Summary

Once upon a time in the land of Skaia there was a witch named Rose Lalonde. She was the greatest witch ever. Of all time. But when darkness threatens to take over the world, she is put to the ultimate test and must embark on a quest of epic proportions to defeat the Four Evil Mages. Along the way she meets some cool people, blows some stuff up, and maybe finds love.
Chapter One: Rose is the Greatest Witch Ever

Once upon a time, in the land of Skaia, there was a witch named Rose Lalonde.

She was the greatest witch ever.

Seriously, she was the best around. Like other wizards would challenge her to duels, and then she’d blast them away with one spell and everyone would be like: “Daamaammmnn.” Then Rose would just buff her nails on her robe like she didn’t give a fuck.

And she didn’t.

There are many great stories passed around the campfires, boasting of her greatness in battle and magical prowess, but as with most legends, most details of the stories are lost or warped with time. One tale stands out above the rest though, one tale that’s so awesome and just so unbelievable that it will probably last as long as time itself.

The story is called: The Tale of the Four Evil Mages.

It’s about four evil mages. That’s pretty much it.

Anyways, the story begins in the year four-hundred and thirteen, in a little town called Honey…

John Egbert was probably the worst hero who ever lived.

Like seriously, he sucked.

The citizens of Honey probably would have kicked his sorry ass out if it wasn’t for one big problem: John was the only hero in the entire town.

There was no one else who had the guts, or the means to defend the town of Honey from the various struggles that came along with living in a fantasy land. Without John, the weakly citizens would be left to fend for themselves. Within a week, they could all be killed by Saber Wolves or kidnapped by Drowsy, a cruel goblin who sometimes snuck into town at night to steal people from their beds. Those taken were never seen again!

Needless to say, Honey would rather have John than no one at all.

“Uh, Mr. Mayor?” John said one day, as he approached the village leader outside of Town Hall. “Is it alright if I talk to you for a second?”

Mayor Buzzles wasn’t a very good mayor either. The town of Honey was known for it’s pitiful complacency.

“Yes, yes, but make it quick. I’m a very busy man, John, as you well know.” Mayor Buzzles said impatiently.

“Well, you see…” John scuffed his shoe in the dirt nervously. “It’s just that I don’t think I should be
the town hero anymore.”

Mayor Buzzles did a triple take.

“W-w-w-w-w-w-w-What?!?” He replied. “John! What is this nonsense? You have to be the town hero! Literally no one else wants the job.”

“It’s just that I don’t feel well equipped for the job and I’m not very good at it either.” John showed Mayor Buzzles his shield, which was just a rusted cookie sheet, and his war hammer, which was actually just a regular hammer with no magical or cool properties. It was pretty shitty. “If we can’t get anyone else to do it, can I just get some better gear?”

“The town budget is stretched as it is,” Mayor Buzzles sighed. “What with Jared wanting to open up that new Peanut Gallery and Mrs. Fireburst needing that new roof on her house.”

“But don’t you think my problems are just a little more important?” John asked. “I mean, peanut galleries are just stupid places where you go to look at peanuts. It doesn’t even cost money to get in! How do you make your investments back? Also, Mrs. Fireburst is called that for a reason. She’s just going to burn down whatever roof you put up again!”

“John!” Mayor Buzzles was incredulous. “How dare you speak in such a tone? Peanut Galleries are an age-old tradition in Honey Town! I’m sorry, but you’re going to have to make do with what you’ve been dealt. Now if you’ll excuse me, there’s urgent business to attend to in the…”

Suddenly a young child ran up to both John and Mayor Buzzles.

“John! John! John!” The kid yelled, screeching to a halt before the two men. “A group of Lime Ogres are attacking the mead hall!”

“Aw, man!” John slapped his hand to his forehead. “That’s the third time this week!”

“I know, right? But they said if a hero didn’t fight them, then they’d tear the whole place down!” The kid grabbed John by the sleeve. “You have to defend the town!”

“The boy’s right, John.” Mayor Buzzles nodded in agreement. “It’s your duty, after all.”

John sighed. He was really tired of bullshit like this.

“Fine.” He hefted his hammer and shield. “But our conversation isn’t over Mayor. Don’t make me have to file a formal complaint.”

“Sure, sure, whatever. Go save the town!” Then Mayor Buzzles stuck his hands in his pockets and walked away, whistling.

Thinking that his conversation with Mayor Buzzles could have gone better, John set off towards the mead hall in defense of his town. John had lived in Honey his whole life and had taken over as town hero after his father died when he was thirteen.

The town hadn’t changed much since then. Five years later and there were still only sixteen or so buildings in the whole place. The only real reason to come to Honey was so that you could get a good laugh about how much it sucked before moving on to a much better town. Seriously, like if a town is called Honey, you’d expect to have to have something to do with actual honey, right? Or at least bees?

But nope. Honey’s main export was mediocrity.
Arriving outside the mead hall, John could already tell that shit was getting out of hand. All of the windows were shattered, the door was hanging off it’s hinges, and screams could be heard from inside. Taking a nervous gulp, John stepped over the busted door and entered the hall.

“Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug!” A group of lime ogres were huddled around a table in the center of the hall, watching as their leader held a barrel of mead over his head and poured the expensive liquid down his throat.

All the citizens of Honey who were unfortunate enough to be trapped inside huddled behind the bar and simply watched the ogres with spiteful gazes, all too afraid to defend themselves.

When the head ogre finished his mead, he slammed the barrel onto the ground and it shattered into splinters.

“This mead tastes foul!” He declared in a booming voice. “I’ll have another!”

“I don’t think so!” John called, mustering the courage to make himself noticed.

Instantly, all the ogres turned to him.

“Hey, look everyone!” The head ogre threw his head back and laughed. “It’s the Honey Knight. Tell me, John, what’s to stop me from taking another keg of mead? Hmmm?”

“You can have as much mead as you want.” John stepped forward. “As long as you pay for it.”

“Yeah…. That’s not going to happen.” The lead ogre pointed a large finger at John. “Wreck this fool!”

All of the smaller, but still powerful lime ogres leapt at John and proceeded to beat the ever living shit out of him. One ogre took his shield and threw it like a Frisbee to his friend, while John jumped between them and tried to snatch it back.

It was hopeless.

A savage blow from one of the monsters struck John on the back and knocked him to the floor. His glasses slipped from his nose and cracked on the hard wooden floor. Now sightless, shield-less, and a little dignity-less, John felt like now, more than ever was a good time to give up.

“If you want me to pay for my mead,” The lead ogre got up from his chair and walked up to John. Grabbing the hero by his ankle, the bandit lifted him into the air and shook him violently. “Then let’s see if you have any gold I can borrow. Hahaha!”

A few gold coins, a paper clip, and a lute pick fell from John’s pockets and joined his glasses on the floor.

“Unhand that weak man!” A voice suddenly called from the front door, silencing the guffawing ogres.

With his vision both inverted and blurry, John was unable to see the newcomer properly.

“What say you, wench?” The leader of the Lime Ogres replied, still jiggling John fruitlessly. “Can’t you see I’m busy being an asshole?”

“I can clearly see that.” The stranger, who was definitely female, began to draw nearer. “The real question is as to whether or not you can see that I am not one to be trifled with. I will ask once more,
“Release that horribly weak and insecure man at once!”

“Uh… I’m not weak.” John raised his hand feebly. “I’m actually a hero.”

“Shut up, you trashy piece of trash.” The Lime Ogre shook John again, and then turned to his lackeys. “Show this wench what we do to those who try to defend the weak and defenseless!”

“I’m not really defenseless…” John began, but was quickly drowned out as a fierce battle erupted in the center of the mead hall.

Still unable to see so much as three inches before his face, John was unable to accurately understand what was taking place. He saw a flash of light, heard a muffled scream, and then six bodies hit the floor. The stranger spoke again:

“With your cronies disabled, you have no other choice but to surrender, Lime Ogre.” She said. “I will not tell you again.”

Suddenly, John reconnected to the floor with painful results.

“Ow.” He mumbled as he lay in a heap.

The Lime Ogre drew his heavy mace and swung around his head.

“No sorcery is a match of Roderick the Brutalizer!” He cried and lunged forward. The stranger hissed another magic spell and then Roderick fell to his knees. “OH GOD MY EYES!”

John fumbled on the ground until he located his discarded glasses. Shoving the cracked lenses over his eyes, he looked up to see Roderick, leader of the Lime Ogres, clutching his face in agony. Before Roderick, stood John’s savior, a beautiful woman garbed in black robes.

“My name is Rose Lalonde.” The sorceress proclaimed. “And I am the greatest witch ever.”

Then she cast one final spell that trapped Roderick in a coma for all eternity, which, when you think about it, is a really fucked up fate. Like seriously, she could have just killed the guy, but now his family has to take care of his useless body forever.

Fun fact about Roderick the Brutalizer: After a thousand years of taking care of him, his descendants eventually say ‘screw this’ and leave Roderick just lying in the middle of the road.

And that’s how speed bumps were invented.

“Daaaaaaaammnnn.” All the Honey Town citizens gasped from behind the bar.

John had to agree, Rose was truly worthy of all the damns. She was shorter than John by a good six inches, slim, with ghostly-pale skin and searing, violet eyes. In all of the town of Honey, there never was a girl as comely as Rose and for a moment, John was speechless.

“Are you alright, peasant?” Rose asked, approaching John. “It was very brave of you to face those bandits.”

“Th-thanks.” John stammered in reply as he climbed to his feet. “I’m, uh… not a peasant though. I’m actually the town…”

“Praise this young sorceress!” A man who had been hiding crept out from under a table. “Fore she has saved us from the bandits!”
“WHOOOOH!” All the other Honey Town citizens cheered as they came to greet Rose.

One guy, which John recognized to be Jared, approached Rose and stooped into a low bow.

“Fair maiden.” Jared said, reaching for her hand. “I did believe our good fortune to have run out before you arrived. With your dazzling display of wizardy you have given me hope.”

“I’m going to build a statue in your honor!” Another man cried.

“I want to have your adopted babies!” A woman squealed.

John frowned. No one had ever offered to make him a statue or have his babies, adopted or otherwise. Hell, he can’t remember the last time he even got a simple ‘thank you’. However, he was too tired and legitimately grateful to Rose to be jealous of her attention. John moved about the cheering crowd, searching for his discarded shield, hammer, and lucky paper clip.

“Please, please, dear peasants.” Rose raised her hands above the crowd to silence them. “Although I do appreciate the gracious sentiments, I was only doing what any good samaritan/wizard/nomadic badass would do. I require no statues or lovers or gold. I simply wish to find a comfortable place to sleep for the night, so that I can continue my travels come first light.”

“BOOOOOOO!” One man howled. “You can’t leave! We need a town hero who isn’t shit!”

“Oh, thanks for that!” John huffed, straightening up with all of his belongings collected.

“You.” Rose pointed to John. “I take it that you must be the town hero then. Forgive me for calling you a peasant.”

“It’s alright, although I sort of think that you should stop calling people that.” John shrugged. “It sounds a little demeaning.”

“No, we’re totally peasants.” Jared argued. He swaggered up to Rose and tossed his arm around her slim shoulders. “I got an extra bedroll in my shack, although,” Jared leaned in close. “It would probably be more comfortable if we shared.”

In response, Rose cast a spell that turned Jared into a peanut. Ironic, since Jared would later be added to his own Peanut Gallery. He would be turned back to normal eventually by a group of warlocks. However, the man would never be the same.

A lot of people nowadays talk about how great Rose was. Don’t get me wrong, she ruled. It’s just that most people forget how much of a bitch she could be. John could tell that Rose was a tough dame already. In the past ten minutes she’d nonchalantly ruined the lives of two men. His flushed feelings for her only intensified.

“You.” She pointed at John again. He wished she’d ask for his name already. “You have integrity. I would appreciate a tour around town, as well as accommodations for the night.”

“Uh…” John didn’t really know if this fell under the jurisdiction of his “hero” duties, but hey, Rose was hot and what else was John going to do for the rest of the day? “Okay, follow me.”

Bidding other citizens of Honey goodbye, John and Rose exited the mead hall. Slowly, the men and women left behind began to collect the corpses of the Lime Ogres, along with Peanut Jared. They wept with the knowledge that Rose’s presence was to be short lived, along with the fact that their lives were pretty awful. It seemed that life in Honey was doomed to be as unfulfilling as always.
“So, where do you want to start first?” John gestured around the small town. “We could check out the Town Hall, go look at the river, we could even visit library if you wanted.”

“Let’s start with your home.” Rose was rummaging through a satchel tied around her waist. “I’ve grown tired of carrying my belongings for so long and would like to lighten my load for a spell.”

“How’s the spell going?” John smiled. “You’re funny and pretty too. I’m John.”

Rose simply nodded. She was used to dudes and dudettes of all shapes and sizes hitting on her. I mean, come on. She was a witch with a rocking body. What do you expect?

“I appreciate the compliment, although I would further appreciate an effort on your part to… How can I put this? *Keep it in your pants?*” Rose looks at John pointedly, with a perfectly curved eyebrow raised.

John flushed.

“I- I’m just trying to be nice.” He said defensively. “It seemed like a nice thing to say.”

“It was. Now let us press forward.” Rose tapped her chin thoughtfully as they walked. “So, Hero of Honey Town, what sort of defensive measures do you have in place to fend off invaders? I ask merely because I am at a loss to how those Lime Ogres managed to make it into the heart of the town. They could have easily pillaged this whole settlement for its wares.”

“Defensive measures? Wares?” John repeated. “Uh, we don’t have any of that stuff. There aren’t any enchantments or wards. We don’t have anything valuable either. It’s just… us.”

Rose blinked in surprise.

“Are you serious?” She asked. “What then, may I ask, is the purpose of this town?”

“We just live here.” John shrugged. “Does it need a purpose?”

“Most towns have some reason for existing, other than simply *because*, yes.” Rose shook her head. “So it’s just you versus the world then? Heh, I’m surprised this place hasn’t been burned to the ground.”

No sooner were the words out of her mouth than they passed Mrs. Fireburst’s house. Inside the burnt husk, Mrs. Fireburst was reading a book. She waved to John.

“Hello there, Hero!” She called. “Who’s that lovely lady?”

“I am Rose, the greatest witch ever.” Rose answered for John. “Nice house.”

She smirked and took John by the shoulder, pulling him forward.

“Out of all the towns I’ve visited, this has to be the worst.” Rose declared, once they were out of earshot of Mrs. Fireburst.

“I guess you travel a lot, huh?” John asked.

“Yes, of course. I’ve been to all four corners of Skaia, across the lava river, through the forest of Horrorterrors, even through the moonbear desert.” Rose gave a small smile at a pleasant memory. “I’ve fought skeleton lords and evil lich kings. I’ve shaken hands with the Empress of the White
Kingdom and rubbed elbows with the Black Emperor. I’ve…”

“Done a lot I get it.” John finished. He didn’t get frustrated easily, but Rose’s boasting pushed his buttons a bit. “But, like, where do you live? Do you just travel around aimlessly forever?”

“Not aimlessly. My goal is to make a name for myself among the great hero’s of this land by accomplishing a great quest. I’ve yet to find such a task, but when I do you can bet your Honey Town ass that I’ll be all over that shit.”

Alright, I’m totally paraphrasing there. Like I said, this is an ancient legend. Do you really expect me to remember exactly what Rose said? Anyways, John was all like:

“What are you going to do after you finish your quest though? Are you going to settle down?”

Rose turned to John with another stern look.

“I thought I told you to rein your hormones, John. If my wish is too much of a trial, then I fear I might have to search for quarter elsewhere.”

“What? I’m not being hormonal! It was a simple question, not a marriage proposal. Sheesh!” John turned to hide his blush. “Uh, anyways. This is my place.”

They came to a stop outside of a small cabin. It was only one floor high, with one room, and one outhouse in the tiny backyard. John had lived there his whole life and had shared the place with his dad before the old man kicked the bucket.

After John unlocked and opened the front door, Rose investigated the inside. It was small, with only one bed and a wooden trunk for furniture. There was a fireplace though and on the wall a picture of a sunflower hung next to a window with a view to the sunset.

“Pretty.” Rose commented and dumped her bag onto his bed. “As I’ve stated, I’ll only be staying for one night before I continue my journey. I’ll take this bed if it’s all the same to you.”

John thought about protesting, but decided against it. Rose could probably transfigure him into something stupid as easily as a whisper. He figured that her asking for permission was only a formality.

“Sure, whatever.” John took his shield and hammer and hung them on the wall. “So you said you wanted a tour around town, right? Let’s go before it gets tooooooo…”

John’s last word was drawn out into a long hum as he watched Rose shrug off her robes to reveal a rather pretty dress underneath.

“God that thing was hot.” She said, tossing it onto the bed. Rose stretched and rolled her shoulders, unwittingly giving John a good view of her lean muscles.

She was fine.

You know John’s heart was-a pounding in his chest. Shit was about to burst with all the dovey dove, love sweet love that was filling the air.

“… ooooooo late.” John finished finally, tearing his eyes away from her. “We should go before it gets too late.”

“Alight then.” Rose stepped to the door, a small smile on her lips. “Lead the way, Hero of Honey
Town.”

With the speed and knowledge of an O.G. Honey Town Resident, John took Rose through all of the interesting landmarks of the small village. He showed her the library, which was home to fifteen books that were all written by the town creep, Sicko Larry.

“Don’t read them.” John said as Rose fingered a tome. “It’s just full page nudes. Just… just don’t read them.”

Next was the Town Hall, where they bumped into Mayor Buzles.

“So you’re the famous witch that I’ve heard so much about.” The Mayor frowned. “News does certainly travel fast around here, especially about such a character as yourself. Let me ask you something, sorceress, what do you think gives you the right to transfigure good people? Jared was an honest man with a dream. Now he’s a nut.”

Rose folded her arms.

“He was a loser and honestly, by looking at this town, I think I did you a favor. Do you really want another shitty landmark marring the landscape?”

Mayor Buzles face began to grow red, not with the warm glow of love though.

“Peanut Galleries are an age old tradition of Honey Town that…” He was cut off when a motherfucking arrow flew through the air and struck him in the throat. “Gah! My neck!”

“Mayor Buzles!” John yelled, lunging forward and catching the mayor before he hit the ground. As the man spluttered and coughed up blood, John looked to Rose. “Why did you do that for?! What kind of bitch casts an arrow spell for no reason?”

“It wasn’t me.” Rose turned on the spot and gasped when she found the source of the arrow.

High above the ground, near the center of town, flew about half a dozen Dragon Knights. They were armed with bows and arrows and clothed in thick, leather armor. Grabbing John by the arm, Rose picked him up and dragged him into the Town Hall. Together, the two of them looked out into the street and watched the Dragon Knights.

“Peasants!” A Dragon Knight roared. “We know that you are harboring the sorceress Rose Lalonde. Turn her over to us and no one else will die! We have a bounty for her head from The Dragon Mistress of the North herself.”

John gasped and Rose grit her teeth.

“You have like… thirty seconds.” The Dragon Knight continued.

Rose made to exit the hall, but John grabbed her by the wrist.

“What the fuck?!” He hissed. “You can’t go out there. They’re Dragon Knights, dragons with god-damned bows and swords. They’ll kill you!”

“I cannot risk anyone else being hurt because of me.” She brushed his hand off. “This will only take a few seconds.”

“Rose…”

“Trust me, John.” Rose pushed open the door and stepped out into the street. “Dragons!”
Instantly, the Dragon Knights set their gazes upon her.

“There she is!” One pointed. “Get her!”

All the Dragon Knights dived towards Rose, with a flick of her wrist, she trapped the first two in blocks of magical ice. They fell to the ground and shattered into a million, frozen dragon pieces. It was super gross and super cool.

“Fuck!” A remaining Dragon yelled. “That was my brother, you bitch!!!”

Rose turned him into a tiny kitten. The cat was immediately crushed by the weight of the dragon’s leathery armor, which was of no use to such a little kitten. The final Dragon Knights hesitated and floated in the air above Rose.

“Who’s next?” Rose taunted, spinning her wands.

One of the Dragons huffed, shooting twin jets of steam from his nostrils.

“We’ll be back, Rose Lalonde. You’re awesome magical deeds have angered The Dragon Mistress and she will have your blood. Tomorrow at noon, we will return with five times our numbers to burn this town to the ground and you along with it.” Then the dragon gave her the finger and flew away, with his companions in tow.

John came out of the town hall

“Oh my golden rings.” He gasped. “Rose, that was awesome!”

The powerful witch sighed and pressed a hand to her forehead.

“I’m sorry, John. By coming here I’ve put your whole existence at risk.”

“It’s alright. You didn’t know that the Dragon Mistress of the North wanted you dead.” John patted her on the shoulder. “You can run if you want. I don’t think anyone will care if Honey is destroyed.”

“I’ll care.” Rose faced him. “This town may be shit, but I will not be responsible for its destruction. Tomorrow, I will face the Dragon Knights in combat and defend your livelihood. Then,” She clenched her fists. “I’m going after the Dragon Mistress herself.”

“Wow,” John whistled. “I guess you’ve found your big quest, huh?”

“Yes. I suppose I have.” With a sigh, Rose led the way back towards John’s hut. “Come, John. We must prepare for battle.”

“Uh….” John stumbled after her. “W- What do you mean ‘we’?”

“So when do you come in?”

“What?”

“When do you come into the story?”

Dave shrugged.

“I dunno, like chapter three or something. Be patient, this shit is still getting started.” With a groan, Dave pushed himself out of his chair and began to tuck-in his daughter. “But that’s enough for
tonight. You have Wizard School tomorrow and I’m tired as hell.”

“Aw. Come on, Dad!” Dave’s Daughter whined. “Just a little bit more! I wanna know how Rose beats the Dragon Knights! I wanna know how you meet Uncle John! I wanna know when you and mom…”

Dave silenced his kid with a small kiss on the forehead.

“Damn, you’re a greedy bastard.” Dave yawned. “Listen, if you promise to do all of your homework and chores before dinner tomorrow, then I’ll tell you two chapters before bed, got it?”

“Yes, sir!” The little girl rolled over and tried to fall asleep as fast as she could. “Goodnight, Dad!”

Dave crossed to the door, extinguishing the torch on the wall as he passed. With his hand on the doorknob, he turned back and smiled.

“Night, Rosie.” Then he shut the door and went to bed.

Chapter End Notes

So this is something that's been in my head for a long time. It's vulgar, silly, a little ridiculous, but hopefully you'll have a little fun reading this, because I know that I certainly had fun writing it. With John: Try to Understand being my primary fic, updates for this may be sporadic, but if you're interested in reading, I will continue to write this.

Thanks for reading.

- Mike
Chapter Notes

Thanks to kateinator, terminalViscosity, Bloopy, DarkroseoftheShadows and for commenting.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Two: The Hero of Honey Town

Alright, so after Rose kicked the ever-living shit out of a few Dragon Knights, the villains flew away to regroup, but not before promising to return the next day and burn the town of Honey to the ground!

That’s some heavy stuff, right?

Anyways, John and Rose reconvened in his little hut to come up with a plan to defeat the dragon attackers.

“I think we should just take the whole town and push it somewhere else.” John offered.

Rose shook her head.

Unless all of your homes are equipped with wheels, I don’t think that is going to work.” She said.

“No, John. We can’t run. If The Dragon Mistress truly sent her minions to kill me, then nowhere is safe enough to hide whilst their bounty persists. Tomorrow I must either defeat these Dragon Knights in combat or die trying.”

“Dammit.” John beat his fist into his bed, which was just a sack stuffed with hay. The thread count was so shitty, that more than once John was awoken when a piece of hay poked through the sack and scratched his eye. “You can’t do this, Rose! There has to be another way.”

“These are not your everyday bandits or raiders, John. They cannot be bargained, bought, or swayed. They only respond to one thing and one thing alone: total carnage.”

John sighed. Although he barely knew Rose at all, she had already endeared herself to him with her amazing magical abilities and bodacious body. He did not want her to get hurt.

“Do you have like… a plan? Or something?” He asked.

Rose looked around John’s hut and spotted his hammer and shield from where they hung on the wall.

“Let’s take an inventory of our gear and then see where we stand.” She collected his weapons and tossed them on the bed next to John, along with her own pair of double wands. “So far we have, my wands, your hammer, and also your shield. Is that it?”

John nodded.

“No one else in town has any weapons, unless you count Jared’s boomerang. Jared was the only one
who knew how to use it though and you sort of…”

“Yeah, yeah. I know what I did.” Rose waved her hand impatiently. She was much too important of a person to worry about dickheads like Jared for too long. “Tell me about this hammer. What sort of enchantments does it have?”

“Um… absolutely none.”

Rose’s eyes widened.

“My gods, what kind of hero are you?”

“An awful one.” John sighed again

“And what is this?” Rose tapped his shield with a nail. “A fucking cookie-sheet? Ugh, how can anyone be expected to defend a town with crap like this?”

John started to get a little upset. He understood that she was some big-shot witch, but that didn’t give her the right to be rude.

“Oh, yeah?! Well, what’s so special about these stupid sticks?” He reached for one of her wands, but she slapped his wrist.

“I wouldn’t touch them if I were you. I’ve lost count of the number of magical wards, runes, and enchantments that have graced these implements of mine.” She carefully picked one up and held it up to the moonlight that filtered in through the window. “Forged on the summit of the great Volcano Woolden, blessed by a Dreaming Songbird of the Emerald Palace, tuned with the hair of a Unicorn’s stepson…”

“I get it, they’re the best around.” John rolled his eyes. “So basically you’re saying that you’re going to win this fight because you have awesome wands?”

“No. I was simply describing the history of my preferred tools. If I’m going to conquer the Dragon Knights, it’s going to take more than a few fancy toys and a quick spell.” Rose began to pace. “What do you know about the Dragon Mistress, John?”

“Hmmm.” John wracked his brains for a moment. “Well she’s the mistress of all dragons, right?”

“I meant, what do you know besides the obvious?”

“She’s… evil?”

Rose heaved a mighty, exasperated sigh. Out of all the people she had met in her travels, human or otherwise, John was probably the most infuriating. She had half a mind to smack him upside the head, and another other half that just wanted to pick him up, cradle him in her arms, and use him to ward off those cold Skaia nights.

If you know what I’m saying. (wink)

“The Dragon Mistress,” Rose defined as she paced. “Lives in the uppermost mountains of Skaia. She is the leader of a league of villains known as The Four Evil Mages and is known for having a completely mastery on all of the arcane arts.”

“All of them?”

“All of them. From her secluded tower in the mountains, she watches over the land and sends her
minions to strike down those she sees as a threat. I suppose it was only a matter of time before she came for me.” Rose clenched her fists. “After I defend Honey Town. I’m going after her.”

“You’re going to travel to the north?” John was incredulous. “Rose that’s incredibly dangerous!”

“I know,” She said with a smirk. “All the more reason to do it, amirite? However, it won’t be as simple as crossing the Wizard Mountain Range and the Lava River. In order to reach the inner sanctum of her domain, I’ll have to defeat the other three mages and obtain their Keys of Fate.”

John was enraptured by this harrowing tale of mythology. At no time in his life had he received such a history lesson and he truly began to wonder what actually lay outside the borders of Honey, lands that he’d only dreamt about traversing before.

“That’s so awesome.” He breathed in awe. “Rose, that’s literally the most heavy metal thing I’ve ever heard.”

“It is, isn’t it?” She smiled at John. If there was one thing she Rose appreciated, it was being appreciated. “First there is the Crab King of the East, followed by the Vampire Queen of the West, and then the Bee Lord of the South. All of which are powerful sorcerers in their own right.”

“Aw man,” John gasped. “I hate bees.”

“Who doesn’t?”

“Well, the Bee Lord obviously.” Struck by a sudden thought, John leaned forward on his bed. “Rose, I’ve just gotten a totally radical idea.”

“Let me hear it.”

“After we finish messing up these Dragon Knights, you should let me go with you on this quest!” He grinned. “It would be awesome! We could camp out on the countryside, meet cool people, see cool things, and in the end, defeat some super evil mages!”

Rose crossed her arms.

“You want to accompany me?” She asked. “Are you serious?”

“Yes!”

She considered his proposition for a moment. Of course Rose had held the company of numerous travel companions during her pilgrimage. None of them ever lasted too long though, as most were not hardy enough to withstand the daily trials and tribulations of her hectic lifestyle.

Her longest companion had been an orc named Henry, who got turned into a skeleton by a necromancer outside of the Black Garden. After his horrific transformation, it was difficult for anyone to look at Henry without feeling a little ill. Rose in particular wanted nothing to do with a former orc who was now just a silly old skeleton. As far as she knew, Henry was now living in seclusion in the Wizard Mountain Range, mourning the loss of his friends.

And his skin.

“I don’t know.” Rose admitted. “It will be incredibly dangerous. Not to mention, long, wearisome, tedious, girthy, and boring.”

“Anything out there is better than this shitty place.” John countered. “Plus, you could use my help!
I’m really good at…”

He trailed off. Rose’s eyebrow rose.

“You’re good at…?” She prompted.

“I’m good at…” John cast about the room, as if the wooden walls and floor would hold the answer. “I’m good at telling jokes!”

“Is that so? Very well then,” Rose sat down next to him on the bed. “Humor me with a noteworthy joke.”

John began to sweat. He didn’t expect her to call him on his bluff!

“Uh, let’s see.” He had to think fast. “A man drowns in the middle of the Smahara Desert, but there isn’t any water around for miles. How did he die?”

“That’s a riddle, not a joke.” Rose chided. “And obviously the man was a member of the Sun Clan, since only a member of the Sun Clan would be stupid enough to drown in a desert.”

Damn! Not only was Rose an awesome witch and the smoothest of operators, but she also knew topical humor! Was there anything she couldn’t do?!?

The Sun Clan was a group of monks who lived on an island off the east coast of Skaia. Some of their rituals included: looking at the sun for hours on end, painting each other yellow, and staring at the sun some more. At night, the members of the Sun Clan cowered in a cave and waited for the sun to return the next day to chase away the evil moon.

John sighed again and rested his face in his palms.

“Welp. You got me. I guess I’m not good at anything.” He said dejectedly.

Suddenly, a small hand began to rub his upper back, along his shoulder, and down his arm. He glanced up to see Rose looking at him with a mixture of amusement and sympathy as she comforted him with a hasty massage. John quickly became aware of how close she was to him and how pretty she looked in the dim light.

“You’re glasses are broken.” She said, almost too quietly to hear. Without asking for permission, she gently pulled them from his face and tapped them with her wand. They mended before John’s very eyes. “There we go.”

She placed them back on the bridge of his nose.

“Now, I know it may be easy to rag on yourself, what with your numerous flaws and lack of any real talent.” Rose patted him on the shoulder again as she continued. She was sort of bad at this kind of thing. “But travel as much as I have and you’re bound to see that the most amazing things can come from the most unlikely of places. I believe that you have potential, John, and although I can’t say for sure how to unlock it, I bet you’ll find an answer out there somewhere.”

John stared at her.

“So was that just a really roundabout way of saying that I could go with you on your quest?” He asked. “Because that’s where I think it was going.”

Rose laughed lightly and patted John once more before folding her hands in her lap. His shoulder
burned from where she had touched him.

“I may come to regret this.” She commented, and then looked up into his eyes. “But yes, I would appreciate your company on my expedition.”

“Aw, fuck yes!” John grinned. “Thanks, Rose! You won’t regret this, I promise.”

“I know I won’t.” Rising to her feet, Rose yawned and stretched. “For tonight though, we should get some sleep. Tomorrow we will face the Dragon Knights, defend the town of Honey, and then begin our quest for the four mages.”

John hastily took his gear and returned it to the wall before setting the bed for Rose. After he was done, he tossed a few blankets on the floor for himself and snuggled up by her side. Rose sank onto the bed with a contented sigh.

“After a few days in the wilderness, you’ll be missing your bed.” She said as she got comfortable. “But… I think you’ll like it, sleeping under the stars.”

As John listened to the slow and steady sound of her breathing, he twisted his neck to look through the window and out into the starry, night sky.

“Yeah,” He agreed. “I think I will.”

The next day John and Rose woke up bright and early to face the Dragon Knights. Rose was lacing up a pair of knee-high boots when John came back to the hut, having gone to collect some water from the town well.

“Is that what you wear when you kick ass?” He asked, watching her prepare.

She always wore these silly boots and a dress with all this purple and back frilly stuff. There was a skull on her breast and a simple black headband that she used to keep her bangs out of her eyes. Around her waist was a purple sash that held her wands.

“Yes.” Rose said, pulling her laces tight. “Yes. It is.”

John put the water bucket on the floor and the pair of them washed up. After they were finished, John caught himself staring at Rose.

“You mumbled in your sleep.” He blurted suddenly. “I mean, you say things. Like, weird stuff.”

Rose watched him thoughtfully as she brushed her hair.

“If you travel as long as I have, you’re bound to come across a few nightmares.” She said simply. “I wouldn’t…”

Outside, there came a loud shout that cut Rose off mid-sentence. Thinking that the attack had begun, John and Rose collected their weapons and raced out into the street to defend the town. However, there were no Dragon Knights in sight, only the citizens of Honey town who were gathered in the village square.

“What’s going on?” Rose demanded, approaching the townsmen. “What was that noise?”

“It’s the witch!” One man cried.

“Get her!” Another yelled and suddenly all the villagers raced forward.
“WAIT!!” John shouted, throwing himself in front of Rose and bringing the mob to a halt. “What are you guys doing?!”

“We built a witch-burning-post next to the statue of Mayor Buzzles.” Mrs. Fireburst, who was leading the charge, explained. Over the crowd, John could see a large stick standing erect next to the statue of Mayor Buzzles.

The statue was built about a year ago, after Buzzles was elected. It was made out of hardened mud and every time it rained, the statue had to be rebuilt. After the first few times this happened, everyone just gave up and now the statue simply resembles Mayor Buzzles if he was a burn victim.

Speaking of Mayor Buzzles, he walked out of the crowd and approached John. A heavy bandage was wrapped around his neck.

“We’re going to offer this interloper to the Dragon Knights.” The Mayor proclaimed. As he spoke, a spurt of blood shot from his neck and hit John in the face. “Rose Lalonde is not a citizen of this town. We have no obligation to protect her. If the Dragon Knights want her, they can have her.”

More blood flew onto John.

“H- how are you even alive? I saw you get shot with an arrow!”

“It’ll take more than an arrow to the neck to take out old Mayor Buzz…” He passed out mid-sentence from blood loss and died.

No one cared.

“Anyways,” Mrs. Fireburst picked up from where Buzzles left off. “Come here, Rose. We’re going to tie you to this stick now.”

“NO!” Once more, John shielded Rose. “You guys can’t do this! She’s trying to help defend the town.”

“The town wouldn’t even be in danger if she hadn’t had come!” A man yelled.

“Yeah!” All the Honey villagers added.

Rose pushed John out of the way and faced the crowd.

“Citizens of Honey Town.” She began. “Listen to me. I know it may seem smart, not to mention easy, to just forfeit in this manner. But look around you,” She swept and arm over the town. “This is your life, your whole existence, right here within these streets. Isn’t it worth fighting for? If you all rally together, with a legitimate cause, then you can overcome any obstacle.”

Everyone who was assembled paused and looked at one another. It seemed as if Rose’s speech had gotten through.

“Did you understand anything she said?” Asked one woman.

“It sounded like a lot of spell craft to me!”

“Get her!”

As the assembled group of citizens raced forward once more, an ear-splitting roar filled the early morning air. Everyone looked up to see a gaggle of Dragon Knights swirling over head in a loose flying formation.
“Shit!” John exclaimed. “They’re here!”

“Wow. I think I found something your good at, John.” Mayor Buzzles wheezed from his spot on the ground. “Pointing out the fucking obvious.”

Then Mayor Buzzles died again. For real this time.

No one cared.

“Everyone!” Rose drew her wands. “Seek shelter in your homes!”

“She’s right here! Come and get her!” Sicko Larry, the town creep, leapt from the crowd. He was super naked and super gross. “Nice, tasty witch right here, dragon boys!”

With a flick of her wands, Rose froze Sicko Larry in a block of magical ice. He toppled over and shattered into a million, frozen human pieces. One chunk of Larry bounced on the ground and struck John in the face.

“Oh man!” John smacked the piece away. “Jesus, I really hope that was his finger!”

It wasn’t.

As one, the Dragon Knights descended and landed on the ground before Rose. Their leader, a Dragon Knight named Crimson Snout, stepped forward.

“Come to face your end, I see.” He hissed. “It appears the tales of your cowardice were false.”

“There are no cowards here.” Rose responded.

“Nope, we’re totally cowards.” A man next to John raised his hand. “I’m comfortable enough with myself to admit that.

Ignoring everyone else, Crimson Snout stepped forward with his dragon sword poised to strike.

“By order of the Dragon Mistress, I sentence thee to- GAHK!” He was silenced when a motherfucking spell flew from Rose’s wands and blasted his head clean off.

“That was my cousin, you bitch!!!” Yelled one dragon and he charged forward.

Apparently all dragons are related somehow. Not in some patriotic, team-building way. Like they’re all totally inbred pieces of shit. It’s super gross, but then again, you shouldn’t judge. To each their own, right?

Rose began to battle the dragons in the most spectacular laser light show that anyone in the god-forsaken town of Honey had ever seen. Seriously, it was like a Van Halen concert out there, but instead of there being actual songs it was just two hours of Eddie wailing on that guitar like a jacked-up Minotaur at a Demonball Match.

For those of you who don’t know, Demonball is a game where Minotaurs try to get a cursed ball into their opponent’s goal. It’s sort of like Basketball, except whoever holds the ball immediately gets high as hell. Demonball matches can last for days on end, but no one really cares because weed, amirite?

Legalize it.

Anyways, as Rose fought the bad guys, John tried to shepherd all of his fellow villagers to safety.
“Come on, Mrs. Fireburst. We need to get you out of harm’s way.”

“Wait! I dropped Peanut Jared.” Mrs. Fireburst crawled on her hands and knees, looking for Peanut Jared.

“Why did you bring him out here?!”

“It’s what he would have wanted!”

Suddenly, a lone Dragon Knight landed right in front of Mrs. Fireburst.

“I’m doing this because I’m evil!” The dragon yelled and raised his sword to strike the woman down.

John leapt forward and swung his hammer as hard as he could into the dragon’s head. The hammer struck and then broke into like, fifteen different pieces. The dragon turned around and spotted John with the broken hammer handle still in his hand.

“Dude, did you just hit me?” The dragon asked.

“Yeah.” John admitted. “I didn’t think it through very well.”

“No. You didn’t.” The dragon pointed his sword at John’s head. “Hey, aren’t you the town hero?”

“Yup.”

“Damn, dude. This must really suck then, huh?”

“I guess. I mean, all my hard work feels sort of pointless now.”

“Especially when your girlfriend is a much better hero than you are.” The dragon pointed to where Rose was kicking ass. “What are you holding by the way? Is that a fucking cookie-sheet shield? You have got to be joshin me.”

John clutched his shield defensively.

“It gets the job done and Rose isn’t my girlfriend. We’re just a couple of hero pals.”

“I dunno. Something tells me that you kind of want to be more than that.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, just think about it. Are you really happy with just being ‘hero pals’?” The dragon made air quotes with his fingers. “You have to set the bar high if you ever want to get with this chick. Women love a man with confidence, who has their goals in mind. If you really like this girl, you should let her know.”

“But that’s the problem,” John explained. “I’ve never liked a girl like this before. I mean, there was Shelby from home room, but she got eaten by a Saber Wolf like ten years ago.”

“That’s rough luck. So I guess you’re worried that you’re going to just make a fool of yourself because you’re inexperienced?”

“I think that pretty much sums it up, yeah.”

“Listen, uh… what’s your name?”
“John.”

“Listen, John. You see this ring.” The dragon showed John a silver band on his dragon finger. “I met my wife at a time when I couldn’t think any less of myself. She drove me to be a better dragon and if that’s how Rose makes you feel, then you can’t justify letting her slip through your fingers. If you really want to be with her, then you can.”

“You think so?”

“I know so.”

“Wow! Thanks, Mr. Dragon.”

“Just call me Super Wings, please. Mister Dragon is my father.”

John smiled at Super Wings.

“So…” He held out his hand. “Does this mean you aren’t going to kill me?”

Super Wings blinked at John’s proffered hand in surprise.

“What? No. No, of course not. I’m totally still going to kill you.”

“Are you serious?!”

“Deadly serious.” Super Wings lifted his sword and John ducked behind his shield in expectation of a powerful blow.

Across the street turned battlefield, Rose was casting spells left, right, and center. She burned dragons with burn spells, melted them with melting spells, and turned them into useless or stupid things using transmogrification spells. A single bead of sweat formed on her brow as she dodged and ducked around the Dragon Knight’s swords. Even with all of her skill and power, the sheer numbers would get to her eventually.

Suddenly an idea struck Rose like a speeding bone train. Skipping away from her attackers, she twirled her wands and casted a very powerful spell with this ancient incantation:

*Oh-oo-oh, you think you're special.*
*Oh-oo-oh, you think you're something else.*
*Okay, so you're Dragon Knight?*
*That don't impress me much,*
*So you got the scales, but have you got the touch?*
*Now don't get me wrong, yeah I think you're alright,*
*But that won't keep me warm in the middle of the night,*
*That don't impress me much,*
*Uh huh, yeah-yeah!*

All of the dragons, including Super Wings, paused what they were doing as Rose sang her song. It was so beautiful and so magical that they were unable to move a muscle or have a single coherent thought. Suddenly as a result of the spell, a blast of arcane magic rippled from Rose and struck all of the Dragon Knights, instantly turning them all to ash.

As gross dragon dust rained down on the town of Honey, everyone was stunned into an impenetrable silence. All eyes turned to Rose and watched in awe as she spun her wands around her fingers, blew imaginary smoke off the tips, and then stuck them into the sash around her waist.
“No foe is a match for the deus ex machina spell.” Rose commented. She turned to John. “We did it, John. We saved the town.”

“No.” John stepped forward and took Rose’s hand. “You saved the town.”

Then he thrust her fist into the air and all the citizens of Honey town cheered. Out of the ashes, Mayor Buzzles struggled into the sitting position.

“Hey, everyone!” He called. “Did I miss anything?!”

A sitcom-esque laugh track filled the air as dragon dust continued to settle all along the street.

A few hours later, Rose stood on the edge of town. She was dressed once more in her flowing black robes and her trusty satchel was slung from her hip. Her time in Honey town had sucked quite a bit, but in the end, she would be sad to leave it behind.

Life on the road isn’t easy and weary travelers so seldom find small towns with the sort of personality as Honey Town. However, as the greatest witch ever, Rose’s destiny lay in the furthest reaches of Skaia, where others feared to tread.

Rose checked her moon-watch for the third time in as many minutes. After the battle, John had agreed to meet her so that they could begin their adventure together. He had yet to show up and Rose was beginning to feel a heavy weight settle in her gut.

Of course John wouldn’t actually go with her. She was a black cat, a bad luck charm with enough of a self-destruction complex to chase away even the most loyally driven of companions, and like so many before, John was just another disappointment.

With a sigh, Rose turned to leave, but stopped when she heard footsteps. She turned to find John running towards her.

“There you are!” John skidded to a halt in front of her. “I’ve been looking everywhere. Are you ready to go?”

“Y- You’re actually coming?” Rose asked, a little nervously.

“Well, yeah! I told you that I would.” John adjusted his backpack on his shoulders. “I’ve had enough of this town for a lifetime.”

“What will Honey do without it’s hero?”

“I’m sure they’ll manage.” John smiled. Fun Fact here, a week after John left, the town of Honey was destroyed by roving back of Flying Bird Bandits. “So are we going on or not?”

Rose smiled.

“Of course.” She turned and led the way towards the horizon. “It will not be easy. As I’ve mentioned before, we’ll need to defeat the other three mages before we can face the Dragon Mistress.”

“Alright. So where are we heading first?”

“The Wizard Mountain Range.” Rose pointed towards a cluster of rocky peaks in the far distance. “The Crab King of the East lives just beyond their lowest valley, on the shores of the Sea of Cancer.”

“Sea of Cancer? That sounds awful!”
“It is.” Rose looked at John seriously. “Are you sure that you don’t want to turn back?”

“Nope.” He replied instantly. “I don’t care if we have to cross the Sea of Cancer, the River of AIDS, or Lake Herpes. I’m with you until the end, Rose Lalonde.”

She turned away, so as to hide her smile. Great witches, especially the greatest witch ever, did not smile like that.

“John!” A voice called from behind.

The two heroes turned and watched as Mrs. Fireburst jogged towards them.

“I packed some biscuits and dried fruit for you trip.” She said, holding out a basket to John. “Good luck!”

Just before the basket was successfully passed, Mrs. Fireburst let loose a mighty sneeze. A plume of flame shot from her nose and incinerated the basket completely.

“My life is a living hell!!!” Mrs. Fireburst wept. She turned and raced back towards the village.

“Come on, John.” Rose tugged on his arm. “Let’s get the hell away from this stupid town.”

Together, the two adventurers walked towards their destiny.

THE END.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa!!!” Rosie waved her hands in front of her father’s face. “What do you mean ‘the end’? This isn’t the end! You can’t pull that shit!”

“Watch your damn mouth!” Dave snapped at his daughter. “Of course it isn’t the end. I’m just joshin you, kid. Jesus, take a chill spell.”

Rosie leaned back onto her pillows and folded her arms with annoyance.

“That’s not funny. I wanna know what happens next.”

“Well you’ll to wait until tomorrow night.” Dave rose from his chair by her bedside. “I’m tired as hell and my throat hurts from all this talking.”

“You promised me two chapters tonight! I did my homework and chores and everything!”

“Well, I lied. Welcome to the real world.” Dave tucked in his daughter. “Sorry. I’ll make it up to you later. Honestly, I don’t know why you care so much about this crap.”

“It’s really interesting! Also you’re a great story-teller. You do voices and everything!!”

“I am a pretty good story-teller, aren’t I?” He straightened up, a smirk on his face. “Did you like that one part when I sang?”

“Uh… yeah! It was great.” Rosie lied. She rolled over and buried her face in her sheets. “Well, I’m going to bed. Night.”

With a final kiss on his daughter’s head, Dave turned and shut the door quietly behind him.
Chapter End Notes

This is going to be a thing now.

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Chapter Three: The Wizard Mountains

After leaving the town of Honey behind, hopefully for good, Rose and John set out on a quest to slay the four evil mages of Skaia and liberate the world from darkness. Rose, who had been on countless adventures before, was looking forward to her biggest challenge yet, whilst John was just happy to get away from that shit-hole of a town and see some new things.

“Look at this tree.” John proclaimed, bringing Rose to a halt next to a large oak. “It’s as big as my house!”

“I’ve seen Gravy Beetles bigger than your house.” Rose pointed out. “Also, I wouldn’t get too close to that one if I were you. There’s a spider on it.”

“Huh?” John squinted at the bark of the tree. “I don’t see any…”

All of the sudden, a goddamned Spider-Tiger fell out of the tree and landed on John’s back. Spider-Tiger’s are large spiders that are about six feet long and weigh about a hundred pounds. Their venom is so poisonous, that one drop will turn you into a dead guy!

John cried out in surprise and shoved the Spider-Tiger off of his back. Rose drew her wand and exploded the spider with a well-aimed bomb spell. Gross spider guts flew everywhere and I think a little bit got in John’s open mouth.

I don’t remember exactly. I wasn’t there yet, remember?

Anyways, John learned his lesson after that and almost always followed Rose’s directions for the rest their lengthy journey. A journey which began on the eastern-most edge of Skaia, in a range of snowy mountains simply known as: The Wizard Mountains.

These particular mountains were called this for a number of reasons. Predominately because it was home to the only wizard academy in the land, but also because there was some almost always some crazy magical shit going on in the highest peaks.

Legends state, the first wizard babies were born on the summit of the Wizard Mountains. Rose herself was probably born there, although this was never confirmed. Regardless, all powerful magical beings felt the ineffable tug to traverse the dangerous range.

“If we just keep on track, then we should reach the lair of the Crab King in a matter of days.” John was perusing a map as they walked. “It’s a good thing I remembered to bring this map. Otherwise we might get lost.”

No sooner were the words out of his mouth, then a goddamned Bird-Shark dived out of the air and snatched the map from his fingers. Bird-Sharks are three foot long birds that weigh about fifty pounds. Their talons are so sharp, that one swipe can turn you into a headless guy!

“Nice map, dick-less.” The Bird-Shark cawed as he flew away. “Shit’s mine now!”

Struck by a sudden rage, John kicked at the ground as hard as he could and cursed up a storm. In the
early days of his travels, he had a rough time adjusting to the harshness of the untamed wilderness.

“Agh!” He cried in frustration. “That was my only map!”

“Don’t worry, John.” Rose patted him on the arm. “I’ve traveled the mountains a few times. We shouldn’t get lost as long as I lead the way.”

John calmed down instantly. He was typically an easy-going fella anyways, but with the added factor of Rose, then anger was rarely a problem with him. Lalonde had a way of controlling him, which I know sounds a little weird, but that’s pretty much what it was.

If Rose said jump, then John was already halfway off the ground and to the moon. It was a little sad.

“Alright, good.” John breathed a sigh of relief. “For a second there I thought we were screwed.”

The pair of them continued on a rough path towards the foot of the mountains and then ascended into the rocky hills. After about thirty minutes of walking, they were lost as fuck.

“I think we’re lost as fuck.” Rose said, looking towards the sky. “I could have sworn that you were supposed to take a left at that boulder that looked like a dog.”

“I told you like twenty times that the boulder looked like a kangaroo.” With a sigh, John took a seat on a small rock. “Give me a second to rest, and then we can double back.”

“I don’t think that’s an option,” Rose turned slowly on the spot. “Considering, that I’ve just lost track of where ‘back’ is.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Do you remember where we came from?”

“Yeah, we squeezed through that crevice over…” John trailed off when he noticed that the way they had come was nowhere to be found. “Oh no! Rose, we’re lost! These mountains must be haunted.”

“Balderdash! These mountains are no more haunted than my knickers. It’s just this afternoon light playing tricks on us. Get up, John. We need to keep moving.”

But the further they traveled around the rocky hills of the mountains the more lost they became. Eventually, they simply began to ascend, trying to get as high as possible in order to gain a better vantage point. As the air grew thinner and cold flakes slowly began to drift around them, John forced Rose to stop.

“I don’t think we should go up any higher.” He said. “It’s getting late and we’ll only get more lost in the dark. Plus we could accidentally walk off a cliff or something.”

Rose cursed under her breath. Of course John was right. She just would have liked to have covered more ground by now. Maybe bringing John along had been a mistake? Was he slowing her down?

Near their current position on the sloped ground, Rose could see the mouth of a cave leading into the mountain. Caves are typically bad news, but with her wands and John’s sharp eyes, Rose felt like they could secure it enough to camp for the night.

“Come on.” She waved for him to follow and together the two of them entered the cave.

They found themselves surrounded by a darkness that seemed to stretch all the way to the center of the earth itself. Rose used a flashlight spell on her wand so that they could see and at the edges of the
light, shapes moved just out of view.

“Stay close.” Rose ordered, leading the way into the unknown.

John followed, even though ever fiber of his being urged him to turn tail and run. This cave was spooky as hell! More than once he thought he saw a person, but it was an oddly shaped stalagmite. One of the stalagmites was holding a pickaxe.

“Wait a minute…” John said squinting at the stalagmite.

Suddenly, the stalagmite leapt into the light, revealing himself to be a gross-ass gnome wearing a dirty pair of overalls and wielding a rusty pick axe.

“What are you kids doing in my cave home?!” The gnome bellowed, waving his tool wildly. “Do you think I’d live high up in the secluded mountains if wanted visitors?!?!”

Rose pointed her wand at the gnome’s chest.

“Silence your wailings, peasant. We are simply travelers looking for a place to wait out the night.” She proclaimed. “Stand aside or I’ll be forced to make you.”

John lightly gripped the back of Rose’s robes.

“I think we should leave, Rose. This cave is this guy’s home after all.” He said

“It’s impossible to own a cave. You might as well say you own the whole mountain, or an ocean for that matter.” Rose responded.

“Oh don’t tell me your one of those hippie losers.” The gnome sighed, and then spoke in a mocking tone: “You can’t own the land, man. We belong to the land. The earth is our sister in naturally love. Cut that nonsense out, you damn hippie! You get stabbed for shit like that in here!”

“Yeah, I’m going to kill you now.” Rose raised her wand, a deadly spell on her lips.

“Whoa!” John pushed his way forward. “No one is killing anyone. Look, you gross-ass gnome. We’re just looking for a place where we can sleep. Surely, we can share this cave for the night.”

“My name ain’t Shirley. It’s Mudbert, and I ain’t sharing this cave with no crazy hippie and his cute lady friend- OH GOD WHHHHhhhhyyyyy!!!”

Rose cut him off mid-sentence by blasting him in the chest with a burst of purple light. His screams faded away as he himself disappeared into the darkness. After a second of stunned silence, John wheeled on Rose.

“What was that?!?” He demanded.

“He was a prejudiced old gnome with a nice cave.” Rose shrugged. “We don’t have time to waste on lowlifes like him.”

“Wow! That’s even more prejudice!” John was aghast. “You can’t just blast people away with awesome magic whenever you feel like it. That’s not you treat people like Mudbert. Hell, that’s not how you treat anyone!”

“I wouldn’t expect you to understand, John. Things out here are much different than how they were in Honey Town.”
They don’t seem different to me. If you see a guy with something that you want, then you ask for it. If he says no, then you just deal with it. You don’t… do whatever it is you just did.”

“He isn’t dead if it makes you feel any better. He’s probably just in a lot of pain.” Rose continued forward. “Come on. I bet he has a camp around here somewhere.”

Sure enough, as they rounded a corner a small camp came into view, compete with a low fire, a bed roll, and a large, wooden treasure chest. Rose immediately crossed to the chest.

“Property of Mudbert.” She read the inscription on the lid. “If you’re planning to steal from this, don’t. There’s totally nothing valuable inside.”

John watched with contempt as she fiddled with the lock. He supposed that since Rose was such an awesome witch, she must have trouble relating to people of a lower social class. John was entirely correct in his assumption. Rose Lalonde had a frequency for looking down on non-magical beings, which didn’t make her a bad person necessarily, as much as it reflected on her upbringing.

Tell a person that they’re great enough times and pretty soon you’ll create a monster.

This was why John and Rose were such a good team. More than anything else, they balanced each other. John was honest to a fault, a little stupid, and compassionate in the worst way. Rose, on the other hand, was quick-witted, not afraid to play dirty, and a little bit of a stone-cold bitch.

Both of them represented extremes and together, they represented something else, something horribly grim and dorky at the same time. I guess you could call them…

GRIMDORKS?????

W-w-w-w-w-w-whhhaaat?!?!?

Anyways, Rose finished unlocking the chest and threw it open quickly. Disappearing inside, she began to throw useless or dumb junk over her shoulder. John dodged a half-eaten hoagie, took a microscope to the ear, and finally caught a worn journal.

“Property of Mudbert.” He read the inscription on the cover. “If you’re planning to read this, don’t. There’s totally not any compromising or private stuff in here.”

Curiosity got the better of our hero and he sat down, cross-legged on the ground, and began to flip through Mudbert’s diary.

Rose, who had an affinity for dungeon loot, pocketed a neat looking dagger and golden nugget the size of a Lime Ogre’s left nut. She spotted an amulet at the bottom of the chest. It was an ostentatiously-large ruby that hung from a long, golden chain and glimmered in the dim light of Mudbert’s fire. As her fingertips brushed it gently, something happened.

The ruby glowed brightly and began to vibrate against the wooden chest. Rose leapt back, caught off guard, and watched as all sorts of magical stuff began to fly all over the room.

“Oh my golden rings! What did you do?!” John cried, noticing the light show.

“I don’t know!” As the light reached it’s crescendo and the chest began to shake violently, Rose turned and threw herself at John, flattening himself to the floor. With a final, massive boom everything ceased.

Tangled in a heap, John and Rose looked in awe towards Mudbert’s treasure chest. Out of the depths
floated a ghostly orange form. Half man, half bird, all badass motherfucker.

“After a thousand years!” Dave cried, stretching his glorious wings. “I’m finally free!”

“Hold on one stinkin second!” Rosie stopped her father mid-story. “You were a ghost?!?”

“Not a ghost,” Dave corrected. “A sprite.”

“A what?! B- But- But you’re my Dad!”

“So? Sprites can be dads.”

“No they can’t! They don’t have… like body parts or anything!”

“I wasn’t always a sprite, just… Fuh.” Dave sighed. “Are you going to let me tell this story or not? If you keep interrupting we aren’t going to get anywhere and there’s a like a million other things I’d rather be doing right now other than this.”

“So you were a regular guy, then a sprite, then a man again?”

“Okay, now we’re getting into spoiler territory. I dunno if I’m comfortable working under these conditions.”

“Alright, alright. Fine. I’m just trying to make sense of this nonsense.” Rosie leaned back onto her pillows and folded her arms. “Please keep going.”

“Oh, do I have your permission? Thank you princess Rosie.” Dave scoffed and rubbed his eyes under his shades. “Fuck. Where was I?”

“After a thousand years! I’m finally free!”

Rose and John were silent for a moment, simply staring at the bizarre sight before them. Eventually, John whispered in the witch’s ear.

“You’re seeing this too right? I mean, I’m not crazy?”

“I assure you that this is not a lonesome delusion.” Rose disentangled herself from John. “Sprite! Identify yourself!”

“It is I,” Dave floated from the chest. “Davesprite of the house of Strider. My friends call me Dave and the babes call me Sexy. You can call me whatever you like.”

Rose’s face twisted into a sour frown.

“I think Davesprite is suitable enough. How did you come to be trapped in that amulet?”

“That’s a long story that I really don’t feel like sharing at the moment with yall.” Dave stretched again. “Like I’ve said, it’s been a thousand years since I’ve been free, so I’m getting the G.D. hell out of here. Later, losers!”

And with that, Davesprite floated into the darkness and out of sight.

John pulled himself up in the sitting position and stared after the sprite.
“Well that just happened. Care to explain?” He asked.

Rose returned to the chest and began rifling through it once more.

“Apparently Mudbert is not the simple miner we once thought. He posses many cursed items and artifacts.” Rose looked back over her shoulder at John. “Is there anything useful in that journal?”

“It’s just a diary.” He turned to a page at random and began to read. “Friday, Moonseven and twenty-two: I found a young Grass Mouse in the corner of my cave. I shall name him Jerry. Saturday, Moonseven and twenty-three: Jerry died. Sometimes I wonder if life is worth living.”


“He had dreams.” John continued. “He wanted to be a singer.”

“Well then he shouldn’t be living in a cave. How can one expect to become famous if they seclude themselves?”

John continued to read.

“He says that the world isn’t ready for his voice and like a caterpillar he will one day break free of his cocoon as a glorious, butterfly songster.” He glared at the back of Rose’s head. “Then you blasted him with a spell and probably crippled him.”

“Will you drop that?” Rose turned on John, suddenly upset. “Seriously, it isn’t that big of a deal. I wouldn’t have let you come along if I’d known you were going to be such a cry-baby.”

“I wouldn’t have come if I’d known how mean you are!”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. Call the news, I think I’ve just walked into a lovers’ quarrel.” Both John and Rose looked to find Davesprite floating towards them once more. “Sup, losers. As it turns out, this cave is confusing as all heck and I don’t remember exactly where I am. So I’m going to stick with yall for the time being.”

Rose knitted her eyebrows angrily.

“Get lost, you stupid sprite. John and I aren’t lovers and we most certainly aren’t having a quarrel.”

“Sounds like a quarrel to me,” Dave folded his arms behind his head and floated lazily near the fire. “So who are yall? How did you find that amulet? Where are we right now?”

“Why are you still here?” Rose snapped. “Isn’t it obvious that you are not wanted?”

John cast another glare at Rose before turning to Dave.

“Don’t listen to her, Mr. Sprite. She’s being all moody today because of reasons.” He scooted forward to the ghostly being. “Do you really not remember anything?”

“I remember being trapped in that amulet by a dark wizard over a thousand years ago, but that’s really it.” Dave answered. “Where are we right now?”

“The Wizard Mountains. Your amulet belonged to this gnome named Mudbert, but Rose practically killed him and started raiding his camp so I guess you don’t have to worry about him anymore.”

“He is not dead.” Rose spoke through gritted teeth. “It really isn’t important at all. I don’t understand why everyone cares so much about that stupid gnome.”

“I’m just giving you a rough time.” Dave waved his hand. “You don’t have to get so butt hurt about it. So are you going to tell he who yall are, or not?”

“I’m John Egbert, hero of Honey Town.” John proclaimed. “And this is Rose Lalonde, the greatest witch ever.”

“Okay, that Honey Town shit sounds fake as hell and ‘the greatest witch ever’? I’ve never heard of you.”

“Well I wouldn’t expect you to have.” Rose folded her arms. “You’ve been trapped in an amulet for over a thousand years, after all.”

“Still, just because I was magically imprisoned in a piece of jewelry doesn’t mean that I couldn’t hear shit. Tell me, Rose, what makes you the greatest witch ever?”

“She’s magical as all fuck!” John interjected before Rose could answer. “Like, she knows so many spells and cool stuff. Rose has traveled all over this land for years!”

“Oh really?” Dave raised his eyebrows over his pair of cool shades. “Educate me in some magical magic then.”

“Very well.” Rose took a seat next to John and delicately folded her hands in her lap. “You are a Sprite, which is different from a ghost in that you are not dead, but indeed, cursed to roam the earth as a familiar without a host. You were no doubt trapped in the amulet by a powerful sorcerer as a form of punishment.”

“Wait a second.” A sudden thought struck John. “So if you set him free, Rose, does that mean that he’s your familiar now?”

Dave and Rose blinked in surprise. Apparently neither of them had thought of that yet.

“Psshh. Of course not.” Dave dismissed the idea with a wave of his hand. “I’m not magically tethered to any-damn-thing, let alone this lame witch. I can leave whenever I want.”

As if to showcase this, Davesprite floated away from the camp and disappeared into the darkness again. Exactly thirty seconds later, he returned.

“Shit, I can’t leave. I think we’re magically tethered together.”

Rose heaved a mighty groan.

“Ugh. No. I already have John. I don’t need another useless companion.”

“Oh, well thanks for that!” John huffed.

“Well too bad, Lalonde. You’re stuck with me until either you or I die.” Dave folded his arms. “And seeing how you couldn’t kill me if you tried, we better become friends real quick.”

“Really? You think you can take me?” Rose playfully twirled her wand. “I wonder if Sprites make good peanuts.”

“Whoa, no, no, no.” John grabbed her wrist. “You aren’t horrifically transmogrifying anyone else. Don’t you think having an extra party member will could help us on our quest?”
“You guys are going on a quest?” Davesprite’s orange shades flashed with sudden interest. “Sweet. What sort of quest?”

“Only the biggest quest ever! We’re going to slay the four evil mages and rid the world of the Dragon Mistress.”

“Naw, that sounds hella dangerous. I’m out.”

“You can’t ‘be out’,” Rose sighed. “You will accompany us or else face the wrath of the elder gods. It is against their highest laws to break a magical tether.”

“Oh don’t tell me you believe in that mysticism, spiritual bullshit.” Dave groaned. “No one worshipped the elder gods, even back a thousand years ago.”

Rose shrugged.

“I wouldn’t expect a non-magical being to understand to complexities of arcane energy.” She said. “There are greater powers at work in the universe than you can ever possibly comprehend.”

With that simple sentence, John was enraptured once more with the unbridled joy of watching Rose riff about stupid magic stuff. Dave, on the other hand, just rolled his eyes.

“Okay, bogus legends aside. Where are you guys heading?” He asked.

“We’re going to go fight the Crab King of the East.” John said. “He lives on the other side of this mountain range.”

“Ah, I heard that guy is a dick. When I was living in that amulet, all I heard Mudbert singing about was how much he loved crab and how much he just wanted to eat the Crab King.”

“Whoa, so wait. Is the crab king a legit crab?” John turned to Rose.

For the first time, the rock n’ rolling witch seemed a little unsure.

“I, uh, don’t know exactly.” Her fingers twisted in her lap. “He might be, or he might just live with a bunch of crabs.”

“Well, then. I guess the world’s greatest witch isn’t so great after all.” Dave said with a snide grin. “Do you know anything about these four evil mages?”

“Yes, I most certainly do!” Rose snapped. “I know all of their powers, their weakness and strengths, and where to find them. I’ve just never…”

“You’ve just never seen them before.” Dave finished.

“I wonder if the Bee Lord is a giant bee.” John tapped his chin thoughtfully. “Or maybe he’s just the size of a bee.”

“I heard that he can turn into a giant tit.” Dave added.

John laughed while Rose scowled. This is not how she thought her biggest quest would begin.

The next morning the group set out bright and early. Exiting the cave once more, they found the sun to be hidden by a floating ocean of grey clouds and the path ahead to be lightly dusted with powdery snow. Rose shivered and pulled her robes tighter around herself.
“I hate the cold.” She mumbled. “Let’s hurry up and get moving.”

“Mudbert’s diary had a map in it.” John pulled a folded piece of paper from his pocket. “If we just keep heading east, then we can reach… this place by night fall.”

John pointed to a square on the map, labeled with a foreign language.

“We don’t want to stop there,” Rose said instantly, examining the map over his shoulder. “See this label. It’s written in gnomish.”

“So? What does it say?”


“Oh, shit. WHCC.” Davesprite floated by John’s side. “I can’t believe it. That place is still around, huh?”

“It is, and it hasn’t changed much in the thousand years you’ve been trapped, Davesprite. We are not stopping at Wizard Harvard Community College.”

Hours later, as the group traveled through the snowy pass, a blizzard rolled through the range. The greatest witch ever: Rose, her love interest: John, and her new party member: Davesprite tried to push their way through the storm, but eventually the forces of nature became too much for the party.

“I think we should go back!” John called ahead to Rose.

“No. We can’t stop now. We’ll never make it to the sea at this pace.” Rose squinted ahead through the storm. “I think I see something up ahead. Come on.”

The group pressed forward, struggling through the heavy snow. As they neared a large structure, they spotted a wooden sign buried into the ground. It read: Wizard Harvard Community College.

“Fuuuuuuuuuuuuccccck.” Rose said.

They were left with no choice, but to seek shelter within.

“Why does Rose hate Wizard Harvard Community College?” Rosie asked of her father.

“Because of reasons. You’ll find out next chapter.” Dave went through the motions, getting up to leave.

“I really appreciate you telling me this story, Dad, even though it’s a little vulgar, confusing, and half-baked. Also you’re a really unreliable narrator and…”

Dave silenced his daughter with a quick peck on the forehead.

