

Chapter 2: Displays of Power

Image © 2003 Daniel "Pendragon"



Lord Sage is (c) Daniel "Pendragon" @ <http://vcl.ctrl-c.liu.se/~vcl/Artists/Daniel-V>

I slowly rose to my feet, while the silence all around me grew so heavy it could've drowned out the din of a Millennial Fair.

I stood watching this creature, for that is all it could be described as. It looked like a demon of the highest order – surpassing even Gehnohn in appearance – with deep emerald green eyes caught inside a face of mutilated plates of green chitin so dark it was almost black behind all those face wrappings. It was like a mummified scarab beetle. I half expected that bulbous pack against its back to open up and spread wings.

It was definitely shaped that way... as if it were a wing sheathe.

A pair of blow tubes served as its mouth, either of which poked out between an open layer of the wrappings, and a pair of black

opal-like gems of varying sizes were set here and there.

It looked *almost* artificial. Almost. In what of its bare flesh that I could see I saw the throbbing beat of veins and arteries pumping black blood in between the thick and heavy plates of armor.

A heavy cloak wrapped about its shoulders, with its wide circular hat atop its head in the traditional Bekkano style that even I sometimes wore. But aside from the premature demonic appearance of a giant bug, there the dark side ended, giving way to priestly attire, and a warrior's demeanor.

It apparently noticed me watching, and turned to look at me with a grinding of servos and taut tendons, with the pair of blow tubes exhaling sharply in a breath of gasses. *That stuff... is armor?! I heard myself think. Living armor? Is that even possible? The closest thing is the undead armor used by necromancers!*

“Are you she?” it asked, shifting its stance to face me, and I saw its solid green eyes flare brightly for a moment behind what was undoubtedly a pair of contact eye visors directly over the wearer’s eyes.

Great maker it’s huge...

“I am.” I responded, lifting my chin, pushing out my chest while I began summoning power into me in case he might try something. “But who are you?”

It was then that the creature threw its cloak to rest over one shoulder, and I got a brief view of a bio-mechanical armor system, complete with servos, feeder tubes, and powerful metal plates before the armor immediately fragmented along preset grooves that fit so well that they were neigh invisible before this. The plates broke open upon hundreds upon hundreds of individual pieces. The affect was like the creature had suddenly grown in size, but then there was a ripple and all the pieces folded into one another before liquefying into thousands of sinuous streamers, and layer by layer of that armor peeled away – heavy plating, light plating, vitals and joints plating, endoskeleton, muscle system – absorbing into red jewels set in wrists and chest, and the Creator knew where else, revealing the creature beneath it all.

I gasped, holding my breath at the sight of the being beneath all that armor. Several others about me raised to their feet at the sight of... him – definitely a *him* – even Equis rose to my side, holding onto my arm at such a... an *exotic* creature.

Feline, eight feet in height, muscled like no Power Leaguer had ever achieved. Fur as white as newly fallen snow, reflecting twinges of varying colors of blue, with a delicate stripe system radiating all over him from head to toe. Deeply compacted, angular and overlapping stripes bordered his outsides like a badge of honor.

“Screw the Casid.” Equis said beside me. “Look at him! Even the Casid of legend have never hoped to look like that!”

The Casid were what Equis was. A feline sporting manes and yellowish to brownish fur, with darker tufts of fur forming at forearms, forelegs and tail tip.

The feeling of unfamiliar magics was incredible around him. So large, so powerful... so exotic. It was a sensual experience just to look at him.

He possessed eyes the same color as the eyes of the armor that had possessed him, but unlike normal eyes, those eyes of his *glowed* a solid color; absent of iris or pupil. And then he was undoing his scarves from about his face and neck, and removing the pan hat atop his head, and when I was finally able to see his face, I felt my heart pause inside my cavernous chest, and my breasts give a heave.

He was so handsome...

His face was as exotic as the rest of him, with the stripe system of his body continuing up along his face and angling about his glowing eyes in a beautiful mesh. High tapering, hooded ears, and a long mane hanging from the back of his head gathered into a pony tail at its very end with a leather thong.

“I am glad that my search is finally over,” he said again holding his hat with both of his five-fingered clawed hands, and began walking innocently forward. There was no malice that I saw in his actions, his demeanor was kind and benevolent, but others did not notice his movements in the same way that I did, which was met with immediate resistance.

The first came in the form of an Imperial Ranger, brandishing her Class-Six battle sword, a thing longer than she was tall with its hilt, and possessing the greatest of technological accomplishments the Empire has come to know. A technological wonder that bordered upon magical with its highly advanced sciences bred into the blade. Its edge held a mono-filament edge, an edge so sharp that if one were to press their fingers together as tightly as possible, the space in between them would hold over five hundred of such filaments. The edge had the capability of a vibro weapon, with gyro stabilizers in the hilt to make it neigh weightless, a nanite repair matrix to fix a multi-composite blade made of a form of steel normally reserved for dreadnaught battleship armor. And that was only the tip of what that sword had in it. Those who were even able to wield such a devastating weapon, with their Sword Tech Skills, still instilled fear in even the Leagues.

Especially since one of the first requirements of the wielders of such a sword was ten thousand battle victories. They were veterans of the highest order.

“Hold!” she cried, and planted her helmet atop her head while holding the long and heavy sword with only one arm, her battle armor enhancing her strength enough to where the sword was weightless in her hand. “You are in the presence of the Emperor! Name your planet of origin and pay respects to his holiness!”

“My home world has many names. Earth, Terra, Gaia...” He answered, and shifted his feet, lifting a hand to a pair of straps on his chest and torso harness that held his cloak and shoulder blades over one arm. “And I am sorry to say but I bend no knee to anyone I have not sworn fealty to.”

“SACRILIDGE!” she screamed. “All in this universe are under His rule. I said... BOW!” she cried, and the Emperor himself rose to his feet.

“Captain...” he said in a warning tone, but the sword-wielding ranger didn’t hear.

“I said BOW!” she repeated, and when the stranger didn’t move to do so, in a shrill battle cry, she surged forward, her sword lighting and humming with technological might, crackling with lightning sparks.

Rapid feet carried her immediately forward then in a dash as quickly as an assassin, her feet landing on only her toes as she raced forward; those toes barely even touching the earth as she lowered her sword to strike.

The stranger simply shifted his feet again, his stance maneuvering into one of defense, and as she neared, he jerked down on the straps and a pair of swords jerked upward from his back and flared apart for easy reach. His clawed hand lanced upward and pulled one of the swords free in the same motion as he struck. There was a titanic clang like a hammer against an anvil, a flash of white and brilliant blue, and the Ranger stood stunned for a moment as her weapon went spiraling away to land point down into the cobblestones. But then the stranger simply lanced his foot upward in a perfect extension, catching the captain under the chin with enough force to knock her upward and backward, dislodging her helmet from off her head as she tumbled backward. As the stranger hooked his leg back in, the motion turned the captain so that she landed face first before he chambered his leg back in and slid forward into his defensive stance again, holding his sword in an unorthodox way.

Both hands cupped the pommel of braided black silk over ivory and held taut with gold, the single-edged, curving sword perhaps the size of the one the ranger had just held. Usually, a warrior had their leading hand as balance and their trailing hand as power and movement. He however had them reversed, and with the blade pointed up now.

But now there was complete and total silence as all stared at this scene.

No one could believe it! Not even I! An Imperial Ranger had been *disarmed*. Those who have never lost a fight in all their years of service. But no greater disbelief remained than that of the ranger who was regaining her composure, her eyes lifting to the one known as Lord Sage as he relaxed his position and resheathed the black-bladed sword with its single glittering edge. It was then that I noticed the golden dragon woven beneath the black-braided pommel. He stared down at her only briefly, one of his hooded ears twitching forward as if he were looking at her with it.

“Seek not glory... seek only honor. Glory leads to pride, and pride goeth before the fall.”

He then turned toward me again and continued on his approach.

