

BETWEEN

A pokeball big enough to swallow its own home world sailed through the space between worlds, nestled safely in the immensity of Bartok's vast, endlessly huge palm. Even with the inter-dimensional travel and its taxation, the godly bat-dragon still remained enormous; it wasn't that the size tax had failed, quite the opposite—it was more that there was simply *that much* of him to tax.

His 350,000,000-mile tall body shrank subtly, sighing slowly down to 330,000,000, then 310,00,000...only for his muscled figure to easily tremble and quake, blowing defiantly back up to 360,000,000 miles...410,000,000...440,000,000...490,000,000!

Bartok's eyes rolled in delight as he hugged himself, feeling every bit of himself explode even bigger, and bigger...truth be told, it was just a nice, when he felt it fade a moment, and let the taxation shrink him back down to 420,000,000...only for the trembling to return, even more.

T-this hero stuff...kinda does have its rewards, heh, he thought, aglow with pleasure, biting his lip as he lessened back to 400,000,000 miles...then angrily detonated bigger, as if his body were clarifying just who was in charge: 390,000,000 miles of bulk halted, shook hotly, then blew up again, to 450,000,000...530,000,000...670,000,000...

In comparison, the 90,000-mile planet of a pokeball remained, sinking deeper and deeper into the boundless warmth of Bartok's scaly palm. Within that ball, no one was the wiser that their once-puny comrade was embarrassing the very fabric of multidimensional space.

“Better,” Toothless sighed, as he finished absorbing off of Spyro, shaving a staggering 200,000 miles off of a partially-willing Spyro, then another 100,000 off of Cynder, blowing him up to just a head taller than Figment. “That's so much better!”

He beamed a broad, goofy grin, flexing overloaded black pectorals, letting the smooth scales shimmer in the overhead light. He took a seat along the cushioned rim about the walls (such as they were), and kept just enough space from Figment, Spyro and Cynder, lest the absorption factor grow problematic, between them.

“Yeah, I guess,” Spyro huffed, smiling slowly. “I suppose I'm still healthy enough, like this, a little sharing hardly hurts. He may have been 400,000 miles tall, but within the sub-space of the pokeball, all four of them were nearly equals, sitting across from one another.

Well. Equals, in height, and bulk. With the struggle and strife of their battle with Leon over and done, they could finally take proper stock of themselves—and goodness, they were alright.

“It is something, isn't it?” Figment chuckled, nodding. “I feel like we're having the kind of sophisticated group conversations that, ah...”

Though he remained smiling, the oddest little look grabbed Figment's eyes, the ridges tilting up as he froze a moment, then laughed it off.

“Blar—” Cynder offered.

“Blarion, of course!” the purple dragon guffawed, shaking his head. “Gracious, I *am* more tired than I thought, aren't I? How embarrassing! How could I have possibly...ah, well, he and other members of the academy, they often would gather and talk through scientific suppositions, theories of matter and space...oh, one time, Blarion even...ah.”

Again, Figment stopped. His smile shrank.

“Why, that's the...the funniest thing.”

Toothless seemed lost on the joke, but Spyro and Cynder watched on, brows furrowing the tiniest bit in worry, as Figment visibly struggled.

“You're tired, Fig, like you said,” Spyro chipped in, cocking his head casually. “I'd be wiped, if I had to juggle a fraction of what you've handled.”

“That's what it is,” Cynder concluded, with a verbal stamp of authority. “You should rest up, dear, we'll stay quiet. You do so much, already.”

“Heh. Truth be told, I thought you wouldn't last a day, when we first met,” Spyro chuckled. There was nothing nasty in his tone; he was legitimately amused.

“Well, thanks,” Figment shot back, starting up a nervous laugh.

“No, really, you're the toughest dragon I've ever met. You're crazy-smart, you're kind, and—”

“Goodness, no. I started this entire mess, Spyro,” he countered, blushing gently. “I...”

“You *help*, Fig,” Cynder said, cutting through. “That's what you do.”

Figment's face had never been this hot, ever. He didn't even know what to do about it, aside from looking down at the floor in a flustered huff. Of course, all that did was wedge his chin into his pectoral cleft—but, down it stayed.

“You're welcome,” Spyro added, closing his eyes, and leaning back against his own muscle.

“T-thank you, both. You too, Toothless. And Bartok, out there. Even Mushu and that reluctant dragon, and...and Lucario. I couldn't have asked for better companions, I mean it. Whatever happens out there, when that ball opens up again...I just wanted to say that much. I don't know where I would be, without you lot.”

“Yeah,” Toothless snorted, scratching his belly idly. “I'm still tougher, but otherwise, yeah!”

Figment beamed back, still hot-faced, but happy. His eyes closed, but his mouth was unable to match the challenge:

“What will you do, when you go back home, Spyro? Cynder?”

Both dragons blinked, caught off guard. Then, they looked to each other.

“Well, I don't really know,” Cynder began, pedaling away from the topic. “I mean...to be honest, ah, there isn't much left to...go back to...”

“You sound so wishy-washy,” Toothless interjected, wagging in his seat. “You're the surest one here, I'd say. It's strange, hearing you *not* be that way.”

Cynder was now blushing, about as hard as Figment, who tried to keep his eyes closed.

“Well...there's a lot that happened, in my world, and...I...”

“She has a home to go to, *any* time she likes,” Spyro said, folding his monstrously huge, violet arms over a hulking yellow-plated chest. “My world is her world. I mean, if she ever wants to go there. Whenever. With me.”

Toothless broke in a fit of throaty rumbles, resembling a chortle.

“Hah! It's just as well, she likes you, anyhow.”

“Toothless!” Cynder shot, before reeling it in.

“Don't get mad,” the black dragon soothed, somewhat. “He's lucky.”

Spyro nodded, just once, and Toothless returned it. It was the nod only brothers could do.

“What about you, then?” Spyro asked Toothless. His green eyes widened, and he tilted his head some, weighing the notion for what seemed to be the first time.

“Me? Oh, wherever.”

“That's it?” Cynder asked.

“Sure. Wherever I end up.”

“Nothing wrong with that,” Figment added, shifting his huge bulk against the wall, already half-asleep. “You'll...do fine, wherever you end up, Toothless, I know it.”

“See, he gets it. I wouldn't even mind traveling all around with you, Figment.”

Figment was drifting too far off to respond, as sleep finally gathered him up in her dark, forgiving arms. All thought ceased, and a small, unhappy idea slipped through its cage, lunging right for him, vanishing with his mind into dawning silence. Not one of them had dared to mention that enormous, dark hand, out in space. Figment already knew who it was, deep down...even if the rest of him fought to keep it locked.

That same dark hand returned, in his slumber, and it grasped.

14.

When the light came back, it was through a slit. That slit remained as it was. There was no

opening of partitions, no swirl of space, no new world to take in. As Figment's eyes adjusted, it proved to be nothing more than a window, light threading calmly through closed drapes.

As most do, the dragon remained still, half-asleep, letting his lids close again, then sluggishly reopen to the sight of the library's back corner. The old Victrola player sat comfortably on a marble-top table, on the other side of a blood-red velvet chaise, several books on Africa and Indonesia stacked to keep it in place.

The hum of pure quiet crept in as he yawned wide, then sighed; Figment slipped up into a seat, his horned head swimming, stuffed with cotton, another yawn getting loose.

He thumped down off his own personal chair, shook his head, and shuffled, little claws tapping across stained hardwood, as he ambled into the kitchen, and fumbled through a cupboard for anything that could hold hot tea. That always helped.

The stillness remained, as the dragon fixed a kettle over a steel-and-wood burner. The knob clicked, but no flame, so he shrugged, smiled weakly, and blew a streak out himself, lighting the pilot under the coil, and watching it start to glow hot.

He sniffed, turning about, looking through unfocused eyes about the place. Was it just him?

"Hello," he called, less a question than a statement, cast out for reactions.

There the tea was, on the table, nice and hot. There Figment sat, on a stack of books, in order to reach the tabletop, from the chair. It all seemed right.

The door shut, softly, pulling him from the cup, as a few shuffling footsteps made their way into the kitchen. There he was.

"Hot one, today," the man spoke, hurriedly crossing the kitchen floor, his cloak folded about one angled arm. He tugged one glove off, then another, stopping only to brush the underside of his reddish beard with a knuckle. "Bit better in here, I'd say, eh?"

Figment watched the whole way along, his little mouth open.

"Big day, Figment, *big day*," he continued, tromping intently into the study, neighboring the library. "Proposals abound, on the light tuner, model seven, and the fly-wright demonstration model. I just...yes, here it is, then. Right!"

The phantom returned, proffering one quick grin, before turning and entering the library, likely going all the way back to the lab. Figment's breathing quickened, his scaly brows arching up, his jaw refusing to work.

"Figment! Figment, have you seen the, ah...schematics for the series one fly-wright? That's the one, not zero, my boy!"

The teacup shook in his tiny purple hands as he finally managed one dry, harsh gulp, just as the man reappeared, rolled papers and prints gathered under an arm.

“Figment? You awake?”

“I, ah,” Figment wheezed, dropping the tea entirely, the cup thumping and rolling dumbly on the floor. “Ah.”

“Right, there's a good fellow. Have a cup ready for me, as well, will you?”

Figment was on him, and there was nothing else. He buried his little muzzle into the man, right in the chest, ruffling his sharp button-up shirt and red vest as he squeezed tightly, desperately into him.

“Well! Hello! What's all this, suddenly?”

“B...Blarion,” was all Figment could get out, a hard sniff following.

“Figment.”

“I was...I didn't, have...this dream, t-this massive...e-epic of a dream!”

Blarion let Figment do whatever it was that was happening, cocking one restrained brow. Whatever it was, the man still put a hand on the dragon's back, patting comfortingly.

“You *are* pure imagination, my friend,” Blarion chuckled, pulling Figment back a bit. “I shouldn't be so surprised, that your dreams are quite serious affairs! You'll really have to tell me all about it, every word, when I return! I want to know more, you know!”

“O-of course,” Figment coughed, shaking his head. “It really...was incredible...”

Blarion set Figment back down respectfully on his chair, picked the teacup off the floor, and set it back onto the table.

“Fascinating! You must write it all for me, unless you can remember it, outright.”

“Remember? Yes, of course! I...gracious, I remember it all...”

“Excellent! I shall return, then, shortly! Remember that tea, as well, if you please.”

The door shut, and the stillness returned.

“I...forgot you.”

No one answered.

The lab was just as it had been, when he had...dreamed of his departure, through the portal. Even the machine was there, where it had been, throughout its inceptive stages, all the way to its near-completion. On closer inspection, he found it was actually completed. Just as it had been.

“Odd, that,” Figment hummed, double-checking the gears in the back cabinet.

It hadn't been completed, except for in his dream, at the beginning. He *knew* that.

The floor groaned, suddenly, then went silent again, and the slightest, softest note of dread crept into his back, up his wings, all the way through his neck, drawing a nasty shudder out.

Of course. A dream. Stupid, stupid.

Figment bonked himself on the head, in penance for a bout of foolishness. He'd fallen asleep in the pokeball, and was dreaming. It was obvious, now that it was here in front of him.

The realization was a relief, but a horrible, horrible one, at that.

His lip raised, pursing, the dragon nearing sudden tears.

He wasn't home. That wasn't Blarion. He'd fooled himself, again.

“Well,” Figment gasped, catching a tired and weary sob, “good to see the old place, then, at least. I...suppose I ought to be grateful. Yes. Yes, it's a comfort. Entirely.”

The dread only swelled, within him. This wasn't like the other dream, at all. His growth, clearly a self-imposed interpretation of his personal growth, versus the place he had started out from, was still a positive thing. Encouraged. Here, he was small. So, so small. Had he always been that little, compared to Blarion? Surely not.

But being home again was the ultimate goal, yes? Why, then, did a dream of such leave icy mud in his veins? What was this?

“Hello?”

This time, he was asking. Pleading, in fact. It was night out, through the silent window, and as he looked on, something darker yet surged along, slithering across the exterior.

“H-heavens!”

How long had he been inspecting the machine? Had time passed, so?

“A dream, right,” he reminded himself. “Only that. Best to...w-wake up, then, I s...suppose.”

Another creak, from a darkened bedroom, the door an open mouth to black.

“I ah, i-imagine I—”

The room growled, and even blind, it had eyes. Eyes, on Figment.

Lord, gracious, something was there.

“Ahah, a *b-bad* dream, no doubt, brought on by s-stressors of a taxed mind. That's it. Not a bother. One merely has to w-waken! Yes! Wake up, then. Here we go.”

Something heavy brushed against the bed he knew was there, in the dark, big enough to shove it

against the far wall. Figment leapt back, wings uselessly flapping, in open, overt fear.

