“Get the fuck out of my body!” the Keira half of Boxxy yelled.

“Your body?!” the monster replied incredulously. “I’ve had it longer than you!”

“As if! I think I’d remember if I was some freaky abomination!”

“Oh, but you do,” Boxxy spoke coldly. “You’re a part of me, so you most definitely remember.”

“I… uh…”

In the short time that Keira had been ‘alive,’ the monster’s abnormal subconscious had kept either personality from accessing the other’s memories. This was the cause of the ‘blank spots’ that both of them had experienced. Indeed, the only reason the shapeshifter had agreed to subject itself to electroshock therapy was because it hadn’t been in control of its actions. The catgirl persona had been in charge ever since the meeting with the other Heroes had started and had been oblivious to her true nature. But now that both sides were aware of the other’s presence, the mental walls between them had begun to collapse. Memories of all the horrible things the shapeshifter had done came flooding into Keira’s unstable consciousness, and with those came the realization of what she actually was.

“No…” the redhead muttered.

“Oh, yes,” Boxxy growled. “You’re not real. You never were.”

Fizzy, who had been struck momentarily speechless by this turn of events, watched as the rogue Facade slowly but surely gave way to the hylt creeper’s true form.

“This body isn’t yours because you do not exist,” the monster piled on the pressure. “You’re just a figment of my imagination - an anomalous thought that can, and will, be forgotten!”

The Keira personality continued to recede until all that was left of her on the surface was a patch of bronze skin on the face, a few locks of crimson hair, and a tear-filled yellow eye that slowly began to close.

“I refuse!”

It then flew open with a furious gaze, and the catgirl began to reclaim the ‘territory’ she had lost.

“I don’t care what you think! I know I’m real, and that’s all I care about! I think, therefore I am, you evil, scum-sucking bastard!”

Within moments she had regained control of the right half of the doppelganger’s body while Boxxy visibly strained, and failed, to keep her in check. It would appear that the selfishness and perseverance of the enlightened persona it had created were comparable to the original’s. Determination, too, as Keira’s hand reached for one of the knives hidden in the clothes she was

still wearing, and stabbed Boxxy's left half in the chest, right where a regular person's heart should be. Of course, there was no such organ there, but it still hurt quite a bit.

[window]You have suffered self-harm. HP -948.[/window]

Keira pulled the knife out and went for another strike, but Boxxy shaped its arm into a cleaver and severed her hand from her wrist.

[window]You have suffered self-harm. HP -664.
Your flesh has been mended. HP +200.[/window]

Whether it was because of the Mend Flesh Skill, the catgirl's 'inherited' adaptability, or maybe just some kind of subconscious response, the severed limb grew back in an instant. Keira snatched the dropped knife out of the air and blocked the blade-shaped limb. She then raised her leg and kneed Boxxy, and by extension herself, in the chin. The frustrated monster grew an extra two arms from its shoulder and decapitated itself. It knew it could survive without a head, but there was a chance its 'better half' didn't. By the shapeshifter's rushed logic, if the redhead thought she was dead, then she would actually die.

Except it didn't quite work out that way. Though the Keira personality ceased her struggling, that only lasted for a few seconds before both she and the doppelganger grew a full head each, attached to their respective shoulders. They glared at each other for a moment, both seething with fury. They were just about to resume tearing themselves apart when Fizzy finally decided to intervene.

"That's enough!"

The dynamo golem, having reconfigured herself into her all-purpose Skirmisher Mode, tackled the mentally disturbed shapeshifter with a yell. She had amped up her Static Field before doing so, giving the monster an electric shock powerful enough to momentarily incapacitate it the instant her mithril frame touched it. Of course, being in the same body, both Boxxy and Keira suffered from the after-effects, and were left writhing around on the ground. The redhead's side of the body reverted, and for a few seconds Fizzy was looking down at a fully exposed hylt creeper.

That didn't last long, though, as Keira instantly emerged when the Bane's debilitating effects wore off. She and Boxxy looked up to see the mithril golem pinning the shapeshifter's body to the ground with a leg on its torso. They looked like they were going to start pleading with her, most likely aiming to secure her aid against the other, but a mild albeit painful shock cut them off before they could even start.

"Don't. Move," Fizzy warned. "Both of you."