The next to arrive was Pleeyo, Equis's young student, physically as strong, but greater talented than her master, she simply stepped right up and brought both hands upward into a double-clasped fist and brought them down again.

She was never one for subtlety.

But a flash of blue-green light erupted briefly, and her fists rebounded upon a dome-shaped section of energy which shimmered briefly with a static charge before fading into invisibility again.

“Please.” He said, looking to her as she recovered quickly from having such a blow made so ineffectual, as well as her surprise, and she began then to hammer at whatever shield he was using.

Aura magics, I thought, at least recognizing this particular magic. *But it’s energy source is so alien. But nonetheless he’s actually using Aura magics.* The Mystic League had done away with them because of how ineffectual they were, but his defense was so incredibly solid, that even Pleeeyo’s unbelievable and sometimes uncontrolled power was being completely deflected! And on top of that, the harder she hit, the greater that shield’s defenses were!

He’s using her own power against her! I thought with amazement, and immediately tried to see how he was doing it.

How?! I thought, lifting a hand to pick at my teeth with one claw as I used my ‘Assessing’ power to read his magics.

“Don’t!” he said as her strikes grew more and more powerful, and she was screaming as she tried to break his shell. As each attack landed, the shield grew larger and more solid, till I could actually see its shell surrounding him like a bubble, and after that, it started to grow darker with each blow.

“No!” “Stop!” “*Please!*” he cried after each blow, and after she was suddenly pushed away by the barrier growing so large, he cried one last time. “**Enough!**” and his words reverberated with an echoing sound that must’ve carried for miles.

My Combat Magic Trigger activated from whatever it was he’d just done to set it off, and instantaneously my mind and body sped up several fold, making it seem that all those around me had just slowed down. But even after that, what happened next was so fast that I nearly missed some of it.

What all that were not blessed with my powers of perception saw was Lord Sage snapping his hand out and back so fast that it was little more than a stunning blur of motion. The simple touch to her midriff pushed her up off the ground about a foot, she gasping as if all the wind had been knocked out of her. There she floated up and down as if in slow motion for a full three seconds before some force of inertia was suddenly transferred into her from a delayed reaction, and a flash of an exploding disk with the sound of a plasma cannon discharging erupted from between her massive breasts, the force of which snapped her body backward into a tail spin. She was throne head over heels for hundreds of yards to finally smash back-first into one of the many columns surrounding the courtyard. The impact was enough to topple the thing, and she collapsed with the heavy stones into a pile at the corner of the courtyard.

What I saw, however, was a heavily muscled arm snapping outward, breaching all of Pleeeyo’s carefully constructed defenses – physical and magical – straight through the cleavage of her breasts and thick muscle packs to clap powerfully against her sternum, with a palm held perfectly to conform to the space between her swollen mammaries and slam right into her solar plexus. His hand, five fingers instead of our four, clawed with thick hooking claws slapped against her

sternum in little more than a tapping motion, but somehow was strong enough to snap her straight from off the ground and up into the air. In a split second, I saw multiple swirling black and gray segmented rings appear about his arm and slide one right after the other into her sternum as he retracted his hand.

This whole motion took perhaps a tenth of a second.

Time slowed as I felt some powerful magics at hand. Force was redirected, enhanced, re-enhanced over and over into a point the size of a square inch between Pleeyo's chest and sternum, before it exploded like a reactor and slapped its full force into her. The result leaving her in a tumbled mess, dazed, scrapped and bruised, and now laying in a pile of rubble.

Few have ever done something like that to her and no one ever as simply or as effectively as that.

“Enough!” he repeated in a voice missing the echoing tone to it from before as he turned to me and jabbed a clawed finger at me. “I did not come here to do battle. I came here to *challenge* the mightiest warrior of this universe into hand to hand combat. A *competition*. But so help me if any more of you continue to show me such dishonor, I shall not be responsible for my actions!”

His breathing was precise and controlled, and I saw a fire behind his glowing eyes that nearly turned the green red as he took control of a temperament inside him and controlled it. And then he addressed me again.

“You, my lady, are reputed to be the most powerful creature in this universe. At least the *known* most powerful warrior. I have searched for others, but your repute is greater than all others I have met and defeated. And so I challenge you and you alone.”

‘Met and defeated?’ I thought. *And now he’s come here?*

This time it was my turn to step forward, my hands folding serenely before my heavily muscled thighs, my legs moving lithely, but rippling with my contained power as I squared off no more than a couple meters before him.

“And so you have said.” I responded. “Why do you wish to challenge me?”

“I seek to better myself.” He said simply. “To be quickened, to heighten myself, and eventually obtain for myself the powers of the Dragons.”

I heard a shallow gasp from behind me, and a quick glance over my shoulder showed my headmistress in stunned shock at his words for some reason. But then Sage was continuing.

“To obtain that level of power, I seek to challenge those who have a portion of that power, learn from battling them on how they use their power and control it myself. Simply by battling you I gain the experience that I need in my search for wisdom. I have already come far in this regard, and I’ve already determined you possess what I seek.”

“And what would we get in return from this... should I prove to be the victor?” I asked quietly, bowing my head to him to look at him discernibly from beneath a flock of my head fur.

“Being that I have challenged, you may choose where to meet me for it should you accept. Should I loose... I shall devote myself to instructing the students here in the powers and magics that my studies have offered me. Some to which I have seen that this school has shown lax training within.”

“Lax?” Menikomenqolui said, suddenly. “My methods are lax?”

“And others in which you have no knowledge of.” Sage continued, turning to her and smiling, and there were whole novels of unspoken communication between the two of them which finally led to my headmistress looking away from his gaze.

“Should I win,” he continued. “Then I shall stay as long as I desire, absorbing what knowledge that I can, and in the meantime, imparting my knowledge to all those who wish of it. I shall give you time to think over my challenge, and whether or not to accept it. Speak to who you will, but the challenge ring will be without armor, and without weapons. A ring of honor. Should you however, choose to draw a weapon, then so shall I. Should you don armor, then so shall I. Should you try to kill me, all bets are off, and I *will* kill you.”

I noted that he didn't add the word *'try'* to his side of killing things.

“And what if I choose not to accept your challenge?” I asked.

“Then I shall enter the tournament you are holding here and earn the right to challenge you directly.”

I nodded. “I shall consider your challenge then. In the meantime, you may rest here while we conduct our tournament. You are free to enter regardless.”

“Rae,” Menikomenqolui said quietly as the tension suddenly released and people began talking excitedly among one another, many surging in close, but keeping a distance from the stranger inside his draping garb and wrappings. “Are you sure you want to do this. I sense a power in him that you are undoubtedly unfamiliar with.”

I smiled, regaining my usual happy demeanor.

“Of course. I see it as a challenge, and he doesn't seem to be of an evil nature.”

We both turned to the shadowed figure as he looked to everyone gathered about him, actually sharing a nod with Gehnohn that was full of respect on both sides.

“What is there to be afraid of?” I asked and stepped closer to the headmistress, out of the ear shot of everyone else.

She hung her head on its long neck and shook it lightly.

“Rae, you are like a daughter to me, but despite your incredible power, there are beings and creatures out there outside your scope of comprehension. Creation is far, far, far more vast than you’d give it credit for. I... I don’t like what he said about ‘Gaining the Powers of Dragons.’ It rings with something nearly forgotten among my kind that I don’t quite like.”

“What does it mean?”

My headmistress was silent for quite some time before answering.

“It was a... an experiment, in a far off place you’ve never heard of before now. A planet called Earth. Few dragons even remember the world it was done upon. I’ve heard of it only as legend, and in stories from when I was a hatchling. It was an experiment similar to the same one that has created the Leagues and the Rangers, but where here we are using natural means, even natural magic means, to enhance the bodies of the students, there, we were hybridizing creatures, through unnatural means.

“Shape shifters.

“They were imbued with a concoction made with the silvery dust from the moon around their world, and as such their strength grows and wanes depending upon the moon phases. You must beware of him underneath the light of the moon, Rae, especially the full moon. The more moons, the more powerful he becomes even should they be in the new moon phases.”