“I think I get what you’re trying to say.” He smirked. “And it’s no problem. I like telling you this stuff too. Now in the glorious words of one Samuel L. Jackson: Go the fuck to sleep.”

Chapter End Notes
After a long, hard day going to class, dealing with people, living with the struggles of a life in a first world country, and writing John: Try to Understand. I like to simply turn off my brain and write some of this crap.

I hope you experience the same mindless escape as I do.

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Chapter Notes

Thanks to invisibleSocialist for commenting.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Four: Wizard Harvard Community College

Our three heroes, Rose the witch, John the hero, and Dave the sprite, sought shelter from a powerful blizzard within the halls of Wizard Harvard Community College. Having just stepped through the large, wooden front doors, they were immediately assaulted by a dastardly welcoming committee.

“Welcome!” Waved a cheerful elf, who scurried towards them. “It is I, Chazz Limplewickle! Student body president at Wizard Harvard Community College and leader of the Hospitality Club! We don’t get many visitors up here. How can I…”

“Buzz off, Nipplelicker or whatever your name is.” Rose pushed through him. “We’re merely looking for a reprieve from the elements. Direct us towards the food court and be off with you.”

Chazz Limplewickle’s large, bushy eyebrows, which are typical of elves, knitted together in confusion.

“I’m sorry, Miss, but you won’t be allowed to roam these halls without a visitor’s badge, and not even then without some sort of supervision. We here at Wizard Harvard Community College pride ourselves with having the safest campus this side of the lava river!”

“Also the lamest campus.” Davesprite floated by John’s side as he scanned the large foyer. “Where are all the babes?”

“Oh, there are no women here, Mr. Sprite.” Chazz held his arms wide, as if to embrace the whole school. “Wizard Harvard Community College is a male-only academy of magic.”

“Gaaaaaaaaaaay!” Davesprite turned towards the doors. “Come on, gang. Let’s freeze to death outside.”

“Wait!” John appealed to Chazz. “What my friend is trying to say is that it seems a little weird to have a school where girls aren’t allowed, especially when the greatest witch ever is a girl.” He turned to Davesprite next. “Also, I don’t know how I feel about you using gay as a negative word, Dave.”

“I’m just expressing my rights. What? Are you calling me a homophobe?” Davesprite demanded. “Where do you get off, Egbert? I’ll show you. I’ll kiss a dude right now!”

“That won’t be necessary, Mr. Sprite.” Chazz licked his lips not-so-subtly. “Although I would be lying if I didn’t say I was intrigued by the idea.”

“Dude, I was kidding.”

“That’s how it always starts, isn’t it?”
Rose slapped a hand to her forehead, fed up with the pointless rigmarole.

“Shut up, all of you.” She turned to Chazz. “Just give us some badges. We simply wish to wait out the storm.”

“Certainly! Right this way please.”

Chazz Limplewickle led our entourage of troubadours through main hall and to a small office. Inside was a desk where Chazz took a seat.

“Would you all form an orderly line here please?” Rose, John, and Dave lined up in front of the desk. Chazz smiled, happy that his orders were being followed. “What’s your name, Miss?”

“Rose Lalonde.”

“Alright. Where are you from, Rose, and what is your business here at Wizard Harvard Community College?”

“I’ve already told you half a dozen times.” Rose seethed. “We’re seeking shelter from the blizzard.”

Chazz nodded and scribbled on a blank nametag.

“Bliiiizzzard.” He muttered as he wrote. “Okay, now where are you from?”

“NoneOfYourBusiness City. It’s right next to the Let’sHurryThisUp River.”

“Alrighty!” Chazz finished the nametag and passed it to Rose. “Enjoy your visit to Wizard Harvard Community College!”

John stepped forward.

“John Egbert of Honey Town.” He supplied with a grin. “I’m here because of the blizzard too.”

“Honey Town? That sounds fake as shit.”

“Well, it isn’t.” John was taken aback. “That’s where I used to live.”

“Suuure. Whatever you say.” Chazz sighed and passed John his tag. “Next!”

“Davesprite.” Dave floated forward and leaned over the desk. “I just came from your mother’s house and I’m here to cause a ruckus.”

“Alrighty! Now that everyone is settled in, we can begin the tour!” Chazz leapt up from behind his desk. “Right this way please!”

As Chazz led everyone back out into the main hall, being sure to display the academy’s massive collection bronzed wands, John stepped back next to Rose.

“This place isn’t so bad, other than the whole ‘no girls allowed’ thing.” He said. “Is that why you hate this place so much?”

“I have no problems with a private enterprise catering to those whom they chose. There are other, much worse reasons to hate Wizard Harvard Community College.” She answered, face grim.

“Like what?”
“Like the whole hoity-toity, vanguard, wizard-elitist propaganda that they preach here.” Rose lowered her voice as Chazz explained to Davesprite the small idiosyncrasies between cauldrons of regular and extensive girth. “What do you know about Wizard Harvard Community College, John?”

“Only the stuff I’ve heard in the last twenty minutes.”

“Well I sincerely hope that your education remains stinted. Let us dump this accursed elf and find a secluded spot to wait out the storm. The sooner we get out of here the better.”

After being shown the academy’s ‘Fun Slide of Wizardry’ and taken through the gift shop, Chazz brought our heroes to the food court. The place was packed with Wizards of all shapes and sizes, some were old, some were young, some were human, elfish, dwarfish, fishman, flyman, and there were even a few frogmen.

Chazz swept an arm over the various vendors, selling all types of wizardly goods.

“We accept gold coins and all credit cards except for Wizard Visa!”

“Aw, man.” John dug through his backpack furiously. “But all I have is Wizard Visa!”

“Well then I guess you’re shit out of luck!” Chazz checked his watch. “I have a meeting with the Badminton Club in ten minutes, so I’m afraid I’m going to have to scram! After you’ve finished with your visit, please proceed directly to the exits without dillydallying. There are numerous dangerous magical experiments going on within these wizardly…”

“Yes, yes, yes, wonderful. Come on.” Taking John and Davesprite by the arm, Rose dragged them to an empty booth.

“Man, I dunno why you’re so down on this place, Lalonde.” Davesprite was sporting an awesome Wizard Harvard Community College T-shirt and waving around a small banner. “They seem pretty legit to me.”

“Really? What seems legitimate about this place? You’re a walking billboard, Davesprite, a mere model to spread yet more of their tainted gospel to the furthest reaches of Skaia.” Rose glowered at a nearby table where a couple of Wizards were playing a card game. “This isn’t magic. This isn’t anything.”

“You know what? I think you’re just upset because they don’t allow ladies to go here.” Davesprite was now wearing one of those hats that holds two cans of mead with straws attached that go straight in your mouth, this one, however, was covered with Wizard Harvard Community College logos. He sipped loudly. “The greatest witch ever isn’t used to going somewhere where no one knows her name.”

“Do you want to go back into your amulet?” Rose dangled the cursed jewelry from her finger. “Because that’s a thing that can definitely happen.”

Davesprite’s eyes widened behind his shades. He glared at the witch.

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“Look, there’s no reason to argue.” John interjected. He was a little putout since his credit card was invalid and would therefore go without a souvenir. “It’s not like we can stay here long anyways. We’re still going after the Crab King of the East, right?”

“Of course. This is merely a stop along the way, a detour on our quest towards greater glory…”
Rose was cut off when a full slice of Wizard Pizza landed in front of her with a wet *splat*. Red, pizza sauce splattered all over her robes and I’m pretty sure a little bit got in John’s open mouth.

As John spluttered, Davesprite floated from his seat, searching for the source of the projectile pie.

“Yo, asshats!” He descended upon a pair of wide-eyed frogmen. “You think throwing food at people is funny? I’m a G.D. ghost, motherfucker. I’ll haunt you into next year!”

“S-sorry, Mr. Sprite.” One of the frogmen gurgled all grossly. “It was an accident, I swear-“

He was cut off mid-sentence when he was suddenly turned into a walnut.

“Rose!” John cried. “No! Why do you keep turning people into nuts?!?”

Twirling her needles between her fingers, Rose stashed her signature weapons away once more.

“I have no tolerance for such child-play and neither should you. Now that I have demonstrated that we are not to be trifled with, we should be left alone in peace.” She explained.

Suddenly, John and Rose’s table was surrounded by like thirty wizards.

“This girl changed Clark in to a nut!” One said.

“Whoa, is that an actual girl?” Asked another. “I thought they were just a myth.”

“Naw, man. Girls are totally real. I saw a picture of one once.”

“Should we do something?”

“Like what?”

“Like I dunno. I’m pretty sure when you meet a girl for the first time you’re supposed to do a dance.”

“Where did you hear that griffin shit?”

“It’s in the Wizard Harvard Community College Handbook.”

“Hey, girl. Can I get a smooch?”

“Yeah! You should smooch us!”

“Back off Wizard Queers!” Davesprite broke through the crowd. “Jesus Orc-Christ, I know yall are all deprived Wizardly boys, but you can’t flip shit whenever you’re faced with a babe.”

“Yeah! Do you have any idea who you’re talking to?!” John demanded, glaring at the wizards. “This is the greatest witch ever, Rose…”

“Rose Lalonde.” A high-pitched voice finished. The crowd parted and up swaggered a tall, sexy as hell Orc in wizardly robes. He smirked at Rose. “Long time, no see, sugar pie. How ya been?”

Rose blanched.

“H- Henry?”

“The one and only, baby.” He tossed something in the air and caught it again. You know. Like cool guys do. He held up the walnut that used to be a frogman to the light, as if examining it. “I’d know your handiwork anywhere, Rose. What’s a witch like you doing in this neck of the woods?”
Rose ignored his question completely. She was staring at the orc with a mixture of shock and disgust.

“I thought you were turned into a skeleton outside of the Black Garden over a year ago.” She said in confusion. “What happened?”

“What do you think happened? You abandoned me in my darkest hours and left me to die.” Henry gestured to himself. “However, I magic-ed and got my hot bod back. Now I’m better than ever and looking for a little revenge.”

John leapt from his seat and positioned himself in front of Rose.

“I don’t know who you are, Henry, or what this is about and I won’t deny that you’re a good looking dude either, but if you want to get through Rose, you’ll have to go through us!” John looked to Davesprite. “Right?”

“Hell no, man.” Davesprite sipped from his double beer hat again. “You don’t need my help. You’ve got this.”

Henry laughed and tossed his hair like a totally cool dude. All the other boys got a little sweaty.

“Who’s the new lapdog, Rose? He looks a little soft.” He leaned around John, resting his elbow on the table. “What’s the matter? Are you having trouble finding quality meat shields nowadays?”

“I’m no meat shield.” Said John, stepping in front of Rose again to shield her with his meat. “I’m John Egbert, Hero of Honey Town.”

“Looks to me like you’re more of a John Egderp, hero of GET FUCKED!” Henry pointed at John’s chest, making our hero believe that something was on his shirt. When John looked down, Henry brought his finger up and poked John right in the nose, totally owning him.

“Daaaaaaammnnnnnnn!” All the wizards and Davesprite said, impressed with Henry’s suaveness.

“Leave him alone!” Rose shrieked, jumping up from her own seat. “If its revenge you want, then you will find it with me. I challenge thee to a duel of wizardly strife!”

All the wizards and Davesprite gasped in surprise, Henry’s smug smirk deepened, and John just rubbed his nose, fighting the urge to cry.

“Very well,” Henry cracked his knuckles. “We’ll do it right here in the food court. Loser has to snap their wands in half.”

“Don’t do it, Rose!” John cautioned.

“Agreed.” Rose ignored John. “Since I challenged you, what are your terms?”

Henry once again examined the frogman turned walnut.

“I’ve got an idea. No transfiguration.” He crushed the nut between his fingers. One of Clarke’s friends let out a little whimper. “That’s cheap shit and I know how you like to play dirty.”

He wriggled his eyebrows in a suggestive manner. John’s blood boiled, Rose simply rolled her eyes, and Davesprite just sipped from his beer hat again.

“Fine. No transfiguration. Is that it?”

“Nope. No hexes either, or jinxes, or curses, or deus ex machina spells.”
“Psshh.” Rose snorted. “Well then what kind of duel do you want? A swordfight?”

“Nope.” Henry grinned. “Familiars only.”

Rose’s jaw dropped, Davesprite did a spit take, and John just looked confused.

“F- Familiars?” Rose repeated.

“Is that going to be a problem?” Henry’s smirk was now so intense, that you could feel it.

“N-no of course it isn’t.” Straightening up, Rose adjusted her headband and met Henry’s gaze. “You have a duel, Henry. Let us reconvene in an hour.”

“See you soon, Rose.” Before leaving, Henry tucked a stray lock of hair behind Rose’s ear. Then he snapped and disappeared in a poof of wizard ninja smoke.

“I want to have his adopted babies.” Said one wizard

“I still wanna smooch on that witch.” Said another.

As the surrounding crowd began to dissipate, John turned to Rose.

“Rose, you can’t fight that guy! If you lose he’ll snap your wands in half!” He pleaded.

“I’ll have to side with Egbert on this one.” Davesprite added. “There’s no way in hell that you’re going to win a duel with familiars only.”

“Ugh. I know.” Rose sank back into the booth. “But I can’t back out now. A Wizard Duel is one of the most ancient and sacred rituals performed between magical beings. If I run from a duel, I risk forfeiting my magic.”

“What are you going to do?” John asked.

“I’ll have to fight him.” She said simply, with a shrug. “It’s already been decided. I shall use this hour before the battle to prepare.”

“Okay, that sounds like a plan.” John offered Rose his hand and pulled her to her feet. “Let’s start with the basics. What sort of spells are you going to use?”

“None. Didn’t you hear Henry’s stipulations? It’s familiars only.”

“Yeah, but what does that mean? Why is that so bad?”

“Because I’m Rose’s only familiar, man.” Davesprite explained with a low groan.

“Yeah, but how is that bad? You can fight. Right, Dave?”

“Hell yes, I can fight. My Bro was the greatest swordsman in all of Skaia. He taught me everything I know.”

“Well that’s perfect then!”

“Yeah, except for one thing.” Rose added. “Davesprite has been my familiar for a total of thirteen hours. Our magical tether is about as weak as it gets. All it will take is one uber-powerful spell from Henry and we’re done for.”
“Oh. “
“Oh. Indeed.”

John began to pace, wracking his brains for a solution to Rose’s dilemma.

“You don’t have any other familiars?” He asked eventually. “I mean, you’re the greatest witch ever, Rose! How can you not have like a ton of magical ghost buddies?”

“Conjuration is a considered a waste of time among powerful sorcerers. It’s the most trivial of arts and therefore I’ve neglected that skill tree in the past. I do have one other familiar though, albeit it’s a bit of a stretch and should only be used for a last resort.”

“Alright well, I guess you guys should practice then, huh?”

Rose turned to Davesprite, who simply shrugged in response.

“I suppose we should.” Rose sighed again and motioned for Davesprite to follow her to an area clear of tables and chairs. “John, stand opposite us please.”

John moved into position and faced Davesprite, who floated in front of Rose.

“Uh, what do I do now?” John asked.

“Just stand there, okay?” Rose drew her wands. “Alright, Davesprite. Are you ready?”

“Yeah, gimme a sec. I haven’t done this in… absolutely ever.” Davesprite clenched his fists and a magic sword materialized in his hands. “Cool.”

And it was.

“Davesprite!” Rose pointed her wands at John. “Use slash!”

Before John could react, Davesprite surged forward and with a swing of his sword, decapitated John with one powerful swipe.

“OH MY GOD!!! NOO!!”

“Rosie, I’m kidding. That was a joke.”

“WELL IT ISN’T FUNNY!!”

“Alright, alright, sorry.” Dave coughed into his hand. “Let’s see, what really happened was…”

“Oh my golden rings!” John cried as he dived out of the way.

Davesprite missed his mark and floated past John to crash into the opposite wall.

“Aw! Come on, John. You weren’t supposed to move.” Rose reprimanded him.

“What did you want? Was I just supposed to stand there and get killed?!”

“I wasn’t gonna hurt you, man.” Davesprite shook the stars from his vision and flew back to Rose.

“Here let’s try that again. I wanna give John’s hair a little trim.”
“Alright, John. Get into position.”

“Hell no! There’s got to be a better way to do this.” Reaching into his backpack, John pulled out his cookie-tin shield. “Here, this thing’s a piece of crap. Why don’t you just take swings at this?”

“Hmmm.” Rose eyed John’s shield. It _was_ a piece of crap. “Alright, Davesprite. Use wing attack!”

“I’m not a Pokémon. You can’t just… aw, forget it.”

With his mighty orange wings, Davesprite created a gale of wind that tore the shield from John’s hands and flung the poor hero across the room. John landed on a conveniently placed mop bucket and was covered in dirty water. I’m pretty sure a little bit got in his open mouth too.


“Ugh,” As John pulled himself to his feet. He looked down at the spilt cleaning bucket and said: “I guess you could say that this whole situation is a right _mess_, huh?”

“Boo!” Davesprite jeered as he floated in front of Rose. “Less puns, more fighting!”

An hour later, Rose, Davesprite, and a bruised John stood in the center of the food court. The floor had been cleared of tables and chairs and a magical set of bleachers had been erected near the wall. The Wizard students from before began to filter in and find seats among the stands.

Even good old Chazz Limplewickle was there, wearing a _Rose Lalonde sucks_ t-shirt. Don’t ask me how he got that. He just had it.

With a puff of wizard ninja smoke, Henry reappeared before Rose. He was as good looking as ever and appeared to be even more threatening with his fancy wand-staff in his hands.

“Do you hear that?” Henry cupped his ear. “That’s the sound of all the crow you’re about to eat.”

“The only thing I’ll be eating is a nice, healthy slice of pie after this is finished. Maybe I’ll use the broken shards of your wand as a knife and fork?” Rose folded her arms, having considered her comeback to be not just adequate, but well superior to Henry’s original jab.

It wasn’t.

“Good luck, you guys.” John patted Rose on the shoulder and nodded at Davesprite. “I’ll be cheering for you.”

“We’re totally screwed.” Davesprite sighed as John took a seat. “I don’t suppose you feel like backing out now, do you?”

“There’s no turning back, Davesprite. We’ve baked our cake, now it’s time to eat it.”

“I’m pretty sure you just made up a new figure of speech. I have mixed feelings about that.”

As Davesprite positioned himself in front of Rose once more, Henry spun his staff and slammed it against the ground, summoning his own familiar. Ignoring the spectacular light show, Rose pumped up her teammate.

“If you just knock out his familiar, then we win. Don’t be afraid to play dirty.” She said. “You can fly, so create distance and keep out of its striking range. I don’t know what Henry is going to summon, but I’m sure it can’t be- MOTHER OF GOD!!!”
A god-damn Laser Hydra burst from the tip of Henry’s staff and materialized opposite Davesprite. With a mighty roar, the hydra swung its powerful tail and crushed half of the bleachers, killing dozens of wizards.

Everyone cheered.

“Yes, yes!”

“Go, Henry!”

“Oh my goodness,” A frogman fanned himself with his hand. “I think I’m in loooove.”

Rose knew instantly that this battle was lost. The Laser Hydra was one of the most complex and powerful familiars in existence, while Davesprite was just a prick of insufferable nature. After all of her glorious battles, wondrous quests, and devilish foes, Rose would be taken down by a stupid orc and his pet in a schoolyard fight.

“Come on, Rose!” John cheered from his seat. “You’re the best! You’re a champion! I think you’re attractive!”

“What?” Rose asked, curiously

“What?!” John responded, frantically

Shaking her head, Rose turned back to the task at hand.

“Stay focused, Davesprite.” She said. “We can do this.”

“No we can’t.” Her familiar muttered in response.

“Yes. We. Can. Just remember what I said, alright?”

Davesprite swallowed with some difficulty and hefted his sword. The Laser Hydra gnashed its many heads and advanced slowly.

“Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit.” Davesprite mumbled as his foe approached, seemingly taking up all the available space in the world.

“Davesprite! Use swagger!” Rose commanded.

Davesprite tried to swag it up, but missed completely. Not that it would have done much damage even if Davesprite had hit his mark. Swag attacks were not very effective against Laser Hydras.

“Tony!” Henry called to his familiar. “Use laser fangs!”

John peeked through his fingers and watched as one of the hydra’s heads lunged forward, snatched up Davesprite with it’s powerful laser jaws, and swung him around much like a dog does with a towel they stole from the laundry basket. Rose winced as her familiar was used and abused by the hydra.

Henry laughed, all the wizards cheered, and Chazz Limplewickle leaned over to John and tried to give him a little surprise smooch.

“Davesprite!” Rose called. “Try to break free!”

Davesprite, who was halfway into a Laser Hydra, responded with something that sounded like:
“AAAAHHH”, but it was hard to tell exactly.

“Tony.” Henry leaned casually on his staff. “Use seismic toss.”

The Laser Hydra pulled Davesprite from its mouth and crossface chickenwing suplexed him into the ground. The floor cracked and everyone in attendance gasped at the brutal attack. When the Laser Hydra backed away, Davesprite lay in a crumpled heap at the bottom of a massive crater.

John leapt from the stands and joined Rose as she raced towards her fallen teammate.

“Davesprite.” Rose knelt by his side. “Can you hear me?”

“If you give a mouse a cookie, he’s going to want two cookies.” Davesprite mumbled.

“I think that crossface chickenwing suplex knocked the sense right out of him.” John said. He grabbed Davesprite under the arms and started dragging him away. “I’d start running if I were you, Rose. Unless your backup familiar can beat a Laser Hydra, I’d say we’re shit out of luck.”

Rose gritted her teeth. Henry had already called her out, insulted John, and beaten Davesprite. He was not going to let him snap her wands in half.

“Clear the floor, John.” Rose said, getting to her feet. “I’m not finished yet.”

As Rose climbed from the crater and faced Henry once more, all of the wizards in the stands cheered. This had been the most exciting day at Wizard Harvard Community College in years! Not only had a girl shown up from nowhere, but they were seeing a totally radical battle unfold right before their eyes!

Henry flipped his hair again like a cool dude.

“Give it up, Rose.” He sneered. “There’s no way you’ll win.”

Gripping her wands tightly, Rose took a deep breath and summoned her last ditch familiar. A flash of light blinded all the observers momentarily. When they could see properly once more, everyone gasped at what Rose had summoned.

“Meow.” Said Jaspers, Rose’s kitten familiar.

“BA HAHAHA!” Henry cackled. “Are you joshin me right now, babe? Is that really all the greatest witch ever could muster?!?”

“God-Daaaaaammmnn.” Chazz Limplewickle commented. “That has got to be the cutest kitten I ever did see.”

John, who had an unconscious Davesprite slumped against his side, turned to Chazz.

“I think you mean the most ‘badass’ kitten, right?” He corrected hopefully.

“Nope. That thing’s cuter than a newborn baby wrapped up in a sugary, frosted crepe with strawberry glaze.”


On the battlefield, Rose regarded her old familiar, Jaspers. She’d first conjured him over thirteen years ago when she was just a little wizard girl. Now, in the face of a great opponent, she’d have to depend on her old pet to defend her honor.
“Get ready, Jaspers.” Rose said. “I’m a hundred percent certain that you’re about to get ripped to shreds, but just do your best anyways, okay?”

“Meow.” Replied Jaspers.

“Tony!” Henry twirled his staff and pointed it at Jaspers. “Use *slam!*”

The Laser Hydra roared and raised its massive, clawed foot. As it prepared its most powerful attack, the Laser Hydra sang these ancient, magical words:

*Slam, duuh duuh duuh, duuh duuh duuh, let the boys be boys,*
*Slam, duuh duuh duuh, duuh duuh duuh, let boys be boys!*

A split second before he was completely obliterated, Jaspers let out a tiny ‘*mew!*’ and pounced. He flew upwards, past the hydra’s powerful leg, and punched through the beast’s chest in a shower of blood. After a second of silence, Jaspers erupted from the Laser Hydra’s back and landed comfortably in Rose’s arms, with the Laser Hydra’s still-beating heart clutched in its tiny, kitten mouth.

All was silent, as the Laser Hydra stumbled once and fell to the ground, dead.

Everyone lost their shit.

“NOOOO!!!” Henry cried, falling to his knees.

All of the wizards, who had seen the miraculous display, ran forward and lifted Rose onto their shoulders, chanting over and over again:

“Rose! Rose! Rose!”

Through the jumping, shouting, and pumping crowd, John pushed his way through to his friend and called up to her.

“You did it, Rose! That was so awesome! You really *are* the greatest witch ever! We should make-out!”

“What?!” Rose shouted back.

“What?! Nothing! I didn’t say anything!”

After the crowd had settled down slightly, Rose disentangled herself from the horde and approached Henry.

“You wand please.” She said with a smirk, holding out her hand.

Henry began to sob.

“Oh, come on, baby. You know I was just playin, right?” He pleaded.

“Suck a hundred demon dicks in hell, asshole.” Passing the bloody Jaspers off to an unwilling John, Rose snatched Henry’s staff from the ground and snapped it over her knee with a sharp *crack!*

“NOOOOooooo!” Henry cried again.

As he wept, something horrible happened. His skin began to melt before their very eyes. Henry screamed in pain as his glorious good looks gave way to a gross-ass skeleton. Squeezing his eyes
shut, John turned away so as not to look at Henry’s now disgusting, bony mug.

“I’m a skeleton again!” Henry sobbed. “Why is fate so cruel!?!?”

And with that, he ran from the hall, all the way out of Wizard Harvard Community College and was never seen again.

Tossing the broken pieces of Henry’s staff to the ground, Rose turned back to John.

“Thanks for believing in me, John.” She said with a smile. “You’re a good friend.”

“Aw, don’t mention it.” John blushed. “Who knew that your little, kitten familiar was such a badass?”

“Not me, that’s for sure.” Rose gently scratched behind Jaspers’ ears as he snoozed against John’s chest. “However, I think it’s safe to say we definitely avoided a cat-astrope on this one.”

Then the two heroes laughed, high off of Rose’s victory, appreciative of horrible puns, and grateful of the other’s presence.

Chapter End Notes

If you wanna know what a Laser Hydra looks like, imagine a regular Hydra, and then add lasers.

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Chapter Five: Scorpion Cave of Nightmares

Although Wizard Harvard Community College had proven to be an overall pointless digression, Rose, John, and Dave would be sad to leave it behind, having become little celebrities following the fall of Henry the Orc. However, the dusty trail wasn’t going to walk determinedly along itself, now was it? Rose’s ultimate quest lay in the furthest reaches of Skaia, so in the words of the great Robert Plant: we gotta ramble on!

Or… Something like that.

Stepping through the large wooden doors and back into the wilderness, our heroes were pleased to find the fearsome blizzard had dissipated sometime earlier. The sky was clear, the air was crisp, and everything was looking sunny-side up!

“Are you sure that you guys have to leave?” Asked Chazz Limplewickle. He had accompanied the group to the gates. “I was hoping that you could tell me about that one time you invented Lightly-Salted Wheat Thins again, Rose!”

Having warmed up to Chazz considerably, Rose graced him with a small smile.

“As much as I would like to regale you with that epic tale once more, Chazz, I’m afraid that we must truly set our sights on the future.” She extended her hand. “Perhaps we’ll meet again, Limplewickle.”

“I most certainly hope so!” Chazz shook her hand enthusiastically. “You’re always welcome at Wizard Harvard Community College as long as I am student body president!”

“Even though we destroyed the food court, killed like a hundred students, and turned one of your greatest wizards into a gross skeleton?” John asked.

“Oh course!”

“Rock n Roll.” Smirked Davesprite. “Stay cool, Chazz. We’ll catch you on the flippity flip.”

As the group started away from the campus and back across the rocky hills of the Wizard Mountains, John adjusted his pace so that he was next to Rose.

“So I guess that place wasn’t so bad after all, was it?” He grinned, nudging her with an elbow. “I mean, yeah, Chazz tried to smooch me like twenty times, but it was still a pretty cool place!”

“By my count, Chazz almost got to first base with you twenty-one times, John.” She responded, smiling.

“No, no, no. That last time he just leaned in because he tripped. He told me so.”

“Sure. Sure. Whatever you say.” Rose reached into her satchel and pulled out a folded piece of parchment. “Regardless of Chazz’s sexual deviancy, he was generous enough to supply us with a new map.”

“Sweet. So we know where we’re going now?”
“John. I’m the greatest witch ever. I always know where I’m going.” She fluttered the map in his face. “This is simply a formality. Haven’t you ever heard the old saying: a witch is never lost?”

“Really?” John thought for a moment. “I thought the saying was: a wizard is never late.”

“No. That’s just silly. No one, even a wizard, can claim to always arrive in a timely manner. That’s simply preposterous.”

“Alright, alright, geez. I didn’t know it was such a hot topic. Sorry.”

“No harm done. If anything, I’m happy to impart this knowledge upon you. The less ignorance in the world, the better.”

Davesprite, who had been floating ahead until then, swiveled to face his companions.

“Come on, Lalonde. Haven’t you heard the old saying: ignorance is bliss?” He countered.

“Spoken like a true ignoramus.” Rose responded, knitting her eyebrows. “What are you doing listening to our conversation anyways? You’re lucky I leave you floating about at all, when I could just keep you in your amulet twenty-four seven.”

“Fuck, why are you always so hostile? It was a simple question.” Davesprite frowned. “And I thought I told you to stop threatening me like that. I helped you defeat Henry. We’re supposed to be best buds now.”

Rose let out a shrill, very witch-esque laugh that sent a chill up John’s spine.

“You call that helping?” Rose chuckled. “If I remember correctly the only thing you did was act as a very effective chew toy.”

“Only because you’re not powerful enough of a witch to functionally control all this awesome.” Davesprite flexed his muscles for emphasis.

“Oh, so you’re saying that I was the problem? As soon as you were replaced by Jaspers the match was turned decidedly in my favor.”

“That was a fluke. I already had that Laser Hydra on the ropes when you brought out that silly kitten.”

“Guy, I really don’t think you should argue like this.” John interjected before Rose could counter. “I mean, we’re a team now, right?”

Rose and Davesprite regarded each other. They were a team now. The familiar battle against Henry had cemented that. However, there definitely was a certain tension between the two that could not be ignored, no matter how good of a mediator John was.

Rose would always be too proud, determined, and serious to put up with Davesprite’s hot-headed, sarcastic, and arrogant nature. Without John between them, their union would probably have been shattered rather early in their questing days.

“You’re right, John. Of course.” Rose assented to her friend. “It is unprofessional of me to stoop as low as to engage in nonsensical bickering.”


John smiled. In all his years living in Honey Town, he’d never had true friends. Sure, he had people
he talked to. Mrs. Fireburst was always kind and Sicko Larry always had something interesting to say. Rose and Davesprite though, were something new entirely.

And he liked that.

“Awesome.” John said happily. “Now that that’s settled, let’s get to killing this Crab King. Where to, Rose?”

Rose examined her map once more.

“We have two paths open to us at the moment.” She explained, tracing the parchment with her finger. “There’s an old path that leads over the tallest peak that would probably take a few days to cross and a secondary route which runs through the mountain itself and straight to the East Sea.”

“Ugh.” Davesprite groaned. “I hate caves. Let’s go over the mountain.”

“But wouldn’t that take too long?” John asked. “It sounds faster if we go through the cave.”

“The Crab King does live on the coast of the East Sea, after all.” Rose added pensively. “But then again, this cave is called the Scorpion Cave of Nightmares, so…”

“So then it must be completely safe!” Davesprite threw his hands in the air. “Come on, gang. It’s so obvious that we should take the extra time and not go through the scary cave, that it’s almost painful.”

“Do you hear something, John?” Rose asked, pointedly putting her back to Davesprite. “It sounds like an annoying gust of wind, whistling through the air and being all whiny.”

“Rose…” John cautioned.

“Oh, come on.” Rose smiled slightly. “The extra time we spent going over the mountain is much better spent on other things. Let’s just hike up our trousers, put on our brave faces, and push our way through this silly cave. I bet it isn’t even that bad.”

John was hesitant. He’d been all for saving time by traversing the cave until he heard what it was actually called. Scorpions are bad enough, but toss in nightmares too! Shit like that is usually called as such for a good reason.

He was about to switch sides and back Davesprite, but then he saw that expression on Rose’s face, the expectant, confident, hella-sexy expression that was positively impossible for John to deny.

“What’s the worst that can happen?” John said, a little quieter than usual. “Let’s do it.”

Grinning like a lunatic, Rose turned to Davesprite.

“Majority rules.” She said, and then led the troupe in the direction of the Scorpion Cave of Nightmares.

After a couple hours of walking, and thirty minutes of backtracking when Rose lost her favorite hair clip, the group began to near the entrance to the Scorpion Cave of Nightmares.

“It should be just over these boulders.” Rose pointed up a steep hill. “Come on, John. Give me a boost.”

As Rose clambered over John’s shoulders, Davesprite floated upwards and peeked over the crest of the hill too. Sure enough, the entrance to the cave lay bare before them. Surprisingly enough, our
heroes were not the only one to have interest in the devilish hell-hole today.

Davesprite watched a young maiden from afar, as she stared into the depths of the cave. She was… smoking hot.

Her tan skin told of a life spent beneath the open sun, her long, dark hair seemed to be composed of the softest of sheep’s wool, and her sparkling green eyes, protected behind round spectacles, shimmered like the waves off the coast of the Emerald Palace.

Also, she had a big ol’ butt, so that was nice too.

On her back was slung a dangerous-looking crossbow, already loaded and prepped to unleash a whole world of pain to whoever was stupid enough to get in her way. Davesprite was instantly smitten.

“Oh my ghostly rings.” He gasped. “She’s-She’s… beauuutiful.”

“Get your head out of your ass, Davesprite.” Rose said by his side, from atop John’s shoulders. “You’re a sprite. Sprites cannot experience sexual attraction. Now take your eyes off that poor woman and help me and John over this hill.”

“I can’t, sorry.” Davesprite now had a pair of binoculars and was checking out the comely babe. “Too busy being a creep.”

Rose smacked him as hard as she could on the back of the head.

“Cut that out! You can’t spy on people like that.” She scolded. “It isn’t right to treat anyone with such disrespect, let alone a lady.”

“Pssh. What else am I gonna do? Go up and talk to her? Fuck no.” Davesprite pulled out a pair of badonkulars and looked again. “Daaaaaaammmmmn.”

“So I have a couple of questions,” Rosie interrupted her father’s story. “First off, what the hell are badonkulars?”

“There like binoculars, but you use them to check out butts.”

“Gross.”

“Don’t knock it till you try it.” Dave advised wisely. “What else?”

“Well…” Rosie twisted her fingers absently on the bedspread. “Was that pretty lady mom?”

“You bet.”

“Really?”

“Really, really.”

“Cool.”

“Damn straight.”

Rose Lalonde yanked the badonkulars out of Davesprite’s hands and tossed them over her shoulder.
Down below, John let out a muffled ‘ow’ as they collided with his ear.

“Do you want to know how to talk to women, Davesprite?” Rose asked. “Because no matter how painful a process educating you may be, it’s preferable to you living the rest of your ghostly life as some creepy onlooker with no respect for personal boundaries. You’re no better than those losers at Wizard Harvard Community College.”

“You take that back, Lalonde.” Davesprite warned. “I’m the smoothest of operators. If I really wanted to impress that fine lady with my womanizing skills, then I would float over there and sweep her off her adorable feet with a few well-aimed pickup lines.”

“Adorable feet, huh?” Rose raised an eyebrow. “I didn’t peg you as the type, Davesprite. Well, I do recall a statistic blah blah blah one in five men blah blah blah blah…”

Davesprite was no longer listening, he was gazing, entranced by the maiden’s beauty. Still oblivious to her audience, the maiden steeled herself, shouldered her crossbow, and then stepped into the darkness of the cave.

“Blah blah John blah blah blah attractive blah he would never, of course blah blah what do you think?”

“Hmmm?” Davesprite had only just returned to earth.

“Oh, never mind.” Rose rested her chin on her elbow, a little sadly. “It’s not important.”

“We need to go after her.” Davesprite nodded towards the cave. “She could get into some trouble in there.”

“I’m sure she’ll be alright. She looked as if she could handle herself just fine. What we need to worry about, is getting ourselves through there in one piece.”

“Guys!” John called from below. He was beginning to struggle under Rose’s weight. “Why are you waiting? Climb up already!”

“Oh! Sorry, John.” Rose hauled herself onto the rocky ledge and then reached down to pull John up as well.

Davesprite, meanwhile, floated towards the cave’s entrance. It was your average cave, dark as shit, full of stalactites dripping with gross water, and there were even a few bats flapping around and doing whatever it is that bats do.

Rose and John, having successfully ascended the hill, joined Davesprite.

“Are you ready?” Rose asked, drawing her wands. “Once we go in, there’s no telling what we’ll face.”

“ Probably scorpions.” John deduced.

“Nightmares too.” Davesprite added. With a flick of his wrist, he summoned his magical sword. “Let’s get this over with, alright?”

Casting a quick flashlight spell, Rose led the way inside, illuminating the path ahead for the group. Darkness surrounded them as they traveled deeper and soon enough, all sunlight had vanished from view.
“Wow. It’s dark as hell in here.” John commented. “I can barely see a thing, even with your flashlight spell, Rose.”

“Here.” Rose thrust her hand behind her and grabbed John by the wrist. “Let’s hold hands so we do not lose each other.”

“Good thinking.” John murmured, barely audible.

He was caught off guard by Rose’s forward movement and the burning sensation that crept up his arm from her frigid digits. In the dim light afforded by her wand, John caught himself staring at her pale fingers against his sleeve, with nails painted black, and a simple silver band around her middle finger.

Damn, this boy was in deep. Love is a poison, ladies and gentlemen, don’t ever forget that.

And love, was what our group experienced in that cave that day. Out of the darkness ahead, came a horrible scuttling sound of many legs across the stone floor that reverberated off the walls. Into view, loomed an indistinct face of almost ethereal beauty.

It was not the same, crossbow-wielding maiden as before, but someone new. This woman had long, flowing, blonde hair and large, almond shaped eyes. Her bone structure and complexion were so fine, that as she moved further into the light, John and Dave felt an instant attraction to- OH MY GOD SHE HAS A SCORPION BODY. IT’S A MOTHERFUCKING SCORPION WOMAN. I’M GONNA PUKE.

“Back foul beast!” Rose brandished her wands. “Come no further and I will not have to strike you down!”

“You dare threaten me, witch.” The babe/scorpion hybrid hissed. “This is my fucking cave home. You can’t just come in here like you’re the biggest gal around and dish out ultimatums like that. Who do you think you are?”

“I’m Rose Lalonde, greatest witch ever.”

“Never heard of you.” The monster gestured with her gross claw hand. “Get out or else risk being tempted by my siren song.”

John gasped. He’d read about sirens before. Once, they had been creatures of the sea, luring lustful sailors to their deaths it the ruthless ocean deep. However, after a horrible incident involving an oil spill in the gulf, the sirens had been forced to move inland to survive, mating with land creatures to create disgusting combo-monsters like the one currently staring Rose down.

“You’re song won’t work on me, creature.” Rose taunted. “With my magical abilities, I’m immune to such trickery.”

“Like I’d want to tempt you, witch.” The Siren sneered. “You have about as much sex appeal as wilted house plant. It’s them, you should be worried about.”

Then the scorpion woman began to lure John and Davesprite with this ancient incantation…

“Stop. Just stop right there.” Rosie interrupted again. “I know what you’re going to do and I’m not up for it tonight.”

“What in the heck are you talking about?”
“You’re gonna sing some stupid song instead of the spell and it’s going to be really lame and boring and not fun at all.”

“I- I wasn’t going to do that at all.”

“Dad…” Rosie casted her father an exasperated look.

“Okay, fine. Whatever. Do you want me to skip the song?”

“Yes. Yes please.”

“Aright. Sure. Whatever.” Dave folded his arm. “Rosie doesn’t wanna hear a song. Okay, then. Take the fun out of everything, why don’t ya? Geez. Where was I…?”

Then the Scorpion woman began to lure John and Davesprite with this ancient ritual dance.

She began krumping, booty dropping, head spinning, all sorts of shit. It was really impressive and really sexy. Both John and Davesprite instantly fell under her spell.

“I dunno how,” Davesprite let out a low whistle, as he admired her scorpion body. “But I definitely gotta get fucked by that thing.”

“I wanna take her on a date.” John sighed wistfully. “I’ll buy her flowers and hold her hand and…”

Rose had heard enough of this nonsense. She wasn’t about to let this slutty scorpion take her friends back to her lair. Twirling her wands, she pointed them at the monster and fired a powerful bomb spell.

The hex flew through the air and struck the siren directly in the chest. Her hardened exoskeleton, however, was tough enough to deflect the spell and send it flying up into the cave ceiling. The whole mountain seemed to shake with the resulting explosion and shards of rock rained down upon our heroes.

“Stupid, witch.” The scorpion woman cackled. “You’re spell are nothing against me. Say goodbye to your sexy, ghost familiar and your average-looking boyfriend.”

Reaching out with her super-gross claw hands, the siren prepared to snatch up both John and Davesprite. A second before she seized her prizes, a goddamn arrow flew through the air and nailed her right between the motherfucking eyes.

“MY BRAIN!!!” The siren wailed, and then she fell over and totally died.

Turning on the spot, Rose sought out the source of the projectile and found the beautiful maiden from before standing a few yards away, crossbow raised.

“What’s up?” The maiden asked, lowering her weapon. “I heard that explosion and came to investigate. Good thing too! You guys looked like you were in trouble.”

“I would have gotten her eventually.” Rose rested her hands on her hips. “Who are you and what are you doing in this cave?”

The mysterious woman, a strong-willed amazonian warrior, furrowed her brows in confusion.

“You know, a simple ‘thank you’ would be nice.” She said with a frown. “Do you know how hard it is to find quality crossbow bolts out here? I just wasted one killing that siren for you.”
“An unnecessarily waste, I’m afraid.” Rose examined her nails. “As I’ve mentioned previously, I required no help in rescuing my friends.”

John who was staring with confusion at the dead siren, suddenly snapped back into a coherent state. He turned to find his savior standing opposite Rose.

“Uh, hi.” He grinned at the stranger. “I’m John Egbert of Honey Town. What’s your name?”

The warrior smiled, ignored Rose, and stepped closer to John.

“My name is Jade Harley of the Sun Clan. I’m a vagabond warrior who roams Skaia hunting rare and exotic monsters!” She extended her hand. “It’s nice to meet you, John.”

Before John could accept and shake the proffered appendage, Davesprite suddenly floated in.

“Sup, names Dave. I’m sort of a badass.” He smirked, taking her hand instead. “Now, what’s a lovely lady like yourself doing in a nasty cave like this?”

“Exploring of course!” Jade grinned. “Are you a ghost?”

“He’s a sprite, actually.” Rose answered. “And we were just leaving. Come on, John.”

Taking her friend by the arm, Rose tried to pull John further into the cave.

“Rose, what’s going on?” John resisted her grip. “What’s the rush?”

“We’ve wasted enough time already. The whole point of entering this cave was to expedite the journey to the sea, not dilly-dally and chat with mysterious women.”

“But don’t you think she could help us on our quest? I mean, look at her! She’s cool!”

Rose came to a slow stop. Still clutching him tightly, she turned back to face John, her mouth drawn into a thin line and her eyes expressionless.

“Fine.” She said curtly. “If you wish to converse with this woman, than that’s fine be me. I’ll see you later.”

Releasing him, she turned to leave, but only to find her progress impeded by a sudden reversal of captors.

“Rose…” John was holding her by the robe and grinning smugly. “Are you… jealous???”

“Jealous!” She repeated incredulously. “Of course not! How could you ever assume such a thing?!”

“I’m just wondering.” John placated. “I mean, why else would you act so weird in the presence of another girl?”

“I’m not acting weird. I’m merely expressing my thoughts on the progression of our quest, which seems to be hindered by the number of side-stops we keep making. We don’t have time to waste on social visits.”

“Yo, weird people!” Davesprite called to them. “Come on back and chat with me and Jade. Stop being weird!”

Gently, John began to tug Rose backwards.
“Come on.” He said. “This won’t take long. She can even walk with us. Don’t you think making new friends is a good thing?”

“Humph.” Was all Rose responded.

As Rose and John rejoined Davesprite and Jade, the newcomer excitedly welcomed them.

“It’s so cool to see new people!” She exclaimed. “I can’t remember the last time I bumped into a group of nice heroes like yourselves.”

“We haven’t met very many nice people either.” John admitted. Together, the group began to press deeper into the cave. “You said that you were a member of the Sun Clan?” John asked.

“Oh yes. I grew up on the Sunny Island, but sailed for the mainland when I turned thirteen. I’ve been traveling the countryside ever since!”

“You know, Rose has also traveled extensively.” John nudged Rose in the ribs. “Isn’t that right?”

“Yes.” Rose answered dryly.

“That’s cool. Have you ever gone up north to the kingdom of Prospit?” Jade asked, interestedly.

“No.”

“Oh. Well you should, next time you get the chance. Everyone is really nice! And it’s really pretty too!”

“Ok.”

Davesprite pushed Rose out of the way to get closer to Jade.

“We’re actually on a very important quest.” He explained. “It’s super dangerous and badass.”

“Really?” Jade’s eyes lit up. “That’s so cool! What type of quest?”

“We’re going to slay the four evil mages of Skaia.”

Jade’s mouth went slack with shock. She turned to John.

“Is that true?” She asked.

“Yup!” John nudged Rose again. “Rose here is the greatest witch ever and is going to finally cement her name in the history scrolls by defeating the Dragon Mistress of The North. Isn’t that right?”

“Yes.” Rose answered.

Davesprite let out a very exaggerated ‘gasp!’ as if he was suddenly struck by an incredible idea.

“You know, Jade.” He said, wriggling his eyebrows. “Our party could use a tough and rough babe like you. We’ve already got a sour witch, a badass familiar, and a John. All we’re missing is someone to grease the wheels and get this machine churning in the right direction, if you know what I mean.”

Jade’s eyes sparkled in the dim light of the cave.

“I would love to accompany you on your quest!” Abruptly she leapt forward and wrapped her arms
around Davesprite’s neck. “Thank you so much for inviting me!”

Rose’s face twisted into a horrible sneer and she cast John a very shrewd glare. He wasn’t paying attention though, as he was too busy smiling at the embracing Jade and Davesprite.

“Oh man.” Jade gasped, finally pulling away and leaving Davesprite in a giddy haze. “I could finally have that Dragon Skin jacket I’ve always wanted! After, we slay that evil mistress of course. This is the perfect opportunity to collect rare resources and treasure!”

“Yes.” Davesprite nodded in appreciation as he very un-subtly ogled the uncovered strip of perfectly tanned skin around Jade’s exposed navel. “Rare treasure indeed.”

After another few minutes or so of walking, the group found themselves stepping out of the Scorpion Cave of Nightmares and back into the snowy hills of the Wizard Mountains. Over a steep incline and down into a valley, the very edge of the Eastern Sea could be seen and with it, the lair of the Crab King of The East.

Before the group started the final trek down to their destination, Rose took Jade off to the side.

“If you’re going to be traveling with us, then we’re going to need to get one thing straight, missy.” Rose jabbed a stiff finger into Jade’s chest. “Even though John and Davesprite are idiots and jerks, they are my idiots and jerks. If you try to become more popular than me, I will not hesitate to talk about you behind your back and turn everyone against you. Is that understood?”

Jade rolled her eyes, but nodded all the same.

“Understood.” She answered with a small chuckle. “You don’t have to worry about me stealing your thunder, Rose. We’re all friends now!”

“Alright. Good.” Rose nodded slowly. “Just as long as we have a clear understanding.”

On a nearby ridge, John and Davesprite waited for the two girls.

“What do you think they’re talking about?” John asked.

“Girl stuff.” Davesprite said with confidence. “Just every day, typical, girl stuff.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Chapter Six: The Crab King of the East

With our totally rad party now consisting of Rose the witch, Dave the sprite, Jade the monster hunter, and John it was time for the Crab King of the East to finally meet his maker.

Apparently, the Crab King had once been a normal man, but was turned into an evil monster by a dark wizard. Out of horror at what he had become, the Crab King had retreated to the East Sea to reside somewhere along the rocky shore, where his only faithful companions were the crabs that lived there. He spent his days terrifying coastal towns and snatching up those foolish enough to stray too close to his lair.

It was unknown how he came to join the Four Evil Mages, but Rose wasn’t much concerned with his origin story. At least, not as much as she was concerned with his termination story.

Basically, she was going to kick some crustaceous ass!

“So what do you know about the Crab King of the East, Rose?”

Our group of heroes was traversing the Wizard Mountain Range, descending the final rocky hills and approaching the shore of the East Sea. When John’s question was poised, Rose looked up from her map to regard him.

“I know that he’s an evil mage, that he possesses one of the Keys of Fate, and that he must be vanquished before I continue on my quest.” She answered. “That is all the knowledge I require.”

“Don’t you think it’d be a good idea to have some sort of plan of attack though?” John pressed on. “I mean, what if he’s really dangerous?”

“He’s the king of crabs, John. How dangerous do you think he can be?”

“I have a question.” Jade Harley, the newest addition to the group, spoke up. “Is the Crab King half man-half crab? Or is he like a full crab?”

“We had this same discussion about the Bee Lord.” Dave responds, as he floats by her side. “John thinks the Bee Lord is a man-sized bee, which sounds pretty fucked up if you ask me.”

“The Bee Lord, huh?” Jade mused. “I heard that he can turn into a giant tit, so I call him Boob Lord.”

Dave’s eyes widened. Although he’d only known Jade for a short time, he could already tell that this girl was the one. As in, the one he definitely wanted to slap a ring on and totally not fool around with twenty-four seven. If you know what I mean. (wink)

I’m talking about sex.

Rose’s scowl probably could have made a baby cry from a mile away. She turned back to her assembled crew, hands on her hips.

“Would you please refrain from imitating a pair of rambunctious school children?” She scolded.
“This is kind of the biggest quest in my witch-ly career and I would hope that you’d treat it with the same seriousness which it deserves.”

“Aw come on, Lalonde.” Davesprite waved her off. “We’re not ruining your quest by joking around.”

“Yeah!” Added Jade. “Besides, what’s a good quest without a little fun?”

“Questing is not supposed to be fun.” Rose glowered. “We’re about to walk headfirst into the lair of one of the most powerful and evil mages in the land and you’re talking about breasts! I’m trying to leave behind a legacy here, guys.”

“Don’t worry, Rose.” John patted his friend on the shoulder. “The history books will clean it up.”

Still grumbling about the potential tarnishing of her greatest quest, Rose continued to lead the way down the Wizard Mountains, with her team in tow.

“So...” John turned to Jade and asked curiously. “What was it like living in the Sun Clan?”

“Oh. It was… alright.” She answered hesitantly. “I mean, everyone was really nice! They just... could be a little silly sometimes.”

“You mean ‘stupid’ right?” Davesprite offered.

“Well, yeah. Maybe a bit.” Jade scratched her nose. “Ever since I was a little girl, I just wanted to get off that island and explore the mainland. Now, thanks to you guys, I’ve got my chance!” She grinned at her new friends. “So why are you two traveling with Rose?”

“I’m magically bound to her.” Davesprite answered, a little glumly. “She accidentally released me from a cursed amulet and now I have to do whatever she says.”

Rose let out a loud cough that sounded like ‘as if’ but it was hard to tell exactly.

“I’m traveling with Rose because…” John trailed off. He wasn’t about to blurt out the real reason he followed the witch around like a lost puppy dog. “Because we’re best buds! Right, uh, buddy?”

John nudged Rose in the ribs with his elbow and she couldn’t fight the small smile that tugged at her lips. As friends went, John wasn’t a bad one to have. He was understanding, funny, a little clueless, honest to a fault, but still a really solid dude. Compared to former companions like Henry and other’s like Davesprite, Rose could do a lot worse. That was for sure.

“Well that’s great! It’s so awesome to find a nice group of friends.” Jade grinned. “Growing up on an island of weird, sun-worshipping dummies, I never really had any real friends.”

“I can relate to that.” John slung an arm around her shoulder. “But we’re friends now and that’s all the matters in my eyes.”

“Great!”

At that moment, Jade’s stomach let out the mightiest growl Rose, John, and Davesprite ever did hear. Embarrassed, Harley wrapped her arms around her middle.

“Sorry.” She muttered. “I guess it’s been a while since I had something to eat. You guys wouldn’t happen to…”

“Yeah we’ve got food for days.” Davesprite floated over to John’s backpack and began rifling
around inside. “We hit up Wizard Harvard Community College before we bumped into you. So we got hella supplies to spare.”

“Nice! What do you have?”

“Well,” Davesprite pulled out different food as he spoke. “We got some berries, a little bit of frozen Wizard Pizza, one of these little, green, tree-looking things. Uh, what did you call it, John?”

“Broccoli.”

“Yeah, that. Also we got some beaver jerky.” Davesprite pulled out a thick slice of succulent beaver jerky and was thoroughly surprised when Jade ripped it from his fingers.

She began to ravenously tear at the meat with her teeth, growling and snarling and just ripping the poor, already dead animal, to shreds. Everyone else just stood there and watched with varying levels of horror as Jade went to town on her snack. Approximately five seconds later, she finished and wiped her mouth on the back of her hand.

“Is that all the jerky?” She asked, eyes shimmering.

“Uh, yeah. Are you still hungry?”

“Yup!”

“Well, we’re out of meat.” Davesprite pulled out the broccoli. “But we got this little tree thing that no one wants to eat.”

“Aw.” Jade’s face fell. “Sorry, but I don’t eat vegetables. Thanks for the meat though!”

“Uh, sure. Anytime.”

Rose suddenly snatched John by the collar and dragged him away from the rest of the group.

“Does something seem off to you about our new companion, John?” Rose asked once Davesprite and Jade were out of earshot.

“Not really.” He shrugged. “She seems really nice.”

“Try to look past the smiling face and the shiny hair,” Rose grabbed John by the shoulders and forced him to look over towards Jade. “Examine her closely and tell me what you see.”

“Rose, I don’t…”

“Shhhhh. Don’t talk. Just look.”

Rolling his eyes, John examined his new friend. Jade looked like a normal girl to him. Tan skin, long, dark hair, white teeth that flashed in the mid-morning sun. He supposed that she was a little more muscular than most girls, taller too. She towered over Rose and Davesprite had to float half a foot off the ground to look her in the eyes. That wasn’t anything too strange though and other than that, John had no idea what Rose was trying to show him.

The witch apparently sensed this.

“Her canines are extremely sharp, she only eats meat, she used to live with the members of the Sun Clan who worshiped the sun and feared the moon, and she mentions ‘how nice we are’ almost ever thirty seconds. John, use your deductive reasoning to figure out what I’m trying to insinuate.”
“You think she’s… a lonely carnivore who has nice teeth?”

“No.” Rose sighed. “I don’t think she’s a lonely carnivore with nice teeth. I think she’s a…”

“Hey! What the hell are you weirdo’s doing? I thought we were going to fight a Crab King?” Davesprite called to them.

If anything was going to get Rose to forget about Jade’s inherently bizarre features, it was a reminder of her ultimate quest. Instantly, she dropped the topic of Jade and pulled John back to the rest of the group.

“Of course. You’re right.” She said. “Let us press on. I’d like to reach his lair before nightfall.”

And so the group walked, all the way towards the ocean and along the coast towards where the Crab King was rumored to be hiding out. Thinking back to John’s earlier words, Rose occupied herself by running through different attack strategies that she could use to defeat her foe.

The deus ex machina spell always worked pretty well, although it was sort of a cheap cop out that should only be used for dire situations. Summoning her kitten familiar, Jaspers, was also an option. From the duel at Wizard Harvard Community College, Rose had learned that there was more to the cuddly spirit than met the eye and that summoning him, was quite possibly an intelligent course of action.

“It smells like a storm is coming.” Jade Harley suddenly said, as she sniffed the air. “We should hurry up if we don’t want to get caught in the rain.”

Rose’s paranoia was once again piqued. She raised a delicately curved eyebrow.

“That’s quite a nose you have there, Jade.” She said evenly. “Any other hidden talents you feel like sharing?”

Jade thought for a second.

“I can do this!” She then proceeded to stuff her whole fist into her mouth.

John laughed, Dave stared in awe, and Rose simply rolled her eyes.

“Not what I had in mind, but interesting nonetheless.” The witch shook her head. “Very well then. If a storm is inbound, then I do suggest we pick up the pace.”

The group continued to walk and, sure enough, dark storm clouds began to appear over the ocean waves, quickly approaching the shoreline and the heroes trekking across it. Consulting her map once more, Rose measured the distance from their approximate location to where a large ‘x’ labeled the lair of the Crab King.

“Hold on.” She said, bringing everyone to a stop. “According to this map, we should be right above…”

The words were torn from her lips as the ground beneath the group’s feet gave way and sent our heroes tumbling down into the earth. Rose, John, and Jade crashed into each other and slammed into the hard floor of the underground cave in a heap of tangled limbs and disgruntled curses. Davesprite screamed in terror, until he remembered he could fly, and then floated down safely to join the group.

“Way to walk us right into a trap, Lalonde.” He snarked, folding his arms. “It’s reasons such as this that make you the undisputed leader.”
“Shove it.” Rose snapped back, shoving John’s legs off of her chest. “Is everyone else alright?”

“I’m fine.” Jade answered.

“I think I’m okay.” Agreed John.

“Good.” Rose examined their surroundings. They had fallen unwittingly into an underground cave. Rose was really, really tired of caves, nothing good every happened in a cave. The walls and ceiling were smooth, as if they’d been cut by some giant blade, and numerous skeletal corpses littered the ground around them.

“What is this place?” John asked as he helped Rose to her feet.

“If I had to guess,” Rose drew her wands. “I’d say that we’ve just found the lair of the Crab King.”

“Well that was easy!” Piped Jade. “I was worried we’d have to fight our way into some super-fortified fortress or something.”

“This is most likely an outer branch to a much larger system of catacombs.” Rose explained. “No doubt the inner sanctum is more heavily fortified.” She stooped to examine one of the many skeletons. “Also I doubt our collective weight alone would be enough to cave in the roof like that. This is most likely a sand trap used by the Crab King to catch unlucky souls.”

“Then we should probably get out of here, right? Like, as soon as motherfucking possible.” Davesprite’s encounter with the Laser Hydra back in chapter four had left him with a slight phobia of being eaten, or phagophobia if you wanna be one of those smart-guys.

“Yeah,” Agreed John. “Let’s go find this Crab King, ruin his day, and get the hell out of here. I’m really sick and tired of caves.”

“Get used to it, John.” Jade advised as Rose began leading the way deeper underground. “When you start questing in Skaia, you’re bound to explore more than a few caves. That’s where all the best loot is!”

Rose’s ears pricked up at the mention of sweet dungeon loot. She was an avid collector of rare, mysterious, and interesting trinkets. So much so, that more than once she went out of her way to raid dungeons just for the slight chance that she might find something cool. Rose’s eye for treasure would get her into trouble, as she was sort of a borderline kleptomaniac.

However, that’s a story for another time.

Presently, the group was following the path of the cave further and further, towards what seemed to be yet more, never-ending tunnel.

“We’re definitely going the right way.” Jade assured them as she sniffed the air. “This place reeks of moldy crab-juice.”

Rose wrinkled her nose, despite her inability to pick up the scent. Although her suspicions about Jade only continued to grow with every word that came from the girl’s mouth, she was determined to keep the issue shelved for the time being. At least until they were back on the surface and with one of the Keys of Fate in her satchel.

Rounding a bend in the tunnel, the group suddenly found themselves faced with a large, cavernous room. The ceiling stretched up and out of view, giving Rose the impression that they were now very
deep underground. The parts of the cavern that she could see were illuminated by these slimy-looking globs that hung off the wall, emitting a soft, blue glow.

From Rose’s current position, a set of stone steps led down to a wide, flat floor. In the very center, sat the Crab King of the East himself, upon a throne composed entirely out of human bones. He was grey-skinned and clothed in dark robes. His eyes were a bright yellow, and two nubby candy-corn colored horns sat in his mess of unruly hair.

He was really gross-looking, although his humanoid features gave merit to the myth that he was once a normal human. He looked up and noticed the newcomers.

“Aw, fuck.” He growled, lowering his copy of *Skaia Today*, a weekly periodical that held all the celebrity romance gossip you could handle. And some you probably couldn’t. “How the hell did you guys get in here?”

“We fell into your sand trap.” John explained.

Rose punched him in the shoulder to silence him.

“Sand trap?” The Crab King repeated. “I don’t have a sand trap. Are you talking about that hole in my roof? Shit. I need to get that fixed.”

“Silence, evil mage!” Rose shouted, drawing her wands. “I’ve come to end your reign of terror and claim your Key of Fate!”

The Crab King sighed and rested his chin on his elbow.

“If I had a gold piece for every stupid motherfucker who came down here, looking to *end my reign of terror,*” He made air-quotes with his fingers. “Then I’d be one of those rich, pompous assholes who lives up in the Emerald City, instead of in this crappy cave home.”

“Yeah, dude. I wasn’t going to say anything, but this cave home is really shitty.” Davesprite commented, as he examined the nearest wall. “Like, I bet you don’t even have *any* cool stalagmites or anything.”

“Hey, man. Screw you. I got plenty of cool stalagmites.” The Crab King pointed towards his left. “See that one. If you squint a bit, it sort of looks like a ballpoint banana.”

“Oh wow. It totally does…”

“Shut up!” Rose shrieked. She pointed one of her wands at the Crab King. “You will not hinder our progress for second longer. I challenge you to a duel of wizardly strife!”

“Pass.” Said the Crab King as he returned to his magazine.

You could almost see the smoke billow from Rose’s ears as she clenched her fists in frustration. She took a step forward, ready to attack the mage, but was stopped by John’s hand on her arm.

“Just hold on a second.” He said, and then looked back to the Crab King. “Uh, excuse me. Mr. Crab King sir?”

“Jegus. You’re still here? What the fuck do you want?!” The King bellowed.

“Maybe,” John scuffed his boot in the dirt. “Maybe, you could just… give us your Key of Fate, so we could be on our way?”
“No.” The Crab King shook his head. “You can’t have my key.”

“Well, why not?”

“Because I said so, now get out of here before I lose my temper.” No sooner were the words out of his mouth, then a spell flew through the air and struck his magazine, burning it to ash in his very hands. He looked up to see Rose glaring and holding her wand at the ready. “BITCH, DID YOU REALLY JUST DO THAT?!?”

“Yeah,” Rose buffed her nails on her cloak. “What are you going to do about it, crabby?”

Teeth gnashing furiously, the Crab King rose from his throne and clapped his hands once, twice, three times. Rose, John, Dave, and Jade simply watched as the King clapped a total of five times, only to sit back in his chair once more.

“Uh…” Jade turned to Rose. “Did I miss something?”

Rose shrugged. She was just as puzzled by the Crab King’s actions as everyone else. That was, until about a million fucking Crabmen began climbing out of holes in the walls and dropping the floor, with various weapons clutched in their clawed fists.

“Crab minions.” The Crab King commanded. “Slay these idiotic interlopers and bring their heads to me, so that I may use their skulls as soup bowls.”

“You got it, boss!” Cried one Crabman. “Come on, boys. Let’s show these pricks what we do to those who try to rid the world of darkness!”

Together, the Crabmen began the assault on our heroes.

Crabmen are just regular crabs that have been transformed into evil warriors. Their bodies are covered with natural, shell armor and their eyes are supported on long stalks which protrude from their heads. All in all, they’re sort of silly-looking, but I guess it doesn’t really matter how you look when you’re wielding a sword and trying to decapitate someone.

The battle began with a flurry of light and sound

Rose twirled her wands and fired bomb spells into the crowd of Crabmen, blowing them away with each flick of her wrist. A grin, the first in a long time, curled her lips as a fire sprung to life in her eyes, the type of fire that only comes with the heat of battle.

Dave summoned his ghostly sword and began hacking away at the Crabmen. He used his natural, sprite abilities to float out of harm’s and his powerful bird wings to bowl over his foes with gusts of wind.

Jade was using her crossbow to fire bolts into her enemies with pinpoint accuracy. She shot eyes, fingers, noses, ears, and even the tip of dick off one with her deadly weapon. A natural-born hunter and marksman, Jade ripped through the Crabmen with practiced ease.

Lastly, John pulled out his signature shield and did his best to defend himself and his friends from any oncoming attacks. He blocked a swipe from a sword and his shield instantly bent in half.

“Are you being serious right now?” Asked one Crabman. “I mean, really. That shield looks like a cookie sheet to me.”

“Well, maybe it is.” John replied, a little defensively. “It still gets the job done.”
“Yeah, but are you really satisfied with just ‘getting the job done’? That’s borderline complacency in my mind.”

“What’s wrong with being satisfied with what you have?”

“Nothing. That’s not what I’m trying to say.” The Crabman shook his head. “Look, if you’re living your life the way you want to live it, if you’re happy with the cards you’ve been dealt, then good on you, man. You’re successful in my eyes. But honestly, do you feel like this is the best you can do?”

“Oh, geez. I don’t know.” John rubbed the back of his neck. “I would like to be a great hero, I guess. It’s just that I haven’t really gotten around to finding any good gear or doing something truly heroic.”

“If you wanna do something with your life, then you gotta set real, realistic goals that are attainable. If you wanna be a hero, like a legit hero, then you can do it if you just set your mind to it. Don’t blame stuff like crappy gear or a low number of opportunities.” The Crabman reached out and pressed his hand to John’s chest. “The true secret to being ‘great’ lies within.”

“So basically you’re saying that I shouldn’t settle for being a second class hero, that I should set goals for myself and systematically work my way through them?” John watched the Crabman nod his head in confirmation. Then he continued. “And that the key for finding the purpose for myself lies within my heart?”

“I couldn’t have said it better myself.”

“Wow.” John smiled at the Crabman. “Thanks a lot! So does this mean we’re friends now?”

“Pshhh. What? Hell no. I’m totally still going to kill you.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?!” John threw his hands in the air. “God, you’re an asshole!”

“I’m an asshole? Bitch, I just got very real with you.” The Crabman raised his sword. “Now, take your lumps.”

John closed his eyes as the Crabman’s sword descended towards him. In a second, he would surely be beheaded and turned into a soup bowl for the King of Crabs, which when you really think about it, is really disrespectful and sad.

From across the cavern, Jade watched in horror as the Crabman lunged towards John. She was too far away to run to his aid and it would take too long to reload her crossbow for another shot. However, Jade was not about to lose her friend so soon after meeting him.

