

The next several days flew by in a flurry of promotions, preparations, and a growing sense of excitement buzzing between the customers and the individuals set to participate in the event. Callum and Tay were the main stars of the competition, with the drake unofficially representing the bakery and the ursine a well-liked personality who connected with many of the other locals. Aaron decided amidst all the hype, that adding one more challenger would amp up the anticipation to an even higher plane of excitement. He asked customers to tell their friends and acquaintances about the unreserved slot and eventually was rewarded with a tall, well-built horse named Franz. The newcomer was a popular student in the city's university and was competitive by nature.

Upon hearing about the impending event, the sturdy stallion was adamant to be entered and Aaron was quick to accept upon seeing the spark of passion in the peach-pale equine's eyes. Having filled the final slot, the serpent and the drake took to setting their front room up in the manner of a true spectator fashion.

Together, the duo situated their tables and chairs on the left side of the room to provide a common seating area for the spectators. After, with the aid of Tay and a couple of carpenters, they bought in a larger, rectangular table made of a strong, reinforced maple along with three equally tough chairs. Forethought on Aaron's part had deduced that normal chairs wouldn't be able to support the three competitors upon completion of the contest. Once the staging area was in place in the right corner of the room near the far end of the counter, Callum aided Aaron in setting up several cloth banners at strategic points around the shop.

The banners advertised 'Aaron's Exceptional Confections' and the "Incredible Pastry Showdown' as well as several other awfully corny sayings inviting customers to witness the event. When the pair was alone, Aaron would often employ his magical capabilities to straighten things up and ensure everything was just so. Callum noted that the serpent was beginning to use his abilities more freely, as if sharing the news with the drake had eased the snake's preoccupations with performing magic in view of others.

The drake decided that the revelation was reason enough to bring up his own progress in the art. "I can actually lift a chair now," the drake said, before briefly muttering an incantation before a nearby stool hovered a couple inches from the ground.

Aaron watched, a smile slowly working its way across his face as he said, "Indeed you have. That's quite impressive."

The drake grinned in turn and allowed his mental hold on the article of furniture to drop lightly to the floor with a soft thunk. He then realized the true intention he had for broaching the subject of magic, "Aaron," the drake mumbled, guiltily kneading his ponderous gut, "I also..kind of...well..I showed Reyna too." Callum lowered his eyes, thinking about the times he'd caused a stray fork or rag to float for the otter's amusement.

Aaron's expression turned slightly darker as he raised an eyebrow.

"I didn't tell her who I learned it from," the drake mumbled, "I just said it was a little talent I came across, and she always seemed to love it." He sighed, grinning slightly before patting his belly, "Almost as much as this."

The serpent considered the drake's words thoughtfully, "Well I suppose there is consolation in your keeping my powers a secret." Aaron sighed, "I'm not really all that surprised though. I can appreciate your motives to impress Reyna," he smiled as the drake gazed up pleadingly. "I simply wish you were comfortable telling me. Trust is a basic bond between friends, and I hope you will feel more obliged to confer with me if this type of issue arises again."

Callum visibly relaxed as he realized his friend wasn't angry, "Thank you for your flexibility. I'll understand if you want me to refrain from anymore magic in front of her."

The serpent's usual mischievous manner returned, "Well I suppose she's already grown to enjoy it, and it would be a shame to put a damper on a relationship I've strived so hard to create."

The drake muzzle widened even more in happiness as he realized he would be able to continue working on his magic, before a scoff and sour expression clouded his visage, "What do you mean 'You worked so hard to create?'" The drake cocked an eyebrow and folded his arms, "From what I recall, I'm the one who's conversing with Reyna, getting to know her and expressing my interest. Where do you come in?"

A delighted smirk illuminated Aaron's face as he watched the drake

swallow the bait whole. "Well one of us had to initiate it, and your reluctance was nearly unbearable for a heightened being such as myself," the serpent teased, before chortling as the drake stuttered with indignation.

"I..you..well I was..the one..who," huffing, the exasperated dragon turned on his heel and marched toward the kitchen with nothing constructive to add to his argument.

Aaron's laughter followed the annoyed reptile through the door, before dying down to a low chuckle. Smiling to himself, the serpent went on working on the front room when an idea slowly began forming and grew in proportion to the serpent's widening grin.

The next day was the last one prior to the competition, and everything was in place; at least as far as Aaron was aware of. The bakery was restricted to narrower hours as the serpent and his draconic partner worked steadily to prepare the food for the competition.

