



ESSEN-SHELL ESCORT

The sands along the Farsail coast are dotted with ropes and red lamps. Posters at these sites read: **“WATCH YOUR STEP - ENDANGERED SEA TURTLE NEST!”** Beneath is a list of dates - discovery, last visited, expected hatch date... and a blank spot labeled “escort”. There are far too many nests for renowned herpetologist Stuart Waystern to watch over alone. While the notice insists that it’s cru-shell for the hatchlings to find their way to the sea on their own time, it calls for aid keeping danger out of their path - everything from litter and debris to predators like gulls, crabs, and weasels. If any of the hatch dates fits into your schedule, and a night babysitting on the beach is your idea of fun, perhaps you could sign up to help?

PARTICIPANTS

1. [Tiberius](#) (played by Rudy)

2. [Valerian](#) (played by Woopy)

Valerian Barnes

he/him • 22 • herbalist

-1 STR	Medicine (+2)
+2 DEX	Nature (+2)
+2 INT	Culinary (+1)
-3 CHA	Magic (+1)

infliction
lvl 1

A stylized illustration of a cat-like character with orange fur, blue eyes, and a red scarf. The character is holding a small green plant with yellow flowers. The illustration is set within a circular frame with a decorative border.

🍷 [APP] 🍷

Dusk was beginning to overset the lake, casting the water into a cool shade of pinks and purples as the sun began to set. The distant cries of gulls echoed through the air, along with the faint crashing of waves along the shore. Salt licked at the air, making Valerian's nose crumple at the smell. Sea salt has always been a familiar smell— living just outside of Seaworn City would get any cat used to the smell— although he never enjoyed it. It gave him bitter memories of lies and false hopes, and as of recently the horrible events that transpired at Dragon's Rest.

As a kitten he would always visit Seaworn City; either to visit his father who worked within the city walls, or to do chores that his Grandparents were too old to travel for. The city was a second home to him, even if it did have bad memories.

Although, I guess it's only natural for a place you've been at long enough to have bad memories associated with it.

Valerian wrinkled his nose at the smell once again, before pushing away those memories in favor of why he was here. *To work.* The herbalist had signed up to help the local wildlife after noticing he had a gap in his schedule. He planned to visit his Grandparents and sister later on in the week but gave himself a moment of rest so he wouldn't look like a mess in front of them. He still aches everywhere, limbs sore with all the running and sleepless nights he took at the Dragon's Rest. Not to mention there was his shoulder that had yet to heal properly after the Guild's first expedition out.

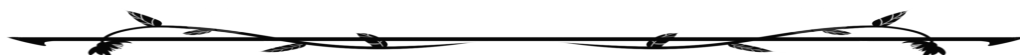
The herbalist took the nearest time slot and left it at that. Sure he was recovering, but that doesn't mean he can't help when needed. Besides, how hard could waiting into the night be? The beaches were bound to already be clean, so that meant keeping stupid gulls away while trying not to get too much sand on him.

With dusk on the horizon, Valerian looked outwards towards the sea, leaning against the railing on the stairs that led into the beach. His partner should be here soon...

I wonder who it will be?

¶ [1/4] ¶

SUMMARY: Valerian thinks about Seaworn city as he stares into the setting sun, waiting for whoever will join him for the night to arrive.





— ◆ □ ◆ —

◆ TIBERIUS BIRCH ◆

Ⓒ HE/HIM / ILLUSION LV. II Ⓜ

◆ STR (-3), DEX (+1), INT (+1), CHA (+1) ◆

— ◆ □ ◆ —

◆ Culinary (+1) ◆ Deception (+2) ◆ Stealth (+1) ◆

◆ Culture (+1) ◆

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□ SHEET ◆ TRACKER ◆ BOUNDARIES ◆ POST 1 □

— ◆ □ ◆ —

Truthfully, Tiberius was less looking forward to doting over tiny little turtles – *bless their hearts, not their fault* – and more looking forward to the sound of a jingle in his satchel! It was *amazing*, how many odd-jobs catfolk were willing to pay you for if you flashed them your kindest smile and assured them that you were a *diligent Wayseeker* who would see it done right!

Had Tiberius known that there was such a thriving gig economy out there – perhaps he never would have signed on and died – haha!
Gallows humor.

...

Weirdly, the chuckle that Tiberius's little inside joke to himself elicited from him was entirely earnest. *By the heavens*, had their second expedition been *something* – but he couldn't deny that on further reflection, something had settled in his soul.

An abstract caricature of belonging.
And it was far more than he ever thought possible.

It was funny, actually – to have joined the guild with *grand designs* about leaving his stuffy, suffocating attic room and moving into a modest, affordable house that he owned... no clear path on what came next, or what about that would *fulfill* him.

Now, when he thought of gold in his pockets, he thought instead of lively inns. He thought of shared meals – of delicacies and treats. Equipment – and useful trinkets for quests...

As he loped thoughtfully across a lantern-lit bridge toward the beach, he reflected quite pleasantly on his prior death. While not ambitious enough to work out *why* he'd been feeling so much lighter – he *had* noticed it... and it was nice.

With a pleasant glance back at the architecture, he adjusted the strap of his largest satchel over his good shoulder – feeling the hefty *tug* of the bountiful enrichment he had packed for himself and whoever might find themselves fortunate enough to be spending the night in his company!

Having packed journals and pens, playing cards, light snacks, a particularly pretty beach blanket he'd seen on offer... as much as it opposed his nature to *brag*, he couldn't help but feel that he'd made himself a particularly splendid partner!

Ah... he was actually starting to really look forward to this. The excitement of the unknown was intoxicating! *Two strangers... tied by fate!* The world could be so enchanting, when he let his mind wander... and so he did. As a little treat – up until he reached the set of stairs that descended down toward the beach...

...

...and as he locked eyes with his partner for the night – an *uncharacteristically* chagrin scowl threatened to play at his lip.

No... no...

Not you. Not *you!*

The thought was sharp and unwitting – going so *staunchly* against every time that he'd reflected on his previous interaction with *the prickly prick*. Where he'd so pridefully decided that he would be *fine* the next time that they met. That he'd be *more than fine* – that he'd be so untouchably enigmatic, a picture-perfect image, that the excursion on the beach would have meant **nothing!**

Yet, as his gaze fell upon striking blue eyes, highlighted so *damned*-starkly by the rich, dark patches that accented his eyelids– the nauseating *burn* that had so-frustrated him that week ago on the beach was beginning to ebb back into his chest.

And he already hated it. He hadn't been ready – not yet, damn it! He was still settling back in – *he wasn't*– **no!**

...

Wait a damned second – *what was he thinking?*

Not ready? Not *ready*? He had prepared a whole damned night of activities out – he had sifted through *dozens* of conversational starters, of topics, of scenarios in his head while he'd packed his satchel and meandered down to the beach. So *what* – that he'd wanted to delay this reunion a little longer! **Tough shit**, this was the breaks! Was he going to deal with it, or was he going to buckle to his knees and cry like a kitten?

This was the golden opportunity that he'd been looking for – to fix this!

With that rousing little internal monologue, Tiberius seemed to *shift*. In fact – had that initial expression **really** been there, really truly? (Yes...)

Sweeping his paw across his face to gently tousle his curly flourish a little more out of his eye, stylishly sweeping it to bounce at the side – he appeared to have been reborn anew, stoked in the flame of mortal embarrassment!

Instead of a *dark grimace*, he wore his most darling of roguish smiles – eyes half-lidded with a playful little glint. Now, he greeted Valerian with a grand wave of his paw, throwing it out in a performative sweep!

“Why, my *dearest* doctor! Fancy seeing you here!”

– ♦ □ ♦ –

◁ SUMMARY ♦

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Tiberius keenly anticipates the money he's going to make by babysitting these baby turtles – and thinks whimsically about how fine he feels about having died on Expedition I.

Oh.

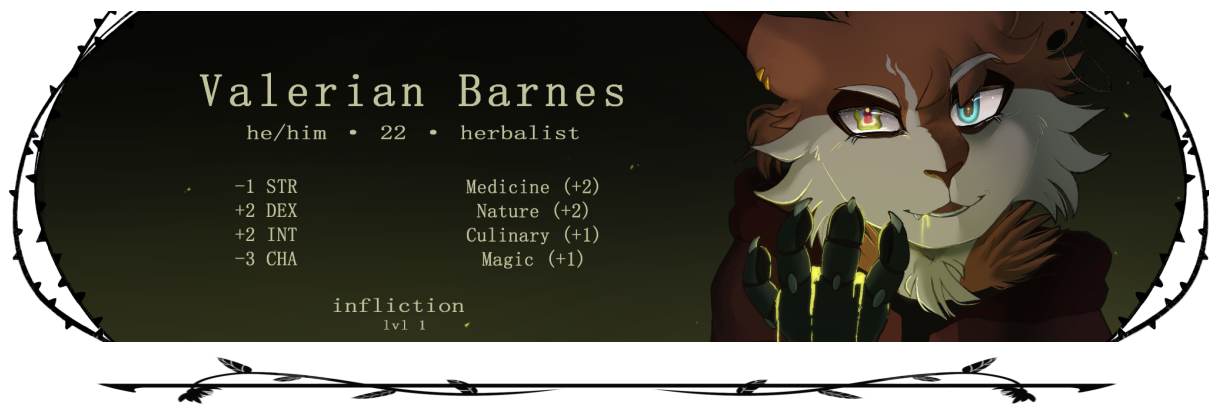
So he's spending the night with... *yeah*. Yeah, no– that's fine. *That's fine*. That's wonderful, even. That's **great!** He's being **really cool** about this.

