

Bruce the minotaur kicked Graolith the green anthro dragon square in the stomach, sent him windmilling to the dirt arena floor. Stars gyrated in swirling eyes.

The ref chopped his hand down, shouting, "Ten!" Reptile, feline, ursine, canine, and all of Kingdom Animalia—their hands ripped up in the stadium. And in a drumming, hammering frenzy they chanted the name "Bruce, Bruce, Bruce"; and front-row people threw flowers and jewelry into the pit in exaltation.

When Bruce got home, the crystal he'd won in the tournament painted his room with glowing hexagonal patterns. Worried of robbers, he stuffed the crystal into his pillowcase and slept on it. The next morning, he woke with the meanest neck-ache a body ever had.

Honey beams of sun striped his kitchen counter. Stepping downstairs into the living room, Bruce yawned. He rounded the counter. He set the crystal he'd been carrying under his arm aside to fix himself a bowl of cheerios. As he spooned them down, a vacant glaze rolled over his eyes. Instead of cereal, they reflected faces of black ski masks. They weren't really there.

Ruled by the id, his Other Hand squeezed the crystal then slid it into a lunchbox he'd forgotten to put away last night. In a meticulous, subconscious manner, it unraveled the plastic wrap of a sub sandwich then stuck the crystal inside the sandwich.

At one o'clock, an alarm in the bull's training room sounded. Smearing forehead sweat to his wrist, Bruce gave the dummy one last roundhouse kick. A tangle of dry spaghetti stuff spurted out the half-marionette's back, spraying the floor. He grabbed his lunchbox, slipped out the sliding door into the backyard then went up the steps to an oak patio, and plopped into a tiny reclining chair. The legs of the chair whimpered.

"Built an appetite training to thwart those robbers, sure did."

Lunchbox in his lap, Bruce unzipped it and pulled out the sub. With a bit of a fuss, he fixed the disheveled sandwich, not seeming to see the missing wrap. He was salivating, no doubt ready to 'light to' with his teeth. But before he lit to, a light summer breeze let him have the sharp, smoked, aged aroma of the cheddar; let him have the juicy roast beef and garden-picked tomatoes, too. He made a warbling harrumph then lit to.

A metallic clang needled pain through his jaws. He reeled back, kicked his legs up, howled like a bastard! A body'd'a been better off 'lighting to' a mithril node with a toothpick, would that they'd no mining pick. When his throat gave her a rest, he was flushing and huffing and sniffing tears.

"Sandwich bread," he groaned, "It's a mean thing to go hard on a hard worker who's labored up a hunger."

Hearing his spherical belly growl, Bruce shoved out a breath. "Whaddya say, Bruce? Take one for Team Belly? You've eaten more stale before." His mouth stretched to fit a bus, almost. Holding the juicy sandwich like a clarinet, Bruce piped it into the back of his throat, both eyes rolling blissfully. Then the sandwich blocked his airway. He began to choke. Luckily, the choking got his throat muscles moving like fleshy gills and got it gliding down.

The bloating sensation was fantastic. His distending belly bulged prominently on the left side. Nerve

clusters fired pleasuring jolts all up and down his body, disengaging his tensed shoulder blades and uncurling his toes. "*Burrrrroroomf.*"

What a tasty burp!

Bruce groaned, clutched his left side. Something pointy jutted into the stomach walls. His eyes slitted from a knifing pain, scanning his backyard. The pool. The garden. The solar-paneled roof. Robbers lurked nearby.

"Why . . . thieves." Whole body with the shakes, he reached for the rim of the umbrella table to pick himself up. But he tripped. The table tipped over his head, and the umbrella pole thwacked hard on his back and chopped him to the patio. "Think, *urf*, you'll have my prize, hey? But it's somewhere you won't lay hands . . ."

Clutching his aching gut with Good Hand, he felt around the patio with the Other. "S-sophy?" (That was the name of the crystal.) "Where'd ya go, Sophe? SOPHE?"

"SOPHE!" He sprang up with arms swinging, legs spread, head spinning every which way. When Sophy still didn't appear, one of his arms grew twice as thick and thwacked a spike bend into the umbrella pole. "*WUAAARGH, SOOOOOPHYYY!*" Electric seizures possessed his growing, fat-rippling body. His hooves stuttered bigger, making their previous size mousy in comparison. Muscle sinew tightened, thickened, warbled at a deepening pitch. New fur for his bludgeoning ankles fusilladed. Barreling outward came a perfectly domed gut; beefy biceps, thighs, and pecs. A grizzly muzzle elongated, teeth sharpening to have razor, feral points. Offset by his enormous body, the fifteen-foot tall brute stepped forward too roughly; one of his dog-crusher hooves smashed through the patio floor, fracturing it inwardly.

He shook his hoof free of shattered boards. He rose to full height, shadow drawing over the lip of his tiled roof. He spotted the hedge separating his property from his neighbors', the Fieldses, then roared with a voice more burly, deep and gruff than before: "Ms. Fields. It was YOU jacked Sophy. Why, I oughta!" The minotaur's monstrously swelling obelisks for legs vaulted easily over the wall of shrubbery.

