

Overview

We're giving Astraea, the Narevan salamander magehunter first introduced in Berwyn Quest 2, a proper expansion!

This project aims to turn Astraea from a one-off character introduced purely as a vehicle for plot into a more proper NPC, with talk topics, sex topics, maybe a thing or two to do with her in between all the talking and the sex. Being of such high rank and one of the world's foremost leaders in the school of polymorphization, she has a room of her own in the palace that the player can enter to interact with her. She's regularly attending physiotherapy (or... magiotherapy?) to help her with the fact that Matiha sucked the magic right out of her and now she barely has any power of her own, but is slowly healing.

My biggest concern with this project is that Astraea is essentially going to need to be two characters: one where she knows who the PC is and is aware of the PC's accomplishments on a personal level, and one where she, uh, doesn't and isn't. These are basically two different people, really: Astraea's whole purpose for being, her entire story, revolves around BQ2, but the player can opt not to take that quest and deny having any interactions with Astraea, so she'll really only know the PC through Nareva. You can still talk with her and fuck her, but her attitude will be significantly different since you're not her personal hero.

The bulk of what makes Astraea who she is, is in BQ2, so this project isn't going to give her scenario a whole lot of limelight, since there isn't really any left. I was hoping to make this project a little on the simpler side, as far as mechanics and depth go.

Parsers required:

[ast.bq2] – Boolean. Tracks whether the player completed BQ2, and, therefore, Astraea knows who they are. Defaults to False, but, for my own writing ease, the first parser is always true. Should parse as [ast.bq2|True, the player completed BQ2|False, the player did not complete BQ2]

[ast.1ns] – Boolean. Tracks whether the player did the one night stand with Astraea in Hawkethorne after the events of BQ2 (and therefore assumes that ast.bq2 is true). Defaults to False. Should parse as [ast.1ns|True; the player fucked Astraea in Hawkethorne|False, the player did not fuck Astraea in Hawkethorne].

// On tile 18-I (as outlined in this document:
<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1IVOXOYYA3l8kvfeD1Q5hPkHCuYBaC6NdUTDCIBPPL1U/edit?gid=1535638798#gid=1535638798>), create a room called Palace Infirmary

// Palace Infirmary room description:

The palace's infirmary, where anyone with access to the building can get the royal treatment. The best doctors, apothecaries, pharmacists and herbalists, and white mages in the land can be found here, treating everything from grievous wounds to bed rashes.

The room itself is modestly large, though most of it is dedicated to the standalone pharmacy; a laboratory of bubbling tonics and working alembics; and several rows of shelves holding tomes containing information on illnesses and remedies, injuries and cures, of all natures, mundane or magical. There isn't a lot of room for the actual infirm, with only four single-size beds available, although each bed is above and beyond what you'd find in a hospital, or even in an inn.

The infirmary has little in the way of pleasantries: no paintings, no burning incense, and the only plants available are solely meant for the pharmacy. Ultimately, while this is about as pleasant as it can get for an infirmary, it's still not what you'd call a pleasant place – people come here because they need to be here, and the sooner they leave, the better.

// On tile 16-J (same document), on the second floor (the floor with Visko's Lab and Queen's Room), create a room called Astraea's Quarters. Reveal this room only after the player encounters Astraea in the infirmary

// Astraea's Quarters room description (to be played if Astraea is not present):

You're standing in the personal quarters of one of Nareva's finest magehunters, and one of the most accomplished morphologists in the world. [ast.bq2|You met Astraea some time ago in Hawkethorne, where she enlisted you and Berwyn to help her with the threat that Matiha possessed. But that's a whole other story.|You met Astraea here, in this very palace, not too long ago, where she was being treated for an injury she had sustained in battle that you had never seen before. You feel like you don't know the entire story, but you know enough to hold a conversation.]

For someone so accomplished that she's not only one of Nareva's go-to [silly|goonettes|henchwomen], but has her own room in the palace, her quarters are... underdressed. She has a desk of worn-but-high-quality wood, and paired with it is an ornate chair that could be best described as 'less than a throne'. Strewn about the desk's surface are papers, books with dog-eared pages, and several different types of quills and inkwells, some of them containing different colored inks. Attached to one corner of the desk is a rope, the circumference roughly half the width of your palm, with the other end of the rope disappearing into the wall[pc.bg courtesan noblescion]. A call bell, you recognize – that bell is likely attached to the maid's chambers of the palace. Astraea is getting some real first-class service, here].

One wall of the room is dedicated solely to a single, massive bookshelf with six shelves, each one packed end-to-end and almost air-tight with books. And judging by the wear on their spines and the fade in their titles, they aren't just for show: Astraea has read each one of them cover-to-cover, probably multiple times, and she probably still does it to this day. The titles are sorted alphabetically, and they're almost entirely academic, with a focus on polymorphization and things like conservation of theoretical mass – topics that go well over your head. Although, based on titles like <i>[rand|The Princess and the Peach|The Wizard's Neophyte|When Once We Were Kings|The Mystery of Myx|[silly|How To Cook For Forty Salamanders|Sing For Me: The Sonnets of a Lonely Sailor]]</i>, not every book on the shelf is nonfiction. Some of them even lack professional binding and look like something an amateur put together. Did Astraea write them herself?

Across from the bookshelf is a bed, wide and long enough only for a single person. Astraea's studious life as a polymorph doesn't allow for a lot of 'socialization', it seems – or, instead, she socializes in other people's rooms, you don't know. The bed is on the firmer side, and the fabrics are plush and thick, capable of keeping an occupant warm during even the coldest of winters. While it's an amazing bed by every metric... it's too small for Astraea by several orders[pc.heightRange 0 48 60||. Hell, it's barely big enough for you|. You're sure as hell not fitting in it, either].

