

Playing with Fire

By Dragonien

"First practical trial of artificial elemental affinity manifestation."

The age-wizened old man's voice came out in a raspy croak filled with both the weariness of age and the confidence of experience. As he spoke a rapid scratching sound followed each of his words as an inky black raven-feather quill scratched on a piece of parchment atop the nearby desk entirely of its own accord. The faint gleam of cerulean energy surrounding the ink-quill would have been a clear sign to any visitor of the old man's wizardly status even if the black-dyed robes and conical hat symbolic of his office didn't. You just don't see normal, run-of-the-mill peasants or knights with self-writing parchment and quills. Nor did they typically have massive, dozen-story tall stone towers sitting atop the edges of cliffs far off in the mountains.

None of the sane ones did, anyway.

"First test subject was chosen due for their existence as a pure elemental entity of a single element. Their close affiliation with their base elemental affinity combined with their inherent receptivity to the arcane makes them the perfect subject. Current subject is a minor fire imp of little collective power, purposefully chosen for their inferior stature both physically and magically. In the event of a catastrophic error they are unlikely to be of any significant threa-"

"Who the hell are you calling inferior you shriveled up, year old hunk of road-jerky?! And my name is Crackle, not 'minor fire imp' you pompous spell-stuffer!"

The interruption caused the mage to glare down at the work table in the middle of the lab. Sitting atop the old oaken piece of furniture, trapped in the middle of a complex scrawl of arcane script etched into the wood within a bread-loaf sized cylinder of glass was an imp. She couldn't have been much larger than 6 inches tall, barely bigger than a pixie or a sprite. Though unlike those creatures, which usually mirrored humans and elves in proportion, her features were more exaggerated. Her face was more squat and broader, mouth lined with inhuman razor-sharp teeth. Her body was more curvaceous and thicker, especially around the hips as if more of a caricature of femininity rather than an unrealistic idealization of it. Her ears were far larger and longer than a human's or even an elf's, proportionally, and jutted out more like a bat's than anything else while a long, serpentine tail ending in the shape of a spade flicked back and forth behind her in agitation. On top of all of that her skin was a pale yellow, like that of dim firelight while her hair was a fiery red like that of the tip of a flickering candle-flame.

From her prison inside the glass container she glared up at the old man, arms crossed and hip jutted out to one side, her body-language clearly broadcasting her annoyance at his casual dismissal of her status. The mage gave her a brief glare like that you would give to a pet that just knocked over its food bowl, which only further enraged her. Dismissing her little outburst, the mage briefly turned and waved a hand at the parchment and quill to compel it to undo the last line written and erase her little outburst from his notes. Then, he continued on as if she had never even spoken. Before she could voice her outrage again a sharp snap of the man's fingers echoed unnaturally through the room and she could feel a faint thrum of invisible energy surround the glass prison she was in. When she yelled this time, no sound escaped the glass. Instead it echoed around within the container, trapped within its confines and causing her to snarl and bare her fangs at him in absolute petulant fury. It was bad enough he had summoned her, bound her, then trapped her in the magical equivalent of putting a cup upside down on top of a spider. The least he could do is let her voice her outrage and listen to it.

"If successful, subject will be given a second elemental affinity. In this case, the chosen affinity will be lightning due to its natural scarcity. Beginning the experiment now."

With that, the mage took his position in front of the table and raised his arms over it. If looks could kill the glare the little imp was shooting the mage would have blown him and half the mountain into a smoldering crater. Instead, all she could do was sit there and glare up at him as she watched and felt the magical energies begin to build around her. The runes etched into the table began to glow as he filled them with power. Within moments they were glowing bright enough that both the mage and Crackle had to squint their eyes against the light. Then, with a single resounding command-word in a language the imp didn't recognize that seemed to thunder through the room, the mage clapped his hands together. All of the energy that had formed in the runes rushed into the center abruptly and slammed into the imp like a bolt of lightning. Her whole body went rigid and she grit her teeth to keep from crying out, not daring to give the mage the satisfaction of showing weakness. Then, just as abruptly as it had hit her, both the sensation, the glow, and the magic (Save for the silence spell still in place) all winked out. Panting and struggling to catch her breath, Crackle realized she had fallen down onto all fours and quickly shoved herself back up to her feet. Though the mage couldn't hear it through his silence spell he could read both lips and body language well enough that she was cursing up a storm at him the likes of which would make a sailor blush.