While Ms. Fields was hosing down one of her tomato plants, a hoof greater than an elephant's came down and squashed it flat. With a squishy squirt, icky red sauce stained the seventy-year-old lion's blouse. She gasped and gazed up. A monstrous, muscular bull with the blubbery fat of a walrus reflected in her spectacles. She dropped the hose. Water gushed down-slope, soaking her sunflower slippers. "Bruce? M-m-my. What's gotten into you? Ack! I know; you're possessed by Beezlebub, ACK!"

The old feline hobbled across her garden yard for her screen door. A giant fist took her captive. She shrieked, her arms flapping at very hummingbird speeds. She cried the names of organic foods supposed to ward off Satan.

Heavy-lipped jaws swallowed her face. With sucking sounds and suckling slurps, Ms. Fields' body jerked and jolted on its own accord until her legs and feet noodled their way into the maw, replaced by the sight of the bovine's perked chin and a neck processing a huge lump downwards. Sunflower slippers plopped to the lawn, nigh unrecognizable behind a blanket of drool. A bulge crawled down Bruce's craw, like some rodent moving under a furry rug, before disappearing into his chest cavity. The

brown belly inflated. The shape of Ms. Fields wriggled to see another day of gardening behind a swollen navel.

*"BURRRrrRRRruURURURRuRP!"*

Struggling inside the stomach, Ms. Fields elbowed the sandwich. A sharp edge of Sophy jabbed the lining of the stomach. The bovine made a face predicting a moan. Instead, he procured a pressure-expelling belch.

Bruce broke open some nearby bushes, searching inside for Sophy.

"Where you put Sophy, you old hag? Where you keep her? Hey?"

He sniffed the flattened tomato plant, to be sure. But Sophy was gone. Bruce beat his chest and roared. He soared to the size of a premature kaiju. Half the Fields' household was blotted by the bovine behemoth's shadow.

"Stashed Sophy in your city bank, hey? That's it!" One of his cow-crusher hooves came down on Ms. Field's front fence; boards flattened and shattered. Quaking footfall left the backyard, rousing car alarms all down the steep slope of a cul-de-sac.

Three houses down the street, Zakano the iguana lay on a couch watching Godzilla. The 1998 cartoon one, not the shitty 2000 one. A titanic pounding of feet flung him and his flat-screen T.V. to the floor. Smoke and sparks hissed up. Groaning, Zakano crawled to the window then peeked his head up, peering through the glass. A truck-crusher hoof lifted, black asphalt crumbling down over a mammoth crater. The pressure burst the top of a hydrant. Water spewed up, fishtailing thirty feet above the ground.

Zakano sank below the window, clutching his heart. "Please don't let that be you, bud."

Once the beast's shadow had passed, he brushed himself off. He ran to the front door.

He burst from the front door. He sprinted down a stone stairway then jumped into 'the whip': a black, 86 Toyota with the spoiler. Tires screeched. Skid-marks flamed from his driveway all down the street and the next street and the—you get the picture. Tailing the unnaturally fat and huge minotaur, Zak disregarded stop signs, sidewalks, lawns, driveways, hedges, and by golly, he damn near gunned down a couple of elderly lizard-folk at the crosswalk. Windshield-wiping leaves and brambles off of his windshield, Zak checked to speedometer to make sure he was riding crazy enough. It said sixty-five. He frowned. "Let's get serious, Zak. Bruce needs help, and fast." His foot hammered that mofo. Smokestacks blurted smog and fire; and 'the whip,' going eighty-five, drove dual curtains of fire down the residential area like Satan's chariot itself. And it dogged the minotaur into the outskirts of the central city.

In front of a tenement, a demigod hoof stomped down. The bovine titan beat his chest then cried barbarously. The tenement looked like the bank Ms. Fields had stashed Sophy in (though he'd never seen it before), so he brought back his arm then punched a hole one story in diameter through the third floor. His fist blasted rubble about an empty room; luckily, the last residents had been kicked out for rent evasion, and no one was chilling there.

The iguana swerved 'the whip' then hopped out of 'the whip.' He landed on the street in an 'insides'-resistant jumpsuit, wearing a double-barrel oxygen tank as you and I would a backpack. Currently the minotaur was feeling his pillars for fingers around the empty room, trying to find the bankers who were in on it with Ms. Fields, with little luck.

"Whatever it is upsetting you, I'll get to the bottom of it." From his suit, Zakano pulled a grappling rope. He thrust the spiked end into the street then stomped on it, to be sure. Then he ran under the bull's legs. Turning to face the demigod minotaur, he twirled the rope like a lasso before slinging it rather high. The hooked end of it jumped into Bruce's agape mouth, hooking between two teeth. Zak clicked a button on his suit; suddenly the rope yanked him off the ground, and "Here I come!" he declared, and fell between the jaws. They snapped shut.

Though Bruce had not seen Zak go down, he noticed the rope jutting out of his maw. It seemed suspicious—was perhaps even an instrument of the bankers in on it with Ms. Fields. He gave it a great tug.