And... that's it. A desk, a bookshelf, and a bed. No paintings; no small creatures in cages, kept as pets; no plants in planters sitting on the floor or hanging off the walls; a single window, slightly offset above the desk, with closed, undecorated shutters. If Astraea has any sort of social life, or, hell, even hobbies, you can hardly tell from the barrenness of the room. This is a room where she sleeps, studies, and nothing else.

Since Astraea isn't here, there's nothing else for you here, either.

// Display only one button, allowing the PC to go back to the previous square

// Play this scene when the player first enters the Infirmary
// For the sake of continuity, Astraea can only be met here if the player either *did*
BerryQuest 2, or *denied* BQ2, meaning they always met Astraea in the Frosthound at some point
// (scene: Encountering Astraea)

You find yourself in a room that can best be described as an infirmary. There are a quartet of beds, each of them large, plush, and exceedingly high quality for a bed in general, much less a bed for the infirm – these are the kinds of beds that an inn like the Frosthound would pay top coin to have. The room is equipped with its own pharmacy, with herbs growing from specialized planters and alembics boiling unknown chemicals of varying colors and viscosity in the corner, and beside the pharmacy is a set of bookshelves, packed edge to edge and top to bottom in tomes of varying thickness and differing labels on everything from the biologies of different races, to different illnesses, all the way from infections to belly aches.

Next to one of the beds, closest to the apothecary, is, well, you hope it's the pharmacist: a salamander wearing sanitized, pure-white clothing without a blemish on them, covering them from neck to ankle in a long, flowing, singular piece. The few exposed scales they have along their neck and lower jaw are glittering green, reflecting [dayNight|the sunlight streaming in from the infirmary's few, thin windows|the dancing firelight of the lit candles dotting the infirmary]. You've never seen this person before, but based on their dress and the way they carry themselves, you assume this to be the royal physician, and with the shape of their jawline and the length of their hair, you think they're male.

Sitting on the bed next to the physician is another salamander, and they're huge. They're wearing some regal leather armors of greens and reds, with a kilt that reaches down past their knees. Their hair is unusually long, particularly for a warrior (or so you assume, based on their size and armor). Strikingly, what really gets you about this gigantic salamander is the paleness of their skin and the stark-white of their hair; most salamanders you've encountered had varying degrees of tanned skin and hair of vibrant, colored hues, but this one stands out.

[ast.bq2|You recognize her for who she is immediately: that's Astraea! You and Berwyn had collaborated with her in defeating the witch Matiha not so long ago[ast.1ns|, and you, uh... 'celebrated' not long after]. You were wondering where she was!

Once your presence is known, Astraea and the doctor tending to her turn their heads toward you, mostly out of reflex. But, the moment Astraea's eyes meet yours, she does a double-take: her head goes back to the doctor, then flicks back to you, her eyes wide, her hair swishing with the sudden jerk.

"[pc.name]?!" she asks, suddenly becoming animated at the sight of you. Her face breaks into a smile, offsetting the black spiderwebs criss-crossing over her skin. "Holy Nareva, you finally made it here!"

You begin to tell her that it's been quite the journey, and that you're glad to see her too, when she lifts her left hand towards you, palm forward.

"Sorry, sorry," she says, turning back to face the doctor in front of her. "I'm in the middle of something. I shouldn't have gotten too excited."

"It's fine," the doctor answers. "Your issues aren't related to your blood pressure."

"Even still," Astraea continues, her demeanor changing entirely to focus on the task at hand. "I didn't come here to shoot the shit."

The doctor frowns. "Indeed."|You can't say you recognize either of them, actually. You think you'd remember a salamander that–

Wait, you think you do remember a salamander that huge. With the same pale skin, with the same long, white hair. You think... if you're right, you must have met her at the Frost Hound at some point? You aren't certain; the encounter was so brief...

Once your presence is known, both the doctor and the salamander he's tending to turn their heads toward you, acknowledging your presence. The doctor gives you one look before turning back to his patient, but the gigantic salamander keeps her eyes on you.

"Who are you?" she asks, her brow furrowing and her tone serious, almost dangerous. "This is the palace. Commoners are verboten."

[pc.isDK|You furrow your own brow and tell her to watch her tone. You were invited, personally, **by Nareva herself**. Is this how Tychris treats all of their royal guests? Or is this something you'll have to bring up with her superiors?

At the question, the giant salamander rears back, her eyes wide. "Oh," she says, her tone audibly flattening and deflating as the fight leaves her in a single word. "You must be [pc.name], then."

You confirm.

"My apologies," she says. "You're correct: you were expected. I wasn't expecting our introductions to be here, in the infirmary, is all."

You'll let it pass, then.|You raise your hands defensively and wave your splayed fingers back and forth, trying to get this gigantic woman to ease up. You insist that you were invited **by Nareva herself**, and you were just exploring the palace at your leisure. You have permission to be here, you swear.

At your insistence, the gigantic salamander rears back, her eyes wide. "Ah," she says, her tone audibly deflating, but rising in pitch as she understands. "You must be [pc.name], then?"

You confirm.

"I apologize," she continues. "You're correct; you're an honored guest, and I've been told you expect you. I just didn't anticipate our introductions to be in the infirmary, is all."

Well, at least there's no harm done. A bit of communication, and you're all on the same page.]

"You'll pardon me for not introducing myself properly," she says. "I am, ah, indisposed, at the moment."