“Waking up!” he shouted, panic strangling his precious few words in a clenched throat. “Wake up! Wakey, wakey, eggs and bac—”

Something straight from hell bellowed, and the moment footsteps slammed toward him, Figment bolted. The kitchen was lit only by the pilot light now, all daylight and safety dead and gone, far away. Not bothering to turn back, Figment scrambled to close the kitchen doorway, just as something enormous bashed it, cracking it nearly apart at the center.

Wood chips sprayed loose as the tiny dragon staggered back. The door held, but the footsteps boomed back the other way, into the bedroom, and Figment barreled into the study doorway and slammed it shut as well, knowing the apartment was connected all across, meaning the bedroom led to the study, on its other side.

BAM!

The very same door cracked and splintered part-way, making Figment scream and tear down the darkened entryway, out through the apartment door, and into the dormitory hallway of the Academy's ninth floor. The door shut, and Figment locked it, as a catastrophe of impacts battered into it, from within.

“Oh, wake up!” Figment cried. “Spyro, Cynder! Toothless! Bartok, anyone!”

He must have been thrashing all about, in real time; why weren't any of the others waking him up? What could they possibly have been doing—

CRACK!

“Gracious!”

The tiny dragon turned and broke into a full run, racing down the dark hallway, twisted in unknowable shapes and shadows, as the door began to smash open, *thud* after splitting, snapping *thud*. His every footfall was so real, so *solid*. As Figment stumbled and rolled into the hallway corner, he smashed his horned head against an oak panel, and a very-believable stab of pain raced down his neck.

“Ah! What...”

He felt it. Absolutely, he did. And here he still was, as the door snapped apart, down the way he had come. He picked himself back up and limped towards the stairwell, only to find there was none—only another corner.

“What in blazes!?”

Panting, he flung himself down the other hallway, finding the stairs situated at the center, in a twin master staircase—but, that was only on the third and second floors, leading down to the lobby! What was this? What was it doing, up here!?

It wasn't the Academy. Not the one he kn...

“Oh, no,” Figment moaned, as the hallway warped from a shifting mass, and something mad and ageless howled and churned nearer, from the opposite hall. “No...no, it can't...”

Another Academy. Another world.

Poor Figment's mind reeled, working fast, yet having so little to work with, to the point that the short list of things he could figure simply looped on itself, instead of working forward.

How had he wound up in another world, in such a state? He had pieced together the rules of creation binding him to his quest, and this was *not* a part of the book. Moreover, what was that thing doing here, with him? If this was real, then what in God's name was chasing him!?

You can't wake up

Something huge slammed into the hall corner he had just slid into, and Figment took off to the new stairwell, scuttling gracelessly down it in the darkness of night. The towering double-bay windows lining the stair wall at its peak was awash in a storm of black shapes and coils, alive and wanting, casting madness between what slim light was cast on the steps.

You can't get out

“Help,” Figment croaked, as he fell into a tumble down the remaining steps, and crashed into a clumsy heap in the pitch. The floor was cold, bordering on wet, and as Figment struggled to reclaim his bearings, something boomed and rattled, shaking the Academy to its withering foundations. “S-someone, help me, please! Please!”

You're so little

“Have to...get out, but where...”

And so lost

The voice was so huge, practically everywhere. What seemed to have started in his head was now shaking everything. All Figment could manage now was borderline-animal grunts as he panted frantically fast, his little heart slamming against his chest, drowning everything else out, as the ceiling violently bowed, sinking lower, from some growing weight or bulk. Boards snap-snapped loudly, snapping him to attention; as he ran to the right of the lobby foyer, a massive ebony mass blew down through the ceiling, swelling uncontrollably in size and scope, groaning loudly, bursting and gushing bigger, to fill and flood everything.

Figment slammed a door behind him, now in a large classroom. He skidded into a desk, which dominoed into the next, as he slipped down underneath the professor's desk, and shook in abject terror.

You're the toughest

Spyro's kind words were a warm flame, a million miles away, on the other side of doom. No, he wasn't. Figment had never been such, by even half. What a joke.

"If this is another world," he muttered, his voice sandpaper and glass, "i-if this another world, I can get out! I can-can ah, p-portal! Yes, portal!"

He focused as best as he could, as the Academy's diseased innards groaned, wooded walls smashing apart nearby, as the horrible mad thing grew and grew and grew and grew.

Nothing. Nor portals, no help. Just the hungering moan of interior walls blowing apart, as the rumbling growth shook the floor, worse and worse.

"Portal, portal! I'm imaging a portal back! Back to the pokeball! Co-come on!"

Nothing. His imagination was just that, like any other mortal.

"Am I being blocked out? Is it the nature of this world? Ah, what, what!?"

If he could *only* wake up. If he could just return there, then return home, to his real—

Return

Figment's panicked breathing stopped, at last.

Return!

It was all he could think of. In a second, it was all he could think *about*. He swallowed, mining whatever moisture he had left in him, to force the words out, properly.

"Bag...return!"

In a flash, there it was. The warmth of the bag, there, in his little clawed hands. He knew there would be no candy in there, nothing to empower him any. That wasn't why he called it back.

Everything in it...everything inside...is from that fairy kingdom...

He opened its top flap, then stuck his head in completely. Being smaller than ever, it proved easy. Inside, he imagined a portal once again, with all his thought and being, all at once.

It's the only space I have that isn't this world's space...if this world is blocking me, then...

A flash, within the bag's warmth, and it happened. Figment cackled, himself half-mad, at the blessed sight of it swirling to life. He knew exactly where to go.

"Hah!"

The Academy sagged, the class walls bending and moaning out toward him, as whatever horrible thing was beyond it groaned and swelled bigger, still.

With hardly a second, Figment squeezed his smaller self into the bag and vanished, just as the classroom walls blew apart, spraying destruction and ruin everywhere, a tide of black mass billowing in through everything.

15.

The rolling green hills rushed to meet him as Figment spiraled out of the portal, and hit the turf. Warm sunlight found him again, and the terrible, soul-sticking cold finally began to fade; he sighed, then sat up...to massive, alien plants, each one towering and bending, high up over Figment's head. He shook it a bit, closed his eyes, then let them adjust to the light. Sure enough, massive plants. What was all this, then?

His confusion was welcome, as it drove back the lingering fear he had narrowly escaped.

"Ho, my..." he huffed, sniffing clean air, and standing back upright. "This...isn't quite..."

He had been aiming for the pokeball, the same way he and the others had warped into them before. Had he been this much off the mark? Come to think...how in all the known worlds had he gotten out of the gigantic ball, to begin with?

Figment dusted himself some, then inspected the enormous flora, his free hand finding his chin as he thoughtfully studied it—for about five seconds.

"Grass," he deduced, before covering his muzzle with both hands. "Gracious, I..."

He looked about, then glanced over to a massive, boulder-sized rock. A pebble.

"I've shrunk *this* far down!?" he moaned, stunned. "Gah, of course. Of course, I did! I already wound up small, in that...awful place...then, I was taxed again, escaping it. Of course, I would dwindle to such a state, as this. How completely mortifying..."

Still, he was free. And, in a more hospitable world, at that. Which meant...

"Best to test my theory," Figment mumbled, before closing his eyes and concentrating. "I can't just go into another portal yet, I would surely shrink to an atom...so...I imagine, I need to be *bigger*..."

It took a moment, but it came: Figment's tiny body began to rumble and bulge up higher, inching slowly taller, and taller. That now-welcome pressure filled his being as he pushed up to a whole foot in size, then a foot and a quarter, the grass humbly sinking down to his knees, then his ankles. As soon as he had started, however, the growth ceased, leaving him a bit surprised to only be 3 feet tall—close enough to what he had been, prior to his adventure.

"Well," Figment began, looking himself over, "square one *is* home, when it comes to science. I suppose I'll regain the knack, if I keep at it. Perhaps that...that *place* affected my abilities?"

At such a size, at least, Figment was able to look around, and what he found was a sight he couldn't have been more glad to know. The wide open, windswept hills, the stone walls, the bright skies—he knew it like he knew the first new world he had ever seen, because that's just what it was.

"The Artisans Realm!" he cheered, the dragon trying to do an impromptu roll, happily failing with a crash among the grass. "Haha! Perfect! Oh, but I'm so glad to see you again, world!"

As far as he was concerned, the world hugged Figment back; he trembled, then, with a soft, pleasant grunt, ballooned even bigger. He heaved out in one hot push, swelling loudly, blowing up to a whopping ten feet in height, and snorting powerfully as he rose to his feet.

“Ah, good, good,” he chirped, curling an expanded, stronger bicep, feeling his scales stretch nicely against its modest peak. “Seems I’ll be back up to snuff soon, at this rate! Now...to business! Much to do, indeed...now...”

A full inventory filed itself out in his thoughts first, then an itinerary to hang them on.

Find Spyro, Cynder, Toothless, and Bartok

No guarantee they're in their respective worlds

No idea what happened in the pokeball, after falling asleep...meaning

No way of knowing where each dragon is

No means of finding out, without hopping to world after world...

Unless you have friends who know magic

Figment beamed, nodding rapidly to himself, as the plan knitted together.

“Bag, return!”

At that, the trusty satchel popped into reality, hugging Figment's body, as though happy to see him again. Black smoke from the previous world faded off, and for a moment, Figment tried to pull back in fear, swatting the foul stuff away quickly.

“Gracious! Poor bag, sorry to have left you there. Nasty business.”

The unpleasant recollections surged back, and Figment dodged them by hiding in math.

“Let's see, now,” he pondered. “How large were we, when we went through the portal that lead to the fairy kingdom? I need that much, combined, to make it there, for sure, assuming it's the same dimensional distance as then...”

A simple thought managed to bite him, at last.

“Though, I ought to make sure of something, before I get big enough to afford to leave...”

The hills rumbled as Figment smiled, closed his eyes, and imagined himself even *bigger*. Raw power surged through him, his athletic build pumping thicker and mightier as he hummed, feeling himself stretch and bulge onward. His horns swelled out as his muzzle pushed ahead, his pectorals and biceps, shoulders and hips and thighs booming, as he easily passed 20 feet, then 23...25...

“SPYRO!” Figment bellowed, his growing body throbbing out in warm, pulsing bursts of energy, as he literally willed himself greater and greater, his hard-earned power steadily returning.

“SPYRO! CYNDER! ANYONE HERE?”

The wind was good enough to reply, as it buffeted against his newly regrown muscle. Otherwise, all was quiet. He wound up for another try, blowing up (with something close to a purr) to 32 feet in height.

“SPYRO! CYNDER!”

“Did you say *Spyro*?”

A smaller, adult voice cut in, making Figment thud heavily around on gigantic feet. The gigantic dragon snapped his attention to, then fro, then back to *to*, but found no one. Then, the genius thought to look down at this paws.

“Hello, up there!”

There, up fearlessly close, was another dragon, green-skinned, and older. He seemed a more masculine sort, top-heavy, broad-shouldered...yet, possessed of an artist's grace. At least, the carpenter's belt, hammer, chisel, and patterned shoulder pad-sleeves said as much.

“Oh! Ah, h-hello,” Figment stammered, surprised enough to be the meeker party. “I didn't even see you there, sir!”

The dragon waved a hand dismissively, up at Figment, grinning a slight bit. His brows were stern, but good-natured, and strong.

“No need for 'sir'. I go by Nestor. I'll say, you're a big one, even among dragons, eh...”

“Figment! Pleasure to meet you, Nestor! I was—”

“You were calling out for a missing dragon, I heard you easily. I imagine you have as many questions as I do, if you're calling out for him, but let me start: how do you know Spyro?”

Figment's growth stopped, as he hardly wanted to scare away the first friendly face he'd come by. He turned with a few thooming steps to face Nestor properly; finding the dragon reached roughly up to his huge knees, he sat down as gently as he could, in a gesture of civility.

“Let's see, what's the fastest way to explain,” Figment wondered. “Ah, your portals? I came in through one, on accident, from a completely different world. He and I have been through quite a lot, since he wound up traveling abroad with me. How...wait. Might I ask, how long ago did he vanish?”

“Nearly half a year,” Nestor said, nodding solemnly. Figment dropped a shade of color.

“I...beg pardon...six months!?”

Again, Nestor nodded, no nonsense, no lie.

“So, you took him with you, then? You must have been out and about, all this time! That bullheaded little dragon, not telling anyone he was going—”

“It wasn't his fault, sir...*Nestor*, I assure you. I took him away, quite by mistake. And, if that means he isn't here, then I have to find him back. We were separated recently, you see.”

“I do. You won't have an easy time getting into a portal, at that size, Figment.”

“Heh! Please, don't worry about that. I'm...*stronger* now, than when I first arrived...”

