

THRONG

4K Scenery

The “No Novel November” Collection

By

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Introduction

Before you is a collection of short stories written during a writing prompt challenge called *No Novel November*. The idea is to write something every day of November, using a word as a writing prompt, with a goal of no more than 300 words.

I blew that limit, but made the daily rule.

That said, I did put in one limit: Average no more than four kilobytes.

My tool? An iPad with a “Smart Keyboard” and Textastic.

In 2019, I also had 30 minutes on MTA Maryland’s MARC Train twice a day, where I could just write.

You get to see the fruits of this work. I’ve collected two years worth here.

Enjoy.

Kelly “STrRedWolf” Price

No Novel November 2019

Lack of *Permission*

A group of lawyers entered in the conference room. Three well dressed black jackals of Egyptian descent, each representing one side of a multi-sided suit against their clients.

Inside, a well dressed German Shepherd, sporting three heads and four arms, awaited. A well-kept pile of documents, sectioned in thirds, were placed next to him. "Come in, come in!" he called out.

"Mr. Octavious Cerberus?" one of the jackals said. "My clients were dismayed over your allegations, and..."

"Cut the crap," Octavious barked in triplicate. "You are trying to save the hospital, the administration, and the head surgeon's butt. In fact, I'm surprised they fell for hiring you."

"What do you mean..." another of the jackals said.

Octavious took each section of documents and dropped it in front of each person. "Oh I know about you. But let us not risk another lawsuit on yourself. Here..." Octavious spread the documents in front of each jackal. "Fifty cases of forced amputations. Forged documentation. Procedures done without permission. I have the paperwork. I have the affidavits. I have enough to file a class action lawsuit and compel discovery. Not just this local hospital in Tuscon, but your entire network."

The jackals poured over the documentation, going through each instance. They rang of the same MO. A fur who multiplied themselves were unwillingly forced to un-multiply by surgical means... and then had to restore themselves at tremendous cost.

The three shook their heads, and in unison said "You got me."

"Come again?"

A jackal said "I have a conflict of interest. I'm part of your class. I was forcibly separated as a child by one of their network hospitals. I'm surprised I'm able to be my own triplets."

Octavious said "Interesting."

They got up and said "File the case. You will get class action status. I will tell my clients to preserve all records, but I will no longer represent them. Be forewarned, they'll attempt everything."

"From what I've seen," Octavious said, "I will be filing for fraud, deception, and malpractice."

"One other thing," one of the jackals said.

"Who's my personal doctor?" Octavious asked.

The jackals jaw dropped. "How..."

"I guessed."

They asked "Think they can merge me back together?"

"Doctor Janus Hexpod at the University Medical Center. I hear there's a study of conjoinment. Although, there's one thing that you will need to do once there."

"What's that?"

Octavious leaned back in his chair and smiled thrice over. "Give her *permission*."

Hidden In Plain Sight

He was flustered. Mad. He needed to get the perfect rant out.

He dressed in a business suit, grabbed a camera, and drove to a nearby Walmart. There, he set up the camera and tripod, close enough to get a good shot. He then stepped in front of the camera, and started live recording to Youtube.

And he ranted.

Mixing religion with politics, he ranted about how unnatural those with extra arms, heads, tails, everything were. He blathered on about conspiracy theories and government corruption. He went on...

...unaware that Vox had stepped out of the Walmart with a few bags of groceries, three packages of socks, and a printed sign from a nearby UPS Store. Shi heard the message, and thought a bit.

Shi then smiled, aligned himself with the camera in the background at just the right spot, and showed the sign -- a blown up QR code pointing to a website of hers. Shi paused for a good five minutes before shi left.

The ranter, unaware, continued on, recording for a good twenty minutes before finishing up and signing off. He then disassembled the tripod, put it back in his car, and drove over to a nearby Chick-Fil-A to pick up lunch.

Inside five minutes, the video went viral... but for the wrong reason. People copied the video and added commentary. By the time the ranter came back home, his Youtube notifications were blowing up. He opened up the video...

...and was dismayed. Shocked. Horrified. He got trolled hard. He felt sick to his stomach. How could anyone do such a thing? He was within his rights to...

A email notification came. Youtube's moderation robot was notified by Walmart's lawyers to take it down for copyright infringement, and it was his third time. His account was being shut down. Another came, this time Facebook. Same message.

A third, Twitter. He hesitated to open it... but it was a direct message notification. The message?

"Hey, you really got to work on your self-awareness. If I was able to troll you, hidden in plain sight, just by noticing you on my way home from shopping... well, I remind you of Exodus 20:17, since you are a bit old-school religious: Commandment X -- You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

"Think about that. If you are coveting my body, I would think you just committed a sin upon your lord. I'd check with your priest about that. In the words of Reverend Mord, be safe, and stay out of trouble. You are not alone."

He sat there, shocked. How could that creature... he reviewed the footage, and found it was easy. Too easy. That cheeky little...

Huh... shi looks rather cute, he thought. He grabbed his phone and looked at the QR code... which directed to a Bandcamp page. Curiosity beset him and he clicked on what looked like a gospel music track...

An angel... hidden in plain sight. He had gone wrong. His god had sent him the message, and he needed to heed it. He needed guidance, a new path... A new church had opened up. All religions. The ad was there on his desk. He grabbed it and went to confess.

Window Of Change

A car skidded to a stop in front of the emergency room entrance of Johns Hopkins Medical Center in Baltimore. Quickly it was shut off, and doors opened. Two wolves came out, one helping the other into the hospital.

"CAN WE GET SOME HELP?!?" the helper howled. "SHE'S GOING TO TURN BACK!"

This took notice of Hayden, who had just came off of a presentation, and was touring the facility. His instincts took over, running out with a gurney, the head surgeon chasing after him. "Turn back?" He asked.

"Reverse werewolf!" the helper yelped as her mate collapsed on the gurney. "The moon's turning back, I don't know..."

"Heelp..." the mate moaned.

The head surgeon turned and yelled at orderlies **"DOC HAYDEN'S GOT ASSOCIATE PRIVILEGES! ASSIST, STAT!"**

"BAY THREE IS OPEN!" one of the more senior orderlies said as they rushed the mate inside. Quickly, they got them into an ER bay and started hooking up external monitors.

"We need blood pulled and into the sequencer, stat!" Hayden howled. He quickly washed up and put on gloves and mask.

"Got it, Doc!" a nurse said as she was pulling it. Quickly they pulled a tube out and put the sample in an analyzer. The heart monitor suddenly went crazy, temperature's spiking.

"Oh no..." the male wolf said as his mate started transforming.

"Everyone back off!" Hayden howled. "We got a live transform!"

Within minutes, the mate shrank down, hands reforming into paws, the entire body dropping down to two-thirds size... into that of a feral wolf. The wolf whined, tiredly, breathing heavily.

"YES!" Hayden cheered. "Get another tube ready, I'll pull this one."

"Doctor?" A nurse asked, handing a fresh syringe to pull blood.

"I'm familiar with these cases, nurse," Hayden said. "In fact, the first case was here during my tenure here." He took the syringe and proceeded to pull another tube of blood. Hayden afterwards carefully pet the wolf, saying "We got you. You're lucky." with one head.

"What are we going to do?" the nurse said.

Hayden responded with his other head "Standard fluids and anti-inflammatory for the switch. She'll be sore for a bit. Get this sequenced as well." Hayden handed the nurse another tube.

The head surgeon peeked in and said "How are we?"

"Stable." Hayden answered. "Did you get that Transformation wing in?"

"Yeah. We're getting info from the male now."

"Good. Once she's hooked up, we'll move her there." Hayden got up, and pet the female wolf again. "We'll get you back asap."

"Mr. Brad Wulfenstein?" Hayden said as he came into the waiting area.

"Yes?" the male wolf said, worried.

"Hi. I'm Doctor Dante Hayden, head of nanobiotic medicine at Metroburg University General. Come on back."

Brad got up and followed Hayden in. "Aren't you the musician for Throng? I..."

"One and the same. I get inspiration in the weirdest places. But I'm a fully licensed Physician. Got my roots here, actually. Did my residency and some tenure here. Repairing hearts with nanobots was my first paper."

"About my mate?" Brad asked as they walked down the hall in the small Transformation wing to his mate's hospital room.

"Sandy? Oh, we found the issue. We flushed out some rogue nano in her blood stream that was causing the changes. The timing was on the moon cycle. Funny enough, she kept the same weight. Everything's so densely packed, so we've injected her with my rebuild nano. She should be finishing up now."

"Oooooooooooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhh..." the mate moaned as they approached. "How..."

Hayden entered in with Brad and a nurse, seeing a fully female anthro wolf, with a large chest on her, flopping onto her back.

"How was the ride, Madam Sandy?" Hayden said, starting to take vitals.

"Wild..." she said. "I'm... sore."

"That's expected with some transformations like what you had."

"Is it..."

"Yep, no more shape-shifting."

"The curse is lifted..." Sandy said. "But..."

Brad asked "You want to go back?"

"Um..." Sandy said, blushing a bit.

"We can turn you into wolftaurs," Hayden cheekily suggested.

"Wait... you can..." Brad said as he turned to Hayden.

"Yep. Both of you have enough mass to do it." Hayden said, one head pointed at the beefy Brad, the other at Sandy.

Brad looked at Sandy, scratching his head. "Would you like to live my fantasy with me, Sandy?" he asked.

"That's..." Sandy asked, blushing again. "Ooooh... Can we?"

Hayden smiled, and said "We'll get things prepped for you two. We're well within the window of change."

Nothing to Look At

Yukon looked over the Bering Strait, past Diomed Island towards Naukan, Russia. She looked, standing on a make-shift boardwalk and sipping her coffee from a thermal carafe, while the morning started in Wales, Alaska. She was dressed in a tank-top and jeans, not minding the cold weather. The cerberus snow leopard was built for it.

Built, she thought. Waking up in a tube, floating in... fluid. Seeing those... "scientists". She couldn't bare to call them that. Hayden was better than any of them. Somehow they had grown her, pre-programmed her mind, then tested her and trained her...

...but they realized that they didn't have a mindless super-soldier on their hands. They had what any military called a conscientious objector... but they called it "damaged goods."

Were it not for one "scientist" who got her out, who defected with her, who said she was his daughter and had named her "Tundra"... she would not have lived.

And now, she was staring back at a nation back to it's old tricks, with a continuous hatred of what America had become in the past, and never letting it go.

"Tundra?" a voice called out in triplicate.

She turned a head to look -- and found a three headed male snow leopard, also with four arms, in a tank top and jeans. He carried a satchel and a thermal carafe. In the sight, something struck her, and she turned fully to face him.

"Mr. Davokev?" she asked.

The male cerberus snow leopard nodded. "Da... I mean yes," he said. "Although... I think you can just call me Sven."

"Sven... you're Norwegian?"

"Yes. I'm from Bergen, Norway."

"You..."

"Heh, it's a long story, but... well, the proof first." Sven pulled out a folder from his satchel and held it out for Yukon. "I think you're more than intelligent enough to understand them."

Yukon took the folder and shuffled through the file, keeping hold on it...
"You..."

Sven nodded thrice over.

"But you weren't..." Yukon started to ask.

"I never liked being a Siberian Husky," Sven said.

"I... How?!?" Yukon asked.

Sven pointed a thumb in-land. "The Canmephians got the ability to switch the species of anyone. Add some multiness... and you got the perfect disguise for witness protection."

"So..."

Sven shook his heads. "I can't go back to Russian. I can't go back to being a Siberian Husky. And I won't go back to anything relating to..." He then shuddered. "I have a new life here. I need to do good."

"Have you heard of Doctor Dante Hayden?"

"Your coworker? Yeah... I don't know. Where..."

"Metroburg, California. My home as well. Better than..." Yukon turned back to facing the Bering Straight.

Sven came up besides Yukon, and carefully placed a hand on her far shoulder. "Whatcha looking at?"

Yukon snuggled a bit up to Sven, nuzzling a head. "Nothing, daddy. Nothing at all."

No *Pickles* Please

Vox purred.

Shi felt hir long neck, coated up hir throat with latex as far as it would go, feeling how smooth it was. Reaching up, then down to hir shoulders and chest, where the latex wrapped around each large breast and cradled them. The latex was tight, and against hir six hands, it felt *goood*.

Vox looked at hirself in the mirrors. From neck down, shi was shiny, in a latex catsuit that covered everything, including hir tails. The only thing not covered were hir head and headtails.

"Mmmmmmm...." shi said as shi looked with half-lidded eyes to a tailor in the shop shi was in. "I'm ready for my corset now, Gwen."

The tailor, a four armed female lynx taur, grinned and purred "Hold still then, Felix. I'm only going to tighten it up just a bit..." She wrapped the corset under Vox's breasts and started lacing them up the back. This was done quickly and carefully, before shi started tightening it up, taking the tension off Vox's back and onto the reinforcements of the corset.

"OOooooooooohhhhhhhh," Vox moaned. "That's.... even betteeeerrrrr....."

"Tight enough?" Gwen said.

"Just a touch more, dear," Vox said, hir voice giving lusty undertones.

Gwen smiled, and with a fore paw pulled a bit more on the laces, tightening it just enough to make Vox moan again.

"How's that, Felix?"

"Purrrrrrrrrfect." Vox purred, feeling the corset and how slimmed down hir waist had become. It was a slight compression, but enough to give hir that hourglass look.

"Did you want to..."

"I want to wear it outside. I want to be in the rain..."

Gwen shook her head, and pointed to an open metallic briefcase. "You're paid up, and I have a briefcase with your clothing and wallet. The corset has two hidden pockets for your wallet and change."

Vox felt up hir corset, slipping under hir breasts, and finding the large pockets, one for each of hir cleavages. "Oooooohhh that makes things *interesting*." Shi stepped over to the briefcase, and found hir wallet. Vox pulled it out, and pulled two \$50 bills out with one hand before slipping the wallet down one cleavage and into a pocket. Other hands grabbed hir keys and slipped them down the other cleavage and into that pocket as well.

"You've done good work, hon," Vox said, handing Gwen the tip. "Here."

Gwen took the tip, and said "Oh thank you! You know how to get out, right?"

"Zipper in the back?"

"Of course. You'll have to come completely out to hit the restroom."

"I shouldn't have too much trouble then. I'm in a study for generating power through waste... in a weird way."

"Oh that's why you have those cables coming out. I slipped them up by the top of the corset and into pockets there."

"Oh really?" Vox said. Shi reached behind, located one of the pockets, and pulled a cord out. Shi then located hir cell phone and plugged it in... and saw it was charging. "Nice! Thanks!"

"Thank you!" Gwen said as Vox slipped hir phone under hir breasts and into a pocket.

"Remind me to come back for a winter jacket or four." Vox purred. "Now, though... I can use a burger."

"Everything but the hots?" Gwen asked jokingly as Vox closed the briefcase.

"Hold the pickles please," Vox replied, and cutely stuck out hir tongue.

Wrong Address

"This should be the place," Lights said, all four eyes looking to the side as he parallel-parked into a space in front of a New Orleans cathedral, squeezed in between two buildings.

"Kinda rustic place," Stereo said with one head. "But they told us to meet us here."

Lights finished parking and shut off the rental car. They then got out, locking the door. "Kinda weird that it's in this out-of-the-way place."

"Yeah," Stereo added.

As they approached, they started hearing music. A tune-up session... and it was going badly. Light's ears folded back. "Ugh..." he said as they entered.

Inside, a band struggled with getting things just right. The mix was off badly, and the lighting could use some work.

The band leader noticed the two and said "HEY! The stuff of legend! Pop on the board, this cat on sound isn't worth the scratch."

"You called?" Stereo asked.

"Numerous times!" The band leader, an otter in dapper clothing, said.

"Called all around too. You're the first to answer."

"Let's get you going, then." Lights said before turning to Stereo. "I'm going for that rig. Need some tools, hon?"

"Hand me your spare driver set," Stereo said. "I got a feeling here."

Lights pulled out a set from his vest pocket and gave it to Stereo, before pulling out a flashlight and getting on stage. Stereo herself went over to the sound board, shooing it's current operator back and opening it up.

"Oh someone moved these speakers all right," Lights said, climbing the rig. "Give me a minute, I'll realign them. Spotlights look good."

Stereo blew out the dust from the control board's electronics and cleared out some crud in it. A broken wire was found... but easily replaced with

the spares inside. She then dropped the board down, put on the headphones, and said "Bass man, give me a good floor there."

A bass guitar started strumming a good beat, as Lights popped over to the other side and realigned the speakers there. Stereo nodded, tuning, "Drums, your turn."

The drummer started a round, and Stereo started picking up the tune. "Dave Mathews Band's Ants Marching?"

Lights said "Good pick to tune with the horn player."

The band leader said "Go for it! You heard the lady!"

The horn player nodded and started. Each musician joined in, starting up the song perfectly, and Stereo tuned and mixed it just right. The band jelled during the song, getting that right amount of feedback. They then went into "Proud Mary" and Stereo locked it down, teaching the sound board operation the ropes.

"All right!" the band leader said. "We're good here. You good Charlie?"

The sound board operator gave the band leader a thumbs up. "Yeah, the gal knows her stuff. Missed a lot, but I'm good."

The band leader then finished with, "Thanks, you two. Glad you came. See the manager next time and we'll let 'ya in for the concert."

"Lates, then!" Stereo purred, before grabbing Lights and stepping out of the cathedral.

Once outside, they were greeted by a pastor. "Mr. and Mrs. Prodan?"

"Yes, that's us." Lights answered.

"Hi. I'm Reverend Travis. I'm sorry, I gave you the wrong address."

"The wrong..." Stereo said, before they both turned back to the cathedral... or the empty garden lot they had parked in front of. "What the..."

