

You're not always sure what to find when scouring the dark web. Of course, one could order the classic stuff on the Silk Road, like prostitutes or drugs. Still, with this upcoming e-commerce revolution that all the analysts were saying was coming, it was hard to argue that such a thing made certain elements open to the public. But when you're on a TOR site, and it's claiming to be magic, it wasn't hard to imagine that this would be a fantastic purchase or something that would be a laugh.

Still, Ethan stared at his computer monitor, browsing through the various bobbles and knick-knacks that promised everything from a "Perfect Bar Test Score" to "Curing of your cancer." Of course, that was quite the claim, especially with a "satisfaction guarantee with full refunds." His concentration was interrupted by a familiar tone, the typical orange bubble appearing in front of the Skype logo. It was his friend, a dragon demigod persona-having furry named Maxos. Apparently, some demigod or something. It was a bit beyond Ethan originally, but it seemed harmless enough.

The two took their time talking to one another about their latest creations. Both had found a shared love of everything from computers to cars. Still, Maxos was a proselytizer for the fandom, with him occasionally showing Ethan some art. Nothing pornographic, of course, but showing off the fandom's open environment and its myriad species options. In their discussions, Ethan had found common animals a touch on the dull side, and he wanted to steer clear of the mythical creatures that seemed a tad too common. "Hah." He remembered Maxos writing, "I ain't good enough for you?" It took almost 15 minutes for the dragon to calm Ethan down. Then, it came ahead one day with a simple image post.

It was a species that Ethan had never seen before. A bipedal creature with lanky proportions, white and grey fur, and dexterous hands and feet. Their biggest claim was their triangular, long, fuzzy heads extending almost to a fine point. The design had instantly captivated Ethan, taking to it quickly, not that he was willing to tell Maxos immediately, keeping his feelings close to his chest. The next few hours were a blur to Ethan as an artist was contacted, PayPal information exchanged, and just yesterday, he was the fine owner of a charcoal grey-furred "Ethan the Eastern Sergal." A new name would have to be invented eventually; everyone in this fandom did. The artist had been kind and, at the flustering Ethan's request, had even sent him a tastefully done, not-safe-for-work variant. Hello "Homework" Folder. It was female as well, though the species was already rather androgynous.

His mind was snapped back to the conversation at hand.

*Oh!  
Do you go to the site yet?*

*Looking at it now. Weird.*

*Totally. Been told that "There's something for everyone there."  
Wouldn't believe it myself, but here we are. I've managed to get a dragon claw.  
Looked an awful lot like Maxos.'*

*Oh?*

*Yeah. It's really weird.*

*Spooky.*

*Tell me about it. So, what was the thing you were telling me about*

*Just wanted to say you finally won.*

*Oh?*

Ethan sent Ethan\_the\_Serg.png  
*You happy?*

*Hah! The question isn't, am I happy. Are you?*

Ethan took a moment to pause. The thought that he was now officially a part of this fandom beyond just the periphery. Now, he was officially in it. He? She? Ugh. Everything for him was moving at 99 miles an hour. This better not awaken anything inside him. Who was he kidding? He'd seen Maxos' gallery on FurAffinity, which would probably be the most expensive thing he'd do for the rest of his life besides buying a house.

*Have to admit, felt good.*  
*The idea of being a female serg more than a male seems weird.*

*Happens to a lot of people.*  
*It is an excellent place to learn about who you are.*  
*Any ideas for what to name her?*

*None off the top of my head.*

*Backstory?*

*Man, I just got her an hour ago.*  
*Does she even need it?*

*Not necessarily. But you know my dragon is a demigod, and that's why he's a dragon.*  
*Furries aren't the best on the internet.*  
*But hey. Fuck 'em'. Be who you want.*

*Had been reading on Vilous Lore, so...*

The next few hours breezed by between the two, only interrupted by a mutual nuking of the dinners that they worked on hammering out her backstory. Maxos kept proposing these fantastic ideas: a sorceress, demon, maybe even a goddess herself. It all was a tad outside his wheelhouse and felt too extreme. Perhaps a merchant of some sort? Sergals were a mostly peaceful race. Maxos took a moment to pause, undoubtedly unhappy after putting all that effort in only to get declined, but he relented. A normal Sergal would be the name of the game. A simple life of a huntress. They weren't the most complicated of creatures, so it made sense.

*So her name is Summer?*  
*Seems rather... Human.*

*I agree, but given the Big Bad was literally "General Rain."*

*But that is the name translated, I would assume.*

*Fair enough.*

*Never been familiar with the Vilous Lore*

*Well, as exciting as this has been, I've got a DnD sesh. Catch you later?*

*See you, Space Cowboy.*

Ethan clicked off Skype and pulled up Steam to play a few test chambers of Portal. He wanted to return to Mass Effect 2, which only came out recently. Still, Ethan had to get up in the morning for chores. Otherwise, he'd lose himself until his wake-up alarm went off. But, for now, he'd lose himself for a few hours with the familiar Valve riff sounding through his speakers.

