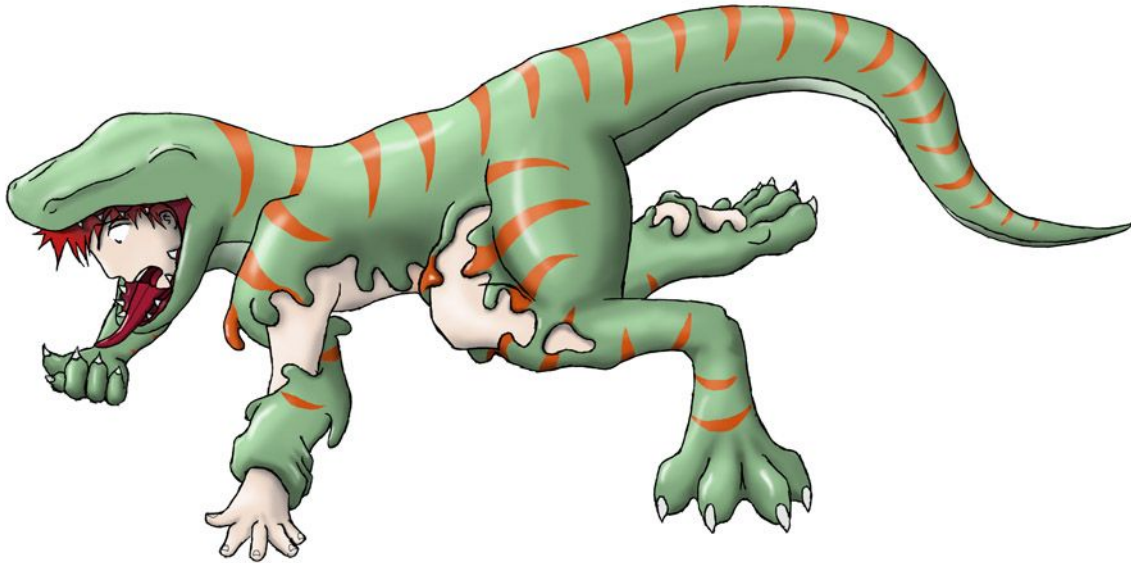


A lizard costume transformation story based in my “costume shop” setting
By Draythix



The months after Halloween were slow for a costume shop, but that didn't mean that Drethan would let himself sit around. Not now that his experiments were starting to actually come up with some results. He still wasn't sure if he should call them transformation costumes, second skins, or something completely different, but he had to keep on distributing as many as he could without being noticed.

Unfortunately, no test subjects with strong enough wishes to power his costumes had come in for over a week. Perhaps 'test subject' wasn't the right word; in a way he was only making these people's dreams come true after all. Of course his costumes weren't perfect yet and he usually didn't tell people what they would do even as he handed them out...

Waiting was infuriating, but at least he could use this time to rebuild his stock. Many of the normal costumes that he used to lure people in had sold out and many of his special ones were gone as well. It was also nice to not have hordes of children making a ruckus in his shop. Not only were they annoying, but having them here was useless to him; he would not fall as low as to allow a mere child be exposed to his experiments. For a few moments Drethan considered weaving together a spell that could attract more teenagers and adults to the shop while keeping the parents with children away.

Shaking his head clear of distractions, Drethan focused his energy and wove another spell upon the blank costume laid out in front of him. It took a rather complex combination of materials and spells to create the transformation costumes. The main problem was fusing living essence into the costumes; that was the necessary component for them to work and focus their energies properly. Once they were complete, they were capable of absorbing energy from a person with a strong wish as long as the wish was

somehow related to the costume. Then it would instinctively use that energy to merge with and transform that person, making his wishes real. Real, but probably not in the way the subject would have expected it to happen.

In a way, Drethan was annoyed to have to spend so much time on something as silly as costumes, but their effectiveness was undeniable. While they were difficult to control and hard to create they were more efficient than normal transformation spells since they could draw unlimited amounts of energy to fuel themselves. He didn't know who had originally designed the costumes or why he choose to make transformation their only apparent purpose, but he was sure that there must be other ways to use their abilities.

A 'ding' from the front of the shop interrupted Drethan's thoughts. Another customer. Sighing, he walked back into the main room to greet his guest. He just hoped that this one would be more interesting than the last few.

It turned out that a tall young man with red hair had entered the shop, and had already started browsing the normal costumes that Drethan put out front to attract visitors. "Just tell me if you find anything that you are interested in," the wizard said as he walked by his customer, causing him to practically jump up in surprise. Apparently, he hadn't noticed the wizard walk in. Drethan always found it funny how his tendencies to not draw unnecessary attention to himself always lead to him surprising people.

"Oh! Thank you," the young man said as he hesitantly regarded the shop owner before going back to looking at the costumes. Drethan took up position behind the shop's counter.

Sometimes he felt guilty that he was using these people, but at least most of them ended up happy in the end. The costumes didn't work unless the hosts wanted the new forms after all. Well, most of the time. Every once in a while Drethan managed to create a costume that seemed to work on people who weren't even consciously aware of their desires, or people who repressed and denied them. There were also those people with weak wills who ended up being controlled by their own desires, thus leading to the skins dominating them. Some mistakes were unavoidable, and most of the problems were just cases of 'you should be careful of what you wish for' anyway.

Drethan whispered a spell to allow himself to learn a few things about his customer and sense his feelings. Within a few moments he had learned that the young man's name was Andrew. He was 22 and was just a month away from graduating from college in December. He was usually the serious type, but tended lighten up and let his imagination run wild when he had a free moment. Apparently, that was why he was here in the first place. That was a promising sign, but it was too early to tell if the boy would be a suitable subject. After getting comfortable in his chair Drethan sat and waited for the signs to appear.

At least he had restocked most of his normal costumes; it was much easier to find potential subjects if they saw something representing what they wanted. He had probably missed out on several potential subjects since he ran low on normal costumes towards the end of Halloween. Drethan knew he could always delve more deeply into people's minds, but that was annoying and tiring. He couldn't do that to every person who wandered in.

