

Lathair and Winyára
Dancer + Vesuvius cleansed
1224 words

“If Dancer is out there researching the spread of corruption, she could be in danger,” Winyara says as she and Lathair leave the two Gryphons to recover on their own.

The sun has begun setting, and the slowly dimming light paints long shadows across the ground. Around them, lanterns and street lights are in the process of being lit, and the bustle at the marketplace is gradually fading out as its patrons make for their homes. A small cart full of vegetables rattles across the cobblestone, drawn by an Equila Gryphon with their human companion sitting atop it.

Lathair frowns to himself. “Yes, but she could be anywhere. With how many floating islands there are, we could be searching for days.”

Huffing in the way she always does when she agrees with him but isn't happy about it, Winyara resolutely heads down the street leading to Dancer's shop. “She might've left some notes. I'm going to look.”

Lathair shakes his head, but follows.

Dancer's shop is unchanged from when they were last here. Winyara steers directly for the front counter, ducking behind it to search through the small shelves built into it where recipes, pouches of herbs and various other small items are hidden away from the view of the customers. While she skims the notes scattered around the space, Lathair takes a quick peek at the note on top of the counter, the one containing the recipe for the antidote they'd successfully used on Apollo and Pez.

Collecting the necessary ingredients takes no time at all. He's often helped Winyara gather herbs, and easily recognises most of the required ones, here. He'll leave the actual potion-making to her, though.

“Ah-hah!” Winyara exclaims, then reads:

“Actual origin of disease still unknown, but possible outbreak began on the western island, the rocky one with the waterfall. Vesuvius not seen since first case in the village - infected? Should investigate.”

“It's dated just yesterday; Dancer must be on that island right now,” Winyara concludes.

“Then we know where to go.”

With a freshly brewed batch of antidotes - which Lathair is determined to repay Dancer for, seeing as they shamelessly used her ingredients - they set out towards the west. Lathair vaguely knows of the island in question, from depictions in artwork he's seen around the main island, but has never actually seen it, himself.

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It's not difficult to guess which one is their target, however, once it comes into view. The floating island is even larger than the main one, but due to the rocky, almost volcanic terrain, construction must have been too difficult to make use of the space. A waterfall, not particularly big but still quite visually impressive, runs down one side of the southernmost peak and into the empty air below, where it disperses into a fine mist some hundred feet down.

Lathair and Winyara touch down on an outcropping by the entrance to the gaping mouth of a cave.

"Footsteps," Lathair mutters, carefully stepping around the imprints in the sandy earth. "Dancer's, I'd imagine."

Inside the cave, it's even darker than the rapidly descending night outside. There are a handful of scattered metal sconces on the walls with lit torches, but they produce little more than pockets of light here and there for Lathair and Winyara to hop between.

The lack of light, however, soon becomes the least of their worries.

Something moves in the dark. There's a scrape of claws against the rocky floor, a swish of feathers. A growl. Then, far off in the dark, a ring of flames ignites.

"Vesuvius," Lathair murmurs. "Get ready. I don't think she's happy about us being here."

The Corvus is, indeed, not happy. With a piercing screech, she lunges out of the darkness. Flames trail around her and light up her feathers in shimmering hues of red, orange and yellow. Her long tail feathers flow behind her like a cape fluttering in the wind.

Winyara spreads her wings and leaps into the air to dodge Vesuvius' charge. The cave only offers just enough space overhead for her to stay up, but not for long. She lands again with a huff, and turns to face Vesuvius.

Lathair braces himself, and takes in the scene. Vesuvius is growling and snapping her teeth as she glares at him and Winyara. There's a strange, sinister light in her eyes, one that can't be explained by the fire around her neck.

"Get the antidote ready," he calls to Winyara.

Winyara nods and pulls out a bottle from the satchel strapped around her chest. "Ready when you are."

Vesuvius lowers her head and prepares to lunge again. Lathair stares her down, unyielding. With another screech, she jumps.

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But the sound cuts off into a confused yelp when another Gryphon leaps out of the shadows and tackles her mid-air. The two Gryphons wrestle on the ground in a flurry of claws and feathers, and it takes a moment for Lathair to recognise the newcomer - but the light brown, pied coat is unmistakable.

“Dancer!”

Lathair hurries to break the two Gryphons apart, but even with his much larger size, it’s difficult to do so without getting scratched, himself. And with at least one, possibly two, corrupted creatures involved, that is something he would much prefer to avoid.

He finally catches hold of Vesuvius and drags her away, putting his own body between her and Dancer. Vesuvius writhes and snaps her beak at him, but he merely lifts his head out of range.

On the other side, Dancer stands panting. She looks mostly unharmed but for a single cut on her cheek. She blinks rapidly, and seems to struggle to hold herself back. When Winyara cautiously steps closer, Dancer startles and backs away.

“Be careful! I don’t—I don’t know when... when it’ll take over again.”

“It’s okay, Dancer,” Winyara says. She holds out the bottle. “We’ve come prepared.”

“Is this...?”

“Your antidote, yes. It works.”

Dancer closes her eyes and lets out a relieved breath. Encouraged by Winyara, she pulls out the cork and drinks. When she’s done, she laughs, surprised. “Oh, you’re right! I can feel it working!”

Lathair grunts as Vesuvius tries to throw him off. “Not to be rude, but...”

Winyara hurries over, and Lathair manages to hold Vesuvius’ head still, with some effort. Her eyes are wide and fearful, and she fights fiercely to get free.

“I’m sorry,” Lathair tells her. “I’m very sorry. Hang in there just a moment longer, and you’ll see why we’re doing this.”

Vesuvius hisses, but Winyara succeeds in pouring a good measure of the antidote into her mouth. She then pauses, blinking as though confused. When her struggling ceases, Lathair immediately lets her go and backs away, giving her space.

She makes a face, likely at the taste of the antidote, but there’s nothing of the previous anger, only regular distaste. “Ugh. That has to be the most awful—... Wait. Dancer?”

Dancer smiles weakly. “It’s me. I wanted to help you, but... I may have gotten a little reckless.”

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Vesuvius cringes and averts her eyes. "Did I hurt you?"

"Oh, nothing that won't heal in a few days," Dancer assures her.

Winyara wanders over to Lathair's side. Patting her satchel, she says. "I made enough of the antidote to cure a couple more, if we find them."

Lathair nods. "Our course is clear, then."