

Chapter 1

"Remind me again why I'm hiking up a mountain instead of working on one of my projects?" Mateo complained.

"Because Emmett kicked you out after you blew up the lab, again," Silas replied with a roll of his eyes.

"It was rhetorical," Mateo huffed. The blue bird was busy writing in his notepad non-stop, even over the uneven terrain. "Besides, that's the price of progress. And it was just a tiny explosion."

"You could use some fresh air anyways," Mochi pointed out. "C'mon, we're basically on vacation. You could actually stand to relax and enjoy yourself."

"I'm just curious to see how big this... what did you call him again?" Jet asked. The plump pink badger was the furthest ahead on the trail, despite not having ever been to their destination before. In fact, none of the four had, besides Mochi.

"A T-Rex," Mochi explained. "He's like Gungnir, from the distant past. Just a different species"

"So big then, got it," Jet nodded firmly.

"I mean yeah, but apparently not all dinosaurs were like that? At least according to Gnash," Mochi replied.

Silas interrupted as he noticed something in the distance. "Hey, there's a stone wall ahead, is that—"

Mochi interrupted to confirm, "It's my home!"

The Iron Palm Dojo was centuries old, undisturbed despite whatever conflicts laid outside it. That was due to the man in charge, Master Freynar. A millenia old dragon, he'd decided to reject the hoarding lifestyle—ignore the books—of many of his kind in search of inner peace. Through the years, many had come and gone from the dojo's walls, but some lived their entire lives there.

Mochi led them inside. The front gates were open, as they usually were during the day. Inside the walls were just enough buildings to look closer to a small village than a simple dojo. There were gardens for growing produce, a dining hall, a dormitory, a training hall, and much more. Over by the zen garden, he spotted a familiar face meditating.

"Ah, look who's returned," Master Freynar said as he stood to his feet. "Didn't I tell you not to

come back until you were content with your travels?"

Mochi twisted his nose at that. "I'm not back to stay. We're just passing through and I wanted to see how everyone is doing," he explained.

"Well good, because I believe I told you I'd tan your hide worse than last time if you simply gave up."

"So what I'm getting from this is the whole reason you're traveling is Master Freynar gave you an ass whooping and kicked you out the front door?" Jet asked. "No wonder you always change the subject."

"That's... not exactly what happened," Mochi replied with a blush.

"Close enough," Freynar replied with a snort. He walked up to Mochi and pulled the hyena into a deep hug as he enfolded him in his wings. "Welcome back, boy."

Mochi just went quiet for a moment as he hugged his master tightly. But when he let go, he immediately moved to introductions.

"The bird with his face stuck in a book over there is Mateo, he's renting space on our ship for his alchemy work."

Mateo looked up long enough to give a wave, then went back to scribbling.

"The fish out of water over there is Silas, who's been with us for ages since he saved us from some navy uh..."

"Assholes," Silas finished.

"Yeah that," Mochi agreed. "And the neon badger here is Jet, who's been with me pretty much since I left the dojo."

"Hello sir!" Jet said brightly. "It's so good to finally meet you!"

"Well, welcome to all of you. I hope you'll enjoy your stay. Mochi, your bed is free of course, and the remaining bed in that room is still empty. Grab a couple of mats from the closet and you four should be all set for your stay."

"Thank you sir." Mochi bowed his head respectfully.

"And the others just went down to the river washing up if you'd care to join them," Freynar added as he returned to where he'd been sitting.

"Wonderful, we could all use a wash after that hike," Mochi said. As he looked back, he caught Jet looking to the side and blushing. Clearly the badger was already imagining the rest of his group naked.

"Hey, Mochi!" Gnash yelled as soon as he spied the hyena approaching. "You're back!"

"Just for a bit!" Mochi yelled right back to him.

"Well join us already, it's actually a semi-decent temperature for once," Stone called.

"Hey, what's that hut thing?" Jet asked as they approached.

"Just a place to store your clothes, grab some soap, whatever," Mochi replied. "Pretty much everyone uses this area to get clean."

Sure enough, the river had four men in it right now. In addition to the T-Rex Gnash and the bull Stone, Mochi's fellow hyena Garz and the bongo-rat hybrid Stripes were both standing in the river washing their fur.

Gnash was apparently already good (a benefit of being scaly), and helping Garz with his back.

"Hey bro, what, you couldn't send a letter that you were coming?" Garz asked.

Mochi just started to strip down himself as he reached the shore. "It was a bit of an impromptu visit."

Silas joined him in that. In fact, the catfish was only wearing a pair of shorts as usual, so he was in before Mateo or Jet even reached the riverside.

"Oh who's your scaly friend?" Gnash asked as he broke off helping Garz and headed over to Silas.

"Dude, can you at least wait for me to introduce everyone before you start hitting on them?"

"I'd just settle for being able to get in the water for once in my life without getting hit on," Silas grumbled.

"Uh, I think I'll just grab some soap first," Jet mumbled as he gazed over all the men in the river.

"Get some for the rest of us then," Mochi called over.

Mateo emerged from the hut with his own soap in hand, apparently having stored his clothes, bag and journal while everyone else was talking. "Alright, so who are these guys?"

"Oh look who's finally left his books long enough to join us?" Mochi splashed Mateo with water as he stepped in.

The bird shook it off and glared at Mochi. "I didn't exactly ask to be here."

"Come on, loosen up a little," Mochi called back to him. "Anyways, the big guy hitting on Silas is Gnash, the quiet one with the horns is Stone, Stripe is—"

"That's me!" The bongo-rat called over. "Sorry, my fur is all matted, trying to deal with that," he explained as he continued working on it.

"Yeah and the hyena's my bro Garz," Mochi finished.

"Your brother is uh... a lot bigger than you." Mateo said as he eyed up the large hyena. "I'd never have guessed you two were related."

"Well we aren't by blood," Garz replied. "Probably at least."

"Probably?" Jet asked as he returned with the soap. He reddened as he realized the other seven men were all staring at his naked form and quickly rushed into the river.

"Huh? Oh well both Garz and I have been here as long as we can remember. Garz basically decided we were brothers and I didn't figure out we might not be related for uh..." Mochi squinted as he thought about it.

"Wasn't it Stripes who pointed it out?" Stone asked.

"You make it sound like I knew any better either," Garz said with a laugh.

"So wait, I know how Gnash got here, Mochi's told that story," Jet said.

Gnash grumbled very loudly at that.

"But have the rest of you been around your whole lives too?"

Jet paused washing as he realized it had grown quiet. "Uh if that's a bad question never mind I was just—"

"I mean, for me it's not that interesting..." Stripes admitted. "I come from a large family, and uh, well around here hybrids are considered bad luck, y'know? So I ended up hanging out with the two 'weirdos' from the dojo whenever they came down to town. And then spending a lot of time hanging out up here with them. I eventually asked if I could move up here to train full time and they said yes and now I'm here."

Garz, Gnash, Mochi, and Stone were all glaring daggers at Stripes. Jet got a very strong feeling they didn't like his family. "Uh okay, so Stone, how about you?"

"I'm guessing a beefy guy like you has been training since you were a kid," Mateo suggested.

"You're not wrong," Stone replied. "My dad was a martial artist who trained me."

"Well..." Jet said uncomfortably when he realized Stone wasn't going to continue. "Hey uh, Stripes, you need some help there?" he asked to quickly change the subject.

"Please, I swear my fur hates me sometimes," the bongo-rat replied.

Jet waded over to him. "Alright, let me—"

"Hold on, Gnash has been suspiciously quiet," Mochi interrupted. "Where did he..."

The hyena peered down river to where he could barely see Silas and Gnash behind some rocks. "Seriously we were here for what, thirty seconds before he fucked one of my friends?" he groans.

"That horndog doesn't exactly get a lot of new options around here," Garz laughed. "Can you blame him?"

"Yes," Mochi said without any hesitation.

Garz grabbed Mochi and dunked him in the water. "And you called Stone too uptight."

"Let go of me you jerk!" Mochi yelled as he pulled his head above water. He managed to slip free, only to start a fight with his brother that gave everyone watching an eyeful.

