

Digimon Freelancer Adventure The Core

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Content warning: Micro, Macro, Digivolution, Inflation

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Koinumon, A Fresh-Stage Digimon, opened his sea blue eyes to his surroundings. Lined by glowing white lines, black squares lay all around the ground and on the ceiling like tiles. It stretched as far as Koinumon could see. No other being existed in this place, making him feel lonely.

Koinumon hopped up and down, moving forward. He was nothing more than a head the size of a soccer ball with red fur covering it all over. Even his small triangular ears, the only part of his body visible other than his eyes, had red fur. A forest green A lay on the back of his head, though he remained ignorant.

In fact, Koinumon realized he had no knowledge or memory of anything.

Despite that realization, he felt no worry or fear; he had no knowledge of either. So, he moved forward like a newborn curious about everything.

"Fascinating," an emotionless voice said.

Koinumon stopped hopping forward and spun around. He was eager to find out who or what spoke to him. It took him a bit to spot a shadowy outline where no glowing white lines passed through. He hopped toward that figure and would have grinned if he had a mouth. Even after

getting within a yard of this figure, he saw no color other than black.

This new figure stood several times larger than Koinumon. His tail stretched long behind him, hovering above the floor without wagging. He wore some kind of clothes that covered much of his body, tied together by a rope of some sort. Horns stretched up from his head, with a type of fur growing between them. He held several sheets of paper with one hand-paw and a large feather with the other.

"You have hatched at last," this figure told Koinumon. "A climax of my observation and examination. All done to create you: a Digimon."

Koinumon does not understand what this figure said or meant, but he thought it was good. He hopped up and down with his eyes curled in a happy expression. He tried to speak out, but no words or any sound came.

The figure wrote on one of his papers. "Here is a tautology, if you can understand. You cannot communicate, for you have no capability to communicate."

Koinumon stopped hopping and blinked in confusion.

The figure turned aside. "I foresaw no intention on why you should be proficient in talking. Such ability would allow you to resist my ethos."

Koinumon hopped forward and rubbed his body against the figure's leg.

The figure stepped away from Koinumon, letting him fall. "Fascinating. You still held affectionate sentiments. Such feelings would prove terminal, my Byronic hero." The figure turned his head down to Koinumon, looming over the Fresh-Stage Digimon. "Your tale begins and ends with me. Let us commence."

A bright light came from all around—

#

Kajimon woke from his sleep with sweat covering his body. He breathed in and out, trying to calm himself. He stood from his cushion bed, only to slip and fall with a thud. He let out a hiss between his teeth before standing back up.

He glanced around, almost expecting to find himself in that endless room again. Instead, he stood in the bedroom of his new house. A brown desk stood across from his cushion bed with notes littered on top. Blue curtains hung before the window, blocking the morning sunlight from

leaking in. He walked around on the stone floor with his white claws tapping.

Unlike his Fresh-Stage, Kajimon stood six feet tall, an impressive size for a Rookie-Stage. The fact that his body was in a feral fox shape only made him look larger. His red singular tail stretched as long as the rest of his body. Red fur covered much of his body, with only his white chest and belly, black ears, legs down his knees, tail tip, and the forest green A on his back free from it. He reached for his light blue bandana and, with impressive dexterity from his paws, tied it around his neck.

Kajimon stood there, still remembering his first day of existence, and shivered in fear.

A knock came from the front door, distracting him from his thoughts. He briefly blinked his sea blue eyes and then hurried out of his bedroom. He rushed through the hallway until he came to the front door. Another knock came, causing him to huff. He pressed on a switch on the floor, causing the door to slide open.

Alephmon, the Folf Digimon, stood there with a wide grin. His light blue fur bristled with the spring breeze. He pounced Kajimon while wagging his tail, gray with a light blue tip. His yellow eyes shined like stars at midnight.

Kajimon stood there momentarily before hugging Alephmon, who stood half his size, back.

“Hey there, Kajimon! Maf!” Alephmon stopped hugging and rubbed Kajimon’s neck above the bandana. “How do you like your new house?”

Kajimon glanced around his house for a moment. The formidable stone flooring went on, with it cool to the touch. Cedar wood covered the walls, with insulations within keeping the temperature steady. Though it only had one floor, it was large, even for a Digimon his size. It needed to be so since the weather would affect his sizershifting abilities.

It would have been awkward to squeeze through doors at twelve feet tall during the summer.

Kajimon turned to Alephmon and nodded with a grin.

“Sweet! Maf!” Alephmon reached up and nuzzled Kajimon’s face. “And I’m sure you love Kuromn’s adorable rails, yes?”

Small rails lined against the walls, which went throughout the house. If a Digimon was an inch high, they could ride on one of the miniature trains to travel through as fast as a normal-sized one. They would be unused for

much of the year but were needed for the same reason Kajimon needed the big house.

It would have been slow if Kajimon traveled throughout his house during the winter.

Kajimon nodded with an embarrassed expression.

"Yay!" Alephmon nodded while snickering. "In a way, that snowstorm was a blessing in disguise, maf. You wouldn't have revealed the truth otherwise."

Kajimon blushed while turning away.

"Maf. I'm only teasing you, buddy." Alephmon reached up and rubbed Kajimon's cheeks. "Now, are you open for business yet?"

Kajimon blushed harder, keeping his tail still. In this castle town, each Digimon was a part of the Digimon Freelancers that Alephmon and Stry the Veemon founded. Various Digimon opened shops for not only fellow Freelancers but also travelers. One of the ethos of this group was that if no deliberate harm comes to others and they work together in need, each could live as they pleased. Nekozukimon, for example, worked and trained in a dojo as Leomon's apprentice.

Kajimon created elixirs that affect Digimon's digital data, like making one big or small.

He focused his powers in front of Alephmon, forming an illusion. Since he could not speak, he needed to rely on expressions or make illusion plays to communicate his point. While he could create words and sentences, he found it easier to explain with images and displays.

Besides, it was more fun for Kajimon.

This illusion showed a miniature Kajimon with rows of potions before him. No label lay on the potions themselves, making them enigmas even to him. He drank one of the elixirs, which made his belly swell until it popped. The event rewind to when Kajimon drank the same potion. This time, his tail grew until it crushed him flat. It rewind a second time to the same point, but Kajimon glowed as bright as the sun this time.

The illusion ended, with the real Kajimon waiting for Alephmon's response.

"Maf. So, you need to test to see which one does which?" Alephmon asked. He waited until Kajimon nodded to say, "Then it's a good thing I'm here! Let me help you test them, maf!"

Kajimon perked up and blinked at Alephmon.

"Yeah! It's the least I can do, maf!" Alephmon grinned as wide as his lips allowed. "Besides, it might be fun!"

Kajimon nodded and let Alephmon inside. With another press on the switch, the door moved to close. It paused halfway, causing Kajimon to glance at it in confusion. A second later, the door moved slowly until it closed. Alephmon laughed while rubbing Kajimon's side for a couple of seconds.

"I guess there might be a few bugs in the design, maf." Alephmon turned to the light switch and flicked it on. The lights flickered on and off before they glowed a steady stream of light. "That's odd, maf. But we can deal with that later."

Kajimon felt some confusion as well but nodded to Alephmon. He led the way through his house, walking past the kitchenette and sitting room until they reached the back. Outside the solid white, steely door, it looked normal. A sign, '**Testing Room**,' hung above the door with the words scratched out. Kajimon tugged it open and let Alephmon step inside first.

This testing room stood large, almost half the size of the rest of the house. It smelled sterile, unlike the wooden sense from the rooms before. Also, bricks lined up the walls, even against the wooden half. To the right held a couple of tables, each with racks full of elixirs. They all held different colors along with numbers on the cork itself.

"Woooooah, maf!" Alephmon twisted all around the room with wide eyes. "The others did a great job here. But then, you really want to make sure, maf."

Kajimon nodded and led Alephmon toward the tables. On the right one lay a leather-bound book. He nosed it open and stepped aside for Alephmon while smiling. Alephmon gulped before stepping forward and staring into the book.