Now, mental disorders weren't the radiant golem's field of expertise. In fact, the science of psychiatry barely even existed on Terrania at that point in time. There was, in all likelihood, nobody around who could diagnose, let alone treat, whatever psychological problems Boxxy

was having. However, Fizzy was still the world's leading expert on sharing her mind, body, and soul with multiple personas. Granted, her alternate egos were the product of a Skill rather than some bizarre form of shapeshifter insanity, but she figured it was close enough.

"I know neither of you are exactly pleased with the circumstances, but it's where we're at right now," she spoke sternly. "Forget how it happened or how long it's been going on, that's not important right now. What matters is where you go from here, and from my personal experience, there's only two ways this can end. Either you learn to coexist, or you're going to kill yourselves fighting each other."

Of course, if it were up to Fizzy, she'd rather incapacitate and detain the shapeshifter rather than let it attempt the latter, but she hoped it wouldn't come to that.

"I may not know what's going on," Keira spoke up, "and I have no idea whether this is real or just a bad nightmare. What I do know is that I would rather die than let this monstrosity anywhere near my Rowana!"

Though originally fictional, the convictions Boxxy had added onto Keira's character had now become very much real. In her mind, the redhead had already determined that cooperation was out of the question. Not knowing when she might lose control and kill the only person she'd ever truly loved was too much of a thought to bear. That said, the thing she was feeling towards the elf at the moment wasn't 'love,' not exactly. She wasn't actually an enlightened being, so she lacked the capacity for that sort of thing. Her snap decision to sacrifice herself for another was the product of a set of predetermined responses and reactions meant to merely emulate the behavior of someone in love.

It still seemed like the real deal to Keira, however, which was more than enough to strengthen her convictions.

"Too bad," Boxxy growled, "because your opinion is irrelevant."

While the rebellious redhead was giving her little speech, her creator had stealthily retrieved a certain item from its Storage.

"Kirk!" it shouted, holding Amelia's divine I.O.U. up to the ceiling, "I want to cash this in!"

The shapeshifter barely even finished that sentence before it found itself standing in the endless white void that was Christopher's divine area. It looked to its right to see that Keira - or at least a projection of her consciousness - was standing right next to, and completely separated from, itself. In the next instant, the monster grew several bladed tentacles and the catgirl grasped a knife seemingly out of thin air. They hesitated for a moment, clearly unsure whether attacking each other in this place would even accomplish anything, but both seemed willing to try.

Clap

Clap

Clap

At least until they heard the dreadfully telltale sign of the Goddess of Happenstance clapping her windows.

“Good show!” Sherman’s jovial tone washed over them. “Very good show indeed!”

The deity appeared next to them, looking like an oak tree with bacon for leaves and pillows for branches.

“… So that’s it then,” the redhead said grimly. “You’re going to take this thing’s side, aren’t you?”

“I’m afraid so,” Timothy coiled his spring at her. “I promised a personal favor to Boxxy T. Morningwood, not Keira Morgana. What the box says, goes.”

“And I say I want to be rid of this liability!” Boxxy immediately declared.

“So yeah, there you have it,” the deity confirmed.

“Bullshit!” Keira raised her voice again. “You’re a dishonest, two-timing scumbag! What you say and what you do never line up! You just do whatever you want, so you don’t need to listen to this thing! Right?”

“I would be insulted, but you have a point there,” Steward nodded his puddle. “Thing is, on this one occasion, I do actually want to do the thing it’s asking me for. Sorry, but I’m afraid your luck has run out.”

With her desperate plea shot down, the redhead fell to her knees. She didn’t cry or scream, nor did she beg. She merely took a deep breath and let a sad smile spread on her lips.

“Well… I guess it was fun while it lasted.”

“Quite so,” the God of Misfortune creaked back. “But all things must come to an end, unfortunately.”

He then snapped his helmets, and Keira collapsed to the ground, her form melting into a multi-colored puddle of ooze.

“Is it done?” Boxxy asked after a few seconds.

“Oh no, I’m afraid I’m only getting started,” Steve rubbed his cookies together. “You see, I actually quite liked having a Hero like Keira.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Well, you see, usually my Heroes are quite obscure. Either that or they’re regarded as a public menace. Having my Hero be treated with respect and looked upon with trust and admiration is a new experience for me. And I quite enjoy new experiences.”