"So are they always like this?" Mateo asked.

"Oh this is nothing, believe me," Stone said with a shake of his head as he walked up behind Mateo and grabbed his ass. "Now, how about I help you soap up?"

"...Suppose I wouldn't say no to that."

By the time everyone was clean and headed back, it was time for dinner. As that was wrapping up, Mochi was explaining the dojo's schedule to his friends.

"Basically, there are morning and evening training sessions that everyone in good health is expected to attend," Mochi explained as he gathered everyone's dishes. "During the day you're

expected to get your chores done at your own pace, though as guests you three don't need to worry about that beyond keeping your sleeping area clean."

"I wouldn't mind getting a chance to work in a proper kitchen," Silas cut in. "Been awhile, we've made the ship's galley nice and all but..."

"Check with Asher—uh, the older snow leopard over there. He'll slot you in I'm sure." Mochi said.

"Otherwise? There are always some member-run training sessions throughout the day you can join in on. Some people meditate or do solo runs, or you might find that people are doing a run down to town."

"You mean I might be able to finally beat you in a fight?" Jet joked.

"Fat chance. You might want to check if they're running any basics sessions and start there. You too Mateo."

"Hm?" The bird looked over at him. "I don't see any need to train."

"With how often our ship gets into trouble?" Jet asked, bewildered.

Mateo let out a deep sigh. "Good point," he admitted reluctantly. "I suppose I could join in on one or two."

"Great!" Stone came up behind the bird and pulled him into a headlock. "Cause I'm running a beginner's course tomorrow anyways, so you're joining in."

"I think I already regret this," Mateo moaned.

"I see some things haven't changed," Mochi grouched.

"Do you find it reassuring?" Garz asked with a laugh.

"Going to kill you," Mochi muttered beneath his breath.

"I mean, we've got eight of us at once, I think that's a record," Stone joked.

"Really, this is all Gnash's fault," Mateo griped.

"Agreed," Silas added.

"Wha—Jet's the one who tripped," Gnash countered.

"And that matters how?" Jet asked in annoyance.

"Quiet, all of you!" Ashur ordered loudly.

The evening training has ended in a way that was far too common, with a fight breaking out. Ashur, as the grumpy old man who was leading it, had all eight of the offenders lined up against the wall with their pants down as he gave them twenty smacks each.

Chapter 2

Darkness had fallen by the time the eight returned to their shared quarters. Despite some grouching and ass-rubbing, it didn't take long for them to get two mats set up on the floor, between the three bunk-beds on the outer walls.

"Looks like my bed's untouched. Here I was expecting some dumb prank in it," Mochi mentioned as he climbed up above Garz to get his bunk ready.

"C'mon bro, I wouldn't let anyone near it," Garz laughed. "You *bed*ter believe it."

"Do not get started with me," Mochi grumbled as he leaned down to look at Garz.

"So who's sleeping below me?" Stone asked.

"Are we seriously going to sleep already?" Jet asked.

"Nah, just figuring it out before we all stay up too late and pass out," Stone replied.

"I say we make the three of them fight for it!" Gnash declared with a fist pump.

"No," Mateo replied flatly.

"You've got two and a half mages here, there's no way that doesn't end poorly," Jet pointed out.

"And a half?" Stone raised his brow questioningly.

"I'm a bit of a magic user myself," Silas spoke up. "Occasionally."

"Seriously? Someone with a bod like you?" Gnash asked in surprise.

"You should meet Emmett, he'd completely throw you off," Mochi said as he jumped down. "So really who will it be?"

"Whatever, I don't care where I sleep," Silas replied.

"Same," Mateo and Jet said simultaneously.

"Oh my gosh, someone just decide," Stripes groaned. "This is painful."

"Fine, bird boy, you can have my bottom bunk." Stone declared as he pointed at Mateo.

"Uh... Sure?" Mateo blinked as he stared at Stone.

"Alright! Then it's game time!" Gnash leapt down from his bed with a deck in hand. "I'm thinking truth or dare!"

Jet, Mateo, and Silas all looked mystified.

"...Then why do you have cards?" Jet finally asked.

"Cause that's how we play," Mochi explained. "Third best hand picks truth or dare, second best picks the question or dare, best hand picks the target."

"Oy, why overcomplicate this?" Mateo asked.

"Cause it's fun!" Stripes said. "Anyways Truth or Dare is a great way to get to know people!"

"Well I'm in," Silas said. "What about the rest of you?"

Everyone else joined in, except for Mateo. When he saw everyone else staring at him, he just sighed. "Sure, I guess."

The first round went down quickly enough.

"First round, it's gotta be a dare!" Garz declared immediately.

"Hm..." Silas mulled over his second place hand. "Twenty bare ass squats."

"Gnash," Mochi declared with the winning hand.

"Damn, the card shark is back in form already," Gnash grumbled. "Why am I always the first target?"

"You're fun to go after," Stone told him. "And we all owe you for training today."

"That was not my fault!" Gnash griped as he stood up. "Whatever, let's just do this."

As Gnash dropped his pants and started doing squats in front of everyone, Stone slid over into Gnash's spot and next to Mateo. "So Mochi's never mentioned you in his letters before? What's that about?" he asked.

Mateo fumbled with the journal he was writing notes in. "Uh, I've been renting out space for my experiments on his ship ever since..."

"Since you blew up your old lab?" Jet provided.

"It would have been fine if those guardsmen hadn't burst in right in the middle of an experiment!"

Mateo shot back. "The whole thing was Roskai's fault."

"I'm pretty sure that's the only reason Rune allowed you onto the ship after that," Jet giggled.

"Anyways, I'm always in search of rare ingredients and materials, so being on a ship has proven rather advantageous," Mateo continued.

"Huh. So you make potions?" Stone asked.

In the background, Gnash continued to grunt as he counted, with all eyes on him.

"Potions, devices, enchanted items. I specialize in contraptions of all sorts," Mateo explained.

"By all sorts he means 'Ones you should avoid at all costs,'" Jet joked.

"Hmph! My inventions always work perfectly."

"I don't think Emmett would agree. He's still pissed about that security mishap," Mochi pointed out.

The blue bird crossed his arms in annoyance. "My device functioned perfectly, he just wasn't supposed to be there in the middle of the night."

"AND 20." Gnash announced the last one loudly as he quickly pulled his pants and underwear back up. "Alright! Time for round two!"

The second round went about as quickly as the first. A few minutes later they were already deciding the penalty.

"As always, round two is truth!" Stripes said cheerfully.

"Who're you thinking?" Stone asked Jet.

"Mochi of course!" Jet said without any hesitation. "I'm sure you have plenty of questions for him."

"Ugh..." Mochi grumbled.

"Alright, Mochi..." Stone mumbled after a moment's thought. "Which of your shipmates have you jerked off to?"

"Seriously?" Mochi asked in annoyance. "Going there already?"

"Well?" Jet asked with a nudge of his elbow. "Don't leave us in suspense."

"Tarakudo, Rune, Emmett, Hiran, Wadi... Jet, Silas, Mateo."

Silas raised a brow. "So everyone besides Roskai?"

"Yup," Mochi replied tersely.

"Yeah I could see how he annoys you too much," Jet said with a laugh.

"Can we move on now?" Mochi asked huffily.

"Yeah, yeah..."

As the rounds passed, more truths and dares continued to be thrown out. From Silas spending the night naked, to Gnash having to explain how he'd bottomed the first time he had sex, to Jet having to be a naked card table for a few rounds, to Stripes having to list, in order, who in the room he'd prefer to spank him.

Of course, that last one had ended with Garz grabbing Stripes and throwing him over his lap as soon as he was named the top pick.

"C'mon man, this wasn't a dare round!" Stripes complained as everyone else was dealt out the next round.

"You asked for it," Garz chided.

"Literally," Mochi agreed.

"Uuuughh...." Stripes buried his reddened face into Garz's leg. The hyena responded by yanking down the bongo-rat's pants to bare his behind.