The page Kajimon opened held a number and an ingredient list. Some numbers held names like 'Macro' or 'Illusion.' Alephmon picked the elixir with the number 14 and with the name 'Micro' next to it. It held a red liquid that Alephmon recognized from the last time he took one of Kajimon's potions.

Alephmon grinned at it. "That's the micro potion I took." He replaced it back in its spot. "At least you know which one to take if you want to shrink, maf?"

Kajimon shrugged and nudged at the elixir with a 21 on its cork.

"21?" Alephmon flipped the pages until he found it. "Hmm. A freezing potion. Throw it at a target and watch it freeze." Alephmon snickered. "I bet that would be good for you if you want to sneak away. Make a sudden burst of

snow, and watch as enemies think you poof into a pike of snowflakes while you snuck away an inch tall!”

Kajimon rolled his eyes.

“Say, I see there isn’t a title for 11. Let’s give this one a shot, maf!” Alephmon grabbed the elixir, with it just as light blue as his fur. “Ready?”

Kajimon shook his head and picked up Alephmon by the scruff and red bandana around his neck. He carried his buddy to the other side of the room, away from the table and elixirs. He stopped and set Alephmon back down before taking the book back and standing several feet away. He nodded at last, signaling to drink the potion.

“Here goes nothing!” Alephmon pulled off the cork and drank the potion whole. He set the vial on the floor and waited a few seconds. “Maf, nothing is happ—”

Alephmon flinched, with the potion finally taking effect. His body compressed as though something had sucked the air out of him. His tail flattened out as thin as a sheet of paper, causing him to eep. His feet-paws flattened along with his hand-paws, with the fingerless black gloves joining in on the fun. It spread up his arms and legs, letting his tan shorts, with its black belt and black slings on the sides, flattened as well. His belly, chest, and back compressed

along with his sword, scabbard, and the belt it was on across his shoulder and hip. His head, along with his red bandana, joined with the flattening.

Alephmon stood there, baffled.

“Maf! That flattened me!” Alephmon twisted his arms around and blinked at how flexible he become. “And this made me super malleable as well! Maf, hmm.”

Alephmon smirked from his flat mouth as though a silly idea had come to his head. At once, he folded his limbs into him. His body folded into the center of his body, with his head joining the fun. He kept folding until he became a paper airplane. Despite having nothing to propel him forward, he flew across the room. He only stopped when he crashed against Kajimon’s nose.

Alephmon unfolded to rub the back of his flat head with his flat, right hand-paw. “Maf. Sorry. Got carried away.”

Kajimon shrugged before heading over to the tables. Alephmon followed, doing some rolls and backflips along the way. Kajimon dipped one of his claws into an ink bottle and wrote into the book. With careful strokes, he added next to the 11 **‘Flattening + Flexible.’**

"I guess that's a fitting title if any, maf." Alephmon stuck a flat tongue out. "So, how long will this last?"

Kajimon reached for the elixir with the number 0 on its cork. He motioned Alephmon to open his mouth wide, waiting until Alephmon did so. Kajimon pulled out the cork and tipped the elixir's clear content over Alephmon's mouth until a slight dribble came down. He tipped it back and stuffed the cork back in.

A second later, Alephmon popped back to normal.

"Maf! So, you made an undo elixir as well?" Alephmon asked. Kajimon nodded and set that elixir back into the rack. "That's really clever!"

Kajimon flinched and blushed, glancing away.

"Aww. Don't be like that, buddy!" Alephmon reached out and rubbed Kajimon's cheeks. "You're pretty clever and sneaky. Don't deny it, maf!" That only made Kajimon blush deeper. Alephmon added, "Now you're being silly! Accept the compliment, maf!"

Kajimon exhaled and nodded.

"Good! Now, what's next?"

#

Throughout the Digimon Freelancer's castle town, everything proceeded as usual. Various Digimon from faraway lands came for trade or to buy products. The eight-sided walls that kept the place safe held firm, with no attacks other than skirmishes. Some of the Freelancers kept guard at the four gates and sea entrances, eying for incoming threats.

The wind blew steady, knocking aside dew on a tree's leaves. One such droplet landed on Fauxmon's brown head while relaxing. She wiggled her snout and long ears before glancing at the tree above. The water soaked into her plushy body like a sponge. She adjusted her gloves, oversized compared to her actual hand-paws, and relaxed again. Though she was small, not even reaching the knees of young teenagers, she held a unique power that made her invaluable.

Even without that, she would still be around.

Once Fauxmon liked someone, nothing would split them apart.

Multiple trees stood within the castle town, enough to make a miniature woodland within the walls. Their natural beauty made the Digimon within reluctant to chop them down unless needed. The woodland made those living in

the castle town feel at peace, especially those who wished to take a break without leaving the castle's safety.

One such tree was invisible.

Aonikmon owned that particular tree, having enchanted it thanks to her Digignome powers. She lay within the hollow trunk, drinking tea with a finger of her hand-wing looped within the cup's handle. Her wispy tail floated above the wooden floor, almost wagging in joy. She loved the tea just as much as living in quietness.

She thought about perching on Alephmon's head later in the day.

Maybe after he exited Kajimon's house, she would approach to do so.

Kuromon the Wolf Digimon and Ember the Gabumon worked in their secondary blacksmith forge within the castle town. They usually worked in their mountain home, but if they came in for business or to visit, they could still work. Kuromon worked on a stock of glowing hot wootz steel, directing Ember to strike carefully with the hammer. Ember followed the direction as closely as possible. One heavy strike or overheating of the stock would cause it to crumble.

Kuromon wiped his sweating brow with his arm, with both a shadowy blackish-gray. His hair-fur, long and pure

black, also dripped with sweat. He picked up a water bottle, spraying its contents on the yellow and orange glowing steel. At once, scales popped out, which Ember knocked out with hammer blows. The two gave each other a thumbs up before consolidating the wootz steel.

In a dojo, both Leomon and Nekozukimon, both Lion Digimon, meditated with their legs crossed. They both closed their eyes, though Nekozukimon struggled to keep it so. His tail, sandy brown and with the tail not lit on fire, strained not to twitch. After a few seconds, Nekozukimon gave in and peeked one of his brown eyes at Leomon.

Leomon, without a word or opening his eyes, batted Nekozukimon's head with a reek. Nekozukimon closed his eyes back shut and meditated further. He thought about the five previous times he had done so, with Leomon always knowing when he had lost his concentration. That only impressed him more with his sensei while wondering how he knew each time.

In short, a typical day in the castle town.

At least, it would be if it were not for the power issues.

Throughout the castle town, the lights struggled to remain on without flickering. When Kuromon checked the long electric kiln for steel tempering, it remained off, to his

surprise. The lights in the dojo flickered enough that even Leomon paused the training to check them. Neko zukimon remained where he sat, only responding when Leomon beckoned him. In Toximon's house, she and Castmon played a video game, only for the TV and console to turn off to their horror.

#

"Guess it's up to me to see what's going on," Stry the Veemon muttered to himself.

Stry walked down the stairs with his red eyes half-closed. His ear-like appendages, blue like much of his body, flattened back to his shoulders. His feet, plantigrade with long, white claws, made puttering sounds against the concrete stairs. His long tail remained still and cautious, with him glancing around for any danger.

When Alephmon and Stry founded the abandoned castle, with rotting houses within the walls, walls shattered, and a forest growing within, they discovered the Old Throne to the north. When they explored it, they found a multiversal portal and a massive power room, more like a chamber. An object known as the Core lay within, inert for thousands of years but still usable. After some repairs, it powered everything within the castle down with no problem until now.

Alephmon suggested extending the walls so the Old Throne was within, but Stry vetoed that suggestion. He explained that, though the Core granted great power, it would cause disaster if it ever went to meltdown. If it was outside the walls, the Digimon within the castle town would have a better chance of surviving.

Besides, by making the Old Throne look decayed, no one would grant it a second look.

Still, Stry did have the decaying statue on its roof repaired.

With one of his hands, he held a battery-powered lantern and the other a Digi Syphon. Kuromon upgraded the Digi Syphon when he made more, with them shaped like a D-3 Digivice and having blue with white highlights. It retained its previous functions and allowed for long-range communications like a smartphone.