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With the end credits scrolling on the screen and Still Alive playing again, Ethan closed out of the game and landed back on his web browser. Oh right! Wasn't he looking through some emporium on the dark web? He looked at the various knick-knacks on the screen as he shook his head. Right, well, he was ready to send money, but what to buy? His immediate focus lasered in on a pendant. "No way..."

He pulled up the reference sheet he had just bought, looking at Summer's pendant that she wore, a symbol from a partner she lost while fighting Rain. While the drawing may have been more primitive, it was a precise replica, even having some scarring and damage from unknown and untold battles. Ethan was baffled; he'd just made that, but here it was on the monitor, photographed with tags and everything.

His keyboard and mouse made a furious noise as he followed the instructions to buy the item and droned out everything. He soon had the thousand of something called "Bitcoin" needed for the purchase, apparently a grand sum of \$250. He eagerly sent it to the seller. He received a confirmation message through the sketchiest-looking, "Super secure" messaging app that she'd gotten the money and would send it shortly. All he had to do was wait.

It had been a while since he had waited so eagerly for anything. This felt more special than any game or, hell, even a job offer. He checked the tracking number religiously as it left Montana and bounced around a few cities from point to point before the nondescript box arrived in front of him, where he tore into it like a ravenous wolf, shredding cardboard and packing paper to reveal the necklace. It was made of gold, carvings gracing its surface with hints of battle damage that he ran his fingers over. The cuts felt so... Personal and profound, a wave of odd sadness washing over him, that it took him a moment to recover.

Panicking, he dropped it onto the table before he grabbed the packing slip and piece of paper that came with it. The writing was alien, with squiggly lines and shapes with dots, but a cohesive letter somehow burned through them:

*Summer,*

*You may not know me, but I am Commander Cirrus. I lead your partner, Gale, into battle against General Rain. We defeated her here, and I was proud to serve someone so brave as him. We are sending his body back to your village for what you must do. We're not as familiar with your customs as you are, but we*

*hope you honor him as I am honoring him now. Attached is his pendant, a symbol I know of your tribe. Wear it with pride, as he did.*

*Commander Cirrus"*

He set the letter down, only now seeing the paper it was written on, a discernably older, rougher, one would say Victorian quality. He set the letter aside. And once again, he picked up the pendant, confusion racing through his mind like his heartbeat as he attempted to comprehend what was happening. He put the charm on as he stood up, feeling slightly woozy. Did he have a stalker? How could he read that? He looked down at the pendant around his neck and sighed, playing with it in his hands. For some reason, he felt calmer with this on; maybe he needed to shower.

Ethan wiped the sweat from his brow as he slowly slipped his clothes off, hands shaking as he did so, breath coming in gasps as he gulped a little. His clothes fell to the ground in a classically crumpled heap as he turned the water on, the warmth flowing through him as his muscles relaxed, his heart and racing mind slowly melting like butter under the stream of hot water. Ethan placed his hands along the wall, feeling the tile underneath as he let the water wash over his face. He grabbed some shampoo and started to wash up, the suds tingling his scalp as he sighed, washed his hair, and opened his eyes, only to see what he'd missed taking his clothes off.

Light gray and charcoal grey hairs greeted him as they slowly rose from his arms, growing longer millimeter by millimeter out of his skin, the charcoal stopping just a tad beyond the elbow. Ethan let out a shocked cry as he looked down at his arms and hands; the callousness he had felt earlier had metastasized into thick pink palms covering his fingers and thumb. He pulled his hands up to look at them, noticing just in time that his pinky finger and ring finger were becoming intimately reacquainted with one another. The process, along with everything else, was painless, like the growing claws replacing his fingernails with sharpened, thicker versions of themselves.

That wasn't to say changes weren't happening elsewhere; as Ethan looked at himself, he felt along his back, now covered in an ever growing coat of fur. He'd been lucky and been graced throughout his life with lacking such a pain in the ass, but that was now gone. Long, coarse charcoal fur pulsated from his back in a motion that only encouraged the strands from his back to grow, flowing into the hair on his head. That hair grew long and twisted into the same color as the hair on his back. His ears tingled, but the squeaking of the metal tub took his attention below.

In all the confusion and excitement, the twisting human only just now noticed his feet, which were becoming more like hands as the pops from the oppressed toes slowly shifted. The big toe was increasingly demoted as the others grew in prominence and importance, matching his hands in overall structure and, increasingly, dexterity. He looked on, testing his toes out, finding them able to move in new, unfamiliar ways.