♦ ACTION ▷

– ♦ □ ♦ –

Tiberius arrives at the beach (beach) (let's go get away).





🍷 [APP] 🍷

“Where are they? What could be taking them so long?” Blue eyes were lazily looking over the dimly lit bridge that led to the beach. It was obvious the ginger tom was growing impatient as he stood there, sea wind whipped past his fur and brows furrowing every so often. He leaned against the wood post, arms folded over his chest as he wore his typical traveling gear; unlike the cropped shirt he wore on Dragon’s Rest. The coat he wore now consisted of a hood that Valerian was trying very hard not to put on and save his poor ears from stinging in the wind.

No, that would hide his face and make his partner probably walk off. He had to keep some semblance of approachableness, even if irritation was growing off him in a storm. It’s *not like they were late*, but that didn’t mean that Valerian wanted to be standing here fighting against the chill that always existed by the sea. He’d rather be down there doing laps checking in on the turtles, or walking around the beach to keep himself warm. *I should’ve brought a damn blanket if I’m going to be stuck here all night.* He half finds himself musing as blue eyes follow the horizon once again.

That’s when he turned his head to see *him*.

Oh fuck no. Is this some kind of joke???

Strolling down the bridge was Tiberius. The fantastical cat looked the same as Valerian could remember; if anything less tired. Gold and black fur were no longer a mess, now the fluffy fur blew softly through the sea breeze. The herbalist wouldn’t let him feel jealous at the sight. His own prickly fur did little to help that, but at least Valerian wouldn’t have to worry about the care that came with that much fur. The ginger tom found himself staring into striking red eyes, a complete opposite to Valerian’s own blue. If he looked hard enough

Valerian could probably convince himself that he saw an equal amount of shock on Tiberius' face, but the dusk sky and dimly lit pathway prevented that.

Valerian couldn't keep the disgust off his face as he had the misfortune to watch as Tiberius swept himself into a deep bow. Unlike the tortie, Valerian wasn't able to hide his emotions very well. If he looked annoyed, he was annoyed. If he looked angry, he was angry. It was almost amusing how quickly Tiberius saw Valerian's face change from shock, to disgust, to annoyance, in a span of only a few seconds.

"Why, my dearest doctor! Fancy seeing you here!"

Dearest doctor?

A low groan escaped the herbalist as he brought his paws to his face and tried to rub some semblance of hope back into it. *No. You can do this. You're just protecting some sea turtles, not even he could mess that up right? You can handle being annoyed by him for a night longer, surely.* Valerian took another deep breath from behind his paws before taking them off his face and folding them once more.

I can do this. Valerian cleared his throat and perked his head upwards in a short nod of greeting. **"Looks like fate decided to play a game today, huh? I don't want to assume but with how packed you are, I have to guess you're here for the turtles? Iris?"** It was obvious Valerian was trying to stay composed, throwing out a nickname in a vain attempt to throw Tiberius off his game. Valerian looked somewhat smug as he watched for Tiberius' reaction.

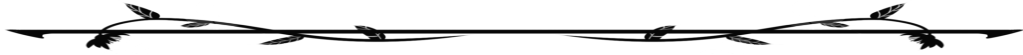
Iris Domestica. Blackberry Lily. Valerian didn't know how much Tiberius' knew about plants or flowers, but hopefully the nickname would throw him off. It's done so before with Edward and Lyre, even if unconsciously. Like most lilies, they were toxic to cat-folk. The nickname was a jab at the tortie, a hidden meaning for only Valerian to know. Although, Valerian half hopes Tiberius doesn't actually think he means an actual Iris, which tends to mean admiration.

Well if he does then maybe that'll throw him off more. Stupid idiot deserves to be confused.

✧ [2/4] ✧

SUMMARY: He has the misfortune of seeing Tiberius arrive, cursing the gods silently before greeting Tiberius back. He throws out a new nickname for him— Iris—in an attempt to throw Tiberius off his game.

ACTION: –



– ♦ □ ♦ –

◆ TIBERIUS BIRCH ◆

(HE/HIM / ILLUSION LV. II)

◆ STR (-3), DEX (+1), INT (+1), CHA (+1) ◆

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– ♦ □ ♦ –



□ SHEET ◆ TRACKER ◆ BOUNDARIES ◆ POST 2 □

– ♦ □ ♦ –

Iris?

In an unexpected twist of events, Tiberius found himself taken aback – unwittingly sacrificing a second of confusion to his opponent.

Surely, he couldn't have meant *the flower*, could he? If it were an allusion to his purple cloak, the herbalist would *certainly* find himself stumbling at the unforeseen implications of such a brazen... *nickname*?

But *as a herbalist*, surely even Prickly couldn't be so dense as to barrel through his learnings without brushing upon at least a little symbolism; *no, that wouldn't make sense*. He had a skull as thick as his *beating paw*, Tiberius knew that much from his little *revenge* *swat on the boat* (*having secretly hurt his paw a little*), but he couldn't have been *stupid* – at least in that capacity.

... What he knew ...

Come to think of it – did the prickly herbalist even *know* his name?

After all, Vulture had spared him a formal introduction, speaking only a *favorable attestment* (some well-earned slander) to the quality of his character...

and it wasn't as though the stoic North had been spilling great, verbose yarns of their travels together aboard the boat.

No, *she certainly hadn't...* – Tiberius thought, a swell of bitterness threatening to resurge at the memories that this trail of thought invited; so *deeply entrenched* with unsavory recollections of *his formal disagreement* with the 'good' herbalist

–

That wasn't the point.

The point – was that as far as Tiberius was concerned – *there was an endlessly alluring chance that Valerian didn't know his name at all.* A wave of adrenalized smugness rushed through him against his better judgment, tickling up the curling brush of his tail in such a manner that he couldn't help but give it a great, jubilant swish of arrogant pride. *Was that it? Could the herbalist be... compensating?*

That sly little look that had slithered into Valerian's dagger-sharp eyes – as though he was *taunting him*, as if he'd thought that *he* held the cards – so boldly masquerading that *he* could hold the upper hand. This was a *challenge*, wasn't it?

You prickly bastard – you think that you're playing games with me!

What had once been a tempered flame of embarrassment, now blossomed into *something new* – the rising heat of competition lapping at him, in the rarest manner that felt too exhilarating to deny himself. There was a sordid sort of affection to the revelation; that of a dormant strategist, pondering if he had *perhaps* stumbled upon a worthy *rival* – a feeling that he was *hardly* familiar with, as a collaborative soul. Yet, *something* about this herbalist just drew out an ire he didn't know he had. For once, he didn't *want* to diffuse this.

What *Valerian* didn't know – was that Tiberius *loved playing*.

– ♦ □ ♦ –

Within moments, the briefest sliver of disorientation had **not** been stiffly *vanquished* from his face – but it had *fallen* into a troubling look of *inquisition*, followed by an ever-more troubling *grin*. In fact, Tiberius appeared awfully *pleased about something*, like he thought he *knew something* – surely a harrowing response to witness unfolding in real-time before Valerian's very eyes.

If fate was to spin them a game, then who was Tiberius to deny it – and who would he be, if he didn't embrace it?

Poor, sweet Prickly had *thought* that he'd get one over, but he couldn't have been further from the truth, *bless his little heart!* Now that Tiberius knew this was a two-person game, he wouldn't go quite so easily!

“Iris...?” He echoed through a suspicious smirk, not letting this move go unacknowledged as he met Valerian's eye – though he couldn't quite keep the playful excitement out of his voice.

For an impulsive moment, he considered responding back with an effortless recollection of the herbalist's name – *that would show him* – but he hastily reminded himself that to pull such a card so early would be *preposterous!*

Well – maybe I've forgotten your name too... he thought, an impish little twinkle to his eyes as he tipped his head just so slightly to the side as he leaned forward on his toes from his polite distance – as though playfully examining Valerian's *closed-arm stance* – before leaning back with a slight nod, as though he was understanding something.

Of course, at that point – the motion was just performance. *Keep him on his toes!*

“I must admit, I'm rather tickled that you'd profess our meeting to be – what was the word you used again... *fate?*” His words *meandered* in the air, a teasing lilt leaking into the drawling silk, **“I'm truly honored, of course! And I must compliment your *astute eye for detail!* How delightful – *that we're already on the same page!*”**

But it appeared that Valerian wouldn't get much of an opportunity to get a word in – as Tiberius was already on the move. *On the move toward the guardrail, in fact* – and with an elegant little *skip-and-jump* more suited to a ballet recital, he had skipped the rail.

“Well, then?” Tiberius called jovially over his shoulder, crooked grin abound as he lingered daringly on the rim of cobble beneath the guardrail – giving a theatrical *lift-and-flare* of a leg, as if *showing off*.

“I would hate to keep our *esteemed patrons* waiting much longer – *wouldn't you?*”

And with that, he cast the heft of his package down into the sand below, making a satisfying *smack* as it stirred a gust of grains with its impact.

Turning to spring down himself, he suppressed secret doubts down with a cool logic – after all, *come now*. If he was going to treat his life as though it had already been spent – and he was *living on stolen time* – this was *nothing* in the grand scheme of things!

