

Content Warning: Weight Gain, Micro/Macro, Size Shifting, Inflation, Berry, Non-Fatal Bursting

Traversing the desert during the day or night is like two sides of the same coin. The day's sweltering heat would drag even the most seasoned traveler down, yet night showed no mercy with its bone chilling winds that swirled the dark sands along. You either burn your feet across the scorched yellow sea, or scrape through the sparkling purple sands that shimmer beneath your feet. Some would consider desert travel suicide, while others were left with no other alternatives. Deep within the Ishtar Desert were old temple ruins anywhere you looked, but one set was particularly interesting to a certain traveler. Said traveler was a blossoming student in the Cragginbarry Institute of Magical, Spiritual, and Ritualistic Peace-Keeping. He was a young man shrouded in baby blue robes that drug along the dunes. His cloth was accented with cerulean flames around the ends of the sleeves and around the midsection, even some amidst the hood that shielded his cat ears. His vibrant, navy blue tail flicked about in the pale moonlight, clearly brushed just a few hours ago with how smooth and fluffy it remained. The poofy tufts of bangs and side fluffs he had on his head poked out from the hood, those bright cyan eyes practically illuminated off of his dark skin. The only other outlier that wasn't some level of cool color was the warm, dark pink valentine heart on his chest, with a hot, poppy bright pink outline around it.

At the time of his journey, this boy was nineteen years old, on a mission to find a magical artifact. The protection from the desert wasn't the only answer he could give to why he sported these robes, evident by when he pulled back the sleeve on his right hand. The boy cringed, his lady-like whine reverberating along the nearby sand particles he scraped across. Silver and bright blue scales aligned his arm, and practically malformed it into something distinctly non-human. His fingers, aside from the tips, were gnarly and flat at the face of them, followed by a flat palm that extended into an arm with an almost muscular structure to it, quite different from the lanky young man with little meat on his body. The way his hand curled pained him, any attempt he made to ball them up into a fist was a significant challenge, they always wanted to claw up at the end. He scowled at his form, and hid his claws back beneath his sleeves.

Some would say he was blessed, but he would be the first to decry that he was cursed. Draconic blood ran through his veins, he'd been told that all his life. He heard tales by the fireplace of his mother and father, both dragons, and how they were so willing to raise him. He knew nothing of his parents, but knew more of the stories of dragons. Giant, monstrous beasts who themselves were the origin of the world, the birthers of magic...yet they turned on the things the world created. Why else would there be stories of heroes slaying these mythical beasts, who hoarded wealth and land over those that needed it most? This student knew no one else with his affliction. His nerve-wracked thoughts pressed him, made him truly ponder what purpose he had out in a desert with no one but himself. For hours, the possibilities of what could happen to him if he didn't counteract this monstrous change tormented his mind. They egged him into imagining worst case scenarios, outright apocalyptic ideas of a feral titan in the streets...

“This has to work.” He choked out to himself, his own voice the only thing that filled the buzz of silence outside his brain. “If there’s any ounce of magic left, it has to be there. It’s gotta be!”

The optimism in his voice was shaky and fragile, simply a futile attempt to keep his hopes high. Those shiny eyes darted around the darkness, almost expectantly, ready for anything to strike his hopeless body. His mind was a mile a minute, but his pace was a mile an hour. While the moon stayed up, he would travel. His destination was not too far away by this point...

Hidden within the dunes of Ishtar Desert were the smoothed paths of timelessness. This landmark in particular was disturbed by violent ruffians and their flock. Carved within a sandstone mountain rested the sanctum of an ancient people, pillars nipped by the prevalence of winds were designed to resemble giant leviathan like dragons. The front of the mighty monument’s very top marked off with a proud, incredible statue of a bipedal, ferocious dragon, wingspan wide as it was tall, that held a woman in its left claw. In these lands where history had been wiped away, there was a great inability to discern fiction from reality. No one left to tell the tales, only to witness them. The military-garbed goons that plundered riches and trafficked treasures in and out concerned themselves only with financial gain. Evident by the sounds of low-grade explosions that went off within the once grand temple every few minutes or so. Each crackle and pop would reveal another hidden path to low-valued treasure.

Overseeing the operation was a stocky, somewhat toned tanuki woman. Her fur was light and smoky brown, with various splashes of black patches. She grit her teeth over the lack of progress, her claws pressed into a map on a flimsy wooden table. The woman couldn’t bare to watch the mockery of progress anymore. Her fists smashed into the table she stood over with a great, crunching force. Tools and daggers bounced up and scattered about, her bare commander’s hat bounced up off her head for a brief moment and slightly ruffled her hair. Solace was found in her flask on her waistband, which she emptied the contents of in quick succession. It was dismissed by a quick chuck to the sand.

“Pick up the pace, people!” She roared, “This is our last shot! If we can’t find it before the sun comes up, I’m docking EVERYONE’S pay!”

Despite being outnumbered hundreds to one, those that heard her sped up production fearfully.. Many soldiers rushed barrels full of gunpowder, massive amounts of TNT, other types of explosives were also hastily rushed along. Loud bangs and pops reverberated out from the monument, subtle cracks in its foundation began to appear in various non-vital spots, though everyone began to panic when a crack appeared in a pillar once some chunk of sandstone struck it. All but the militaristic commander.