I looked up, and grimaced at the three moons floating overhead. The fourth moon wasn’t even visible as of yet.

“The last legend we had of them was nearly thirty thousand years ago! I cannot imagine how far they must have come in all that time. The fact that he is here, over such an impossible distance under his own power...” she let her statement trail off. It must’ve taken tremendous power, and if Gehnohn was any example...

“Be careful Rae.” She finished then, kissing me on the forehead.

“I will... mother.” I smiled, and then turned to bring our guest to his new quarters.

Dressed again in his robes, the great creature followed me silently, his some eight feet dwarfing my diminutive six foot stature. He was remarkably quiet as he followed me, so quiet to the point where I had to constantly look behind me for him to see if he was still following me. Even his presence was being masked, and my attempts to read his power kept leading me to power levels of mundanes.

Barely more than twenty in power level. But to overpower Pleeeyo's defenses would require a power level in the hundreds of thousands! Perhaps millions.

How is he hiding his power levels like that? Magic? Psionics?

"Here is your room." I said as we came to one of the rooms reserved for the upper echelon students. "I'm sorry we cannot provide anything larger, but..."

"It is quite satisfactory." He interrupted in all politeness, lifting a hand to stop me before removing his hat. "This is a school after all, and I'm sure even a room like this would've been shared by two or more students normally. I appreciate the sacrifice of offering me lodgings. I will make the necessary adjustments."

He passed by me into the small chamber, looking about him at a small ten by ten meter room. My own home, located a decent ways away from the school, was a hundred times the size of this place. Currently it was empty except for two small beds and a pair of desks.

"Are you sure this is to your liking?" I asked, pausing at the doorway, watching then as he removed his robe to reveal only his torso harness and a metallic, upside down egg shaped thing attached to his back.

"Quite. But if you could tell me where I may deposit these beds and desks... I will not require them."

I blinked at him as he continued to remove his torso harness and that backpack looking thing, to which my eyes focused on the reddened gem attached to his chest.

"I... I will find some place we can stow them." I paused, my curiosity getting the better of me. "What... what is that thing in your chest?"

He turned to face me a little more, smiling warmly, with the crystal in his chest glittering brightly for a moment. "That is what is called a Soul Gem. I possess two others on the backs of my wrists." He held up one of his hands to show a like sized and colored gem just behind his hand on that massively muscled forearm. "They are... growths... gained after achieving some rather difficult personal successes.

"In layman's terms, they are power foci, and in the case of my Heart Stone here," he rubbed the gem in his chest. "It also helps to reinforce my skeletal system to help support my elaborate muscle system over my bones."

I nodded, and looking down briefly, I found myself staring at his groin and at the bare hips, upper thighs and sides of his rear appearing out of the large gaping holes in his pants. And also on the way that long, thick tail fell out over the backside of those pants.

"I-I am curious... what kind of creature are you? I've never seen anything like you before."

He laughed, starting to stack the beds up against the wall beside the door.

“I am sure you probably never will again, either. The terminology for my race is Lycanthrope, though that is more attributed to the Wolf tribe of my species. More specifically, I am a were-cat.” With that last bit he flexed his hand, and several long and thick claws slid out of his bulbous finger tips to then hook toward the palms, and when he grinned, it was to show off several long and piercing teeth.

“Now you. What are you?”

“Well,” I began, hugging myself. “I am an Aphkian, of the dog tribe.” He nodded, a soft smile crossing his blackened lips again as he continued to move the furniture by the door. “I... well... I am the senior student here.” I felt a blush rising up upon my cheeks beneath my fur, and I lifted a hand to cover one burning cheek as my eyes again fell to his tail, and the thick, tight muscles framing it.

“By most senior, I assume the most skilled as well? Your reputation proceeded you even as far out as the fringe worlds in this universe. They called you ‘goddess,’ ‘immortal,’ and ‘the most powerful fighter in the universe.’ Quite the titles to aspire to.

“Your power seems to be well over one million, my lady; several million perhaps. I have not yet met your equal.”

Again, I simply blinked at him and he chuckled.

“That is as grand a compliment I think I can manage under the circumstances. I am indeed truly sorry for harming your friend like that. My temperament is quite short in the face of illogical actions.”

This time it was my turn to laugh, and hugging myself, hefting my bosom up higher atop my chest, I opened my eyes in time to see the darkened centers of his suddenly shift from my chest to my face. I managed to blush at that.

“Pleeyo is overzealous at times, but she means well to protect this place. Many saw you as an intruder.”

“And so I am.” he smiled again, taking a step closer to me, and lifting a hand, held the point of my chin. “I look forward to fighting you.” he finished, with a nod. “I thank you for the rooms, but I am afraid that I must retire.

“Good night.”

I had no choice but to leave, and he made sure I was clear of the doorway before shutting it quietly behind him. Immediately, I felt an odd power rising in the air around me, and I stared at the door as a reddened spot appeared at about head level on me, before the dot became a sinuous line, the line becoming a glyph, and the glyph being joined by others. A vertical strip of them,

made up with circles, slashes and dots, before an oval joined them all. Then the light faded, and it was as if it were nothing but paint on the door.

“How strange,” came a voice, and I turned quickly to see Headmistress Menikomenqolui standing there before me. “He is using the Glyph Magic of a Spell Weaver.”

Her massive form stepped up beside me, and lifting a clawed hand, she passed her hand over the glyph. “Chinese calligraphy, a very simple glyph, but infused with just the right level of spirit magic to make it an incredibly powerful barrier.

“Apparently our guest does not like visitors at his door late at night.”

She turned to look at me, her great body cloth that was opened on the sides, emblazoned by chips of jade and emerald, bordered in real gold thread, waved briefly about her in her movements and the wind while her wings folded at her back.

“What is your impression of him, child?” she spoke, her own eyes, a softly glowing midnight blue, blinking at me as if looking straight through me.

“He is an enigma.” I answered. “I... tried to read his power levels, but it’s barely over twenty, despite that he does things that require the hundreds of thousands. How is he doing this?”

Menikomenqolui paused, dipping her head.

“There are dragons, I meet occasionally, that state that they know where his home world resides. Perhaps they are the ones who enacted the experiment that wrought his species out, perhaps they are the dragons from his home world, but they tell of magics developed there that are completely apart from that wielded by dragons or demons.

“Glyph magic, Chi magic different that the type the Power League uses, Temporal magics... forms which are incredibly, incredibly rare in this universe, all seem to find their way to that planet. The humans there are incredibly powerful and proliferate. Where here they are vagabonds and few and far in between, there, there are billions of the creatures.

“And above all, the beings from that world... we dragons, even the most powerful of us... fear.”

She lifted her eyes and stared at me in all truthfulness.

“I am going to tell you the truth behind the legend, Rae, and I want you to remember and mark well of this in your dealings with this were-cat. We dragons did not leave or abandon their world, we were forced out. You are a sorceress; they have created mages and arch mages, grades above you in magic power. They have created dragon slayers, *Dragon Slayers!*” She cried, and reaching forward and grabbing both of my muscled arms shook me briefly.

Now I knew why she feared him. The world from where he had come from had *created* the legacy of beings that had learned the weaknesses of dragons and slaughtered them. There were

occasions, extremely rare, where the all-knowing motherly demeanor of my headmistress disappeared in favor of a form of naiveté.

“Headmistress, I do not believe he is here to kill you. I... I don’t think sheer murder is in him. All that I’ve seen so far is a creature of honor.”

She stared at me, and then looking to either side of her, slowly righted herself and regained her composure.

“I am sorry for that, Rae.” She said and massaged one of her temples. “But for you, I suggest considering deeply before you accept his challenge. So far, he has shown knowledge of three magics, one of which I’ve never seen before, and his aura magics are being used in a most unorthodox way. Then there’s this.” She gestured toward the glyph before running her hand along it again.

