartan glanced over to his right and stared at the small brassling and wolfling. Sitting quietly on the railing when they were clearly not there before, just staring back at the bear. Though wagging their tails rather happily. "Heyyy." The larger one started.

"Hi!" The two chirped in sync, not noticing the awkward silence that followed.

"...Please don't put me in another sack."

"We make no promises." Once again, in sync with one another and actually making the older one chuckle at the sudden response. "It's your fault anyway." The brass one snorted.

"You keep avoiding our parties."

"So we're sent to retrieve you!"

"Of course you are." Bartan grumbled, looking off at the scenery again. "I suppose you do have a point. As much as I detest to admit that these things are 'For Me', I always felt..."

"Felt what?" The smaller white wolf almost whimpered, getting a sigh from the bear.

"...You know stuff?"

"We know stuff!" The two chirped, once again putting a bit of a smile on that muzzle at such energy.

"I always felt like I didn't deserve it." The larger one half turned around, gesturing the home. "I feel like I don't deserve this. Not just the party, but the home. The people within them." Another breath. "What have I really done, Lexar and Rev? I make people suffer for a hobby-"

"Meta Switch, bear."

"They're not people, they're characters." The wolfling, Rev, snorted.

"They're my characters. They're people I see-okay, well... Some of them I see. Usually the ones I don't write about too often."

"Aside from SD!" Lexar chirped, getting his brother to do the same.

"Scaly Dad, yes."

"As well as the Mistress!" Another chuckle from the larger one.

"Anne does like to be called that once in a while. Hard to tell if it's a power thing like Anna, really."

"Which one's Anna?" Rev asked, the two tilting their heads the same direction. Perking one ear up and leaving the other almost sideways.

"Pink, white and stripped with... Blue? Navy maybe?" The two nodded at the bear's answer.

"The grumpy one!" The wyrmling chirped.

"Talking to the other grumpy one!" Another chuckle from Bartan.

"Yes, Maverick is still grumpy looking, but he's growing a bit softer with more attention. You two should give him a hug. No context, just scamper up to him and hug him-"

"After!"

"Right now, we have questions!" Half a snout toss from the larger one.

"You can't blame me for trying." A gesture to go on, and the two just stared at him for a moment. "What-?"

"What color is your toothbrush?" A laugh from the bear that time as the other two joined in.

"That sounds like something Dehoken would ask."

"It does." The wolf agreed.

"But it wasn't." Lexar reached behind him and pulled out the script. "Apparently it was GoldenSpectra."

"Of course." A sigh from the bear, one that expressed more awkwardness than depression.

"Something wrong?" The two asked.

"Not really *Wrong*. It's just, while everyone seems to have a simple answer for basically everything, I have a very complicated one." The little ones giggled. "I have four toothbrushes: blue, orange, one mostly white with a little bit of blue, and one mostly blue with a little bit of white." A blank stare from the two, and the bear tossed his snout. "Two bathrooms and two of them are electric."

"Electric...?"

"Toothbrushes?"

"They're as gimmicky as they sound. I've went back to the more traditional way, and it works just the same, really."

"Okay! Next question!" The dragon chirped.

"What's your favorite color?" Another groan from the bear.

"I don't have one." The two tilted their heads in the other direction as that bear muzzle tossed. "Complicated answer!" He hissed, getting the younger ones to chuckle at him. "Having one single flat color is boring, I like to have a combination of colors that work well and look good together. Specifically, blue and orange have been a common choice of mine lately. It's when colors complement each other that makes things look good, make things look interesting."

"So, our dad's releases?" The brass one asked, getting Bartan to cover his eyes with a paw and make them giggle.

"You can call them whenever you need something painted!"

"That's not what I-" A hiss from the bear, but a motion to get on with it.

"Favorite food?" An exhale from the older one, more out of thought than anything. Making the two smaller ones to giggle at him.

"I think I'm going to go with Honey Garlic Chicken Wings. But there's a thousand dishes I haven't tried."

"I can't imagine that dishes taste too well." The wolfling teased, getting a glare from those brown eyes, but only appearing innocent towards them.

"Favorite music band?"

"Blessthefall. I have used them as story titles far more than any other band, at least seven times

within my library. And I'm probably forgetting a couple as well." The two just smiled at him. "...What?"

"Not so complex of an answer, wouldn't you say Rev?" The brass one smirked, getting a large nod from the wolfling.

