

After the battle, Artyom rushed back to his army. Where once he traveled by leaps and bounds, he now jogs steadily, unaided by any skills. Even so, his training does not betray him and, with his well honed endurance, he returns to his army in far better form than poor Eucles.

When he arrives, he breathes a sigh of relief. All of the time elementals were defeated before everyone lost their skills.

“Úlfhéðnar, you’ve returned!” Jokull yells in delight. “Was Camelot able to defeat the Titan of Time?”

Artyom grins and clasps arms with Jokull.

“No, they never got the chance. Some woman destroyed it before it even reached the city. And your battle? Did it fare well?”

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Smoke rises from the ruined city of Camelot, scented with the aroma of freshly cooked meat. In the midst of the ruins, Aodean stands in the courtyard of his own, miraculously intact, villa. He looks at the faces of the survivors around him and flips another burger. The meat sizzles and flames soar as the juices leak into the charcoal. He flips the rest of the burgers and then adds some cheese.

As he grills, his guests stand around awkwardly in their cliques, unsure how to approach each other.

“Feel free to take a seat anywhere,” he calls. “The food will be ready shortly.”

They take seats around the several long picnic tables in the yard,

At one table sit Franky, Jessa, Serena, Calidi, Darius, Siberia, Sylvia, Hannibal, and Donovan. At a second table sit Belial, Ambrosia, Garn, Adam, and the Panoptic. At a third table are most of Camelot’s leadership.

A single table is left empty as the formerly powerful leaders cluster together with the people they know.

Quasi walks in, grinning with confidence, a beautiful woman clad in a white summer dress on his arm. A fox woman with nine tails and a dignified, middle aged man clad in spiky black armor, its demonic visage tucked under his arm, follow the couple.

“Oh damn, is this a barbecue?” Quasi raises a thumbs up. “You should have told me. I’d have brought a grill.”

“Quasi!” Franky quickly gets up.

Quasi waves.

“Oh shit, Franky. Hey, hows it go-”

“What the hell did you do?” Franky interrupts, “everyone's skills are gone.”

He releases a breath. Everyone stares at the two heroes.

Quasi pouts. “Really, Franky? It’s our first true face to face meeting and the first thing you do is blame me for upending the entire planet's status quo? Here I was all worried for my best friend! Would he save the day? Get the girls? Make it home?”

Franky rolls his eyes. “But it’s true, isn't it?”

“Franky, I want you to meet Jessica. Jessica, meet Franky, my best friend from Earth. He’s normally not so boorish, but I expect he’s been under a lot of stress lately.”

“Still... you...,” Franky stammers.

Jessica graces Franky with an understanding smile and holds out her hand.

“Your reaction is normal, Mr. Franky.” She glances at Quasi, “I’m reassured to know our world isn’t the only one where he’s an aberration.”

Jessa and Serena walk up behind Franky.

“Aren’t you going to introduce us?” Jessa intrudes.

“Wow, not bad Franky,” Quasi whistles.

Jessica elbows Quasi hard enough that he bends. She kisses him while he’s leaned down and steals his stole.

“I’ll leave you two to get acquainted,” Jessica smiles at Quasi.

She wraps the mantle around her bare, unmarked shoulders and leads Jessa and Serrena away.

Aodean taps the side of his grill and grabs everyone's attention. He then points at the bench, “Right. Now tha’ dramas settled, let's save the rest of Q & A till everyone’s present. Mr Eludo, please take a seat and thank you for coming.”

“Present? Who else is coming?” Quasi walks to the table and takes a seat at the bench. His two compatriots in tow. The fox-women, upon sitting, makes direct eye contact with Belial. The armored [General] burns the table as he takes a seat.

“There was another army present. It was led by three [Generals]. They should be arriving soon.”

Quasi perks up. “Oh, them. Yea, I just talked in passing. Funny guys, but I don't think they're going to show up anytime soon. They looked a tad too high to find their way here.”

Aodean pouts, “Pitty. I wanted to ask them about that crystal worm.”

“I'm sure you'll get the chance. In the meantime, I don't suppose those burgers are ready? I haven't eaten in awhile.”