Then it hit him, the changes, the letter, coloration. Summer. He was becoming Summer. He didn't know whether to laugh, cry, or break down in disbelief. But as his stance shifted to a more animalistic stance, his pelvis became more bird-like as it reoriented itself into a triangular shape. He couldn't help but feel a tad woozy. He was still struggling to comprehend exactly what was going on here. He ran his hand through his mane, fur encroaching on his space as his ears grew and twitched into life.

Fur exploded from his groin as he felt the transformative magic pull and morph the area, new sensations making him pant and shudder as twisted new sensations filled him. It wasn't long before he felt a budding weight above his rump, a tail snaking its way out to bend up. It was at least as long as his torso if he remembered correctly. He hiccupped as his sternum slowly expanded, becoming somewhat of a horn on his chest, a hand shakily sliding over it, covered in wet fur as he waved his new tail in utter disbelief.

Finally, the changes had hit his head, his vision widening as the snout that he so loved became his own. His skull creaked and popped painlessly, pushing further into a triangular point. Cutouts for sight allowed him a marginal degree of straightforward vision as he gasped and coughed, undoubtedly his insides rearranging to become more in line with his new biology, their protests finally heard after certainly being shuffled around by shifting bone and muscle.

His jaw ached as his teeth bifurcated, splitting down the side, though some rejoined the fold of his bones through his gums, leaving him with six sharp teeth on each side of his mouth. A gummy front where he'd traditionally bite in when it was human was something to get used to. His tongue also found the new real estate inviting, growing, and sharpening to a point. He felt his tongue dangle and grow as he struggled to control it, eventually pulling it back into his mouth as he finally let out a panicked yell, his brain finally reaching the point of processing it all.

The capstone to the whole thing was a blurring in his eyes, his pink paw pads rubbing along his eyelids as his pupil and iris rearranged into a more bestial and feral slit, the eye losing its natural blue coloration to become a muted grey. When his hands were removed, he ripped open the shower curtain and staggered over the tub lip to the vanity. He placed a hand on the foggy mirror and wiped his hands away. What stood before him was what he feared. Summer. He stared momentarily, processing the situation's absurdity as he looked down at the pendant around his neck, his four-fingered hands lifting it up.

Even though he wanted to rip off this accursed thing, something in his mind told him not to; it was too important. He let it drop against his chest as he stood up and back. Shaky hands set to exploring as he felt over the various parts as if his brain was attempting to see if this was really him. He wiped away a fresh layer of fog as he remembered a critical detail he'd felt earlier. Summer wasn't exactly a male. A swift parting of the fur revealed the anatomy he dreaded, or if not dreaded, at least expected.

As time wore on, though, Ethan felt himself straighten up, only now looking around the room to see the gobs of water he had tracked along the bathroom tile. There would be a time later to investigate, but just... let's get this together, he thought as he placed some towels down, using his Sergal paws to push the towels into place. He applied the last few to himself, getting his fur down to a lovely damp as he opened the door, the massive two-meter female looking out into the connecting hallway as he dashed to the blinds and sealed them up.

Now out of sight, he went to his computer and typed in his password, only to be reminded that he was missing a finger. Fixing that minor issue, he loaded up Skype, hoping that Maxos was on and he could help. Worryingly, the messages that he was sent earlier remained unanswered. He let out a snarl and pounded the keyboard before cursing at it before retreating to his room. At least if there was something positive here, tomorrow was Saturday, so there would be that at least. The bed felt terrific to his damp frame, the cool air-conditioned air wicking away the moisture, leaving his coat increasingly puffy as he rolled onto his back to stare at the ceiling. His mind once again raced with thoughts on now being the

world's only Sergal freak, and god knows what happens from there. He closed his eyes, a sudden feeling of peace flooding over him that made him open his eyes. The cursed pendant was glowing violently, levitating even off his chest before suddenly he was blinded, sleep washing over forcefully.

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The noises of the wilderness filled his ears as Summer's eyes flittered open; she looked around to see the two village elders, Winter and Storm, surrounding her as she lay in the makeshift cot. She reached up and rubbed her head; her arm felt heavy and uncoordinated as the elders approached.

<Easy Summer. You had a terrible fever. Are you OK?> Winter asked, concern evident in his voice as they set to work on switching out the warm, damp rags for fresh, cooler ones. She looked up, the presence of the two and their voices giving her a sense of ease as he let out a soft sigh. What had happened? Summer remembered a strange room with mysterious glowing objects. It was all a bit beyond her right now. Her fever-addled brain and cheeks felt flush under her fur.

<Winter, perhaps the worst is over. She is back with us.>

<Agreed. It was touch and go for a while there, Summer.> He smiled and gave her head a pat. The old Sergal elder smiled at her. <I am glad you decided to rejoin us here.>

Summer nodded in agreement, albeit weakly, before another wave of lethargic drowsiness. Washed over her. She brought her hand to the pendant and rubbed it along its gold surface. Cloud really had saved her, it seemed. Just one last time. She knew she would have to find another partner soon. Maybe a male one, as the tribe always needed more children. She closed her eyes, hand sliding down from the pendant to her lower belly. That could wait, at least.