While the smoke from previous explosions plumed up into the starry night sky, Mitsuru had perched himself atop one of the many dune-y hills near the historic dwelling. His heart had

skipped a beat when he saw the smog beacons, partially relieved when the building still seemed to be intact. The panic set back in when he saw the heavy militaristic occupancy within the area. He paced back and forth, those big blue eyes now dots with all sorts of panic in his mind. With his grotesque hands gripped into his hood, he paced back and forth erratically.

“Oh nononoNO.” His shrill screeches didn’t carry far over the dunes, thankfully for him. “If they’re going as far as to damage the integrity of a monument, then they’re...they’re trying to find the gem!” He sat down and took a breath, knees pressed together and arms wrapped around them. “If they’re after it too...then, then, then...!”

He didn’t want to think about it, how the artifact he had researched for a good few months was about to be taken by others and used for no doubt nefarious purposes. What else was a force like that going to use it for? It looked like a small platoon down there! He breathed through his nose, then out from his mouth. He couldn’t let others use such a powerful item for destruction. It was then, though, that he pulled back his sleeve to let his claw breathe again. It blinded him in the moonlight with its refraction, and curled in an unnatural way. It only just now occurred to him, was he to use this power selflessly?

No, he just needs it to pool away the draconic essence within him, to trap those beastial thoughts within. He didn’t want to be a monster in the making, he was afraid. Yet, wouldn’t the more selfless thing be to seal himself away? Mitsuru covered his hand again and gagged some. Yes, he was selfish in his thoughts too, but he had to weigh his options. The owner of the gem could either have the best intentions, or the worst. He might as well have the best intentions and potentially find the high of power rather than enable the ones already with power. For once during his trip, he had a serious face on. He wasn’t intimidating, he wasn’t menacing, he was just focused and headstrong.

“Y...you got this.” He boosted his confidence just by a bit, finally having found a bit of solace in his words. “You just have to sneak in, so...”

He took a deep breath, then clapped right in front of him. The moment his hands came in contact, it was as if a gust of wind blew away his visage. His clothes, skin, items in between, they all dissipated in a quick flash. The only way you could tell he was there was by the gentle, meticulous footsteps in the sand anyone could have skipped over. He was there physically, but the way he manipulated the light around him made him invisible to the naked eye. He knew he couldn’t keep the spell up for long, so down he slid, ready to slip in undetected.

Mitsy shook and shivered when he slipped past the outer perimeter of the camp and into the central hub. Thankfully, not many guards were present, and seemingly none who could detect magical anomalies. He thought he was home free, until he narrowly avoided contact with a nervous, sweating pandin man. The half-felinis stood perfectly still, for while he knew he couldn’t be seen, he could be heard in the small pocket of quiet.

"C-C-Captain Bakudan?" Despite the large structure of the soldiers, they still cowered at their tanuki leader. "If we keep bombing the structure, we're going to risk integral damage!"

Captain Satoka Bakudan crumpled up her map, a sneer formed on her face. It seemed that explosives wouldn't solve her problems this time. Everyone realized that by now. Still, she took out her frustrations with a quick chuck of the crumpled up map. Mitsy covered his mouth to hide a yelp, the crumple landed inches away from him in the sand.. "Fine." She grumbled, "We're just going to send *HIM* in!"

It was a relief on a lot of people's shoulders, to be pulled back after so much risk with no reward. Some of Bakudan's soldiers gathered up outside, while Mitsy practically swerved and curved his body about to avoid them. Six or seven soldiers push a container out from a tent with immense difficulty. A large, steel box with iron bars. One could see the flash of two red eyes within the darkness, a low grumble haunted the seven foot tall structure. With enough of a distraction, Mitsy absconded and weaved through. He dared not wish to learn what was in the cage. One person went in effortlessly, as if the lock to the cage was more a promise, and not so much a prison sentence. Another individual rolled a plump orange within the gloom. Those eyes moved down, and one could hear a simple *ulp* that sounded off afterward. Afterward, the beast within slowly lumbered its way out, only to reveal... the beast was more man-like than one would have originally thought.

Sure, there were oddities in the prisoner. No normal person had bat wings that came from their back, nor did they have husky dog ears and a fluffy husky tail, and no one nearby had piercing red eyes that looked as empty, soulless, and devoid as those, especially when the pupils were missing.. Despite all that, there was a genuine smile on the man's face, with one orange juice soaked tooth revealed. His tail and ruffled, fluffy hair were a merlot red color, skin a faded, but still darker color. His towering stature was betrayed by a friendly, round face, alongside his hefty body. One could easily mistake him as nothing more than an oversized paper weight, it would be very difficult to move with an apron of a stomach like his, or a large set of legs that more than likely squished and rubbed together, or move arms more suited to be someone else's pillows.

The platoon had him dressed in mainly loose cloth for general desert travel, boots that have had the laces pulled out just to fit on him (not like he could tie his shoes anyhow, given that empty minded look he had), a distinct yellow scarf that covered most of the blubber neck he had, not to mention the shackles around his wrists, a ball and chain connected to them. This was, more or less, a pointless addition. For one, it's not like he was going anywhere, for two, given how the chains that linked the shackles were broken, it wouldn't stop him.

"That's it," Satoka let this dogman leave his cell, "come on out now, killer!"

