

Typhoon wasn't sure about venturing into the depths again, but this time they would be sticking to safer waters, and not venturing into the unknown. And the goal would be different too - find and cleanse some of the rayfins that had been corrupted. Another dragon with more experience was coming along to show them what to do, an emperor named Ember Leaf.

Typhoon wasn't expecting them to show up with a cat.

The cat was protected by the same magic that allowed them to breathe and survive under the water, and was tethered to Ember Leaf with a harness so they didn't escape.

"Oh - can I pet them?" he asked eagerly, bending to eye the cat curiously.

"Yes, but be gentle," Ember Leaf cautioned. "She's already done her best to chew through the harness once, I don't have another replacement."

Typhoon nodded and carefully patted the cat, feeling the purrs rumble through the small body.

"So -" he started, then paused, not sure exactly what to ask. "You've done this before?" he settled for lamely.

Ember Leaf nodded. "Yes, but for the gryphons - I think we're going to have to gather some different ingredients here for the potion, since they're in a different realm?" they tilted their head and gently pulled Mara away from batting at one of their whiskers. "I've managed to trade for most of them, but - you're more familiar with the depths than I am, have you ever seen this plant before?"

They showed him a drawing of the plant - a seaweed with strange globes at the tips of the leaves.

"I'm not all that familiar with the depths," Typhoon admitted fretfully, "most of it involved being chased around by the hostile rayfin. But... I think I remember seeing that? It was by the crevice that marks the boundary to lesser known lands," he added thoughtfully.

Ember Leaf nodded. "Best start looking there, then."

The two and cat began to swim out towards where they might find the strange seaweed. Ember Leaf kept looking around, fascinated by the strange land of the depths. The sky was dark above, but the

ground - the *seafloor*, they kept having to remind themselves - was covered in all sorts of bioluminescent plants, rocks, and creatures. They glowed in all sorts of soft neons, and Ember Leaf found herself floating in place, watching a massive crab with glowing crystals embedded in its shell making its way across the ground, unbothered by the dragons overhead, or the fish with glowing patterns swimming between its legs.

“Sorry,” they started to say, but glanced around to find Typhoon poking curiously at what appeared to be a glowing sea anemone, tendrils waving in the gentle current.

He looked up and laughed at their apology. “It’s quite alright. This land is so strange and beautiful, it’s hard not to get sidetracked sometimes.”

They began to move on again, and as they reached the place Typhoon had thought he had seen the strange seaweed, he was proven right. They began to gather some of the strange globes - which *glowed*, not that that was surprising considering the rest of the life down here - and began to prepare the potion to cleanse the rayfins. Giving up on keeping Mara from fully stealing the strange globes, Ember Leaf tossed one to her to play with so that they could brew the potion in peace.

Typhoon floated nearby, keeping an eye out for danger, just in case. While he could do rudimentary tasks with his feet or the “thumbs” on his wings, he didn’t have nearly the same dexterity as Ember Leaf did with their hands. He was mildly jealous watching them manipulate the ingredients with obvious ease, and then was distracted by movement out in the depths.

It took him a second to realize what had caught his eye - not the movement itself, for there were fish darting everywhere, seaweed waving in the wind - but the *size* of it.

“Uh-oh,” he said warily, “we might have company.”

Two rayfins undulated in the distance, lit from below by the multicolored splendor of life along the seafloor. One was neon pink, with a pale underbelly and green spikes. The other was a neutral yellow with black spots and a darker back. They moved not like he had seen the other rayfins move - but in a jerky, uneven way, with seeming little goal or destination.

“Hm,” Ember Leaf said, “They look corrupted.”

Typhoon agreed. “Do you think they’ll come over here?”

Ember Leaf considered as they continued to mix the ingredients and watch the bubbling liquid closely. “If they’re like the gryphons... they shouldn’t really care about anything. But there were a few that were more hostile, so it doesn’t hurt to be safe. This should be done in time before they get too far away, but,” they hesitated, “I don’t particularly want to get any closer to their mouths than I have to.”

Typhoon could see why. The rayfins looked like they could swallow emperors whole in one go.

“Maybe we could pour it into the water in front of them?” he suggested, thoughtfully, moving Mara away from one of the ingredients the cat kept trying to chew on. “It won’t fall like the air, and they can take it in through their gills...”

Ember Leaf nodded thoughtfully, putting the finishing touches on the potion. “There’s a thought... I keep forgetting this is water, not air. But what if they change direction and miss it?”

Typhoon shrugged, “We’ll have to get pretty close then, I think.”

Ember Leaf sighed, seeing their dreams of avoiding being close to rayfin teeth quickly fading. “Well, it’s better than trying to chuck the thing down their mouths, I guess.”

With the potion bottled up, Ember Leaf handed one to Typhoon while keeping the other for themselves, and they swam out to meet the rayfins, Mara safely tucked into one of the satchels Ember Leaf wore.

As they got closer to the rayfins, their size grew even more intimidating, and Ember Leaf was not looking forwards to getting close to their mouths. Thankfully, though, as they approached the massive dragons, they seemed uncaring, and they were able to unstopper and pour the contents out ahead of them without incident. According to plan, the rayfins moved through the cloud of potion, mouths half open, and sucked some in through their gills.

The dragons paused and shook their heads, corruption fading from their scales, and Ember Leaf called it a success.