The next round played out a bit slower with everyone distracted by the show. But as soon as Garz, Mochi, and Gnash won, they quickly teamed up to throw a dare at Stone.

"I dare you to streak a lap around the building," Gnash declared with a fang-filled grin.

"C'mon, Ashur is totally on patrol around this time of night," Stone complained. "I already got got by him once already today."

"You can always take a penalty instead..." Gnash offered with the exact same grin as before.

"Up to you."

"Ugh, fine," Stone pouted.

"What exactly is the penalty for refusing," Jet asked. "We probably should know that."

"Naked for the night, and spending one round over each other player's lap," Mochi said with a wink. "It's rarely taken."

"Yeesh," Jet replied. "I can see why."

"Alright, be back in a jiffy!" Stone flashed them a thumbs up and ran out the door into the hall.

"Now, while he's gone..." Mochi mused.

Mateo tensed as he realized that Mochi, Gnash, Garz, and even a just-let-up Stripes were all staring at him. "What?"

"What's the deal with you and Stone?" Garz asked.

"Wha—Nothing! He's nice, that's all." Mateo waved his hands in rebuttal.

"Dude's got it down bad for you, he's had his eyes on you all night," Gnash declared loudly.

"Yeah, and he's got enough bullshit to deal with without you toying around with him," Garz agreed sternly.

"I'm not toying around with anyone," Mateo said crossly. "He's nice. We'll hang out. See what happens, if anything. He seems smart enough, he doesn't need four bodyguards looming over him."

"Stone doesn't really flirt," Mochi explained. "Like ever. He'll smack your ass or have sex for fun but... this is weird for him."

"Whatever. I think you're all seriously overreacting," Mateo grumbled.

"Maybe he's really into trans guys?" Gnash suggested in response to Mochi.

"My bets on birds," Stripes replied. "I mean I've seen him stare at Eskah before."

"Who's Eskah?" Jet asked confusedly.

"That big buff hawk who barely talks and usually wears just a fundoshi," Gnash explained.

"Dude, everyone stares at him," Garz laughed.

"Maybe he just likes me, you ever think of that?" Mateo interrupted in annoyance.

"Nah, that couldn't possibly be it," Jet joked as he slapped the bird on the back.

Mateo didn't find it funny.

"Anyways, just promise us you won't string him along if it's not working out," Mochi said seriously. "He deserves better than that."

"Yeah, okay, yeesh," Mateo grumbled. "Like I'd have done that anyways. I don't have time for pointless things."

"Well—"

Everyone fell quiet as Ashur's voice echoed through the hall, with another set of footsteps behind him. "You're on my last nerve tonight, Stone."

As the snow leopard came into view, Stone walked in behind him with his hands on his head, and a bright red behind.

"10 minutes in the hallway like that," Ashur told him in a deep growl. He whipped his head around to look in the room. "Then I better see none of you making trouble again tonight!"

"Got it, sir!" came a choir of responses. Silas shifted to make sure his own nudity wasn't visible behind Garz.

"Good." Ashur scooped up Stone's pants and shirt from the doorway, leaving only his underwear.

Once Ashur stormed off, Stone let out a deep sigh.

"Damn it Stone, we told you not to get caught," Garz joked.

"Oh you are going to be in for it the next time I win a round," Stone called back at him.

"Well, I'm going to enjoy the show in the meantime," Mateo told him.

Stone just blushed and turned his head back towards the wall.

"Y'know, the same people who say he deserves better also just subjected him to that guy," Mateo whispered.

"Eh, that's how it works around here," Garz declared.

While they waited for Stone to be allowed to move, another game went down that ended with Garz getting targeted to play the next three rounds with his wrists and ankles bound.

Mateo was glancing furtively as the next round began. He was fairly certain he was the only one who hadn't been hit with *something* at this point. Which meant he'd almost certainly be the target, unless Gnash annoyed someone again.

Stone had rejoined them, now wearing only his underwear. He did have other outfits, but the implied threat from Asher was enough for him not to go for them.

Mateo looked over his cards once they were dealt. Two pairs, 5s and 3s. Not the worst start. All he had to do was make the top three to be out of the running. He tossed his last card, a 9, only to be given another 3 in exchange.

Well, that should do it.

When everyone was ready, he tossed his hand down first. That led to a lot of groans and tossed down hands across the table. He noticed Garz didn't even have a pair, maybe he'd call him out.

"Four sixes," Stripes declared as he placed his own hand down. "And my target is... Mateo."

"What? But I'm in the top three?" Mateo replied in surprise.

"When did we ever say that made you immune?" Garz asked with a laugh.

"Truth or dare is up to you," Mochi pointed out.

Mateo couldn't even begin to imagine what crazy truths they were planning to ask him. Probably something about Stone. Best to sidestep that entirely. "Dare."

"And... I'm third, right?" Jet asked as he looked down at his cards. "About time I placed."

"Yeah, it's you," Mateo confirmed. "So what's the dare?"

"I dare you to..." Jet looked around as he thought about it. "Oh I know! I dare you to spend the rest of the night sitting in Stone's lap."

"Wait what?" both Mateo and Stone asked simultaneously.

"Come on, that's like the tamest thing anyone's dared tonight," Gnash pointed out. "Unless there's a problem?"

"No problem." Mateo refused to even look at Stone as he moved over and sat right on the bull's lap. He could feel his bare chest pressed up against his tail feathers.

"Right, let's just go again," Stone said in a rush as he sat there red-faced.

By the time everyone was getting tired, the game had taken quite a few more tolls. Gnash, Jet, and Mochi had all joined Silas in the nude. Garz was refusing to sit after a particularly nasty spanking from everyone in turn, though no one's rear end was completely untouched. And most everyone had been forced to reveal some embarrassing tale or secret or another.

"Oh care to say that again?"

While everyone else was getting ready for bed, Mochi and Gnash were glaring daggers.

"I said that after all this time away from the dojo there's no way I couldn't take you down," Gnash repeated.

"Fine, tomorrow, I'll take your ass down, *again*," Mochi replied. "Done it enough times before."

"Hmph! When I win, you're going to do whatever I say tomorrow night," Gnash declared.

"Only if you want to listen to me when you lose."

Stone slapped both of them on their bare asses simultaneously. "Hey you two idiots, go to bed already!"

"Tch, fine," Gnash growled as he stormed off.

Mochi just rolled his eyes as he headed to his own bunk.

Mateo rolled onto his side, already trying to go to sleep. But Gnash started right back up with Stripes as he reached his bunk, about something the bird didn't care to pay attention to.

"Psst, Mateo."

The bird's eyes opened as he heard Stone call from the bunk above him. "Yeah?"

"Did you have fun today?"

Mateo thought for a moment. His own plans had been completely blown up, and he was going to be behind on his project. But still...

"Yeah, I'm glad I came along."

"Me too."

"Ugh, going to get those jerks as soon as I get back."

Stone grumbled to himself as he slunk down the hallway. Truth or dare with his friends was always a blast... but today he'd gotten the short end of the straw. He had to streak all around the dormitory.

And he's been trying to get to know their intriguing bird visitor as well. At least Mateo hadn't been able to take his eyes off him as he undressed and left.

"Let's see..." Stone whispered to himself as he came up to another corner. "Looks like the coast is clear."

He was covering himself with both hands as he dashed to the next corner. Thank goodness it was dark out, he had a decent chance of not being noticed. It'd be better if he didn't have snow white fur though. Sometimes he was envious of Master Freynar's dark brown scales.

But as he made his next dash, it wasn't barely visible scales that stopped him. Instead, fur as bright and white as the bull's own suddenly blocked his path as the snow leopard, Ashur, exited a door in his path.

Perhaps speed was not the best plan, as he barrelled straight into the older man.

"...Stone." Ashur grumbled lowly.

"Aheh, sorry about that, I'll just be going—"

Stone groaned as Ashur grabbed him and reoriented the bull right upon his lap. Ashur was one of the top fighters at the dojo, and if he was angry there wasn't a chance in hell that he'd escape.

"How many times do I have to tell you all not to play such childish games."

"Sir, it was just a dare, I swear I'll go right back to my room," Stone pleaded.