Confused, the dog man tilted his head to the left, his ears flopped along with him. "That's not my name?" He wondered aloud, "My name's Cerbi, ma'am. Did you already forget?"

“Don’t care, didn’t ask.” The captain brushed off, before she grabbed one of the broken chains and tugged the man along. “I’ve got a job that only *you* can do, and you’ll be VERY good at it...”

Chain clinks echoed about the smooth sandstone walls, a faint flicker of light from a torch revealed the grooves and scratches that remained. Rubble from grand and miniscule explosions lined along the halls. Some of the blasts had revealed hidden alcoves, others brought to light undisturbed sarcophagi of those long since deceased.. It was just the three for all they knew, Satoka, the pandin lower grunt, and their captured dogman. Cerbi casually observed his surroundings, unphased by the centuries of history that separated both him and the monument. The tug of a chain brought him back to reality, a yelp escaped him.

“Alright, mutt.” Satoka’s firm tone broke through the silence. “Your job’s to start throwing rubble around and checking places out. Remember your ‘special power’, right?”

“Oh!” Cerbi was taken aback by the sudden reminder. “Yeah! Totally! I remember it one-hundred-per-cent.” He saw the expectant look of Satoka’s, only to blink some. “...What was it again?”

A simple question made the short tempered tanuki grind her teeth. “Your. Height. Changing. Powers.”

“Oh right!” Her stern reminder was offset by Cerbi’s chuckle, then a gentle tap to his forehead. “Silly me! Yeah, no problem!”

Effortlessly, Cerbi pushed aside fallen rubble towards the dead end portion of the hallway. Despite naught a muscle shown on his blubbery exterior, he showed grand power. Five soldiers alone couldn’t do the work he could! He clapped his hands clean of dust once finished and awaited other orders. Satoka snapped her fingers and pointed at one of the holes he uncovered. Brought to his attention, Cerbi looked up and down the cavity and measured what side he’d need to be to fit. Faster than gravity itself, Cerbi’s limbs and body parts shrunk and receded, along with his torso itself. Nothing went out of sync, like a machine in perfect operation. He went from a seven foot tall behemoth to a small, one foot tall, fat headed toy of a man. With his stubby arms behind him, Cerbi happily charged headlong into the hole, while the other two just watched. Satoka didn’t seem worried, after all, this dogman was a neanderthal in comparison to her! She smirked, then leaned on the wall in wait for her retriever.

“C...Captain Satoka?” Her torch-bearer had the gaul to pipe up. “I get that he’s just expendable, but, what if he gets any funny ideas?”

“He’s too stupid to *get* ideas.” Satoka bragged, “That’s the beauty in an idiot like him. We can use him all we want without expending the actual members of our army.” She turned to the bearer, then gripped onto his chin with her thumb and the edge of her pointer finger. “So you should be *happy* he can’t get any funny ideas.”

A gulp left the throat of the torch holder. No further questions were needed at that point, he got the jist. It didn't take long for Cerbi to emerge from the hole he entered from, with a cute, little red gem in his hands.

"Tuh-daaaah!" He proudly presented them a small, red gem in the palms of his hands. It couldn't be any bigger than his tail.

The sudden gem to Satoka's peripheral was enough to make her jump some, before she simply examined it. "You dunce." She slapped his hands with just enough force to knock it out, though not enough to sting, surprisingly. "We're looking for a BLUE gem, about THIS big." She motioned in the air something that would take a normal person all their arm space to lug. "Got it?!"

With a slight whimper, Cerbi nodded, before he reverted back to his normal towering height. He followed along the captain herself, not really happy with his predicament anymore. Especially since a task of this magnitude took a lot of repetition...

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Past all the sounds of guards and busy soldiers, Mitsuru's form refracted itself back into visibility. Alone he wandered the bottom level of the old monument of cultures past. It had upset him, this place of once historical importance now left like a pigsty of broken up sandstone chunks, collapsed ceilings, and shaky wall foundations. He knew the treasure he sought was lodged deep, hidden within these walls. It must have been of such grand importance that it had to be hidden away from anyone without magic to access it. More specifically, someone within a magic bloodline sealed the entrance away. Of course, it didn't matter how fancy your door was, so long as you could blow the foundation away. That made what was originally going to be a calm trek within this temple into a swift-shuffled search.

A problem lied in that he had not seen any insignia during his search. He would listen in on the walls beside him to tell where a hidden room might be, and if that didn't work, he'd try the knock strategy. While it got him results, never was it what he was looking for. Just tombs, something he knew better than to disturb, lest a curse be placed upon him by spirits of all kinds. He could hear that woman and her two goons approach sometimes. Mitsuru was smart enough to know that he could outrun them. Confrontation with them was not something he was worried over. He noted the steps got lighter at some points, like suddenly a tiny animal walked in place of a bigger figure, though that didn't ultimately matter.

When Mitsuru put his hand to something much too sturdy to just be a wall, he stopped for a moment. He glided those digits a bit more forward, then put his ear up close. The other twitched in response, his eyes lit up when what he heard back the familiar echo of a long, hollowed hall. Then it hit him. When he sluggishly pulled back his head to find the insignia of two

dragons, both a shimmery bright blue, and a prideful silver, he knew that this was it. His claw throbbed some, it yearned to press into the chipped off painting with its lineage.