Mid-fall, Zak felt the rope reel up. He snapped upwards with a groan, saved from having his neck snapped by the suit. Before the rope left the mouth, he abandoned it, and by and by found gravity reversing. He smashed into a throat wall. He grasped at it, fingers slipping, losing the hand-holds of the slippery grooves again and again. Crying out in frustration, he tilted in motion then kicked his feet into the wall. He slammed against the wall upside-down, boots glued to the sticky saliva. Exasperated, he thrust his back into the wall, and—*squooosh*—his boot stayed, but the rest of him fell, fell down the chasm; and he screamed so full of fright, he could not long for the rope. Echoes bounced and rebounded for nine seconds.

The vocal reverberation tickled Bruce's throat. Thinking some bug—such as a feral dragon—had landed on his neck, Bruce slapped it. The aftershock dizzied the iguana, and it sent him hurtling the opposite way.

Weightlessness. Stagnant and humid winds leapt up like the procession of a church to music, beating against the back of his suit. Bruce was still growing, so the stomach grew as Zak fell, so fast, he couldn't fall fast enough to hit the bottom. Floating down faster than him, all around him, came stoplights and cars and streets and tenements, all bitten out of and slobbered on. For some reason, gravity weighed heavier on such truck more than the iguana, so by the time he landed, streets had landed (*splash, splash, splash!*) before he had; and, with a hard *thunk* against some gravel, he had a rolling sort of ride—"oof, oaf, urf!"—down a steeply tilted street. I reckon it was round fifty yards long, jutting out of—what looked to Zak like—a spummy sea of acids. "Surely it will eat up my suit," he said aloud, still somersaulting to his death. He tuned his ears into the rhythm of his rolling then timed a backwards thrust of his feet just right. Then "Hoomf!" He flew across a gap of bubbling, chardonnay-colored juice onto the top of a digesting 86 Toyota. Alas! It was 'the whip!'

Jumping to his feet, Zakano cried sorrowfully: "Not 'the whip!' " As he wept salty marine reptile tears, more of 'the whip' was submerged by the happily bubbling, burping 'jacuzzi.' "Well, it's silly to be grieve for it now," Zak told the 'jacuzzi.' Moving on with his life, he gazed ahead. There, he saw three paths: one of floating chunks of avenue, which led to a leaning tenement with half its roof submerged; another of jutting buildings and iron beams, which looked like a jungle gym; and another of geysers of stomach acids, which were on and off, but would each lift a platform every time they went on. That third looked the coolest to Zak, so he brainstormed some justification as to why he should go that way. *Why would stomach acids be whirling unless there was something upsetting them at the bottom?*

"Let's get to the bottom of this. For Bruce."

And so he jumped for the first platform right as the geyser below it went on, and erected. And Zak squealed. He clung to the side of it. He clawed for a grip, trying to climb aboard.

Back in the city, the gigantic, ripped minotaur radiated a mad yellow glow from eating thousands of pounds of people and urban architecture. He scaled over some of the central-city skyscrapers, becoming a two-hundred-fifty foot tall monstrosity. Spreading his arms, the fully-matured kaiju minotaur ripped a roar more mighty than a cloudburst. The little ant people were whipped across streets, alleys, homes, grocery stores. In the sky, planes steered off course to avoid Bruce. The kaiju lunged at them, but was interrupted by—by something the distance swelling from a relative 'doll' to 'child' to 'gnome' size. By and by, that something became a dragon Bruce's size. Wide-eyed Bruce became. For, before him stood the green anthro dragon he had humiliated in the tourney just the other day.

Graolith!

"Why—it MUST HAVE be you," came the booming snarl of the leviathan bovine's voice. "You no doubt (being all jealous), you robbed it while I was training to fight robbers."

"Get out of here, Bruce!" the other, considerably gargantuan monster of a dragon said; "I won my OWN crystal for second place. Then some robber he nabbed it from me round lunch. But I don't care 'bout that much no more, cuz NOW I can have my revenge match with you. C'mere—get a load of this —" Springing from his shoulder discus, his bicep, wrist, and fist whipsawed into Bruce's bouncy midriff. Fifty subways'-worth of noise erupted from the bull's throat. He staggered backward, thumped against a skyscraper. The scraper began to crack; on the higher floors, office workers and supervisors and managers screamed "Noo—not the excel spreadsheets!" as computers and cubicles pelted acrylic office windows and self-destructed.

The stomach tilted like a picture frame in a home hit by a bulldozer. Gravity peeled the iguana's ("waaaah!") feet up over his head. As if he had put in some cheat-code of some sort, he was flown across many of the platforms he'd've had to have leapt across otherwise. He alighted on one pretty far ahead. He picked himself up. The platforms, reacting a bit more late to the tilt, suddenly threw themselves from their geyser-places. Zak got low on his board and whooped. He and it splashed. Then together they went surging down a malevolent current, a surfer and his boogieboard. Zakano shot into the gyrating maelstrom. It became a tunnel of sorts. He spiraled through it, and his sense of gravity became absolutely fucked.