"Um... Reverend, was there a church here?" Lights said.

"Oh dear, yes. There was but it's gone. Some say if you listen closely, you can hear a badly out of tune band."

A breeze gushed through the three, with a voice whispering "Rolling down the ri-ver..." heard by the three. They looked at each other, wondering what they just heard.

"Vox." Stereo said.

"Vox?" the priest asked.

"We need to talk to Vox and Cass," Lights said, nodding. "I think we just resolved another ghost story. Both can address what we just been through."

Jump

"Jump when ready."

Norse looked at his forlorn mate, Hauler. The male hoss was in deep shock, jaw slightly slack and eyes looking a hundred miles ahead.

"Michael dear," Norse said. "Are you ready to go back?"

"Hubadupah," Hauler mumbled.

"You better go now, Valhalla." A four armed, strawberry colored rabbit in robes said. "He'll get worse if he stays."

"Stand back, we're taking the express route." Norse said. Shi grabbed all the luggage, and with a free hand, grabbed Hauler by the back of his head and kissed him with both of his heads.

The circle of friends that had gathered whooped and hollered as Norse and Hauler faded from sight.

"What a sight!" A four armed chocolate-colored rabbit said.

"Oh that's Valhalla for you." Another four armed rabbit, vanilla colored, replied.

Hauler, Norse, and their luggage reappeared in a special office at Metroburg's Office of Immigration and Naturalization. The room chimed, and a display next to the door blinked on. Killer appeared, video from a control room.

"Valhalla!" Killer yelped. "Is Michael okay?"

"No, Karen." Norse replied after breaking the kiss. "Did you get my message earlier?"

"Yes. Sasha's here. You know her as Blacklight. Hold on a minute, let us do a quick puff and scan..."

Various jets of air gushed in and out, taking a minute to do, before the display turned green. The door unlocked and opened outward to Blacklight waiting.

"Blacklight!" Norse said. "Or should I say Dr. Thomson?"

"Sasha is fine in this regard," Blacklight said, coming in and leading Hauler out. "Come, dear Michael. Home is this way. Lets get you back in more familiar surroundings."

"Hebiduh." Hauler said. "Habidah drabit." He walked out of the room, following Blacklight's lead, before joining her side by side. Norse followed, bringing the luggage.

Killer came over and said "Is it..."

"War shock," Blacklight said. "You're good to bring him back here."

"Veeeb veeeb. China clipper calling Alameter. Zilch." Hauler moaned, and collapsed on top of Blacklight's taurtrain section. Blacklight noticed, shifted Hauler over a bit more, and carried him forward outside.

Killer, coming right behind them, asked "Do I need an ambulance?"

"No," Blacklight said. "Just a taxi to their home. Michael needs some rest now."

Back home, Hauler woke up on the couch. He shook his head, and sat up. "What..."

Norse said "Michael?"

"I think... Valhalla, please..."

"Anything, dear?"

Hauler muttered "Can we not jump into the deep end when we go back?"

It is the *Season*

Mussi came upon the double-height door to what looked like one of New York's famous brownstone cottages, and rang the door bell. She had been invited over for a tasting, and her fathers had come a bit early.

"Coming!" she heard from behind the door, two voices close together. The doors then unlocked and opened. Behind them revealed a well-balanced double headed white tiger, wide eyed.

"Hi," Mussi said. "Is this Admiral RedWolf's residence? My fathers said to come..."

"Oh!" The feline said. "You must be Mussi! Reddie and the two have been chatting in the kitchen. Come in! I'm Sandra, by the way."

Mussi came in. "You're..."

"Tall?" Sandra said.

"...not going to eat me, are you?"

Sandra shook both heads in unison. "Nah, you're safe. We don't eat sentient sphonts."

"SANDRA!" RedWolf bellowed out from the kitchen. "Don't confuse the young gazelle!"

"Any more of that and I start taking photos!" Mussi said.

RedWolf's head poked out from the kitchen, and said "I'm surprised you haven't for your newspaper. Come! You're fathers and I are making various dishes."

Sandra closed the door and locked it again. "I kinda wondered what that smell was," shi started with one head. "You trying gumbo?"

"Why not come and..." RedWolf started before swearing in Afrikaans was heard.

"Uh oh..." Mussi said, before rushing into the kitchen.

"No no no!" the elder double-headed gazelle's left head said. "We can't make biltong stew! We don't have any dried meat!"

"Daddy Nathu," Mussi calmly said. "Use chicken breast with smoked bacon."

RedWolf, being a three headed and nine-limbed cougar/skunk mix, purred "In the fridge, but you'll need to fry up a sample of each. I have Canmephian Chook which tastes about the same. Nathu, Tolta, try it out." Shi snaked hir heads back into position, being rather long necked for hir form.

Nathu and Tolta, the elder gazelle, moved to the large fridge and pulled it open, finding a cooked chicken breast larger than a child. He carefully pulled it out onto a table, and sliced off a small chunk to taste.

"Hmmm..." Tolta said. "With bacon you said?"

Mussi answered "Yes Daddy Tolta. I make it myself."

"Oh really now..." Tolta and Nathu said sarcastically.

"Scoot over, I'll show you." Mussi said before the door bell rang again.

"That's probably Felix now." RedWolf said. "Sandy dear, can you..."

Sandra was already out by the front door and said... "Hey Reddie, are you pulling my leg?"

"One head and a mohawk?" RedWolf said, snaking a head back out the kitchen door.

"Yeah!"

"That's Drake 'Vox' Felix! Let hir in!"

Sandra brought in the nine-limbed pure feline, saying "If I didn't know any better, I'd say you're RedWolf."

"Oh, you mean Drake Bacon here?" Vox said, carrying two grocery bags.

"We keep wondering about that shape-shifter." Shi sniffed the air and said

"Is someone making biltong stew... and chili?"

"Hey Felix!" RedWolf said. "Sorry to impose, but did you..."

"Yep," Vox said. "Scoop-style corn chips, sour cream, and I even got all the seasons." Shi then noticed the elder male gazelle and said "Oh! Hey, I don't think we met..."

Mussi said with one head "Hey Felix! You helping me out in front of my fathers, Nathu and Tolta?"

"Oh really? Your fathers?" Vox said, looking at the male gazelle. "Now this is a story I got to hear."

"All in due time," Nathu said, with Tolta following up with "Just treat us as a conjoined pair."

"Probably easier that way," Vox said. "I got nothing else planned tonight. We chewing the fat?"

"Yeah, if I can get everything done and get the fireplace going. Got the wood split and everything but..."

"I'll get 'er blazing, if I can borrow your double-headed cutie tiger here," Vox said, pointing a thumb at Sandra.

Sandra shook hir heads and said "It is in the season, after all..."

Fuzzy Blanket

A hot, roaring fire. Good food. Good conversation.

Mussi and her fathers, Nathu and Tolta, were full and happy. They sat in front of the fire, leaning against each other. Father and daughter, finally bonding after all this time away. Each having their own adventure. An occasional nuzzle here and there, but mainly just being in each other's embrace.

Vox noticed this and pulled RedWolf over. Shi whispered an idea, to which they and RedWolf's mate Sandra silently exited the den and over into a workshop. A spare automatic fabrication system, or auto-fabber, was there.

"Can we..." Vox asked quietly.

"Oh we can." RedWolf purred. "We just need a suitable design."

"How fast is your network access?" Vox asked, grinning.

Sandra purred and said "Blink and you'll miss it. Here." Shi gave Vox a thin tablet, already opened up to a web browser.

Vox looked at Sandra with an evil grin. In minutes, shi had located the right design... but said "This, but the rights..."

RedWolf looked at it, and said "Give me a minute here." Shi blinked, hir eyes turning solid white. Vox noticed and started to say something but Sandra patted the cougar's shoulder and shook hir heads. The tiger knew what was going on.

"Got the reproduction rights," RedWolf said quietly, blinking hir eyes back to normal. "I'll make the one-off and then contact a garment company to make the rest."

"How..." Vox started to ask as RedWolf tapped on the auto-fabber's touch screen.

"Actor class Canmephian Drygerskunk," RedWolf quietly purred as the auto-fabber quietly stirred to life. "This liquid shape-shifter's full of tricks."

"If you read Internet Engineering Task Force Request For Comments documentations while you were in college, I'm... I'm..."

"Want some fabber time?" RedWolf purred.

"Yes please," Vox muttered. "I got too many ideas."

RedWolf purred as the auto-fabber took but a minute to produce a garment. Shi then took it, fluffed it up a bit, and walked back into the den. RedWolf saw Mussi and her fathers slowly nodding off, and wrapped the garment around them.

Both Mussi and hir fathers said "Mmmm... fuzzy blanket."

RedWolf, Vox, and Sandra all smiled, and left them in front of the fire to rest.

Downright *Delicious*

Mussi yawned, not realizing that she and her fathers had slept in front of the fireplace at the residence of one Ambassador RedWolf of Canmephia. She was invited over for just a social call.

"Morning, dears," a call came from their host at the door to the downstairs den. "There's coffee and breakfast upstairs if you want to join us."

Mussi turned a head and says "I... I'm sorry if..."

RedWolf purred "Oh no, don't be. Felix and I had a feeling that would be the case. Staying the night was no trouble."

Mussi's fathers, Nathu and Tolta, stirred awake. They realized where they were, and started to bolt. "We've overstayed..." Nathu started, but Mussi put a finger on both Nathu and Tolta's lips.

"Sssshhhh..." Mussi said. "RedWolf has extended the welcome. Lets get up and get some coffee and food before we head on out."

RedWolf purred "Bathrooms are right next door. I'll be upstairs."

Mussi thanked RedWolf as shi slipped out, and got up. It was a very comfortable blanket. The double-headed, four armed femme gazelle made her way to the bathroom, and freshened up a bit.

Soon, the three had came up to the kitchen, where RedWolf was putting on a fresh pot of coffee with Vox.

"Oh hello there, sleepy heads." Vox said, rather chipper. "Reddie's putting on some coffee I got from Metroburg. You should try the coffee shi has from hir home planet, though."

"Coffee?" Mussi asked tiredly.

RedWolf looked at Vox, who said "That's a yes. Do we have..."

"We do," RedWolf said, opening a cabinet. Three sizes showed: Regular for folks native to the planet, double sized for Canmephians like RedWolf and Sandra, and one single mug filling the cabinet marked "#1/#2/#3 RedWolf". Carefully RedWolf pulled three small mugs out, and handed

them to Vox. Vox examined them, having a "TransWorld RailRoad" logo on them.

"Now that's a story right there," Vox commented. Shi then pulled three draws of the coffee RedWolf previously brewed, and carried them over to the table that Mussi, Nathu, and Tolta settled down at. Each one took a sip... and looked at the mug. They then sipped again.

"Where's this from?" Tolta asked. "This is good!"

RedWolf purred "It's the Six O'Clock Express from TransWorld Roasters. They have a good mellow medium roast I like to drink. I'm also fond of Death Wish here. Meanwhile..." the cougar-skunk hybrid grabbed a double-sized mug and filled it with the fresh brew.

"That's the Medium Futures blend, also a medium roast, from Hybrazil Roasters," Vox said. "Try it out. If you don't mind, I'd like to get some pancakes for Mussi and her dads."

"That's from CeeGee's coffee shop?" Mussi asked.

"Yep. I grabbed a few vacuum-packed pounds when I was up there."

"Oh, go ahead then." RedWolf said. Shi then took a sip with one head... then shared it with his second and third heads. All three then raised up, jaw open, eyes closed, for a few seconds. "Ooooh... that is..."

"Awesome, right?" Vox asked, donning an apron.

RedWolf purred "Down-right delicious."

Buying the *Farmhouse*

Home, Hayden thought. He was back home... in Hell.

Hell, Michigan. The small town celeb was home, driving a rented Jeep from the airport. Going up Patterson Lake Road, some old memories shook loose and refreshed themselves. Ooooh the days where he walked to the store and back.

He pulled the Jeep up to the Hell Saloon, parked, and locked it. Hayden then padded into the Saloon with a satchel, where an old waitress recognized him.

"DANTE!" she barked. "Where 'ya been, boy? Haven't seen you around!"

"Hello Cherri," Hayden said back, kissing the old hound. "It's been too long. I've been everywhere."

"You got a lot of explaining to do," Cherri said.

"Only if I get some chili fries and a Coke," Hayden countered.

Cherri and Hayden stared at each other for a minute, before Cherri barked "KARL!"

"Chili fries coming up!" a voice yelled back from the kitchen.

Cherri tilted her head and smiled.

"Same ol' Cherri," Hayden said. "I'll start with what I've been up to..."

"Whoa..." Cherri said. "Quite an adventure!"

"Oh yes... OH!" Hayden said while another head ate. He stopped for a bit and pulled out a few CD's from the satchel. "Proof. All the CD's my band has made, and a few friends made along the way."

Cherri was wowed. She said "Oh deer, we've been playing the dickens out of your first CD. One of the kids built a jukebox setup, a Pi TrackMaster. Don't know how to use it..."

"Oh, my colleague Tony built one. We call him Lights. What you do is just touch the screen there to wake it up..."

Cherri walked over to a blank display and touched it. It lit up, and showed a few buttons on the screen, and a display saying it was fairly empty.

"You got your play button for just playing the CD's, but also an Import button. That'll read the CD into the jukebox so you can put it safely away. Just follow the prompts on screen."

Cherri did, swapping the old Throng CD for a fresh copy as the CD tray popped out. It worked it's magic, popped the tray back open, and asked about playing it.

"Don't I need..." Cherri asked.

"Not anymore. You can leave it empty or continue importing while it plays."

Cherri tapped the play button, and it started playing the latest Throng hit, "Train 125."

Hayden grinned as Cherri paused... and smiled as the music played. "I love it. Oooh, you must be on the drums and keyboard!"

"You got it in one." Hayden said. "Give me the check, I gotta get up to the old home."

"Better talk to your papa, Dante. They're thinking of selling it."

Hayden said "I heard. It's why I want to talk to him. I'm going to buy it and keep it with the family. I'm buying the farmhouse."

Test Failure

Vox staggered into a meeting hall at Union Station. Shi had barely made it down from Baltimore after a stressful adventure, and shi was pent up with anger.

"If there is no other business," the chairman of the meeting started to say.

"MOVE TO EXTEND DUE TO EXCRUCIATING CIRCUMSTANCES!"

Vox bellowed out, approaching the guest seat.

"You... your name?" The chairman asked as Vox plopped down on the seat.

"My name is Drake Felix," Vox started. "I ride the Penn Line from Odenton to Baltimore as part of my daily commute. Today, however, showed an extreme breakdown in the relationship between MARC, CSX, Bombardier, and Amtrak. If I may be afforded thirty minutes, I shall explain."

"Make it brief," The chairman muttered.

"YOU WANT BRIEF?!?" Vox howled in a godly chorus, standing up and planting all six hands on the table and leaning over. ***"FINE! SHUT DOWN ALL CSX, AMTRAK, AND NORFOLK SOUTHERN RAIL TRAFFIC UNTIL YOU FIX YOUR EQUIPMENT. PTC, BACKUP SIGNALING, POWER, ENGINES, PASSENGER CARS, THE ENTIRE WORKS! ALL OF IT! THEN GO TO BALTIMORE AND PAVE EVERY DAMN ROAD AND PARKING LOT. YOU DON'T WANT TO DO IT?!? THEN I WANT YOUR RESIGNATION, IN THE NEWS PAPERS, BY TOMORROW MORNING! DOES THE MARC RIDER ADVISORY COUNCIL WANT THE DETAILS OF WHAT HAPPENED TO WANT PEOPLE'S HEADS? THEN GIVE ME MY DAMNED THIRTY MINUTES!"***

By that time, more people had poured in. Regular commuters that had missed the opening of the council meeting and were too of the mindset to speak their minds.

The council and chairperson were taken back. The chairperson blinked, regained his composure, and said "My apologies, Madam Felix. Please,

take all the time in the world." The chairperson motioned to some staff, and said "Get everyone some water. This meeting is extended."

Vox sat back down, hir temper abated a bit, "Thank you, mister chairperson. I apologize if I do not know your names, but it is excusable for what I have to tell."

With that, Vox told about hir regular commute, and how it was starting to slip. Equipment failures started happening on a regular basis. Lateness was now regular. Tracking was becoming unreliable, which wore on every commuter shi talked to.

All the issues came to a head that day when Vox got on a seemingly regular train at Odenton, hir regular stop. It then broke down just south of BWI Airport and had to be pushed into the station using a staged engine nearby... but it took over an hour and a half to do so, and no evacuation along the side of the tracks were possible. Another MARC train was able to come and board all the passengers on the train from the center track... only for all signal and overhead train power to stop as they stopped at Halethorpe. That took another two hours for Amtrak to decide to let the diesels run at 15 miles per hour up and down every block, and each block required a stop, communicate, wait, start again. Each wait dragged on, forcing Vox to work via laptop and cell phone, until they reached West Baltimore and the train was told to offload and go back. By that time, the delay went to five hours, and Vox was forced to take a half day off work. The only saving grace was the food trucks at West Baltimore.

Vox then went on to describe the route home, and the train that was supposedly going to be an all-local ended up being a non-stop to DC... at 15 miles per hour, diesel all the way. Shi cited the poor maintenance and horrid communications between the train, Amtrak staff at their operations center, and MARC operations staff. Hir only praise was that the conductors were being transparent about what was going on, and doing the best they can.

Vox panted, looking around to see the overflowing crowd of passengers, before turning back and saying "I can only assume that the passengers being me share my anger, and are demanding a public root cause analysis

over the complete breakdown that has happened here. Everyone here can all agree, if this was a test, *YOU ALL HAVE FAILED!*"

Green with *Envy*

Vox looked over at the panel at the MARC Riders Advisory Council's meeting. Signs pointed to the CEO of Amtrak, the governor of Maryland, the head of MTA Maryland, the department director for MARC (being part of MTA Maryland), the CEO of CSX (who happened to be in town), and several riders. All of them were shocked.