There was no hesitation, Mitsuru Ryuu slammed both claws into the mural, before the ginormous wall ahead of him rumbled and groaned. A faint glimmer of light seeped out from the crack such a large door caused. No doubt, the sound of its heft upward would alert the three for sure, so Mitsuru had to act quick. He could just barely see into the room, just enough. With another arcanic surge, he leapt over to the middle of the door, then blipped his way into the room.

An impressive **THOOM** shook Satoka and her torch bearer's concentration, while Cerbi squeezed out of yet another hole. The angry general grabbed onto the shoulders of her low ranked lackey, then shook him about.

"The only three people down here are supposed to be us!" She reminded him violently, "Everyone else was to pull out the moment I stepped in! Who did you not take into account?!"

That shake quickly turned to a choke, her thumbs pressed in on the man's Adam's Apple. He gagged out, "No...one...ma'am..." then let the torch drop from his hands.

A quick pull to his collar made the man gag for air, Satoka's eyes now pin-shaped. "Oh REALLY?! No one?! Well then, I'd like for you to explain that noise!"

"Could...just, be rubble?" the soldier whimpered out pathetically.

Aggravated, Satoka chucked aside her torch bearer effortlessly. His body's impact on the wall left heavy cracks among the sandstone. Cerbi rubbed his hands gently, while the tyrant angrily pointed to where the sound came from. "GO!" She ordered, and the tiny little thing quickly kicked it into high gear.

When the blue light greeted Mitsuru's face, he felt tranquility take hold of him.. The only thing that could peer in from the outside world was a tiny little hole on the right-hand side of the room. With his palms outstretched, an icy patch formed from pure, arcane energy that expelled itself from his body. He continued to add ice onto the hole until he couldn't see any form of light from the outside, and continued into the room. Slowly, Mitsuru grew closer to the origin of the light in the room; a gigantic gem that rested between two dragon's statues. Their tails curled at the lower girdle, the ferocity in their eyes was something stone could barely replicate. These statues were painted, still in nearly pristine condition. A giant silver dragon to the left with fangs bared, a not as mountainous bright blue dragon on the right, claw outstretched. There was something so peculiar about how tender their tails curled together, but their menacing, combative expressions spoke otherwise. The boy needed a moment to take it all in, the

extensive history he might never return to. Why did his heart sink? Why did he feel like he'd been here before? Why did this room feel so familiar? The more Mitsuru gandered, the more he realized that the walls had inscribed names on both sides. Those names were written in such strange inscription, the mortal tongue probably couldn't speak it. Nevertheless, the mage caught his lips and tongue mouthing each syllable as if it were a greeting. There was a darkness to this place, but a distracting serenity in how the gem shimmered and refracted. It was like Mitsuru was finally...

"Excuse me!"

The voice of a man from below him cut off any focus or train of thought that he had. Mitsuru swished himself around to the origin point of the voice. There stood a short dog man, no bigger than the half of a foot Mitsuru had covered up in ice. Somehow, it had melted to a mere puddle. Those big, soulless eyes, with a genuine smile were a bit off-putting for the catboy, but he nervously kneeled down to the creature's level.

"U-Um...helloooo." He nervously waved to the creature, was this the little footsteps he heard earlier? If so, then where would the big ones come from?

"What'cha doin' in here?" Asked the short fella politely, a bit absent minded of the reason he entered in the first place.

Mitsuru looked at him, then the crystal. "Um, I'm just here to...touch that...real quick?" He motioned to it with a simple jerk of his head.

The dog-thing hummed some, he briefly forgot why he interacted with the cat. Once he remembered, his ears flicked upward. "Oh yeah! You wouldn't happen to be someone unaccounted for, would you?"

A strange thing to ask of someone for sure. "N...not that I am aware." Mitsuru answered honestly, "I'm here of my own volition, are you?"

"You're here cuz you play music?" That seemed to confuse the thumb of a creature, who tapped his cheek some. "Uhhh, why would you need to come here to play music? There's nobody who'll listen!"

"Nono," Mitsuru then gently scooped up the tiny man and fit him in both his claws. "Volition is a term that means 'of one's own free will', when you choose to do something. I chose to come here."

"Ohhhh! Now I get it!" While he had that dopey smile, it then swapped to a frown. "Then I'm not here cuz of my own violin..."

While Mitsuru carried him over to the gem, he sat down by the statues' tails. "Care to explain then, little one?"

"Well, there's this really mean woman who's been making me move around rocks and get gems, but everyone I've found so far has made her even meaner. Not too long ago she chucked the guy holding a fire on a stick at a wall! He sounded like someone stepped on a tree branch after that."

"That's...that's terrible!" The shock in Mitsuru's eyes was abundant, though the little guy seemed not to notice.

"She's actually nicer than the others who've brought me places. Sometimes they make me fight, and I'm pretty good at it now! In fact, I just remembered something I can do! Watch, watch."

He then turned to face away Mitsuru, then puffed up his chest...and puffed, and puffed, and puffed... it disturbed the cat to see this tiny dog swell so comically, his limbs sunk into his body pretty quick, as he became denser. He looked like a big, round ball with a head in no time flat, before he expelled all that hot air...quite literally. With a huff, and yet another puff, he blew bright blue fire above him. The sudden squeak from Mitsuru was certainly the sound off that this strange creature's power was beyond unexpected, to say the least. He returned to his normal size after a good few seconds, then spun around.