Not to mention, he'd already committed – and harbored a sneaking suspicion (that snaked into a creeping smirk), that this would *truly* stir his companion's ire...

With a final merry little twinkle of a wave, Tiberius sprung down after his luggage – disappearing *down* onto the beach below with a similar, lighter *smack* into the sand... though if Valerian peered over, it would seem that Tiberius was lucky enough to land on his feet!

And of course, such a *caring* act would prompt a warm smile-and-wave from below, should he choose to make that mistake.

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◀ SUMMARY ♦

– ♦ □ ♦ –

Tiberius is so, so lucky that **Valerian** can't see how lame his internal dialogue is right now. He gets competitively excited over the fact that **Valerian** caught him off-guard with a little mind game – and pleased at himself for catching on.

Now, he's decided that they're playing a game – but he hasn't really *solved* his unresolved baggage from *the island*.

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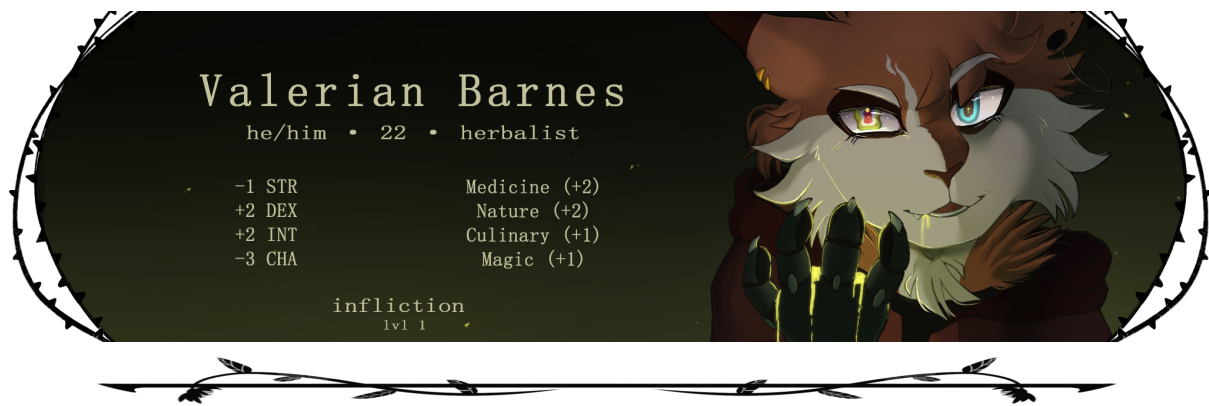
Sorry, **Valerian**.

♦ ACTION ▶

– ♦ □ ♦ –

Tiberius shortcuts a length of the stairs by jumping the guardrail and springing down into the sand, as if he's got something to prove.

Dexterity; 10



🍷 [APP] 🍷

Whatever expression Valerian was hoping to see on Tiberius' face wasn't there. Anger? Hysteria? Brooding? To see the tomcat act like a complete buffoon, tripping over his tail and getting tongue-tied at the very idea of such an insulting nickname. *No.* Instead, the herbalist was gifted with a troubling grin that made Valerian's skin crawl. Whatever foothold he thought he had was quickly swiped from beneath him as blue eyes met amber; the trickster wasn't even frazzled!

"Iris...?" Valerian listened as honeyed words came out of Tiberius' mouth, the nickname held no weight on his tongue. He would almost think the tom was offended if his eyes weren't gleaming with a challenge. *What is going on in that mind of his?* No matter how hard Valerian stared at the tortie he just couldn't get a read on him. It was all sorts of irritating. Valerian's never been the best at understanding folk, he oftentimes had to be told straight what someone was feeling to actually notice. The only folks he could really understand at a glance were his family and patients, and even then his patients are easy to read because that's just how *good* he was at healing! Learning how Tiberius ticked, his mannerisms, and what made him irritated; a part of Valerian wanted to understand him for just that reason.

Although that also required spending more time with him— Valerian thought rather bitterly and scrunched his nose up at the idea. *Well, I guess I do have all tonight, it's not like I can just up and leave.*

Just as he was doing his own study of the tortie in front of him, Valerian watched as Tiberius did his own examination, found something, and nodded in satisfaction; *Now what... what the fuck was that all about?!* His fur puffed up in indignation, blood running *warm* in what Valerian will only assume to be anger and nothing else. Not only was it embarrassing to fail at reading Tiberius, but for him to find something in Valerian that he was trying his damndest to keep his irritation at bay?

This jerk!

Valerian's ears were pinned back as he glared at Tiberius, doing his best to ignore the teasing words that continued to make his blood run hot. **"Meetings brought by fate aren't always a good thing—"** he lashed back quickly, refusing to let Tiberius think of this meeting as anything but a good thing. However, it seems like the illusionist wasn't about to listen to him. Instead, Valerian hissed as the tortie skipped the rail rather gracefully and turned back to face the herbalist.

The cocky grin Tiberius met Valerian with was just as irritating, so irritating that Valerian kept looking at it with annoyance. *That stupid grin. I bet he thinks he's hot shit right now, huh?!* Anger was plain on his face and Valerian did very little to try and hide it as he marched towards the guard rail and used a metal arm to stabilize himself as he swung his entire body over. It wasn't nearly as graceful as Tiberius, but the motion was smooth and stable by the time hind paws met the sand quietly.

Valerian wasn't sure if Tiberius was watching him when he swung over the guardrail but it was probably for the best that he didn't know. He caught up quickly and saw moments before Tiberius jumped onto the beach, the smack of sand *sounded* rather off but as Valerian peered down he was met with another blood-boiling smile and wave. Valerian returned the gesture with a rather graceful one as he stuck his middle finger up and followed after.

He was once again light on his feet as he landed on the sand, only cursing slightly when it brought up grains that would most definitely be stuck in his tail fur until he had time to clean it out. Valerian did his best to dust himself off and stood back to his full height—although that wasn't much considering how short he was.

Blue eyes examined the horizon line of the beach; the darkening sky was surprisingly bright with stars that danced through it. Now that they were a little ways away from the city it meant less light pollution— which in turn provided a rather beautiful sky for the two of them. It was skies like these that made Valerian miss being at home: sitting with his sister, making jokes as they lay upon a grassy hill. There have been countless times where the herbalist found himself waking up the next morning, clothes filled with grass stains and back aching from lying on the ground all night; there's nothing Valerian would change about those days.

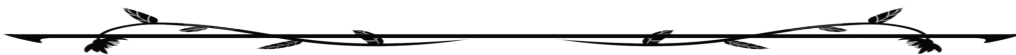
Now isn't the time to be sappy about the skies. The herbalist turned towards Tiberius' and looked down at the package that he had tossed down ahead of time. **"Why do you even**

have all that shit anyways Iris? What? Going to give the baby turtles a makeover before you send them off to the sea? You know we can't actually touch them, yeah?" Valerian was back to folding his arms over his chest as he perked a brow toward the illusionist. Despite the snappy comments, he was actually curious about why Tiberius was carrying so much. It's not bad to be prepared, but Valerian could only assume *someone like him* would bring booze and card games to slack off.

🍷 [3/4] 🍷

SUMMARY: He has the misfortune of seeing Tiberius arrive, cursing the gods silently before greeting Tiberius back. He throws out a new nickname for him– Iris– in an attempt to throw Tiberius off his game.

ACTION: –



– ♦ □ ♦ –

♦ **TIBERIUS BIRCH** ♦

Ⓒ **HE/HIM / ILLUSION LV. II** Ⓓ

♦ **STR (-3), DEX (+1), INT (+1), CHA (+1)** ♦

– ♦ □ ♦ –

♦ **Culinary (+1) ♦ Deception (+2) ♦ Stealth (+1) ♦**

♦ **Culture (+1)** ♦

– ♦ □ ♦ –

□ **SHEET** ♦ **TRACKER** ♦ **BOUNDARIES** ♦ **POST 3** □

– ♦ □ ♦ –

Vindication had never felt so sweet! Valerian's anger was clear – and *endlessly delightful* to elicit! He had the upper hand, *he could tell*, and it was putting him in the most *spectacular* mood! Did it *always* feel so good to win?

The middle finger elicited a chaste gasp from below, Tiberius's dainty little paw flicking up to cover his mouth. It was as though such *obscene gestures* were more than he could bear! Yet, without even a second more indulgence, he swept the facade from his face with effortless flair, casting his paw up to fix the flourish of his hair instead – preparing for Valerian to take the long way around with a cocksure whistle.

He had all but moved on from peering upward, readying himself to sling the bag back over his shoulder. Then, he'd saunter down to the foot of the stairs that descended onto the beach, soaking in the snide satisfaction of his shortcut; he could only *imagine* how furious the herbalist would look then.

What he wasn't expecting, however, was to catch the tail-end of *Prickly* slinging himself over the guardrail – giving him only a few precious moments to scoop up his bag and skid out of the target zone! **My!**

“Why, careful, you–!” Tiberius retaliated, pressing distinct pressures into each word as though it were an *art-form*. Releasing a haughty sigh, he protectively hefted the bag he now clutched under-arm as if to emphasize it, piquing a critical eyebrow at Valerian – flicking out his other paw to give a haphazard, accusatory point. It almost evoked the image of a touchy mother with a swaddled infant. Draining the *particularly heartfelt* emphasis from his voice, he spoke in his usual theatrical drawl, **“You almost landed on my whimsical sack of trinkets!”**

With a ‘tch’ and a little roll of his eyes, his signature smirk curled back onto his face... *unveiling the facade of his botherment!* Closing his eyes in his smile for a moment as he let his teeth shine, he so hoped that Valerian had taken the mock offense seriously!