“Ah. Sucks for you, then, huh?”

Boxxy had yet to process everything that had happened or really consider the implications of this development, but it felt quite confident that it didn’t want to pretend to be Keira anymore. Yes, losing all the Facade’s connections and influence was a shame, but the shapeshifter didn’t want to risk a relapse of… whatever this was.

“Actually, this worked out better than how I thought it would,” Jeremiah stated happily. “You see, when you first started this spunky catgirl enterprise, I calculated there was a 79.16% chance that something like this would happen. Having multiple personalities is actually a relatively common condition for doppelgangers who put too much effort into their disguise. And since you tend to go ‘all in’ whenever you do anything, it was practically guaranteed.”

“So where’s the surprising part?”

Boxxy knew better than anyone else that the Goddess of Gambling only felt this enthusiastic when something unexpected had happened, but so far it sounded like she’d foreseen this turn of events.

“Why, the fact that it happened so soon, of course!” the deity’s blankets broadened into a wide smile. “Usually this sort of thing takes decades to develop, but you managed it in record time. Probably because of all that corruption and addiction stuff shaking up your psyche. Frankly speaking, it would’ve been an incredible surprise if you came out of that **without** any psychological trauma. So… a win-win, really.”

“Oh. Then, what happens now?”

“Now, I reveal myself to be a massive hypocrite by doing exactly what I tell the rest of the pantheon not to do - exploit my godly powers for my own gain.”

Antoinette clapped her tables together, then opened them to reveal what appeared to be a floating ball of pink smoke no bigger than an apple that hovered in place above the deity’s vase.

“Next, I’ll need a bit of this.”

Voltron snapped his clothespins, and the shapeshifter felt dizzy for a moment as its vision went blurry. When it came to, Ekaterina was holding another puff of smoke, this one pitch black in color, in her left chair. She combined it with the other lump in her right carrot and mashed them together like two globs of steaming putty until they were a single mass with a uniform dark red color.

“Mhm, this should do.”

This was dropped onto the puddle that ‘Keira’ had left behind. It soaked into the colorful sludge, which began bubbling and rising. Boxxy watched with mounting dread as the mysterious ooze solidified into a perfect replica of the made-up beastkin’s body, which immediately started breathing. By this point the shapeshifter had started to figure out what the God of Chance was actually doing.

He was turning Keira into a real person by using Boxxy’s memories and soul as a template.

“Well, that could’ve gone better, but it’ll do,” he idly remarked. “I’m also going to need **this** back.”

Another snap of the eels left the hylt creeper with the uncomfortable feeling that it had just dropped something important. What that ‘something’ was became clear a few moments later.

[window]The Hero of Chaos Perk has been removed since you no longer meet the required conditions.
Proficiency level decreased. Chaotic Disposition is no longer available.
Proficiency level decreased. Agent of Chaos is no longer available.
Proficiency level decreased. Essence Concealment is no longer available.
The Usurper of Justice Perk has been removed since you no longer meet the required conditions.
Proficiency level decreased. Vengeance is no longer available.
The Usurper of Death Perk has been removed since you no longer meet the required conditions.
Proficiency level decreased. Eyes of the Dead God is no longer available.[/window]

“… What?” it mumbled in confusion.

“Oh, yes. You’re fired, by the way,” Otis said matter-of-factly.

“What?! I never agreed to this!” Boxxy protested.

“Too bad,” Joanna chuckled, “because your opinion is irrelevant.”

Whether the shapeshifter liked it or not, the Hero titles could be given or taken away entirely at the gods’ discretion. Granted, it wasn’t at all sorry to see Chaotic Disposition go, and it technically no longer needed Essence Concealment. The other Skills, though? Those were quite tasty, and it would’ve preferred to keep them if at all possible. Especially the Eyes of the Dead God. That had been, without a doubt, one of the most powerful Skills that Boxxy had ever come across, and it couldn’t understand why that had to be taken away, too.

It would have protested and attempted to convince the Goddess of Randomness to let it hold onto that one, but it didn’t get the chance as it suddenly found itself struggling to remain conscious. The Aether was no place for a mortal soul to linger in, and Boxxy had already been here for quite a while. Now lacking the protection of Hector’s divine spark, the creature couldn’t even remain upright and fell to the floor, right next to the ‘new and improved’ Keira. It made a few futile gasps and clawed at the deity’s shark-patterned pajamas, but was ultimately ignored.