"OK. Let's see here," Stry said once he reached the depths. Despite being underground, it was spacious enough that Ultimate- and Mega-Stage Digimon could easily stand. Stry wondered if any mischievous Digimon went down but saw no traces. He glanced at the room with the multiversal portal and worried about how it struggled to function. "What's going on?"

He then realized how warm it felt despite being underground. After sensing where it grew hotter, he flinched and followed while hurrying. The heat grew intense enough that the lantern struggled to remain on. He sweated from worry and the heat, noting how it came from the Core chamber.

“Please don’t be the Core. Please don’t be the Core,” Stry said to himself. He sprinted faster, ignoring the growing heat as much as possible. “Please don’t be—”

Stry reached the Core chamber and felt his heart sink.

Within lay the Core, a dark sphere that hovered and spun midair. It was about the size of Agumon and made by Digimon of the Metal Empire. Thanks to its ingenious design, it could generate power that lasts thousands of years and light up an entire city. Though there was a risk of overheating, that only happened if too much power was drawn out or too long, along with critical damage. Even then, the chamber had a failsafe that would flood the Core chamber with water, shutting it down. That was one benefit of having it built near the sea.

The Core glowed bright yellow to almost white, almost at melting point.

No water flooded the chamber.

“Crud!” Stry lifted the Digi Syphon and contacted Kuromon. “The Core is overloading! Any longer, and it’ll reach meltdown!”

Kuromon took several seconds to respond. “Oh, frick.”

Stry nodded, knowing how serious this was.

A Core meltdown was many times more severe than a nuclear meltdown. A nuclear meltdown, after all, does not end with a nuclear explosion; even nuclear weapons require precise conditions to detonate. It would still emit radiation, but an excellent structured power plant ensured that only a little, if any, would be released into the environment.

A Core meltdown would cause an explosion large enough to engulf the Freelancer’s castle at least.

The Digimon within would have a better chance of surviving if it was not within the walls, but not by much.

“Why isn’t the water flooding the darn Core!?” Kuromon demanded.

“I have no idea! I should’ve flooded the chamber hours ago!” Stry shook his head. “We need as many volunteers as possible to see what’s happening. Perhaps get a group into the pipeline to see if anything is clogging. We also need to evacuate.”

"How much time do we have?" Kuromon asked.

"I, well, I think we have an hour at most." Stry grunted, sweating from the heat. "I'm not sure if that's enough time. What could be preventing the water from flowing in could be anything. If we could get something that can absorb heat, it could delay the meltdown and buy us some time." Stry rubbed his chin. "But where can we get something like that?" Stry turned to the reader. "Why am I asking you?"

"Er, was that to me?" Kuromon asked.

"Ah, m-maybe." Stry rubbed the back of his head. "Vevehehe. I'm being silly in such a stressful situation. Still, do you have someone in mind?"

"Actually, I do."

Stry blinked. "You do? Who?"

#

Kajimon smiled and nuzzled Alephmon.

"Aww, maf. Nice of you to join me at this size," Alephmon said.

Throughout the day, the two tried out Kajimon's elixirs, taking turns and even trying the same ones. They found themselves bloated into balloons, turned into plushies, grown thick furs, had tails grown to massive sizes, and

more. The current one Alephmon tried shrunk him to an inch tall. Kajimon also drank it, joining his buddy at such a tiny size.

“Ahahaha. That tickle.” Alephmon laughed and patted Kajimon’s head. “So, you know how long this would last, maf?”

Kajimon shrugged and lay down.

“I guess that’s also the part of testing, maf.” Alephmon sat next to Kajimon and rubbed his ears. “I hope this won’t take too long. This is a lot of—”

Scampering sounds echoed into the testing room. Kajimon flinched and stood on alert while wiggling his ears. Alephmon also stood up, though more confused than concerned. The scampering sounds came closer, footsteps-like but with sounds of plastic rubbing against stone. Voices also came from behind the door.

“Er, are you sure this is alright?” One voice asked. Her voice was fainter than the scratching sounds. “It’s rather rude to—”

“It’s perfectly fine! You said that you saw Alephmon come in, yes?” Another voice, more hyper-sounding, responded. “And he hasn’t left with Kajimon, yes?”

“Yes, but—”

“That means they must be in here! Keep calm and carry on!”

“Huh?” Alephmon blinked. “Aonikmon? Fauxmon? Why are they here?”

Kajimon tilted his head in confusion as well.

The door handle shivered for a second before it turned. The door swung open, with Fauxmon stepping in. Her plushy steps emitted no sounds, with only her gloves with plastic claws making sounds. Her purple eyes glanced around the seemingly empty room, full of energy. A zipper lay underneath her neck, its plastic teeth reaching her belly.

Aonikmon floated in behind Fauxmon just above her head. Aonikmon spread her arms like she was flying, with the ends of her hand-wings tipped with pale violet. She glanced around the room as well with her black eyes. Her tail, as long as her height, stretched long, covered in creamy-color fur like much of her body. Her forehead held the Zero Unit symbol with the center upside-down triangle red and the three outer triangles black.

The two were small, with Fauxmon two inches over a foot tall.

To Kajimon and Alephmon, they stood as giants.

"They must be here!" Fauxmon skipped around the room. Her tail, long and tipped with dark brown, wiggled behind her. "That I'm sure of!"

"Um, I don't see anyone here." Aonikmon lowered to the ground. "Maybe they're in another room."

"Nah. I'm sure they're here somewhere!" Fauxmon swung around. Her tail caused a gust that almost knocked Kajimon and Alephmon down. "You know how excited Alephmon is about trying Kajimon's potions! Well, I see plenty of that stuff over there on that table! Though, do you think he also got soda?"

Kajimon rolled his eyes.

Alephmon stood atop Kajimon's back and yelled, "WE'RE DOWN HERE! WE'RE JUST TINY!"

"Hmm? You heard something?" Fauxmon turned back in confusion. Alephmon waved both arms up and down at Fauxmon. She widened her eyes and approached the two tiny Digimon. "Awww! Look at them! They're so tiny!"

Alephmon blinked at the looming Fauxmon, who approached with a wide grin. Aonikmon leaned over Fauxmon's shoulders, wondering what distracted her this time. Fauxmon picked up the tiny Alephmon and Kajimon

and hugged them closely. Despite her body being plushy, they struggled to breathe.

The symbol on Fauxmon's forehead, with two off-white triangles laying over her eyes like eyebrows and two dark brown mirrored and between the off-white ones, glowed.

Both Kajimon's and Alephmon's bodies glowed as bright as the sun.

DIGI~~V~~OLUTION

Kajimon gritted his teeth, feeling his skin and fur ripped off his body. His bandana also dissolved, with the data within configuring. He stood like a digital wiring frame with bright red and white glowing lines. A series of digital encases formed around his body like a Digiegg.

The same happened with Alephmon, with his skin and fur shredded off. Sword, scabbard, shorts, bandana, and fingerless gloves ripped off his body before disappearing. His body stood with pale blue and white wireframing lines. Like with Kajimon, digital encasing surrounded Alephmon in the shape of a Digiegg.

Within, the two felt a surge in power. New skin and fur surrounded their bodies, larger than their wireframe bodies. They contorted and stretched, fitting their new forms. Throughout it all, they felt a great deal of pain.

Kajimon's body stretched and expanded far more extensively than his previous body. The claws on his paws stretched long. Before the new skin spread up his legs, a dark, cold power grew in his front-left leg. It made that paw and claw larger and fiercer than the rest. Before it traveled up to the rest of his body, white wrappings surrounded that leg with the letters **REALS** on the inner part. The darkness stopped spreading, though its mark remained.

Alephmon's claws stretched out, black instead of white. His replacement fur lay scruffier than his previous one. His tan shorts reformed on him, longer and with silver chains for the strappings instead of black felt-like ones. Black, fingerless gloves formed on his swollen hand-paws, though stretching back to his elbows and with a pair of red belts on each one.