"You'll do no such thing!" Ashur's hand came down with the force of a paddle upon Stone's bare behind. His rough calloused hands had no give as he immediately started a heavy, consistent pattern of swats.

"Sir, I'm sorry!" Stone pleaded, to no avail. Despite his kicking and whining, Ashur didn't let up at all.

"I don't believe that for a minute, but when I'm done you will be sorry," Ashur grunted.

The sound of a spanking had started to draw a crowd too. The two were illuminated by the light from Ashur's room. Stone couldn't be sure who was watching in the dark, but he had a feeling at least one of them was his Master.

As his cheeks reddened (both sets), there was nothing he could do but continue to plead. By the time Ashur let up, there were tears running down the side of his face.

"Stand-up," Ashur declared as he rolled Stone off his lap, "and hands on your head."

Miserably, Stone obeyed, showing off everything to the surrounding crowd. "Now, follow me, I'm going to make sure you go back to your room."

Stone groaned as he followed after. His cherry red cheeks stood out like lights in the night as he gave a show to all he passed on his way back.

Chapter 3

The next morning, Mateo found himself the first one up. He got dressed and slipped out early to walk around the grounds.

His head was still spinning. And it was so stupid. He hardly knew the first thing about Stone, they'd literally only known each other for a day. Logic dictated this was a bad idea anyways. It wasn't like he could stick around, even if he wanted to. What had he been thinking, not just shutting this down before it started?

Mateo's inner spiraling was interrupted when a voice called out to him.

"Hello there, young one."

Mateo looked up and around, only to finally look downward somewhat. Freynar sat cross-legged in the garden, in the exact same spot he'd met him in yesterday.

"Oh. Hello."

"Something troubling you?" Freynar asked.

Somehow, Mateo suspected it wasn't a question, so much as an invitation. "That obvious?"

"I have experience with troubled souls," Freynar replied with a small smile. "Come, sit, relax. It may do you some good."

Mateo sat next to Freynar, though he didn't say anything. And as much as he tried to relax, his cascade of thoughts just started up again.

"That's not relaxing," Freynar pointed out. The brown dragon patted Mateo on the shoulder. "It may help to let it out."

"I don't want to hurt Stone but..." Mateo started.

"But you feel you have no choice?"

"This all started so fast. I don't do fast. I mean with my experiments maybe, but not like this," Mateo complained. "And it's not like I'm going to be here long. This is just a mini-vacation. But everyone's so on top of me about hurting him and like? How is that not going to happen?"

Freynar let out a small snort. "Stone is stronger than they may believe. And he can make his own decisions."

"I know that but that doesn't mean—"

"Aren't you getting rather ahead of yourself?" Freynar cut in. "It's been one day. Not even prophets truly know what the future holds."

"But now's the time that I can break it off if I'm going to," Mateo pointed out. "If I wait—"

"Then you'll let him get to try dating someone?" Freynar cut in again.

The bird furrowed his brows. "Are you going to keep interrupting me?"

"Only if you keep saying things only for the sake of avoiding the truth," Freynar replied. "Stone isn't the only one who'll get hurt if you try and fail, is he?"

"What are you talking about?" Mateo turned to face Freynar properly.

"This is just a shot in the dark, but when was the last time you tried to have a real relationship?"

"I uh..." Mateo paled. "Not in a while."

"Mhm," Freynar closed his eyes again and turned his head forward. "Need I say more?"

The bird just groaned at that. "It's kind of scary how well you read people."

"Like I said, lots of practice," Freynar told him. "And that's what I recommend here as well. Whether it ends well or not, it seems you both could use the experience."

Mateo looked over again to see a hint of a grin on the dragon's face. That was enough of that. "Alright, alright, I get the point, I'll stop overthinking it," he declared as he stood back up. "But this sitting around doesn't work for me. I've got other things to do, I'm heading outside."

"Whatever you say."

[center]* * * *[/center]

"You guys think Mateo is good?" Stone asked as he pushed around the food on his plate. "Dodging morning exercises is one thing, but breakfast as well?"

"You don't know Mateo," Jet laughed. "My bet is he started working on whatever the heck he's been obsessing over and has no idea what time it is."

Stone snorted, "Alright, that makes sense." The bull finished the last of his plate and got up. "I guess I'll see if anyone's seen him then."

Once the bull had left, Mochi and Garz both laughed. "He's down so bad," Mochi declared with a shake of his head. "Man, I hope this doesn't blow up in his face."

"Seriously, he's gone totally [i]birdbrained[/i]," Garz added as his own laughs continued.

Stripes just groaned at that. "Can you not go for every pun that crosses your mind?"

"How long have you known me?" Garz asked with a wide smile.

"Hey, you guys said there's a village near here, right?" Jet asked.

Stripes gave a nod, "Yeah, why?"

"We probably should restock at some point before we trek back, so I just figured I'd ask where it was?"

"Don't worry about it," Mochi told him. "We all spoke with Ashur already about doing some trades down at the village tomorrow, we can all make a day of it."

"Great! So then... Hm... well that was my original plan for this afternoon so..." Jet trailed off.

"Don't worry about this afternoon, we're going to be hunting," Gnash told him with a toothy smile.

"Uh, hunting?" Jet asked. "I'm not really good at that."

Garz just laughed at that.

"Don't listen to him, it's just a game," Stripes interrupted. "You'll see."

[center]* * * *[/center]

"Whatcha up to?" Stone asked.

Mateo nearly jumped to his feet in surprise. "Oh uh... Just trying to design something," he said as he put down his notebook.

"It looked like a recipe for something alteration related."

"Hm, yeah, it's my latest client's request," Mateo explained. "They're looking for a potion that can increase muscle density at an expedited rate, but doing that without causing other health defects is—" Mateo suddenly ceased his rambling as he looked to Stone. "Wait, you can read my notes? And why are you even here?"

"You missed breakfast," Stone explained. "And Master Freynar said you were probably out by the front gate." He held out a plate with eggs and sausage.

"Of course he did," Mateo let out a sigh as he accepted it.

"And as for the notes, he's also an expert on magic," Stone explained. "We all had to take lessons on magic basics, even though most of us aren't casters."

"Yeah but this isn't exactly the basics," Mateo pointed out.

"I read a lot," Stone admitted sheepishly. "Not that I have any talent for magic, but Master Freynar does have quite the collection of magic tomes and scrolls, so I take what I can get."

"Yeesh, they weren't kidding about you being smart," Mateo admitted. "You wouldn't happen to know which tome had information similar to this, would you?"

"Sure, let's go take a look!" Stone replied as he took a seat. "[i]After[/i] you eat."

"Deal."

[center]* * * *[/center]

"Hm..." Jet wandered over towards the training area. Stone was supposed to be running a beginner's session here, but he was more than a little early.

Just as he was trying to decide what to do until it started, he spotted a particularly appetizing behind in tight pants doing squats in the training area. It was one he'd been staring at earlier, when Garz had been talking to him about something or other. Not that tight pants were too unusual around here, the training uniforms were very much to Jet's taste.

"Heya, are you here for Stone's training session?" Jet asked cheerily.

As the hunky guy turned to face him, Jet was able to figure out he was a pine marten. He didn't look that much older than any of the guys he'd been hanging out with. "Nah, I'm just doing some solo training. Stone's sessions are for newbies, visitors and villagers. Uh, no offense."

Jet just laughed, "None taken, I'm one of those three things. But honestly, I was just hoping to get a little one-on-one time with you, if you know what I mean?"

"Bold for a little guy, aren't you, Pinky," the martin laughed at the blatant flirting.

Jet just pursed his lips.

"Well sure, why not I guess?"

"Eh, really?" Jet asked. He wasn't used to getting such an easy yes.

"Follow me."

[center]* * * *[/center]

"Alright, it looks like we're almost ready to begin," Stone declared as he looked around the training area. Mateo was standing there after the bull had dragged him away from his reading to participate. But someone else was missing who said they'd show up. "Has anyone seen a pink badger around here?"