Vox drew a deep breath, and in a soothing tone started again. "If I may be so bold, I have a few suggestions to get through the day."

"You are in no..." the chairman of the board started to say, before the governor interrupted. Meanwhile, a inverse-colored four-armed snow leopard taur named Rails came into the room.

"I know this former employee of the MTA." The governor said. "Make your suggestions."

Vox said "Thank you governor. These come from experience inside and outside the MTA.

"First, suspend all electrical service between Washington and Philadelphia. Long distance service hauls the electrics up to Philadelphia 30th street and swaps them there. MARC short-hauls between Washington and Wilmington, where SEPTA will pick up the slack.

"Second, signaling. MARC ops will control the NEC outside of K tower to Newark, where SEPTA will take over and guide them into Wilmington. Blocks start at every station. Service is local and trains run on visual rules with flagmen, two track operations, max 79 MPH. Amtrak and MARC stop at all MARC stops for flagmen to clear them. Communications over radio.

"Third, alternate service. CSX suspends freight traffic on the MARC Camden Line. WMATA bus-bridges between Greenbelt, New Carrollton, and Seabrooke, along with between Murikurk and Bowie State. MTA Maryland bus-bridges between Savage and Odenton, and between Dorsey and BWI. No service to Jessup or St. Dennis. Existing Light Rail and bus for Baltimore stations, and a bus bridge to Halethorpe from BWI including Light Rail.

"These are the short term suggestions. I think you can get the long term taken care of."

The governor, the CEO of Amtrak, and the CEO of CSX looked at each other, and nodded. The governor then turned back, and said "It will be done."

Vox turned his head to the side, a bit slack-jawed.

The CEO of Amtrak dialed a number, and got a dispatcher. "This is Andermore. Suspend all electric services from Newark, Delaware to DC. The NEC is diesel only DC to Wilmington. Call MARC operations for emergency diesel operations... yes, pull staff from the Northeast Regionals and get everyone on the MARC. They're going to pull off 20 minute service DC to Wilmington. Get signals off their butt as well too..."

All the directors and reps started calling and coordinating. The chairman, shocked, looked around confused, when another member said "Move to terminate the meeting and turn the room over to our ad-hoc emergency coordination panel."

Everyone not busy agreed and the chairman said "Motion passed. Lets get these people home!"

Vox leaned back against the chair, spent. Rails pushed against the crowd leaving, and headed towards Vox. "Vox! You okay?"

"I can has home now?" Vox muttered.

"Let's get you home." Rails said, helping Vox up.

"Excuse me," Mr. Andermore said. "You're Madam Thomson of the Station to Station 2 train? The one powered by the CMP BH-3 engine core?"

"Yes. In fact, I have my CMP BH-3 powered GP40WH-2 here with combo caboose. I think Madam Felix here needs a ride home to Odenton."

"Mind if we drop a few staff along the way? We're implementing Madam Felix's emergency suggestions... and I'm kinda envious of the engine."

"Get 'em over to track 3, and get me a *ooof* window." Rails said as Vox flopped onto her back. The governor came over and helped Vox back up.

"Copy that." Mr. Andermore said as a conductor came in. He pulled the conductor over and said "Get eight conductors with radios on overnight duty and meet me by MARC Engine 66 on track 3. The GP40WH-2. Get another six up at BWI, Halethorpe, and West Baltimore. And get me a radio."

"Steak..." Vox moaned. "Medium well, potatoes and green beans on the side..."

"There's a steak house in Odenton." Rails said. "Not a chain, but near the station."

"I know the place. I'll call an order there." The governor said as they made their way down to track side.

Rails pulled the train into Odenton. Vox was feeling a bit better after a bit of a nap on the train, as both the governor and Mr. Andermore coordinated on a higher level to get the rail system fixed. Shi got up, stretched, and noticed folks exiting. Vox exited, and approached the governor and Mr. Andermore.

"You going to be okay, Madam Felix?" Mr. Andermore said.

"Yeah. Long day." Vox said. "Let's get Rails' consist off the line first, and..."

"They got it now," the governor said. "Need a ride?"

"My car's nearby," Vox replied. "Hopefully I won't get..."

A reporter came up and said "MADAM VOX! What..."

Vox sighed and said "Listen, if you want rumor mongering you talk to my lawyers. You want details on the emergency service for the MARC Penn Line and NEC to Wilmington, you talk to the Governor here. It's been a long day that I vented to him and the CEO of Amtrak here."

The reporter turned to the Governor, who said "In brief: MARC rush every 20 minutes to Wilmington, Delaware, full diesel service. Hourly MARC service overnight. No Amtrak service -- take MARC, tickets honored. All stops. No express. Lasts until we get everything fixed."

"Also, we had a trial run of service using the CMP BH-3 equipped GP40WH-2 engine." Mr Andermore chimed in as Vox slipped away. "We'll be pushing for an R&D program around this engine with our partners. You might say, we're green with envy with that engine."

Digital Jewel

Elder looked on as Merlin and Cass looked over an apparatus one more time. Vox had flew in for the weekend, and also waited.

"Well, Felix," Merlin said. "Tell me what do you think of this?"

Vox stepped up and looked around various parts of the apparatus. Shi walked around, carefully looking, observing...

"Hmmm..." shi started... "I think you can go solid state on a lot of the control side... but the density needed..."

"What are you thinking, young herm?" Elder asked.

"Canmephian computer technology!" Vox exclaimed, and scrambled over for paper and pens. Shi started writing down ideas and diagrams, exclaiming "If we can get a microcontroller and light emitter down to... yes... oh yes... oh... oh hell that's going to be sick."

"Felix?" Cass asked, all three eyes growing wide as Vox then sped over to hir satchel and pulled out a small laptop computer.

"Yes, I can solve Merlin's manna gathering issues." Vox said, transferring hir notes into the computer. "And I have a favor to ask back home, since shi offered..."

"How..." Merlin started as Vox quickly dialed a number and put it on speaker. It picked up quickly, and a voice said "RedWolf speaking..."

"Red! It's Felix. You said you'd let me have some fabber time at your house?"

"Yeah, but it better be good... did you just email a design?"

"Oh it's so good it's..."

"You just recreated Canmephian technology, Felix, and you improved it. How many do you need?"

"Make nine. Send three up to the address I gave you. I'll pick up three myself. Have fun with the other three."

"Fun as in 'Get Terry to recommend a patent lawyer while I ask a similar one to patent it on the Canmephian side?'"

"I..."

Elder asked "Excuse me, but is this Ambassador RedWolf of Canmephia? I'm Athena Elder."

"MADAM ELDER!" RedWolf's voice said over the phone. "Why, Terry keeps reminiscing about you. I'll have to get your address and visit some day. I have yet been up to Metroburg. Felix tells me of the Caffeine Grande Apothecary and had me taste a sample roast."

"The same. Are you saying..."

"This is patentable tech next to my transgalatic telecom equipment. I know a few people interested in this. Hell, I got some time off. Lets do lunch next week. I'll bring the jewels myself. Felix, you're going to make a fortune."

"As long as we can wear it like a necklace."

"Or a choker. Just don't snap it. I'll make the jewels. Gotta go."

"Lates!" Vox said, and hung up.

"A choker you say?" Merlin asked.

"I always wanted a digital jewel." Vox purred.

Lucky Guess

"Nnnngggghhhh..." Vox rubbed his head with two hands at a local Baltimore bar.

"You okay?" Hayden asked with his right head, on Vox's left side. "That sounds bad."

"Migraine," Vox said. "It's a big one. Just came over. Nnnngggghhhh..."

Hayden's left head said "Barkeep! Cancel Felix's order here." Meanwhile, his right head looked around... "Damn, I don't have my medic bag..."

RedWolf, who happened to be in the same bar, came up and asked "Someone call for a medic?"

"Unless you got a kit..." Hayden started, before RedWolf held up a hand. Shi then stretched the neck of his tee down, and pulled out a Canmephian Medic's Kit from one of his cleavages.

Hayden, a bit shaken, asked "Who are you?"

"Rear Admiral RedWolf, Canmephian Military, Space and Medic side," RedWolf said with his left head while opening the kit up and grabbing a scanner. "I take it you're Doctor Dante Hayden of Metroburg?"

"Yes, I... How do you know..."

"The Canmephians are glad you're working on nanobot medical technology. We've been monitoring." RedWolf purred with his left head. His right purred "Okay Felix, hold still, let's see..." Shi moved a scanner over Vox's head on either side of his mohawk, holding the receiver part out for Hayden to see.

"Nnnnnghhhh... Feels like a pressure migraine..." Vox moaned.

"How much water have you been drinking, Felix?" Hayden asked.

"96 ounces? I don't know why... haven't hit the head all day."

RedWolf moved the scanner down Vox's body and around... "Ooooh... That's why." Shi commented.

Hayden looked... and said "Haven't seen that before. Heard of it. Damn... I'd need my kit to code up some custom nano to unblock that."

"I got that. A number nine." RedWolf tapped a few buttons, and out popped out a pill in a container. "Water for Felix here."

The barkeep placed a glass of iced water down in front of Vox. Vox then took the pill, and gulped it down, chasing it with the water, before feeling his head again. "Nnnngggghhhh... How long..."

"Give it five minutes. Meanwhile, Barkeep, Yeungling depth-charged with Everclear."

Hayden howled "WHAT? That's going to knock his right out!"

RedWolf said "That's the idea."

Vox moaned "Do it... NNNNNNNNNGGGGHHHHH...."

The barkeep errr'ed, and served it. RedWolf paid for the drink as Vox drank it down in one sitting.

"What does a number 9 do?"

"Other than clear the blockage and helps the kidneys work?"

Vox prffed, bolting straight up and heading straight to the rest room, closing the door behind him.

RedWolf grinned with all three heads and chimed "That. She'll be fine."

"Is she..." Hayden started to ask, pointing to the restroom.

"Draining. 96 ounces of water, after all. Let's talk about your nanobot architecture. Fan of the ol' 6502 chip?"

Hayden and RedWolf chatted for a while, until after several flushes, Vox came out.

"How 'ya feeling?" Hayden said as Vox sat back down between him and RedWolf.

"Much better." Vox said. "Migraine's gone, and I'm considerably lighter. Question, though."

"Yes?"

Vox turned to RedWolf and asked "How did you know to spike a Yeungling beer and not some other?"

RedWolf grinned thrice over. "Lucky guess."

I Remember it All

Killer stared at his coffee, sitting in a booth at the Caffeine Grande Apothecary. Shi thought of his first trip, his first stranding... a portal from one world to another.

A quick trip, they said. A milk run. Nothing more. But shi was held in Romania and "tortured..."

Heh, Killer smiled. Torture wasn't the word. Shi was wine and dine so much that shi spilled his guts in front of a UN researcher... and that researcher pulled a lot of strings and a lot of favors.

Getting a "research facility" in Metroburg. Getting his identity and primary job in the Immigration and Naturalization Services. Some additional training. Finding Norse and getting his straightened out. Killer smiled, before taking another sip of coffee.

Now, shi's part of a rock and roll band, partly as a cover to find who else was stranded. Cass had come as well. It was a bit of an open secret. All one had to do was probe public records. Shi had "challenged" Hayden to do it... and from the paperwork next to his, it ended up being Vox taking it on.

CeeGee came up to Killer in the booth and asked "Everything okay, Karen? Can I get you anything?"

Killer said, "Heh... yeah, can I borrow your pen?"

"Sure!" CeeGee said, and handed one over. Killer took it, signed the paperwork marked "INFORMATION RELEASE APPROVAL" on it, and handed it back.

"Thanks," Killer said.

"What's that for, if you don't mind me asking?" CeeGee asked.

"Freedom of Information Request for some public records," Killer said.

"Basically, ancient memories. I remember it all."

Keyhole Sweater

Yukon stood out on the balcony of her hotel in Toronto, staring at the city and one of the Great Lakes. It was a frigid day, so cold that everybody needed to be bundled up hard...

...except the snow leopards. Yukon, being one, chose to dress in just a sweater, jeans, and boots. That's all she needed... save for a thermos of coffee that she drank from.

From there, she just watched the scenery, the city hussle and busle, working through the cold spell. Trains and trolleys going back and forth. All she did was just take it in.

"Excuse me, miss?" an older lady, all bundled up, asked. Yukon turned a head to see the lady, before turning to face her. A cheetah face showed in the snowsuit.

"Oh, don't mind me." Yukon said.

"Uh... aren't you cold?" the lady asked.

"Nah. My fur's so dense that it's like insulation with a high R-factor."

"Even with..." the lady pointed to Yukon's three breasted chest, exposed by the design of the sweater.

"Oh yes." Yukon purred, waving a hand. "Don't worry about me. This is very comfortable weather for me, even in my sweater. You should see me in concert!"

The elder cheetah lady blinked, and then remembered who Yukon was.

"Ooooh, I have your CD's. They remind me of my youth. I'm sorry to have bothered you, dear."

"Oh, it's no bother at all. Thank you for checking," Yukon purred with a smile.

"Thank you." the elder cheetah said, and continued on with her day.

Yukon purred, and looked. Yep, this was a very comfortable keyhole sweater.

Track-side *Susurrus*

Vox leaned against the ad sign at Baltimore Penn Station, waiting for the train home. Shi had been delayed at the office twice and ended up having to wait for an all-local run.

Meanwhile, a few people on another platform two tracks over looked, staring at Vox. They stood there, staring, wondering. Three of them crowded together and in hushed tones asked questions among themselves.

"How does shi walk like that?"

"Where does shi get clothing?"

"Hir back must hurt bad..."

"What is with those ears..."

"Could shi even hear us?"

Vox waved at the three. They straightened up, watching hir point at hir ears with one hand, while another two pulled out a wired pair of headphones leading to hir satchel, and a third pulled out hir cell phone. The three gasped as Vox tapped hir phone, and showed a scrolling sign.

"Get to know me better -- [throng.band/who_is?vox](#)" scrolled by three times before Vox's train came. Shi turned to the opposite track, and boarded the train.

The three stared as the train left the station. One then pulled out her cell phone and tapped in the given link... to see an exact match of the person they observed. She shared it with the others.

And as their train came up to take them north, they swooned.

Back on Vox's train, Vox smiled... and then got an idea. Shi pulled out hir tablet, folded it out of the keyboard case, and started writing a new song idea... tentatively naming it "Track-side Susurrus."

Bigger Ruler

Lights walked into a small bar in Baltimore, and happened upon Vox and Hayden. "Gentlemen," he said, and sat next down.

"Oh hey Tony!" Hayden said. "How's..."

"She got a craving for crabs... here."

Vox turned and asked "Here? Sahari's up at Fadley's?"

Lights shook his head. "No, she's up at a nearby hotel. We bought six crab cakes and she's snoozing off the orgy now."

Vox and Hayden looked at each other for a moment, and then turned back to Lights. "Um..." Vox started, "I think you best get a pregnancy kit."

"You're saying I..."

Vox and Hayden all nodded.

"Tiger wolf hybrid..." Hayden mused, "that's going to be..."

"Wait. Is that even possible?" Lights asked.

"Can't you simulate that with current medical tech, Dante?" Vox asked in response.

Hayden started to open his mouths, then closed them and thought... "You know, it's possible. Folks never had traced which genes go where and how they'd mesh. I think... Hold on a minute..." He then pulled out a phone and started frantically searching his email.

"Oh boy," Lights said. "Barkeep, your local IPA. I just unintentionally excited my friend here."

Vox looked as the barkeep acknowledged the order, and said "What were you going to talk about?"

"Well... I keep wondering about various back-room parties and whatnot, some intimate gatherings... and what herms do..."

"Errr...." Vox started to hesitate.

"Fe-lix..." Lights said...

"Me, Karen, and Valhalla had a private party while on tour, and... Valhalla got interested in some... anatomy statistics."

Hayden put a hand on Vox and said "Good word choice."

"Well, you know how big Tygris, Ethan, and Chuck are. Valhalla's got a size kink. Michael's matching Valhalla... and shi wanted to see how big I was."

"How..." Lights started to say as the barkeep give him his beer, followed with "I never got invited..."

"I think there's minimums, and shi respects the privacy of others. Valhalla keeps it on the down low and very close to the heart."

"Heh... surprising from Valhalla's open relationship. So... no pressure, refuse to answer if you think I'm prying, but... did you make the mark?"

Vox took a drink of his beer, and said with a grin "Shi needed to get a bigger ruler."

Start a *Convoy*

"She's a looker, isn't she?" Hauler said, opening up the garage to reveal a piece of history.

"Michael, you..." Norse said, wondering as shi felt the sides of well preserved, classic silver-sides Greyhound bus. "But I haven't seen one of these in like... forever!"

"But I have one. I take it out on a trip every year, and this year..."

"It runs?"

"Oh yes. The engine in the back is a reserve diesel. It's primary's a hyper-efficient motor/generator setup, and it'll plow through six feet of snow like nothing. It'll easily go from here to Key West and back."

"Baltimore. No, Washington! Let's visit Mussi."

"You sure, Val?" Hauler said, coming up and kissing Norse's left head.

"After that wild ride I gave you," Norse said, "I think you need some time under your control."

"Oh yes. Let me show you inside first, but I warn you about one thing about this bus."

Norse looked at Hauler incredulously. "What? This one's haunted?"

"Worse," Hauler said with a grin as he opened the door with a key. "This one tends to start a convoy."

That First Deer

Mussi drove her Jeep, carefully squeezing through traffic. She and her fathers Nathu and Tolta had just finished up hitting all the farmer's markets in Baltimore. With a vehicle stuffed full of veggies, Mussi had thought to take some back routes.