Reyna had stopped by daily to encourage Callum in preparation for the contest. Her periodic stops were almost as cyclical as Tay's who still stopped for lunch and to talk friendly banter with Callum, whom he good naturally referred to as the competition. Today, the otter came by mid morning, entering the transformed shop with a lighthearted smile on her face and an noticeably bouncier disposition. Aaron was finalizing the small touches to the front room, laying out settings for the spectators, placing a banner with each competitor's name on their seat, and ensuring the shop was clean and presentable.

Upon hearing the otter enter, the serpent turned and offered a polite greeting, "Good morning Reyna," he said amicably. "Are you ready for the big day?"

The otter nodded enthusiastically, "I certainly am, Aaron. I look forward to seeing how Callum manages against those other two. That blacksmith bear seems as if he can really pack it away."

Aaron assented with an agreeing nod, "I'm sure he'll be fine. He's in the back right now, making the courses for tomorrow."

"That's nice. How are you going to have it work?" Reyna asked, thinking about all the food the drake would be consuming.

“We had each of our competitors select their favorite course from our bakery,” Aaron explained. “We start with Tay’s selection, which are Danishes, then Franz’ which are doughnuts, and will end with Callum’s preference of éclairs. The competitor to finish each course first will be awarded 3 points, the second 2 points, and the third 1 point. If they don’t finish then they are awarded nothing.”

Reyna smiled at the layout, before asking, “Mind if I suggest one more?” She had a familiar glint in her, one that Aaron recognized as the same sly notion he had when he produced a devious idea.

“I’m intrigued,” the serpent said leaning forward in anticipation.

“I was thinking of a cake. One similar to what Callum had when I returned mine for my absent brother.” She found comfort in knowing that the simple confection had brought Callum a sense of enjoyment and, more importantly, the impressive expansion it wrought on the drake’s large girth.

Aaron found the notion quite appealing, and also saw the opportunity as a perfect chance to run his own idea by her. “I think that is quite possible, if you’re also willing to hear out an idea of my own design.”

Reyna agreed with a vigorous nod of her head, still excited that the kind snake was willing to opt for her suggestion. “I was thinking,” the serpent confided, “That with three contestants, it would be quite difficult for me to serve all of them at the same time.”

The otter was unsure of where this was heading, but her instincts told her that she would quite enjoy it.

“And I realized,” Aaron continued, “That I would be in need of another individual. I thought perhaps you might enjoy delivering Callum his trays. After all, he would certainly appreciate the thought, and you would be able to showcase your own interest.”

The otter’s eyes widened at the idea, she opened her jaw a couple times to say something before she was able form words. “I would absolutely love that Aaron,” the otter said enthusiastically. “It would be a win-win, because Callum would feel more encouraged and I would get to see him expa-..” she cut her words short, as a crimson tide washed over her cheeks.

“..Experience the competition of a lifetime,” she amended, looking innocently at the bemused serpent.

“Yes, I’m sure Callum will love the idea of you serving him,” Aaron said, allowing the otter’s slip to pass smoothly. He didn’t want to prevent Reyna from enjoying a heartfelt moment with their mutual friend. “I think it would be best to keep it a secret for now,” the serpent said, lowering his voice and grinning encouragingly. “It would be a pleasant gesture and Callum usually loves the unexpected,” Aaron’s mind was back on its usual devious path as he pictured the look of surprise the drake would have when he realized who was serving him.

Reyna smiled in return and nodded in agreement. “I think that’s a great idea,” she said with a short dry laugh, “And now I’m thinking entirely about this blasted competition rather than the test I have this afternoon.” Shaking her head, the otter smiled ruefully at the snake, “I blame you for that,” the otter quipped in an accusatory tone.

“Why does everyone attribute me with their woes,” Aaron said in an overly offended tone.

“Because you’re usually the source of them,” Callum snickered as he exited the doors. “And now you’re laying them on Reyna,” he rounded the counter and clasped the otter’s hand in a friendly greeting. “It’s nice to see you,” he said with sincere warmth to his voice. “I hope my colleague,” the drake gestured dismissively at the self-pitied serpent, “Isn’t deterring you from coming tomorrow.”

Aaron cast a hopeful glance down at the otter, believing she would defend the snake’s recent words of encouragement, “Oh don’t worry,” Reyna laughed, “I’ll still attend despite the present company.”

The serpent let loose a gasp of mock offense, before winding his way into the kitchen with a coldly polite, “Good day to you Reyna,” thrown over his shoulder.

The drake and otter laughed heartily, satisfied in their paired assault on the indigo serpent’s ego. “Thank you,” Callum chuckled. “That was wonderful, and he’s been asking for it all day.”