Zak approached the bottom of a highway underpass which bridged two sides of the tunnel. He ducked, barely avoiding getting lopped off his board. More obstacles came: iron beams, cars, slabs of freeway. He kick-flipped over a guardrail, his board twirling below the top of the rail before meeting back up with his feet. Beneath Zakano the board glowed crimson, steaming from the heat of the juices. He gritted his teeth, holding in a yelp. And, also, he leaned forward, propelling himself at an admirable rate.

Shooting through an orifice, he heard behind himself the snapping gulp of a meaty rubberband. A noodly passageway he coasted through, on a surf of juices flooding from the orifice. And the passageway plunged steeply; and the juices briefly left the bottom of his board. A microscopic cry went

through the kaiju's duodenom. (This cry tickled Bruce, which we shall see the effects of shortly.) The world below the iguana's feet felt empty until the acids again sped forward; and they rocketed him through the looping, serpentine tunnels of the large intestines; and if you'd've been there, and if your name were Sini, you might have compared the experience to “an endoscopic roller coaster ride—or some shit.”

Back in the city, Bruce felt a bubbly sensation in his insides. He bellowed a humongous belch that catapulted the dragon over the city and onto the commercial district. A godly thud jolted the city. Hundreds of thousands of civilians were knocked down, crumpling on the streets and alleys, and in homes and grocery stores. Malls and parks, and the tournament stadium too, presently crumbled beneath the dragon kaiju's midsection: beneath scales each as big as a bedspread. He groaned. And the fiery grumble from his mouth set a rapid transit track aflame (and the train, too, when it ran into it). Then the dragon, he inhaled like a god; and oak trees and vehicles and a T-Mobile headquarters, the vortex of his maw uprooted from the ground, and vacuumed them into itself. And, consuming these things, the kaiju dragon grew and grew; and so great he became, he outgrew Bruce, and could probably belch the little bull to his grave, but chose not to, out of fairness. He got up, a three-hundred foot goliath.

Fear was planted in the whimpy little bull. But, gathering courage, he squeaked to the dragon (and boomed to the civilians): "Anything you can do I can do better, chump!" Then with but five stomps he stepped onto the smoggy side of the city, and he pulled up from the earth a great barrel one-hundred-and-fifty feet wide and labeled "RADIOACTIVE WASTE PLANT: KEEP KAIJUS FROM CONSUMING AT ALL COSTS." The way he raised the barrel, it was the same way you and I would raise a can of soda. He pressed the hole in the top to his lips then glugged, and glugged, and glugged, and glugged. Supernatural chemicals and anthropomorphic beasts in hazmat suits crashed down his esophagus. *Glug glug glug glug*. A glow that was like dragon's breath radiated round from the godly bull; and he got so huge, feral dragons could throw roofs over the clefts of his hooves and call them dragon caves. The colossal hooves pushed buildings and broadened streets, feet that had outgrown their tiny socks. The minotaur's head rose above the dragon's; and, standing 338.698473 feet tall, he eructed a continental rift shifting belch:

**"GWWUAUUAUAUWUAWWRWRrRRRRrRRRRrRRRRRWRRRRRWrrP!"**

And the petrifying blast of filth smacked Graol upside the head. As though a rug were ripped from underneath his feet, he rose, torpedoed backward, and, sliding down across the city, plowed a seven-hundred foot scar of molten Earth. Little blocks of architecture came splashing up round him like Legos. And from the scar, lava from Hell spouted. And it blazed red, like the forge-metals of blacksmiths. When the dragon got up, he ground his teeth and trembled with wrath unparalleled: not by the lava from Hell, or by the lava's ancestors' cursed spirits, even. He hopped to the edge of the city to the lake called Clean Lake, knelt and baptized his whole head in it; and he drank and drank with a godly thirst. And he grew with a magical sound of ascending scale, and became a godly dragon. Safe people in neighboring cities slung out their phones, snapped photos and sent them to Instagram, sometimes Tumblr, saying things like “#wereallgonnadie” and “yo, i'm here in the next city atm. They finna die lmao.” (The latter one is a Facebook message sent by Sini.)

Back in Bruce's body, Zakano dropped through an endless abyss—wailing, falling, seemingly motionless in an infinite, vertical chute. Unable to match his speed of descent, the flood of acids became increasingly farther above. By and by, though, some wreckage *did* fall faster than him; and following that, the acids gained on him, and seemed to gobble him; and then there was a big typhoon

splash, which turned the U-shaped depression of the intestinal ropes into a lake a tenth the size of Michigan's, I should think. So Zak got up, pretty relieved to see he had landed all safe on a bobbing rooftop amid the lake. A force-field coming from somewhere formed a protective sphere round the roof, which domed away some of the acids below the roof, too. From where did it come, though? We shall get to that, you.

On the far end of the roof, an obese purple dog-pile composed of multiple *sacculococcus*, a.k.a. *voracious stomach bacteria*, was humping and sucking and palpitating in on itself. The bacteria—all seventy of these guys—had grown when Bruce had. And they were so big, they could sit on sumo wrestlers and win matches that way! Spears of light rayed up from the less dense, more translucent spots of the throbbing congregation. *They're hiding something under their body*, Zakano thought. And he meant to find out what, exactly.

