

The winged crowned clown cat approaches the massive set of cobble stairs that ascends to the mentor's training grounds, a sense of dread pooling in his stomach at the idea of having to ask for assistance. He should be able to do these things no problem, having to ask for help just to be able to properly govern his emotions let alone his people left a palpable taste of shame in his mouth. To have to do this with potentially nothing to show of it at the end of the day made this situation worse as the earth mentor had refused to take on any new students for quite some time. The earth mentor was much, much older than his counterparts, having watched the world form around him as one of the primary elementals. He had likely grown tired of teaching those who were unworthy to learn the magic of the earth, his aging body growing tired and worn throughout the years. What would Eros do if he could not get the help he needed? If he did not even try to get help with his issue? With a heavy sigh, Eros began the ascent up the massive set of stairs, his chunky body weighing him down, the heart within his chest beating in overtime as his lungs required more oxygen to function properly. Could he have flown up to the training grounds? Probably. But what would the mentor have thought of him; he had taken the effortless way out. Eros had to make sure Bira helped him no matter what the cost. It took the newly crowned king a good half hour to finally reach the top of the steps, sweat slicking his thick fur to his body, chest heaving with exertion as he silently cursed whoever had made the decision to build the training ground stairs.

The scene before Eros consisted of a large Zen Garden, massive rocks were scattered across the garden, some adorned with bits of foliage and moss. A small temple of sorts sat at the far end of the garden, similar to those found on earth in Asian countries. A large wrap around porch jutted from the tall structure, a shadowy form sitting beneath the porches overhang caught Eros's attention. Whatever it was, it had seen him arrive at the same time Eros had noticed it sitting there, an azure-colored eye peeking out from beneath a set of jagged teeth.

"GO AWAY!" It hollered, the tone giving away that this belonged to an elderly man. This was likely the earth mentor, Eros concluded as he took a shaky step forward. Ignoring the man's request, Eros sucked in a short breath as he attempted to steel himself before speaking, hoping to avoid the tone in his voice to waver.

"Mentor Birathan! I have come to request your aid!" Eros cried, refusing to back down now that he had come this far. "I am the newly crowned king of the land of Chitonious, please i beg of you, help me save my people!"

The mentor had grown tired of teaching those who aimed to use their magical abilities to gain leverage over others, his lip cocking in surprise at the king's request. The mentor slowly crawled to his feet; his massive body hunched over to prevent himself from

bumping into the ceiling of the pavilion he sat beneath. Emerging into the sunlight, Eros could clearly see the mentor for the first time since his arrival, body covered in thick, rocky plating, ropes of muscle lined his arms and legs. Eros was considered large even by crowned clown cat standards, but this man was absolutely *massive* in size as he towered over the king.

“Who threatens your people, little king?”

Eros had never been called little in his entire life, the wording amusing the king for a moment before he continued. “No one, sir. Only my own emotions. I come to you in search of confidence, the ability to steel oneself to allow me to make tough decisions that will affect my people, both positively and negatively. At this moment in time i am unable to make executive decisions that will bring my people peace without losing my lunch, I am so afraid of messing something up that i refuse to every try anymore... What kind of king am I if i cannot even lead without shaking?”

The mentor’s tone shifted immediately; Eros’s cries had moved something within the elder as he slowly began to approach the cccat. “I understand your concerns all too well, King Eros. Anxiety and self-doubt can be crippling, especially when placed under the weight of responsibility over others. Those who make the climb to my temple do so with the intent to learn my magic to further gain something from someone else, to harm others, but you... you are different. You care for your people; you care about the gain for someone other than yourself; something i have not seen in a long time. I will help you.”

Eros spent the next several days learning the basics of the magic with the mentor, attuning himself with the world around him in addition to his own emotions.

“The key to mastering earth magic lies not in brute force, but in harmony with the natural world. By attuning yourself to the magical rhythms of the earth, you can channel its’ strength both physically and mentally into yourself.”

“How can one attune to the earth without the basic knowledge of earth magic?” Eros asked, head turning to watch as the elderly mentor walked in slow circles around the king.

“Listen and learn, young one. Start by observing the earth around you—the way the plants grow, the cycles of the seasons, the solidarity of the stone and soil. Feel the ground beneath your paws, the texture of the leaves, the warmth of sun on your fur. Allow these things to seep into your being, their sensations, to quite the restlessness of the thoughts that plague you.”

Eros did as he was told, his eye closing as he attempted to feel the world around him. What he would once have passed off as the simple sun shining across his body, the sand crunching beneath his feet as he walked, he attempted to intently focus on the sensations that swam across his body as the elements touched him.