“Spell weavers are a form of mage like I told you. Their powers are slow in developing, but they use glyph magic, mathematics, and scientific theory to enhance their magical powers, so that they don’t have to work against the laws of nature as much, and there is a less of a degree of paradox working against them. Another trait is that they create magical effects on the fly. All they have is magical theory, and use those theories to create their own magic. No preset spell formulae, they simply... do.”

My headmistress turned and I followed with her, the cool night air growing heavy with a mixture of anticipation and excitement from all those in the school tonight.

“He can mask his power levels, so we can’t tell how strong he is.” I said into the silence. “He uses completely unorthodox methods, and comes from a world in which dragons have actually been driven out of.”

“Not completely.” Menikomenqolui stated. “Another secret. “Earth, his home world, was the sight of the first and only dragon war. Dragons against dragons, with humans and our ‘creations’ in the middle.”

“What side were your ancestors on?” I asked quietly, and my headmistress, stopping to look over our guests being organized to their own rooms, folded her hands together.

“The loosing side.”

I slowly awoke to the sound of the crashing waves on my sea side home, a place of residence that I’d built within three days using only my bare hands. And I do mean only my bare hands. Every nail was pounded in by my own fingers. Every board cut through martial arts, every steel girder bent to specifications over my head or over my knee. It was rather simple. I could’ve done it in a day, but I wanted to take my time and do it right.

Rising groggily out of bed, my coverings falling off my naked body as I felt the cool moist air on my bodice, I stretched majestically, as gracefully as it was powerfully, and yawned. Sitting back, with my arms behind my back to hold me up, I shrugged my shoulders against the morning cold, even despite the fur covering every square inch of my bodice – my breasts wouldn't lose their fur till after I had a cub and started lactating – so I only marginally felt the chill.

I loved it here, on this world, living by the sea in a home the size of a spacious resort.

“Shutters open.” I said with a contented sigh to the house computer, still groaning with sleepiness, and the blinds all along the edges of my massive room slowly slid open, folding against one another to reveal the semi-circular bay windows overlooking my porch.

The house computer I admittedly had some difficulty with. I had to ask some of the more technically minded members of the league help me install it, those studying Technomancy. I learned a lot over those three days from them. I could at least operate my own computer...

Sliding out of my great bed, large enough for three of me – or one of me and that one, other, extra special person to romp around in – I stepped lithely over to my porch, opening up the sliding door to step out to see the barest strip of dawn rising along the sea coast.

I leaned over my railing, my breasts resting over my thick arms and the railing as I bent over there, still naked, my ears and tail waving lithely in the air, while I greeted the dawn here like I had every day since coming here.

There was no greater sight than to see the dawn rising against the vast expanse of a blue-green ocean.

There were overcast skies today with a red tint to them. It meant that a storm was coming. It meant that there was a storm coming on any planet if the clouds were a different hue than what they normally were.

It definitely looked as if it were going to rain too.

But nonetheless, I breathed in long and deep from the salty sea air, feeling my skin prickle with goose bumps beneath my fur before I retreated back into my rooms and dressed in a shapely two-piece bathing suit that concealed very little and had a pretty little blue draw string in the front, white thigh socks and a shirt large enough to actually be loose about me and the good expanse of my endowments.

Then drinking a quick glass of juice, I set myself out my porch door, descended the hundred or so stone steps – again carved out by hand – and set myself into my usual sprint around the perimeter of the island. It was only a few hundred miles around, but it was a good morning work out for the first hour or so. A good strong sprint all the way around.

I worked at blanking my mind out of all distractions, which seemed harder today for some reason. I kept thinking back to my headmistress's distress the night before, and of our new

visitor in the form of Lord Sage combined with Makahn's arrival here. *Did he know that I have a crush on him?* I had to pause and ask myself which 'him' I meant. Sage or Makahn...

At last I reined myself in as I returned to the school, my legs thrumming with power, I slowed as I neared the main courtyard, and breathing in long, controlled gasps as a bead of perspiration ran down between my breasts.

My normally soft and beautifully well kept fur was matted down here and there, and was quite moist from sweat and the moist mist in the air. I'd have to take a good long bath after all this.

But then when I straightened after doing my warm-down stretches, I stopped, catching sight of the frost-furred and black-striped Lord Sage walking into the middle of the courtyard where the pillar broken the night before was being repaired. I was amazed at how graceful he was... at how graceful a male could be as he stopped, and bowing his head, lifted his arms to his sides, and slowly brought his hands together before him till the fingertips were just *barely* touching.

Five fingers, five toes... how odd. I thought, my lithe steps bringing me up onto the cobblestones from the field leading from the shore. I could see him wearing thick and baggy pants even as a light sprinkle of rain began to add to the mist on its way down from the heavens, and as I neared, it seemed as if he were muttering under his breath.

And then suddenly, so suddenly that I leapt back a few paces, several rings of reddened light exploded outward from him like ripples in a pool, floating into the air before they set themselves into the ground like the glyph had on his door from last night like they were nothing more than paint. Between the rings, a space of narrow breadth, dozens of glyphs simultaneously etched themselves into the ground. Then the rings flared, and I saw the air above the ring shimmer and then flow downward, with the occasional energy streamer sliding downward with the air.

Then Sage, uncoiled, seeming to struggle with his movements to the point of losing some of his gracefulness now as he walked forward, circling the center point once, then set himself into a combat stance and then moved forward around in the same exact path again.

I looked down at the rings, recognizing the design of a magic circle but once again the glyphs were unrecognizable, feeling the powers within it and sensed the down flow of magic increasing gravity several hundred fold. *Hundreds of gravities!* I thought right up front?! *He was training underneath gravity levels that would liquefy a lesser being! Even the average Power Leaguers would have troubles at this gravity level.*

My mouth hung open as he his movements grew more forceful now while he continued to move in circles, changing directions now and again to repeat the actions he'd just done in mirror direction. Every full circle in each direction he shifted his stance, shifted his very way of fighting, beginning with the straight forward, moving forward into complexity.

There was a growing crowd arriving now at the sight of our new guest in the throes of vigorous training, and getting more vigorous. Unorthodox movements, changes in motion that surely

should've landed him on his rear or even dislocated something, were stabilized at the last moment and recovered.

"It's like Crumpled Dancing." Came a low rumble beside me, and I turned to see Gehnohn watching with interest along side me. "How very odd this stranger is."

Gehnohn turned his head to me, his great wings attached to it shifting heavily against his back.

"And all that under such a high gravity level." I responded. And the rain water... it may only be lightly falling here, but they must be striking hundreds of times harder when they fall through that field."

"Like a needle prick on every square inch of his body." He leaned close to me then and nudged me with his arm. "You've taken worse."

I laughed at that, and he even managed a little laughter under his breath before we returned our attentions back to Sage. He had now moved into a routine of incredibly rapid movements, every strike moving dozens of times per second and his movements became even more erratic and acrobatic now.

"His form... it's so massive!" I heard someone gasp from nearby. "And I haven't even been watching the whole thing! He's already shifted forms..." a brief pause as the speaker counted. "Sixteen times!"

Rain began to fall heavier now; and looking up at the falling droplets, my eyes then lowered to the figure of Sage. He definitely seemed to be laboring in there, but he was forcing himself to move.

Another ring snapped outward from him as he regained the center again, and the same force of gravity increased all over again before he set to his movements.

There was no grace now as he moved, and every step, every motion no matter how subtle, sparkled and shook with power in the form of a emerald green lightning that fizzled and sparked over his body.

Battle cries could now be heard as he snapped forward and about now, and then in a flash, he had moved from one side of his magically created ring to the other. I blinked, following his movements between the two sides.

But there had been no magic there! I thought in wonder. *Teleportation, if that's what he'd just done, would've created a brief explosion of magical power no matter who was doing it or how it was done. There was nothing here.*

Is he actually that fast? I asked myself.

Combos and power moves were being accomplished now, and there were gasps and cries of awe at some of the movements he was doing. He accomplished more of those rapid moves of speed that seemed as if he were teleporting, and now that I was following him, I saw that he was dashing very quickly somehow from side to side, the only motion to mark his passing being a repeat rippling shadow of darkness and smoke.

