

# **Digimon Freelancer Adventure The Party**

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Content warning: Flattening, Fattening, Toony silliness

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A large castle towered in the distance, sandwiched between the western forest and the eastern sea. Its octagon walls surrounded the budding town within, where multiple Digimon lived. A pair of rivers passed from the north and south to the sea, with the northern river flowing underneath the walls. Woodlands dotted the north half of the castle, enough to form a mini forest.

The Digimon Freelancers, founded by Alephmon and Stry, owned this castle. Before, this place had been decaying for a thousand years, with few interested in it; now, it has regained much of its former vigor after months of repair work. The Freelancers found secrets lurking within the castle's land, from the multiversal portal underneath to various relics predating Digimon's history.

With the Digimon Freelancers growing in numbers, including some humans, it seemed there was nowhere to go but up.

At least, until the Core incident.

# # #

Stry the Veemon went through the paperwork, from the budget to the scouting reports, with tired red eyes. His blue skin-like scales, except for his white torso, dominated much of his body. He rubbed underneath his eyes, where one of

the small yellow V lay. Another lay parallel and a larger yellow V lay on his forehead. His long ear-like appendages flopped behind his head, trying to stay upright but could not bring the will to.

Stry sighed and hopped off from the wooden chair, cracking his back along the way. The candle near the wooden desk could not get him to stay as awake as he wanted. Instead, he stepped toward the window to feel the springtime sunlight flowing in. It was not too hot, but he knew summer was only a few weeks away. With all of the air conditioners down, he might as well enjoy the perfect warmth as possible.

He and the other Freelancers had tried to pretend that their defenses were still up. Under the castle's full power, it could generate a shield powerful enough to withstand an attack by a Mega Digimon. With it down, though, the best they could do was bluff. He knew it was just as equivalent to showing a paper Omegamon to outsiders, but even a bluff had some power.

He wondered how much that bluff brought and if it was a matter of time.

Stry shook his head in defiance. He would not give this castle up to any Digimon, even if victory was a fleeting hope. There were still some secrets waiting to be

discovered, which he felt in his heart. They already lasted two weeks with the Core down, so they only needed two to three more weeks.

At least, he hoped it would be that long.

“Maf. Anything wrong?”

Stry perked his ear-like appendages and turned to the voice’s source. Standing next to him was his best friend in the entire Digital World. Pale blue fur covered much of his anthro folf body. He rubbed his fluffy white chest and stomach, making them poof more. His bushy gray tail, tipped with pale blue, swayed behind him. Khaki shorts hung on his waist, with a pair of black suspenders flopping on his sides. A belt holding his sword slung from his white shoulder to his left hip.

He wore a bright red bandana around his neck, much like Stry, symbolizing their friendship.

Stry forced himself to smile. “The usual, Alephmon.”

Alephmon the Folf Digimon nodded. “How’s the auxiliaries, maf?”

“So far, OK. We used them for stuff like refrigeration.” Stry rubbed his eyes. “Toximon begged me to use it to help power more, like her TV and video games, but I had to decline. We can’t stretch the power too much, which means

not using it for such things. Otherwise, we'll lose too much too quick, and any devious Digimon might guess the truth of what happened. Even having Stormymon to recharge it could only help us so far."

Alephmon nodded, though some of it passed over his head. "Right, maf. So, have you read about the details on Factorial City?"

Str glanced at the folder Alephmon and Levin made during their time on File Island.

The simple solution for replacing the old Core, which almost underwent a meltdown, was to buy a new one. It would cost tremendous money, enough to put the Freelancer in debt for decades. Despite that, Stry would rather be in debt for life than live in a powerless castle for a year. The problem was that the Metal Empire, which builds such Cores, did not like outsiders in the best times. The closest settlement to them, Factorial City, and its leadership, Metal Tyrannomon X, were downright xenophobic. With such attitudes, it was impossible to get inside to purchase a new Core.

So, they plan to steal one instead.

Stry chewed on his lips for a second. The idea of stealing from a Metal Empire's city, where even a village

had constant surveillance, felt insane. It was not helped by how their previous information about the city was outdated, when it was a town instead. Even during the Freelancer's scouting mission to observe, it almost ended in disaster. Stry could think of multiple ways of taking a Core that could go wrong, even during a return trip with one.

At the same time, he could not think of a better plan.

"Yeah. It's good work that you discovered where the Cores are made." Stry went to the desk and picked up the folder. "Even more so thanks to our newcomer, Headmon." He opened it and flipped through the pages. "The details he brought from the city, and especially from what he knew about Metal Tyranomon X and his inner circle, are invaluable."

"Maf. That's great!" Alephmon grinned, closed his bright yellow eyes, and wagged his tail.

Stry nodded and turned to the reader. "In case you're wondering, by the time you read this, the silly writer will already recon a previous story that mentioned Headmon with Levin. The writer is not that knowledgeable, that's all."

"Maf?" Alephmon opened his eyes and tilted his head. "Who were you talking to?"

"Oh! Er, nobody!" Stry rubbed the back of his head and laughed. "Vevehehe."

"Alephmon giggled and booped Stry's nose, where a short spike pointed outward. "You're silly."

Stry nodded and sighed. "Still, do you really think it's a good idea to have a party?"

"Of course I do, maf!" Alephmon grinned. "And there's plenty of good reasons why I think so!"

"Uh-huh." Stry set the folder on his desk and crossed his arms. "Explain."

"First off, it's to truly welcome Headmon into our group." Alephmon pressed one of his swollen fingers against the other. "Did you know that the Digimon at Factorial City are allowed an hour of rest each day, not including sleep? Or how the only 'rest' is through gambling in openly rigged casinos? Headmon never even heard of anything like a party or fun where anyone could win. He should at least know that we don't do things like that there."

Stry inclined his head. "That's one."

"Second, it's to keep morale up." Alephmon glanced out the window and stared inside the castle's walls.

"Though I don't hear them say it, I know they're afraid."



They're afraid that we'll get attacked at any time. They're afraid that we'll never get a new Core. A party, even a small one, would lift their spirits. I just know it."

Stry rubbed his chin." That's two,"

"Third, it's our last day of peace." Alephmon curled his left hand-paw into a fist and pressed it against his chest. "Tomorrow, we'll head over to Factorial City. Once we're there, with everything we know, we'll go inside and take a Core. Rather unbecoming of a Digimon knight, but we need it." Alephmon turned to Stry. "I want them to have one last day of happiness before we start this quest."

"I admit that makes a certain amount of sense." Stry nodded. "Yeah, it won't do to have our nerves to always be high-strung. We need to relax."

"Maf! Thanks!"

Alephmon swung his arms out and hugged Stry close. Stry blinked once, laughed, and hugged Alephmon back. They both wagged their tails fast before they calmed down.

"So, I'm guessing that you got everything ready for that party?" Stry asked.

"Yeah, maf! It'll start in an hour or so!" Alephmon grinned wide. "I asked everyone if they wanted to join, and they all said yes!" His grin faltered. "Except for one."

Stry nodded with a grim expression. He walked around the desk, pulled open one of the drawers, and glanced inside. There, a brown quill lay. Stry picked it up and examined it, like dozens of times before. It felt normal, but he knew that was only a façade. He would have thrown it away if it had not been for it being the reason the Core underwent a meltdown.

One of the Freelancers knew about the quill and its owner.

After all, that Freelancer panicked at the sight of it.

Rather than answering any questions about it, he holed himself up in his home.

"Yeah," Stry answered.

Stry returned the quill, closed it, and left his and Alephmon's room. It might be a futile attempt, like the previous two weeks. At the same time, doing nothing would not give him the answers he and the other seek. If they were to prevent this from happening again and find out who did it, they needed the answers.

Perhaps the best way to do it was to put him at ease.

What better way to do that than a party?

Alephmon followed close behind, having a concerned yet determined expression.

# # #

Kajimon the Fox Digimon sat in front of his desk, observing with tired sea blue eyes. A large vial had its reddish contents in a near-boiled state, enough to flow through a clear tube. It exited out the other end, falling into green liquid in a smaller vial. Misty wisps flowed out, with the green turning cyan and reaching near the top. Once every bit of the boiling fluid exited, Kajimon turned off the burner and placed a cork inside the cyan vial.

He set the vial next to dozens of other potions he made.

Over half of them were too dangerous to consume.

Kajimon shook his head and rubbed his face, covering it with bright red fur like much of his body. His jet-black ears with white inner wiggled and flopped forward. He took a couple of steps to the dangerous potions he had made, wondering if he should dispose of them. Kajimon shook his head, not feeling in the mood to do something so tedious. That should be something to do tomorrow.

Like how he pushed it from yesterday to today.

And how he pushed it from the day before yesterday to yesterday.

Kajimon picked up the failed, dangerous potion, careful not to break it open with his paw. A small part of him wanted to dispose of it with the others; even the glass would be dangerous. Then again, the only one harmed by it would be him. He placed it down and instead picked up one of the successful potions he made a few days ago. He stuffed it in his light blue bandana, which almost slipped off because of how carelessly he tied it. Once he caught it and had it secure, he carried it out from the test room and stepped into his library nearby.