"Tell me again why you chose this way?" Nathu asked.

"Sometimes you need to get out and explore," Mussi said, turning onto a back road. "It helps rest the mind and spark some inspiration."

"I'd say," Tolta said. "These... we never had trees like this back in Africa. And so many!"

"Yes, we're going through a forest now," Mussi said, navigating the small two-lane road. "The local government designated areas of preservation."

Tolta became transfixed over the landscape, while Nathu asked "Do we have to return this vehicle?"

"Oh no," Mussi said, driving through rolling hills and windy roads. "I bought the Jeep from the prize money I got from my photojournalism. I'm not going to knock landing in a career that aligns with my passion."

"Photos..."

"Snapshots of time, place, memory. Copied into a recognizable form. I'll have to BRACE!" Mussi slammed on the brakes as a large creature crossed in front of the vehicle. She brought the Jeep to a safe stop feet before the critter staring right at them.

"WHAT..." Tolta started.

"Deer." Mussi said. She turned off the headlights, letting the doe recover and bounce off back into the forest.

"Whoa..." Nathu and Tolta said. "That..."

"That was a deer," Mussi said, turning back on the Jeep's headlights and slowly starting back up. "They seem to be more active at this time."

"Never have I seen..." Nathu started. "That's a deer?"

"Yep. Feral wild deer."

"I thought lions were troublesome..."

"Nah, you get cougars here, sometimes called mountain lions. Also wolves and coyotes, and some other big cats."

"That point you made about getting out more?" Tolta asked.

"Yes daddies?"

"I think that deer punctuated it."

Nathu bleated "deer" in a bit of shock as they drove on. Mussi grinned with a head, and held one of their hands for the rest of the trip home.

Lawsuit Generating Device: The *Musical*!

The pitch movie ended and a voice on the teleconference said "What do you think?"

"***NYET NYET NYET NYET NYET***," Yukon trailed off. Norse squealed, joined by Hauler and Archer. Killer hissed. Stereo hissed. Cass hissed. Coils hissed. Rails and Blacklight hissed. Lights howled.

"Almost everyone is in disagreement." Elder said of the teleconference. "Hayden?"

Hayden and Vox were in the same room, Vox's laptop showing the visuals from the teleconference. Vox looked at Hayden, who said "I have Vox here in the room. It is taking all my effort to not devolve into a primal condemnation of what I just saw. Vox, your opinion?"

"Are you sure?" Vox asked.

"Yes, Vox. Please." Elder asked over the phone.

"Everyone else, mute yourselves." Vox started. "Because mere words cannot describe how much an abomination of a documentary this is. In fact, this is not a documentary, this is a hit piece. This takes Michael Moore's movies, blows it past 11, damages the equipment, and slags everything in it's path. Horrible doesn't even put it lightly. I'd rather watch 'Manos, the Hands of Fate' over this, this, this hell spawn waste of film. Not even removing the audio will help this. I now need to throw my laptop into molten lava to put it out of the misery of carrying that... I can't even call that video or even media. Just how many bad tropes did you employ in this? Movie in a movie in a movie? What is this, 'This is Spinal Tap: The Ride: The Screen Play: The Movie: The After-school Special: The Merchandise: The Musical?!?' No, this is not a documentary. This is a lawsuit creation device. This is bad and you should feel bad.

GHAAAAAAHHH!

"Do I make myself clear? I *CAN* go on."

"Who invited this gawd-damn critic here?" The presenter's voice said. "I swear all critics must die, and you're the first one on my list."

Vox held up a finger, and paused for a minute, before saying "You do realize that two lawyers are in the conference, and you have eight witnesses listening to it?"

"You can't file charges against me, I'm the greatest film maker ever!"

"And I'm Athena Elder," Elder started. "And it's too late. You've already violated our negotiation contract. This call, per that contract, is recorded. Permission to make the documentary of Throng and Station to Station 2 is denied. Any further work will be penalized per the contract. This call is terminated."

The conference room phone indicated that it hung up. Vox flumped back into his chair.

Hayden asked "Lawsuit Creation Device?"

Vox chimed with a grin "***THE MUSICAL!***"

Like Clockwork

CeeGee looked at the wall clock. It read 1:55pm. It was a Sunday afternoon and the church-going regulars at her coffee shop had finished up and left. However, one regular was due.

The triplicated lion did a quick stretch and then started brewing the regular's regular drink -- a triple-shot blueberry latte, hold the whip. It took a while to make, but timed just right, it would be ready by the time the regular came in.

One of her assistants, a four-armed, double-mouthed pine martin, noticed and said "Aren't you..."

"Watch, Tammy," CeeGee said.

The clock hit 2pm. Kali stumbled in from next door, mumbling a greeting in gibberish as CeeGee finished. CeeGee handed Kali the drink, who took a sip... another... then started fully downing the drink.

"CeeGee?" Tammy asked.

"Wait," CeeGee said with the lion's left head, holding out a finger.

Kali finished the drink, took a breath, and sighed. "Oooh I needed that," she said, and pulled out her wallet. "Was that number nine?"

"Nope," CeeGee said with her right head. "That's your free tenth. Hand over your card."

Kali pulled out the loyalty card, and it was fully punched. "Huh, you're right. Here. Going to need another card. Got gigs lined up every Saturday night for the next few months."

CeeGee traded cards and purred "Sure. I'll let my supplier know to get a fresh blend for them. Same time?"

Kali nodded. "Yep. You know me. Can I get a sausage, egg, and cheese on an English muffin, or is it too late?"

Tammy said "On it. Question, though. Why do you always come in at 2pm on a Sunday?"

Kali yawned, and said "It's 2pm? I kinda got to bed late..."

CeeGee purred "You mean you crashed on the couch upstairs at 3am or so, and just woke up?"

Kali murred "Yeah, long night at the club. Really mixed it good."

Tammy tilted her head a bit while a male version of the pine martin came out with the breakfast sandwich, freshly made and ready to go. "Huh?"

"I do music remixes," Kali said as she pulled a soda out from the case and a twenty dollar bill from her wallet to pay for it all. "I'll drop last night's performance onto the share, CeeGee, in a few."

"I'll make sure all the Tams and Toms listen," CeeGee said.

"All of them?" Kali said.

"Nah, all of them are me," Tammy said. "I got bops in San Jose, Portland, Vancouver, and a few in Baltimore now. That's the music you play Monday afternoons, CeeGee?"

CeeGee nodded, saying "Yep. It helps gather the Monday crowd."

Kali purred "That good, huh?"

CeeGee replied with "Like clockwork."

Feather Quill

Elder sat at her desk, and continued reviewing documents.

She shook her head. Three cases involving Throng now, on top of her regular work load. But Elder could handle it -- training, experience, and discipline over the decades has given her the techniques to do so.

The class action against a for-profit hospital system went into settlement talks... and they weren't going well. The lawyer involved, Lager, asked for help. He thought the proposed settlement papers were heavy-handed towards the defendants, the management company for that for-profit hospital system. As she reviewed the documents, she concluded he was right. They were pulling a fast one. Elder opened up her laptop and shot Lager an email detailing the issues, along with her fee schedule as requested.

The lawyer for Hayden's ex-girlfriend sent over paperwork with an "apology" settlement. The ex was drunk at the time when she was arrested. Elder sighed, and read through it. The ex's lawyer proposed full alcoholism detox and therapy, at a facility of Hayden's choosing. Elder knew which one from a list Hayden provided, and sent it off to the ex's lawyer and the prosecutor.

And finally, the documentary company received the violation notice. The courier noted that the notice was shredded on receipt, so Elder opened up some prepared filings, found the right one, and printed it off. She got up, stretched all the way out (thankful for the two story tall office) and went over to the laser printer in the other room, finishing up the job.

Archer came by and said "Are we going to court on that... thing?"

Elder muttered "The garbage film needs a temporary restraining order. I have the case ready to go already including the petition for the TRO. I just need to sign it, scan it back in, and send it off electronically." She gathered the paperwork and headed back to her desk.

There, a bottle of ink and an elegant pen stood. She turned to the right page, then opened the bottle of ink. With a dip, then a stroke, she signed

the lawsuit petition and the TRO petition, before letting it dry. Capping the ink bottle, she sighed.

"Old memory coming back, Athena?" Archer asked.

Elder sighed, "Very old. Things have changed over the centuries. I remember signing papers similar to this with a feather quill."

Get *Out* of the Bus

An old Silversides bus spewing smoke parked right outside a gas station near Vox's home, right in front of Vox refueling hir car. The pump stopped, the car's tank full, almost immediately afterwards. "Huh... perfect timing," thought Vox.

The bus opened and spilled out Norse and Hauler. Vox noticed as shi replaced the pump, tapped "no receipt," and went over to render aid.

Norse coughed "Smoke... fire..."

Hauler spat out "Engine exhaust!" between heavy breaths.

Vox quickly rushed to hir car, and popped the trunk. Shi grabbed a gas mask and a fire extinguisher. Quickly shi put it on, and rushed into the bus to turn it off. The smoke stopped pouring out. Shi came back out, and assisted Norse and Hauler to the side. Meanwhile, an ambulance showed up from the nearby fire station, and medics came over to assist. A fire truck also came over, a pumper, a minute late.

Vox waved over to the fire fighters, taking hir mask off. They came over and asked "What's going on?"

"Engine trouble," Vox said. "Exhaust may be blocked. Driver and passenger are out and..." Shi leaned over, seeing Norse and Hauler get some oxygen therapy. "...medics got them. Diesel Silversides bus. I think I know how to open it up."

"Open it up, we'll grab the ABC extinguisher," one of the firemen, a dalmatian, said.

Hauler whinnied and said to the medic "That did the trick, I'm... FELIX! Middle first, then sides! Catch is under the license plate!"

"Gotcha Mike!" Vox yelled back, and shi carefully opened the engine bay up fully. Inside... no fire, no smoke, nothing.

"You know this vehicle?" the fireman said.

"Of these vehicles. Youtube channel 'Bus Grease Monkey' is worth a watch. Let me see... I need a flashlight..."

The fireman shone a light on the engine, tracing what looked like the exhaust back up and into the roof... but there looked like to be some damage near the exit port. The fireman directed his partner, a female hyena, to grab a ladder and look at the exhaust port. She did so, and reported "You got smoked squirrel here!"

"WHAT?!?" Hauler squealed.

Vox yelled back. "Blocked exhaust, Michael. She's not going anywhere less we get her towed."

"Ugh... where are we..."

Vox said to the fire fighters "If you can unblock that exhaust port, I can call a neighbor to get it towed nearby."

"Not a prob," the hyena fire fighter said, and proceeded to carefully fish out the blockage.

Vox walked back over to Norse and Hauler on the other side of the bus. "How they're doing?"

"Minor smoke inhalation," the medic said, a four-armed, double-mouthed pine martin, joined by the local fire chief. "They're be fine in a few minutes."

"Felix," Norse asked, "What are you doing here?"

"I live nearby. Heh... looks like I have house guests. Let me pull the car out to a parking spot and I'll call a neighbor to have it towed."

"You don't have to..."

"It's not a bother. I'm near by. Besides, it looks like you needed to get out of that bus."

Reactions to the *Verdict*

"The Supreme Court has upheld the conviction of the former President. First in the nation's history will a President of the United States be executed under the law."

Yukon blinked thrice as she entered the bar where Vox, Hayden, and RedWolf were at. "Oh oh..." Yukon muttered.

"Tundra!" Hayden called over. "Over here, by Felix!" Vox turned and waved. RedWolf, having shrunk down, noticed and vacated a bar stool for Yukon.

Yukon took the seat and asked "Am I..."

"Are you Miss Tundra Yukon of Throng?" RedWolf asked in return.

"Yes." Yukon said, looking worried.

"Admiral RedWolf, Canmephian Ambassador to this planet." RedWolf said. "You're safe, nobody will harm you."

"Knowing RedWolf here, there's already a file on you back at the Embassy." Vox commented.

"Given that the band's been granted a permanent resident status up there, yes. I know about Madam Yukon. If there was a problem, we wouldn't of granted even a visa."

"Yes, but..." Yukon said, before nodding to the television.

"OH!" Vox said. "Nah, RedWolf's got your back. You're fine."

"Can you catch me up? This is the first time I heard of this?"

Vox took a drink of his beer and started "Well, it all traces it back down to Russia."

"Ugh," Yukon said. "What are they trying to pull now? I'm going to need a rum and Coke..."

Vox waved to a barkeep, who nodded and poured Yukon's drink. Shi then said "Well, Russia interfered with the election again, and this time they caught it early. They were going through five countries, and the courts had

ordered a Internet-wide block on them during the election. There was a ton of arrests leading to conviction of Russian agents, followed by impeachment of the President and full removal. Afterwards they found evidence of treason, and that's been going through the system."

"Treason?"

Vox purred "The full list of crimes was treason, obstruction, bribery, tax evasion, abuse of the judicial system, military code violations, and violations of the Presidential Records Act. The first one alone carries the death penalty."

RedWolf added "And this time, there was an air-tight case all up and down, and they also impeached the Vice President and some members of his cabinet."

"This Supreme Court..."

"Highest court of the United States." Vox said. "High respect."

"They take their lumps when needed." RedWolf purred.

"So what's next..." Yukon said, before the television broke into the conversation.

"BREAKING NEWS: THIS JUST IN. THE FORMER PRESIDENT HAS TAKEN HIS OWN LIFE IN DEFIANCE OF THE SUPREME COURT."

Everyone looked at the screen in horror, slack-jawed. Vox said "The reactions to the verdict, I guess. I'm going to need something stronger."

Preserve the Music

"Felix, can you do something for me?" rang the voice of Kali, the producer of Throng's records. She had called Vox with a concern from her music shop and recording studio's offices. Elder had joined her, and shared the same concern.

"Depends, Kali," Vox replied over the phone.

"I'm kinda worried about the music on our site going away. I want to have it available forever."

"All of it? I think Elder needs to be involved."

Elder said "I am here, Felix. I share the same concerns."

"I take it this is outside of the thirty day backup we have on the sites?" Vox replied over the speaker.

"Yes." both Elder and Kali said.

Vox started with "Hmmm... There's an option, but there are concerns about copyright. Kali, have you heard of the Internet Archive?"

"I have." Kali replied. "There's some good tunes that I've used for mix-ups."

Vox said "I think having a Throng and Plur Audio repository on the Archive will be our best bet. How are sales going, then?"

"Gangbusters. If we stop now, the projections go out to ten years before sales die."

"Lets do this. Ten years out from record release, we start checking sales records. If they have died off, then we cut off sales and release that record to the public off the Internet Archive. If sales are still going strong, assuming the band is still around, then it's kept off the Archive. The limit is 75 years, and we release the copyright to the Archive.

"Athena and Terry will have off-site backups of all the sites. I'll send some equipment up to do that, and instruction on how to access it and perform the submission, given the longevity of *some* people."

"I'll run this by Cori, Felix." Elder said. "And also contact Terry and a few other lawyers. You may have some more equipment to build."

"I'll send over a bill of materials. I already have a prototype here."

"I'll touch base with you on some stuff I can't copyright, Felix," Kali said. "I bet we can prime the pump on this."

"Sure! Not a problem. We may want to push out the radio edits as well to combat piracy. Just a few songs with a message 'Hey, we know you like us. Why not support us in making more music! Visit [throng.band](#) for details.'"

"We'll check with everyone on that, if I can find out where they are."

"Baltimore. Most of them are here, save Karen and Cass. If they were here..."

Kali purred, "Next thing you know, it's the 'Preserve the Music' tour."

Vox purred "Good one!"

Rotten Mess

"*ALL RISE!*" the baliff said in Metroburg's district court as the judge, a chimera, entered. "*THE COURT IS NOW IN SESSION BEFORE THE HONORABLE JUDGE ENZO PANAGOPULOS!*"

Everyone stood up, from Elder on the Plaintiff side, to the lawyers for the disaster-in-waiting documentary director, to the galley were Killer, Cass, and Merlin were among some journalists.

"Be seated," Judge Panagopulos said as he banged his gavel to open the session. As everyone sat back down, the judge's lion head continued, "As you know, this will be recorded and transcribed, so please be respectful of the proceedings.

"This court has reviewed the filings of counsel and believe that some rulings are required before proceeding.

"Mr. Frothenslosh! In regards to your motion to quash the temporary restraining order, I have seen many of a well written argument. Yours is pure garbage, and I have written numerous times about your due diligence. No more. Your motion is denied.

"I have also reviewed your various other motions. They too border on the insanity best described as being from a Sovereign Citizen. They are also denied."

"*YOUR HONOR!*" the lawyer, a swarmy looking fox, spat out.

The judge's goat head added "You are out of order, Mr. Frothenslosh. Any further outbursts and you will be held in contempt."

The judge's lion head continued "I had also issued an order to show cause for your lack of due diligence and care in this matter. You had responded but not answered as so ordered. Therefore I am removing your recognition from this court and referring you to the state judicial disciplinary board for further consideration."

The lawyer opened his mouth, then closed it again, and slumped in his seat, shaking his head. His partner, a proper vixen, stood up and asked "May I speak, your honor?"

"Yes, Mrs. Burton," the judge's goat head replied.

"My client wishes to move for a delay so that I can take over the case and perform a proper analysis. We ask for no more than three business days."

"Mrs. Elder?"

Elder stood up and said "While we would stipulate that the temporary restraining order be kept in effect, we have received evidence that it has been violated. A third party has been hired to produce an animated version. I have filed a motion to include them in the temporary restraining order and a motion for a finding of contempt of court."

Mrs. Burton looked at the director, a swarmy black panther, who muttered "I shred those things. They are no concern to me and my genius."