At that, Figment's body rumbled anew, and with a soft groan, began to swell even larger, still, surging past 45 feet, then 50. Nestor gawked, in spite of himself, and backed away, step by startled step; his composure remained, but was in a state of crisis.

“What...kind of magic...is this?” Nestor muttered, wide-eyed, his brows arched, as he watched Figment's purple-pink bulk erupt higher, and higher, his clawed feet swelling over the grass, over the stonework, over the hills, until even the green dragon was lost in his spreading shadow.

“Just putting some imagination to work,” Figment replied, his voice growing into a thunderclap of bass that shook down through his feet, into the terrain. “Thanks for letting me know he's gone, still! I promise, I'll bring him back!”

“Imagination!?” Nestor balked, now standing more than 200 feet below Figment, watching as the dragon's toes bulged farther out, on either side of him, without end. “I don't understand!”

Figment peered down over the growing cliff of his chest, smiling.

“There's a lot to explain, I know...I'll be happy to, when this is all over with!”

The adult dragons across the Artisans Realm all slowed and stopped what they were doing, coming out of their stone buildings and turrets and around their higher walls, to stare in muted awe at the rising tower of a dragon, looming higher in the distance. They gathered into a crowd, agape, yet hushed, as Figment's great shadow spilled over the hillsides, consuming them all in shade.

Nestor eventually took to flight, flapping his wings enough to achieve liftoff; even so, he fell below Figment's colossal knees, as the growing dragon trembled all over, closed his eyes in effort, and blew himself up even more, doubling his 300-foot size in one rude, booming push.

Still, it wasn't enough, and Figment knew it. Huge as his bulk had swollen, it paled considerably to what it had been, before. His size, so staggering to the many dragons and creatures below, was laughably inadequate to the task. He had held an entire planet, before this. He could do better.

Toughest I know

The words came back, and Figment *exploded* bigger. His arms blew up so massively that they sagged out, his pectorals and belly heaving out wild, as his rear and tail pumped back, his thighs bloating wider, his feet trenching down deeper into the hilltop. His neck swelled tremendously as his head pushed into the lower clouds, the sky filling with violet, as the dragon rocketed up to 1,500 feet, then 2,100.

With a last shudder he billowed up into the cloud banks, swelling so much that the landscape

under his feet tremored and cracked, before a great flash overtook everything...

16.

Figment landed with enough of a thud to shake some nearby trees, meaning his math had proved as solid as his weight. Patting himself over, he remained every bit as bulky, but stood roughly fifty feet tall, having spent well over half a mile's size in exchange for passage back to the kingdom.

He stopped, brushed himself off some, and checked about. Verdant forests, tall mountains, distant castle, now free of thistle and thorn valleys. Good.

"Alright, that's the way," Figment boomed, nodding to himself, as his confidence swelled more and more back to form. Rather than holler about like some jackanape, he could simply ask for help.

Those citizens no longer trapped by Maleficent's power (meaning, *everyone*) fled thoroughly at the sight of Figment, as he thundered along the dirt road bordering the kingdom, sticking nearer to the calf-high trees of the forest.

"I suppose they weren't there to see us save them," he murmured, focused on keeping his current size. "Best keep a healthy distance, then..."

Some thanks might have been nice. But, Figment was a dragon on a mission, and such luxuries would have to wait. The way back to the fairy's house was still relatively fresh, and he was where he ought to be within a half hour's time. Gigantic strides were helpful, like that.

"Ah," Figment whispered, as he cleared a snapping herd of trees, "there we go..."

If time moved roughly the same, in this realm, then half a year should have been more than time enough, to rebuild a home, magically or not. There the humble cottage stood, as good as the day Spyro and he had come and wrecked it. Well, they, and that *foul bird* of Maleficent's.

Putting that madness out of mind, Figment focused on getting smaller, and compacted his gigantic size down, down, down, slipping to a tidy height of six feet, even. That would work. He grinned crookedly as he knocked on the old wooden door, genuinely excited to see the ladies again. He waited a moment, his smile still on, then knocked again, harder.

Figment began to shift in place, fidgeting with the strap of his bag.

"Hello? Miss Flora, Miss Fauna? Miss Merryweather?"

Again, nothing. Figment's draconic lip pursed. Just then, and only then, the door slowly opened up, as an older woman in green peeked out. Figment, perhaps rudely, craned his neck to see in, making her withdraw with a start.

"Heavens!"

"Oh, no," Figment started, grinning wide. "Miss, Fauna, it's me, Figment!"

The door nearly shut, then swung wide open, to wide eyes. Where there had been a flicker of

fright, there was now relieved joy, and the green fairy was out on the porch in a blink.

“Figment! Why...hello! What a surprise! Do come...oh, gracious, yes, come in, quick!”

Just as suddenly, she was pulling the taller dragon in through the door, shutting it fast.

“H-hello!”

“Gracious me, Figment, I hardly recognized you! You've certainly...grown! And oh, I apologize for the caution, I do,” Fauna gasped, briskly looking back at the door, and locking it. “But, these are cautious days, I fear—yes, dreadful business!”

“Dreadful?” he repeated, cocking his head, as he took the fairy's hands with his. “How so? What's happened, while I've been gone? Where are the others?”

“Gone, out to the kingdom, to settle a foul account, I fear,” she sighed, shaking her head. “I remained, to recuperate, after the three of us were ambushed, by a terrible foe—wait, where are your friends, the other dragons?”

“It's just me, here, too, heh,” Figment admitted. “Who is this troublemaker, then? Goodness, did Diablo break free of your prison?”

“No, no, it's something else. A reptile, a vicious, selfish, cruel fiend! He wormed his way into the castle several weeks earlier, and stole an ancient artifact, blessed with great magic. Really, it was only days after you left—”

Figment winced.

“Then, we've only been away...how long?”

“Near to a month, Figment, why?”

“Then time does change, between realms,” he mused, both shocked and fascinated. “But, ah, never mind that. This interloper, does he have a name?”

“One as unpleasant as he is, yes. Ripto, he says.”

Figment suddenly held back a fit of laughter, struggling to stay respectful and serious.

“I see...a diminutive type, like some lizard with horns?”

“Why, yes, actually...how did you—”

“We've met,” Figment sighed, clearing his throat. “I suppose he could still menace sufficiently, to be fair, but I should tell you, Fauna, we've dealt with much worse than him.”

“But, this jewel he stole,” the fairy countered, “it's granted him considerable magic! Such that, when we confronted him earlier, he managed to seal away my own abilities. Shameful as it is, I've stayed to mind the house, while Flora and Merryweather went to stop him. The kingdom has managed

to drive him back twice, but each time, he's returned stronger, and stronger, and I don't think they've the manpower to manage a third push.”

“Sealed?” Figment murmured. “Then, the other two...”

“Are the only ones imbued with any magic, yes.”

The scenario sorted itself out, in the dragon's head.

“Then, I'll need to put Ripto in his place, before you're able to help...”

“Help?”

“Oh, yes, sorry! Spyro, Cynder, and some other comrades have been to many worlds, since we left here, and...we've become separated. Someone as bold and strong as Spyro would have drawn attention enough, here, and he would have come to you first, so...clearly he isn't around...”

“He isn't, I'm sorry to say,” Fauna agreed, nodding. “He would be most welcome.”

“That's why I arrived here—I wanted to see if your magic could either find Spyro and the others, or even bring them back to me, like the spell you used on this magic bag.”

“Oh, my. Figment, any of us would help you, at the drop of a hat, my dear. But I can help least of all, at the moment. I'm terribly sorry.”

Figment sagged the tiniest bit, but filled back up.

“He's at the kingdom, you say?”

“Well, he was driven out to the ruins bordering them, from Maleficent's reign...he would either be there, or the kingdom, were he on the attack, again...”

“Perfect, I'll see to it,” Figment said, patting her hands with his bigger paws. “Thank you for the information, Fauna, that's extremely helpful!”

“W-why, certainly, but...you're going, all along, Figment?”

The dragon blushed, looking up to the ceiling, before turning to leave.

“I've grown much stronger, so don't fret or fuss over me. Heh. I'll be quite alright! Be back shortly, with Flora and Merryweather in tow. Back soon!”

Fauna stared on in shock as Figment nearly bumped his head on the door, going through. He hadn't even noticed he'd grown larger, nearing nine feet of scaly muscle. His footsteps shook the porch, then the forest beyond; she went to the window and watched the adorable dragon balloon up and up, surging past the trees as he left.

“...Good luck, dear.”

Merryweather hid behind a tall pillar, deep within the old ruins, trying to get her breath. Having to hide was the absolute worst, but that's what was on the plate. Flora dove by, unseeing, zipping away from a flurry of orange bolts of magic, which blasted everything around as she dodged.

"Foul creature," Flora snapped, banking away, then returning around for a counterattack. "Begone from this world!"

"Bahahaha," Ripto cackled, the small dinosaur flying after her, the two darting around in a magical dogfight. "How about *you* begone, and save *me* some trouble, witch?"

With one clawed hand, Ripto cast bolt after sizzling bolt; he motioned the other, mid-air, and commanded a magically-glowing hunk of rock up from the ruins, heaving it at Flora. She saw it last minute, then whipped her wand around to stop it, sending it back to Ripto, just as a bolt struck her.

"Flora!" Merryweather gasped, the blue fairy crying out from her hiding spot, as the red fairy crashed to the ground.

"So there you are!"

Ripto's voice rang out, just before the old stonework of the pillar exploded to nothing, hurling Merryweather back. She pinwheeled in the air, then slammed against a wall, knocking it back with her as she slid off of it, spent. Flora forced herself up, battered and tired, lifting her wand weakly, as Ripto glided down to Merryweather, and raised both hands. The jewel on his necklace glowed bright as he sneered at her, a shell of dark light engulfing the blue fairy.

"I'll just be sealing you, next," the reptile laughed, as a bolt of red magic struck him, knocking him into a roll along the ground. "Gah, hey! You—"

Ripto snapped his little fingers, and Flora was caught in the same shell.

"No!" Merryweather groaned, as both she and Flora were caught fast.

"Let's see you two flit about, now!"

Ripto made a fist, and the shells burst with light, leaving both fairies limp on the dirt and stone. Flora gave out first, fainting, while Merryweather struggled to stay awake at all, when a great thud cracked the ruins, shaking dust off of withered rock and mortar and wood. Even Ripto stopped his gloating, long enough to look about.

"What was that?" he muttered, furrowing his brows, as a second shock wave hit, harder.

That was when the shadow came, and stayed.

"AHEM."

The lizard leapt in place, then looked up. And up. And up. His cocksure grin evaporated, as a titanic dragon loomed high overhead, over the ruins themselves, easily 500 feet tall.

"S...Spyro!" Ripto balked, before squinting up at the towering behemoth. "Wait, no...you!? That

goofy little dragon from before...Spyro's friend!? But... you went away! You idiots left me here!"

"WELL, I CAN FIX ALL THAT," Figment boomed, his brawn twitching all over. "YOU STOP ANTAGONIZING THESE NICE FOLK, AND I'LL SEE YOU HOME. DEAL?"

Flora remained out, but Merryweather looked up over her shoulder, and started laughing.

"F...Figment! Oh, how perfect...he'll show you what, you rotten reptile!"

"Oh, shut it," Ripto snarled, before turning back to Figment. "So, you got stronger, so what? I have, too, you know. Watch!"

With that, the jewel lit up, and the far smaller lizard sent a slew of magical bolts at Figment. The purple dragon folded his impossibly thick arms, calmly letting each of them bash against his thick muscles and huge scales, letting them detonate in magical bursts. The fusillade ended with Figment still very-much fine, and very big, and Ripto finally saw fit to back away.

"LOVELY," Figment sighed, starting to reach down at him with a massive hand.

"G-get away!" Ripto ordered, as a magical glow overtook Figment's huge hand, and forced it to a halt in the air. "Stay away from me, you hear!?"

Figment blinked, then patiently applied a mote of effort, and the glow-covered hand easily pushed right back, getting closer and closer to the target. Ripto cried out in fear, stumbling back over himself, before covering himself with a different shade of magical glow.

"Come on...grow," he commanded, the jewel blazing brighter. "Grow!"

"I THINK YOU WOULD HAVE DONE THAT MUCH, FIRST THING, IF YOU WERE CAPABLE OF IT," Figment sighed, cocking a massive, mansion-sized head. "MEANING, THAT DOESN'T FALL UNDER ANYTHING YOU CAN DO."

"Shut up!" Ripto wailed, taking to flight again. "I'll figure it out! I'm getting more powerful by the minute! I've already learned a lot, you know!"

"FUNNY, SO HAVE I!"