Within a few minutes Drethan practically jumped as he sensed a very strong reaction. Looking up, he saw Andrew was holding one of his lizard costumes in his hands. No, it wasn't just any random costume; it was an 'ordinary' copy of a certain costume that he had been saving in the back. Perfect! He had been waiting for a while to find a person who might be compatible with that one, maybe this time it would finally be a match. "Ah, I see that you're interested in that lizard costume. I have a much more realistic version of it in the back, I'll go ahead and get it for you."

The young man looked up with a startled look, not sure how Drethan had realized that he was so interested in the costume.

Drethan slipped into the back and searched through his selection of transformation costumes. He had made quite a lot of them so that it would be less likely that he would have to make 'custom orders' for people. However, it was getting to the point that finding a specific one was getting difficult. He made a mental note to organize the things a bit better.

After a few moments of searching he found just what he was looking for in one of the back rows, and took it down for a quick inspection. The quarter inch thick, skin-like rubbery material of the single piece costume drooped to the ground as he held it. Like all of his costumes it was surprisingly heavy, and had the perfect balance of flexibility and rigidity that them to have the basic structure of their creatures while avoiding impairing the movement of the one wearing it. Well, that would be the case if they weren't magical at least. The true reason why it needed to be so stretchy and flexible was that the costume needed to be able to fit itself to anyone, no matter how big or small.

Specifically, this one was an animal style lizard costume, one specifically based on geckos, with brilliant green skin and orange markings along its back. Unlike most reptilian costumes which had a cold look to them the gecko style mask had a kind of friendly feeling to it. Of course, that didn't imply that the essence in the costume was friendly as well; sometimes they developed their own little personality quirks.

There were some interesting properties in this specific costume that Drethan had wanted to test for a while. It could absorb wish energy at an exceptional rate, but only at certain wavelengths. That meant that it could react to a person very quickly and gather far more energy than most of the costumes, but only if the person had a very specific interest in the costume. A mere 'oh, I like this kind of creature' wouldn't be enough for it, unlike a lot of the others. That was why he had left a similar costume in his main room: so that he would know when a possibly suitable host came around. Drethan hoped this wouldn't

be just another false positive, since this was the third time that he had brought the costume out.

There was one thing that worried him however; this one was a full animal costume. The last two customers that had looked at it hadn't even wanted to take it home because it seemed obvious that it wouldn't fit. Usually when it came to animal style costumes he would stuff them in a box so that people wouldn't get to really inspect them until they were home and felt like they would at least have to try it on. However, that wasn't possible with this one. In this case he had to make sure that it would be able to use the subject's energy.

A smile formed on Drethan's face as he thought of a very simple solution to the problem. The young man only had to *think* that it would fit him. Why hadn't he thought of that before?

First Drethan wove a spell of illusion over the costume so that anyone who looked at it would think it matched human proportions. After a moment of thought he also added on a spell of paralysis. The costumes had a built in desire to transform people, and sometimes after gaining some energy they would attempt to get on a person and transform them forcibly. Since this costume had such exceptional energy absorption abilities it was even more likely that something like that would happen. Drethan didn't need anyone making a scene and getting transformed in plain sight.

Just barely holding back a chuckle about the trick that he was playing on his customer, he folded the costume up and brought it into the main room.

"Here it is, as you can see it is much better than the other one," Drethan said to Andrew as he handed him the costume. His eyes went wide with amazement as soon as he saw the thing, and quickly held it out in front of him and inspected it. Drethan smiled as he sensed energy already flowing from Andrew and into the costume. It was about time he had found a match!

A moment later however, Drethan was surprised to realize that Andrew seemed disturbed by the costume somehow. After a few moments the young man shook his head and handed it back. "I'm sorry, but I doubt that there is any way that I can afford this; I think I'll just go for the other lizard costume."

Drethan tried hard to hold back his disappointment, he had seen this happen before. Every once in a while he ran into people who seemed to be able to tell that there was more to these costumes than meet the eyes. He wasn't quite sure if it was a sixth sense or if these people were just more sensitive to the slight outward signs of life that the costumes gave off. Maybe it felt too warm and alive or maybe he sensed a presence within it. Whatever the case there was something about the costume that was disturbing Andrew.

“Why, it isn’t that expensive. You’re missing a great opportunity I tell you! How often do you see costumes as extraordinary as these? I can tell that you’ve been interested in feeling what it is like to be this sort of creature...” He didn’t usually even hint at what his costumes were capable of because he worried it would scare people off and attract unwanted attention. Even with the spells of forgetfulness he had cast over the town to hide his work, the magic had its limits. “In fact, I think you’re the perfect owner for this one, I’m even willing to give you a huge discount.”

A confused and torn look crossed Andrew’s face as he considered this, but he shook his head, “I..I thank you for the offer, but as much as I would love a costume like this, I would rather wear something less conspicuous in public. It looks, um, a bit too realistic. It would be best if you just gave it to someone else.” He was obviously just trying to come up with excuses to not take it.

Drethan sighed as he took the costume back. That was just his luck; Andrew was almost certainly the perfect person for the costume. He had to credit him for not letting his wishes control himself like so many of his other customers at least. “Alright then, would you bring that other costume over here if you’re done?”

It was annoying to lose a chance for experimentation, but Drethan knew where the boy lived now. He could drop the costume on his doorstep if he really wanted to. Plus, there was always the forgetfulness spell. Within a day or so the boy would have forgotten all the strange things that he had sensed in the shop and come back wondering what he had been so worried about.

After the transaction, Drethan took the costume into the back room and started to hang it back up. As he did so, he saw the thing wiggle as if it was still trying to get to the boy. He considered this for a moment, and concluded that it was probably a good thing that Andrew hadn’t taken the thing after all.

Every once in a while he would unintentionally create a costume that didn’t just have the essence of its creature and the instinct to transform a host, but one that was actually sentient. He didn’t know how, but some of the costumes were gaining souls and he couldn’t find any way to stop the process.

Sentient costumes were unsafe, he was sure of that. The ‘normal’ ones would at least let someone take them off after a few hours and the wearer would usually stay in control of himself as long as he didn’t let his fantasies overwhelm him. However, when it came to the sentient ones it was the costume that decided when it would come off and they could actually take over people’s bodies and minds. Because of that, he tried avoiding letting anyone use them if he could help it.

Naturally he still let a few out so that he could study them, but he would rather not have anything to do with them. It would have been better if he could prevent them from becoming sentient in the first place because he certainly didn't want to have to worry that the things he derived from his research wouldn't obey him!