"Subject seems to be visibly unharmed beyond minor, expected discomfort. Aggressive behavior should be noted to most likely be indicative of the species and gender of the subject rather than a result of the spell itself. Will now test their reaction to electrical energy in hopes of their new elemental affinity reacting."

Crackle was indignantly dumbstruck as she listened to the mage's words, somehow going full circle beyond angry that she couldn't even react. She was too preoccupied struggling to decide if she was more outraged about the comment on her race or her gender that she didn't even realize he was conjuring a simple shocking spell until the small crackle of blue-white light jumped from his fingertip and hit her square in the chest. The sudden charge of electricity made her whole body seize up, momentarily losing control of her muscles and causing her to fall back flat on her ass. When she recovered enough to return her gaze back up to the mage she was so utterly, absolutely livid at the treatment he was putting her through that the tips of her hair, tail and eyebrows had actually begun to spark and smolder as if threatening to burst into flames any moment. Sadly, that didn't seem to be the reaction that the mage had been looking for. He started to turn away, only to pause mid-turn and stare down at the little imp.

Crackle, for her part had reached her absolute limit. After pushing herself back up to her feet she had stomped her way right up to the edge of the glass and raised an arm to slam the bottom of her closed fist on the wall of glass in front of her, too angry to even care about possibly hurting herself with how hard she hit it. That was what made the mage pause and stare, though his gaze did nothing to alleviate her anger. She beat her little yellow fist on the glass a second time, then a third as she continued her muted string of curses. It wasn't until she felt something bump the top of her head that she paused her tirade enough to realize something was off and that the mage's eyes had widened in concern. First, her hand didn't hurt at all despite having been beating it against the glass so hard that she probably should have been bleeding by now. Second was that she actually saw a small crack on the glass where she had been hitting her fist on it. The third and most confusing of all, though, was when she realized what it was that she had bumped her head on: The ceiling of the glass enclosure.

Experimentally, she cocked her arm back again and punched the cracked part of the glass with a fist. To her shock as much as the mage's, not only did the glass crack further but her body seemed to push upwards until she had to hunch slightly to keep her head off of the glass ceiling. What neither of them knew was that the mage's experiment had actually worked perfectly. The only problem was that he had made an error in translating the ancient text he had gotten the spell from. What he had thought had been the command word for

lighting had actually been the ancient language's word for force. He hadn't given her an affinity for electrical energy in which to draw strength from, he had given her one for kinetic energy instead. While she may not have understood even a fraction of the technicalities of what was going on, what she did know was that that glass container wasn't going to hold her anymore. The mage found himself taking a nervous step backwards as the realization dawned on him at the same time as her lips split into a wicked shark-toothed grin. Crackle's arm cocked back and...

CRASH.

Small fragments of glass flew everywhere onto the table top and floor as the now fully foot-tall imp proudly stepped out of what had been her prison even as her body absorbed the remnants of energy from the punch that had broken the glass. Still grinning like a mad-woman, the little imp girl began casually strolling her way towards the edge of the table she stood upon. Though her demeanor was far more subdued and casual, the small flickers of smoke and sparks still twitching around the edges of her hair and fingertips told she was just as pissed as she had been moments ago. The only difference now was that she had an opportunity to direct some of that outrage into a more 'productive' endeavor. She opened her mouth to speak, ready to give the mage a piece of her mind only be cut off before even finishing her first word by a full on bolt of lightning slamming into her right at center-mass with enough force that she flew clean off the top of the table, across the room, and slammed against the far wall hard enough that it rattled the stones. Or at least, it should have.

Instead, the impact made no sound whatsoever. It was as if she had been cushioned by fluffy pillows to the point that she didn't even really feel anything beyond the actual momentum of abrupt movement. When she clattered to the floor, dazed more from the disorientation of being flung about rather than any damage, a sense of now familiar vertigo started to overtake her once more. Her body greedily sucked in the kinetic impact of both the force of the lightning bolt hitting her and her slamming against the wall and rapidly converted it into more size and energy. She actually got to feel her ample backside spreading out across the cobbled stone floor as her legs stretched out in front of her and her view raised to a yet-higher perspective. When all was said and done the only sign other than her relocation of any attack being launched at all was a barely discernible scorch mark on her stomach and her newly enlarged, two-foot height. As she pushed herself back up to her feet the mage, still holding his arm outstretched with his index and pinky finger extended and flickers of remnant electrical energy crackling between them, simply stared in shocked disbelief.

