

Everything you want to know about Cheshires...that they want to keep secret

It was over. I have been tried and found guilty of my crime. A crime so heinous I wasn't even allowed to enter a plea. Even without that my crime was witnessed by more than enough to ensure no doubt of my guilt. I had left enough evidence behind that if the neighborhood I had committed the crime in had been empty there still would have been no doubt who the perpetrator was. It merely would have taken time to have me identified by the authorities. Those authorities have charged me with murder and I cannot disagree with them. There can be no mistaking murder for anything else when your hands are forcibly removed from around the neck that had just been broken. They call it a crime and that is where my opinion differs from theirs. I will not call it justice and I will not call it revenge though it can easily be seen as both. My crime as they call it is nothing more than a consequence of another's actions. My true crime was in not being a sanctioned entity of the very same justice system that is about to kill me. By taking the law into my own hands I broke a law that supersedes all others. No Cheshire must kill another Cheshire. Because I have done so I am to be killed as well. They will call it an execution and the public will nod their heads and say it is exactly that. Even if the word is merely a rationalization creating a difference in perception between the murder I am responsible for and the murder they will soon commit. It will allow them to sleep at night knowing they have put a permanent end to a public menace.

None of this goes through my mind as I hang from the ring welded to the pole that will send me to my doom. Bound at the wrists by a very thin rope as strong as braided cable my arms are suspended above my head which can do nothing but look at my feet. There is a hinge at the bottom of this ring that will only release if enough force is applied to it. That is why my feet are also bound with this wire rope to the large rock I am standing on. Beneath this rock is a metal plate set into the ground which opens at the push of a button. This metal plate opens into a long shaft and then opens into nothing. When the plate opens the rock and the pole will fall taking me with them. The pole is attached to a set length of a thicker version of what binds my wrists. When the pole comes to the end of that length the rock my feet are tied to will help provide the force to open the hinge on the ring. While I continue on my way they can retrieve the pole for future use.

This is not what is going through my mind either. I really cannot say what I am thinking of thanks to the narcotic cocktail of stimulants they had injected me with when they captured me. This is standard procedure when attempting to capture a Cheshire. When a being is able

to become intangible in less than a few seconds, capturing that being would be extremely difficult without inhibiting this ability. Cheshires use a mix of different stimulants and narcotics instead of tranquilizers. This is because revving us up makes us unable to concentrate enough to change states. It is this vile brew polluting my blood stream which is responsible for warping my senses and perceptions. This in turn prevented me from being able to do anything more than hang by my arms while I stared at my feet in a slack jawed drooling stupor. In the epileptic hyper awareness of accelerated consciousness my mind twitched and stuttered in abortive attempts to direct my body. As soon as one command was sent it was overridden by another. It made for a limp paralysis making me unable to even lift my head to see who had shown for my execution.

The one thing I could do was hear the sounds around me. Even as distorted as the source was, what was spoken was left untouched. I was able to understand every melodramatic word in the speech delivered by a professional orator who was also the court bailiff. Despite sounding like a child whose voice was broadcast at a deafening and stentorian volume, the bailiff spoke with such feeling and verve one would think it was he who I had murdered. That he had come back from the grave to personally proclaim my actions he had been a victim of. This was the individual who had sounded so bored during my minutes long sentencing I thought he would put the whole room to sleep. Now he spoke in a tremulous baritone throaty in timbre while droning on and on. Since my sense of time was as skewed as everything else it is a good thing I only committed one crime. Even the addition of one other offense would have drug the proceedings on for hours beyond what I have already endured. Since I'm the star of the show as it were I am certain I am the only one who feels this way. Those here to witness the spectacle of my death would be willing to stand motionless on anthills to watch me die if that is what was required.

These spectators are not being morbid nor are they here to be entertained. My execution is the first in hundreds of hundreds of years so of course such a thing would draw a large crowd. It is something different, something that didn't happen often enough to be mundane. For as long lived as Cheshires have become there are none around who are old enough to remember the last execution. Needless to say this means there are more Cheshires looking on in interest than I could see if I could lift my head. I am sure every camera available is being put to use so those who wish to see the epilogue of my life as a Cheshire will not miss a single detail of it. Despite this I know I am not being made into a spectacle. They are not watching me being put to death. They are not witnessing the end of my life and they are not corroborating a historical event. They are confirming the end of a problem. After everything is said and done and I am gone, they will go about their lives as if nothing happened. Except for any records that exist I will never have existed. I will not become a case study in any medical field which could benefit from such information. No one will posthumously champion my cause

by trying to find a way to cure or prevent it. I will not be the pyrrhic martyr others talk of in the past tense in a sympathetic yet perplexed whisper. No one will use my name to scare their offspring into behaving. No one will think of me as the villain who committed a monstrous act. I will merely no longer be.