Behind Kajimon, his tail split into three, each as long and thick as his body and ending with jet-black tips. His torso elongated into an elegant shape, with the white fur underneath spreading to the lower half of his jawline. A large curved sword and sheath, a Tachi, appeared and slung on his back and shoulder so he could pull it out with his teeth. A pair of sage green triangles formed on his shoulders.

Alephmon's white fur on his chest puffed out and spread around his neck like a mane. His muzzle stretched out further than his previous one, quadruple its original length, but had a subtle acute angle. White fangs poked out from his lips, making him somewhat cute. Yellow upside-down triangles appeared before each of his yellow eyes.

Kajimon winched, with the rest of his muzzle reforming. Black triangle fur patterns formed underneath his sea blue eyes. Hair-fur grew on his head, stretching over his right eye. The sage green A on his back glowed as it regenerated. With a flick of his tails and muzzle, the Digiegg-encasing exploded.

Alephmon reached for behind his back. His sword, Checksum, was reformed along with its scabbard, with a red ruby on its pommel. He pulled it out, showing its new wootz steel structure, remade thanks to Kuromon's works. Its diamond-shaped blade held faint Digimon symbols, each made from Blue Chrome Digizoid. He made one swing from it, causing the Digiegg-encasing to explode.

Fauxmon and Aonikmon gasped at the now Champion-Stage Digimon, with Kajimon now Maboroshimon and Alephmon now Cirrusmon. Under normal circumstances, the two Digimon, especially

Maboroshimon, would explode from the house thanks to their new sizes; Maboroshimon usually stood forty feet tall and Cirrusmon ten feet.

The shrinking elixir the two drank still affected them, despite their Digivolution, so they still stood shorter than Fauxmon and Aonikmon.

"Awwww. You're so much cuter like this!" Fauxmon hugged the six point six inches tall Maboroshimon close. He blushed in response. Fauxmon turned to Cirrusmon and added, "Same with you!"

Cirrusmon blushed, with him two point fifty-four inches tall. "M-maf!"

Fauxmon said, "You know, I bet that—"

"Um, Fauxmon?" Aonikmon interrupted. "Could you please save it for later? Stry needed their help."

"Ah, right!" Fauxmon set Maboroshimon and Cirrusmon down. "Sorry~"

"Maf?" Cirrusmon tilted his head. "Help? For what?"

The lights flickered, straining to remain on.

#

"Are you sure you can handle us both?" Cirrusmon asked Aonikmon.

Aonikmon nodded in response. "I need to." She smiled. "I guess it fair that you lay on my head this time."

Cirrusmon nodded and glanced back at Maboroshimon, who still dominated much of Aonikmon's back. He held a nervous expression, though at least he did not hold onto her too tight. Cirrusmon could not help but snicker to himself at the sight. The Digimon, who could grow to massive heights, was nervous about being high up.

Even if it was only three feet off from the ground.

Then again, perhaps that was a natural expression one held in this situation.

Earlier, Aonikmon and Fauxmon explained about the Core meltdown (more like Aonikmon explained; Fauxmon was busy playing with Maboroshimon's tails). This horrified Cirrusmon, who had to explain to a confused Maboroshimon why that was such a bad thing. Stry asked them through Kuromon to get the two over to the Old Throne as fast as possible without explaining why. To help with the speed, Aonikmon volunteered to carry the two tiny Digimon at least to the underground.

Fauxmon lingered behind, playing with Maboroshimon's tracks; though her ability to Digivolve

other Digimon was useful, her plushy body would not handle the heat.

When they reached the bottom, Cirrusmon wondered if he could handle it.

Stry stood there, waiting with his arms crossed and his eyes half-closed. "Looks like everything has gone wrong all at once. We have a Core meltdown, the emergency water flood failsafe is down, and the ones I needed most are tiny."

"Maf?"

Cirrusmon glanced around with a curious expression. Many of the Freelancers stood there with Stry. Nekozukimon balanced a kunai on top of his finger, though even he had a serious expression. Stormymon crossed his arms while sighing. Toximon tried to cheer Castmon up by telling jokes to him, which he appreciated. Kuromon and Ember were nowhere to be found, though.

"This will have to do." Stry spun around. "Here's the plan. Kuromon, Ember, and Leomon are checking inside the flood pipes. I want Toximon and Castmon to join with them. The sooner we get that fixed, the better."

Castmon blushed and glanced away, uncertain about it. Toximon grabbed him by the shoulder close and smiled. He smiled back, though he still had a blushy expression.

"Nekozukimon, Stormymon, and I will support Maboroshimon and Cirrusmon in whatever we can." Stry glanced at Maboroshimon, who held a curious expression. "I want to ensure that they aren't hurt."

Stormymon gave a prideful chuckle. "Right. Because they'll be at the heart of the issue."

"Don't worry about me! A ninja like me can handle the heat!" Nekozukimon dispelled the kunai and saluted Stry.

"Maf?" Cirrusmon tilted his head. "What do you want us to do?"

Stry sighed. "The hardest thing. I'm not sure when the Core will go into full meltdown; likely, it'll be within a half hour. We need as much time as possible to get the flood pipes working and cool down the Core with water." Stry pointed at Maboroshimon. "That's where you come in."

"Huh?" Cirrusmon glanced at Maboroshimon and flattened his right ear. Maboroshimon, for his part, held a nervous yet understanding expression. It took a second for Cirrusmon to understand. "Oh!"

"Yes. His heat-absorbing ability." Stry nodded. "I doubt he can cool it completely, but if he can delay the meltdown by another hour, that'll be great. Plus, the Core chamber should handle him even if he grew to 200 feet."

Maboroshimon swallowed but nodded in response.

Stry picked Maboroshimon and Cirrusmon off Aonikmon's back. "Thank you for bringing them with us." Aonikmon nodded and flew up the stairs. "Cirrusmon, your healing ability will allow us to last longer in the heat. Still, stay close to Maboroshimon unless we need you. OK?"

Cirrusmon nodded and gave Stry a thumbs-up. "You got it, maf!"

"Right! Everyone, get into positions!"

With that, every Digimon rushed deeper underground.

#

Maboroshimon hid his fear from Stry, who carried him and Cirrusmon into the Core chamber. The Core glowed in a bright yellow, whitening by the second. He felt its heat, more potent than the harshest desert he had ever wandered through. It still did not bother Maboroshimon since his body could absorb the heat without issue.

He wondered how much he could contain.

“OK, Maboroshimon. Ready, maf?” Cirrusmon asked.

Maboroshimon nodded his head despite not being ready.

“OK!” Stry held Maboroshimon like a ball before throwing him at the Core. “Delay the meltdown!”

Maboroshimon widened his eyes throughout the toss. The Core grew bigger from his view, a floating ball of near-melting metal. It also grew much hotter, enough that his body could no longer reject the heat and instead absorb it. He grew to a foot tall when he landed on the Core.

When he touched it, its sheer heat almost overpowered his mind.

Maboroshimon gritted his teeth, feeling its heat energy flowing through every bit of his body. He grew fast, gaining a foot in size for every second. It felt as though he touched the sun itself. Perhaps, in its own way, the Core was like a miniature sun.

Stry, Cirrusmon, Nekozukimon, and Stormymon approached with caution.

“It’s working!” Stry yelled out. “It’s already cooling down! Keep absorbing the heat!”

Maboroshimon winced but nodded. Already, he had grown to his normal height of forty feet and still grew. Despite the overwhelming energy flooding his heat, he could not help but note that. He theorized that its effects would end if the drinker somehow grew to their original height instead of letting the potion wear off. That could be useful to know in the future.

Maboroshimon curled his front paws around the Core, feeling it smaller to his touch. Its glow decreased from bright yellow to glowing orange. It still felt hot, though not as hot as before. He kept holding onto it as long as possible, absorbing more heat.

When Maboroshimon reached ninety feet tall, he stopped growing.

"Anything wrong?" Stry asked. His previous confidence turned into confusion. "Why did you stop?"

Maboroshimon gritted his teeth. He curled his head down in pain, though he still refused to let go of the Core. His muscles tensed up, becoming hard as stones. He breathed fast, with him spewing steam.

"Maf? Maboroshimon?" Cirrusmon asked. "Is-is this your limit?"