The library itself was extensive, though all his rooms were large, at least doubled the size of an average room. Even the height of these rooms stretched taller than usual. Given the incoming summer, he knew he would fill the extra space with his size. Under normal circumstances, that would excite him, but he had difficulty putting much energy into anything.

Instead, he just repeated the same routines, hoping that it would end the nightmares.

They still came, regardless of what he did.

Kajimon hopped onto a bright red couch where an already open book lay. He was large for a Rookie-stage Digimon, with him at six feet from paws to shoulders, but the sofa was even larger. If it were not for his white underbelly, chest, front of his neck, jet-black legs down the knees, and jet-black tail tip, he would blend in with the rest of his couch. He pulled out the potion and watched its clear fluids spin around inside before setting it down.

A knock on the door came from the front of the house.

Kajimon lifted his head and felt tempted to answer the door. After a second, he lowered it back down and ignored it. They would not understand the fear he carried. If they found out about his creator, they would view him as just another threat. Kajimon knew better, having been 'raised' by him. They would not see him as someone beyond their ability to fight until it was too late.

How could he convey that?

The door knocking happened again, distracting Kajimon from his depressing thoughts. He huffed and shook his head. Such distractions would be welcoming, but it would only be a reprieve. No, it was best to stay—

The door's lock clicked, followed by the door sliding open.

Kajimon flinched and stood from the couch. There was only one he would trust to keep a spare key to his home. He hopped off and walked over to the open doorway. When he turned to the front door, it slid shut with two more Digimon, Alephmon and Stry, inside.

Alephmon spotted Kajimon, waved, and rushed over. "Maf! Hey there, Kajimon!"

Kajimon blinked twice and stepped backward into his library.

Alephmon sprinted inside and pouched Kajimon by the neck. Despite being much shorter than Kajimon, at about half his height, Alephmon managed to reach his head with a jump. He slung around back and forth in that hug as though expecting Kajimon to hug back.

Kajimon, with some reluctance, patted Alephmon on the back.

"It's nice to see you, Kajimon." Stry followed inside, leaning by the doorway with crossed arms. "Sorry for barging in."

Kajimon shrugged and set Alephmon on the red couch.

"Woooooooooah! This is so soft!" Alephmon bounced on the couch a few times. While the sofa made Kajimon look

small, it made Alephmon look like an infant in comparison. "I should visit your place some more."

Kajimon rolled his eyes, hopped onto the couch beside Alephmon, and stared at the open book.

Alephmon peeked over Kajimon's shoulders with wide yellow eyes. "Making Friends in High Places? What type of book is that, maf?"

Kajimon shrugged.

"You don't know?" Alephmon scratched the top of his hair-like turf on his head. He followed that up by hopping off the couch and wandering over to the dark brown desk. It had no chair behind it, given Kajimon's feral shape, so Alephmon grabbed the front and lifted his head just high enough to stare at the topmost paper. It repeated in Kajimon's handwriting: Oncoming Storm; His Bandaged Arm; He's Counting Down; Good Fox. These repetitive phrases filled the entire page from top to bottom. "What do those mean, maf?"

Kajimon kept his eyes on the same page he read for the past nine days.

Alephmon huffed, lowered back onto the floor, hopped onto the couch, and booped Kajimon's nose. "Boop!"

Kajimon flinched and turned to Alephmon with narrow eyes.

"Maf, sorry." Alephmon rubbed the back of his head. "I'm just worried about you. I mean, when have we last seen our large friend offering potions for testing?"

Kajimon huffed and lowered his head onto his front paws with his eyes half-closed.

Alephmon sat beside Kajimon and rubbed his triangular ears. "Ahahaha, maf."

Kajimon could not help but wag his tail.

"Seriously, bud, we're worried about you," Stry said. He set his left hand against his hip. "You've been cooped up in your home since, well, you know. It's not healthy for you! You got a whole bunch of us worried sick about you. You should step outside, feel the sun, have fun! And best of all, do some workouts!"

Kajimon blinked two times at Stry. What he said made some sense, something that Kajimon knew. At the same time, if Kajimon did step outside, he would eventually have to explain what he knew. If they knew that his creator caused the near Core meltdown, they would keep an eye out for him.



Kajimon would not let his friends suffer because they crossed his path.

He stood, hopped off the couch, and left for his potion-making test room.

Kajimon had just adjusted some ingredients he brought from the storeroom when Alephmon and Stry followed. Alephmon carried the clear potion Kajimon had at the library, one of his more special potions. Stry sighed and looked at the dozens of potions Kajimon made for the past two weeks.

"Is this what you've been working on?" Stry lifted one of the sick green brews and hovered it before his eyes. "I must admit that your potion-making ability is impressive. I thought that using Digimon cards and Digivices in conjunction to edit Digimon data, even if temporary, was the only way possible. I only realized how mistaken I was when I saw the aftermath of what one did to Alephmon. You're a genius in that regard. You know that, right?"

Kajimon turned to Stry, trying to hide his embarrassment and pleased expression from his face. Though he would not admit to it, he felt delighted whenever he got praise. At the same time, he sensed that Stry was just trying to butter him up with these compliments. Kajimon huffed and shook his head.

Stry nodded at Alephmon and pulled out the cork from the sick green potion.

Kajimon widened his eyes and snagged that potion away from Stry.

“That got a reaction from you,” Stry remarked. Kajimon huffed, folded his ears back, and glared at Stry. Stry responded with a sly grin. “Relax. I wasn’t going to drink it. I bet that you didn’t follow your usual strict standards, right?”

Kajimon blinked several times, enough that Stry inserted the cork back into the potion. He huffed out his cheeks and went where the good and bad potions were mixed. He separated the bad ones by putting them in a wooden box with a skull symbol. He also added cotton padding to prevent them from bursting. Once done, he sealed the box with a wooden top.

Stry went over to Kajimon and patted his leg. “Look, buddy. I know you went through a lot that day. We may not know each other for more than a year, but I know you well enough that there’s something wrong. More than just those rotten potions. Do you want to know why?”

Kajimon gave Stry a curious glare.

"Because you have not used your illusion abilities to communicate with us. Not even once."

Kajimon flinched and took a step back. Now that he thought about it, he had not used his illusion powers ever since the Core incident. Even alone, he enjoyed using illusions to have fun and create stories.

Had he let his creator take away one of the things he had fun with?

Kajimon sat down, curled his front paws together, and lowered his head. He breathed in and out hard, feeling his guts twisted within. Alephmon and Stry rubbed his front legs, trying to calm him down. Kajimon clenched his teeth, his chest expanding from how much he breathed. The rubbing soon calmed him down, allowing him to turn to Stry.

"Don't worry. You're with us." Stry reached and patted Kajimon's back, where a forest green A lay. "Now, we're having a party at the castle's center."

"Yeah!" Alephmon jumped and nuzzled Kajimon's face. "There'll be plenty of games, prizes, and more! Plus, you'll see a new member of our Freelancers! Why, you should take care of the drinks center! Fauxmon is currently

the head of it, though she'll try to bring alcohol along. I'm sure you'll come up with something healthier!"

"Vevehehe. It wouldn't be too hard." Stry let out a wide grin. "Ready to have fun?"

Kajimon hesitated, breathed in, and nodded.

"Good!" Stry half-guided/half-pulled Kajimon out from the testing room. For being a Rookie-level Digimon that Kajimon outsized, he had little issues pulling him. Stry did not seem to notice Kajimon's weight or size at all. "Now, remember to have fun!"

Kajimon nodded while wondering how Stry got so strong.

# # #

Alephmon waited behind, watching Kajimon and Stry approach the front door. He stepped forward before pausing, realizing he still carried that potion. He wondered if he should leave it behind since he had no clue what it did. It had no label or even symbols on the glass itself.

Still, it could not be anything terrible.

Alephmon grinned and carried the potion with him, hiding it behind his back.

# # #

All around, the various Freelancers did the final touches for the party. Toximon and Castmon set up the benches and picnic tables before the stage. Stormymon went from table to table, setting up electric blue sheets on top of them. Stry went to his game, a strongman game, and did the final touches to it.

Nekozukimon and Leomon carried sunshades over to the various tables. They unfurled one of them and planted it on the ground. It was long enough to cover two tables at once. It did not go that high, with it only tall enough that Leomon could only fit underneath by crouching. He was still satisfied with it, granting Nekozukimon a headpat. The two went on to another table to set another sun shade over.

Alephmon watched with approval throughout it all before heading to the drink area. Kajimon stood there with Fauxmon, nodding at the ingredients. He sliced one of the lemons in half with a claw and handed both halves to Fauxmon. She smiled and squished both simultaneously, pouring the juices into one of the glass bowls. They repeated this pattern until it reached halfway up. Kajimon pulled out a water bottle full of syrupy water and poured it in. Fauxmon stirred the mixture together before adding some ice to cool it down.

Alephmon glanced at the potion he still carried and hid it behind his back. "Hey there, buddies! Maf, how are things going?"

Kajimon nodded while giving a half smile.