"I'm coming!" Jet called as he ran up. Well, ran may have been too strong a word. Staggered awkwardly into position was probably more accurate.

Hopefully, by some miracle, no one would notice he couldn't walk straight.

"Alright, let's begin."

As Stone started to go over some basic self-defense techniques, Jet couldn't help but notice Mateo side-eyeing him. "What?"

"So what happened to you?" Mateo asked quietly as he was matching the movements.

"Nothing?" Jet replied shiftily.

"You're a terrible liar," Mateo replied with a snort.

"Oh shut up." Jet wrinkled his nose in response.

"It looked like someone took a stick and shoved it so far up your ass that—"

"IT'S NOTHING!"

Jet froze as he realized that not only were all eyes on him, but Stone was walking towards him. "I don't appreciate people interrupting my training."

"Oh come on, I'm sorry," Jet waved his hands. But he already knew what was coming next.

Jet just groaned as he was dragged over to the front and pulled over Stone's knee. And of course, when his pants were pulled down...

"Seriously? What did you do already this morning?" Stone asked as he saw Jet's red ass.

"I didn't do anything," Jet grumbled. "Just had some fun."

"Ah, then I won't feel bad about this," Stone replied as he brought his hand down on Jet's already battered behind.

"Gah!" Jet groaned as he found himself over someone's knee, again. "Come on, haven't I already suffered enough?"

Chapter 4

Jet was still scowling at Stone across the table. Everyone had reunited for lunch, even Mateo. Which of course meant that everyone was snickering at the fact that he couldn't sit still after having his ass beat twice in a row this morning.

"Laugh it up, just wait til it's your turn," Jet grumbled as he poked at his food.

"Eat up already." Silas was the one person who wasn't chuckling. "I didn't spend all morning cooking for you not to eat it."

"Thanks for your concern," Jet groaned. *[i]Why does everyone always have to pick on me?[/i]*

"So, is everyone ready?" Gnash asked.

"Ready for what?" Mateo replied.

"This is what happens when you miss breakfast," Mochi teased. The hyena had already cleared his plate and was now busy stretching. "It's manhunt time."

"Huh?" Mateo's brows furrowed as he tried to figure out what the hyena was talking about.

"It's where we split into teams and try to catch each other. Take a slap to the ass and you're captured and have to do a walk of shame back to their base, until someone rescues you or the game is over," Mochi explained. "And considering we've got eight people here, that's the perfect split for—"

"Uh about that..." Stripes interrupted. "I can't make it. I forgot, I promised to help run a training session this afternoon."

"Oh come on. I specifically took my shift this morning so I'd be free," Garz complained. "You couldn't have remembered this earlier?"

"It's fine, I found a substitute," the bongo-rat replied quickly. "Ashton will take my spot."

"You sure you don't want us to just reschedule?" Stone offered.

"Nah." Stripes folded his hands behind his head as he got up. "Besides, this way I get to see what you all do to the losers when I'm done."

"Why do I feel like you're getting off easy here?" Jet complained.

[center]* * * *[/center]

"So, who is this Ashton guy?" Mateo asked once they'd assembled.

"Not to mention where is this Ashton guy? Weren't we supposed to meet up straight after lunch?" Jet asked.

He found his answer when his underwear was grabbed and yanked from behind. "Oh good, you are playing, Pinky."

"Pinky?" Mochi asked suspiciously.

"Will you stop calling me that!?" Jet yanked himself away from the pine marten's grasp. "Don't tell me you're Ashton?"

"Guess you got half a brain on you after all," the marten teased.

"I see you two have met," Stone commented. "I guess that makes things easier.

"He—"

"You can tell us tonight... Pinky," Mochi teased.

Jet puffed his cheeks and crossed his arms. It was like everyone had chosen to target him today. Which wasn't *that* different from any other day, but still. It was annoying.

Garz laughed and held up his fist. In it was a bundle of straw, eight pieces to be specific. "Well if [i]that's[/i] over, I'm ready here. Short straws vs long straws, no complaining if you end up on a piss-poor team."

[center]* * * *[/center]

Once they'd gathered to their respective sides, both teams tried to figure out who'd come out ahead. For Mochi, the fact that it wasn't clear cut was good enough. Sure he was up against both Stone and Gnash, the two scariest players they had, but neither Jet nor Mateo was particularly a threat, especially since they didn't know these woods.

On his own team, Garz and Ashton were both decent catches. Garz wasn't the stealthiest, but he did know the woods like the back of his hands. And Ashton had played their sixth a number of times in the past, the pine marten having proved how sneaky he could be. As for Silas? Well he was a bit of a wildcard. The hyena knew the catfish well enough to not underestimate him, even if he hadn't played before.

"Alright, time to show the newbies where the bases are." Garz slapped Silas on the ass emphatically. "Once the bell rings for one o'clock, the game starts, got it?"

"Uh, yeah. Right!" Jet agreed. He quickly realized the rest of his team was already leaving and took off after them.

"Alright, time to figure out our strategy," Mochi declared as he led his own team off in the opposite direction. "We need to take down either Gnash or Stone off the bat, they're the two heavy hitters."

"Mateo and Stone will probably stick together, at least at first," Silas pointed out.

"Yeah, and Jet will probably volunteer for guard duty at the base..." Mochi tapped his chin as he tried to figure out what Gnash's first move would be.

Silas wrinkled his brow at that. "Why does the base need a guard if no one's been captured?"

"The flag!" Garz exclaimed. "Bit of a downer if we get [i]flag[/i]ellated over that getting stolen."

"Uh..."

"If you bring the enemy team's flag back to your base, there's no more rescues allowed. It's a pretty sure bet you'll win if you can pull it off," Ashton explained. "Course, if you get caught with it, you get gagged with it and can't be rescued instead."

"Ashton's favorite way to lose," Garz joked.

Ashton just snorted. "Gotta risk it all to win big."

"Alright, I think I get it." Silas mumbled. "So what if we just all went and took down Jet first?"

Mochi shook his head. "No capturing in the opponent's base until you've gotten their flag out of it. Otherwise it'd be too easy."

"Ugh, okay. Any more rules I should know about?"

Mochi nodded and continued to explain. "Just that if you get your ass smacked, no fighting back. You're captured until either your captor gets nabbed if they haven't brought you back to the base, or you get freed after you get tied up in their base."

"So if I grab someone, I need to tie them up? Where exactly?" Silas asked.

"Take your pick." The group finally reached their base in the woods. It was a clearing with an old log cabin. It looked decently well kept, which made Silas frown.

"Who's place is this?"

"Ours!" Garz proclaimed proudly.

Mochi just corrected him, "It's no one's really. It was abandoned ages ago, and we fixed it up to use. The other base is a tree fort, which is in another clearing. That one we built from scratch."

"We definitely got the better base," Ashton shook his head. "They gotta look through the whole cabin to find where we tie up their team."

"Yeah, but if we get tied up in the trees it's a massive pain to get rescued," Garz pointed out. "I hate climbing."

"It's okay, no one is dragging your fat ass up into the trees," Ashton joked.

"You're cruisin' for a brusin' already, huh?" Garz attempted to grab Ashton, only for the marten to dodge his grasp entirely.

"Let's save that for the other team, huh?" He shook his finger at Garz.

The sound of the bell interrupted the planning as the game suddenly began.

[center]* * * *[/center]

"Alright, I'm off!" Gnash announced loudly. "You two better keep some distance between ya, don't need you both getting caught off the bat!"

Mateo just snorted. "Well thanks for your faith in us."

Ten minutes later, Mateo was already feeling a little winded. Physical fitness wasn't exactly his strong suit.

Ugh, if he hadn't been blindsided, maybe he'd have pulled a Stripes and found a substitute for this stupid game.

Of course, there was nothing for that now. A few minutes later he found himself sneaking through the woods as best he could. Which, admittedly, was not that sneaky. But then again, that was the goal, right?

There was no sign at all before Mateo felt a slap on his ass. "Who the hell?" He whirled around to see a smirking Mochi. "Where did you even come from?"

"Maybe next time you'll find out," Mochi teased. "Now then, time to strip down."