"Only because you've been wording them correctly. If you asked me what my favorite dish was, or favorite type of music, then it would be much longer answers." Bartan grumbled. "What else?"

"Favorite game!" The two chirped, getting a loud groan from the bear.

"I can't answer that." The two tilted their heads. "I can list several by type, but not any real favorite." The young ones looked at each other for a moment.

"We shall accept that answer."

"Oh goodie-"

"Start with Fighting game-"

"Bugger all." A near growl, but the bear submitted. "Probably a game 90% of people have never heard of before: Bloody Roar 3. Hack & Slash: Devil May Cry 3. Horror/Action: The Suffering. Though Resident Evil 4 is amazing, no one talks about The Suffering." A breath from him. "Racing: Need For Speed Hot Pursuit 2, the game just worked well with you. Explorer/Opened World: probably Shadow of Mordor. Tower-Defense: Orcs Must Die! Unchained. Horror: Silent Hill 2. RPG: This one's a little hard, but I think I'll go with Final Fantasy Tactics. MMO: Guild Wars. The first one, not the second."

"Brawler?" Rev asked.

"Aces Wild. Though it's a mixed relationship with the game, I've never seen another one perform so well and keep my attention so long." A breath from the white bear. "Even then, I'm likely forgetting several different styles-"

"Like strategy!" Lexar chirped.

"Rogue-like!"

"Sports!" A groan from Bartan.

"Cart Racer!"

"Party Game-!" A near whimper from the adult, getting the smaller two to giggle at him. "But alright, moving on."

"Favorite TV show!" A snout toss from the bear.

"I don't really watch TV. Sometimes I watch shows, but I really don't feel like they're a good use of my time. Not to mention, how I feel while watching it." A groan from him. "It's like my brain is melting and I feel stunned afterward. So I don't watch a lot of TV, specifically. Barely any youtube as well, and

before you or anyone else asks: I don't watch streamers or let's plays. They bore me." The two just smiled at him, getting those brown eyes to glare at the pair of youth.

"You didn't answer the question." Another snout toss.

"*Fiiiine*. When I do watch TV, it's usually Titus, Project GKR, and Freakazoid. They may be a little bit more on the slow paced now, but they bring back good memories. Happy?"

"Yep!" The wolf chirped.

"When is your birthday-?"

"Spectra, I am going to have your balls for this." The bear grumbled, covering his eyes with a paw. But taking a deep breath after. "...I really need to get myself past this. Stop being such a sourpuss when it comes to that day, but so many bad things happened to me during the month of March that I just have the hardest time to live it down. It's not every year, but it's a reminder of everything that happened: when Roxann died, when my hometown of Perth-Andover flooded, when I got an abscess tooth and had to live an entire month with that pain. When my father died, though you can argue that was a good thing, considering his condition." The younger ones looked at him sadly as Bartan continued.

"Something happened this year. As in, later this year. I remember sitting in a waiting room to visit my OT, overhearing someone talk to the receptionist, and mentioning that their birthdate was in September. Deago asked me: What if your birthdate was then instead? What if we just changed the month, how would you feel about it?" A heavy breath from the bear.

"What was your answer?" Rev whimpered.

"...I felt okay with it. Just thinking that if I had my 'Day' in the later months, be it October, November, December... It feels closer to who I would be, to who I see myself as. I was born in the late winter, almost early spring, but I'm hardly a summer person. I like the autumn, I love the winter-I love *this*." A gesture to the weather around them. "Not to see it expire. Not to look forward to when it all go away and replaced with heat. Bugs, tropical storms and power outages... And Heat-"

"You already said heat-"

"It bothers me that much!" Bartan grumbled at the dragon, only to hear them chuckle in response. "But if it was a different date, a different month... Away from all the damn hardships, the damn neglect. People forgetting about it over and over to the point where they just would, to the point where I just craved that it no longer existed." A deep breath from the white one. "March 16th, 1986." Another breath as he looked over the two. "That's the real date too. For anyone who's ever read Where The Frost Rose Withers, that number: 1986, would sound familiar. It was written on the bridge that I crossed at the very beginning of the story, and what me and Deago were talking about."

The two looked at each other a little sadly, and nodded. "Okay, last question." Rev started.

"Why a bear?"