“Now, what if the baby turtles had been there?” He tagged on, *cheekily chiding* on a factor that he knew was *bullshit*, **“So reckless!~”**

He *hardly* saw fit to humor the question that the herbalist had so stringently buried in derision. As if he would be *that easy!*

“What...? We can’t?” He asked sorrowfully, feigning surprise as he slowly tipped his head to face his bag – giving it a slow, sad blink, before returning his puppy-eyed gaze to Valerian, **“...You mean it?”**

However, he was quick to move on, snapping back to normal in an instance – lightly cuffing Valerian’s shoulder in a beckon.

“I’ll be the final judge of that. Keep pace – okay, or I’ll pick them all up.”

After giving Valerian a big grin, he began to march off onto the beach – pretty sure that they weren’t far from the nesting signs.

Now – what had Valerian been intending to do without equivalent supplies of his own? He was lucky that Tiberius *had* come prepared.

His mind’s eye couldn’t help but paint a picture of the huffy little doctor, plonked down on the beachside, his arms firmly crossed as he unblinkingly *stared down* the inching sea of tiny little turtles with his *wrath-wrinkled* face.

The bemusing thought brought a wiggle to his whiskers, subconsciously letting slip a demure little chuckle as he strolled down the beach, expecting Valerian to be following in tow.

Only... he didn’t *actually* know where he was going.

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◁ SUMMARY ♦

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Tiberius is *convinced* that he’s ratioed Valerian. This delights him endlessly.

♦ ACTION ▷

– ♦ □ ♦ –

Tiberius starts heading off in *a* direction. Is it the right one?

Valerian Barnes

he/him • 22 • herbalist

-1 STR	Medicine (+2)
+2 DEX	Nature (+2)
+2 INT	Culinary (+1)
-3 CHA	Magic (+1)

infliction
lvl 1

Watching Tiberius' voice grow more pressured with every word was rather amusing to the herbalist. It looked like the tom didn't know exactly how to phrase his thoughts into words; making the illusionist look like a blubbering fool in Valerian's eyes. *Was that bag precious to him or something? With the way he threw it before jumping down you'd have no idea.*

"Oh stop being so over dramatic, I was nowhere near close enough to land on your stupid bag. Besides those turtles can barely make it to the shore, how the hell would they be all the way out here? Moron." the herbalist responded with a roll of his eyes, unintentionally copying Tiberius' gesture which only made his fur prickle more. *I should be the exasperated one right now!* It seems Valerian definitely fell for the mock offense, but probably not in the way Tiberius wanted him to: there was no ounce of guilt on the ginger cat's face.

*I am **not** falling for your stupid kicked-dog look.* Valerian pointedly said to himself as he glared back at Tiberius. **"No. We. Can't."** he gritted out bluntly. Just as Valerian was about to go on a rant about how stupid that would be— they're babies they can barely move!— Tiberius cuffed his shoulder as moved past him in one fluid motion. Valerian barked out a **"Watch it!"** As he watched Tiberius march further into the beach.

This stupid cat is going to be the death of me. Who does he think he is? I get he likes acting like he's better than me but could he wipe the act off his face for one second? I'm trying to do a job here, and with his ugly mug staring at me— I mean messing with me— damn it-! He's so annoying!

Valerian lets himself mutter a string of curses as he trudges rather begrudgingly after the Illusionist in the right direction.

It doesn't take long for the two of them to reach the point they were supposed to watch. The herbalist had come down earlier to get a look at the place while it was still bright out and did his best to clean up the area. Not like there was much to clean up, the cat-folk who was previously in charge of keeping an eye on the turtles did a good job. Now, really, all Valerian and Tiberius had to do was keep them safe.

The herbalist came to a stop surveying the land once again— but as his eyes flew over the empty sand he noticed a certain someone kept walking. *Did he... not know where he was going and still took the lead?* An amused smirk was on the ginger tom-cats face as he came to that conclusion.

He doesn't. Does he?

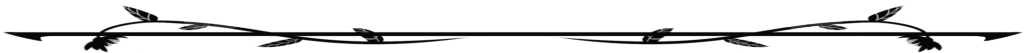
Valerian decided instead of notifying his partner, he'd instead let the fool wander as far as he wishes. The ginger cat let a smug look plaster on his face as he simply stared. His eyes were narrowed in glee, and he did his best to hide a soft chuckle into the back of his hand. He wasn't sure if it was muffled completely, but this sight was definitely worth it.

Looks like with one stupid move on Tiberius' side, Valerian was back in the lead for their small game.

🍷 [4/4] 🍷

SUMMARY: Valerian watched Tiberius make an absolute fool of himself.

ACTION: –



– ♦ □ ♦ –

◆ TIBERIUS BIRCH ◆

Ⓒ HE/HIM / ILLUSION LV. II Ⓢ

◆ STR (-3), DEX (+1), INT (+1), CHA (+1) ◆

– ♦ □ ♦ –

◆ Culinary (+1) ◆ Deception (+2) ◆ Stealth (+1) ◆

◆ Culture (+1) ◆

– ♦ □ ♦ –

□ SHEET ◆ TRACKER ◆ BOUNDARIES ◆ POST 4 □

– ♦ □ ♦ –

Tiberius's wonderful mood knew no bounds!
Though Valerian *hardly* seemed embarrassed enough for his liking when he'd been caught so unaware by the fakeout, it was ultimately inconsequential. How could it not be, when the herbalist treated him to such a hilarious string of petty

little curses. The game was as good as over – and dear, sweet Prickly might as well concede.

Oh, but he was sure that they'd come to have a wonderful night anyway, as soon as the stubborn herbalist let his guard slip. *Perhaps he'd even share his cards.*

It was doubtless – *the incident at Dragon's Rest had been a fluke!*

...

Or at least, that was what he had *wanted* to think.

That was what he *had* been very comfortable thinking, in fact. It didn't take long for a distinct lack of uttered obscenities to strike him – not to mention the disappearance of plodding pawsteps behind. Initially, he had responded in pure curiosity; *had the herbalist seen something along the way?*

And that was when he heard it.

A tiny, stifled chuckle.

His *breath caught*. And to his chagrin, the new distance between himself and Valerian seemed to loom – as the pieces of the puzzle tumbled into place, made *blazingly apparent* by that too-pleased little sneer that had spread across Valerian's stupid little face–

Of course, Tiberius's next action tumbled right into his lap! Fine-tuned to his foolproof formula – a modest reclamation of a mistake seldom backfired onto its proponent, *and with a conniving cat like himself*, such lackadaisical paw pointed to a 'misstep' would breach the question of if it were staged!

It was only the most natural course of action – and it kept him *invincible*. He'd have an airy laugh about it – and brush off that he was just sooo *directionless*–

“Ahhh!~ It's a wonderful view of the sea!”

So, perhaps that was why – when he caught himself silkily stumbling into a haughty retort to *an invisible accusation* – he felt like *continuing to walk!* Continuing to walk straight into the ocean. *And hopefully not returning!*

...

It's a wonderful view of the sea?!

From the significant distance between them, he could only pray that the *grimace* that had crept into his grin appeared to be *sheer nautical whimsy*. It was dark enough – right? *Right?*

“Such a *shame* that *you’re* missing out!”

He *grinned harder* – and a lie had never felt more *amateurishly blatant*.
Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!

...

That stupid herbalist! Why did I–!

Realizing that he had theatrically swept his arms out with the defensive proclamation – he so *smoothly* endeavored to... cross them over his chest. Yes. That’s what he would do – *okay* – and he’d sweep around. He’d sweep around and look out at the sea. *Sure*, had he been a third party, he could have throttled himself – *but it was water under the bridge!* It wasn’t.

This was just a *little misstep* and it was *all Valerian’s fault*. He was overthinking it.

Surely, he could sell this. He would take a moment – he would recollect himself, *and then*, he would be back on top. He ignored the prickle of hot *embarrassment* running up his spine. With a faux, cocksure laugh, he spun on his heel – thrusting his arms from their folded position to plant his paws firmly on his hips, casting his dramatic gaze out to the open ocean!

...

And the very second that his face was out of the loathsome herbalist’s line of sight, his grimace *deflated miserably*. Suppressing a frustrated huff, his fluffy cheeks puffed a little with his *uncharacteristic* scowl, through *gritted teeth*.

Of course, he *stringently* bit down on dismissing the tickling heat of *annoyance* that had crept up his neck, prickling uncomfortably in his cheeks. He was above that – *this didn’t happen to him*. Facing away from the insufferable herbalist, he looked *fine!* He forced the image from his mind – *of that piece-of-work-pincushion* and his ridiculous, *smug* little smile–

A painted silhouette against the ever-darkening sky, Tiberius’s tail gave a firm swish – *that moved more like a singular lash* – before continuing to waver and weave in its usual, hypnotic pattern.

It had been a *hot second*. He was *really* getting a look at the sea!