Mateo signed, and started to do just that. He was in no rush of course.

Mochi was watching closely, which just made Mateo grumble uncomfortably.

He was quite thankful when Stone came in to strike Mochi from behind. Unfortunately for their plan, Mochi seemed ready for him.

The hyena grabbed his hand as it went to strike and whirled around. "Come on, did you think I wouldn't predict you two would be together?"

"Predict us or not, you're not getting out of this on your own," Stone taunted as he slipped out of Mochi's grip. "And I don't think you brought any backup."

"I've gotten stronger since we last went head to head," Mochi warned him.

"We'll see about that."

Mateo couldn't help but be impressed as he watched the two of them go at it. It wasn't just an attempt to slap each other's rear, the two were matching each other in martial arts that the bird could barely follow. There were strikes, grabs, and dodges aplenty. The whole thing was incredibly impressive.

"Speaking of training, Khalid is planning something special for you when we get back."

It was a good thing Mateo knew Mochi's weak point.

"Wha—" Mateo's name drop of the djinn that lived on their ship was enough to distract Mochi for just a moment. Stone finally got in a firm slap on his ass.

"Told ya you were done for," Stone laughed.

"Gah! Can't believe I fell for that. Please tell me he's not actually planning something."

"Huh?" Mateo shrugged before bending over to grab his discarded shirt. "Probably, how should I know?"

"Y'know, you don't need to get dressed right away," Stone pointed out. "Though Mochi needs to start stripping."

"You wish," Mateo stuck out his tongue as he continued to get redressed. "Anyways, let's just get him back before anyone else shows up."

"Jerks," Mochi grumbled as he stripped off his shirt.

"C'mon, we can get someone else afterwards," Stone told Mateo cheerfully.

"Can't believe I volunteered to play bait," Mateo grumbled as he finished redressing. The bird wasn't happy about it, even if he knew it was the best plan. Still, it looked like they were taking an early lead.

[center]* * * *[/center]

"Well then," Gnash grinned as he spied his first target. "I had a feeling I just had to follow the stream to find you," he whispered to himself.

He wasn't particularly worried about being heard, since Silas was clearly hiding underwater. Either he was just planning to stall out the game, or wanted to take someone passing by surprise.

But while his natural green scales were almost invisible in the water, his black shorts stood out next to them. Clearly he was used to hiding in deeper water. Gnash hadn't had much trouble finding him. Between the catfish's scent and tracks he'd been certain he was in the area.

Gnash made his way around to approach from behind Silas, following the water upstream. Once he was close enough, he just dove for the strike. "Gotcha!"

His hand hit something far harder than he expected, causing him to yelp out in pain. "The hell was—"

A slap to his butt just made him cut off and groan. "C'mon, what the heck?"

Silas stood behind him, dripping wet and nude. "Huh, thought you were supposed to be a big threat."

"Damn it, I underestimated you," Gnash complained as he watched Silas pull the pants from the river. They'd been wrapped around a rock, with a number of leafy branches tied to them to mimic his body and legs. Under the distortion of the water, it had been convincing enough.

"Mochi warned me. Figured you couldn't track my scent once I got underwater," he told Gnash as he slipped his shorts back on. "Now, I think it's your turn to strip."

"Ugh, let me get out of the water first at least," Gnash grumbled.

Silas watched approvingly as Gnash got out and stripped off his soaking wet outfit. "Hey, at least you'll dry off better this way," he joked as he grabbed the T-Rex's meaty ass.

"Hmph, just wait til my team turns this around. I'm gonna whip that ass of yours good, fish-boy."

[center]* * * *

[i]Newbie on the flag? Bad play guys. Knew you'd want both of your big hunters out and about.

[/i] Ashton looked over the opponent's base with great interest. Jet was sitting by the base of the ladder up to the tree fort, just casually watching his surroundings. If the marten had a guess, he was feeling safe and secure due to his immunity within the base.

Of course, Ashton knew better.

He tiptoed over, grabbed the badger in a headlock, and gave him a noogie. "Hey Pinky."

"H-hey, what!?" Jet jumped to his feet the moment Ashton let go. "C'mon, you think I can't grab you?"

"Aw Pinky, what's got you so upset?"

"Will you stop calling me that!" Jet steamed. The badger dashed for Ashton. "You seriously want me to take you over my lap, don't you?"

"As if. Your ass is gonna belong to me. Again." Ashton dodged out of the way with a sly grin.

"Come on, you can't even touch me in here." The badger ran desperately after Ashton to try and land a single slap on his ass. "And I'm not planning on leaving."

"Uh-huh." Ashton easily dodged another strike aimed at his behind. "I just need to wait until you're out of breath enough that I can drag you out of here."

"You underestimate me." Jet suddenly had a vicious smile upon his face. He lifted his hands and focused. "Even if I don't have my wand with me, I can still do this!"

"Here we go." Ashton wasn't at all concerned about this. In fact, it was exactly what he'd been waiting for. He focused his chi, and struck an open palmed strike against Jet.

The effect was immediate. A burst of energy sent Jet flying backwards as his spell was interrupted.

"D-dang it..." Jet muttered as he felt a slap upon his rump. A moment later he registered that the blast had sent him far enough to leave the safety of the base. "Of course you know Mochi's dumb trick."

"You knew he learned it here, didn't you? Should have thought that through, Pinky," Ashton taunted the badger. "Now, time for you to strip for me!"

Jet rolled his eyes as he pushed himself upright. Ashton took the opportunity to give him a swat on his still tender rump. He was gonna have some more fun with this badger, that was for sure.

Chapter 5

Much to the badger's annoyance, Ashton was taking full advantage of Jet's situation. The marten had grabbed and slapped his ass continuously since they'd started the march to the other base.

"C'mon, can't we just walk in peace?" Jet complained as another slap crossed his bare cheeks. He was carrying his clothes in his arms, high enough to not cover his groin. At Ashton's insistence, of course.

"Nah," Ashton replied. "Where's the fun in that, Pinky?"

Jet blushed furiously at the turn of events. He couldn't even do anything about the nickname now. And he'd lost in the base of all places. He was going to get taunted about this for ages. This really hadn't been his day.

"Y'know, when your team loses, I'm going to have some real fun with you." Ashton continued as they walked along. "That plump ass deserves way more of a beating than it's gotten."

"What did I do to deserve any of this?"

"Have a nice ass." A harsh slap punctuated that comment.

"...I get that a lot," Jet groaned.

"I'm sure you do," Ashton just laughed at the badger's distress.

Jet came to a sudden halt. "Fine, then stop picking on me already!"

"What's the matter Pinky? Weren't you the one who flirted with me first?"

"That's totally different. You've been a jerk non-stop since then!" Jet blustered. "And I told you to stop calling me that."

Ashton stepped forwards and gently rubbed Jet's face. "Eh, you're cute when you blush," he teased.

Jet's face was hot as a volcano after that. "Damn it y-you can't just say something like that and think that makes it okay!"

Ashton threw back his head and let out a deep laugh. "You lost, I think I can do whatever I want with you. Isn't that what you signed up for?"

"I mean, sort of, but that's not. You know. Ugh, why are you the worst!?" Jet through his hands up in the air.

At that moment a heavy smack rang out. But not upon his own behind.

Stone was grinning as Ashton let out a groan. "Glad you saw my signal Jet, I was starting to think you hadn't, but that was some good bratting to distract him."

"Huh? Oh yeah, of course." Jet had absolutely no idea what or when Stone had tried to signal him. But he wasn't about to admit the bratting hadn't been a distraction either.

"Look, Pinky, you don't have to—"

Whatever Ashton was about to say was interrupted as Jet remembered a very important rule. "Uh uh, if you get caught with the flag, you get gagged with it. Isn't that right, Stone?"

"Mhm." The bull grabbed the flag from Ashton's hands and pulled it tight across his muzzle.

Ashton let out a glare at Jet. The badger just smirked in return. "Your turn to strip down," he told him as he redressed himself.

Within a minute, Ashton was now carrying his clothes in the same position Jet had been, but with the addition of a nice gag.

