

Name: Enebris Toniata

Age: 68

Species: Qrrlian

Physical description: Enebris stands just over two metres tall, digitigrade, has a pronounced ridge along the bridge of the nose, feathering at sides of face heading into hair, brown streaked with reds and lighter browns from sun-bleaching, worn back in a complicated braid. Full feathers are visible down the back and along the arms, with wrappings around the forearms and almost scaled backs to her hands. Nails are kept neat and close-cut, the palms of her hands are softer than the backs, even with work calluses.

Small feathers form eyebrows with longer ones on thin stalks at the edges of her eyebrows: these feathers have their own muscle control at the base that allows for their precise movement, and are part of her natural body language. Her colouration leans toward creams and whites with darker browns at her skin and feather bases, and her tail is near prehensile and likewise lined with short feathers, tapered longer at the point of her tail, roughly at her ankles. She favours open backed shirts with no sleeves, and combinations of pants and half aprons at her front, with a plethora of pockets and a bandolier worn across her chest. Her eyes are a dark brown, flecked with even darker brown, and look black in low light situations. Her feet are taloned, and she rarely wears close-toed shoes, preferring ones which protect the arches and heels of her feet while leaving her toes exposed.

Mentality: A practical Qrrlian with a very grounded outlook on life. Despite the bird-like features of her species, she is not terribly fond of flight. She considers it more a necessary evil than anything else. She's fond of chatting with all those she meets, endlessly curious about other cultures or day-to-day life details, has a great love of her rescue project (the chentuu, best described as a kind of llama-wyvern better at gliding than flying, omnivorous by nature, requiring trace elements from plants native to their home planet for optimal health) of rehomed and reclaimed chentuu from illegal animal trafficking or exotic pets owned by individuals with inadequate space or inadequate understanding of their husbandry.

She enjoys working with her hands, directly addressing problems and finding solutions, and believes in self-improvement and a constant process of learning, which has lead to her present situation and her successful running of the Wayward Wings sanctuary. Despite setbacks in her personal life and the slow attrition of her flock, she's made her own pseudo-flock with her volunteers and the chentuu in her care, as a way of maintaining her stability and keeping herself engaged and focussed in her middling years.

Brief recent history: Enebris runs a chentuu sanctuary on Habanu called Wayward Wings, selling the wool-like hair of the chentuu as a sort of water-proof and fire-proof material, useful both in weaving textiles and in an assortment of yarns. She's managed the sanctuary with a team of volunteers, some long term, others coming and going, and has been recently adding fields for cultivating the grains necessary for chentuu diets in order to save on feeding costs. At

present, she's between flocks, having lost the elder members of her most recent one due to a combination of age, illness, and accident over the last ten years.

She was referred to the Refugium through Kyn Talmai, head of Kindred Souls, a multiverse connected thinktank and scientific research and sanctuary group seeking to meet individual and group social bond needs and support and promote strong relationship building of all kinds amongst all sapient species, with its homebase on Habanu.

Species Notes: Qrrlians have three sexes and seven genders, none which have reliable phenotypical cues to anyone not of their species or capable of seeing colours in ultraviolet. Enebris identifies as physically female (the other sexes being hermaphrodite or male), and is loosely translated as "chaotic-neutral" gender, a classification that makes sense more for the relationship genders have to flock-bonds on their homeworld. There aren't really pronouns within their language, so the Qrrlians take to referring to themselves all as "she" in outside cultures with pronouns that have a female-identified lean, regardless of physical sex. It's easier for them to deal with as it has no bearing on their own concepts of gender.

They're a long lived species, averaging around 124 standard solar cycles (or years, independent of an individual planet's own solar year), and showcase complex social bonds with younger, older, and equal aged individuals, along with members of species outside of their own.

Their lips are more ape-like, and they possess two sets of teeth, one behind the other, with the second row acting as replacement for the first should those teeth become loose or fall out. They have no flight capabilities of their own, despite the appearance of feathers which can grow to what would look like full flight capability on some individuals.

The Qrrlian are excellent mimics and thus also excel in linguistics, highly ironic when their preferred form of communication is telepathic, with a touch of empathy. This empathic bond is self-limited to social groups, flocks as they're termed in common shared language, while the telepathic reach is to any receptive species who doesn't have natural blocks against such things. One might have expected the Qrrlian to display other psychic abilities, but none have been known to manifest since their time of taking to space.