You step forward, getting a better look at her exposed skin. She's wearing full-body armor from the neck down, covering everything but her face, and from what you can see... the pale skin was odd enough, but, in addition, you can clearly see black webbing all throughout her cheeks, her neck, her forehead, appearing to center in on her eyes. Her hair is white when most other salamanders have anything from reds to blues. [pc.isDK|You ask her what's wrong with her|You know that it's no business of yours, but you ask her what's happened to her][pc.cl whitemage|. You're a healer yourself; maybe you can help].

[pc.cl whitemage|"With all respect," she answers, "do you really think you're more knowledgeable than the royal physicians of Tychris?"

Only one way to find out.]

The doctor she's with maintains his duties without turning to face you. His hands are on the woman's wrists, pulling off the soldier's gauntlet with a single, practiced pull. There, you see more of her skin, and it's more of the same: pale, scaleless, and covered in black webbing. Even the fingernails are off-white. "Up to you if you want to tell [pc.himHer]," the doctor says. "They couldn't get my patient's information from me with a hammer and some nails. Say the word, and I'll ask [pc.himHer] to leave."

The massive woman takes a sigh through her nose as she considers it. "Nah. It's not like my condition is some secret I'm trying to hide." Her eyes flick to yours briefly before going back to the doctor's. "I botched my last mission," she answers noncommittally. "I got messed up for it pretty badly."

Any other specifics?

"No, and that's the problem. We don't know what the issue is with me. We're trying to find out. But!" she says suddenly, clenching her now-naked fist tightly, making her forearm inflate as the muscle tenses and strengthens. As it gets larger, you see that the black webbing underneath her skin seems to fade away, only for them to come back when she relaxes. "I'm healing, which is nice. There's been some real improvement lately. It's just a matter of... rehabilitation, going forward."]

"Alright, Astraea," the doctor says after inspecting each of her fingers individually. "As before. Remember not to force it."

[ast.bq2|Astraea|The woman, apparently named Astraea,] looks down at her hand and flexes her fingers. The muscles in her arms tense, her fingers going rigid, [pc.isMage|and you feel the faintest flicker of the fabrics of reality beginning to whip and shiver around you both. The stuff of ethereal realities between your body and hers flickers and moves, spawned and summoned to her very fingertips to bend reality to her whims.

And... very little happens. You can feel it – the motions, the will, the knowledge to make magic happen at her fingertips – but... nothing is happening. Something should be happening, you can feel that something should be happening, but something is stopping whatever Astraea is trying to do from occurring. This is far too much effort for even the most basic of basic spells.

Just as you think to tell Astraea that that's enough, you see the fruits of her efforts: a single spark, something that lives and dies in the space of a blink, appearing in her palm, then vanishing. An apprentice mage with an hour's worth of studying would have been able to do more. But, it is, nonetheless, magic. Proof that she can.|and... you don't feel much of anything. As far as you can tell, Astraea is sitting there, staring at her own hand, her fingers and arm flexed tense, but nothing is happening at all. The room falls awkwardly silent.

You shift from one foot to the other as you watch, waiting for something, anything, to break the silence. You think to ask if anything should be happening, but you know it's a dumb question; Astraea wouldn't be here, doing whatever she's doing, just for no result at all.

Then, for the briefest of flashes, you see it: a spark, alive one moment, then dead within the blink of an eye, in the center of her palm. All of that effort for something you'd get by banging two rocks together – but, no matter how small and quick it was, it was there. Magic, even to your untrained eye.]

"Very good," the doctor says.

Astraea frowns. "Is it, though?" she asks. "There's no improvement from last time."

“Progress isn’t always in the form of ‘improvement,’ my dear,” he answers. “That you are still able to channel magic after our sessions, no matter how briefly, is a sign that your condition is stable. We all need to learn to walk before we can run.”

Astraea’s expression doesn’t change, her discerning eyes still on her flexing fingers disappointingly.

“Think of it the same as a person with injured legs relearning how to use them,” he continues, noting her expression. “There’d be no sense in therapy if the patient couldn’t move their legs to begin with. Now that we’re certain that your ‘legs’, as it were, are functioning properly, we can move forward with treatment.”

She lifts her eyes to his. “What are you suggesting?”

The doctor turns away from Astraea and moves towards the apothecary, reaching for a tall, standing dresser with more than a dozen smaller drawers lining it from bottom to top and side to side. “Something very similar to putting you in a pool, then having you walk from one edge to another,” he says as he reaches for one drawer, no more distinct than any others. From it, he pulls out a small, leatherbound pouch with its drawstring pulled taut. [pc.isMage|You immediately feel the resonant energies from within that pouch, and the little nubs and wedges poking from inside, and the jingling of glass bouncing against other glass, are very telltale: it’s filled with ley crystals.|You hear the jingling of glass rubbing against glass, and you see little nubs and wedges poking from inside the pouch, but you can’t really tell much else just from the sight of the pouch. For all you know, it could be filled with rocks.] “We use a catalyst.”

Astraea clicks her teeth at the word.

“This is no time to be prideful, Astraea,” he lightly chastises. “You’re unwell. I know you’re the queen’s greatest polymorph, a title you’ve earned, but unless you wake up tomorrow fully healed, then you’re going to need a crutch.”

The doctor looks up at the nearest window, eyeing [dayNight|the light of the sun as it slowly arcs through the sky|the light of the moon, however dim it is, as it slowly crests the sky]. “I think that’s enough for today,” he says as he sets the leather bag back into its cabinet. “I have to update my findings on your condition, Astraea. Whatever that witch did to you is something utterly alien to both the medical and magical fields. I need to be as thorough on my notes as possible, especially when we beat it.”