Maboroshimon fought against his body to turn his head around. He gave him and the others a curt nod. Once done, he twisted forward and curled down in pain.

"Oh." Stry widened his eyes. "For a moment, I thought you could grow indefinitely. Silly me." He shook his head. "Still, that would give us an extra half hour. You can—"

Cracks formed all over Maboroshimon's body.

"Let. Go?" Stry finished while blinking.

Maboroshimon opened his mouth. If his vocal cords worked, he would scream from the overwhelming energy. It ripped through his body, leaking out like a tire with too much air. He still held onto the Core, his willpower overpowering his instincts.

"Maboroshimon!" Cirrusmon turned to Stry. "Throw me to him!"

"Aleph!" Stry winced in horror. "He might have made it cooler, but it's still way too hot! And I bet he might be boiling there!" Stry pointed at Maboroshimon. "If you touch him too long, you may die!"

"I know, buddy!" Cirrusmon folded his ears back in fear despite having a resolute expression. "But if I don't help, Maboroshimon would rip his body apart containing

that energy. Heck, he might explode at this rate! At least with me there, I can heal the damage done to his body!”

“I-Aleph!” Stry bit into his lips and grunted. “GAH!!” He sighed. “You’re right. Just, please, my dear friend, live.”

“I will, maf.”

Stry swung Cirrusmon back before throwing him onto Maboroshimon’s back.

Cirrusmon landed at the center of the forest green A while wincing from the heat. It only grew hotter when he touched the red fur and body, as though he clung onto lava. Despite that, he still held onto Maboroshimon’s back. He inhaled and hugged him close.

“Lay on Paws!” Cirrusmon summoned a burst of green molts, most fusing into Maboroshimon’s cracks. The cracks closed and healed thanks to Cirrusmon’s healing powers, but new ones replaced them. Cirrusmon grunted, summoning more healing molts to keep Maboroshimon together.

#

“How deep did it cave in?!” Ember grunted and smashed one of the boulders. “Freaking heck!”

Kuromon also grunted, carrying smaller rocks away and tossing them through the door outside the flood pipe. When they discovered the reason for the flood waters not flowing, a series of massive stones that blocked the way, they went out to dig an opening. Even if they dug a small one, it would be enough to clear through the rest, thanks to its connection to the ocean.

When Toximon and Castmon arrived, they asked no questions and went to work. Toximon lifted her large hammers and, with a swing, smashed a couple of boulders into dust. Meanwhile, Castmon dug out the smaller rocks and carried them out of the way. Leomon swung fists and kicks at the flood pipe's blockage, knocking aside the boulders.

"More than enough to delay us," Leomon said. He picked up one of the rocks and glanced it over. "This looks very recent. Also," he glanced at the ceiling and walls, "there's no damage to the pipeline itself."

"Leomon?" Kuromon pushed aside another boulder for Ember to smash. "What do you mean?"

"I don't have anything definite," Leomon responded. His muscles flexed before he swung his foot-paw at more of the boulders. "But we'll ask questions and study more as soon as this crisis ends."

#

"Come on, maf!" Cirrusmon grunted. He summoned more healing molts for Maboroshimon. "You can do it!"

Maboroshimon gritted his teeth in pain. His body went through the pattern of ripping apart and healing, thanks to Cirrusmon. Despite the pain, he still held onto the Core. Cirrusmon wondered if he held onto it because he could not or because of stubbornness. Regardless of the answer, he must heal Maboroshimon as much as possible.

"Come—"

A massive shockwave knocked Maboroshimon away from the Core. He slammed back dozens of feet away, almost landing on Stry, Nekozukimon, and Stormymon. Cirrusmon had no such luck, getting flattened as thin as paper while underneath Maboroshimon. Stry rushed over and pulled Cirrusmon off, whose eyes spun into spirals.

Maboroshimon lifted his head, having a confused, baffled expression.

"Maf?" Cirrusmon shook his flat head before healing the rest of Maboroshimon's injuries. "What happened?"

"Uh, could the Core do something like that?" Stormymon asked Stry.

"No." Stry stared at the orange-glowing Core with unblinking eyes, his hands against the floor. "It doesn't do anything like that."

The air around the Core vibrated as though it shimmered. To everyone's surprise and horror, it heated up rapidly back to its bright yellow with a white center. The time saved for the others to fix the flood pipe had disappeared instantly; it was as though Maboroshimon never absorbed its heat.

The Core shuddered, and fiery Digimon spawned from the Core itself.

"What in Azulongmon are those!?" Stormymon demanded in shock.

"I-I have no idea." Stry stood there, stunned. "The-the Core doesn't have a self-defense mechanism."

"It does now!" Nekozukimon summoned a pair of kunai. He tossed one at a blazing Agumon's forehead, causing it to disintegrate. Two more fiery Digimon, one a Renamon and the other a Veemon, took its place. "Looks like we need to fight!"

More fiery Digimon spawned from the Core, though they ignored the Digimon trio of Stry, Stormymon, and Nekozukimon. Half stared at the tiny, flattened Cirrusmon;

the other half turned upward to the pipe where the water should flood. They split forces, with the ones going upward doing so as flame wisps. The remainder of the burning Digimon charged at Cirrusmon, who pulled out his flat Checksum in response.

Stry sprinted before the fiery Digimon and swung his fist at one. It knocked out a fire-made Palmon's head, causing it to fade. Nekozukimon and Stormymon joined Stry, with Nekozukimon slashing with claws or kunai and Stormymon sending lightning blasts. With each fiery Digimon gone, two more took their place.

"Careful! Don't hit the Core!" Stry kicked aside a Patamon. "That would cause it to explode!"

"You don't need to tell us twice," Stormymon responded. He threw another lightning bolt at a burning Guilmon. He added in a softer voice. "Though it might explode regardless of what we do or not."

A couple of flaming Digimo, an Impmon, and an Armadillomon, went around the three Digimon toward Cirrusmon. Impmon threw a fireball at Cirrusmon, larger than his whole body. Cirrusmon twisted his sword and slashed it in half, ensuring the remaining flames did not hit Maboroshimon. Despite being flat as paper, Cirrusmon

pounced and stabbed with Checksum at the Impmon's forehead, causing it to dissipate.

The blazing Armadillomon rolled into a ball before bouncing toward Cirrusmon. He saw it coming and managed to flutter away from the attack. He wondered if he became extra dexterous due to his experience with the flattening elixir or if his Champion-Stage was always flexible. Regardless, he managed to land and turned up toward that Armadillomon.

The Armadillomon unrolled itself and splayed all around, intending to body slam Cirrusmon.

Cirrusmon jabbed his sword upward just before the attack impacted.

The Armadillomon disappeared thanks to the stab before it could crush and burn Cirrusmon.

He sighed, but his relief was short-lived since four more fiery Digimon appeared from the Core.

#

Castmon flinched and turned to the other side of the flood pipe. "Do you hear something?"

The others stopped digging and smashing boulders for the moment to turn as well. At first, they saw and heard

nothing other than an orange glow. That glow became brighter as it went on, with it, or rather them, taking form. The others widened their eyes at the dozens of blazing Digimon approaching them.

“Wh-what are those?!” Toximon took a step back in horror.

Leomon growled while pulling out his sword. “This deepened my suspicions.” He turned to the others. “Get the pipe unblocked! I’ll handle this threat!”

“But-but there’s so many!” Castmon tugged on his black and red plaid scarf. “You’ll get overwhelmed!”

“Don’t worry about me.” Leomon bent his knees, ready for battle. “If you don’t clear it, we’ll ALL die!”

The fiery Digimon approached, each tossing fireballs at Leomon. He blocked the attack with his sword before swinging it. At once, several dissipated under that swing. The remaining fire-made Digimon took several steps back as though considering their foe. Leomon pointed his sword at them.

“By my Beast Sword, I will not let you pass.” Leomon growled and prepped his other hand-paw. “Fist of the Beat King!”

An orange aura formed from his fist in the shape of a lion's head. He punched forward, with the aura firing out from his fist. It impacted several fiery Digimon at once while knocking the rest back. Leomon grunted and took several steps forward, though he knew this conflict had only begun. Already, dozens of fire-made Digimon came into the flood pipe, replacing the fallen.