"THEN MAKE IT YOUR CONCERN!" the judge roared with all three heads. *"YOU ARE IN CONTEMPT OF COURT. OFFICER, ARREST THE DEFENDING COUNCIL'S CLIENT. YOU ARE TO BE HELD IN A MAXIMUM SECURITY FACILITY UNTIL YOU LEARN THE RESPECT OF THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM. MRS. ELDER, YOUR MOTIONS ARE GRANTED."*

The burly canine officers came over and arrested the director, and hauled him out. His last words saying *"A POX ON YOU AND YOUR ROTTEN PROCESS! I AM THE BEST DIRECTOR IN THE MMRRRRRFFFF!"* before being gagged with a tennis ball and lead away.

The judge banged his gavel again. *"SILENCE!"* This court has enough trouble blowing out the microphones with MY roaring." He signed with all his heads and said "Mrs. Elder, I think a week with the temporary restraining order in place will be better off. Don't you agree?"

Elder said "Given the handful that Mrs. Burton has, I agree as well."

"So be it. Mrs. Burton, you have until next week, in which we will have a status conference. Please be timely with your filings."

"Thank you, your honor," Mrs. Burton said.

"This case is hereby placed on the step docket until next week." The judge said, banging his gavel once again. The vixen then grabbed her associate and lead him out of the courtroom.

The judge shook his heads. With the goat head, he said "Is there a Mastress Merlin Trent in the courtroom?"

Merlin rose up and said "Yes, your honor! May I be recognized?"

"That you are! Step up to the podium here. I hear that you have completed your immigration and naturalization in rather quick fashion, but the Immigration and Naturalization service has found no fault to prevent you. Therefore, please raise your upper right hand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance."

Merlin did so, perfectly.

The lion head of the judge then said "I hereby order Mastress Merlin Trent, immigrant of the United Kingdom, to be granted dual citizenship with the United States of America. Congratulations."

Confused, Merlin looked around as the judge got up off his seat, and chuffed "Your daughter can now hug you. This court is adjourned." He banged the gavel one more time and stepped down to the galley of the court.

Meanwhile, Elder hugged Merlin from behind. "Congrats, daddy!"

The judge came up and shook Merlin's hands. "I'm sorry for that rotten mess we had to deal with."

"Oh I've seen worse." Merlin said.

A Bone to Pick

A French black panther had been struggling, trying to get out of the gag and straitjacket. Had... until the medics came in, strapped him down hard, and sedated him.

Lieutenant Dee Cee, a psychologist doctor with the Canmephian Medical Corps, laid her hand on his head... and instantly retracted it. She rushed to the door and yelled "GET REDWOLF NOW!!!"

"What's the situation?" RedWolf said, three-pawing into the Infirmary's psycho unit.

Commander Honeycut, a three eyed, six eared, six armed male Dryger in lab coat and scrubs, handed RedWolf a tablet computer/clip board, or digiboard. "Male black panther native, late 40s. Court ordered 3.666 from Metroburg, California. Judge said he went off the rails three times and the local hospital recommended us."

RedWolf read through the documentation, hooked into the local wireless network, and read though it again in the background. Shi then walked over to Dee, who was sitting down, being tended to by a nurse.

"You okay, Dee? What happened?" RedWolf said.

"I went to scan this guy," Dee moaned, thumbing to the sedated black panther, "And his head's full of too much legal mumbo jumbo and it made no sense even inside anyone's mindscape. Does the words 'Sovereign Citizen' mean anything to you?"

RedWolf recoiled for a moment, and said "You were right to escalate to me. I'm taking over your patient. BJ, here, take this." Shi handed the digiboard back to the commander and went inside, rolling up hir sleeves. Shi then slowly placed all six hands on the black panther's head.

The panther's body jerked, paused, and jerked again. It then shuddered and jerked one more time before visibly relaxing.

"There there now, you understand now." RedWolf purred in surround sound with all three heads. "Now I'm going to take my hands off and take off the gag. You'll be groggy." Shi then slowly took his hands off, one at a time, before moving with grace over and removing the gag in the black panther's mouth. The panther's eyes slowly opened, and he yawned.

"How are you doing?" RedWolf said.

"Ugh..." the panther said. "Thank you for taking the time to sit with me and... how long was I out?"

"Two hours. I only spent five minutes with you, though. Time in headspace is a bit compressed."

"I'll need to talk to my lawyer, Mr. Semaphore, over in Brooklyn, New York. That documentary film's not going to be made, period."

"Not Mrs. Burton in Metroburg?"

"I have to get them together on the contract matter, give them some info. I have a bone to pick with that financier."

They Called Him *Stretch*

"Oh my...." a male maned wolf looked at himself in a reportedly full-length mirror. He felt himself as his body finally matched his arms and legs.

Hayden, in scrubs and lab coat, stood by with a few students of nanobiotic medicine along with some psychologists in a large patient room of the Johns Hopkins Medical Center in Baltimore. He gave the maned wolf some time to get reacquainted with himself.

The maned wolf then snaked his head down and around, being a bit dragon-ish with is lengthy body. "Oh my, I'm a noodle now. Oooh this is great!"

"How's the new bod rocking, Troy?" Hayden asked.

The maned wolf snaked his head around behind himself, looking at the group. He answered "Much better. Clothing though..."

"Go to Gwen's in the Inner Harbor. They got you covered."

"Oh nice..."

"We'll have you run a few tests here on the treadmill to check your heart and whatnot. You'll have to duck under some door frames."

"That's fine. It's a small price to pay for not dragging my knuckles against the floor. Plus... it helps where I'm at."

"Oh? Took time off from your job? Where is that?"

"Tree farm up I-83 near the PA line. They need a bigger person for some of the trees. Now all I need to do is muscle up a bit."

"Hope there's some good gyms up there. I'm only privy to a few back in Metroburg and various hotels."

Troy grinned as he turned fully towards the crowd. "True, but then, I get to live up to my nickname."

Hayden hummed and asked "The obvious, aka 'Stretch'?"

Troy grinned and nodded.

Hyper Hourglass (extra)

Cori dialed Hayden's cell phone and popped it on speaker from her desk in the law office-slash-band headquarters. She let it ring a bit before Hayden picked up.

"Hayden speaking." was voice from the hound.

"Dante, it's Cori." Cori said. "I got some bad news."

"Band or ex-girlfriend?"

"The latter."

"**SIGH** what did she do now?"

"The rehab clinic called, then the lawyer. Your ex has been committed."

"How is this bad news?"

"They're asking for an expert to roll back her... changes."

"And they're asking for me?"

"Yes. And that's not the worst part. Where are you?"

"Local bar in Baltimore that Felix frequents. Not a bad little dive. Good steak. Felix is next to me."

"You're going to need a stiff drink for this one. I'm sending you the... work safe version." Cori tapped a few keys and sent a photo over email.

"Work safe version... don't tell me *OH MY GAWD WHAT THE HELL DID SHE DO?!?!?*"

Vox was heard "What's going on Dante *HHHHHHHHYYYY WHAT THE... BARKEEP, I NEED A PAN GALATIC GARGLE BLASTER, STAT!...* You don't know how to make one?!? Do you have Jack Daniels, peach schnapps, Blue Curacao, and orange juice?!?... Here's how. Fill a glass 3/4ths full with ice. 1 ounce of Jack Daniels. Half an ounce of Peache schnapps. Half an ounce of Blue Curacao. Top it off with OJ and stir. Give it to Dante here, and make one for me."

"NNNNGGGGHHHHH Did a court order her to be committed?" Hayden asked.

"Yes, Dante." Cori said carefully.

"Metroburg has her original DNA. Let her guardian know. They can roll her back if... those aren't implants."

"Let me check... no, they aren't, but she's got active nano in there. They're trying to find out what type."

"Ugh, we need to disable that..."

Vox said "Electro-Magnetic Pulse. I'll be surprised if she's mobile... and can talk."

Silence came over the line, before Hayden said "Yeah, EMP and then the full flush round. I'll fire it off over email before I scrub my brain of this image. Ghah... this is the very definition of hyper hourglass duck-face."

"HEY!" someone quacked over the phone. "I object to that... oh. Eeeecchhhh. I object to *that*. Let me buy you a drink..."

Travel (extra)

Killer face-palmed backstage at the phone call shi had gotten. "Aww crap."

Vox heard, and came up with Yukon. "What's going on, Killer?"

"The opening band canceled just now. Right at the last minute. They're due to go on stage in five."

"What happened to them?" Vox asked.

"Arrested, dunno what for. Their mother called. I don't know what I'm going to do."

Vox though, and said "Let me try something on stage. Yukon, can I have you come and provide some musical feedback? Maybe with the keytar?"

"Sure!" Yukon said, and went over to grab the instrument.

Killer shook hir head, and keyed up hir radio. "Stereo, Killer. The opening band stiffed us. Vox is going out with Yukon. Key up Vox and Yukon's keytar."

"Killer, Stereo. Copy." Stereo said over the radio as Vox quickly discussed the plan to Yukon.

"Get ready!" Killer said as Yukon came back. "It's about to go in three! Two! One!" Killer then pointed out.

Vox started with an announcer voice. "LADIES AND GENTLEMAN. OPEN YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS, TO THE ONE AND ONLY..."

Yukon then played a scratch sound on hir keytaur.

Vox shifted to a 9 year old girl and said "It's just a..."

Yukon yelled in surround sound "KIIIIITTTTTTYYYYYY!!!!"

Vox hoofed it out on stage, skidding to a stop in front of a microphone facing the rear of the stage. The crowd cheered, making hir turn around and face the sell-out crowd.

"Whooooooooooooooooawwwwww..." Vox said. "You all are loaded to bear. I got some good news and some bad news. Bad news, the opener canceled on everyone minutes ago."

Boos came over the crowd. Vox let the boos go for a few minutes before motioning everyone to quiet down.

"Instead, if you'll indulge me, I'd like to tell a story. To help with that, I've asked Yukon to come out and add some humor. Yukon, everybody!"

Yukon came out with the keytar, plugged in, and started up "Once Upon the Time." Vox started singing to warm the crowd up.

Vox completed the song and said "Thank you everyone. Now not only do I do covers, well... gimmie a cheer if you flew in by airplane."

A good-size cheer came out.

"Awesome, because I got to get this out of my head. You see, before I became Vox, I was this good ol' geek programmer, making decent money."

Yukon played a few bars of the Beverly Hills Cop theme, and said "You still are, Vox."

Vox pointed a thumb towards Yukon and said "The band told me never to quit my day job. That said, for vacations I would fly out to various sci-fi conventions. The conventions were great... but the trip to and back... now that is an adventure!"

"AD-VENT-URRRRRREEEE!" Yukon yelled out.

"Thank you Captian. One year I was headed to Pittsburgh from my home near Baltimore. I was weary of the new airline who's hub is at Baltimore Washington Thurgold Marshal Airport, so I went with an online discount travel agency."

"Teeny Weeny Airlines?" Yukon asked.

"You'd wish." Vox countered. "The flight was booked Baltimore, Atlanta, Pittsburgh. I had to go south to go west. The return flight was the reverse. I booked months in advance. Decently cheap. I should be set. Nothing bad would happen."

Yukon then played the intro bars to the Imperial March.

"Yeah. Right. I get a call at work from a number I didn't recognize, so I shoved it into voice mail until I got a chance to review it. And the beauty of iPhones is that at the time they transcribed the message... and I saw it was the travel agency trying to contact me about a canceled flight."

Yukon played a "Oh-oh."

"So I called back and talked to the travel agency and rebooked through Charlotte. Everything was okay. It would be fiiiine."

Yukon played the Imperial March again, gathering a few laughs.

"Apparently Yukon's been there. I get another call, and I pick it up. It's the travel agency and the agent, in a thick Oriental accent said 'Mr. Vox, your airline has canceled your return flight, would you like to rebook?'" Vox imitated the voice.

Yukon played a record scratching sound.

"Why yes, I'd love to rebook." Vox said. "I can rebook you through LaGuadia.' Yes yes, just do it. 'Okay you are rebooked. Have a nice day.' Yeah, you too. CLICK." Vox then rolled his eyes and said "That two things wrong. Want to put money on their being more?"

"So, day of the flight. I get to the airport, go up to the check in counter. They have you go and do it on touch screens. So I tap in my reservation number..."

BZZZT! Yukon triggered a buzzer.

Vox shook his head. "Nothing, couldn't find it. Use my credit card."

BZZZT!

"Nothing," Vox said. "Flagged down an attendant with the reservation paperwork... and got the rudest response. 'NO! You're with this other airline!' But it says 'NO! Go! BYE!' Quite rude! So I schlepped my then fat bod over to the other airline's counter.

"Over there, I went to their own touch screens and tried the number again."

BZZZT!

"404 not found. Try my credit card,"

BZZZT!

"Bumpkiss. I talk to the sole lonely attendant and showed her the reservation. She works her magic, and finds... my canceled flight."

Yukon played the standard WAH Wah waaaaaahhhhhh sound.

Vox shook his head and continued. "So I'm approaching that state of confusion and incredulity. The attendant explained that the code share system between the two airlines didn't work all that well. She then says the equivalent of 'Hold my beer', takes the system by the throat, and chokes out an emergency boarding pass, Baltimore, Charlotte, Pittsburgh. She then rebooks my return flight, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Baltimore."

"Going up was good. Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, no problems. Philadelphia, Baltimore, I'm put on a Dash 8-300 twin turboprop that you have to exit the terminal onto the tarmac and then up stairs to get into. I'm in the first row." Vox spread his left hands out, one to his side splayed out. "The turbo prop is right outside my window. As this pond skipper of a plane takes off and my hearing starts dying, the immortal words from the Steve Miller Band run through my head."

Yukon started up "Jet Airliner" and Vox sung it out from memory. At the end, everyone cheered.

"Everyone love that?" Vox asked. Everyone cheered again.

"You want more?" Vox asked. Everyone cheered yes.

"Well you can't have any, because Throng's about to come out on stage and Yukon's gotta switch guitars. But rest assured from your ol' Uncle Vox, what I've said is true, one hundred and thirty-three percent!"

Vox put the microphone back on to everyone laughing and headed backstage with Yukon.

Back-stage, Killer looked at Vox, and said "Really?"

Yukon nodded "It was a good day when that airline was bought up and the code share killed. Train travel, outside the tour, has different issues... but that's another story."

Post Text - 2019

The timing of #NoNovelNovember couldn't have been more perfect. I had finished up writing and several rounds of editing *Throng: Going Station to Station*. The novel introduced the band and all the major characters in that realm, with some hints of the Canmephian universe. There were more stories to tell, and #NoNovelNovember would be an interesting exercise.

I got carried away (thus two extra stories plus a bit of a violation of the main rules).

The exercise was to take the word (which I highlighted in *italics*) assigned for each day and write a short scene (about 250 words). I ended up with each scene averaging 4 kilobytes in length, lending to the title *4K Scenery*. Unfortunately, it also means you'll need to read *Going Station to Station* first... which at the time of writing is about half-way done on Patreon... and Vox (Felix) hasn't been introduced yet.

Why not find out?

<http://throng.band>

<https://patreon.com/strredwolf>

-Kelly "STrRedWolf" Price

2019 Dec 1st

No Novel November - 2020

First in the Morning

The Caffeine Grande Apothecary coffee shop's owner walked over to the door, unlocked the door, and flipped the sign over to "Open". It was early Saturday morning. A light day, she thought as she turned her double-headed, six armed, three legged lioness frame on her middle leg, twin tails swishing through the air. Slowly, she walked back to behind the counter, and triggered the brewing of the regular medium roast. It would be a while for the first customer, she thought, easily putting on her coffee smock.

The thought proved untrue as a similar feline opened the door, dinging the chime. A reddish cougar, with the same number of limbs, same arrangement, but for not only a single headed sporting overly lengthy Anubian jackal-like ears, their lobes stretched, but nine tails, six in two groups of three and another group of three from the base of hir head. Shi came in hauling a backpack and a satchel.

"Vox?" the lioness said with a head. "What are you doing here?"

The cougar yawned in three voices, before saying "*Coffee.*" in a spooky choir.

The lioness checked... yes, enough was brewed already. "Question, Vox. How do you want it adulterated?" she asked.

Vox placed a hand on hir face, trying to think. "*Number of packets is half the number of ounces. Half sucralose, half sugar, favor the first.*" shi said.

"Give me a minute, Vox, I'll get you a big one." The lioness quickly measured out the sweeteners, before pouring the brown ambrosia into the largest available paper cup.

"*This has been a prerecorded message...*" Vox moaned tiredly.

The lioness finished pouring, mixing the coffee for good measure before capping it and handing it to Vox. "Here you go sweetie..."

Vox lifted it up... and drank it in one sitting. Hir eyes fluttered open. Hir face tightened up from it's tired droopiness. Slowly shi went from a shambling super-positioned zombie to an actual humanoid being. Shi was awake.

Vox shook hir head, flailing hir ears and head-tails back and forth. "Oh much better..." shi said with one voice. "Damn that was good, Ceegee. How much do I owe you?"

"\$3.50 plus an explanation of why you're here." Ceegee stated, ringing it up.

Vox pulled out hir phone to pay through it's built-in wallet. "Took the red-eye from Baltimore. Kali asked me to redo the vocals on the concept album in her studio. Originals were in Norse's studio. I think she wants to compare the two. Dunno, but... eh, gets me out of the house for a bit."

"You'll need a hotel," Ceegee said.

Vox put a hand behind hir head, looking at the ceiling. "Yeah, I got invited to an Insomniac Alliance meet-up here in Metroburg. They heard rumors that my snoring actually promotes useful sleep. It just meshed nicely... and I'm kinda on Eastern time anyway. Which reminds me, is your kitchen open?"