And he was also powering up now.

“Ah... now we shall see what lies under the mask.” A new voice said, and I turned suddenly in surprise as Makahn stepped in beside me.

Lifting a hand he placed it warmly upon my shoulder, giving it a squeeze in hello before we again looked to Lord Sage.

A fourth ring of crimson shot outward to join its fellows, increasing the gravity around him again, and this time he leapt up into the air, hovering there amidst all the punishment from such high gravity and all the hammer blows from the rain. Then in an explosion of power that made the psychics in the crowd groan with dizziness, and made my eyes screw up briefly from the sudden massive increase in power, I focused again, and read his now unmasked powers.

“Nine hundred thousand!” I breathed in disbelief. He was the first I’ve met in a long time who actually possessed such a level.

“And still climbing!” said someone new.

This time it was Noxi; The Mystic League’s resident scholar and technomancer. Not only did she help me install my house computer, but she also was smart enough to program a holo recorder.

Image © 2003 by DocWolph

Of all of us, she had decided to focus more upon her mind than her body, and though this long-eared rabbit-like fem had a body several times stronger and much larger than any other member of her race, she had intelligence and knowledge in her head both magical and mundane.

A scientist true to heart.

And she had her bio-wave visor scanner on.

“Nine hundred thousand, nine-fifty, nine-eighty... Great maker! It’s still going!”

This angelic creature in her simple, form-fitting clothing was rarely wrong about anything, and to see her gasping in awe at the power levels rising confirmed the numbers I was sensing.



“It’s still rising! Exponentially it seems. How... how is he doing that?! Ah! He’s just breeched the one million mark!”

There was murmuring in the crowds now, both in astonishment and in fear at what this creature was capable of, and now explosions were happening inside the invisible chamber formed by the magic circle as he exerted more and more of his power into his routine. Blasts of blue-green roiling energy were being shot one after the other from his hands and even his feet, the balls ricocheting against the dome created by his magic circles to come back at him, changed minutely by the dome so that it no longer matched his signature and would hurt him if it hit him. He bounced these balls back, maintaining this with an ever growing number till at last he was focusing upon just defending himself against so many attackers. It was then that we all got such a view of his fighting style.

I’ve never seen a form so vast! He shifts forms in mid movement! I heard myself think

And then there was another explosion as two of the balls struck each other and exploded into a ball of flame in which Sage had to duck out of the way of.

Then Sage’s power began to climb rapidly, and I heard screams from the psychics, and Noxi’s wave form visor exploded against her face before a pillar of blazing energy erupted into the sky, carrying him with it.

“**HA-SA!**” he cried, and far up in the sky, the energy wave subsided before exploding outward into a cross surrounded by a magic circle of their own, and there was a collective sigh of wonder at this display like a night of fireworks.

And then he fell, hundreds of feet, before landing with a lunge on his hands and feet with force strong enough to shatter the ground about him.

“What was your last measurement, Noxi?” I asked amidst the stunned crowd as Lord Sage held his side briefly before weakly sinking to one knee. Apparently, whatever that was, it was incredibly tiring. I noticed, however, that the reddened gems in his chest and wrists were shining brightly and glittering like reddened fire opal.

“My last reading was one-million-point-two before my visor broke.” She looked down at the remains while a black mask surrounded her eyes. “Rae... I know you’ve been rated at two million the last time we checked... but this thing was rated at least that before its scanners would be overloaded.

“I believe we’ve finally shown you someone who can match you in strength and in power.”

I remained behind as everyone else dispersed. The only other person who remained in the courtyard was Makahn, and he was taking on the skulking demeanor of someone who didn't like *'his girl'* fraternizing with another male.

After rubbing his head down with a towel, Sage tilted his head back and let the soft rain patter against his face. After the bruising he'd taken from the rain earlier, I could imagine that the difference in strikes was quite refreshing.

"That... was a marvelous display, Lord Sage." I managed to say at last as I approached.

"You honor me, Lady Iksaki." he said, not looking at me but rather continued to feel the rain pattering against his face, rolling his head from side to side till his head fur began to grow matted.

I came to stand before him, and with the fluff of his fur being wetted down so thoroughly, I found myself discovering another oddity of this creature.

Six nipples?!

That was strangely... appealing. I had four after all, but my secondaries were more artfully covered beneath fur and my primaries. One of the advantages of a larger bosom.

At last he opened his eyes and turned to me, and I almost gasped at the fire in his eyes, a raging thing so great that wisps of green light wafted from his eyes as if it were green mist from off of a green fire.

"I am sure you have done no less before." He assured me, his high hooded ears turning rearward now, pointing in Makahn's direction. A wisp of a smile crossed his face then.

It was as if he were looking at him at that moment.

"And that is your morning routine?" I asked and he nodded.

"Works wonders for the heart." He smiled and then gestured off to one side. "If you could show me where the commissary is, I'd like to purchase some breakfast for this empty belly. I haven't eaten in a couple days."

I blinked and then covered my cheeks as I blushed. *Silly Rae... of course he eats!* A voice in my head chortled. *What sort of creature do you think he is?*

"Th-this way, Lord Sage. And you needn't pay for it. All foodstuffs are provided for the visitors, students and faculty of this school."

I don't know why I was blushing... didn't know why I was so flustered, but he was bringing out a cold sweat underneath all my fur despite the rain, to where I felt a bead of it trickle down

between my breasts. Swallowing, I lead the way, absentmindedly swinging my hips a little more than I should've, with Sage following me a few paces behind me. All was going well until...

“Stop!”

We both stopped and turned, and saw Makahn marching his way across the cobblestones with intent and purpose in his eyes and also in his stride.

“I don't think I like that, stranger. You simply following Rae here all over the place. Especially the following part.”

Sage turned, head and shoulders above Makahn and leveled that cool emerald gaze of his on him.

“And why not? She is free to choose as she pleases here. After all, you and I are both guests here.”

“Makahn, I can take care of myself!” I said in an annoyed tone, folding my meaty arms beneath my breasts, but he completely ignored me and simply stepped up to the much larger Sage and jabbed him in the chest with a finger.

“We don't know who you are, ore even *what* you are, you pop in out of nowhere, uninvited, and challenge my belo... -er- friend,” Makahn swallowed heavily at that last bit. “And you think you aren't going to escape angst from it?!”

“I know I am going to be looked upon with disdain.” Sage answered, completely levelheaded and emotionless, doing nothing more to show his annoyance with Makahn other than wiping off the spot on his bare chest with the back of an oddly made five-fingered hand.

But I couldn't help but notice that Makahn had begun to call me... his ‘beloved?’

“*Look*, stranger... I don't care who, or *what* you are, if you don't leave her alone, I'll...”

“You'll do what?” Sage said and turned fully to face Makahn, Sage's eyes burning more noticeably now. “I do not take kindly to idle threats.” He paused. “But you seem sure to challenge my right to follow a lovely lady.” He lifted a hand then and rubbed his lower lip with the back of one clawed finger.

“So I'll tell you what. If you can prove that you're stronger than me, I shall abide by your wishes. But if you cannot manage to beat me, you will kindly step away.”

Makahn grinned, punching a fist into his other hand to crack his knuckles while grinning ferally. “Accepted. So what shall we test ourselves with? Bench press, dead lift, or just try to beat the living crap out of each other?!”

“Gravity tolerance.” Sage said instead, and the fire in his eyes glittered.

“Sage.” I urged. “You *really* don’t want to challenge Makahn to gravity tolerance. He *trains* under intense gravity.”

“So I’ve heard.” He glanced at me and then back at Makahn. “Are you ready?”

Makahn folded his sizeable arms over his barrel of a chest. “Whenever you are.”