The last thing it saw before it finally blacked out was the catgirl's yellow eyes fly open and stare into its own.

When Boxxy woke up, it was still lying down in the fortified bunker underneath Fizzy's workshop. The golem was off to the side, pacing nervously while quietly talking to the other minds she shared a head with. The shapeshifter quietly sat up. This caught the radiant construct's attention, and she immediately rushed over and did her best impression of an anvil hugging an old sausage.

"You're back!" she squealed while squeezing down on it.

"I am," it answered weakly, "so could you let go? I only have so many bones to break."

"Oh, right, sorry…" she released the creature from her vice-like grasp.

"How long was I out?"

"Twenty seven hours, fifty eight minutes, and thirty three seconds. N-not like I counted, or anything."

"I see. Could be worse, I suppose."

"But, you're okay now, yeah?" Fizzy asked the all-important question. "No more rogue personalities hijacking your body?"

"Yeah. That's one way to put it."

A brief review of its perfect recollection of the last four days revealed that all of the previously observed blank spots had been filled in. Unsurprisingly, they had been the instances where Keira had seamlessly taken control, and now that she was no longer a part of it, Boxxy had no difficulty accessing her memories. It did note, however, that they seemed oddly foreign to it. It then discovered that it wasn't just those, either. Every memory it had of it acting as Keira over the past three years was now strangely disjointed. They felt surreal, like Boxxy was merely a silent observer in someone else's life. It doubted that this was a side effect of the mental disorder itself, as this stretched as far back as its first meeting with Rowana.

"What's wrong?" Fizzy asked. "Why did you suddenly freeze up like that?"

"… I need to try something."

Boxxy rose to its feet and was immediately made aware of just how hungry it was. It ignored that feeling for the moment, instead focusing on its shapeshifting. It was a bit loathe to do this, all things considered, but nevertheless assumed the form of a perky eighteen year old female beastkin with yellow eyes, red hair, and bronze skin. However, though it certainly looked like her in terms of appearance, it was very clearly not Keira. The face, height, and body proportions were all slightly off, making this form seem like a poor imitation of the genuine article.

Something that Fizzy noticed as well, given her confused expression.

“It seems I’m no longer able to use that Facade.”

Even the voice wasn’t quite right.

“It’s like… I’m trying to swim for the first time. Or when I was first figuring out how wheels worked.”

“What do you mean?” the golem asked.

Boxxy explained that, though it retained the memories of acting as Keira, it had lost the muscle memory and mental preparation to do so. Three years’ worth of acting practice had been sucked out of its brain, likely to fuel Wilbert’s new pet project. That was most likely why its memories of pretending to be a beastkin felt so odd. Fizzy suggested it could relearn the act, but the shapeshifter immediately rejected the idea for two very good reasons. The first was its legitimate concern that doing that might cause it to relapse, though this time it wouldn’t have access to a personal favor from an actual god to fix things.

It then explained to Fizzy the second and arguably more important reason why it wanted nothing to do with Keira Morgana.

“Well, that’s going to be awkward,” she sighed. “I don’t know if I can act all buddy-buddy with this new Keira when I know it’s not you underneath.”

“You’re taking this news rather well,” it remarked.

“Honestly, Eugene turning a fictional character into a real one barely even registers on my internal What-The-Fuck-O-Meter™ after I saw the two of you throw down earlier.”

“Fair enough. You really don’t need to contend with her, though. You can just leave and let her sort it out.”

“I could, but that would make it difficult for me to pursue my ambitions.”

Boxxy and her devotion to the God of Dice Rolls aside, Fizzy still wanted to claim the glory of being the first Level 100 Arclight Artificer. That required generous amounts of high grade materials that would be extremely difficult to obtain without the interpersonal connections she’d developed as Keira’s companion. Not to mention that it would be nigh-impossible for the whole world to know her name if she disappeared from the public eye.

“What about Snack?” the golem asked. “She should still remember how to impersonate Keira.”

“That actually reminds me, what’ve those two been doing this entire time?”

The monster sent a mental prod to them to find out just that.