It troubled him that he hadn't noticed that this one had developed sentience. He had inspected it for flaws several times. How did it slip past him?

"Perhaps you only awakened just now, when a good match for you came along..." he said to the suit, knowing that there was no way for it to reply to him with its current level of energy. This was a problem that he hadn't thought of, that some of the suits might not show their dangers until they've absorbed energy from someone. Maybe some of them would even change over time, developing new traits and abilities because of the energy that they were fed by their hosts.

If that was true, perhaps he should take another look at some of his older subjects. He had been keeping tabs on a few of the more interesting ones; but there were a large number of people that he hadn't been watching. If he had more time he would have kept watch over them all constantly, but alas, he couldn't. Not while he was restocking at least.

Drethan sighed. He kept telling himself that there was great potential behind these studies, and that if he could figure out the secrets to these costumes' wish granting powers he would gain unfathomable power or perhaps even immortality. However, one would think that after creating so many he would have figured it all out by now, but apparently being able to make the costumes and actually understand them were two different things.

Glancing over at the costume, he saw that it was still trying to overpower the paralysis that was gripping it. It would probably be an hour or so before it became dormant again, but with that stun spell still active it probably wouldn't be able to cause any trouble.

It was troublesome and more than a little awkward, but he somehow he felt that he should try and calm it a bit since it was at least semi-sentient. "I suggest that you just calm down and go back to sleep. Maybe if you're lucky my spells will make him forget what was troubling him so much when he held you, and he'll come back here."

For a moment it seemed to try even harder to get off, before stopping and drooping as if in defeat. The wizard shook his head in disbelief; to think that he had to talk to the things! This was more proof that he had to find a way to stop these costumes from becoming sentient. Otherwise it would lead to more trouble. He had to make sure that none of the older costumes had become truly aware, so he quickly climbed up to the 2nd level of his shop so that he could use his scrying pool.

For a few minutes the shop was quiet, except for the faint murmurings of Drethan spellcasting in the upper level. Then there was a thunk on the hardwood floor as the lizard suit flung itself off of the hanger with every bit of its strength and will that it had. Using the energy that it had gathered from the human it had touched, it filled out its body so that it would be able to move around as if someone was inside of it. It knew that it didn't have much time; it had to get to the human before he got too far away or before its creator stopped it.

It weakly stumbled as it took its first few steps, it hadn't fully recovered from the spell that the wizard had placed on it and simply didn't have enough energy to be moving around either. However, through sheer will it crawled to the front door and peeked out. Luckily, it seemed that the human had stopped for a moment in another store, and was only now getting into his car.

There wasn't much time. It didn't understand why the person that it had been waiting for had left it behind, but it knew that it had to follow him. The lizard costume stuffed itself under the car and wrapped around whatever it could grab hold of it just moments before it drove off.

The ride was quite uncomfortable; its tail would get loose and drag on the road at the most inopportune times. The stress of it all further drained its energy. It couldn't afford to lose consciousness again, it wouldn't! Not now that it had tasted life again. This was the first person it had encountered that could keep it awake for more than a few seconds, and it didn't intend to let him get away. At least it didn't have to move right now, moving on its own was by far the most tiring thing it had ever done.

After what seemed like an eternity the car pulled onto a dirt driveway and slid to a halt, and the exhausted costume dropped itself onto the ground. The human got out of the car and walked around to the trunk. An incredibly strong urge to just leap out and try to merge with the human gripped the costume. It needed to fill the emptiness inside of it and this was the perfect chance, but what if it failed? If it leapt out and he fought it off out of fear, it wouldn't get a second chance. With the little bit of energy it had, it was quite likely that he would get away and then he would be too afraid to get near it. Maybe it could just present itself to him? No, something told it that that wouldn't work.

Instead, the suit reached out from under the car with a single foot and lightly touched the one of the human's shoes. Fresh energy flowed into it, probably because the human was pulling out the 'fake' costume out of the trunk and unconsciously wishing it would be real. It was not as much energy as it had hoped for however, the indirect contact weakened the flow of energy. Then all too soon the human walked off for the house.

The costume mentally sighed and let itself droop to the ground as it remained hidden under the car. It had just gained itself some precious time. Perhaps an hour or two if used its energy effectively. Still, it needed a good chance to initiate the merge. It was

possible to try as long as the human had clothes on, but it would be easier if nothing was in the way...

It pondered this as it stuffed itself under the front door. It needed a good chance...

Andrew groaned as he found his thoughts going back to that stupid lizard costume again. Why couldn't he get over it? Sure, it had been an amazing costume, probably the best that he had ever seen. It was just that he felt like there was something more to it as if that weird shopkeeper was serious that it would let him feel what it would be like to become a lizard. That just couldn't be true though, it was just a costume.

Then again, if it really had been just a costume, what had bothered him about it so much? Something about it just felt wrong.

Finding that he couldn't concentrate on his homework, Andrew got up and walked over to the costume that he had dropped on his bed. He hadn't even tried it on; it seemed so lifeless compared to the second one.

Continuing his homework seemed to be impossible. There had to be some way to calm down. Maybe a nice shower would relax him a bit.

What was that sound of running water? The living suit went over the bits of information it had absorbed from its short contact with the human. It was frustrating, it only needed a few minutes of contact to learn all the basic information that it needed to know about the human world, but it only had a fraction of that. After a few moments it realized that its future partner was probably 'taking a shower'. This was its perfect chance! It just needed to get into a good spot to surprise the human in.

As it crept up to the bathroom door, it realized that the feel of energy radiating from the human was weakening. What was happening?

Dread filled the costume's mind. The wizard had said something about the human forgetting! It knew that it wouldn't matter in the end; the human would still react the same way to it no matter what he remembered, but somehow those thoughts still scared it. It tried to tell itself that it just needed the human for his body and energy. Why should it care whether he remembered or not?

With a hiss it pushed those distracting thoughts of its mind. It didn't have much time! It carefully pushed itself under the bathroom door.

The shower had the effect that Andrew wanted; he had calmed down and relaxed. He must have just been imagining things. What could be so special about a costume after all? He found his mind wandering to other thoughts, such as how nice it would be when he finished college this December. He would be graduating half a year ahead of most people, and he would have plenty of time to find a job.