Considering the fact I really have no idea when I was dropped to my death after the bailiffs voice started echoing I shall jump ahead, or behind if that is the case, to the metal plate swinging down and plunging the rock, and therefore me, into the artificial shaft below. When the rope was pulled taught below me I managed a pained grunt caused by being snapped into a rigid position from the gangly dangling mess I was before. This caused the pole I was bound too to slip the pin barely holding it in place. As it began to fall it also started to drift which caused me to start to swing around randomly. This produced the result of seeing which was the harder, my skull in the area of my face or the rough stone of the vertical chute I was free falling through. After that it was more than just my face smacking into the textured surface of the walls or bouncing off the smooth curve of the pole I hung from. The more I was moved around the more my body was subjected to crushing impacts. If I wasn't suffering from a new abrasion from the stone it was a new bruise from the metal. Between the stimulants and narcotics coursing through my system and how they were making me perceive what was happening I had no idea which was where on my body. My skin felt like how I thought badly planed wood would feel. Each gouge was rough and raw and what had been dug out was left behind to add its input to my screaming nerves. Despite this pain I was still aware of the ache of the bruises pulsing from my concussed muscles beneath my torn skin. The velocity I was falling at forced the blood trickling from my wounds upwards through my fur and over my grated skin which I could also feel. Then there was the constant sting of the rushing air over my wounds and all of this combined made me certain no part of me had been left unscathed. It enveloped me completely and tinged every sense with its flavor.

It has been said that if experienced long enough any sensation can become an environment. This environment would then become the norm and therefore could be taken for granted. Whoever said this said nothing of the torture of having to endure the sensation until its constancy could be ignored. If I had been coherent I am sure I would have wondered about going insane before dying from the impact of hitting the ground I was falling towards. The amount of time I felt like this fall had taken to reach the bottom of the shaft made this whole experience a repetitive hell. It was as if I were reliving it over and over again. So when I reached the bottom of the shaft and left it for open air I was shocked into a little clarity right before my body exploded in pain when the rope reached its limit. The snap of the ring I was bound too ricocheted through my ears before another explosion ripped through my skull from it rebounding off the pole one last time. It was mercifully a short instant later I blacked out. I would rather not know when I hit the bottom of the planets deep ravine than see it coming.

Surprisingly I awoke lying face down on a smooth metal floor. The cool temperature of the plating helped me to focus on something other than the awakening pain of my body which had regained consciousness with me. Not enough to keep everything from spinning around me or to keep me from reacting to the dizzying nausea I felt. After my stomach relieved itself of its contents I once again became unconscious. The next time I awoke the first thing I saw was the bile I had spewed up. Disgusted with having lain in it I tried to lift my head only to find I was so weak I was stuck in it. I had barely enough strength to feel the fur on my cheek resist being pulled free before my head dropped back down. Easily defeated by my own bodily fluids I lay there wondering how long I had already done so and how I had arrived there to begin with. As I breathed I noticed there was not much of a smell left to what had dried on the floor beneath me or in the air around me so I know it had been quite a few hours at least. I also became aware of the lack of pain I was feeling. It was still there but not nearly as bad as when the injuries had first been made. I was able to feel other things through it like the uncomfortable position my body was in and the slight breeze in the room. I could also tell one of my legs was resting on something keeping it suspended off the floor. I couldn't feel or see what it was but I could feel the air tickle the fur on my foot. Flexing the muscles of my leg as much as I could I was rewarded with the sound of my leg sliding off the object it had been propped up by. I was also rewarded with more pain when my toes banged onto the hard floor like a dead weight. Slowly I moved myself until I felt like I was in a position to turn over. After several failed attempts I was finally able to work up enough force to flop myself over onto my back. I lay there shallowly gasping for breath for quite some time before my eyes closed and I fell asleep.