Taking a deep breath, Jade closed her eyes and concentrated. Time seemed to slow down as she transformed. Black hair sprouted from all over her body, tall ears sprung up from her mane of dark hair and a wagging tail grew from her spine. As her nails grew into sharp claws, everyone froze, struck dumb by her sudden transformation.

“Jade Harley the Weredog, motherfuckers!” She howled and then leapt towards John, swiping away his attacker with one mighty slash.

All the Crabmen screamed in terror as Jade proceeded to rip dozens of them to shreds. She snapped with her glistening fangs, scratched with her razor-sharp claws, and beat all the rest to a bloody, crabby pulp. Davesprite watched in awe as she picked up one Crabman and ripped him in half over her head, showering the ground with crab blood.

“I’m not into furries.” He said. “But somehow… I’m more attracted to her than ever.”
Rose ignored him and set her sights on the Crab King, who was hopelessly trying to piece together the burnt pages of his magazine.

“Ah! Fucking piece of shit!” He cried and tossed the pieces away. “Now I’ll never know what Rachel and Mark’s wedding theme will be!”

“I believe you have bigger problems than that, fiend!” Cried Rose as she approached. “You’re army is being busted-up as we speak. Face me now, or else concede defeat.”

“Gog! You’re still here?!” The Crab King roared. “I thought I told you to get out like five minutes ago! Now you’ll pay, you stupid witch!”

Leaping up from his throne, the Crab King produced a pair of wickedly-curved scythes and began swinging them around. Rose gripped her wands tightly and leapt towards him.

The pair clashed in shower of sparks and proceeded to trade spell after spell in quick succession. Rose fired a transmogrification spell, which would have surely ended the fight quickly, but was blocked by a swipe of the Crab King’s scythe. He responded with a dastardly fire spell that singed Rose’s bangs, but failed to harm her otherwise, as she danced out of the way.

Meanwhile, Jade was doing parkour around the room and beating up Crabmen hardcore ultimate style, whilst John and Davesprite stood back to back and used some rock n rollin’ teamwork to create an unstoppable killing team. It was a bloodbath, a horrible display of murder, silhouetted by the flashes of magical light from the fierce wizard battle waging between Rose and the Crab King.

This went on for like two hours.

Finally, the last Crabman fell with a swipe of Jade’s claws. John leaned against the wall, breathing heavily. The floor was littered with corpses and the walls were smeared with gross crab blood. He himself was covered with nasty bruises, cuts, and even a small burn from where one Crabman had tagged him with the end of a lit cigarette.

That particular Crabman was a real dick.

Anyways, as he caught his breath, he looked across the room to see Rose and the Crab King still dueling it out. The Crab King was shooting fireballs from his hands, while Rose crouched behind his bone throne for cover.

“Face me, you cold piece of rotted fuck!” He roared as he cast spell after spell. “You wanted to fight, so fight!”

Rose poked her head out from behind his throne.

“Be careful what you wish for, King of Crabs.” She taunted. “You might not be so happy with the outcome.”

“Just shut up and duel!”

Leaping out from behind her protection, Rose performed a perfect spinning back flip and kicked the scythes from the Crab King’s hands, disarming him. He stumbled backwards and tried to cast a shield charm on himself, but it was too late. Rose fired a spell that hit him right in the gut and knocked him flat on his ass.

“So much for being a powerful, evil mage.” She advanced, wand poised to deal a killing blow. “I’ll be sure to tell the Dragon Mistress how easily you fell to my wands.”
At the mention of the Dragon Mistress, the Crab King’s lip raised in a feral snarl.

“You think you’re so tough, Rose Lalonde.” He sneered. “But you’ll never make it to the Dragon Mistress alive. Hell, I bet you won’t even get pass the Vampire Queen. The only reason you won here today, is because- OH GOD MY FACE!”

Rose suddenly blasted him directly in the nose with a swift spell, which caused his entire head to explode like a hot dog in the microwave. Disgusting crab brains flew everywhere and I’m pretty sure a little bit got in John’s open mouth. Screaming, black spirits rose from the Crab King’s corpses and ascended up into the ceiling to go who knows where.

With his head gone and his dark magic vanquished, the Crab King crumbled into dust, leaving in his place a small, glittering, bronze key.

Rose picked it up.

“The only reason I won here today,” She said, pocketing her first Key of Fate. “Is because I’m the greatest witch who ever lived and that’s all there really is to say on the matter.”

“Oh yeah. It’s not like we helped at all or anything.” Davesprite said, as he, John, and Jade made their way to her side.

“Well, of course I couldn’t have done it without you guys. I was just saying,” Rose nodded towards the pile of dust that used to be the Crab King. “That’s why I beat him specifically. I mean, you guys could have probably…”

John silenced her a pat on the arm.

“I think we get it, Rose.” He said with a smile. “Congratulations on defeating the Crab King of the East.”

“That was a whole lot easier than I thought it would be!” Jade commented, as she slowly transformed back into her normal self. “I mean, this place looks really spooky and those Crabmen looked really tough.”

“I suppose looks can be deceiving.” Rose commented, eyeing Jade. “Isn’t that right, Jade Harley the Weredog?”

Jade rubbed her exposed arms a little self consciously.

“I suppose I should have told you guys… about me.” She muttered. “I honestly planned on it, but the time just never seemed right. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry.” John gestured around the room. “That was the coolest thing I’ve seen in, like, ever!”

“So you guys aren’t scared of me or anything?” Jade asked, wide eyed.

“Scared, no. I wouldn’t say that.” Rose folded her arms. “Unlike Werewolves, Weredogs are typically much better company, since they have the ability to control their transformations, of course.”

“Basically what Rose is trying to say, is that you’re an awesome chick with superpowers who should really be on this team with us,” Davesprite said. “If you still wanna come.”
Jade’s eyes lit up.

“Of course I want to come! Do you think I’m going to tap out after one major battle with you guys? As if!” She grabbed the whole assembled crew and crushed them to her chest in a might bear hug, or dog hug if you wanna be like that. “You’re the only bunch not to run for the hills after they get a glimpse at my furry side!”

“Well everyone’s strange in their own little way.” John’s voice was muffled as his face was smushed against Jade’s shoulder. “Isn’t that right, Rose?”

The witch did not comment, as she was currently doing a good impression of a stiff piece of drift wood. Tenderly being embraced by not one, but three different people was not how she liked to celebrate small victories such as this.

By the time the group excited the lair of the Crab King of the East, the sun was beginning to set. The storm that had been brewing previously had washed over. Now orange rays of light shimmered off the waves of the East Sea and painted the surrounding landscape a soft, gold color. Standing together on the beach, John turned to Rose.

“So,” He began. “That wasn’t so bad, was it? That’s one evil mage down and three to go. You’re blazing through this quest, no problem.”

“Yes, it has been a walk in the park up to this point, no doubt.” Rose responded. “But although I consider the Crab King’s words to be mostly false, I fear that he may have some merit. I doubt we’ll reach the end of our journey completely unscathed.”

“Well as long as we work together,” John nodded over to where Davesprite and Jade were talking and laughing in the low tide. “Then I bet we can accomplish anything. Don’t be so negative, Rose. What’s the worst that could happen?”

Considering his question to be rhetorical, John gave Rose one last smile and then trotted off to join his friends on the beach. Rose stared at his back as he retreated.

“Oh, John.” She sighed. “You have no idea.”

For the first time in a while, Rosie waited until her father was completely finished before speaking.

“So that’s it, huh?” She asked. “Man, that Crab King was sort of a chump.”

“Well what do you expect? The first boss is never much of a challenge.” Dave heaved a mighty yawn. “The second one though, well, let’s just say that that’s a story I’m looking forward to getting to.”

“Awesome.” Rosie couldn’t help the bubble of excitement that grew in her chest at the thought that this story was only just beginning. “So anyways, that’s how you found out mom was a Weredog?”

“Yup. Pretty awesome, right?”

“You didn’t freak out or anything?”

“Nope. I kept my cool a hundred percent of the time. Don’t get me wrong, the challenges of dating a half woman-half beast hybrid are more than enough to fill an entire book, a book that would undoubtedly be a best seller and would catapult me into the realms of stardom. However, I don’t feel like getting into that now.” Dave rose from his chair. “This seems like a good place to stop for me.”
“Alright, fine.” Rosie leaned back on her pillows. “One quick question though. Does Uncle John ever learn to close his damn mouth? I mean, gross stuff is always getting in there, you’d think he’d be poisoned by now.”

“He has small nasal passages, breathing just through his nose is hard, and you know what? I don’t have time to explain this.” Dave made his way towards the door, extinguishing the torch on his way out. “Next time we go visit, you can ask him yourself. In the meantime, go to sleep. You’ve got Wizard School tomorrow.”

Rolling her eyes, Rosie rolled onto her side and drifted off to sleep. She dreamt of sprites and Weredogs, brave heroes and evil mages, and of the greatest damn witch the world had ever known.

END OF PART ONE.

Chapter End Notes

I'm wrapping up season two of this as we speak, but I won't start posting the next chapters until I'm completely done! I don't know when the next chapter will be up, but let's shoot for next week. Who knows? Probably sooner.

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Chapter Seven: A Rose by Any Other Name

Having successfully defeated the first out of the Four Evil Mages, Rose and the rest of her team were feeling pretty good about themselves. You know that feeling you get when you’re shooting hoops with your homies and then you decide to go up try to do a slam dunk, and then you run up there and actually do a slam dunk.

Yeah, that’s pretty much how they felt.

However, for a great witch such as Rose, there were no time for celebratory dances or over-choreographed chest bumps with her buds. No, her next trial awaited all the way on the other side of Skaia, where the dastardly Vampire Queen of The West ruled over her undead minions.

“So this Vampire Queen,” Davesprite spoke, as the group trekked across a grassy field. “All we’ve got to do is lure her out into the sun, right? Then she’ll just melt into a gross pile of vampire goo that we can kick dirt on top of and just be done with it.”

“Vampires do not melt under the rays of the sun. That is an old myth.” Rose debunked. “They cannot be repelled by garlic, do they do not fear water, and they cannot turn into bats.”

“What about a stake to the chest?” John offered. “Does that work?”

“Steak?” Jade, who was kicking a rock across the ground, suddenly looked up. “Do you guys have steak?”

“No, we’ve told you like a dozen times, we’re all out of meat.” Rose shot her a look over her shoulder. “And to answer your question, John, I’m pretty sure driving a wooden stake through someone’s heart would kill anyone.”

“Oh yeah. Good point.” John scratched at his chin. “So do you have a plan for how you’re going to beat her?”

Rose shrugged.

“I’ll probably just wing it. That worked out with the Crab King well enough, didn’t it?”

“Yeah, but the Crab King was a chump bitch.” Davesprite pointed out. “No one finds crabs intimidating. Vampires on the other hand are hella scary. They got sharp teeth and glowing red eyes and capes. Fuck that shit.”

“Have you actually ever seen a vampire, Davesprite?” Jade asked.

“Of course he hasn’t.” Rose answered for him. “No one has seen a vampire for over three thousand
years. They are creatures shrouded in mystery, whose descriptions have only become more warped by the imagination of frightened children over time. Some say they wear capes, some say they wear leather jackets and ride motorcycles, and some even say they sparkle like diamonds in the sunlight. Basically, we won’t know what to believe until we get there.”

“Oh geez.” John rubbed the back of neck. “I dunno if I could fight a vampire on a motorcycle. That’s just too badass.”

“John, you probably couldn’t fight a vampire riding a unicycle.” Davesprite smirked. “If you ask me, our next step should be training you to be as good a fighter as the rest of us, so that you can kick some ass too next time we get into a scuffle.”

“Hey! I kicked some ass back there!”

“Oh yeah, so many asses were kicked from behind that cookie sheet shield.” Davesprite rolled his eyes. “It’s a wonder you even need the rest of us at all.”

“Leave him alone.” Rose snapped. “John did perfectly fine against the Crab King’s minions and he’ll do even better against the Vampire Queen.”

“I think Davesprite might have a point though,” Jade spoke up. “I mean, shouldn’t we all prepare a bit for this next boss? They’re supposed to get harder and harder, right?”

“They are supposed to increase in difficulty, yes.” Rose pulled her map out of her satchel and consulted it. “Although I do consider training to be a good idea, I believe our next best step is to stock up on supplies. If we continue on our current path, we should head straight through the Forest of Franklin and end up near the City of Lakewater.”

“Ooooh!” Jade’s eyes lit up. “I’ve always wanted to go to the City of Lakewater! Apparently the whole city is built on a single island in the middle of the biggest lake in all of Skaia. Isn’t that cool!”

“Sure, if you like drinking gross lake water, that is.” Davesprite looked up towards the sun. “Hmm. Are we going to stop for lunch soon? It looks like it’s almost mid-day.”

“Why do you care if we stop or not?” Rose looked at him with confusion. “You’re a sprite.Sprites don’t need to eat.”

“Maybe I’m just tired of walking.”

“You don’t walk either.” Rose pointed to his ghostly tail. “I feel like we can get a few more hours of walking in before we stop. I want to reach the Forest of Franklin before nightfall.”

“Come one, Lalonde. What’s the rush? A little ten minute break won’t hurt anyone, quite the opposite actually.”

Davesprite’s true reasons for wanting to stop lied with his concern for Jade. He watched her warily out of the corner of his eye. Her shoulders were a little slumped and her strides were shorter than usual. Davesprite didn’t know much about Weredogs, but if he had to make an assumption, he’d guess that her transformation back in the lair of the Crab King took more out of her than she let on.

“Is anyone else feeling ‘tired’?” Rose asked, utilizing air quotes around.

“ Nope!” Jade chirped instantly.

John was about to shake his head, but Davesprite elbowed him hard in the ribs. Casting his friend a
wounded glance, John rubbed his side and eventually nodded.

“I- uh, could use a rest.” He said, watching Davesprite nod in confirmation.

“Ugh, fine.” Rose brought the group to a stop atop a grassy hill. “Ten minutes, but that’s it. After that, we aren’t stopping for anything until we reach the forest, understood?”

“Yes, ma’am!” Jade crouched down on the grass, spun around six times to get comfortable, curled up, and then fell instantly to sleep.

Davesprite couldn’t help the small smile that tugged at his lips when he watched her. Jade was a weird bitch, but in the endearing way. Sort of like the way everyone likes Michael Jackson.

MJ was a great artist, of course, but face it: the dude was weird.

John and Rose sat down together and began setting up a quick picnic, whilst Jade slept and Davesprite floated lazily on the breeze.

“I feel like we should throw this thing away.” John was fiddling with the piece of broccoli that the group had been carrying around for literally days. “I mean, is anyone going to eat this?”

“No, but I would save it anyways.” Rose held up her satchel and dumped its contents onto the ground. “Broccoli brewed with other certain magical ingredients can create some helpful elixirs. Who knows? It might come in handy one day.”

“I doubt it.” John stowed away the broccoli again regardless.

As Rose began picking through the spilt contents of her bag, Davesprite spotted a glint of silver amongst the blades of grass and swooped to pick it up.

“Nice dagger, Lalonde.” He commented, examining the blade. “It looks evil as shit.”

“I took from Mudbert’s treasure chest back in the Wizard Mountains.” Rose explained. She rifled through her bag and produced a slice of cake. “Would you like some cake… John?”

At the sudden appearance of the pastry, John had become frozen with fear.

“I’m diabetic.” John explained, eyeing the cake warily. “C-could you please put that away?”

“Of course, forgive me.” Rose stashed away the cake, making a mental note of John’s fear of baked goods. Next, she produced an apple, which John was much more agreeable towards. “Davesprite, hand me the dagger, would you?”

The sprite looked between the apple and the blade in his hand.

“Are you going to use it to cut an apple?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because me and John are going to share.”

“No. I mean, why are you going to use this dagger to cut an apple.” Davesprite held up the small blade to the light. “It looks like it could be cursed or something. You could accidentally poison that apple or something on accident.”
The dagger was small, no bigger than the palm of Davesprite’s hand. It was covered in many powerful runes, such as the Van Halen symbol and that cool ‘S’ thing that kids in high school used to draw all the time. You know what I’m talking about, that cool ‘S’ everyone drew.

Anyways, it totally looked evil as shit.

“Davesprite,” Rose began with a sigh. “I am the greatest witch ever. I believe I know what I’m doing when it comes to cursed and magical items. Also, I’ve about had it up to here.” She held up a hand high above her head. “With your bullshit today, so I’d greatly appreciate it if you could just pass me that dagger, alright?”

“Alright, alright. Geez.” Davesprite threw the dagger at Rose.

She let out a shrill shriek and tried to catch it. The blade’s handle bounced off her palm, flipped in the air, and sliced open a small cut on her little finger, before falling to the grass.

“Davesprite!” She cried. “What the fuck is wrong with you?!”

“What?! You asked me to pass you the dagger!”

“I didn’t ask you to try and kill me with it!” Rose squeezed her bloodied finger with her other hand. “Oh shit. Oh shit.”

“What’s going to happen?” John asked, warily eyeing the cursed dagger where it lay. “Are you going to be okay?”

“I-I don’t know.” Rose’s face grew pale. “I feel… I feel like…”

Suddenly her entire body began to glow with a white light, along with the discarded dagger. John and even Davesprite, who’s eyes were usually well-protected by his shades, had to shield their eyes from the intense light. Eventually the glow faded, and both of their jaws dropped in unison.

Where before there had been only Rose, there now sat four, entirely different Rose Lalonde’s.


The first, was just regular Rose apparently. The second, had large, watery eyes and limp, mousy-looking hair. The third was eyeing him with a predator-ish smirk and was wearing a rather revealing dress plus corset combo. And finally, the fourth Rose was almost skeletal in appearance, with hallow cheekbones, sunken eyes, and a glare that seemed to say ‘fuck everything’.

The first Rose, looked at her counterparts and gaped.

“O-Okay.” Her skin was still deathly-pale and she began to sway unstably where she sat. “N-o one move a muscle…”

She then flopped over onto the grass and passed out.

“Rose!” John rushed to her side and shook her gently. “Are you okay?”

“I hope not.” Muttered the thin, angry-looking Rose. “I hope she’s dead.”

“How can you say that?!” Cried the Rose with wide eyes. Tears began to fall down her face. “That’s so horrible!”

“Oh, suck it up, sister.” Said the final Rose, as she pulled a cigarette from her bra and lit it. She took
a long drag and exhaled a perfect ring of smoke. “You have no idea how gross you look with all those tears leaking out of you like a leaky faucet. Wipe that snot off your face before I totally vomit.”

The crying Rose let out a loud wail, jumped to her feet and began to run away across the grass.

“No! Come back! Don’t run off!” John called after her, but she did not listen. “Shit.”

“Don’t worry about her, honey.” Cooed the sexy Rose as he scooted over to John’s side. “There’s more than enough Lalonde right here to keep you company.”

“This has to be the greatest thing that ever happened.” Davesprite was furiously fighting to keep his cool. Totally radical ghost dudes did not burst into laughter, no matter how much they wanted to.

“Nice dagger.” The Rose with the thin, haunting face snatched up the cursed blade. “Shit’s mine now.”

She then got up and proceeded to run away.

“Whoa, whoa!” John jumped to his feet to follow, but the final Rose grabbed him by the arm.

“Where are you running off to, sugar? We were just getting acquainted.” She pulled the cigarette from her mouth and then extinguished it on her own tongue. It was super hot and super badass.

John started to get a little sweaty.

With a mighty yawn, Jade stretched and woke up from her short nap.

“Aw, man.” She sat up, rubbing at her eyes. “Did I need that! What’s going on, guys?”

She looked between Davesprite, who was barely managing to hold in guffaws of laughter, John, who looked about as uncomfortable as a guy could get, and finally the pair of Rose’s, one unconscious and the other hanging from John like a scantily-clad handbag.

“I take a ten minute nap and you guys pull this shit!” Jade barked. “What the hell is going on?!”

“Dave nicked Rose with a cursed dagger and then she split into three different Rose’s and two of them ran off and one of them has the dagger and I don’t know what to do!!!” John responded frantically.

Jade jumped to her feet and sniffed the air.

“One of the Rose’s is running back east and another is heading north.” She turned to Davesprite. “Head north and cut off that one. I’ll double back for the other.”

“Sure, sure.” Davesprite wiped tears from his eyes. “Yeah. I need to get away from this before I completely lose my shit. God. Remind me to stab Rose more often, okay?”

He then floated towards the north, whilst Jade began to jog back east.

“Wait!” John called after Jade. “What am I supposed to do here?!”

“Watch those two!” Jade called back, pointing to the two remaining Rose’s. “I’ll be back soon!”

And then she disappeared over a hill and disappeared from sight, leaving John alone.

“So, Johnny.” Flirty Rose trailed a finger up John’s arm, leaving goosebumps in her wake. “Alone at
last, huh? Oh, what ever will we do to pass the time?”

John swallowed hard.

“God help me.”

So as John was dealing with that bullshit, Davesprite was flying in pursuit of one of the other Rose’s who were running about.

As much as he would have liked to stick around and watch John fumble through that particular mess, he knew that if any of the Rose’s escaped, there would be little chance of putting original Rose back to normal. And even though Davesprite and Rose rarely saw eye to eye on most things, it would suck if anything really bad happened to her.

He cared about her. In a sisterly sort of way, that is.

After flying for about five minutes, he caught sight of the runaway Rose. She had come to a stop at the bank of a river that was moving swiftly through the grassy plain.

“Halt, Rose-Clone.” Davesprite commanded, floating up behind her. “I know what you’re thinking: ‘If I jump in this river then I’ll float like a duck’. But I’m here to tell you that that’s a load of BS. You’ll probably just drown.”

Rose wheeled around. It was the evil-looking one and let me tell you, she looked hella evil.

“The only one in danger of drowning around here is you, sprite!” She growled. “I’ll toss you into this river and hold you under until the cold embrace of death pulls the life from your limbs!”

“Whoa. Take it easy. There’s no need for overly-descriptive murder threats. We’re supposed to be pals.”

“I’ll show you pals!” With a flick of her wrists Rose drew her wands and fired a spell directly towards Davesprite.

“Well fuck.” He groaned as he spun out of the way.

Evil Rose fired spell after spell, missing Davesprite by inches each time as he barrel-rolled, loop de looped, and did one of those triple cow things that ice skaters sometimes talk about.

“Stand still, you orange fuck!” Rose demanded, launching another spell.

“Why? So you can kill me? That sounds like a shit plan. Why don’t you stop being such a G.D. bitch?”

“Fat chance!” Rose twirled her wands and conjured magical ropes that wrapped around Davesprite and dragged him to the ground. “Ha! Take that!”


“Now I’m going to kill you and bathe in the orange blood which flows from your Spritely veins. Afterwards, I’ll hang your wings on my mantel and sell all of your ghostly organs on the Troll Black Market for hundreds upon hundreds of gold pieces.” Rose grinned and drew the cursed dagger that started this whole mess. “Then I’ll travel to the north and join the Dragon Mistress. Together we shall rule the world! Mwahahaha!”
“Jesus. I guess you actually do have a plan.” Davesprite tried to wriggle free, but could not escape the magical bonds. “Hey, let’s make a deal. I promise that if you let me go, I’ll be your super evil minion/slave forever.”

Evil Rose paused, her hand freezing mid-air with the dagger poised to strike a killing blow.

“Seriously?” She asked.

“Totally.”

She scratched her chin for a moment, considering his proposition.

“How good of a minion/slave are we talking here?” She crouched down by his side. “Like, if I ask you to punch a dozen sick orphans in the stomach, will you do it?”

“I’ll steal their shoes too.”

“Wow.” A twisted, villainous grin contorted Rose’s already fearsome features. “Now that sounds evil. You’re hired!”

And then with a wave of her wands, the magical bonds constricting Davesprite disappeared. He floated to his feet… or whatever. He didn’t have feet. You know what I’m trying to say. He got up off the ground.

Anyways, Davesprite was all like:

“Rock n Roll. Good times. Beach party. Lead the way, your wickedness.”

Smiling to herself, pleased to have received a new minion for her dastardly plans, Rose turned around and began to walk confidently towards the river.

“Hey, Rose- Clone.” Davesprite called.

“Yes?” Rose asked, turning around.

“Yes?” Rose asked, turning around.

“Catch.”

And then Davesprite punched her right in the motherfucking temple, knocking her unconscious. Davesprite wasn’t usually liable to hit women, but he was willing to make a special exception in this case.

“I hope real Rose didn’t feel that.” He muttered to himself and then stooped, carefully collecting the cursed dagger and grabbing the evil Rose under the arms. Slowly, he began to drag her back towards the rest of the group.

Meanwhile, Jade was sprinting across the grassy plain, following the scent of the other Rose as she tried to run to… god knows where.

Jade smelt a heavy amount of sweat, mixed with tears and Rose’s usual scent of delicate lavender. However another, sour scent, tinged the mixture. Jade recognized it as fear.

She picked up the pace, dug her toes into the soft ground and ran flat out towards the scent. With Davesprite wrangling his own charge and John watching over the final two, all she had to worry about momentarily was making sure that this one didn’t accidently get killed by Saber Wolves or something equally stupid.
Eventually, her awesome vision spotted a form sitting atop a nearby hill. Cresting the slope, Jade approached the Rose there, who was silently crying.

“Oh. It’s you.” Rose sniffed when she saw Jade. “What do you want?”

“I- uh, just want to make sure you’re okay.” Jade wasn’t expecting to see this, a crying Rose with her dress all wrinkly and her hair all messy. It caught her off guard. “What are you doing up here?”

“I don’t know.” Rose buried her face in her arms. “I just wanted to get away and then I got tired of running and…” Her shoulders shook and suddenly she wailed: “Why am I so awful?!”

“You’re not awful!” Jade flopped down onto the grass by her side. “You’re great! What ever gave you that idea?”

“I only pretend to be great.” Rose wiped at her red eyes. “But I only know what I’m doing about forty-nine percent of the time. Usually I just make shit up as I go!”

“Well, that’s worked out so far.”

“Yeah, but what about when it doesn’t? Davesprite was right,” Rose blew her nose loudly into her sleeve. “The Crab King was a chump bitch. I can’t fight the Vampire Queen. I give up.”

“You give up?” Jade echoed. “What does that mean?”

“It means I don’t want to be the greatest witch anymore!” Rose started tugging at the clasp of her robes. “I don’t wanna wear these robes, I don’t wanna use these stupid wands, and I don’t wanna be a witch!”

“Whoa there, sister.” Jade grabbed her by the wrist. “Keep your clothes on. We’re going to talk about this, okay? Why don’t you tell me what’s going through your mind?”

“I just wanna find a nice cave where I can curl up and cry until there are no more tears in the world.”

“Wow. You’re just a little drama queen now ain’t ya?”

“Oh it’s easy to point and laugh.” Rose turned to Jade, lip a-quiverin and nose a-runnin. “You’re the sexy Weredog with all her shit figured out.”

“That’s not true! Everyone has doubts about themselves, Rose.” Jade suddenly became very interested in a particular blade of grass. “I, for one, used to wonder if there was anyone out there who wouldn’t mind the company of a Weredog like me. I never told you why I left the Sun Clan, did I?”

“No.”

“Well, I didn’t leave. They kicked me out.”

Rose’s eyes widened.

“Really?”

“Yeah, they fear the moon, remember? And everything associated with it.” Jade ripped the blade of grass from the ground and smushed it between her fingers. “Even Were-people.”

“That must have been awful.”

“It was.” Jade suddenly smiled. “But then I found you guys and everything’s okay now! You’re my
friend and no matter who we are or how we feel, nothing can change that now!” Jumping to her feet, Jade offered Rose her hand. “Come on. Let’s go back to the others. We’re going to sort everything out together, alright?”

Rose eyed her hand warily, as if it might bite her. However, after a moment of consideration, Rose took it and was pulled to her feet. Together, hand in hand, the two friends walked down the grassy hill and towards the rest of their party.

John had never been more sexually conflicted in his life.

Not three feet away, lay Rose Lalonde, unconscious, yet somehow positioned perfectly so that her hands were laced over her belly, more like a sleeping princess than a cursed witch. Also, not three inches away, was another Rose Lalonde, extremely conscious and extremely horny.

“Are you even listening to me, John?” Rose slung her arms around his neck.

“Uh, what were you saying?” John tore his eyes away from the sleeping Rose.

“I was just telling you that I’m freaky as shit.”

“Oh.”

“Oh. Indeed.”

John was suddenly very sweaty, a little dizzy too, but more than anything else, he was just confused.

This new Rose was every heterosexual man’s wet dream. She wore copious amounts of make-up, tight-fitting clothing. Her voice was husky and her eyes were permanently half-lidded and her womanly assets were so generous, they made Ellen DeGeneres look like a selfish prude.

And Ellen’s name literally sounds like “Ellen: The Generous” when you say it out loud.

However John’s eyes continually roved back towards the original Rose or Rose Prime, if you will. The sleeping Rose was almost the exact opposite. Her robes were loose and comfy-looky, battle worn and weathered. Her make-up was light, with only her black-painted lips standing out harshly against her too-pale skin. And above all, you could probably use her chest as an ironing board.

I’m not being rude, just honest.

John didn’t want the uber-sexy-awesome-idealistic Rose. He just wanted Rose.

“Listen, er… Sexy Rose.” John began. “You seem like a nice girl…”

“I have so many daddy issues.” Rose interrupted, leaning into him. “I just wish there was some man around here unto which I could project my feelings through sexual intercourse.”

“Look.” John was not going to get sidetracked. “I think you’re nice, but I really don’t think that fooling around with you is a good idea.”

“Why not?” Rose pouted. “Don’t you want this?”

“Not really.” John looked to Rose Prime again. “Not at all.”

“Well, fuck.” Sexy Rose flopped back onto the grass. “Now what am I going to do with all these raging, out of control hormones?”
John shrugged, exhaling a heavy sigh of relief. However his momentary reprieve was shattered by her next words:

“You don’t even want to, like, make-out a bit?”

“W-What?” John turned to her.

“Make-out. Lock lips. Dance the tongues. You know?”

“Uhhh.”

“Oh, come on.” Rose popped back to her knees and scooted over to him. “It’s not like I’m going to tell anyone. It will be out little secret.”

John chewed his tongue. He could not, would not let his physical desires get in the way of his emotional ones. Fooling around with this Rose in any capacity would feel like cheating and yet…

This Rose wouldn’t be around much longer. After Davesprite and Jade got back with the others, they would find some way to restore everything to normalcy.

“Fuck it.” John said, reaching for her.

The two clashed in spectacular collision of lips and tongue and even a few unfortunate teeth. Her nails dug into his arms and John buried his fingers in her short, blonde hair. After about ten seconds, they separated with a loud mwah!

They stared at each other.

“Oh god.” Rose gasped.

“That was…” John sighed.

“… Awful.”

“Yeah.”

They stared at each other for a moment, no words spoken other than the whispering of the breeze.

“Do you wanna try again?”

“Sure.”

But it was horrible. For everyone.

EVEN YOU.

When Davesprite and Jade returned with their respective charges, they found John and Sexy Rose sitting as far apart from each other as physically possible.

“What’s up with you two?” Davesprite asked as he dumped Evil Rose onto the ground. “I thought we’d be coming back to a fierce bone session.”

John just shook his head, struck mute by the unmitigated horror and untrusting of himself to speak coherently enough to form a full sentence. Jade eyed him warily as she led Sad Rose towards the group.
“Alright,” She said once everyone was assembled. “How do we get about setting this right?”

Davesprite pulled out the cursed dagger from where he had stowed it in his… pocket or something. His ghost pocket? I don’t know. He just had it, alright?

“It all started when Rose accidentally cut herself with this knife.” He explained. “It was a complete and total accident that solely involved Rose and no one else.”

“Okay well,” Jade took the dagger cautiously and examined it. “I don’t know a whole lot about cursed items, but this has to be reversible somehow.”

“We have to mix our blood together,” Spoke the Sad Rose suddenly and quietly from Jade’s side.

“What?”

“Our blood.” The Rose pointed to her clone counterparts. “Prick us all with the dagger and mix our blood.”

“Will that work?” John climbed to his feet. “I mean, how do you know?”

“I’m a witch.” She smiled feebly and cast a glance at Jade. “It’s sort of my job to know these things.”

Jade smiled back.

“Then would you do the honors?” Jade asked, passing her the dagger.

Sad Rose took it with a small nod and her eyes went wide as her fingers wrapped around the handle of the blade. Davesprite dragged Evil Rose over to Rose Prime and positioned the two unconscious women side by side. Sad Rose walked over and knelt between them.

“Um… Sexy Rose.” John reluctantly spoke to the final woman. “You sort of need to go over there with everyone else.”

Sexy Rose blinked and started, as if she’d forgotten that everyone else was there.

“Oh, okay.” Getting to her feet, she brushed past John, but stopped suddenly by his side. Biting her lip, she leant in close and whispered in his ear. “Don’t let what happened between us ruin it.”

“Ruin what?”

“You know… it.”

“I don’t…”

“You and her, dumbass!” Sexy Rose nodded to her original. “It could still happen maybe. I didn’t come out of thin air, you know?”

John frowned, but nodded all the same. Giving him a final, almost melancholy smile, Sexy Rose joined the rest. Together, her and Sad Rose made tiny incisions in their palms with the cursed dagger, repeating the process with their snoozing twins. They linked hands then, in a blood pact-esque ritual that blinded John, Davesprite, and Jade with more magical light.

When it faded, only one Rose remained.

“Rose?” Davesprite floated to his friend’s side. “Rose, can you hear me?”
The witch’s eyes opened with a snap and her fist shot upwards, connecting with Davesprite’s jaw and knocking him flat on his ghostly ass.

“That’s for throwing a knife at me!” Rose shrieked. She jumped to her feet and then kicked him in the ribs. “And that is for punching me in the face!”

Jade giggled and looked towards John, expecting to see a look of relief or maybe even happiness on his face. Instead, John just looked sad.

Chapter End Notes

This begins what I would call season two of this crap. All in all, there should be a total of four seasons, with six chapters each. Plus an epilogue, that’s twenty-five chapters. It should be just over a hundred thousand words. That seems like a good fic length to me.

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Chapter Eight: Attack of the Werecats

“Stupid cursed dagger!” Said Rose Lalonde, the greatest witch ever, as she hurled the aforementioned blade into the river. It landed among the rapids with a dull sploosh. “I hope you get all rusty, you dark magic enchanted piece of shitty shit!”

“Whoa there, Lalonde.” Davesprite floated by her side. “No need to be so harsh. Daggers themselves aren’t evil. It’s those who wield them in the name of evil.”

“You.” Rose wheeled on him. “You don’t get to talk to me! If you didn’t feel the need to play ‘catch’ with an obviously dangerous and cursed artifact, then that whole mess last chapter wouldn’t have even taken place!”

John, who also stood nearby, rubbed the back of his neck a little sheepishly. He’d just been struck by a sudden thought.

“Uh, Rose?” He began. “You don’t remember anything that happened… do you?”

Rose thought for a moment, rubbing her chin and wracking her brain.

“I get… flashes.” She stated after a moment. “Images and sounds. I see Jade walking toward me, Davesprite punching me in the face, and you… looking really uncomfortable.”

“That’s because your sexy clone was totally- GAH!” Davesprite was cut off mid-blurt, by Jade’s elbow connecting with his ghostly ribs.

The Weredog/Amazonian Warrior shot Davesprite a dirty look and he decided to hold his tongue. It was silently understood that whatever transpired between John and the sexy version of Rose would not be spoken of ever again, at least, not in the presence of Rose Prime.

“Well all that matters is that everything is back the way it’s supposed to be,” John said, grinning. “We’ve learned some valuable lessons and now it’s time to continue on our quest, right?”

“Extremely right.” Rose adjusted her robes and fixed her hair so that it was perfectly tucked behind her headband once more. “Where is my satchel?”

“Right here!” Sang Jade, passing the witch her bag.

Rose opened it and pulled out her map, flourishing it in the breeze so that she could look at it fully.

“We’ve wasted enough time. Let us continue to the Forest of Franklin. Hopefully we can reach the City of Lakewater before nightfall.” Without waiting for anyone else to speak, Rose shouldered her bag and led the way towards the forest.

As the group walked, John adjusted his pace so that he was next to Jade.

“Thanks for having my back.” He said with a small smile. “I would probably die from embarrassment if Rose heard a single word about what transpired back there.”
“Oh, don’t mention it. I’m pretty sure that Rose would be super embarrassed too.” Jade responded. “It’s best if we leave the past in the past, right?”

John stared at the back of Rose’s head, watching her blonde locks sway in the breeze as she confidently blazed the path ahead.

“Right.” He agreed with a sigh.

By the time the group reached the edge of the Forest of Franklin, it was nearing late-afternoon. If they wanted to make it to the city by the time the sun set, then our heroes would have to pick up the pace.

“If we want to make it to the city by the time the sun sets, then we need to pick up the pace.” Rose said.

“Can’t you just conjure a bonecar or something?” John asked, leaning against a tree and catching his breath.

“Yeah!” Jade added. “Magic a bonecar, Rose! I’ve always wanted to ride in one of those.”

Rose rolled her eyes. There were times where she was truly annoyed to have beings of non-magical nature in her company. She could be a real elitist bitch sometimes, but you know that already.

“You can’t just *magic* bonecars.” She explained, voice laced with condescension. “They are the most complicated of complicated dwarven machinery, extremely rare and extremely complex. You’ll be lucky if you ever *see* one in your life, let alone ride in one.”

Suddenly a motherfucking bonecar came flying out of the woods and landed in front of the group with a screech of its wheels. The super awesome and monstrous vehicle burnt rubber as it did like a dozen donuts in a row, spewing dirt out of its back wheels and coating Rose, John, Davesprite, and Jade with gross mud.

And, you guessed it, some of the gross mud got in John’s open mouth and it was totally disgusting.

After about thirty minutes of impressive driving, including but not limited to: three point turns, barrel rolls, figure eights, and a perfect parallel parking job between two trees, the bonecar finally came to a halt. The doors opened with a magical *hiss* and about twenty, smoking-hot men and women with swords jumped out and surrounded the group.

“Yeeeeeaaaaah motherfuckers!” Cried one, as she poked John in the ribs with her blade. “Walking is for suckers!”

Jade bared her teeth and growled as the mysterious rogues danced around the group, prodding them with their swords and whooping and hollering up a storm. Davesprite didn’t know whether to be terrified or turned on by the proceedings, so just settled on putting as many bodies between him and the mob as possible.

“Rose.” John whispered, as Davesprite tried to wriggle into his shirt. “Rose, what do we do?”

“Just stay calm.” Rose commanded, as she eyed the laughing and shouting horde. “Just stay calm and don’t panic. I have an idea.”

Drawing her wands, she thrust one into the air and cast a firework spell that shot all these awesome magical sparks into the air. Now here’s a little known fact about rogues: these bitches love magic, especially magic that looks pretty. All the rogues lowered their weapons and stared in awe at the light
“Oh my stolen rings.” Said a rogue, some Ryan Gosling-looking motherfucker. “Those are some gorgeous lights.”

“Listen here, hooligans!” Rose called, having gained their attention. “We know not what your business be and you know not ours. Let us simply part ways and forget this encounter ever occurred.”

“Why the hell would we do that, Blondie?” Snorted another pretty girl. “Can’t you see that we’re rogues? We’ve got you surrounded. Hand over all your expensive shit before we cut you!”

Jade’s growling intensified. She was almost to the point of barking at these new foes. Rose wondered why. Her Weredog companion didn’t act this way in the face of the Crab King’s minions.

“I- I don’t think you should steal from us.” John spoke up.

“Oh yeah? A rogue sneered. “And why’s that?”

“Well… we’re heroes! We’re on a quest to defeat the Four Evil Mages.”

“Well, heroes. Don’t you think that you’re heading the wrong way?” One of the girls pointed over their shoulder. “The Crab King of the East actually lives in the friggin east in case you were wondering.”

“We have already vanquished the Crab King and obtained his Key of Fate.” Rose responded.

“Really? Show us!”

Reaching into her satchel, Rose produced the bronzed Key of Fate and showed it to the rogues.

“Yoink!” Shouted one, as she snatched it from Rose’s hand.

“You bitch!” Rose shrieked and leapt forward, but was stopped mid-leap by John’s arms around her middle. Good thing too. She probably would have been impaled by the dozens of swords that were poised to catch her. “I’ll kill you! Let go, John! I’m going to kill that rogue!”

“You won’t be killing nothing, Blondie.” All the rogues laughed as they passed around the Key. “Thanks for the trinket. I bet this will sell for big bucks on the Ogre Black Market. Stay sweet, losers.”

One of the bandits snapped his fingers and then the entire group of rogues began to pile back into the bonecar. All except for one.

“Hey, guys.” Said the remaining rogue, as she shifted nervously from foot to foot. “Doesn’t this seem like a dick move to you?”

“A dick move?” The lead rogue repeated. “Roxy, what the hell are you talking about? We’re rogues. We take shit and we act rude. It’s what we do.”

“Well, yeah. But, Damien, maybe we don’t have to be that way all the time?” The girl, named Roxy shrugged. “Like, maybe we can try to be nice every once in a while. These babies don’t seem like bad news to me. What if they actually are heroes?”

Roxy was a good-looking lady. Not as curvy as Jade, but not as small and petite as Rose. I’m not saying that there’s anything as a perfect body type, but Roxy pretty much had the best of everything.
She had shoulder-length blonde hair, and pink eyes with cat-like pupils.

“Psssshh.” The leader, named Damien, snorted. He walked back over to towards John and flicked him right in the ear. “Does this loser seem like a hero to you?”

Roxy stared at John for a long while, watching him as he rubbed his ear and blinked back the tears that began to form in the corner of his eyes. He wasn’t in hero garb, just a normal shirt and pants. There wasn’t a legendary weapon strapped to his hip. There wasn’t even a name tag on his chest with some cool name written on it like ‘John the Sex Master’ or ‘Hakeem the Dream’ for example.

He seemed just like a normal dude. However, Roxy smiled at him all the same.

“Yeah,” She said. “Yeah, he does.”

“Well he’s a shit hero then.” Damien grabbed Roxy by the arm and began hauling her towards the bonecar. “This is the last time you act against us, Roxy. When we get back to the clubhouse we’re going to have a serious and stern talk about your behavior.”

“As if!” Roxy brought her heel down, stomping on Damien’s toes and causing him to release her. “I’m tired of being a part of this awful group of rude rogues. All you do is rob people, read dirty scrolls, and make crude, racist jokes! I won’t let you rob these people!”

“Oh, yeah?” Damien snapped his fingers again and all of his rogues jumped out of the bonecar once more. “What are you going to do about it?”

“I’m going to fight you!”

“Pssh, okay. You and what army?”

“This army, fuckass!” Jade cried suddenly. She and the rest of our trusted heroes leapt forward and joined Roxy’s side.

Rose and Davesprite drew their weapons and Jade quickly transformed into her Weredog form. John, meanwhile, stood in the middle of them all and tried to look as menacing as possible. Roxy blinked in surprise, but smiled once see saw who was on her side.

All of the rogues looked at each other then back at their foes.

Then they started to laugh.

“Oh my god. Is that a Weredog?” One girl cackled. “Ew. Fucking gross.”

“Nice sword, ghost boy. Does it come in men’s sizes too?” Jeered another.

“What the actual fuck?! Is that a cookie sheet that you’re using as a shield?! Holy shit! That’s amazing!” Mocked a final rogue.

For the third time in as many minutes, Damien snapped his fingers.

“Rogues.” He said. “Show these silly bitches what we can do.”

Rose, John, Davesprite, and Jade watched in horror as all of the rogues transformed before their very eyes. Hair sprouted all over their bodies and razor-sharp claws grew from their fingers, along with long whiskers from their faces. After a moment, Rose and her team found themselves faced with over two dozen Werecats.
Jade started barking like mad and charged forward.

“Jade, no!” Rose called, but it was too late.

Jade was backhanded by Werecat Damien and knocked flat on her butt. All of the Werecats laughed again.

“Oh my god. This is so sad.” Damien sighed as he looked down at Jade. “If these really are Skaia’s heroes then I’m afraid to say our beautiful land is thoroughly fucked. The Dragon Mistress might as well have already shrouded the world in darkness.” Still shaking his head, Damien issued his next command. “Rogues. Beat these silly fools up.”

And that’s exactly what they did.

Maybe if Rose had been alone, well-rested, and fully prepared she would have been able to hold her own. However, she had to watch out for John, Davesprite, Jade, and now this girl Roxy. She was also recovering from a harrowing experience with a cursed dagger and I don’t think anyone is ever fully prepared for a bonecar full of Werecats to suddenly jump you. Needless to say, the Werecat rogues completely destroyed our group of ragtag heroes.

They shoved Rose to the ground, took John’s shield from his hands, used it to beat Davesprite, and then scratched them all up with their sharp cat claws.

One of the Werecats pulled out a jar of peanut butter and smeared a bit of it onto Jade’s nose. All of the rogues stopped and laughed, watching as Jade tried in vain to lick the peanut butter off for like five minutes.

In the end, only the turncoat Roxy stood against Damien and his crew.

“If you wanna fight with the losers, then you’re no longer a part of the Cool Cats.” He said, as he flipped his hair like one of those cool guys. “Any last words before we kick your teeth in?”

“Suck a hundred demon dicks in the underworld, asshole.” Roxy growled.

“Eh, not bad as far as last words go.” Damien snapped his fingers for like the fourth time. “Get her.”

The Werecats seized Roxy and slapped her around like a beach ball at a Nickelback concert. When they were done, they threw her to the ground and took her Cool Cats specialty ID badge and Clubhouse smoothie punch card, which is a dick move considering she was one purchase away from receiving a large Mordor-Mango Smoothie for free!

“Cool Cats, roll out!” Damien commanded and then all the rogues piled into the bonecar and peeled out, leaving Rose, John, Davesprite, Jade, and Roxy lying in the dirt.

Battered and bruised, John rolled onto his side and looked at Roxy.

“Hey.” He groaned. “I’m John.”

“Roxy.” She replied with a small smile. They shook hands. “Nice to meet you.”

An hour later, our heroes were sitting around a small fire on the edge of the Forest of Franklin, nursing their wounds both physical and emotion in the wake of their first, major defeat.

Davesprite was angrily hacking at a tree with his sword, Rose was lazily stirring the fire with her wands, and John was using a handkerchief to clean the peanut butter that Jade couldn’t reach from
her nose. No one talked.

What could they say?

They were a shit team, minus one Key of Fate, and more behind on their self-imposed schedule than ever. If Rose ever needed to be knocked down a few pegs, then this was definitely one way to make that happen.

Roxy sat on a nearby log, sharpening a gleaming dagger and occasionally licking one of the many cuts on her arms with her tongue. She was sort of starting to regret her decision to side with this group of losers. If she’d just held her tongue and went along being a bitch, then she’d be back at the Clubhouse, sipping smoothies and making offensive jokes, instead of sitting out in the woods like some kind of hobo.

Eventually, it was Rose who broke the silence.

“Roxy, is it?” She asked of the new girl. Roxy nodded. Rose continued: “Tell us about these rogues who call themselves the ‘Cool Cats’.”

Roxy sharpened her blade with a loud shink!

“What’s to tell?” She began. “They’re a group of beautiful jerks who jump travelers, taking whatever they want and beating up whoever stands in their way. Everyone in the club is a Werecat and we… I mean, they live in a totally awesome clubhouse outside of the City of Lakewater.”

Rose poked her wand into the fire again, a little too forcefully, and sent a shower of sparks into the air. Everyone watched the red embers dance in the wind until they faded away. They were all thinking the same thing.

“We have to retrieve the Key of Fate from them.” Rose stated, absentmindedly twirling her wands between her nimble fingers. “Even if we defeat the Vampire Queen and the Bee Lord, we’ll still need all three keys to access the lair of the Dragon Mistress. With one missing, our quest is essentially pointless.”

With a final, mighty strike, Davesprite buried his ghostly sword into the tree a final time and turned back to face the group.

“This whole quest has been pointless!” He cried, throwing his hands in the air. “We went through so much shit and then those fuckers just straight-up robbed us! I give up. Put me back in my amulet and ship me home to Mudbert. I’m done.”

“You can’t be done.” Jade argued, jumping to her feet. “So we’ve hit a snag. It was bound to happen at some point! We can’t give up now, when we’ve already come so far.”

“Look at us, Jade.” Davesprite gestured around the battered group. “We can’t fight a team of highly choreographed and badass Werecats! It’s just not possible.”

“Anything is possible if we work together! This was a fluke, I tell you, a fluke! When we roll up to their clubhouse and beat the ever-living shit out of them, then we’ll see who’s laughing!” Jade rubbed at her nose. “Peanut butter on my face. I’ll show them. I’ll show them!”

Then she started to march off into the woods, a look of fierce determination in her eyes.

“Jade, stop.” Rose called after her. Reluctantly, Jade came to a halt. “I think both of you are on opposite ends of the same spectrum. If we’re going to defeat these assholes and retrieve what is
rightfully mine, then we are going to need to find a happy medium, a perfect balance between revenge and justice.”

Getting to her feet, Rose began to pace. John recognized this as her thinking phase.

“What do we know about the Cool Cats?” She asked after a moment,

“Um… They’re really organized, great fighters, and have the sweetest bonecar I ever did see.” John answered.

“Correct. On all counts. Now, how do we defeat an organized team of excellent fighters with a fabulous set of wheels?”

“We don’t.” Davesprite scoffed.

“By punching them in the god-dammed face!” Jade cheered.

“By… talking it out with them?” John offered.

“All good options, with the exception of Davesprite’s.” Rose said. “However, I’m thinking of something a little more… ritualistic.”

Everyone looked confused, except for Roxy, who’s eyes suddenly lit up with excitement.

“We challenge them to a Tournament of Warriorish Clash!” Roxy concluded. “That’s perfect! You’re a G.D. genius!”

“What’s a Tournament of Warriorish Clash?” John asked.

“It’s a sacred ritual between two warring clans to fairly decide a victor with limited bloodshed. Three of our best fighters against three of theirs in a tournament-style event.” Rose defined. “If we bring this challenge to the Cool Cats, they will have no choice but to accept and face us in a neutral battlefield.”

“Then after we beat them, get our Key of Fate back and continue on our quest!” Jade grinned. “Rose, this could work!”

“Of course.” Rose buffed her nails on her robe. “I did think of it, after all.”

“Well, you guys can count me in!” Said Roxy, as she jumped up from her seat. “This is great! I totes wanna stick it to those mean Cool…”

She trailed off when she caught Rose’s glare.

“You aren’t accompanying us anywhere.” The witch said steadily.

“Well, why not?” Roxy demanded, resting her hands on her hips.

“Our party is already full, we know nothing about you, there’s a possibility that you could simply be a double agent who will betray us at a crucial moment in the future, and also I doubt Jade would be happy having a Werecat in our midst.”

Sure enough, Jade had been subconsciously eyeing Roxy hungrily almost all day and was currently snarling at her. At Rose’s words however, Jade caught herself and pressed a hand to her lips with embarrassment.
“Aw, come on, Rose.” John said. “Roxy has just as much of a reason to get back at these jerks as we do. Jade can control her animal instincts, we can learn more about each other as we go, and since Roxy used to be a Cool Cat, she probably knows all these private secrets about them. Boom! Problem solved.”

Rose folded her arms. She was not inclined to let another stray into their group, especially one with such deep ties to her current foes. However, John did raise some good points and out of everyone, he was probably least likely to be short-shifted by the witch.

“I don’t know.” Rose turned to Roxy. “Are there private secrets of the Cool Cats that you would be willing to share? Otherwise, I cannot thing of a valid reason to allow you to join to our group.”

“Really? I’m a fucking Werecat. That’s not cool enough for you guys?” Roxy rolled her eyes. “Sheesh. Tough crowd.”

“Just answer the question.”

“Yes, I know some stuff. I wasn’t very high up in their ranks, but I do know a secret entrance into their clubhouse.”


“I suppose…” Rose looked between John and Roxy in quick succession. She had a sneaking suspicion that John was becoming smitten with the Werecat, an unfortunate turn of events if there ever was one. A small, greedy part of Rose wanted John’s affection, adoration, and admiration all for herself.

Who doesn’t like to be worshipped? Especially when you’re a totally awesome witch.

“So that’s settled then?” Jade asked. Without waiting for a response, she bounced over to Roxy and extended her hand. “Welcome to the team, Roxy!”

“Aw, yeah!” Roxy cheered, taking Jade’s hand and shaking it roughly.

As John, Jade, and Roxy began to talk animatedly, Davesprite floated over to Rose. The witch looked to her familiar and caught him staring at her with a smug smile on his face.

“What?” Rose hissed.

“You must love this, huh?” He said, fighting to keep his smirk under control.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“I’m not talking about anything, Lalonde. Just the fact that the competition just heated up a bit.” Davesprite leaned in close to her ear. “You’re taking what you’ve got for granted. If you don’t act fast, it might just…” He waved his hands before her eyes. “Slip away.”

Rose waved him off.

“That’s enough metaphors from you, Sprite.” She snapped. “Prepare your gear, we leave for the City of Lakewater in an hour.”

But even as Davesprite floated away, his words resonated in Rose’s mind. She watched as John and Roxy conversed on the other side of the fire. Roxy laughed at something John said and rested her hand on his shoulder.
A small fire burned in Rose’s gut, an ember more than anything else. She instantly recognized it as *jealousy*. One of the most dangerous emotions a magical being, or anyone for that matter, could fall prey to.

She squashed her emotions down, smushed her feelings under the powerful heel of determination and instead set her sights on revenge. The Cool Cats would pay for humiliating Roes and robbing her of her trophy, she would fight her way across Skaia to the Vampire Queen of the West if it killed her, and she would *not* let whatever emotions she felt for John get in the way.

*Witches do *not* get jealous.*

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“I remember Roxy!” Rosie exclaimed after her father finished his night’s tale. For the first time in a while, the young girl had patently waited through the entire tale before speaking her mind. “Wasn’t she that nice lady who used to come by every year and give me presents?”

“That’s her.” Dave answered, as he rose from his chair.

“What happened to her? Why doesn’t she visit anymore?”

“She’s just busy.” Dave shrugged nonchalantly and rubbed the back of his neck. “Uh, I’m sure she’ll drop by again… someday.”

“I hope so.” Rosie wracked her brains, trying to remember what Roxy had been like. The Werecat had not visited Rosie since she was little, but she could still remember her almost. It was hard, like trying to remember a dream after you woke up. “Did she and Uncle John ever…”

“It’s late.” Dave doused the torch on the wall. “Like so late, you don’t even wanna know what time it is.”

“Oh, okay.”

“I’ll see you in the morning.” And with that, Dave shut the door.

Chapter End Notes

Have a Happy Thanksgiving Everyone! I’m thankful for all of you :)

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Chapter Nine: The Fish Baron of the Sea

After a few hours of walking and other bullshit that really isn’t worth mentioning, our group of traveling heroes made it through the Forest of Franklin and arrived on the shores of an enormous lake. In the center, situated on a rocky island, lay the City of Lakewater itself in all of it’s glory.

“Wow!” Jade gasped. “It’s beautiful!”

And it was. Tall buildings reached up to brush the stars and twinkling lights of street lamps gave the entire town a warm glow. From across the lake, sounds of laughter and music could be heard, competing with the chirping of Glork Crickets to fill the night air.

“This isn’t anything,” Rose commented with a snort. “The Emerald City is easily a hundred times more elegant than this.”

“What’s the Emerald City like?” John asked, curiously.

“It’s the largest city in Skaia, with buildings nearly a hundred feet tall and streets paved with emerald gems.” Rose’s eyes went vacant. “Step one foot in that town and you’ll never wish to leave again. It’s a magical place, full of wonder and…”

“Hey, guys!” Roxy, who was standing near the edge of the group, suddenly called out. “Look over here. There’s a boat!”

“Sweet!” John began to move over towards Roxy but was brought to a halt when Rose dug her nails into his sleeve.

“John.” The witch snapped. “Do not walk away when I’m speaking. It’s extremely rude!”

“Oh. Sorry, Rose.” He disentangled his arm from her grip. “You can tell me about it later, alright? I wanna check out Roxy’s boat.”

As John jogged over to Roxy, Davesprite floated up to Rose and began to sing.

“Baby come back!

Any kind of witch could see,

There was something,

In everything about you,

Baby come back!”
You can blame it all on me...

Rose turned and buried her fist in his ghost stomach, knocking the fake wind out of him. As Davesprite spluttered and clutched his ribs, Rose stalked away to join John and Roxy.

“You shouldn’t tease her, you know.” Jade said, glaring at Davesprite. “She make act all tough and aloof, but deep down she’s really quite fragile.”

“Psshh. Oh yeah.” Davesprite wheezed. “I can really sense her fragility. Old Rose ‘glass jaw’ Lalonde strikes again. Don’t hurt her feelings; she’ll totally smother you in salty tears.”

“I’m serious.” Jade continued, as she and Davesprite slowly walked over to the others. “After what happened what that cursed dagger, then having her Key of Fate stolen, and then Roxy joining the group. It’s been a hard two days on her.”

“Roxy isn’t so bad. So what if she and John hit it off? It’s not like Rose had that market cornered.”

“Still, just try to keep all those sick fires shacked for a little bit, alright?”

Davesprite was about to open his mouth to argue, but stopped when he got a glimpse of Jade’s adorable puppy eyes, which shimmered in the moonlight. Ladies and gentlemen, you know that sprite’s non-existent heart was beating double time. It was like a drum solo at a Pantera concert, except it was all double kicks and absolutely zero of anything else.

She gave him those puppy dog eyes and he crumbled like an Oreo Cookie that you held in the milk for too long.

“Alright. Alright. Fine.” Davesprite held a hand to his chest. “I promise that from now on, until the foreseeable future, Rose and I will be the best of buds. I’m talking friendship bracelet buds. BFFL’s.”

“Good.” Jade nodded with a smile.

As they approached the rest of the group, they noticed that there was indeed a boat docked on the shore. It was tied with a heavy chain to a sturdy-looking post and secured with a large padlock. Pinned to the post was a note that Roxy examined.

“City of Lakewater Boat Service.” She read. “Open Moonsday til Stevesday. Closed on Soonsday. Shit, what day is it?”

“Soonsday.” Answered John, looking up at the moon. “I can tell because the moon is almost full. You could almost say that the full moon will happen… soon.”

Rose rolled her eyes, Davesprite groaned, Jade pretended not to hear it, and Roxy burst out with laughter.

“BAHAHAHA! Nice pun, Johnny!” She slapped him on the back, causing him to wince. “I like you. We’re friends now.”

“Awesome!” John beamed, while Rose mimed sticking her finger in the back of her throat and vomiting.

“Well I guess we’ll have to wait until tomorrow then.” Jade said with a sigh, then added brightly: “Unless you guys feel like doing some night swimming!”
“Hell yes!” Roxy cried and immediately popped off her top, revealing a very smexy-sexy-looking bikini underneath.

John, Davesprite, and even Jade got a little dizzy. Rose actually barfed a little bit in her mouth.

“Come on, guys! We aren’t going to get to the city by just standing there!” Roxy sang as she performed a perfect triple back flip and somersault into the water. As she broke the surface of the lake, the water rippled, and you could almost hear a tiny ‘Daaaaaaammnnn’ echo into the night.

“Yeah! Give us a sec!” Davesprite called back. He then looked at Jade expectantly. “Well? Are you going to pop those puppies out, or what?”

“No!” Jade slapped him in the arm, hard enough to sting. “That is most certainly a thing that will not be happening. I was kidding. There’s no way I’m getting in that water. I am a Weredog, after all.”

“So?” John asked, as he watched Roxy backstroke in a lazy circle. “Roxy is a Werecat and she doesn’t seem to be having any problems.”

“Oh yes.” Rose sneered. “Roxy has no problems whatsoever. Perfect little Roxy with her generous curves and perfect teeth.”

Everyone looked to the witch, surprised by her outburst.

“Rose?” John eyed her warily. “Are you okay?”

“Yes! I’m glorious really. This whole setback is really doing wonders for my anxiety level. Thank you for asking.” Rose rolled her eyes again and turned to Davesprite. “You. Fly across the lake and wake the Boat Driver. Tell him to come out tonight and ferry us across.”

“First you treat me like a goddamn Pokémon. Now I’m Hedwig? Fucking shit, man.” Davesprite folded his arms. “It’s Soonsday, in the middle of the night. What am I supposed to tell him?”

“Tell him that I’m the greatest witch ever, you insufferable sprite!” Rose seethed. “Get going now, or else you’ll spend the rest of your ghostly life as some sort of nut!”

“Alright. You got it, your highness. Sheesh!” Davesprite shook his head and floated away across the lake.

After he disappeared into the darkness, Jade turned to Rose.

“Do you think we could have a talk?” She asked the witch, giving her a pointed look.

“A talk? What for? There’s no time to waste talking.” Rose responded quickly.

“Just come on.” Taking the other girl by the arm, Jade dragged her away, leaving a very confused John by the side of the lake.

“Listen,” Jade began, once her and Rose were out of hearing distance. “I know that you feel threatened whenever another girl joins the group, but you aren’t going to win any battles by being a total bitch sandwich.”

Flustered, Rose adjusted her headband and cast an anxious glance over towards where Roxy was trying to coax John into the lake.

“It just doesn’t make any sense.” Rose eventually mumbled. “It’s completely ineffable. I’m the greatest fucking witch who ever lived and she’s just some scantily clad, rouge with the natural-born
ability to transform into an anthropomorphic cat warrior. I’m the leading lady and John is my lovable, male costar. We’re supposed to be together.”

Jade rolled her eyes.

“Rose, you’re a great sorceress who knows a lot about magic and other cool stuff.” She rested a hand on the shorter girls shoulder. “But it’s obvious that you know nothing whatsoever about people. You can’t force things like this. Since when did you care so much about romance anyways?”

“I don’t care about romance or companionship. I’m a strong independent woman with witchly powers. It’s just that…” Rose paused, for the first time looking unsure. “It’s just that she’s messing up our… team dynamic.”

“Our team dynamic?” Jade echoed.

“Yeah, you know?” Rose gestured between the two of them. “We’ve got a good thing going and she’s upsetting the system. It’s very magical stuff, auras and whatnot. I wouldn’t expect you to understand.”

“Okay?”

“After we retrieve our Key of Fate from those Cool Cat rouges, she’ll have to go. It’s for the best.” Adjusting her headband for the third time in as many minutes, Rose squared her shoulders. “Come on, let us wait for Davesprite by the shore.”

When the two girls rejoined John, they found Roxy to be lounging in the shallows with a pouty frown on her face.

“What’s the hold up, guys?” She asked. “I thought we were going to take a dip?”

“Change of plans.” Rose answered curtly. “Davesprite has gone to wake the Boat Driver.”

“Aw man.” Roxy sighed, rising from the water. “Are you saying I stripped down to my skivvies for nothing? Fugh.”

“It’s alright!” John chirped. “I mean… what?”

Roxy laughed again, her voice like a thousand wind chimes clinking together in the summer breeze. Except less annoying and much more sexy.

“Could you be any more adorable, Johnny? You better watch yourself, if you keep this up I might just steal you for myself. Haha!”

“HAHAHAHA!” Rose guffawed awkwardly along with Roxy and John. It was super forced and super embarrassing. “HAHA FUCKING HA!”

As Roxy slipped on her shirt once more, John cast Rose a curious glance, but she pointedly ignored his gaze. He had an uncanny habit of seeing through her carefully constructed façade and she did not want him to see through her veil on this particular occasion.

“While we wait for Davesprite to get back, maybe we could play a game!” Jade offered. “Does anyone know how to play Cluckaroo?”

“I do!” Roxy cheered.

Cluckaroo is a game that involves two players. One stands with their hands over their crotch, while
the other stands ten yards away and throws rocks at them. You win if you can dodge all the rocks being thrown at you. You lose if you go blind. It’s not very fun or safe, but kids love it!

As Roxy and Jade started to search the shore for rocks, John and Rose took a seat by the water edge.

“Hey, I’m sorry that your Key of Fate was stolen.” He said to her after a moment. “We’ll get it back though, don’t worry.”

“I have no doubt that we will retrieve my trophy. The real question is how badly I’m going to torture all those douchebag Cool Cats before I murder them.” Rose responded coldly.

“Maybe you shouldn’t torture or murder them at all.” John offered. “I mean, don’t you think there’s enough killing in the world already?”

Rose thought about this. In all her travels across Skaia, she’d seen many murders and killings and been a part of a few too, some of which were pretty cool. One in particular, where she killed a skeleton wizard, ground his skull into powder, and then smoked it in a wizard bong, getting high as fuck is extremely memorable. However, maybe John’s fresh look at the world had some merit. Maybe mercy was a skill she had yet to learn?

Before she could respond to him though, there was a loud *sploosh* as something erupted from the surface of the lake and shot into the air. Rose and John watched in surprise as a hooded figure descended from the sky on a wave of water to touch down on the ground before them.

“Who dares enter my domain?” Hissed the hooded figure.

Jade and Roxy, who had been prepping to start their game, paused and walked over at the stranger’s arrival. They joined John and Rose, opposite the strange, lake-born newcomer.

“Your domain?” Jade asked. “What are you talking about? Who are you?”

“I am the Fish Baron of the Sea!” Cried the Baron as the flipped up his hood. He had grey skin and yellow eyes, with a pair of crocked horns atop his head. There was a streak of purple in his dark hair and he clutched a glittering wand in his hand. “And someone has been swimming laps in my home!”

“Uh, dude. You do realize that this is a lake, right? Shouldn’t you be called the Fish Baron of the Lake?” Said Roxy. “Also, I was swimming in there like five minutes ago. You’re hella late, fish boy.”

“Silence, good-looking wench!” Shrieked the Fish Baron. “I am the Fish Baron of the Sea! And you will pay for trespassing OH GOD MY LEGS!”

Rose blasted the Fish Baron with a quick spell and sent him flipping back into the water whence he came.

“I’ve already forgotten what that was about.” She said, as she put her wands away again. “So anyways, what were you saying, John?”

“Well, just maybe there’s a chance we can talk to the Cool Cats? Maybe we could work out some kind of deal where everyone wins.” John continued.

“Unlikely. You heard their spiel. They’re *rouges*, John, simple thieves who pillage and assault travelers just for the fun of it. There’s no bartering with their types.”

“I agree.” Chimed Roxy, her and Jade’s game of Cluckaroo having been forgotten. “There’s nothing
we can do but get some old fashion revenge.”

Rose’s face wrinkled, as if she’d just tasted the most sour of lemons. She did not like having Roxy on her side, even in circumstances such as this.

“Still,” John pressed on. “It just seems wrong not to try.”