He finished cleaning off, shut off the shower, and absent mindedly reached out for his towel. However, instead of the soft cotton that he was expecting his hand grabbed onto some rubbery material instead. Andrew gasped and pulled his hand back, only to find that some sort of green lizard shaped suit came with it! The memories of that afternoon suddenly rushed back into his mind. What in the world was the costume doing HERE?

In a panic he tried to get it away from him, but Andrew only succeeded in making it stretch a little. His hand had somehow gotten caught in the thing. As he tried to pry it off, he realized that not only was his hand caught, but it was actually inside of one the costume's arms and the material seemed to be traveling up his skin.

A yelp escaped his mouth as the costume then jumped up and grabbed onto him! He had been right, it wasn't a normal costume: it was alive and moving!

Andrew ran out of the bathroom and searched around for a sharp object to cut it off with. However, he tripped and fell to the floor when something grabbed onto one of his legs. He felt the lizard climb onto his back, the thing's belly pressed up against him, and then it seemed to open up and start to close around the sides of his chest. He tried to get up, but found that the thing was on his legs as well and was making it hard to move.

Something slipped under his neck, and to his horror found that it was the thing's lower jaw. At the same time, its upper jaw went over the top of his head, and the two resealed together so that his head was inside the lizard's mouth. Andrew tried to pull it off, but something had wrapped around his left arm and was holding it, and his right arm was already inside of the thing and it seemed to be restraining him. Even his legs were getting pulled inside of the costume's reptilian legs, and it seemed to be closing around his body. It didn't make any sense though, the material was only a fourth of an inch thick; how could it be so strong? It felt as if it had invisible muscles

Somewhere in the back of his mind, he felt something reply to his unspoken question, *I'm just making your wishes real. Stop fighting it.*

"I have to be going insane," Andrew told himself. The thing had talked to him? On top of that, costumes didn't eat people! He struggled wildly, but the material only seemed to stretch instead of tearing like a costume should have.

Things became even worse as the costume painfully tightened around his arm, as if it was trying to crush it. Twisting his head to look, he saw just in time to see his arm start shrinking. Within the period of a few seconds it became thin and the costume around it gained an obviously reptilian shape. What the...he could have sworn that it was an anthro costume before! Soon there were popping noises were sounding all along his body. He gasped as he felt an odd sensation along his spine, and then actually felt it start growing. It pushed backwards into the empty tail of the costume. The costume wasn't just pulling him inside of it, it was transforming him!

Stop fighting, it is annoying. Besides, this wouldn't be happening if you didn't want to be a lizard like me.

Confusion and indecision filled his mind. Did he really want to be a lizard? He always had an odd fascination with reptiles. At odd times he would find himself fantasizing about what it would be like to walk around with scales and a tail. Did he really want THIS though? It didn't seem like he was being given a choice though. His hips and shoulders grinded, and he found that he was suddenly comfortable standing on all fours. Soon he felt his entire body reshaping to fit the thing that was taking over his body.

Part of his mind screamed out, he kept on telling himself that this couldn't be real, but he knew it was. Suddenly, the costume gulped and swallowed his head, pulling the last of him inside of it. He found himself unable to see or breath and went into a full panic again only to find that he couldn't control his body. The thing wouldn't let him move!

Stop struggling! The now agitated voice yelled in his head. *It will be easier for both of us!*

Andrew's head suddenly pushed forward into the costume, and pressure from the mask spread over his face as his flesh fit snugly into his new skin. His eyes and throat lined up with that of the costume, and he took in labored breaths. He felt sick and wanted to faint, but he somehow stayed awake. His skin felt odd as well, the costume tightened uncomfortably against his reshaped body and then seemed to melt into him. When it was over, he realized with a start that he couldn't feel the costume anymore! It was his skin now!

Now he felt something pushing its way into his mind, and Andrew resisted it, afraid of what it might do with him. He tried to yell out and tell it to leave him alone, but found that he couldn't. The presence gave another, stronger push and took up residence in the back of his head. Andrew found new thoughts and instincts flooding in, and he didn't know what to do with them.

Finally, it all stopped and he fell to the floor as the force that had been gripping his body released him. For a minute he laid there, not quite able to comprehend what had

just happened to him. His body had stopped hurting at least, and he found that he could control it again. He cautiously stood up and tested his body, and found that it was totally reptilian now, as if he a fully animal version of the costume that he had seen in the shop. He had new thoughts and instincts to go with his new body, but could tell that he was still himself.

The presence of the costume's mind was still there, but it wasn't doing anything now. It felt...content. What did the thing want with him and what was it anyway? How had it gotten here from that costume shop?

For several minutes he tested his new body. The strange feel of it all intrigued him. He had often wondered what being a reptile would feel like, and he already knew that he was loving it. Well, he could have done without having to crawl on all fours, but for now that wasn't the foremost thought on his mind.

Soon he realized that...he felt cold. Thankfully it unusually warm and bright for November, and without even thinking he scrambled to pull a window open with his unfamiliar limbs. He climbed up the side of the house and stretched out on the roof, absorbing the sunlight. The fear and worries that had been plaguing him faded away.

It was finally complete! Finally, it knew what it was like to have a true body, to be able truly feel and smell things. It could feel warm sunlight on its body!...or maybe it should say 'their' body. It was sharing it with its host 'Andrew' after all.

Despite how well everything was going however, it couldn't get the feeling out of his mind that something was wrong. The merge had been painful for the host, very painful. It knew that it wasn't supposed to be that way. Not only that, but Andrew's energy seemed to be changing, it was becoming less and less effective at animating him. What was happening?

What if the wavelength shifted to the point that it could no longer absorb the human...Andrew's...energy?

The easiest way to solve the problem would be to permanently merge with Andrew. Then they would be one being and energy wouldn't matter anymore. However, with the odd things happening with Andrew's energy it couldn't do anything of the sort without him willing the merge. It would just have to wait for now.

It could only hope that the human wouldn't make things difficult for them, because it intended to stay with him for the foreseeable future.

After basking in the sun for almost ten minutes Andrew finally snapped back to his senses. What was he doing just lying there?