– ♦ □ ♦ –

◀ SUMMARY ♦

– ♦ □ ♦ –

Tiberius is having a wonderful time – *until* he’s caught off-guard by **Valerian**’s stifled laugh. Fumbling his typical strategy, he forces his own hand into a tooth-grinding lie that is *not* his style (he *meant* to keep going!) – and privately laments *very dramatically* about how awful it is, while trying to play into his own (*obvious*) lie. Your +2 **deception** won’t activate for this one. “*Sorry*” *about that, buddy*.

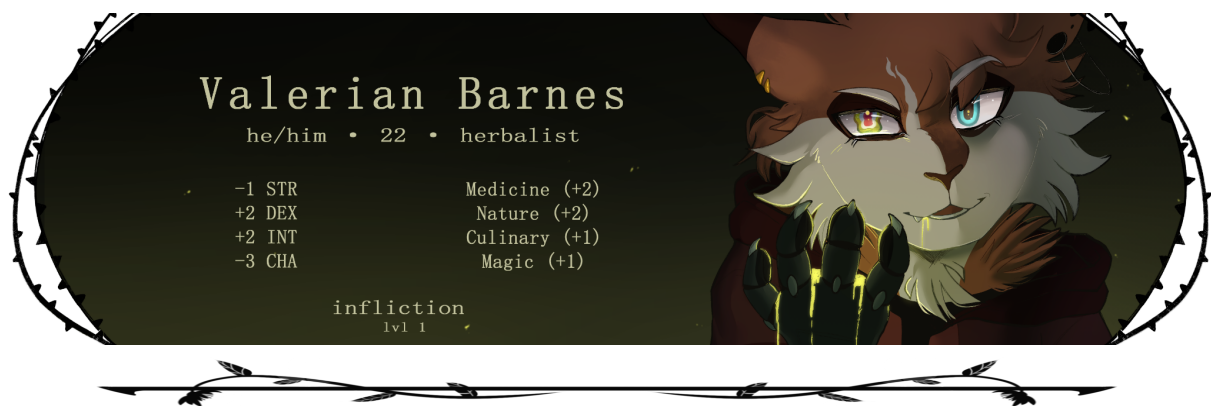
He can only hope that **Valerian** won’t laugh at him any more.

♦ ACTION ▶

– ♦ □ ♦ –

Tiberius feels embarrassed for once in his life. He couldn’t tell you *why*.

He decides that he’s not – *because that’s something that you can do*.



👉 [APP] 👈

He is *still* going.

Just as Valerian thought he was in the clear in hiding his laugh, he got a clear view of the tortie’s hitched breath and blink-and-you-miss-it shock that was lovingly illuminated by the

starlight above. While it was gone in a second, the retort that followed made a wobbly smile appear on the herbalist's face. It was obvious he was trying to hide it the way his paw covered half of his face.

No shot this is real, no way he's actually this stupid.

“Such a shame that you’re missing out!”

Valerian watched as Tiberius turned to the sea as if to look wistfully out at the waves.

He really is!!

“BAHAHA-” Valerian couldn’t hold it in– he laughed. And he laughed loudly. It was ugly, loud, and mean, but there was obvious joy on his face. It was all teeth as the herbalist hunched and held onto his stomach. **“Pfft. O-oh my Gods this– hahaha– this can’t be real. You’re so... stupid–”** In a way, Tiberius’ performance really did work, albeit at the cost of the tortie’s pride.

It took a moment for Valerian to recollect himself. He wiped away tears that began to form at the corner of his eyes and rubbed at his cheeks to try and stop the sneering smile that was on his face. The herbalist had already long forgotten about his discomfort towards the sand in his fur and the job they had to actually do. Right now it was just the two of them, acting like kits playing a dumb game of ‘I am better than you.’

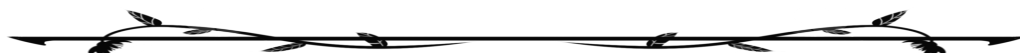
Instead, the ginger tom looked up to see Tiberius *still* staring out at the sea– and almost broke back into a fit of laughter. **“Haha. Stop staring at the sea already and get your ass over here.”** Valerian vaguely motioned back toward the turtle nest where unhatched eggs lay. There was a hole surrounded by fence posts that would keep others away from the nest, and while Valerian understood how easy it was to pass by there was no way Tiberius was getting an easy way out of this.

He’s not living this one down– not that I’ll be spending much time with him outside of this.

🍷 [4/4] 🍷

SUMMARY: Valerian does, in fact, laugh VERY loudly at Tiberius.

ACTION: –





— ◆ □ ◆ —

◆ TIBERIUS BIRCH ◆

Ⓒ HE/HIM / ILLUSION LV. II Ⓜ

◆ STR (-3), DEX (+1), INT (+1), CHA (+1) ◆

— ◆ □ ◆ —

◆ Culinary (+1) ◆ Deception (+2) ◆ Stealth (+1) ◆

◆ Culture (+1) ◆

— ◆ □ ◆ —

□ SHEET ◆ TRACKER ◆ BOUNDARIES ◆ POST 5 □

— ◆ □ ◆ —

A chorus of *graceless laughter* rung out behind Tiberius, the herbalist behind him practically *guffawing* with – doubtlessly fuelled by some *unearned schadenfreude*. The bastard!

Though he tried to concentrate his efforts into reestablishing control of his above-it-all demeanor, the sound of laughter almost tugged at his ears – such a hearty, *full* sound – it hardly sounded befitting of the irritable doctor. If Tiberius had to hazard a guess, from the sheer volume of *unrestrained whimsy* – this was perhaps Valerian's twisted equivalent to seeing the first cherry blossoms of the season bloom, or to hearing a newborn kitten's first laugh.

The weight traitorously lifted from his scowl, his muzzle crinkled at the midpoint with reluctant... *curiosity*.

His bewildered nosiness impulsively overrode what *certainly wasn't* annoyance prickling in his pelt – *it wasn't his fault that some cats couldn't appreciate the majesty of the sea* – rewriting the narrative for himself – what in the heavens would that sourpuss laughing his guts up look like anyway?

With a reluctance that carried the distinct slowness of a young bride's shy peek out of the dressing room for the very first time, set to be adored by her doting

family – yet garnished with the foul expression of a tom who had just eaten *several* lemons, Tiberius slowly turned his head back to see–

Valerian – laughing his guts out.

Though Tiberius's brows were taut with frustration, lip curled up on one side... he wasn't immune to the ghost of a smile, trying to upturn in – *what was it – annoyed amusement?* The fervid *not-embarrassment* certainly remained, but as he lay eyes upon the doctor, consumed by sneering superiority as he wiped the tears from his eyes, clutching his stomach with the ferocity of his gleeful laughter.

“*How very mature,*” Tiberius called back immaturely, with a rather snooty inflection.

Judging by Valerian's reaction, *clearly*, this had been a set-up. Yet – Tiberius was so, so painfully vulnerable to *fun*, however frustrating it was to be tricked. And of course, he had to hand it to him – *it was an excellent execution*. It was staggeringly difficult not to smile back openly – he just looked so *stupidly happy with himself*.

To think that Valerian said that **he** was stupid!

That pinecone had *some nerve* calling him stupid – when he looked this *ridiculous* himself! Yet, the thought didn't come with derision, but more with *unrestrained playfulness*. *What an idiot!* He was down on Tiberius's level – and he didn't even know it!

The sea lapped quietly, a short distance away.

Turning back away, Tiberius's contradictory expression blossomed into a malicious grin of his own. He had seen how meticulous Valerian had been about getting the sand out of his fur – when they'd finally stopped arguing. If he had to hazard a guess, *surely* he would find the sludgy texture of wet sand utterly *detestable*.

With a mischievous twinkle in his eye, Tiberius fastened his sack to his non-dominant shoulder, dropping down low and sinking his paw through the sand closest to the tide's reach. Slimy and gooey, it slipped through the cracks between his foretoes with an ugly *squelch* as he curled together a hefty glob of

the stuff. "Ew," he murmured to himself as he tested its weight, wicked grin spreading as he envisioned the dismay across the herbalist's *dumb face*.
Would he scream? Tiberius hoped that he'd scream.

And Valerian, who now so condescendingly welcomed him back - was none the wiser.

"Oh, I'm-" Tiberius replied lowly, a shockingly ominous edge to his voice...

With Valerian's eyes on him, he daintily spun on one paw, the other lifted sweetly behind... and gave him the most twistedly wicked little grin of his life as with a teasing delay, he slowly arched his paw of slurry up for the herbalist to see.

He was still, for just a second.

...before purring into a deceptively sweet little sing-song, "- on my wa-a-ay~!"

Tiberius broke into a dash.

How was Valerian to know that it was a hollow threat?

— ♦ □ ♦ —

◀ SUMMARY ♦

— ♦ □ ♦ —

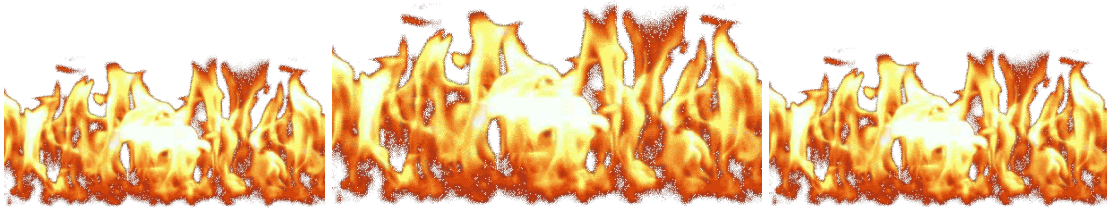
Tiberius can't bring himself to resist the whimsy of playing and having fun – even if he's frustrated by getting embarrassed. Valerian is so stupidly happy! Still, he's not just going to let Valerian have this. He thinks that he can freak him out if he jumpscares him with a pawful of wet sand, holding still for a second before making a mad dash at him.