When the diet of a minotaur has too much starch, *sacculococcus* infest the minotaur's guts. When sandwiches are too close to Sophy when she starts making shit grow, they grow. So, the amount of yeast grows, too. Now do you see why these *sacculococcus* are so fucking huge? They ate an entire two loaves of bread. Would that they were hungry enough, they would eat your family and your family's pets, too.

Zakano approached. Some of the dog-pile looked up. The fat brows of their featureless face-areas hardened. Hisses went up. Some of the dog-pile formed canines and foamed at the mouth. It was a first and a last for him: facing off against a pack of gelatinous, voracious dogs. "Either you step aside or taste this laser." He handled the laser on his belt.

The dog-pile disbanded, separating into distinctly single organisms. A pack of purple dogs sprang forward, bristled, snarled. Behind them shined a resplendent crystal. The iguana glimpsed it. But he trained his gun on the bacteria.

A moment of stillness played out. The purple dogs scrunching and going "grr" real low, foaming at the mouths . . . Zakano spreading his feet, becoming very much poised for bacteria assassinating . . .

One of the dogs sprang off its gelatinous base at Zak. Gnashing teeth formed from its previously featureless face. Rabid spittle flew.

Zak pulled the trigger. Laser-fire was followed by a canine yelp. The *sacculococcus* barreled into the pack's masses, its body billowing smoke the color of grape jam.

(A burning pain sparked in Bruce's side. He groaned and bent. The dragon smirked and ran up and launched a foot into his abdomen.)

The pack might not have gathered to courage to go at Zak. But the quake of Graolith's foot shoved them off their gelatinous bases. They played it off as if they'd planned to do it, and in a great, flying conglomeration, gnashed their fangs at the iguana.

And Zak he gunned them down and out of flight with the laser one after the other. Purple corpses piled the rooftop between him and Sophy. But, by and by, one got a hold of him, and then another and another. And they brought him down in a ravenous swarm. The last of Zak we see here is his muzzle being crawled over by the hungry jelly cyborg; and the last we hear is a "Help . . ."

*THUMP, THUMP, THUMP, THUMP.*

Outside the intestines, the kaiju dragon was kicking the kaiju minotaur in the gut with the technique given to him by famed karate masters. Every kick made the building behind Bruce's back buckle and slant backward. He could hear cubicles and office-workers and water coolers piling to the floor, *thurmthurmthurmthruthruthrum*. What's more, he heard something else: an echo sent to him straight from Sophy the crystal, who heard it first: "Help . . . help . . . help . . ."

Bruce blurted, "Zakano." It was helpful, in the sense that it took his mind off getting pummeled. Though, every time that foot came, he had to stutter for it: "Zakano—needs me. And all I've—been concerned about—has been those damn robbers." The next time the foot came, he hugged the attached ankle. The dragon bleated colossally. His leg was thrown up; and he scissored backward and fell, crushing a myriad neighborhoods. Thunder boomed. When Graolith looked up, he saw the bottom of a humongous hoof lift over him. The hoof came down.

Something the city would later call Hurricane Graolith rumbled out of his maw. A roaring pillar of wind, it shot into the sky. And his stomach deflated. There shot into the clouds a shiny little speck. We zoom closer. A jewel!

Revenge lust left the dragon's eyes. They became serene-looking. And you could tell, he at once forgave Bruce for beating his ass pretty badly in the tournament just the other day. And he shrank and shrank and shrank. He shrank until you could stuff dozens of carbon copies of him in Bruce's left nostril.

Bruce caught the crystal between two fingers the size of tour buses. He put it up to his left eye. Its size and shape was so identical to Sophy's. The crystal triggered a memory.

"Now that I think about it, I stuffed Sophy in my sandwich, I was so focused on the cheerios." Which meant—"Zakano? You went inside of me to fish out Sophy?"

What a true friend.

Behind the squelching of the bacteria consuming his suit, Zak heard Bruce's words. He replied, "Disable . . . the forcefield . . ."

"What?" Bruce looked round, but could not see where the voice came from.

"The forcefield, I said."

"I can't hear you. Sophy, turn up his volume, will you?"

"The forcefield! Tell Sophy to cut it out!"

Shocked that Zak would use that tone with Sophy—would tell Sophy to 'cut it out'—Bruce's eyes flashed. His rage was renewed. The rage only lasted a few seconds, though. For, Zak was a true friend. Bruce had faith in Zak, so he would stop fooling around and tell Sophy the deal. He formed the words in his mind, messaging Sophy via telepathy.

Sophy did what a crystal did best: nothing at all.

"Well damn," Zakano whispered. "I've never met a magical crystal I could rely on."

The iguana reached for the small of his back, grabbed the oxygen hose then yanked it loose. A deathly croak went up from him. But fumes spewed from his back, bursting a hole in the mass of saccylococcus. A somersault, and he was out. The mass was nettled. It dove for him. He dodged. He took to all fours toward Sophy. He jumped at her, and for a heartbeat looked very much like an Olympic track-racer before a finish line in a frozen frame. His right foot slowly homed toward Sophy; and then the smoking toes and Sophy connected, but not intimately.