You're being a reptile, an amused voice replied to him. Apparently, it could read his thoughts. *You'll find it somewhat difficult to resist your new instincts, since I am a part of you now.*

The thought that animal like instincts were taking over his mind instantly incite fear in him. He knew that he couldn't let that them take over, he had to go back to being human!

Go back to being human? The voice sounded confused...and afraid. *This is what you've always wanted, why would you want to go back?*

Andrew tried to talk back to the thing, but found that he couldn't speak. Panic enveloped him as he realized just how animal-like he had become. He didn't want this!

His thoughts were interrupted as he heard a car coming up the driveway. His parents were home, he couldn't let them see him like this! For a moment he thought about getting out of the costume, and then realized that he didn't know how. Fear and his instincts took over, and he darted down the side of the house and into the forest.

It took several minutes before Andrew was able to regain control and made himself stop running. It didn't take him long to realize that it wasn't just his fear of his parents seeing him that had made him do that, but the reptilian instincts that were embedded into his mind now. As much as he liked having a reptilian body he was beginning to hate the limitations and side effects of it.

He tried to find a seam to pull open, and started searching his belly. Almost as soon as he started though, a force pulled his hands away and planted them on the ground. Andrew struggled for a moment, only to find that his arms wouldn't obey him.

I'm not a costume that you can simply pull off! the indignant voice practically yelled at him. Andrew could now tell that it had a distinctive reptilian tone. After a moment he found that he could move his arms again, but didn't try searching for the seam.

He stopped and considered his situation. The thing obviously didn't want to let him out. It was probably also the only thing that could release him as well. That meant that he *had* to try and find a way to reason with it. He already knew that he couldn't speak, but tried again only to fail. The voice seemed amused by this attempt, *You don't need to speak, I can hear your thoughts just fine.*

Andrew took a deep breath and decided that it was time to have a chat with the thing. *What are you?* He thought to it.

It took a while, but eventually the costume was able to explain enough to Andrew that he was satisfied. At first its host didn't quite believe that his creator was actually a wizard or that his own wish to be a reptile had fueled the transformation, but he eventually accepted it in face of the overwhelming proof that was right in front of his nose.

Costume...should I call you costume? No, that doesn't sound right, do you have a name?

The costume found itself cringing at that question. Well, at least he had finally gone to a different subject. *No, I don't have a name, but I would rather not be referred to as a 'thing' anymore.* After noticing that Andrew seemed to be getting annoyed by its by his tone, it decided to add something a little more diplomatic. *Sorry, but I just haven't been able to think of one. Maybe you'll have an idea?*

A name? I don't know. I'd have to think about that one. I'm guessing that just 'lizard' won't do?

I think that may be a little too unoriginal, the costume replied hesitantly, *Maybe some variation of some word describing what I am would work.*

After thinking over names for a few moments one finally came to Andrew's mind. *I did come up with a good name like that for a character that I played on a rpg game once.*

What is an rpg? Apparently, it had not absorbed all of his host's knowledge of the human world yet. Or did that mean that it could only learn so much through his energy?

Er, that would be hard to explain. The character's name was Lizarou, how is that?

Lizarou...that name appeals to me for some reason. Lizarou it is.

An uncomfortable moment of silence followed, and Andrew finally mentally voiced his greatest worry. *This...joining isn't permanent, right?*

Why did he still want to go back to being a human? Hadn't he wanted this all along? *Why? Why would you want to? No, I can't let you go. You have no idea what it is like...I can't go back to being alone and empty. Besides, didn't you want this? I remember*

when you first touched me I felt the incredible desire that you had to wear me and feel what it was like this.

A wave of fear and worry emanated from Andrew's mind, but then gave way to...puzzlement? *Hold on, arguments over whether or not you're letting me out notwithstanding, you were humanoid shaped when I first saw you! Crawling around on the ground was hardly what I was thinking of when I saw you! I love lizards and reptile, and especially geckos. I love the feel of this tail and scaly skin and I would love to keep those, but I would rather be able to keep on walking on two legs!*

What? It was Lizarou's turn to be confused. *I was never humanoid, I was always like this! How could you have...* suddenly, the obvious answer hit it like a rock. *Oh no...*

What is it?

Drethan tricked you, the costume replied with a depressed voice. It all made so much sense now.

Drethan? Is that the shop owner's name? Andrew quickly started piecing everything together. *Hold on, you mean he somehow made me think that you were shaped like a normal 'anthro' style lizard costume? How?*

Like I told you, he's a wizard. He can do all sorts of things. Yes, it all made such perfect, horrible sense. Drethan must have cast a spell to make Andrew think that it would fit him like a normal costume, but hadn't realized that Andrew would make such a distinction between whether it was an animal costume or an 'anthro' costume. No wonder it was getting more and more difficult digest Andrew's energy, this wasn't the form that he really wanted!

Noticing his partner's sudden discomfort, Andrew pressed his point. *So, see that this really wasn't what I wanted now don't you? I can't stay like this.*

It doesn't matter anymore. I've been having more and more trouble using your energy, and now I know why. Since you're coming to realize that this isn't what you wanted, your energy is shifting into a form that I can't digest. I was wondering what was happening.

To the costume's disgust, it sensed hope building in Andrew's mind. *Will you let me go then?*

Anger welled up within Lizarou, how could the human be so blind and selfish? *I'm probably going to be doomed to months of lifelessness and darkness when I you leave me! Can't you give me some peace and let me feel what it is like to be alive while I'm still able to?*

Andrew finally felt ashamed as he realized just what he was talking about. *I'm sorry, I didn't realize it was like that.*

Another awkward silence followed before the costume responded. *I'm sorry as well, you couldn't have known. Your sleep at least has dreams in it.*

How long do you have?

Maybe a few hours. What could it do with only a few hours? There had to be something! But what? Andrew's wishes weren't just going to randomly shift back into a form that it could use to stay alive. If only there was some way that it could get itself to be exactly what Andrew wanted...

Then, an idea began to form in its mind.

A few hours? Well, do you know if lizards have anything to do other than lounging in the sun then?

Wait a minute, The pieces began falling together. Lizarou knew that it had the power of wish granting, so why couldn't it use it for something other than just transforming its host? When it first merged with Andrew it had turned him into a lizard just through instinct. Was there any reason why it couldn't do more if it tried?