"Come on, let's get going!" Jet declared with a slap to Ashton's behind. He immediately jumped as he heard another noise nearby.

"Chill, it's just me and the idiot hyena," Mateo told him with a huff. Mochi just rolled his eyes, but declined to comment. "Stone told me to hang back and see if someone might try and grab you two. I think the coast is clear."

"Yup," Stone agreed. "Now, let's get them both back to base."

Jet smirked at Ashton before glancing over to Stone and Mateo. "I promise this time I won't get caught as the guard—"

Mateo snorted. "Yes, because I'll take over. I'm sick of running around already anyways."

"One down." Silas grunted as he entered the base. The nude and still sopping wet Gnash followed after him with a growl.

"Damn, nice work for a newbie," Garz declared as he eyed up Gnash. "Should have known you could reel one in."

Silas glared at him with a death stare, but Garz just laughed.

"Whatever, I did my part, you go out and hunt now." Silas waved his hand dismissively at the dumb hyena.

"Yeah well, I have a target in mind anyways." Garz cracked his knuckles before taking off to bag himself a man of his own.

It was a good fifteen minutes before he spied his target. Stone was a tricky one, but he'd found the most reliable way to take him down was brute force. And hoping he hadn't had time to set up a trap of some sort.

Today, it seemed he was in luck. Stone had his back turned as he came into sight. And that was all the opportunity that Garz needed.

He stampeded in, eschewing any and all stealth for raw speed. Stone certainly heard him as he approached, as the bull whirled around to face him. But a full speed tackle sent the two of them flying to the ground.

A heavy thwack resounded as Garz struck his target before Stone could recover.

"Oh come on," Stone complained. "Talk about a stupid way to go down."

"Eh heh heh, you should be used to it by now," Garz told him. "Now strip for me."

Stone just groaned as Garz got off him. "Alright, alright, jerk. Damn, you didn't have to hit me that hard."

"Oh yes I did, I know better than to give you an inch," Garz teased. "Now hurry up, I want to win this quick."

Silas glanced up at Stone's naked form as the bull was led into their base. "Heh, nice."

"Told ya I was ready to go," Garz grinned. "And with Stone and Gnash down, their team is doomed." He made quick work with the ropes to tie Stone up next to his glowering T-Rex teammate.

"Damn it Stone, you were supposed to rescue me, not get caught yourself," Gnash complained. His wrists were tied to a tree branch, forcing him to stay on his tip-toes, unable to cover himself while exposed from every angle.

Stone rolled his eyes. "You don't have any room to speak, you were the first one down. Well second, but I rescued Jet at least before I got caught."

"Yeah, how long do you think *that* will last for?"

"What, him being free? Eh... not long now I guess." Stone admitted. "He seems pretty dopey."

"No joke, I can't believe he wasn't the first one caught." Gnash laughed. "Ah well, I guess we're probably doomed at this point."

In the nearby bushes, Jet was fuming. He'd show those two what for. Well, after Garz left and he managed to rescue the two jerks.

Not that he had a plan on how he'd get past Silas or anything, but how hard could it be? Knowing Silas there was a 50/50 chance he'd just be uninterested in playing and ignore him.

"That's probably just wishful thinking."

But once Garz had slipped away Jet had to do more than just sit and wait. But after pondering for a bit, he only came up with one idea:

Distract Silas, and rescue his teammates.

"I'm so screwed."

Still, what did he have to lose? Besides his clothes, his dignity, and his ability to sit down of course.

Yeah, he was just stalling. He is chest heaved as he took a deep breath and tossed a stone off in the opposite direction. The breath escaped him in a rush as Silas actually took the bait.

Jet rushed over to the two of them and started to fight with the knots holding them. Just as he finally got Stone's wrists free a heavy weight landed on his back knocking the air out of him.

Before he could even think of recovering, a smack on his ass took Jet out, again.

Silas chuckled and shook his head as he stood up from his position on the badger's back..
"Really Jet?"

"What gave me away?" Jet groaned. Of course Silas had to have come from above, and neither of the two idiots he was trying to save bothered to warn him.

"They've been bickering non-stop." Silas pointed out. "Like I wouldn't notice if they fell quiet?"

"Damn it you two! First you insult me, then you get me caught." Jet just let out a sigh. "I guess I have to strip down now. Again."

"Eh, whatever. You can have some fun with Gnash and Stone if you want first, I don't care."

"...Well if you're offering." Jet turned back to Stone and Gnash with a grin. "Now, what were you two saying about me earlier?"

"Uh..." Stone just gulped.

"Oh come on, do your worst, Pinky—" Gnash's taunt was interrupted as the badger brought his carpet beater-esque wand down with a thunderous smack.

* * * * *

"Hiding in your base?" Garz taunted. He stood at the border of the clearing around the cabin. Mateo was in plain sight, sitting and scribbling in his notebook by the front door. Ashton was also clearly visible, gagged and with his wrists bound behind him as he stood right in the middle

of the clearing on display. Mochi was presumably inside somewhere, more under guard. "Thought you were a uh... well some other kind of bird, not a chicken."

Mateo glanced up just long enough to give Garz a scathing glance. "It's called guardwork, genius."

Garz crossed his arms. "Uh-huh, then why aren't you doing anything about me?"

"Not worth my time." The bird didn't even bother looking up this time. "Busy with something actually important."

"What, you think your precious Stone will come and take me down for you. Bad news for you, he's currently getting red-assed in our base."

"Good on him, hope he's having fun," Mateo replied off-handedly.

"Seriously? What a betrayal. You aren't even going to try and help him."

"Nah, I just know you're probably lying."

Garz grunted, growing more annoyed. Why was this bird so hard to piss off? Screw it, he'd just pick him up and carry him out of the safe zone if he was going to be like this.

"Fine, if you're going to be like that, I'll just show you in person—" Halfway to Mateo, Garz suddenly couldn't lift his feet thanks to some strange sticky substance. His momentum carried him forwards as he planted himself face first into the ground.

"What the hell is this stuff?" Garz grunted as he tried to push himself back up. It was all over his shirt, pants, arms, and worst of all his face.

"The sap of the birches around here makes a fine base for an adhesive." Mateo explained as he casually strolled over and smacked Garz's exposed ass before he could break free. "Especially when mixed with some dandelion pollen and a touch of powdered dragon scale."

"How do I get it off me?" Gnash complained. He'd managed to free his face, only to get one of his hands stuck in the process.

"Comes off with soap and water." Mateo explained as he just walked back to the bench. "Guess you'll have to wait for the game to be over."

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Mateo placed his book down as he heard Silas call his name. "Hey! Mateo!"

"What's up? Figured you'd be guarding your base."

Silas sighed. "Yeah no one showed up for a while so I figured I'd check in. You have Mochi here too?"

"Yup. Lemme guess, you've got all my teammates?" he asked in return.

"Sure do." Silas replied with a sigh. "Don't really feel like trying to sneak in, free folks and start this all over again though."

"Yeah, I think I've got a better idea." Mateo stood up and glanced to the catfish. "Up for a truce? Let's discuss this away from any prying ears."

Silas eyed him warily. "You do know this sounds like a stupid trap."

"Yeah, but I think we both know that both of us would rather talk than fight. 'Sides, I think I found a loophole, and that's way more fun to exploit than winning by the rules."

Garz growled from where he was stuck to the ground. "Silas, just get this damn bird already!"

"..." Silas glared at Garz. After a few moments he responded to Mateo. "Yeah okay, if only because it'll piss off that idiot."

"Hey! Get back here you traitor!" Garz yelled as the two walked away. He gulped as they vanished from view. He had a feeling this wasn't going to end well for his ass.

Chapter 6

When Silas and Mateo returned to the cabin, they were trailed by the naked forms of Jet, Gnash, and Stone, all tied up in a chain.

"...Okay so wait, did we win after all?" Garz asked as he looked over the three in surprise.

"Hardly. What in the world happened to you?" Stone asked as he looked over the hyena sprawled on the ground.