I was falling again except this time the shaft wasn't made of unfinished stone walls. I was plummeting through a natural chasm with several outcroppings. Bouncing off one always put me in line for hitting the one below it. After several such jarring impacts I resigned myself to finding everyone one of them from top to bottom. I knew I was dreaming because somehow I could see each jagged chunk long before I reached it. This and the simple yet very important fact of not feeling any pain each time I bounced off is what clued me in. Without being able to see them I knew the stone and the pole were above me also. They never hit the protrusions or the walls and never got any closer or farther away from me. In the odd way dreams have these two objects fell in perfect illogical unison with me. Yet I was the only object forced to take the longer path down by bouncing from rock to rock. I never reached the bottom of the shaft in this dream. I bounced from one last rock to find myself instantly flat on my back on the ground far below. Knowing time was short I went to roll away from the point of impact only to find myself paralyzed. No part of my body would move. I could not even voluntarily twitch my tail. With my arms and legs stretched out to my sides I stared at the metal pole falling straight towards me with the large rock directly above it. I knew in the way one knows things in dreams without really knowing them the pole would impale me through the center of my chest. If that weren't bad enough I also knew the rock above would drive the pole further through me to pin

me to the ground like an insect in an entomologist's collection.

Unable to exert control as I had been trained to do in the occupational education I had received I could only watch the two objects continue to fall towards me. Far slower than the descent of my impending impalement a feeling of dread crept up on me. I tried to latch onto this small sliver of hope only to find another dream affect impeding my efforts in an abstract way. This dream affect was the one which causes the dreamer to not be able to move towards or reach an important object. In this case it was affecting my ability to use the spark of dread to light a flame of fright to snap myself awake. If I could not do so before I was skewered I would die in my dream and very likely suffer enough shock to die as I lay sleeping. The thought of doing so made me sneer and a growl started to build in the back of my throat. Focusing on the anger I felt instead of the feeling of a lesser fear brought an abrupt change in my situation. Everything now moved at an accelerated pace making the pole and the rock fall even faster towards me. What made this a good thing was my anger was building at a much quicker rate than the objects of my doom were falling. My right fist clenched into a fist without my having to direct it to do so. With the extended claws I have this brought a sharp pain to the palm of my hand when it was punctured by the four sharp points. I relaxed my hand and straightened my fingers enough to turn the intended punch into a palm strike. Waiting until the bottom of the pole was in striking distance I snapped my arm up to deflect it away from me only to find myself still unable to move. Dread bloomed directly into terror passing fright by altogether. Eyes wide I watched the pole pass the point in the air I had mentally marked as where my blow would intersect it and continue on past it. The only thing I could do was watch as it touched my chest without slowing.

Jerking awake violently enough to fall out of bed, I landed on the floor jaw first. This completely killed the urge I had to scream. The deep breath I had reflexively inhaled to do so forced its way past my clenched teeth in a loud groan. Clutching the bottom of my face in both hands I lay on the floor face down waiting for the pain to pass. With my eyes screwed shut and my face buried in my hands it came to my attention that someone or something had put me in the bed I had fallen out of. Ignoring what was left of the pain I quickly got to my feet and looked around the room. The full body breeze I felt as I turned told me my clothing had been removed as well. I ignored that for now, concentrating instead on where I was. In my scan of my surroundings I noticed several indented seams on the walls in the shape of squares and rectangles. These recessed lines in the wall didn't look decorative and didn't seem to have any obvious function either. This made me wonder if they might not be panels where something was stored inside the wall itself. Towards the foot of the bed and directly across from it were ones large enough to be doors. I moved towards the one across the room and heard a whisper of sound from behind me. Spinning in place I saw the bed had been retracted and I now stood in a completely empty room. Turning back around I continued on towards the other wall and

leaned forward to study the panel. Rubbing my throbbing jaw with one hand I used the other to physically inspect the panel while I tried to see if there was any indication of an opening mechanism. I found a slight depression in one part of the panel close to the top. It felt rough and irregular like a dent but I tried it anyways since laying my full hand on the panel had done nothing. Nothing happened after touching it with the tip of my finger. I even left my finger there for a few seconds just in case but nothing changed. It was just a dent after all. I dropped my hand and stood up letting out a sigh of frustration.

"Place your hand on the identity scanner on the wall."

I didn't react to the voice and continued to look down at the panel I had tried to open. I figured the voice I heard to be generated and broadcast but the inflection and tonal quality sounded genuine. It was the absence of emotion in the voice that made me think it was an artificial intelligence. Not enough to rule out a recorded response system though. Recording or not the broadcast system was of extremely high quality. No white noise has preceded the voice and I also noticed a lack of a telltale pop when a speaker is turned on. When the instructions were not repeated I turned around until I saw where a small scanner had been brought out. Making sure I looked around the whole room once more as I did so I found I was still alone. I had been correct about no one coming in the room without my noticing. This was something to always consider when dealing with Cheshires, since transitioning from one space to another is noiseless. Walking over to it I decided I needed to know if I was alone in this place or not. Since my options were limited I formed my meager plan and placed the back of my hand against the glass reader.