"Ta-da!" He flung his arms up in the air. "What'dya think?"

With a nervous gulp, Mitsuru gently set the little thing down. "Well now I know who melted the ice wall I put up..." He rubbed the back of his head. "I'd expected to keep things out with that ice, not to...invite people in."

"I can do more than that!" he giggled, "I can fit in nearly any hole you put me in! All I gotta dooooo..." He stepped back, then clenched his hands in his fists. "Is think really, really hard!"

At that point, his body tingled and surged some, while his limbs and torso, not to mention his head, all grew in tandem with one another. It was too smooth of a transition, really, as the tiny man surged up from his half foot tall spot. One foot, two foot, three foot... At that point, Mitsuru noticed the curves this fella had. A stomach that hung a foot from the ground at best, hips that could clog a door frame, the bright scarf that matched whatever socks he had on, not to mention the sash that dug into his belly. Mitsuru had to admit, he held no upheld preference to body types or figures before that point, usually judgement on looks were beneath him, but...how could he not feel comforted by this tall fellow? A soft, round face, paired with fluffy hair, a waggly tail, and odd wings that were much too tiny to carry him at any size. The cat felt a potent blush spread across his cheeks. His toes curled with worry.

"O...oh." Mitsuru could only muster that as a response.

"This's what I normally look like." The dog spun around some to give his new pal a good view. "My name's Cerbi! That's C-E-R-B-I, no Y! What's your's?"

"Mih, m, mh...Mitsuru Ryuu." the cat choked out, incredibly nervous around this friendly fatty.

It was such an odd name, it bounced around in the mage's mind. Cerbi, that was too short to be a full name. Mitsuru was too distracted to think about it too long. All he did at that point was brush his backside off, and look up to the big man before him. Another odd thing he could notice now was his blue tongue, and bluer mouth root. He definitely wasn't a corpse, the guy irradiated enough heat to make a fireplace seem like ice! Not only that, but his skin was smooth and free of any rot that would come through normal means of decomposition or means of rigor mortis. He was the genuine article for certain...

"Nice t'meet you Mitsy!" Cerbi chimed, "I'm Cer-...wait." He poked his chin, then tilted his head. "Errr, I said that already! Whoops!"

By that point, Mitsuru couldn't help but giggle a tad at the boy's short term memory, he was such a peculiar thing! Plus, that nickname did sound pretty cute... "Do you have problems remembering?" He asked with a smile, not to bully him necessarily, just out of curiosity.

"Yeahhh," Cerbi admitted and rubbed the back of his head some. "Oh! Speaking of remembering, uh...you're not supposed to be here."

Unfortunate that it had to wrap back to the original topic, Mitsy had started to warm up to this new face. It isn't too late to explain himself though, which is when he took a deep breath and explained. "It's an educated guess, but there's something inside me that I...don't want outside me, so, I have to put what's inside me in the gem. I promise I won't be long."

"Okay!" Just like that, Cerbi was convinced. Good, not having to fight him was a chip off Mitsuru's shoulders.

With another deep inhale through his nose, then exhaled through his mouth, Mitsy turned his back to Cerbi. The hound watched intently, while the cat's robed claws slowly made their way up to the enormous crystal. There was a frosty aura around the priceless artifact, something that couldn't be replicated through any other means. It was like ancient dragons abound surrounded the cut crystal, inside and out. It beckoned Mitsy, as if to comfort him into touching the crown. No more hesitation, the young man pressed his palms to the gem!

There was a chaotic sensation that brewed within, the light flashed the whole room with blinding white. Cerbi had to cover his eyes to avoid damaging them. One could not deny the magic that came from the illumination. Whatever would have blinded Mitsy as he stared right into it seemed to only enlighten him. He could see generations, ghosts that roamed in and out of

this room, figures that looked somewhat like him, paired with those that looked nothing like him at all. It was peculiar, but he did notice something while he felt a force pull itself out of him. A couple things, in fact. Through those visions, people chipped off the gem, as it slowly, overtime, regrew its lost form. That, and while Mitsy gave power...he obtained some of it too.

There was a sensation similar to when a bird molted, as his claws began to deform, and scales peeled off and dropped to the floor. Mitsy thought this would have made him weaker, he would have accepted it even, if anything though...it was more like a barter. His draconic changes for a bit more magic to use. Before he was kicked out of the vision, Mitsuru thought he could see two figures standing beside the dragon statues. One to his left, tall, slender, with a scar along her face, a woman with his skin tone. To his right, a short felinid, scarred across his chest and covered in a soothing blue fur. Both stepped forward, pieces of the gem in hand, but when they touched, it felt like the world came to a standstill. Mitsy felt this vision slow down bit by bit, he could see lips move, but no words carried over the air. Before he knew it, the vision picked up slightly, an egg was placed next to the gem in a fancy little garb. The egg shook about, and Mitsy swore, from within the egg...his own eye peered back at him.

Instinctively, Mitsy severed the connection from him and the gem. The first thing he did was feel upon his wrists, to find that not all of the scales have dissipated...but above them were smooth, human hands, all he could be thankful for.