“We are still following your instructions, Master. What else would we be doing?” Xera replied with audible confusion.

“Where are you right now?”

“Outside your house.”

“Why?”

“Because we followed you here after you left Fizzy’s place last night, and you haven’t left or given us other orders.”

“But I’m still inside?”

“Yes, Master,” Drea chimed in. “You’re sleeping in the bed with- Huh?”

It would appear that the webstalker finally realized something was off about the ‘Master’ she and Xera had been secretly tailing. Boxxy, on the other hand, found out that Keira was already up and about. It would appear Winston could really work quickly when he wanted to.

“I’ll explain later. For now, all you need to know is that the Keira you’ve been following isn’t me. Snack, get in there and have a look at her memories. Take extra caution not to be seen. Claws, abandon post and return to the dungeon immediately.”

With the ex-succubus as a proxy, Boxxy learned that this manufactured Hero of Chaos had all of the made-up memories that it had come up with over the years implanted into her. From the time when her nonexistent parents were killed by an Imperial guard patrol, right up until yesterday’s mental breakdown in Fizzy’s basement. Even the fictional stories and fabricated excuses Boxxy had given Rowana were in there. There were no traces of the shapeshifter or any of its schemes and wrongdoings, aside from Keira’s alleged dealings with the Sandman.

By the time morning had rolled around, all of Boxxy’s followers had been caught up on the situation and a new plan of action was formed. As part of this new agenda, the shapeshifter declared that Keira, and by extension Rowana and the house mimics, were off limits. Bill had clearly gone to great lengths to hide the truth of his Hero’s existence from everyone, including the person herself. It just seemed like a very bad idea to try and interfere with that over some misguided thirst for revenge.

The only real sticking point was the shiny magic items that Keira was supposed to have. Most notably the jeweled mithril rapier Feathersting, the Artifact-grade icy bow called Winter’s Bite, and the belt-shaped Aetherial Repository #3. Though Boxxy was willing to let go of its Facade, its greedy nature wanted to keep those three at the least. So it stole them. Well, it was more accurate to say that it had Xera walk into the house as Keira while the couple were out and about and take its rightful property back. That probably wouldn’t be how the now-genuine article saw things, but the ‘theft’ would be her problem to deal with, not Boxxy’s.

However, the shapeshifter had to give up on Bob's instant-dungeon-generating Divine-class item since there was no way to keep that pink gemstone away from the current Hero of Chaos.

With all of that settled, Boxxy was finally ready to leave its life as a doppelganger behind. Though it hadn't been able to gather all the information it wanted regarding its far-too-many Rank Up options, it had been able to learn just enough to make an informed decision. To summarize, the treant and wendigo options were unappetizing since they were rather basic when compared to the others. Not to mention their shapeshifting was extremely limited, which was a huge downside in Boxxy's opinion. The greater barghest, a type of canine creature that had some speculated relation to hellhound demons, was ignored for similar reasons.

Of the more exotic options, the ancient sporelord turned out to be some kind of fungus-beast native to the jungles of Velos that controlled dead bodies with necrotic spores. The problem there was that these spores and minions were very weak to fire, and fire was a popular element among adventurers. Not only was its shapeshifting also relatively limited, but the species' major features were deemed too easily countered, so Boxxy gave up on this.

The spirit flayer, stygian shambler, and abyssal hivemind were complete unknowns. Judging from what little the Rank Up screen revealed of their innate abilities and Skills, they seemed to be creatures that were not suited to direct confrontation. They likely relied on mental attacks, minions, stealth, or some combination of the three. While Boxxy was all for these underhanded tactics, it felt uneasy about choosing a species that was inherently lacking in the personal combat department. Even as a Warlock with three excellent familiars, it still couldn't avoid getting directly involved in battles.

Long story short, its choices boiled down to one of three abomination variants or one of two types of queen slimes. Both were amorphous blobs with versatile shapes, but the former was made of flesh while the latter was goo. And given Boxxy's Skill choices, the former seemed more apt than the latter. Another thing to consider was that the sheer bulk of an abomination meant it would have an HP multiplier via a new Perk, which would then get doubled by Ultimate Overachiever. Lastly, since it didn't want to be the painful eyesore that a titanic abomination would most likely be and wasn't nearly pious enough to make the divine variant work, that narrowed its options down to one.