Now that it was consciously aware of its own powers it had a basic understanding of how they worked, so perhaps it could do other things now. They had a few limitations, such as that the power had a short range; it could not work outside of its 'body'. However, could it work on their combined body?

Of course it could, it used to be made of a rubber-like material, but now he had real flesh. Other changes should be possible.

In a way, it actually had two different wish related powers. The first was the one that kept it awake; the ability to take energy from a person's desire to become like it and use it to come to life. The more energy it digested the more aware it became.

The true wish granting power, the one that altered reality to cause the transformation and the merge had a different set of prerequisites. First, the living essence within the costume was what had to focus the power; that's why the merge would fail once it lost consciousness. Then, the energy from the wish had to be strong enough to cause the change. The less basis in reality the change had, the more power was required for it to happen.

That was another reason why the power was placed into a living costume like itself. Not only was it an imitation of the being that the host wanted to become, but it was

infused with the very essence of that creature. This gave a kind of blueprint for the change and also greatly reduced the overall power that was required.

The wish didn't truly have to have anything to do with being a lizard, it was just that without a blueprint and basis in reality for the wish it was practically impossible to grant anything else. However, maybe it could use other things, such as Andrew's body, as the wish's ground in reality. An anthro lizard was just a hybrid of a human and a real reptile after all, and the two of them had the forms AND essences of both. Why couldn't it use those?

If, IF, it was right, it should be possible to alter itself into a more humanoid shape, one that would appeal more to Andrew and allow it to continue to stay alive!

One thing bothered it however: that it would have to change itself to make this person happy. Why did its life have to revolve around serving another?

Hey, are you there? What is it? Andrew said for probably the fifth time.

After hesitating for a moment, it decided to explain its idea. There was no helping it now; anything was preferable to going back to being a lifeless costume again. *Do you truly wish to be an 'anthro' reptile?*

Yes, he replied after a moment of hesitation, Something about that form, it all seems so perfect when I look at drawings of them on the internet and imagine how it feels. Honestly, I've often wished that I was like that instead of a human.

I think if we work together I can alter myself to grant your wish; let me explain, unconsciously using their body to take a deep breath, and then laid out the basic idea.

I guess that makes sense to me... Andrew replied, with what the costume was surprised to realize was hesitation in his voice.

What's wrong? I thought you wanted this?

Look, I guess I'll just have to be completely blunt and honest about this, he began. *Are you still going to demand that you always be on me like this? I would LOVE to be able to live as my favorite creature all the time, but the truth is that the world doesn't work that way.*

What do you mean? The entire reason why I'm offering this to you is because I'm trying to avoid sliding back into nothingness! Don't you CARE about that?

Look, the human tried to explain. How do you expect me to live? People would fear me and think I was a freak. My parents wouldn't recognize me, I might not even have a house to live in and food to eat...

You're just afraid of being seen with me? Do you humans only care about yourselves?! Lizarou finally found itself blurting out.

You're one to talk! You forced yourself on me and you've been trying to take over my life like I'm just a tool! Why should I even help you? Let me explain this in a way that you'll understand: I think that the idea of everything that I've been working towards suddenly being lost is frightening almost as much as this 'nothingness' frightens you.

Lizarou tried to keep on arguing, but found that it couldn't. Andrew was right; this had been forced upon him. It was being selfish as well, and hadn't made the slightest effort to care about what Andrew thought about all this. Even if hadn't tried to dominate his mind like it knew many costumes like it might have tried, it was still trying to just use him and dominate his life. *I'm sorry, I didn't think of it that way.*

Andrew paused for a moment, apparently surprised that he had managed to prove his point. *Thank you Lizarou...I guess I should apologize as well.*

Not necessary, the costume replied, However, maybe we can come to some kind of agreement?

Sure, but for now let's just agree to not force anything upon each-other and get this wish thing done, how does that sound?

Lizarou hesitated. Did it really want to do this if his host was going to leave him? Even if it was going to be for short periods of time, the thought was frightening. Sure, it was possible to store enough energy to stay animated for long periods of time, but it would still have lost all these senses...

Andrew seemed to realize what it was thinking, *I guess even then you might not like being separated...maybe it would be best if you just found someone else. Maybe you'll be able to find someone who's willing to stay with you all the time, but I can't.*

At first Lizarou pondered this accepting that option, but it started to realize that Andrew didn't really seem to want that to happen. It wasn't even for selfish reasons either. Now that they were beginning to understand each other, Andrew really did want them to stay together. Why would it ever want to run the risk that it would never find another person like him? *No, this will work just fine. I agree, let's just cooperate and do our best to not force each other into anything.*

The smile that appeared on Andrew's reptilian face spoke volumes. *Great! Now, how will this work?*

Well, first I will revert back into a costume.

I have to take you off? But I won't have anything to wear!

You humans and your clothes. No, you aren't taking me off. I'll stretch myself across you like I did when we first merged. That will give me a roughly humanoid shape and will make the change easier. You will need to stand up to make us seem more humanoid, and you'll also have to focus on the end result as hard as you can.

Alright...I just hope that no one sees us or else it will be very awkward. Andrew took a look around as if expecting people to start appearing at any moment, despite how deeply he had run into the forest.

The costume would have rolled its eyes if it was in control. You worry too much about little things when you should be worrying about whether or not this will even work.

“Those two sure have been talking for a while,” Drethan grumbled to himself.

It was a good thing that he had trained himself to sense the energy that his creations gave off as they started a merge, or else he would have completely missed this. How had that lizard costume managed to make it all the way to Andrew's house anyway? It must have run out and hitched a ride on the young man's car as soon as his head was turned, it was the only explanation. Even so, how did it shake off that paralysis spell? It should have lasted for an hour at least, and only a very strong will could have broken it. Could it really have managed such a feat? He would have to make sure that his future bindings were stronger.

It was annoying that he could have made such a mistake, but at least he was gathering some interesting data. That lizard costume's energy absorption range was so narrow that something as little as the distinction between a normal animal and an anthropomorphic one could keep it from staying animated. That had never happened before; in every other case the costume functioned as long as its wearer wanted to be that creature.

Drethan realized that he had been idly spinning a memory crystal in his hand made himself put it down and stop fidgeting. This was a unique situation; none of his creations had acted like this before and he had to make sure that he was around to note anything interesting that it did.