"Things are going super-well!" Fauxmon rubbed her gloved hand-paws together while nodding up and down. "His alchemist's skills in making potions transfer really well to making lovely drinks!"

Kajimon rolled his eyes at the word 'alchemist' and shook his head.

"Maf! That's great!" Alephmon reached up and patted Kajimon on his side. "Keep up the good work!"

Kajimon nodded, though he eyed Alephmon's other arm.

"Huh? It's nothing, maf!" Alephmon dropped the potion, and it rolled underneath the table. He showed both of his puffy hand-paws, with fingerless black gloves over them, to Kajimon. "See?"

Kajimon raised his eye in doubt before shrugging.

"Say, Kajimon?" Fauxmon grinned while hopping onto his head. "Maybe next time this happens, you should make some moonshine. That'll be great!"

Kajimon blinked twice, his expression unreadable.

Fauxmon giggled, hopped back onto the table, and poured herself some of the lemonade. She picked up a cup full of it and drank it with a smug smile. Her eyes lightened up, with her jumping up and down in joy. Kajimon blinked a few times before smiling a bit wider than before.

Alephmon laughed and patted Fauxmon on the head. "Maf. I'll leave you be."

"OK! Be good, OK?" Fauxmon grinned and set her drink down.

"I will, maf."

Alephmon wandered away, watching the various Freelancers finishing up the party. He felt immense pride for his group just then. Once, it was just him and Stry, but time passed with the group swelling into a significant team. He knew that they would stick together through thick and thin, something that this crisis proved. In fact, he did not sense a single bit of tension. Alephmon grinned wide and wiggled both hand-paws behind his back.

It dawned on him that he left that potion behind.

He shook his head and continued onward. It was not like anyone would find it there.

# # #

"O-wow? What's this?" Fauxmon hopped underneath the table and found an unlabeled vial with clear liquid. She turned to Kajimon, wondering if he knew what this was. Instead, he focused on cutting up the apples and removing the seeds from them. Fauxmon glanced at the vial and thought about it. "Hmm."

Fauxmon pulled off the cork and sniffed it.

"Smells like nothing. Must be plain water then." Fauxmon closed the vial and hopped onto the table. She hummed, watching Kajimon grinding the apples to a pulp. An idea popped into her head, causing her to grin. "I doubt it'll do too much harm."

Fauxmon opened the vial again and poured its contents into the lemonade.

# # #

"OK, everyone. Maf!" Alephmon leaned forward on the stage. Stry stood beside him while nodding. Alephmon continued, "How are you all doing?"

Kajimon sat on the ground, one of the few who did it instead of sitting on a chair. It would have been awkward at best for him to sit on one at his size and shape. He did



not mind, of course, since he was used to it. He kept his focus on the stage, though his attention drifted occasionally.

Fauxmon sat on top of his head, between his ears. Unlike Kajimon, the brown plushy Digimon did not focus on the stage. Instead, she relaxed and fiddled with the zipper on her chest. Her purple eyes remained shut in perfect relaxation.

"As you all know, maf, we went to Factorial City on File Island to scout for a new Core. Along the way, we got ourselves a brand-new friend, maf." Alephmon extended his arm to the right. "Say hello to Headmon!"

On cue, Headmon walked onto the stage.

Kajimon blinked in complete surprise at this new Digimon. His body was navy blue, with minty green toes, fingers, tail tip, and on the edge of his fuzzy cheeks and ear tufts. The rest of his hands- and feet-paws were shaped like he wore pure white fingerless gloves and frontless shoes. Headmon rubbed his white oval chest and belly with a brown belt and bag just above his tail. His eyes glittered two tones, deep blue at the top and dark amber at the bottom.

What struck Kajimon the most was the lack of arms, legs, and neck on this Headmon. His torso floated above

his feet-paws, which walked forward without any indication of how. His hand-paws floated beside him, thought for a moment they paused in midair halfway across the stage. Headmon spun his head around 180, and his hand-paws floated back to his sides.

Kajimon leaned forward, feeling intrigued for the first time in a while.

"Um, hello there." Headmon rubbed the back of his floating head between his large triangular ears. "I-I'm not that used to having this many eyes on me. But, um, thank you for taking me."

Everyone in the audience clapped for Headmon, with Toximon cheering at the top of her voice. Kajimon nodded, standing on his hindlegs and trying to clap with his forelegs. All it did was cause a muffled clap and knock Fauxmon off his head. Rather than getting angry, Fauxmon hopped back up, booped Kajimon's nose, and clapped with the others.

Headmon's face turned bright red, stammering for a couple of seconds. Stry nodded and, with a gentle push, helped him off the stage. Headmon relaxed and smiled, giving the other an approving nod. One of Headmon's hand-paws floated around and tapped Stry's shoulder. Stry

looked the other way in confusion while Headmon let out a slight snicker.

Kajimon nodded and sat back now, already liking this new Digimon.

“He looks like a fun one,” a voice to Kajimon’s side said.

Kajimon glanced over and saw Zoom, one of the few humans in the Freelancers. His black with a white stripe baseball hat somehow managed to lay on top of his shoulder-length brown hair. His orange eyes glittered with joy. His tan jacket with a brown streak at the zipper and end of sleeves lay snug on him. The jacket’s collar, meanwhile, looked as though it was meant for someone with a thicker neck. He glanced at Kajimon and, after a bit of hesitation, patted his side.

“Nice to see you finally out,” Zoom said.

Kajimon nodded, this time careful not to knock Fauxmon off.

“Say, I have a bit of a strange question.” Zoom tapped his fingers against his dark gray pants. Kajimon raised an eye at him, waiting for that question. Zoom inhaled and asked, “Is it alright if I rub your paws for a moment.”

Kajimon blinked a couple of times, surprised by that question. Still, he had no excuse to not let Zoom rub or touch them. He lifted one of his forepaws and set it on Zoom's knee. Even if one excluded his large white claws, it covered all of that knee. Zoom, without hesitating for a single moment, rubbed Kajimon's paw with both hands.

"Man, it feels so good." Zoom smiled and rubbed Kajimon's paw some more. He then tickled Kajimon's paw paws, causing the Digimon to flinch. Zoom noticed and stopped. "Sorry."

Kajimon shrugged and rubbed his cheek against Zoom, assuring him it was all right.

"Thanks!" Zoom set Kajimon's paw down.

"Maf!" Alephmon waved on the stage, drawing every eye to him. "I declared that this party has begun!"

Everyone (or at least everyone who could speak) cheered.

# # #

"Has Kajimon explained about the quill yet?" Leomon asked Stry.

Stry leaned against a pole in front of a strongman game. Alephmon behind him lifted a mallet with a head

larger than his torso. A second later, Alephmon leaned too far back and fell. Toximon the Chincat Digimon giggled, watching on the side while wagging her tail. Alephmon scrambled to get himself back onto his feet-paws.

"We haven't asked him about it yet," Stry answered. He shrugged and spun around. "Careful with that, Alephmon! You could hurt yourself!"

"Maf!"

"Let me help you with that." Toximon hopped over the small wooden fencing with ease. Her lime green fur fluttered in the cool breeze along with her hair-fur. She stood beside Alephmon and picked up the mallet much more easily than Alephmon. She followed it up by showing him the proper grip and where to hold it for better ease.

"You see?"

"Maf, yeah." Alephmon accepted the mallet and gripped it, which was where Toximon had shown him.

"I swear if he didn't get flattened at least once this entire party, it'll be a miracle of biblical proportions." Stry shook his head.

"There goes my faith," Leomon remarked in a dry tone. He leaned closer to Stry. "To get back to the point, you haven't asked him yet?"

“Not yet.” Stry stared back at Leomon. “Look, I want him to explain it as much as you do. Whoever or whatever destroyed the Core will likely pull another stunt like that again. We have to be ready for it.”

“But?” Leomon crossed his arms between his ripped, muscular chest and stomach.

Stry sighed. “But I don’t want to rush Kajimon. Whatever he knows about it is obviously traumatic. So much so that it’s clear that he doesn’t want to think about it, let alone ‘explain’ it.”

This time, Alephmon lifted the mallet above his head without leaning too far back. He breathed in and swung it at the lever. The force knocked the puck upward, only pausing at the halfway point in the tube. It went back down with a couple of bounces before staying down. Alephmon rubbed the back of his head, embarrassed by it. Toximon, meanwhile, patted him on the shoulder while giving him a nod.

Stry smiled, enjoying how close they become. It was almost fitting that Toximon wore a red bandana like himself and Alephmon. Leomon coughed, pulling him away from those two to continue that conversation.

"We can't exactly treat him with kid gloves forever," Leomon said. He shook his head while rubbing his golden mane. "He knows something. And while I do understand why you don't want to rush him, we may need to."

"Why's that?" Stry asked. He rubbed his chin and face, stopping at the white spike on his nose.

"As you said, whoever or whatever caused the Core to almost meltdown will certainly strike again," Leomon answered. His stern blue eyes remained steady with Stry's red. "In fact, I foresaw several areas where they could strike again. It could be sailing on the way, in Factorial City, or even while installing the new Core in. That's what any sane attacker would do. We need to know this threat to better face it, not go in blind."

