

Prompt: Caring for the Eggs

Subprompt: Step Four

### Burrow Buddies

It took a couple hours of walking before the two found a spot sufficient for a long-term rest. The next thing on the list was to make a nest for the egg so it had a proper place to pop open when it hatched. The Veldt was unforgiving when it came to safe places to rest, and Tenet knew of no species that kept eggs anywhere but the trees. But, he was not exactly a proficient climber, due to his hooves and bulk, so that was not an option. His search for a good spot that was firmly set on the ground ended upon the discovery of a large burrow: *hours* of walking led to a hole in the ground. Upon inspection, Tenet learned it had belonged to some other kirunhound, who had dug it for some reason or other and abandoned it months ago. At least, it smelled like it was abandoned months ago. Tenet figured it was best to take advantage of such an encampment; the ground under the surface of the veldt would be much cooler than the sun-kissed grass, and the length of the vegetation nearby hid the opening from any untrained eyes.

Tenet glanced around his surroundings to ensure nothing was following him, and seeing nothing but swaying grass and the violent sun of the cloudless sky above, he went in. It was large by average standards, but upon entering it Tenet realized it was not meant for a creature of his size nor stature. It was evident that the kirunhound who dug it was a bull type, or perhaps even a baby type, because Tenet had to crane his neck to fit it in the hole. Deciding he could not stand this, nor stand outside all night, he set the pouch to the side and started digging. He pawed

at the earth, tossing it aside out the entrance. He was not built for digging, but his large paws aided the excavation regardless.

He finished the project by the time the sun had begun to set. The burrow was still not nearly big enough to remain long term, but it would suffice overnight and keep both the egg and himself safe. Hopefully. Tenet climbed out of the hole and scattered the dirt he had removed from it into the grass, since the mound was rather conspicuous, before climbing back into the little gap to prepare a spot within for the egg. He shaped a corner of the burrow to keep the egg snugly inside, so it would not roll over or be jostled, then added some cuts of grass to pad the bottom of the little niche. He removed any stray pebbles and stones from the burrow, and tucked away any roots, so that no dangerous objects remained to potentially harm the egg's fragile shell. Satisfied with his work, Tenet removed the egg from its leather carrier and gently placed it in the makeshift nest. He silently wondered why it needed such pampering, when the bag he was loaned came with a nest already in it- and, technically, the list did not say the premade one was unsatisfactory- but still, Tenet figured it was. It specified the creation of a resting place, after all, so if a nest was crafted by other paws or hooves or hands, it would not count. Well, probably not.

It did not matter, though. What mattered is his egg had a safe place to rest, and so did he. With the night's sanctuary in place, Tenet figured it was time he found something proper to have for dinner. While he felt it would be unsafe and irresponsible to leave his egg unattended, he also reminded himself that it should be perfectly safe in the burrow. After all, birds leave their eggs alone in the trees all the time. And, yes, birds have to worry about snakes. But, birds have small eggs.

He figured that his own egg was much too large for any snake that preyed on birds' nests, and that it would be fine for an hour or so while he hunted. It would be risky if he hunted something larger that fought back, since the bag could certainly not defend the egg within if it were kicked. Finally making up his mind, Tenet climbed out of the burrow and set off into the Veldt to find something to eat.

Tenet sulked through the brush for quite some time, hiding the majority of his bulk within the tall grass. His purple fur and blue scales did him no favors blending in, but thankfully the grass of the Veldt was so thick it barely mattered. The sun was still setting when he set eyes upon proper prey: a herd of gazelles. They somehow hadn't noticed his approach, so when Tenet suddenly burst into action, one of the older members of the herd was not able to pick up enough speed to escape. Tenet enjoyed his meal in peace, knowing no apex predators of the area could take it from him except for *maybe* another Kirunhound, and began the trek back after scattering the rejected morsels for the scavengers that would soon approach. When Tenet made it back to the burrow and climbed in, his egg was still there in one piece, just as he left it. He was glad it was okay, and— wait.

*His egg?* Tenet only now realized the way he had referred to his charge that afternoon. It was barely *his egg*, was it? It was *the egg*. *An egg*. He was merely hatching it, doing the strenuous steps of the incubation process; he did not lay the egg. He was not its father... was he? It was given to him- without his consent, no less! How could he possibly... *his egg*. To be his egg, he would have to raise it, and... well, was he supposed to walk all the way back to that town to take the hatchling back? Surely not. *Maybe...* maybe it was time to call it his egg. If he is all that the egg has now, he surely can not abandon the child within.

Sighing softly, Tenet curled up inside the burrow, protecting the egg's makeshift nest by blocking the entrance with his body. Anything that smelled it overnight would have his claws and teeth to answer to; now Tenet knew what he had to do. The list would not suffice, and the hatching process is only the beginning of this journey. He must guard this egg better than his parents guarded him; it is much more fragile than he ever was as a pup, and should grow as powerful as he even if it was no hound.

With this revelation, Tenet closed his eyes and drifted into sleep as the sun set. By the time the reds and oranges of the sky faded to deep black and blue, the Kirunhound was fast asleep.