

Word Count 1,182

Zerealith helps Abyss stranger proof his cave

Zerealith was minding her own business, fitting amongst the clouds down by the coast when something shiny caught her eye. Now this wouldn't normally grab her attention, but it intrigued her because of where the glint of light came from. It was between the branches of done particularly, and Zero thought perhaps deliberately so, thick prickly bushes. Since prickles had never really bothered her in the past, Zero floated down silently to investigate.

Upon closer inspection, and a few muttered curses, Zero found herself looking into a small hole, barely big enough to squeeze through. Inside this hole was what could only be described as a hoard. "Well, well. What have we here?" She said with a twitching whisker. "What enterprising Drakiri has gathered such a fine assortment of baubles and shinies?" She shimmied her way through the hole, her scales scraping noisily along the rocks as she came. "Oof, that's annoying." She grumbled.

"How did you get past the prickly bushes?" An irritated voice said from below.

Zero craned her body around to see the speaker. The head of a very annoyed Kelpie bobbed in a tide pool at the bottom of the cave. "Oh, ah. You see, I noticed a bit of shiny under them and I thought to myself: 'That's an odd place to see something so shiny.' And wouldn't you know it, when I took a closer look I found this lovely...cave of wonders." Zero grinned at the raised eye ridge. "It is quite lovely. And impressive." She added cheerfully.

"I know, it's mine." The Kelpie sighed and flew up to meet her. "I'm Abyss and this is my home. What's your name stranger?" Abyss asked.

Zero blinked at seeing a Kelpie fly, that wasn't exactly normal, now was it? "I'm Zerealith, but most call me Zero." She grinned again and dragged her long body all the way into the cave. "Nice to meet you, Abyss." Zero shook her mane as the spikey end of her serpentine tail cleared the hole. "This is quite the place you've got here." She acknowledged.

Abyss inclined his head. "Yes, I'm rather proud of it. Please don't tell anyone else where it is. I've kept it well hidden for years." He sighed.

Zero nodded. "Of course. Maybe if you added some mesh with plants woven around them to the holes it could help prevent anyone less friendly from stumbling in here." She offered. "I'd be happy to help you design and put them up."

Abyss blinked. "That's actually a very good idea. Thank you, Zero." He smiled shyly.

"You're welcome!" Zero said brightly. "Now where might some paper be among all this?" She cast her eyes about for the aforementioned paper. "Do you have a desk in here? Or is it just treasure? Not that there's anything wrong with treasure!" Zero hurried to correct herself.

Abyss chuckled. "Indeed not." He snickered. "This way, I have what you want." He led her down to a sunny shelf with a small cave off of it. There was a mirror outside the cave entrance and he shifted it to catch the light and shine it into the cave. The chamber lit up almost instantly. "Here you are." Abyss said.

"Ooooooooo!" Zero said, properly impressed by the display. "That was a neat trick!" She said excitedly and snaked her way into the chamber and up to an ornately carved desk. "How'd you get it in here?" She marveled as she ran a claw across the wood.

"It was in a sunken ship." Abyss explained succinctly and gathered a few pieces of paper and some writing implements. He returned and placed them on the desk in front of Zero. "I'd like them to be easily removable so I can use the holes as entrances or exits if I need to." He said and started doodling on one piece himself.

"Okay, so probably some hooks and eyes involved. Strong enough to go through the rock and to hold up plants." She tapped her nose with a pen. "Do you want actual hanging gardens, or just vines?" She looked up and asked Abyss, tilting her head inquisitively. "Flowers beneath prickly bushes might draw too much attention though." She answered her own question and continued to scribble. "So vines. Ivy will be too hard to control, it just grows wherever it wants, it would seal the holes in short order. Hmmm..." She continued to tap and think and mutter to herself.

Abyss left and brought in refreshments, which Zero ate without seeming to notice or think too much about. He did not take offense, just kept adjusting the mirrors to provide light and when the sun had gone down, he brought in candles and lit them to use instead of the mirrors.

Zero kept drawing and plotting, it was clear this was her happy place and that she was deep into what it was she was doing. Several times she swore and crumpled up a paper, tossing it into the waste bin beside the desk. Abyss simply replaced it with a blank one each time and continued to supply snacks and beverages.

Eventually though, he needed to sleep, so he curled up on the floor and shut his eyes as Zero worked through the night.

When he awoke in the morning Zero was passed out with her head on the desk, papers scattered all over its surface. Abyss looked at the page beneath her chin and smiled. Carefully, he slid it out from beneath Zero's sleeping form. He looked it over and nodded with satisfaction, then he left the cave to gather the needed supplies.

Zero stretched and yawned hugely when she woke and blinked at her surroundings. Where was she? Oh that's right, in Abyss's treasure hoard. She yawned again and slithered out of the cavern into the main cave. She looked around the floor and jumped when Abyss addressed her from the ceiling. "Good afternoon." He said.

She chuckled and looked up at him. "I forgot you can fly." She chuckled.

"Yes, well it's not a very common ability for a Kelpie." He acknowledged. "What do you think?" He asked and gestured to his handiwork on the cave ceiling.

"Oh! Very nice!" Zero said and leapt into the air. "I love how you made them like trap doors! Very clever!" She nodded in approval.

Abyss laughed. "This is your design, Zero." He said quietly. "And I must say, having the plants in little swinging baskets so they can be upright with the door both open and closed is rather brilliant."

Zero took a look at the sketch in Abyss's outstretched claw. "Oh, yup. That is indeed my scrawl." She nodded and scratched her scales in embarrassment. "Well I'm glad you like it." She shrugged. "You've done a good job of implementing my design too, well done." She clucked her tongue against the roof of her mouth in approval. "Now you shouldn't have any more uninvited guests." She grinned at the shy Kelpie.

"Oh, I don't know. It wasn't all bad." He winked and laughed at Zero's indignant sputtering.