Veins crawled up her hexagonal surface. She shuddered, brightened, flashed. The intestinal tract lit up like a disco ball, and would have been cool to have a disco party inside of, but only while it was still flashing.

CRRRRCKRCKRKCRKCKCRK. That was the surface of Sophy cracking. She cut the force-field off. She went speeding at the speed of sound back up the rope of intestines, fearing for her life. The turbulence pulled the lake of acids up with her like a hitched trailer. This includes everything in the lake.

"Oh," Zak moaned, while he was spinning in a digestive juice tornado: for he had not assassinated Sophy, only relocated her.

The maelstrom of fluids lifted, poured, gushed, swallowed, consumed. Goodbye saccylococcus. Goodbye Zak?

Soon as the digestive juices engulfed the mass of saccylococcus, great bubbles built up. One of these bubbles swallowed Zac, carrying him up the stale twister. The iguana bounced inside of the stinky sphere. Other bubbles encapsulating people and places and things elevated alongside his own en route to a gateway in the intestinal heavens.

Zac entered the belly. In Sophy's wake, the belly was stirred like mad, and began to produce bubbles in overabundance.

Bruce put a palm to his mouth, the color draining from his face. Absorbing the saccylococcus had upset his stomach, which we're about to see the effects of here:

A legion of bubbles blipped to the top of the rising acids, the acids rumbling and rattling three stories beneath the bull's closed sphincter until finally, *"BWWAWAAAAARRAURUARRRRRRRRRRRRRRP!"* Up from the kaiju bovine's mouth erupted lanes, boulevards, districts: included in these things were cars, trucks, underpasses, trees, birds, squirrels, canines and citizens. The sonic belch erupted them into the lake adjacent the city. The cacophony of splashing captured the ire of a thunderstorm. The belch's trajectory was so spot-on, everybody's head popped up from the lake; and everybody seemed rather happy and unhurt and clean. Unfortunately, Clean Lake was never again clean. You can see the damage now: the tumbleweed mess of metal; oil bubbling up . . .

Alas, Zakano's work was not yet done. Instead of the entrance to the throat, fate steered him through some cavity I know not the name of and into the bull's bloodstream. Turbulent gales smacked him against blood cells, bang bang, "ow, ow"; and all the while, the damn crystal was maneuvering with

agility through fleshy intersections, wriggling her way through small holes and whatnot. Luckily Zak realized, "Ah! I am an iguana!" and applied his experience swimming in water to swimming in blood; and he jetted downstream like, good golly, I'd say Michael Phelps or better. *Spshpshwphpwhwphpwhphswpsh* the hardworking iguana went, freestyling the bejeezus out of himself and really straining his lungs.

*HMP HMP, HMP HMP, HMP HMP.* Zakano swam into the heart. The crystal, having a mind of its own, darted into some fancy valve. Zak pursued. Blood cells, which thought he was a virus, began to pummel him; and they died when they did, not suicidal but kamikaze-like, or bee-like, more like; and Zak, he whipped his blaster out to blast through a bunch of them—(Bruce clutched his chest, starting to spazz like seizing person, saying "Hungn! hyungn!" and less pronounceable variations). Then Zak, he aimed the blaster at one of the more respected blood cells, holding it hostage; so the others cried "Cease fire!" and pretended to respect Zak; and Zak inquired genteelly about where the crystal went. Well, lacking facial expressions, the blood cells kicked off a certain way to point him that way. Zak thanked them, and gave them each a respectful bow the blood cells of Bruce's body have not forgotten since. In fact, their children and their children's children tell tales of the iguana and call him "The Genteeliguana."

Zak swam through the manifold arteries; and he left his legacy imprinted in the minds of cells and fungi and bacteria and dormant viruses all about. For, they'd never seen an iguana in their life-times and never again would. However, I would consult Wikipedia, or even better, the sources Wikipedia consults, to confirm this.

Time and time again the crystal snarfed herself away from Zak. But Zak said "I'm faster than Michael Phelps!" and he meant it; and this struck great fear into the heart of Sophy, and broke the Benjamin Bennett concentration it had required for her to escape thus far.

A lid popped up from the top of a synapse, sort of like a sewer lid. Up from the hole shot Sophy. Up from the hole shot Zak. He clambered out of the synapse. He hastened after her, hopping over connections of the brain and sometimes leapfrogging off of floating brain cells to catch up. Indeed, he was as delicate in the brain as he was in all the other parts of the body. Not at all. So with his every footfall, he could hear Bruce freaking out (heaving up froth at the mouth, sputtering gorilla sounds when not shouting the discount prices of Furniture at Ikea ["Plaid sofa, three ninety-nine and ninety-nine cents! Study lamp fifteen fifty-nine!" and so on]). (If you think I'm just playing with you, google 'Bruce epilepsy,' and a link to my Youtube userpage Sinirawrz will come up, and then you will feel pretty sorry.)