Arrival:

Enebris had decided early on she was not fond of space. The concept of it was too immense, and she liked things she could better visualise, which meant she preferred moving within the biomes and pretending the whole time she was gravity-bound on planet rather than within the artificial generation of a space-encased series of biome-cities. What was the difference in the end? She couldn't say, precisely, but she felt there was one anyway, and that was that. To prevent her mind from wandering back to her present space-faring reality, she'd started a project.

This was nothing new. She had a tendency to start *projects*. This one was both relaxing and productive, and simple enough to haul along with her whenever she changed locations. Right now, she was sitting in the subterranean biome, mentally chattering at Queen Gleam of QueenLore as her deft fingers worked her knitting needles, the thin filament of light woven into the scarf she'd begun working on after meeting the myrmex queen.

All things considered, the idea of a bioluminescent garden is fascinating. Would you only consider those which could be subterranean, or would you venture surfaceward after the hatching to view one during the evening?

Croke lifted her head, turning it to the side and studying Enebris's work, wings lifting and buzzing for a moment before settling down again.

Night cycle?

Enebris's browfeathers twitched, swaying on their long stalks and flicking outward. A mild sort of displeasure, her discomfort at the reminder that everything here was scheduled rather than following a planet's natural rotation and orbit around one or more suns.

Yes, a night cycle, given this place. Truly, your whole species is much better suited for space travel than mine.

Queen Gleam's head tipped her way, several of her eyes catching a gleam of light in the soft illumination of the space. *Does yours not travel the stars?*

They do, really, but it's often been difficult for us to handle, to the point where we perfected cryo-slumber for the sake of early exploration and later colony ships. The technologies learned from other space-faring species were helpful, but I'm afraid few of us still can truly handle the stars. She paused in her knitting, holding up the length of scarf and watching the gleam of light travel through its weave. She was nearly done, then it was on to knitting the next egg cap, a task set to after Croke and Boldly had taken the scarves she'd knitted for them (smallest as they were, it'd been simplest to complete) and wrapped them lovingly around the eggs.

Queen Gleam considered her words, then shifted, looking across the vast number of her eggs within the dark warmth of the subterranean clutching grounds. *This changes with beneficial materials.*

Lowering the scarf she held, Enebris opened her mouth and creened a laughing sort of sound, dark eyes lighting up. *Likely it does, she agreed, Yet is it necessary? Cryo-sleep travel is fine for those not wishing to pilot a ship outside of folded space, or any of the various means of travel needed to bridge galaxies and universes. One who wishes for such a sky, they're welcome to claim it. We support all those dreams the young and old may have.*

The clacking of her knitting needles resumed, the scarf bundled in her lap slowly growing.

Perhaps, said Queen Gleam, But is reasonable. Why hold back, why not improve?

An interesting thought, isn't it? Has it held us back, or simply asked us to address our solutions in another way? She smiled, more with her eyes than her mouth, and fell to her task again as silence gently settled back over their mental shoulders, a pleasant background hum of awareness accompanying them all.

She liked it here, even if she'd never be the sort to want to truly live underground. Catching glimpses of the skies overhead, framed by trees or grasses or mountains or nothing but clouds and an endless horizon, held a different sway over her soul. Places like these were warm, like being encased by something barely remembered in a time before she'd had the consciousness of a self or a fully holding *other*, nothing uncomfortable, but they weren't quite home.

Enebris breathed in deep, appreciating the scents she could parse out, the sort of dampness that never left without turning the corner into mustiness. The chentuu wool she worked with was soft under her callused hands, the needle holding the final line as she tugged on a thread of thickened yarn and glowing filament and wove it through, tying it off and cutting through the yarn with a nip of her teeth.

She set her needles and the skein of wool remaining to the side, on top of her plasteel bin for carting it all around. No easily draped scarf, this one, but she appreciated its weight as she carried the many folded creation closer to Queen Gleam, her feathers subtly spread, tail giving a low and happy swaying twitch as she made her careful way forward. Her eyes didn't find the caverns here difficult to see within, but she took extra care regardless, reminded of the many external egg-pods she'd tended to in her earlier years as a worker in the home creches of her childhood colony.

For you, Gleam. The kind of light woven in this will respond to vibration, so if you hum or sing, you'll see a change. Quite clever!