Stry kept his stare, hiding his feelings about it. Leomon had some strong points about it, he knew. The thought of getting attacked was on his mind, especially by the one who destroyed the old Core. Already, he envisioned their home getting taken with the Freelancers defeated, or worse, dissolving into pure data where it would reform into new versions of themselves.

The thought of losing his memories of Alephmon disturbed him more than he would like to admit.

At the same time, there was one thing bothering him.

"If this attacker were going to do that, why haven't they done so already?" Stry asked. "After all, the castle lost its power. There's no way they would have not known this would happen. They could send a Digimon army to attack us. Heck, they could've ambushed Alephmon's team during the scouting trip in Factorial City. Why didn't they?"

Toximon took the mallet from Alephmon despite it not being her turn. She swung it back, with a much better stance than Alephmon's, and swung its head against the leaver. The puck flew up and slammed against the bell, ringing it. Toximon turned to Alephmon and grinned, her tongue sticking out. Alephmon laughed and cheered for her.

"That thought struck me as well," Leomon admitted. He turned away and leaned on one of the wooden fencings. "Will Toximon get a prize for that?"

"Nah. She cut in line," Stry answered. "Besides, she didn't do it for a prize. She did it to show off to him."

"Like a friend showing off their skills to another," Leomon said. He rubbed his long left ear, touching the golden earring on it. "But yes, I thought about it. It didn't



make sense, at least at first.” Leomon rubbed the black belts on his left forearm. “But now, I have a theory as to why.”

“Hmm?” Stry lifted one of his ear-like appendages in Leomon’s direction. “And that is?”

“It’s because our mysterious attacker is waiting for a certain someone,” Leomon answered.

It took a second for Stry to guess who he meant. “Kajimon.”

“Exactly. It doesn’t fill every hole, but it’s the best I got.” Leomon nodded. He lowered his left arm, letting it brush against his jet-black pants. “It would be better if we know more from Kajimon, though.”

“I agree. Of course, I could say the same with everyone here. Kuromon, for example.” Stry shifted his eyes side to side. “A Digimon who can mold Digizoid, one of the hardest materials in the Digital World, without issues. And one who had no memories of their origins? That also rang alarm bells.”

“At least his past hasn’t come to haunt him,” Leomon remarked in a dry tone.

“For now.” Stry stretched his arms and walked over to the laughing Alephmon and Toximon. “Alright, you two. Both of you made your attempts, with yours without giving

out a ticket I might add,” Stry eyed an embarrassed Toximon. “Either hand over another or try out the other games at this party.”

Both Alephmon and Toximon nodded and ran out. Along the way, they passed by Kajimon’s and Fauxmon’s drink stand and accepted lemonade from them. They drank it up and tossed the empty cups into the trash. Toximon pointed at another game, a dart game run by Castmon, and she and Alephmon headed over there. Stry laughed a bit and picked up the mallet.

“Do you want to give it a free chance, Leomon?” Stry asked.

“No thanks. I don’t think it would be fair for a Champion like me to play a strongman game with Rookie-level Digimon.” Leomon rubbed his left knuckles, where iron knuckles lay. “Well, except against you.”

“Oh, come on!” Stry swung the mallet around. “I may be strong, but I’m not *that* strong.”

Stry, without paying attention, slammed the mallet on top of the strongman game’s lever. It rocketed the puck upward with such force that it shattered the bell upon impact. The puck flew ever higher, beyond even the most

sharp-eyed Digimon. Stry and Leomon stared upward for a few seconds.

Before Leomon could say anything, Stry said, "Shut it."

# # #

"Woah! This drink stall is pretty cool," Zoom said.

Kajimon nodded, showing the various drinks he made with Fauxmon's help. Lemonade, apple juice, orange juice, and even cranberry juice lay in huge bowls to be scooped out. Other drinks, like sun tea, chocolate, and a couple of sodas, lay in giant jugs. The liquid levels were lower than when it started, with the lowest being the lemonade.

Kajimon waved one of his legs out to the drinks.

"You want me to try one?" Zoom asked.

Kajimon nodded with a small smile.

"Jeez. Well, I would like lemonade, but I've been having that for the past week, so I'll pass on that." He headed over to another large bowl and nodded. "I'll take the apple one if you don't mind."

Kajimon nodded in approval.

Zoom smiled and grabbed the apple juice scoop and an empty cup. He poured the juice into the cup, careful not to let it drip onto the table. Once he set the scoop back into

the bowl, he sipped. His eyes lit up, and he smiled brighter than before.

"This tastes so good!" Zoom walked over to Kajimon and patted him on the head. "Thank you for making these!"

"Hey! I helped, too!" Fauxmon hopped around the table and flailed her arms around. "Like he could've stirred all of them by himself!"

"Ah, Fauxmon. My bad." Zoom patted Fauxmon on the head. "You did good as well."

"Awwwww! Thanks!" Fauxmon hopped in joy. "I do my best! Though it's a shame that you passed on the lemonade. It has an extra bit of luck!"

Kajimon raised an eye in confusion but shrugged.

"Sorry. Maybe next time," Zoom said. He let out an embarrassed laugh before turning to Kajimon. "So, how have you been doing?"

Kajimon hesitated for a few moments. He was unsure of what to answer to that question. He did feel better than the previous two weeks, but not that much better. At the same time, he was not outright miserable. So, Kajimon lifted his paw and wiggled it in a so-so fashion."

"Hmm. I see." Zoom reached over and rubbed Kajimon's paw again. "Sorry. I just like paws."

Kajimon nodded while suppressing a smile.

"How are things going here?"

Kajimon, Zoom, and Fauxmon turned to the side toward the newcomer. Stry walked over, rubbing the back of his head as though embarrassed. Kajimon leaned to look behind Stry, where Leomon struggled to fix the lumber damages to the strongman game's wooden back. From the look of it, it would take time for the glue to dry up and for the game to be ready again.

"We're doing well, thank you." Zoom waved to Stry. "Say, want a drink?"

"Yes. I would ask for a hard one, but I don't see anything like that here." Stry huffed for a second. "So, I'll settle for what Alephmon had."

Stry reached for the lemonade bowl and picked up its scooper. He poured the lemonade into an empty cup, ensuring none dribbled onto the table. Once done, he replaced the scooper and drank the lemonade. He smiled, wagged his tail, and straightened his ear-like appendages.

"This tastes great." Stry grinned at Kajimon and Fauxmon, giving them a thumbs-up. "I knew having you two run the drinks was a good idea."

"Awww! Thanks! And I'm glad that you have taken the lemonade!" Fauxmon giggled for a few seconds. "That one is super lucky!"

Kajimon rolled his eyes for a second. The idea that any specific type of drink would be lucky felt ridiculous. All of the drinks here tasted good; he ensured that thanks to his potion-making skills transferring to here. It felt silly to name one as silly, even if it was to exaggerate.

"Say, you look thirsty all of a sudden." Zoom gazed at Kajimon for a few seconds. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind one of your own drinks for yourself, then?"

Kajimon blinked a few times in confusion. Before he could do anything, Zoom poured some lemonade into a cup. He handed it to Kajimon, who took it by curling his paws around it. He stared at its light-yellow content before shrugging and drinking it whole.

The lemony taste rolled over Kajimon's tongue, causing him to smile for just a bit. He always enjoyed a sour taste more than a sugary sweet one. He wagged his tail and nodded to himself. At the same time, he could not help but

detect something odd about the taste. It had an extra kick, like a small piece of pepper.

He gulped it before he could think anything more about it.

“Yay! Now you’re extra lucky, too!” Fauxmon hopped in joy around the lemonade bowl.

Zoom and Stry laughed in amusement.

Kajimon just rolled his eyes.

# # #

Castmon, the Fox Digimon, stood behind a table with a shy smile. He tugged on his black and red plaid scarf, which reached as far as his knees. He followed that up by rubbing his dark brown sleeves, which ended with fingerless gloves. His light brown fur lay smooth on him, with it extra bushy on his tail. The rest of his body, the torso, forearms, forelegs, and tail tip, had a creamy color. His yellow eyes widened at the two Digimon approaching his stand.

“Hey, I bet I can pop more of these balloons than you,” Nekozukimon the Lion Digimon boasted. He set his desert tan hand-paws on top of his hips. He wore a sleeveless hoodie with a red and yellow flame pattern on the bottom and a white ‘大’ on the chest. The red-brown

hair-fur reached as far down as his slim tail and black jeans. "Just watch me!"

"Sure, sure," Stormymon the Wolf Digimon replied. His electric blue eyes rolled in their sockets. His blue torso lay bare and skinny, with a flowing black cape and electric blue inner flowing behind him tied by an electric blue pearl. His jet-black shorts with electric blue sides hung on his hip thanks to his belt. He brushed his blue hand-paw against the black fur on the top of his head. "I'll believe it when I see it."