"Oh you're the first person to order. By the way, your voices are just *creepy* when you're a caffeine zombie..."

Landed in *Traction*

Vox settled down in hir booth at the Caffeine Grande Apothecary coffee shop. A red-eye flight with not much sleep, remediated (if not mitigated) by a powerful medium roast. Shi now munched on a breakfast bagel sandwich and nursed a large half-caff.

As a light crowd bustled in and out, Vox decided to start hir regular morning reading off hir tablet. This distracted hir as a nordic horse herm, an anthromorphic personification of Slepnir, trotted into the cafe, and up to the counter. With six arms gracing the counter, shi was about to speak with hir double heads.

“Norse,” Ceegee said, noticing the mare with a small four-armed pine martin double-smiling with a two-mouth maw. CeeGee pointed to Vox and said “Shall I get you your regular?”

Norse looked with one head at the distracted Vox and quietly said “Nay, mistress of the bean. I hear a certian someone loves your mint mocha lattes. I’ll have two.”

CeeGee chuckled, and said “Nay, only one to try. The subject in question downed a large medium roast early after a red-eye flight, and is on half-caffs now.” She leaned closer, one head of hers to one of Norse’s, and whispers “Shi practices C3 for hir heart.”

Norse looked with both heads, and said “I would think shi would practice ECC, but then shi may of had a few scares in the past. One to try, then.” Shi produced a debit card to purchase the drink.

“I’ll have it right up.” Ceegee said, ringing the order up and finalizing it. Her assistant was already prepping the drink. In short order, Norse had hir latte.

Then shi had a sip of it with a head.

Shi stammered back, squealing like shi had been hit. Shi shook that head, and steadied herself.

Vox noticed, pulling hir head out of hir tablet computer, and said “Trying a mint mocha latte to my styling, Norse?”

“Felix, dear...” Norse started. “You actually drink this regularly?”

“More than occasionally, but within reason.” Vox replied. “Granted, Valhalla, I am a mint fiend. I like it when it punches my face... in the face.”

“I doubt I could stand for this...”

Vox purred in triplicate, “Then come, sit, and try another sip. At least it won’t land you in traction.”

Luxuriant Levels

Just as Norse had sat down to try another sip of a Vox-level mint mocha latte, a triple-headed snow leopard femme came in, stretching her four arms out and yawning.

“Good morning Yukon,” Ceegee said, “Joining the crowd?”

Yukon’s right head looked over at Norse and Vox, just as Norse tried his drink again. One sip from a different head, before she whinnied and snorted.

“What did...” Yukon said with her left head, her center leaning back on it about to snooze again.

“I take it you want something powerful today?” Ceegee said. “Your usual may not cut it.”

“Yeah... what Norse’s having.”

“Breakfast as well?”

“Meat lovers bowl, please.” Yukon pulled a wallet out, fishing it out from one of the two cleavages on his three-breast-wide chest.

Ceegee rang Yukon up, accepting her credit card, and got the order underway. “Any more and I’ll have to try out the other mint liquors in the sampler from the Isle of Red...”

“YOU GOT MINT LIQUOR FROM THE ISLE OF RED?” Vox yelled over.

“Yeah, I’ve been using the *ASDF* mint liquor for yours, and I think... yeah I’m all out of it. There’s like five flavors, the *WeakSauce*, the *Driving Rain*, the *ASDF*, the *Mon Canard Es En Feu*, and *Zombie Mama*.”

Norse snorted and giggled.

Vox said “Use half of the *Mon Canard Es En Feu* as you would the *ASDF*. ***DO NOT USE THE ZOMBIE MAMA WITHOUT A LEGAL LIABILITY WAIVER.***”

Ceegee made the mint mocha latte, as one of the back kitchen staff came out with a plate of food. Yukon took it and sat next to Norse and Vox. She then took one sip with hir middle head.

Her eyes flew open. She sat straight up. Her tail poofed out even fluffier than before. Yukon let out a little “*eeep*” from all three heads, freezing there for a minute before she slowly relaxed.

“Powerful, isn’t it?” Vox said.

“What... that’s...” Yukon panted.

“Mint so strong it’s considered overpowered?”

“That’s just some luxuriant levels of mint there, Vox! I have questions now!”

Duck Out

Yukon and Norse peppered Vox with questions as they chatted at the Caffine Grande Alchemy coffee shop, mainly centered around mint. They were getting used to how minty their mint mocha lattes were... just like how Vox liked them.

“So let me get this straight,” Yukon said, “You would nearly overdose yourself on regular mint flavors just to be able to taste the mint, until you came across...”

“The cultivars of mint from the Isle of Red, up on Canmeph 2.” Vox said, pulling up the island’s tourist site. “Yeah, they’re real fanatics up there.”

“I have to admit,” Norse said, “I have not heard of a planet called Canmeph 2 until I met a real-life Canmephian. What is so special about this place?”

“A stupidly-mad scientist with a hard-on for our friend RedWolf?” Vox countered. “Created a short-lived virus that affected Canmephians and turned them into variations of RedWolf, with some odd twists for a few folk from what I hear.”

“Remember Tazel?” Yukon said with a head turned towards Norse. “I bet that blue multi-armed vixen would love to go there.”

“Oh yes,” Norse nodded. “Shi was a rather deep mint fiend.”

That is when another nine limbed feline, with a purple coloration to her fur, came in from behind the coffee shop’s stage. “Felix!” She said.

“Oh hey Kali!” Vox said, turning to her. The multi-cougar got up to greet her, but ended up stretching again. “Oooooffff... sorry, took a red-eye in from work, and the flight wasn’t comfortable.”

“How much coffee have you had?” Kali said.

“A large medium roast, followed by a medium half-caff that I’m almost done... and I think I could use a nap.”

“Might as well crash on the studio’s couch then. You look like it.”

“You look like you’ve been working out, Felix,” Norse commented.

“Yeah,” Yukon agreed. “That’s Hayden’s work?”

Vox turned again and said “Nah. I had enough room after clearing out the house and remodeling it to put in a small gym. With how thin I was and how busty I got, I thought I’d add some beef. Not too much. Enough to balance the curves.”

“I’d say.” Norse said.

“Looks like I better get some photos done during the session too,” Kali added.

Ceegee audibly cleared her throats.

“I think I’m out of time here,” Vox said. “I better duck out to your studio, Kali. That couch is sounding awfully good.”

Lowering My Profile

As Vox followed Kali back behind stage to a hidden exit, a nine-limbed, dual-headed German Shepard walked in the front door, decked out in workout gear. He threw some punches in the air before catching the multiplied cougar and purple cat escape back-stage. The multiplied canine stopped for a bit, tilted his heads, and then came to the counter.

“Hey Hayden honey,” Ceegee said. “Have a nice jog?”

“Yeah...” Hayden said. “I... was that Felix?”

“Yeah, that was Vox. Shi flew in on a red-eye and was here when I opened. Shi’s going to entertain Kali after a nap.”

Hayden noticed Norse and Yukon still looking at the exit, having tracked the two felines on their way out. “What did...” Hayden started to point at the group.

“Coffee?”

Norse took another sip of his mint mocha latte, and whinnied again.

“Did Norse try Vox’s uber-strength mint mocha latte?” Hayden asked.

Ceegee said “Yes, as did Yukon. Want to try it?”

“No thank you,” Hayden said, holding up all six of his hands. “I’ve tried it before and it *hurt*. I was smelling Christmas for days. No, just my regular Saturday setup.” He pulled out his wallet and produced a twenty dollar bill and a royalty card.

“Right up,” Ceegee said, ringing up a large medium roast and two sausage-heavy sandwiches. The price came out to be exactly twenty dollars. “It’ll be out in a minute.”

“Thanks hon.” Hayden said, and kissed Ceegee, pair to pair. He then went over to where Norse and Yukon were sitting. “Ladies?” he said.

“Hayden!” Yukon mewed. “When did you... did you see Vox?”

“Yeah, I saw. Shi... looked good!”

“Dante, dear,” Norse started in a sultry voice, “Please tell us that was your technology that did all of that.”

“Not me,” Hayden said as he shook his heads no. “Even doing work-out aids like that is unethical. Plus, Vox flushed hir nano out before the pandemic.”

“Oh really now...” Norse said. “Shi said shi got a home gym now.”

“Yeah, that empty back room? That’s the gym now.”

“The one that me and Hauler were in when Vox hosted us while the bus was repaired?”

“Now that’s a story...” Yukon said, absently taking a sip of her own mint mocha latte... and puffing back up for a half minute. “*YEEEP!* That’s STRONG!”

“Yeah, decent setup too.” Hayden said. “Looks like shi put it to good use with hir figure.”

“Really, Hayden,” Norse said. “That figure is all natural?”

“It’s not my nanotech treatments. I mean, why would I lower my profile as a respected doctor?”

Pure Coincidence

A dual-headed, four armed tiger femme rushed out from back-stage of the Caffeine Grande Apothecary coffee shop, having come from the next door record shop and studio owned by Kali. She came over, panting, chuffing “Am I late?”

“Oh no,” Ceegee said, serving a double-headed canine. “two hours until closing, Stereo. What’s up?”

“I couldn’t raise Kali to get into the studio,” Stereo said. “I had to use the ‘secret entrance’ to get in for the session with Vox... and guess what I saw!”

“Vox and Kali cuddled up on her couch?” the canine asked flatly.

Stereo turned her two heads to the canine. “Why yes, Scout. Here’s the proof.” The tiger raised up her phone showing a photo of Vox and Kali, just flopped against each other on a couch in what looks like a studio green room.

Scout groaned and growled, while Ceegee signed and fired off a travel tankard sized brew of coffee. “Vox came in on a red-eye overnight for the session,” the multiplied lioness said with one head, checking a clock with another. “Shi and Kali went up around 10, it’s about 3... yeah...”

“I barely made it out before I fell asleep itself,” Stereo said, still in a bit of shock. “Vox’s snoring in triplicate...”

“It helped me sleep up in Seattle on the Going Station to Station Tour,” Scout admitted.

Stereo looked at Scout with a “you’re kidding me”.

“Seriously! After you left when Vox took up the master of ceremonies duties for the wedding party, I smoothed things over with hir and shi went to bed. I was about to lay down myself with the noise generator app... and Vox’s purr-snore actually helped more than that.”

Ceegee capped and plopped the tankards in front of Stereo. “Kali had a set last night as well. Take these. High Joltage blend. I doubt Vox’s snoring

has beneficial properties and thus these are just instances of pure coincidence.”

You Wound Me

Ceegee closed up the Caffeine Grande Apothecary for night. A good day, sales were good, and everything proceeding to budget. She checked that everything was secured and ready for tomorrow, before locking the back doors.

One of the celestial pine martins met her at the back door, a male of the double-mouthed, four armed species. "Ceegee?" he said.

"Oh, hey Tommy," Ceegee said, locking the door. "Accompanying me home?"

"For a bit." Tommy said. "A question for all of me, though. You said that you were hiring a manager?"

"Oh yes," Ceegee replied. "I need to take a break sometime soon, so I'm hiring."

"You're not thinking..."

"No, you all asked not to. I've already hired the person, but I have to wait for her to come out from the self-twinning study at the medical college."

Tommy looked at Ceegee and asked "Self-twinning?"

"Yeah, some researchers were by and asked me to put up some ads for the study into hive minds using nanotech. They're doing it by cloning individuals and using communications between the two. Intentionally slow."

The pine martin hehed with an echo and said "Heh, I bet there'll be someone who'll comes up triplets. Some species are like that."

"She's a mocha-colored rabbit." Ceegee said as they walked along the road. "Don't tell me she'll..."

"Don't discount it. I mean... I'm a hive in the low hundreds."

"And yet nobody has plumbed the depths of your anatomy?"

Tommy stopped, a bit in shock. "Ceegee, you wound me with that statement! Be glad it's just this body!"

No Need to *Adjust* the Levels

“Ready, Vox?” Kali said in the control room with Stereo and a four armed, four eyed wolf in the background.

“Ready,” Vox said in the recording studio, tablet in a stand scrolled to the lyrics of hir concept album’s first song.

“Recording...” Stereo said, pushing the right button on the control panel.

Vox went in, singing and laying down perfect vocals matching that of the song. Kali took off her earphones and moved back to the wolf.

“What’s going on?” the wolf quietly asked. “Not every day you let my wife take the controls.”

“I couldn’t belive how good Norse’s home studio was, Lights,” Kali whispered. “So I asked Vox to come in and sing a few songs. With Stereo’s pitch-perfect hearing...”

Lights nodded, letting Stereo work her magic. Vox sung song after song, and even played a keytar to a bonus track. After each one, Stereo played the masters recorded by Norse and Vox...

“I can’t belive it.” Stereo said.

“What?” Kali asked, putting back on her headset.

“Is there anything off, Stereo?” Vox asked.

Stereo looked at Vox and Kali, one head to each. “The performance is exact to the masters! Vox just duplicated effort! There’s no need to adjust the levels at all!”

Too *Jittery* to Fly

Sunday had arrived at the Caffeine Grande Apothecary, and Ceegee opened up for the more religious crowd. She didn't mind that many faiths would come, have a cuppa joe and chat over various topics with each other. She even got a few points in herself. impressing even some agnostics.

As soon as enough priests, rabbis, and imams came in to render several long-running jokes moot, an winged feline bearing three eyes came in, shaking.

"Cass?" Ceegee said, signaling a coworker to get a first aid kit.

"Too much... just... too much..." the feline said in response.

"Coffee?"

"No tththththththank you..." Cass said. She put her hands on the counter, and *everything* rattled like it was an earthquake.

"CASS!" Ceegee screamed twice over. Cass lifted her hands off the counter, stopping the shaking. This got one of the pine martin coworkers working on a drink.

"Ifififif thhhhheerrreee's soooooommeeeettthhhiiiiinnnngggggg tttoooooo sttttoooooopppp..." Cass started, her speech starting to slur though the shaking that started to get worse.

"MINT MOCHA DECAFF WITH WEAK..." Ceegee started roaring before being handed a container sealed with the drink, with a secured straw in it. She handed it to Cass and roared **"DRINK!"**

Cass took one sip through the straw... and the shaking started to abate. She took another... and another... before she opened up the container and downed the entire drink in one go.

"Cass?" Ceegee said.

"That..." Cass started purring, looking at the container, before saying "How much do I owe?"

“\$5.75 for the drink, and what happened before you came.”

Cass pulled out a wallet from a hidden pocket in her dress, and produced exact change. “The concert... everyone kept giving me coffee afterwards and chatting. I couldn’t let it go to waste, or else I’d just be bad...”

“There’s decaff and half caff, you know.”

“I know, but they didn’t have it. I think they just went with regular store-bought. And you know this is my regular stop after the choir concert. I don’t know what you did but that definitely...” Cass yawned. “...made me sleepy.”

“One last question. Why didn’t you fly here?”

“And shake off all my feathers? I was too jittery from the caffeine to take flight!”

Slink on Out

On the road where the Caffeine Grande Apothecary is on, a four armed garden snake slithered his way down to the coffee shop. He grooved to some classic beats on his headphones.

“He wear no ssshoessshine,” he started humming to himself. “He got, toe-jam football. He got, monkey finger. He sssshoot, Coca-Cola. He say ’I know you. You know me. One thing I can tell you is you got to be free.”

The snake stopped before an intersection, strumming an air guitar and saying “*COME TOGETHER! RIGHT NOW! OVER ME!*” before calming down and strumming in the air, going “Bum bum bum dahahaha. Bum bum bum dahahaha.” as the crosswalk turned to let him across.

And so he crossed, passing a computer store named RetroTygris Classics and Modern Computing, followed by Kali’s record store and her offices – the headquarters of Plur Audio. He then slithered into the coffee shop, holding both doors open before piling himself in front of the counter.

“Coils!” Ceegee said as the snake turned off the tunes and pulled his headphones down. “Oh glad you can make it.”

“What’sss up, Ceegee?” Coils said, before a certain winged feline flopped on his coiled body.

“It’s more like what’s down.” Ceegee said. “Cass got to try out one of the mint liquors from the Isle of Red. This one’s so weak it actively counteracts any caffeine, making you tired.”

Cass murrowled and purred “Take me to my bed, Jeeves...”

Coils shook his head, chuckling. “I better take my brunch to go then. Did you get my order from earlier?”

Ceegee pulled out a brown bag with the name “Coils” on it. “Yep. And you paid online, so you’re good to go.”

Coils looked back and said “Come my dear. Let us ssslink out before ssssomeone thinksss you’ve tamed me.”

What Do You Take Me For, *Vegan*?

An odd debate arose at the Caffeine Grande Apothecary that Sunday afternoon. Laymen, priests, rabbis, imams, all faiths of color (and those of no faith) debating long and hard... and showed no sign of abating.

Ceegee sighed as the coffee shop's door opened, revealing a male horse. Well muscled, he filled out the flight jacket and slacks while wearing a barrette. And yet he moved with intent and seriousness.

"Hey Hauler!" Ceegee said. "Kinda late for coffee."

"It's all right, Miss Cynthia." Hauler said. "Norse is on a tear and I figured I'd get some lunch here."

"Want a tank of coffee to bring back to hir? Should help smooth hir out."

"Nay, shi's productive. I'm just keeping out of hir way. Can I get a bowl of oats and a BLT, extra bacon?"

Suddenly the debate stopped on a dime. Hauler noticed the sudden silence, looked towards the crowd, and said "What? Can't this war vet like bacon?"

Everyone gasped in unison.

"Apparently nobody here's a farm hand," Hauler said.

"You know the drill, Hauler." Ceegee said, ringing Hauler up. "Show me your Veteran Affairs ID."

Hauler snorted and pulled it out. "I don't know why you demand it, Miss Cynthia."