"Place the palm of your hand against the glass please."

So both the scanner and programming were good enough to notice what I had done and respond appropriately or I was being monitored somehow. The use of the word please increased the percentage of an intelligence behind the voice but only by a very small degree. The first time it had spoken there had been no use of manners. I decided to make one more play with its words before doing as it or who asked. Turning my hand around, I placed only the palm of my hand against the scanner and waited. It wasn't long before the voice spoke again.

"Place the complete front of your hand against the glass."

Still no emotion but the lack of the word please at the end of the sentence unlike before made me rule out a recorded voice. Small weights and quick judgments but my instinct also told me I was dealing with an artificial intelligence or a living being. There was no way to find out which without wasting a lot of time. If it is a program then I could spend hours trying to get it to respond emotionally. It would be quicker to just get on with what I was being told to do. Relaxing my hand I let my fingers rest on the glass. A couple of seconds passed before the

actual scan took place. Very little to read into that since it could have merely been a delay in the system and not someone waiting to see if I was going to keep my hand there. I waited to be told I had been added to the database and allowed to use what was in this room.

"You are now able to open and use the facilities in this room. To open what you need place your entire hand against the panel." There was a hesitation before I heard the voice again. "Cleansing yourself is recommended." The use of the word entire was telling as well. Was it used because the intelligence could modify its sentence structure when needed or was it merely a more completely formed phrase leaving nothing for interpretation?

I let myself react to that last comment and raised my eyebrows. I still wasn't sure what I was contending with. Whether a living person or a nonliving program, either way I had just signaled the request gave away information I could use. An empty gesture really since the information was useless at this time. But sometimes the empty gesture has the most meaning. What the meaning could be would be determined by later interaction though. Even the use of more detailed instructions would have offered me nothing. All of this could still have been done by a properly programmed response system. I may have ruled that out but it had not been eliminated from the list of options entirely.

Walking to the tallest panel I rested my hand against it. Almost immediately it slid open disappearing into the wall on the right and revealed a water based shower. This gave me an indication this place may be extremely old. Cheshires have found and acquired parts and plans for sonic showers but only a few used them. They needed to be continuously fine-tuned to a degree that was problematical for the average citizens budget because if they weren't it would eventually damage their ears. Except for the wealthier citizen there was only one organization I knew of that used these devices which was the military. Cheshires pride themselves on their stealth and leaving drops of water behind or being tracked by the smell of wet fur were punishable offenses when in the service. Having to be ready to go at a moment's notice made the time it took to get completely dry problematical too. Therefore water showers were only allowed for medical treatment or when on leave.

The door closed after I stepped in cutting me off from the other room. Turning the water on, I adjusted the temperature until it was as hot as I like it. A sad smile curled my lips at the memory of my sister yelling at me for using all the hot water. Something I had not heard for years before this fateful time in my life. Ever since she had married and moved out of the family residence. I quickly refocused on finding out as much as I could before I got lost in the memories of my youth. I let the water relax me while it sluiced off as much of my vomit as it could when I was struck by a thought. I started looking for the bottles of shampoo and conditioner. When I noticed them on the shelf beside me I nodded to myself. Both of the bottles were unmarked and if my suspicions were true the contents of both bottles would be

completely scentless and a quick sniff proved me right. If this place had been constructed by my own race it was before we had obtained the use of sonic showers because that had only been a few decades ago. The military still used the scentless toiletries because they were also made to eliminate scent too. Everyone else scented themselves however they saw fit for their own personal statement about themselves. Unless of course they were going to make a jaunt somewhere themselves which was rare. It happened but not very often. A memory of my own father prepping himself for one because he had found out about an item on another world he wanted to get me for my 9th birthday popped into my mind. Again I had to cut the memory short before I left myself open to any possible surprises or threats or worse. The heartache and grief I would feel because of those memories would leave me helpless to almost everything else.