Figment rumbled all over terribly, letting Ripto see, as he boomed even *bigger*.

"W...what? No! S-stop it!"

The shadow poured over more and more ruins as Figment casually willed himself larger, his muscles stretching tight and huge and full, his shoulders ballooning against his thickening neck. His pink-plated pectorals surged hotly, throbbing out fuller and mightier, without any effort, until he had blown up another 300 feet, pushing his way up to a massive, imposing, periphery-blotting eight hundred feet in height. The highest parapets and columns hardly made it to his feet.

"WILL YOU KINDLY ACCOMPANY ME, THEN?" Figment thunder-spoke, asking nicely, as he loomed so large, he could sit and tower over the ruins, like they were a model set.

Ripto seethed in frustration, before flying back along the ruins, darting between chunks of broken outer walls, past a withered courtyard. At his tremendous size, Figment easily kept sight of him.

“Get him, Figment!” Merryweather cheered, though she did so in place, worn out and still.

“ARE YOU TWO ALRIGHT, MISS MERRYWEATHER?” he gently asked, taking his sights off of the fleeing reptile. “SORRY I ARRIVED LATE, BUT I WENT TO THE HOUSE FIRST.”

“Never mind all that, Figment, just...s-stop that nasty thing!”

“RIGHT!”

As he looked back up, Figment caught sight of Ripto, farther off. He also caught sight of something else, something that made his grin disappear. The reptile had crashed headlong into a strange structure, a massive mountain of gathered stones, all seemingly compressed together, into a single, 1,200-foot mass of rock. It only took seconds for the dragon to understand why it bothered him.

“WAIT, THAT...THOSE...IS THAT...DIABLO?”

“We...moved him away, over here, where there was less...chance of magic...getting close enough for that stupid bird to absorb! It took half the kingdom, to drag it, inch by i-inch...we couldn't use our magic to move him...”

Figment gulped, then wasted no more time.

A humongous hand shot out through the air, over the ruins, big enough to catch Ripto's grain-sized self between Figment's palm, and the stone prison, which still rose even higher than he, even as he stood up. He made a fist, brought it back, and opened it, to reveal Ripto there, a dust mite in his vast palm, cowering and sniffing.

“I-it's not fair,” he moaned, pounding Figment's huge scales in anger. “I was winning!”

“IT COULD HAVE BEEN WORSE,” Figment rumbled, irritated and relieved. “YOU NEARLY WOKE UP SOMETHING A LOT WORSE THAN YOURSELF—”

He paused, bringing Ripto up closer to his massive eye, looking him over. The tiny lizard backed away, and a massive claw curled down to hold him still.

“WHERE...” Figment began, squinting closer still. “THAT JEWEL, WHERE—”

The huge stone prison rattled and quaked to life, as Figment looked up to it. A tiny light glinted for a moment as he saw the jewel dance against the outer stones, then slip down between them, vanishing inside.

“OH, NO—”

The tower-sized prison cracked down the sides, partially splitting them, the edges bleeding a terrible magic glow. The apertures cracked and pushed further out as mounds of pitch-black feathers

fluffed free, getting bigger, and bigger, and bigger. Figment stepped back over the ruins as the cracks split wider, a set of plumed pectorals bursting out the front, followed by massive, broad shoulders on either side; the snapping topside blew apart, and a huge, yellow beak shot up into the air.

A great, booming caw broke the air as Diablo emerged, and swallowed hard.

The jewel. A creature that absorbed magic power had not only been released, but had swallowed an artifact that was *pure magic*.

“What the *heck* is that!?” Ripto balked, from the relative safety of Figment's palm.

“DIABLO,” Figment growled, watching on, as the towering man-bird burst into mad animal laughter, his overgrown black muscles rumbling even bigger, far stronger.

“Oh, that's great,” Merryweather grouched, as she crept over to Flora, and slowly attempted to move her to safety. “That's just great!”

“HAAAAAAW,” Diablo huffed, a thick streak of magic billowing from his beak, like smoke.

Figment felt the air shift as bolts of energy threaded the bird's 1,500-foot tall body, feeding him surges of raw, unbridled power. His once-feral eyes flared bright gold, cruel and intelligent, as his muscles tensed in on themselves; his taut black biceps condensed tighter, stronger, then blew up against his sides, pulsing bigger in hard, bursting waves. His laterals ballooned up under swelling triceps, his back muscles blowing out around, then up against his swelling trunk of a neck. Both quaking thighs erupted larger, his toes cracking the ruins into further dismay as he shuddered and bellowed, throbbing up to 1,600 feet...1,700 feet...

Figment grimaced as he found himself not even half the colossal bird's size; yet, with a little calm and focus, he began to rumble, all over, and burst up and up. His feet sank, and sank, and sank, breaking through the crust and stone on his share of the ruins, pillars toppling against the lower curve of his purple feet, as he blew up to match Diablo's size, then push up past it, to 2,000 feet, even.

“THAT'S ENOUGH OUT OF YOU!” Figment bellowed, as best he knew how.

Diablo didn't even bother replying, in any form, as the monstrous avian chuckled to himself. His eyes glowed even brighter as the bolts of energy snapped and cracked, doubling over, making him spasm and quake ominously, until the ground and mountains shook with it. Every avian muscle remained deeply flexed, almost painfully tight—yet, the stretching growth was worsening, every tensed sinew groaning as they surged bigger, pulling his plumage more and more.

“DID YOU HEAR?” Figment started, putting Diablo in a tight bear-hug. “I SAID—”

Diablo's entire body *tripled* in size. Then, it rumbled worse, and tripled, again. And *again*.

Even Figment was caught off guard, the huge dragon suddenly hugging the bird's heaving chest, then his midsection, as a wall of feathered abdominal bulk burst up and up against him. His gigantic arms spread out around the span of Diablo's 46,000-foot body, suddenly having to regard the creature in miles. Yellow plates as wide as roadways swelled thicker and stronger as the raven's feet crashed through the ruins, growing out into the borders of the kingdom, smashing through stone and tree and

dirt alike in one furrowing grind. Tail-feathers several miles long stretched out and up along a mountainside, behind him, his rear fluffing out against it, and growing up its contours without stop.

Figment was suddenly a mere teddy bear, a plaything, even at half a mile tall, as Diablo had blown up to nearly nine miles in size, in less than ten seconds. As number eleven hit, he felt the towering man-raven rumble even deeper, as more and more magical energy cascaded off of his bulk, striking the landscape in ugly, shattering gouges. Two mammoth arms rose high, commanding, lightning called down from the clouds; they struck and danced through him, lancing Diablo's colossal muscles, and feeding the booming bird more power than anyone ought to have.

“CAAAAW! C-CAAAHAAHAAA!”

Figment focused again, but the raven's feathers boofed out against him, a growing jungle of black, confounding fluff; the disorientation was enough to throw him a moment, and by second twelve, the quaking titan *quadrupled* in size. The explosion of growth was so much that the air pushed back, whipping violently across the landscape, rocking the kingdom, which sat precariously between the beast's ever-growing, hulking thighs.

At nearly 35 miles tall, even sitting down to a more manageable 18 miles, Diablo's beak was already well past the clouds, which submissively crept away, as his feathery pectorals blew up through them. Both raised arms flexed even harder, vast, castle-crushing hands closing into merciless fists, as the god-bird finally deigned to look down at Figment. His monstrous beak had to force itself down between both overloaded pecs, to manage it, each muscle booming out of control on either side.

“YOU,” the immense man-raven thundered, his voice shaking even Figment. It sounded rough and callous, and the idea that Diablo had never spoken a single word in his feral life before now did not miss Figment's thoughts. **“WHERE...MALEFICENT?”**

Figment truly didn't have time for this. This was supposed to be a quick stop-off, not a quest.

“SHE ISN'T HERE,” the dragon huffed, trying to puff himself up. Of course, thinking of doing that made it happen, and in seconds, Figment was billowing up to match the titanic raven's sitting height, putting him about about 20 miles tall. **“DIABLO, I'D LIKE TO PLEASE—”**

“WHERE...SHE, NOW?”

“SOMEWHERE FAR AWAY.”

Figment redoubled his focus not on himself, but on Diablo. For all he knew, he was still perfectly capable of absorbing the bird's size, by touch; he'd eaten plenty of candy, after all. It could even blow him up big enough to really spend some travel tax—but first, the fairies needed saving.

Ripto's seal is broken, Figment thought, as he watched Diablo glare, from his mountain perch. The bird's expression darkened as he took in Figment's evasion, and didn't like it at all. *Ripto's seal is broken, the fairies already have their powers back...*

He glanced off, on the chance he might see the tiny glow of Miss Flora and Merryweather flying off, but no such luck. Had it really not worked?

“BRING HER BACK, THEN.”

The rough voice was smoothing out, into a deep, sinister velvet, as Diablo made his first ever command. He wasn't getting any larger, thankfully, but the avian was no less awesome a sight, for it. Still, Figment could feel his powers returning quickly enough; by his guess, he would have to remove that jewel, before Ripto's seal could be undone. He rolled his huge scaly shoulders, and folded his massive arms authoritatively.

“...ONLY IF YOU GIVE ME WHAT YOU SWALLOWED.”

Diablo tilted his head, blinking a rapid bird-blink, before bellowing in anger. His monstrous physique exploded even larger and heavier, as they doubled in mass, bulging so big that it looked harder for the avian hulk to even move.

“NO! YOU BRING HER BACK TO ME, LIZARD! NOW!”

This would all have to be done quickly. A brief test of his abilities wouldn't hurt so much.

“NO. I DON'T THINK I WILL, BIRD.”

All 35 miles of Diablo moved, and the planet groaned. One immense foot slammed the firmament, then the other, as the raven stood up, and up, and up, parting whatever clouds had meekly come back toward his bulk. A torrent of golden smoke spewed from Diablo's mouth as he roared, more and more bands of power snaking out and lashing around his bulk.

“DO NOT TOY WITH ME!” he boomed, starting to tremble with rage. ***“BRING HER BACK, BEFORE I SNAP YOU IN TWO, AND SWALLOW BOTH HALVES!”***

There was a flicker of pity, there, even as Figment braced himself in Diablo's shadow.

“I SAID, NO. OBEY YOUR SUPERIOR, RUNT!”

Figment had learned a lot in his time abroad; one thing that was still new, however, was bluffing. He could manage being big enough to hold entire planets, and being more powerful than gods...but being rude? *Well.*

“RUNT!?”

Diablo swelled uncontrollably larger, each breath inflating him taller, wider, thicker and heavier. His massive toes crushed down into the terrain as he heaved with tightening, pulsing brawn, his feathers all the way out. To be fair, it was a legitimately intimidating gesture—especially when the one doing it was blowing up past 50 miles tall...no, 60...

Feet as big as entire mountain ranges, tore into the forests and hills and lakes, clouds hiding in fear about his calves, then ankles, all as Figment watched the avian beast expand.

“ONLY MALEFICENT...CAN DARE...TO COMMAND ME!”

Instead of trying to grow to match or even compete with Diablo, Figment stayed put, even as Diablo roared bloody death, inflating himself up to over 80 miles tall, nearing half a million feet of bulging muscle and plumage. Figment seemed smaller and smaller, as the raging bird trembled with crackling power, his eyes blasting yellow light as he belched a volcanic geyser of gold magic into space, flexing tight, and exploding even *bigger*!

“IF YOU WON'T DO IT...THEN I DON'T NEED THIS WORLD!”

Uh-oh.

Suddenly, Figment's plan was turning around on him, and fast. He needed Diablo much larger, but the bird was still cawing in a fury, raving and pumping his huge arms up as he spread his feet over the continent, shook, and blew more and more magic out of his bellowing maw. At over 200 miles in size, standing over one million feet through and beyond the atmosphere, Diablo was big enough, and Figment finally made his move.

A fight wouldn't end this. But a cool head would.

As he surged up past 10 times Figment's size, the huge dragon took off into a leap over the kingdom and the rest, forcing his wings into flight. He shot through the clouds and past, as Diablo screamed and cursed, his still-growing beak opened wide.

At 300 miles, Diablo had swollen so prodigiously massive, so full of muscle and girth, that his huge arms moved too slow to possibly swat Figment away, as he shot up into the opened beak, and down Diablo's throat. The enraged raven continue to balloon bigger, and bigger, his muscles overflowing over themselves, crashing and bulging and rubbing into each other, as he surged to 500 miles...700...each burst was more intense, more agitated and powerful.

“I’LL CRUSH IT ALL, IF YOU DON’T!” he bellowed, not realizing what Figment had done seconds before. ***“YOU BRING HER BACK TO ME! BRING...HER...B...BUH-BAAAAAAACK!”***

As he billowed up to nearly 1,000 miles, as his feet outgrew the entire kingdom on its borders, as his tail feathers loomed across an entire ocean and multiple islands in uncharted lands, something happened. Diablo gagged, then shook his beak in stunned quiet. He blinked, then coughed harder, bringing hands big enough to cup an entire lake up to his huge neck, feeling.