The fiery Digimon turned to each other, nodded, and jumped into the air. They converged into three spots, taking in new shapes. Leomon paused, considering this threat's latest tactic. The three burning masses grew and took shape until they landed.

The one in the front took the shape of a Leomon with its own Beast Sword. It swung the sword at him, with their sword clashing. The rightmost one became a Greymon, with the bony skull a duller red. It opened its mouth, which almost looked like it drooled out, and fired a massive fireball at Leomon. He fired his Fist of the Beast King attack to block it. The leftmost one solidified into a blazing ExVeemon with its wings spread behind it. It glided ahead, swinging its burning claws at Leomon, but he ducked back.

The remaining fiery Digimon became wisps of fire, which gathered up behind the three burning Champions.

“So, they can fuse together, eh?” Leomon charged at his flaming duplicate and stabbed its chest. It did nothing to avoid or block the attack but followed it up with a counterattack. Leomon pulled out his sword and jumped back, avoiding the attack. The wound on the burning Leomon’s chest remained open until the fiery wisps fused into it, healing its wounds. Leomon grunted. “Great. Just great.”

The three fiery Champion Digimon charged at Leomon, using various attacks. Leomon ducked and avoided the attacks, launching counterattacks of his own. Each one hit, though the wisps healed any damage done to them. Leomon growled, parrying or avoiding attacks and then launching his own.

Despite Leomon’s efforts, he found himself pushed back.

Kuromon paused digging the flood pipe to watch the battle in horror. Whoever or whatever was causing these burning Digimon to appear only had a basic idea of combat. Their attacks were clumsy, their self-preservation nonexistent, and they only seemed to overwhelm rather than outsmart their opponents.

That was all they needed, given the sheer amount of power and the wisps healing them.

“Partner!”

Kuromon flinched and turned to Ember. “Yes?”

“Stop watching the battle and help us!” Ember said with a grunt. “The sooner we get this cleared, the better!”

“But, Leomon—”

“Leomon can handle it! Even if he can’t, we’ll be wasting his sacrifice if we don’t clear this!” Ember punched another boulder into dust. “There’s nothing you can do to help him!”

Kuromon nodded, yet he still stared at the battle. Already, the burning Leomon sliced the real Leomon on the cheek. Despite the injury, he still fought on as before. Though he might be overpowered in time, he battled like a warrior.

Kuromon balled his hand-paws, gritted his teeth, and shook his head. He reached into his pocket to pull out his Digi Syphon, which was pure black with white highlights. The screen on it glowed bright enough to grab the attention of the other Freelancers.

“Kuromon, what are you doing?!” Ember shouted out.

Kuromon charged forward, with the screen glowing brighter. His body responded, glowing just as bright.

DIGI~~V~~OLUTION

Kuromon gritted his teeth while his skin and fur ripped apart, leaving him with a wireframe body. His ripped blue jeans, chains, and floating shadows also disintegrated. He stood there, his wireframe body a shadowy black with glowing white lines. A series of digital encases surrounded him in the form of a Digiegg.

A second later, he felt a surge in power. New skin and fur grew on his body, staring from his hands- and feet-paws. His wireframe body contorted to fit the new shape of the skin and fur forming around him. His new jet-black claws on his feet-paws stretched out doubled in length. The digitigrade feet-paws also shifted downward into a plantigrade. A pair of black belts wrapped above his right ankle.

Four more black belts formed into existence, two on each wrist. His jeans reformed, just as torn on the bottom and with a pair of rips on the side of each thigh. A brown belt with steel studs materialized, wrapping itself on the jeans. A jet-black mane grew on his chest, shoulders, forearms, and upper back. The rest of his torso remained a pale shadowy gray while much of his body held dark gray fur. What little the mane did not cover showed how ripped his muscles become.

New silvery chains formed, wrapping around the base of his long tail and around his neck. Rather than slumping down, it spread out into a circular shape. Two neon cyan lines formed on his back at an angle. His muzzle stretched out twice its original length when the new skin and fur spread up his head. Fangs poked out from his lips from both top and bottom.

Neon red lines stretched from his jet-black nose to his bright red with black sclera eyes and down his neck. His hair-fur grew longer and pointer. The pale, shadowy gray turfs stretched longer than his already longer ears, at least doubled the length. He flexed his fingers and showed off his new claws.

With a swing of his claws, the Digiegg-shaped encasing exploded.

“Woah!” Ember took a step back. “You-you really did it.”

“Huh?” Castmon twisted back at Kuromon’s Champion-stage form in confusion. He heard a beeping noise from his Digi Syphon, hidden in his scarf. He pulled it out and pointed the brown with cream highlights Digi Syphon at the new Champion. At once, a three-dimensional image of his body was displayed above the screen, along with the details. “Oh?”

WereKuromon: Beastkin Digimon

Attribute: Vaccine

Level: Champion

Family: Nature Spirits

WereKuromon held out his right hand-paw while grunting. At once, a black sphere formed above it, with it so filled with darkness that it was like a void. He tossed the ball at the fiery Greymon in the chest.

“Void Blast!” WereKuromon cried out.

The dark ball expanded in size, quickly ripping through the burning Greymon. Within a blink of an eye, it split in half, with the upper side disappearing. The lower half stumbled before the wisps behind went up and fused with the remains. By that time, WereKuromon stood side by side with Leomon.

“I thought I—” Leomon began, but WereKuromon cut him off.

“I know. This is rash.” WereKuromon flexed his fingers. “But victory through sacrifice is no victory at all. I’ll have your back.”

Leomon paused, stabbing his fiery duplicate through its head. He finally said, "Very well. Just know that we'll talk about this if we both survive this."

"Got it." WereKuromon extended out his claws. His shadows crawled up his body and fused into each claw. They grew longer and harder, as though they could stab through Digizoid. "Shadow Claws!"

WereKuromon slashed a blazing ExVeemon through the chest.

Ember huffed while watching the fight. "Grah! Of course, you decided to do something dumb, partner!"

"Er, at least he's buying us some time," Castmon said. He lowered his Digi Syphon and shook his head. "That way—"

"It'll take *longer* to dig out that blockage because he decided to be a hero!" Ember thought about it for a moment. "Very well. I'll do what he should've done."

Ember pulled out his Digi Syphon from his pouch, with it dark blue with pale blue highlights. The screen on it glowed as bright as the sun. Ember turned back to the collapsed pipeline with his body glowing bright.

DIGI4OLUTION

Ember's body ripped apart, exposing the wireframe body underneath the skin, scales, and pelt. The WereGarurumon's pouch and brass knuckles dissolved off him into nothing. He hovered in the air, letting the Digiegg-like encasing surround him.

A second later, Ember felt robust data flowing into him. It generated new skin with fur instead of a pelt like before. His body contorted, stretching longer while taking on a four-legged stance. Limbs stretched, with his thick stubby tail stretching long and thin while ending with two-prong tips.

New brass claws formed over his massive front claws, each with spikes at the back. A pair of large brown sacks formed around the waist at the sides, fitting his growing size. His back leg's claws became black instead of white like before. His torso went from short and rounded to long and slim. Blue, white, and silver fur covered his body, with the blue taking on a series of waving lines like a tiger. Six long series of fur, three on each shoulder, stretched long and thin while hardening. A similar six series of fur, three on each upper thigh, also grew out.

Ember's snout stretched out into a long, blocky shape. His lower teeth grew in size and length, matching the upper size. A series of turfs spread around his head, each ending

with blue tips. Two of them, his ears, stretched out the longest. Soon, the new skin and fur finished spreading out.

Ember huffed out fiery blue flames, breaking free from this Digiegg encasing.

Castmon and Toximon gasped at Ember's Champion form, facing at the boulders' wall. Ember, now a Gaururmon, charged forward and smashed through as easily as dirt. Castmon stared in wonder before his Digi Syphon beeped again. He lifted it up, and it displayed Ember's new form along with the related data.