"I stopped it for now..." He joyously mentioned, before he put his hand upon the gem one last time, mainly, at the culet. Barely visible beneath the two tails intertwined, he snapped off the bottom and pocketed it. It was then he turned to Cerbi, with a respectful nod. "Thank you, so very very much, but...I must be on my way."

"Wait, what was that?" Cerbi questioned while Mitsy began to wander off. "You looked like you were super focused there for a moment..."

Silence filled the chamber for a moment, before Mitsy took a deep breath. "That, was the Cryo Gem." he explained, "Those who are cursed to bare draconic heritage like myself must make their way to these gems in order to funnel their energy into it. The...reasonings have been lost to time, but I presume it's because it can lock away the possibility of ever becoming a dragon. Now, I don't wish to keep you." With some more arcanic strength, Mitsy lifted his hand in the air, only to bring forth a doorway around his size. He was about to walk through, only to have cold feet right beforehand. It...wouldn't be right.

"We're gonna meet again, right?" Cerbi wondered so innocently.

His already puzzled mind now felt beyond guilty for the assumption he would leave the dog in slavery. Mitsuru...couldn't leave him. Not in good conscience. Even if they barely knew each other, being a servant to a tyrant like this was no way to live. The catboy turned away from his icicle portal, which flurried away into snow, before those shackles grew colder, and colder, until...snap! Snip! They contorted to the cold temperature they were forced into.

"S...Sure." Mitsuru answered, with a smile. "But that means getting you out of here first, okay? Now, what we need-"

A large explosion from the other side of the door cut off any thought that Mitsuru had at that point. In the doorway stood the tanuki woman captain, a pouch on her side had been opened, as plumes of dust piled into the room. By the scowl on her face, and the bugged left eye, she was **not** happy.

"Cerbi you dumbass!" She roared, "You listen to your captain's orders! Finish this bozo off!" She pointed with her free hand at Mitsuru, who then looked up to Mitsy.

There was already discomfort in the idea, he'd just gotten to know Mitsy, now he has to beat him up? "Can't we just...keep him?" Cerbi suggested, "You know! As a friend!"

Mitsy grabbed onto Cerbi's hand, then shook his head rapidly. "D...Don't let that woman make you think you have to listen to her!" he warned, "You're a whole lot stronger than you think! Not in muscle, but in heart!"

"Oh for crying..." she quickly revved her throwing arm, and chunked the explosive at Mitsy. "I have to do this myself, again!"

That headsized bomb arched its way over to Mitsy, something of that caliber was definitely made to combust on impact. He knew that would kill him, but there was no way to shield it after he spent so much of the mana within him on complicated spells. He just tried to hop back, and hoped that it would be enough. The bright orange flare plumed around the catboy, something that felt a bit lacking. There should have been a flare in the front. With one eye open, Mitsy saw that his savior was none other than the bulky Cerbi. His stomach was smoldered with smoke at the front, enough to where his clothes took more damage than he really did. He still jiggled some from the impact, but a heroic feat like that? Mitsy would have definitely been a goner had it not been for him.

"You know what Captain Satkota?" He butchered her name, whilst he balled his fists. "Mitsy's right. I *am* stronger than you!"

Even when the realization came, it only seemed to egg on the captain. "IT'S SATOKA YOU MAGGOT!" She stomped her foot into the ground, then grinded it by the tip. "That's IT! If you're not gonna listen to reason, I'll MAKE you listen! You and your new friend are going down!"

The situation to Satoka called for more bombs, obviously. It was all she really had in her arsenal, but if fire didn't do the job...she chunked the contact explosives up at the ceiling, with a malicious grin on her face. Cerbi yelped, and stayed back the best he could, being Mitsy's shield at this point. He blew flames at some bombs to keep her explosives from an inevitable cave in,

but he wasn't particularly the best at thinking. It took a bit to realize that she's just a one trick pony at this point, and these bombs either had to run out...or come from somewhere. Cerbi could *threaten* the captain to stop. He blew a fire cone in front of Satoka, which lit a fuse in one of her bomb bags. Uh oh, that blew up in his face. In a panic, Satoka quickly chucked the bomb bag she had up into the ceiling, which immediately ker-blasted and crackled the ceiling heavily.

"Look out!" Cerbi was the first to react, he hopped his gut right onto Mitsy so that any chunks of ceiling would be cushioned by his body.

CRACK! CRRCK! CRUNCH! A few good chunks landed on the hound's back, which only jiggled him and jostled him slightly. Underneath all that gut Mitsy rested, eyes wide, face redder than a tomato. Being squashed underneath all that wondrous adipose made him forget that this was a life or death situation, especially when the light from outside came back. The cat was dazed before he got hoisted by Cerbi up to his feet.

"Tha...thanks~?" Still a bit love struck, Mitsy teeter tottered back and forth, before he shook himself back to normal.

The infuriated tanuki reared up a fist, while the ceiling began to crumble and cave into the room.

"I'm gonna KNOCK YOUR-" Her leap to a threat was quickly cut off when something light bonked off her forehead, and surprisingly, into her cleavage. She was merely unphased by it at first, until she started to feel...weird. When she went to throw a punch, she was slowed down by a sluggish bloat inside her. "Eh?"

One could easily notice her fur start to tint a red color, followed by her hair's new green tinge. The two boys simply chose to take this opportunity to let her deal with her own karma, and start to run over to the gem.