♦ ACTION ▶

— ♦ □ ♦ —

Tiberius pretends that he's going to glob Valerian with some wet sand.

oh well it just keeps fuckening.



Valerian Barnes

he/him • 22 • herbalist

-1 STR	Medicine (+2)
+2 DEX	Nature (+2)
+2 INT	Culinary (+1)
-3 CHA	Magic (+1)

infliction
lvl 1

💧 [APP] 💧

It was well worth making a fool of himself– laughing through the night air loud enough for all to hear– when Valerian’s eyes gratefully got to lay witness to Tiberius’ very-taut frustration. The crinkling of his nose appeared as his lip curled up into a *definitely not*

amused smile, the pinched brows that gave way to his real feelings, it was all so *real*. It almost made Valerian break into another bout of laughter, another fit of small chuckles slipped past him before the herbalist had a chance to stop; all he could do was muffled it by holding his fist to his mouth.

“How very mature.”

“HEY! It’s not my fault you were being a moron. It’s like teaching a kitten to know their limits, you gotta let them embarrass themselves. You, of course, being the kitten.”

Valerian was practically singing his praises at comparing Tiberius to a small infant, eyes glittering with self-praise. He almost looked like he was about to pat himself on the back, the only thing making him refrain was Valerian not wanting to snoop down to *Tiberius’ level*. Like he wasn’t already there.

Just as he was calming himself down, movement caught in the corner of his eye. Valerian watched in obvious confusion as Tiberius crouched into the sand, paws getting dangerously close to the sea waves. *Was he seriously still playing along like he didn’t just make a fool of himself?* ***“Hey little minnow, if you’re not careful the sharks are gonna get you. Can you stop acting like you weren’t lost and get over here already?”*** the edge of irritation was back in his tone as the herbalist called out. He closely watched Tiberius, squinting through the dark.

What was he...-

"Oh, I'm- on my wa-a-ay~!"

Tiberius dashed towards him.

“...Eh?”

Alarm bells went off instantly, and despite it being hard to see Valerian could tell he was hiding *something* in that arched paw of his. What did he grab in the ocean? Is it a handful of gross sea water, or maybe some seaweed that was dredged up? Either way, Valerian had *no* desire to stick around to see what it was.

He stumbled into a sprint. Paws scrapped against the loose sand making the herbalist fumble for a few moments, all the while Tiberius got closer. If he was any lesser he’d let a squeak slip out, something he often did as a kit whenever playing tag with his sister and Peanut. He was never good at the game– either his sister and companion were just good at the game or he just sucked– Valerian didn’t know.

Valerian managed to find his feet, only steps away from Tiberius now as he broke into a four-legged sprint that quickly turned into two when sand managed to slip into the mechanics of his arm. “**No-nono no- getaway you wilted Iris-**” he yelped as his voice pitched with panic.

Spirits above, he felt like a *kit* again, running away like he was playing a game of chase. The playful adrenaline that raced through his veins felt like just a distant memory, one he has long forgotten. The last time he got to play was ages ago when his sister still had the energy to! It wasn't a bad memory, but the reality was *he should be working right now*.

Swinging around, Valerian laid his stakes in the sand and kept up a defensive posture. Hands were outstretched with palms steady as if to calm a raging animal. “**Hey. Hey now. Come on. We should get back to work, not play around like kits.**” The herbalist's voice was strained in anger with a wobbly smile; yet despite the tone, the absolute whimsy in his blue eyes seemed to dance.

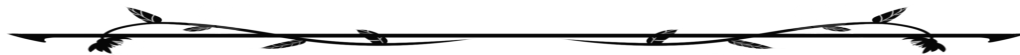
He was slowly backing away but with the grace of a fish out of water, he trips against the sand. Valerian grunted loudly, his newly scarred shoulder strained in a ghostly pain but quickly recovered. He had gotten the injury back during the first expedition, so it was nice to know that it was becoming less of a pain in his tail.

“**Ughh..**” Valerian groaned as he recovered from the fall, peering an eye open as sand dripped from his fur. Great. Lovely. This still be a blast to clean up.

❖ [4/4] ❖

SUMMARY: Valerian gets scared and runs away like a baby, before eating it and falling into the sand

ACTION: –





◆ TIBERIUS BIRCH ◆

Ⓒ HE/HIM / ILLUSION LV. II Ⓢ

◆ STR (-3), DEX (+1), INT (+1), CHA (+1) ◆

◆ Culinary (+1) ◆ Deception (+2) ◆ Stealth (+1) ◆
◆ Culture (+1) ◆

□ SHEET ◆ TRACKER ◆ BOUNDARIES ◆ POST 6 □

In an unexpected twist of fate - this extent of tomfoolery had not been a part of Tiberius's grand design.

He had assumed in complete sincerity that Valerian would be barren of delight for the rest of the evening, *for the rest of his life, even*. Surely, forcing back that much laughter from his chronic scowl must have given him indigestion. Any more joy - and Tiberius fretted that his body would give out!

With the self-congratulatory gloating cooling on the pinecone's tongue, he was certain that what was intended as a rather *vindictive* - no, *good-natured* - spot of revenge would lead to nothing but a yelp, followed by an earful of snappy retort.

Make no mistake, Tiberius was more than ready to be satisfied by such a response! He would pretend that he was delivering the glob of sea-sand to the baby turtles, he would have paper-thin '*plausible*' deniability, and they would move on.

He couldn't have possibly expected what came next.

Where he had expected a cutting remark to slice the levity, the herbalist had instead begun to scramble - *genuinely scramble*, slipping from fours to twos and everything between - off in a flurried direction. Fortunately for him, in his

hurry, he wouldn't have to bear witness to his pursuer's astonished silent gasp of amazed bemusement. Of course, without missing a beat, Tiberius's whole demeanor changed - his evil grin thinning to a mischievous smirk that creased the corners of his eyes into little amber crescents in the night.

What else was he to do?

“No-nono no- getaway you wilted Iris-” Valerian had squeaked out- with Tiberius teasing back in a silk-laced purr, the rotten smirk *audible* in his voice, **“Oh, I’m wilted now – am I?”**

Tiberius couldn't be so easily misled – that was a little smile, try as he did to hide it. A little rush of pride swelled in Tiberius's chest - like he'd won something; gotten one over on that prickly doofus.

Nice try!

With all the performing grace of a thespian, Tiberius staggered threateningly forward, baring a sharp-toothed grin as the herbalist backed up - playing his part perfectly as the dastardly antagonist. Yet, there was something harmlessly *silly* about the *theatrically malicious grin* matched by the *mischievous glint* in his eye, so clearly selling himself unapologetically into this overblown part.

Oooh – you're *having fuuun!*~

"Oh dear!" Tiberius proclaimed, actually sounding and appearing quite surprised. As widened eyes watched Valerian tumble unceremoniously back, the thick squelch of a pawful of sludgy sea-sand could be heard slapping its dense weight into the dry sand below – blessedly missing the poor, upturned doctor.

The following succession of events played out in slow motion; at first, he had been dumbfounded. Then, an unstoppable smile forced against the round of his cheeks. A snickering laugh caught on his lip, held tightly with a pinch until...

With a bluster of air, Tiberius broke into a poorly-restrained laughing fit of his own, **"Oh no - oh dear,"** he repeated, practically glowing with delight. Widening his stance to stoop down somewhat, he fought against his giggling fit to present Valerian with a... goopy paw.

Immediately noticing the slimy coating as he set it in front of him, he quickly drew it back - seeming to fall even further into amusement as he stifled back his cackling to offer Valerian his nice *dry* paw instead, wearing his *big smile* with mischievous pride.

Tiberius snickered through a smile that was almost too genuine to be mad at, had he not lathered the words with such a tauntingly silky lilt.

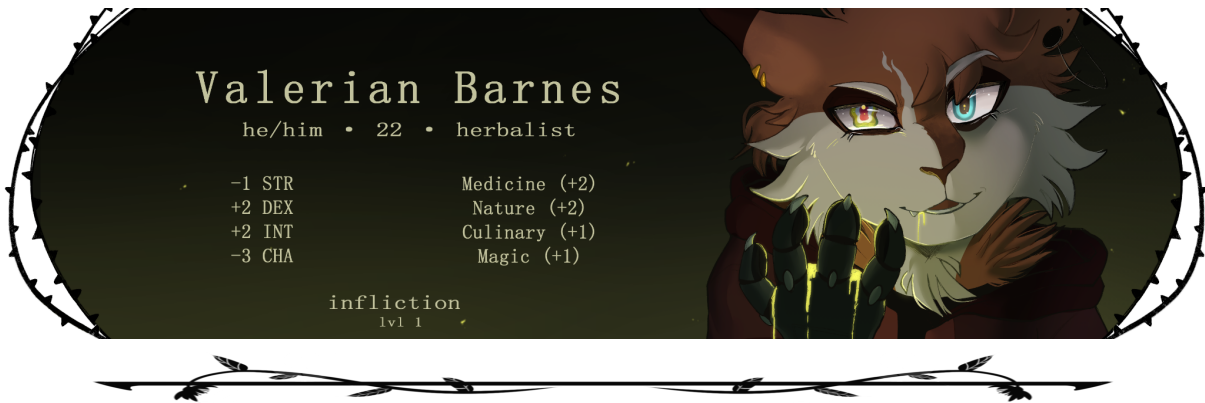
"Aww, poor thing!"