Castmon could not help but wince when he saw them approaching his attraction. Those two Digimon were opposite in many ways, but they stuck around like bickering brothers. The idea of getting close to someone like that made Castmon even shyer and a bit jealous. He glanced at Headmon, who was talking to Kuromon the Shadowy Wolf Digimon, and hoped he would at least come and chat.

Nekozukimon grinned and offered Castmon a ticket, knocking him out of his thoughts. Castmon hesitated momentarily before accepting it, giving him three darts in return. Nekozukimon grinned brighter, holding the three darts between each finger. He bent his knees, focused, and threw all three darts simultaneously.

Each dart popped three balloons at the same time.



"N-nice one," Castmon said. He stretched his right arm to grab a prize for Nekozukimon. He retracted it once he got one. "H-here you go."

Nekozukimon grinned, taking the gray fox plush toy. He squeezed it, with it letting out a squeak thanks to the rubber inner. Castmon gave a shy grin, creating a poolplush toy rather than a standard plush one. It felt right to him.

Nekozukimon giggled and turned to the taller Stormymon. "I doubt you can get all three at once like I did!"

"Hmmpf." Stormymon shook his head. "We'll see."

Stormymon handed Castmon a ticket, who took it and gave three darts in turn. He flipped over each dart, feeling the pointy tips and plastic tail. A slight glow came from his black claws, but only for a second. He inhaled, closed his eyes, and threw the darts one at a time.

Each dart missed a balloon, instead hitting the cork backing.

"HA! You missed!" Nekozukimon laughed. His tail tip ignited into a flame from joy. "What do you have to say?!"

"Wait." Stormymon grinned and snapped his fingers.

The three darts Stormymon tossed emitted an electrical shock. The nearby balloons popped, with the rubber falling onto the ground. Neko zukimon widened his brown eyes in disbelief, with that burst of electricity popping nine balloons. He huffed, flattened his ears back, and twisted to a smirking Stormymon.

"Hey! That's cheating!" Neko zukimon's flame on his tail tip grew intense.

"Nothing in the rules says I can't use electrical powers to burst balloons." Stormymon opened his eyes and turned to Castmon. "Isn't that right?"

"Er, I-I guess." Castmon rubbed the back of his head while averting his eyes. "T-though I think I'll need to add that, along with others, on wh-what not to do. C-can't let Neko zukimon burn the stall down trying to pop more balloons."

Neko zukimon huffed, trying to calm down.

Stormymon snickered and poked Neko zukimon's forehead, where he wore a black headband. "See?"

"Alright. Fine. Just this once, though." Neko zukimon shook his head. The flame on his tail tip extinguished itself.

"Good." Stormymon waited for Castmon to grab a prize. A second later, Castmon handed another fox plush

over, which Stormymon accepted. He hugged it close, even squeaking it a few times. "This is adorable."

Castmon gave Stormymon a shy smile. "T-thanks."

Castmon leaned to the side, noting Leomon still fixing the strongman game. This time, he slid a new puck down the tube and set a new bell above it. The other two spun around and saw it as well.

"It looks like sensei is finishing that game," Nekozukimon said. He shrugged for a second. "Let's go get a drink."

"Sounds good to me. Sesehehe. I'm thinking of one of the sodas. What about you?"

"Me? I'm thinking lemonade. A ninja always needs something tasty, even if it's sour."

"Oh? I thought you would get something sweet, like apple juice. Lemonade is more," Stormymon paused for a couple of seconds, "electric in taste."

"It's not that bad!"

The two still argued like brothers, though it went out of earshot of Castmon. He sighed and grabbed new balloons to inflate. He breathed in, expanding his chest to five times its size, and huffed down each balloon. When he finished

huffing, his body returned to its unexpanded size. He pushed tacks near the ends to set the balloons on the cork walls. He returned to the front, waiting for another Freelancer to try this game.

Castmon also could not help but feel hungry.

# # #

"So, you're from the Metal Empire?" Kuromon the Shadowy Wolf Digimon asked. Much of his fur had a shadowy color, with dark gray through much of it. He brushed his hand-paw against a lighter shade of gray on his torso, with the palms also the same lighter shade. Jet-black hair-fur reached his boxy muzzle, parted enough to expose his bright red eyes. Glowing red lines went from his chest, which began in three four-point diamonds, and went up to his eyes in multiple ninety-degree angles like a computer chip. Blobs of shadows floated near his ears and tail. "You don't look like you're a part of that family."

"Y-yeah." Headmon the Catgon Digimon rubbed his floating hand-paws together. "I know I don't look the part, but I am part of the Machine Empire family."

Huh," Ember the Gabumon, Kuromon's apprentice, said. "That's weird. You look like a hybrid with none of the Machine Empire ancestry."

"Yeah." Headmon floated his hand-paw to Kuromon and Ember each. "I, well, am just really advanced for a Metal Empire. All of my limbs and head are connected to my torso through magnetics. This weirded out everyone else there, so I was heavily abused like I was an outsider no matter what part of the empire I went to."

Kuromon nodded and patted Headmon's shoulder, or at least that general area. It was challenging to discern, thanks to a lack of necks, arms, and legs. At least the hand-paws and head floated near where they should be if he had any. Kuromon smiled in understanding to Headmon and nodded.

"I understand. I've been wandering around much of my life until I joined the Freelancers." Kuromon glanced around at the various Digimon Freelancers having fun. "No Digimon wanted to hang out with me since I'm a living shadow."

"That's a darn shame." Headmon crossed his hand-paws and clutched them against his torso. "The Metal Empire, well, tolerated me for my technology skills. If I was, er." He paused; his words stuck in his mouth. "Sorry. It was a terrible home, but at least I had one before here."

Kuromon nodded. "Y-yeah. Though that does beg the question. Who has it worse, no home or a terrible home?"

"Both sounds like terrible options to me," Ember remarked.

"I, er, it depends." Headmon showed his palms to Kuromon. "I, well, was wandering around until I came to Factorial City. I never stay in one place too long because the leaders I encounter are, um, all the same."

"Let me guess," Ember said. "They're all jerks who take all the good ideas and stuff from you while claiming all the credit. And you better shut up about that treatment, or else bad stuff happens."

Headmon blushed while twisting his head away farther than if he had a neck. "Y-you got me. I, um, need to return to Factorial City, though, even if it's a nasty place." He sighed. "My friend, Gene, is still there. If we, once we get you all a new Core, I—" He paused and shook his head. "Sorry. I shouldn't ask for too much."

Kuromon and Ember glanced at each other and nodded.

"How could asking to save a friend be too much?" Ember asked with a sly grin. "We'll save your friend, and then he'll become a part of us."

"R-really?" Headmon lightened up and grinned. He went over to hug both Ember and Kuromon. "Thank you!"

“What’s going on here?”

The three Digimon turned to another member of the Freelancer, one who was also part of the scouting mission. Levin the Gazimon walked over to them, fidgeting his hand-paws in his deep blue hoodie. His tail bands, rather than all being black, had multiple colors, each with English text. He turned his red eyes from Headmon to Ember to Kuromon and then back again. After a bit, he let out a laugh.”

“Just talking,” Headmon answered. He smiled and nodded. “Again, thank you for helping me escape from Factorial City.”

“Lelehehe. It’s no problem.” Levin winked and gave Headmon a thumbs-up. “Say, did you talk to them about your suggestions with the Digi Syphon?”

“Eh?” Kuromon blinked twice.

“Oh!” Headmon lightened up before extending his hand-paw to Levin. Once Levin handed his Digi Syphon over, with it having the same gray tone of his fur, Headmon flipped it over. He leaned it toward Kuromon and explained, “The design is pretty impressive, especially with its ability to contain the light of Digiolution. However, I noticed a spot where it leaks out that light.”

"Yeah. That's true." Kuromon rubbed the back of his head while blushing. "It's frustrating to figure out what's causing that leak. I've disassembled it and others multiple times, but I could never fix that leak. It's driving me nuts."

"Might I suggest some techniques after the party?" Headmon asked. "I, well, I was often asked to work on electronics like this, specifically for issues like this. In fact, that's why I, um, got volunteered to work on building Cores. Perhaps something I learn could translate to containing that light."

"Huh." Kuromon nodded a couple of times. "Perhaps I need a different perspective on constructing a new Digi Syphon."

"That's not the only issue I noticed," Headmon added. "I couldn't help but notice that it's a lot more fragile than it should. A Digimon can't bring it into battle without risking it getting damaged and losing their Digivolution."

"Yeah." Kuromon lowered his ears forward. "I, well, had a difficult time building them, not helped by a lack of Digizoid in them. I couldn't find a way to put them in without causing some issues, like bringing up wrong information or containing that light too well. I guess blacksmithing skills don't translate well into electronics."



"Easy there." Ember patted Kuromon on the arm. "It's not like you can know anything?"

"Wait, you were able to put Digizoid in earlier models?" Headmon blinked a few times. "Those stuff are indestructible! Even trying to forge it should be an impossible feat!"

"It's not for me." Kuromon shrugged. "I was able to reforge Alephmon's sword with blue Digizoid."

"Huh?" Headmon rubbed his chin. "You know, I'm already coming up with a few ideas." His eyes lightened up. "Perhaps, after the party, we can get together and see about making a Digi Syphon with your supply of Digizoid."