Reyna snickered in turn before replying, “Don’t worry about it. I love

winding others up, and Aaron seems to have a decent sense of humor.” The drake nodded in agreement, before the otter heard a gong in the distance signaling that it was almost noon. “Shoot, I have a test in half an hour,” she said urgently, “I have to run, but I’ll look forward to seeing you tomorrow. Good luck,” and without thinking about it, she patted the drake’s belly lightly before blushing, turning to the door and hurrying to her class.

Turning red himself, Callum rubbed his round middle self-consciously before calling a quick, “See you then,” after the otter. Once she was gone, the drake smiled to himself and disappeared into the kitchen before being surprised when Aaron assigned him to begin baking several three-tiered cakes. “What’re these for?” He asked.

“The fourth course,” Aaron said simply.

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Competition day was finally upon them, as the sun rose the next morning and each respective competitor readied themselves for the contest.

Callum dressed in a simple pair of elastic, woolen pants and a comfortable cotton shirt. Both were infused with Aaron’s stretching incantation, and the drake simply hoped they would be able to take on the incredible challenge that had been set for the dragon’s ample belly.

He made his way to the shop, where everything was in place and structured for a couple hours of big-bodied anthros being cheered on by their companions as they stuffed themselves with confections.

Callum had arrived earlier than nearly everyone else, due to the fact that his internal clock was set on waking with the cusp of dawn. Still yawning, the hefty drake stretched his bulbous body while making his way into the side entrance.

Coming in at the early hour usually meant Callum only needed to watch out for a certain, overzealous serpent, but all that greeted him was a silent, slightly lit kitchen. Shrugging off his jacket, the drake smiled when he saw a flash of purple in the darkness. Callum was certain his friend was planning another friendly attack, especially after his small victory the day before.

What the drake did not expect was a very enthusiastic Reyna popping up behind him and grabbing his gut from behind. The motion caused the drake to squeal in fright, as Callum jumped and attempted to twist around to face his attacker. The motion coupled with the drake's front heavy belly initiated a fascinating display of discoordination, as the drake's upper half rotated faster than his bottom half. Scrabbling to keep his balance, the hapless reptile let loose a pitiful shriek as he tripped from the unexpected movement and landed squarely on his belly. While the protruding mass softened Callum's fall slightly, he could do nothing to stop himself from planting his face directly into the floor between Reyna's feet.

The otter doubled over in laughter, while the dragon lay mumbling a combination of obscenities and short groans from the soreness in his head. Aaron appeared from the pantry, a triumphant grin on his face as the drake slowly sat up and assuaged his jaw.

Looking between the two with a venomous glare, Callum adopted a pouting expression in hopes to derive sympathy from Reyna. "Yo-you ganged up on me with him?" The drake asked with wide, sad eyes and a pitiful frown.

Reyna smirked and placed her hands on her hips, "Pffft, don't even try to look for empathy." The otter appeared to be entirely impervious to the drake's attempt to gain sympathy, but part of her found the drake's plush features and pathetic expression somewhat cute.

"Seems I have bested you once more," Aaron slid into the drake's low-angle field of vision. "At least someone is willing to take my side every once in a while," the serpent teased as he gently rested a hand on the otter's shoulder.

Unable to play the victim any longer, Callum grinned up at the two anthros standing over him. Pranks or not, they were certainly his closest friends and the drake was able to laugh along with them and accept that he'd been trounced. "I suppose I did deserve that to a certain extent," he admitted, "I was just surprised to see Reyna be so easily subdued by the forces of evil." He cast an accusatory glance at Aaron who rolled his five luminescent eyes dramatically and sighed.

"Well," the serpent said, clapping his hands together, "Let us finalize everything for the big event."

Grinning, Reyna reached down and helped heave the hefty reptile to his feet. The motion was made difficult by the impediment of the drake's plush belly, which pressed against his legs and bunched into a series of accordion rolls as he leaned into the maneuver.

Once Callum was on his feet, he exchanged an appreciative nod with the otter before they made their way into the front room to ensure everything was in place.

The main event was scheduled for high noon, as Aaron anticipated plenty of furs would be more willing to purchase a couple pastries to sate their hunger around that time. It was a beautiful day and the large table serving as the center stage was awash in a pleasant, natural glow.

Around half past ten, the main crowd began trickling into the shop, which was large enough to seat forty furs comfortably. Almost right away, Aaron could tell there would be more than that as close to seventy furs were crowded into the area within an hour.

Over the initial preparation time, Callum and his two contestants idly chatted with one another and made small talk. Reyna was constantly at Callum's side, talking with the others along with the drake, but she would occasionally disappear into the kitchen for a couple minutes before reappearing again. Each time, the otter would leave with a wide smile on her face and when the drake confronted her about it, she simply shook her head and said, "You'll see."