No sooner were the words out of his mouth, than the surface of the lake began to bubble once more. From it’s depths rose the Fish Baron once more, this time atop the back of a mighty narwhal. You have to feel bad for that narwhal. Usually narwhals are cool underwater unicorns, but when lame-ass wizards, like the Fish Baron for instance, are controlling them, their overall cool-rating suffers dramatically.

“You’ll pay for your insolence, sorceress!” Cried the Baron once again, pointing his many-ringed finger at Rose. “It’s time for you to learn what happens to those who cross wands with the Five Evil Mages of Skaia!”

“Five Evil Mages?” Jade repeated quizzically. “I thought there were only four.”

“There are.” Rose assured her.

“NU UH!” Argued the Fish Baron. He pointed to his chest. “I’m the secret, hidden, fifth mage, who is also the most powerful and badass. I wouldn’t have expected you to have heard of me. I’m super underground, sort of a cult hit, if you will.”

“I won’t.” Rose shouted back, folding her arms. “You’re not one of the Evil Mages of Skaia. I can tell that much just by looking at you. You, Fish Baron, are nothing but a douchebag with a fancy cloak and some fish friends. Now, scram before you get hurt.”

The Fish Baron’s gills flared with rage and he rose to his full height atop his steed. Pointing with his wand again, he addressed Rose with a mighty voice:

“How dare you doubt my legitimacy! The only reason I haven’t been added to the official Evil Mage roster, is because Four Evil Mages looks better on paper than Five. It may be unofficial, but it still counts! The Dragon Mistress herself told me so!”

“I bet she also told you that cloak looked scary and fashionable!” Roxy shouted up at him. “That was a lie too! It’s not very appealing at all!”

“Screw you, you dirty piece of fish bait!” The Fish Baron raised his wand. “Prepare to super die!”

He fired a bolt magical energy straight down at Roxy. The Werecat’s eyes widened in shock, not having expected the Fish Baron to be much of a threat at all. A split second before she was completely obliterated, John leapt forward and tackled her out of the way.

The magical blast burnt a Roxy-sized hole into the ground, exactly where the woman had been standing scant mili-seconds prior.

“John.” Roxy breathed as she lay by his side. “You saved me.”


“Are you kidding me? That was heroic as shit!”

And then Roxy, high of her narrow escape and possibly a little drunk, grabbed John by the lapels
and pressed her lips to his.

Everyone, with varying levels of annoyance, stood there and watched the pair of them make-out for a bit. Neither John nor Roxy seemed to notice or care that everyone else was waiting for them to be finished.

“Wow.” Jade eventually gasped. “You’d think they’d need to come up for air sometime, but wow… look at them. They’re still going!”

“This is the worst day of my life.” Rose growled.

She was sick of Roxy, for macking on her love interest, and John, for not having the wherewithal or guts to control his hormonal urges and admit his feelings for her, respectively. On top of everything else, this Fish Boob was trying to get all up her grill.

“Man, fuck you guys!” Cried the self-proclaimed evil mage. “I feel like you aren’t taking me seriously at all!”

At that moment, Davesprite floated out of the darkness from across the lake and rejoined his friends. He looked at the Fish Baron, Rose’s furious expression, and finally John and Roxy who were now rolling around on the ground, somewhere between first and second base.

“Holy shit.” Gasped Davesprite. “I leave for like three minutes and everything’s kicking off! What the hell is going on?!”

“What did the boat driver say?” Rose asked him, ignoring his question.

“Well, first off: he wasn’t very happy to be woken up in the dead of night. Dude straight up tried to banish me from his house with a cross and a bottle of holy water. Secondly: after I got him calmed down, he said that he didn’t care if you were the greatest *bitch* ever. He’s not coming out here now. The earliest he might show up is like six-o-clock in the morning.”

“Dammit.” Rose cursed. “That won’t do. Go back and tell him that I’ll pay him twice his usual fee if he comes out now.”

“What? Seriously? You want me to go back?”

“Yes! That’s an order, Davesprite.”

“Man, fuck this noise. Being a familiar sucks.” Davesprite took a last look at John and Roxy, who were starting to smoke from all the hot, sexy feel-copping that was going on, and at the Fish Baron, who was smoking as well, except from an overwhelming amount of rage.

Heaving a mighty sigh, Davesprite turned and floated away again across the lake.

As soon as he left, John and Roxy separated. They were both red-faced and breathy, with rumpled clothes and hair. John, who hadn’t been this close to a woman in some time, was nearly over the moon with excitement. Roxy, on the other hand, was just happy to get a little action.

The Fish Baron was *pissed*.

“Have a good make-out break, did we?” He seethed. “Now that *that* highly uncomfortable display of sloppiness is over, maybe we can get back to the matter at hand. Namely, YOU’RE imminent DESTRUCTION.”
“Yeah, that’s not going to happen!” Jade shouted.

She drew her crossbow, Rose raised her wands, and Roxy pulled a short sword from the sheath strapped to her thigh. John, meanwhile, stood in the middle of the girls and tried to look as menacing as possible.

“Face the facts, Fishy.” Roxy jeered. “You’re outnumbered and outmatched!”

“We’ll see about that!” With a wave of his glittering wand, the Fish Baron summoned at least a dozen gross fishmen from the depths of the lake. The minions crawled onto the shore, staring with wide, lidless eyes and gaping with this ugly fish mouths.

“Ugh. Sick!” John wretched. “Fishmen are so fucking gross. Jesus Christ.”

The Fish Baron conducted his minions as if they were a deadly orchestra. An orchestra fully of slimy fish people with no musical talent whatsoever, that is.

As they stumbled forward on their silly, little fish feet, Rose and Jade began laying into them with spells and crossbow bolts respectively.

“You should turn into a Werecat, Roxy.” John suggested as he shoved one of the fishmen onto her sword. “That’d probably be a good idea.”

“I can’t.” Roxy answered as she sliced one fishman from his neck all the way down to his taint. “My Werecat transformation is on cool-down. I can only do it like once every six hours.”

“Seriously? That’s lame.”

“I know, right?”

As the last fishman fell to a well-placed crossbow bolt from Jade, everyone directed their attention back to the Fish Baron himself. He swallowed hard. He knew he was fucked.

“In my defense,” He began. “You guys look a whole lot less tough then you actually are, so… Sorry, I guess.”

“Apology not accepted.” Rose twirled her wand and caused the Fish Baron’s narwhal mount to disappear, sending the wannabe mage tumbling to the ground. Rose stood over him. “Lose the shitty cloak, get some better minions, and just… don’t suck as much. Maybe then you’ll actually be worth my time.”

Then Rose conjured a giant fishing rod, hooked the Fish Baron by his lame cloak, and then cast him out into lake. As he broke the surface of the lake, the water rippled, and you could almost hear a tiny ‘Wa Wa Wa Waaaaaaa’ echo into the night.

“Do you think that’s the last we’ll see of him?” John asked.

“Well we totally shit on his parade hardcore style.” Roxy cheered, throwing her arms around John’s neck. “I bet this won’t come back to bite you guys on the butt at all!”
It would.

Half an hour later, Rose and Jade were sitting on the beach, resting their feet in the water and waiting for Davesprite to return. A few yards away, John and Roxy were standing under a tree and laughing together.

Jade caught Rose staring over at them.

“I’m sorry that your quest isn’t working out the way you planned.” She said to her friend. “But I think learning to roll with the punches is what makes a good hero! At least in my opinion.”

“You’re right of course.” Rose absentmindedly fiddled with the hem of her robes. “I have much better, more pressing matters to worry about than relationships after all. A small part of me is angry with myself for acting so immature and not feeling happy for John. The rest of me still wants to punch Roxy in that perfectly-shaped nose of hers.”

“That will pass.” Jade patted Rose on the shoulder. “Relationships are too much trouble anyway. I’d rather be sassy bachelorette any day of the week over a housewife/mother.”

“You don’t ever want to settle down?”

“Hell no. Do you?”

Rose cast a final glance over towards John.

“No.” She said. “Of course not.”

Davesprite arrived half an hour later, still boat-less and more pissed than ever.

“He called me an orange birdy fuck and said that if I didn’t get out of his house he’d banish me to the shadow realm.” He reported to Rose. “I don’t think that Boat Driver will be coming out tonight, your witchliness.”

“Oh well.” Rose sighed and looked towards the pale sky. “It’s almost day break we can wait a little while longer, I suppose.”

Davesprite caught sight of John and the giggling Roxy.

“So I guess those two finally sealed the deal, huh? Good thing too. I was getting real sick of all that ‘will they, won’t they’ bullshit.”

“Yes.” Rose nodded. “It truly is a good evening to bury the hatchet.”

Under the tree, John and Roxy awkwardly laced their fingers and spouted lame, romantic gibberish.

“So… I guess we’re an item now, huh?” John chuckled nervously.

“That’s cool with me.” Roxy winked. “Is it cool with you?”

“Yeah! Definitely!” John cast a glance towards Rose, who had her back to him. “No second thoughts here, Haha.”

Grinning and blushing, the two met once more with a kiss.

“Well I gotta admit.” Said Rosie, once her father had finished his nightly tale. “I did not see that
“What? The Fish Baron stuff? That was the name of the chapter, Rosie.” Dave said. “How did you not see that coming?”

“Not that. I don’t care about that lame wizard. I’m talking about John/Roxy!” The small girl threw her hands in the air. “I was on team John/Rose since the beginning and now you’re throwing curveballs at me. What’s the deal, dad?!”

“Hey. You think I’m making this up as I go? This is legit history stuff.”

“Whatever. So when does Rose get her Key of Fate back?”

“I haven’t decided yet. I’ve got to make up the next chapter.”

“But you just said this was legit history...!”

“I’m just joshing you, kiddo. Jesus, you’re too easy.” Dave ruffled his daughter’s hair. “Christ you’re gullible, you must get that from your mom.”

“I heard that!” Called a voice from the other room.

“Oh shit. It’s the law. Go to bed.”

Dave kissed his daughter on the forehead before quickly absconding.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you all had a lovely Thanksgiving. I know that I did! Got to see my brother and sister which is always nice :)

Thanks for reading.
- MIke
Chapter Ten: Dude, Where’s my Bonecar?

By the time the Boat Driver arrived, it was well past six in the morning, almost noon really. Rose, John, Davesprite, Jade, and Roxy stood anxiously on the shore of the lake, shivering in the cool morning air.

“I think we should find an inn first.” Suggested Jade, as the group climbed aboard the ferry. “We could get some food, have a nice nap, a warm shower!”

“There’s no time for such digressions.” Argued Rose. “We must assault the lair of the Cool Cats, retrieve my key of fate, and continue westward to slay the Vampire Queen.”

“If we’re going to challenge the Cool Cats to a Tournament of Warriorish Clash, don’t you think we should get a good night’s sleep?”

“Yeah,” Added John. “Last night was a whole rigmarole of pointless bullshit and we didn’t get any rest. We should recharge our batteries, Rose.”

“We don’t need to recharge shit!” Rose was fed up with this insubordination. “I am the greatest witch ever. I do not need rest or relaxation. As soon as we find the Cool Cat’s Clubhouse, we attack.”

The boat driver, who had been silent until then, turned to Rose as she spoke. He was a gnome, about four feet tall and covered in scraggily, ginger hair. His name was Wally and he will be completely irrelevant to the rest of this story.

“You’re the greatest witch ever, huh?” Said Wally. “You’re the dame who demanded that I come out to work last night, despite the fact that my hours of operation are clearly listed…”

Rose silenced the gnome by seizing him by the collar, bringing his face close to hers, and mad-dogging him into the following week. As this was taking place, Roxy got John’s attention.

“So I was thinking,” She walked her fingers up his arm and around his shoulder. “While Rose is getting her revenge by brutally murdering my old associates, we could get some alone time.”

“We could get lunch!” John exclaimed, excited by the idea.

“Yeah, or we could get a room at the inn and…”

“And watch one of those enchanted movie scrolls! I’ve been wanting to see that new Matthew McOrcnaughey jam. You know the one? That movie scroll about the thirty-something elfish slacker who thinks his parents of setting him up with his dream orc so he’ll finally move out of their cave home?”
“Yeah I’ve heard about it, but…”

“Shit. We’re going to need snacks and drinks! We bet visit the market as soon as we get there so we can stock up.” John grinned at Roxy. “This is going to be awesome!”

“Uh huh.” Roxy sighed in agreement as she leaned on the edge of the boat.

After the boat docked in the City of Lakewater, our group disembarked and made their way up into the bustling streets of the city. John and Jade, who were unaccustomed to seeing large settlements like this, gasped in awe at all the different sights and sounds.

Rose confidently plowed her way through the crowd, shepherding her team forward so that they could continue her mission. However, as they passed through one large market street, lined with different vendors, Rose suddenly noticed that all of her friends had vacated her side.

“Dammit.” She cursed as she cast about for her companions.

Through the throng of people, she located Jade and Davesprite next to a small cart displaying various squares of fabric.

“Ratty old carpets for sale!” Called the salesman. “Make your cave home look even shittier with these disgusting pieces of carpet! Good price! Definitely not fragments of discarded undergarments!”

“What are you two doing?” Rose demanded as she pounced upon her friends. “We don’t have time to go shopping. We barely have any gold as it is and we’re wasting daylight. Where are John and Roxy?”

“They took off, probably boning somewhere. Who cares?” Davesprite pointed to a shimmering wand in a glass case atop one of the vendor’s carts. “Look at that, Lalonde. That wand makes yours look like a pair of battered old drumsticks.”

Rose examined the fancy wand. It was very nice, but also very expensive. Also, she was perfectly happy with her own wands. What did strike her fancy, was the collection of dark, leather-bound tomes stacked neatly next to the wand.

“Interested in the zoologically dubious, eh?” Spoke the saleswoman, an old and wrinkled goblin. “Many evil secrets lie within the pages of these books. They are not for the faint of heart nor the weak of stomach. Simply opening one of these books will probably place a curse upon your family for the next twenty-thousand years.”

“How much?” Asked Rose.

“I thought we didn’t have time for shopping?” Jade snapped, folding her arms.

“Sit on a broomstick, dog girl.” Rose fished several gold coins from her satchel. “We’re here, so we might as well make the most of it.”

Out of the corner of her eye, Rose spotted another vendor attempting to sell a collection of cool-looking weapons. The witch fingered her remaining gold pieces and eyed a hammer that was for sell.

“Hmmm.” Rose hummed, leading her friends towards the weapon’s salesman.

As Rose, Davesprite, and Jade took care of some shopping. John and Roxy were doing some browsing of their own in a nearby alleyway.
“Is this normal for Werecats?” John asked, as Roxy dragged her tongue over his cheek.

“This isn’t foreplay, Johnny.” She responded between licks. “You’ve just got some lembas bread crumbs on your face left over from breakfast.”

“Ugh. Gross.” John shivered, but stifled a chuckle as her sandpaper tongue tickled his jaw. “You’re cleaning me.”

“Just helping out my new beau.” Roxy laughed. She pulled away and started tugging at the bottom of his shirt. “Now pop this off so that we can get busy.”

Before anything could be popped off and before any business could be conducted, several voices could be heard approaching from outside the alley. John and Roxy froze instantly, struck by the sudden fear of being caught fooling around in public. They waited and listened as the voices grew closer.

“Haha. Man, I cannot believe how easy it was to rob those fools.” Cackled an annoying girl’s voice. “I mean, for the greatest witch ever, she sure was a chump bitch.”

John stifled a gasp. It was those ‘Cool Cat’ rogues who jumped them in chapter eight.

“I know, right?” Agreed a second voice. “Now that we’ve got this Key of Fate added to our trophy collection, I feel like we can accomplish pretty much anything! Who should we rob next!!?”

“No one.” Answered a cool voice. It was Damien, leader of the Cool Cats. “That witch bitch is probably heading here right now to get her Key of Fate back. We have to be ready when she gets here.”

“Aww come on, Big D. Don’t tell me you’re scared of that little girl and her lame-ass friends.”

“I’m only scared of two things: Spiders and Hepatitis C. And since that witch doesn’t have eight legs or the ability to single-handily ruin my liver, she don’t frighten me at all.” The group came to a stop outside the alleyway John and Roxy were hiding in. The horny couple pressed themselves to the shadows to stay out of sight. “All I’m saying is that we’ve got to be prepared. Roxy is probably working with them and that means she’ll probably lead them right to our clubhouse.”

“You’re right.”

“Of course I’m right. Now, who wants to hear about how cool I was in high school again?”

“Me! Me!” Cheered several Cool Cats in unison until their voices faded away.

John and Roxy waited a few more seconds to make sure that the coast was clear before stepping out of their hiding spot.

“What a bunch of dicks.” John commented, staring after them. “We should go find Rose and take her to their lair now.”

“Oooor.” Roxy gave John a sly look. “We could go to their clubhouse right now and steal back her Key of Fate ourselves!”

“Just the two of us?”

“Yeah! It will be quick. I know that place like the back of my hand. We’ll be in and out, and have Rose’s Key of Fate back before you can say: ‘Oh shit, where’s John and Roxy? I hope they aren’t
“I don’t know.” John rubbed the back of his neck. “This sounds a little *too* foolish and reckless. What if we accidentally make a bigger mess than we originally intended?”

“Oh, come on, John. What are the odds of that happening?”

“Really good. I mean, it’s like almost a hundred percent positive.”

“Don’t you like to live dangerously?” Roxy reached down and interlaced her fingers with his. “I know that I do.”

It was strange, how John could fool around with Roxy in alleyways and in the middle of intense battles, but something as simple as holding hands could cause a bright-red blush to appear in splotches across his cheeks.

“Y- Yeah, okay.” He mumbled.

“Great! Let’s go!” Roxy beamed and dragged John off, towards the Cool Cat’s clubhouse.

She took him through many side streets, over a sky-bridge, down a rung ladder, up a rope ladder, and finally towards the edge of the City of Lakewater. There stood the Cool Cat’s clubhouse in all of its glory. The building was a tall tower, near the edge of the water, and decorated with many fancy ribbons of colorful yawn. On the sloping lawn, leading up towards the large front gates, were many scratching posts and sand pits full of cat litter, of which John had no interest in investigating further.

“Pretty fancy.” John whistled quietly, admiring the tower.

“It’s even better on the inside. Come on!” Roxy led him towards the water and around the side of the tower to a much smaller, side door. “This is the secret entrance.”

“Really? It just looks like a back door to me.”

“Well yeah, but it’s secret because it has a pass code. Watch.” Using her nails, Roxy tapped a complex pattern onto the stone wall next to the door. After a moment, the door groaned and swung open. “See?”

“Wow! That’s awesome!”

“I know, right? Come on.” Roxy led the way inside and John shut the door behind them.

Inside, they found themselves in a large, beautifully decorated room. There were many cool artifacts and treasures hanging on the wall, including but not limited to: A silver sword that could cut through anything, but with the caveat that whoever wielded the blade could only do so completely naked. A magical wand labeled, *dance wand*. And an awesome-looking fedora, that equipped the wearer with negative six hundred charisma.

There, on the mantel above a roaring fire, sat Rose’s Key of Fate. It was locked away in fancy glass case and watched by a dozen or so wizard security cameras.

Up above, through the ceiling, the sounds of a raucous party could be heard. John took a deep breath and hoped that the Cool Cats upstairs decided to *stay* upstairs.

“Alright, Rox.” He examined the room. “Let’s not touch anything, but OH MY GOD WHAT ARE YOU DOING??!”
Roxy was in the process of smashing several expensive-looking, crystal ashtrays.

“Being a vandal.” She responded as she shattered another one.

“We’re going to get caught!”

“Only if you keep shouting like that.” Roxy hurled a final ashtray into the wall. “Hurry up and grab the key so we can go.”

Shaking his head, John set his sights upon the Key of Fate. He was about to take a step towards it, when he noticed a faint light reflected off the gleaming case. Squinting through his glasses, John now realized that Rose’s treasure was also surrounded by a network of wizard lasers. Tripping one would surely sound an alarm and have them caught by the clubhouse’s inhabitants.

“Dammit. Roxy, this whole place is covered with wizard lasers. I can’t reach the case.”

“Ugh. Fine. I guess I’ll do everything.” Roxy knelt down and unlaced her boots. “Stand over there in the corner, John, and try not to touch any lasers, alright?”

“Got it.” John took up position on the edge of the room, as Roxy finished discarding her shoes and bounced to her feet.

With a running leap, she pounced onto the headrest of a handsome, leather armchair, back flipped onto a bookshelf, somersaulted over a laser, landed on a mahogany coffee table, and finally pirouetted onto the mantel above the fire. She landed perfectly on her feet, because Werecat.

John watched nervously as his girlfriend pulled a bobby pin from her hair and began picking the lock on the Key of Fate’s protective case. Surely, the wizard security cameras recorded the whole thing on wizard tape. All John could hope was that they’d be out of here before the Cool Cats decided to come visit this room.

“Got it!” Roxy cheered as she unlocked the case and flipped it open. “Now, to get out here completely undetected…”

WAH! WAH! WAH!

An alarm, loud enough to rattle all the objects in the room, vibrated off the walls. John and Roxy covered their ears as nearly every other sound was drowned out by the deafening alarm.

Roxy shouted, but John couldn’t hear. However, by watching her lips move, he could guess that she was either saying “Fuck, fuck fuck,” or “Run, run, run”, which when you really think about it, does it really matter which?

John and Roxy raced towards the door from which they’d entered. John opened it to find half a dozen Cool Cats right outside, brandishing swords.

“Not that way!” Roxy tugged John back into the Clubhouse and across the room towards a second door.

With a completely unnecessary, yet badass kick, Roxy knocked the door off it’s hinges and sent it flipping away. Our pair of heroes dashed through the entryway and found themselves in the Cool Cat’s garage. Parked in the center of the room was the awesome bonecar.

“Hop in!” Roxy commanded, as she Duke’s of Hazard slid across the hood and jumped into the driver’s seat.
“Where are the seat belts?” John asked, searching his chair for the safety harness.

“Seatbelts? Psshh.” Roxy revved the engine. “Where we’re going, we don’t need motherfucking seatbelts.”

“I dunno. I think you pretty much need seatbelts wherever you go.”

“Babe, you’re ruining this badass moment.”

“Sorry…”

Cool Cats stormed into the garage.

“Stop them!” One yelled. “They’re getting away!”

But it was too late, Roxy gunned the engine, peeled out, and drove straight through the god-damn wall, exploding out of the clubhouse and racing away along the shoreline. There was a mighty crash and John looked behind them to see the Cool Cat’s clubhouse crumbling in on itself and crashing to the ground.

“Shit. Do you think they’re okay?” He asked, nodding back towards the wreckage.

“Who cares? They were a bunch of douchebags.” Reaching into her pocket, Roxy pulled out the Key of Fate and tossed it into John’s lap. “Mission accomplished, by the way.”

“Awesome! Rose is going to be so jazzed!”

“YOU DID WHAT?!?” Rose Lalonde shrieked, five minutes later when the group was once again reunited.

John cowered under Rose’s mighty glare. She was most definitely not jazzed to hear about his and Roxy’s mini adventure.

They were on the outskirts of the City of Lakewater, near a clump of trees by the shore. Roxy was showing Davesprite and Jade the sweet new bonecar, whilst Rose busted John’s balls.

“We just went and got your key back.” John explained again, showing the witch her trophy. “I thought that’s what you wanted.”

“I wanted to do this my way. I had a whole plan! We were going to challenge them to a Tournament of Warriorish Clash! I was going to stomp all those kitten fuckers under my boot!” Rose tossed her hands into the air. “What came over you, John? This isn’t anything like you at all!”

“Roxy said…”

“Oh, well that explains it!” Rose angrily snatched her Key of Fate from John’s grasp. “If you ask me, that Werecat is a bad influence on you, John. You could have been captured! Or killed! Or converted into their stupid, roguish cult!”

“Well we didn’t obviously! And we got a sweet new bonecar!” John gestured towards the sweet new bonecar. “I thought you’d be happy. I did this for you, after all.”

“I’m the leader of this party, John. You can’t be following other people’s directions like that. You endangered this whole group, our entire quest, but running off with Roxy!”
Their argument caught the attention of Davesprite, Jade, and Roxy, who moved over to join the pair curiously.

“Whoa there, Lalonde.” Chided Davesprite, who was wearing an “I heart City of Lakewater” t-shirt. “Don’t blow a gasket. So John and his gf went and undermined your authority, so what?”

“Yeah, what’s the big deal?” Asked Roxy.

“Don’t you speak to me!” Rose snapped, thrusting a finger at Roxy. “You are not a part of this party.”

“What are you talking about?” John was incredulous. “Of course she’s a part of the party.”

“No she is not! I won’t have her anti-establishment ways jeopardizing our mission!”

“Well fine! If she’s not part of the group, then…” John swallowed hard. “Th-Then neither am I!”

Rose faltered. Was John really saying what she thought he was saying?

“J- John?”

“Come on, Roxy.” Eyes averted towards the ground, John walked towards his girlfriend and took her by the hand. Together, the pair began to walk away.

“John!” Rose called after him. “Are you joshing me right now?! After everything we’ve been through!”

He did not look back, but continued on his path until he disappeared into the trees and out of sight. Davesprite was shocked into a silence, a rare occurrence if there ever was one, and Jade simply frowned in confusion, unable to grasp fully what had just taken place.

“I- I’ll go talk to him.” Said the Weredog, before scampering off into the woods in pursuit of John and Roxy.

With a savage curse, Rose sank to the ground and glared daggers over at the gleaming bonecar, which was now more of an insult than anything else.

“Hold on loosely,
But don’t let go,
If you cling to tightly,
You’re gonna, oh, you’re gonna,
Lose control!”

Davesprite sang.

“Shut the front, fucking door, sprite.” Rose hissed, burying her face in her knees. “Can’t you see that I’m in the middle of regretting my recent actions?!”

“Aw, come on, Lalonde.” Davesprite floated down to his friend’s side and patted her on the shoulder gently. “Everything is going to be A-OK, I’m sure of it. You know how John is. He’ll realize his mistake in about thirty seconds and be right back by your side in thirty-five. In the meantime, I recommend you work on an apology.”
Rose lifted her head and looked at Davesprite.

“You’re right.” She sighed, but smiled slightly all the same. “Thank you, Davesprite.”

“No problem. I’m not just your badass familiar. I’m also an all around solid dude, so don’t you forget that.” Reaching into his trademark City of Lakewater backpack, Davesprite pulled out a piece of patented City of Lakewater Taffy. “Now who wants some taffy?”

“We do.” Said a cold voice suddenly.

Rose and Davesprite turned to find that a large group of Cool Cat’s coming their way, with a struggling Jade, held captive in their grip. Rose and Davesprite jumped to their feet, drawing their respective weapons.

“Let her go.” Ordered Rose.

“Of course.” Said Damien, leader of the cool cats. He snapped his fingers and Jade was tossed bodily to the ground at Rose’s feet. “We caught that little puppy running through the woods. Wouldn’t tell us what she was chasing though, but I guess it doesn’t matter. Now that we’ve found you, that is.”

“No. I don’t suppose it does.” Rose twirled her wands as Davesprite helped Jade to her feet. “Let us settle our disagreement with some semblance of civil attitude. I challenge thee to a Tournament of Warriorish Clash!”

“Pass.”

“What?”

“We aren’t doing some stupid tournament, witch.” Damien pointed towards the bonecar. “You break into our clubhouse, steal our shit, smash the whole thing to the ground?! We’re going to kick all your asses, hardcore ultimate style!”

“We’ll see about that!” Rose cried and fired a spell towards the Werecats.

They all dodged and converged on the heroes, transforming into powerful Werecats and attacking with brutal efficiency.

Rose did her best, transmogrifying many of the rogues and blasting them away with well-aimed spells, but was it was too much. She was eventually overwhelmed by sheer numbers and shoved to the ground. The Werecats took Davesprite’s t-shirt and pulled it up and over his eyes. They watched and laughed as he flailed around blindly before finally giving up and going limp to the ground. Lastly, they beat Jade with rolled up magazines until she whimpered for mercy.

Our heroes lay battered and beaten at the feet of the Cool Cat’s, exhausted, bruised, and simply depressed at another defeat at these douchebag’s hands.

“Any last words?” Sneered Damien, as he raised his sword. “No? Didn’t think so. Welcome to DIE, assholes!”

The mighty Werecat brought his sword down, ready to cleave Rose’s head in two. The witch closed her eyes and braced for the impact. She would never finish her ultimate quest. She would never tell John that she was sorry.

She would never tell John that she loved him.
There was a sharp, metallic **cling**! But Rose did not feel a blade pierce her skull.

She opened her eyes and found John, standing over her and blocking Damien’s strike with his twisted, mangled, worthless, and completely shit, cookie-tin shield. She gasped in surprise and could not deny the swell of warmth in her chest in seeing that he had returned.

“I won’t let you hurt my friends.” Growled John, as he struggled to hold Damien’s sword at bay.

“Wow, dude. Deus machina much?” Suddenly, there was a loud **honk**! Damien turned his head to see that the bonecar, driven by Roxy, was bearing down on him and his crew. It was too late, there was no time to move. “Mother of…”

All the Cool Cat’s screamed in unison as Roxy drove over all of them. All of the asshole rogues caught sudden bonecar-itis and died instantly after five minutes of extreme pain. Bonecar-itis is where you get run over by a bonecar and all your bones turn to dust. It’s easily one of the worst ways to die ever. Of all time.

Rose, Davesprite, and Jade climbed to their feet to examine the mountain of Cool Cat corpses left in the wake of Roxy’s awesome driving skills. John was stood with his mangled shield in his hands, among the ocean of death, looking more badass than he had ever looked before.

Rose got a lady boner. Which, I guess is like a regular boner, but on the inside???

“John, that was easily the most heavy metal thing I’ve ever seen.” Rose gasped, running to his side. “Are you hurt?”

“Nope.” John grinned. “Although my shield is a little more fucked up than usual.”

He held up his weapon, which now resembled a frosted flake, except a lot more crooked and fucked up and less delicious.

“Well then it’s a good think we bought you this!” Jade reached into her bag and pulled out a new hammer. “Here you go, John! We were going to give it to you, but you ran off.”

“Yeah, so does this mean you’re a part of the group again?” Davesprite asked, as John took the hammer.

He gave it a few experimental swings. The weapon was much cooler than his original one, with many different colors pointed on its side, and wicked-looking spike fused to the back of the powerful head.

“I don’t think I ever left really.” John commented, sliding his new hammer into his belt. “Thanks, guys. I’m sorry for leaving.”

“But thanks for showing up when you did.” Rose said stepping closer to him.

Just before they maybe about to kiss, Roxy brought the bonecar to a screeching halt next to the group.

“Sup, dudes.” She grinned and tipped her cool-gal sunglasses that she was suddenly wearing. “What’s all this jibber jab? I thought yall were heading to kill some evil vampire mage or something?”

“Hell yeah we are!” Cried Jade as she jumped into the bonecar. “We’re stocked up on supplies and all ready to go!”
Rose watched John climb into the passenger seat next to Roxy. The Werecat Rogue leaned over and gave her boyfriend a kiss on the cheek.

One day Rose would tell John how she felt. Or maybe… one day she’d just get over him? Regardless, she joined her party in the bonecar and rode off into the sunset, as Fleetwood Mac’s “Second Hand News” started to play.

(Fade to black)

( Words appear, saying: To be continued )

( Words fade and the credits roll up )

(After credit scene)

Damien, leader of the Cool Cats and only remaining rogue, pulled himself into the sitting position.

“Nine lives, motherfuckers.” Growled Damien. “You may have won this round Rose Lalonde, but I will have my revenge!”

(Fade to black)

(Fin)

Chapter End Notes

I knooooooow there's nothing to say!
Someone has taken my place.
When times go bad, when times go rough.
Won't you lay me down in tall grass and let me do my stuff?
Come on!

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Chapter Eleven: John Hates Cake

Roxy the Werecat drove the bonecar away from the City of Lakewater, right over the water (which was possible because of magic), and back onto the opposite shore on the outskirts of the Forest of Franklin. She brought the vehicle to a grinding halt there and turned around in her seat to look at Rose.

"Alright, witchy pooh." She said with a grin. "Now that we've shown those Cool Cats what's up and gotten your Key of Fate back, we can go fight this Vampire Queen, right?"

"That is the plan, yes." Rose answered from where she was sandwiched between Davesprite and Jade. The witch reached into her satchel and pulled out her map. "We need to continue westward, away from the City of Lakewater and into the Forest of Franklin once more. The Vampire Queen's lair lies in the catacombs of Virgo's Keep."

"Catacombs. That means caves, right?" Davesprite groaned. "Shit. I am so tired of caves. Why can't these evil mages live in swanky penthouses with lots sunlight and stalagmite-less floor space instead of in these busted cave homes?"

"Because that would be too easy, of course!" Answered Jade. "Come on, Davesprite. You know that looting caves is a big part of any fantasy quest!"

"Also vampires don't like sunlight." John pointed out. He was sat up in the passenger seat next to Roxy. "So I guess it makes sense that she'd live underground."

"No matter where she lives, no matter how far she's buried, she cannot hide from my wands." Said a determined Rose. "Full speed ahead Roxy, if you will."

"Right oh!" Roxy snatched Rose's map from her fingers and threw it into John's lap. "You're my navigator, babe. Try to keep us on the right track," Roxy gunned the engine once more. "Because it's time to burn some G.D. rubber!"

The bonecar's magic engine rolled over once, emitted a puff of black smoke, and then died.

"Shit!"

"What's wrong with it?" John asked.

"Some of those stupid Cool Cat's guts probably got stuck in the engine when I ran them over." Roxy reached under her seat and popped the hood. "Let's take a look."

Sure enough, when they looked at the engine of the bonecar, they found it to be clogged with lots and lots of gross blood and other Cool Cat body parts.
"Jeezus." Whistled Davesprite. "That's a lot of freshly minced douchebag. So I guess it's walking from here on out, huh? Sucks. This thing was a sweet ride."

"I can probably fix this." Jade stuck her hand into the bloody mess. "We just need to pull out all the hoses, change the wizard oil, unclog on the circuits." With a sick *squelch*, she pulled a mangled *something* out of the engine. "Oh god. I hope this is a finger…"

"How long will it take to get it moving again?" Asked Rose, who was anxious to continue on her quest.

"An hour at the most. I used to work with machinery like this all the time back when I lived with the Sun Clan."

"You lived with the Sun Clan?" Roxy raised her eyebrows. "Isn't that the cult of idiots who worship the sun, listen to soft rock, and eat dish towels?"

"That dish towel thing is a rumor!"

"Alright. Alright." Rose stepped in before the group was sidetracked once more. "Jade, get to work on fixing the engine. Davesprite will help you. I want to be on the move again by second lunch, got it?"

"Yup!" Jade turned back to her work. "Alright, Davesprite. Start grabbing guts!"

"Aw shit. This is so fucking gross. Oh my god. Cool Cat guts all up in my grill. What the hell have I gotten myself into?" Davesprite grumbled, struggling to maintain his cool.

As the pair of them got to work, Rose made herself comfortable in the shade of a nearby tree and began to read one of her new books. It was a heavy tome, dedicated to the most dastardly hexes and most wicked of curses. Her fight with the Crab King had been a cake walk, but she doubted the Vampire Queen would be as easy. She needed to be prepared.

"Come on, John." Roxy pulled her boyfriend away from the rest of the group. "Let's practice with that new hammer of yours."

"Practice?"

"Yeah! You wanna learn how to fight, right?"

"Oh yeah. Sure!" John felt a bubble of excitement form in his chest.

If he trained with Roxy, who was an awesome fighter herself, then he could become the great hero that he always wanted to be. He got a sudden mental image of himself, ripped as all fuck, standing next to his friends in the heat of battle, bashing in zombie heads with one swing of his mighty hammer and making out with both Roxy and Rose at the same…

"Hey!" Roxy snapped her fingers in front of John's face, regaining his attention once more. "Are you even listening to me?"

"Y- Yeah of course." John tugged at his collar, suddenly feeling very warm. "What were you saying?"

Rolling her eyes, Roxy stepped forward and pulled John's new hammer from his belt. She gave it a few experimental swings, pressed it against her ear, dabbed at the handle with her tongue, and finally broke into a wide grin.
"You're in luck, John. This new hammer your friends got you is hella enchanted!"

"Really?! That's so fucking cash!" John gazed at the weapon with a newfound respect. "What sort of enchantments does it have?"

"Just one enchantment, I think. Although I can't really be sure. What am I? Some kind of witch? There is this though," Roxy turned the hammer over and showed John that there was an inscription inscribed on the bottom. She read: "Whoever wields this hammer shall possess the power of the mighty Zillyhoo, a really solid dude."

"So… what does that mean exactly?"

"It means that when you use this hammer you get this guy Zillyhoo's power."

"Yeah, I got that part, but what kind of powers does Zillyhoo have?"

"I dunno, but apparently he was a really solid dude."

"So that's it? No super strength or flight or mind-control?"

"Hey," Roxy shrugged. "Solid dudes are hard to come by these days. If you ask me, there are worse enchantments you can have."

"I guess, but…" John took the hammer back from Roxy. As he clutched it in his fist, he certainly didn't feel any different. It would have been nice to have a cooler hammer…

John shook himself. What was he doing be a whiny shit? His friends got him a really cool hammer. He shouldn't feel disappointed!

"But, I think this will work just fine." He eventually said with a small smile.

"Great!" Roxy beamed. "Well are you ready to begin your training?"

"Hell yes!"

A super awesome training montage of Roxy training John to be an awesome hero followed, with "Push it to the Limit' by Comiesee playing in the background. John was running through the woods with Roxy on his back, doing crane kicks on top of a broken pier, pulling the still-busted ass bonecar down the shoreline with a metal chain, doing one-armed pushups with Roxy, Rose, Jade, and Davesprite all piled comically on his back, and running up a flight of extremely long steps before coming to a stop at the top with his arms raised triumphantly above his head.

The montage ended with John and Roxy jumping into the air and high-fiving as the frame froze.

"Oh my golden rings." John gasped as he rested with his hands on his knees. "I don't think I've worked out that much since… Well, ever!"

"I'm so proud of you, babe." Roxy crooned throwing her arms around his neck and giving him a peck on the cheek.

"I dunno what you're both so excited about." Davesprite piped up, from where he and Jade were still working on the bonecar. "That whole montage only took about five minutes. You aren't a great hero yet, John."

"But it's a start!" Commented Jade, pulling her head out of the bonecar's engine. She was covered in black, wizard oil and gross blood. "Keep up the good work!"
Still high off of the excitement, John couldn't fight the grin that pulled at his face.

"I'm going to go wash up." He said cheerily, before jogging over towards the lake.

As he moved away, Roxy let out a contented sigh and moseyed her way over to Rose, who was still sitting beneath the tree with her book. The Werecat sat down next to the Witch, who pretended not to notice the newcomer's presence.

"Hey." Said Roxy.

Rose tilted her head and said something that sounded a bit like "Eh", but it was hard to tell exactly.

"I was wondering if I could talk to you about something." Roxy was suddenly anxious. She twisted her fingers in her lap and stared with great apparent interest at the small patch of ground between her boots.

"Eh." Said Rose.

"I really like John, like a whole friggin lot. He's sweet and nice and not hard on the eyes either." Roxy scooted closer to Rose. "He's been working real hard too and I just wanna get him a little something to show him how much I like him!"

"I can't imagine how this would concern me." Rose deadpanned, still buried in her book, although a page had not been turned in quite some time.

"Well, you're his best friend, right? I was hoping you could give me some ideas on what I could get him!"

Rose narrowed her eyes. This had just become a very delicate situation. Was Roxy really trying to get her, Rose Fucking Lalonde, to help cement her relationship with John? Shit. Where did that Werecat get the lady-balls?

When Rose had first met John, she'd considered him to be a decent fellow, albeit one who ranked below her on almost every scale. However, after seeing his bravery and strength of character first-hand, she'd become endeared to him more and more. Now, when she felt strong feelings, unlike any she'd felt for anyone in a long time, this damn Werecat was here, pushing her generous bosom into her business.

Maybe Rose would have been able to let her feelings for John slip away. Maybe she would have been happy to let John and Roxy be a thing. But there was no chance in hell that she would be giving Roxy any good advice.

"Sure, Roxy. I would be happy to help." Rose shut her book with a sharp snap.

"Awesome!" Roxy beamed. "Now, I want to get him something that means a lot, you know? I want him to be able to take one look at it and be like: 'Oh my sexy rings, that's something special!' Do you get what I'm saying?"

"I think I know exactly what you're trying to say." Rose smiled sweetly.

"You do? Oh, man. That's so awesome!" Roxy suddenly embraced Rose in a warm hug. "You're the best friend ever!"

"Indeed I am."
Roxy pulled away, releasing a very uncomfortable and now slightly weary Rose. Was the witch making the right decision here by being a total Bitch Town U.S.A, population: HER?

"So what do you think I should get him?" Roxy asked.

Rose couldn't turn back now. She was in too deep. She was making this happen.

"Cake."

"Cake?"

"John loves cake." Rose answered with a nod. "If you really want to get him… excited, then give him some cake."

"Are you sure?" Roxy quirked an eyebrow.

"Of course. I am his best friend, after all."

"Well then…" Roxy bounced to her feet and looked around the immediate area. They were on the shore of the lake, with the City of Lakewater a good hundred yards of swimming away, and the Forest of Franklin immediately to her back. "I don't suppose you'd know of any bakeries around here, would you?"

"I can't say that I do. No." Rose returned to her book. "Good luck though."

"Yeah, I'll need it." Roxy turned towards the forest. "I'm just going to go look around I guess. Cover for me if John asks about me, will you?"

"Of course."

"Thanks, Rose." Roxy looked back, grinning as she jogged off into the forest. "You're the greatest witch ever!"

"Yes." Rose felt a heavy something settle in her gut. "I know."

As Roxy disappeared from view, Rose climbed to her feet and made her way over to Jade and Davesprite, thinking that she might be able to escape her guilt by occupying her mind with pleasant, intelligent conversation.

"And then I said: 'those aren't prophecy stones, those are my balls'." Davesprite was saying.

Jade let out a peal of laughter that was somewhere between a snort and a shriek.

"Then what did he say?" She asked excitedly.

"Well, first he spat them out, right? And then… Oh, hey Rose." Davesprite frowned as Rose approached. "Don't worry about interrupting my story or anything. It wasn't important. Just come barge right in. Really, it's no trouble."

"I fail to see how my presence would impede your rhapsody." Rose replied, a little curtly. "Please continue."

"Naw. You're not going to get any of the jokes if you just come in half-way through."

"Just start over again." Jade offered cheerily. She was still half-buried in the bonecar's magic engine. "I don't mind!"
"Naw. The magic and wonder is gone. I'll tell you again later, some other time where we don't have to worry about being interrupted by inconsiderate witches of the 'great' variety."

"Okay!"

Rose rolled her eyes. Apparently she'd have to look elsewhere for intelligent conversation.

"How long until the bonecar is ready again?" She asked of Jade. "I'd like to cover some ground today."

"Not long! In fact, I'm pretty sure I almost got it."

"Good. That's some excellent work, Jade."

"Well," The Weredog pulled her face out of the inner mechanisms of the vehicle, covered in even more oil and grease. She grinned and nodded at Davesprite. "I couldn't have done it without my lovely assistant."

"Oh, I just held the flashlight." Smirked Davesprite, although whatever the equivalent of a blush for a sprite was now dusting the parts of his face uncovered by tinted glass.

"But it was really good holding! Like everything was so well-illumintated. You should have seen it, Rose."

"It's the middle of the day." Rose gestured up, towards the blazing sun. "I seriously doubt that an auxiliary source of light of any kind is necessary."

"Still."

Before either Rose or Davesprite could respond with a sarcastic or cool answer, respectively, John walked up to the group. He was still breathing hard from his intense workout, droplets of water hung from his bangs, and his glasses were foggy with the mid-afternoon heat.

"Hey, guys." He wiped his face on a towel and slung it around his neck. "What's going on?"

"Just jibber jabbing."

"Awesome! I can't wait to…" John suddenly trailed off when he noticed that his girlfriend was nowhere to be seen. "Hey, where's Roxy?"

Davesprite and Jade quickly scanned the shoreline too, also finding no sign of the highly attractive and cool Werecat rogue. Rose pretended to be intensely interested in the fingernails on her left hand.

"Rose, have you seen Roxy?"

"Who?"

"Roxy. You know, my girlfriend?" John looked at his friend quizzically. "As in the same Roxy who's a Werecat, who's been with us for the past couple of days, and who saved your life just last chapter by killing a bunch of other Werecats with a bonecar."

"Oh, yeah. Roxy. It rings a bell." Rose shrugged nonchalantly. "Last I saw, she was heading into the forest."

"The forest?" John turned and looked into the spooky gathering of trees that seemed to look
incredibly threatening, even in the light of day. "Why would she go in there?"

"I don't know. Probably to do some Werecat stuff or something. I wouldn't worry."

"I'm going after her." John started to walk towards the Forest of Franklin, but was brought to a sudden halt by a set of strong fingers wrapping around his bicep.

"I wouldn't go in there by yourself, John." Said Rose, relaxing her grip slightly. "The brief forays we've had into the forest don't do the horrors within nearly enough justice. It could be dangerous."

"All the more reason to go after her then!" John tugged his arm from her grasp. "You should come with me, Rose. We could watch each other's back."

"Hmm." Rose tapped her chin with a finger. "You know. That actually does sound like a good plan. Yes, let us travel together."

Together John and Rose headed towards the Forest of Franklin, leaving Jade and Davesprite alone by the bonecar yet again. The pair stared after the witch and their friend for a moment, then exchanged worried looks.

"What's she planning?" Jade asked.

"Who says that she's planning anything?" Davesprite leaned back against the side of the bonecar. "Maybe Rose simply wants to help John find his gf, who's apparently superior to her in every way, with absolutely no ulterior motives or underhanded schemes- OH GOD WE HAVE TO HELP THEM!"

As Davesprite jumped to his "feet" or whatever, Jade turned to look into the depths of the forest, chewing her lip nervously.

"I don't know." She responded. "I mean, I know that Rose is jealous of John and Roxy, but she wouldn't do anything potentially… harmful, would she?"

"John told me that she once turned a guy into a peanut just for hitting on her." Davesprite started to float away in pursuit of his friends. "I'm not going to pretend to know what she's capable of."

"Davesprite, we can't leave the bonecar unprotected!" Jade called after him.

"Well then stay here."

"Fuck that! I don't wanna stay by myself!"

"Well then come with."

"B- But… the bonecar!" Jade stamped her foot. "Come back, Davesprite. Let that confusing love triangle sort itself out. It's up to us to be the sensible ones in times like this!"

But the sprite could no longer hear her shouts, as he had already floated beyond the edge of the forest and disappeared from view. With an angry grunt, Jade slammed the hood of the bonecar close and then climbed atop it, sitting against the windshield and glaring off into the forest after her friends.

"Well now, don't you look unhappy!" Called a tiny voice from nowhere.

Jade looked down to see that a tiny songbug had alighted on the bonecar next to her. Songbugs were pretty common back in the day, always flying in open windows in the middle of the night and singing these really annoying songs that woke you up. They're small too, so imagine trying to find a
tiny, annoying as hell, singing bug as you stumble around your room in the middle of the night. There's a good reason they're extinct nowadays. Their songs usually start off pretty good, but go bad really fast.

"Fuck off, songbug." Growled Jade. "I'm not in the gaming mood."

Rosie, your mom hated songbugs.

"Aw, that's not the attitude a pretty lady like yourself should have!" Responded the songbug. He then began to sing:

"Little pretty girl sitting on a bonecar most sad,
If you wanna cheer up, just come on down!
I'll take off my pants,
And we'll have a little sex quest staring the two of us- OH GOD WHHHHYYYYY!"

Jade silenced the songbug by punching it away. The little guy flew through the air and landed with a small plop in the lake. After several minutes of pitiful struggling, he drowned.

"I'll never be a star now…" Wept the songbug as he died.

Meanwhile, Roxy was making her way through the dense forest foliage in search of cake.

Now, Roxy wasn't stupid. She didn't just expect to find a healthy slice of cake lying on a plate just cold chillin on the ground and waiting to be scooped up. Shit just doesn't work like that. What Roxy was hoping for, was to find some sort of wizardly shack in the middle of the woods, preferably made entirely out of candy of something. There's bound to be cake in one of those!

"Oh, man." Roxy grinned to herself as she skirted around a clump of bushes. "When John sees this cake, he's gonna be all like 'Thanks, Rox! I love it! Smooch smooch smooch' And then we'll do 'it'."

You know, 'it'?

I'm talking about sex.

Anyways, the further Roxy headed into the forest, the spookier shit got.

A skeleton jumped out from behind a tree and yelled: "Boo!" really loudly, startling the Werecat. A little while later, Roxy saw one of those fake rubber snakes hanging from a tree, and I'm pretty sure that she saw the eyes of a painting move whilst she worked her way through the haunted forest.

"Fuck my ass. This place is scary as hell!" She commented as she avoided a trashcan, which probably had someone waiting inside to jump out and scare her. "I gotta get find this cake and get the G.D. hell out of this forest."

As she rounded a large oak, she saw it: an enormous shack made entirely out of candy!

"Hell. Fucking. Yes." Roxy immediately sprinted up to the front door, which was a large graham cracker, and knocked three times.
"Who is it?" Called a voice from inside.

"Uh, I'm Roxy."

"Roxy who?"

"Roxy the Werecat. Listen, uh, whoever you are." Roxy leaned against the wall. "I'm really hurtin for some cake. Do you think you can help a gal out?"

Suddenly the door flew open, revealing an old, wrinkled, nasty-ass witch with a lazy eye for some reason.

"It is I! Yahtzee the evil woodland witch! And did you say cake? Sure, I've got hella cake! I only need one thing in return."

"Okay. Whatever you say, unappealing witch. What do you need?"

"Nothing much." Shrugged the witch, named Yahtzee. "All of my cakes sell for the simple cost of YOUR SANITY! MWAHHAHAAHA!"

"Pass."

"W-What?"

"Pass." Roxy began to walk away, waving goodbye as she went. "I'll try the next candy shack. Thanks for your time, un-comely witch."

"You aren't going nowhere, foolish girl!" From her disgusting, and probably disease ridden robes, the witch pulled out a gnarled, old wand and pointed it at Roxy's chest. "Do you know how long I've waited for a sexually appealing, idiotic, young girl to come by so that I could steal her sanity? A really fucking long time! I have really specific tastes!"

"That sounds like a lot of bullshit that only concerns you!" Roxy drew her short sword. "I don't have time to deal with this. I'm trying to be a good girlfriend! Now just step off, granny. I'm not afraid to cut an elderly person!"

"I'm only two hundred and six and a half!" The evil witch twirled her wand and fired a blast of purple magic at Roxy, who dodged nimbly out of the way.

"Ha! Nice shot, witch bitch." She taunted. "But you'll have to do better than that to hit a Werecat!"

"Oh, a Werecat, huh?" The witch reached into her pocket and quickly pulled out a large ball of yarn. "You don't say!"

Roxy froze with fear. Apparently this witch didn't have any problems with playing dirty. As long as Roxy stayed focus and didn't get distracted, she could get out of this- OH MY GOD A PIECE OF STRING!

With a tiny hiss, Roxy leapt forward and snatched the ball of yarn from the witches grasp. Roxy then proceeded to roll around on the ground with the yarn as she kicked at it with her legs.

"Hahaha. Gets them every time." The witch raised her wand. "I hope your boyfriend likes delicious, insane, kittens. Because that's what you're about to be in a second!"

Suddenly, something very cool and powerful struck the witch on the back of the head and knocked her to the ground. John stood over the evil witch, his awesome hammer raised to strike her again.
"Ew. Fucking gross." He said when he saw the witch's face. "I don't mean to be rude, but… geez. I was not expecting you to be that ugly. Holy shit."

Rose appeared from between the trees and joined John's side.

"Oh look, a forest witch was about to kill Roxy and you prevented that from happening." She said in monotone. "How wonderful."

"John?!" Roxy jumped to her feet, yarn ball be damned. "What are you doing here?"

"Rose said you went into the forest by yourself." John took his girlfriend by the shoulders. "I was worried about you. Are you alright? That very unseemly witch didn't hurt you did she?"

"No. No. I'm fine." Roxy's face fell. "John, you weren't supposed to follow me. I'm trying to get you a present!"

"Oh, really?" John blinked in surprise. "You don't have to do that, Roxy. Having you as a girlfriend is already enough of a present!"

"Aw, that's really sweet. It's just that…” Over John's shoulder, Roxy spotted the entrance to the witch's shack. "Hold up! John, wait right here, alright?"

Without waiting for him to respond, Roxy pulled away and dashed into the witch's house. Confused, John turned to Rose, who was now examining the prone, evil witch.

"Good hit, John." Rose nudged the witch with the toe of her boot. "If I didn't know any better, I'd say that you knocked the sense right out of her."

"Is she going to be okay?" John asked, looking down at Yahtzee as well.

"Who cares? As long as we're far away from here before she wakes up." Rose looked back towards Yahtzee's hut and watched as Roxy struggled to fit something very large through the doorway. A small smile broke the witch's face. "Aw. Look, John. Your girlfriend got you a present."

John followed Rose's gaze and instantly froze when he noticed what Roxy was now carrying in her arms: a large, frosted cake with pink icing that spelt out: 'John X Roxy 4 Eva!' In curvy, messy letters. His eyes grew wide.

"Happy twelve-hour anniversary, Johnny!" Sang Roxy, holding the cake out to him. "I know this is a little ugly-looking, but I literally made it just now. What do you think?!"

By the time Davesprite floated through the trees and located Rose by the candy-made shack, John and Roxy were nowhere to be seen and the large cake lay smashed on the ground.

"Shit what happened here?" Asked Davesprite, examining the unconscious Yahtzee and the destroyed cake. "Looks like some kind of confectionary war-zone. By the way, did you see that skeleton that yells 'Boo!'? That guy's a dick."

Rose turned to Davesprite, but instead of having the same look of distaste she usually reserved for her familiar, she looked quite pleased.

"Nothing too exciting to report here." Rose said with a smile. "Roxy and John just had a little argument. They're currently having a rather intense discussion elsewhere. Would you care for some
Davesprite folded his arms.

"One: you know I don't eat food. Offering me delicious cake is not only insulting to me, but to all sprite kind. Congrats, Lalonde. You're now a huge racist." It was impossible to tell at the time, but Davesprite narrowed his eyes. "Two: what did you do, Rose?"

"Nothing." Rose stooped and dragged her finger through some of the discarded icing. Bringing her finger to her lips, she sucked off the icing and savored the sweet taste. "Nothing at all."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Chapter Twelve: The Vampire Queen of the West

It was about seven-o-clock on a Moonsday night. Rosie had just finished brushing her teeth with wizard toothpaste and was getting all snug in her bed, awaiting another epic tale to be spun from the colloquial rhapsody her father was accustomed to dropping on her young self.

She lay in her bed, under the covers, with her favorite stuffed animal (a plush furbettle) under her arm and waited for her father. He would open the door, wearing that signature smirk and his favorite aviators, say something snappy like: ‘shit was tonight story night? I totally forgot.’ And then take a seat in the chair by her bedside.

It was a ritual, a universal law that was never to be broken. However, after an hour of waiting, Rosie’s father had yet to come.

Confused, and a little pissed, Rosie slid out of bed and made her way into the hall. She padded on bare feet to the living room, trailing her stuffed toy behind her. Her father was nowhere in sight, although the small girl was quick to notice that her mother was sprawled out over the sofa, snoozing quite heavily.

“Hey.” Rosie poked her mother’s face with a stiff index finger. “Yo. Wake up.”

“Wh- What?” Jade pawed at her face. “N- No. Not there, Dave. I’m not in the mood.”

“Mom.” Rosie poked harder. “Mom, it’s me.”

With a low grown, Jade opened her eye a sliver and recognized who was truly disturbing her slumber. With an incredible amount of willpower, commonly found in women of Jade’s caliber, the mother pushed herself up into the sitting position and regarded her daughter.

“What are you doing up, Rosie?” She asked, rubbing her eyes. “I thought you went to bed.”

“I did, but Dad never came to tell me a story.” Rosie clambered up into her mother’s lap. “Where is he?”

“Dad went to go visit Uncle John. He won’t be back until tomorrow morning probably.” Jade, out of reflex, loosely wrapped an arm around her child’s middle. “I’m pretty sure we told you that.”

“Oh yeah.” Now that Rosie thought about it, she did remember her father mentioning his visit to Uncle John. “I guess I forgot.”

“Hmmmmm.” Jade was already beginning to dose off again.

“Hey! I have an idea.” Rosie jabbed her mother in the ribs with her elbow, rousing her again. “Why don’t you tell me a story tonight?”

“A story?”

“Yeah! About you and dad and Uncle John! It’s called the Greatest Witch Ever and even though it’s really stupid, incredibly vulgar, and mildly racist, I really like listening to it!”
Jade was momentarily taken aback. For a moment she simply looked at her daughter with confusion.

“Y- You’re dad has been telling you stories about… us?”

“Yup! How you met and how you defeated all the Evil Mages and all that stuff!”

Jade tightened her grip on her daughter. Rosie couldn’t see it, but her mother’s eyes had suddenly become very distant.

“That isn’t… It’s not…” Jade sighed and ground her teeth. “That story isn’t really for kids. I don’t think your dad should be telling you it.”

“Well, he is! It’s too late, don’t start thinking I’m too young for this stuff.” Rosie twisted in her mother’s lap. “I really wanna know what happens next. Dad sort of left us on a cliffhanger last time.”

Jade was hesitant, as she really didn’t feel comfortable sharing the tales of adventures past. She was a different person then, younger, less inhibited, more reckless. Motherhood had changed her. Her adventuring/monsterslaying/kick-assing days were far behind her.

Yet, as she looked into her daughter’s eyes, full of hope and excitement, she couldn’t find the heart to deny her.

“Fine.” Jade rubbed the final dregs of sleep from her eyes. “Where did Dad leave off?”

“Well, Roxy had just tried to give John a cake and he like flipped shit, smashed the cake, and ran off into the forest or something.”

“My god, you’re already on chapter eleven? Damn.” Jade wracked her brains, thinking back years and years ago. “Okay, well I guess what happened next was…”

John was having a full-blown panic attack. He stumbled through the haunted Forest of Franklin, blindly tripping over roots and logs in an attempt to escape from the horrible, delicious terror that he had been confronted with mere moments prior.

“John!” Roxy called for her boyfriend, wildly crashing through the trees and bushes in an attempt to find him. “What’s the matter, babe! Come on back! I’m sorry for… whatever it is I did!”

Stumbling over his own feet, John staggered out into a clearing and fell to his knees. He was shaking and quivering like a leaf. (Almost like one of those wizard Shake Weight things your dad bought when he was on one of his ‘health kicks’)

Roxy, with her awesome cat-like sense of smell, followed him through the trees and eventually spotted him on the ground.

“John!” She ran to his side. “Are you okay? Come here, baby, let me get a good look at you.”

As she tried to pull him towards her, John recoiled as if he’d been burned by her touch.

“I- I’m fine.” He stammered. “So fine. J- Just give me a second, okay?”

“Tell me what’s wrong, hun.”

John just shook his head in response.

“I- I need to be alone. Could you leave me alone?”
Roxy gaped, frozen in shock. Here she was, having just gone through a ton of trouble to make her boyfriend a nice cake, and he was reacting like she’d just tried to give a sandwich with mayo, mustard, ketchup, and fish hooks on his grandmother’s eyes! It was completely irrational and weird!

The Werecat was having none of it.

“John.” She grabbed him by the cheeks and forced him to face her. “What in the name of Pippin and Merry is wrong with you?”

“C-Cake.” John managed. “Y- You had cake.”

“Well, duh. I made it for you, silly!”

“Why! Do you hate me?”

“Hate you?” Roxy was more surprised and hurt than ever. “How could you possibly think that?! I was trying to do something nice.”

“By making me a cake? Roxy, look at me,” John held his arms wide, presenting himself to his girlfriend. “I’m diabetic! You can’t give me cake!”

“How was I supposed to know that just by looking at you?!”

“You could have asked me!”

“Oh! My bad!” Roxy threw her hands in the air. “Forgive me for not running through the list of chronic diseases during our first date! I should know to always check the blood-glucose level of my bf’s blood! How stupid of me!”

John pulled away from her, angrily rubbing at his arms as if to restore lost warmth.

“You could have killed me.” He muttered quietly.

“Sorry. Damn, I just thought that you liked cake.”

“Seriously?!” John was incredulous. “What ever gave you that idea!?”

“Rose told me that you love cake.” Roxy folded her arms. “Those were her exact words.”

“Rose wouldn’t have told you that. She knows that I hate cake.”

“Well then, are you calling me a liar?”

“I ain’t calling you a truther!”

Suddenly, Roxy jumped to her feet. She glared down at John with a fire in her eyes, intense enough to burn a hole that some paper that a wizard had cast an anti-burn spell on. That is to say, her gaze was pretty intense.

“You know what? Fuck you and your lame-ass diabetes.” She spat.

Jade brought the story to a grinding halt. Had she really just cursed In the presence of her daughter? That was not kosher, by any stretch of the imagination.

However, Rosie didn’t seem to notice at all. In fact, the young girl was so thoroughly enthralled with
the story, it was almost like she hadn’t even noticed the swears at all.

Jade didn’t know whether to be disappointed or pleased. She coughed into her hand and continued, making a better effort to censor herself.

I mean, what really happened was:

“You know what? Forget you and your lame-butt diabetes.” She spat “I’ll see you around, Egbert.”

Then she gave him a pair of upside-down middle fingers…

I mean, she made a capital letter “L” with her fingers, calling John a loser, and stalked away angrily into the forest, leaving him alone, on the ground, still recovering from the intense shock of being confronted with a massive cake in the middle of a spooky woods.

At the edge of the clearing, Rose and Davesprite hid among the thick bushes and watched the scene as it unfolded.

“Yes!” Rose cheered quietly, as she peered through her binoculars.

“You’re a real bitch- I mean, meanie-head, you know that, Lalonde?” Davesprite was looking through his badonkulars, watching Roxy disappear into the woods and not checking out her butt at all. “I hope you’re happy with yourself. You’ve probably just broken up what could have potentially been a very healthy and prosperous relationship.”

“Oh, give me a break. John and Roxy have absolutely zero concrete chemistry.” Rose passed Davesprite his binoculars again. “She’s all fun and spunky and interesting. John is… Well, he’s John! It would never have worked out. In the end, I did them a favor.”

“Keep telling yourself that.” Davesprite sighed. “I suppose you’re going to go swoop in now and act out the part of faithful best-friend/re-potential love interest, huh?”

“Yup. Don’t wait up.” Shoving her way through the bushes, Rose entered the clearing and walked over towards John.

Davesprite simply shook his head and floated away after Roxy, back towards the bonecar.

John, who was lamenting the cruelty of the universe, suddenly became aware that there was someone new standing over him. Looking up, he found himself faced with the violet eyes of the one and only Rose Lalonde, greatest witch ever.

“Oh. Hey, Rose.” He said, looking back at the ground again. “W-What’s up with you?”

“I heard some shouting.” Rose knelt by his side. “Are you okay?”

“I dunno.” John sighed. “I’m pretty sure Roxy and I just had a really big fight. In fact, we might be broken up now.”

“Oh nooooooooo.” Said Rose. “How awful! I knew that rogue was no good.”

“Yeah. I guess you can say that she rogue my heart.”

“... I’m not sure if ‘rogue’ can be used as a verb, but I think I get what you’re trying to say.” Rose tentatively wrapped her arms around John. “Regardless, I want you to know that I’m here for you, alright?”
“Thanks, Rose.” John was starting to feel a whole lot better! “Will you walk with me back to the bonecar?”

“Of course! You don’t even have to ask.”

Taking John by the arm, Rose led him from the clearing and back into the woods. Her mind was abuzz after this most recent victory, swelling her ego to new, dizzying proportions. Not only was she a master witch of the mind, body, and soul, but apparently she possessed the ability to wield magic over the heart too! Needless to say, all this sweet power instantly went to her head.

Back at the bonecar, Roxy was angrily packing her bags.

“I’m outta here.” She said, violently shoving a bedroll into her backpack. “Good luck fighting your mages, guys. I don’t think I should travel with you, not after my fight with John.”

“Where are you going to go?” Jade, the most beautiful and sophisticated woman ever, asked worriedly. “Back to the City of Lakewater?”

“Heck no. There’s nothing left in that town for Werecat rogue like me.” Roxy slung her bag onto her back. “I’m heading north. I hear the Emerald City is, like, one of the coolest towns around.”

“You shouldn’t leave.” Davesprite said, folding his arms. He was well-aware of Rose’s meddling, but thanks to the magical tether he shared with the witch, he was pre-disposed not to rat her out. “Something tells me that John has already gotten over what happened and really wants to apologize.”

“I dunno.” Roxy exhaled deeply and scuffed her boots in the dirt. “I kinda get the feeling that he likes Rose anyways.”

“No!” Jade exclaimed, sharing a nervous glance with Davesprite. “I mean, they’re just friends. You know that.”

However, at that very moment, John and Rose came out of the woods, arm in arm, laughing at some shared, private joke. Roxy caught sight of the happy and smiling pair, and instantly felt sick.

“Tell them I said ‘bye’.” She said, blinking back tears. Then she threw down some ninja-smoke and disappeared with a small poof.

Davesprite and Jade exchanged another glance, both of them not only displeased with the recent acts, but also thoroughly confused. How had everything managed to do a complete one-eighty so quickly?

“Hey, guys.” John approached with Rose still on his arm. “Have either of you seen Roxy?”

Jade and Davesprite looked at each other again, exchanging the third silent conversation in as many minutes. (Your dad and I are just in-sync like that) They both agreed that John must be told the truth, albeit as gently as possible.

“I’m sorry, John. But…” Davesprite rested a hand on his friend’s shoulder. “Your sorry butt just got dumped hardcore ultimate style.”

Jade angrily slapped Davesprite in the arm, disappointed with his tactlessness.

“I think what Davesprite is trying to say, John.” She corrected. “Is that Roxy just needs some time for herself. She said that she was heading north for a bit.”
“All alone?” John grew worried. “Oh man. This sucks! I really liked her…”

“Well she tried to kill you with cake. What can I say? Love is a battlefield.” Rose clapped her hands. “Alright, team! So this Vampire Queen, amirite?”

“What about her?”

“We should probably get going. She isn’t going to slay herself, is she?” Climbing into the driver’s seat of the bonecar, Rose turned the key in the ignition. The powerful, magical engine roared to life. Wow! Jade sure did a good job repairing that engine. Isn’t she the best!?  