Kuromon's ears remained low. "Sure. Sorry, though. I don't like failing anyone. I bet you can do a better job."

"Oh, heck no!" Headmon shook his floating head. "I couldn't come up with this myself. And I sure as heck couldn't put Digizoid in it by myself. Even if I could, I bet I'd make even more critical flaws if it was by myself."

"Hey, I was the one who's supposed to be moping, not you." Kuromon laughed. His mood improved with his ears straightening up. "But yes, after the party, let's work together. I bet we'll come up with something by midnight!"

Headmon blushed and nodded. "Y-yeah."

Levin walked away, laughing to himself.

# # #

"Maf. Kajimon?"

Kajimon lifted his head off from a side table. His front paws were soaked with apple juice from cutting apples in half and removing the cores. Alephmon stood behind the main juice table, holding a clipboard. He had a sly grin on his muzzle like he had a silly idea. Kajimon blinked three times, wiped his paws until they were dry, and walked over to Alephmon.

"In a few minutes, we'll have a food-eating contest, maf." Alephmon laughed. "Stry and I will be joining along with Castmon. I'm just curious if you wanted to join as well."

Kajimon hesitated for a moment. On one paw, he did feel hungry since he had not eaten anything that morning. In fact, he had little to eat during the past two weeks. He only did as much as he did because Kajimon had help, and he was stubborn. Perhaps he should give it a shot, if only to get a meal.

On the other paw, he still had some duties to fulfill in running the juice station. Many of the drinks were running low, especially the lemonade, and he needed to refill them.

Also, he could not leave it all to Fauxmon since it was not as though she could do it herself. Besides, she would likely add alcoholic beverages instead of replacing the juice.

At the end of that moment, Kajimon decided to decline.

Before he could, Fauxmon hopped onto the table and said, "Oh, you mean I can run this place by myself?!"

"Maf! If Kajimon allowed it, sure." Alephmon nodded while sticking his tongue out.

"Yay! That means I get to decide!" Fauxmon rubbed her gloved, plushy paws together. "What we need is more caffeinated drinks, especially the sugary kinds! And booze!"

Kajimon rolled his eyes.

"Maf, is it alright then?" Alephmon stared at Kajimon with eyes that sparkled like stars.

Kajimon huffed, annoyed since it felt like his answer was decided for him, but he nodded.

"Yay!" Alephmon hopped with joy.

"Yippee!" Fauxmon also hopped, dancing between the juice bowls.

It took Kajimon all of his strength to not roll his eyes around. He felt dragged around and wanted to head back home and lay on his bed. His anger flared up, but he forced himself to swallow it. If it would make Alephmon happy, then he would do it. Besides, being dragged around was a familiar feeling, begun by his creator.

He would not be sure what to do if he did not discover his natural potion-making talents.

Kajimon walked around the table, following Alephmon to the main stage. He spotted Leomon standing next to the repaired strongman game along the way. This time, the bell was reinforced so as not to break away from the board. It helped that Stry joined the food-eating contest instead of showing off, even accidentally.

One of these days, he would discover how Stry got so strong.

It did not take long for the sweet aroma of hamburgers to enter Kajimon's nose. He sniffed it, smelling the beef, cheese, and toppings. His belly rumbled, eager for him to scarf them down. From how Alephmon shook, he was just as anxious to chomp them down.

Perhaps more so than Kajimon.

Kajimon climbed up the stage and sat on one of the sides, not having a chair like the others. Stry sat next to him, flexing his fingers as though he was doing a boxing match instead of an eating contest. Alephmon sat between Stry and Castmon, with him waving at the growing crowd. Castmon looked away, with him having a bright blush on his face.

Kajimon remained the largest of the four, though he bet that was the only advantage he got.

Alephmon stood on top of his chair. "Alright, maf! In this contest, whoever eats the most burgers is the winner! Levin will be bringing out the burgers Zoom makes for us to eat. Levin?"

Levin walked onto the stage from the side, waving to the others. He also gestured to the side, where various hamburgers were already made. Twenty sat on a table, ready to be eaten. Zoom stood behind the grill, cooking dozens of premade patties at once. Kajimon nodded in approval, with his belly rumbling harder.

Levin handed each contestant five hamburgers. "Ready. Set. GO!"

Kajimon did not hesitate to chomp down the first hamburger. Despite lacking thumbs, he managed to hold

one with little issues. It was a skill he learned to handle vials when potion-making. Once down, he went to the next one and scarfed that down.

“Go, Alephmon, go!” Toximon cheered while standing on her chair.

“Come on, Stry!” Kuromon waved and jumped up and down.

“I believe in you, Castmon!” Headmon waved his floating hand-paws side to side.

Kajimon wiggled his ears but did not hear similar cheering from him. Perhaps it was because he was already big and thus had an unfair advantage. Part of him felt disgruntled by it, enough that he wished he could step aside. The rest of him desired to eat lots of hamburgers. That would show them what he could do.

Already, Levin rushed to replace the hamburgers that had been eaten with new ones. He increased the amount given to the other side of the table. That must be Alephmon eating more than once, Kajimon believed. He always loved hamburgers and liked to eat as many as three in one sitting. The only reason it was not anymore was because Stry forbade it.

If Alephmon was his most prominent challenger, so be it.

Kajimon chomped on two at once, letting Levin replace the eaten hamburgers.

This continued for ten minutes, with Kajimon eating hamburgers nonstop. His belly stretched outward once he ate his tenth, but he knew it was not close to his limits. He kept on eating, his belly stretching rounder. He could not help but smile, patting his plump belly for half a second.

He heard a thump on the side but remained focused on eating. Only after eating ten more did he dare to look there. Stry lay on his back, his eyes turned into black spirals. His belly had also swelled out, though only doubled his usual width. That was one down.

Kajimon turned back to eating after that moment. He grunted, and his belly kept growing larger and broader with each hamburger. Levin remained rushing over to the other side of the table, sometimes bringing twenty at once. Kajimon blinked in disbelief at this. Alephmon loved hamburgers, but he could not eat that many, right?

Kajimon decided to step up his game by eating three hamburgers at once.

The time ticked forward, but Kajimon kept eating more hamburgers. Already, his stomach pressed against the floor. It was getting close to his limits, but he chose not to stop. He was determined to win this contest, even if it meant having an unhappy stomach.

He heard another thump beside him.

Only Kajimon and Alephmon now, he figured.

Despite all that time and hamburgers, Levin still rushed to the other side. With each lap he took, Levin looked increasingly baffled. The audience quieted as it went on until it was as silent as a funeral. Kajimon could not help but feel baffled by it. What were Alephmon's limits?

By the time he resolved to eat four at once, a bell rang.

"Alright, huff, everyone," Levin said between breaths. "It looks like, huff, we have our, huff, winner."

Levin took the remaining hamburgers to the other end.

Kajimon puffed his cheeks out and ate his remaining ones.

"And the winner is, huff, Castmon!"

A cheer came from the audience, but Kajimon ignored that. Instead, his eyes widened so much that they turned pure white from what Levin said. Castmon?! Kajimon



twisted around and dropped his jaw. Castmon, who was once a short Digimon, was humongous. Even Kajimon, at his six-foot-tall and rounded shape, felt small against Castmon's bloated fifteen-foot-tall and round shape.

Alephmon lay on his back with a half-eaten hamburger in his mouth, his width only tripled.

Kajimon blinked in disbelief several times. Of all the Digimon, he did not expect Castmon to be his rival in this contest. Sure, Kajimon knew he was also rubbery, but he did not expect that would grant him that much bonus. If he could speak, he would not know what to say.

"So, Castmon?" Levin patted Castmon's belly twice. "What do you have to say about winning?"

"Mmpmm." Castmon patted his belly a few times. His mouth halfway sank into his neck and chest from all that eating. His bright red face glowed even brighter. "Pmmph."

"Er, very good." Levin turned to the audience and shrugged. "Um, could I get help getting them off the stage?"

At once, all of the Freelancers climbed the stage. Toximon and Nekozukimon helped Alephmon to his feet-paws. Nekozukimon grabbed the hamburger in

Alephmon's mouth but could not get it out; instead, when Alephmon stood up, he ate the remaining hamburger.

"B-burgers." Alephmon huffed and wagged his tail in joy.

"Ugh. Why did I agree to do this?" Stry huffed, with Stormymon and Levin helping him back onto his feet. "This was the worst idea."

Kajimon puffed out his cheeks, only to feel a hand rubbing his side. He turned and saw Zoom, his face covered in some soot. He reached up and rubbed Kajimon's ears.

"You did good there. I saw how much you wanted to win." Zoom smiled.

Kajimon nodded while flopping his ears forward.

"Don't feel bad. Here's what I do when I get frustrated at losing." Zoom reached down and rubbed Kajimon's left paw. He blinked, with Zoom rubbing it up and down from the padding to the fur and even the claws. Zoom laughed and patted Kajimon again. "Do you feel upset now?"

Kajimon shook his head.