Angry as he was, his glowing eyes were darting, in thought. Before he could guess at what was happening, a hole in the world ripped open, floating out in space. Through it, a startled Diablo saw a dark, pink tunnel, through which Figment barreled out, into the open, free-floating through space.

“WHAT...”

“I’LL BE TAKING THIS, THEN,” Figment chirped, smugly, as the jewel suddenly swelled up so large, that it fit neatly in the dragon's colossal hand.

He waited a moment, for Diablo to understand properly, as the looming raven's enormous face took up his entire view of the cosmos. The gargantuan bird blinked, then made...a face.

“WHAT IS THAT?” he caw-boomed, shaking the world completely. He wasn't getting bigger, thankfully...but he remained a staggering colossus. Figment could fix that.

“NEVER YOU MIND, DIABLO,” he huffed, floating off a few 'relative' feet, over the planet. “THIS FELL INTO YOUR PRISON, YOU ATE IT, AND YOU'VE ASCENDED INTO A GODLIKE TITAN. THERE.”

Diablo looked himself over, then snorted.

“SO, WHAT. SHE STILL ISN'T HERE. WHY? WHY WON'T YOU BRING HER BACK?”

That pang of pity returned. Beneath all that power, the raven was still struggling with a hole in his lousy, evil little heart. He really cared. Huh.

“BECAUSE SHE'S EVIL, THAT'S WHY. I WON'T LIE TO YOU.”

The massive avian didn't even flinch, at the revelation, because he already knew that full-well. The thought that should have gotten to Figment five minutes ago suddenly reached him, and Figment adjusted the conversation accordingly.

“WELL, I'LL TELL YOU WHAT: I DON'T WANT YOU HERE, CAUSING TROUBLE. YOU DON'T WANT TO BE HERE ALONE, RIGHT?”

Diablo eyed the smaller dragon, his vast, sky-sized eyes narrowing.

“...NO. NOT IF SHE'S SOMEWHERE ELSE.”

“OKAY. THEN, I SUGGEST A CEASEFIRE. WE AREN'T ENEMIES, ANYMORE, I WON'T ATTACK YOU, IF YOU DON'T ATTACK ME. I KNOW WHERE MALEFICENT WENT, WHEN SHE LEFT. IF...*IF* I TAKE YOU TO HER...WILL YOU BEHAVE?”

Diablo's eyes widened, even though they tried to stay cautiously lidded.

“...YES.”

“ALRIGHT, THEN. I HAVE SEVERAL THINGS TO DO, FIRST, SEVERAL STOPS TO MAKE...BUT, IF YOU LET ME TAKE YOU WITH ME, IN MY TRAVEL BAG—”

“NO!” Diablo boomed, snorting angrily. ***“NO MORE PRISONS!”***

Hmm.

“ALRIGHT, FAIR ENOUGH. JUST TRAVEL *WITH* ME, THEN. I WON'T LET YOU NEAR MALEFICENT, IF YOU MAKE TROUBLE FOR ME, OR ANY OF THE OTHER FRIENDS WE'RE GOING TO PICK UP ALONG THE WAY. YOU DON'T LIKE SOME OF THEM, AND THAT'S FINE. BUT, NO TROUBLE. THEN, I PROMISE, I'LL GET YOU BACK TO HER. DEAL?”

Diablo glowered, giving Figment an astonishingly good death stare, as he loomed up in the heavens. Still, the god-bird nodded, quick and mean.

“FINE. DEAL.”

Okay, good. Lovely. Almost done.

“DEAL. THANK YOU FOR WORKING WITH ME, DIABLO, I APPRECIATE IT.”

“WE'RE GOING, YES? NOW?”

“YES, WE ARE. AS SOON AS I GET YOU TO A BETTER SIZE—”

“NO! I STAY BIG, I STAY STRONG. YOU DON'T MAKE ME SMALLER. DEAL? DEAL!”

“...THEN, I *WON'T* SHRINK YOU DOWN. FAIR ENOUGH. BUT, I WILL BE RIGHT BACK. IF YOU WANT TO BE THAT HUGE, JUST...WAIT THERE, PLEASE.”

The 1,000-mile tall behemoth clicked his beak impatiently, following Figment with his mean eyes, as the dragon sailed back down to the world. When he was sure the tiny dragon was out of sight of him, he finally preened a bad spot of feathers, in his massive chest, and sighed in relief.

“I do feel it,” Miss Flora said, sighing in relief. “Yes, the magic is back to us! For certain and true, I feel myself again!”

The red fairy hugged Figment thankfully, making him creak from the effort of containing all that size he had compacted down into himself. It was the only way to fit back in their house, as the three old ladies doted on him, piling food and drink on their table, at which the embarrassed dragon sat. He was already nearly as big as their ceiling, and was visibly shaking with strain from holding so much size in. Clearly, just a little more training was needed, before containment could be more easily imagined, and kept. The whole effort was chalked up to practice, given there was no other alternative.

“Glad you're all well, again, ladies,” Figment replied, grinning down over them, as they fussed and patted and smiled. “But, as to my request...”

“Oh, sure, sure,” Merryweather said, nearing 'glib' territory. “Since we know Spyro and Cynder, at least, we can reach out to find them. Easy.”

“Well, it is rather new to us, honestly,” Flora corrected, cutting the blue fairy a little look.

“In theory, it should be doable, though, dear,” Fauna added, giving the huge dragon's sides a motherly pat. “All of us working together, should be able to manage it. Anyone else you try to find, that we haven't met, well...hopefully, they're them, when we reach out.”

That would have to do, then.

“I'd be terribly grateful!” Figment said, as Flora stopped moving long enough to grab his much bigger paw in her hands.

“Oh, nonsense, it's the least we can do! A good dragon like you, saving us all, twice! Now, ladies, let's begin, no time to waste...”

The three fairies took up hands, forming a circle, by the hearth. Figment quietly watched, restraining a sudden, overflowing hope. No matter what, after this point, there would be no more separations, no more being lost. That was over.

The dream, that...that horrid world, it was wrong. That voice had been wrong. He loved Blarion dearly, and was happy to be a part of that world...but he could do more, be more. There was too much proof, now, how powerful he really could grow, if challenged, if *pushed*. There was too much evidence, now, to think differently, to go back. That was science, after all.

The fairies kept their heads low, now, murmuring gently among themselves, until:

“Found him,” Merryweather said, suddenly, pulling Figment's attention.

“Spyro?” he asked, leaning in over them.

“He...I found her, too! Cynder! She's near to him...very near...”

Figment had to restrain himself, as he bulged bigger, pumping up into the rafters in burgeoning waves of excitement. His thick tail curled in a happy loop, thudding the floor beside them.

“Really! That's wonder—”

“Oh, my,” Fauna gasped, before Flora and Merryweather both shuddered, and pulled back.

Figment's tail stopped.

“W...what is it?” the dragon asked, cocking his brows high.

“There's another presence, near them,” Flora spoke, gravely. “It's become so great, it...it nearly crushed everything else! Heavens...”

“That awful aura, that black tide,” Fauna added, putting her hands to her face.

“Maleficent,” Merryweather huffed, more angry than afraid. “That foul, no good—how is she

there, with them? Why is her presence so...so colossal?"

Figment gulped, a wave of terror brushing under his scales at the wrong angles.

"Oh, no," he panted, biting his lip. "They're with her. I put her away in another world, last time, to keep her imprisoned, but it...that terrible hand I saw...she really has grown that powerful!? That monstrously huge!? Oh, no, no..."

The fairies listened on, looking to one another, then back up at Figment, who visibly shook.

"Please, Figment, dear, calm down," Fauna began, rubbing his huge sides comfortingly. "Whatever's happened to make her so powerful, it's surely nothing you could have foreseen."

"So, quit fretting and wasting time, and go get them," Merryweather ordered, her hands to her hips, her expression firm. "You're stronger than that no-good reptile, anyhow. So, go."

Figment gathered the loose bolts and bits of himself, then swallowed, and sighed.

"Y...yes, you're right, you're right. Can't come unglued. Thank you, Merryweather. Thank all three of you, in fact, you've saved us! I can't tell you how much I appreciate this, ladies!"

"While I might normally consider this proper compensation," Flora began, "I still say, if you can do us one last favor, Figment..."

"Yes?" he patiently asked, feeling himself balloon another few creaking feet larger.

"Well," Fauna started, "if you could—"

"Go beat her big, dumb head in, Figment!" Merryweather finished, grinning.

For once, Figment had the same exact look as her, a crooked grin forming.

"Gladly."

The partially-wrecked landscape was waiting, when Figment stepped back out, and another pang of guilt broke through his bravado. The dragon winced as he bulged larger, and larger, starting to tower over the ruins of the continent. Far, far beyond it all, the sky loomed yellow and gold, as Diablo's vast feet consumed everything. The bird had grudgingly moved to another side of the continent, and was still very visible.

"Time for a real test, then," Figment sighed, as the now 400-foot dragon closed his eyes, and concentrated harder than before. "Thankfully, no harm has been done, for it...no damage, at all...when we leave, this entire world will be as clean as a camp site!"

Stubbornly, reality resisted, as a few trees un-crushed, rising back up to healthy form. After a few seconds, the entire forest sprang back to life, green and calm, then the lakes refilled, as flat craters curled back up to their usual elevation, rocks and roads and mountains and hills all reversing back up into their previous states.

"It's all fine, again, it's quite fixed," Figment told himself, as the kingdom began to rebuild, in the distance, brick by brick, the town around it building back up once more. The strain was considerable, this time, and with his powers still returning, Figment could only focus on it; this meant the hold on his size slipped loose, and he had to stop and take up into the air, as his rumbling purple body exploded bigger, and bigger, and bigger.

"Oop! I-it's all as right and proper a-as...t-the rain!"

Again and again, he roared larger, having to pull himself up higher into the skies, every time he blew up in size. He was half a mile in two seconds, then boomed up to 10 miles, just seconds later, rising higher and higher, to keep his swelling feet off the newly-restored world.

Diablo hardly noticed, as the world knit back together, under the returning clouds at his toes. All the bird noticed was Figment, billowing up to the size of his country-dwarfing beak, before exploding up to 1,100 miles, floating just over the planet's surface. The humongous raven snorted, seeming to sourly note how Figment was a head taller than him, now.

"WE'RE GOING?" he grumbled, bitterly.

"YES, WE'RE GOING. WATCH."

Rather than bother pointing, Figment looked to the West, and Diablo turned to watch, as a new portal swelled open, spreading wider and taller, on and on. The bird's unflappable demeanor kept, as he coldly stared, seeing the opening double in size, then double again, until even their massive bodies could fit. Within, was a truly horrid sight.

Figment recoiled, though the portal held fast in space. He had opened up the same portal that he had tricked Maleficent into taking, but it was different now. Black, fluid-like streaks swirled and churned, inside, a maelstrom of bad dreams and misery, and Figment closed it back up, wide-eyed.

"OPEN IT!" Diablo roared, wheeling about on him, his huge bulk swelling out. **"WHY DID YOU CLOSE IT!?"**

Intimidating as he was, Diablo's caws went unnoticed. Figment was too busy drifting back, stunned and silent.

"HEAVENS," he huffed, collecting himself yet again. "THAT...THAT WAS WHERE..."

There was no denying the proof. The horrible darkness that nearly seeped out of the portal, was the very same that had clung about the hellish version of his beloved Academy. He'd just escaped from it, gotten free, before it had destroyed and consumed him.

The world he was supposed to go to...*was* the nightmare world.

They're in there? Figment thought, frantically working it out. *Spyro and Cynder, at least, are in that terrible place? How?*

Something had to have happened, with the pokeball. There was no other explanation. He had

wound up alone, on the same world as them, somehow, and escaped before being killed. But, if the fairies were right, then the others were surely alive, for the time being—otherwise, they wouldn't have been magically detected. The ungodly miasma had been outside of the Academy...was it everywhere, outside, in that world? They must have seen and opening into the open part of the world, then, meaning if they simply went through, they would be torn apart, overtaken...

“OPEN IT, I SAID!” Diablo boomed, snapping him out of his thoughts.

“WE NEED ANOTHER WAY IN! IF WE GO STRAIGHT INTO THAT PORTAL, NOW, WE VERY LIKELY WON'T SURVIVE. UNDERSTAND?”

“MAYBE YOU WON'T,” the god-raven huffed, sourly.

“JUST, FOLLOW ME. WE'LL HAVE TO FIND ANOTHER WAY.”