Astraea reaches for her glove and slips it back onto her massive forearm, flexing her fingers as she gets them into their sleeves. “You seem confident,” she says, her voice tinged with bitterness.

“We have every reason to remain optimistic!” he insists. “The webbings under your skin are receding; your magic is returning, albeit, I realize, at a slower pace than you would like; and there are no other health concerns. If we could somehow approximate the atmospheric conditions of the Ways Between, we’d be able to monitor your recovery in a controlled environment there, as well.”

Astraea stands. The bed she was sitting on audibly groans as it relaxes back into shape, and the leather in her armor creaks back into position. [ast.bq2|She’s, well, exactly as tall as the day you two met. You know she’s a polymorph and all, but it’s still hard to believe that they make salamanders that big.|[pc.heightRange 0 84|She’s... very, very tall. You got that impression just from the way that she sat, but seeing her tower to her full height is... something different.|Wow, this one really drank her milk and ate her chicken. You got the impression that she was tall just from her sitting posture, but seeing someone be roughly as tall as you always throws you for a loop.]

For the briefest of moments, your eye catches something beneath her waistband as her kilt sets back into place. The fabric folds itself around an obstruction jutting from her crotch, taking the shape of a massive shaft before vanishing as the kilt sets properly. It could have been your imagination – fabric bends and folds in all sorts of weird ways as it moves. But... knowing the salamanders of Tychris...?]

“We’ll save the experiments where it feels like my skin is boiling off my bones for last, if you don’t mind,” she says lowly.

“Of course,” the doctor answers quickly. “I didn’t mean to imply that it was something we ought to get to soon. Just that it ought to be on the agenda.”

With that, Astraea’s doctor’s visit concludes. They turn away from each other and say nothing further.

[=Next=]

[ast.bq2|With that out of the way, Astraea turns her full attention to you, facing you fully. Her hardened, frustrated expression with the doctor’s visit vanishes as her eyes meet yours, and, with just a smile and an ease in her shoulders, it’s as though she still has her polymorphing magic, because Astraea’s transformed into someone else entirely.

“Sorry to make you wait, [pc.name],” she says warmly[pc.heightRange 0 84|, bending over to meet you at your level]. She brushes a lock of her silvery hair from her eyes as they narrow into crescents. From the look she’s giving you, you’d think she’d been waiting all day for this moment. “I’m glad to finally see you here in Tychris. I hope the journey wasn’t too difficult?”

It wasn’t any harder than any other journey you’ve had.

“I’m glad to hear that,” she says, taking in your words like they were candy. “I hope you don’t mind, but I’ve been taking the liberties of [ast.lns|fluffing|inflating] your reputation after what you did for us with Matiha. Everyone in the palace knows [ast.lns|how... skilled you are.”

Her choices in words aren’t lost on you.[just how far you went – and what you did when two of Nareva’s finest had failed.”

She keeps talking you up, [pc.isDK|and you see an opportunity to [silly|humblebrag|fish for more of her fluffing]: you were just being a good Samaritan. Anyone would have done what you did|but, really, you didn’t do anything that anyone else in your position would have done].

Astraea laughs, snorting through her nose derisively. “No, actually, most people wouldn’t have marched into a witch’s teleporting tower inside a reality-between-spaces after two of the best magehunters in the business had failed.” Her hand goes to your chin – and she flicks it with her finger. “You need to be more prideful sometimes, [pc.name]. I do that stuff for a living, and I failed. If I were you, I would never shut the fuck up about it.”]

With your reputation apparently preceding you, you suppose it’s a good thing you found Astraea when you did.

“I’ll say,” she says, her mouth crooking into a sly grin. “I wouldn’t be surprised if the other girls can’t keep their hands off a specimen like you once they see you.”

“To that end,” she continues, righting herself and taking a more formal body language, but her grin doesn’t wane. “We should probably save the double-meanings for somewhere more private, don’t you think?”

Actually, using double-meanings in public is exactly what they're for.

Astraea gives you a smarmy, closed mouth look, her brow furrowing. "Go upstairs and get into my room," she commands. "We can [ast.1ns|'talk'|talk] more in [ast.1ns|the sound-proof]privacy up there. My room has my name on the door; it should be easy to find."

With that, she gives you one last look – one that could melt metal – before turning towards the infirmary's door and making her way out. Whether you follow her is up to you, but... she'll be waiting. With that out of the way, Astraea turns her full attention to you, facing you fully. Her hardened, frustrated expression with the doctor's visit softens when her eyes meet yours, turning from a woman that's apparently suffering from medical issues to the sort of warrior you'd expect her to be, with size and armor like hers.

"I assume we have business?" she asks, keeping her eyes on you.

Not particularly. You were just curious about her and her condition, and the quality standards of the palace's infirmary.

She frowns, reaching for her gauntlet again. She pulls on the cuff and flexes her fingers, making sure it's good and tight on her arm. "Well, they're among the best in the world for a reason," she says.

The doctor said that the black webbing on her skin was receding?

"With all respect, [pc.name]," she says sternly, "you may be a guest in the palace, but questions like those are personal. You being invited doesn't mean you have rights to my medical history."

[pc.isDK|You scowl back at her for her attitude – but you don't push the subject. You'd be flippant at best if someone was nosing around where they didn't belong, either. You're not used to this kind of pushback, but, ultimately, you digress and relent. She's right: her medical history isn't anyone's business but hers and the doctor's.]

Unexpectedly, especially after that, Astraea extends her right hand, waist-height, her fingers splayed apart. "Allow me to formally introduce myself," she says. "My name is Astraea, of the Astrida magehunters. I specialize in polymorphization and transmutation."