Callum turned back to his competitors and engaged once more in friendly banter. Tay was seated in the middle, and wore a large flannel shirt in accompany to a pair of well-worn, brown pants. The ursine's belly rested in a smooth, convex curve that pushed out at his chest and came to a rest two thirds down the length of his thighs. The bears bulbous appearance seemed to strain slightly at the buttons of his plaid patterned shirt, but the bear took no notice.

On the bear's left sat the other competitor, Callum briefly tried to remember the newcomer's name. 'Franz,' the drake recalled mentally, as he eyed the equine. Franz was a being of impressive height, but somewhat reduced girth. The peach-pale horse stood 6'7", but had a sturdier build than the more rotund bear and dragon. He had the appearance of a wrestler and had been convinced to take part in the contest by friends in college who

now formed a substantial portion of the crowd. Franz was amiable and talked to the drake and bear, but Callum had the feeling the equine was seriously competitive and wouldn't be easy to beat. The only consolation Callum felt was in the suspicion that the horse wouldn't be able to stomach as much as the others from lack of training.

Following this train of thought, Callum's eyes drifted back to Tay's rounded gut, which was the prominent source of nervousness for the drake. He knew that the ursine had an expansive appetite, but the drake hoped the bear would underestimate the competition and take his time early on. Looking down into his own lap, Callum affectionately squeezed his gut which was settled only a third of the way down his thighs. He hoped he would be able to stomach the vast quantities of food coming in the near future. The drake's confidence lay in the notion that he had been working on expanding his flabby figure constantly, and the incessant practice would allow his gut to stretch. Still pondering the sentiment, the drake was jolted slightly by a loud 'gong', which turned out to be Aaron indicating the competition's start in approximately five minutes.

Looking around for Reyna, the slightly nervous drake was unable to spot the familiar otter's brown furred face in the crowd. He met the gaze of quite a few regulars who'd showed up to cheer him on and he smiled at each of them with an appreciative look, but Callum knew he'd feel much better with the otter in his view. After a minute of fruitless searching, the drake sighed in disappointment and leaned back in his chair. He mentally prepped himself for the impending competition, and quieted himself.

'GONG,' a much louder, harsher bellow pierced the chatter of the crowd as Aaron signaled that the contest was about to start. The drake was once more startled to attention by the sound and watched as Aaron wound his way around the counter and came to a rest alongside Franz.

"Kind patrons and customers," the serpent said, "It gladdens me to see so many familiar faces and then a couple new ones. I am pleased to announce the inception of the first ever Bakery Bulge Competition." The enthusiastic declaration was greeted with a polite, but hearty applause as the crowd's excitement began to increase.

"Today we have three competitors of impressive renown, starting with one Franz Dorner." The sturdy equine elicited a strong cheer from the group of college students in the back as well as some polite claps from the rest of

the spectators. Franz made a good-humored gesture of shaking his fists near his head as his name was announced.

“On Franz’s right is Tay Burlinger,” the serpent continued. The large black ursine waved his arms enthusiastically with a ridiculous smile plastered on his face. Several guards, fellow black smiths, and carpenters bellowed their support at the bear’s antics, which resulted in a wily laugh from the others.

“And at the other end, representing the bakery itself, is Callum Reiner,” Aaron finished with a grin. The aforementioned drake waved one paw politely and garnered a well-rounded applause from the crowd as he acknowledged his name.

“And now,” Aaron said with obvious enthusiasm, “Let us begin our first course: A wonderful platter of twenty-five Danishes for each contestant.” With the announcement, Aaron proffered two handsome silver platters that had been sitting behind him while Reyna, sporting a chef’s hat and apron identical to the serpent’s, carried one from the kitchen.

Callum grinned at the sight of the otter wearing a uniform similar to the one he’d seen his boss wear for years, but more than anything the drake was comforted by the fact that Reyna would be present for the ensuing competition. Muzzle widening dopily as the otter approached the dragon and set the platter of Danishes down in front of him, he said, “I’m truly glad you’re here.”

Reyna smiled in return and said, “I wouldn’t think of missing it.” She then patted the drake’s belly, bolder this time, before saying, “Good luck,” and standing off to the other side.

Suddenly Callum felt considerably surer of himself. While he knew he was still facing serious competition, the drake wasn’t as apprehensive about stuffing himself to the limit, in fact it seemed more of a goal than a challenge and when Aaron issued the gong to start the first course, he dug in with gusto.