Echoes of familiar energy fluctuations emanated from the pool and Drethan turned his attention back to it. They were canceling the merge already? That was unexpected; there was no way that the costume would be able to merge with Andrew again. Well, it was technically possible, but unlikely now that Andrew had realized that he really didn't want to be like the costume. Why would it allow the merge to be canceled

already? It was going to lose consciousness in a few hours, and this would just make it happen sooner.

The pool suddenly distorted as it detected a pulse of energy. Drethan stared at it incredulously and almost forgot to pick up a fresh memory crystal to record the energy readings. That could only have been wish energy, but what were those two doing? Were they actually trying to initiate a new merge? Why would they break a merge to just to do it again?

Or were they...wishing for something else?

Did transformations always have to feel so weird? Andrew shifted uncomfortably as his own skin seemed to come to life and detach from his body. As the costume separated from him and returned to normal his body almost seemed to snap back into its human form like a released rubber band. His tail retreated back into his spine, leaving behind an empty skin. The arms and legs were far more uncomfortable; they swelled in size and stretched the costume outwards. By the time they had returned to normal the costume was painfully tight around them. His torso and head did the opposite and shrunk since the lizard equivalents of them were actually larger.

If you think this is odd, keep in mind that I don't know what will happen when we try to alter my form, he heard his 'costume' say with a somewhat fainter voice than usual. *Now, stop fidgeting, this part is almost over.*

As his head returned to normal it suddenly shifted downward, and Andrew found himself being suffocated as his face was surrounded by the costume's throat. In a panic he pulled the costume's mask downward, and craned his head up so that he could breathe.

Oh! I should have realized... The mask suddenly shifted downwards and lined up with Andrew's face, allowing him to take in labored breaths. *Are you alright?*

"Yes, I'm fine," he gasped, glad that he was finally able to speak again. His body felt human again as well, though he had to admit that he missed some of what he had just lost. At least he would have the best of both worlds if everything went according to plan.

Andrew slowly stood up on his hind legs for the first time in almost an hour. It was a little difficult to move with the improperly sized costume on him, it was loose in some places and uncomfortably tight in others. He basically looked like a gecko with human limbs stuck on.

A wave of disorientation from Lizarou hit Andrew's mind and he almost fell back over again. *Ack, how can you stand up like that all the time? This feels so awkward.* He could feel it tensing up around his body, as if it actually needed to hold onto him.

“Don’t be a baby, you’ll get used to this,” he chuckled, and then looked at his arms as an odd thought crossed his mind. “Wait, why is this such a big deal if you can shape yourself to my body so easily?”

Because I can only change people into the creature that my essence is modeled after. I literally have to use your essence to alter my own in order to turn you into this ‘anthro lizard’ of yours.

“Oh...I guess that makes sense.” He still couldn’t believe that he was actually dealing with living costumes and magic of all things. “Well, are you ready?”

Yes, focus on your wish as hard as you can. Envision the form. I’ll do the rest, so just keep in mind that I don’t know what will happen.

“I’m perfectly willing to take that risk,” Andrew replied before closing his eyes and letting his imagination run. He always had an easy time imagining the feel of having that idea form, that of half reptile. It was even easier since he was wearing a costume.

First his thoughts hovered upon the basic form, the tail, scales and muzzle. Definitely the head: that had always appealed to him. After a few moments he added more details such as the shape of the head and distinctive green and orange color pattern that he had always wanted...the details that this costume had just happened to match.

A wave of weakness washed over him, and he gasped as he struggled to stay upright. The costume around him wavered and seemed to heat up. *Keep focusing!*

The loose parts of the suit suddenly tightened around his body. It was like it was shrinking to fit him, all except for the hands and feet. Those seemed to be reshaping to fit their human counterparts. Andrew opened his eyes and gasped as he looked at himself through the suit’s perfectly lined up eyeholes. Anyone that looked at him would have thought that he was a real anthro now! He could already imagine what the end result would feel like.

Familiar sensations went through his body as it began to transform. There was almost no pain this time however, and it was much faster than before. His face had merged so quickly that he didn’t even lose a moment of breath, and the lizard costume’s presence once again took up residence in the back of his mind.

Just as he had been thinking that they had been worrying for nothing, another wave of weakness hit him. He heard Lizarou's voice screaming in his head as fell to the ground and blacked out.

What had gone wrong? Lizaru panicked as it tried to figure out what had happened. Everything had been going so perfectly, the transformation had completed without any problems and then Andrew fainted! And now it was stuck in this unfamiliar body. Was Andrew alright? What if he didn't wake up?

A flash of light shone in front of him, and when its sight returned Drethan was standing right there. No! Was the wizard here to take him back?

The wizard walked right up to Lizarou and looked it in the eyes. It felt as if some force latched onto and for several helpless moments it was unable to look away before Drethan nodded and spoke. "So, you really did manage to change your form and essence into a half reptile. Interesting."

"Is he going to be al...alright?" It stuttered, having some trouble speaking out loud in its modified body. "And what are you going to do with us?"

The wizard looked down on the lizardman with a somewhat unsure look on his face. "I believe that he's going to be alright, but just to be sure how about you tell me what in blazes you just did?"

Lizarou couldn't help but wonder if all wizards asked so many questions. Drethan had spent half an hour prying out scraps of information that even it didn't know that it had before being satisfied. At least he was now sure that Andrew would be alright. It turned out that it had actually absorbed a part of his essence, his life energy, while transforming itself. They were both lucky that he didn't die. It would be weeks before he recovered completely, and he would have to wear it as much as possible in the meantime.

At least everything was alright now! Even with Andrew unconscious, it could feel his energy nurturing it. Why, soon it would be able to stay awake for hours without touching him. Sure its new form was awkward, but the benefits far outweighed the cost.

It was so tempting to go that extra step and permanently merge with Andrew now that it had almost enough energy to do so. It would never have to worry about energy or being alone again. Something held it back however. Maybe it was that it didn't want to betray Andrew after he had put so much trust into it.

By the time Andrew's mind began to stir Lizarou had already walked them within sight of his house. When he finally snapped to awareness he reflexively snatched back control of his body and almost fell over in the process.

Calm down Andrew! Everything's alright now, I was just walking us home while you were unconscious.