◁ SUMMARY ▷

—◆□◆—

Playing + having fun :)



🍷 [APP] 🍷

Cleanliness has always been an important factor in Valerian’s day-to-day life. Even before he became cursed and his fur became the prickly dry mess that it was, he gave himself daily groomings. It had become a routine with how often he’d dig through the dirt and only became more obsessive once his curse had taken over him and dry fur became more

meaningful to maintain. After all, having a thorny tail that manages to pick up every grain of dirt or patch of leaves made it important to do so.

So laying here, sand encasing his body and getting into the joints of his arm, was definitely what he was trying to avoid when he got here. *Damn it, why is it always so hard to run through the sand?!* Valerian heard a surprised gasp escape Tiberius, and the herbalist glared upwards to see the tortie drop a rather large glob of wet sand. **“Were you seriously about to throw fucking– wet sand at me–”** he hissed in surprise but cut himself off as the illusionist broke down into a similar laughing fit.

Valerian felt his blood run warm as he stared at the hunched form in front of him: eyes were squinted in laughter, smile tilted upwards illuminating the joy in his face. All of it made Valerian let out a flustered hiss, **“Fuck off!”** he was glaring daggers at the cat towering above him. Unable to keep eye contact with the tortie, he instead focused on dusting off as much sand as he could.

Movement in the corner of his eyes dragged Valerian’s gaze away from his impromptu cleaning, and instead, he was greeted with a... *goopy paw*. Valerian whipped all amusement off his face as he stared blankly at Tiberius like that was some sick joke. Whether he meant it or not– it looked like he meant it with the way he started giggling like that– the tortie was quick to swap paws and offer Valerian an easier way to get up. *A cease-fire, was it?*

Fuck no.

There was no way Tiberius was about to get the last laugh. Even if this was petty and childish– well...

Well fuck it! He’s a petty guy!

The only thing that gave Valerian away was the evil glint in his eyes he was unable to hide, but he was too quick. In one swift motion, the herbalist grabbed the offered paw and **TUGGED** Tiberius towards him with all his body weight. It was easier to use gravity against the illusionist, especially with the bag on his back that was already weighing him down.

Just as Tiberius came falling down, Valerian was quick to scoot out of the way so the tortie could land in his own pile of sand. It was more than satisfying to hear the impact and sand shifting around him. **“Oh! That was clumsy of you.”** the herbalist had a sly-looking grin on his face as he stumbled back up and dusted more sand off himself, **“You should be more careful, you could’ve landed on me.”**

He stared proudly down at Tiberius, taking in every bit of the uncoordinated cat beneath him. *Serves him right, he's the real I went looking like a fool.*

Now that he was standing back up he could feel the sand falling off of him. Ew. Valerian gave his fur a shake, sending grains of sand and dust flying off him and right onto the fallen Tiberius. It was another petty act but at least it made Valerian feel better, and it was better than following his revenge-addled brain that wanted to bury Tiberius in the sand.

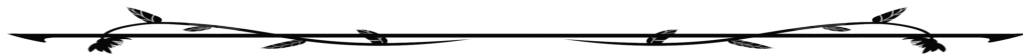
“Anyways get off your lazy ass, we have actual work to do. Those turtles may have already hatched for all we know.” He'd offer a paw, yet he knew where that would lead to.

Instead, Valerian occupied himself with cleaning and shaking as much sand out of the joint of his arm as he could. He grumbled to himself in the process, but still kept an eye on Tiberius in case the tom wanted to follow up with any more petty revenge.

✧ [4/4] ✧

SUMMARY: He gets his petty revenge!! Down with Tiberius!! It's your sandy-ruination!!

ACTION: –



– ◆ □ ◆ –

◆ TIBERIUS BIRCH ◆

Ⓒ HE/HIM / ILLUSION LV. II Ⓢ

◆ STR (-3), DEX (+1), INT (+1), CHA (+1) ◆

– ◆ □ ◆ –

◆ Culinary (+1) ◆ Deception (+2) ◆ Stealth (+1) ◆

◆ Culture (+1) ◆

– ◆ □ ◆ –



□ SHEET ◆ TRACKER ◆ BOUNDARIES ◆ POST 7 □

Admittedly, as he found himself pancaked onto the sand (after letting an unceremonious little yelp slip, of course) – Tiberius couldn't help but reflect upon the fact that if it were him being spoken to in such a manner, he would surely have done the same.

“Oh! That was clumsy of you. You should be more careful, you could've landed on me.”

Yea-eah... – he deserved that...

The back of his head bounced slightly in the sand with a restrained yet impish little chuckle that caught on a near-inaudible snort.

...not that he regretted it, of course!

The look on Valerian's face had been *priceless*! Gah, if moments could be framed!

Making surprisingly little effort to resist his fate, Floor-berius absently swept his arms up in the sand a little – feeling how the cool granules shifted with a wavy ripple with the motion. Under the watchful gleam of the moon, the sand had grown so remarkably cold; it was almost soothing, actually.

Though he knew from *Dragon's Rest* experience that the irritant little grains would soon wedge themselves in every curl and crack he possessed, taking a moment to lay in the sand set that a little further back.

Valerian would be crestfallen to know that the basking calico didn't even notice the delicate dusting of sand that he was so kindly wafting onto his cape.

“Anyways get off your lazy ass, we have actual work to do. Those turtles may have already hatched for all we know.”

“Mmm,” Tiberius responded absently.

All-in-all, Tiberius was still feeling remarkably pleased with himself. Oh, he felt bad for it and all – but he couldn't help looping Valerian's little, *‘Fuck off!’* in his head. Of all the cats in the world, he had hardly expected that Valerian could be so cute. The tone of his voice... why, if Tiberius hadn't known any better...

Hmm.

That was an experiment for another time, perhaps. *After all*, they had devoted an astonishing amount of time to chicanery thus far – and as much as Tiberius had found himself having **far** more fun than expected, they *were* here to do a job at the end of the day. Feeling pleasantly buzzed from what *he* saw to be a satisfying draw – Tiberius gave a soft little sigh of contentment, ready to set aside his playtime for a little work.

Following that, he promptly rolled himself onto his side, feeling the sack roll loosely off his shoulder, where it would stay in the sand after he stood – only to find that *somebody* was *eying* him; in the manner that one might eye a fox creeping around a chicken coop.

With a bemused little exhale from his nose, he gave Valerian an uneven little smile – piquing an eyebrow as if to ask if he was *really* still keeping an eye on him.

Laying so *innocently* flopped onto his side, with his lower body still mermaid-tailed against the sand, he resembled a rather roguish seal – and the image was only exacerbated as he flipped the rest of himself over onto his side with a little jerk.

Giving a dramatic little sigh, he rested his head into the sand as he peered sweetly up at Valerian, pulling what *must have been* his best angelic act, **“You’re right. I was being so clumsy and careless... I could have really hurt you!”** Pushing his muzzle down a little as he spoke, it was beginning to grow blatantly clear that he *wasn’t* getting up, “You’re right. It’s about time that we got to work.”

Extending his clean paw out, Tiberius cheesed Valerian a big grin.

“Help me up – *please?*”

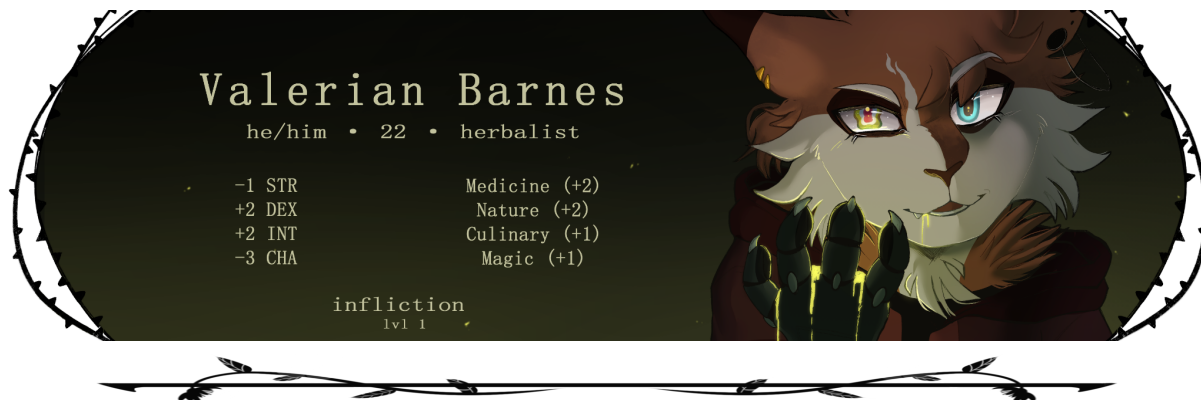
Wow. A cat had never sounded so patently untrustworthy... but he had been offering Valerian such a *sweet* smile. And he hadn’t *technically* said anything wrong – if a little *playfully*.

Now, *what was a herbalist to do?*

◌ SUMMARY ◌

—◆□◆—

Tiberius is being himself.