The Danishes didn’t last long for any of the contestants. A combination of their early ferocity, hunger, and sheer enthusiasm ensured that each contestant was still going strong by their twenty-fifth pastry. Surprisingly, Franz finished first, plowing through the pile of confections as if he hadn’t

seen food in days. The equine's gut also sported the most noticeable change as it bloated out steadily in a taught dome that contrasted sharply with the stallion's all around sturdy build. Finishing three Danishes in front of Tay and five in front of Callum, the horse sat back with a contented whinny as he amusedly watched the others.

Tay's figure barely registered the confections, as they each dropped steadily into the ursine's cavernous gut. One couldn't be sure, but the bear's belly might have expanded an inch, which cinched the pressure slightly on the buttons digging into the bear's smooth belly.

Callum ate at a steady pace, feeling his belly compress against his thighs as he leaned forward to polish off the remnants of his platter. His stomach had expanded more noticeably than Tay's, but not by much. Feeling lightly contented, the drake sighed in satisfaction knowing he had finished the first course without much trouble but was marginally disappointed that he was riding in last place. The drake didn't want to disappoint Reyna, and he mentally assured himself that the next round would be different.

Once the competitors were finished with their first course, Aaron gave the crowd a brief tally on the current score. "Franz is leading the way with 3 points, Tay following closely with 2, and Callum in last with 1. Now let us move onto the next round."

The serpent grabbed the old trays off the table, before he and Reyna produced the second round. "Twenty-five doughnuts," Aaron said, "The absolute favorite of a Mr. Tay Burlinger."

While hyping the crowd for the next round, Reyna approached Callum with an encouraging smile. "How're you feeling?" She asked, drawing her eyes over the drake's slightly bloated frame.

"Pretty good," the drake replied, "I just wish I wasn't in last right now." He sighed, developing a slightly nervous expression.

"Don't worry about that now," the otter said kindly, placing a paw on the drake's pudgy shoulder, "Just worry about finishing the next course and making it to the end."

Callum responded with a small grin, "I'll do my best."

Reyna wished the drake luck once more, before Aaron unleashed the signal to begin on the doughnuts.

Despite his early lead, Franz seemed to be having trouble with the new pile of confections in front of him. He made his way through the second platter at a considerably slower rate.

Tay seemed to pick up the horse's slack, as he practically inhaled the doughnuts with little trouble. The ursine's gut swelled slightly from the additional food, and his shirt's buttons creaked alarmingly but held. The bear seemed to finally be filling up the initial space in his stomach and was now expanding slightly with each bite.

Callum retained a respectful speed, though slightly quicker than the rate at which he ate the Danishes. He knew he could stomach the doughnuts without much trouble, but felt slightly anxious about only reaching the halfway point. The drake's belly continued to expand to the point where it released a gurgle indicating it was contented. Callum's plush layer of flab that had developed in his middle was now stretched slightly over his overstuffed organ and offered a firm, but yielding surface.

Tay finished the second course nearly eight doughnuts ahead of Callum and Franz was only halfway through his. The horse was grumbling in discomfort as his swollen midsection bugled tighter, but the equine kept at it by way of victorious thoughts.

Eventually Callum finished and leaned back before kneading his slightly firm belly which now bulged halfway down his thighs and grumbled slightly from the volume of food residing within it. Franz looked a little sickly as he swallowed his last doughnut several minutes behind the drake and ursine. The stallion's gut quivered ponderously and creaked from the unfamiliar pressure of food stuffed in it. Franz was gasping steadily from the sheer fullness of his state, and tenderly ran his cloven paws over the taunted appendage.

Now that the second round was complete, Aaron tallied the numbers and announced each contestant's score to the crowd. "In first place, with 5 points we have Tay." The seemingly unaffected ursine waved cheekily to the crowd while rubbing his belly with the other, running a gentle hand nervously over the straining buttons. "In second place, with 4 points we have Mr. Dorner." The stallion managed a weak grin, before moaning and

drooping his head in order to focus on soothing his creaking stomach. “And in third place, with 3 points is Callum.” The serpent concluded. The dragon smiled and waved once more to the crowd as he gently shifted his elastic shirt over his rotund midsection. He hoped the article would be stretchy enough to last the duration of the contest.

Looking up at Reyna, the drake chuckled when he found the otter transfixed once more on the globular mass resting in his lap. “I think I’m ready for my next course,” he said, breaking his friend out of her trance.

“Hmmm? Oh yes of course,” Reyna exclaimed as she blushed in response to being caught by the grinning reptile. The otter hurried off in an adorably flustered manner to retrieve the drake’s next round of food.