Setback after setback, even with all his powers.

Figment cleared his throat, and turned the other way, in space. It didn't so much matter what direction he opened the next portal; truth be told, he was just turning away from the earlier sight, to get away from it.

A new portal split, then yawned wide open, and Diablo all-but shoved Figment aside, going right through it without another thought.

“AFTER *YOU*, THEN,” the immense dragon growled, brushing his bulky arm clean. As he followed along, something happened, well behind him—something even Figment hadn't dared to imagine. He would never have even *conceived* of it, to begin with.

The portal he had opened and closed, was open again.

Figment rubbed his city-sized eyes; when he opened them, it was still there. No, it was larger!

“WHAT...IN THE...”

It kept swelling wider, larger, taller, Figment nervously backing away toward the new portal. As he gawked, something bulged out into the void of space, clawing through the black mists, stretching the massive portal even wider. It was the hand, back again.

Vast, cosmos-filling claws extended, as far as Figment could see, looming higher and higher up, overhead. All told, the hand was even bigger than before, so much so that the emerging palm blotted all the stars above out, more than large enough to push on far past the new portal, which Figment dove into as he cried out. As his own portal closed, so too did the monstrous hand, taking the planet and moon and everything within it hostage.

BETWEEN

How? How had she found him? How was a portal opened, without his doing!?

Question upon question attacked, as Figment and Diablo flew through the space between

spaces, between realities, tumbling and rolling through what he figured was 'the air'. That was surely Maleficent's hand, same as last time! But, he hadn't opened *that* portal, meaning...she had done it? But, how? She was flesh and blood, not a being of imagination, like he was!

None of it made any sense. He could have sworn no one else was on the world he had banished her too, before. He was sure. What could she have fed on, to have become *that* incredibly powerful!?

Think, think, Figment ordered himself, as Diablo fluffed out, clearly not enjoying the trip.

He was so close to the end, he knew it. Yet, he couldn't simply barge into that world, and set things right, not with it crawling with pure darkness and nightmares. Had she done that to the world, in that short of a span of time? Did time move the same, there?

"We need a way in, that puts us in a building, or underground," he mused, mid-flight, "anywhere that there's an interior...but, there were no interiors, when I dropped Maleficent there, none that I found, at the time. That part of the world seemed so barren..."

"BAD!" Diablo roared, unhappily flapping, trying to right himself. **"HATE THIS!"**

"YOU'LL HAVE TO PUT UP WITH IT!" Figment shouted, as they tumbled forth. "WE DON'T HAVE ANY ACCOMMODATIONS FOR TRAVEL--"

Wait

Figment thought over his own words, before it hit him, like lightning.

There was a way. There was!

Maleficent was, by all evidence, clearly grabbing for Figment, that much he had gathered. That made this a sneak-mission, while she was chasing after him. Thankfully, Diablo hadn't seen her hand, otherwise the deal would have likely been off. Gracious, he might have offered Figment *to* her, right there and then.

But, she hadn't found that reality right away, either. That meant there was presumably time that she would need, to relocate him, after each leap. That gave him at least some breathing room, to do something he was well-versed at, being an inventor's assistant:

Inventing.

17.

China was even more beautiful and mystifying than Figment had ever dreamed, from the library books he'd read, a mist-cradled world of high mountain peaks and deep, unknowable temples. Had he not been on a severe schedule, he'd have surely played tourist.

When they both landed, Figment was still big enough to put a mean hole in the ground, as their impacts shook the hills. He wasted no time in getting back up and taking stock of himself, then Diablo; he stood roughly 500 feet tall, with Diablo being about four hundred.

“Smaller!?” Diablo groaned, flexing his bulk in surprise. “You said I wouldn’t shrink, lizard!”

“That’s fine enough,” he said, ignoring the raven. Instead, he thudded up a high hill, the avian puffing out angrily behind him. “This should be a good enough size to still do some building...”

“HEY!”

Figment reached the hilltop, looked about, then shouted:

“MUSHU! MUSHU! HAS ANYONE SEEN A HUGE, POWERFUL RED DRAGON?”

He paused, then thumped a palm on his own head, chiding himself.

“Chinese, of course, heh,” he laughed, trying to adjust internally to the idea that they were being stalked by a dark goddess through time and space. “Not English...let’s see, what time period would this...would it be proto-sinitic, middle...ah, no time...”

He imagined he would be understood, instead, as it constituted more practice:

“HELLO! IS MUSHU ABOUT? HE’S A HUGE, STRONG, BULKY SPECIMEN–”

“Well, bang my gongs! Haha!”

An equally-gigantic voice answered, far off, though it was getting closer, and fast. Before he knew it, a massive cluster of muscles and scales collided, behind him, knocking him over—as well as the nearing Diablo. The bird tumbled back heavily (cursing a streak) as Figment was hugged tight, finding two massive red arms around him.

“Figment! You ol’ emperor of a dragon! I never thought I’d see you here,” Mushu boomed, the bigger dragon beaming down at him, whiskers up high in the air. “You lookin’ alright, kept fit, good for you! What you doin’ in China? Where the rest of y’all?”

“DON’T IGNORE ME!” Diablo barked, coming right up between the two huge dragons, jabbing a mad feathered finger into Figment’s pectorals. “YOU SHRANK ME! YOU SAID YOU WOULDN’T, YOU LIED–”

“No, I didn’t,” Figment countered, thudding back a step; Mushu lurched away in shock, his ears perked up. “We all lose size, when we go to different worlds! It did it to me, as well, see?”

“OUR DEAL IS OFF!”

“No, no, it’s still very-much on. If you need to be bigger again, if it makes you feel better, I’ll help you grow *extra-massive*, alright? But for now, we need to stay smaller. I can’t get you in to see Maleficent, if you’re too big, too soon, okay?”

The musclebound bird puffed all over, bristling and fuming. Still, his eyes darted back and forth, thinking; he stormed away a few heavy paces, grumbling incomprehensibly to himself.

“New entourage?” Mushu asked, leaning in.

"A deal was struck," Figment sighed, rubbing his gigantic temples. "I'll explain, soon. But for now, we're all on a tight schedule, and I could very-much use your help."

"Hah, for you, Fig? Anything. Man, you got me so big, nobody here makes a lick of fun! I'm large n' in charge, haha! Hey, you jus' say what it is, I got you."

It was admittedly fun, seeing him like this, so confident and happy with himself.

"Blueprints," Figment answered, smiling. "Any blueprints for flying machines that your best and brightest have. Spyro and Cynder—and I think several other friends you haven't met—they're captive!"

"They got my boy, and girl!?" Mushu exclaimed, running a huge hand over his ears. "Oh, that ain't half of right! So, them blueprints..."

"Yes! To save them, we need to sneak into a very hostile, very dangerous world, and the only way I know to safely do it is to build a craft that can house us!"

"Ah, we a little *big*, for any kind of inside of *anything*, you get me, Fig?" Mushu chuckled, seeming happy enough at the idea to really balk, or be taken aback.

"Heh, point taken—we would have to build big, yes. But, are there any designs for—"

"Oh, yeah, at the Emperor's place, sure, they got all kinds of crazy stuff drawn up—"

"Excellent! I'm going to try something rather radical, and make a ship for us, out of imagination, given we have so little time for full construction, with a dedicated crew and whatnot."

"You gonna build a ship, yourself?" Mushu asked, finally fully puzzled.

"Yes."

"You can do that? What, you a carpenter?"

"I've assisted on builds," Figment chirped, folding his muscled arms. "I doubt we have the time to recruit any humans to help with the build, so I'll have to create whole-cloth. I shall have to practice a bit, with what time we have, but I can manage it! Now, how soon can we get hold of the—"

"Blueprints? Shoot, man, you jus' leave that to me," Mushu laughed, waving a dismissive hand. "You do what you gonna do, I be right back. I'mma have a talk with the big man, get what you need."

"You can do that?" Figment mooned, impressed. Mushu puffed up.

"Hah! Can I do—you jus' wait here and do your imaginin' thing."

Mushu thundered off, leaving Figment to a very impatient Diablo. The bird clacked his beak in mounting annoyance, as the dragon rubbed his thick palms together, and concentrated on a large patch of open turf.

“Never quite tried anything this ambitious,” Figment murmured to himself, getting this thoughts right and proper. He knew the fundamentals of aerial design and engineering, to be sure...but Blarion had always helmed the actual design process. Figment was the dreaming, and Blair was the *doing*. Now, it was all him.

He thought back over the basics of every design they had done, before. Flying machines were always part and parcel of any dreamers' repertoire, but this was new. They would need total encapsulation, aerodynamic structure, capacity...what materials would be it made of? He could imagine the stone and minerals of China into a new form, but how heavy would that be?

He thought, and thought, until an ovular mess of warped wood and stone appeared, thudding down into the ground with a telltale crash. The one porthole he imagined at the front cracked, then blasted open with a brilliant shatter.

“Bad,” Diablo offered, helpfully.

“Yes, it is rather,” Figment muttered, glumly, before trying again. “Didn't account for proper tension, so...”

He tried again. And again. And again.

The ship, as it were, shifted and warped, over and over. Rudders were added at the back, then scrapped, then put back, in different places. He knew what was more or less needed, but the truth was crashing in even harder than the ship: he wasn't an engineer. All the power to create, to cheat at reality, and none of it mattered, since he didn't know how to make it.

When he created a full ball of plastic, it deflated in on itself, around the weight the porthole created. When he removed the porthole, all he got was a closed ball, then realized they would all suffocate in it. So, he imagined a sturdy floor, built supports of steel, like for a building, and then the rafters—only, when he closed an exterior around them, bits protruded and snapped.

By the time Mushu returned, Figment was taking a break, a bad one.

“Have thee no fear, y'all! I hath returned, heh!”

The red dragon's big voice boomed, and Figment turned to see him looming up over the high hill to the mountain side. He was all smiles as he opened a massive hand, and dumped a mess of scrolls down before Figment.

“That was fast, Mushu!” Figment said, getting back up. “Thank you!”

“Course it was, they know me there,” Mushu chuckled, as he turned away, showing roughly nine hundred arrows harmlessly embedded in his thick muscles. He didn't even seem to know they were there. “So, you jus' pick you one, and let's get going!”

“You're coming, too?” Figment said, blinking.

“You know I am! My boy's in trouble! I ain't havin' that!”

“So, we need to design for three, then! But, you know, where we're going, there's a very, very powerful dragoness, waiting to crush us, I should warn you. She's grown unbelievably massive!”

“So?” Mushu huffed, flexing his tremendous bulk. “We jus' take us some of them candies, and blow up bigger and stronger! Here, lemme start!”

Not bothering to ask, he reached over and opened Figment's bag, pulling Figment closer, along with the strap.

“Wait! I don't have any left!”

As he opened the flap and twisted the bag upside down, only one thing tumbled out—and indeed, it was not a piece of candy.

“Ah!” the green dragon yelped, as he fell out, quickly flapping himself into a panicked flight. “What was...ah!”

Figment and Mushu both yelped, a bit more loudly, as the gnat-sized thing fluttered up to them, taking in their sheer size with a tiny gasp.

“Wait, is that...” Figment muttered, squinting at the bug. “N..Nestor?”

Baffled and disoriented, the tiny green dragon wavered and wobbled, before dropping down in resignation, and Figment's gigantic hands were there to intercept.

“I, huh, I apologize, but,” Nestor gasped, as he rested doggedly against Figment's colossal, warm palm. “B-but, I had to come with you. I had to make sure...Spyro was okay...”

“Bug?” Diablo cawed, narrowing his cruel eyes, nearby. His beak clacked once.

“Friend,” Figment corrected, as Mushu watched. “Clearly, he stowed away in my bag, before I left his world. I won't say I'm sorry to see you, Nestor...but really, I do think you're only imperiling yourself, here.”

“I...I know I'm smaller than you, or, ah...your...”

He finally looked out beyond the rim of Figment's hand, to see Mushu giving him a salute, and...well, a very big, *mean*-looking bird.

“I know, Spyro isn't in the roster, but bear with me,” Figment continued. “We're about to construct a way to go and rescue him, and the others, from a very perilous world.”

Suddenly, Nestor was upright in the dragon's hand, straightening out his sleeves.

“Construction, is it?” he huffed, forming a wry smile. “Air, land, or sea?”

Figment stopped to really consider it. The miasma was semi-fluid, but airborne. It moved, but likely not from wind current. Should they constitute a guess of similarity to a cloud bank?

No, it was still able to move through vertical axes. It could go up.

“...Air. Meaning, we would need an adequately-sized vessel that accounts for aerodynamics, propulsion, control, structural capacity, *and* load—”

Nestor smiled even wider.

“Bit of a builder, are you, Figment?”