Gaururmon: Beast

Attribute: Vaccine

Level: Champion

Family: Nature Spirits

"Don't just stand there gawking!" Ember said in a gruff, deeper voice. "Help!"

"Right!" Both Castmon and Toximon went back into the blocked flood pipe to dig.

#

"Jeez, it's producing so many of those things!" Stry grunted, punching back several fiery Digimon at once. Before he could recover, the Core produced loads more

burning Digimon. "You think that would make it cooler, but the Core is just getting hotter!"

"Gth!" Stormymon blasted several more with lightning. He hopped to Stry's side. "So, how long now?!"

"Honestly, it'll be minutes before it finally reaches meltdown." Stry gritted his teeth. "Looks like this is the end of the Digimon Freelancers."

Nekozukimon threw a few kunai at the blazing Digimon and hurried to Stormymon's side. "At least we're all together when it happens, eh?"

"Don't remind me." Stormymon sighed.

Maboroshimon lifted his head at the Core, with it almost a ball of pure white. He felt so sore from the overflow of energy, which did not come close to delaying its meltdown. Despair crawled over his body, even as the flat Cirrusmon did his best to cheer everyone up. Perhaps this was fate, he thought.

Kabumon, the In-Training Digimon, lay on his side with bruises and dirt marks all over his body. The dirt covered his natural bright red fur, which covered much of his body. Unlike his previous form, Koinumon, he had four stubby legs, tiny ears, and a short singular tail. The forest green A

on his back remained just as bright as before, even after battling that Agumon.

"Fascinating."

That voice, the one that Kabumon grew to fear every time he heard it, came from behind. He wiggled before he hopped back onto all fours. A huge part of him does not want to turn to his creator, the one forcing him into these trials. Despite that, he still spun and stared at him.

Kabumon's creator stood there, holding a brown quill between his right hand-paw's fingers. He carried a series of papers with his right, which had some writing. Like all previous times, his sea blue eyes held just as little emotions as his voice: none. He wore a black and white yukata kimono, which covered his red with a blue belly scaly body. His brown scaly-fur stretched out long between his white horns.

"Though you were outmatched, your tenacity held out." He wrote in the frontmost paper. "It showed similar levels as your inspirations." He stopped writing for a moment to glance at Kabumon. "Your development on becoming my desired Byronic hero is going as plotted."

Kabumon huffed out and glanced away.

"Two weeks of training, and you already displayed contempt." Kabumon's creator wrote some more.

"Fascinating." His eyes glowed white for a moment. "Oh, is that a conceivable forthcoming plot development? Because of the inclusion of possible friends, you gain a possible friendship? Tsk."

Kabumon's creator pulled out a blank piece of paper and wrote on it for a minute. Once he finished, he pulled it out and breathed on it. He released it, letting it float and fold in on itself. The centermost line solidified while the outer portion thinned. It gained a brown texture with thin strands and thinner barbs connecting them. When the page finished transforming into a brown quill, it zoomed into the sky.

"A Byronic hero that I desire for my plots has a diminutive need for friendship." Kabumon's creator shook his head. Kabumon glared at his creator despite his fear. His creator stared back with that infuriating blank expression. "Fascinating. Still, I have acquired experiences from previous disappointments. Among the things I comprehended better as a Writer is to develop plots that accomplish anticipated outcomes regardless of the conclusion."

Maboroshimon clutched his front left paw close as though clutching it into a fist. His eyes focused on the Core, which reached seconds to total meltdown. It may be futile, but it would be better to fail to do the wrong thing than to succeed in doing the right thing. Besides, his creator was right about one thing: he was tenacious to a fault. He stood back up despite how his knees shook.

"Maf?" The flat, tiny Cirrusmon turned to Maboroshimon. "Are you alright?"

Maboroshimon gave Cirrusmon a glance that told more than any illusion could. Before his friend responded to that look, Maboroshimon leaped over Stry, Neko zukimon, Stormymon, and Cirrusmon. His leap went over many of the burning Digimon the Core still produced. When he landed, his front paws clamped all around the Core.

"Maboroshimon!" Stry stared with wide, horrified eyes. "Don't! It's way too much for you now!"

"MABOROSHIMON!!" the other three screamed out.

Maboroshimon inhaled and absorbed the heat from the Core and all around, despite his body protesting he had enough.

#

WereKuromon grunted, the fiery Leomon grazing his right shoulder with its sword. It left behind a burn mark and a lot of pain, joining with his other wounds. Leomon beside him took on a similar number of wounds. Despite their injuries, the two Champion-Stage Digimon stood firm.

The three blazing Champion Digimon still fought and, worst yet, did not lose any traction.

"It seems like you needed my help after all." WereKuromon huffed. "Though it seemed I wasn't enough even for the end."

"Don't be too harsh on yourself." Leomon held his sword firm. "Even if we won't last much longer, we still gained the others some extra time."

"If there is some extra time to gain." WereKuromon summoned more of his shadows to his claws. "One last push?"

"Agree." Leomon's offhand hand-paw glowed from an orange aura.

The three fiery Digimon charged—

At the other end of the flood pipe came a bright burning glow. WereKuromon winced at the sight, wondering if the Core was melting down at last or if there would be a fiery flood. Their spinning around at the sight in

confusion disproved his second theory and maybe the first. If this meant the end, though, at least he did so to protect the others.

To WereKuromon's and Leomon's surprise, the fiery wisps and Digimon flew back to the other end as though being sucked. The burning Leomon thrust his sword into the pipe to remain, though a stream of fire leaked from his back. WereKuromon and Leomon glanced at each other, nodded, and lunged at the creature.

"Shadow Claw!"

"Fist of the Beast King!"

Their attacks knocked the burning Leomon away, splitting apart along the way.

A few seconds later, the large flood pipe became dark like before those creatures came.

"Er, we won?" WereKuromon asked though more to himself.

"Seems so," Leomon responded.

"But how?"

#

Cirrusmon covered his eyes from the fiery tornado in front of him. The others did the same, with each one

grunting. Despite his eyes being closed, he still saw the tornado's glow through his eyelids.

The glow turned faint.

The room cooled far more than Maboroshimon's previous attempt.

Cirrusmon opened his eyes and gasped at the sight.

Maboroshimon lay on top of his belly with an exhausted expression. That alone would be surprising, but what was shocking was how much his stomach swelled. From what Cirrusmon estimated, his belly grew at least five times larger than his entire body, enough that his paws were not touching the floor. It dominated the Core chamber.

"W-woah." Neko zukimon lowered his arms and widened his eyes at the sight. "I didn't think you could do something like that."

Stry planted his fists onto the ground, his eyes as huge as dinner plates. "H-HOW!?"

Stormymon rubbed his chin. "Perhaps he instinctually gathered all that heat energy into the one place that can contain it: his stomach. It's a shame he can't put it all into size." He smirked a bit. "Still, he looks somewhat adorable like this."

Cirrusmon, despite his flat body and tiny size, approached Maboroshimon. "Are-are you alright, maf?"

Maboroshimon struggled to nod. His eyes spiraled as though he was stepped on and flattened. He stuck his tongue out in a cute expression.

Stry rushed around Maboroshimon's belly to see the Core. It still glowed and hovered in the air, but a dull red. It heated up, but not as fast as the previous attempt, and did not spawn fiery Digimon. He sighed in relief.

"I-I think we finally put off the meltdown." Stry turned upward to Maboroshimon. "Though, how to get you out?"

#

"Got it!" Ember cried out.

Water streamed out from where Ember struck. It was tiny and carried sludge along the way. Still, he knew the ocean's pressure would force in more water, blasting and smashing everything along the way. Ember rushed out with Toximon and Castmon on his packs.

"Time to go!" Ember rushed out to WereKuromon and Leomon. They both nodded and sprinted as fast as possible. The door lay large and thick, enough that even Ember could fit through. The group rushed outside, with Leomon flinging on the switch. The door shut firm and tight,

enough to contain an explosion. Several seconds later, they heard water-rushing sounds. "Whew. Just in time."

"Yeah." WereKuromon nodded. "We succeeded."