"You mean as...?" A gesture to his own body, and the two nodded. Letting Bartan take a breath. "...I don't know. I wish I had a better answer than this, but it just fit the space perfectly. I never really even noticed Polar Bears growing up, never had some obsession with them in my life. Never thought of them as my 'Spirit Animal'. Never was attracted to another character that was a polar bear... I just liked the cold, fur, and I'm naturally just big. Not really aggressive, but can be if backed into a corner. And regardless of my size, I'm stronger than I look."

"Then why the tail?" The three looked over at the bear's more wolfish style tail.

"That's about the only thing I didn't like about them, and what almost turned me away from the species. But Arson claimed that I could alter it anyway I like, and at any time..." A breath as he looked at the tail again. "I love hers, but I didn't want to copy it. Foxes are a little overused anyway. Not really saying that wolves aren't, but... It just seemed to fit." A slow sigh from Bartan as he gazed over the scenery again. "Everything just seemed to fit into place. Though the design is a little plain, I never was the type to attempt to stand out anyway. Even as a Counterweight, your father looks *plain* compared to the others. Same with the-

"Mistress!" The two chirped, getting a double take from the bear and following their eyesights towards the doorway where a white fox was coming out. Scampering over to her and nearly demanding a hug from Arson's humanoid form. Getting a chuckle from her as she carried them up next to the polar bear.

"Have you two been hogging the guest?"

"Must you call me that?" He grumbled, but meeting her with the three-way hug and making it a fourth. Sharing a small kiss. "We're all guests here, even Bryce apparently."

"Ah, yes. Your new sets of tail for the next couple of years." A shy look from Bartan. "How are they enjoying the real you?" A snout toss from him that time, as the two little ones were dropped and scampered off when a grey dragon was spotted in the distance.

"They apparently love it, though I can't see how." He snorted, getting a playful shove from Anne. "I'm not going to wallow in self-pity or anything, but I haven't been holding back-"

"Yes, you have."

"I've been holding back the fetish stuff, yes. But not the misanthropy."

"Only due to a lack of such things here. What's going to happen if one is suddenly introduced-?"

"I'm going to burn them at the stake." A laugh at the bear's grumble. "I don't know, honestly. Not all of them are bad, but most of them have terrible habits... I feel like that's what the main antagonist of the entire story is."

"What? The humans?" The fox teased, getting a strange look from those brown eyes. "Or do you pronounce it Hoo-mans in your story-" A loud groan from him, getting his eyes covered by a paw. "I know, I know. It's all too easy or overused. Especially with characters-"

"That are not human, yeah yeah." Another groan. "That's just why I can't accept the true ending to AWSW. All I see are future problems that the series will have. As much as I'd like to see another game of it come out..." A heavy sigh from the bear.

"You know it will take place there. And instead of it being a wonderful land of dragons, it will be an apocalyptic burnout filled with human history."

"As much as I do kinda like the idea of the role switching to a dragon exploring a more human world..." Another heavy sigh, and Bartan got a few sympathetic pats.

"That is, if the story continues. It'd likely just be a safer bet to try an entirely new one, considering you'll have to find a way to please everyone."

"And to please me is-"

"Nearly impossible." Arson smirked, getting the bear to toss his snout toss. Getting a playful tap on his arm. "Greatest fears."

"What?"

"What are your greatest fears? Or quirky half phobias?" A grumble from him. "Yep, we're not done with this yet. Spit it out." Another sigh as he took a moment to think.

"Children are the big one, but it's not a fear of them per say." A nod from her and a gesture to continue. "It's the idea that we're living in a world where it's nearly impossible to raise them."

"How so?"

"Well, at least where I lived, people need to work nearly day and night if you haven't landed the correct job. Take nearly two decades of your life to 'prep yourself' for that job, and then spend the next twenty years paying for said 'Prepping'."

"And by Prep, you mean schooling." A solid nod from him.

"So, by the time you can afford having a child, you're about 35-40. Even then, you're stuck unable to really raise them. Letting them be brought up by technology or personal experiences. I mean, Beo says the ladder isn't so bad, but humans are not as smart as wyrmlings." A chuckle from her. "-As much as he's denied that claim, he's never seen how bad human children are."

"And you've never hatchling-sit before." Another snout toss.

"Fine, you got me there. Still, that's not even counting the fact you can be arrested for disciplining one out of line. Or be charged for not doing such at all because you're too busy working to

afford a roof over their head. It's all a damn mess... And being caught in that damn mess is what scares me." A faint nod from the female, as she hugged her husband. "It's not really the children themselves, I guess you could say it's the responsibility of having one that worries me."