“Well!” Figment chuckled, blushing, as Diablo crept in closer. Mushu quietly slid between the avian and dragon, shaking his head. “I do assist on inventions, yes! We just came into possession of quite a few potential blueprints, as well! Granted, I...don't do too much actual assembly...but I help on schematics and corrections, and core concept-work...but, long story short, I am capable of creating a ship, through thought! I just...am a bit of a novice, at it all...”

Despite the face he was making at that idea, Nestor kept himself in check, and went with it.

“I see. Then, what dimensions are you looking for? What's your flight envelope? Relative to your current weight, that is? We would need to change these blueprint factors, accordingly...”

Figment knew the terms. What he didn't know was the answers.

“Heh. Alright. Who all is going on this journey, then?”

Figment, Mushu and Diablo raised their powerful arms high.

“All of you!? Well, I'm...*glad* Spyro's made friends,” Nestor added, sincerely. Figment lowered him down to the pile of schematic, as Nestor was politely pointing to them. “Very big friends.”

He tore through the pile, quickly eyeing each blueprint.

“Now, might I make some suggestions, given what I'm seeing?”

“Oh, o-of course!” Figment stammered, up above. “Please!”

“It sounds like time is precious, so we don't have the luxury of process. How intricate do you need your control elements to be? Are we flying, or is it just flying blind, on momentum? Comfort, how about that? Do we want a bullet, or a bird? You see, most of these are quite intricate, and would take ages to make. Give me short answers, and based off these designs, I promise...I will give you the best thing possible, for your time.”

His tiny green hands were already at his belt, his tail swishing gladly.

A true ingenium enthusiast—perhaps, a master, even. If this wasn't a boon.

Answers were given, or rather, gently culled, from whatever it was Figment thought he wanted. Within half an hour, Nestor had gathered enough desires to begin chiseling away at with reality, into a more functional format. The ship would need to house all three giants, at their current size (Figment

cared less for any further size taxing, as it would have left them defenselessly small, on arrival, and if the pokeball proved anything, the effects *could* be blocked). It would need to be a bullet, given there was no time to build out a proper navigation system, and ride on raw momentum. If they needed to move themselves, upon landing in the miasma...well, he would have to think up something, quite literally. All they really needed, was to get there, intact, and untouched by the horrid stuff.

“Very good, then,” Nestor sighed, cracking his thick dragon-knuckles. “Figment, this is exactly what I want you to create, in the exact order it needs to be created. Then...we get to assembly.”

Diablo sourly waited, pacing about, as Mushu finally began to pick arrows off of him, while he thought no one was looking. For roughly three hours, Nestor guided, pressed, and corrected Figment's efforts, making him painstakingly shave centimeters off his creations, then lengthen, then shorten each component, piling them, moving them, rearranging their individual places, as an interior frame formed, then an exterior.

“Plastics?” Nestor balked, as Figment explained it. “A lightweight, durable material?”

“More malleable, too, in the shaping phase,” Figment added.

Both his tail and Nestor's were wagging frantically, as shop talk inevitable broke through.

“How incredible!” the green dragon murmured, taken.

Diablo glowered as he clicked his talons, somehow successfully grimacing, with a beak.

By hour four, the exterior design was roughed out into form, based off of a combination of chassis ideas from three of the best blueprints. By hour six, amazingly, a year's worth of hard work was finished. Nestor stood there, by Figment's colossal foot, beaming wide, at their handiwork.

“Just, lovely,” he sighed, his tail lashing about happily.

“You think it will fly, then?” Figment asked, as he looked up at the half-mile monstrosity of design. It was more than large enough to fit all of them, a plastic oval with back and side rudders, two portholes, and an entry portal at the center side. To anyone nearby, to any unwitting traveler or passing merchant, it might as well have been some towering alien city.

“It'll fly,” Nestor confirmed, nodding confidently. “Unless you have any further business here, in this world, I imagine you're ready to test it.

“Indeed! If anything goes wrong on the test, we'll know what to fix, before going headlong into danger. If it does, I can imagine protection for us, shield us.”

“You could do that, all along, Fig?” Mushu asked, coming up close to see the ship. “Then...what's the point? Man, couldn't you jus', you know, bubble us up, and we fly in like that?”

“I could maybe, up to a point,” Figment sighed. “Any other world, with more practice, I might be able to manage it for a little while, but I'm hardly a full-on god. And, powerful or not, I'm afraid my powers would fizzle out, in this final world. We would be sitting ducks. This ship fixes that.”

“Let's be on, then,” Nestor said, having to shout up to be heard by the tower-sized titans.

“Are...you sure you're coming, too?” Figment asked, looking down over his huge chest.

“Were you going to leave me here?”

“I would have picked you back up, once we succeeded...”

“Well, thank you, but no. I'll be going in, too. Put me in your bag, if things get hairy—”

The world around the dragons tumbled into an unnatural twilight, as the skies high up above suddenly ripped in two, a gash forming from far South to high North. Figment winced, looked up, and lurched back in shock.

What came through the portal wasn't a great, black hand, claws ready. Whatever it was that was coming through was...pink. Dark, sickly pink.

“What in the world,” Mushu started, as a great pink muzzle and nasty teeth pushed through, parting the huge portal even wider, up above the clouds.

“Oh, good heavens,” Figment gulped. “Everyone, into the ship! We're doing the maiden voyage, now! Now, now!”

“Not one of yours, Fig?” Mushu asked, as even Diablo warily made for the opening ship portal.

“Definitely not!”

“So, that bad dragoness you was talkin' 'bout, this is her!? She found us!?”

“That's not Maleficent,” Diablo huffed, indignant, as he thudded into the ship, making its hull shift with his great, bulky weight.

“He's right, that's someone else—Ludmilla!”

“YOU!”

The dragon's booming voice tore through the stratosphere, shaking China over, as a vast muzzle and angry eyes and long, curling horns pushed forth.

Well, gracious. This was worse.

“Everyone, in!”

Figment climbed into the massive ship last, and closed the door. There was no propulsion system, it would have to run on the momentum generated, in the passing between worlds—so, that's what Figment set to. He thudded over the interior flooring, right up to the porthole, and grabbed hold of the steering wheel.

“Let's go, Fig!” Mushu hollered, as the light outside grew more and more dark, more pink.

“Right!”

He concentrated, as Nestor flew up and wriggled into the bag at his bulky side. A portal formed overhead, and Figment forced it to slowly, grudgingly move over them, swallowing them up steadily.

“NO, YOU DON'T!”

A hand big enough to hold the Emperor's entire kingdom descended, blowing through little cloud banks, as immense fingers curled in. The portal below swallowed the ship entirely, and began to close up—only for a towering claw-tip to catch it, and begin violently forcing it open...

18.

“Who's Ludmilla!?”

Mushu's question lingered a moment as Figment panted, then gathered himself back up, as the ship hurtled through the space between. It seemed to hold together, just fine—that was likely Figment's only positive, at the moment.

“A dragoness from yet another world,” he sighed, turning back to Mushu, who stood next to a sulking Diablo. “I thought she was imprisoned, but it looks like she outgrew it, and went free. You see, she...well, another friend of ours...a lot of candies were involved. ”

“Kinda sorry I missed it, hehe,” Mushu offered, trying to lighten things some. “So, she chasin' us, on top of this other Maleficent dragoness, chasin' us?”

“She's...working with Maleficent,” Diablo sourly growled. The hulking raven snorted, trying not to be angry, but it was clearly building. “She smelled like her. They were together.”

“They partnered up?” Figment gasped, hating the idea too much to keep it.

“NO,” Diablo cawed, seething as quietly as he could. “NOT PARTNERS. I'M HER PARTNER, NOT SOME STINKING OTHER LIZARD.”

“Right, sorry,” Figment soothed, huge hands up. “Didn't mean it like that. Silly me.”

“Well, we got away, it's all good,” Mushu added. “So, where we headin'?”

“I wanted to try another world,” Figment began. “But the last time I wound up there, it was within a strange sub-world, and I worry about trying to go back, for the same result. So, I'm heading to another world, instead, a friendly one.”

“The ship seems to be bearing the test well, so far,” Nestor said, having to speak up from where he was, peeking up from the top flap of Figment's bag. “It's solid work, for short notice!”

“Thanks to you, Nestor!” Figment added, grinning down.

“So, that big bag of mean back there was jus' a lackey for this Maleficent,” Mushu said, thinking aloud. “An' even she bigger than all of us, by a landslide. How we gonna beat that, Fig? You said all the candies were gone, right?”

“Ooh, yes. Yes, that's true,” Figment hummed, biting his lip again. “We lost the last bits, in another world. I could simply *imagine* us all to a better, bigger size, if we needed to be...I just don't quite know how much power that would take, from me.”

“What if we got split up, though?” he countered. “I mean, no offense, but it sounds like y'all get split up a lot. How you gonna grow me proper, when we ain't together?”

Figment opened his mouth, then closed it. Yet another problem.

“What I'm gettin' at, Fig, is...we need candies. Right? Well, can't you jus' make some more?”

Figment's eyes nearly bulged out of his skull. A wave of hot embarrassment slipped down through his bulky body, nearly consuming it with a darkening blush. Had something that obvious eluded him that long? Really?

“Well, I...” he fumbled, gulping. “I do suppose...”

“Yes,” Diablo seconded, the huge bird turning to face them. “Yes, he's right. Make us candies! Big, BIG ones. I will crush Ludmilla, myself! Tower over her stupid height!”

“Yeah, see? He could show Maleficent he's still got it—” Mushu started, making the raven tremble with sudden excitement. Figment motioned for him to, perhaps, not pursue the idea so hard.

“YES!” Diablo roared, nodding rapidly.

“Okay, let's simmer our soup a bit,” Figment coughed, pulling things back. “I can try, while we're en route. After all, I don't think I'll be able to create anything, once we get to Maleficent's realm, so...yes, I suppose now is the only time to try it...”

“Make me a super-duper candy, Fig, c'mon,” Mushu said, his eyes gleaming with a pleasantly understandable greed. Even at their most noble, dragons *were* dragons. “Like, a million times stronger! No, no, a billion! Yeah!”

“YES!” Diablo concurred, the god-bird's feathers bristling out happily.

“I'll see what I can manage,” Figment offered, clearing his throat. “But, we're starting small...”

He opened both supinated palms, closed his eyes, and thought hard. He thought of a humble candy—a regular blue one, like before. With surprising speed, one did indeed pop into being, landing with a tiny thump on his vast palm. He opened his eyes, and smiled. Mushu and Diablo saw his palms, and frowned.

“It's kinda tiny, ain't it, Fig?”

“Not for him, it isn't,” Figment replied, letting Nestor catch it as it rolled down to him, in the rim of the bag. He caught it, wide-eyed, then looked up. It was a bit too big for him, still.

“Candy, you say?” Nestor wondered, looking the ball-sized thing over.

“Eat it, go on,” Figment gently ordered, waiting.

Nestor looked at each of the towering giants, then shrugged, and made to bite in, when the ship jerked to the right, throwing them all into a series of reptilian roars and a very unhappy squawk. It righted itself, then pitched left, as some pressure or force buffeted against the hull, from outside. A porthole in the far back told a grim story.

“Ludmilla!” Figment bellowed, as the image of a great, opened maw of teeth bore closer, behind them. “She forced her way in, after us!”

Even though the space between taxed her thoroughly, Ludmilla still loomed large, easily 40 miles tall, more than big enough to outsize the ship and its passengers. Where she had loomed big as a continent, overhead, she had dwindled down to roughly the size of a city. To something that was comparatively hardly a small town, that remained bad news.

“She's gainin', man!” Mushu wailed, as the monstrous dragoness bore down on them, her vast breasts getting close enough to bulge underneath the ship, as her mouth opened wider, readying to swallow them whole. “Can't we do anything!?”

“We didn't build for combat!” Figment hollered, as he spun the steering wheel and banked hard left, narrowly avoiding Ludmilla's huge jaws as they snapped down. “Our only option is surviving, until we clear the other side of the portal!”

“When'll that be!?”

“Any minute—”

“Can't you just open one up, now!?”

“A portal attempt, *during* portal travel? I...I don't know! I don't know how that would fare!”

Happily enough, before they could spitball their doom scenarios, the rush of energy and light slipped away, and a lovely evening sky rushed in as they careened through it. The porthole was lavender clouds snuggled in the bosom of orange glow; the next, it was the ground, and the ground was a lot happier to see them than the clouds.

What could he do, what could he do? Give the ship wings! A parachute? Given how tricky pure focus was, while they free-fell to their deaths, nothing seemed to come of his panicked thoughts.