"Now" Crackle began, using the back of one hand to dust some of the soot off of her front. "As I was trying to say. It looks like your; hey what are yo-"

She had started to speak again, only to cut off when she saw the mage drop his arm and start running straight at her. The still-comparatively tiny imp didn't even have a chance to finish her confused question before, to her disbelief, the ancient sorcerer of apparent skill and magical talent ran up to her and kicked her. It wasn't a little shin kick or even a martial arts technique, as he intended neither harmlessness nor combat with the blow. Instead he simply hooked his leg and foot right up against her with the full force of both his run and his leg's abrupt forward momentum and punted the little imp...

Right out of the open window.

After several long seconds of silence the mage finally sighed and relaxed. Turning his attention back to the quill and parchment he began to speak again, trying to keep his voice from showing the strain of the abrupt physical exertion and adrenaline rush he had just gone through.

"It appears the first trial has ended in failure. It seems that the subject did not acquire an affinity for electrical magics. It seems they did, in fact, gain a new affinity, simply not one of the electrical nature. It seemed to involve impacts and force, as each time the subject hit something they converted the impact into power. I have disposed of the test subject through... uh. through..."

As the mage continued his notes something started to dawn on him and soon caused him to trail off as he glanced towards the window. The imp had been absorbing impacts and kinetic energy, having grown both when they had hit the glass container and been flung against the wall. It just now dawned on him that he had, in fact, kicked them. Kicked them right out of a window. A window at the top of a ten-story tower.

A ten-story tower built on the edge of a cliff overlooking a deep ravine.

Almost as if reacting to his realization, the entire tower abruptly shook with enough force the mage stumbled against the nearby wall. A chorus of clattering objects and breaking glass was heard as the earthquake sent items flying off of their shelves and onto the floor. That wasn't what concerned him, though. It wasn't even seeing cracks spider-webbing across all the walls beyond the damage a simple earthquake should have caused, as if something were causing the tower to crumble inwards. What did concern him was that the light coming in from the window had suddenly gone dark. Instead of a view of the ravine and the mountains off in the distance, the window now instead held a much different view. A single, gigantic, blood-red eye. Outside of the window, standing on the now hip-deep ravine with a single gigantic hand wrapped around the top of the only chest-high tower as if it were nothing more than a small log, was the demon. Only once she had seen him realize what situation he was in did the Titaness of an imp speak, her voice booming with enough force that trickles of stone-dust rained from the ceilings as the entire tower shook.

"As I was saying: It looks like your experiment was a success after all. In fact, I have to give my compliments to your work. I'm not even mad anymore."

Those words brought a tiny spark of hope into the smothering depths of fear that was threatening to drown the mage now. If she wasn't angry at his treatment of her anymore then she could just leave. Sure, he may have unleashed a nigh-unstoppable demonic monster onto the world, but that was other people's problem; not his. His hopes further soared when she continued to speak, and he found himself lowering onto his knees in both relief and thanks. Her last words, however, turned his blood cold.

"Thank you for your gift, little sorcerer. I won't forget what you've done here, today. This is a fitting final accomplishment for such a skilled mage."

Then, with no further warning, Crackle simply clenched her fingers. Her hand smashed through the top levels of the tower and sent a cloud of dust and debris flying outwards little different than if she had simply picked up a dirt clod and crushed it. With him gone there was no one who knew of what had been done to her and little chance of anyone being able to undo it. As the now titanic imp turned her attention towards the horizon, she spotted a small outline of grey with little wisps of smoke billowing up from it. A town. What a perfect place to introduce the land to their new demonic empress. But first, she had one important matter to deal with now that there were no witnesses around to see her embarrassing situation. With a grunt, she started to twist herself back and forth, cracking the walls of the ravine to either side of her with her struggles. This was going to take a bit more effort than she thought.

She couldn't take over the countryside with her ass trapped in a ravine, after all.