“Everyone get in.” Commanded Rose with uncharacteristic excitement. “I thirst for vampire blood!”

Everyone piled in, with varying levels of reluctance and melancholy, and soon the group was off, westward bound once more. As Rose weaved the bonecar in and out of trees, covering ground in record time, John sadly leaned over the side of the bonecar, watching as the ground raced along beneath the magical wheels.

From the passenger’s seat, Jade watched John sigh heavily and just look all around depressed as could be! The Weredog leaned over the consol and confronted Rose quietly:

“He looks really sad. You should say something to him.”

“Like what? Sorry that I broke up you and your girlfriend? Pass.” Rose steered the bonecar around a large boulder. “Let him mourn in peace. When the time is right, I’ll come clean about my feelings and consummate our relationship.”

“What happened to you, Rose?” Jade asked, a little sadly. “I mean, I knew you had the capacity to be a real jerk, but I didn’t think you’d stoop this low.”

Rose shrugged.

“I’m a go-getter. What’s the point of just ‘wanting’ something when you could actually ‘have’ it? It’s the sort of determination I possess that will insure my victory against the Vampire Queen and all of the Mages. It’s why I’m such a great witch. Some would even go as far to say the greatest ever.”

“Yes. How could I forget?” Jade leaned back in her seat. “Rose Lalonde always gets what she wants, even John.”

“It’s for the best.” Rose cast Jade a quick glance before looking back to the road ahead. “You’ll see.”

“I certainly hope so.”

After, like, thirty minutes of driving, Rose brought the bonecar to a halt just outside of the Forest of Franklin. The group found themselves faced with a large, rocky plateau that blotted out the sun above. Directly ahead, in the face of the plateau itself, was carved an ornate tunnel entrance.

“The entrance to the catacombs of Virgo’s Keep.” Rose explained, killing the bonecar engine. “Prepare yourself, companions. We are about to face our most challenging challenge yet.”

“Worse than the Crab King?” Asked John.

“Yup.”

“Worse than the Cool Cats?” Asked Jade, who was still salty about her repeated humiliation at the hands of those dreadful rogues.
“Mhmm.”

“Worse than John and Roxy’s sudden and brutal breakup?” Asked Davesprite, once again displaying a spectacular ability to avoid discretion at all cost.

John let out a little, sad sniffle and immediately changed the subject:

“What’s the plan, Rose? How are we going to beat this Queen of the Vampires?”

Rose drew her wands.

“With some awesome and radical magic, of course.” She said and then confidently led the way into the tunnel.

The Catacombs of Virgo’s Keep are an extensive network of tunnels that supposedly run all the way from the Giant Plateau in the West to Owl Bay in the very South of Skaia. Apparently, ancient, gnome runaway slaves used the tunnels as a sort of underground train station or something, until King Martin Luther King Jr. ended gnome racism in the great slave battle during the year of one hundred and six.

Gnome slavery was one of the darkest periods in Skaia history, a time period where gnomes were forced to do things that they didn’t want to. Such as: work in the pain mine, drink spoiled milk, and break up with their girlfriends. After gnome slavery ended, the Vampire Queen supposedly took control of Virgo’s Keep and its tunnels, utilizing them for her fiendish acts.

The group made their way into the tunnels. Soon, it became pitch black, and Rose was forced to use a flashlight spell to light the way. The group walked and walked for what felt like hours. The walls of the tunnels were covered with gross slime and the ground was evenly sprinkled with clumps of cool-looking stalagmites.

“Look at this one, John” Said Davesprite, trying to cheer up his mopey friend. “It sort of looks like Roxy- Oh… Oh wait. Never mind. Forget I said anything.”

John sighed. The stalagmite did look like Roxy.

Jade quickly tried her hand.

“Look at this one though! It’s a cone!” Sure enough, the stalagmite did, in fact, resemble a cone.

“Isn’t that cool, John?”


“Wow! It really does!”

“Wait a minute…”

Suddenly, the vampire that was posing as a stalagmite leapt into the light of Rose’s wand with a feral hiss. The vampire had grey skin and glowing, red eyes. Sharp talons protruded from his fingers and its white fangs glimmered in the dim light.

“Sup, losers!” Snarled the vampire. “Yall best get out of here before you get cut!”

“I’ll show you a cut!” Davesprite swung his magical sword and cleaved the vampire in two.

“HAHAHAHA!” Cackled the vampire as the slash across his stomach healed itself. “Your poo poo weapons are nothing to my vampire healing factor- OH GOD MY HEART!!”
As he was talking, Rose blasted him in the chest with a powerful heart attack spell, giving the vampire a severe heart attack and killing him instantly over the course of the next few minutes.


Sure enough, the further they traveled into the catacombs, the more vampires they encountered. Rose’s heart attack spells were effective, yes, but casting them took precise aim and concentration. More than once, a vampire dodged her spell and attacked with impressive strength.

“HAHAHAHA! Nice spell, witch.” Laughed one vampire as Rose’s spell missed its mark. “But it’s gonna take more than that to bring me down- OH GOD MY SPINE!!!”

As he was talking, Jade performed this really neat flip and struck his vertebrae with a roundhouse kick, instantly turning his bones to powder and paralyzing him from the neck down.

“Hey come on, guys.” Called the vampire as the group walked away. “Yall know that I was just playin, right?”

However, our group did not heed his words, but continued to search for the Vampire Queen herself. After, like, two hours of that bullcrap, a strange sound began to fill the tunnel, echoing of the walls and reverberating intensely. It was a sharp *clack clack clack*, like thousands of type writers at once.

Rounding a corner, our heroes were suddenly faced with a large cavern, not unlike the one they discovered whilst facing the Crab King. Covering the floor of the cavern, were hundreds upon thousands of sewing machines, each manned by a vampire who was churning out colorful fabric with impressive speed. The walls and ceiling were draped with beautiful tapestries of cloth and sitting on a very elegant throne in the middle of it all, was the Vampire Queen herself.

“Oh my undead rings.” Gasped John. “She’s… She’s… beautiful.”

And she was. The Vampire Queen’s grey skin was beautifully complimented with her flowing red gown, her dark hair was perfectly sculpted into a fancy do, and a pair of stylish candy-corn-colored horns sat atop her head.

“Beautiful or not, she must be defeated.” Rose readied her wands and called loudly above the *clitter clatter* of machines: “Hey! Hey, Vampire Queen! Look over here!”

The Vampire Queen, who had been examining a really well-organized portfolio of evening wear, looked up and noticed the newcomers.

“Intruders!” She gasped, rising to her feet. “How did you manage to breach my inner sanctum? And in those outfits of all things!”

“We walked in through the main entrance,” John explained, pointing behind him. “And what’s wrong with our outfits?”

“Oh! Where do I even begin?!” The Vampire Queen regally stepped down from her throne and weaved her way through the many sewing machines to reach our group. She picked at John’s shirt disdainfully. “Flannel? In early winter? Egad! It’s much too early to have this much blue in one place.”

She turned to Jade next.

“Is that a sleeveless leather vest?! Ugh!” She poked at Jade’s middle. “Where’s the femininity? The
color? The shape?! It’s a wonder you’ve lasted this long with such dreadful attire! AND YOU!!!” She pointed a shaking finger at Davesprite. “O-Orange?!?!”

“I make it work.” Shrugged Davesprite, adjusting his sweet shades that Jade totally didn’t find attractive at the time.

“This is a true travesty, a dishonor among the highest of variety, a true blot of red on an otherwise pearly white…” She trailed off when she caught sight of Rose. “Well, well, well… What have we here?”

The Vampire Queen examined everything, from Rose’s robes, to the skirt beneath, to the knee-high boots and the purple headband, and even the tiny bit of mascara she wore to make her eyes really pop!

“You, my sweet, are a true diamond in the rough.” The Vampire Queen smiled at Rose. “Tell me, darling, what is your name?”

“Rose Lalonde.”

“Well, Rose Lalonde.” The Queen trailed a finger up Rose’s arm. “It’s… refreshing to see a woman with such refined taste. It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

“We’re here to kill you.” John blurted suddenly.

The Vampire Queen froze. She turned and examined the group, for the first time noticing the deadly weapons possessed by each.

“Oh my. Really?” She laughed nervously. “Why would you ever want to do that?”

“I require your Key of Fate.” Explained Rose. “My ultimate goal is to defeat the Dragon Mistress of the North. You, Queen of Vampires, are standing in my path towards glory and must therefore be eliminated. I challenge thee to a Duel of Wizardly Strife!”

“Pass.”


“I’m a pacifist.” The Vampire Queen pulled out a small hand mirror and reapplied her lipstick. “If you want to fight, go curse out one of the drunken fools the local tavern. I’m much too elegant and civilized for such barbaric pastimes.”

“Oh, Rose.” She sighed, snapping her small mirror closed with a sharp snap. “You should not have done that.”

Before the Vampire Queen could respond, Rose stepped forward and, in a fit of anger, attempted to shove away the Vampire Queen’s hand mirror. What happened instead was that the Queen’s jade lipstick was inadvertently smeared up her cheek.

The Vampire Queen gasped and looked at her reflection, examining the screw-up.

“Uh, you do know that you live in a cave, right?” Davesprite asked.

With incredible speed, the Vampire Queen twisted her lipstick tube and transformed it into a motherfucking chainsaw… I mean, a really cool chainsaw! She revved the powerful weapon and, with a bloodcurdling screech,
leapt at Rose.

A split second before she was surely sliced in half, Rose leapt out of the way and responded with a quick volley of spells. The duel was on. As the sexy Vampire Queen and the comely Witch battled it out, weaving in and out of sewing machines, stabbing and hacking at each other, John, Davesprite, and Jade awkwardly stood there and watched.

“Hey,” John caught the attention of the nearest vampire minion, who was halfway through sewing a fancy-looking pair of pantaloons. “Aren’t you guys, like, going to fight us or something?”

“Psshh. Heck no.” Replied the vampire. “Fighting interlopers is not in my job description. I don’t get paid nearly enough for that crap.”

“Wait a minute.” A nearby vampire leaned into the conversation. “You’re getting paid for this? I thought we were bound by some unspoken law that governed all undead vampirical beings!”

“What? No. No, that’s not true at all.”

“Well then forget this!” Cried the vampire as he overturned his workstation. “I’m out of here!”

And then he walked out of the cavern, became hopelessly lost in the catacombs, and slowly starved to death over the course of the next three months.

Nobody cared.

The Vampire Queen deflected one of Rose’s spells with her chainsaw and leapt forward, bringing her deadly weapon down for a mighty strike. At the last second, Rose raised her wands and blocked the attack. Their respective weapons clashed in a shower of sparks, illuminating the cave with a haunting, yet awesome, lighting effect.

“I want to help her,” Said Jade. “But then again, I kinda wanna see how this turns out on it’s own.”

“Do you think Rose is going to lose?” Asked John with concern.

“ Heck no. I bet she burns this prissy vampire to a crisp with her next spell.” Answered Davesprite, confidently. “Look! Here it comes.”

Rose twirled her wand and fired a powerful flame spell directly at the Vampire Queen. As the flames bared down on the Evil Mage, it seemed as if the duel was about to brought to a quick and decisive victory. However, as the flames consumed the Queen, there were no screams, but instead a shrill laugh that filled the cavern.

The flames dissipated to reveal the Vampire Queen, unharmed by Rose’s spell.

“Nice one, Rose Lalonde.” Commented the mage, as she buffed her nails on her dress. “But you’ll have to do better than that to kill a vampire.”

Rose gritted her teeth.

“Then bring it, you blood-sucking fiend!”

The two clashed again, fighting with all of their might, and dueling with all of their spirit. It was an even match, with each combatant either blocking, dodging, or parrying they’re opponents attack. The battle probably would have gone on forever, if not for what happened next:

The Vampire Queen’s chainsaw met Rose’s wands and each of the women held their ground. They
were locked in a stalemate, frozen in the middle of the heat of battle.

Struggling to hold her ground, Rose screamed at the Vampire Queen:

“I’ll fucking kill you!” She shouted.

“I’ll fucking *kiss* you!” Responded the Queen.

Then the pair threw aside their weapons and met in a furious embrace, locking lips, and initiating the hottest make-out session you ever did see. Everyone within attendance got a little dizzy from all the lovey dove hot sweet smexy sexiness that was taking place.

“What a strange turn of events.” Commented John as he watched Rose and Vampire Queen round first and then steal second base. “And yet, I can’t find the heart to be upset by this.”

“I think I like girls now.” Admitted Jade, tugging at her collar.

“Eh.” Davesprite shrugged. “I’ve seen better.”

“Really?” John was intrigued. “What’s better than this?”

“Have you ever seen two minotaurs going at it?”

“No.”

“Well then. Let me tell you friend. When two minotaurs get going…” Davesprite leaned over and whispered in John’s ear.

John stiffened and let out a tiny ‘eep!’.

“Oh me, oh my.” He said as Davesprite pulled away. “I think I’m getting the vapors!”

“You think two minotaurs consummating their relationship is hot? I’ve seen something waaaay better than that.” Jade leaned in close. “Have you ever heard of a 169?”

“What’s that?”

“It’s when two people 69 and a third person just stands there and *watches.*”

“Oh geez.” Davesprite shivered. “Don’t tell me you’re into that, Harley. I may just have to call your daddy.”

Jade giggled.

“Good luck. My dad is dead!”

John felt pretty sure that that most recent revelation was sort of a mood killer. However, with Rose and the Vampire Queen still dueling with tongues, he felt that he could recover.

Down below the pair of sorceresses continued to kiss.

“You kiss like a punk bitch!” Spat Rose, as she pulled away momentarily.

“You kiss like a *double* punk bitch!” Snarled the Vampire Queen before she recaptured Rose’s lips with hers.

This went on for like two hours.
Eventually Rose could take it no more and fell away from the Vampire Queen, weakened by the fierce lip smushing that had taken place. The Vampire Queen stood over Rose, victorious.

“Nicthe job, Lalonde.” Glaoted the Vampire Queen, now with a lisp. “But it’sth time for you to be sthlayed!”

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that.” Replied Rose, grinning up from her position on the ground.

“What are you sthaying? I won!” The Vampire Queen knelt and grabbed Rose by the neck, holding her still. “Prepare to have your blood sthucked!”

“How will you suck my blood,” Rose opened her mouth, revealing a pair of pearly-white fangs sitting on her tongue. “Without your fangs?”

The Vampire Queen’s eyes widened. She put a hand to her mouth and, sure enough, found her precious fangs to be gone.

Rose had kissed them right out of her mouth!

“NOOOOOOOOOO!!!” Wailed the Vampire Queen, burying her face in her hands. “Thisth can’t be!"

“But it is.” Rose climbed to her feet and pocketed the fangs in her satchel. “Face it, Queen of Vampires. Your reign has come to an end. Hand over your Key of Fate and perhaps I’ll let you live.”

“I- I mustn’t!” Sobbed the Queen. “If I give you my Key of Fate, I’ll be kicked out of the Evil Magesth of Stthaia for sthure!”

“Well you should have thought about that before you challenged me.”

“You challenged me!!”

“Whatever!” Rose kicked the Vampire Queen onto her back and pointed her wands at her threateningly. “Key! Now!”

Still sobbing uncontrollably, the Vampire Queen reached into her dress pocket and produced a tiny, silver key. Rose snatched it from her hand and raised the Key of Fate victoriously into the air as a wicked guitar solo played in the background!

“Nice one, Rose!” Cheered John as he ran to her side. “That’s two mages down and two more to go!”

“Stho confident!” Scoffed the Vampire Queen from where she lay. “You may hathve defeated me, Rose Lalonde, but you’ll nethver defeat the Bee Lord!”

“That’s what the last bitch-ass evil mage said.” Rose lifted her wands. “Do you know what happened to him?”

“No.”

In answer, Rose blasted the Vampire Queen with a powerful bullet spell that punched a hole through her chest, killing her instantly a few seconds later.

“Oh. Stho that’sth what happened.” Gasped the Vampire Queen. Then she died.

“Suck a hundred demon dicks in the underworld, you sexy bitch.”
Davesprite and Jade walked over to join John and Rose, together they all stood around the Vampire Queen’s corpse.

“I’m really proud of you, Rose.” Said John, stepping closer to the witch.

“Thanks, John.” Rose stepped closer to him as well. “Even though you really didn’t do much of anything at all, I really appreciate your support.”

Tentatively, like two shy schoolchildren, the pair met in a chaste kiss. In that moment, fireworks erupted in John’s brain and Rose realized something earth-shattering:

She did not like John Egbert.

She was just jealous of all the attention he was giving Roxy and wanted it for herself. She truly was the greatest bitch ever.

They separated after a moment.


“Shit.” Muttered Rose.

“Hey, guys!” Jade drew their attention. “I thought that vampires couldn’t be killed by bullet spells.”

“They can’t.” Rose quickly pulled away from John, adjusting her headband nervously. “She’ll probably come back to life in a few seconds.”

“What?!” Exclaimed John, still high off the kiss. “We have to make sure that doesn’t happen!”

Everyone looked down at the Vampire Queen.

“I have an idea.” Said Davesprite.

And then they cut out the Vampire Queen’s heart, ground it into a powder, rolled the powder into a massive joint, and got high as hell. And you know that when you smoke a Vampire Queen’s heart, that shit is next level.

END OF PART TWO.

By the time that Jade finished the last sentence, Rosie had already fallen asleep in her arms. Good thing too. Towards the end there, Jade sort of lost track of her self-imposed censorship. The truth is just too undeniable!

“I hope you caught all that.” Said Jade as she stood, gently cradling her daughter in her arms. “Because there’s no way I’m retelling that mess.”

She carried Rosie down the hall and to her bedroom, depositing the young girl on her bed and tucking her in snugly. As she was finishing up, the sound of the front door opening and closing could be heard from the main room.

Jade quietly left Rosie’s room and returned to the living room just in time to see Dave shrugging off his traveling cloak.

“Hey, babe.” Smirked Dave. “I know I said that I’d get home tomorrow, but this wizard with a flying carpet offered me a ride and there’s no way in hell that I’m saying ‘no’ to a flying carpet ride,
“Amirite?”

“You’re telling Rosie about the greatest witch ever.” Jade said, ignoring his words.

Dave froze. He had been super busted.

“Uh… Yes?” He stepped forward and took his wife by the hands. “It’s just for fun though, a little something to put her to sleep easier. I’m keeping it strictly PG, maybe a little PG-13 if I can’t avoid it. Alright, maybe it goes full-blown R sometimes. I ain’t sugarcoating shit.”

“Dave.” Jade gripped her husband’s hands tightly. “You shouldn’t tell her about that stuff. That story… That story does not have a happy ending.”

“I dunno.” Dave pulled Jade closer with one arm and gestured around the home with the other. “This seems pretty happy to me.”

“You know what I’m talking about.” Jade pushed herself gently away from. For a moment they simply stood there, feet apart, in silence. “I’m going to bed. There are leftovers in the wizard fridge.”

And then she walked away, leaving Dave alone in the darkened living room.

Chapter End Notes

That’s not the last we’ll see of Roxy. She’ll be around again. It will probably be a while before I start posting the next “season” of this shit, as I still have like three and a half chapters left of it to write. I dunno when I’ll start posting, but let’s shoot for a week from today, so Dec. 14th. It might be sooner, probably later. I dunno.

I have to finish up John: Try To Understand and study for finals, so you know.

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Chapter Thirteen: Jade Goes Through Puberty

When Rose, John, Davesprite, and Jade finally exited the catacombs of Virgo’s Keep, it was just beginning to break dawn across the land of Skaia. The birds were singing, the wind was blowing, and our heroes were still high as a fuck.

The bonecar was parked where they had left it, under the shade of a nearby tree. Quickly, everyone piled in and Rose gunned the engine.

“Hold on, guys.” She said as she peeled out. “There’s no time to lose!”

They drove through the Forest of Franklin, over a wooden bridge, through a stone tunnel and back to the City of Lakewater. Five minutes later, the group was sitting in the booth of a wizard pizza parlor, dining on some delicious wizard pizza.

“Do you ever think about hands?” John examined his own fingers “They’re like… so fucking weird.”

Jade was furiously ripping into a piece of meat lover’s wizard pizza and was therefore indisposed to answer her friend’s question. Rose, on the other hand, was busily plotting their course south. In order to reach the Bee Lord’s lair in a timely manner they’d have to travel through the deadly Moonbear Desert and the famous Owl Bay, where the Fuchsia Kingdom ruled.

“I mean,” John continued. “Is the thumb a finger or not? Do I have eight fingers or ten? Rose?”

“Hmmm.” Rose reached for a slice of wizard pizza, careful to keep her maps clean.

“Are you listening to me?”

“Mhmmm.”

“What do you think?”

“About what?”

“Oh never mind.” John sighed. “It’s not important.”

Davesprite looked across the table at where John and Rose sat. They weren’t acting like a couple of people who had just passionately kissed mere hours before. Rose was a little withdrawn, focused on her maps, whilst John watched her warily out of the corner of his eye.

Hadn’t Rose been working and waiting for an opportunity to hook up with John? Now that Roxy was out of the way, surely she’d want to pursue a relationship. At the moment though, it didn’t look
that way at all.

“I’m gonna take a piss.” Davesprite said, sliding out of the booth. “Rose.”

“Hmmm?”

“Rose, come with me.”

The witch looked up from her map, confusion reflection on her’s, Jade’s, and John’s face.

“Uh… why would I go with you to the restroom? You don’t even pee. You’re a sprite.”

“Just come on, Rose.” Taking her by the hand, Davesprite pulled her from the booth and towards the restroom.

There weren’t any type of health requirements for restaurants back in those days. The restroom at the wizard pizza parlor was a disgusting mess and most of the walls were covered in erotic graffiti, racial slurs, and a couple of phone numbers left by orc babes who were looking for a quickie.

Rose was not in the mood for this.

“Davesprite, what the hell is the matter with you?” She demanded once they were alone. “Why are we in this disgusting place?”

“Because I got some questions.” Davesprite jabbed a stiff finger into Rose’s chest. “Why are you giving John the cold shoulder?”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.” Rose folded her arms and turned away. “John and I are perfectly fine. You’ll be hard-pressed to find a couple of party members as close as we.”

“I thought you and him were an item now.”

“We… are. Kinda. I don’t know.” Rose sighed and messaged her forehead.

“What the fuck? Isn’t that why you ruined his relationship with Roxy and smooched him back in Virgo’s Keep?”

“I- I came to a realization then.” Rose was suddenly nervous. She twisted her fingers anxiously as she spoke. “It appears as if my attraction to John was merely spurred by his infatuation with Roxy. Before then, I was unsure what my feelings were for him or even if I had any at all. When the Werecat rogue was here and I saw them together, I just got so... upset. I’ve never felt that way before about anything.”

“Well what happened?”

“Well, now that Roxy is gone and I have John to myself, I don’t really know how I feel.”

Davesprite groaned.

“Holy shit. You have got to be the greatest bitch who ever lived.” He shook his head. “You can’t treat people like that. Don’t you know anything? Friend aren’t pets or toys that can be swapped out and played with for your enjoyment. I get it, you’re a high and mighty witch with amazing powers, but you don’t know anything about people or friends.”

Sighing once more, Rose turned and leaned against the nasty sink, gazing into the grime-coated mirror. This was a bizarre scenario for the witch, one that, as previously mentioned, she had never
been confronted with before. What made this situation even more strange was the fact that Davesprite of all people was the one talking sense.

“I am a bitch.” She spoke, whilst staring into her own violet eyes. “And what I did to John is unforgivable. You’re right.” Rose turned back to Davesprite. “I’ll make it up to him, I promise. I’ve just never attempted to have relationship like this before with anyone. I have to work up to it. Who knows? If we start small, maybe I’ll fall for him the old fashion way?”

“You better. That dude’s put up with a lot of shit because of you.” As Davesprite spoke, a talking Red-winged Crow fluttered through the door.

“Oh shit.” Said the Red-winged Crow, when he spotted Davesprite and Rose. “Uh… am I interrupting something.”

“No. we were just leaving.” Replied Rose.

“Good. Hurry up, because I got a date soon.” The Red-winged Crow flew to the sink and perched on the edge. “There’s going to be lots of sex. Also, the date’s taking place in this nasty restroom so yall got to get the fuck out.”

When Rose and Davesprite rejoined John and Jade at the booth, almost all the wizard pizza had been eaten. Judging by the mountain of crumbs around Jade’s area and the ring of red, wizard pizza sauce around her lips, it wasn’t hard to figure out who’d done most of the heavy lifting.

“Guys, we need to order another wizard pizza.” Said the Weredog as soon as Rose and Davesprite reclaimed their seats.

“What?! You’ve already eaten like four!” Gasped Rose.

“Yeah. I know, but I’m still reeeeaaaally hungry.” Jade hugged her middle for emphasis. “Please, Rose. I promise that I’ll pay you back!”

“Alright. Fine.” Rose summoned the wizard pizza parlor waiter and ordered another super meat lover’s wizard pizza for Jade. After a few minutes the pizza arrived.

As Jade ravenously devoured piece after piece, John slowly reached out and attempted to yoink the tiniest sliver of a slice for himself. Suddenly, Jade snarled and lashed out, nipping at John’s wrist with her sharp, Weredog fangs.

“Shit!” John gasped, quickly retracting his bloodied hand. “Jade, what the hell?!”


“Bad, Jade.” Rose rolled up her map and bopped the other girl on the nose. “Very, very bad.”

“She bit me!” John was furiously pressing napkins to his bleeding hand. “I can’t believe it.”

Jade shook as if she was coming out of a trance and looked from John’s bleeding hand, to his white face, and to the half a dozen empty pizza trays sitting before her on the table. Rose, John, and Davesprite watched her warily.

Then Jade started crying.

“I’m sorry!” She wailed, shoving Davesprite out of the booth so that she could get out. “E-Excuse me, please.”
The heroes watched the Weredog as she sprinted from the wizard pizza parlor and out the front doors. Davesprite floated off the ground and brushed himself off.

“Well, that was weird.” He said, reclaiming his seat.

“Do you think she’s okay?” Asked John.

Rose shrugged. She was stroking her chin and staring after her friend with a curious expression. Irregular eating habits, acts of violence, sudden mood swings. There was only one conclusion that Rose could reach based off of Jade’s strange behavior.

“Guys,” She said, slamming her palm on the table. “I think Jade is going through puberty.”


“Puberty,” Rose defined. “The change of life, the entrance to womanhood, the beginning of the end.”

“Yeah. Yeah, I get it, but I thought Jade was well past puberty.” John frowned. “Isn’t she like… twenty something?”

“Weredogs mature at a different rate compared to other magical creatures and humans.” The witch smoothed her map over the table once more and began to study it.

Davesprite, who had been staring after Jade this whole time, turned back to the table with concern evident on his orange, shaded face.

“Is there anything we can do to help her?” He asked.

Roes traced a line on her map before answering.

“I have… an idea, but I don’t know for sure whether or not the effort will be worthwhile.” She answered.

“Worthwhile? Rose, if it helps Jade then we have to do it.” John leaned over her shoulder to examine the map as well and saw Rose trace a circle around one dot in particular. “What’s Wooftown?”

“One of the most well-known Weredog settlements.” Rose answered with a sigh. “It’s one of the few places I can think of where we could take Jade to receive help. However, it is in the complete opposite direction of the Bee Lord’s lair in the south.”

“Well, we don’t have any choice.” Davesprite floated from his booth. “We’re going to Wooftown.”

With that decided, our group exited the booth again and made to exit the wizard pizza parlor through the front door. However, before they could make it, a sexy lady gnome burst from the bathroom followed by the Red-winged Crow.

“Aww come on, baby!” Cawed the crow as he flew after his girlfriend. “You know I was just playin!”

No one knows what that was about.

Anyways, Rose, John, and Davesprite found Jade sitting on the hood of their bonecar looking sad as fuck. She had her head buried in her knees, but looked up as her friends approached.

“Oh. Hey, guys.” She said, wiping quickly at her eyes. “John! I’m so sorry. I don’t know what came over me!”
“It’s alright.” Said John, still bleeding profusely. He patted her on the knee in what he hoped was a comforting manner. “I know it wasn’t your fault now.”

“It wasn’t?” Asked Jade in confusion. She wasn’t exactly sure how you could accidentally sink your Weredog teeth into your friend’s hand.

“That’s right, Jade.” Agreed Rose with a nod. “We’ve identified your plight as puberty and decided to help you overcome it by traveling to Wooftown and seeking aid from the Weredogs who live there.”

“Really?!” Jade’s eyes lit up. “So that’s what’s wrong with me? Just the change of life? Do you think the Weredogs in Wooftown will be able to help me?”

“They’ll certainly know more on the subject than us. If I’m being honest, the school of animal-tranformalicia is one that I’ve explored to the minimal degree. This small detour might be educational for me as well.”

“But…” Jade frowned. “Aren’t you worried about going to fight the Bee Lord as soon as possible?”

“I- I think that can wait,” Rose smiled slightly. “For a friend.”

Jade broke into a wide grin, all traces of tears gone from her beautiful face.

“Aw! You guys!” Jade leaped from the bonecar and tackle-hugged her three friends, squeezing them tightly. “You are the best! Thank you so much for this. I’ll make it up to all of you, I promise.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Davesprite patted her on the back.

“Yeah. It’s what friends are for!” Added John.

“Well, then,” Jade pulled away excitedly. “What are we waiting for!? Let’s go meet some Weredogs!”

Together, everyone piled into the bonecar, and then Rose peeled out, speeding off into the wilderness in the direction of Wooftown. John was once more sitting in the passenger seat, acting as navigator and manager of the radio. As he turned up the smooth-flowing jams of Holland Oat’s latest hit single, he leaned over to Rose.

“Don’t worry about this being too big a detour, Rose.” He said, slipping his hand onto her knee. “We’ll have Jade sorted out and be back on track in no time, trust me.”

Rose looked away from the road momentarily, looking first to John’s smiling face and then to his hand upon her knee. Her robe was open and her skirt had ridden up slightly. That meant there was skin against skin contact, the likes of which is not acceptable between two people claiming to be ‘just friends’.

John’s hand was cold against her leg and Rose shivered, but resolved not to order him to remove it. If she was going to figure out whether or not she could legitimately like him, then she’d have to get used to stuff such as physical contact. Plus, the longer the touched, the better it started to feel.

It had been a long time since Rose had done something this mundanely romantic with anyone. Well, she had kissed the Vampire Queen and John, of course, but this simple leg touch was just so… domestic. It was alien territory.

And maybe, just a little bit, she liked it.
Talk about confusing, amirite? One second she’s claiming not to feel anything from John, then the next she’s getting flustered over a simple leg touch.

Women! It’s nearly impossible to understand what happens in that labyrinth of a brain they have. Seriously, it’s like there’s a little David Bowie in their heads, singing “Dance magic dance” on repeat as he’s walking up walls and shit.

Don’t get me wrong, I respect and love women. It’s just that most men don’t have the mental processing capacity to understand what the fuck is going on with them most of the time. If there’s one thing I’ve learned from marriage, Rosie, it’s that communication is key.

Anyways, as Rose drove and got felt up by John, Davesprite and Jade sat in the back seat in awkward silence. The sprite had been well-aware of his attraction to the Weredog pretty much the first moment he saw her through the lenses of his binoculars. Now, when she was in distress due to the changes taking place in her body, he felt nothing but worry and affection for her.

“Hey, Jade.” He reached over and tapped her on the shoulder with his ghost hand. “Whatever happens later, I don’t want you to be scared. Like John said, we’re your friends and that means we’re here for you no matter, what?”

Jade smiled and nodded.

“I know. Thanks, Davesprite.”

Davesprite swallowed.

“You, uh… Haha.” He chuckled nervously. So fucking uncool. “You can call me ‘Dave’. If you want, I mean.”

“Dave.” Jade repeated, feeling the weight of the name on her tongue. “Alright, is that what you want?”

“That would be nice, yeah. I mean, I guess. Whatever.” Davesprite shrugged and turned away, sinking further into his seat.

What the hell was this crazy sprite doing? He was supposed to be the coolest, ghostly fuck around and here he was acting like a total loser, like a regular John. So what if he was called Davesprite or Sprite or douchebag all the time? That’s what he was.

Jade leaned over and hugged him quickly, startling him.

“Dave it is.” She said warmly. “You can keep calling me Jade if you want.”

“Yeah. Yeah, no problem.”

Then she pulled away, back to a respectable distance and returned to sticking her head out the window and enjoying the passing breeze as it flapped her lips. Davesprite smiled.

About an hour later, Rose brought the bonecar to halt just on the outskirts of Wooftown. Next to the main road was welcoming sign that read: “Welcome to Wooftown! The fluffiest town around!”

Jade was finally home and I’m talking like home-home, not that bullshit Sun Clan island that she lived on all her life. She was finally among people who were just like her.

“Come on, guys! What are we waiting for?!” The Weredog scampered out of the bonecar and
sprinted full-speed into Wooftown. Rose made sure that the bonecar was properly secured, before walking with John and Davesprite at a much more reasonable pace.

“I really hope this works out.” Said John a little anxiously. “Jade will be crushed if the Weredogs here are mean or can’t help her or…”

“Or nothing.” Davesprite cut him off. “This is going to work. It has to.”

“Weredogs,” Began Rose. “From what I know, are typically friendlier to their own kind and others. They’re a loyal, honest, and spiritual people.”

“Unlike Werecats who bake devilish pastries and dump you like a sack of useless stonenuts.” Muttered John ruefully.

Stonenuts aren’t actually a real thing. It’s a prank that you pull on people where you give them a rock and tell them that it’s a nut. Then you laugh when they try to eat it and end up breaking their teeth or choking on it. It was a cruel trick that works about sixty percent of the time every time.

I know that statistic doesn’t make much sense to us now, but then again, back in those days there wasn’t a whole lot that actually did make sense in a backwards fantasy world like Skaia. Just go with it.

And if anyone offers you stonenuts, don’t trust them. They’re sick fucks.

Anyways, Rose, John, and Davesprite caught up with Jade in the town square. All around, Weredogs of different sizes and breeds were walking around all over the place. Some were walking each other with leashes, playing tug of war with a dish towel, or just frolicking through a grassy park nearby.

Jade was blown away.

“I’m blown away!” She gasped, spinning in a slow circle. “I don’t even know where to begin!”

“I think here is a good place to start.” Said a bespectacled old man with a thin, curly mustache. “Welcome to Wooftown! Would you like a free sample of licorice?”

“Would I ever?!” Jade happily began munching on the free licorice, as the man continued to speak.

“Here in Wooftown, everything is beautiful and nothing hurts! We are an equal opportunity community, although we can’t deny that we do have a high population of Weredogs.” The man shook Rose, John, and Davesprite’s hands in quick succession. “I don’t like to be called mayor, even though that’s my official title. You may call me Grandpa or just Jake if you want to be even more informal!”

“I love you, Grandpa!” Jade cried, hugging Jake around the neck.

The old man laughed whilst John and Rose exchanged pleased looks. Turns out that this detour seemed to be well worth the effort.

“Now, what can I do for you young travelers?” Asked Jake once Jade pulled away. “Are you looking for a good night’s sleep? How about a warm meal? Some fresh clothes and supplies?”

“Those all sound lovely, uh- Jake.” Rose said. “But we are on a tight schedule. Therefore we won’t be staying long. The reason we came today is we seek assistance in a personal matter. It is my hypothesis that Jade,” Rose gestured to her Weredog friend. “Is experiencing puberty.”
“Oh! You don’t say.” Jake cast a glance around the town square. Then said: “Follow me.”

Our heroes followed Jake from the crowded town square across the street to a large brick building, presumably Town Hall. After leading them to a private office, Jake shut the door and crossed to a handsome mahogany desk that was probably really expensive, but really tied the whole room together.

“Take a seat, young lass.” Cheered Jake, patting the surface of his desk. Jade instantly hopped up and was examined by the mayor of Wooftown. “Go ahead and give me a big smile. Yes, like that. Now say grrrr.”

Jake checked Jade’s teeth, ears, nose, hearing, reflexes, memory, just about anything you can think. He ran a blood test for heart worms that came up negative, checked that she was up to date on her vaccinations, and finally slapped her on the back.

“Seems to me like you’re a one hundred percent healthy Weredog.” Jake said proudly, prompting Jade off of the desk. He handed her a lollipop and a sticker for being such a good patient.

“So what’s the verdict, Grandpa?” Asked Jade around her lollipop. “Am I going through the change of life?”

Rose, John, and Davesprite, who had been standing and floating in the corner respectively during this process, watched as Jake began to pace. He stroked his mustache and then came to a stop before the group.

“Yes, Jade. I would say without the shadow of a doubt that you’ve reached that special age for all Weredogs where you start to notice some… changes. You’ll become more aggressive,” Jade cast an apologetic look at John. “You will become more sexually stimulated around people you’re attracted to.” Jade glanced at Davesprite, wondering if his ghostly self counted as a boy or not. “And finally, you’ll start to notice a discharge of blood from your…”

“All right, all right. I think we get it.” Rose interrupted. “What can we do to help Jade through this transitional period?”

Jake smiled then.

“Well, quite a lot actually! Since Weredogs mature so late into their life, the process is much easier to understand and manage. There are two well-known and tested methods for alleviating the negative effects of pubescent growth.” Jake counted off on his fingers. “Fucking or fighting.”

Everyone was stunned into silence.

“I’m sorry, but… what?” Asked John in confusion.

“She can either bang another Weredog or beat one up, that will get all the hormones out of her system and improve her mood.”

Jade considered her options, all there Weredogs that she saw walking around outside were pretty good looking in her opinion. However, she was the type of girl who valued an emotional connection over a physical one, therefore:

“All right. Whose throat am I going to rip out?” She asked.

“You’re in luck! We have around half a dozen other Weredogs in town with situations similar to yours!” Jake took her by the shoulder and guided her from the office. Her friends followed close
behind. “I’m sure we could fit you into the strife program. We’ll have that unbridled hormonal rage beaten out of you in no time. All you need to do is sign this form right here.” Reaching into a desk drawer, Jake pulled out clipboard and passed it to Jade.

As the Weredog read over the form, Rose stepped up to her side.

“Are you sure that you want to do this, Jade?” She asked. “All of this is happening a little fast. Perhaps you should think this through.”

“What’s to think through?” Jade sighed the form and passed it back to Jake. “This will be easy, maybe even fun. Don’t’ worry!”

As Jake led the group out of town hall and back into the square, John adjusted his pace so that he walked next to Rose.

“Does this seem like a good idea to you?” He asked.

“I don’t know honestly.” Rose shrugged. “Let’s look at the facts. Jake knows much more about Jade and her afflictions than we do, plus she seems to be into it herself.”

“But don’t you think it’s dangerous for a bunch of excitable Weredogs to fight like this?”

“If you’re worried about Jade being hurt, do not fret. She has beaten two out of the Four Evil Mages of Skaia, after all. She will be able to hold her own.”

“Well, okay. If you say so. I’d just prefer it if no one got hurt.”

“I’m sure it will be fine, uh- babe…” Rose cautiously reached out and laced her fingers with his. It was a rare sign of affection from Rose and her first purposeful attempt to establish their relationship.

John stared down at their fingers: his then hers, then his, then hers, over and over until it seemed to stretch into infinity. In the future, he would look back on this moment fondly, as one of the few where Rose showed him genuine, mutual, romantic affection.

It was real sweet.

Anyways, back on track, Jake brought Jade to the grassy park next to the town square where about half a dozen Weredogs were gathered. They were all about Jade’s age, with the same obvious symptoms that had affected Jade.

One of the Weredog boys was gnawing on his own arm like it was a chicken leg, while a Weredog girl was humping the nearest tree so hard and fast that the damn thing caught fire and exploded, raining pinecones and bird’s eggs onto the assembled crowd. One of the bird eggs flew into John’s open mouth and he was soooo mad.

“Tickets to the Weredog fight!” Yelled a girl carrying a box labeled: ‘give me money please’. “Only one gold piece per person.”

“Why do we have to pay for this?” Demanded Davesprite. “It’s completely out in the open. Anyone can walk up and see it. Also Weredogs are always fighting. This whole ticketing process is a superficial and inconvenient gesture.”

“Hey screw you, pal. I’m trying to run a business here!”

“Fuck you and your business!”
“Why, you son of a…”


“You suck. Being orange sucks.” And then Doglips gave Davesprite a pair of upside-down middle fingers as she walked backwards into the crowd and disappeared.

“Bitch.”

“Just ignore her, man.” John pointed towards where Jade had joined the other Weredogs. They were all wearing boxing gloves and those padded helmet things karate people sometimes wear. “They’re about to get started.”

As town mayor, it was up to Jake to open up the fights with a little speech and an explanation for all those who did not understand why this was even happening.

“These young men and women Weredogs are going through the change of life. So to prevent them from being driven insane by their weird dog-genes, they’re going to fight until all the sex and aggression is beaten out of them.” Explained Jake. “Refreshments and merchandise are sold in the booth by Joshua. Give a wave Joshua so that everyone can see where they can pick up their limited edition Weredog’s Puberty Fights t-shirt.”

“Damn. I gotta get me one of those shirts.” Said Davesprite.

John was currently experiencing major anxiety about this whole process. Everything was happening much too fast! They’d only just found out about Jade’s affliction this morning and now she was expected to fight all these other hyped as shit Weredogs? It was all just too much.

However, there wasn’t a thing to be done.

“Let the fight begin!”

Instantly the Weredogs, who were once stood in a single line, converged on each other in furious battle.

Jade faced off against another girl and waste no time in socking her repeatedly in the nose. The girl went down and Jade stepped over her to continue the fight. One guy took a swing at Jade, but she blocked and kicked him in the fun sack. He fell to the ground with a strangled yell and then Jade proceeded to do atomic leg drops on him over and over again.

“Take this, you punk ass bitch.” Said Jade, then she did a leg drop on his spine and shattered his spine.

Seeing Jade as the most deadly threat, all the other Weredogs leapt at her. A cloud of smoke obscured what was actually going on, but fists, feet, stars, and curse words could be seen imitating from the cloud, giving the impression that whatever was taking place inside was really intense.

In eight sentences, it was all over. Jade stood victorious atop a pile of battered and bloody Weredogs, all of which were actually looking a lot better despite the wounds they sustained during the fight. Rose supposed that maybe Jake was right in saying that punching out their emotions could actually do some good.
“Wow, guys!” Jade cheered as she jogged over to her friends. “I feel so much better now. Nice t-shirt by the way, Dave.”

“Who?” Asked Davesprite, casting about for this ‘Dave’ who apparently had a nice shirt. After a moment, it donned on him. “Oh, me? Yeah, heh, thanks.”

“Do you really feel better? Like, no violent or sexual tendencies at the moment?” John was half-way hidden behind Rose, trying not to show fear in the face of the intimidating Weredog.

“Yup! I feel great actually!”

“Well then, I guess all’s well that ends well.” Rose said with a smile as she squeezed John’s hand. The couple smiled at each other and just before you thought they were maybe going to kiss, the chapter ended.

(post credits scene)

In the woods, outside of the City of Lakewater, an evil witch gave a low groan and began to stir. It was Yahtzee, the evil witch who tried to take Roxy the Werecat’s sanity back in chapter eleven. She was still alive and super pissed.

Out of the darkness, approached a cloaked figure and a hot-looking rogue.

“Who are you?” Demanded Yahtzee.

The rouge stepped forward. It was Damien, leader of the Cool Cats. The cloaked figure also pulled down his hood to reveal that he was that gross-ass Fish Baron of the Sea.

“We are friends.” Gurgled the Fish Baron. “I believe you may be looking for some… revenge?”

TO BE CONTINUED.

“Oh, man!” Rosie exclaimed once the story was finished. “That Weredog fight was pretty anticlimactic, although it was still cool! Yahtzee, Damien, and the Fish Baron working together to take down the heroes of Skaia. How can this story get any better?!”

“Yeah, I know. I’m doing a really good job and this story is riveting and you like it,” Dave put a finger to his lips. “Just remember to turn down the excitement a few clicks. We could get in trouble if you mom finds out I’m still tell you this shit.”

“Why doesn’t she want me to hear this story? I mean, besides all the obvious age appropriate stuff.”

Dave sighed and shook his head. He really didn’t feel like having that conversation that night.

“It just wasn’t all wizard pizza and wizard battles, okay? Mom has a habit of remember all the bad stuff that happened and well… Well, that’s not the way things are.” Dave got up and made to leave. “If you take away one thing from this crap, remember this: No matter how dark things get, there’s always a chance to smile.”

“I don’t get it.”

“Yeah. Well, whatever. I tried. Goodnight.”
Chapter End Notes

Welp. Here I am doing this again. Hopefully we won't have another three week or so hiatus ever again. This chapter is one of my least favorites out of the bunch, but hopefully y'all won't mind it as much.

I hope you had a merry chirstmas or holiday or whatever.

Thanks for reading. Happy New Year.
- Mike
Chapter Fourteen: Looming Tower of Necromancy

On the outskirts of Wooftown, Rose and her companions bid farewell to Jake, the kindly mayor who had helped Jade fight out her hormonal aggression by beating up a bunch of other Weredogs. For more information on Jade’s battle with the other Weredogs, check out Chapter Thirteen: Jade Goes through Puberty.

Anyways:

“Are you sure that you don’t want to stay here, Miss Harley?” Asked Jake. “There are many great opportunities for Weredogs, such as yourself, here in Wooftown.”

“No thanks, Grandpa.” Jade shook her head, but smiled. “My friends need me. There’s only one life for an adventuring gal like me and that’s a life on the open road!”

“Well then I hope to see you again someday, all of you.” Jake shook Rose’s hand and nodded to everyone else, before turning back and walking into town.

“What a lovely old man.” Commented John, as the group piled into their bonecar once again. “You know, it’s really refreshing to see nice people out here. Usually everyone we bump into is either really mean or they just try to kill us.”

“Oh don’t worry, John. We’re bound to have more random hostile encounters soon.” Rose started the engine of the bonecar. “Now, pop out that map and let’s get going. We’ve got a lot of ground to cover.”

The group drove away from Wooftown and further south, plotting a course directly to where the Bee Lord of the South was rumored to reside. They rode well into the night and throughout the next day, through the Forest of Franklin, over the Bridge of Purulence, around the great lava river and finally to the edge of the Moonbear Desert.

Rose brought the bonecar to a slow stop right at the edge of the massive desert.

“Alright. Everyone wake up. I think there’s a few things we need to discuss before venturing forward.” She said, rousing the rest of her party who had fallen asleep during the journey.

“Why are we stopped?” Asked Jade with a massive yawn. “I thought we were going to drive straight through to Owl Bay.”

“The Moonbear Desert is a dangerous place and charging headfirst into it’s depths is both foolish and dangerous.” Rose responded, turning in her seat to look at Jade and Davesprite. “Once we venture past it’s borders there is no turning back. Moonbears, Sandbeetles, and nomadic bandits prey on unsuspecting travelers. It’s important for us to be on guard.”
“We should be fine with this bonecar.” John patted the console fondly. “I mean, we shouldn’t be in any real danger when we can just outrun everything, right?”

“Damn straight.” Agreed Davesprite. “Come on, Rose. We get it. This desert is hella scary and you wanna make sure that all of your best buds are safe, but let’s not get all sentimental, alright? I dunno if my ghostly heart can take it.”

“I’m just trying to proceed with caution. Too many times does an adventurer find themselves in danger by rushing into a hazardous situation head-on.” Rose started the engine and slowly drove the bonecar forwards one more. “But if you insist that you’ll full prepared, let us press onward. You’ll have no complaint from me.”

The group rode directly into the heart of the desert.

“Seriously though,” Said Davesprite once their quest was once again underway. “What’s the worst that could happen?”

Five minutes later the bonecar’s engine spluttered and died.

“Shit.”

They had come to a stop at the top of a large sand dune. The sun beat down upon them like the heat of a thousand flaming hot Firefalcons, which are just regular falcons accept that they on fire twenty-four seven. Do not pet a Firefalcon, no matter what they tell you.

If a Firefalcon is like: “Hey, come stroke my feathers and I’ll grant you a wish.”

You turn and run, because that thing is a fucking liar and you will burn to death.

Anyways:

“I think this might be the end of the line for ‘ol Veronica.” Said Jade sadly, as she peered into the engine. The whole thing was smoking and sparking with magical energy. “It looks like the dilithium crystals have been burnt up.”

“Is there any way we could replace them?” Asked Rose, trying in vain to peek over the taller girl’s shoulder.

“Oh sure. If there was a dilithium mine around here, a plasma cutter, and if we had over twenty hours to kill then, yeah. I could definitely replace them.” Jade slammed the hood shut and looked at Rose with an eyebrow cocked. “Or maybe… you could magic a new bonecar!”

Rose shook her head.

“It’s like I said before, bonecars such as this are too complicated to simply conjure. I could probably produce the crystals and whatever other simple tools you needed, but we do not have the time for that.” Rose unbuttoned her dark robes and tied them around her waist. “Come on. We better get walking.”

Groaning, moaning, and bitching, John, Davesprite, and Jade fell in step behind Rose and began to trek across the Moonbear desert.

Fun Fact: after sitting alone in the desert for over a hundred years, the bonecar was buried beneath tons and tons of sand. One day, an explorer accidently uncovered it and thought he discovered a new type of dinosaur. After years and years of meticulous work, the explorer pieced the individual parts
of the bonecar together to form a new type of dinosaur that had never really existed.

The explorer would win a Nobel Prize for his discovery of the Grundle-saurous Rex, but really it was all just a sham.

Anyways:

The walk through the desert was brutal on our poor heroes. Rose’s skin went from ghostly pale to firecracker red in about ten seconds. She probably would have developed some type of skin cancer (which is a serious and completely unfunny ailment that could affect anyone don’t go outside kids) were it not for her innate magical abilities. Jade, who was accustomed to tropical climates, fared much better, although her tongue continuously flopped out of mouth as she panted with thirst. John stumbled clumsily over the fine grains of sand, trying to keep up with Rose who plowed ahead despite the intense heat.

“Holy shit. This is awful. Why did we come here?” Moaned Davesprite from where he trailed behind the group.

“Shove it, sprite!” Rose snapped back. “You can’t get hot, tired, thirsty, or sunburnt. So stop your god-damn complaining, you ghostly piece of trashy trash!”

“I can tell that we’re all a little high-strung right now,” Davesprite placated. “But that’s no reason to toss around hurtful comments like gold coins at a minotaur gentlemen’s club.”

Rose sighed.

“You’re right, Davesprite. I apologize. It’s just that this heat is so unforgiving.”

“Maybe we should take shelter and then continue on at night.” Offered John.

“Maybe, but I do not see any place suitable for such a recess. It’s not like there are abandoned wizard towers out here, looming over the sands with unspeakable magic power.” Said Rose.

At that moment, our group mounted the crest of a large sand dune and saw a motherfucking abandoned wizard tower down below, looming over the sands with unspeakable magic power. John looked at Rose with awe. She truly was magical.

“Oh my sandy rings!” He gasped. “Guys, are you seeing this too?”

Jade shielded her eyes from the sun and looked down at the mysterious tower.

“Yup!” She cheered after a moment. “That’s definitely a wizard tower and not some mirage! I think we’re in luck.”

“We should proceed with caution.” Advised Rose once more as she drew her wands. “We’ve encountered magical strongholds like this before and they rarely house pleasantries. Prepare yourselves.”

And then she led her party down the sandy dune and towards the mysterious tower, careful to watch for any hidden booby traps along the way. The tower was about fifty feet tall and constructed of a shiny, black stone. Hung from the boarded-up windows were drapes of tattered and ruined banners, one of which read: “PAAAAARRRRRTTY!!!”

Must have been some party.
Jade and Rose approached the wooden door with their weapons drawn. Exchanging a quick glance and a nod, they proceeded to shove the door open and rush inside. Jade, with her crossbow raised, immediately spotted a pair of mummmified skeletons sitting at a table and building a house of cards.

“Shit!” One skeleton yelled in surprise as Jade charged in, causing his carefully constructed house of cards to collapse. “Dammit, Fred! I told you that we were supposed to be guarding the **outside** of the door.”

“I still think that order was up to interpretation.” Responded the other skeleton, named Fred. Then he too caught sight of the intruders. “OH MY GOD, INTRUDERS!”

Jade fired a crossbow bolt into Fred’s eye socket.

“Aw shit! My eye socket!” Cried Fred, who was otherwise unwounded because he was a skeleton.

Rose fired a bullet spell that took off the top of the other skeleton’s head, double killing him. Fred the skeleton, with the crossbow bolt still lodged firmly in his face, stood up and screamed.

“That was my boyfriend, you dirty bitch!”

Twirling her wands, Rose transfigured Fred the skeleton in a pear, which Jade then promptly pinned to the wall with another crossbow bolt.

“Strange couple.” Commented Rose, investigating the rest of the tower entrance.

It was a circular room, with a cozy fireplace, a wooden table plus chair combo probably from wizard IKEA, and a thin staircase against the far wall leading upwards into the rest of the wizard tower. John and Davesprite entered the tower after the girls.

“Wow.” Davesprite let out a low whistle as he floated about the room. “Pretty nice place for just a couple of silly old skeletons.”

“I doubt they are this tower’s only inhabitants.” No sooner were the words out of Rose’s mouth than a loud *thud* was heard from upstairs, as if something heavy had been dropped on the floor. “Come on, team. Let us investigate the dark sorcery emanating from within this mysterious tower.”

Together, our group ascended the staircase to the second floor to another room much like the one below, albeit lined with bookshelves housing all sorts of interesting bullshit. There were evil books that shouted dark curses when you opened them, fedoras that granted the wearer negative *a billion* charisma, and a little songbug trapped in a jar. When he saw our heroes, the songbug began to sing:

“Don’t you be coming into this tower, baby! There are all types of spooky things! Monsters and ghouls and bloodsucking imps, Terrors of the night and my big swinging dick- OH GOD WHHHHYYYYyyyy!!!”

Seizing the songbug’s jar, Jade hurled it to the ground, broke it, and proceeded to murder the ever-living shit out of the songbug by stepping on it over and over again.

Rosie, your mom really hated songbugs.

“Hey, they had hats like these in the Cool Cat’s clubhouse.” John said, picking up one of the fedoras. “Roxy told me not to touch them.”
As John placed the hat over his head, his charisma was lowered to a meager negative a billion. Instantly, Jade and Davesprite rushed over to him and started punching John in his poor bones. They were involuntarily infuriated by John’s now abysmal levels of charisma! Rose, who was immune to such enchantments, rushed over and removed the hat from John’s head. Davesprite and Jade immediately stopped pounding on their friend.

“Don’t wear fedoras.” Rose warned, burning the hat to cinders with a quick spell.

Up on the third floor, they encountered something crazy! There in the center of another circular room, stood a skeleton necromancer over a cauldron of bubbling fluid. Careful not to alert the skeleton to their presence, Rose and the rest of the gang hid just outside the doorway and watched as the skeleton worked his evil magic.

“Janesprite!” Barked the skeleton. “Bring me the caramel drizzler!”

From the shadows, floated a blue sprite with the cutest smile, most pinch-able cheeks, and prettiest eyes you ever did see, hidden behind a pair of wire spectacles. She carried a small cup with a spout in her little sprite hands, which she handed over to her skeleton master.

“Here you go, Scott.” Said Janesprite happily. “Is this the final ingredient?”

“You bet your ghostly ass it is.” Scott, the necromancer, used the caramel drizzler to drizzle caramel over his concoction. A puff of purple smoke billowed from the caldron and when it cleared, the nature of the evil wizard’s potion was revealed. “Finally!” Bellowed Scott. “I’ve created a masterpiece! The perfect macchiato!”

“Shit.” Rose gasped, with a sharp intake of breath. John looked at her with confusion.

“What’s wrong?” He whispered. “He’s just making some coffee. That doesn’t seem very evil to me.”

“The most evil of coffee’s, John.” Rose hissed back, equally hushed. “We have to stop him before…”

But it was too late, the surface of the macchiato cauldron began to boil and churn, swirling and emitting more foul, purple smoke. From the murky depths rose a skinless, blood demon with glowing red eyes and enormous, bat-like wings.

A little bit of pee may or may not have leaked out of John.

Scott, the skeleton necromancer, took a step back to admire his creation, whilst his familiar, Janesprite, floated away to a safe distance. She was a poor sprite, with a good heart, forced to work for the evil Scott for no pay whatsoever. Her job sucked, especially in times such as now, when Scott summed demonic spirits to commit evil deeds.

“What is your bidding, master?” Asked the blood demon in a voice that sounded like that one noise you make when you’re eating dinner and then you accidently scrape the plate with your fork. Yeah, it sounded like that.

“We’re going to take over the world!” Cackled Scott, rubbing his gross skeleton hands together. “You must travel to the Fuchsia City and slay the Empress of the Sea. When that is complete, bring her crown of power to me, so that I may use it’s mystical enchantments for evil!”

“I don’t think this is a good idea.” Piped up Janesprite. “I mean, the Empress of the Sea is a fair and just empress who always remembers everyone’s birthdays. Don’t you think it would be really mean just to go out and kill her?”
“Janesprite…” Scott pinched the bridge of his skeleton nose between his skeleton fingers. “We are evil. We do stuff like this all the time. I really thought you’d be used to stuff like this by now.”

“Well, yeah. I’m used to it, but that doesn’t mean I like it.” Janesprite fidgeted nervously. “I stood by while you burned down that double orphanage, helped you put a bag of flaming saber wolf shit on Mrs. McGuffin’s front steps, and I even let you put reindeer horns on my head so we could steal Christmas that one time, but no more! I won’t stand by while you commit acts of evil!”

“Janesprite, shut up and go float in the corner.”

“Okay.”

As Janesprite sadly floated over to the corner, Scott turned back to his blood demon.

“Alright, where were we? Oh yeah. The Empress of the Sea. You’re gonna killer her, right? And then…”

John turned to Rose again as Scott outlined the plan to his evil minion.

“Why doesn’t Janesprite fight back?” He asked.

“She’s his familiar, John. She has to do whatever he says.”

“That’s messed up.”

“Tell me about it.” Sighed Davesprite.

“Quiet, Davesprite.” Rose snapped. “I’m as good a master as you’re going to get. So I don’t want to hear any sass, got it?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I think you guys should start calling him, Dave.” Said Jade randomly. “I mean, doesn’t that sound nicer than Davesprite? Like what if I called you Rosewitch?”

There was a pause as Rose considered her proposition.

“That… doesn’t actually sound that bad.” She admitted. “What do you think, John?”

“Rosewitch.” John tested the name on his tongue. He grinned and slid his arm tentatively around Rose’s waist. “I think it could work.”

She stiffened under his touch, being unaccustomed of course to such open displays of physical affection. After a moment, however, she acclimated to the comfortable weight around her hips and even allowed herself a small smile.

“Guys, I’m being serious. I think it’s racist to constantly refer to Dave as a sprite.” Jade pressed on.

“Just forget it, Jade. It’s cool.” Davesprite said.

“No it isn’t! You deserve to be treated with respect.”

“I’ll tell you what,” Rose quickly regained control of the situation. “After we deal with this business up in here, I’ll consider your words. As for now, let us work to prevent an assassination attempt against the Empress of the Sea.”
Through the crack in the door, our heroes returned to watching the scene unfold inside the skeleton necromancer’s potions room.

“So anyway,” Scott was saying. “After you’ve roughed her up real good, take her magical crown and then bring it back here to me, okay?”

“Yes, my lord.” Said the blood demon. “I will kill the Empress of the Sea.”

However at that exact moment, a crossbow bolt flew through the air and struck the blood demon in the fucking face, killing him instantly. Attached to the bolt, was a note that simply read: “The fuck you will”.

Scott let out a very high-pitched squeal of surprise and leapt backwards as his poor blood demon tipped over, fell out of the cauldron, and exploded into a mist of evil, black spirits upon contact with the ground. He looked to the doorway to see Jade, Rose, John, and Davesprite entering the room.

“You foolish fools!” Cried Scott. “You shall pay for slaying my blood demon!”

“That’s unlikely.” Rose twirled her wands and pointed them at Scott’s chest. “You will fall, necromancer. I challenge thee to a Duel of Wizardly Strife!”

“Duel accepted!”

“R-Really?”

“Yes!”

“You’re seriously going to duel me. Wow, that’s like the first time that has actually worked.” Rose scratched her temple with her wands. “I’m actually quite surprised by this.”

“Rose,” John nudged her with his elbow. “You should duel him now.”

“Oh. Yes, of course.” Rose took a fighter’s stance, facing Scott from across the room.

John, Jade, and Davesprite joined Janesprite in the corner, out of harm’s way.

“Sup.” Said Davesprite, nodding to the other ghostly being.

“Hey.” Greeted Janesprite.

“So, do you come here often?”

“I’m a slave. I live here.”

“Oh. Okay.” Davesprite decided to be quiet for once.

“Here are the rules,” Growled Scott, reaching into his robes and pulling out his bonewand. A bonewand is a wand made of bone if you couldn’t deduce that for yourself. “No familiars, deus ex machina spells, or dirty dancing spells.”

“What about booty dropping spells?” Asked Rose.

“Those are fair game.”

“Alright, anything else?”
“Well, not really, just…” Scott twirled his wand. “SUCK MY HEX, WITCH!!!”

Rose ducked under his hex and launched a dozen bullet spells in his direction. Scott dodged as well, causing the bullets to collide with a large number of magical artifacts that were sitting on a self behind him, minding their own god damn business.

A green potion was struck and exploded, showering the floor with a slime-like substance that began to eat it’s way corrosively through the floor. A self portrait of Scott that was also on the self for some reason was also hit with a bullet and destroyed, along with a magnificent collection of porcelain elephants.

Scott was pissed.

He leapt over a patch of glowing acid and fired a red spell at Rose. She tried to dodge, but was a millisecond too slow. The spell hit her in the chest and instantly transformed her into fruit bat.

Everyone who was watching the battle gasped in shock.

Furious, fruit bat-Rose tried to pick up one of her wands with her little bat hands, but they were too heavy! Cursing her fowl luck, she instead picked it up with her bat mouth and swung it around, hitting Scott full in the face with a bright blue spell.

Scott instantly started booty dropping, twerking like mad, and looking like a complete and total idiot. John and Jade couldn’t help it, they stared at Scott’s skeleton jive moves and instantly got dizzy. Davesprite and Janesprite, who were sprites and therefore could not physically feel sexual attraction, were not overly impressed by Scott’s dancing skills, although they did appreciate his progressive technique.

“Fuck you, you slimy piece of rancid honey!” Scott cursed, krumping his way around the room.

“Honey can’t spoil, dumbass. Go eat a bag of dicks!” Squeaked bat-Rose in response. She flapped her little bat wings, flew over to Scott, and began doing atomic leg drops on top of his head, fracturing his skull in like thirteen different places.

Scott shielded his head with his arms and cried in pain.

“Super fuck this. I’m out!” He said and then dashed for the door, dodging puddles of corrosive, green acid along the way.

“He’s trying to escape!” Yelled bat-Rose, as she flew after him. “Don’t let him get away, guys!”

Davesprite floated forward and positioned himself between Scott and the open doorway.

“Sorry, Bro.” Smirked the sprite. “Can’t abscond.”

Scott was trapped. He looked between bat-Rose and Davesprite, then to John and Jade who were also advancing with their weapons drawn. There was no way he could fight his way out of this mess. Without playing dirty, of course.

“Janesprite!” Scott shrieked. “Use the magic distraction dust!”

Janesprite reluctantly reached into her ghost pocket and pulled out a handful of magic distraction dust. With a sigh, she tossed the mystical powder into the air and activated it with this ancient, magical incantation:
“Distraction!”

It worked. Whilst bat-Rose, John, Davesprite, and Jade were distracted by the magical distraction dust, Scott ducked under Davesprite and fled down the tower steps. Janesprite followed.

“Hey, Master. Wait for me!” She called.

“No way. Screw you. I don’t need a shit sprite as a slave. There’s way better familiars out there than you.” Scott snapped back.

“But we’re connected by a magical tether, you can’t just fire me!”

“Watch me!” Scott taunted. On the way out, he passed by the double corpses of Fred and his boyfriend. “Rest in peace, friends.” Mourned Scott. “You shall be avenged.”

Then he turned and dashed away across the Moonbear desert, leaving Janesprite forlornly floating in the open doorways, watching as her master ran away into the distance.

Up in the wizard tower, bat-Rose the rest of our heroes slowly shook off the affects of the magic distraction dust.

“Dammit! He’s gone!” Bat-Rose fluttered on her little bat wings down the stairs to indeed find that Scott had absconded like a total pansy. “I had him on the ropes.”

“Of course you did.” Commented Davesprite, floating up behind her. “Here are your wands. I suppose you do know a spell that can turn you back to normal, right?”

“Yes. Yes, of course.” Taking one of her wands in her little bat mouth once more, bat-Rose twirled it and in a tiny puff of smoke, transformed back into regular, sexy(?) Rose.

“Should we go after him?” Asked Jade. “I can probably track his scent if you wanted.”

“Let him go.” Said a voice. Everyone turned to see Janesprite still floating all by her lonesome. “By absconding from a Duel of Wizardly Strife and severing our magical tether, he’s brought a whole lot of suffering down on himself.”

“What happens if you break a magical tether?” Asked John.

“Horrible things.” Rose answered with a shiver. “Our friend Scott truly is a dumbass. You, Janesprite, what thou thee allegiance doth be?”

“I’m my own sprite now!” Answered Janesprite happily. “Although if I had to put a commercialized label on myself, I’d probably say that I’m an agent of the ‘light side’ now!”

“So are we! We’re heroes!” Cheered Jade. “Hey, is it cool with you if we camp here for a few hours? The desert during the day is hella unforgiving and we think it’d probably be safer to travel at night.”

“Sure.” Janesprite shrugged. “I really don’t care. Where are you heading, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“We are traveling to the Fuchsia Kingdom on Owl Bay and then from there, to defeat the Bee Lord of the South.” Answered Rose.

Janesprite gasped, for that truly was a heroic quest to undertake, not to mention a dangerous one. As an immortal sprite, Janesprite had been under Scott the necromancer’s control for quite some time,
living in that tower, doing evil deeds, fending off interlopers. She was intrigued by this band of misfit travelers.

“I know a shortcut to the Fuchsia Kingdom!” Janesprite clapped with excitement. “There are maps up in the lab that tell of a route straight there. I’ll give them to you on one request!”

“Name your request, sprite.”

“Let me come with you.”

Rose narrowed her eyes. The last time she had accepted a strange member into their group it had turned out… pretty okay actually.