“Oh!” Figment yelped, reflexively holding the wheel tight. “HANG ON—”

To his and everyone's mutual shock, the ship didn't land, so much as it *bounced*. In one arc, it thumped again, then came to a rather gentle rest, in place. Figment opened his eyes back up, peered out

the porthole, and gasped.

“Hey, alright, Fig!” Mushu whooped, laughing. “Smooth landin’!”

“It...wasn't me, frankly,” Figment chuckled weakly, pointing out the porthole.

Diablo and Mushu came nearer, looked, then wore about the same confusion as Figment. The sky had been replaced, completely, by green—and that green was moving. The entire ship rose and fell gently, as a deep, warm *rumble* followed, tremoring through. It certainly wasn't grass.

“Wait,” Figment sighed, forcing his hands to release from their death-grip on the wheel. He went over to the exit, opened it up, and stepped out—onto a smooth, massive scale. “Oh, heavens, it...it is...it must be! Haha!”

The others peered out after, looking about, and went slack-jawed.

“MY GOODNESS GRACIOUS,” a tremendous, heavy, singsong voice blasted, shaking them all from up above. “SUCH BIG BUGS, WE'RE HAVING, THIS SEASON!”

“Hello, up there!” Figment cheered, waving all about, down on the oversized chest of the Reluctant Dragon. “It's Figment! Hello, I say!”

Figment was hundreds of feet in size, and even he was indeed a bug, compared to him. The Reluctant Dragon sat on the countryside, literally, his huge, round belly dimpling from sheer weight as it rested over mountain ranges and valleys, his feet rising higher than any beanstalk ever could dare. Each scale was practically a city in itself, clinging to his tear-drop bellied body, easily over 100 miles tall, and change. Clouds nuzzled affectionately around his smooth belly as he blinked, squinted hard, then broke into a delighted laugh that shook everything for miles, beyond.

“MY! WHY, FIGMENT, IT'S YOU! HELLO! HELLO, HELLO, YES!”

Eyes big enough to swallow the horizon settled excitedly on him, the edges of a vast grin curling up on either side of the periphery.

“You know this guy, Fig?” Mushu checked, staring up in awe.

“Don't you? It's Reluctant, the dragon you and Spyro and Cynder and I all met, before!”

Mushu went pale.

“That's him!? H...how'd he get so supreme!? Why I ain't that big!?”

“Good question,” Figment hummed.

“OH, BUT IT'S SUCH A RELIEF TO SEE YOU!” the dragon boom-boomed, clapping hands big enough to hold a kingdom, shock waves bursting out. “WHY, IT'S BEEN DREADFULLY DULL, BEING AT SUCH A STATURE, JUST A *DREADFUL* BORE! THERE'S NO ONE TO SERVE LUNCH, NO WAY TO HEAR APPLAUSE FOR FINE POETRY. OH! HEAVENS, NO!”

At that, the dragon's colossal body rumbled fresh, and deep, making Reluctant lid his eyes and grit his teeth cutely, as another huge burst of growth blew up inside him. His scales stretched angrily as he groaned, ballooning even great in scope; his belly sagged heavier as its plump bulk inflated over the ranges, clearing the mountain borders of his seat. His tail pushed bigger and fatter through the coast, into the ocean, his growing toes curling as his heels dug through the topside of the continent.

“G...GUH-GOODNESSSSSS...”

His gentle voice swelled deeper as he pumped 20 miles larger, then 20 more, expanding again by half, in mere seconds. His head punched up higher into the skies, his belly and neck scales inflating thicker and smoother under the ship, beneath the feet of Figment, Mushu and Diablo.

“Make me big, like that!” Diablo ordered, poking Figment angrily, yet happily.

“This isn't from me!” Figment countered, as the quakes and tremors of the dragon's growth finally receded, leaving him an incredible 220 miles tall, sitting down.

The earth moaned unhappily against such catastrophic weight, but held.

“YET AGAIN, I'M SWELLING AND BULGING HIGHER,” the dragon sighed, shaking his now-titanic head with a booming symphony of *tsks*. “THIS REALLY WILL NOT DO. YOU SEE, MY DEAR FIGMENT? I MUST BE A SIGHT!”

“And how,” Mushu said, still staring. “Should I even tell him I'm here?”

“If you aren't going to make me that big,” Diablo cut in, tapping a huge claw on Reluctant's scale, “we should go. Why are we still here? We escaped, we should go to Maleficent!”

“You're right,” Figment admitted, making Diablo swell a bit with satisfaction. “There was a bit of a chase there, but the test worked, the ship is operable. We need to go!”

“What if she keeps on chasin' us, though?” Mushu asked. “She gonna just bust into this world too, right?”

“Right, she likely will.”

Figment turned back to the looming face of the Reluctant Dragon, rendered a monument of effeminate chagrin.

“It's good to see you, just the same!” Figment shouted up, wagging. He would have rather not grown at the moment, lest he have to stop and resize the ship, accordingly. “Have you been growing ever since we left here?”

“WELL, NO, NOT RIGHT AWAY,” Reluctant sighed, thinking. “IT TOOK A FEW DAYS, BEFORE I STARTED RUMBLING UP BIGGER...ALL I DID WAS HAVE SOME TEA, AFTER FINDING A BIGGER CAVE TO TAKE RESIDENCE IN...”

“Well...was it the same pot you made that tea for us with?”

“CERTAINLY, FAMILY HEIRLOOM, YOU KNOW.”

“And, did you clean it out first? Or, was there still traces of the growth tea left?”

“WELL, NATURALLY, I...OH, HEAVENS, I DON'T KNOW THAT I DID...OH...OHOHO! BY MY SCALES, YOU KNOW, I...HOW DREADFULLY SILLY OF ME!”

Figment turned to Diablo and Mushu, then looked down at Nestor, who remained up over the rim of his bag, the tiny blue candy still in hand.

“Alright, this is perfect,” Figment said, grinning lopsidedly. “We only need to make one modification on the ship, then we go straight to Maleficent. No need to tarry, now that we know it works. Nestor, would you please take a bite or two of that candy? Better to have you up to size.”

Not bothering to ask, nor to argue, the tinier green dragon obliged. With one good bite of candy, the carpenter dragon shook, then rattled, then closed his eyes as he ballooned bigger, and bigger, and bigger. The bag sagged against his growing weight as his already-healthy physique swelled out and out, his green arms stretching thicker, his proud chest pushing wider, his neck thickening just enough to keep up, as he bulged to fill the bag.

Figment helped him up as Nestor grew to a comparative child, then a teenager. By the time he was set down, he stood nearly half Figment's towering height.

“That should more or less do, Nestor, thank you!” Figment chirped. “We don't want to fuss about with changing the size of the ship, if we can all just stay the same range, and get in quickly. Now, can you tell me where a propulsion system would best go? We can't just go full-bullet, if we end up being chased again, we need to maneuver on our own.”

“FIGMENT, DEAR, WHO ARE YOU SPEAKING TO, DOWN THERE?”

The dragon's great shadow swelled down over them all, as Figment chuckled.

“Just some other comrades, heh. Could you do us a rather massive favor?”

“OH, CERTAINLY SO, FIGMENT, YOU KNOW I WOULD HELP YOU, ANY DAY!”

“Well—”

Once again, the sky darkened, unnaturally so. Figment winced as a bright gash of energy slit across the heavens, above, and that same pink hand started to force it wider apart.

“Ah, well,” Figment stammered, double-timing. “We're trying to go save Spyro and Cynder, you remember them!”

“WELL, OF COURSE I—GRACIOUS ME, MARGARET, WHAT *IS* THAT, UP THERE!?”

“We need to go to their world, to settle everything, but we're being chased by this other nasty dragoness! Could you please occupy her? Calm her down, with some tea and poetry, perhaps?”

“OH! WELL, I DO HAVE SEVERAL NEW VERSES, AND I HARDLY HATE THEM...”

The sky cracked wide, and Ludmilla's immense muzzle and breasts pushed into their world, her taxed-down body closer to maybe 5 miles in size. Still, from below, it was enough.

“You'll want them at the four corners, Figment,” Nestor said, briskly, now just a head under the purple dragon's size. “There, and there, both sides. I recommend air currents or steam for your actual propulsion! Make exactly what I tell you!”

“R-right!”

As Ludmilla crammed her bulging scales free, her eyes settled on them, far below.

“YOU MERE WHELPS! TO THINK, MALEFICENT EVEN WANTS TO BOTHER WITH YOU ALL! I...SHOULD CRUSH YOU TO DUST, INSTEAD! JUST LET HER BE MAD! IT'D BE A PERFECT EXCUSE, TO DEFEAT HER IN COMBAT, AND TAKE OVER!”

“I don't think she playin', Fig!” Mushu gulped, backing away.

Figment focused, and four large divots dug into the corners of the ship's hull, before a large exhaust pod formed, to fill each one. Nestor rattled off far more interior components than Figment was expecting, but he kept up with every detail—even as Ludmilla popped free, and dropped down through the air, descending like a doomsday meteor.

“I'LL SHOW YOU WHAT YOU GET, FOR TRYING TO IMPRISON ME! THAT OLD CRONE GOT WHAT WAS COMING TO HER! AND NOW, YOU'LL ALL WHAT IS THAT—”

Gigantic green palms slammed in from both the East and West, as the Reluctant Dragon easily snatched Ludmilla out of the sky, holding the towering reptile like a mere toy.

“SUCH A FUSS!” the Reluctant Dragon said, shushing. Despite being so very-much bigger than her, his gentle nature gave him the softer voice. “I MEAN, REALLY!”

“L...LET GO!” Ludmilla boomed, thrashing her bulk about, whipping her head in anger. Compared to him, her roars were more cute than terrifying. “YOU HEAR!? LET ME GO!”

“I RATHER THINK I SHAN'T,” he huffed, only glowering when she bit ineffectually away at his gripping hands. “NOW, REALLY! BEHAVE!”

“Alright, Figment, that should do it!” Nestor cheered, thumping him on the back muscles with an open palm. “We're good to go!”

“Wonderful, you're wonderful,” Figment sighed, putting a huge hand on Nestor's nearly-mutually-huge shoulder. “Let's be off, everyone! Time to end this!”

The others climbed aboard, as Figment knelt in, and hugged what little he could of the Reluctant Dragon's huge chest, tightly.

“Thank you terribly, up there! So good to see you again! I promise, I'll come return you to your proper size, once this is over, okay?”

“MY BOY, YOU'RE TERRIBLY WELCOME!” the dragon laughed, winking down at him from so, so high up. “I SHOULD LIKE TO APOLOGIZE TO THE HUMANS, YES. LORD KNOWS WHAT THEY'VE BEEN PUTTING UP WITH, DOWN THERE.”

“I imagine they're all quite fine, my friend!” Figment said, making absolute sure that would hold fast, in this world. “No one is hurt, I assure you!”

“OH, THAT IS A RELIEF! WELL, THEN, OFF WITH YOU, DEAR! TELL SPYRO AND CYNDER HELLO! YOU MUST COME BACK FOR LUNCH, I INSIST! IF YOU DON'T, WHY, I'LL JUST GROW SO BIG, YOU CAN'T GET AWAY...”

“SHUT...UP!” Ludmilla bellowed, only to feel it as Reluctant trembled all over, grit his teeth, and started to swell even more monstrously vast.

“R-right, then!” Figment yelled, climbing into the altered ship, and slamming the door shut.

The ship's propulsion system flared to life, as jets of steam burst out from the vents, until the ship rose higher and higher up off of the dragon's swelling scales. They almost found themselves turf-bound again, as his booming belly and chest roared up to catch them, the titanic dragon quaking and grunting as he bloated up to 250 miles...300 miles...400 miles...his rump smothered the country, the coast, the lakes, the mountains, the skies, on and on, Ludmilla growling and writhing as she sank completely in between his growing palms.

“Hope that he'll be alright,” Nestor said, as Figment took to the wheel, and steered away from the ever-rising belly in the distance. “He seems a good sort.”

“Oh, very,” Figment chuckled, surprised at just how lifted he was, seeing another friend. “I'd worry more about Ludmilla, at the rate he's expanding. *For* her, rather.”

“Let's go,” Diablo barked, his huge arms folded again. “No more playing around!”

“Science is as much patience, as it is pushing,” Figment replied, as Mushu busied himself with blowing great volleys of flame into a new-formed furnace, at the back, over and over.

“Easy...for y'all t...to say,” he huffed, his huge chest swelling out as he blew more fire in, supplying the steam to the system and pods.

Diablo was correct. All the most necessary test were as done as could be. There was no other preparation, no other task. All there was, at long last, was Maleficent. The thrill of it butted against the lingering terror he had felt, but Figment bullied through, as he opened the last portal, saw it swirling with darkness and nightmares...and sailed the ship straight into it.