Sage stood opposite Makahn and then took three steps back, and with the same effect as before, he summoned a ring of dazzling red that rippled outward one right after the next, and reformed his gravity well magic circle. I felt each ripple of the deep red rings pass through me, and I gasped at the feel of the exotic magics. It was a more refined source of magic, more pure than what I was familiar with. It had a certain resonance that tickled me from the inside.

With the circles on the ground, I then felt the force of gravity begin to increase several times over, with the two males facing off with one another; I stood idly by watching it. And then I realized something else: I was *inside* the gravity well!!

“Eight gravities.” Sage said at a certain point. “I am impressed; most people from where I come from would’ve been transformed into liquid sludge by now from the force. You are indeed strong.”

Makahn snickered at that, but just then another red ring exploded outward and attached to the outer most ring, and the rise in gravity levels began to rise exponentially.

“Twenty five... Fifty... Seventy five... One hundred.” Sage counted off as each gravity level passed by. I felt a little downward drag, but I didn’t know how much Makahn was feeling it... let alone Sage. Sage at least had just been training in this level.

I looked up at the rain, and saw that it was falling against an invisible dome. A thankful thing that Sage had thought of that. I didn’t feel like getting pelted with rain drops that fell one hundred times harder than normal.

And then another ring of crimson red snapped outward, passing through us all, and as it slapped into place, the gravity level suddenly doubled. Every three seconds another ring would snap outward and as it landed, gravity would double.

“One-twenty-five... One-fifty... One-seventy-five... Two hundred.” Sage counted off at each increment of twenty five.

“Two-hundred... Two-twenty-five... The air was growing heavy, but I could see signs of strain in Makahn. He was incredibly strong; he could withstand tremendous levels of gravity, which was how his muscle system got so strong in the first place.

“You must weigh over eight hundred pounds.” Sage said at last. “Your knee, for example, a thing that perhaps weighs about five pounds normally for one as large as yourself, presently weighs about one thousand two-hundred and twenty-five pounds underneath this current gravity

level. It must be horribly difficult to keep up. Are you sure you don't want to stop this little fracas?"

"No!" Makahn gritted through his teeth, and Sage shook his head.

"Very well"

Sage's red rings were thicker now, as they snapped outward one right after the other, and with each ring that snapped outward and slammed to the ground, the weight on us all grew steadily heavier. Even *my* legs were shaking with the strain. Sage himself was breathing incredibly heavy and through his mouth, his stance had reset to hold himself erect, but what I kept staring at was Makahn's knees.

Just like Sage had intoned, Makahn had made for bending his knees to support his weight, but that joint was surrounded by the least amount of muscle for keeping the legs upright. Only a few tendons not nearly as strong as his calves or his quads surrounded that bundle of bone and sinew. And with each ring that snapped outward, one right after the other, Makahn slid further and further downward.

"Three hundred gravities." Sage intoned, and waited there for Makahn to regain his balance. And then the rings that erupted from the noble lycanthrope grew thinner and thinner as Sage gauged the maximum his opponent could tolerate. As for Sage, he barely showed the strange other than having to breathe harder.

Makahn sagged; he lowered onto his hands and the tips of his toes, gritting his teeth, trying hard not to sink. But inch by inch those knees slowly did lower toward the ground, and with one final forceful slam of a red ring, Makahn was slammed straight to the ground.

"Three-hundred twenty-two gravities." Sage said at last, and then lifted his hand to dispel the force pressing down on us.

The rings gently lifted away again, slowly returning gravity back to normal, and looking to Sage, I could see that even he was trembling with the strain, and glad that it was being removed. And then he lowered his gaze to Makahn, who looked back up at him with a look that set an ache in my heart for him.

It was the look of defeat. I'd never thought to see such a look on his face.

"You have lost." Sage stated, simply. "Good day." And then bowing turned his back and started moving off in the direction we'd been going in a slow walk.

Then Makahn looked to me with that same hurt look. "H-how did you remain standing? *You! How?!*" There was a mixture of differing emotions upon my face, and I knew not whether I should comfort him or look smug about showing that I was able to beat him at his own game, just like Sage had just done. But eventually I just bit my lip before turning slowly away from him.

The last thing I heard from him as I rejoined Sage to lead the way, was Makahn's baleful cry of defeat, and the power of an impact tremor beneath my feet as he punched the ground.

I sat back watching as Sage chose one of everything from the buffet bar of high energy foods, filling three trays up, balancing one in either hand and another on his head as he moved as gracefully as a dancer forward, walking mainly on his toes to politely ask if he could sit amongst some first years.

The girls giggled, the boys sat in awe at this giant, exotic-looking creature and as he arrayed his metal trays before him, smiling at the young ones around him and laughed like a big brother.

He's very good with children, I heard myself think before I took my own tray and sat down beside him; he sampling all the food there was here.

"That's quite an appetite." I commented amidst more giggles from the girls.

He turned to me, both eyes and mouth smiling. "My training has made me hyper metabolic." He responded after kindly swallowing. "Plus, I'm unfamiliar with the delicacies of your world. Now would be as good a time to find out what I liked."

"Try some of this Mr. Sage!" one young teen boy gestured, and Sage more than willingly tried one of the sweets.

I sat in awe of this great white creature, at how gentle he was, and how he brought out the best in so many different people. He undoubtedly outweighed me. A titan of a cat standing taller than even Makahn, and with the insurmountable strength to beat him at his own game.

Just then, underneath the table, our knees bumped against one another, and for a split second, there was an electric shock, an exchange of energies, an ever so brief sharing of powers. In that instant the world ceased, time stopped, and Sage and I both turned to face one another.

I stared into those lucid green eyes of his, feeling my heart flutter, feeling something awaken inside me, and I felt desirous to be closer to him, and I moved forward, staring at those eyes, my lips puckering...

"Hey! Mr. Sage!" someone called, and just then our knees lost their contact with one another and the moment ended. I blinked and then turned away from him, holding my hands over my panty front, trying to keep the sensuality rising up in me from displaying itself through the white triangular patch of my bathing suit bottom.

Sage in turn addressed the young girl, and even magically summoned a charm for her to place around her neck. He finished his meal, and getting up, after stacking his trays and all their

utensils together, stretched grandly. In a fifteen foot ceiling, his fingers were brushing against the fine marble panels surrounding the floodlights there.

“Very good food,” He stated, stretching even larger to show off the feathered layers of his ribs to everyone, and this time, it was the adult females who noticed his form then, and I heard more than one sigh at that while he innocently displayed a set of eight tightly packed abdominals and four lats. I was alarmed that I was one of the females who sighed at the sight of this. “But I must now meditate for a time.”

“Good day.” He said at last, and reaching down, took my hand and kissed it.

And with that he swept out of the cafeteria, much to many eyes on his back, and I had to reach up to cover the burning in my cheeks.

The hallway leading to the bath house late in the evening was now crowded. For some, it was a nightly event to bathe and relax from a day of hard work or training. My home had its own bath house, but I find that I miss the experience of the public bath here at the school with its camaraderie, and if I found myself here late in the day, I bathed with the others.

The women’s corridor, catering to all those who had aged to at least nineteen years and were allowed to use the bath house, was filled with the near physically perfect women of the Mystic League. Most were presently in their underwear, as they moved down the corridor from the locker room to the bathing pool and its natural mineral spring water. Most. Some, like Equis, who took every opportunity she could get to be naked, wore only a towel around her shoulders. Her elaborately feminine form of full and rounded flanks, shoulders, bottom and thighs and bosom, strode with feline grace beside me as we joked about things and commented on the arrival of the enigmatic Sage.

“He is cute.” Equis said with a grin, and the fact that her teats were poking out of her fur told of how cute she thought he was.

I nodded to that comment. He was strong, tall, and had an energy level that near equaled mine. Whether it was above or below mine, I couldn’t tell. He masked his true power very well.

“Menikomenqolui believes that he comes from a world called ‘*Earth*’” I said quietly. “Have you ever heard of it?”

Equis shook her head. “Maybe Noxi knows.”

I made a point to ask her later about that when we all began to file into the bath house itself, away from the prying eyes of all the men here, some one hundred and twenty fully – and in some cases, super – endowed and virile females began to disrobe.