"Hey, no deserting!" She demanded, only to find herself unable to chase after them. It's like the nerves in her body tensed up, or like her muscles refused to work. "What...what is happening?!"

Cerbi and Mitsy easily made their way over to the giant gem, since the Satoka situation sort of settled itself. "Cerbi!" Mitsy called over, "I know a place we can hide this, but we need to get it out of here first!"

The big man tried his best to pull up the gem while debris fell around him, but no dice. Even with his strength the gem was too big. "No good!" He called out, "It's just stuck in its spot!"

An idea popped back up into Mitsy's head when Cerbi tried to pull again, one that made his residually faded blush pop right back up in full form. "You can get smaller, right?" He proposed the idea rapidly, "What if you can get taller, too?!"

“Oh, taller?” Cerbi lit up slightly, it seemed that idea totally blanked him out. “Why didn’t I think of that?”

Perhaps it wasn’t the best thing to remind Cerbi of his powers, as a man like him would take it seriously. He raised his arms up to the sky, with a great reach up, only to start both an expansion and an extension. His loose robes stretched alongside his body, like any piece of clothing on his body wasn’t safe from the growth too. Mitsy stepped back, his head leaned back whilst Cerbi stretched and expanded. The gem that once stood over the dogman, so very much grand, was soon on his level, then beyond.

“C-Cerbi, stop!” Mitsy yelled, he saw the quickly growing gap between his head and the ceiling, “If you keep growing, you’re going to-”

-put a dent in the ceiling, which he very much did. When the already crumbled and fallen roof above was bumped into by Cerbi, the debris parted in a more controlled splash. The locked up statue of a tanuki just violently shook and rattled, before the now seventeen feet tall, and more, hound grabbed the gem with ease by the hand.

“Let’s roll!” He called, then scooped up his new pal by the feet.

Mitsy squeaked aloud while he was hoisted away, his arms spun comically around as he looked down to Satoka. Once they started to move away, Mitsy swore he saw the red gem flicker with a bright red light, then the tanuki swooped out of her frozen stance. “She’s free!” Mitsy called, “Cerbi, you need to get taller faster!”

“Got it!” Cerbi easily stretched up the hand that clasped the macguffin Mitsy sought out, before his already accelerated height accumulated faster.

While the hound retreated with his new friend in hand, gem in the other, the furious commander gripped that red gem, her tight grasp could burst a fruit. “When I get my hands on them...!” She growled, until her focus was taken away by, well, something else.

There was a thick trail of red that trickled down the palm to the wrist of Satoka’s hand, gradual for certain. She dropped the strange, seemingly bled stone, and just presumed it was blood from her hand. After a scrape of her palm, no cuts could be found at all...but the redness didn’t go away. It was as if she was stained by the trickly liquid, something, by this point, she tried to shake off. Sure, a dye job was going to be a hell of a wash, but something like this had to be chalky, right? How come there was no residue?! Panic splashed over the too-mad-to-be-scared militant’s face, before her reddened arm started to swell. Swell, swell, swell... it puffed in circumference rather intently.

“What’s this gem doing to me?!” She yelled aloud, the crumbled roof above her now more a makeshift staircase to follow the giant’s footsteps.

While she tried to climb with her other arm, she quickly found that it had also started to puff. It had some catching up to do, but two arms that were clown pants shaped made not excellent climbing tools. She fell back down in no time flat, her side in droplets of the liquid. Being so close to it gave her a chance to take a good sniff at just what made these hellish, ungodly changes to her anatomy.

“That’s...that’s cherry!”

The red had pulled itself to her lacking bust and swelled it outward, much like how the rest of her frame rounded out. As buttons and her belts strained, so too the fabric that adorned her body so diligently. Her bomb bag sashes felt like knives in her belly, soon, it felt like daggers in her body entirely. There was a subtle, orb-like figure that her bod soon started to take on. She tried to move off the ground, but the intense pressure of her body kept her down. It was similar to being at the bottom of the ocean, the pressure weighed and sloshed about inside her.

...Sloshed?

Make no mistake, the sounds of slurshing and churning sounded out when she made any type of movement. Satoka remembered what that noise was distinctly, the sound of a bottle being shaken, a canteen being rattled, kegs being rolled. She was filling with liquid! The red crept up to her face finally, along with whatever juice started to fill inside her. This wasn’t like blood, it felt thicker than that. It felt like almost every liquid inside of her dampened into a red cherry juice, from the translucent tear of defeat in her left eye, to the foamed saliva in her mouth. She even felt it leak in certain spots, more specifically, her navel. That red goop seemed to fill her stomach up quite well, and left her to look like an oozed jelly donut. Her limbs were cone like, body now a ball rather than any type of anatomical structure, face swelled with an overabundance of juice. This was it? This was her humiliating defeat? Not at the hands of some warmonger, nor to a savage brute with a lust for violence? Not even some fighter who outsmarted her? To some stupid gem, in some crumbled ruins, of people she’d never even met in her lifetime?! The buttons and belts on her figure popped off her, fabric shredded with the taut flesh that reached its unfortunate limits. Satoka knew what was coming, that didn’t make things less humiliating for her in the long run.