After making some final preparations, such as giving its familiars their standing orders and securing a ridiculously large supply of food, Boxxy curled up in the middle of its dungeon. It locked itself inside its preferred chesty shape and began its transformation into an eldritch abomination. The significant size difference between an abomination and a doppelganger likely meant that growing into one would take a lot of time. It wasn't sure how long, exactly, but based on past experiences it guessed it would take anywhere from several days to a few weeks. With only eighteen days to go before the Dragon Festival started, it really couldn't delay this any longer.

A few days after the Rank Up process started, Boxxy's body had already burst out of the wooden treasure chest it had shaped itself into. By this point in time, it was like a messy

pulsating blob of bright red flesh, its surface veiny, bumpy, and moist. Xera would normally be unreasonably excited by such descriptors, but in this particular instance she found them to be somewhat repulsive. The odd stench that wafted from the mess didn't help much, either.

At the end of the first week, Boxxy's body had swollen to a dome of meat nearly three meters in diameter. From then on it went through dozens of cycles of it expanding outward only to shrink back down, like some form of extremely slow breathing. Ambrosia and Lavender occasionally checked on it, but mostly did their own thing. Drea, Kora, and Xera had no choice in the matter and stood watch around the clock. Jen was also there, though she seemed confident everything would turn out okay and merely killed time by training on her own. Fizzy was the only one of the group that still had social obligations and as such wasn't free to stand by Boxxy's side as much as she would've liked.

The shapeshifter inevitably completed its Rank Up without any problems. Not that much could happen to it while in the middle of its sealed-off home dungeon with numerous powerful entities guarding it. When it regained consciousness, the layer of unidentifiable red meat that it had been cocooned into burst open like a ruptured kidney. Nasty-looking yellow blood spilled all over the place with a disgusting splatter and unidentifiable screeching and hissing filled the dungeon, alerting the others to Boxxy's awakening. They gathered in the central chamber just in time to see it rise from the mess it had created.

[window]Rank up complete.
Congratulations! Your species has become Abomination (Eldritch).
Level up!
Congratulations, you are now a Level 1 Abomination! All Attributes +10.
The Abomination Job is now your Main Job.
Proficiency level increased. Corrupting Influence is now Level 1. INT +6. MNT +6.
Feat of strength performed! You have unlocked a new Perk: Lesser Colossal Vitality.[/window]

The creature's appearance was not all that easy for them to parse. It was a mess of dangling limbs, its bright red flesh fluctuating and undulating constantly both in shape and hue. Thick tentacles randomly lined with eyes, teeth, blades, and spikes wiggled around in the air like nightmarish grass stalks in a hurricane. It stood on half a dozen arm-like appendages with four fingers and large yellow eyes in the palm. And right in the middle of it all was a massive maw and tongue that looked like they could easily devour an entire family of four people and two pets in a single mouthful.

Confusing biology wasn't the only thing that made it difficult for observers to comprehend this creature, however. Though that was certainly part of it, everyone in that dungeon chamber instantly had the same sensation - that Boxxy looked somehow 'off.' Alien. Like it no longer belonged to this particular reality. It almost hurt to look at it. And this was a collection of battle-hardened demons and monsters, each of whom had either a natural or acquired resistance to mind-altering effects. It was highly likely that, should a commoner gaze upon the abomination, they might instantly lose their grip on sanity.

All of this was a byproduct of the inborn Skill of Boxxy's new species.

[window]**Corrupting Influence**
Description: When the mind falters, the flesh will soon follow.
Requirements: Be an Eldritch variant
Type: Active
Activation Time: 3 seconds
Cost: 1,200 MP
Range: 15 Meters
Effects: Attempts to permanently enslave the mind and corrupt the body of a target within range.
Passively reduces the mind magic resistance of all targets within range by 5% per Level of this Skill.
Passively reduces the scourge magic resistance of all targets within range by 3% per Level of this Skill.
This Skill may not be activated more than once every 24 hours.
The passive effects of this Skill are disabled during its cooldown period.[/window]

Not only did it indirectly amplify Boxxy's already formidable mindfuckery, but it could also be used to make slaves out of its enemies. The monster had no way of knowing exactly what Corrupting Influence would do to a person without testing it out first. Based on the context, it was safe to assume that it would mutate and disfigure its victims, turning them into a twisted mockery of their former selves. It would need to experiment with this for sure, but it had a more pressing issue to take care of at the moment.