Zoom smiled and patted Kajimon on the head. "That's a good boy. Now, do you need some help getting down?"

Kajimon looked at his belly for a couple of seconds. It was massive, though nowhere near as huge as Castmon's. It pressed down against the floor and splayed against his limbs. This was the first time he pushed himself this far from eating. His belly ached from the pressure. He pushed his limbs forward, which only moved him by an inch.

He turned to Zoom and nodded.

"Let me help you then.

Zoom walked to the other side and, with a grunt, pushed Kajimon toward the ramp. At first, Kajimon only jiggled, but he pushed his paws in that direction. He rolled toward there once, twice, and then down the ramp. He huffed, feeling a bit dizzy, and managed to stop himself from moving further.

"Alright there?" Zoom asked when he reached Kajimon at the bottom.

Kajimon nodded and spun around, facing the ramp. Alephmon and Stry waddled down, with Toximon and Levin assisting them. Even with his current size, Kajimon thought he was in a better spot than them, if only because he could eat more. Then again, with the way his belly ached, perhaps not.

“Careful with him!” Stormymon shouted. He and Nekozukimon, Kuromon, Ember, and Headmon pushed the huge and round Castmon. “Wait! Not toward the ramp! We won’t be able to—”

Part of the stage cracked under the weight, with Castmon tilting toward the ramp.

“Oh, shucks.” Stormymon leaped to the side. “Get out of the way!!”

Rather than listening, the rest went around and shoved as hard as possible against Castmon’s round belly. Even Toximon and Levin, when they noticed with wide eyes, rushed up and pushed as hard as possible. The extra help managed to tilt Castmon back—

The stage cracked again, collapsing under the massive weight.

All of the Digimon pushing Castmon yelped and flattened underneath his body.

“Jeez!” Stormymon shook his head.

Alephmon raised a white flag from nowhere and waved it at the rolling Castmon. “Maf.”

Kajimon wiggled his tail between himself and a stunned Zoom. With a push from his tail, he knocked Zoom

to the side, away from Castmon's trajectory. He faced forward, clutched his paws, and accepted his fate. Within moments, the massive Castmon rolled Alephmon, Stry, and Kajimon over, flattening them.

For a moment, the darkness consumed Kajimon.

That moment passed, with light returning.

From behind, Castmon kept rolling, running over chairs and flattening them. He crashed against his balloon-popping stall and finally stopped. He let out a sigh, his yellow eyes spiraling around. The other Digimon lay stuff on his body like tattoos, flat as paper.

Stormymon shook his head. "At least I wasn't a part of th—"

A puck fell from the sky, landed on Castmon's belly, and bounced upward. It fell at an angle, crashing on top of Stormymon's head. His eyes turned white for a moment before turning into black spirals. He stumbled a bit and fell on his back.

"Maaaaaaaaf." Alephmon lay there, as flat as paper and as round as pancake. The white flag disappeared, its purpose fulfilled. "Is-is everyone alright?"

"Sorry I'm late, headmaster. I've been wrestling with Plato." Stry huffed, just as flat and around.

Kajimon shifted his eyes around, the only part of his body that could move.

"W-woah." Zoom stood from the ground and walked over to Alephmon, Stry, and Kajimon. Each one had their sides, especially their bellies, emphasized flat. Perhaps that was because of how round each of them got. Zoom headed over to Kajimon and patted his flat forehead. "You-you saved me. Thank you."

Kajimon shifted his eyes up and down as though trying to nod.

"Sigh. I figured this might happen." Leomon walked over while carrying a large air tank. "Let's get this over with."

Leomon kneeled to the circular and flat Alephmon, who stared back wide-eyed. He took the tank's hose to Alephmon's mouth and pressed it there. It took ten seconds to do, a lot longer than it should. Leomon scratched the back of his right ear before turning the tank's nozzle.

Despite the air flowing in, Alephmon remained flat as paper.

"Hmm?" Leomon blinked once. He turned off the tank and removed the hose from Alephmon's flat mouth. He carried it over to the flat Stry next and, after a struggle,

inserted the hose into his mouth. He turned it on with the expected hiss, but Stry remained flat. "That's curious. Why aren't you two—"

"What's going on here?!" Kuromon, who restored himself to normal thanks to his shadowy powers, tried using it with Ember. However, Ember remained as flat as before, no matter how hard he tried. "Why are you still flat?!"

Nekozukimon peeled himself from Castmon's body and pressed his flat palms against each other. He made hand signals until his entire body burst into flames. He grinned wide, knowing that his technique would restore him. The fire faded, but he remained just as flat as before. He flinched, his grin fading.

"That's weird." Nekozukimon scratched the back of his flat head. "That usually works."

Leomon and Kuromon moved from Digimon to Digimon who got flattened by Castmon. Despite their efforts, only some Digimon, like Headmon, got unflatten. That only baffled them since it proved their techniques worked, but why only on some of them? Leomon kept his cool, rubbing his golden mane, while Kuromon grew frustrated.

"Why can't we restore them?!" Kuromon kicked one of the chairs to the side. "This is ridiculous!"

“Maf! On, no!” Alephmon widened his flat eyes in horror. “It must be some kind of curse! We’re flat forever!”

“Now, now, Aleph!” Stry hopped his circular flat body up and down. “There’s no proof of that! Besides, why does it only affect some of us if there's a curse?”

“Maybe it’s because we had something we shouldn’t have, maf! Like beer!”

“Kajimon didn’t offer any alcoholic beverages!”

The last two comments clicked something inside Kajimon’s flat head. He shifted his eyes from flat Digimon to flat Digimon. Each looked nervous or scared as to what was happening. Maybe it was not alcoholic, but there was a common factor in all of them.

Something that ended up being bad luck.

Kajimon hopped his flat body up and down.

“Hmm?” Zoom kneeled to Kajimon. “What is it? You thought of something?”

Kajimon shifted his eyes up and down.

“What is it?” Zoom asked.

Kajimon hesitated, feeling reluctant all of a sudden. His creator never granted him the ability to speak, so he relied on expressions and illusions to communicate. This



was not a facial expression he could show that everyone would understand, so it left illusions. He had not used illusions for the past two weeks since his creator left a hint of his return. Perhaps it was fear of having to explain in some way about his creator that prevented him from using that route.

If he did not, though, the panic would spread further.

Kajimon focused, with an illusion forming above his head. Zoom gasped in wonder, watching it take form. It turned yellow while taking the shape of a pointy oval. A stem with a leaf formed at one pointy end. Zoom watched in wonder before he shook his head in confusion.

"A lemon? What does that mean?" Zoom tilted his head.

"Lemon?" Leomon turned to Zoom and Kajimon. "What— Wait." He turned to the flat Digimon. "Did all of you have a lemonade today?"

All of the flat Digimon either raised their hand-paw or nodded in their own way.

"Huh?" Kuromon rubbed his jet-black hair-fur. "What does that mean."

"It means that there's a common connection." Leomon picked the flat Kajimon up and carried him. "Let's figure it out."

Kajimon glanced around at the surroundings, with the various Digimon having a confused expression. Soon, Leomon took him to his drink stand, where Fauxmon already had several bottles of booze ready. She held onto one of them, dancing with it. When Leomon with Kajimon approached, she turned and waved at them.

"Hey there, fellows!" Fauxmon bounced around. "Want some of my personal favorites?"

"Maybe next time." Leomon pointed at the lemonade. "Tell me, was there anything extra about this?"

"The lemonade? Oh, hell yeah!" Fauxmon giggled. "It's extra lucky!"

"But I added a bit of extra water from a corked bottle!" Fauxmon hopped off the table for a moment. When she jumped back on, she carried a vial about her size and showed it off. "I found it under the table!"

"I," Leomon paused, noticing Kajimon's stunned reaction. "I don't think that's water. You know what that was?"

Kajimon summoned an illusion of a thumbs-up. He followed it up with a series of illusions showing a miniature Agumon drinking it and walking away. A roller came from nowhere, flattening the Agumon as flat as paper. A Gabumon walked in with an air pump, inserting its hose into Agumon's mouth. No matter how hard they tried, Agumon remained flat.

"Now, that's an adorable show!" Fauxmon clapped a few times. "Now, can you do another like it?"

"He wasn't doing it as a show." Leomon took the empty vial and carried it to the rest of the Digimon. "OK. Here's what happened. Fauxmon found this potion that Kajimon made and added it to the lemonade, thinking it was extra water. From what Kajimon showed, if someone who drank it got flat, they wouldn't be able to unflatten themselves no matter what."

"Wait, you created such a potion?" Kuromon asked.

Kajimon shifted his eyes up and down in a nod.

"That's actually a clever potion." Nekozukimon's grin returned, and rubbed his flat hand-paws together. "Give it to unsuspecting Digimon, and watch them struggle to reinflate themselves. Heck, I can see it being used on

someone like me. Sometimes I wish to remain flat to do some ninja stuff."

"Lucky you," Levin said. He rubbed his flat hand-paw against his face.

"But, how long will it last?" Ember asked.

Kajimon used illusion to summon two figures. One showed an Agumon drinking the potion, and the other showed a flat Agumon. The first one had the number 1 and the letter D next to it. The second one had the number 1 and the letter H beside it.