[pc.isBimbo|Those are a lot of big words! You would have accepted 'my name is Astraea and I'm hot as fuck'.]You reach forward and accept her handshake, and you reply with your own name and titles – not that she needs them. If she knows you're invited, then she knows why. As you had expected from someone of her size, her grip on her handshake leaves nothing to be desired, but she clearly knows her own strength: firm, confident, [pc.strengthRange 0 70|and she could probably crush your hand into a pulp if she wanted, but she's careful not to|and, with a strong enough squeeze, she could probably wring your hand if she wanted. You're not weak yourself, by any stretch, but... well, a sucker punch from a woman with muscles that big would hurt even you all the same].

"As you may have gathered, I'm not in a condition to be of much assistance on long-form missions for the time being," she continues. "There are countless other Astrida within the palace that can see to you if you need anything."

What if all you want is to talk? A woman like her – huge, decorated, and with her condition – probably has quite the story to tell.

Your eyes roam over her armor when you say the word 'decorated', focusing on the ornate symbols and peculiarities of her outfit... but, betrayingly, your eyes drift further

downward for only a split second, stopping at where her armor meets her kilt. A woman like her has plenty of ‘secrets’ to tell.

The question seems to catch Astraea off-guard. She rears backward slightly as she withdraws her hand. “I,” she stutters, her eyes widening, then narrowing back down to normal as she tries to parse her own answer. “I suppose there’s no harm in it. You’re a vaunted guest in the palace. I could spare you a few moments of my time, if you’d like.”

Perfect. Where is most comfortable for her?

“My personal quarters are up a flight of stairs, almost directly above this infirmary,” she says, pointing upward with her right thumb. “The door has my name on it. Just announce yourself before coming in, if you don’t mind.”

Her personal room? [pc.dcb|Your eyes flick downward, towards her kilt. Even better.|You had expected her to suggest something a little more open, but if she doesn’t mind having you as a personal guest, that works for you.|Your eyes flick downward, towards her kilt. Yummy!]

“Until then,” Astraea finishes as she places her right hand across her chest as she bows respectfully toward you. “As a guest in the palace, the facilities are yours to peruse as you like.”

With that, she turns and leaves, her long, wispy-white hair swishing across her shoulders with her every booming step.]

You’re left standing there in the infirmary, alone...

... with the doctor that had been tending to her, still busying himself with his notes and findings over her condition.

“[ast.bq2|If I may ask,” he says, lifting his eyes from his parchment-and-quill to look in your direction. “It’s rare to see any Astrida fawn over someone outside of the Order as much as Astraea is over you. Just what did you do?”

You stopped a witch from using an ancient relic charged with millenniums-worth of ambient energy to suck the whole of Savarra into the Ways Between, where her power would be limitless. It was the mission that Astraea and her partner had failed.

“Ah,” the doctor says, nodding in understanding. “Elexis. The poor thing.”

Maybe you could ask Astraea how Elexis is doing. You could ask the doctor, but it might be better coming from Elexis’ partner. [“Good luck with her,” he says, keeping his eyes on his parchment-and-quill, furiously scribbling his notes and findings for later reference.

You ask him what he means by that.

“Perhaps I’m presuming,” he admits, “but there are several ways to understand – and misunderstand – what it means when a woman invites you into her room to ‘talk’. Astraea’s been through quite a lot. You may find her reception to be cold.”

Hmm. You’ll just have to find out on your own.]

[=Next=]

// Astraea can now be encountered in her room on the second floor

// (end scene: Encountering Astraea)

// Continue here the first time the player enters Astraea's room after meeting her in the infirmary. This can be played at any hour of the day.

// (scene: Astraea in Her Room)

Following Astraea's instructions from earlier, you find yourself on the second floor of the palace, facing down a long, opulent hallway lined with tall, regal doors on either side. One of the doors, closer to the stairwell, as Astraea's name emblazoned across it on a bronze plaque. You knock on the door[ast.bq2], then enter without waiting for her permission. You know you already have it.].

"Come in," you hear a gruff, but feminine, voice reply.]

The room you enter [ast.bq2]is about what you expected, knowing Astraea, one of the best practitioners of polymorphization in the world[pc.cl mage|], something you're told is extremely difficult to do[|isn't quite what you'd imagined a soldier of Astraea's size to make her own]. There's a bed that's several sizes too small for her body; a desk, with papers and quills strewn across its top and what appears to be personal journals stacked end-to-end across its headboard; and a personal library occupying the entire eastern wall, packed tight with volumes of encyclopedias on magic and theory. Against the western wall, next to the bed, is a dresser, and, like the bed, there's no way it's holding clothes that's fit for Astraea's bulk, going by the size of the furniture.

And... that's about it. There's nothing in the way of personalization: no paintings on the walls, no small creatures in cages, no plants in hanging planters. This is where Astraea goes to study and sleep. [ast.bq2|Given how studious she is, you aren't terribly surprised[ast.lns|], although... she sometimes talked of having orgies with the other women of the sorority. Clearly, they aren't held here].|Given her size, you would have thought she'd have put more of an interest in weapons and armors, not books and [pc.isDK|other nerd shit like that|study]. Although, you suppose, you did meet her in the infirmary over a magical ailment...]

Sitting at the desk is Astraea, looking almost comically out-of-place: her body is so massive that she takes up most of the room herself, and that's including her personal library. The poor chair that she's sitting in, while of regal design and sturdy wood, looks like the legs are about to snap from underneath it from her weight. She's writing something on parchment, but with how thick her fingers are, she's having a hard time holding it steady to write. She's still wearing her kilt, but her upper armor, her gauntlets, and her grieves have all been removed and are sitting on the floor, beside her desk, leaving her in only her kilt and an undershirt.