👉 [APP] 👈

Tiberius seemed a little too content to lay there and bask in his joy. Even as Valerian watched him from the corner of his eye he could see the way he shifted relaxingly in the sand and that stupid smug smile of his— *he truly thought he won didn't he? Whatever. I'll be the better person in this stupid game.*

The illusionist in question seemed to notice Valerian staring at him and caught his blue glare with an uneven smile that had Valerian scoff and look away fully; shaking his head a bit at the utter lack of maturity this cat has. The herbalist could hear the flopping of Tiberius moving around but only flicked his ear at the noise as he looked around for the sea turtle nest once again.

Right, looks like he didn't run too far. He could still see the marked-off area from here, the moonlight lit up the area just enough to make it visible.

"You're right. I was being so clumsy and careless... I could have really hurt you!"

A demonic voice echoed in Valerian's ears that had him looking back over toward Tiberius. The herbalist opened his mouth about to say a snappy retort, but he caught himself off as he looked down at Tiberius.

He lay casually in the sand, obviously not getting up. *Did I perhaps tug too hard on him?* The last time Tiberius had gotten hurt under Valerian's watch was the unfortunate day when they first met. Even running for his life the tortie had done his best to hide his injuries. The herbalist peered down at Tiberius giving him a quick look over, scared for only a split second that he had somehow strained his arm when Valerian had tugged him down.

That, of course, was quickly proved when Tiberius extended his paw with a *stupidly annoying* grin on his face.

"Help me up – please?"

There was no falter in the movement, no twitch of pain in his eyes. *Why the fuck am I even worrying over this moron?* His smile was so sweet it was almost tooth-rotting, meant to poison him. Valerian hissed loudly at the tortie, slapping his hand with his own metal one and rolling his eyes.

There was no way he was going to help him up, not in a million years. **"No. Get up already."** his voice was awfully strained and there was no hiding the forced maturity that Valerian was putting on. There was also a hint of anger that was more directed at Valerian himself for even *thinking* about *worrying* for Tiberius. To prove he was the 'better man', Valerian turned and stomped away in the direction of the turtle nest, trying to get Tiberius out of his mind for the time being.

He's like a leech on my soul.

Valerian's never met a cat more determined to goof around. Even cats like *Seven* or *Lyre*— while playful and sassy in nature— were still goal-driven and weren't ever trying to derail Valerian in such a way. *Tiberius* on the other hand obviously wanted to take Valerian down with him.

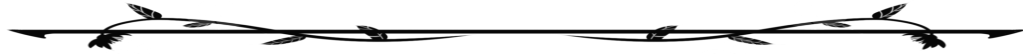
The turtle nest rested still, nothing disturbed them as the night continued on. The only thing that really disturbed the night was Valerian and Tiberius' earlier banter, but even now that had calmed down. The herbalist made sure to do a headcount either way, numbering off the turtle eggs that were listed on the sheet. *Right, nothing to worry about.*

...

There truly was nothing to do right now besides wait, huh?

SUMMARY: Valerian slaps Tiberius' hand away because he's a MATURE cat who simply wants to focus on work and nothing more!

ACTION: –



– ♦ □ ♦ –

♦ TIBERIUS BIRCH ♦

Ⓒ HE/HIM / ILLUSION LV. II Ⓜ

♦ STR (-3), DEX (+1), INT (+1), CHA (+1) ♦

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♦ Culinary (+1) ♦ Deception (+2) ♦ Stealth (+1) ♦

♦ Culture (+1) ♦

– ♦ □ ♦ –

□ SHEET ♦ TRACKER ♦ BOUNDARIES ♦ POST 8 □

– ♦ □ ♦ –

“No. *Get up already.*”

Tiberius's cheeks unwittingly bunched a little at the dull metallic *thwack*. Though apparently *fiendishly prideless* enough to roll about like a beached seal batting his eyelashes about on his own terms – Tiberius was seemingly *too prideful* to shout a comical ‘ouch!’ at the unanticipated density. Did the herbalist really have to use *that paw* every time, though? Giving a half-hearted pout that didn't have the energy to pretend it held any true ill-will, he gave a *bi-i-ig* roll of his eyes.

Frail and delicate as he was, however, a lifetime of stubbing his paws on various surfaces had raised a beautiful, resilient boy. That was to say, his focus

immediately drifted back to Valerian – who appeared to be experimenting with how much sand he could kick up in a single step. Stomping vengefully away, Tiberius could practically sense the venom in the air – as though his huffy fury was so *dense* that it was tangible.

Watching Valerian simmering off into the distance with a cough of a chuckle, he made sure that the tom definitely wasn't going to peer behind him with that suspicious, narrowed stare...

...so that *behind his back*, Tiberius could oh-so-sneakily slip up a little middle foretoe of his own at the fleeting figure – slipping a sliver of tongue out with it.

Harmless justice.

Okay, yeah – he was getting up now.

...

Eugh.

He was already starting to feel the side-effects of *sand time*. Though, his attention was drawn most annoyingly to his former sludge-paw, which had transformed into a *miserable new form* with the magic of sand. *Sandy sludge-paw*. The primal urge to swat it about in a futile attempt to cast off the icky concoction was almost unbearable when he was hyper-aware of it. Better look out for a smooth rock to scrape it off on, maybe.

As Tiberius dealt with the consequences of his actions, feeling a little more victimized by his circumstances than he had any real right to, Valerian was gifted a *blessed moment of peace* to recuperate without any of Tiberius's *devilish utterances* silkily drifting through his ears. It didn't take too dreadfully long for Tiberius to dust himself off and re-equip his bag, dealing with the residues on his paw and such – but the quiet that it brought was likely appreciated.

Coming down from his own little energy spike, as Tiberius strolled with a leisurely sway over to where Valerian was standing over a cluster of sweet little baby turtle eggs. The star-speckled night certainly did the clutch justice, basking them in a tranquil moonlit hue; even Tiberius had to give it to them, they looked pretty darling, all bundled up like that.

“He-e-ey~!” He greeted absently as he trotted up beside the herbalist, fiddling about with the bag hung over his shoulder. Despite the vigor of their banter

having seemingly mellowed out, Tiberius still appeared to be in a rather pleasant mood – appearing *rather relaxed*, actually. After fluttering Valerian his little wave, he turned his attention to sifting through the sand a little further out, gently unloading the sack from his shoulder onto the sand at a safe distance from their precious benefactors – squatting down to access it.

“So, now we wait!”

Humming a quiet few notes as he unlatched the top, he soon tipped his head up to look up at Valerian.

“...Beach-towel?”

– ♦ □ ♦ –

◀ SUMMARY ▶

– ♦ □ ♦ –

At last, **Tiberius** is ready to be a mature cat, who is ready for work!

As Tiberius sits down to join Valerian, the herbalist begrudgingly accepts the offered beach towel and places it beneath him. While it was only big enough for the ginger tom cat, Tiberius didn't seem to care, only responding with a light-hearted tease that cat Valerian snapping back rather pettily. *It's your fault I'm already this sandy*, was yelled into the air at some point between the back-and-forth.

There was little silence between the two, especially when Tiberius took out a herbology book from his bag. Valerian was quick to lean over and look at it, going on tangents about any missing information the book may have and dramatically insulting it when he thought something important was missing. Tiberius listened surprisingly silently, only adding on with quick quips and questions when he found the need. He started goading Valerian about hybrid plants and how they aren't real, which led to the herbalist spewing on about his own *personal* garden. There was a passing comment from Valerian claiming he'd prove it– trying to keep the childish tone out of his voice– and Tiberius gives him a look as if he would hold Valerian to that promise. The ginger tom was quick to tumble into more topics about plants, Tiberius listening in the meanwhile.

It was hard to tell time as the two of them sat there chatting. No danger was ever really sighted through the night, and Valerian found himself slowly relaxing once again as they

chatted. The moon was fully out as it reflected against the ocean waves, the two toms continued to read the herbology book until there was the faint cracking of shells. The turtle eggs shifted a bit where they were laid, freeing themselves as they moved through the night. One baby turtle was able to fully escape before Tiberius took notice, causing Valerian to cut himself off to look behind him at the baby.



They're hatching! One of the two said in surprise before there was a quick scramble from Valerian as he got up. It didn't take long as throughout the night the small sea turtles began to make their way through the sand and towards the water. Tibierus and Valerian watched unwavering, watching as the young turtles went on their first journey towards independence. It was endearing and humbling, watching the small things shift and move through the sand, finally reaching the waves only to be forced back by the tides.

Still, the two of them did nothing but watch, only making sure no pesky animals were here to harm them. The sun was beginning to rise by the time the first turtle made it into the sea, and Valerian's eyes visibly brightened at the sight. A smile rested on his face as he watched the remaining turtles follow their sibling. Tiberius meanwhile was smiling with joy, silently doing a fluttering applause to congratulate the small thing on its journey.

Just like that, they were all gone. Valerian stretched out his limbs, Tiberius doing the same before he went to clean up their area. The illusionist quickly put everything away, clearing out the area like they were never there. While the job wasn't hard, staying up the night made exhaustion run through their veins. It was a tired, yet fulfilling feeling. The two parted ways rather quickly after that, Valerian pulling away and only offering Tiberius a stiff nod before leaving.

The herbalist hoped he wouldn't have to put up with Tiberius again anytime soon... somehow that seemed like an impossible dream.