Roxy wasn’t a problem at all. It was all that bullshit drama that Rose stirred up because she couldn’t handle her shit. The witch looked between John and Janesprite, wondering if there could possibly be any competing sexual attraction between the two. It seemed unlikely, seeing how John was now smitten with Rose once more. Also Janesprite had a ghost butt. So things probably wouldn’t work out.

“What kind of skills do you have?” Asked Rose, folding her arms.

“I know healing magic and am well-versed in the sleight of hand.” As example, Janesprite reached behind Jade’s ear and produced a gold coin.

“Oooooh.” Said everyone.

“Alright.” Rose extended her hand. “Welcome to the party, Janesprite!”

“And that’s how we met Aunt Janesprite!” Dave said, finishing the night’s tale.

“Really? She used to work for an evil necromancer named Scott.” Rosie’s face twisted with confusion. “That doesn’t seem like her at all. She’s so nice!”

“Sometimes good people do evil things, just look at Rose.”

“Yeah, you’re right. That was a really bitch move she pulled when she broke up John and Roxy.”

“Ain’t that the truth. Also watch your fucking language.”

“Sorry.”

“It’s okay.” Dave stood up and kissed his daughter on the forehead, as was their bedtime ritual. “Sleep tight.”

Before he could exit the room though, Rosie let out a little cough.

“Uh, Dad?”

“Yeah?”

“I- er, kinda have something for you.” Reaching underneath her pillow, Rosie pulled out an official looking document and held it out to her father.

“What the hell is this?” Dave examined the letter. It was very official, on heavy parchment, bearing the wax seal of the Young Witch’s Academy, where Rosie went to school. “Shit. Did you get in
trouble at school?"

“It wasn’t a big deal!” Defended Rosie. “I just… well… I transfigured this other girl into a nut.”

Dave was livid. He tore open the envelope and read the contents. According to the document, he
was required to attend a parent-teacher conference to address the exact problem that Rosie had just
admitted to. This was not good.

“Rosie…” Dave pinched the bridge of nose under his shades. “Why on earth would you do
something like that?”

“She called me a bog-wench and I just got mad! I couldn’t help myself!”

“This,” Dave shook the letter. “Is the exact reason your mom doesn’t want me to tell you about the
greatest witch ever.”

“I wasn’t trying to be like her or anything! I was just… I dunno. I wasn’t thinking.” Rosie pleaded
with her father. “Please, please don’t tell mom. She’s the law!”

“Psh. You think I’m going to tell your mom? Hell no. Then I’d be in trouble too.” Dave folded the
letter and stuck it in his shirt pocket. “I have a lot to think about. Just… try to get some sleep, alright?”

Then without waiting for his daughter to respond, Dave left, quietly shutting the door behind him.
He slouched his way to his own bedroom, finding Jade already under the covers and half asleep. He
flopped onto the bed next to her and lazily draped his arm over her waist.

“Mmmm. Hey.” Murmured Jade. “How was story time?”

“Eh. You know.” Dave buried his head into his pillows and fretted silently. “Same old, same old.”

"What story are you telling her now? Since you aren't telling her the greatest witch ever
anymore, right?"

"Just a nice story about talking dogs or something like that, I don't know. I already forgot about it."

"It's better this way, hun. It's safer."

"Yeah..." Dave embraced his wife. "I know."

Chapter End Notes

I hope you had a happy new years eve! Mine was pretty good!

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Chapter Fifteen: The Battle at Owl Bay: Part One

After a long, hard day’s work as Skaia’s number one mix master general beat dropper M.D., Dave Strider moseyed on down to the Young Witches Academy where he was expected to make an appearance following his daughter’s rather inappropriate behavior during class a few days back.

He drove his bonecar through rush hour traffic to the academy where he forced to deal with an overzealous gnome security guard that got a little too grabby.

“It’s for the children’s safety.” Explained the little gnome as he snapped on a rubber glove.

Thirty minutes later Dave walked into an empty classroom that had been arranged into a small courtroom of sorts. Against the far wall sat a panel of ten old witches and wizards, who were the judiciary department of the school. Before them, at a tiny desk, sat Dave’s daughter Rosie, looking more bored by the proceedings than anything else.

“Mr. Strider.” Said the president of the school, an old tree witch with just the most unforgiving eyebrows you ever did see. “You are late. We, of the council, would appreciate it if you treated this situation with the prudence and respect it deserves.”

“Yeah. Yeah, sorry. I just flew in, you know? And let me tell you, my arms are tired as shit! Haha.” Dave’s attempt at lightening the mood with a quick joke didn’t go over very well. “Uh, that’s a little sprite humor. I wouldn’t expect you to understand.”

“Please.” Glowered the president. “Take a seat, Mr. Strider.”

With a wave of her hand, the president summoned a magical desk next to Rosie’s, incredibly small and uncomfortable for a man of Dave’s size. He squeezed in nonetheless, smashing his knees up to his chin.

“Sup, Rosie.” He sent his daughter a small wink. “These goons aren’t working you over too hard, are they?”

“They haven’t said anything yet. They wanted to wait for you.” Rosie replied. For the first time, she appeared nervous. “Dad, do you think there’s any chance that they won’t kick me out of school?”

“I think there’s a big chance. Just let me do the talking, alright?”

Up at the panel, the president of the school cleared her throat and shuffled some papers, gaining the room’s attention.

“We are gathered here today to discuss what sort of disciplinary actions should be taken place in the case of one Rosalynn Strider, ten years of age, of human descend, biological daughter of…”
“YYYYYAAAAWWWNNN.” Dave interrupted very rudely. “We know all of this jazz already. Get to the whole nut magic thing so we can get out of here.”

The president’s nostrils flared and Rosie stifled a giggle.

“Very well then, Mr. Strider.” The president reviewed a few of her notes. “Your daughter on the date of Moonsday, Moonsvember the Moon-seventh, performed a highly illegal transmogrification spell on another student, turning her into…” The president reached into her cloak and pulled out a small, glass vial. “An almond!”

Sure enough, at the bottom of the small vial was a tiny almond.

“Uh…. Is that- Is that the kid?” Dave asked, nodding towards the vial.

“Of course not! Do you think I would carry around a child-peanut in my pocket like some kind of trinket?! Preposterous! This is just a regular almond.” The president uncapped the vial and shook the almond into her mouth. “Seeeee?!?”

“Uh. Miss President.” One of the other panel members leaned over to her. “That actually is the kid, so yeah. I’d spit that out if I were you.”

After that crisis was avoided things got down to business.

“Now.” The president continued, wiping her mouth on the back of her hand. “It says here that young Miss Strider pleads guilty to the charges. This seems very much like an open and closed case to me then. I sentence thee to expulsion!”

“Whoa hold up.” Dave interjected. “Don’t I get the chance to defend my daughter?”

“Ugh. What could you possibly say to make this fiendish act any less criminal, Mr. Strider?” Sighed the school president. “Your daughter was caught red-handed, she admitted to it, here’s the evidence!” She shook the vial containing a very damp and lucky almond at Dave. “There’s nothing else to be discussed.”

“Well how about….” Dave struggled out his desk and stood up. “Well how about childhood, ma’am? Kids do stupid stuff all the time. I’m sure that you, yourself, was young many and many and many and many and whole god-damned many fortnights ago.”

“So you’re claiming that we should not prosecute your child because she’s young?”

“Yeah and other stuff to.” Dave held up a finger as he began to pace. “For one thing, do you know how hard it is to perform a perfect transmogrification spell like that? It takes years and years of training as well as awesome magical talent. If anything, you should be doing everything you can to keep this young witch in your school.”

Rosie’s chest swelled with pride at her father’s words. The president was less impressed.

“Well don’t you pretend to know a lot about magic? Haha.” She laughed. “Who are you, Mr. DJ, to give me advice on how to run my school of magic? Peanut spells like this were made illegal years ago. The last witch I knew that used spells like this was…”


“Bullshit!” Cried one panel member. “I don’t believe that for one second.”
“It’s true!” Defended Rosie. “My dad was her ghostly familiar that followed her around and looked at butts through his badonkulars!”

“Rosie, maybe you should let me handle this.” Said Dave nervously.

The president leaned forward on her comfy chair, resting her elbows on the table top and meshing her fingers before her chin. She smiled at Dave.

“You talk big game, Mr. Strider, but I’m afraid that I cannot take your word at face value.” Her grin widened. “I’m afraid that you’ve wasted enough of our time…”

“I was at the Battle of Owl Bay!” Dave blurted. “I fought alongside the greatest witch ever and the armies of the Fuchsia Kingdom and helped to defeat the army of Beemen led by none other than the Bee Lord of the South himself.”

“The Bee Lord of the South?” Repeated a panel member. “Wasn’t that that one wizard who could turn into a giant tit?”

“No, idiot.” Snapped another panelist. “He was the wizard who could control bees.”

“I thought he could summon bees.”

“Isn’t that the same thing?”

“No, man. Summoning is way different than controlling. Imagine if you summoned a hot dog right now. That’s great, right? But if you could control it too, then that’d be something special.”

“I’d rather turn into a giant tit.”

“Enough!” Shouted the president of the school, regaining order. “Mr. Strider, unless you can prove to us that this story is true, then I’m afraid I’ll have no choice but to throw your sorry ass out of this court.”

“That won’t be necessary, ma’am.” Said Dave, as he began to pace once more. “If it’s proof you want, then it’s a story I got. I remember it like it was yesterday…”

John and Rose were making out hardcore in one of the upstairs rooms of the necromancer’s tower. The rest of their party, now consisting of Davesprite, Jade, and Janesprite, were somewhere below doing something boring and/or not worthwhile.

Rose, who had been flummoxed by her affections for John for quite some time, was coming to terms with the whole romance thing. Maybe she liked him, maybe she didn’t. Either way, kissing was fun and John wasn’t half bad at it either.

Not that I would know. I mean, John and I never kissed. At least not officially. Who knows though? Under the light of the full moon, at the bottom of a tankard of mead…

Anyways:

After a little bit of heavy petting, John pulled away from his half-girlfriend.

“Tell me something that I don’t know about you.” He whispered in her ear, his breath raising goosebumps on her neck.

“I once spent an entire month living in the Mystik Jungle among the native gelatinous cubes as a
spiritual sabbatical.” She responded, voice equally husky and hushed.

“Oh yeah! I remember you told me about that.”

“Really?” Rose frowned. “Well, this one time I traveled through a magical portal to a world entirely made out of soggy bread.”

“You told me about that too.”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah, that’s where you met that crazy orc with three legs. One of them was a peg leg though so no one really knows what that’s about.”

Rose wracked her brains, doing her best to think of a magical tale that she’d yet to regale to John. However, nothing came to mind. Had she really told him everything?

That wasn’t very like her at all. As a great and powerful witch, she rarely shared delicious tidbits of personal information just for no reason. She always considered herself the strong and silent type, although perhaps her boastings of adventures past had gotten out of hand a bit.

John was just one of those people who was really easy talk to, you know? He would sit for hours on end, completely enraptured by any bullshit that you wanted to throw his way. He was a really good listener.

And that’s when Rose realized… She did like John. And it was sad that everything she knew about him could probably be written in large, block letters on one side of a small post-it note:

He was a shit hero. He came from a shit town. He hated cake.

That’s really it.

“Why don’t you tell me something that I don’t know about you?” She asked, settling more snuggly against his side.

They were sat rather comfortably atop a large sack of dry rice, most probably used for deadly alchemic potions, but a suitable couch nonetheless. In the dim light afforded by a small candle, Rose could not see John’s frown, but she could feel through his shirt the quickening of his heartbeat.

“Oh geez. I dunno.” He sighed and raked his finger through his hair. “I guess… I guess something you don’t know about me is that this is probably the best part of my life.”

Rose laughed lightly.

“What does that mean?”

“Well, I mean, look at my life before this.” He gestured between the two of them and to the tower as a whole. “I’ve lived my whole life in Honey Town doing nothing but sucking and now I’m running all over this land fighting monsters and demons and evil dudes and it’s awesome and I guess I wanna say… Thanks.” He smiled at her. “Thanks, Rose Lalonde.”

Rose felt a blush creeping into her cheeks. Here she was, the most powerful sorceress of all time, getting flustered over a little ‘thank you’. To be fair though, there were few people that Rose encountered on her journeys that ever said ‘thank you’. Usually because they were super dead.

“You’re welcome, John.” She responded after a while. “You’ve certainly made this quest much
more enjoyable, yourself. I would surely be lost without your support.”

“Heh. I don’t know about that.” John tentatively pressed a small kiss to her ear, causing her to squirm. “I uh, guess it’s your turn. Tell me something that I don’t know about you!”

Rose rolled her eyes, but wracked her brains again nonetheless. There had to be something she hadn’t blabbered about yet. It was hard to think between the cozy glow of the candlelight, the warmth of John’s chest, and the softness of the rice sack.

Suddenly, she thought of something. Something that probably should have been said sometime before now.

“I suppose one thing you don’t know about me is that… I like you, John.” She said, resting her hand on his chest. “Like no one I’ve ever liked before. I was… in denial for a long time and then I was jealous and then I was confused and I guess… I didn’t know how I felt about you until I saw you through another’s eyes.”

“Roxy?”

“Yes.” Rose was halfway to telling him the true nature of his breakup with the Werecat rogue, but stopped herself. There was a time and place for such things and getting your cuddle on in the top of a necromancer’s tower is not the time nor place. “Although I guess she isn’t that much of a problem anymore, is she? Haha.”

“Yeah, I guess not.” John smiled again, although it was a little half-hearted. Breakups are never easy, no matter what and this one was especially brutal, considering that it had been John’s first real relationship in a long time.

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“Hey, I’m really sorry.” One of the disciplinarians interrupted Dave’s story. “But who the fuck is John? What’s going on? They’re in a necromancer’s tower? I thought this was a story about the battle at Owl Bay.”

Dave rolled his eyes.

“Can we kick this guy out?” He asked, pointing to the panelist in question. “Because I’m trying to build the foundations of a relationship here. Like, seriously. I’m being dead serious, can we have him removed?”

The president of the Young Witch’s Academy looked to her fellow panelist and nodded towards the door. With a sigh, the old wizard got out of his chair and exited from the hall, blinking back tears of embarrassment.

“In his defense.” Said the president. “I sort of feel like this is somehow unrelated to the matter at hand. Perhaps we could skip forward a little bit?”

“Sure. Sure. Whatever.” Dave coughed into his hand. “Where the fuck was I…?”

“Yeah, I guess so.” Said John with a half-hearted smile.

A bubble of guilt swelled in Rose’s chest, a very annoying bubble that had been present since she first endeavored to break up John and Roxy. She vowed then that she would one day come clean about her involvement in their breakup, one day when John was in a good mood and away from any
sharp objects that he could potentially use to stab her in her bitchy heart with.

“Would it help if I eased the recovery process for you?” Rose asked, leaning further into John.

“I guess, but I really don’t know how…” John was suddenly dragged by the collar to Rose, until their lips connected in a hot, messy kiss that lasted for like thirty minutes. When they finally separated, John breathed: “Oh. So that’s how.”

Rose kissed him again.

After a few more hours of resting and probably some sex, I dunno, I don’t pretend to know what goes on in my friend’s lives behind closed doors, Rose and John came down the stairs to find the rest of their party chilling at the bottom of the necromancer’s tower.

Jade was cleaning her crossbow at the table, whilst Davesprite and Janesprite were talking about sprite stuff, you know, ghost things that only ghostly beings can hope to understand, like how awesome it is to not worry about getting haircuts, or how you can be naked all the time and no one cares. Being a sprite rules.

Until it doesn’t. But that’s a story for another time.

“Allright team.” Said Rose as she buttoned up her robes right to her chin. Yeah, her and John totally had sex, or at least got to second and a half base. “We have a few more hours until first light, so that gives us plenty of time to reach the Fuchsia Kingdom before the elements really start to give us a hard time. I suggest that we head out in the next five minutes.”

“Yes, ma’am!” Cheered Jade, loading her crossbow and slinging it over her back. “I’ve been hurting for some more adventure! I’ve never been to the Fuchsia Kingdom before, but it sounds like a good place to get my fix!”

“It’s not a bad place to visit, although I wouldn’t recommend staying there for long.” Rose advised.

“Really? Why’s that?”

“You’ll see when we get there.” Rose answered carefully.

As John and Jade started packing their bags for the travel ahead, whilst Davesprite supervised, Janesprite floated over to Rose.

“Are you sure that you want me to accompany you, Rose Lalonde?” Asked the blue sprite. “I mean, I did used to work for an evil necromancer. Not many people will like me when they hear that.”

“That’s why we’ll keep it to ourselves.” Answered Rose, smiling at the sprite. “I’m a big believer in second chances and it goes against my grain to leave a good-natured sprite like yourself all alone in this shitty tower. While you may not accompany us to our quest’s end, it would be good of you to at least travel with us to the Fuchsia Kingdom. Who knows? You might even find employment there.”

“Do you really think so? Who would hire a sprite?”

“Lot’s of places!” Answered Rose. “You’ll just have to find out when we get there.”

“That’s the second time you’ve said that in the last two minutes.” Janesprite pointed out. “Is there something you aren’t telling us?”

Rose placed a hand to her chest in mock incredulity.
“Janesprite.” She fake-gasped. “I’m appalled by your skepticism. Surely, you trust me to be a lady of my word.”

Janesprite floated there for a moment, examining Rose from head to toe. Eventually, the sprite spoke once more.

“I trust you to do whatever you can to make sure that you reach your own goals. I can tell that just by looking at you.” Janesprite shrugged. “And I can respect that.”

“Then we’ll be having no trouble.” Said Rose, patting her on her ghost-shoulder. “Alright everyone. Let’s move out!”

Together, our heroes bid the necromancer’s tower farewell and ventured out into the sandy dunes of the Moonbear Desert once more. Since the moon was still high, the sun could not berate them with its devilish rays, making this journey much more enjoyable than their previous day’s one.

After a few hours of walking or floating, the fine sand began to turn to lose rocks and then to large boulders and then finally to a rocky landscape pock-marked with many craters. The craters of the Moonbear Desert are rumored to be caused by ancient Moonbears that fell from the heavens somewhere around year four.

No one has seen a Moonbear, although many people worship them as heavenly beings. Shit’s bullshit if you ask me. Like, why would you worship something that no one’s ever seen before? Fucking crazy, amirite?

Anyways, there was also this large valley that led out of the desert, and through that valley lies the Fuchsia Kingdom, one of the most famous ports in all of Skaia that feeds right out into Owl Bay. It’s called Owl Bay because the entire city is protected by Owl Knights, which are just regular knights except they are owls.

The sun had just crested the horizon when our party reached the city gates.

“Whooooooo approaches?!” Cooed the Owl Knight guard when he saw the heroes.

“It is I! Rose Lalonde, the greatest witch ever.” Rose bowed and gestured to her companions. “And these are my friends. We are mere travelers who wish to visit this fine city before continuing on our very important and epic quest.”

“Eh. Whatever.” The Owl Knight waved his owl wing and the large doors, baring the entrance to the Fuchsia Kingdom, swung open slowly. “Don’t get into any trouble. I mean it.”

“You have our word, fair knight.” Said Rose, as she shepherd her friends into the city.

As the doors closed behind them once more, Jade and John couldn’t resist letting out an awed gasp at what lay before them within the town walls. The Fuchsia Kingdom was one of the largest cities in all of Skaia, seconded in grandeur only by the Emerald City itself. There were many large, square buildings made from dark stone and neat, orderly streets throughout which all sorts of fantasy-ass creatures were going about their daily business.

Between John’s legs slithered a pair of Wizard Snakes, which are just regular wizards except they are snakes and nearby, a few green-skinned Elves could be seen playing a rousing game of Cluckaroo.

“I don’t win very often.” Admitted one Elf with three eye patches, one of which was over his crotch.
“Alright.” Rose clapped her hands once. “I suggest that we find the nearest inn and get accommodations for the night. Last time we stopped in a settlement, The City of Lakewater, we got a little sidetracked and ended up having to head out on the road again without a good night’s sleep. I’d like to insure that doesn’t happen again, especially not when my duel with the Bee Lord is only three chapters away. So everyone stick together and…”

Rose turned around to find that everyone, with the exception of John, had disappeared into the crowd.

“Shit on my dick.” She cursed.

Grinding her teeth, she took John by the wrist and tugged him through the city streets, in search of an inn suitable for their needs. One cozy little establishment, dubbed simply: ‘The Best Inn Around’ seemed appealing enough.

The inside was remarkably devoid of patrons, which pleased Rose just fine, as she valued her privacy highly.

“Two rooms for one night.” Said Rose to the clerk behind his counter, as she slammed a pair of gold pieces in front of him.

“Two rooms?” Echoed John. “Why so many?”

“I’ve spent my last nights in recent memory sleeping within the same ten square feet as Jade and Davesprite, one of which snores like a walrus with one lung and the other who kicks like an unborn infant. If I have the opportunity to live comfortably, even for one night, I’m gonna.”

“Where is everyone?” John asked the clerk, who produced two room keys for Rose. “You’d think that with so many people out in the streets that some of them might have a room here.”

“Yeah, you’d think that, wouldn’t ya?” The clerk sighed and leaned on the counter. “Yall must be new in town, so I’m gonna fill you in. About two weeks ago we got word from the south that an army of Beemen was heading this way to take over the Fuchsia Kingdom in the Bee Lord’s name. Since then, people have been fleeing the city in hoards and newcomers rarely stay more than one night.”

Rose’s eyes narrowed.

“The Bee Lord.” She growled, digging her nails into the counter. “That son of a B! Come on, John. We’ve got work to do.”

“Uh, what sort of work?” John followed her deeper into the inn and up a set of stairs to their rooms. “Like fun stuff that isn’t dangerous or difficult, right?”

“I’m afraid not, John.” Rose opened the room to find a single bed and a small dresser as the only furniture. She didn’t mind though. This would do just fine for one night. Dumping her satchel on the bed, Rose continued to speak. “If the Bee Lord is sending an army up to capture the Fuchsia Kingdom then it’s up to us to thwart him. Who knows? Maybe the Bee Lord himself will make an appearance, if so, we have to be ready to do battle.”

John swallowed hard. He didn’t know much about Beemen, other than the fact that they were half-bee, half-men hybrids who were known for fucking shit up. Despite the fear that stirred in his belly, he was sure that he would follow Rose’s lead no matter what.

“Alright.” He shrugged off his own bag and retrieved his hammer from it’s depths. “What do we
“I need you to go track down Jade and Davesprite.” Rose ordered. She adjusted her headband and checked her appearance in a shitty mirror hanging over the wall.

“What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to speak to the ruler of the Fuchsia Kingdom.” Answered Rose confidently. “The Empress of the Sea herself.”

The Empress of the Sea lived in this big-ass palace on the edge of town near the bay. The palace was built there because, as it turns out, the Empress of the Sea is a pretty big fan of the sea, and therefore wants to be near it pretty much all the damn time.

Like seriously. We get it, Empress. You like the sea a whole fucking lot. But maybe you could just relax, sometime. You know? Play it cool. Chill it with the sea stuff for a bit.

Anyways, Rose made her way to the palace, leaving John to go find the rest of their party and inform them about the current situation. If they were going to rally the city to fight against the approaching army of Beemen, then they’d have to do it together, and they were going to need the Empress on their side. Which might be easier said than done.

The reason Rose was often wary about the Fuchsia Kingdom, was because of the Empress of the Sea, who was a little bit of an incompetent ruler. It would take all of her witchly powers to get her on her side.

Rose walked right up to the palace gates, which were guarded by a pair Owl Knights.

“Good knights of the Sea Empress.” Rose said. “I seek an audience with your majesty.”

“What be thy business?” Asked the first Owl guard as he flapped his owl wings.

“I wish to offer her my support in the coming battle with the Bee Lord’s army of Beemen.”

“The D Lord’s smarmy of semen?”

“The D Lord… No. No, what the fuck? That’s not what I said at all.”

“Forget him.” Said the second Owl Knight. “He’s been hard of hearing ever since he traded his ears to an evil sorceress in exchange for a bag of magic beans.”

“Can you blame me?” Smirked the earless Owl Knight, clutching a very magical-looking bag of beans in his little owl hand.

“You can follow me, fair maiden.” Said the other Owl Knight. “I’ll take you right up to the throne room.”

“Thank you, kind sir.”

The Owl Knight opened the gates and led Rose through a beautiful garden. There were many ornate benches and flowing fountains that would have made for a really scenic postcard if cameras or postcards had been invented yet. The lovely park was entirely vacant though, as news of the impending Beemen attack had spread throughout the city.

“So where are you from?” Asked the Owl Knight, trying to make conversation.
“The west.”

“Ooooh. Sounds nice. My owl wife divorced me thirteen years ago and my kids don’t call me.”

“Really? How interesting. You know, I could probably find my way from here, thanks.” Rose quickly absconded the fuck away from that situation.

“I’m so alone.” The Owl Knight wailed after her, as she slipped through a pair of large doors and entered the throne room.

It was a pretty swanky room, with fishbowls all over the damn place, chandeliers shaped like octopuses, or ‘octopi’ if you wanna be a grammar troll, and at the far end of the hall, sat upon a gilded throne, was the Empress of the Sea herself.

She was a beautiful lady, swathed in a colorful gown and laden with many glittering jewels. Her long, shimmering hair was being brushed and braided by a group of five fairies. Their names were Flip, Bip, Kip, Slip, and Tony, and you’ll never hear about them ever again. On the Empress head, nestled between two curved horns sat the most beautiful crown you ever did see.

Rose had seen better, obviously, since she was a cool adventuring witch and all, but still, she appreciated the craftsmanship that went into the fine piece and fully understood why Scott the Necromancer would want it for himself.

“My lady.” Rose did a little curtsey. “It is I! Rose Lalonde, the greatest witch ever. I have come here today to offer you my services.”

The Empress looked down at Rose, surprised the see the witch in her throne room, as she had been preoccupied with some important work. She had been writing a song about the sea, that went a little bit like this:

Oh man I love the motherfucking sea, yeah!

Fish and shit and all kinds of squid!

Let me get into those waves, baby!

You won’t regret it, na na na come on!

In three years time, after the Empress finished the eleventh verse, the song would go triple platinum all over Skaia and be played in the palace twenty-four seven. It’s a big hit with most of the Owl Knight guards, but one guy really hates it.

“Greetings, Rose Lalonde.” Said the Sea Empress with a smile. “What sort of services are you willing to provide?”

“Protection, my lady. I have heard news of the impending invasion and I lend my wands to thee so that your rule may continue uninterrupted.”

“Oh. Are you talking about the army of Beemen heading this way?” The Sea Empress chewed her lip. “Yeah. I’ve pretty much decided that we can’t beat them.”

“So what? You’re going to surrender?”

“We’re too ill-equipped.” Explained the Empress. “Our armies cannot stand a chance against the Bee Lord’s. Not many people know this, but it turns out that owls fucking hate bees. Like, won’t even
“You cannot surrender!” Rose advanced towards the throne. “What of the people that live within your city’s walls and require your protection? Will you allow them to be turned into slaves of the Bee Lord?”

“Listen, I would love love looove to survive this invasion, but let’s be realistic.” The Empress sighed. “There’s nothing that can be done.”

“You can fight!”

“And get out asses kicked? Pass. I’d rather become a Bee slave than be super murdered during some pointless battle. Have you ever been stung by a bee? How about a six foot tall bee? Yeah, didn’t think so.”

“Well then fine! If you won’t lift a finger to defend these people, then I will.” Rose turned to stalk out of the throne room, but found her path blocked by half a dozen Owl Knights.

“I’m afraid I cannot allow you to incite a panic among my people.” The Sea Empress rose from her throne. “Let the ones who wish to leave, leave and the ones who wish to stay, stay. But there will be no fighting. You will not give them hope.”

“What are you going to do to stop me?” Rose’s fingers twitched towards her wands.

As in response to her question, a giant glass dome fell out of the ceiling, trapping her inside. Rose fired a spell at the wall, but the glass refused to break. She was trapped.

“A few hours in the time out bowl should hopefully set you straight.” Said the Empress as she retook her throne.

Rose grit her teeth. She hated being duped like this. How would the city survive the Beemen invasion now?

John was still out there. It was up to him.

Rose resisted the urge to groan. They were totally fucked.

Chapter End Notes

Can we talk for a second about why Sonic the Hedgehog is such a dick to Amy? She's like the sweetest, nicest pink hedgehog ever, who's totally into him, and yet he just treats her like shit every single game. Fuck Sonic, Amy. You don't need that.

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Chapter Sixteen: The Battle at Owl Bay: Part Two

John jogged through the streets of the Fuchsia Kingdom, looking through the various vendors and shops for his missing friends. Rose, who was accustomed to doing things on her lonesome, had trusted him with this very important mission and he wasn’t about to let her down.

He looked in Burlington Cloak Factory, Wizard Costco, and even in Dragonco (where the dragons go), but could not see head nor ghostly tail of any of his friends. He was starting to get a little flustered until he noticed a very raucous commotion taking place outside of a large tavern.

A large crowd had formed outside and John pushed his way through the throng of people to get a good look at all the fuss.

“We don’t serve their kind here!” A gross-ass goblin brandished an axe at Davesprite, Janesprite, and Jade. “Can’t you read the signs? No sprites, ghosts, ghouls, werebeavers, or goblins allowed!”

“How can you have a sign that forbids goblins when you’re a goblin yourself!?!?” Jade barked in response. Back in the day, Jade was known to pick a fight or two over social issues, especially where his friends were concerned. “You’re just a mean old hypocrite!”

“Mean old hypocrite!?! The goblin repeated, enraged. “I’ll show you a hypocrite, you dirty Weredog!”

He lunged forward and swung his axe at Jade’s head. She ducked his swing easily and responded with a roundhouse kick to the face that shattered his nose bone or whatever you call it into a billion pieces. A shard of his skull severed a lobe in his brain and caused him to relive every sad moment of his life in a timeless mind-prison of misery.

“Daaammnn.” Said someone standing on the sidelines.

Jade dusted herself off as the goblin’s dumb body hit the ground, and then looked around at the assembled crowd.

“Anyone else want to get fresh?” She asked.

Everyone instantly pretended to be interested in something else and walked away, leaving John, Davesprite, Janesprite, and Jade alone outside of the tavern.

“I appreciate you standing up for me and all,” Janesprite said. “But I can’t help but feel like that got out of hand really fast.”

“Oh you haven’t seen nothing yet.” Davesprite assured her. “Stick with us for a while and you’re bound to see all types of crazy shit. Like, this one time John was dating this super hot Werecat
named Roxy and… Oh hey, John. Uh… Just forget it, Janesprite. Never mind.”

John swallowed a lump in his throat as he joined his friends. If he could go one day without getting reminded of his former relationship with Roxy, then all would be right with the world.

“Where have you guys been?” John demanded. “I’ve looked all over the city for you guys.”

“We hit the shops.” Jade pointed to Davesprite, who was wearing a very snazzy ‘I heart Fuchsia Kingdom t-shirt’. “We decided to stop for a drink, but that asshole wouldn’t let us in. He was really rude! I thought this kingdom was supposed to be one of the nicest around!”

“Things are actually going to shit here.” John explained quickly. “Turns out that there’s an army of Beemen on their way here to attack the kingdom! Rose sent me to find you guys. We have to help defend the town!”

“Beemen. Really?” Janesprite rolled her eyes. “John, that’s the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard. There’s no such things as Beemen.”

“Actually there are.” Countered Davesprite. “Not many people know about them, but Beemen are man-sized bee’s who work for the Bee Lord.”

“I thought Beemen were a bunch of bee-sized men.” Jade stroked her chin thoughtfully.

“Bees the size of men, men the size of bees. It doesn’t matter!” John threw his hands in the air. “They’re coming and we’ve got to fight them. Now follow me, Rose is up at the palace talking to the Empress and…”

“Halt!” From the skies descended about half a dozen Owl Knights. They fluttered down to the street and surrounded the group. “We got a call about a domestic disturbance involving a goblin barkeep and a Weredog by the name of Jade Harley. Apparently someone was super murdered.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about. My name is Hade Jarley.” Said Jade, as she tried to kick the goblin’s corpse out of sight. “And there have been no disturbances here. No, sir.”

“Sorry, ma’am. You and your friends are going to have to come with us.” The Owl Knights closed in on our heroes. “You’re under arrest until we get this matter sorted out.”

“What do we do?” Davesprite whispered quickly to John as the Owl Knights pulled out magic shackles and began cuffing Jade.

“Just play it cool. We’ll figure something out.” John responded, as he allowed himself to be cuffed as well.

Up in the palace of the Fuchsia Kingdom, the Empress of the Sea herself was sitting in her throne.

“What do you think about this?” The Empress cleared her throat and began to sing:

Ooooh baby. I need you here right noooow!

It was once the best of times,
And now it is the… the... blurst of tiiiiIIIiiimmes!

Rose, who was still trapped inside the fish bowl, groaned and covered her ears. The ‘blurst’ of times? What the fuck was this crazy Empress talking about? Surely she wasn’t seriously considering
that particular verse a worthy of addition to her song.

“Oh, this is hopeless.” The Empress sighed and rested her chin in her hand. “I’ll never finish this song. Writing is just too hard!”

Out of frustration, the Empress angrily snatched up her writing notebook and ripped it in half. She threw the crumpled pages into the air and sadly watched them drift to the ground at her feet.

Oh how full of woe the life of an artist is.

Rose, ever the mischievous little minx, decided to play the Empress’s depression in her favor.

“You can’t give up, milady!” Rose said, in her sweetest voice. “All great songwriters reach a wall at some point, but an artist of your talent is bound to find their muse eventually. The world deserves to hear your voice!”

“Well of course, no one is going to argue with you on that point.” The Empress rose from her royal chair and began to pace up and down the throne room, around Rose’s glass prison. “I just have trouble finding the right words to express myself, you know? I’m a tortured soul, with a desire to express my anguish and grief!”

“Perhaps I can be of assistance.” Rose offered, then she too cleared her throat and began to sing.

Oooh baby. I need you here right now!

It was once the best of times,

And now it is the… worst of tiiiiimes!

And thus Rose wove a beautiful, musical blanket, which enraptured the Empress in the soft warmth of rhythmic majesty. Not many people know this about Rose, but she had quite the set of golden pipes on her. You might even say she was liable to drop a radical rhyme every whence and then.

Davesprite was still eons ahead of her in the bodacious beats category, but that just goes without saying. I don’t even know how you could even think about comparing the two. You’d have to be some kind of hydra-kissing idiot or something.

Anyways, I’m getting sidetracked:

“Oh my lyrical rings!” Gasped the Empress. “Of course! It all seems so simple now. The worst of times makes much more sense. Thank you, kind witch. Thank you so! How can I ever repay you?”

“You could let me go.”

“Naw.”

“Shit!” Rose pounded a fist against the wall of her cell and instantly regretted it as the sound bounced around the enclosed space. “Ugh. You can’t keep me here. I haven’t done anything.”

“You were going to incite panic amongst my people, at least the ones that are left.” The Empress sighed. “Listen, Lalonde. I just want everyone to get along and be happy. If I fight the Beemen, then my loyal servants and valued friends and companions will be put in danger! I can’t have that!”

“So you’d rather be easily conquered than risk death by fighting for your freedom? That’s one of the stupidest things I’ve ever heard! And I run around with a brain-dead sprite and… well, and John. A leader is supposed to be strong, stand firm and set an example for their people. You have an
obligation to stand up for yourself!”

“I have an obligation to prevent as much blood from being shed as possible.” Sulking back to her throne, the Empress flopped onto the velvet cushions. “I appreciate what you’re trying to do, Lalonde, but my mind is made up.”

“Ugh!” Rose threw her hands into the air. “Is everyone in a position of power in this fantasy land completely incompetent?!”

At that moment, the doors to the hall were thrown open and in marched a group of Owl Knights, shepherding John, Davesprite, Jade, and Janesprite as their prisoners. Rose groaned and beat her head against the wall of her prison with a solid thunk when she saw that her friends had been arrested.

Everything was totally fucked.

“This group was found at the scene of a grisly murder, your highness.” Explained one Owl Knight as he gestured to our heroes. “Eyewitnesses claim that this one,” He pointed to Jade. “Killed a local barkeep in warm blood, which isn’t as bad as cold blood, but still, like seriously, murder is murder, amirite?”

“Hey, Rose!” Jade waved to her friend and Rose waved back weakly.

“Ah! Friends with the witch, I see.” The Empress looked between Rose and the rest of her group. “Do you see now, Lalonde? Do you see now what happens when you allow rebellious nature to run rampant? You, Weredog. Yes, you. I bet you and your friends were planning to spread tales of rebellion as well! I cannot have that.” Snapping her fingers, The Empress summoned more Owl Knights. “Guards! Lift up Rose’s glass, fishbowl prison so that we can fit more people inside of it!”

Together, the Owl Knights struggled to lift the bottom of the fishbowl prison, which weighed like a billion fucking pounds I’ll have you know, and shepherd our heroes inside of it.

“Wait!” John yelled as he was shoved roughly towards the dome. “You can’t just lock us up! That’s not nice!”

“The world isn’t nice, whateyouurnameis.” The Empress sighed. “Now if you’ll excuse me, the Beemen are coming and I must prepare a solid surrender speech for, you know, when I surrender the kingdom to them.”

Davesprite, Jade, and Janesprite were thrown inside of the glass prison, whilst John continued to struggle against the guards.

“Stop being a bitch, dude, and get inside the bowl.” Urged one Owl Knight.

“No! You can’t do this!” John called to the Empress. “Please, your highness! Give me a chance to speak to you.”

“It’s hopeless, John.” Said Rose. “There’s nothing that you can say to her that I haven’t said. She’s made up her stupid mind already.”

“Just wait!” John ducked away from the Owl Knights and quickly dashed right up to the Empress’s throne. “Listen to me, your highness. I come from a town full of people like you. A town where everyone just wants to live peaceful lives full of nothingness and sorrow. You want to be a good Empress and I get that, but this isn’t the way to do it.”
“Oh, really?” The royal lady leaned forward and set a shrewd gaze upon John. “Am I just supposed to take your advice? Who are you to speak to me in this manner?”

“I am John, Hero of Honey Town.” Said you know who. “But to truthfully answer your question, I’m just a normal, below-average guy, who doesn’t deserve to lick the sole of your boot, let alone get all up in your grill.” John smiled sheepishly. “However, I think I know what it I’m talking about when it comes to letting people walk all over you.”

“This is different than what you think, peasant.” Snapped the Empress. “There’s a difference between being a floor mat and doing the smart thing.”

“A month ago, I would have agreed with you there.” John pointed back towards Rose and his friends. “But then I met them and I met her. Rose Lalonde is her name and she is the greatest witch ever. She showed me that things are different than the way I always thought they were. She showed me that there’s a time to be afraid and a time to run and most of all: a time to be brave.”

John took a step closer to the Empress and even had the guts to take her by the bejeweled hand. He continued:

“Now is the time to be brave, Empress. Even if it’s hard, even if it’s dangerous. You need to show your people that there’s honor in living within your Kingdom’s walls. With our help, you can fight off the Beemen save your people!”

As John finished, several things happened. The Empress looked into his bright, blue eyes and saw her own fear reflected in them, as well as an unprecedented amount of unmitigated hope that, frankly, changed her heart. Davesprite, Jade, and Janesprite, each broke into wind grins and smug smirks, seeing for the first time John’s capacity for heroism.

Lastly, as Rose listened to John speak of her in that manner, she realized something:

She loved him.

Rising from her throne, the Empress hefted her double-sided trident and raised it above her head.

“This lowly peasant is right!” She bellowed. “We’re the god-fucking-damn Fuchsia Kingdom and it’s time we proved what that meant!”

“What does that mean exactly?” Asked one Owl Knight. “I mean, Fuchsia is just a color, right? Like, a pretty obscure color too. What does that have to do with anything?”

“Get the fuck out.” The Empress demanded, pointing to the questioning Owl Knight. “I’m serious. Get the fuck out if you’re going to be like that.” After the Owl Knight left, the Empress continued: “Anyways, prepare for battle my owl guards. These Beemen will not take over our way of life today, fore we are floor mats no more!”

“Yeah!” Cheered all the Owl Knights.

They took their war hammers and swords and shields and ran from the throne room to set up defenses along the kingdom walls. The Empress herself walked up to the fishbowl prison and smashed it with one swing of her mighty double-sided trident. Glass rained down upon the group and I’m pretty sure that one shard bounced on the hard floor, flew towards the throne, and straight into John’s open mouth.

He spat the glass out quickly, but not before it made a tiny cut on the side of his tongue. For the next week, whenever his teeth brushed up against that side of his tongue, you know he wanted to shed a
“I’m sorry for the rough treatment. I now consider you all my friends.” Said the Empress to Rose and her companions. “I would be honored to fight by your side in the upcoming battle and in the end, stand victorious as champions of virtue.”

“You can count on us.” Said Rose, giving the Empress a solid fist bump.

As the Empress exited the hall to prepare for battle, John rejoined his friends and was immediately enveloped in a ridiculously tight hug by one Jade Harley.

“Oh, John! The way you talked to the Empress was so awesome! You really are a hero!” She squealed gleefully.

“I always knew you had it in you. Roxy would be so proud- Oh… oh, wait. Never mind. Just forget I said anything.” Congratulated Davesprite.

“Nice work.” Nodded Janesprite appreciatively.

“Heh, thanks, guys.” John smiled at his friends. “I just did what any of yall would have done. Hehe.”

“Was that true?” Rose blurted suddenly. “All that stuff you said… about me?”

John rubbed the back of his neck.

“Oh, yeah. Yeah, it was…”

He was cut off when Rose suddenly grabbed him by the front of the shirt and pressed her lips to his. John was momentarily stunned, but recovered quickly and reciprocated tenfold. Ever since he first began his journey with this amazing, brave, and spectacular woman, his heart had ached for her.

His hands gripped her slim waist tightly and only then, did he realize that his heart finally had her.

Eventually, after a good forty-five seconds of awkward and uncomfortable waiting at the hands of everyone else in attendance, the couple separated.

“Alright.” Said Rose, with a magical spark in her eye. “Let’s kill these Bee-bitches.”

They set up defenses on the kingdom walls. All of the Owl Knights came together to form an impenetrable line of pure muscle. They wielded long pikes and bows, with which they could use to fight the Beemen from a distance, and set up large catapults that they could use to launch flaming barrels, heavy rocks, and balloons full of slime at the attackers.

The slime doesn’t really do anything. It’s just really inconvenient. Just imagine you’re flying towards the palace with your fellow beebros, when a fucking balloon hits you right in the face and covers you in head to toe in green slime just like Danny Tamberelli from ‘Figure it Out’.

You’d be hella pissed right?

Anyways, up on the wall at the front lines, The Empress of the Sea herself stood with her mighty double-sided trident raised. By her side stood Rose and her band of heroes. They waited and watched the mist-covered bay for any sign of the invading Beemen. It was quiet… too quiet.

“There!” Shouted an Owl Knight as he pointed with his little owl hand. “In the mist.”
Sure enough, all of the defenders squinted into the fog to see a large shape moving towards them. As the shape grew nearer, the sounds of hundreds upon hundreds of buzzin insect wings could be heard. The fog dispersed and from it’s depths came the Beemen.

“Ooooh.” Davesprite squinted at the army, which must have been three thousand large. “So they are man-sized bees. Ugh. That’s fucking sick.”

The army of Beemen hovered over the bay. They were armed with bows and arrows, swords, axes, and one old Beeman just had a pair of spoons that he tried to scoop eyes out with. It never worked and more often than not, the old Beeman just got his ass kicked. He was a shitty soldier, but the other Beemen kept him around since he knew some good jokes and made the meanest cheese and potato stew you ever did taste.

One Beeman, the lieutenant of the army, flew forward to convene with the Empress.

“Empress of the Sea!” The Beemen buzzed. “The mighty Bee Lord of the South has sent us to claim this kingdom for his world domination kickstarter. I received word that you were looking to surrender without a fight. Is that so?”

“I don’t know.” The Empress tapped at her chin thoughtfully. “Why don’t you tell me?”

The Empress then turned to Jade and gave her a quick nod. Grinning, the sexy-fine Weredog raised her crossbow and fired a bolt directly into the Beeman’s eye socket.

“Ah! Son of a honeycomb!” Wailed the Beeman in pain. “Fuck you Empress! Fuck you in your fish asshole! We’re going to tear this kingdom down brick by brick. Fuck you!” He raised his bee sword to the sky. “Attack, Beemen! Attack!”

The Bee lieutenant rushed forward and was instantly decapitated by the swing of Davesprite’s sword. His dead, stupid body fell to the ground, chest-down, and his dead, stupid head flew through the air to be impaled on his incredibly erect stinger.

Every one of the kingdom defenders stared at the gruesome display for a second.

“Daaaamnnn.” Said one Owl Knight.

Then another Beeman fired an arrow that flew right into the Owl Knight’s mouth. He choked to death and died.

The battle had begun.

“Get to the town square and defend any civilians that may still be loitering about.” Rose commanded to John, Davesprite, and Janesprite. “Jade and I will remain here on the wall to hopefully impede their progress to the kingdom’s heart. If we are to fall, it will be up to you to save the day.”

“You can count on us, Rose.” Said Davesprite. “I eat pieces of shit like these guys for breakfast!”

“You eat pieces of shit for breakfast?”

“Wait- what? No… No that’s not what I mean…”

“Take care of yourself.” John stepped up and gave Rose a quick peck on the cheek, causing a tinge of pink to creep into her cheeks. “See you when all of this is over?”

“Bet on it.” She responded with a small smile. “Now get going. There isn’t much time.”
John, Davesprite, and Janesprite descended from the tower wall and ran/float as quickly as they could towards the center of the kingdom as the army of Beemen launched their assault against the defenders on the wall.

Rose and Jade fired magical spells and crossbow bolts, respectively, into the Beemen army, killing dozens upon dozens of the insect douchebags. The Owl Knights activated their catapults and launched projectiles at the invaders. Some of the Beemen were hit with slime and it was super inconvenient.

“This truly is a glorious battle!” Cheered the Empress as she swatted at the Beemen with her trident. “I’ve never felt so alive!”

“That’s the power that comes from standing up for yourself!” Cheered Jade. “That’s how I felt when I killed that goblin barkeep. I mean, when I saw someone kill that goblin barkeep.”

Rose summoned her cat familiar, Jaspers, and set him lose on the airborne attackers. He ripped through them like tissue paper, showering the bay with disgusting bee guts and bee body parts. With a tiny ’mew!’ Jaspers flew back to his master and deposited at her feet the still-beating heart of a Beeman.

“You’re a sick fuck, Jaspers.” Said Rose appreciatively. “And I love you.”

Then she raised her wands to the sky and continued the fight.

Down in the town square, some of the Beemen had managed to sneak past the first line of defense. They terrorized the Fuchsia Kingdom citizens by throwing rocks at them, jumping out from behind trash bins and yelling ‘boo!’, and by doing kick-flips on their bee skateboards outside of the public library, where a sign clearly forbid such practice.

John, Davesprite, and Janesprite had their work cut out for them.

“Hey! Stop that!” John yelled at a couple of Beemen who pulling up flowers in the town garden. “I thought bees were supposed to like flowers!”

“And I thought nerds were supposed know when to shut their traps.” One of the Beemen taunted as he drew his sword. “En garde, you scurvy dog!”


“What? No, you idiot.” The Beeman shook his head. “That just sounded like a fun thing to say. Don’t people say that before they fight?”

“Yeah, in movie scrolls.” Davesprite drew his sword. “But things are different in the real world. Prepare to get stomped!”

As John and Davesprite engaged the Beemen in combat, Janesprite floated off to the side and watched. She wasn’t much of a fighter, in fact, she was the exact opposite of a fighter: a pacifist. Now, there’s nothing wrong with being a pacifist, or any other type of person with strong beliefs. However, in the midst of a great battle, you sort of have to make yourself useful somehow.

“Uh, excuse me, sir.” Janesprite floated over to a Beeman solider in the process of setting fire to a wooden building labeled: ’Double Orphanage’. “But could you please not do that? I know that you want to prove how much of a big, tough guy you are, but there’s other ways to find fulfillment other than violence!”
“Like what?” Asked the Beeman, lowering his box of matches.

“Well, you could go to school and get an education, or find religion, or do work to improve society. All of which have the potential to build character and improve you as a person.”

“But this is what I’m good at.” The Beemen gestured to the battle waging around them. “My dad was an evil henchman, and his dad before him, and his dad before him. It’s in my blood. This is all I’ve ever done and it’s all I’m any good for.”

“Now, I don’t believe that for a second.” Janesprite argued. “Look at me! I’m the cheekiest little sprite you ever did see! However, I have a dark past shrouded in evil. At one point, I worked for an evil necromancer named Scott. I thought that was all I was good for too, until I met my new friends. You have the capacity for great things. You just have to be open to opportunities!”

“But change is scary.”

“Change is always scary, but you know what’s even scarier? Growing old with the knowledge that you didn’t try hard enough, that you didn’t set your best foot forward.” Jane took the Beeman by his little bee hand. “It’s not too late to try, Mr. Beeman.”

The Beeman looked at the ground and sighed. For a moment, Janesprite worried that her words hadn’t made much of an impact at all. But then the Beeman looked up once more and there was a brilliant smile on his face.

“You’re right, sprite.” He said. “It’s time to turn this life around!” Then he drew his bow and aimed at Janesprite. “Tomorrow.”

Janesprite let out a shrill shriek of fear and covered her head with her arms. John heard her yell and turned just in time to see the Beeman let his arrow lose, right at Janesprite.

“NOOOOOooooooooooooo!” Yelled John as he dashed forward.

He took a flying leap and dived in front of Janesprite. The arrow struck him instead, piercing his chest and ripping through the back of his shirt in a shower of blood. The hero fell to the ground in a heap, leaking red onto the cobblestone street.

“John!” Janesprite screamed in horror.

“Dumbass.” Commented the Beeman as he notched another arrow. “Hold still, sprite lady. This will only take a second- OH GOD MY NECK!!!”

Davesprite decapitated the Beeman with one swing of his sword. His body fell to the ground, leaking whatever it is bee’s have inside of them onto the cobblestone street. His severed head flipped through the air and landed right on top of John.

“Ow.” Said John, who was probably about to die.

His two friends knelt by his side and examined his chest wound.

“Fuck, John. Shit, shit, shit.” Davesprite cradled John’s head in his lap. “Are you a fucking idiot, dude? You better not die right now. Rose is going to be so god-damn pissed at me if you croak it now.”

“Oh, John.” If Janesprite possessed the biological requirements to produce tears, she probably would have been crying. “Thank you so much for a saving me. That Beeman was such a douchebag.”
“He was, wasn’t he?” John wheezed, coughing up blood. “Look, guys. I’m pretty sure that I’m totally boned. If I don’t make it… tell Rose that- that I love her, okay? Ever since I first saw her…”

He trailed off and with a final ‘bleh’, John died.

Up on the town wall, Rose was almost at her wit’s end with these fucking Beemen. Yeah, they weren’t good fighters and yeah, she tore them to shreds, but there were just so many of them. It was time to bring this battle to an end.

“Jade, cover me!” She ordered, as she raised her wands to the sky and chanted this ancient incantation:

\[
\text{Don’t speak!}
\]

I know just what you’re saying,
So please stop explaining.
Don’t tell me cause’ it hurts.

\[
\text{No, no, no.}
\]

\[
\text{Don’t speak!}
\]

As she sang her song, magical lightening flew from her wand tips and coated the sky in a purple glow. Almost immediately, all the Beemen fell from the sky, struck dead by the pure might and power of Rose’s unmitigated magical ability.

A Beeman fell at Rose’s feet.

“This is but a small victory, witch.” He spat. “The Bee Lord’s day is coming and soon, you shall fall!”

“Doubt it.” Said Rose, then she blew a hole in his head with a well-placed bullet spell.

“Rose! Jade!” Janesprite called as she flew up to her friends. “You have to come quick!”


“It’s John. Just come on!”

Leaving the Empress and her Owl Knights to celebrate their decisive victory, Rose and Jade followed Janesprite to the town square, where Davesprite waited with John. Rose saw the blood and the arrow protruding from John’s chest, quickly piecing together what had happened.

“Oh no!” Jade gasped, dropping to the ground by Davesprite’s side. “What happened? Is he dead?”

“I think it’s pretty obvious that he got shot with an arrow.” Snarked Davesprite, despite the anguish currently rolling in his chest. “And yeah, he’s really fucking dead.”

Rose turned to Janesprite.

“You know healing magic. Is that correct, sprite?” She was strangely calm considering the situation.

“I, uh… Yes, I do.” Janesprite eyed John worriedly. “But I’ve never tried to raise someone from the dead.”

“You have to try now.” Rose’s voice refused to waver. “You’re going to try.”
“Uh, yeah. Of course.” Taking position by his side, Janesprite held her hands over John’s corpse, and cast her most powerful healing spell: “Come, baby, come. Baby, baby. Come, come!”

Blue magic leapt from her fingertips and sank into John’s chest, swirling around his arrow wound and causing his body to spasm. Jade and Davesprite leapt back out of harm’s way, but both Rose and Janesprite held their positions. The arrow in John’s chest dissolved before their very eyes and the wound in John’s chest stitched itself together as if it had never been there in the first place.

He opened his eyes.

“Oh my golden rings.” He gasped, gingerly touching his healed chest. Upon finding himself to be thoroughly un-penetrated, he looked up to see Rose, with tears streaming down her once composed face. “Hey, Rose. Why are you crying? I’m healed!”

“I’m- I’m crying because…” Rose quickly wiped at her eyes. “Because I love you, you fucking idiot!”

And then she kissed him, right in front of her best friends, in the heart of the Fuchsia Kingdom, surrounded by dead Beemen, and without a care in the world. For the moment, they had won.

“So, yeah. That’s the story of the Battle at Owl Bay.” Dave finished, coming to a halt in front of the panel of judges. Rosie, who still sat in her tiny desk, was enraptured by the tale and had hung on her father’s every word throughout his long spiel. Most of the panel members were snoozing lightly in their seats, albeit the president and one guy on the far left who was crying silently.

“That fucking ending…” Sobbed the weeping panelist. “When she kissed him. CLASSIC!”

The president cast him a scathing glance and then returned her attention to Dave.

“Yes, Mr. Strider. That was a truly lovely tale, one which we’d love to hear the rest of someday.” She said shrewdly. “I fail to see, however, how that entire thing had anything to do with your daughter’s predicament.”

“Well, you see, ma’am. I told that story because… uh, you see…” Dave wracked his brains. “I was trying to explain how I knew the greatest witch ever, right? And how my daughter learned that transmogrification spell.”

“Yes. And?”

“And what?”

“And how does your story excuse your daughter’s actions!” The president shrieked.

“Uhhhhhhhh.”

“That’s right! It doesn’t! Thank you for the entertainment, Mr. Strider, but the truth of the matter is that your daughter brutally harmed a fellow student and therefore must be expelled!” The president lifted a large, rubber stamp and brought it down on an official-looking document with a deafening slam! “So it has been decreed. You’re daughter will never step foot in these halls again. Thank you for coming. Goodbye.”

Before Dave or Rosie could object, a large troll wearing a plaintiff’s uniform ushered them from the large hall. The father and now expelled young witch were taken from the academy and tossed out onto the street.
Dave dusted himself off, took his daughter by the hand, and angrily marched away from the school. Rosie began to cry.

“What are we going to do, Daddy?!” She asked. “Mom is going to be so fucking pissed! How am I ever going to learn magic now?! My life is ruined!”

“No it isn’t.” Dave stated firmly. “I’ll handle everything, okay? You’re going to be just fine. We’ll figure something out.”

But even as Dave spoke, he knew that both he and his daughter were fucked as soon as they returned home to Jade.

Chapter End Notes

I think there were three songs in this chapter, maybe even four, which is the most I’ve ever stuffed into one chapter before. I doubt there will be any more songs in any future chapters, simply because song-spells are much too powerful and need to be nerfed. Oh well.

Thanks for reading. Watch the Sonic Boom cartoon.
- Mike
Chapter Seventeen: The Worst Wizard Dance Ever

After being expelled from the Young Witch’s Academy, Rosie had gone straight home, locked herself in her bedroom, and thrown one of the biggest, most pitiful fussy fits you could ever possibly imagine.

It was extremely rare to be born with awesome magical powers. Most witches and wizards are just normal dudes who devote their entire lives to learning magic and understanding the arcane arts. So when you see a witch, who was born as a witch, it’s pretty cool stuff.

So you can just imagine Rosie’s woe upon learning that she was now forbidden from returning to the Young Witch’s Academy to hone her magical skills. It was easily the worst day ever in the young girl’s life.

As she lay on her bed, crying, there was a knock on the door.

“Yo, Rosie.” It was her father, Dave. “I know that you’re heartbroken over what happened today, but I promised you that everything is going to be okay, and it is. Now get yourself cleaned up and come out here. Your mom is supposed to be home soon and you’ve got to help me finish up dinner.”

“Ugh.” Rosie hated it when her dad made dinner. He never utilized Jade’s garden, which was an endless source of fresh fruits and vegetables, but always made the same wizard burritos with apple juice to drink. It was pretty awful.

However, when Roxy cleaned her face of all the gross kid tears and snot and exited her bedroom, she found that her dad was pulling out all the stops. He’d made a glorious salad, roasted some racoonicorn meat, and even moseyed on down to the local winery to buy the finest, most blood souring, liquor money could buy.

“Grab some plates and set the table.” Dave commanded, as he tossed his wife’s salad. “She’ll be here any minute.”

Rosie did as she was told, all the while examining the glorious dinner warily. Her dad had only ever prepared food like this once before, back when he had accidentally ruined Jade’s prized Rickenbacker 4001S wizard bass guitar by feeding it to super-termites.

“Oh my golden rings!” Rosie gasped, wheeling on her father. “You’re going to tell her what happened!”


“Yes, you are! You’re going to spill the beans and then beg for forgiveness. That’s why you made this awesome dinner and… and what the heck is that?!?” Lunging forward, Rosie snatched a long, thin box out of the Dave’s exposed back pocket. “You bought her jewelry! I can’t believe this!”

“It’s for her birthday!” Dave snatched the box back and shoved it into his pocket. “What? A man can’t by his woman a gift every whence and then?”
“Her birthday was two months ago, Dad!” Rosie dragged a hand down her face. “God-dammit. I thought we were going to make up some story about why I can’t go back to school. We can’t tell her the truth. She’ll be so mad!”

“Lying isn’t healthy in any relationship, darling. Now go put on that nice dress Aunt Jane got for you last year.”

“Fuck no. I’m not putting on a dress.” Rosie stamped her foot. “Dad, we cannot tell mom what happened. If she finds out. No amount of dinners or fancy gifts will ever soften the unmitigated rage that will explode out of her. She’ll ground me for eternity and never speak to you again!” The small girl took a deep breath. “And worst of all: she won’t let you tell me about the greatest witch ever anymore!”

At that moment, the front door opened and in stepped Jade Harley herself. She dropped her bag to the ground with a heavy thud and shrugged off her coat, throwing it towards the coat rack and not caring when it completely missed and lands on the floor.

“Today was the worst day ever!” She proclaimed, stomping into the kitchen. “First I left my papers at home so I had to come back for those, then when I got back to work, everyone was out bowling without me!”


“And then, when I try to order wizard tacos for lunch, then sent me fucking wizard fajitas, Dave. And you know that I can’t eat wizard fajitas.”

“Oh man, do I ever….”

“Finally, on the way home, some dude riding a fucking unicorn cut me off on the loop and nearly caused a six wagon pile-up! Needless to say, I’m not in the mood for any bullshit tonight!” Grabbing Dave’s fancy bottle of liquor off the counter, Jade opened it with her teeth, spat out the cork, and took a healthy swig. Wiping her mouth on the back of her hand, she continued: “I really hope you don’t have any bad news tonight, because if you do, I will fucking LOSE MY SHIT!”

Dave exchanged a glance with Rosie. Both of them were on the verge of pissing their trousers.

“Don’t worry, hun.” Dave quickly, yet lovingly, coaxed Jade into a seat at the table. “Just relax and enjoy this awesome and lovely meal. This house is now a worry-free zone.”

“Thanks, Dave.” Jade smiled at her husband. “I needed this.”

And so the Strider family sat down for dinner, careful to tread lightly around any topic that might set Jade off, or depress the good vibes currently flowing through the house thanks to Dave’s remarkably well-prepared meal. However, there was still the slight, underlying problem of Rosie’s expulsion, which Dave would have to cover for.

He had to think quickly.

“You know,” He set down his fork after a while. “I’ve been thinking about the public school system around here and it really sucks. Standardized testing, under-paid and over-worked teachers, impractical curriculums. I think it would be smart to look for alternative forms of education.”

“I agree!” Added Rosie, and then much more calmly: “I mean, I sort of feel like I’m out-growing the Young Witches Academy. Maybe I should put some feelers out for some different… I dunno, educationalists?”
Jade, who had been happily enjoying her meal until that point, set her fork down as well and examined her family curiously.

“This is coming out of nowhere.” She giggled and turned to her daughter. “Are you being serious? Do you think that you’re too old for that school? You’re still so very young.”

“Well, yeah, but daddy agrees with me!”

“It’s something to think about at least.” Said Dave wisely.

“Yes…” Jade tapped her chin with her finger. “That school is pretty expensive, isn’t it?”

“Indeed.” With their meal pretty much finished, Dave began to clear the table. “In the meantime, I was thinking that we could, I dunno, have a family vacation or something.”

“A family vacation?”

“Yeah.” Dave shrugged casually, with well-practiced nonchalance. “When’s the last time we did something fun as a family?”

“Where would we even go?”

“I hear the Fuchsia Kingdom is nice this time of year.” Dave shot his wife a wink.

Jade stifled another giggle.

“Dave, we haven’t been there in… oh my god, it’s been years!” She narrowed her eyes at him then suddenly. “You sure are acting weird tonight, honey. First this nice dinner, then the thing about Rosie’s school, and now you’re bringing up the Fuchsia Kingdom? What’s up?”

“Nothing, all of those things are completely unrelated. Stuff is just popping into my head, you know?” Dave sank back into his seat at the table. “So what do you think?”

Jade sighed and rubbed at her tired eyes. She looked from Dave to her daughter and then back again.

“Oh gosh. I don’t know if we’re even allowed back there after what happened last time.” She laughed a little nervously.

“What happened last time?” Asked Rosie.

“Well, you see it was just after the Battle at Owl Bay…” Began Dave.

“Whoa!” Jade interrupted. “Dave, are you seriously about to launch into another story?”

“Of course.” Dave rolled his eyes, even though no one could see it. “She asked, didn’t she? This story is harmless, okay? There’s no death or anything, just good old family fun.”

“Well… alright.” Jade leaned back in her chair. “I don’t really remember anything about that night anyways.”

“Then it will be educational for everyone!” With a grin, Dave turned back to Rosie. “So yeah, as I was saying…”

Rose, Davesprite, Jade, and Janesprite were in the palace of the Fuchsia Kingdom. It was mere minutes after John’s resurrection and they were all standing around his hospital bed in the infirmary.
There were other places the heroes could be, of course, but they all decided to stay with their friend, even when the head warlock healer declared him to be perfectly fine.

Now, John didn’t have wizard health insurance back in the day, but by order of the Empress of the Sea, he would receive care free of charge anyways. He and his friends had just helped to save the kingdom from the Bee Lord’s army of Beeman, after all.

“How are you feeling, John?” Asked Jade, worriedly examining her friend as he lay in bed.

“I’m pretty fine, I guess.” John fingered the heavy bandage wrapped around his head. “I mean, better than dead. Thanks for that by the way, Janesprite. You really saved the day on that one.”

“Oh, you’re welcome.” Janesprite blushed, unused to such high praise. “You would have done the same for me if you could have. I have to warn you against dying a second time though, as my powers only work once per person.”

“Pshh. What kind of bullshit limitation is that?” Davesprite asked. “Hell, that’s borderline useless.”

“What do you mean ‘useless’? My useless powers just saved your friend’s life!”

“Yeah, but what’s the point of only being able to save his life once, but not again?”

“The point is that you don’t be an idiot and die more than once.”

“Can’t you just ignore that stupid handicap and resurrect everyone as much as you want?”

“It doesn’t work like that. My powers are dictated by the nature of magic itself.”

“Yeah, but wouldn’t it be cool if you could live forever.”

“No. Who’d want to live forever?”

“I would!”

As the two sprites squabbled, Rose, who had been sitting in a chair by John’s side this entire time, leaned forward and spoke to her boyfriend quietly.

“I, uh… nearly lost you back there, huh?” She chuckled nervously.

“Yeah… I guess so.” John smiled weakly. “I’m sorry that I missed the rest of the fight. Jade said that you were spectacular though.”

“I just did what I could. Thank the gods it was enough. Also, you shouldn’t feel guilty for being shish kebob-ed by that arrow. You were very brave.”

“I wasn’t really thinking clearly.”

“Still, you acted like a true hero and that’s what counts.” Rose found his hand on the sheets and gently laced her fingers with his.

John unabashedly stared at their interlocked hands. He was in awe that he, John Egbert, could possibly ever be in a situation such as this. He had once been a lame-ass hero in a lame-ass town, but now he was a true hero, in one of the biggest kingdoms in Skaia, surrounded by true friends, and with a beautiful/badass/bodacious girl holding his hand.

If only his dad could see him now.
But his dad was super dead, so yeah, that wasn’t going to be happening.

The doors to the infirmary suddenly opened and in strode an Owl Knight dressed in the fanciest, fuchsia garb that you ever did see. In his owl hands he carried an official-looking scroll. After walking to the foot of John’s bed and standing before the group, he unfurled the scroll and began to read:

“By order of the Empress of the Sea, Rose Lalonde the greatest witch ever, John Egbert the hero of Honey Town, Davesprite the most bitchin dude ever, Jade Harley the Weredog, and Janesprite the sweet healer, must attend a wizard dance tonight in honor of the Fuchsia Kingdom’s victory over the Beemen army.” The Owl Knight closed his scroll. “It’s at seven tonight in the throne room, black tie event, B.Y.O.B.”

Then he turned and fluttered away.

“Wow!” Gasped Jade once their group was alone once more. “A wizard dance! I’ve always wanted to go to one of those. I wonder what it’ll be like.”

“Probably a bunch of pretentious socialites smiling plastic smiles at one another and giving each other firm handshakes.” Davesprite scoffed. “We aren’t going to a stupid party. Sorry, Jade.”

“But we were invited! We have to go.”

“The best part of being invited, is that you get to turn down the invitation, thus making yourself appear more desirable to the regal sonovabitches who sent the invitation in the first place.” Davesprite tapped a ghostly finger against his ghostly temple. “This is basic high-society stuff, Jade. If you’re having trouble grasping this, then you should stay away from friggin wizard dances.”