At the sound of you entering[ast.bq2| uninvited], she pivots in her chair to face you, [ast.bq2], and as soon as her eyes meet yours, her expression lifts. "Ah, you came!" she exclaims, turning back to her parchment and quickly scribbling the end of her thought before placing the quill back into its well. Her chair's legs scrape across the floor, and the seat groans as the wood sets back into place once she and her immense weight lift off it.

Her hair swishes over her shoulder as she stands and faces you. Even though things haven't even started yet, the atmosphere is surprisingly intimate without her armor on – the only thing keeping her decent is a high-quality-but-still-thin bit of fabric, and her muscles are practically exploding out of it. The hem isn't long enough to cover her shoulders and her breasts while also reaching her waist, leaving her abdomen, and its rippling abs, almost fully exposed.

"Sorry that my room isn't much," she admits sheepishly. Her mouth crooks into a grimace and her eyes break from yours to roam around her living space. "I'll be the first to admit that this isn't where the party starts."

From the stories she told you, you got the impression that the party started wherever she was. You don't fault her for not keeping her own room open to distractions.

“Maybe once upon a time,” she says, raising her right hand, fingers flexed. Seeing her arm without its armor or gauntlet – just naked skin, bulging with muscle, with black spider-webs pulsing underneath her skin – is quite the sight. She bends each of her digits, [pc.isMage|and you feel the miasma wisp around you as she attempts to summon magic from the ether... but nothing happens. Her attempt at using magic, in any shape or form, has failed yet again.|and... nothing happens. You feel like something should have happened. You’re not a mage or anything, but you didn’t even feel the air stir. If she’s trying to use magic, then this display is worse than in the infirmary.] “Not so much anymore. Not unless the ‘party’ involves me as I am now.”

Your eyes trail along her explosive limbs and down the immaculate ridges of her abs. There’s a bulge jutting from her crotch that even her loose kilt couldn’t hope to fully conceal. You dryly say that there must not be much change, then.

“You’d be surprised,” she says with a huff. “But you’re not here to listen to me complain about my turbulent sex life.”

You’re not?

“Aren’t you?”

That’s up to you.

There’s an awkward pause between you two before she snorts, choking back a laugh. “Let’s start over,” she says, motioning to her chair. “Have a seat! Would you like something from the kitchen? I can call the palace’s maids with a pull of the string and have them get us anything we need.”

You accept her invitation to sit. Attached to the desk you’re sitting at is a rope, its circumference about half the width of your palm, with the rope disappearing into the wall. [pc.bg courtesan noblescion|A call bell, you recognize. Astraea really **is** getting the royal treatment here.|That must be the ‘string’ that she mentioned. You wonder how it works.]

Astraea sits on the bed in front of you. The poor thing sags almost cleanly in half at her weight, clearly designed for someone less than half her size. Her hands pitter-pat on her rock-solid knees and her mouth curls into a giddy, excited grin as she waits for you.|her expression smooth and even, trending slightly towards annoyed once she gets a look at you. “Ah, the [pc.race] from the infirmary,” she notes dryly as she moves to stand. Her chair’s legs scrape across the wooden floor of her room, and the seat itself groans and creaks as the wood works itself back into shape now that her weight is off it.

She stands to her full, towering height – Gods, she must be eight feet tall, thereabout[pc.heightRange 0 90||. It’s so rare to see someone your height in the world. It almost makes you feel like you’ve found something of a kindred spirit]. Her body is so massive all around that she’s one of the body types where she doesn’t look smaller now that her armor’s been removed. Her undershirt, while of high quality, is meant for someone much smaller; the hem covers her breasts, but not much farther, leaving her abdomen, and every rippling abdominal muscle on it, fully exposed.

Astraea puts her hands on her hips as she sizes you up. You’re not unwelcome in her room, based on her body language, but she clearly expects something from you, and your staring isn’t it. “Can I help you?” she eventually asks.

The question pulls you away from staring at her stomach. You almost get hung up staring at her arms next before telling her that you looked for her because, well, she seemed interesting, and you wanted to talk.

She lifts one eyebrow as she looks you over. Her body language isn't impetuous or impatient, but she's clearly a bit hesitant. "Do you normally do that?" she asks. "Barge into someone's private room and ask to hang out? You don't even know me."

Hanging out is a good way to fix that.

She holds her expression on you for a moment – then, it cracks. She snorts as her lips curl into a light grin. "Damn it, that got me," she admits. "Alright – fine. Normally, I wouldn't be so keen on giving a stranger the time of day like that. But it's not every day that someone is personally invited into the palace like you have been."

She turns to one side and motions toward her chair, inviting you to take a seat. "Let's talk, then," she says. "It'd behoove me to learn some more about Nareva's hand-picked guest."

You accept her invitation to sit. Attached to the desk you're sitting at is a rope, its circumference about half the width of your palm, with the rope disappearing into the wall. [pc.bg courtesan noblescion|A call bell, you recognize. Astraea really **is** getting the royal treatment here.|You aren't sure what it's purpose is.]

Astraea sits on her bed, causing the poor thing to bend in half underneath her weight. The wooden frame of the bed tightens and creaks as it strains to support her immensity. Her posture is stiff and proper, but even then, the muscles on her gut tighten up, the creases gaining definition. She can't even sit down without somehow being a mountain of muscle.

[pc.isBimbo|God, she's yummy.|Play your cards right, and she ought to be a lot of fun...]