When I first inspected the room I awoke in I had noticed it didn't have a door or seams for a panel I could find other than the one for the shower and one other I suspected to be a closet because it had been next to the bed. This information is what prompted the thought that Cheshires built this place because we didn't use doors to enter or exit rooms. If the other panel proved to be a useable door to a closet that would tell me this facility might have been built by our own military. Citizens have open closets while those in the military use closets with doors. This was so the barracks could keep its uniform style and not reveal any individualism among the ranks. The idea was to bring enlisted members of an already family oriented race even closer together. Recruits were trained in several obvious team building exercises and this more subtle method along with others subconsciously reinforces that ideal. Cheshires celebrate being their own unique person but when it comes right down to it we know we are one race. All Cheshires believe this but the military lives it. When one is threatened all respond whether by action or support. To know you are facing the entire race for hurting only one individual is enough to scare most thinking beings. Realizing the public will be supporting a very well trained military in any way possible only makes it worse. With our abilities we have no need of supply lines and secrecy is easy to maintain. The citizenship themselves will make jaunts to drop off supplies directly to the base of operations. As I said this leaves the trained professionals free to do their job.

Done with the shower I turned off the water and looked for a towel but was unable to find one. I did find what I thought was a panel to a small cubicle so placed my hand against it. Startled by the jets of warm air coming from around and above me I jumped in surprise. I had thought it odd to see drains in the walls and ceilings but thought maybe they were there in case the shower became flooded when the door was closed. That could still be the case but if so they also functioned as vents for the drying system. Completely dry if a little frizzy, I stepped out of the shower and the door slid closed behind me. Looking over where the bed had been I had another suspicion confirmed. Next to where the bed had been was now open.

What was inside confirmed beyond any doubt this place had been constructed by my own race. Most likely by the military as indicated by what was in the closet and how it had been designed. First off there were the three dark gray uniform shirts with red trimmed cuffs and collars on hangers on a pole at mid height. A pair of pants had been hung from the bottom runner of the hangers as well and they also had red trim at the bottom of the pant legs and waist. The pole the hangers are on is set into the wall at one end but stems from a four drawer dresser on the left. Being at roughly waist height allowed for two shelves to be made use of above the dresser, which the top of was actually part of the bottom shelf.

Opening the topmost drawer I found exactly what I thought I would find. On the right were underpants and the left side contained folded undershirts. They smelled, felt and looked brand new which more than likely meant some sort of fabrication system was at work. This probably meant this was technology we no longer had access to if we had had it when this place was built. I have heard of it but only in the past tense. I put them back into the drawer because I wouldn't need to wear them. It was standard issue clothing but only used for climates below standard cold tolerances. These densely woven garments held in body heat quite nicely. This extra help allowed the body to spread the extra heat where needed without fear of losing it thanks to the insulating undercoat of fur.

Ignoring the other three drawers which were for personal affects and therefore empty, I took a pair of pants down and stepped into them. After zipping them up and slipping the button through the button hole I did a few experimental movements. Now I knew some sort of visual system was in place here because they fit perfectly. Something had viewed me and scanned my dimensions at some point in time. Obviously this also made a stronger case for the uniforms being tailor made very quickly. Where now we had tailors to fit our clothes for us, if this base was as old as I was beginning to think, there had been a lot more Cheshires in the military than there are now. Losing three quarters of the population makes for a much more leisurely time constraint after all.

"Now that you are dressed please exit your quarters and follow the designated path."

Heading towards the wall now marked with the Cheshire symbol indicating a clear field on the other side of the wall I decided that I was dealing with an artificial intelligence program. It would have taken too much effort to make programmed responses sound as in context as everything I had heard so far. It would have been much less of an effort to have replies and instructions be as to the point as possible. How some of what had been spoken to me had been worded implied a recognition of what was transpiring. Still possible but a massive effort to think of all possible scenarios and plan for them then take the time to set it all up.

What confused me though was we had nothing like this on Chessiss that I had heard of.

Secrets were not kept though details might be left out. Every Cheshire knows about the military and its several functions including our health, fire and law enforcement departments and details about each of those departments. They would even know of the clandestine branch that handles keeping our existence secret. Clandestine in operation only I should note. They would know this department is involved in disinformation, sabotage, assassination, emergency extraction and even elimination of our own on those rare occasions it was needed. If we knew we were safe the details didn't matter.

So with that in mind I knew even with the advanced technology we had appropriated for ourselves there was nothing like this currently in use. This place I had found myself in was too far advanced. The mark on the wall for example seemed not to be lit up from behind. Having made a close inspection of it as my mind searched for anything that might explain where I was I found the mark was flush with the wall. Neither recessed nor extended it was still somehow made noticeable. It didn't appear to be made of a different material and didn't feel like it was separate from the wall itself. It looked like the color of the metal had been changed somehow.