At last, Zak cornered Sophy. It was in the cobwebbed attic of Bruce's mind—the one that stored knowledge about calculus, social studies and tales such as *The Ramayana*. Zak procured his raygun. Then suddenly, Sophy said her first three words: "What is that?" Though she was asking about the gun, Zak visualized her pointing a certain way in his mind, and looked that way. She took that opportunity to 'dip.'

"Rats," Zak said. He took aim and blasted for her, but only missed and killed 984,632 brain cells accidentally and heard the bull go 'woof' like a German shepherd. After pausing to pray for the bull's health, Zak continued on.

Long and far the iguana chased her. In the abyss, he did not see the floor leave his feet. He landed with a brace of his knees into a swamp of mucus in a sniffing tunnel. When he tried to move, the stuff

between his soles of his feet stuck worse than chewing gum. Great accordion stretches of green bile were made per lift of his legs. Seeing this, Sophy stopped fleeing so fast, fearing for her life less. She laughed at Zak, and was not looking where she was going. Thus, she hovered right into a bush of nosehairs. The hairs were coarse and congested. No matter how much she wriggled and writhed, she only assimilated deeper into their sticky coat. Zak, seeing Sophy vulnerable, was inspired with wild plans. He reached up and grabbed an obese vine of nosehair to pull himself out. And he pulled and pulled. The seaweed of boogers peeled away from his feet with lewd slurps. Zak climbed up the obese vine then kicked off a wall, landing past the booger traps. "I've got you now, Sophy," he said, unsheathing the laser gun from his belt.

However, his own words made him pause. Could he not have pulled the gun out and gotten Sophy while he was still bound? One hand he put beneath his chin and held it there like Sophocles.

While the iguana philosophized, Sophy squirmed out of the nasally thicket. She vanished. Zak said, "Shit. That's what I get for trying to be Sophocles." Resolved not to be like Sophocles anymore, Zak dove after her. And he clawed open curtain upon curtain of nostrilly mane.

Ahead, a wheel of light appeared, great as a water mill wheel. The afternoon sky lay ahead. At the precipice of the nostril, Sophy was levitating. Without looking behind herself, she sensed Zak's approach and cried: "Don't come another foot closer, Genteeliguana! Should you, I shall jump and perhaps die."

Though Zak wanted Sophy to die, he did not want her to just Leap of Faith herself to death like Ezio. He kind of wanted the killing blow. "Take a moment before you do this," he said, in the calm voice he had heard the firefighters with the trampolines use on television. "Think of all the good times you've had."

"Oh!" Sophy's sorrows intensified. "All I've done is create an out-of-control monster. The ones who love me are evil, the ones who seek to kill me good. It is my fate to live a woeful life, Zak. Oh! oh Moses! oh Solomon! Aphrodite as well!"

Zak knew not the meaning of the names, but they sounded poorly out of context; and he felt guilty for inspiring such poor behavior. Salty marine reptile tears glittered round his tear ducts. "I . . . I didn't know what you were going through, Sophy . . ."

Sophy waited three seconds to confirm that Zak was going to be crying for a while. He was. So she sent a pulse of telepathy into the shadowy edge of the left nostril. Behind Zak there appeared three gluttonous *nosstrylopythoccus*: writhing black serpents wide as one-car garages, long enough to swallow ten feral dragons whole and, after clearing some space with a few big burps, eat their hatchlings for dessert. Zak turned round. Too late. The trio of *nosstrylopythoccus* opened up three previously unseen mouths. The left one nommed on the helmet of his suit. The right one nommed on his bare feet. And the middle one nommed on his midsection. Zak struggled. He raised the laser, but it was too dark to take aim without hitting China instead. The middle one quickly shook him, and the laser fell from his hand. The three of the *nosstrylopythoccus* seemed to be making a team effort until the left one overpowered the others. It gobbled the iguana voraciously, devouring his head, shoulders and torso, and not stopping there. Its drool was a lime neon mucus, its teeth bristly hair follicles, its tongue a prickly black bobtail.

While Zak swelled the creature's coarse gullet, wafting into the nostril was a miasma of sour grape

jelly. Inhaling its way through the thicket of nosehair—gorging itself on nosehair to grow bigger and fatter—was a saccylococcus.

Let me explain. Bruce had a habit of smelling the hell out of his sub sandwiches before he bit into them. His nosehair had absorbed a great deal of yeast over the years, and so his nostrils were gold mines for the saccylococcus. Every now and then the saccylococcus came up to prey on the nosstrylopythoccus, and now was the time.

The purple dog grinned. It leapt on all three serpents at once, and gobbled them up; and through the nosy cavern there came a loud jelly belch.

So foul was the belch, you could see the left nostril shake from the outside. And the grape gas that billowed up from it made Bruce cough and hack.

Zak rolled out of the mouths of the nosstrylopythoccus in time. He turned to the bacteria and said "Thanks!" But it was too busy burping off its meal to hear.

Sophy cursed. Having never planned to jump all along, she charged up kinetic energy then bulletted past Zak. But Zak whipped the laser out quick as a previously charged murderer, and "powpuhpupowowowowpapiupiu" went his laser, more fast than Michael Phelps in the 2016 Olympics.