Ceegee looked, and rang it up as a free meal. "Veterans are always honored here, Captain Hauler. Even if they're a little aggressive."

Hauler snorted again, saying "Yeah, was a mean mule during my years of service. I've mellowed out since then, gotten used to a little meat in my diet."

"Salad for Norse as well?"

“You treat me well, Miss Cynthia.”

“I try. Besides, it’s not every day you get to shut down a debate.” Ceegee pointed a thumb to the crowd. “It was if horses were all vegetarian or even...”

Hauler nickered, turned to the crowd again, and said “What did you take me for, *vegan?!?*”

Helm the Engine

Nearby, Yukon led Vox to a train yard. While most of the tracks were busy, six were designated for use by the city's Train Museum. Several cars, from classy Pullman-built designs pulled by a steam engine to a full Amtrak Horizon set, kept in working order as a mobile hotel. One track was empty, while on the opposite side of it's platform an engine caught Vox's eye.

"Hey, Tundra," Vox said. "Isn't that a GP40?"

Yukon turned a head and said "It is. It's one of the few GP40WH-2 engines by General Electric's Electro-Motive Division, the ones built for the MARC train service in Maryland. This one I actually own – MARC engine 69."

Vox said "Whoa... I've only seen MARC 66. You remember Rails, the green-on-black snow leopard with the horns?"

"Oh yeah, the train engineer Hayden gave an extra pair of arms and chest to," Yukon said with another head.

"She's got MARC 66. Took the engines out and replace them with the Canmephian Motive Power BH-3 engine, and got a power pickup arm on top of it. Got to ride in her custom caboose, the *Cougar River*, a few years back... well, nap in it. That was a tiring day."

"Want to see inside?" Yukon purred.

"Sure!"

Yukon unlocked the cab of the engine and lead Vox in. "I was able to trace this one and buy it before it went to scrap, like Rails did. Restored it back from being an MP32PH-Q engine. This is to-specifications a GP40WH-2. Come, sit in the engineer's seat."

Vox did, looking at all the gauges and readouts. Nothing was turned on, rending it safe for hir to be seated... but Vox kept hir hands to himself.

"What are you thinking, Felix?" Yukon asked.

"I should talk to Rails. I wonder what it's like to helm this engine."

Betwixt People

At the nearby airport, Vox fumed as shi walked back up the walkway with hir satchel. An airline employee escorted hir up and back into the terminal.

There, a manager from the airline met hir. The female mouse squeaked “Oh my, what happened?”

Vox, looking at the mouse, held up a hand and said “Let me calm down first, so you’ll get everything straight.” Shi took in three deep breaths, showing off hir triple throats and three tongues. This would have made any bystander wonder how shi could eat, let alone speak or sing.

The mouse nodded and said “Take your time.”

Vox replied “I’m better. I wanted to calm down before I got physical and airport security were needed to dog-pile on me.”

“So what happened on the airplane?”

The multiplied cougar pulled out hir phone and opened the ticketing app. “I had bought two tickets for this flight, since I need two seats with... I hate to be crude, but I literally have an ass-and-a-half. Very odd anatomy. Go ahead, look, it’s relevant.”

The manager mouse looked around... and squeaked in surprise. “Oh my!”

“Keep that in mind. I’m following the rules. I even put in comments saying I need accommodation because of said odd anatomy. This is the first time in my time I’ve flown your airline that I’ve had this problem.

“That problem? One of my tickets got canceled for some weird reason, and my remaining seat is taken up by two other passengers with a size that makes it impossible for me to travel. They have to be several times the weight used for estimating passengers.”

As the airplane pulled back from the terminal, the manager turned to the airline employee, and said “How large were the passengers?”

“Um... very.”

“HOW LARGE, SPECIFICALLY?”

“We had to use the belt extenders, and even then they touched each other. I’m surprised they even fit!”

The manager said “Come over to the station here, lets see.” She went over, logged in, and dug through the system. With Vox showing both tickets to her, she said “You checked in both tickets... but one of them was bumped, no reason. It shouldn’t have...”

Vox said flatly, “Your booking software has a bug in it. I would report it to the developers to get that fixed quickly.”

The manager then said “I think that was our last flight of the day. We can rebook you first thing tomorrow...”

Vox said “Nay. Your contract of carriage allows rebooking on any other airline, as required by law. I’m envoking my right to that rebooking.”

“Seriously, you can’t...”

“I CAN AND I DO!” Vox roared, employing all three voices at the same time. **“I AM NOT GOING TO SUFFER BEING FLATTENED BETWEEN TWO MORBIDLY OBESE BEARS ABOUT TO HIBERNATE FOR THE WINTER JUST BECAUSE SOME CODING ERROR TOSSED ONE HALF OF A SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS ORDER!”**

Vox sat back down, trying to calm down again. Shi growled with a single voice, “Dammit, I wasn’t intending to say it like that.”

Another airline’s manager, a male kangaroo rat, came over. He came up to the manager mouse and said “Is everything...”

“Got a flight to Baltimore?” She said, wide-eyed.

“I got one leaving in 30 minutes, and it’s half full.”

“I have a passenger who needs two seats or a wide seat. We screwed up her booking. She booked two together, tagged with special accommodation, and our system dropped one without reason.”

The kangaroo rat looked at Vox, and asked “Ma’am, are you Vox from the band Throng?”

“I am,” Vox said tiredly.

The kangaroo rat grinned, took over the terminal, and printed out a flight plan. “Did you check in any baggage?”

“Nah. My satchel’s one of those ‘bags of holding’.”

“Perfect. Come with me. I have something more fun than being betwixt two lumpy animated carpets.”

Sandwiched In

Vox mrrrrffed, trying to keep awake, as shi was flying back home. Instead of a conventional passenger airplane, the multiplied cougar was dressed in a flight suit, shoved into an upgraded double-seat fighter “jet”, and helmeted.

“How you doing back there, Vox?” the pilot’s voice crackled though the intercom.

“Getting there,” Vox said. “Trying not to fall asleep.”

“You can take a nap back there.”

“I best not. I’ve had reports that my snoring causes drowsiness. On the ground in a hotel setting, that’s fine. In the air and close quarters...”

“Good thinking. We got some time and I’m not on the radio. Why don’t we chat for a bit, back and forth questions. You first.”

Vox looked around, and said “What is this fighter jet? I didn’t get a good look at it.”

"Oh? It’s based on the old F-15E Strike Eagle. Engines are upgraded high-efficiency pulse-jets. Back seat’s for a weapons systems officer, although this gal’s retired and only has evasion stuff now I control up here. All part of the experience.

“My turn. Are you some fan or what with Throng? It looks like you got changed.”

Vox replied "Oh, that’s an adventure. Fan turned contributing member. I’m sometimes on stage. I’m a programmer by trade, and helped Hayden with how to transform me. Turned out the underlining processor is the same as the one in the Commodore 64, just shrunk all the way down. It... had a few bugs. Happy errors.

“So what’s with this flight? I thought I’d be on another red-eye.”

The pilot said “Our airline’s a specialty flight line. We don’t just do flights, we’re more tour of duty field for tourists. You lucked out on

catching this one. We had to get this gal back to DC for a show. You're heading to Baltimore, right?"

"Yeah. Dulles or National?"

"National. You're going to be fine heading there?"

Vox thought for a moment. "Yeah, if I can get a nap in one of National's sleep pods, I'll be able to get my regular train out from Union Station and get to work up in Charm City. Will I get charged for this flight?"

"Not up to me. What happened?"

"I bought two tickets with special accommodation, and one of them got bumped. Ended up with a seat taken up by two bears who were more than ready to hibernate for the winter. No room, and I demanded a manager. Ended up kicked off the flight for an error in their systems, since I still had the proof of purchases. Was so pissed off that I evoked the terms of the contract of carriage.

"I wonder if that flight ever made it off the ground. You hear anything on the traffic control about that? I think it's ZZTA 1839..."

"We passed them by an hour ago. They had to stop in Austin to refuel and extract two passengers for medical reasons. Wanna bet it was those bears?"

"One gets you ten that they're the cause. Even money if they're the subjects. How are we doing on time?"

"One more hour and we'll be landing. So, what were you expecting in our overnight flight?"

Vox replied, "Well, Captain, I wasn't expecting being sandwiched inside a classy cockpit like this on a midnight run..."

Not Even a Tire *Iron*

“Where are you Felix?” an aged, long-necked dinosaur spoke into the speaker phone of the conference room she was in.

“Home, Elder,” came Vox’s voices, tiredness coming over the call. “It’s 6pm and I put a normal day at the day job. I’m about to guzzle down a meal replacement shake and crash in bed.”

“I’ll keep it brief then. You had trouble with a flight, ended up riding a F-15E replica back home, did a quick nap in an airport pod, went to work, came back home, and now about to crash in bed.”

“Yes.”

“I’m missing a step here between the flight trouble and the fighter jet ride.”

“Trouble was that the airline I booked my flight with dropped one of my two tickets for that flight, and the only seat left was taken up by two bears who really should of taken the train. It was the last flight out for the airline, but after that mistake I evoked a provision of their conditions of carriage. I got booked on a specialty flight.”

“There’s an airline that specializes in flights in fighter jets.” Elder said flatly.

“Yeah, I gotta send you up the name. I lucked out since the jet had to be in DC for a gig. The pilot’s good.”

“So what’s with these photos that Scout received from... wait, is that your account?”

“Yeah, I got a private server set up in Las Vegas. I sent then from my phone, and it defaults through that server.”

“Ohhhh. I thought I’d have to fight rumors there.” Elder fanned herself with a spare manila folder.

“Nope, but it’s a good marketing opportunity,” Vox purred in triplicate.

“Not sure about getting reimbursed for the jacket and helmet I got. Can I

say that I'm just glad I didn't need a tire iron to extract myself from the jet?"

Gob-smacked

“Would you like the name of the airline, Scout?” Vox said over the phone the next day.

Scout looked at the photos Vox had sent the day before. Getting dressed up in flight gear. Climbing in. Getting settled in. In-flight cockpit, head-on. Landing. Getting out. Getting a custom flight jacket. It was as close to getting his flight wings.

“Please tell me there’s flight audio.” the double-headed wolf murmured.

A ping hit her computer. Vox had forwarded the airline’s email – there was audio.

“Felix...”

“Yes Annie?”

“How...”

“I don’t know. I think I got Kage Adventure Syndrome – I keep getting into adventures. I think I now have more opener material...”

Scout just stared... before saying with one head “I... am just gob-smacked over how you get into these situations!”

Remembering the *Catalog*

Back at the Caffeine Grande Apothecary coffee shop, a cat-rabbit hybrid entered, yawning before shi approached the counter bearing CeeGee, cleaning up a bit. In one of hir four hands was some sort of magazine.

“Hey Killer!” Ceegee said. “How you feeling?”

Killer’s gruff voice said “Meh... clothing shopping. Can I get a medium-sized dark roast? Not sure about food yet.”

“Sure! Black I take it.” Ceegee said, ringing up the order and pouring from a coffee tankard. “Yeah, I think my go-to has been Gwen’s. Nobody else seems to be wanting to handle the three-wide chest, especially in my size.”

“Yeah,” Killer said, blinking hir four eyes as even hir two tails yawned out their tail maws. “Did some early-morning shopping. The only thing that would really fit are the pants.”

Ceegee placed the coffee on the counter. “Nah, go to Gwen’s a few blocks over, get yourself fitted. They’ll tailor anything.”

“Really?” Killer asked, before shi put down the magazine and turned it to a page. “Because I kinda want this outfit.”

All of Ceegee’s eyes lit up, and she pulled her hair away from them to take a closer look. “*OH. MY. GAWD!* I mean, yes, they’ll do that... but how did you get a classic Harley Davidson clothing catalog?”

“Oh, I remembered I still had it.”

Get *Over* It

An age-old terrapin met up with Vox at a Baltimore local bar and grill, just to chew the fat. Vox purred “Hey Terry, how’s the law life going?”

“Heh...” the terrapin said. “Let me tell you about my day and this client.”

“Before you start, is this a one beer or three beer story?” Vox asked.

Terry thought... “You know, I’m not so sure. Buy me a drink and lets find out.”

Vox hehed. “Barkeep! One round for my friend here, put it on my tab.”

The barkeep, a cute vixen, nodded and asked Terry for his choice of alcoholic poison. Terry went for a shot of scotch, which was served neat. This gave Vox pause.

“That bad, Terry?” Vox asked.

“Well... let me start,” Terry said, taking a sip. “Mmmm, nice vintage. So this guy comes into the office, drops a ton of cash on my desk, and demands representation.”

“Troubling there...” Vox said.

“Oh you know he’s trouble, Felix. It was that guy with a hard-on hatred for multifurs like you. He wants to file suit against the government for allowing... I think it’s Dr. Dante Hayden’s nanotech?”

“Yeah, that’s Hayden’s M.O. FDA approved it years back.”

“So I warn him, he’s got an up-hill battle. He has to fight FDA approval of the technique and the Canmephian organic version using viruses. He has to prove detrimental effects to the people involved. If he wants to do it, he pays my fees all up-front, no refunds.”

“And he agrees... no, he demands it.”

“He’s got a few hundred thousand. So I drag him to the bank, make him deposit it all into an escrow account, and sign a contract. He didn’t want to do it but I tell him if he wants any lawyer that’s worth his salt, he puts that cash in the bank in an escrow account. It protects him and protects me.”

“And he has proof.”

“Not much. I file it in the Federal circuit courts. FDA responds, Johns Hopkins responds and demands it be moved up here. Client agrees, FDA agrees, all good... except for my stomach. Hey Barkeep, got a Caesar salad with chicken on it?”

“We got it on our menu, hon,” the vixen says. “Would you like one for dinner?”

“Yes, please.” Terry said.

“Get me a meatloaf platter, put both on my bill.” Vox added. “This one’s interesting.”

Terry chuckled before continuing. “So a preliminary hearing on motions comes... and the judge throws out the deposition and his evidence as baseless. Dismisses the case. I take that to the client and he demands the appeal.”

“More money.”

“He overpaid. So I file the appeal on various procedural grounds, trying to thread a fine line through the arguments. Everyone appears for the appeal arguments. I make my own best effort.”

“And you get shot down.”

“Right on the spot! They rule immediately, affirming the ruling and terminating the case. This sets off the client into a ranting tirade right from get-go throwing everything that I knew wasn’t going to be admitted from the spot. I had advised him not to even think about submitting it... and he spewed it out anyway. Accused one of the judges of bias because she’s a cerberus hound.”

“Oh boy...”

“Oh boy is right. They send it back down for order of payment, and arrested him for contempt of court... right after he fired me for incompetence.”

“So?”

“Well, I file notice with the lower court of my termination, file my fee schedule and escrow amount. Turns out he paid all the way up to termination.”

The dishes get served as Vox asked “So that cash is yours now.”

Terry shakes his head and said “It took a bit of time. It took the lower court to order him to pay me from the escrow. He gets a sleazeball of a lawyer, fails the appeal to the Supreme Court, fails to not pay the FDA and Johns Hopkins’ lawyers, and rules that my fee schedule was reasonable. Oh, and I got out of the disciplinary hearing scot-free today.”

The terrapin lawyer raised up his scotch glass and said “The highlight? Having that last judge tell the now ex-client to shut up and get over the fact that multifurs are here to stay. Cheers!”

Endangered Anthro Species List

Hayden came into Elder's lawyers office, a medical kit in tow, and talked to the receptionist. She warned him that Elder was very stressed, and fetched Elder's assistant.

Another horse came out, a rather strong mare stuffed into a suit. "Dante?" She said.

"Miss Cori Archer," Hayden said. "I was sent for by Athena. Is there something wrong?"

"Yes," Archer said. "You better come. Athena got... the letter."

"The letter?" Hayden said, getting up and following Archer to Elder's office. Elder noticed the two come in.

"THIS BLASTED ORDER!" Elder yelled, smacking a stapled set of papers on her desk in front of Hayden. **"WHAT IS THE HELL THEY'RE THINKING?!? AND I CAN'T FIGHT IT!"**

Hayden picked up the papers and read through, while Archer said "I tried, even going to the courts, but they said no, the law's constitutional."

"I mean, what they want me to do, bugger some stranger?" Elder said.

"Just a blood sample, Athena." Hayden calmly said. "And they only ask for... *geesh*, that small?"

"Dan-*teeee*...." Elder started using the motherly voice.

Hayden said "The federal Health and Humanoid Services wants your DNA on file. They want it sequenced. It won't be opened until you give permission or you fall deathly ill... um... who has power of attorney if you're incapacitated?"

"Cori." Elder said flatly.

"So I get called if Athena is medically incapacitated to make life or death decisions." Archer said.

Elder grinned, and said "When you get to even a quarter of my age, dear, making sure someone can pick up the pieces is worth while."

Hayden put the paper down and placed his medical kit bag on the desk. “Either way, you’re joining my club. Turns out us native double-headers are rare. So a DNA sample is needed, and thankfully that’s a pinprick and small gather away. I can do it here and get it over with.”

Elder asked, “Really, Dante?”

“Really. It’s one of the few things you have to deal with, being in the Endangered Anthro Species List.”

Reel That Joke Back In

Yukon looked around Metroburg's lake-side park for her father. He had left an ominous note at the house when she checked on him, one that filled her with dread.

"Gone Fishing. -Sven"

She drove down and saw him at the fishing dock, casting another line from a fishing rod. Yukon carefully came up and asked "Daddy?"

Sven, the male version of Yukon if not older, turned a head and said "Ahhh! Good morning, Tundra. Long night at the studio?"

"No, actually, normal times. What..."

"Every weekend I'd go out fishing. Some days it'll be a good place to settle your mind, others you'd..."

Sven was interrupted with the fishing rod twitching – something had caught the line.