"In that world, you mean." Another nod from him, holding onto the fox for a moment until he got a nudge from that white snout. "But there's another fear." A grumble from him. "I doubt it'll ever appear in SOT, or in any other meta that you do-"

"Because I wouldn't be caught dead living or visiting a party on a houseboat." Bartan nearly growled. Exhaling afterword in a near grumble. "Fine, fine. Ghost ships. Happy?"

"Explain that for those who don't know what they are." Another snout toss.

"Ships that are supposed to be sunken, but somehow rise and are kept moving without anyone on board them. Often enough found on shore with next to no evidence of what happened to its crew members, but it all makes my fur stand on end. Even just the idea of being out in the ocean itself. All there is: blue and an abyss black. Places and creatures completely unknown scurrying under you, unable to observe or defend yourself against them. Who the Fish would seriously go out there on their own free will?"

"The brave, that's who."

"I believe you mean Stupid."

"It's a matter of perspective, bear." He grumbled at the fox. "Ready for more?"

"Can't we just enjoy the night?" One of those round ears flicked, getting Anne to chuckle.

"You want to skip right to that, do you?"

"Only because it's better than being interrogated by children and females who are stronger than me." The bear playfully snorted, getting another chuckle as they shared a kiss. Hearing two others make a noise of affection, as Bartan half double taked at the red behemoth that was skating earlier. Carrying Lorem on his back.

"Isn't that adorable?" The small blue wyrm asked, teasing the two.

"If that's what you want to call it. Me and Naught tried doing that, and just ended up biting each other's tongues." Karmu grumbled, actually getting all the others to laugh a bit.

"You're doing it wrong, that's all. I know a few people inside who can teach you." The fox said, getting a bit of an awkward grumble from the large one. "You were planning to join, yes?"

"I'm pretty sure everyone's forced to participate into that orgy, providing they were old enough."

"That's what I understand, bear." The cyan one chuckled, blushing a bit. "Who would you

suggest?"

"For you? As the troublemakers." A double take as their heads tilted. "Yes, Rev and Lexar. They have adult forms and 'Know Stuff.' They'll show you a good time, and be damn happy about it."

"That's because they're always happy, bear." Arson chuckled.

"Tell me about it." Bartan grumbled, watching the two enter the building... Somehow, with the Render's size. Taking a breath and overlooking the scenery. "Y'know, it's weird. I actually wanted to talk to a few others. Rixxix, Siggy, maybe even Nalchulus."

"Yeah, but this story's getting too long as it is." A bit of a grumble from the bear. "Come, let's go in before we're late to the *real* party."

"You just want to see me get mounted by 18 dragons, admit it."

"Yep!" Another snout toss as they held each other one more time before heading in. "And you're going to love every moment of it."

"...I'm not writing this one... I'm not!"

"Alright, alright. I'll take your word for it, furball." She chuckled, pulling him inside where many were gathering towards a large room that seemed to be just a massive floor covered in pillows. Along with passing another room where many of the children were sleeping for the night. A couple of adults were watching over them for a bit longer while talking. Soon approaching the Six-legged host for the evening. "Wonderful party, FD." Arson complimented getting the larger one to smile brightly.

"Enjoyed yourself, did you? I hope not too much just yet." A chuckle from the fox as she entered with a few more, leaving the two behind for a moment. "What about you?" A sigh from the bear.

"Well, I didn't feel like I was being interrogated this time, if that's what you mean." A blank stare at each other. "**Much**. Aside from a couple of parts..."

"I know, I know. But you must realize that it's difficult to get you to open up otherwise." Another breath from the smaller bear. "I should know-"

"Yeah, yeah." A glance inside as a few were already starting. "...I'm not writing this one." A loud chuckle from the Counterweight.

"Fair enough. No one should be forced to work during the holidays anyway. But speaking of which..." Those eyebrows bounced a little bit at the smaller one, who was just nearly glaring at him.

"You didn't..." A devious smirk. "I already have enough, 'Fuzzy Dad' I don't need more-"

"Too late!" His two sets of forepaws clapped together in an almost white electrical wave that sent several into loud hisses of pain, save for the dozens upon dozens that were barely heard outside the home. "Happy holidays, Bartan one." The larger bear hugged him.

"Furball, what the hell did you just do?"

"You'll have to explore around town to find out." A bit of a whimper from him. "And by explore, I mean-"

"Mother of Bahamut, are you serious?"

"Let's just say..."

"It'll give you an excuse to meet up with some old customers."