It would have been hard for a small duo of adventurers to escape the ruins through the crumbled halls, maybe even impossible if one had to consider how fast it all fell around them. The odds drastically increased once Cerbi’s head broke through the roof of the ancient halls, at most all he had to worry about was to wiggle if he got his foot caught in the rubble beneath him. The men below who waited for their commander all panicked differently. Some deserted the field, some called for their commander, though the brave few tried to take potshots at Cerbi’s legs. Whether it just be his bulk, or maybe even how tall he was by this point, the crossbow bolts did nothing but bounce off him.

“That demon’s on the loose!” Yelped one soldier, who realized a lost cause when he saw one. “Fall back! Fall back!”

While the other soldiers started to dart off, it was then something had finally clicked in Mitsy’s mind. He tilted his head up to Cerbi, readying the most invasive question yet. “Cerbi? Uh...is your name short for something?”

It took a bit of thinking on the dog’s part, before he nodded. “Yeah! It’s short for Cerberus, actually.”

“OH.” Mitsy leaned his body slightly toward the tip of Cerbi’s fingers, while the giant started to wobble off towards the direction of the moonset.

It really should have been obvious at the forefront. The wings, breathing fire, the soulless stare his eyes had given off. Mitsy should have realized just how dangerous of a demon Cerbi really was from that point. The name Cerberus harkened back to a powerful, three headed canine, tall enough to destroy a village just by setting foot in it, then to demonic warriors whom held the same name. Those with the title of Cerberus were to be feared, so then why did the feelings of gratitude and the thump-thumps of his heart complicate matters? Why did that genuine smile radiate so much positivity and joy on Cerbi’s face, while the night winds swung his floofy hair about? Why, oh why, was Mitsy smitten by the most dangerously named creature in all of time itself? The great, hellishly named Cerberus, was nothing more than a chunky, huggable pal.

The mind of that cat sorcerer was fractured in concentration when a loud, unusual pop sounded off behind them, followed by splorches and glorps of all kinds. Cerbi turned around to see those ruins they left shattered, crumbled, and disheveled, were now coated beyond belief in a vibrant red liquid, too saturated to be blood. WAY too saturated to be blood, and considering there were no organs, skin fragments, bones even...yeah, that most certainly was not blood.

“What was that?!” Mitsy cried out, bug eyed and panicked.

“Uh, probably nothing?” Cerbi’s unsure answer made it seem like he wasn’t the cause, at least. “Prooobably nothing.”

Mitsy’s head started to race again. Well, on one hand, Cerbi was a demon with possibly the same bloodline as the warriors of Cerberus, but on the other? He was friendly, curious, and didn’t really seem to fight and more so wanted to protect. Maybe he just...forgot his name, and tied it with the first thing he heard. Yeah. Probably that. With a soft sigh, Mitsy curled up into the palm of his savior’s hand.

“Thank you again, Cerbi...” He cooed a little, the exhaustion of such an eventful night finally hit him.

“No problemo, pal.” Cerbi’s tail wagged when he was given that sweet recognition. “So uh...where do we go now?”

Mitsy yawned, then looked up to the skies. The sun had just barely begun to peak above the surface of the sands, the darkened skies now slightly dulled pink. “Do you see where the sun is?”

“Yeah, it’s right in front of us. Do you live on the sun?”

Cerbi’s comment made Mitsy giggle a tad. “No silly, I live here on the earths, just like you do. If you could, turn about sixty-five degrees clockwise, and just head forward until you make it to the road...”

“...but it’s only fifty degrees out.” Cerbi flicked his ears, and tried to get a test of the climate.

“Just turn to the right a bit.” Mitsy corrected, “A little bit before facing all the way to the right, then go forward. You should hit the road soon...”

Cerbi realized how sleepy his new pal sounded, then slipped him onto his chest. Surprisingly soft, and there was plenty of room to stay dormant without sliding around. The lovable hellhound tucked his bud in with his scarf, then followed along Mitsy’s directions. While the sunrise slowly peaked over the horizon, the nice remainder of moonlight on the sands was just enough for the jolly giant to get going. Mitsy purred profusely in the bundle of warmth he was in, having not realized where he got set, and drifted off to sleep. What sorts of shenanigans would Cerbi get into if he wasn’t around? The cat just wasn’t sure, but he was determined. Cerbi had to stick by his side, not just for his sake, but for Mitsy’s sake as well. Maybe one day, they could be more than friends...but who’s to say that for certain?

In the dilapidated temple they left behind, only one brave soldier dug through the stone to find his boss. The giant explosion of cherry juice had left more chaos in its wake, there were several men who had touched the slop either bare skinned or by the foot of their steel toed boots. They ended up as useless, sloshing balls of cherry juice. Whatever that magic gem was, it had more power behind it than one thought, almost apocalyptic power... Said soldier came across a familiar hat, soaked in red gunk, which meant that his captain wasn’t that far away. He pulled a piece of rubble back, and found cherry gunk right underneath it. There lied Satoka, dazed, groaning, with a belly that seemed to slowly seal itself back together.

“C-Captain, ma’am...?” He dreadfully called out.

From the grunt she sounded off, and the fling of her arm, it was very much obvious she wasn’t dead. “At least...some of you...aren’t cowards.” She growled out, then glared at the skies

above her. The sun had slowly made its way up, the oranges and pinks of morning had followed behind. "When I get my hands on those boys, there'll be hell to pay. Much, much hell to pay..."