“Just about. Letting the cheese get a bit melty.”

While Aodean focuses on finishing up the burgers, Franky moves over to Quasi's table; the only one to move to Quasi's table.

“Quasi,” Franky pauses, “I'm sorry.”

“Uhhh, for what?- Wait, is this one of those rare backstabs that's about to happen where everyone here all at once tries to kill me? I've only had that happen twice before, and both times I didn't predict it.”

“What? No, of course not. They're just keeping silent because they're scared of you.”

“Then what are you apologizing about?”

Franky releases an annoyed breath. “About how I treated your stories as just stories. I thought you were just pulling my leg when you said you were a professional summoned here for hire.”

“Oh... yea. I told you those stories because you had a good chance of being summoned. I hope they helped.”

“They did. So, uh, thanks for that.”

Quasi raises a fist up, “For a friend, anything.”

Franky chuckles and fist bumps.

“So, how'd you,” Franky points at the distant tower, “you know. Do all of this.”

Quasi grins. “Well, it's a long story, but it starts with me naked in a shower...”

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Within a castle that rests upon the back of a turtle, a lord strides through his laboratory, his focus intense. He moves with purpose as he selectively chooses perfectly roasted beans from a pile of thousands.

Once chosen, he places them into a hand grinder and then slowly grinds the beans into a powder. He sifts the grounds for the perfect grain size and masses them, precise to the milligram. He pours, then brushes the powder into an annular, adamantium filter. He slides a glass pipe through the filter, then presses the assembly into a glass bulb. The cautious noble carefully lowers the upper bulb assembly onto the lower bulb filled with precisely 1.005 kg (at 193 K) of filtered rain water. He sets the whole assembly on a stove and takes a moment to curse the loss of precise heating magic. The water boils and slowly pushes up, through the straw, into the upper bulb. As soon as the straw lets through the first puff of steam, the careful lord removes the contraption from the stove and sets it on a cool slab of stone. The water percolates through the grounds and trickles back into the bottom flask.

Done, he decants the dark brown fluid into an enchanted ceramic seidel. Luckily, its passive thermal and stain resistant enchantments still work. Only the best for his guest.

He walks to the table and gently places the mug of piping hot coffee in front of the guest.

The guest leans forward and tastes the coffee.

With a mighty **Caw**, Barglesmash screams his approval.

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In the gloaming, a tiny spider sits upon the barrel of a massive mobile gun, which sits upon a floating ship moored to Camelot's last standing wall. All three bask in the ruddy glow of sunset and watch the first twinkling stars appear.

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Jessica sits next to Jessa and across from Serrena at the opposite end of the table from Quasi and Franky.

"So," she asks, hesitant, "how do you make it work? With two of you?"

Jessica jumps as a woman leans against her back. The woman's arms drape over her shoulders and trail across her chest, one questing finger finds and traces the fabric around a nipple.

"Want me to show you?" comes a playful, sensual whisper.

Jessa and Serena stare wide eyed at the stunning woman who just materialized hugging Jessica. The mysterious woman wears a black, one-piece dress, a match for Jessica's white one. The two women are a matched set. Were it not for the stranger's subtle air of divinity, Jessa would swear she was Jessica's older sister.

Serena blushes and Jessa swallows her saliva. The sexy older sister winks at them. Jessica twists to look up.

The woman traces a finger along Jessica's unadorned neck.

"You know, I was just starting to get used to wearing one," she says, "I miss it a bit."

"Miss what?" asks Jessica.

"Being tied up."

Tears come, unbidden. Jessica swallows a lump in her throat.

"Eir?"

The goddess smiles.

"I'm sorry," says Jessica.

Eir wipes away Jessica's tears and kisses her on the forehead. She smiles again.

"Thank you."

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Finally, a god sits lonely upon a throne with the head of the all-father in his palm. He stares into the lifeless gods eyes... and smiles.

Then he throws the severed head to the large severed-head pile.

With a content sigh. The god of Chaos raises his free hand and-

**\*Tap\***

A moment passess...

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