"One hour?" Toximon remarked. Her tone was heavy with disappointment. "That's awfully short!" The others turned to her. "Er."

Kuromon rubbed his boxy muzzle. "So, Kajimon, did you carry that potion to the juice table?"

Kajimon shook his eyes side to side so hard that he wiggled.

"He's not lying," Stry said. "He had it in his home, true, but he left it behind when he came out. I saw him and even helped him out. And before you ask, I didn't take it."

"Then who did?" Ember demanded.

A few seconds of thinking later, combined with a lack of a certain Digimon not speaking, gave them the answer. All eyes turned to the flat Alephmon, expecting a response. Alephmon blushed bright red, with flat sweat drops forming on his head.

"Er, I may have carried it along and dropped it by Kajimon's and Fauxmon's drink station," Alephmon admitted.

"ALEPH!!" all (outside of the mute Kajimon) said.

# # #

Despite that bump in the part, it proceeded with no more issues. As Kajimon 'said,' the ones who drank it in ignorance returned to normal after an hour. Still, they all know from the same illusion that the potion still affected them. It would mean another hour of being paper flat if they got flattened again.

"Maf." An unflattened Alephmon said. He patted his plump belly before patting Kajimon's side. "It's good to be back—"

Kuromon and Ember pushed the obese Kajimon to the side until he tipped over. Alephmon flinched, unable to pull out his white flag in time. Kajimon wiggled in the air, unable to stop it. After a couple of rolls, Kajimon stopped

on top of his belly. Alephmon lay flattened on Kajimon's side, with him much wider in the middle.

"Oops. Sorry." Ember stuck a tongue out.

Kajimon rolled his eyes.

Nearby, many Digimon Freelancers played with the massive and round Castmon by pushing him around. Castmon, for his part, seemed to enjoy it. He blushed bright red, of course, but what little of his muzzle showed him grinning and giggling. They were careful not to run anyone or anything over while doing it.

After they ran Castmon over the juice station and Fauxmon.

"Woooooooooah! I feeeeeeeeeel so dizzzzzzzzzy~" Fauxmon lay flat on Castmon's belly. Her eyes spiraled, with her cheeks and nose red. "Woooooooooah~"

Kajimon watched the display and could not help but smile. He pressed his front right paw against his muzzle as though covering up a laugh. He felt the tendrils of his creator slipping away. Some of it remained but with less power on him.

If he could laugh, he would.

# # #

The next day arrived, with half of the Digimon Freelancer cleaning up the party's remains. Tents were pulled down, tables and chairs placed away, and entertainments and stages disassembled. The tension of the castle's lack of power returned, but not as bad as before. As Alephmon hoped, the party helped with the thick tension they all suffered.

The remaining Freelancers were at the dock, loading supplies to it.

"I have no idea how long we'll be at File Island," Stry said to Alephmon and Leomon. Stry and Alephmon lost all that extra weight after a night of sleep. It was a thing that Digimon could do. Stry continued, "It might be a day, or it might be a week or even a month. Either way, I want us prepared."

Alephmon nodded while giving out a goofy grin. "Yeah, maf. Also, sorry about yesterday."

"All is forgiven," Stry said with a shrug. "I did so after the first time you apologized."

"Maf? But everyone took a chance of flattening me. I saw you pushing Kajimon on top of me when he showed us a tale of a young hero fighting a hunter to save a kitsune's life."

“Yeah, but it was to break off steam.”

Alephmon nodded while shifting his eyes.

“In any case,” Stry said while tapping his clipboard, “we should be nearly done with it. We just need a few more—”

Pawsteps came nearby, with the three turning to the sound. There, Kajimon stood with a slight blush on his face. He approached after a few moments of hesitation, not keeping eye contact with anyone. He wore a brown sling with a large brown bag that jangled.

For a few seconds, nobody said a thing.

Alephmon then asked, “Kajimon. Maf, do you wish to join us?”

Kajimon did not move for a few seconds until he nodded.

Alephmon ginned, ran over to him, and hugged close. “Yay! Now you can see Factorial City for yourself! Maf, it was a super interesting place with many tall buildings that glowed neon lights. Not to mention—”

“Um, that’s quite alright.” Stry laughed while rubbing the back of his head. “Vevehehe. Better get yourself on board, then.”



“Yesh.” Leomon eyed Stry for a few seconds, who eyed back. Stry sighed and nodded as though agreeing to a previous argument. Leomon nodded and said to Kajimon, “Before you do, we need you to explain what happened that day.”

Kajimon huffed and hesitated under Stry’s and Leomon’s stare. After a bit, he nodded and pushed Alephmon back as gently as a newborn Digimon. Alephmon blinked, wondering what Kajimon would show. Kajimon shook out of fear, perhaps thinking about backing off. Alephmon approached and rubbed his leg, which calmed him down.

Kajimon faced Stry and Leomon while swaying his tail back and forth.

At once, a visible gray wind swirled in front of Kajimon. It gathered around, taking some anthropomorphic form while thickening. A few seconds later, the wind burst like a cocoon breaking and revealing a butterfly. Alephmon gasped at this figure, who stood at a lifelike size instead of a miniature one.

This anthro figure stood about six feet tall, perhaps an inch taller. For a moment, Alephmon thought Kajimon would show a human or a humanoid Digimon, but this was far from it. Instead, he looked like some wingless dragon

with bright red scales, the same shade of red Kajimon had. Dark brown hair-plumage lay on his head, which went down the back of his neck and likely down his back before ending near his tail tip. Alephmon was not sure about the back because the figure wore a black and white horizontal striped kimono. Dark blue scales lay on his torso, under his tail, and the front of his neck.

What struck Alephmon the most was this figure's eyes.

They were the same sea blue eyes Kajimon had. The only difference was this person's eyes were devoid of any emotions. Alephmon could detect anyone's feelings even with a glance at a stoic. Looking at him, though, was beyond stoicism. It was like looking at a statue giving judgment to anyone he deemed lesser.

If that was the intent Kajimon wanted, he succeeded.

"So, this is the face of the one who caused the Core disaster," Leomon remarked.

"Wait! Look at what he's holding!" Stry pointed at the figure's left hand-paw.

Alephmon blinked and turned his attention toward it.

This being held a brown quill, the exact one Leomon founded.

Alephmon dropped his jaw at the sight.

"Mmm. That quill." Leomon rubbed his mane. "Who is he in relationship with you, Kajimon?"

Kajimon panted, trying to maintain that illusion for as long as possible. He swayed his tail back and forth, with the tip glowing red. In response, the figure summoned a stack of papers and a board on the back. He followed it up by writing on the topmost page with that quill. Once finished, he showed it to Alephmon, Stry, and Leomon.

It said:

*I am the architect of the Digimon you acknowledged as Kajimon. I am the writer of his vocation. I foreknew his itinerary and maneuver it if he had proceeded astray.*

"Maf, that's a lot of big words." Alephmon rubbed the back of his head. "I understand some of it."

"What he means is that this figure created Kajimon and had a specific goal for him," Leomon explained. He crossed his arms. "And even set things up if Kajimon moved away from that goal."

"Oh." Alephmon turned to Kajimon, who sweated gallons by that point. "You can stop, maf."

Kajimon relaxed, with the illusion figure fading away. The last thing involving this figure was his quill, which hovered and spun around for a few seconds. It zipped past Alephmon before disappearing as well. Kajimon gasped and stumbled, about to fall on his side. Alephmon caught him before he fell on top of his potions.

"So, that's the face of our enemy," Leomon pondered. "At last, we know. If he dares to show himself—"

Kajimon widened his eyes in a panic, rushed over to Leomon, and shook his head. Leomon leaned forward, though Alephmon sensed he was surprised by Kajimon's actions. Stry and Alephmon yelped and rushed over to Kajimon's side. It took one look of his face to send a chill down everyone's spine.

The expression Kajimon wore was beyond fear.

It was complete and utter terror.

"I-I don't think he wants us to fight him," Alephmon said. He reached over and rubbed Kajimon's front left leg. "And I don't think it's just because he's scared of him. He's scared for all of us."

"Mmm. You don't think we stand a chance." Leomon waited for Kajimon's response, which was several nods in a second. Leomon gave a soft chuckle, bent down, and

patted a confused Kajimon on the head. "Don't be afraid. I'm sure that this threat will be a deadly one. All the same, we'll face it head-on."

"Yeah!" Stry patted Kajimon on the right side. "Whatever comes, we'll stick together as Freelancers!"

"We'll either win together or we'll fall together, maf." Alephmon smiled and patted Kajimon on the back. "You're not alone in this."

Kajimon's terror remained, but he looked in much better control over it. He swallowed and nodded once. After a bit, he relaxed while listening to his friends' comforting words.

An hour later, they sailed out of port toward File Island, where Factorial City stood.

Whatever threats they faced, they would battle them as one.

# About Author

Thank you so much for taking the time to read my story! I really appreciate it. If you enjoyed it, then you'll definitely want to check out my gallery accounts at:

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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!