The days slowly ticked by, each one more clear than the last as her symptoms finally relieved themselves from her. Summer slowly gets up to do basic things around the tent. In the meantime, she'd gotten reacquainted with the tribe. Each one of them came in to congratulate her on making it through that mystery condition. Despite that, she couldn't help but feel something was wrong with her. Two forces, something else inside, panicking, some unfamiliar, confused. She attempted to reach out, but, for the moment, she couldn't. In the meantime, though, as her strength returned, she resumed her duties as a huntress. Yet, on the night before her first hunt, as she slept she found herself tossing and turning. Her finding herself floating in an endless void.

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When Ethan found himself again, it was more of a coming to. He had been experiencing everything that Summer had felt for the past few days, learning everything here is about her life and experiences. Now Ethan found that he was floating in an endless void with a strange figure. Floating closer, somehow, he saw that it was Summer or at least some version of Summer. <Who... Who are you?> Summer asked, her voice was soft and soothing. Ethan was amazed he could understand her, even though she spoke some other, far more alien language. <You are nothing like I've ever seen.>

"I'm Ethan," he responded, "I'm a human. I... Created you."

<Created? How? I had a mother and father.>

"No... I commissioned artwork of you for me to be used as a character. You're part of a Manga series in my world..."

She stared at him blankly. <So, art. I... see... I have been here for many days. Do you know why we're here?>

"I don't know. I just ordered this pendant, and... Well. I became you."

<Became me? You do not look like me.>

Ethan bit his tongue. "Look, i-it's hard to explain but... I just became you."

<Given I am here, I will take your word for it. So, what now>

"I don't know...." At that moment, Ethan caught something he'd overlooked before. He looked at himself and saw the same thing. "How are we supposed to get out of here?"

<I don't know. I've never been good at things like this.>

Ethan paused and looked at her before thinking some. "I... Think maybe we can help one another out." Ethan approached her and offered his hand. "I am you. You are me, right?"

<I... I suppose?> She responded as she reached her hand out.

"Maybe we just need to go..." He took her hand, an intense blinding light forming from their union before he felt an intense rush. Feeling, sensations, and knowledge were all thrown into a mixer and thrown around their essences growing ever closer. The two seeing one another one last time before an indescribable warmth washed over them.

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Summer awoke with a start on her cot as she looked around. The tent was glowing dimly, as if there was a lamp lighting it. The source turned out to be her pendant, which was floating momentarily before she saw it dim and be rendered inert, collapsing against her chest. She inspected her arm and the inside the tent inside the tent, feelings washing over her that were confusion, but a sense of understanding rolled through her, placating them.

She unfurled the sheets and walked over to the washbowl, moving effortlessly with familiar limbs as she slowly cleaned the sweat off her brow. She felt at ease and her mind felt... clear sharp, free of fog it felt. The Sergal looked into the water as it cleared, slitted blue eyes staring back, reminiscent of her former humanity, stared at her. She chuckled and inspected them lightly before returning to the cot, a white square catching her eye.

She took a deep breath before looking at the small stool on her nightstand. On it was a plain white envelope. The paper felt like nothing of her world, but it felt familiar nonetheless from the other. In it was an address to a distantly aware name in a language also distantly unplaceable, yet but known intimately.

*Ethan/Summer,*

*Thank you for purchasing Summer's Medallion. I had a feeling that you'd be deeply bonded to that one. Welcome to Vilous, or that's what I would say if you weren't also a native simultaneously. Not every day I get to send someone there, but it's always a treat when I do. I hope you are enjoying yourself. I'm sure you will have many epic hunts and, being a Sergal, great kids with the village that will be proud to call mom.*

*As one, I feel you will do many great things for the Sergals. There are many things to invent. I hear you're quite the wizard with math and logic, or at least you will be after a stint at Agundres. You may be one day too old and frail for the hunt, but a sharp wit can be as vital as an army. Plus, I hear your eyes are well above board. Maybe there's some good in human biology after all.*

*Enjoy your time there, Summer; you have a long life ahead. It's been a pleasure to serve you.*

*Catch you on the flip side,  
Fergus County Craft Goods*

Summer closed the letter with a soft chuckle before gingerly placing it back into the envelope. With it in hand, she walked over to her things, opened her trunk, and gingerly placed the brilliant white envelope. She took her time to put on her bone armor, which she'd managed to craft. Her mind was drawn to its design, already thinking of new and improved means to-

<SUMMER! YOU COMING?!> Shouted Winter into the tent, causing Summer to let out a surprised merp before quickly gathering the rest of her gear.

<Coming!> Summer replied, looking at herself in the mirror one last time, winking, and dashing out of the tent.