“For the third round,” Aaron commentated, “We will be serving éclairs. The favorite of our very own Callum Reiner.” The drake licked his muzzle in anticipation for his most appreciated confection.

Reyna and Aaron presented the competitors with the next round, and stepped back in order to allow the crowd a view of the action.

“And here we go,” Aaron said dramatically before initiating the loud gong once more.

Franz never stood a chance at this point in the competition. He ate three of the éclairs before turning a worrisome shade of green, his eyes rolled up in his head, and the stuffed stallion fainted plowing head first into the remainder of his éclairs. His groaning middle shifted and creaked from the movement, before going still.

Tay dug into the éclairs with the same voracity as the previous courses, but Callum matched his pace in an exceptionally tight race. The drake had allowed his senses to be overcome by the allure of his favorite food, and consequentially fell into a single-minded stupor he’d occupied on several previous occasions. The effect was immediately noticeable and quite dramatic as the dragon shoveled the éclairs down his gullet. His belly expanded in a similar fashion to a water balloon hooked up to a hose, steadily swelling outwards and rolling over itself as the bulbous mass took over increasing space. Callum showed no signs of slowing and his belly grew proportionately to the vigor with which he ate.

The competing ursine might have stood a chance against the voracious drake if he'd been smart enough to unbutton his shirt. As the bear worked his way through the pile of éclairs, his buttons strained tighter and tighter. Widening ovals of bulging belly fur peeked out through the seams of the tortured flannel material, and the resisting pressure interrupted the ursine's pace. While on his seventeenth éclair, the bulging bear heard a 'pop' followed by a 'whizz' before someone in the crowd yelled in surprise. A button had nailed them squarely in the face, and the terrified fur was forced to take cover as the rest of the bear's buttons left in a similarly spectacular fashion. Once the exceptional pressure was relieved, Tay's industrious obsidian stomach surged forward and flopped onto his knees, shaking and quivering from the sudden movement whilst unleashing a creaking groan from the taught flesh. Sighing in relief, the bear resumed eating only to find Callum finishing his final éclair.

The drake's belly now covered the majority of his swollen thighs, and sent out a signal that it was full. The layer of lard encompassing the draconic competitor's stomach had become increasingly resistant though still somewhat plush. Sitting back, the drake allowed a low moan of pleasure and fullness to issue from his muzzle. He looked over at the ursine who was still six or seven pastries behind him and patted his belly affectionately. Running his claws tenderly over the smoothly curving ventral plates, the drake grinned knowing that he had already consumed more in this one sitting than ever before. The drake looked forward to the impact it would have on his body.

Eventually Tay finished and leaned back as well, massaging his overblown gut while reveling in the relief provided by the absence of his straining shirt. Several members of the crowd had suffered minor casualties from his bursting shirt, and Tay now smiled guilty at each one in turn.

"It seems we have reached the end of our third course," Aaron stated to the audience, though the comment was rather evident. "And we have had our first contender to drop out by way of unconsciousness. How about a round of applause for the impressive efforts of Franz Dorner?" A smattering of applause accompanied by several good-natured chuckles responded in light of the horse's comical departure from the competition. Two college students helped bring the horse down from his awkward position in the platter of éclairs and placed him off to the side.

"And for our two remaining contestants we have Tay in first with 7 points

and Callum in second with 6. This looks to be a very close race,” the serpent said, building up the energy of the audience once more.

“Now let us continue onto the final course,” the snake said before he and Reyna each hefted a good-sized three-tiered cake up in front of each contestant.

Callum balked slightly at the confection in front of him, before gripping his grumbling gut self-consciously. Looking at Reyna, the drake smiled mischievously, “I’m guessing this was your doing,” he said to which the otter replied with a mirthful chuckle.

“I suppose,” she admitted, “I just hope you’ll be able to stomach it.”

Smiling grimly, the drake gauged the size of the cake and then looked down at the elastic shirt stretched out over his monolithic gut. ‘I just hope I don’t burst,’ he thought to himself.

Reyna gave him her most encouraging smile, before patting his cavernous gut and saying, “Good luck,” once more.

As Aaron prepped the crowd for the final round, Callum pondered how to tackle the incredible confection. He decided to do it in the same manner as the one he’d consumed several weeks earlier: layer-by-layer.

Aaron sounded the gong and the contestants were off. Tay had decided to opt for one last enthusiastic effort, hoping his strained, wobbling gut would be able to simply fit the large cake into it.

Callum embraced the cake with a rough, tactical plan that he hoped to the Gods would work. Synchronously the two contestants dug in, and they were off.