Boldly sidled up to Enebris, plucking the mass of draped scarf up in their twin sets of forelimbs, hovering higher and offering their bond the whole collection of soft, glowing warmth with a jaunty toss of their head. Enebris hummed a note of pleasant amusement, her own tail swaying back and forth, carefully brushing nothing nearby, not even the ground.

Watching the care with which the myrmex took up the draped scarf and carefully settled it around her neck in several rounds was a happiness of its own, like reading the reports she had in from the volunteers in charge of Wayward Wings in her ongoing planned absence.

(She could trust in their efficiency for now, though whenever she'd be returning, the restless part of her concerned about the chentuu she cared for, and the fields, the rookeries, that second well

they were supposed to drill come the following summer. She could miss them all, but she wasn't led into delusions of their incompetency as explanation for her emotions.)

This pleases. Queen Gleam stroked the fabric, making a soft humming sound that turned the gentle blue glow into one that shaded slowly into a deep purple. Shifting her head to look down at Enebris, with Boldly coming to land again before Gleam and mimicking the angling of their head to their bond's, she paused. *You'll make these for all eggs?*

Browfeathers twitching in a mixture of amusement and personal challenge, Enebris lifted her hands and spread her fingers, palms on display.

As many as I can manage before they're ready. Caps instead of scarves, they look warmer that way. Don't you agree?

That question aimed at all four myrmex, and met with an enthusiastic sense of agreement from Croke, a slightly tempered sense of agreement from Boldly, and a more tolerant appreciation of a sort from Tempered. Gleam's warmth and love for all the many, many eggs around spread like a balm against Enebris's senses, and for a moment, she allowed herself to sink into it. It'd been a long time since she'd had any contact with a telepathic flock of any kind, and while the bonds of Gleam and the rest were stronger and of a different nature than the ones of the Qrrlian, they were still familiar enough to be welcome.

She tamped down on that longing, browfeathers waving as her tail lifted and she turned back to her plasteel container. She had a sudden itch to knit in purples and oranges, the colours distinguishable to her eyes in the dark. Croke settled in close with an irrepressible need to ask questions and reach out to stroke the skeins of chentuu wool, skittering off with Boldly carrying each finished cap, all to lovingly and carefully slide them onto the slick-surfaced eggs.

For a while, ensconced in the periphery of another flock's bonds, surrounded by the hope of a desperate species in the twilight of their culture, knitting caps for pearlescent eggs shining with their own ooze, she didn't have intrusive thoughts about yawning blackness outside, the looming face of nearby worlds, the burning eye of the closest sun. The quietness of a flock long gone, and the inevitability of such things.

Enebris could simply be, and knit, and share silly stories about the chentuu in her care, and everything was beautiful, and nothing hurt.

Hatching:

Midway through knitting another scarf for one of the fellow beings attending the hatching, the bracelet indicating the myrmex eggs were ready to break shell began beeping. She hummed to herself, a sound that continued on into a weaving sort of melody as she put her needles away,

bundled with the skein of yarn she'd been working with, and took a moment to stretch her limbs. Enebris wasn't in a rush, her mental landscape all pleasant variations on anticipation and curiosity, certain she would arrive in time for what needed arriving, and not a moment too late.

She made her way to the subterranean biome with fellow candidates, and those likewise there simply to witness the event of hope for the myrmex, looking forward into their next generation. The unique ability to take genetics from outside races and incorporate it into new forms was fascinating to Enebris, a natural form of genetic manipulation most species required outside influence to put into play.

Her eyes skimmed the many eggs and the form of Gleam, to whom she sent a feeling of congratulations and greeting, carried further to the two drones and the warrior who moved still among the eggs or directing the flow of foods to handle the grubbling's appetites once they broke shell. She didn't deny a sense of cosy pride in seeing all those knitted caps on the slimy eggs, and so she settled into waiting, keeping up her audible humming as a celebratory background song to the birthing event.

Then the first egg hatched, and with a twitch of her brow feathers, she watched the chaotic tumbling of grubbings from torn up eggs begin in earnest.