Many males would believe the female's side of a bathhouse is a place of sustained erotic pleasure. Nothing could be further from the truth. But it was a place of sensuality, where a female could once again be totally naked, to feel the cool air on her skin in a place where those around her didn't mind that she was. The Bathhouse also served as a piece of the training here. It was the Headmistress's desire to make us proud of our bodies, and in our pride wish to develop it more, to become more beautiful, or handsome with the males. It was also a place to make friends and to converse with one another.

And this was the time in which the bath house was to be used only by the females of the League.

'Meant to be.'

I myself was amidst the process of lifting my undershirt up over my head when a voice, a male's voice, entered into the hearing of every last one hundred and twenty three females currently in the house.

"Before any of you go any further, I should perhaps inform you that you are not alone."

We all froze and looked in the direction of the voice, and for a short time there was no one there. Then the mist hovering over the waters began to gather, solidifying into a smoky form it seemed, before the form smoothed. And as if materializing out of nowhere, a figure appeared half submerged in the water amidst several of the rocks and reeds. His white fur and black stripes cast a perfect camouflage in the mists, making him appear nearly invisible. But then the piercing green eyes opened, and the mists seemed to part slightly like he had just suddenly taken form from them, and we were all granted a view of him reclined back in the limpid waters, with one thick arm rolled against the edge of the pool with his hand resting atop one of the half submerged rocks there, and his other hand holding a long pipe by the bowl. The pipe's end was positioned just within his lips, he idly sucking on the end of the thing and allowing wisps of the white smoke to waft up into his face.

"What are you doing here?!" Pleeyo demanded, still hurt from the night before after having been so thoroughly subdued, and so quickly, by Sage the night before.

"My apologies." He said in earnest, staring at the naked Pleeyo, who, like her mentor Eqis, chose to freely display her naked bodice as often as possible. "I was led to believe that this was the male's half of the bathing house. I also came at this time after they were to have done their time so that I might be more alone with my thoughts and free for meditation.

Image © DocWolph 2002



“I began to become suspicious when I found there were no halves to this auspicious domicile.”

“Who led you to believe that?” Eqis said, stepping forward to place a hand on the younger and slightly smaller Pleeeyo to calm the young Casid’s fiery temper.

In answer to that, Sage merely pulled out his pipe from his teeth, and pointed its mouth piece toward none other than Fatima. My own sister!

She giggled, striking a sensual and lovely pose, displaying off her young sexuality. Legally, she was now able to mate, and it was growing tiresome trying to protect her from simply throwing her virginity away at the drop of a hat. I knew it was her overwhelming desire to at last have a male naked against her body, to feel her loins aflame in her desire to feel her femininity awakened by the appropriate male. She so intensely desired to be called an adult instead of just a young adult, or even worse, a cub.

Among one of the youngest members here, just *barely* old enough to be here, she still had a curvaceous body instead of the rock hard angular feminine forms practically everyone else had.

“Oh, you mean *this* is the women’s side in here?” she said with a giggle and a wink toward sage. “I thought we were going to the other side.” obvious not even bothering to hide the fact she had duped sage in here. “I didn’t even know there *were no* sides here. It must’ve slipped my mind...”

“It slipped something.” Someone muttered, and there was a low murmur of chuckling laughter everywhere and more than one pair of eyes rolled at her comments.

“Fatima... honey.” Eqis said while rubbing her forehead as a slightly annoyed vein throbbed against her forehead. “There are no different sides. This is a *public* bath, remember?”

“Oh yeah!” she giggled, and opening her skimpy robe that came only to her mid thigh she revealed her bodice in a poise that amply framed her femininity both between thighs and between her rounded biceps, she dropped her robe and immediately descended forward and waded into the bath, straight toward Sage. “An honest mistake.” She giggled, and knelt right before the Lycanthrope and began to innocently cleanse the sweat and grime from her body.

Image © DocWolph 2002



“At least she didn’t go straight up and sit on his jock.” Equis whispered into my ear, and I descended into a fit of giggles as she proceeded forward down the marble steps into the deeper water of the pool where even she couldn’t touch the bottom.

Sage favored Fatima with a raised eyebrow as she continued to bathe before him, turning this way and that way so that he could get more than an ample view of everything that she was. And then Sage turned his head to look at me while her back was turned to him, and I responded by covering the look of embarrassment on my face with one hand.

But then the others around me simply chuckled at Fatima’s attempts against our visitor, as she was making sure that her already ample bosom was visible floating atop the water now, and they simply continued to disrobe. Begrudgingly even Pleeyo entered the bath, and then in spite of myself, I too disrobed and slid into the mineral-rich waters along with everyone else, not even trying to hide my nude bodice.

I was proud of it after all. My dragoness teacher’s teachings had instilled that much in me. But I found, that with one hundred and twenty three remarkably build females, I found Sage’s eyes focusing upon me.

I noticed this once, when looking up once I’d stepped down onto the marble flooring of the pool, I found Sage, now the focus of the attentions several of the females from young adult to the mature, my sister included, with even Equis pressing right up against him and fingering his chest, watching me.

A half smile was centered on his face as he drew from his pipe again, and opening his mouth to simply let the smoke out, he breathed in deeply through his angled nostrils.

And again, in spite of myself, I waded straight over to him and sat on one of the many submerged benches there before beginning to wash the sweat and grime out of my fur.

“For one who seems so intent on being healthy, Lord Sage,” I commented. “I am surprised that you smoke.”

Right now, he had two of the young maidens, apart from my sister, half pawing and half massaging him while he took another draw from his pipe and inhaled it in the same way. I got a whiff of something sweet in the air. It wasn’t acrid like Tabac, nor was it the foul smell of spice herb or other like toxins, this was a mixture of things.

“Have you ever sat in an empty room, alone with your thoughts, while an incense stick burns in its holder at the center of the room?” he asked, and several of us nodded. “The concoction in this bowl isn’t a toxin, but rather a collection of herbs to promote respiration.

“It’s a veritable quagmire of some rather common plants on my world, mixed with various different substances like sugar and maple syrup, all of it specially treated and formed into bars that once cured is as thick as leather. The whole mess of it is something I’ve called Mélange.

It's very slow burning, even once shredded and set alight like it is now, and even a small amount burns for a long, long time."

He took another puff of it and instead of inhaling it, blew it toward us, and the worst it did was make me light headed, but I took in a very deep breath of it, and felt my lungs swell a little more beyond their original capacity. Once in the blood, it actually cleared my head.

When I looked to him again, he gave me a wink and took another draw on the pipe for himself.

"Multiple schools of magic, an advanced form of martial arts, and now alchemist." I heard Equis mention. "Any other tricks you got in here?" and she ruffled his mane of fur, planting her sizeable breasts over either of his shoulders as she stood behind him.

"Artificer." he added with a small smile, and then inclining his head in a more serious note. "...and healer."

Lifting a hand, a soft, luscious bluish-green glow suffused the tip of his finger, and lowering it into the waters, a flash like lightning striking the water flooded throughout the entire pool. I felt it wash through me; lighting me with the same glow briefly before it traveled further outward to each and every last woman in the pool. The waters shone then as if lighted from underneath.

It was as if the effects of the waters were enhanced ten fold, and I just wanted to melt into it.

"I trained myself as a jack of all trades," he continued while we all marveled at the feeling in the water... like bathing in blue silk. "There were many who looked up to me, who I had to protect." He took Equis's face by the chin and he smiled at her as she experienced the soothing feel of the changed pool. "Now if you'll excuse me ladies," he said, and releasing Equis turned his back to us and climbed out of the pool.

All eyes turned to him as water sloughed off his heavily muscled back, and it was then – for the first time, that anyone saw the elaborate starburst of flesh seeming to form a crease between what looked like ritually scarred flesh all across his back. The network of lines all surrounded a green gem at the peak of his back, much like the ones on his chest, wrists and neck.