Tay plowed into the confection with the grace of a freight train, grabbing paw-fulls and cramming them into his muzzle. His belly steadily expanded, forcing its way into the edge of the table and bulging obscenely from the huge mass of food it contained. His sides wobbled, and love handles creaked as they strained to support the unbelievable black dome groaning in the bear’s lap.

Callum steadily and periodically waded his way through the top layer.

Causing his belly to tighten with pressure, but the drake was familiar with the feeling and forged onwards. Halfway through the second layer, the drake felt his belly blimp against the table and the dragon's eyes widened as he realized his feet were completely obscured from his view. Shifting his weight, the overstuffed reptile's belly creaked and then let out a sigh in relief as his ventral plates parted slowly. Tender silver flesh poked out among the slightly sturdier plates and continued to widen and tighten as additional food was crammed in. Coming up against the final layer, the foundation of the cake, Callum glanced over at the bulging blacksmith.

Tay's plan for using pure adrenaline to power him through the cake had failed miserably, and the bloated bear was having difficulty reaching around his wrecking ball gut to finish the half of cake still in front of him. Callum realized that the front heavy ursine had no chance of finishing, but it wouldn't matter if he himself was unable to stomach the rest of the cake. Tay was still ahead with a score of 7-6 and Callum needed to finish to be victorious. He looked at the mass of cake left on his platter, steeled his mind over, and to the pleasure of the crowd, began on the final piece of cake.

Three-fourths of the way through, Callum felt a different sensation in his stomach. A burning pressure that pressed against his gut and almost drowned out the sense of fullness currently occupying his mind. Looking down, the bloated drake realized it was his shirt. Despite Aaron's infusion of elasticity, the dragon's bulging belly had somehow reached its upper limits. With a fierce dedication, he shoved the final portion of the cake into his maw and swallowed.

Nothing happened for a moment....and then Callum's shirt ripped. Starting at the base, the elastic threads gave way in one enormous flurry of torn fibers and the drake's belly surged forward. Callum groaned from the fullness and collapsed dramatically into his chair. His belly's ventral plates parted to reveal drum-tight silver flesh beneath. The cavernous mass was rock-hard to the touch and extended to the drake's knees in an perfect sphere almost three feet in diameter. Callum collapsed back into his chair, pinned by the monumental mass as he struggled to register the events occurring around him.

Reyna, witness to the entire ordeal, shuffled forward and hypnotically placed her paws gently on the goose-fleshed mound. Groaning even from the light touch, Callum murred as he enjoyed the pleasant sensation

prickle his scales. He was able to recover enough of his senses to send an adoring gaze up at the otter, he was entirely sure he saw the same combination of passion and adoration in her face too, but it might have simply been the influx of sweetened pastries weighing down his gut. Her feather-light touch certainly sent off promising signals, and the euphoric sensation produced from the otter's paw weaving its way across the hyper tentative flesh was an experience that would brand itself in the drake's mind. He would pursue the hunch, but first the crowd awaited.

The drake's belly, now exposed to all those in attendance, strained proudly in the air and forcibly wedged itself between Callum's thighs. Everyone, from the college students to Tay's fellow workers to the drake's own supporters cheered at the spectacle. They didn't seem to mind the fact that only one individual could win, the appreciation was for the drake's ambition to cross the finish line. As ridiculous as the competition was, the spectators were hearty enough to support the winner and cheer on those who competed along side the others.

Tay came to a halt only a quarter piece shy of his own cake, and his head collapsed forward causing his chin to tilt onto his stuffed belly at a precarious angle. His blimp of a midsection rose and fell with the periodic breaths of one who'd entered the realm of the unconscious.

Smiling at the sight, Callum decided that didn't seem like a bad idea and slowly drifted off to sleep with the crowd's cheer echoing in his dreams.

Amused at the sight of all three contestants dozing off from their exceptional intake of food, Aaron took charge of the boisterous crowd by providing complimentary muffins for those who wanted one. He began tidying things up, and while the majority of the crowd left, a few remained to either aid in the clean up or wait for their companion to awaken. Franz was propped in his chair, babbling incoherently about the dangers of éclairs while making random twitching gestures and grabbing his bulging midsection. Tay, who was entirely too large to move, was simply left in his chair next to the victorious, bloated dragon. Callum had his head tilted to one side, one clawed hand occasionally tracing the rigid contours of his stretched ventral plates and taugth under flesh. Reyna sat beside him for a couple moments, seemingly content on continuing her exploration of the drake's cavernous belly, which swelled rhythmically with each breath. The otter then realized she would be more help if she aided in the clean up and began passing the time by assisting Aaron in washing the pans in the back

room.