Jade turned to Rose, clapping her hands together and giving the witch the most pitiful, puppy-dog pout she could muster. It was the type of looks that could melt hearts, boost morale, and even be used as an effective demon banishment technique in exorcisms. Even Rose, the greatest witch ever, could not last long under such a saccharine gaze.

“Can we go to this party, Rose? Please, please, please, please, please…” After, like, twenty minutes of solid ‘pleases’ , Jade wrapped it up. “Please, please, please, please with a magic cherry on top?”

Rose stroked her chin, wished she had a beard, and considered the pros and cons of attending such a gathering.

“It would be rude to refuse,” She began. “But this also seems like a colossal waste of time. I’ve attended many wizard dances such as this in the past and they never amount to much, a little food and a little dancing, but in the end, these sort of parties are nothing but a chance for the privileged to pat themselves on the back.”

“I dunno if it’s that kind of party.” Janesprite piped up. “I mean, the scroll said it was because of the battle you guys won. Maybe they’ll give you guys some kind of medal!”

Davesprite’s ears perked up at this.

“A medal, you say…” He rubbed his hands, sort of like a bad guy does when they’re scheming something evil or when a fly is about to eat, and changed his mind about the wizard dance entirely. “Alright, how about this. We go to the party, have a few drinks, have a lot of drinks, get completely trashed, get our medals, and then head out before sun rise.”

“And set our sights on the Bee Lord of the South.” Finished Rose. “Alright, that’s fine with me. I
suppose it would do us all a little good to celebrate, considering how hard we’ve been working recently.”

“Yes! I’m hyped as shit for this party.” Jade did a little happy dance. “Oh fuck! What are we going to wear?! I don’t have any nice clothes, just my adventuring duds. And you heard that Owl Knight, he said it was a black tie event!”

“Oh goodness. You’re right.” Rose clapped a hand to her mouth. “There’s only one thing we can do. Are you thinking what I’m thinking, Jade?”

“You know it!”

SHOPPING SPREE!

A montage of Rose and Jade going through all these fancy clothing shops followed, as Cyndi Lauper’s ‘Girls Just Want to Have Fun’ played in the background. The two classy ladies spend time trying on different hats and laughing at one another as they made silly faces. Then Rose comes out of a dressing room wearing a nice dress and Jade is all like: ‘No way!’ And then Rose goes back into the dressing room, comes out with a different dress, and then Jade is all like: ‘Oh yes!’ Next the girls get inside one of those wizard photo booths that take, like, five photos real quick and they take all these cute photos where they make kissy faces and flash weird gang signs, and then the final shot of the montage is the two girls walking down the street with a lot of shopping bags on their arms, then jumping into the air and high-fiving as the frame freezes.

“That was the best shopping spree ever!” Said Jade, once they were back by John’s bed in the infirmary. “Look, Dave. I even got you a tie!”

“I’m a sprite. I don’t wear clothes.”

“You do when we go to parties like this, silly.” Jade pulled the tie out of her bag and slung it around her friend’s neck, expertly tying a double windsor knot. “There! Doesn’t that look nice?”

Davesprite looked down at his new tie. It was orange in color, just like the rest of him. In fact, you probably wouldn’t notice he was even wearing a tie at all if you didn’t look really, really closely. It was that kind of irony that persuaded Davesprite to continue wearing the tie.

“Where did you get all the money for this stuff?” Asked John, watching as Rose put a floral hat on Janesprite’s head.

“Oh, you know I always keep a few gold pieces around for emergencies.” Rose shoved Davesprite’s credit card deeper into her pocket as she spoke. Don’t ask me how she got it. She just did. “Here, John. I got you this.”

Rose then passed John a nice-looking dress shirt.

“Oh, geez. I can’t accept this, Rose! It’s too nice-looking.” He tried to give it back. “Plus, I don’t even know if I should go to this thing. Maybe I should take it easy tonight, since I died last chapter and all.”

“Aaw don’t be like that, man.” Davesprite groaned. “There’s no way I’m going to no shin dig without my best bro. The warlock healer said you were fine anyways.”

“No. I think John is right.” Janesprite reluctantly agreed. “He’s in no condition to be drinking and/or dancing. The best thing for him is a good night’s rest. You want him to be in top shape for the Bee Lord fight, right?”
“Yeah, I guess that makes sense.” Jade’s ears drooped. “Sorry, John, we’ll make this up to you. I’ll sneak you some fancy horderves or something.”

After bidding John goodbye, the suddenly less-enthused party made to leave the infirmary to prepare for the wizard dance. Before Rose left though, John reached out and caught her by the wrist. She turned and looked back at him with confusion.

They were now alone.

“I-uh… Hehe.” He chuckled nervously. “I’m sorry. It’s just… did you mean what you said earlier?”

“What?” Rose asked.

“Well, when I came back to life. You said something… and then you kissed me. Did you mean it?”

Rose’s black-painted lips quirked in a small smile.

“Yes.” She leaned forward and gave him a quick kiss. “I meant every single word.”

“Heh. Awesome.” He stole another kiss. “So I guess I’ll see you later then. Try not to have too much fun, okay?”

“I think we’ll have the appropriate amount of fun. Rest easy, hero.” And then she left him, with the ghost of a kiss on his lips and a lovely warmth in his heart.

Seven-o-clock rolled around soon enough and our heroes, sans John, found themselves approaching the large, wooden doors to the throne hall. Beyond the entry way, the muffled sounds of a rockin party could be heard and no one was not excited.

“Oh man, I’m so excited.” Said Jade, who was all ritzed up. Her dark hair, which was usually tossed back in a messy stallion tail, was all sleek and shiny, and you know that Davesprite’s ghostly heart was beating double time. “It just sucks that John couldn’t come.”

“He’ll be fine.” Davesprite assured her, offering the pretty Weredog his ghostly arm. “Now come on. It’s time I showed you how sprite’s get down!”

“Haha. Okay!”

Leading the way, Davesprite pushed open the heavy doors to find that the party was totally, fucking awful. The music they heard out in the hall was just the Empress of the Sea, who stood on her throne singing her horribly-written personal rhapsody. There was a lone table with a bowl of gross-ass punch and one of those lame-ass fruit platters that some overly health-conscious attendee probably brought.

No one was dancing. All those invited stood against the four walls as if awaiting some kind of firing squad. There were Owl Knights, of course, fish men, goblins, racoonicorns, and even a few gnomes. A Red-winged Crow flew overhead carrying two glasses of punch in his little bird feet. The crow flew right to his girlfriend and handed her one of the drinks. She took a sip from the cup and then splashed the rest of the liquid into the crow’s face before storming away.

No one knows what that was about.

“You’ve got to be joshin me.” Said Rose. “This is literally the worst wizard dance ever. Of all time.”

“I don’t understand.” Janesprite examined the shitty get-together. “I thought this was supposed to be
a big deal.”

“Yeah!” Jade exclaimed. “Where’s the dancing? Where’s the fun? Where are the horderves!!?”

“Did someone say horderves?” Out of nowhere, a little gnome scurried up carrying a gleaming silver platter. “Would anyone care for a stonenut?”

“Fuck off!” Rose cried, knocking the tray out of the gnome’s hand. Drawing her wand, she quickly transfigured the cruel gnome into a real nut and left him on the floor next to his fake brothers. “This party blows, guys. Let’s get out of here.”

“Not so fast!” From the throne descended the Empress, halting her beautiful song so as to greet her guests of honor. “Thank you all so much for coming. This party is about to kick into high-gear. I promise!”

“How?” Davesprite demanded, folding his arms. “I see no evidence whatsoever that this party will be approaching anything relatively close to ‘high-gear’ any time soon.”

“Well, here comes the band right now, you silly sonovafish!” The Empress gestured towards the doors and, sure enough, a full band entered.

There was a sexy mummy maiden on lead vocals and guitar, a gorillaman on drums, and a wizard snake on electric bass. If you’re wondering how the wizard snake could possibly play electric bass when he didn’t have any arms, just remember: he’s a wizard snake.

“What happened next could only be described as some kind of terminal disease, like dragon wing cancer, plus a horrific natural disaster, like a lava tornado. In short, this band was so bad that it was like a lava tornado full of dragon wing cancer.

The worst thing imaginable.

“Alright, super fuck this. I’m out.” Rose waved to her friends. “Tell me how the rest of this dreadful party goes and pick up my medal for me, if we even get one.”

Leaving her friends to brave the travesty of a jam without her, Rose ascended back up through the palace all the way back to the infirmary. John was still in his bed, snoozing lightly in the dim light afforded to him by a small candle on his bedside table.

Kicking off her shoes, the witch gracefully clambered into the bed with John. No matter how much of a lightfoot Lalonde was though, this was no temperpedic mattress. John’s metaphorical wine glass jigged as the bed was disturbed and hypothetical wine was spilt all over the god-damn place, waking him up.

“Ugh. Hey, Rose.” John muttered sleepily, scooting over to make some room for her. “Party over already? Geez, that was fast.”

“I only went to the party for like thirty seconds.” Explained Rose, snuggling up against his side. “It was incredibly dreary and awful, not someplace where I’d like to spend my evening in complete honesty. It’s a shame truly, as wizard dances typically have so much potential.”
“I’m sorry that you’re disappointed. Although, I can’t imagine why a smelly old hospital room would be better than a boring party. At least there’s food down in the throne room and other people too.”

“Yes, but none of them quite as enjoyable as thee.” Rose rolled onto her side, propping herself up on her elbow so as to look at John fully. “I’ve come to a realization recently, experienced an epiphany, if you will.”

“Really?”

“Mhmm.”

“Well, go on. Tell me about it.”

“I think I’ve finally got this whole witch thing figured out.” Rose’s eyes fell to John’s chest, where her hand not propping her head toyed with a loose string on his shirt. “In the beginning, it was all about being the greatest I could possibly be, no matter what that entailed. I went on many quests, defeated many foes, gained and lost many companions, but in the end, I was always left feeling unfulfilled.”

She took a deep breath, then continued:

“When I came upon this quest to defeat the Four Evil Mages, I thought that I’d finally found my calling and nothing was going to stand in my way. However, the further we got into my journey and the more time I spent with you and Davesprite and Jade and everyone else, I couldn’t help but feel like something was still missing. It took Roxy and you hooking up to realize what it was.”

“What was it?” John asked, curious.

“It was… well,” A blush rose in the witch’s cheeks. “It was companionship and love and… it was you.”

“Oh.”

“Oh indeed.”

A grin split John’s face and Rose couldn’t help but smile too. They met in a kiss, more passionate and much less innocent than the quick ones before. John’s hand found it’s way to her waist and he gripped her firmly. Rose’s fingers laced in his hair, spurring a deep growl from the back of his throat.

Pretty soon, it was an all out grope fest. They were copping feels, stealing second base, performing the mobius double reach around. All that jazz.

They got it on.

You know… it.

I’m talking about sex.

Anyways, while that was going on, the party was still sucking double dick down in the throne room. Davesprite and Janesprite were taking turns dancing with Jade and doing the best possible to make a half-decent situation out of this incredibly shitty one.

“I’ll take you to a real party one day, Jade.” Davesprite said as he and Jade did The Carlton to a particularly fast WGM song. “This isn’t nothing. I’ll show you what it’s really like to get down.”

“I really hope so!” Jade whined. “Fuh. Even the sun bathing rituals back with the Sun Clan were
more fun than this. And that was literally just lying on a flat rock and baking in the sun all day, the most pointless, potentially harmful, and incredibly boring ritual ever!”

“Wow. You must have really hated that place.”

“It was awful, yeah.” Jade sighed. “But... it was home.”

“Your home’s here now.” Davesprite said. “Out here, with me and Rose and John. We’re your family, baby doll, and as long as we’re together, you’ll never be homesick.”

As the dancing pair switched dances with the song and started performing a fierce krumping routine, Jade eyed Davesprite with a peculiar gaze.

“No I mean that?” She asked quietly.

“Yeah. Of course.”

“Aww that’s so sweet of you!”


“You know it!”

As the music began to die down, everyone in attendance to the party turned towards the stage, where the Empress of the Sea had taken the microphone. She cleared her throat and began to speak in a voice magnified so that it could be heard throughout the entire hall.

“It’s that time of the night, folks! It’s time to pay tribute to those who served our Kingdom wonderfully in the recent battle against the fiendish Beemen. Without these brave women, man, and sprite, our kingdom surely would have fallen to their insect master.” The Empress beckoned to a nearby Owl Knight, who approached with a glorious, jewel-incrusted box in his hands. “Here! I have medals for all of you!”

Davesprite, Jade, and Janesprite approached the stage and retrieved their medals of honor from the Empress of the sea.


The Empress shrugged as if to say ‘sorry bro’ then turned and left the stage.

Davesprite lost his shit.

“Fuck this party!” He cried. Drawing his sword, he cleaved the punch bowl in two, splattering gross, disgusting punch all over the god-damn place. “Yeah, motherfuckers! Punch is for suckers!”

He then proceeded to wreck the entire throne room, with help from Jade and Janesprite, of course. They knocked over the Empress’s throne, smashed the wizard snake’s electric bass in half, and spray-painted vulgar words and lewd images all over the walls.

All in all, it was a good night for everyone.

Chapter End Notes
I'm starting my second semester of college this morning, so yeah, my updates may or may not slow. We'll see.

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Chapter Eighteen: The Bee Lord of the South

“This is just the type of family vacation that we need!” Said Dave, as the ferry dropped him and his two favorite ladies off in the port of the famous Owl Bay. Up a path of gilded stone and through a set of fancy gates, lay the great Fuchsia Kingdom. “When’s the last time we had fun as a family, you know?”

“Not ever since we tried to take that trip to the beach.” Said Jade, as she pulled the young Rosie along by the hand.

“Oh, come on. The beach wasn’t that bad.”

“It was the beach on the coast of the great lava river, Dave. It was pretty bad.”

The family ascended the stone steps and entered the kingdom proper, but only after nodding to the Owl Knight guards and flashing their wizard passports of course. The streets of the Fuchsia Kingdom were blurs of color and sound. People of all races and professions and genders were rushing to and fro, conducting business, getting laid, getting paid, and performing public sanitation for a wage unsuitable for anyone in any social standing to live by.

In sort, it was just like Dave and Jade remembered it, but better.

“I’m actually starting to really like this whole vacation idea!” Jade sang happily, as they made their way through the bustling streets. “Rosie can use this break from school to look for better academies where she can continue her studies,” She looked to Dave next. “And you, my dear, can play a few shows at the local taverns and educate these deprived fools in the majestic magic of raw lyrical rhythm.”

“You know it, babe.” Reaching into his shirt pocket, Dave produced a slip of paper. “And last but not you, my sweet Jade, are going to enjoy a child and husband-free night at the best spa in the Fuchsia Kingdom.”

“Oh my golden rings, I don’t believe it!” Jade screeched and snatched the paper voucher from her husband’s unsuspecting fingers. Sure enough, the ticket was for one evening at the swankiest spa around town. “Dave, you shouldn’t have.”

“It was my idea, Mommy!” Piped up Rosie. “You’ve been working so hard lately, being a great mom and all, you really deserve some time to yourself!”

“Awwww, you guys.” Jade embraced her beloved family in a powerful hug. “I love you.”

“Yeah, yeah. Everyone loves each other.” Dave swiftly deposited a kiss on Jade’s check. “Now let’s check into an inn.”

An hour or so later, I don’t really know I wasn’t fucking there, Jade bid goodbye to her husband and child and absconded to the spa for an evening of solidarity and relaxation. The next day, she’d spend time with her family proper, but until then, fuck those needy assholes.
Dave and Rosie, left to their own devices, sat together in their rented room at the inn, playing cards and sipping on some delicious wizard hot cocoa.

“Hey, Dad?” Rosie asked. “Is there a god?”

“Nope.” Said Dave.

“Oh. Okay.”

Well, that settled that.

Suddenly, the door was kicked open and in fluttered like six Owl Knights armed to the teeth. Rosie let out a squeal of fright and Dave quickly shoved her behind him, drawing his sword to defend himself.

“Dave Strider!” Barked the lead Owl Knight. “By order of the Empress of the Sea herself, you are required to accompany us to the royal palace.”

“What?” Dave demanded.

The lead Owl Knight’s owl eyes narrowed.

“Why?” Dave demanded.

Like, ten minutes later, I still don’t know exactly how long it was, Dave and his daughter Rosie were brought before the Empress of the Sea. She hadn’t changed much in the years since Dave’s last visit to the kingdom. She still wore many jewels, a fancy-ass dress, and had hair that flowed down her shoulders, back, ass, legs, all the way to the floor and out the door down the hall.

“Dave Strider.” Said the Empress with a wide grin. “How good it is to see you again. I trust you are in good health?”

“I’d be in even better health if your owl goons didn’t jump me and my kid.” Dave folded his arms.

“What do you want, Empress?”

“I just wanted to catch up! What? A girl can’t call up some old friends for a chat? Pshhh.” The Empress waved her hand and the Owl Knights brought in some chairs, a table, and a few snacks for their guests. “Have a seat, guys. All the food and stuff is on me.”

Rosie immediately began munching on some grapples (half-grape, half-apple fruits that are simply delicious) as the Empress and Dave sat across from one another and had a fierce stare down.

“What a pretty girl.” Commented the Empress as she inspected Dave’s daughter. “I have to be honest, Strider. I never pegged you as the type to settle down.”

“Yeah, well people change.” Dave swirled some fancy wine in an even fancier goblet.

“Never has there been a statement so true. Haha.” The Empress laughed lightly. “Is Jade here as well? I have truly missed that lovely Weredog lass. And what of Mr. Egbert? Did he also make the trip?”

“Jade came, yeah. We’re having a little family vacation, you see?”

“Wonderful! You will have to let me have you over for dinner some time before you leave.”

“Actually…” Dave sighed. “I’d rather Jade not know you brought us here. She doesn’t like…”
bringing up the past… she’s different than she used to be, your highness.”

“Oh. Keeping secrets, are we? Hehe.”

“Bitch, there wouldn’t be a secret to keep if you hadn’t brought us here!”

“I wanted to talk! Sue me if my guards are a little over-zealous. Fuck.” The Empress took a healthy swig of wine. “Fine, if our time is short, let us the make the most of it, my old friend. You must regale me with tales of your travels following your last visit to my kingdom.”

“Surely you’ve heard the story yourself.”

“Of course, of course.” The Empress flapped her hand. “Your travels are legends, Mr. Strider, of the most regal and epic proportions. However, there’s nothing like an account from the man himself, is there not?”

Dave rubbed his eyes under his shades and cast a look at his daughter. She was still munching quietly, yet watching the proceedings with great interest. He’d have to tread carefully with this tale.

“Alright, sure. I’ll tell you a story.” He leaned back in his chair. “After the battle and that fucking shitty dance, that you should feel bad for even attempting to throw, we went after the Bee Lord of the South…”

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Rose Lalonde awoke with a start. Something was grappling with her, wrapping her up in tendrils of inky darkness and squeezing the air from her lungs. She fought, lashing out at her attackers with all of her might, but they were too strong. Gangly limbs tightened their grip on her soul, pulling, literally ripping her apart until…

“Rose.” A gentle hand rubbed her shoulder. “Rose, are you okay?”

The witch heaved a mighty breath and twisted in the small bed to face John Egbert, her boyfriend. His eyes were full of concern and maybe a little fear. It was understandable, of course, considering how her thrashing probably awoke him.

“I- I’m fine.” She gasped, slick with sweat and short of breath. “Go back to sleep, John.”

“You were having a nightmare.”

“Astute observation.”

John fumbled on the bedside table for his glasses and then propped himself up on his arm to look at his girlfriend more fully.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“Not necessarily, no.” A cold chill brought up goosebumps on Rose’s skin and starkly reminded her of her current state, as in, she was buck ass nude. She tugged the thin sheets up to her chin and rolled away from John. “But if you must know, unsavory dreams are not uncommon for adventures like myself. If you travel for as long as I have…”

“You’re bound to come across a few nightmares.” John finished. “Yeah, I know.”

Slowly, hesitantly, Rose reached back and grabbed his hand, dragging his arm over her waist and cradling it to her chest. His limb was warm against her cold flesh and she honestly liked the feeling of someone else’s heart beating gently against her back.
“I want to help.” John continued, his breath disturbing the hair at the nape of her neck.

“I know and you are.” Rose closed her eyes again. “Go back to sleep. We are departing early tomorrow.”

John wanted to continue pressing into Rose’s personal life, her problems, and her darkest secrets, but despite his social ineptitude, he didn’t want to press his luck. A good majority of him still considered last night’s events involving him, Rose, and lots and lots of smexy sex to be some sort of stress-induced fever dream. He wished for it not to be though, since that moment, when he held the greatest witch ever in his arms, was the only moment in his entire life where he could say without the shadow of a doubt that he was truly, extremely happy.

And that happiness would stay with him until the morning, long after the couple had awoken again, gotten redressed, checked him out of the infirmary, and exited the royal palace. The happiness would stay with him until they found out that Davesprite, Jade, and Janesprite were currently in criminal-lockup for committing heinous acts of vandalism in the royal throne room of all places.

“Fuck!” Rose cursed as her and John raced to the dungeons. “Leave it those immature children to get themselves into trouble at a party as lame as that!”

“Maybe it wasn’t their fault?” John countered, as they descended a spiral stone staircase into the depths below. “Like, maybe someone tried to pick a fight with them?”

“Trust me on this, John. There was no one at the party worth this much trouble. Come on. Let’s get our friends out of there.”

The dungeons were your stereotypical medical prison hole of misery. There was a long, stone hallway lined with one-room cells barred with iron and even a lazy Owl Knight guard, who snoozed lightly in a wooden stool by the door.

“Rose Lalonde,” Greeted you know who, after waking the guard. “I am the greatest witch ever and friend to the Empress of the Sea. There was a misunderstanding last night regarding three of my colleagues currently imprisoned here. I have orders from the Empress herself for you to release them. I will pay for whatever damages they caused and then we will be on our way, capiche?”

The Owl Knight guard, who was lazy, underpaid, and incompetent, simply nodded and gave her the key to her friend’s cell. Five or so minutes later, don’t ask me for an exact number, Rose Lalonde was alternately beating Davesprite, Jade, and Janesprite over the head with her satchel.

“What. The. Fuck. Is. Wrong. With. You. Idiots!” She shrieked, punctuating each word with another solid smack. Jade whimpered something about medals, but Rose was having none of it. “I don’t give a unicorn’s hoof about medals! By acting like total moronic hooligans, you could have easily jeopardized our quest! What could John and I have done if you had been sentenced with greater punishment?”

“Made an appeal to the Empress- OW!” Janesprite was silenced when Rose struck her again.

“Don’t you ever act out like that again, do you understand?” Rose glared at her friends. “You should all be ashamed for your behavior. Now collect your things. We will head further south for the Bee Lord’s lair shortly.”

“Actually, Rose, uh…” Janesprite twisted her hands nervously. “I’ve actually been thinking about that and… I think I’m going to stay here.”

“Well, the Fuchsia Kingdom has a growing economy with many great job opportunities.” Said Janesprite. “In fact, I talked to your warlock healer in the infirmary, John, and he was so impressed with my resurrection abilities, that he even offered me a job!”

“Are you serious? Jane, that’s fantastic!”

“Is this what you want though?” Rose asked. “Chances are good that we won’t come through the Fuchsia Kingdom again anytime soon. Are you sure that you wish to part ways?”

“I’ll stay in touch with you guys somehow! You’ve all been really good friends to me, better than I’ve ever had before. You liberated me from the evil necromancer Scott and showed me true adventure.” Jane hugged each of her friends in turn. “But you also showed me that there’s more to life than just doing what you’re told. It’s time I started making my own choices! I’m going to be a warlock healer!”

“Well, then congratulations, Janesprite. We wish you the best of luck.” Rose bid the friendly sprite a final wave as she shepherded her party away. “Until we meet again!”

We would, of course, stay in touch with Janesprite over the years. Her career as one of the best warlock healers in all of Skaia kept, and still keeps, her busy as a little sprite could be. However, she always manages a visit on holidays and birthdays, with a beautiful baked cake to show!

God, I love Janesprite. Rosie, if I wasn’t happily married to your mother, a human man, or way over the dating scene, I would totally tap that. Also, Janesprite is a sprite with a ghost butt, so there’s that too.

Anyways, our heroes bid goodbye to the Fuchsia Kingdom and made their way further south. Without the bonecar to race through the wilderness, it was pretty slow going. Rose marched her troops around the great Owl Bay, past the shitty Moonbear Desert, and all the way to the southern coast, where a set of cliffs named, Blind Man’s Cliffs, loomed over the sea.

The Blind Man’s Cliffs are called as such since there are absolutely zero safety rails along the cliff side, meaning that blind dudes accidentally walk off the edge all the time and accidentally fall to their deaths. It’s really depressing and something should be done about it, says all privileged individuals high up on the social and economic ladder who really don’t care at all.

“How far is the Bee Lord’s lair?” said Rose, as her group approached the cliff’s edge. Protruding out of the cliff’s face, were a twin pair of stone columns, and supported between them was a massive honey comb-like structure of dark stone. “We’ll have to infiltrate the hive and fight our way to it’s heart if we are to find the third Evil Mage of Skaia.”

“Well, then what are we waiting for?” Asked Jade. She drew her crossbow and cocked it like a cool action hero from a movie scroll. “I’ve been hurtin for some more bee killing.”

“I don’t think we should go in gun’s blazing.” Cautioned John. “Those Beemen back at the Fuchsia Kingdom were actually pretty tough. One of them killed me!”

“Yeah, because you did something really stupid.” Scoffed Davesprite. He clapped his friend on the back. “Just be selfish and aloof all the time and you’ll never have to worry about dying again. Now come on. Let’s go slay this asshole.”

The party of heroes scaled the cliffs and carefully made their way into the Bee Lord’s lair. The inside was a maze of topsy-turvy passageways and chutes. Delicious, golden honey leaked from the walls like sexiness from Davesprite’s smoking-hot bod. And there were Beemen guards literally
“Let’s be stealthy,” Commanded Rose, as she cast a ‘shhhhhh’ spell to muffle their steps. “If we can make it to the Bee Lord without raising any alarms, we’ll be golden.”

“Haha. Golden. Was that a honey pun, Rose?”

“John, please. I am the greatest witch ever. I do not make puns during crucial missions such as this.”

“Are you sure? It sounds to me like you’re positively buzzing with pent-up bee humor.”

“John, no. That- That didn’t even… what the fuck?”

“Come on, guys. Quit pollen my leg!”

“Why?”

“Up top, babe! Give me a hive five!”

“John, no! STOP!”

“Don’t yell, Rose. That’s no way to bee-have.”

“STTTTAAAHHP!”

This went on for like two hours.

Eventually, Rose, John, Davesprite, and Jade rounded a corner to find two Beemen guarding a locked door. They were examining their razor-sharp swords and laughing at some private joke. Jade bit back a low growl. She hated bugs of all types, songbugs, Beemen, fur beetles, you name it. Jade hated them all.

“Hey, bro.” Said one Beeman to the other. “Remember that one time I shoved that old lady onto your sword?”

“Yup.” Said the second Beeman.

“Heh. We’re good bad guys.”

Rose motioned for her team to hide behind the corner out of sight. They did so and she spoke to them in hushed tones.

“If we get through this door, we should be close to the inner sanctum.” She explained. “I can tell, because there’s a sign above the door that reads: ‘This way to inner sanctum’. We need to quickly and silently take out these guards. Jade, would you do the honors?”

“It would be my absolute pleasure.” Grinned the Weredog as she hefted her crossbow once more.

Peeking around the corner again, she saw that the two Beemen were still deep in philosophical discussion. Now was her time to strike. If she wanted to make this quick and silent, per Rose’s specifications, she’d have to take them both out with one shot, not an easy task for your average marksman (or is it markswoman? fuck gender-specific titles!).

However, Jade was no average markswoman-man. She was one of the best shots in all of Skaia, and probably still is to this day! The incredibly intelligent and attractive Weredog raised her crossbow, lined up her sights, and fired.
The bolt flew straight and true, hitting one Beeman straight between the eyes and exploding out the back of his head in a shower of brain matter. The bolt then ricocheted off the wall and hit the second Beeman guard twice, once right through his left eye socket and again through his dick.

Both the guards fell with a whisper-soft *thud*, dead.

“NICE WORK, JADE!” Shouted Davesprite in excitement, displaying a disturbing amount of uncoolness.

Immediately, about six billion Beemen guards flooded the hallway, alerted by his shout.

“Fuck stealth! Kill everything!” Rose commanded, twirling her wands.

It was a bloodbath. Rose and her friends slaughtered dozens upon dozens of Beemen with brutal efficiency. They fought their way to the door which led to the inner sanctum and slipped inside, locking the door behind them with a handy crossbeam on the other side.

They now found themselves in a large room in the heart of the hive. The walls were pock-marked with many large holes, housing yet more Beeman that poked their heads out to gaze at the intruders. In the center of the cavernous room, were two thrones gilded with some fancy-ass jewels.

In an elegant throne, sat the Bee Lord’s wife: The Corpse Maiden and in a slightly larger throne, sat the Bee Lord of the South himself.

The Corpse Maiden was beautiful, with flowing dark hair, flawless grey skin, and the most gracefully-curved ram horns sitting atop her head that you ever did see. The true reason for her namesake has been lost with time, although a lot of people still try to guess anyways. Some say that she is an immortal goddess, who came down from wherever gods come from to be with the Bee Lord, who she sort of loved. Others claim that she is a sorceress who cast a ‘never die’ spell on herself so that she could live forever, therefore ruling over death. Yet others still claim that she just picked that name because it sounds hardcore.

And guess what, The Corpse Maiden sounds pretty fucking hardcore, doesn’t it? Like if I was to go back in time and start a heavy metal band, you bet your ass it would be called motherfucking The Corpse Maiden.

Anyways, The Bee Lord, on the other hand, was a horribly disgusting fuck. He wore these stupid sunglasses with different colored lenses and a cape composed entirely out of yellow and black silk. In a horizontal stripe pattern no less! Talk about tacky! He too had skin of grey, but four, short, pointed horns atop his head.

The Bee Lord rose from his throne and spoke:

“Intruders! Indentify thee selves!”

Rose stepped forward.

“It is I! Rose Lalonde, the greatest witch ever,” She proclaimed. “And I have come to end your evil reign over the southern provinces of Skaia!”

“Yeah, well can that hold on for a second?” The Bee Lord gestured to his wife. “We were sort of in the middle of something.”

“A very personal something.” Corrected The Corpse Maiden. “You see, our marriage has been a little on the fritz lately. I’m trying to talk him into some counseling.”
“We do not need counseling!” The Bee Lord wheeled on his wife. “Our problems are our problems and we do not need to involve some hoity-toity douchebag with a high-falutin university degree to tell us how to live our lives! Also, do not talk to these intruders! I will handle them!”

“Pshhh.” The Corpse Maiden snorted and rested her chin lazily on her palm. “Whatever, hun. Have fun I guess.”

“Thank you!” Straightening his cape, the Bee Lord turned back to Rose. “As I was saying, now isn’t really a good time for this. Can you go away and come back later?”

“We have already infiltrated your base, murdered your Beemen minions, and confronted you face to face.” Rose countered. “We will most definitely not be leaving without a battle!”

“Fuuuuck.” The Bee Lord dragged a hand down his tired face. “Do you think I care? I leave the front door of my lair unlocked. Literally anyone can walk in if they want. Also, do you see all these damn Beemen?” The Bee Lord gestured to the walls, where hundreds of Beemen sat and watched in their little hidey-holes. “I have more of these assholes than I know what to do with. You’re doing me a favor by killing them.”

“Look, I’ve already killed The Crab King of the East and The Vampire Queen of the West. I know how this works already. We’re going to fight and that’s how things are going to be.” Rose pointed her wands at the Bee Lord. “I challenge thee to a duel of wizardly strife!”

“Alright, fine. You want a fight so damn badly? I’ll give you a fight.” The Bee Lord reached up to remove his sunglasses, but was prevented from doing so by his wife’s hand on his arm.

“Ahem.” The Corpse Maiden coughed. “Babe, we were in the middle of a discussion. You said that you would stop doing stuff like this. How can this relationship work if you’re always shuffling me off to the wayside?”

“Shuffle you off to the… Dear, what the fuck are you talking about? I never do that!”

“Uh, yeah. You do.” The Corpse Maiden counted on her fingers. “That one time I wanted to redo the dining room, you made a big deal about hatching more Beemen. Then, when I wanted to take a trip up to visit my mom and dad, you went and planned that assault on the Fuchsia Kingdom. And now, when we’re trying to have a civilized conversation, you’re going to fight this silly witch and her friends. When are you going to get to me?!”

“Babe, please. I’m not in the mood for this shit right now. Just sit there and please be quiet for a bit. I’m fucking begging you. Shit!” The Bee Lord forcibly turned from his wife and set his sights on Rose. “As I was saying, Lalonde. I accept your strife! Here are my terms: no familiars and no deus ex machina spells.”

“Anything else?” Asked Rose, mentally preparing herself for her fiercest battle yet.

“Nope. Everything else is fair game.” The Bee Lord slowly removed his shades to reveal that his eyes glowed with dark magic. “Any last words, greatest witch ever?”

“Just two.” Rose’s wands sparked. “Let’s rumble!”

She leapt forward and fired a powerful blast of magic directly towards the Bee Lord. At the same time, the evil mage shot a brilliant beam of raw power from his magical eyes. The two enchantments connected in midair and the resulting explosion rocked the entire lair right down it’s foundations. The walls shook, the ceiling crumbled, and The Corpse Maiden heaved a mighty yawn into the back of her hand.
Dust swirled in the air, but did nothing to impede the battle in the slightest. Rose and the Bee Lord charged at one another, firing magical bolt after magical bolt at their foe in quick succession. Each time either combatant dodged or blocked their opponents spell with their own, until they met in the middle of the cavern and began to grapple ferociously.

As this was happening, John, Davesprite, and Jade stood there and contemplated with one another.

“So did either of you guys figure out why he’s called the Bee Lord yet?” Asked John.

“Well,” Davesprite scratched his chin. “He sort of controls bees, right? But then again, they aren’t really bees as much as they are Beemen. Although, he does live in a hive. Fuck. I dunno, man.”

“Hey, Mr. Bee Lord!” Jade shouted to the lord of bees. “Why don’t you… uh, turn into a giant tit! I bet that’d be something.”

The Bee Lord dodged another one of Rose’s spell and then raised his hands into the air. From his open palms spawned dozens of angry bees which flew towards Rose and began to sting her. She quickly cast a fire spell and began to defend herself against the insect attackers.


Rose punched the Bee Lord in the stomach and fired a spell at his face that missed by mere inches. The Bee Lord responded by kicking Rose in the shin and shooting an optic blast right towards her, which she narrowly dodged by pirouetting out of the way.

“Hey, babe.” The Corpse Maiden spoke up. “How much longer is this going to take?”

“Silence woman!” Bellowed the Bee Lord. “I’m killing this interloper for us! Can’t you see that?!?!”

The battle continued and the two fighters appeared to be evenly matched, that is until Rose stepped backwards onto a patch of honey lying inconspicuously on the ground. She tried to lift her foot, but she was trapped in the dastardly nectar!

“It’s been fun, Lalonde.” Said the Bee Lord as he charged another optic blast. “But the buzz stops here.”

Rose groaned.

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding- AHH!”

The Bee Lord fired a blast directly into Rose’s chest. The witch was lifted off the ground and thrown against the far wall, where she fell in a crumpled heap.

“Rose!” John ran to his girlfriend’s side. “Shit. Come on, Rose. You’ve got to get up!”

“Fuh.” The witch groaned, obviously in a lot of pain. “J- John… I- I…”

“What is it, Rose? Speak to me!”

“I th- think I fucking hate bees.” Then her eyes rolled into the back of her head and she passed out.

“Rooooooosssssse!” John wailed.

“Oh, get a grip.” Jade joined his side and pressed two fingers to Rose’s neck to check her pulse. “She’s just been knocked unconscious. She’ll be fine in a few minutes.”
“But by then it will be too late!” The Bee Lord approached, charging another optic blast. “Accept defeat now, intruders, and maybe I will make your death quick and painless.”

John, Davesprite, and Jade stood themselves in front of Rose and drew their weapons.

“No way, asshole.” Davesprite said. “You may be super powerful, have an army of Beemen, just bested Rose, who was the best fighter out of all of us, but there’s no way you’ll win!”

“Right!” Agreed John. “We’re going to kick your ass!”

The Bee Lord laughed.

“Hahaha!” His eyes glowed brighter than the sun. “Good luck with that, you miserable pieces of- OH GOD MY SPINE!!”

Suddenly, the point of sword exploded through the Bee Lord’s chest, spewing gross Bee Lord blood all the fuck over. He died immediately and crumbled into dust, sending black spirits floating from his corpse and up out of sight. Standing there, holding the murderous blade, was none other than The Corpse Maiden herself.

“Ugh, fucking finally.” She grimaced and cast the blade away. “I was getting really sick of that guy. All he did was fight interlopers and talk about how precious his Key of Fate was. I don’t even care about this stupid hunk of junk. You can have it.” She stooped and, after a moment of digging through her husband’s ashes, retrieved his key of fate. She tossed it to John. “Now take your witch friend and get out of here.”

John caught the golden key and stared at it in wonder. Somehow, after Rose had been narrowly defeated, their team had still managed to win. He couldn’t believe it.

“W- wait!” He called after The Corpse Maiden, who was already halfway back to her throne. “What are you going to do now?”

“Probably reform these Beemen minions for the better.” She answered honestly. “I’m their ruler now. Maybe I can put them to some good use? Hell, I might even put up a guard rail around the Blind Man’s cliffs. Someone really should have done something about that before now.”

“Yeah, no kidding.” John tucked the golden Key of Fate into his pocket. “Uh, thanks for murdering your husband for us, I guess.

“No problem. Just remember: the Crab King, Vampire Queen, and Bee Lord may have been tough, but they’re nothing compared to the Dragon Mistress of the North.” The Corpse Maiden sat in the former Bee Lord’s throne. “Travel swiftly and with good fortune. Should you ever require my assistance, you know where to find me.”

“Alright, thanks again, miss!”

Not wanting to press their luck, John and Jade hoisted the unconscious Rose between them and followed Davesprite’s lead out of the Bee Lord’s lair. They carefully traversed the cliffs down to the beach of the southern ocean, where John splashed some cold, ocean water on Rose’s face.

The witch spluttered and gasped, but was revived nonetheless. Through squinted eyes, she looked up into the concerned faces of her friends with confusion and spoke in a weak voice:

“God-damn. I feel like I was hit by a bonetruck. What happened?”
"You stepped in some honey and then the Bee Lord laid you out." Said Davesprite. "It’s all good though. The Corpse Maiden decided at the last second to turn on her one true love and murder him."

"We got the Key of Fate too and everything!" Added Jade. "Show her, John."

John reached into his pocket and pulled out the golden key.

"Here you go, Rose." He said happily, pressing the key gently into the witch’s hand. "That’s three keys and three mages down. All you have to do now is travel north and defeat the Dragon Mistress!"

"I- uh, yes." Rose pushed herself into the sitting position and gazed down at the key, which glittered merrily in her palm. "Yes, of course."

"Are you alright? You look a little pale."

"Just a tad sore." Storing her prize in her satchel, Rose climbed to her feet. "Come on. Let’s get moving."

As Davesprite and Jade floated and walked ahead respectively, chatting excitedly about their latest conquest, Rose trailed behind with John. The former hero of Honey Town stared at the witch out of the corner of his eye, watching her slumped shoulders and shuffling footsteps.

Something was off about her. He didn’t know what exactly, but he knew it was something. Instead of pestering her about it now though, like his gut told him to, he restrained himself.

"Hey," He took her hand gently, giving her time to pull away if she so wanted. "No matter what happened back there in that battle, you did good. You know that, right?"

Rose nodded, gripped John’s fingers a little tighter, but kept her silence.

(post credits scene)

In the middle of the Moonbear desert, Scott the evil skeleton necromancer wandered the wasteland in search of death. Rose and her gang of jerks had broken into his home, killed his friends, set his familiar free, and nearly killed him.

He had nothing. He was nothing.

"You there, enemy of the greatest witch ever." Gurgled a gross-ass voice.

Scott turned to find a cloaked figure, flanked by an ugly forest witch and sexy-looking Werecat rogue.

"What the fuck do you want?" Demanded Scott, who was too weak to ward off bandits. Most of his magic had been sapped from his being after he’d severed his magical tether with Janesprite.

"This isn’t about what we want." The Fish Baron of the Sea grinned a villainous grin. "This is about what you want."

"How do you know what I want?"

"You want what all of us want…"

Pause for dramatic effect:
It was very late into the night by the time Dave and his daughter Rosie left the Royal Palace and returned to their Inn. The Empress of the Sea had been so impressed with Dave’s tale of how Rose kind of defeated the Bee Lord of the South, that she had kept the father and daughter in her company for much too long, celebrating and festing over the wonderful story.

Needless to say, little Rosie was so tired, that Dave was forced to carry her most of the way through the darkened streets and all the way up to their room, where he tossed her unceremoniously onto the bed.

“Ugh.” Rosie sighed, burying herself in the sheets. “Where’s mommy?”

“Mom’s still at the spa. She won’t be back until tomorrow.” Dave sank onto the bed as well and closed his eyes. “Damn, my throat hurts.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t be so long-winded when you tell stories.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t- BLEH!” Dave snapped back, too tired to formulate a good comeback.

“Why did she keep us there so late? Why did she fucking kidnap us the first place?!” Asked Rosie. “She’s an empress for god’s sake! Doesn’t she have anything else to do?”

“Such are the games rich people with nothing but time on their hands play with the commonfolk.” Dave rolled over and flopped an arm over his daughter, pulling her into him embrace. “Enough talk. Sleep.”

And Rosie did.

Chapter End Notes

Let’s plan on the next chapter being posted a week from today. Might be sooner, will probably be later, I don’t know. This chapter has some sill stuff in it, none of which I hope you take to heart. This story is pointless and dumb and for entertainment only. Opinions expressed are... pretty much my own lol but whatever. I dunno what I’m trying to say.

Thanks for reading and sticking with me, guys.
- Mike
Chapter Nineteen: Fish Baron Redux: Hooked Again!

It was one of those nice days. The sun was shining brilliantly, reflecting off the gently flowing surface of the river, the breeze was billowing softly, and the pollen count was lower than it had been in many, many moons. Our intrepid group of heroes had opted to stay the fuck away from the awful moonbear desert and had instead hired a ferry to sail them up the Black Rock River.

The Black Rock River runs parallel to the Great Lava River and is called as such because of all the black rocks that all over the fucking place in that thing.

Anyways, most of the black rocks are pretty harmless. They’re just small river stones that line the bottom of the riverbed. Some black rocks though, are as large as bonevans, and require a skilled sailor to navigate through. Luckily enough for the heroes of Skaia, this ferry driver claimed to be the best in the business.

“Hehehe.” Laughed Damien the Werecat, as he wore his evil disguise and steered the boat. “The Fish Baron’s plan is working wonderfully. These idiots won’t know what hit them.”

Yup, that’s right. No sooner had Rose and her friends defeated the Bee Lord than they were already enraptured in some other type of mortal danger, this time a dastardly trap. Damien the Werecat was steering the boat, Yahtzee the gross-ass woodland witch was hiding below deck, Scott the skeleton necromancer was posing as a waiter on the boat, and the Fish Baron himself was following close behind, using the river itself to travel along with his lame fish minions.

And Rose, John, Davesprite, and Jade were none the wiser.

“Would anyone care for another cracker? Hehe.” Snickered Scott the skeleton necromancer, as he offered the group a plate of wizard cheese-itz.

“I would!” Sang Jade. “Thanks, Mr. uh, what was your name again?”

“My name is Scooo…” Shit. Scott had to think fast. “I mean, my name is Scob the skeleton funcromancer.”

“Funcromancer?” Davesprite cocked an eyebrow. “I don’t think that’s a thing.”

“Oh, but it is, Mr. Sprite.” Scott grinned to himself. “Soon you shall see. Hehe. Yes, you shall see…”

Then Scott the necromancer retreated, walking backwards until he slipped into the captain’s quarters and disappeared, leaving our heroes on the deck alone. It was a pretty nice boat, with comfy folding chairs, a swanky interior, and even a poop deck!

“That skeleton funcromancer waiter gives me the creeps.” Jade shivered in her chair, yet nibbled on her crackers nonetheless. “I mean, what kind of ferry comes with it’s own waiter?”

“Fancy boats like *these* come with waiters, my dear Weredog.” Davesprite, who was wearing a ‘*I heart ferries*’ t-shit, sipped on a cold wizard diet coke. “It’s high class. I wouldn’t expect you to
understand.”

“I understand high class just fine! I just don’t understand how a boat this nice, with all these fancy perks, could charge absolutely zero money.” Jade thought back to when they had been offered the ferry ride. “Gosh, I think the captain nearly begged us to take this ferry. Something smells fishy.”

“You can’t look a gift horse in the mouth, Jade.” Davesprite continued to chastise. “We’re being given a smooth ride on a nice ferry, free of charge. I fail to see how you can be uncomfortable with this situation.”

As the two of them squabbled, John sat nearby and stared across the deck to where Rose sat by herself. Ever since the defeat of the Bee Lord, she’d been acting funny. In the mornings she was cranky, during meal times she was ravenously hungry, and worst of all she just seemed to be more down-trodden and mopey. A good majority of the time, right now included, she preferred to sit all by her lonesome in deep reflection.

John hoped it had nothing to do with their romantic relationship. He’d been doing everything in his power to be a good boyfriend. Including but not limited to: holding her hand as they cross the street, opening doors for her, laying his coat down in a puddle so she could keep her boots dry, and even pre-chewing her food on a few rare occasions.

John loved being Rose’s boyfriend and doing all of those boyfriend things, well except maybe that last part about the food. That made him a little uncomfortable germ-wise. Anyways, he just didn’t want anything to come between them.

“Hey, guys.” John decided to seek help from his closest and only friends. “Have you noticed anything weird with Rose lately?”

“What do you mean? Like the fact that she’s gone fucking crazy these past few days?” Davesprite counted off on his fingers. “First she nearly bit my head off when I told her ‘good morning’ the other day, then she yelled at Jade for burning dinner last night, and now she’s sitting off all by herself, heavily contemplating something apparently soooo important that she’s neglecting us on this otherwise perfect day.”

“Uh… I wouldn’t say she’s gone completely crazy.” John chewed his lip. Davesprite was right about all those things and it made him uncomfortable. “D- Do you think it was something that I did? Maybe I should go talk to her.”

He rose from his chair, intent on doing just that, but was stopped when Jade grabbed him by the wrist.

“I wouldn’t do that, John.” She warned. “If you want to know my opinion, Rose just needs space right now.”

“But why? If she’s feeling sad about something, then I have to cheer her up! It’s my job.”

“Listen.” Jade dropped her voice a few octaves to keep her next words private. “I think the reason Rose has been acting so strange lately is because of what happened with the Bee Lord.”

“Because of what happened with the Bee Lord? You mean when we beat that asshole into next week?” Davesprite asked.

“We didn’t do anything. It was the Death Maiden, remember? She killed her husband and saved all of our lives.” Jade’s ears drooped as she looked across the deck towards her witch friend. “Rose is probably really upset with herself for not being able to beat the Bee Lord by herself.”
“That’s just stupid!” John argued. “She got stuck in some honey and then the Bee Lord took a cheap shot. It wasn’t because she wasn’t good enough or anything. She’s the greatest witch ever!”

“All the more reason for her not to make mistakes like that. Rose holds herself to much too high of a standard if you ask me.” Jade sighed. “Anyways, Rose probably feels like a failure for not being able to hold her own and the last thing she needs is you, John, acting like a knight in shining armor, swooping in to make her feel better about herself.”

“So what is he supposed to do?” Questioned Davesprite. “Just sit on his ass and watch his lady waste away in despair?”

That was most definitely not what John wanted to do. His friendly, as well as boyfriendly, instincts were urging him to rush to Rose’s side and comfort her. However, if Jade advised against it, he felt it would be a good idea to heed her words, since he honestly knew little about relationships and even less about the complex inner-workings of a woman’s mind.

Jade spoke to him:

“Look, John. I know that this is confusing and upsetting, but you need to take a backseat right now. You need to be there for Rose without actually being there, if that makes any sense.”

“It doesn’t.”

“Well, how about this: just be nearby and when Rose is ready and willing to talk, she’ll come to you.” Jade thumped him on the arm. “And that’s when you work your comforting magic.”

Considering Jade’s wise, yet incredibly confusing words, John came to the conclusion that he would do his best to follow the Weredogs advice. When Rose wanted him, he’d be there.

And that’s all there really is to say on the matter.

“Thanks for your help, Jade.” John let out a heavy sigh and rested his elbows on the edge of the ferry, gazing down into the glimmering water below. “It means a lot.”

“No problem. Just doing my best. Rose is my friend too, you know?” Jade grinned, happy at having been able to help another friend in need, despite the fact that she didn’t know for sure whether or not she was even remotely accurate in her analysis of Rose’s emotions.

As it turns out, Jade was nearly spot on. Rose sat on the far edge of the boat, dangling her feet in the gently-flowing water, and examining the three Keys of Fate which sat heavily in her palm. There was the bronze from the Crab King, the silver from the Vampire Queen, and the gold from the Bee Lord. With the three keys combined, she could gain access to the Dragon Mistress’s lair in the northern mountains and face her in one-on-one combat.

If she was even good enough to challenge the Dragon Mistress, that is.

Gripping the keys tightly in her palm, Rose considered for the briefest of moments just tossing the precious artifacts into the river deep. She was not match for the Dragon Mistress, not after her abysmal performance against the Bee Lord. She had choked, lost her thunder, pulled a total John, completely threw the fight over something as stupid and as an easily avoidable puddle of sticky honey.

If it weren’t for her friends or the timely intervention of the Death Maiden, she probably would have died. And that, in all honesty, was the worst feeling of all, the feeling that she was now dependent on these mere mortals. Friends they may be, Rose had never ever, in her entire witchy career, found
herself in a situation like this: where she was tied down.

“What happened to you, Lalonde?” She muttered to herself, gazing down at her blurry reflection in the water. “You never needed anyone before. Now look at you, a Weredog friend, a wise-cracking familiar, a fucking boyfriend? You never lost a fight to anyone until you joined up with this crew.”

It was easy to blame her recent lapse in skill and her newfound mindset on her friends, even easier to pinpoint an obvious solution to her predicament: Just run away, leave John and all your friends behind. It would be better that way. She could face the Dragon Mistress on her own, not have to worry about protecting them or explaining things to them or trying to impress them.

Things could go back to the way they were, just Rose Lalonde the greatest witch ever and the ultimate quest. Rose looked across the river to the nearest shore. It would be easy to slip away while the others were distracted, just so incredibly easy.

And yet…

Rose turned her neck slightly to regard her friends on the other side of the ferry. John and Jade were cackling loudly and pointing at Davesprite, who was attempting to juggle several wine bottles. They were happy and alive and… Rose wanted to be a part of that.

But she also wanted to be the best around and she also knew that, in the end, other people were just a liability.

“Why can’t things just ever be simple?” Rose sighed to herself as she rested her head in her hands.

Down below deck, while our heroes were still unawares, Scott the Necromancer and Yahtzee the evil woodland witch met to discuss their evil plans.

“Everything’s in place for our grand assault.” Reported Scott. “Damien the evil Werecat is bringing the ferry to a stop up ahead, where the Fish Baron will board the boat from the river. At that time, you and I will spring up from below deck and join in the ambush. In seconds, we’re have Lalonde and her gang under out boots.”

“Good, good.” Chuckled Yahtzee as she weaved some magic betwixt her gross-ass fingers, which had like ten inch long yellowing fingernails. “I’ve been waiting far too long to get revenge on these suckers. I have a very nasty spell cooked up for the hero with the hammer. Hehehehe!”

“That dork with the glasses? I wouldn’t waste my time.” Scott grumbled in response. “It’s that pretentious, snooty witch that I want.”

“You know that the Fish Baron wants Lalonde for himself, Necromancer. I would stick to the plan if I were you.”

“Yeah, yeah. Whatever. That ol’ Fish Baron just better let me get in a few blows edge-wise before he finishes her off. That’s all I’m saying.” As Scott spoke, the boat’s magic engine emitted a low boom and then began to bring the ferry to a slow halt. A grin split Scott’s lips. “That’s Damien stopping the boat. I better get into position. Wait for the signal, Yahtzee. Then, well, you know what to do.”

“Victory shall be ours!” Cackled Yahtzee as Scott moved away through the cargo hold.

Up on the deck, Rose and the rest of the gang quickly noticed that their journey was quickly being brought to a grinding halt. As the ferry came to a stop, with a final pulputputs from the engine, they found themselves positioned at the base of a set of cliffs, complete with a nice little waterfall. Black
river rocks protruded from the riverbed like tombstones and a mystical mist filled the air due to the flow of the waterfall.

On any other occasion, Rose would have appreciated the view, but she was anxious to get moving.

“Any idea why we’ve stopped?” Rose asked, joining her friends across the deck.

“Sounds like engine trouble to me.” Answered Jade. “Come on. Let’s go talk to the captain.”

The group crossed the deck once more to the captain’s quarters, arriving outside the door just as it was opened from the inside. Out stepped the captain, secretly Damien the Werecat, dressed in your typical captain’s garb.

“Ahoy! How’s it going, mihardies?” Greeted Damien in his best pirate voice.

“Seeing as we are no longer moving, I’d say that things are going rather unfavorably.” Rose folded her arms to illustrate her impatience. “Why have we stopped? You promised us safe passage all the way up to the Emerald City port.”

“A good sailor always keeps his promises, my fair maiden! We’ve merely hit a snag in the road, nothing a little engine maintenance won’t fix. If you’ll just retake your seats, I’ll have us up and runnin again in no time at all!”

“Why don’t you let me take a look at it?” Offered Jade, who was not only adept in several forms of engineering, but also hella antsy to be of use. “I have experience with magic engines! This one time we stole this really sweet bonecar from these rogues and I had to fix it up more than once.”

“Yeah. It’s too bad that baby broke down and we had to abandon it in the desert.” Added John with a frown. “Rest in peace, you beautiful piece of machinery.”

Damien the Werecat ground his teeth furiously. John and Roxy had stolen that rock n’ rollin bonecar from him back in chapter ten, as you should remember. It had been one of his prized possessions, as Damien and his Werecat father had built it from scratch during the summer of year 205. It took all of the evil rogue’s willpower to resist drawing his blade and cutting down the heroes then and there.

“That’s quite an engrossing tale.” Growled Damien. “But I will not be requiring your help, Miss Harley. Thank you for offering though.”

“Oh. No problem!” Jade responded, a little sadly. “I’ll just- be up here if you need any help.”

Without another word, Damien turned and disappeared back into the captain’s quarters, slamming the door behind him once more in Jade’s face. The Weredog scrunched up her nose and took in a big whiff of air, catching the scent of something on the breeze.

Rose noticed goosebumps rise on Jade’s exposed shoulders and arms.

“Something wrong, Jade?” Asked the witch curiously.

“I dunno for sure.” Jade rubbed her chin thoughtfully. “For a second there, I could have sworn that I could smell a little Werecat around here somewhere.”

“Oh. That’s probably just John.” Davesprite tried to ease her anxiety. “He’s still wearing the same shirt he wore back when he used to date that incredibly talented and attractive Werecat Roxy. He probably still has a little of her scent on him. Do you remember Roxy, guys? She was really cool and John totally fucked up his relationship with her. Remember?”
“Yes.” John swallowed hard around the lump in his throat. “I remember.”

Rose narrowed her eyes at Davesprite.

“Could you stop brining Roxy up every five seconds? We get it, you have absolutely zero tact or people skills, but even an idiot could see that mentioning her makes John uncomfortable.” She snapped.

“Or maybe it just makes you uncomfortable?” Davesprite countered lightly, displaying remarkable crassness. “You used to have a ridiculous inferiority complex with her, remember? Do you remember that, Rose? Do ya?”

Age, a wife, and a kid would help Davesprite to mature eventually. For the time being though, it was up to Rose and the rest to keep him in check.

Turning, Rose curled her fingers into a fist and cordially introduced them to Davesprite’s ghostly stomach, knocking the fake-wind out of him with a well-placed punch. As he doubled up and fell to the floor, the much more doting Jade went to his aid. John took this opportunity to converse with his own love interest.

“Say, Rose. Have you been feeling okay lately?” He asked, as he gently led her away from the others. “I’ve just noticed that you’ve been… I dunno, a little withdrawn as of late.”

“Withdrawn? Me?” Rose laughed lightly and deposited a quick kiss on John’s cheek. It was all a facade though, created to hide her true self-doubt. “How preposterous! I’ve never felt more close to anyone in my life!”

“Well, it’s just that you’ve been a little down since the Bee Lord fight.” John face pleasantly warmed from her kiss, but he was determined to stay on track. “I just want you to know that if you need to talk to anyone, about anything, that I’m always here for you.”

Rose opened her mouth to brush him off again, but caught herself. Here was John, extending a friendly hand of support with no strings attatached, and she was about to shove it back in his face. That’s no way to treat anyone, let alone a friend, let alone your god-damn boyfriend.

Maybe the solution for her anxiety wasn’t the pull away, but to actually draw nearer. It’s one of the many things Rose Lalonde, in all of her epic career, had yet to try.

And it was worth the shot.

“Thank you, John.” She said with a small, yet genuine smile. “It- it means a lot to me that you say that.”

The couple shared a brief hug, that probably would have descended into something much less innocent were it not for what happened next. As Rose and John had a straight-up feel session and Jade helped Davesprite recover his latest ass-whooping, a massive shape exploded from the surface of the river, causing the boat to rock dangerously.

Rose pulled away from John and shielded her eyes from the sun to investigate the disturbance. She gasped at what she saw, for it was truly a terrifyingly familiar sight.

“Rose Lalonde!” Bellowed the Fish Baron, who sat astride the back of a giant seahorse. He wore his usual black robes and wielded a glittering wand in this ringed fingers. “Your time as sorceress supreme has come to it’s end! Prepare to meet your maker!”
“Fish Baron!” Rose snarled, as she drew her wands. “I thought our previous encounter would have taught you that I am not one to be trifled with! I suppose fools such as you never learn!”

“Oh, but that’s where you’re wrong, Lalonde. I have learned extremely well!” The Fish Baron raised his hand above his head and snapped his fingers. From below the wooden deck erupted Yahtzee and Scott, as well as Damien, all of which were now donning battle gear. “Behold! Your past transgressions have returned to cause you unmitigated grief! You shall not walk away from this battle unscathed, Lalonde. I promise thee that!”

John, Davesprite, and Jade drew their weapons and leapt to Rose’s side as the villains surrounded them. They had fallen for the Fish Baron’s trap and found themselves in what could truly be described as their hairiest situation yet! The Fish Baron pointed his wand directly at Rose’s chest and bellowed:

“ATTACK MY FRIENDS!!! SHOW HER WHAT IT’S LIKE TO BE TREATED LIKE TRASH!!!”

As one, Scott the skeleton necromancer, Damien the Werecat, and Yahtzee the evil woodland witch leapt forward and engaged the heroes in a fierce battle.

Scott fired a spell at Davesprite’s head, which the sprite dodged and responded to with a furious swipe of his magic sword. The pair of them danced across the deck, trading blow after blow, as Jade tackled Damien to the deck and wrestled him into a sleeper hold.

“Not so tough without your crew, are you, dirtbag?” She growled. “Give me one reason not to snap your neck.”

“How about this!” Damien roared and then transformed into his Werecat form! He bucked Jade off of his back and wheeled on her, baring his now razor-sharp fangs and hissing menacingly.

“Two can play at that game!” Jade quickly shape-shifted into her own animal form, becoming a fully-fledged Weredog! The two werebeasts then clashed in a mass of claws, teeth, and fur that rolled across the deck, leaving deep gouges in the already ruined wood.

While that was happening, John and Yahtzee circled one another. The evil woodland witch conjured magic fire in her palms and shot fireballs at John, who used his hammer to deflect them.

“I dunno if I can hit a woman.” Admitted John honestly, as he dodged another one of her spells. “Maybe we can work this out by, like, talking or something.”

“Oh! So you chose now of all times to act all chivalrous!” Yahtzee barked angrily. “You had no problem giving me the old bash to the back of the head back in my forest!”

“Only because you were trying to steal my girlfriend at the time’s sanity! Who does that, by the way? It’s such a dick move!”

“Maybe you missed this somehow,” Yahtzee fired another spell at John. “But I’m Yahtzee the evil witch. MWAHAHHAHHAHA!”

Lastly, while all of that other shit was going on, Rose leapt into the air and flew right towards the Fish Baron. The evil mage wannabee let out a pitiful shriek of fear and leapt from his seahorse mount, landing on one of the black rocks protruding from river. Rose perched on another rock nearby and faced the villain.

“Fight me like something resembling a real wizard, you shitty piece of shit!” She taunted.
“Otherwise, surrender your wand and be gone!”

“I’m not going anywhere!” The Fish Baron steeled himself. “I organized this whole plot to kill you and dammit if I back down now. En garde, Lalonde!”

Leaping from black rock to black rock, Rose and the Fish Baron battled in a fierce duel of magics, as the river continued to flow swiftly beneath them. It was easily one of the most interesting and cool battles that Davesprite would have loved to have watched, that is if he wasn’t duking it out with Scott the skeleton necromancer himself.

“Where’s Janesprite?” Snarled Scott as he dodged another swipe from Davesprite. “Did that pitiful excuse for a familiar die during the battle at owl bay? Please tell me she croaked it.”

“Janesprite is ten times the person you’ll ever be!” Davesprite angrily swung his sword at Scott again, who blocked it with his wand. “And she’s alive and better than ever now that she’s away from you!”

“Heh. You sprites are all the same. Pathetic creatures who live under the delusion of actually being a legit person.” Scott raised his wand and summoned a mighty spell. “You’ll learn your place soon enough, sprite!”

“Davesprite, duck!” Shouted a voice suddenly.

Davesprite did as he was told without hesitation and a confused Scott was suddenly blind-sided by a power hammer swing by none other than John Egbert. The skeleton necromancer was lifted off of his feet and tossed across the deck where he crashed into the captain’s quarters. His evil skeleton bones couldn’t stand up under the abuse and they crumbled into a fine powder as he slumped to the floor, leaving only a pile of bone dust and some nasty-ass robes in his place.

“No! Scott, my love!” Yahtzee glared at John. “You’ll pay for that ten-fold, you monster! You just killed my boyfriend!”

“Strange couple.” Commented Davesprite.

Swirling her hands in a complicated pattern, Yahtzee worked some of the most evil magic ever to exist in this plane of reality. A swirling mass of red energy formed around her fingers as she spoke:

“I notice that you and that witch have grown rather close. Hehe. What’s up with that? Was that Werecat not enough to satiate your loins?”

“Ugh.” John raised his hammer again. “Can we talk about something else please?”

“Sure!” Yahtzee finished weaving her dastardly spell. “I hope that you and Lalonde have a long, prosperous relationship, because other than her…” The evil witch fired her spell at John. “YOU SHALL NEVER LOVE AGAIN! MWAHHAAHAHA!”

John tried to dodge the spell, he really did, but it struck him regardless and blasted him off his feet. He slid across the deck of the ship and into the still-wrestling Jade and Damien bowling them over as well. As Yahtzee shrieked with laughter, her evil deed done, she did not notice Davesprite sneaking up on her until it was too late.

“I abhor violence against women,” Stated Davesprite firmly. “But I’ll make an exception in your case, bitch!”

Then, while Yahtzee was distracted, the sprite ran her through with his sword. She died instantly.
after bleeding out on the deck of the ferry for about five minutes. It truly seemed like the battle was in
the heroes’ favor, with already two of the Fish Baron’s companions defeated.

“Get off of me, you foul cretins!” Barked Damien the Werecat as he shoved John and Jade away
from him. “I shall not be defeated so easily!”

“I don’t care.” John stood up and brushed himself off. “What did Yahtzee do to me? It sounded like
she cursed me!”

“You have been cursed, idiot!” Damien growled. “But not like it will matter. You’ll soon be dead!”

“We’ll see about that.” Jade snarled and advanced on Damien. “Bring it you little puddy cat! Let’s
end this!”

The Weredog and the Werecat engaged each other once more. Jade clamped her powerful jaws on
his neck and ripping at his throat, while Damien dragged his claws across her belly, attempting to gut
her. It was an intense and horrifying battle that left John and Davesprite frozen in fear, as the two
werebeasts rolled once more across the deck of the ferry.

The boat was pretty glubbed up. Gaping holes opened up to the cargo hold from where Scott,
Yahtzee, and Damien had leapt upwards, claw and teeth marks scored the surface from the
werebeast fight, and the captain’s quarters now had a slight lean thanks to Scott’s impact against it.

To top it all off, Rose and the Fish Baron’s fight was leading to a lot of unneeded collateral damage.
As the magic-dueling pair leapt from river rock to river rock, dodging one another’s magical blasts,
wild spells ended up flying all over the god-damn place.

They ripped holes in the cliff side, blew columns of water from the river, and ripped holes clean
through the unfortunate ferry, whose only crime was being in harm’s way. John and Davesprite
quickly noticed that the ship was beginning to sink.

“We’ve got to end this before we all wind up in the drink.” John said to his friend. “Go help Rose.
I’ll get Damien off of Jade.”

“No. That’s a shit idea. You have shit ideas, John.” Davesprite responded. He watched Jade and
Damien, who were now just two masses of bloody fur, tussle across the ferry. “Rose can handle
herself. I’m not leaving Jade.”

“You aren’t leaving her. I’ll be helping her. Listen, Davesprite. I know that you want to protect her,
but I can’t exactly fly over the water to help Rose. You can. I need you to watch her back.”

However, no sooner were the words out of John’s mouth then Jade let out a might roar and pinned
Damien to the deck between her knees. She then unleashed a furry of claw swipes against the
Werecat, clawing up his face, neck, and chest. Deep gouges of red opened up across Damien’s fur,
leaking red onto the ferry’s deck. Gripping him by either side of the head, Jade bared her fangs and
growled:

“This is what you get for being such a shitty person.”

Then she ripped his motherfucking head off.

“WHAT!!!” Rosie shrieked, cutting her father off mid-story. “Mom would never do that!”