"Some stupid adhesive trap," Garz growled. "So wait, Silas did convince Mateo to betray us—"

"No, we just formed our own team," Silas interrupted. "No rules against it. And hey, between the two of us, we had the six of you captured. So I'd say that means we win."

"Wha—You can't do that!" Garz growled.

"That's what I said!" Gnash yelled.

Ashton grunted in agreement through his gag.

"You five said you told us all the rules, I don't recall there being one against this," Mateo replied snidely.

"I think we're going to need to make another rule addendum after this," Stone groaned. "Best just take the loss Garz."

"Ugh, this is so damn stupid," the hyena scowled.

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One bucket of cold water later, a soaked Garz joined the other five losers in the cabin while his clothes hung up to dry outside.

"Fucking powdered dragon scales..." he grumbled as he took a seat. "Alright, who's first?"

"I don't mind the water, so why not you," Silas snarked.

"Can't *seam* to keep your fins off me, huh?" Garz joked.

Silas went and grabbed the hyena by the ear. "Just want to shut your puns up."

"Hey, ow, OW! Be careful!"

The rest of the group snickered as Garz was hauled off to the front of the room for a show.

"Anyways, you get to be my first pick, cow boy." Mateo declared as he grabbed Stone by the arm.

"I'm both honored and frightened," Stone replied with a straight face.

Jet leaned over to the others. "Y'know, losing isn't **that** bad if we get to watch."

"Not normally how it goes, but I'm not complaining," Gnash replied with a grin. "Glad I'm not in the first batch, gonna be less fun with a red ass."

Silas had dragged Garz to the far side of the room and positioned him with his legs spread and his hands against the wall. "Alright hyena boy, laugh at this."

"Oh, so you *can* take charge, I was starting to wonder if you were ever—YOW!" Garz yelled in surprise at the strength of the first swat. "Ah shit, I'm in trouble, huh?"

"Sure are."

* * * * *

"I give, I give!" Ashton complained

"So have you two decided or what?" Jet asked.

The six losers were lined up against the wall with their hands over their heads, showing off their reddened asses. Once they'd taken them all over their knees in turn, Silas and Mateo had taken a break to confer about what the prize they'd demand would be.

As much as Jet wasn't looking forward to finding out what their punishment would be, the anticipation was killing him as well.

"Yes, I think we have," Mateo replied. "Stone, you have to spend the night naked and serve and obey me."

"Heh, figured it'd be something like that," Stone replied with his face still against the wall. "That's pretty standard for a loss anyways."

"So I heard."

"Garz, you're mine," Silas declared. "Best be on good behavior if you don't want another paddling."

"Yeesh, one would think you're a herring with how red you made my ass," Garz joked.

Jet raised his brow. "And for the rest of us?"

"You and Mochi are going to pay us back once we leave. No rush there," Mateo explained. "I've got a special experiment with Mochi's name on it."

"It better not involve any explosions," Mochi warned.

"Nah, but you might want to lube up first. Just in case." Mateo gave him a wink.

"Ugh... And that means Silas has something for me then..." Jet grumbled. Now he was going to have to have that weight hanging over him for who knew how long.

"Oh don't look so down, I have a gift for you too," Silas declared with a small smile as he walked up to Jet. He lifted the badger's chin with a single finger. "Ashton's yours for the night."

"Wait what? Pinky didn't win." Ashton huffed.

"So what?" Silas turned to him. "Mateo and I will be busy."

"Jerk," the pine martin crossed his arms.

Gnash stood up next, glaring at Mochi. "And let me guess, that means Mochi has my punishment?"

"Nah, you two already have a fight scheduled or something right?" Mateo dismissed the idea. "No for you? You get to be everyone's special entertainment on our final night. Whatever the group wants to do to you."

"Wha—" Gnash's face turned redder and he took a step back. "Everyone's going to get me?"

"Unless you keep us entertained," Silas replied slyly. "Sorry guy, that's the price for being hot."

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Dinner and evening practice provided a welcome respite for the losers, even if they were both rather uncomfortable to do with their asses stinging.

But once that was settled, everyone split up. While Silas and Jet dragged Garz and Ashton off to have some fun and Stone and Mateo snuck off on their own, Mochi, Stripes, and Gnash decided to keep on training..

"Alright let's see if you've been keeping up your training." Gnash chuckled as he took a seat at the side. "Maybe Stripes can take you down now."

Mochi just shook his head. "Ignore him Stripes, let's just have some fun."

"Took the words right out of my mouth." Stripes declared as he took up his position.

"Boo... Boring!" Gnash teased from the sidelines.

Mochi rolled his eyes and took up a stance opposite Stripes. The two began to make small strikes back and forth, testing each other's reactions.

"So Stripes, what's been up with you anyways?" Mochi asked. "You haven't really mentioned much."

"I guess that's because there's not a lot happening," Stripes replied sheepishly as he went for a low kick. "Just the same old same old, day in and day out."

"You good with that?" Mochi asked as he jumped out of the way.

"I think so," Stripes replied as he followed up with several rapid jabs.

Gnash grunted. "Hey we're getting stronger all the time too, what more could you ask for?"

The hyena went to say something, before thinking better of it. "Well just glad you're doing well then."

"You two don't listen to this," Garz ordered.

Silas rolled his eyes. He had the large hyena over his knee and was just lightly smacking his bare ass. The four of them were back in the dorm room, since Garz and Jet had wanted time to plan... something. Whatever it was, it was something Silas was sure he wanted no part of.

"Sure, I've got plenty of practice ignoring Jet's antics."

"Just leave me out of whatever you two are planning Pinky—Yeow!" Ashton yelped as Jet brought a paddle down on his ass with full force.

"My *name* is Jet, got it?"

"Okay, yeesh, so sensitive," Ashton muttered.

"Anyways," Jet continued loudly, "While we're in town tomorrow. What supplies are we going to need?"

"We still need to actually decide on a prank," Garz pointed out. "C'mon, with the two of us putting our heads together, we have to come up with something awesome."

"Yeah..." Jet just fondled Ashton's ass as he thought. "Man, I'm just blanking on new ideas. We can't just do something stupid like a pantsing or whatever."

"Well you're a mage right?"

"Yeah?"

"Can you uh..." Garz thought about it between slaps of his ass. "oh, what if we pranked them in their dreams?"

"Well that's creative at least." Jet admitted. "But I'm not really talented enough to pull that off. If we could prep them to make their dreams more accessible maybe but..." He turned to stare at Silas.

The catfish leveled a cold stare. "No."

Jet pursed his lips and gave Ashton a hard smack on the rear. "Come on! You can pull something like that off, can't you?"

"Hey I didn't do anything!" Ashton complained.

Silas ignored him and continued to stare at Jet. "I could, but I'm not messing my food up with one of your prank spells."

"Well Garz and I can make the food, we just need you to do the magic."

Silas stared for a few moments more before letting out a deep sigh. "Fine but my name is nowhere on this, got it?"

"I think we're almost there." Mateo had paused and was glancing around to ascertain they were still on the path.

"I can't believe you, the one who complained most about having to hike out here this morning, dragged us back for the evening," Stone chuckled in response. The bull was fully nude and carrying his own clothes.

"My want to get you to myself outweighed my hatred of hiking," Mateo replied glibly.

Stone just shrugged. "Well you *are* right, the cabin is just ahead."

As soon as they got inside, Mateo turned around and pinned Stone against the wall. The bull's eyes went wide. "Uh..."

"Stay right there."

"As you say."

Stone shuffled as he waited, all too aware of how red his face had gotten when Mateo had pinned him down. Fuck, his entire body was on edge after that. He slumped slightly and let out a sigh.

"Alright, explain this."

Mateo returned down the stairs with a wooden paddle in hand with the word "Stone" carved upon it.

Any redness that had left Stone's face immediately returned. "Well, one time I lost and uh, was forced to carve that. For my own punishment."

Mateo lightly smacked it against his hand. "I think I might keep this one. But first, let's see if I can leave your name on your own cheeks."

"It doesn't uh..." Stone gulped. "I mean, you can try but..."

Mateo just silently pointed at the table for Stone to lean over.

"...Let's find out."