“Whaa..” he groggily began to reply, when he suddenly jumped. “It really worked!”

Not without some problems however, Lizarou quickly explained everything that he had learned from Drethan.

“I really almost died...?” He replied as everything sunk in.

I’m sorry, I guess I didn’t really know what I was doing after all. Drethan said that I actually absorbed some of your essence.

“Don’t worry, we both knew there were risks,” Andrew replied, though his voice wasn’t entirely steady. “He did say that I would recover though, right?”

Yes, after a few weeks of wearing me very often if you don’t want to worry about fainting at random times or worse. I think he said twelve hours a day at least, the living costume couldn’t help but sound pleased as he said so. And you remember that you don’t have to speak out loud for me to hear, right?

“I think I prefer talking, it makes it easier for me to tell when you’re listening to thoughts that you should be leaving alone.” He couldn’t help but chuckle at that. “Twelve hours though, that will be hard with these last days of college going on. I think I’ll have to stay transformed in my sleep, because I can’t go around all day like this.”

Well, then I guess I’ll have some free time to do whatever I want with our body while you’re sleeping, the costume could sense its host’s discomfort at just the notion of that happening, and changed the subject before he could object. One thing though, why would it have to be while you sleep? Just explain it all to your parents and there won’t be any problems.

“Ummm, that will be very weird and awkward, and I don’t want to deal with their reaction just yet.”

The costume was silent for a moment before replying. *You really are planning to hide me from the world, aren’t you?*

“I...I’ll try and figure something out. For now though, we need to plan how to sneak you in, and how I can explain to my parents why I was gone.”

In the end they ended up climbing up into Andrew’s window to grab a change of clothes so that he could be seen walking into the house dressed normally. They climbed back outside and then after a minute of convincing he finally got Lizarou to let him take it off.

A slit formed along their belly and Andrew didn't waste time. He started at the head, and worked his way down as he coaxed Lizarou off of him.

As he pulled his first arm out of the skin, he groaned in surprise as the costume's arm shrunk back into a lizard sized one, "No no, please tell me that all this wasn't for nothing?"

The overgrown lizard costume panicked for a moment before looking at itself thoughtfully, "No, I still feel your essence within me, put your arm back in."

Instead, Andrew looked over his shoulder at the hanging mask to give his partner a startled look, "did you just speak out loud?"

Now it was Lizarou's turn to be startled. "I guess I did...it must be a side effect the change. Now come on, put your arm back in me!"

Andrew cautiously pushed his arm back into the costume, finding that it easily stretched to conform to his human dimensions. As soon as it was in place Lizarou wasted no time melting back onto him. Within moments it had a familiar anthro reptilian look to it. "See? You were worried over nothing. Plus, I think that I could have you assume my old form if you wanted me too."

"Really? Well, I guess it would be nice to experience that one every once in a while."

Having resolved that development; Andrew quickly finished pulling the costume all the way off and changed into his clothes. Lizarou climbed back into the bedroom window while Andrew just walked in the front door. Thankfully he hadn't been gone for too long, so his parents accepted his explanation that he had been going for a walk in the forest. He still got a lecture on how he should be telling them when he left so that they wouldn't have to worry.

"You would think that I was a ten year old considering how they treat me, but I guess I should be glad considering that some parents completely ignore their children," he was saying to Lizarou when they met up in the room. Andrew kept his distance from Lizarou at first when he noticed just how tense the costume was with the desire to get back on him, but instead decided to trust it and sat down beside it on his bed.

"If they keep so close an eye on you, it will make hiding me more difficult, you know."

Andrew rolled his eyes, realizing that the costume was going to keep on bugging him about that. "I'll figure something out, and if I'm lucky I'll only have to deal with this for a month and then I'll have my own apartment in the city. I'm just wondering; how long can you run around like that for?"

A grimace appeared on Lizarou's face. "I think I can continuously move around for fifteen minutes at best before I run out of energy. Even talking like this is tiring; I would be speaking to your mind instead if I didn't know that that you're going to have to put me back on soon. During times that you'll be away for a while I'll have to just...lay myself out and conserve energy."

"So, in other words, you'll lie around like a normal costume instead of being like a weird pet most of the time," Andrew sounded pleased that his life would still hold that tiny bit of normalcy while Lizarou snorted in irritation at the comparison. "So, this 'blacking out' isn't like falling asleep?"

"No, it is more like dying, and then being almost consciously aware of staying dead and waiting until someone comes to pull you back out of it. I know this because someone almost compatible with me came along once, and I was able to stay awake for a few seconds before losing my grip on her wish energy." Lizarou seemed to shiver just thinking about it. "Before she touched me being 'dormant' wasn't that horrible because I didn't know what being alive was like. Now it is something I intend to avoid experiencing again."

Andrew smiled, "You won't have to worry about that for quite a while I think."

Out of all his creations, this must have been the most successful yet. This was the first major breakthrough Drethan has seen since he first puzzled out the secrets to creating the second skins. To think that he had been trying to avoid giving out those sentient costumes! He still believed that they were dangerous and inconvenient, but maybe he should consider handing them out a bit more often.

That one costume had finally proved that their wish granting powers weren't as limited as they appeared. Drethan was glad that he had been right all along about their great potential. With the energy recordings he had just made with his memory crystal and the knowledge he had gained from questioning that costume he was sure that he could start designing a few that took advantage of this newfound knowledge. Why, if the costumes could draw the basis for their wish granting from something other than their on essence, the possibilities were endless!

There was also the huge amount of energy that the costume had been able to absorb and focus. Surely it didn't need ALL of that power, why couldn't some of it be used for other purposes? Why, maybe the wish energy from a single person could fuel abilities, psychic powers, and spells even while maintaining a different form! It wasn't like these were normal transformation spells that could only change form; there was no reason why they couldn't imbue people with supernatural powers as well.

It was even getting tempting to consider making a costume based on some powerful being, perhaps an astral dragon or some other legendary creature, for himself. That feat by itself would make him one of the most powerful human wizards who had ever existed. Naturally, it would be preferable if he could find some other way to benefit from this research; the costumes were too unpredictable. The thought was nevertheless intriguing.

Dozens of theories and questions were whirling around in his mind. Today had given him answers, but those answers also presented more questions that needed answering. What should his next experiment be...?