Some hatchings managed to shove their heads into the caps, while others worried at them, or ate them. She smiled with her eyes when she saw that, observing the impressive sight of a different kind of dragon elsewhere in the caverns, to the many variations on bipedal species closer to her, with all different features. In ways it felt familiar to her short time in Kindred Souls, where beings of all forms crossed paths and stayed or went as necessary, prudent, or demanded. She'd be traveling back through Kindred Souls to get home either way. While she enjoyed her time here, she also missed the familiarity of the chentuu and their needs, their particular scent, the work she did at the sanctuary.

It was that work in mind when she caught sight of a small group working fervently at an unbroken egg, the semi-translucence of it showcasing a grubbling striving as best it could from inside to meet the outside world. Nature, untouched, was a brutal, beautiful thing. She was both pleased at the efforts of the group that then collected the tiny grubbling in their collective arms, and curious, knowing that means like these were part of every species survival and thriving. It was the difference, she felt, between having a flock, and not. The chentuu who came to her impregnated, or the few who had become so during the tenure of her care, could rely on her and those of her volunteers to see them through the birthing process, harrowing as it could be.

Not every birth was successful. Not every grubbling was fated to survive, but she was glad that one had, and the rest who tore free of their shells and stumbled or danced across the cavern to find their flocks did as well. A testament to Gleam, and another sentence of congratulations she aimed toward the myrmex queen, as the hatching continued.

Congratulations on such thriving, healthy young.

There was a sense of *of course*, before Enebris's attention was pulled toward another hatchling with a cap firmly planted over their head, their ears angled down in the process. She smiled, this

time showing her teeth. Beyond the one wandering off with the knit cap jauntily in place, another struggled with a scarf, claws entangled and the vibrant green grubbling falling down and flailing.

Enebris didn't have to think, already dancing her way forward between stretches of goop and egg leather, her hummed song changing tune into something soothing. Her brief inquiry to the grubbling, a questioning sensation of well-being, was met by warmth and a pleading sense of sheepishness.

It wasn't a question of exchanging names so much as knowing in that moment the young green grubbling took on the mantle of a thought: *Vibrant*. Looking up at Enebris from its sprawled position, it tried holding up its tangled limbs, claws poking through the weave of the scarf in question.

I wanted to see how it worked, but I'm stuck. Vibrant felt briefly apologetic, but more for having to admit it hadn't achieved the objected it set out with than for the fact it was in a predicament at all.



Enebris smiled, eyes narrowing into crescents. "I can teach you," she said, thinking that even the adult warrior tempered might learn, with properly adapted tools. Her fingers set to work gently extracting Vibrant's claws from the scarf, pooling it on the ground to their side. Such a peaceful moment in all this chaos.

She'd barely begun when a soft nudge under her arm was accompanied by a pale head and beautiful brown eye giving her a curious look, a knit cap of mismatched blue and black keeping its ears pressed down the sides of its head, like the other grubbling she'd seen earlier. *Can you teach me, too?* The grubbling paused, blinking its eyes. *Mostly about the chentuu, I think. They look so soft in your mind, I'd really like to meet them.*



Enebris finished untangling Vibrant's claws, shifting to better kneel and adjust Peaceful's hat. "And you will," she said, making a breathy sound of amusement that turned into an equally soft trill. A final tug on the knit hat had her brow feathers twitching in satisfaction. "I'll make you one of these with holes for your ears, too."

Peaceful lifted its head, all eyes glimmering bright in the dimness. *I'd like that very much!*

Vibrant regained its feet, shaking itself off and half bouncing, half walking forward, head lowering a fraction. *And one for me, too, right?*

She laughed outright, gathering her two flockmates into her arms. "Of course. Now, as that is a matter for later," she said, switching smoothly over to telepathy and allowing her sense of happy well being to meet the looming hunger of both grubblings. *For now, let us feast.*

Patting both on their shoulders, Enebris stood and led the way toward one of the many feasting piles, choosing one with only three other grubblings and their flocked beside it. Food didn't appear to be a concern of taste so much as quantity, and by the time Vibrant and Peaceful were temporarily sated, most the bondings of grubblings to candidates had completed.

Say goodbye to your mother and her flock, Enebris prompted, stroking her hands down the necks and back of the increasingly rounded forms of her grubblings. *They have gone far and endured much to be able to safely allow you to be here, and for us to find each other.*

Peaceful complied, sending her queen mother a quiet, sated, *Thank you for your attendance and care.*

Vibrant's own sending was far more energetic despite its sleepiness after feeding. *You've provided us a chance, and we'll leap forward into that unknown!*

Enebris arched her eyebrows, browfeathers dancing, before sending her own thoughts. *You and yours will always be welcome at our sanctuary. If you ever have need, send word through the Refugium. It will reach us, almost as fast as dreams.*

Out of the biome, with the lights dimmed for the sake of myrmex senses, Enebris headed for her quarters and to send along a message to make its way back to the Kindred Souls for transportation home.