#

Cirrusmon blinked for a moment. Did he feel the room rumble for a bit? The rumbling grew harsh by the seconds, with the others glancing around. Even Maboroshimon lifted his head in confusion. Stry rushed back around with a mixture of panic and joy.

"They cleared out the blockage! This room is about to get flooded!" Stry picked up the flat Cirrusmon and rushed through the door. "We need to get out!"

"But, Maboroshimon!" Cirrusmon flung his flat arms toward the swollen Digimon. "He can't move on his own! We have to help!"

"Aleph! There's nothing we can do! We need to leave it to luck now!" Stry gritted his teeth. From his expression, he hated this decision just as much but had no choice. He turned to Maboroshimon. "Survive!"

Nekozukimon and Stormymon hesitated before following Stry out. Water streamed inside, along with smashed-up rocks, by the time everyone but Maboroshimon had escaped. Steam came upon contact with

Maboroshimon's body and the Core. Stry pulled on a switch, slamming the thick doors shut tight before the water flowed out.

Stry set Cirrusmon down and sighed. "Whew. That was way too close."

Cirrusmon stared at the doors in horror. "MA-MABOROSHIMON!!!"

#

An hour had passed since they left Maboroshimon inside.

Cirrusmon sat in front of the doors, waiting while not moving. His eyes remained focused on the steel doors keeping him out. He knew why it must take so long to ensure all the heat dissipated from the room, but he still waited. Even when he no longer remained flat and grew back to ten feet tall, he sat there, waiting.

WereKuromon, Leomon, Ember the Gaururmon, Castmon, and Toximon joined them, with Stry explaining what happened. They all waited with him, each one hoping that Maboroshimon was alright. Maybe the extra energy would help keep him together instead of fragmenting into data. Perhaps there was enough air for him to breathe. They all looked grim despite clinging onto this thin hope.

The doors, at last, slid open.

Cirrusmon sprung up and rushed inside the damp Core chamber. "Maboroshimon?!"

At the center of the room lay Maboroshimon, or rather his Rookie-Stage Kajimon. He lay on his side, gasping for breath. He did not move any part of his body, as though he only had strength to breathe. His sea blue eyes held shut.

Cirrusmon picked Kajimon up and showered him with green healing molts. "Kajimon. You saved us. Don't die on us yet." Kajimon remained still, not even twitching his tail. "Kajimon!"

Kajimon coughed out some water and lifted his head to Cirrusmon. He gave his friend a weak smile while twitching his tail. With each healing molt, his vigor returned. After thirty seconds, Kajimon twisted around and lay forward toward Cirrusmon.

"He's alright!" Cirrusmon cried out to the others. He hugged Kajimon close before setting him down. "Now, don't move. You need to gain as much strength as possible, maf."

The others walked in as well, with most of them surrounding Kajimon. Leomon went around the Core chamber, digging underneath the rocks within.

WereKuromon went over to the Core itself, no longer glowing and at risk of melting down but laying on its side instead of floating.

“Kajimon, that was very foolish of you to risk your life like that!” Stry crouched to Kajimon’s side, fuming. “We don’t need anyone dying on us! But then,” his expression softened, “you saved us, the castle town, and everyone still around. If you didn’t try to take in the heat like that, I can’t imagine how big the crater would get.”

Kajimon gave Stry a sly smile.

Stry sighed and turned to WereKuromon. “How is the Core? Is it repairable?”

Meanwhile, Kuromon picked up the Core and flipped it over. “I’m gonna be honest with you. Even with my skills and every bit of Digizoid we have, I can’t repair this.”

Most of the Digimon around blinked and rushed over to WereKuromon’s side. Cirrusmon hesitated, patted Kajimon’s head, and hurried over as well. Kajimon remained lying there, with his sly smile fading from his muzzle. He glanced at Leomon, who still searched under the rocks and rubble.

Stry widened his eyes at the Core itself. Chunks of its dark surface lay melted. On one end lay a small hole that

should not be there in the first place. WereKuromon twisted the Core open and showed its inner. The generator within lay crippled, especially by the near-meltdown, along with various machinery.

“Oh-oh jeez!” Stry took one-half of the Core. “This-this is horrible!”

“I know. That means I won’t have my rematch with Castmon on Super Smash Bros.” Toximon huffed out her cheeks. “How will we settle it now?”

Stormymon rolled his eyes. “Toximon, it’s much worse than that. The Core generates power for everything in the castle. From refrigerators to freezers, air conditioners to heaters, and the castle’s defenses. Without it, our food will rot out quicker, and it would be easier for invading Digimon to take over.”

“I hate to say it, but Stomymon’s right.” Nekozukimon held a serious expression that was unusual on his face. “Before, it would take centuries for someone like Beelzemon to break through. But now? Seconds?”

“O-oh.” Toximon gasped and widened her eyes. “I-I guess that game will be done in another time.” Stormymon almost rolled his eyes when she added, “After all, we’ll need everyone to guard the castle town.”

Stormymon blinked and turned to WereKuromon and Stry. "Is there anything that can be done?"

Stry hummed for a few seconds. "Well, the only thing we can do is get a replacement. The only group that makes these Cores is the Metal Empire."

"The Metal Empire?" Castmon spoke up. "Isn't that some distance away?"

"Afraid so." Stormymon rubbed the back of his left ear. "The closest one we can get to is at Factorial Town in File Island."

"File Island, you say?" Nekozukimon remarked.

Stry sighed. "If that's where we need to go and get a new one, then yes."

"And maybe, while we're there, we can get a new game!" Toximon giggled.

"Er, what caused the Core to meltdown in the first place?" Castmon asked.

Before anyone could respond, Leomon interrupted. "Sabotage."

The room felt much colder despite Kajimon not absorbing any of the heat. Every eye turned to Leomon,

who lifted a boulder and set it aside. He faced the ground while twitching his lips.

Stry inhaled and took a step forward. "Um, sabotage? You don't mean—"

"I'm not accusing anyone here of it if that's what you're wondering." Leomon bent down. "But think about it. The clogging that prevented the Core chamber from flooding looked recent. In fact, I bet it happened at around the same time the Core was starting to overheat. Plus, it doesn't look like it caved in; rather, someone or something planted the blockage there." He picked up the object from the floor. "Plus, the Core somehow produced those creatures that *wanted* it to meltdown. As though it held a will that desired it."

WereKuromon nodded. "Yeah. And look at this." He pointed at the thin line throughout the Core, starting from that tiny hole. "That isn't natural. The Core was pierced through, causing it to overload in the first place. But what could cause it?"

"I thought you might find a sign of damages, so I went on a hunch to see if whatever caused it remained here. And I believe I found it." Leomon showed the others what he found and held.

Cirrusmon blinked at the object in confusion. "Maf? A feather?"

"Yes. Or, to put it in more accurate terms, a quill." Leomon approached the others while carrying the brown quill. He lay it on one end where the hole was. It fitted in perfectly. "Someone tossed this in, piercing through the Core."

"That-that's ridiculous!" Stry shook his head in disbelief. "How could this feather, a quill, do that!? Isn't that ridiculous, Kajimon?!"

Kajimon had already disappeared without a trace.

"Kajimon?" Stry blinked. "Where did he go?"

"Maf?"

#

Kajimon sprinted outside despite still feeling exhausted. His face paled as white as a Bakemon's sheet from pure fear. He stopped once he climbed outside from the Old Throne and went several yards away. He breathed in and out, splaying and clutching his front paws in a pattern while calming himself. Despite that, terror still filled every bit of his body. He stood there, repeating that pattern, for who knows how long.

“Maf? Kajimon?” Cirrusmon said from behind.

Kajimon, despite wanting to turn to Cirrusmon, remained facing ahead. He lowered his face out of shame and fear. He closed his eyes, wanting to scream despite having no ability to do so.

Cirrusmon stood beside him before kneeling. He swung his arm around Kajimon in a warm side hug. Cirrusmon murred, which Kajimon felt.

Kajimon still felt the terror of his creator finally making his move.

It felt a lot less with Cirrusmon by his side.

About Author

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I'd love to hear from you and answer any questions you may have.

Thanks again for your support, and I can't wait to share more of my work with you soon!