// Display Astraea's main menu

// (end scene: Astraea in Her Room)

// Continue here on subsequent times meeting with Astraea in her room.
// After the first encounter, Astraea can be found in her room in any hour of the day, except between the hours of 11:00 and 13:00. During this two hour window, display the entry written at the start of the document, where her room is empty, instead of this one
// (scene: Astraea in Her Room, Subsequently)

You knock on the door to Astraea's room[ast.bq2], and you show yourself inside without waiting for her response. You've already been invited in, after all. "Come in," you hear her say on the other side.]

The inside of Astraea's room is exactly as you last saw it: the desk in the corner; the eastern wall being dedicated to her personal library; jutting from the western wall, a single-wide bed that's far, far too small for someone of Astraea's size; and a dresser next to the bed, itself far too small, carrying clothes meant for someone orders of magnitude smaller than herself.

Astraea herself is impossible to miss: [rand|she's hunched over her desk, her fingers deftly working a quill that's too small for her fingers. To her left is an open book that she occasionally glances towards. She's clearly taking notes, as if she were studying for some big exam, even though she's already one of Nareva's most accomplished witches.

She glances over her shoulder towards you, [ast.bq2|then, on seeing that it's you, does a double-take. "Oh!" she exclaims, then turns back to her parchment to finish her current thought before sliding the quill back into its inkwell.|then returns to her parchment, unhurried as she finishes her current thought on the parchment. Still, you're a guest in her room; she doesn't leave you waiting.]|she's standing in front of her dresser, holding up a shirt against her body. The shirt modestly plain-white with frills along the seams, but more importantly, you can see from where you are the way the fabric moves and flows, rippling like water with every one of Astraea's motions.

She uses her chin to pin the collar of the shirt to her collarbone, and she tries to stretch the sleeves along her arms. She's clearly trying to see if it'll fit her... but even a cursory glance would tell anyone that it's just not going to happen. It'd be like an adult trying to wear a shirt meant for a toddler.

Astraea glances towards you, [ast.bq1|then sighs as she folds the shirt back up neatly and sorting it into the second-from-the-top drawer. "That was my favorite shirt," she says. "Back when I could fit into it, anyway."

[pc.isMage|The school of polymorphization is the most difficult school to master for a reason, and even for someone as attuned to the realities of magic as you are, it's difficult for you to imagine someone like Astraea shrinking down enough to fit into a shirt that comparatively small. Still, you|You] tell her that she'll be able to fit back into it someday. She just has to remember that she's healing – her condition isn't permanent. She'll recover eventually.

"Thanks," she says. She sighs again, then does her best to put on a more positive face.|then sighs dejectedly as she folds the shirt neatly and sorts it into the second-from-the-top drawer. "Just reminiscing," she says. "Back when I was smaller."

Hard to believe that someone like her hadn't just sprouted like that.

She gives you a look – brow furrowed, her mouth screwed, her nose crunched. Clearly, her being 'smaller' is something of a sour topic for her. "Well," she continues, resetting her expression. "It takes a lot of work to get the sort of bodies that we want."|she's lying on her bed, one hand up and behind her head, with the other holding a book open a few inches from her face. From the way her eyes are scrunched, she's deep into it. The bed is comically undersized for her frame: it's just barely big enough to support her from her neck to her ass. Her legs are

bent at the knee and her feet lie flatly against the wood of the floor, with her tail swishing lazily across the wood between her feet.

From where you're standing, you can't get a good look at the cover or the spine, but based on the thickness of the book, it looks like fairly light reading – but that might be because the book is small against her hands. It looks almost like a brochure than a proper, printed volume.

Despite you being a guest in her room, it takes a moment for her to tear her eyes from the page to look you in the eye. [ast.bq2|As soon as she does, she bolts on her bed as if electricity had shot right through her. “Oh, [pc.name]!” she exclaims. “I’m sorry, I just – I got so absorbed that I–”

You tell her that she doesn't need to apologize, and that you only just got here.

“Well, even still,” she says as she dog-ears the page she was just on before shutting it. “I shouldn't be treating my guests that way. Especially you!”

She lays the book on her nightstand as she throws her legs off the side of the bed, facing away from you and towards her desk. The carved muscles of her back and shoulders pronounce through her thin, casual shirt. “Have a seat!” she says, motioning to the chair beside her desk. “You didn't come here to watch me read. What can I do for you?”

You take her invitation and sit in her chair[pc.heightRange 0 84|. It doesn't creak underneath your weight].|“Ah,” she says, her brow launching upward once she realizes she's not alone. “My apologies.”

You tell her that you hadn't been standing there for long.

“All the same,” she says as she dog-ears the page she's on, then closes the book and sets it onto her nightstand. “It's unbecoming of me to get so engrossed in recreational reading that I don't realize I have any guests.”

What if the reading wasn't recreational?

“Then that'd be different,” she says with a light-hearted smirk. She throws her legs off the bed and faces away from you, towards her desk – and, perhaps unintentionally, gives you a good look at the carved muscles of her back and shoulders as she does. “Have a seat,” she says, inviting you to her desk chair with a wave of her hand. “I imagine you didn't come here just to watch me read.”

You take her invitation and sit in her chair[pc.heightRange 0 84|. It doesn't creak underneath your weight].]]

Now that you're here, what is it you want with Astraea?

// Display Astraea's main menu

// (end scene: Astraea In Her Room, Subsequently)

// Astraea's Main Menu
[=Appearance=][=Talk=][=Sex=][=Leave=]

[=Leave=]
// No tooltip
(scene: Leaving Astraea)

You tell Astraea that, as lovely as it is to be in her presence, you have duties elsewhere. You didn't get invited to TyChris by sitting on your ass.

