

Lights burned brightly amidst the landscape of the setting sun, casting reflections on the water that snaked all around the entrance. Skilled and hard working Symprites had carved channels through the white sands to make rivers and streams of water, ribbons that naturally led the guests of the Snowshell Masquerade to the entrance of the ball.

Symprites from all over Capricorn-13 had gathered and they brought with them their own unique twist to the event. Some wore beautifully tailed tuxedos, others shimmering gowns that had beads sewn onto them - giving an effect of the sun sparkling against ocean surf and yet others were decorated in jewels and shells.

Vadi himself was dressed simply, there was no need to cover his body. As a child, his skin had burned and made ill another young Symprite but that was not his fault, his toxicity was a product of tending to the poisonous corals of his family's coral reef. He was tired of being ashamed of it, of being a sea urchin with spines no one dared to get close to.

Tonight, he had red satin draped low over his hips, leaving what was obscured more exciting, tantalizing. Upon his face he had a simple mask made of a holographic fabric he had traded for one of his potions when a Symprite had visited him from far away. In his ear was a simple gold stud, sharp - his own spine.

Some of the Symprites he recognised as he walked in, his neon green hooves gliding effortlessly over the white sands. To most the white sands were a thing of beauty but to him, standing on the dead corals felt wrong, debase. Yet he carefully fixed his face into an expression of careless bemusement, giving away nothing.

Yet more Symprites seemed to recognise him than he did. A few cupped their hands over their mouths to whisper to one another. What were they saying about him, he wondered to himself. Hopefully he would overhear some of the tasty morsels tonight. It would no doubt be some of the usual gossip that surrounded him; that he was heartless and always demanded a price for his medicines and poisons, that he was painful to touch and to some, even to look at (the latter he vehemently dejected - if others couldn't see how gorgeous he was, they must be blind of mad) or that he was some kind of witch or spirit. He definitely liked those last few rumours, they were always fun.

Passing under the arch to the gala, he took a moment to pause and examine it. His orange pupils looked over the intricate arch, made of driftwood, shells and even a few pieces of dead coral. Plucking one particularly rare specimen of coral out of the arch, he held it gently in his hand. Corals were as alive as he and every other Symprite here. It was thoughtless to have their bones as simple decorations.

Taking a deep breath, he turned away from the arch and walked into the interior. Soft music filtered through the room and the fragrant smell of rich foods cloyed on his tongue. The masquerade was always the most sophisticated event of the social calendar, one he had never missed once he was old enough to attend.

For a moment, he stood alone and simply watched. Some of the Symprites were content to simply imbibe and feast, whilst watching the dancers. But not he, no, Vadi stepped confidently up to the dance floor and ran a clawed hand down the satin of his artfully draped attire for the evening.

Symprites moved away instinctually at the sight of him, noting the toxic patterns upon his skin. Vadi ignored them and began to move to the beat of the dance, swaying his hips, treading intricate patters on the ground and swishing his tail in slow alluring movements.

He felt alive, seen. It was everything he loved.

“Vadi right?” Vadi turned to see another Symprite holding out their hand and offering a fanged smile. “Care to dance?”

Vadi chuckled and wrapped his fingers around the Symprites hand, holding him tightly. His dance partner didn’t flinch, it seemed his toxic skin didn’t bother this one.

“I thought you’d never ask...”

The gala, although it had started with him alone, ended with Vadi dancing with many. As always, a highlight of the year.