Phasing for a Cheshire is much like walking through a door is for most others. There are distinct advantages to phasing though. One is while someone who cannot phase can see past the door when they open it, a Cheshire can be on the other side of a wall in a lot less time. This does not mean a Cheshire enters an area blind. Though largely unexplained it is a proven fact that all Cheshires know the area they are phasing into as if they had walked through a door but only after they have passed the intervening obstacle. After moving beyond the wall I knew the air was breathable and there was light to see by. Since moving while phased is almost instantaneous I could quickly retreat back to the room if need be too. If there had been no atmosphere or if the air was poisonous I could just as easily go back to where I had come from. Even more minor details like the directional path marked on the floor were known to me before I reverted to my solid form.

It's as if I were using my sight though I could not see when phased. The same goes for hearing, smell, touch and taste. As long as the particular sense worked a Cheshire would have the awareness of it when phased. So I knew there were no noises to be heard and the air of the hall I found myself in was not very different than the air in the room I had left. The temperature was a little bit colder and there was an astringent taste to it too. Much like what is found in hospitals from all of the antiseptics that are used. This smell and taste had not been evident in the room I last woke up in. Probably because I had been placed in the room covered in my own bile.

When I phased back in I didn't need to look at the floor to see that the path laid out for me had been done so the same way the wall had been marked with the Cheshire symbol for safe passage. Following it at my own pace I looked at the ceiling. What I had taken for

fluorescent lighting in the room was probably what I was seeing now. Just as with the mark on the wall and the path on the floor, the light in the hall was provided by a changed section of the metal it was made out of.

After several minutes of walking I found myself approaching a dead end. Stopping at the end of the hall I entertained the idea of flitting through each of the three sides to see what was there when the wall on my left changed to show the mark telling me to go that way. I shrugged my shoulders and quickly made the transition. There was something different about this new room. For one there was no light at all and something told me not to move from where I was standing. Something had triggered my instincts and I would be a fool not to listen to them. With no ambient light I could not see anything around me. Refusing to put myself in potential danger I stood completely still. I would have left the room except for one thing. That one thing was anxiousness. First off I wanted to find out who or what had been directing me and what they wanted. Secondly I was not keen on having to explore this place just to find food. With how long it took to go from the room I woke up in to here had been several minutes. If one hallway could be that long I worried about how large the building itself was. With the turns I made to get here I also wondered how elaborate the floor plan was. If I was forced to look for food I could starve very easily. It wasn't a promising thought.

All of a sudden a twin burst of red light appeared at the other end of the room. Looking like a pair of eyes peering in my direction two lethal bursts of energy had been shot in my direction. Ducking out of pure instinctive reaction I barely managed to get beneath them when another one came from my upper left. I rolled under its path instead of away from it and heard two sizzling impacts come from where I had just left. Evidently I had noticed another one coming at me from the other side without consciously being aware of it. Sprinting across the room I jumped and laid myself flat in the air so yet another bolt could pass harmlessly beneath me. Throwing my legs down and to the left yanked me out of the way of the two bolts coming from above. Crashing to the floor I spun into a sidelong roll long enough to dodge another one. Coming into a face down position I tucked my legs under me just in time to not be drilled yet again before being forced to jump straight up to avoid another shot. I threw myself backwards and landed on my hands to find myself looking straight at one coming towards my face. At the start of the backflip I had caught sight of one coming for where my head would be if I completed the move. Having no choice I made myself small and let both bolts pass under and over me. Crashing to the floor I landed on my back and winced at the pain caused by the rough landing.

The shots were coming at me more frequently now and from more concentrated angles. I knew I would eventually be killed if this did not stop. This time it would be for real if I did not make myself scarce. Instead of taking the safe route though I had something in mind. Whoever

the bastard in control was I would show him who he was dealing with. I was taking a huge risk in doing so but by not phasing until the last second I would be showing my level of skill to the other party. This was a gesture of contempt as much as it was a warning. It showed how little I worried about the increasing difficulty of the crossfire. By showing off my defensive skills while another was trying to kill me I was proving my offensive skills as well. Every military trained Cheshire is as lethal as they are evasive. The risk was in offending the other party though. If I took it too far measures would be taken to make sure I didn't survive no matter what. By now things were getting close enough I had quite a few scorch marks burned into the clothes I was wearing. Again this only proved how good I was because I had not been wounded yet. All too soon though I started smelling burnt fur and knew I didn't have much longer before I would become a lifeless pincushion. I would wait until I was hit once then I would pass over into intangibility. Happening before I thought it would I felt the sting in my right ear when it was brushed by an energy bolt as I was in the middle of a twisting dodge evading the previous shot. Without hesitation I phased and waited to see what would happen.