"Oop! Got one!" Sven said, and he started pulling back the line in.

"You..." Yukon started to say, as the line got taught.

"FISKEN ER VELDIG STERK!" Sven yeowled as he pulled the rod up, dragging the line in on the downstroke, repeating until the catch was out of the water. And it was a big catch! What looked like a good three-foot tuna.

"Oh my!" Yukon exclaimed.

"It's no surstromming, but still..." Sven started.

"Reel that joke back in, Dad." Yukon growled.

My *Mask* is in the Wash

At a grocery store near Vox's home, a shiny black figure pushed a cart. Nine limbs, an over-endowed chest showing three breasts, even the nine tails (in groups of three, and one group coming from the figure's head) enclosed in black, glossy latex. On the figure's head, a specialty hood molded to look like an Anubian jackal, which made the long ears all the more fitting, although the two hoses attached at either side of its snout and connected to a canister on its back made it look ominous.

It pushed a cart, through produce, picking up potatoes and checking it off on a cell phone held by one of its six hands. Over to the deli to pick up fresh-sliced lunch meat and cheese, then walking to the bakery for pre-made biscuits, muffins, and bagels. It then moved over to the butchers area, looked at the meat case, and motioned for a few lengths of salmon.

Folks looked on, partly curious, partly weary of the creature's presence. Still, it moved along, picking up various supplies. Ground beef, pork, bread, sodas (avoiding the common stock and picking up imported brands), soups, flower, salt, pepper, spices, meal kits, ice cream, milk, yogurt, and some cookies to boot.

It then waited in line, patiently, silently, before approaching the counter. It loaded each item in a deliberate order, leaving the staffer at the register with little choice but to pack things safely. The staffer looked, tracing up to from the tips of the creature's ears to the bottom of its three legs. When the creature was done loading the conveyor belt, the staffer asked an important question.

"Paper bags, Mr. Vox?"

The creature held out a finger, one of six on each hand. It then tapped its phone a few times, until a voice came out – Vox's voice, saying "Hey Charlie. Paper please. Sorry for the get-up."

"That has to be the most effective personal protective equipment out there," Charlie said, smiling and starting to run the groceries through the register scanner. "Any particular reason why you're all sealed up?"

Vox's head tilted with a hand behind it, making it look like the static lenses for eyes moved like shi was embarrassed. "Turns out my custom mask is in the wash, so this was the next best thing..."

No Need to *Finagle*

Hayden whew-ed as he slumped down into a booth seat at the Caffeine Grande Apothecary coffee shop. He sat, tired, exhausted, laying against the wall.. with a smile on both faces.

Ceegee came over and said “Long day, Dante?” Meanwhile, one of the pine martin coworkers went over, flipped the sign from “OPEN” to “CLOSED”, and locked the door.

“I’ve been in meetings all day,” Hayden said. “Just... legal, ethical, whatnot...”

“What is it about? Can you tell me?”

“Remember the trip back to Seattle at the end of the *Going Station to Station* tour? Tony and Sahari’s wedding?”

“Yeah.” Ceegee said, hesitating a bit. “It was a nice wedding. Felix was a good master of ceremonies.”

“Felix told me you met my ex-girlfriend there and had her arrested for trespassing.”

Ceegee was taken back a bit. “That was your ex? With the stupid-huge chest?”

“Yeah, real bitch. Turns out to have had multiple personality syndrome. She’s in a better place now.”

“What does this have to do with the meetings?”

“Well, turns out other medical researchers wanted to study such largeness. We had to hash out some limits, procedures, legalities...” Hayden leaned forward onto the table, putting all six elbows on it and resting his heads on all six hands. “I mean, we’re talking well beyond your size.”

“Heh,” Ceegee said, leaning back a bit to emphasize her massive set. “I was surprised that I was able to keep the girls here. You just...”

“That was a simple triplication with the one-up’ed heads,” Hayden said. “I sent your original DNA to be emulated. Your hourglass figure is all genetics.”

“So I can officially say this fat-bottom girl makes the rocking world go round?”

“That you’re all natural, no need to finagle that!”

Load-Bearing *Yarn*

Vox bounced into work, a major Internet company that managed servers or colocated equipment for the big major companies. If it wasn't in a dedicated data center... it was likely in Vox's company... and shi worked at their managed systems department as a programmer for their customer relations and asset management system.

Bounce was the operational word, as shi was wearing a form-fitting sweater and kahki pants, listening to some music on hir way in... and hir chest kept bouncing up and down and in and out over Vox's movement to the music. This caused the sweater to flex and strain. It almost looked like Vox's sweater would suffer structural failure at any time.

One of the finance team noticed this and came up to Vox as shi sat down at hir cubicle desk. "Felix?" she said.

Vox looked over and noticed her. Shi reached up to hir hears, turned off the music, and pulled out hir earphones. "Oh hey Martha!" Vox said. "What's up?"

"Your sweater. Are we going to have..."

"Oh, I'm wearing my turtleneck over a regular shirt. With me and how big I am, I took precautions."

"I'd say. Looks comfy."

"True. Besides, you don't want to know how expensive load-bearing yarn is..."

Unsuitable for work

Vox's coworkers in the various tiers of the Support department started questioning a report. It went through line managers, then the department manager. It then snaked its way through some Engineering departments, into Security... before it hit his system. That's when the head of Security and his manager, the head of Development, had him look at it from a secure setting.

Vox looked at the report in a window-less conference room... and shook his head. Shi pulled out a cell phone, and started texting to Hayden.

"Hayden? Got a few minutes? Something's weird at this report we got here." Vox sent.

"You're asking me? What report?" was the reply back.

"Abuse report. Someone complained about one of our customers, a medical journal, and some of the content... and... remember your ex?"

"Really? Someone complained about the quality-of-life study down in Houston University of Medicine?"

"Yeah. I mean, I may be big but the images they sent to complain about..."

"Let me guess... one of the few anthro cows?"

"Yes."

"Bigger than a barn-yard shack?"

"Almost as big. How they can see over... I can't..."

"Yeah. Turns out they did an off-shoot on that one. Look at the title of the article off their site."

Vox looked... "Optimization of milk production via experimental expansion" read the title. Shi sighed, and texted back "Okay, actual study paper. Thanks for checking."

"Any time, Vox!"

Vox put hir phone down, rubbed hir eyes, and looked at the contracts and terms of service... before logging out of the room's computer and opening the door. A male doberman pincher, a female grey wolf, and a male bat greeted hir.

"Well?" the bat asked.

"It's a ranty complaint about a medical paper on our client's site, Vinnie." Vox said. "No actual claim of copyright infringement."

"But can we view it?" the doberman asked.

"It's expanding anatomy to fetish levels for a legitimate purpose, Matt. In context, I can't see it being unsuitable for work... but take the precaution I did."

No need to take the *trip*

Vox was packed and ready. Shi pulled out his cell phone and was about to open a ride-hire app... when it rang. The message on it was “Killer”. Shi tapped to pick it up and put it on speaker. “Hello?”

“Felix, it’s Karen...” Killer’s voice came over... but not gruff. “Can you cancel your flight? The concert’s canceled this weekend.”

Vox sat down on the foyer stairs. “Um... why?”

“The city forced the venue closed after a viral outbreak traced to it.”

“Um...”

“Can you cancel the flight?”

“Gimmie a minute here, can barely concentrate...” Vox put four hands on the stair step, and carefully opened up the airline app. A few taps later, it was canceled. “...yeah, but I ate a cancellation fee.”

“Forward the receipt of the fee to me. I’ll get you reimbursed.”

“Okay.”

“Are you feeling okay?”

Vox thought as much as shi could, then said “No. Very late deploy that I haven’t recovered yet.”

“Deploy... um, software?”

“Yeah, sorry, had to install new versions of tools used at work. Usually only takes two hours but this time it went through the day. I’m just glad I set the reminder for the flight...”

“Go to bed, Felix.” Killer said with motherly tones.

“I... okay Karen.”

“The concerts are canceled. There is no need to take the trip anymore.”

Nothing Will Be *Native*

Vox walked into the offices of a nearby train yard, one that was rebuilt in Odenton as a private rail yard and repair shop. There, shi found a person shi knew from a a previous trip... the one that made hir the way shi was.

“VOX!” that four armed, goat-horned inverse-colored snow leopard taur said as she looked up. “Felix! Hey, what are you doing here?”

“Rails!” Vox replied. “Hey, I saw folks rebuild a good chunk of the ol’ WB&A Eletric Railroad yard. Been meaning to check it out, and I saw the gate open.”

“Heh, yeah, we’re open for business. Welcome to Thompson Rail Skunkworks! I had this going for a while. They finished the lead rail before that meltdown you were involved in.”

“Oh, so your rail car is here?”

“Yep, we got the approvals last week, and I moved the train in onto track 1. It’s not the same layout as the ol’ WB&A Electric but it works the same.” Rails got up, picking up a rail map and giving it to Vox. “I could take you on a tour, but I got this contract from Amtrak.”

“Heh, if you can make the same engine magic on the HHP-8 series like you did on that FL-9 and the GP40...” Vox started to say.

“You practically guessed the contract,” Rails said. “The CMP-BH3 engine I used in those? I’m splitting the HHP-8’s in half, fabbing two engines out of it, and putting engines in both. I’m designing the prototype right now. Want to take a look?”

“Sure...” Vox said, moving over to Rails’ computer. “I... whoa! New under-frame too?”

“Yep. Nothing will be native on these motive units when I’m done with them.”

Top *Quality*

A double-headed African Dama gazelle walked into a bar near Vox's work, looking for someone. That someone, Vox, noticed and motioned her over.

"Hey Felix!" she said. "This your usual haunt?"

"Eh," Vox replied. "It's close by and I frequent it, Mussi. What brings you here?"

Mussi took out her drivers license and showed it to the multiplied cougar. Shi looked at it... and said "Barkeep, do you have one of those UV light license checkers? I..."

The vixen of a barkeep looked at it, looked at Mussi, then grabbed a small flash-light like device and shined it on the license. It was legit, it showed a hologram.

"First time here?" the barkeep asked, handing Mussi her license back.

"Yeah," Mussi said, "Kinda curious about things. I don't know..."

"At least there's a good beer scene here," Vox said. "Let me teach you about the drinking scene. Some starter fare, then. Two Yeungling Traditionals, one for me, one for her. Also an order of quesadilla for now." The barkeep nodded, tapped the food order in, and poured the drinks.

Vox turned to Mussi and said "Since you're of age, you should have some years under your belt, thus now you can drink alcoholic beverages. However, the drinks, the beer, the wine, the hard liquors... they are only a tool. They are social lubrication. You go to a bar to be social, not to just drink the night away."

Vox then picked up his beer glass. "With that in mind, we must find out your taste in beer. You may not like what I like. You may like different brews. It's all good... well, the thing I like to say is go local first. There are national brews you can find everywhere. But you want something better, go local.

"This is sorta-local. A traditional lager from a brewery in Pennsylvania. My go-to preference. There's other types like a kolsh, a india pale ale, a

boch, a double-boch. All have different types. For me, I tend not to like a beer that has too much sharpness to it. For you... well, lets find out. Go ahead, sip it.”

Mussi took her beer, sniffed it... and sipped. Shi then took a gulp from one head, then the other.

“Describe the taste,” Vox said after taking a drink from hir beer glass.

“Interesting,” Mussi said. “And... you like it?”

“I like it. If you don’t, that’s fine.”

Mussi took another drink... “I like it... but I don’t know how much.”

Vox grinned as the quesadillas arrived. “The other thing is eat. Alchohol will dull the brains and cause issues with driving, speaking, whatnot. So you don’t drink as much, you eat to help metabolize the alchohol, and if you thirst for water, ask for water.”

Mussi nodded with one head as she munched on one of the quesadillas. She then looked at the food... and said “this stuff is... oh could this be the beer talking?”

“Nah,” Vox said. “I’ve done lunch here without drinking the beer, or as they say, ‘keeping it dry.’ You should look at the menu. The food here is top quality.”

First To *Knock*

Vox worked from home the next day. There wasn't much to do now, as many of his projects were at a state where they would go for the next release without too many problems. So it was a good day to quietly work on the backlog of projects Shi had from his home rig...

And his security cameras picked up movement. A delivery driver making a delivery. Shi watched the displays showing the camera's feed. Amazon. A large package... left at the door, no notice.

Vox ughed, getting up, going to the door, and retrieving the package. The case for his new PC came in. Shi put it off to the side, and sat down to resume the back log...

Another notice of movement. UPS. A set of smaller packages, piled up on the door... and left again. Again, Vox got up and retrieved the packages. Motherboard, CPU, and RAM. Shi grumbled, set them next to the case, and set back to work.

Again, more movement. FedEx. More packages, drop and run. Shi got up again and pulled them in. Storage, graphics card, power supply, display. Why they got shipped in separate boxes... off to the side they went.

One more notice from the security cameras. The postal service. More boxes. But no sound at the door, like all the others. Vox growled, got up one more time, pulled them in and checked the mailbox... stuffed with mail and another package, international. Scanner, graphics tablet with built-in screen, printer, and a small computer built into a keyboard from the UK. Shi sighed, brought them all in, and tried one more time.

A sound at the door perked up his ears. Shi went over, and a delivery boy handed over a large paper bag smelling of fries. "Hi Mr. Vox! Here's your burger order from Five Guys!"

Vox heh'ed, and handed the boy a \$20. "Out of all the delivery people I got today, you're the first to knock. I guess you get all their tips as well."

You Really Know How to *Impress* a Gal

Crisp, comfortable air flowed through Vox's lungs as shi sat on hir back porch, watching the sunrise that Sunday morning in hir fuzzy bathrobe. Shi took a sip of coffee, slowly waking up with a good local roast. Shi grinned, and set back inside hir second house. Shi had bought a brand new house, moved in, rebuild the old one, and sold it at cost. It was a much more comfortable fit.

As shi stepped inside and started to get another cup of coffee, the phone rang. Shi checked the ID... from College Park, a familiar number... and picked it up.

"Odd Audio Emporium," shi echoed, employing hir three voices.

"Felix! It's RedWolf, from the Canmephian Embassy!" came the voice on the other end of the line.

"Oh hey Red! How's it going?" Vox replied, putting the phone on speaker.

"Nothing much," RedWolf said. "Hey, I know you're a bit of a hands-on creative type. How would you like an industrial-grade fabbery?"

Vox put down hir mug and said "What's the catch?"

"No catch, and no cost. I had to fix a military-grade fabbery and ended up with one of my own. Full ownership, my name only, signed off by the Canmephian Space Command. So I gotta get rid of the industrial-grade one here at home."

"And you thought of me," Vox joked.

"It was ether that or scrap it."

Vox hmmmmed, thinking... before asking "Hey, can you make an entire train out of this? Like, engine and passenger cars?"

"Easily," RedWolf replied. "This is the same grade used to make those digital gems of yours."

Vox purred "Oh RedWolf, you certainly know how to impress a gal..."

This Ain't No *Portal* Technology!

“Okay, tell me how this works again?” Lights asked as the entire band and their equipment were in one room.

“Just watch, Lights,” Norse intoned, pointing to the middle of the room. There, Cass faded into view... which shocked everyone but Killer.

“Cass?” Hayden barked. “How did you...”

“No,” Norse whinnied. “Who taught you to planeswalk?!?”

“Oh, this was before I came over,” Cass said. “I had to pop over to get my certification... and yours.” The three-eyed feline walked over and handed some paperwork to Norse. “There’s a card inside you gotta keep on you at all times.”

“Okay,” Lights said. “So we’re tripping through space here...”

“More like alternate realms,” Cass said. “Call it a wild ride.”

“Too wild,” Hauler quietly said.

“Oh hush, we’re not going back home,” Norse said.

“Instead of a space ride to Canmeph 2,” Killer said, “We got a gig on Relic. And with our equipment, we need some help... so I hired some roadies.” Killer pointed over to center of the room, where three four-armed bunnies faded into view. “Everyone, may I introduce Nia, Polly, and Tan, our transportation staff.”

“Hey Killer!” Nia, a chocolate colored rabbit, chirped. “Is everything ready?”

“Everything’s in cases. Got the place?”

“We just popped in there to get the feel. Going to need more folk, though.”

“Pop me, Norse, and Cass over, Nina. Poly can take Lights, Stereo, and the lighting and sound equipment. Tina can bring Coils and the instruments. Once we get a feel, Norse and I will come back for Hauler, Hayden, and Yukon.”

Polly, the strawberry colored rabbit, said “Sounds like a deal. Should keep us from burning out on the jumps.”

As Lights was about to say something, Cass said to him “*No Lights, this ain't no portal technology!*”

Post Text – 2020

Another year has gone by, and it was a year.

To be fair, I (the author) am writing this small bit (what you're reading) in March 2021, a few months removed from the political turmoil in the United States of America.

Things are starting to recover. Medically the COVID-19 pandemic is being beaten back by *SCIENCE!!!* and not by certain people talking it to death (that never works). Three vaccines are approved by the USA's Food and Drug Administration for emergency use, and this pandemic qualified.

Politically the radicals tried to form a coup... and were beaten back... but not without difficulty. There are lawsuits and investigations on-going now. There's going to be jail sentences, for sure, but how far up... I won't be surprised.

Personally... well, in March my mother died, thankfully before the COVID-19 lock-downs. Things took a bit of a tumble but I'm now trying to run a household with a retired father. Slowly things are getting better.

There is one person I do need to credit. Darkwing Dork, a writer and creator of the webcomics *At Arm's Length* and *Off Centaured*. Nia, Polly, and Tin are his characters that I borrow from time to time. Go read his works:

<http://atarmslength.net>

<http://offcentaured.com>

Kelly “STrRedWolf” Price
March 2, 2021