[window]You are ravenous. Automatic HP and MP recovery are now disabled.
You are starving. You will lose 2% of your maximum HP every 60 minutes.[/window]

The monster leaped straight at the disorderly mountain of food at one end of the chamber. Nobody was sure just how much stuff was in there, but its combined weight was easily more than a ton. It wasn't just meat, either. Fish, fruit, vegetables, baked goods - anything and everything that had nutritional value had been hoarded into one messy pile. Of course, much of it had deteriorated, dried up, or straight up rotted during the lengthy Rank Up process. That didn't stop the 'newborn' abomination from indiscriminately gobbling it up, of course.

And, as was to be expected, it still wasn't quite enough. It used its Hylt Metabolism to actively suck up the dungeon's ambient mana to the point where the flow of magical energy could be felt like a weird breeze. Next, a pair of squid-like tentacles shot out of the whirlwind of gnashing teeth and attached themselves to Ambrosia's teats before she could react. They began draining her nectar with such vigor that the dryad cooed loudly in delight and collapsed to her knees.

Xera, sensing a chance to serve herself to her master, eagerly dove into the feeding frenzy. Much to her own glee, she wasn't ripped apart in an instant. What happened instead was that one of Boxxy's limbs wrapped around her like a giant snake. It then squeezed on her hard enough to make demon blood ooze from every orifice she had, including the new ones opened up by the tooth-like barbs on the monster's tentacle. The ex-succubus screamed in shameless

pleasure as she was quite literally wrung dry of all her bodily fluids, which were used to flavor and season the half-rotted pile of food as it was still being devoured. When no more blood would come out of her, her mangled and lifeless body disappeared somewhere inside that wet mess with an audible crunch.

“Well. That was… visceral,” Fizzy mumbled in disgust.

“Yeah,” Kora nodded. “Kind of brings me back.”

“I guess.”

The scene was oddly reminiscent of the time Boxxy first became a doppelganger. The golem and the former fiend had been there for that one, too, and it had developed in much the same way. Albeit on a much smaller scale. Not the most endearing of memories, but somewhat nostalgic nonetheless. Drea had also seen it, though in her case it was from the Beyond via the Boxxy Show. Witnessing it live was a whole other experience, as she found the disgusting display of gratuitous gluttony stoked her own appetite something fierce. Jen, on the other hand, showed very little reaction. She just stood there with a rather long list of groceries, rapidly ticking off which of them Boxxy had eaten. There wasn’t any real point to this, other than slowly advancing her Scribe Job.

By the time Boxxy was done feeding itself, it had done more than completely demolish the food stockpile. The ambient magical energy was now so thin that the overhead dungeon core was starting to lose power and Ambrosia’s breasts had been drained to the point where they had visibly reduced in size by several cup sizes. The dryad herself seemed to be loving this, though. This was the first time in millenia that her bust felt so light. It was honestly quite refreshing.

“How are you feeling, Boxxy?” Fizzy stepped up to the creature.

“Incredible. Like I could eat a literal mountain.”

The voice that oozed out of the monster echoed with an unnatural reverb, almost as if it was being shouted across an unimaginable distance. It was otherwise more or less the same as Boxxy’s natural tone, if a bit a deeper.

“Probably wouldn’t be very tasty, though,” it added matter-of-factly.

“Yeah, I can’t imagine dirt and rocks being all that flavorful.”

The golem allowed herself a relieved smile. She was glad to see her partner was still the same as ever. Granted, that might change as it adapted to its new species, but if its quirks and preferences survived the transformation from a mimic to a doppelganger, then they would most likely persist through this transition as well.

“How long was I out?” Boxxy asked.

“Precisely sixteen days, seven hours, eleven minutes, and ten seconds.”

Meaning that the shapeshifter had ‘slept’ through Keira’s wedding. The newlywed couple had most likely already left Azurvale for their honeymoon, but Boxxy didn’t give them more than a passing thought. It had no time to waste on those two.

Not when there were less than forty hours before the Dragon Festival was supposed to begin.