The serpent took this as a good time to bring up a concerning subject in hopes of clearing the air. "I appreciate your help," he said, looking fondly at the otter, "And I was hoping to discuss a certain...topic concerning our mutual draconic friend."

At first Reyna tensed, apprehensive of the fact that she might have done something to hurt the dragon, but was relieved as the serpent said, "I know he's been entertaining you with small magic tricks, namely levitation and I thought you should know that I was the one who taught him them."

Blinking in surprise, Reyna allowed a small smile to creep across her face, "I was wondering how he came up with those little incantations."

Aaron visibly relaxed as his mind was put to ease that the otter was taking the news well and that he hadn't inflicted any unintentional damage to their relationship.

"Actually," Reyna smiled, "I've learned a bit of magic myself. Not from him mind you, but from my studies. It's similar to the basics you've taught Callum, and I enjoy it quite a bit."

"And what kind of magic are you involved in?" The serpent asked with piqued curiosity.

"Infusions," the otter said simply. "I study different reactions between elemental forces and magical ones on a minuscule level and am learning how certain combinations affect one's body and mind." She grinned widely, "I've taken a recent interest in ones that impact an individual's overall health and weight, particularly on a certain dragon."

Aaron could appreciate the otter's sense of humor and acceptance of his teaching Callum the basics of telekinesis, but there was one more truth he needed to make known. "Reyna," the serpent sighed, "The reason I am able to teach these tricks is because I'm...well..I'm an immortal spirit."

The otter took the news in stride, nodding as she considered the implications, "I suppose that makes sense. I mean, I've never met a spirit before, but I have read about them." She continued after a moment, "I can understand your apprehension about telling me, but for as long as I've

come here, you were always kind, supportive, and Callum holds you in high esteem. Spirit or not, nothing changes.”

The serpent was slightly surprised by the otter’s widely accepting mind, and he found himself offering her an embrace, which the otter gladly received.

Both seemed relieved, and their trust for one another was deeper than ever.

After some long hours of cleaning, the bakery finally resembled it’s former self. Franz had been guided back to the college with a couple of friends acting as crutches. They kept stumbling in every direction due to the off-balance nature of the equine’s bloated midsection.

Tay awoke a couple hours after the horse, jolting awake and proudly looking down at his bulging stomach. The bear was unable to reach around the monolithic mass and had to be practically carried home. He'd attempted to walk on his own and discovered that his low-hanging belly got in the way of his legs which threatened to send him toppling onto his own gut. “This’ll make working in the forge a bit of a hassle,” the ursine declared with a boisterous laugh as he was aided in returning to his home by several supportive guards.

Callum was the last to wake, stirring just as the sun cused the horizon and plunged the world into a slowly fading twilight. Moaning lightly from the unwieldy bulk occupying his lap, the drake looked around groggily, before becoming aware of the late hour. Looking down, he smiled satisfactorily at the boulder of a gut that was his midsection. He tentatively poked the mass and felt a decent amount of pudge squish under his finger. His digestion must have been working in serious overtime to process the unbelievable amount of food crammed into it.

A soft padding made the drake’s head pop up as he grinned at the sight of a tired, but happy looking otter making her way towards him.

“Hey,” the drake said softly, “Nice of you to stay behind.”

Reyna smiled, “Of course, I enjoyed it the most. And I was able to get to know Aaron a little better.”

Callum raised an eyebrow, "Not to plan anymore pranks I hope," he laughed, "I don't think I could take both of you on."

The otter laughed too, a pleasant lighthearted sound that made the drake immensely happy...for whatever reason.

"We just talked about some things, I'll tell you about them later," she assured him. "I had other reasons to stay behind too," the otter said, tracing a blunt claw over the yielding curvature of the drake's belly, "Ample reasons," she reiterated with a sly grin.

Callum's face lit up with a faint blush, but he felt more comfortably confiding in his feelings now than he had in previous days. Perhaps it was the fact that he sat, stomach fully exposed and without a shred of dignity in front of the otter, or maybe it was the defining touch he'd received at the commencement of the contest. Running through the possibilities, Callum realized the main factor was in the knowledge that Reyna's personality, her acceptance, her passion matched up wonderfully with the dragon's own. He could only hope she reciprocated the same sentiment towards him.

"I'm sure," the drake said, smiling nervously as he prepped himself for what he was about to say, "But I think I can guess those reasons, because I feel a similar way." He shifted his bulk, causing it to ripple gently with the otter's paw still in place, "I am exceptionally and entirely taken by you." The drake drew in a breath, hoping he hadn't taken the moment too far.

Smiling warmly, Reyna placed her other hand on his, "The feeling's mutual." She said simply and the two embraced.