Wayward Wings

We're going to see the chentuu! We're going to see the chentuu! Vibrant was near bouncing around, flecks of the grain mash they'd just finished eating flecking their muzzle. Peaceful was as excited, but sat still for Enebris as she wiped down the grubbling's muzzle.

Both had been growing, though Peaceful still stood a negligible few centimetres taller than its grubsib, Vibrant. Most had the opposite impression, given Vibrant's tendency to throw itself into everything with far more enthusiasm than sense, and Peaceful's far more careful, hesitant approach.

Cleaned, Peaceful dipped her head down to nudge at the shearing kit tucked into its carrying case. *Isn't it the wrong time of the year for a shearing?*

Enebris smiled, nodding her head as she gathered up the kit and a secondary wound-care kit. *Yes, Peaceful. Shearing now is for the chentuu's health. This poor chick was brought to us with a neglected fleece, so we're taking off the top to help check for injuries and let them heal.*

Peaceful's ears twitched forward, then back, its new-knit cap a blue-green flecked with white. Concern shared itself through their flock, Peaceful stretching out its neck as it fell in at Enebris's side.

Is the chentuu hurting?

Enebris dealt fairly with all questions, patient and explaining, but didn't coddle. *I don't know, but I do know they're uncomfortable, and we can do something to help. We're a new home for the chentuu who've been through all different hardships, some easy, some more difficult. Taking care of them can be difficult, but we try, because we care that they have happier, better lives here.*

Vibrant practically ran circles around them both, setting out in the stretching out twilight kindest to their senses. Nearing winter at the Wayward Wings Sanctuary, a fine dusting of early snow marked the ground from storms that afternoon, crunching pleasingly underfoot. Vibrant barreled into it, dropping down and rolling around and kicking up its feet to send clods of dirt and snow flying, some smacking into Enebris and Peaceful, who was taking care to step in Enebris's footprints.

Enebris lifted her brows, the feathers attached to the corners on their long stalks twitching into a questioning look; meanwhile her equal part amusement and warning censure had Vibrant laughing and starting to settle down, practically prancing along. Peaceful's moment of disbelief and brief toying with being hurt passed as it instead assessed the snow, hesitantly stepping out of Enebris's footprints to scrape snow into a perfect, rounded ball. It ducked down, using its smallest arms to take hold of the decently sized ball of snow. Then, looking between where it stood and where Vibrant was prancing along, it reared up, tossing the ball of snow up, and then used its second set of forelimbs to carefully send the snowball arcing toward Vibrant.

The snowball landed perfectly square on its back, sending soft, compact snow splatting in all directions. Vibrant's immediate reaction was to leap straight up, startled and cold, only to land and spin around, laughing and barreling back toward them both. Peaceful laughed, then bolted forward, leading Vibrant in a dance around Enebris's legs that only calmed when Peaceful primly informed Vibrant of their proximity to the chentuu stable housing the newer arrival.

The two grubblings shook themselves off, their hats fun mirrors of each other, and stomped (or crept, in Peaceful's case) into the stables with the warmed interior with a mental sigh of relief. Vibrant was immediately trying to check into each stall, a feat it was largely frustrated from completing with the stalls having taller doors than the grubbling stood, even fully stretched out on hind legs.

Enebris called for calm, something Peaceful had already delivered with its quieter focus and perked forward ears, studying the stall Enebris stopped before. Writing on a board at the stall front monitored the feeding and medication schedules for the newer arrival; Enebris translated it

all with a thought to her flock, shifting her carried burdens and clucking her tongue. An answering snuffle from inside the stall reassured before she opened the stall door, slipping inside first and then holding it open for her two bonds.

The newer arrival was a large male, his fleece carrying dirt and plant matter in a compacted, unhealthy way. It was difficult to say his proper colouration, something of white long turned orange-brown with filth, and a darker mane of fur. His wings were tucked tight against his body, and he issued a low call at the three new arrivals, head lowering as he backed into a corner.