[ast.bq2|Astraea pouts slightly, twisting her head as her lips curl into a downward frown. But the expression doesn't last long. "Sure, I get it," she says as she slaps onto her knees to stand. It sounds like someone beating planks of wood against rocks. The bed she's sitting on groans and creaks as it resets its shape. "Don't let me keep you from your heroism, [pc.name]. Who knows how many more Astrida are in need of rescuing out there?"

She follows you to the door of her room, her footsteps heavy enough to rattle the furniture. She opens the door for you and sees you out with a smile. "Come back whenever you want, [pc.name]," she says as you leave, then clicks the door shut behind you.|Astraea nods once in understanding. "Right," she says as she stands. The bed creaks as it resets back into place, and the floor underneath her groans as it takes the whole of her weight on her two feet. "It takes something special to earn Nareva's favor enough to be invited directly into the palace. I wouldn't want to keep you from whatever deeds and duties you bear."

While Astraea isn't exactly fighting to keep you from leaving, she also has the courtesy to see you to the door: her footsteps tromp behind you with enough weight to rattle the furniture in the room, and she does the gentlewomanly thing of holding the door open for you as you leave. "I'll either be here, or the infirmary, if you need me," she says as you leave.

Then, with a click, she closes the door behind you.]

[=Next=]
// place the PC one square outside of Astraea's quarters
// (scene: Leaving Astraea)

[=Appearance=]

// Tooltip: There is a whole lot of woman sitting right in front of you. Why not... take inventory, while you have the time?

// (scene: Looking At Astraea)

Astraea has all the makings of a typical salamander native to Tychris. Two arms, two legs, and a scaly tail sprouting from her lower back, long and thick, tipped with a flame that constantly dances – and yet, it never seems to burn anything. A common trick among the Astrida that you know.

However, Astraea is far from what you would call a ‘typical’ salamander, not the least of reasons being that she’s eight feet tall. You’re led to believe that this is extremely unusual for her race, and that she’s highly abnormal[ast.bq2], although, you know that she’s so large because of the mission she had been assigned to deal with Matiha – but that’s another story for another time].

To go with all that height, Astraea is a rippling mountain of muscle: everything from her shoulders, to her arms, to her abdominals (especially her abdominals), to her thighs, her calves, even her ankles. There isn’t a single part of her that isn’t so large that she could snap a rope by flexing, or so taut that she could shave meat by rubbing it against her. Astraea is a flawless specimen of a bodybuilder: there is no muscle unaccounted for, no tendon that isn’t tight like a chain.

Regardless of her physicality, though, anyone would take one look at her and assume that she was seriously ill. Salamanders have skin and scales of colors varying from a healthy peach to an exotic tan, but Astraea’s skin is ghostly white all over, leaving her seriously pale. And underneath her skin, instead of her veins being blue and fading into her body, her veins are all pitch black: they scatter like spiderwebs all throughout her muscles, all the way up to her skull, where they appear to center on her eyes.

Adding to her apparent illness, her hair, while well-kept and knotless, is white as silk and lacking body. It droops well beyond her neck in flowing strands, merely... dangling there, listless. But it’s not all bad in her hair: the roots are pink, showing just a little bit of life as they grow out – and implying that, whatever is ailing her, is leaving her body. It’s also possible to interpret the black spiderwebs under her skin as receding rather than spreading.

Astraea’s typical uniform is green, ornate leather armor, thick and heavy enough that an average man would struggle to lift it, let alone wear it. Though imposing enough from a distance, the real prize in the armor is that it’s enchanted with all the best, most powerful wards that [pc.isBimbo|magic can... magic|magicians could apply]. She wears leather gauntlets and comes with an enchanted sword that, for her, is one handed, but anyone shorter than her would need two, if they could wield it at all. Rather than wear armor on her legs, she instead wears a kilt, providing unparalleled freedom of movement in her legs. Besides, thighs like hers are armor enough.

In the comfort of her room, she still wears the kilt, probably because the Astrida don’t have proper leggings for someone of her size. But the armor sits discarded next to her desk, awaiting the next time it’s needed, and, instead, she wears a plain, simple tank top shirt that is large enough to cover her breasts, but not large enough to cover her stomach, leaving her abdominals on full display. Not that you hear anyone complaining.

{has sexed Astraea, including the one night stand in the Frosthound|Hiding underneath that kilt is quite the beast of a secret: a cock that, even on someone with a frame as huge as hers, looks out of place. When fully erect, it’s easily eighteen inches of pitch-black bitch-breaking cockmeat, thick as your forearm, flanked by a pair of testicles that weigh so much, a lesser creature would walk with a lower center of gravity. Salamanders being intersex isn’t exactly

uncommon, but Astraea [ast.bq2|really went above and beyond when she crafted this body for herself|is clearly cut of a different cloth].

Going all the way, Astraea has a vagina tucked beneath her testicles, where her taint would otherwise be. Proving that her body hadn't skipped the Kegel exercises, it's tight as [silly|a gorilla's grip|an iron vice], no matter how much punishment it takes, and it doesn't skip on its own moisturizer. Finally, going back further, she has an asshole between her clay-thick buttocks, underneath her tail, right where it belongs.} {else|You've never seen Astraea naked, but you have reason to believe that there's more to her than meets the eye. And by 'reason', there's a bulge the size of your forearm underneath her kilt. It vanishes when she stands upright, but when she sits, or the kilt is otherwise pressed against her crotch, it stands out like a sore thumb that's been wrapped in a thin bandage. Forget the sword – she could easily club anyone she's fighting with that thing and it'd almost be as effective.

Until you get her naked, you'll just have to assume that her asshole between her buttocks, where it ought to belong.}

// Display Astraea's main menu
// (end scene: Looking At Astraea)