Once he'd climbed out of the water, he cot on all fours and shivered his whole body powerfully, shaking the water off his body before he rose up again, and blandly lifting a hand as he wiped his face off with the other, a large white towel floated from its rack over to him.

"My apologies to have to leave all of you so soon ladies," he grinned, showing off all those sharp teeth, before a black sludge exploded from his back to surround him from neck to foot in black bodysuit. "But I do have some renovating that needs to be done."

He bowed low, with a small smile to us and then turned to exit the chamber, leaving us to enjoy to spirit energies now saturated through the waters.

Now dressed in clean white cotton underwear and a cool white robe that was cut high along my sides, with my fur now lotioned and conditioned to a soft consistency and a shiny gloss, I strode purposefully forward across the near-deserted campus grounds of the school.

All of the younger students were in their dormitories by moon rise, and even the upperclassmen had retired for the evening. It allowed the professors and graduates like me free reign of the grounds.

My graceful steps brought me ever toward to the base of the Pinnacle Tower, to where a garden resided specifically for meditation at its base. I didn't really get into the mantra sort of meditation thing, but what I did like was all the fragrances, the bird song and the forested feel of the place.

A vast contrast to what I'd grown up with once upon a time ago.

Instead of cold, wasted urban landscape, it was cool jungle and forest, wrought with dozens of different species of insects, birds, and small animals, with a myriad of plant life from all over the known universe to reside here.

It was beauty instead of the cruel ugliness of cruelty and sadness.

The gateway stood wide open, without a single doorway to bar anyone from entering or exiting. Moving straight down the path to my favorite spot, hearing some young lovers engrossed within some bushes a short ways away. Ignoring them with a subtle grin on my face, I found my place of meditation, a spot beneath a great sweeping tree that formed curtains around a marble bench situated before a reflecting pool.

However when I arrived, I found that there was already someone there.

The green lights of his body jewels gave away his presence almost immediately, before the rest of his form seemed faded into being from out of the darkness. How someone with such brilliantly white fur can hide in shadows like that was beyond me, and he seemed to do it without thinking. Especially with those green gems of his giving him away. It was as if he took form from out of the shadows itself, with his black stripes seeming to clasp hard onto the shadow and remain the same color.

The effect was like holes in space about his body, punctuated by the softly glowing green gems against his wrists, back and chest.

He was like a being of shadow, and unless you were *just* close enough to him, he didn't exist. He stood in a pair of baggy pants with his priestly aprons hanging to his fore and rear like loincloths. His long, thick tail hanging from underneath the aprons, swayed lazily from side to side. Other than that, he was bare furred, allowing me to see that broad, compacted siege tank-like form that nearly made even Makahn look scrawny.

At eight feet tall, this gentle giant was a sight to behold. Especially now.

He stood, feet shoulder width apart while he lifted a hand, one thick finger outstretched while he twittered and chirped through his black lips and over his teeth in an almost ghostly song. I wondered for a moment what he was doing before from out of nowhere a flutter of wings signified the arrival of one of the avian creatures of the garden.

I gasped at the sight of a Moon Singer, an incredibly rare bird that shone a brilliant silver and chitinous blue along its back from its armor under the light of the full moons. Today was the perfect night to see such a creature, with all four moons up and shining their fullest, this brilliant bird glowed with an aura of its beauty and power.

Normally they were so shy, and yet Sage had just charmed this bird from its roost to perch on his great hand.

And once the bird had found its perch on his thick fingers, he lifted his other hand to stroke the beautiful plumage on its head and chest, to which it fluffed itself up happily to the touches.

I sat down on my bench to watch him as he chirped and cooed with the bird, to which the bird responded with its wonderingly beautiful moon song.

How can he be so massive and powerful, yet so graceful and gentle? I wondered watching that bird sing her song only for him. In only two days, he's displayed skills and capabilities that excel those possessed by even the greatest of us who specialize in those specific fields. Makahn with strength was so far a prime example of that. The Imperial Ranger, bested in a single stroke with the sword, was another. And now here he is cooing and sharing songs with a most recluse of birds...

“What do you call this bird?” Sage asked suddenly, and I jerked my head up to look back up to him as he half turned to me to place me in his wide peripheral vision.

“Wha?” I stammered. “Uh... It's called a... A Moon Singer.”

“Very aptly named.” He said quietly. “It resembles a Ghost Dancer or a Phoenix from my world. The coloring is different, but plumage is the same.” He turned more to me, and now I was able to see his brilliant green eyes shining a duller collar than his gems were capable of, the pair glowing like orbs of light inside the deep sockets of his face. “Though I admit I've never seen one of their kind with carapace imbedded in their heads and backs.”

I sat there, my hands folding into my lap as I watched this beautiful, exotic, powerful creature as he caressed the breast of the bird, stroking the soft plumage as the ghostly song of the bird cooed softly into the night air.

He stepped over to me, and then idly settled down on the bench beside me, continuing to cradle the bird atop the backs of his knuckles, and in spite of myself, I reached out and caressed the breast of the bird as well.

“It seems as if you’ve found a friend, Lord Sage.” I commented. “Though, I am quite surprised that you found one in this creature. They are usually quite shy. Often times, we only get glimpses of them.” I looked at him, seeing him smiling innocently at the bird as it took a moment to preen its feathers with its hooked beak.

“Sage,” I prompted, and he turned his head to face me. “Why is it that this bird came to you?”

“I heard her singing and called out to her.”

“And she came? Just like that?”

His smile twitched a little wider. “It took some doing. She was very cautious. Creatures like this can sense predators, and she saw a creature like me, a cat, who normally eat birds, but who showed no animosity to her. It took time, but I think her curiosity of me overcame her fear, and when I finally showed that I wasn’t something to fear... she came.”

There was silence between the two of us, either of us watching this beautiful creature in stead of looking at one another.

“Why did you come here Sage” I asked suddenly. “Why did you travel so far just to challenge me?”

Sage was silent for a time, and I thought for a moment as if he hadn’t heard me as he pulled a fruit of some sort from out of the satchel hanging at his side and offered it to the bird.

“My world holds the belief that power comes through perseverance and challenges. ‘That which does not kill you makes you stronger,’ as the saying goes. Growth comes from meeting challenges and surviving them; and the greater the challenge, the greater gains.

“Especially if one fails to accomplish the task. Some of my world’s greatest achievements – the light bulb, flight, and others – were all accomplished after an inordinately long series of failures.

“I traveled far and wide, because you were the single person in this universe who the denizens all said was the most powerful fighter there was. So here I came.

“Granted, Rae, I do not expect to succeed, I do not suppose for an instant that I will beat you hands down, as a matter of fact, I truly wouldn’t mind it if I lost. But for me to grow and succeed further down my path, I must challenge the champion of this universe. Perhaps, if I’m lucky, I will grow enough to get my next Soul Gem...”

With this he slid a pair of fingers over the green gem in the hollow of his chest just over his sternum.

“Which one’s next?” I asked, looking at the gem now.

“Who knows? I have two left to gain.”

“And then what?” I blinked, suddenly interested.

“I... evolve.” He stated simply, and for the first time he turned to look at me fully. “In the beginning we are little more than spirits, but we gain the elements to us and become insects. But the Insect must grow, and grow it does, and becomes an animal. That animal grows as well and becomes a man. Further does he grown till he becomes a man beast, and finally a dragon. And looking back along the length of time he had traveled, over so many lives, he thought, and recorded his life, and left it for those who are to follow.

“For me, it would mean I’d become a Dra’Con, a sub species of the lycanthrope who currently reside as the over-clan among us; the head of all clans. A Were Dragon.”

He remained quiet for a time before rising to his feet again. I am sorry, my lady Rae, but it grows late. I shall speak with you in the morning. Good eve...”

He bowed low and then turned, lifted a hand to let the Moon Singer hop onto a tree branch before he walked away. It was no surprise to me, that after a moment or two of fidgeting, the Moon Singer leapt off her branch and soared briefly through the sky to perch on Sage’s shoulder.