The first shot struck Sophy. The nostril lit up like a disco ball. She exploded into a million microscopic daggers. Shrapnel flew. The shrapnel tickled the nostril. While Sophy was raining up and down and left and right, Zak's trigger finger carried on, a bit carried away. Relentlessly he shot down bush upon bush of nosehair. Fireworks combusted. Smoky plasma conflagrated, rising up from the nose-hole in addition to the stink of the bacterial burp.

"Aah . . . AAH . . ." Bruce could no longer withhold a sneeze. "AAH! . . .

***CHAWWWWWWWWWWWWW!"***

A machine-gun fire of nosehair needles and forest green bubbles and meteoric balls of slime came from the left nostril. The meteoric balls of slime dropped like nuclear missiles, exploding and creating craters in Central Park. The weather forecasters had almost said that there would be a light mist of mucus and jewels today, but their best-two-out-of-three coin tosses slightly favored a heavy rain of sunflower seeds. Boy, do they feel stupid now.

Zakano jetted across the city skyline in a bubble of snot, faster than 'the whip' ever was, I might dare say.

His bubble popped. The remnants of his half-eaten, half-digested, half-mutilated jumpsuit dissolved to the kiss of oxygen. Zak looked down and saw the city approximately 1,443.6834299 feet below. Being the only citizen who had not been launched over the lake, Zak scratched his chin, but decided he'd best not philosophize over it again. He shrugged, resolved on dying (the better of two evils) and proceeded to fall.

A huge palm cushioned his fall. He looked into his friend's eyes and yelled enthusiastically: "Bruce, you caught me."

"Yes, yes I did." Bruce grinned a monstrous grin, right before he felt his skin tightening on his big body.

His gut sank in. He shrank from half-a-skyscraper to a third-a-Godzilla to three-stories, two-stories, one-story. Zak tumbled out of his palm, and the both of them landed on the street of a ruptured intersection.

One side of the street had been uprooted to reveal the stalactited, stalagmited, cragged depths of the Earth, which plunged straight into Hell. Fires burped and smoked from the cavernous trench. Crushed cars, parking meters, and streetlights were strewn about, the way a very large girl would have had it with her Barbara dolls. The smell of barbecued metal lingered round warmly roasting car bumpers, tires and misshapen poles.

Zak explained to Bruce what had happened: how the crystal had turned him gigantic and angry; how Zak had entered his body to placate him and discovered Sophy in the small intestines; how Zak had explored far and low, met bacteria who had tried to eat him, blood cells who now revered him and nosehairs deliciously rich in yeast from Bruce's bad habit of sniffing like a coke-head before sandwich time. Bruce was wowed and took some time to think. But not like Sophocles, because we know what happens to people who think like Sophocles. To be safe, I'd say more like the man who wrote the *Daodejing*.

Sitting cross-legged like a wise learned person with the dragon's sparkling crystal in his lap, Bruce said to Zak: "You know, I know exactly what to do with this gem here." He raised it, a rock to be chucked. Zak thought that's what it was, anyway. But naw bitch. The minotaur stuck it under his underarm. "I'm gonna keep it close to me, where no robbers can get it."

"Bruce!" Zak was exasperated. Had his friend not learned a valuable lesson about greed and become a learned sage?

"After all, the city'll be charging me billions for this mess, and this crystal here's worth 387.44 billion."

"Ah." The iguana sighed the sigh of a relieved iguana; you'd've had to have been there to know the distinct sigh.

They hugged, two happy silhouettes before the flaming disaster.

Tomorrow came. Sure enough, the mayor charged Bruce 386.88 billion for destroying a good deal of the city. The mayor knew the value of the crystal and was being considerate. Bruce would later send him a "right on" and "thanks for looking out" message via Facebook.

With the leftover money (0.56 billion), Bruce bought a tropical island off the coast of Nankuku for himself and Zak; and on the island lay a resort containing a great big video game room with 3-d simulation technology; and on the island lay many palms and tropical plants and fruits; and off the coasts swam some pretty neat sea monsters and dolphins. And when the poisonous dragon Sini caught wind of such an island, he flew there and he ate all the extra dolphins and he out-belched everyone else in this story, so loudly, would that I included the onomatopoeia in this story, you'd probably go deaf in both ears and die. And then he paid the iguana and minotaur a visit in their luxury suite, and they laughed and chatted and played *Call of Conquest* on the X-Box 720.

"Zak, you forreal just no-scoped me again?" A little *rawr* escaped Sini. "I'm bout to eat y'all if you keep teaming up on me."

The last two million dollars, Bruce donated to Graolith as a 'participation' award. Graolith had no idea Bruce had jacked his crystal, but I think Bruce did: for when he cashed it in, he pulled out a large piece of Sophy he had salvaged and he winked at it. That may cause some issues in the future. But for now, Bruce is happy; Graolith is happy; Zak is happy; we shall conclude The Tale of the Voyage Through the Humongous Bull's Body on a happy note.