“Shhhhhhh.” Dave motioned for his daughter to lower her voice. They were currently lounging on
the shore of Owl Bay, still enjoying their family vacation. Jade was having a swim in the shallow water at the moment, giving the father and daughter duo time for a quick story. “Christ, keep your expletives under a reasonable decibel level, child. You want to get us busted?”

“No.” The young girl muttered and looked towards the water, where Jade was lazily doing the doggy paddle. “It’s just that, I- I can’t even picture mom doing something like that.”

“You’ve never seen her transform before.” Dave pointed out. “Also, like I’ve said a billion times, things were different back then. Your mother’s mellowed with age, I promise you that. We all have.”

“Okay.”

“Do you want to stop?”

“No. Keep going.”

Dave eyed his daughter anxiously, but continued the story anyways. He wasn’t about to stop now.

Then she ripped his motherfucking head off.


If John wasn’t happily in a relationship with Rose and didn’t see Jade as a sister-like figure, then he probably would have been sexually aroused by the badass act. Davesprite didn’t possess any sexual organs at the time, thus rendering this sentence moot point.

“Are you guys alright?” Jade asked her friends, as she tossed Damien’s head overboard. “You weren’t hurt, were you?”

“I’m fine.” Answered Davesprite. “Although Yahtzee did set a curse on John.”

“What?! What sort of curse?!”

“I dunno.” John shrugged. “She said something about Rose and never loving again…” A thought suddenly struck him. “Oh god! What if she made it so that I don’t love Rose anymore?!”

“Can that be a thing?” Jade asked.

“I dunno if regular magic can change someone’s heart.” Davesprite mused. “It would have to be an incredibly dark and powerful hex-“

He was cut off as the boat groaned loudly and tipped to the starboard side quite violently, tossing John and Jade to the floor. The boat was beginning to sink at a rapid rate, thanks to all the holes Rose and the Fish Baron were peppering into the side of the hull.

“We’ll have to figure it out later. Right now, let’s get the hell off this ship!” Jade turned and led the way to the edge of the ferry, wasting no time in leaping down into the water below.

Davesprite was already floating ahead when he noticed that John was still on the boat.

“Yo, Egbert! Move that ass!” He called back.

“I, uh… I can’t swim.” John admitted. “Just- Just go without me.”

“And leave you to die? Yeah, that makes a lot of fucking sense. Damn, you really are a shit hero.”
Davesprite quickly floated back to John and grabbed the other dude around the middle. “Keep track of your personal belongings and keep your arms and legs in the sprite at all times. Hold on, Bro!”

As the ship sank, with Jade, Davesprite, and John narrowly escaping a watery grave, Rose and the Fish Baron still continued their duel. Rose leapt off a rock just as the Fish Baron disintegrated it with a well-aimed cannon spell. The greatest witch ever had to admit, the lame-ass Fish Baron had actually learned a few things since their last battle.

The Fish Baron ducked as Rose fired a few magical beams of light his way and leapt to the next black, river rock. It seemed apparent that this duel was going nowhere fast as both of the magicians were unable to gain any ground on their opponent. Rose then noticed that the ferry was half-submerged below the lake and that her friends were collecting themselves on the nearest shore.

“Observe, Fish Baron!” She taunted a final time, as she pointed to the sinking ship and her safe friends. “It appears your companions have been outfoxed once more by my own. I believe that’s quite telling about how this battle is going to end. Accept your doom and maybe I’ll make your death quick and painless.”

“I- I can’t surrender.” The Fish Baron fired desperate spell after desperate spell at Rose, but the skillful witch was too quick. “I’ve come too far to give up now!”

“I know exactly how you feel.” Rose leapt from one to the next, somersaulted over another magic projectile, and pirouetted to a rock close to the Fish Baron. “Which is why I’m sorry for what I’m about do, however, not sorry enough to change my mind!”

Twirling her wands, Rose fired an incredibly powerful burst of magic at the Fish Baron of the Sea. He tried to block it with his wand, but it was far too late, the spell struck him head on, ripped his wand from his hands, tore his black robes from his body, and left him standing there in a pair of boxer shorts with red hearts on them.

Everyone laughed because they could see his tiny bulge.

“Rot in hell, Fish Baron. You stupid sonovabitch.” Said Rose as she flicked her wrist and fired a bullet spell directly into the Fish Baron’s stupid head.

His dead body slumped and fell into the river, where it was then eaten by his pet giant seahorse, who secretly hated him this entire time. In the distance the sound of bagpipes could be heard, although no one really gave a shit because the Fish Baron sucked and Rose was way cooler.

She floated across the river with a magic spell and rejoined her friends.

“Nice work back there, guys.” She congratulated. “We sure showed those guys not to mess with us.”

“Yeah. I guess, but we lost the boat.” John pointed out. “Not to mention that all of our supplies were on board. We’re literally stranded in the middle of nowhere.”

“Be that as it may,” Piped up Jade, as she drew her friends into a group hug. “You’re never lost when you’re with friends. As long as we’re together, we’ll be fine.”

And as they stood together, victorious under the midday sun, watching the ferry sink to the depths below, Rose Lalonde had a hard time disagreeing with her.

“Wow.” Said Rosie once her father’s tale for the day was finished. “Our heroes just can’t catch a break, huh? Are we ever going to get a chapter where they just chill out?”
“The Worst Wizard Dance Ever was a pretty chill story.”

“Yeah, but it was also kind of messed up because the party that was thrown in their honor was utter shit.” Rosie leaned back on her beach towel and sighed. “I suppose the life on an adventurer is rife with uncertainties. Speaking of which, John just got cursed, right? Yahtzee said that she cursed him. What’s that about? Does John not love Rose anymore?”

“Naw he still loves her. The curse was… a little more dastardly than that.” Dave explained carefully.

“So… He can never love… anyone other than Rose? That’s not so bad. I mean, now that they’re together and all.”

“I suppose so.” Dave rubbed at his eyes under his shades. Maybe his wife was right about recanting this story. He could almost feel the weight of his words on his bones. His thoughts were broken by the sound of footsteps on the sand.

“Hey there you two.” Jade stood over her family. “Are you going to join me in the water or what? It’d be a shame to waste a day like this!”

“Yeah! I’ll race you!” Leaping to her feet, Rosie sprinted towards the water with Jade close behind, both of the girls giggling madly.

Dave shook his head, climbed to his feet, and followed.

Chapter End Notes

I'm back again, after another little hiatus. Let's hope that I can power through the rest of this story with no more trouble, since John: Try to Understand is done and all that jazz.

Anyways, I hope that you're still enjoying this story. Thanks for reading and sticking around.
- Mike
Chapter Twenty: Davesprite’s Bro is a Jerk

It was the last day of the Strider family vacation and Dave, Jade, and Rosie were having a good old time, walking through the kingdom’s streets, seeing all the sights, greeting all the friendly faces. They’d have to head back home the following morning, so for now, they were making the most of the time they had left.

“We still need to do some shopping for a new magical academy that’s better suited for Rosie’s needs.” Jade pointed out, as she tugged the young girl in question along by the hand. “Here, let’s stop by the library. They’re bound to have some directories in there!”

“Bleh.” Dave was not a big fan of libraries, not because he disliked reading or anything though. He was known to curl up every whence and then with an ice-cold mead and one of the many Marry Totter books.

Marry Totter is a popular book series, in which this young witch discovers one day that she’s actually just a regular old human! She’s then sent to this lame, boring, human school where she learns all this everyday human stuff, like balancing a check book, mowing the lawn, and unloading the dishwasher, and goes on absolutely zero fun adventures.

No. The real reason Dave disliked the library was because of just how quiet and stuffy it was in there. After his thousand-year imprisonment inside of a magical amulet, he’d become adverse to enclosed spaces, complete silence, and neck jewelry.

“I’ll wait outside if it’s all the same to you guys.” Said Dave. “Libraries give me the creeps and there’s this really awesome record scroll shop that I’ve been wanting to check out.”

“Alright,” Jade bid her husband farewell with a quick kiss on the cheek. “Meet us back here in an hour. Come on, Rosie.”

As Jade and young Rosie entered the library, Dave turned on his heel and headed off down the street once more. The record scroll shop was only a few blocks away and within a few minute’s time, he was stepping through the front door. Inside the small shop there were many scrolls, all of which played sweet jams the second you unrolled them.

As Dave perused the selves, keeping his eyes peeled for anything worthwhile, he quite by accident stumbled on the long robes of a fellow shopper.

“Oh shit. Sorry, miss.” Said Dave to the stranger. “I didn’t seeeeeeeeeeeee-”

His word stretched out into a long hum when the stranger turned around to reveal the face of none other than Roxy the Werecat, the sexy former rogue. She pulled back her hood to look at Dave fully and waited patiently for him to recover from his shock.

“eeeeeeee you there. Roxy? What the hell are you doing here?” Dave asked, giving his old friend a quick glance over.

He hadn’t seen her in years, not since Rosie was a little girl. The rogue was older, of course, but not
any less beautiful. Her hair was longer, the lines of her face were deeper, but her eyes were just as
sharp as ever. She wore dark robes and carried her signature short sword in a holder-thingy strapped
to her hip.

“Shopping.” Said Roxy simply. “The Fuchsia Kingdom is known for having the best record scrolls
in all of Skaia. You of all people should know that, Strider.”

“Yeah, but… We haven’t seen you in- what? Five years?” Dave lowered his voice slightly, even
though they seemed to be the only two people in the shop. “Where have you been, Roxy? Five
years. No letters, no wizard emails, nothing. Jade and I have been worried sick.”

“After… everything that happened, I needed some time to myself. I spent some time in the Wizard
Mountains, along the eastern coast, even up in the northern plains.” She smirked slightly. “You
should see the monument they’ve built up there. It’s nice. Although…” She prodded at Dave’s
stomach. “They might need to glue on some more marble to keep it current with the real thing.”

Dave slapped her hand away.

“What are you talking about? I’m just as sexy as I ever was.” He sucked in his stomach none the
less. “And yeah, I’ve seen the monument. It’s pretty shit if you ask me. Rose’s stature is much too
big. It’s like four times mine. What’s up with that?”

Roxy pursed her lips slightly.

“Well, Rose always did have a knack for placing herself above her friends, didn’t she?”

“She changed, Roxy. You know that. For the better too.” Dave folded his arms. “But Rose’s past
bitchiness aside, I’m more concerned about why you ran away like that and also what exactly you’re
going to say to my daughter to make up for it.”

“Rosie’s here?” Roxy’s eyes lit up and she cast about, as if to find the young girl crouching behind a
nearby display. “Where is she?”

“At the library, with her mother. We ran into a little bit of trouble lately with her school and we’re in
the process of finding a new one.”

“Oh really? Huh, what sort of trouble?”

“The Jade-would-kill-me-if-she-knew-the-full-story kind of trouble.”

“Haha! Nice.” Roxy grinned. “You know. You could teach her if you wanted to, Dave. You have a
background in the magical arts.”

“Yeah, but only in frustrating narrow fields.” Dave grimaced. “Rosie needs more than just lessons on
familiars, magical tethers, and conjuration. She needs potion-making skills, hexcraft, transfiguration,
and a whole bunch of shit I know nothing about.”

“You know… I know some stuff.” Roxy chewed her lip. “I mean, if you were unable to find a new
school, maybe we could work out some kind of multi-cooperative-tutoring thing?”

Dave was flabbergasted.

“I’m flabbergasted!” He said. “You’d do that? What happened to finding time for yourself or
whatever hippie shit you were just talking about?”
“I’ve spent years being a shit aunt.” Roxy admitted with a sigh. “I’ve had time to myself and I suppose the reason I’m this far south again is because… well, maybe I was hoping that I’d bump into my old friends a little bit.” She met Dave’s gaze with her own, firm and resolute. “I don’t think it’s a coincidence we’re in the same record scroll store, Dave. Your daughter is meant for great things, just look at her parents! If I can help her on the road to that greatness, then of course I’ll do whatever I can.”

Dave smirked, which is about as close to a full-blown grin you could get from the cool guy, and embraced Roxy tenderly. After four years of separation, the friends were together again once more.

“Come on,” Said Dave, tugging Roxy behind him. “Let’s get to the library. The girls will be so fucking jazzed to see you!”

Jade was not fucking jazzed.


A stereotypical librarian, complete with horn-rimmed glasses and a cardigan, peeked between two books on a nearby self and let out a sharp ‘shhhhhhhhhhhhh’ to silence Jade. Dave hastily grabbed his daughter and wife by the arms and began steering them towards the doors.

“Perhaps we should continue this outside.” He muttered quietly, as Roxy followed sullenly behind the family.

So yeah, after the pleasantry’s were hashed out, it was agreed that Roxy and Dave would work together to tutor Rosie in the magical arts. It was a cheap, fun, and potentially much more dangerous solution to Rosie’s school issues, which looked pretty good on paper, but whether not it would actually work remained to be seen.

Regardless, it was agreed that Roxy would travel with the Strider family back to their home the following morning and seek housing in their town. For the first time in years, Rosie had her favorite aunt back and Roxy, once more, felt like she belonged.

Everyone was not sad.

And as Rosie snuggled up in her bed at the inn that night for her father’s story, she couldn’t help but be distracted by fantasies of herself, her mother, and now her two tutors: her dad and Roxy, roaming the plains of Skaia together, an unstoppable team in search of adventure…

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Rose, John, Davesprite, and Jade, having just survived the second and final attack of the Fish Baron of the Sea, were marooned on the edge of the Black Rock River. All of their supplies were left behind on the sunken ferry, which included Rose’s map, John’s head of broccoli that he’d been carrying around since chapter six, and Davesprite’s collection of souvenir t-shirts.

That being said, everyone was not happy.

“This is such bullshit!” Said John. “I was like, a hundred percent sure that broccoli would get us out of tough bind one day.”

“They’ll be more where that came from.” Assured Rose. “In the meantime, we should continue our trek northward. There’s bound to be a town nearby where we can restock up on supplies and rest. Jade, which way do you think is north?”
Jade, the clever Weredog badass, examined the setting sun. As a former member of the Sun Clan, she was adept at telling cardinal directions by use of sun and in no time at all, she had identified which direction they were meant to travel.

“This way gang!” She sang, as she led the way into the undergrowth.

The group once more found themselves in a dense forest, much more dark and mysterious than the Forest of Franklin outside the City of Lakewater, and also much harder to navigate. Rose’s robes got snagged on many thorns and branches, whilst Jade continuously got sidetracked by interesting scents.

“Oh shit. I think there’s a racoonicorn over there!” She barked, attempting to race away once more.

Davesprite seized her by the belt though and held her back.

“Maybe there is, maybe there isn’t. Get a grip on yourself, you crazy loon.” He snapped.

“I’m not crazy! You’re crazy!”

“Ooooooh. Good comeback.”

“I’ll show you a comeback!” Jade pulled back her fist, but Rose quickly intervened before they could come to blows.

“Stop it both of you. I know that we’re all under a lot of pressure right now, following that battle and the loss of the ferry, which was in no shape or form my fault by the way, but we can’t afford to fight amongst ourselves.” The witch examined the immediate surroundings and noticed that the group had come to halt in a small clearing. “Here we go. Let’s rest for a few hours and regain some composure. Then we can continue on our quest.”

John was taken aback. Rose was never one to suggest pausing for rests, not when her ultimate quest was at stake. Yet here she was, plopping herself down onto a fallen log and motioning for the rest of her party members to join her.

“Alright, sounds like a plan to me.” Jade promptly curled on the soft grass and fell asleep.

Davesprite gave Jade an odd look, half affection and half exasperation, before shaking his head and turning away.

“I’m going back to the river.” He explained. “Maybe I can salvage some stuff from the ferry that you wrecked, Rose.”

“I didn’t… oh whatever. Be careful and don’t stray too far as to lose your way back, alright?”

“Yeah, yeah. Whatever.” And then Davesprite disappeared into the trees, leaving only John and Rose behind.

John took a seat on the ground and leaned back against the log which Rose was perched upon. He sighed, getting himself comfortable as Rose’s shin bumped gently against his side.

“Do you wanna… I dunno, talk about something?” He asked, craning his neck to look up at her. “That fight with the Fish Baron was pretty intense. You were spectacular, as per usual.”

“Thanks, John.” Rose smiled sweetly. “I appreciate the compliment and no, I do not have anything I wish to discuss at the time being. I suggest you rest, fore we will not be making any more pit stops
once we get moving again.

“Well… alright.” John could still sense that something was off about Rose, but decided not to press her about it. She’d talk when she was ready.

Jade mumbled in her sleep and kicked with her legs, caught up in the midst of some dream. John chuckled to himself as he watched her until his eyes grew heavy. Jade’s breathing was rhythmic, the grassy ground was soft, and Rose’s thigh against his shoulder was pleasantly warm. He was lightly dozing when he hear the soft snap of a twig being broken.

“Huh?” His head, which had been resting back on the log, snapped upright once more. He’d fallen asleep for a moment. Jade was still curled up on the ground and Davesprite had yet to return from the sunken ferry. Wiping the sleep from his eyes, John looked up to Rose to see that the witch was gone. “Rose?”

Casting about quickly, he spotted a familiar blonde head bobbing away between the trees. Getting to his feet, John gave chase after his girlfriend, careful not to disturb the still-snoozing Jade. Wherever Rose was going, she obviously wanted it to be kept a secret, otherwise she would have woken him before leaving.

John was all for giving his relationship partner the proper space she desired, but this was just ridiculous. What if she got hurt? He deserved to know if she was rushing off to put herself in harm’s way once more.

He tracked her to edge of another clearing, much larger than where he and the others had previously stopped to rest. Rose was standing just beyond the tree line, gazing up at a set of cliffs just barely visible beyond the opposite, clustered trees.

“Rose?” John announced his presence as he approached, sure not to surprise her.

She turned at his call and met his gaze with firm eyes.

“John.” She responded evenly. She did not move as he joined her side.

“Where are you going?”

“There’s something that I need to do.”

“Something dangerous?”

“Not in the way you’re thinking.”

“Oh. Well that’s… frustratingly vague.” John rubbed the back of his neck. “Do you- um, need any help at all?”

“No. I’d prefer if I went ahead alone.”

John nodded slowly, not fully grasping the point of all the secrecy, but doing his best to be accepting of it regardless. Jade’s words from earlier came back to mind, you know the ones. The wise words about how Rose was meant to work out her own problems on her own.

“Alright, then.” John jabbed a thumb over his shoulder. “I guess I’ll be back at the camp if you need me.”

As he moved to walk away, Rose suddenly let out a disgruntled sigh. When he looked back, he
noticed that the firmness of her glare was gone, replaced with an almost sad expression.

“Dammit, John. Why do you have to be so… understanding?” She demanded irritably. “Just for once, why can’t you tell me off? Why don’t you ever do what \textit{you} want to do?”

“Huh?” John moved back towards her. “What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about \textit{this.}” She gestured between the two of them quickly. “You’re perfectly fine with me going off on my lonesome right now, which is incredibly dangerous in this neck of the woods. Isn’t it obvious that I’m not really sure what I’m doing anymore? Why the fuck can’t you slap some sense into me? Why has no one \textit{ever} done that?!”

Actually, correction. The lovely Davesprite did in fact talk sense into Rose before on many prior occasions, surprisingly enough. Oh well, it’s surprising how easily people forget the good done unto them by others. Let’s see how that witchly bitch deals when her old sprite buddy isn’t there to listen to her shitty relationship problems.

“I’m not going to slap sense into you, Rose.” John gently took his girlfriend by the shoulders. “You may not feel it right now, but you’re still the same awesome witch that you always were. In fact, I’d even say that you’re better than ever! That little snag with the Bee Lord was just that: a snag. You defeated a whole army of Beemen almost singlehandedly not twenty-four hours before that bullshit fight.”

Rose sighed again and leaned forward to rest her forehead on John’s collarbone. She took a second to steel herself, breathing in his familiar scent of coffee grounds, slight sweat, and freshly baked cake, oddly enough.

“I’m scared, John.” She muttered into his chest. “More than that, I feel sick. I don’t… I don’t think I’ll be able to finish my ultimate quest. I just want to… run away, you know?”

“That’s fine, Rose. That’s a \textit{human} thing. Even witches can feel doubt and stuff.” He pulled away slightly and gently lifted her chin with his thumb to meet her violet eyes. “But you’re not going to run away, because we’re here for you. Me, Davesprite, and Jade, have got your back no matter what and as long as we work together, there’s no way you’ll quest will fail.”

“How do you know that though?”

“Because… well, because I have faith in you, Rose. I think you can do anything if you set your mind to it. You’re the greatest witch ever.”

“Hmmmm.” Rose hummed, not all that convinced. “Well it’s good to hear that one of us can maintain their optimism.”

“Yeah, it’s how we complete each other. Haha.” Wrapping his arm around Rose’s slim shoulders, John began to guide her back towards the camp. “Come on. You’re exhausted and depressed. You need rest, Rose.”

“I cannot sleep now.” Rose put a hand onto his chest to stop him. “As grateful as I am to have your full and undivided support, there is still a quest which I must undertake tonight, alone.”

“What sort of quest?” Asked John, confused.

Rose turned and pointed towards the cliffs.

“Do you recognize that rock formation, John?”
“Nope.”

“Those are the cliffs of heart. It’s rumored that an old sage, familiar with the machinations of the soul, resides atop the tallest peak. If I go to the sage with my troubles, I’m bound to receive some sort of spiritual guidance.”

“You really think that talking to some dusty old magician who lives in a cave is the way to go? How did you even know those cliffs were here?”

“I saw them from the river and to answer your question about the dusty old magician, I’m having trouble thinking of a reason not to take this time of rest to address my confidence issues. I believe it’s worth the risk and I’d like to follow this through.”

“Well… alright then.” John hugged Rose again quickly. “Just promise me that you’ll be careful, okay?”

“Of course.” Rose returned his hug passionately before pulling away, waving farewell, and making her way towards the cliffs of heart.

Back at the sunken ferry, Davesprite was doing his best to salvage as much as the team’s supplies as he could. The depths of the lake were murky, and covered with this really gross-ass sea weed, which really wasn’t sea weed at all since it grew at the bottom of a river.

Motherfucking river weed.

Anyways, Davesprite couldn’t see more than a few feet ahead of him through his goggles and more than once he swam head-long into the side of the crashed vessel, earning him a few bumps on his ghost head. However, he wasn’t about to give up. All of his shit was down there! Like, fifty gold pieces worth of novelty t-shirts!

What’s a sprite supposed to do? Let that shit go? Naw. Not in a million years.

He eventually found his sodden backpack by more of a stroke of luck than anything else. As he was swimming around the vessel, trying to find a suitable entrance through one of the many jagged holes in the hull, a glint of silver had caught his eye. He descended to the river’s depth and retrieved his bag from a tangle of river weed.

“Hell to the fucking to the yes.” Davesprite smirked to himself as floated up and out of the river. “Jade is going to be so jazzed when she sees that I got my gear back.”

As he made his way towards the shore, an odd noise reached his ears, giving him pause. It was a gentle humming like that of magic engine in a boatboat. Turning to investigate, Dave squinted down the river and noticed that a second vessel was approaching from further upstream.

It was smaller than the sunken ferry, armed with large cannons, and flew a flag that Davesprite recognized almost immediately.

“Son of a bitch.” Muttered the sprite as the boat drew nearer.

Meanwhile, John had returned to the camp and awoken Jade from her slumber. After learning the hard way that it’s best to let sleeping Weredog’s lie, he’d relayed to her in detail his conversation with Rose and the witch’s plan to find her confidence once more, all the while nursing a nasty scratch to his cheek.
“Sounds to me like you did everything you could, John.” Jade said, once he’d finished his spiel.
“You reminded her that you were there for her, gave her emotional support without being
overbearing, and supported her in making her own decisions. I give you an A Plus in the friendship
scale.” She then reached over and punched him as hard as she could in the arm. “But I give you a D
Minus on the boyfriend scale!”

me?”

“Relationships are a two-way street, John! Rose opened up to you and admitted some very personal
emotions. You have done literally zero for her in return. Why haven’t you told her about Yahtzee’s
curse yet!?”

For those of you that forgot, Yahtzee the evil woodland witch placed a cursed on John last chapter.
Something about love and Rose and not being able to love and other stuff. I don’t remember exactly.
It just sounded evil as shit.

John was now a marked man, cursed by an unknown hex. He felt a heavy weight settle in his gut,
one of fear. It was almost as if he could feel the malevolent magic inside of him, rotting him slowly
as he sat and fretted.

“I- I don’t want Rose to worry.” John replied dumbly. “We don’t even know if Yahtzee put a real
hex on me or not. I don’t feel any different. Maybe she was just bluffing? Maybe, if she even did cast
a curse, it stopped being a thing when she died?”

“We don’t know that, but do you know who would?” Jade pointed through the trees, towards where
Rose had left. “Your girlfriend! It’s stupid not to tell her, John. You have to do it the next chance you
got. Your life may be at stake!”

“Alright. Alright. I’ll tell her. Just relax.” John settled back against the log that was acting as his
backrest. “There’s nothing I can do about it at the moment. I’ll tell Rose when she gets back. For
now though, let’s just have a nice, quiet, pleasant rest with absolutely no trouble whatsoever.”

“Sounds good to me!” Agreed Jade.

Together, the two adventures settled in to continue their rest, heaving a contented sigh. It was a nice
evening, with a full moon on the rise, late birds twittering happily in the branches above, and roving
pack of pirates rushing through the trees and surrounding them.

Wait… what?

Yeah, John and Jade were suddenly surrounded by a group of pirates, wielding swords and holding
none other than a furious-looking Davesprite as their hostage.

“You’ve gotta be joshin me.” John groaned. He remembered all too well several occasions where he
and his group were suddenly overwhelmed by bandits. He had absolutely zero desire to go through
that again. “What do you pirates want? Why the fuck can’t any of you just leave us alone? We’re on
a quest to save the world for shit’s sake!”

“Relax, little guy. We aren’t going to hurt you.” One man stepped forward, the leader of the pirates.
“How are yall doing on this lovely evening?”

“We’d be doing a whole lot better if you guys weren’t here.” Jade bared her fangs and growled at
Davesprite’s captors. “Let him go! Or else I’ll rip your god-damn arms off!”
“Jade, no.” Davesprite sighed. “Listen, these guys aren’t here to rob us. This is Dirk,” He pointed to the leader of the pirates. “And… and… he’s my brother.”

John and Jade exchanged a shocked glance and then looked to Dirk. He was an impressive-looking dude, wearing warrior’s duds, a sweet pair of pointed shades, and wielding a razor-sharp katana in his gloved hand. You could sort of see a resemblance between him and Davesprite if you looked close enough, save for the obvious difference that Dirk was a hundred percent human.

“Heh. That’s right.” As if to affirm Davesprite’s words, Dirk slid to his brother’s side and ruffled his ghostly hair roughly. “We were heading south to, uh… pay a visit to some coastal towns when we heard the telltale sounds of a totally wicked battle. When we came to investigate, you better believe I was shocked to find this little dipshit floating around out there.”

Davesprite chuckled half-heartedly as Dirk ruffled his hair again, slapped him on the back, and gave him a nasty whip with a wet rolled-up towel. You know, typical Bro stuff.

Jade continued to growl quietly. She could tell that Davesprite was uncomfortable with this situation and her hero’s spirit refused for her to sit idly by while he suffered under his brother’s rough, doting nature.

“So what do you want if you aren’t here to pillage us?” She demanded. “You’re pirates, right? Isn’t that what you do?”

“Well, I wouldn’t call us ‘pirates’ so much as motherfucking ‘sailor-ninja-knights’.” To illustrate his ninja skill, Dirk did a clap-flip, where you flip and clap at the same time.

“Daaaaaaaammmmnn.” Said John, who was impressed.

“Man, Bro. You’re so goddamn awesome. I want to be like you when I grow up.” Muttered Davesprite as he scuffed his ghostly tail in the dirt.

“Don’t worry, little man.” Dirk smirked as he dispensed more violent, brotherly affection. “Eat all your green veggies and you’re bound to grow a few muscles eventually. Haha!” Dirk laughed and pointed at Davesprite’s tiny biceps, as all of his ninja buddies joined in too. “Speaking of growing up, Davey. Why the hell are you still a sprite?”

“I got cursed asshole.” Davesprite wriggled away from his Bro’s attempt to give him a noogie and glared at him. “You should remember. You were there, after all.”

“Well, yeah. But it’s been a thousand years, dude. You should have removed the curse by now.”

“There’s a way to reverse his sprite transformation?” John interjected curiously. This was news to him. “How? I sort of always thought that Davesprite was just your regular, run of the mill sprite.”

“Naw. This guy and I used to run this whole fucking land together as some of the greatest DJ’s of all time, probably ever. We would have hit it big if this idiot hadn’t gotten on the wrong side of that sorcerer.” Dirk slung an arm around Davesprite’s shoulder. “You know, after he turned you into a sprite and trapped you in that amulet, I didn’t know what to do, man.”

“You could have found me and set me free.” Grumbled Davesprite.

“I would have, but by the time I found out what happened, your amulet had been sold. How the hell was I supposed to find one cursed amulet in this big old dangerous land? I’d almost given up hope that I’d ever see you again, Bro.” Dirk wiped a fake tear out from beneath his shades. Cool dudes don’t cry. “Until I saw your orange ass floating out over that river.”
“How do you reverse the curse though?” Repeated John. If there was a way to return his friend back to his human form than he was eager to help in any way he could.

“The reversal of this particular curse is simple. I managed to squeeze it out of the sorcerer who hexed you in the first place, before I decapitated him of course.” Dirk smiled fondly at the memory. “Anyway, yeah. To reverse the curse all you need is a kiss from your one true love.”

Oh. So maybe John wouldn’t be able to help out very much with this particular problem. All of Dirk’s ninja pals laughed again at some private joke as all of the color drained from Davesprite’s face. He cast a quick glance towards Jade, who had also gone quiet pale. Their eyes met momentarily before flicking away again.

As much as Davesprite liked Jade, he was unsure if the sloppy, crass affection he felt for her counted as ‘true love’ or not. Jade, on the other hand, was just overall confused for her feelings for Davesprite in general. She liked him, sure, but much like Rose, she had never attempted a fully fledged relationship before and didn’t really know what to do. Also, Davesprite currently had a ghost butt, so there was that too.

“Welp. It looks I better get used to be a ghostly fuck, because there’s no way in hell that I’m going to find my ‘true love’ or some shit anytime soon.” Davesprite shrugged with forced nonchalance. “Thanks for the information though, Bro. I’ll be sure to put it to good use never.”

“Don’t be such a sour sprout, pussy.” Dirk slapped his bro on the back for, like, the sixtieth time. “That sort of attitude won’t get you anywhere worthwhile.”

“Speaking of getting places,” John segued seamlessly. “Our ferry got wrecked by some evil mini-bosses and we’re kind of stranded out here in the woods. You wouldn’t happen to be able to give us a lift to the nearest town, would you?”

“Hmmm.” Dirk stroked his chin as he mused, then he turned to his sailing navigator or map guy, if you will. “What do you think, map guy?”

“Well…” Map guy pulled out his map and pushed his spectacles further up his nose. “The nearest settlement northward would have to be Martindale, but if we go that far, we might as well go the extra twenty miles and take them to the Emerald City.”

“We don’t have time for such a detour.” Piped up another sailor-ninja, whose name was calendar guy. Calendar guy pulled out his calendar and examined it closely. “If we want to make it the southern coast before next Soonsday, then we just can’t travel that far in the other direction. Hmmm. A roving festival is supposed to travel near here sometime tomorrow. Maybe they could find transport with them?”

“You.” Dirk pointed to a third sailor-ninja-knight. “Event planner guy, where exactly is this festival going to take place and between what hours?”

Event planner guy pulled out his event-planning notebook and thumbed through the pages. “Apparently the festival, which is thrown once a year to commemorate contemporary artistry, will take place on the shores of the black rock river tomorrow, about seventeen miles from out exact location.” He answered.

“That isn’t too far out of the way.” Dirk nodded in approval and congratulated his brother once more with a quick flick to the ear. “Fret not, dear brother. We will sail you up stream and to the festival, but from there it’s up to you to make your own damn way. We leave at first light!”
“Alright! Thanks, Dirk.” John beamed. “I just hope Rose is back by then.”

“She should be.” Jade reassured him. “And even if she isn’t, there’s no way we’re leaving without her.”

So then the group settled in for the night, with Dirk and his sailor-ninja-pirates pitching their tents and John, Jade, and Davesprite curling up beneath the stars. John thought of Rose and prayed that she was alright, whilst both Jade and Davesprite wondered about their one true loves and if they would ever meet them.

As all that shit was happening, Rose made her way through the forest and to the cliffs of heart. Carefully, with the skill of a practiced adventurer, she scaled the rocky wall. It wasn’t easy going, as the raw stone was jagged and sharp and many cracks and crevices gave shelter to rancor-rats.

Rancor-rats are these really belligerent rat-like creatures who like to yell at people. They’re one purpose in life is to instill self-doubt in their prey, crippling their spirit by repeatedly bashing them with derogatory statements.

“Nice robes, witch.” Said one rancor-rat as he poked he head out of his hidey hole. “They look really affordable. If know what I’m saying.”

“What’s with the haircut, witch? I thought bowl-cuts went out of style in year six. Hehe.” Taunted a second rancor-rat.

“It’s a bob!” Snapped Rose. “And shut the front fucking door! Climbing this cliff is hard enough as it is.”

There was a moment of panic when a stone under her left foot suddenly crumbled under her weight, threatening to send her tumbling down back to the earth. She scrambled with her hands to find purchase and eventually regained her footing, but not without being reminded how truly dangerous and foolish this side-quest might be.

“I’d give up if I were you, witch.” Continued the rancor-rat. “It’s not like the guru that lives on the top of these cliffs will tell you anything worthwhile. You’re wasting your time. Why don’t you go home to your bazillion cats and die alone like you’re supposed to- OH GOD MY LEGS!!”

Diving her hand into a crack in the rocks, Rose seized the offending rancor-rat and ripped him from his home, tossing him bodily over her shoulder. The poor rat flew through the air like a speeding bullet spell and was caught in the claws of a Firefalcon, who just happened to be flying by at the time. The Firefalcon flew over to a basketball net and behind the back dunked the rancor-rat into the hoop, killing it instantly.

The rancor-rat succumbed to his wounds, but not before bemoaning his entire existence and yielding to the dreadful knowledge that his entire existence was utterly and irrevocably pointless.

At the top of the cliffs of heart, Rose saw what she had traveled so arduously for. There, nestled amongst a group of large boulders, sat a cozy, little hut, complete with a chimney, porch swing, and even one of those stupid bowls of water that people leave out for birds to take baths in.

Stupid. Everyone knows that birds only take showers in the privacy of their own home. Only uninhibited freaks bathe out in public like that.

Anyways, Rose approached the front door and knocked swiftly three times. Almost immediately, the door swung open to reveal the tiniest, cutest, little, wise sage ladies that you ever did see. She wore a
green shawl and this adorable knitted cap atop her head.

She looked up at Rose and grinned widely.

“How wonderful!” She exclaimed. “A guest! Please come in, come in. Wipe your boots on the door mat there, come on. Don’t be a stranger.”

Rose cleaned her boots on the mat and entered the hut to find that it was a one room affair with minimal furniture, the most prominent being a pair of chairs directly in the center of the room. The wise sage lady crossed to one of the chairs and took a seat, motioning for Rose to take the one opposite her.

“I know why you’re here, young witch.” Spoke the sage. “I foresaw it in my crystal ball.” She pointed towards a glittering ball on a nearby self, which sparkled with all sorts of magical bullshit. “Have no fear. Whatever you say in here will stay between the two of us no matter what! It’s part of my magical contract. Hehe.”

“Okay, well…” Rose shifted nervously in her chair. Talking to John about her problems was one thing, but this old sage was a complete stranger. It would take a second for the witch to steel her nerves once more. “I haven’t been feeling up to snuff lately. Typically I’m an unstoppable killing machine with untold capacities for magical awesomeness, but I threw my recent battle with the Bee Lord of the South and now… now I just don’t feel like the witch I once was.”

The sage considered Rose’s words for a moment and then stood up from her chair.

“How are your eating habits?” The sage started poking and prodding at Rose with her fingers. “Are you getting enough sleep?”

“I suppose I’ve eaten less than usual these past few days, slept less too.” Rose admitted. “But that’s just life on the road. It’s hard to keep a good schedule when you’re racing through the wilderness in pursuit of adventure.”

“Mhmmm.” The sage forced Rose’s mouth open and peered down her throat. “Let’s do a little bit of word association. Say the first thing that comes to your mind. If I say ‘moon’, you say…”

“Sun.” Answered Rose lazily, as the sage moved on to inspecting her knee caps. She was starting to think that this so called ‘wise’ sage was nothing more than a hack.

“Water.” Continued the sage.

“Rain.”

“Turtle.”

“Shell.”

“Wagon.”

“Wheel.”

“Hammer.”

“John.”

The sage lifted an eyebrow and Rose pursed her lips. Of course she’d think of John in such a scenario. A hammer was his signature weapon and she had just talked to him not too long ago. The
Sage, with a sudden amount of caution, leaned forward and gently tickled at Rose’s stomach.

“John is your mate, I presume?”

“We’re in a relationship if that’s what you mean.”

“Of course.” The sage finally returned to her seat and rubbed at her temples, whilst staring hard at the floor. The hut was silent for the moment, save for the soft crackling of the fire in the hearth, as Rose waited for the sage to speak once more. “I have an idea about what may be afflicting you, young witch. Are you ready to hear it?”

“Yes.” Answered Rose immediately.

The sage looked up and met Rose’s eyes. A wide grin, like that of the cheshire cat, split her face as she spoke:

“You, Rose Lalonde the greatest witch ever, are pregnant.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Wizard Harvard Community College Musical

Chapter Notes

Thanks to HowlingArmadillo for commenting

See the end of the chapter for more notes

**Chapter Twenty-One: Wizard Harvard Community College Musical**

It was just breaking dawn by the time Rose returned to the camp. Her encounter with the recluse and eccentric sage up on the cliffs of heart had left her a little rattled to say the least, therefore she was no way fully prepared for the sight that awaited her as she entered the grassy clearing.

John and Jade were snuggled up together against the fallen log. Nothing bizarre there, Werедogs are accustomed to living in packs and sleeping in piles. The truly shocking revelation were the twenty or so pirates milling about the smoking embers of a campfire with Davesprite strung up on a spit roast.

“Keep turning him.” Ordered the leader of the pirates, some Johnny Cage-looking motherfucker with a pair of sweet pointed shades. “I wanna get some of that classic smoky flavor.”

All the pirates laughed and the one turning the rotisserie continued to rotate Davesprite over the small flames. Rose was not in the mood for this shit.

“Unhand him, foul pirates!” She shrieked, leaping into their midst with her wands drawn. “I haven’t slept all night, I nearly broke my neck climbing those damn cliffs, and now you’re cooking my friend alive?!? Hold on to your butts, I’m about to hex all of you into oblivion!”

“Whoa. Take it easy there, shorty. My name is Dirk.” The head pirate, Dirk, said with a grin. “You must be the infamous Rose Lalonde. I’ve heard a lot about you.”

“Then you must know that I am not one to be trifled with.” Rose leveled her wands at Dirk. “I will not ask again, pirate scum. Release my friend from his delicious predicament!”

The sounds of the scuffle had awoken John and Jade, both of them saw what was transpiring and quickly jumped to their feet.

“Rose! You’re back!” John exclaimed, rushing to greet his girlfriend. “Oh. I see you’ve met Dirk and his buddies. It’s cool, babe. They’re with us.”

“They are with you? Then why the hell are they trying to cook my familiar?”

“It’s some twisted, backwards, convoluted display of brotherly affection.” Jade explained grumpily as she moved forward to rescue Davesprite. She pulled the apple out of his mouth and quickly untied him. “Are you alright, Dave? Sorry John and I were sleeping and didn’t notice what was happening.”

“Naw. It’s all good. These guys were just kidding.” Davesprite defended his brother. “It’s funny, right? They were going to kill me! Haha! How ironic. Damn, my bro is the fucking coolest ever, isn’t he? Gods I want to be just like him.”

“Yeah!” Snapped Jade. “That’s his name, after all!”

“Not when he’s a sprite it isn’t.”

“It’s what he wants to be called!” Jade barred her fangs at Dirk. “He’s as much of a person as you or me and treating him any less by referring to him as a ‘sprite’ is just barbaric!”

John exchanged a look with Rose, in which the he rolled his eyes heavenward. It was obvious to the witch that Jade and Dirk were close to blows and that tensions between them had been running hot for quite a while. She would have to step in if they wanted to get anything productive done this morning.

“You know, Harley, you don’t be such a socially conscious ripsnorter all the time.” Davesprite brushed some stray ash off his ghost shoulders. “I am a sprite, after all.”

“You’re just saying that because Dirk said it!” Jade grabbed Davesprite by the shoulders. “You’re your own man, you’ve been that for a long time now. Don’t let this prick come out of nowhere and start affecting the way you think.”

“Psshh. You don’t know what you’re talking about, Harley.”

“Since when did you call me ‘Harley’?”

“Since you started calling me, Dave. Heh. That’s so uncool.”

“You asked me to call you Dave!”

“Alright, alright. That’s enough.” Rose intervened then. “You two will sort out whatever bizarre conformist issues you have later, preferably when there aren’t a bunch of rambunctious pirates in our midst.”

“Sailor-ninja-knights.” Dirk corrected. He moved to shake Rose’s hand and introduced himself fully. “Put her there, Lalonde. My name’s Dirk and I’m Davesprite’s long-lost, and infinitely cooler brother. May I say you look positively radiant this morning?”

“Radiant?” Rose subconsciously wrapped her arms around her middle. There was absolutely no way that her pregnancy could already be showing… could it? “That’s a code-word for bloated, isn’t it? How much do you know!!?”

Everyone eyed Rose warily as she barked like a paranoid guard dog. John, who was by now accustomed with such dog-like behavior thanks to Jade, leaned in close and whispered in his girlfriend’s ear:

“Rose, you alright? You seem a little jumpy this morning.”

“I- I’m just tired, I suppose.” She put a hand to her head and waited for the world to stop spinning. Pregnant. She, Rose Lalonde, was pregnant with John Egbert’s child and… oh. Oh mother of god. “Move! I’m going to be sick!” She screamed as she fled to the edge of the clearing to vomit amongst the trees.

John, Davesprite, Jade, Dirk, and all of the bewildered sailor-ninja-knights stood and watched the witch dry heave for a while.
“Geez. I always knew that magical beings were eccentric, but I’ve never seen nothing like this.” Dirk chuckled and slung an arm around John’s shoulders. “You’re a lucky man, Egbert. Lucky indeed.”

“Yeah. I know.” John chewed his lip as he stared at Rose. “I’m going to go check on her.”

As he slipped away, Dirk turned to command his troops.

“Allright!” Dirk clapped his hands and motioned to all his pirate pals. “Let’s use this time to break down camp. We move out in ten minutes, people!”

All the pirates did as they were told, putting out the remains of the fire, wrapping up their tents, and packing their bags for the voyage ahead. While this was happening, John was comforting Rose as best as he could, holding her hair back and rubbing gentle circles over her shoulders with his hands, and Jade and Davesprite started arguing again.

“What’s your problem?” Jade demanded of him in a hushed voice. “Why are you being so rude to me?”

“This is the first time I’ve seen my Bro in over a thousand years.” Davesprite quickly explained. “I’m trying to show him how cool I am by putting up with his bullshit. This is my only chance to impress him before he runs off again. Don’t fuck this up for me!”

Jade couldn’t believe her highly-sensitive ears, which could detect much higher frequencies, up to four times the distance of a human with normal hearing. Davesprite was willing to put up with this egregious abuse just to fit in with Dirk and his friends. She had never seen such an astounding display of peer pressure and, frankly, it made her almost as sick to her stomach as Rose.

“Fine. Fine.” Jade folded her arms and turned away. “If you want to eat dirt to be accepted by these pricks than that’s your own stupid prerogative. In the meantime, your real friends will be over here waiting.”

Then she stalked over to John and Rose, leaving Davesprite alone with nothing but the swirling ball of self-directed hatred churning in his ghostly stomach.

After the sailor-ninja-knights finished cleaning house and after Rose stopped doing a fine impression of a vomit fountain, Dirk led the whole group back towards the river and to the waiting sailor-ninja-knight vessel. It was smaller than the original ferry that brought our heroes this far north, but would comfortably carry the group ahead nonetheless without any size complaints. Not to mention, Dirk’s ship was famous back in the day for being one of the fastest in it’s class. Our heroes would be delivered to the festival in no time at all!

However, where Rose was concerned, any second spent on the wobbly deck of the ship was a second too many. She leaned over the railing, periodically hacking up sick into the river as John stood by and kept her company.

“That sage in the cliffs didn’t cast a flu spell on you, did he?” John asked, watching Rose heave once more.

“She.” The witch corrected, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand. “And no, she didn’t. The only curse she thrust upon me was that of pure knowledge.”

“What sort of knowledge?”

Rose turned to John, her mouth open and prepped to drop the bombshell to end all bombshells, but suddenly caught herself. Was now really the time to inform John of his impending fatherhood? Her
heart told her that John would like to be informed as quickly as possible, whilst her mind warned that such information should be dealt with carefully and at the right time.

On the deck of a pirate ship, surrounded by cackling sailor-ninjas, puking up your guts, while leaning half-way over the river, did not seem like the most opportune moment. That and a small part of Rose was hoping that the sage was mistaken in her diagnosis.

Maybe her sickness had nothing to do with the birth of life within her womb? Rose knew little about motherhood, having considered the subject to be unworthy of her time. However, the tidbits of information that she had picked up on her many quests told that witch’s biology, her biology, behaved quite differently than normal humans during times such as pregnancy, due to the sheer amount of magic coursing through her veins.

Who could she talk to that knew enough adequate information about witch pregnancy? Who could she talk to that could confirm her condition?

Rose knew of no such person. She was truly and utterly alone.

And afraid.

“Hey.” John’s arms wrapped around her shoulders and pulled her delicately to his chest. “Are you there? I think I lost you for a second.”

Rose craned her neck to look up at John. He was smiling at her, despite their predicament, despite the dribble of stubborn sick on her chin, despite everything that had ever happened to them, he was still smiling.

She didn’t have to be alone if she didn’t want to be. She knew then that John would understand if she came clean about her condition. He wouldn’t abandon her in her time of need. However… as she looked into his eyes, she also swore that she would preserve that smile as his for as long as possible and decided to wait, for just a while longer, to tell him the truth.

Such was the selfish way of reasoning to the greatest witch ever.

“Forgive me. The sage I spoke with was a proprietor of shamanistic powers. Some of her incents have made me a little light headed, paired with my subtle case of sea-sickness, I’m afraid you’re forced to witness a disturbing display at my hands.” Rose sighed and pressed her forehead against John’s chest. “I’ll share with you the results of my side-quest soon enough, once I’ve had the chance to mull them over myself.”

“Okay.” John agreed brightly. As curious as he was, he trusted Rose to keep him informed on a need to know basis. He watched her ragged breathing slowly return to normal as she rested against him, and quietly thought of his own information yet to be shared. Namely, the curse that Yahtzee the evil woodland witch cast upon him back in chapter nineteen. “You know, Rose. There’s actually something that I’ve been meaning to tell you too.”

“Hmm?” Rose’s tired eyes had drifted close, as John’s warmth slowly lulled the tired witch to sleep.

“It’s not anything big, probably nothing at all really. Haha.” John swallowed hard. “It’s just that… during the second battle with the Fish Baron of the Sea, I was battling Yahtzee, right? And well, I don’t really know how to describe it, but she sort of- I mean, this was after Davesprite saved my life and…”

“LAND HO!!” Shouted a sailor-ninja-knight from the crow’s nest, completely cutting off John mid-
way through his terribly awkward rambly mess.

Sure enough, when Rose and John looked, they say that the boat had taken them quite suddenly to their desired destination. The shores of the Black Rock River were alight with activity, as patrons of the festival scurried to and fro. Gigantic, colorful tents dotted the grassy coast and, much to our heroes excitement, there were several large boats moored nearby, just waiting to ferry them further upstream and further towards their ultimate goal.

Dirk lowered the gangplank down to the dry land and dismissed Rose and her friends with a wave of his hand.

“Well, here you are, brother dearest.” Said Dirk as Davesprite floated past. “One festival pit-stop just like I promised. I hope that you succeed on your quest, find true love, become human once more, grow spiritually, blah blah blah. You get what I’m trying to say.”

The two brother’s embraced and Davesprite was about to bid his long lost brother a tearful goodbye when one of the sailor-ninja-knights spoke up.

“Hey. Listen, Dirk, my man.” The sailor-ninja, who shall be known as Map Guy, said. “I was talking with the rest of the boys and... well, this festival looks hype as shit and we wanna check it out.”

“Fuuuuuhhh. Fine.” It was impossible to tell from behind his sweet shades, but Dirk totally gave a spectacular eye-roll for the ages. “I suppose a few hours of good ol’ fashion family fun won’t hurt anyone.”

“So you’re staying?” Asked Davesprite with a perfect balance of genuine interest and feigned nonchalance.

“Yeah, I guess.” Dirk slung his arm around his brother’s shoulders once more and steered him down the gangplank. “But just for a little bit, don’t get your brassiere all tangled up with that ghost tail of yours.”

“Haha! I won’t, Bro. Damn, you’re so fucking cool!”

The whole group made their way through the festival, taking in all the awesome sights and sounds. As mentioned before, there were a fuck-load of tents with all sorts of bullshit going on inside of them. Jade peeked through the flap of one and saw a bunch of orcs having a lembas bread walk, the next one was full of kids playing Cluckaroo, and the one after that proved to be some kind of underground skeleton fight club.

“The first rule of skeleton fight club,” Said the ring leader, as our heroes stopped to watch. “Is that you don’t talk about skeleton fight club.”

Anyways, the deeper Rose and the gang went into the festival, the more stuff there was to do. As Jade forced the whole team to stop for wizard churros, a nearby carnival game caught John’s eye.

“Come on, Rose.” He said excitedly, taking his girlfriend by the hand and pulling her along. “Look at this!”

It was one of those stupid carnival games where you throw a rock at a tower of empty mead bottles to see if you can knock them over. Everyone with half of a quarter of a brain knows that shit like that is rigged, but John being who he was, had never been to a festival like this before, let alone this particular game.
“Come one, come all, to the greatest and most non-rigged game in the world!” Boomed the game master, some Puzzle Riddleton-looking motherfucker. “Three chances, ladies and gentlemen, to see if you’ve got what it takes to knock over these completely empty and non-tampered mead bottles! Every winner gets a prize!”

John looked to the prizes. There was your typical garbage, giant stuffed animals and the like, but the thing that really caught his eye, was glistening golden ring that sat atop a pile of velvet cushions. Immediately images flooded his brain: him, winning the ring for Rose in a pure contest of masculinity and presenting it to her right there on the spot. The ultimate romantic gesture, the ultimate proposal.

“How much?” Asked John to the game master.

“One play for one gold coin, young lad!”

As John dove his hand into his pockets, Rose gripped his arm tightly.

“John.” She hissed. “You know that games like these are nothing but shams, right? This man will bleed you dry before he parts with a single, awful prize. Our money is best spent elsewhere.”

“Aw, give me one of your magical breaks, Rose.” John flipped a gold coin betwixt his fingers and gave her a sly wink. “I’ve got this on lockdown.”

Ten seconds later, the mead bottles were still standing and John was down one gold coin.

“Shit!” He cursed. “Rose, spot me another coin. I’ll pay you back later, I promise.”

“John…” She sighed.

“Plleeeeeseee???”

Thirty seconds later, the mead bottles were still standing and John was down five gold coins.

“Shit on my dick!” He cursed, grabbing two great fistfuls of his hair. “I can’t believe it! I swore I hit them dead-on that last time!”

“Darn. That’s some sorry luck, lad.” The game master snapped his fingers. “Got anymore coins?”

“You bet I do! Rose, could you…”

“No.” The witch growled angrily. “I’m not giving you any more of my coins. We’re done here.”

And before John could argue further, she had sized him by the collar and tugged him bodily away. John watched the glistening, golden ring of pure unadulterated loved fade into the distance as he retreated, and mourned it’s passing.

Oh well. It was sort of a spur of the moment gamble anyways. Plus, after he went through enough money to win the damn thing, Rose would probably reject him on the spot out of pure spite. John decided it was better to wait, for when they weren’t on a major quest, for when Rose wasn’t acting so strangely, and when a potentially dangerous curse wasn’t hanging over his head.

Shit. He’d forgotten to tell her about Yahtzee’s curse again.

“I know that all of these new and exciting things must be very intriguing, but try to stay on track, John.” Rose was chastising. “We need to find a boat suitable for further travel north and the only way we’re going to do that is if…
“Rose Lalonde!!!!” Shouted a voice suddenly.

Both Rose and John turned at the shout and found a familiar face scurrying towards them through the crowd. Both of the heroes were surprised, as the newcomer was none other than Chazz Limplewickle, student body president of the infamous Wizard Harvard Community College up in the Wizard Mountains back east.

“Boy, am I glad to see you guys.” Beamed Chazz as he skidded to a halt in front of them. “It has been a long time, hasn’t it? Might I add that you look particularly fertile this morning, Miss Lalonde?”

“Fertile?!? How much do you know?!” Rose grabbed Chazz and pinned him against a nearby tent. “Talk Limplewickle!”

“Whoa! Whoa!” John jumped in and broke the two up. “Oh my golden rings. What’s the matter with you today, Rose?”

The witch put a hand to her forehead, she felt hot, and dizzy too.

“I just need to sit down for a second.” She muttered.

“I- uh, yeah. Yeah, of course.” Taking her by the arm, John led her towards the center of the festival, where numerous tables and chairs were set up to accommodate the carnival-goers. Chazz followed.

“For me, Chazz.” Rose sighed as she sank into a chair graciously. “Today has been… an off day for me.”

“Don’t sweat it!” Chazz brushed dust from his letterman jacket. “You don’t need to tell me how fucked up today has been. I’m here with the rest of the Community College as part of a field trip! We’re supposed to put on a play in an hour to entertain these fine folks, but four of my actors went and caught thespian flu!”

“Thespian flu?” Questioned John.

“A terrible disease.” Rose defined. “It’s symptoms include glossophobia, stress fractures in the leg bones, and an unquenchable desire to wear sweaters as scarves.”

“And now I’m down four principal leads!” Continued Chazz. “Listen, Rose. I know that you don’t owe me and my college anything, but if you and your friends could fill-in, I’d make it well worth your while!”

Rose was halfway through dismissing the eccentric Limplewickle, but suddenly remembered the whole reason they even stopped at the conksuck festival.

“We need passage by boat north, just as far as the Emerald City.”

“If you help us out here today, consider it done!” Chazz extended his hand and the two shook in agreement. “Our college comes equipped with one of the finest boneboats in all the land! We’ll have you upstream in no time at all! As for now though, gather your crew and meet me by the large blue tent on the edge of the festival. The play is in one hour!”

Then Chazz scampered away, clicking his heels as he went and humming merrily to himself. John helped an unsteady Rose to her feet and supported her with a firm arm around her waist.

“Are you going to tell me what’s been going on with you today?” He pressed, as they began to move
through the festival once more.

“All in due time, my love.” She assured him. “However, for now, let’s just deal with one matter at a time.”

And for the moment, John was unhappily satiated. Call it her use of the word ‘love’ or his excitement to participate in a real-life play, but he trusted Rose just as much as ever and followed her, without question, in search of the rest of their friends.

Just under an hour later, Rose, John, Davesprite, and Jade were stood just outside of the blue tent on the edge of the festival. Chazz was there leading them, as well as the rest of the cast, through some last-minute details.

“Where’s your bro?” Jade asked Davesprite, with only a little bit of venom.

“Inside with the rest of his pals, finding a seat.” Davesprite peeked into the tent nervously. The place was packed, with audience members filling almost every part of the space that wasn’t occupied by the stage. “Shit. I hope I don’t embarrass myself out there.”

“No. I’m sure Bro would absolutely love that.” Jade giggled. “I wouldn’t worry though. You’re a great public speaker, Dave! If anyone can put on a good show, it’s probably you.”

“You think so?”

“Of course!”

“You know. I bet you won’t be too bad yourself, Jade.”

“Thanks! I’ve never been in a play before either. All of this is actually pretty exciting…”

“Hey!” Chazz interjected with a shrill shriek. “You two! Casper and Marmaduke. Cut the chatter. This is my play. I wrote it, I directed it, and I’m acting in it. So don’t you fucking dare ruin this for me!” He went around, passing out costumes and props to all his actors. “Here, guys. Put these on.”

Davesprite looked down at his costume, a frilly dress and accompanying blonde wig.

“Yo, Limplewickle. I think there’s been some mistake.”

“No. There most certainly has not!” Chazz pulled out a copy of the script and shook it in Davesprite’s face. “You, Davesprite, will be playing the role of Sally, the hero’s fetching female companion.”

“Who’s playing the hero?” Questioned Rose, who already knew the answer.

“Me, of course!” Cheered Chazz. “Who else? Here John, put on this red track suit. You will be playing my faithful sidekick: Glorb!”

“Glorb?” John repeated, confused.

Jade lunged forward then and seized the script from Chazz’s unsuspecting hand, quickly flipping through it. The further she got through the mysterious play, the more blood drained from her face.

“Um, Chazz?” She began. “I don’t mean to be rude, but what sort of play is this? Nothing makes any sense.”
“It’s an original piece, of course, from the most creative recesses of my own mind.” Chazz retook the script and clutched it passionately to his chest. “Everything will make sense once the ball gets rolling. Just remember your lines, don’t fuck anything up, and we should get through this no problem.”

“No fuck this. I’m out of here! This is bullshit! You’re bullshit! Fuck everything! I’m not playing a girl!” Davesprite raised his shitty costume above his head and prepared to throw it to the ground, but was brought to a grinding halt when Rose gave a curt cough. It was such a small gesture, but it held quite a bit of weight. Not only was she the wielder of their magical tether, but she was also Rose, and that meant she could reprimand him with not so much as a glare. She reminded him silently that if they didn’t go through with this, they’d never reach the dragon mistress. Davesprite sighed and lowered his arm. “Fuh. Nevermind…”

“Rose, you shall play the part of the main villain. The dangerous Tentacleilla.” Chazz continued, uninterrupted. “And lastly, you there Weredog. I have no idea who you are really and there are no Weredogs in this play, so you’re going to be performing as the secondary male lead, Daisy’s primary romantic interest: Brian.”

Jade took her outfit, which was just a strange tunic covered in sparkly glitter, and exchanged a peculiar look with Rose and the rest of the gang, all of whom also had their own misgivings about this bizarre stage production. However, it was too late to back down now, as their ultimate quest currently depended on whether or not they went through with this garbage. They were making this happen.

It was time to break a leg.

Dirk and his fellow sailor-ninja-knights got front row seats to the show. As he split a large wizard popcorn and soda combo with Calendar Guy, Dirk thought back on his recent reunion with his little brother. No matter how much he liked to give Davesprite a hard time, Dirk did care for him, in like, a backwards, convoluted sort way.

He hadn’t been there for him when he got turned into a ghost and trapped in a magical amulet for a thousand years, but dammit, Dirk would sure as hell be there for this lame-ass musical, after which, he would pretty much consider him and Davesprite to be even steven.

All’s well that ends well I suppose.

The chatter in the auditorium died down as the lights dimmed and the currents opened to reveal little Chazz Limplewickle, all dolled up in his musical gear.

“Welcome, ladies and gentlemen.” Greeted Chazz with a sweep of his arms. “To the most lucrative and well-thought-out musical performance that you’ll probably see in your entire lives. I must remind you to switch your moon-stones to silent or at least put it on a vibrating setting, so as not to disturb the performers or your fellow guests. My name is Chazz Limplewickle and on behalf of Wizard Harvard Community College, I hope you enjoy my own personal creation: The Siege of Tralfmadore!”

“Ooooooh!” Exclaimed Rosie then. “Dad, I know about The Siege of Tralfmadore! That’s like the most popular play ever. My school was going to perform it this fall if, you know, I didn’t get expelled and everything.”

“Shhh.” Dave cautioned. “Keep your voice down. Your mom’s sleeping in the next room. Shit. You wanna get us in trouble?”
“No. No. Sorry.” Rosie pulled her covers up to her nose and spoke through the heavy quilt. “I get excited during these stories, you know that.”

“Yeah. Well I don’t blame you. It’s pretty exciting stuff.” Dave ran a swift hand through his hair. “Uh, yeah. Anyways, this was the first time The Siege of Tralfmadore had ever been performed in public. So it was a pretty landmark moment in the history of musical theater. After this performance, the land of Skaia would never be the same and Chazz Limplewickle, a now famous playwright, would go down in the history books.”

“Sweet.” Rosie grinned. “You never told me that you and mom could sing.”

“There’s a lot of things you don’t know, little missy. Now, prepare yourself, this shit is about to get heavy…”

The lights brightened and the curtains drifted apart once more to open up on the first scene. John, Davesprite, and Jade, all dressed in their costumes, stood on the deck of a ship. It wasn’t your average ship though, as everything was painted chrome and magical lights danced atop steel consoles.

“Space!” Boomed Chazz from off-stage. “The Last Frontier! The year is 2015 and the residents of Skaia have long-since turned their attention skywards to the endless expanse of space. We join our heroes now, as they prepare for the impending battle against the villainous Tentacleila, an evil space tyrant with the power to destroy entire planets at her disposal!”

Chazz came on stage then, garbed in a suit made entirely out of wizard duct tape that sparkled under the spotlight.

“Oh, Captain Wicard!” Said Davesprite, as Sally, in a breathy voice as he read the lines hastily scribbled on his palm. “Tentacleila’s battleship approaches quickly from the Nebular Quadrant! We must arm the F-Foe…” Davesprite squinted at his hand. “The Photon Cannons??? (what the fuck is this bullshit)”

The devilishly handsome Captain Wicard was a legend among men, an expert space pilot, an accomplished laser duelist, and the most womanizing womanizer you ever did see. Seriously, rumors stated feverishly that he could impregnate you from a mile away. With your consent of course.

He smirked confidently and strolled to the control panel.

“Good idea, Sally.” Said Wicard as he flicked several witches. “Brian!”

“Yessir!” Saluted Jade, with a wild grin on her face. She was enjoying this role-play a little too much. “What it is?”

“Arm the main photon cannon and fire mega-slug three parsecs above Tentacleila’s ship.”

“As a warning shot?”

“Yes. Let’s show this monster that we mean business.”

Saluting again, Brian rushed around the control room, pressing all sorts of fancy switches and shit. Eventually her fingers danced over a large red button and, with a final nod from Captain Wicard, Brian pressed the switch.

A large boom rattled the control room as the photon cannon was fired. Wicard and his crew looked
through the viewing window to watch the mega-shot fly clear over Tentacleila’s approaching ship, the perfect warning shot.

“Sir!” Squealed Davesprite. “We’re getting a message on the v-vi… Video Comms? (seriously does anyone know what the fuck is happening)

“Glorb!” Wicard barked. “Accept the call. It’s time to hear what Tentacleila has to say.”

John opened his mouth and, after clearing his throat, read his lines:

“f’ai ep grah’n fhtagn, goka h'gotha gnaiih.”

Everyone in the control room laughed.

“Ah, shit. Glorb.” Brian wiped a tear from his eye. “You always know just what to say to lighten the mood. Haha!”

Glorb was an orphaned alien from the planet Hopodopulos. After witnessing his parent’s death at the tender age of a billion, he wandered the starscape, looking for a purpose in life. Captain Wicard took him aboard as his first mate and they’d been best friends ever since.

“k'yarnak lw'nafh.” Said Glorb, as the large video comm screen on the wall buzzed to life.

It fizzled and sparked before settling on a grainy image of high-tech-looking throne, turned away from the screen. A cold voice spoke beyond the chair.

“Captain Wicard.” Hissed Rose in a menacing voice. “You’ve got a lot of nerve drifting into my quadrant like this.”

“Your quadrant?!” Barked Wicard in disbelief. “This quadrant is home to the tralfamadorians that you enslaved! I have come to set them free, no matter what the costs. Surrender now Tentacleila or the next mega-slug goes right through your starboard thruster!”

The high-tech-ass throne swiveled around to reveal the horribly disgusting face of Tentacleila. She had eyes of bright yellow, skin of sickly green, and of course, there were horrible, slimy tentacles undulating grossly from where she should have had arms.

“Confident as always, Wicard.” Snarled the Tentacleila. “Let’s see how cocky you are, after this!”

A loud beeping noise filled the control room and Brian quickly consulted a flashing consol.

“She’s fired a plasma barrage right for us, Captain!” Cried Brian with fear.

“Brace yourselves!” Commanded Wicard, as he grabbed Sally and pinned her to the floor.

The entire control room shook once more as the plasma blast struck Wicard’s ship dead-on. Dust and sparks filled the room and the lights flickered as Tentacleila’s maniacal laughter rang out as a garbled mess from the damaged video comm. When the dust settled and the lights returned, Sally let out a shrill scream.

“Glorb!”

Glorb, Wicard’s best friend and trusty alien companion, was lying in the middle of the control room with a sharp piece of shrapnel protruding from his chest. He coughed and hacked up a glob of blue blood onto the deck as his friends rushed to his side.
“gnaiih, grah'na.” Gasped Glorb with his final breath before he died.

“GLLLLLLOOOOOORBB!!!” Screamed Wicard to the heavens as he cradled his dying friend’s head in his lap. “You’ll pay for this Tentacleila! Mark my words!”

Tentacleila, who was still connected to the video call, laughed shrilly.

“I am so damn evil!” She snarled. “You’ll never defeat me!”

“Yes I will!” Spat Wicard in return. “Brian! Fire another photon blast…. NOW!”

“Oh my Saturn rings!” Brain gasped. “Our weapon’s systems have been destroyed!”

“Noooooooooooooooooooo!!!” Wept Sally.

“I won’t let you win, you stupid tentacle bitch!” Wicard shook his fist furiously as he belted. “This is only the beginning!”

“You can’t beat me!” Screeched the Tentacle Bitch.

“Yes I can!”

“No you can’t!”

“Yes I can!”

“No you can’t!”

This went on for like two hours.

Then, the epic space battle reached it’s crescendo. With Wicard’s ship damaged and Glorb dead, Tentacleila had backed the heroes into the wall in which there was only one escape. Wicard and Brian armed themselves with laser swords and concocted a final, fool-hardy scheme.

“Sally,” Ordered Wicard. “Prep the teleporter and set the destination coordinates for the Tentacleila’s control room itself!”

“No! What are you planning!?” Sally cried.

“There’s only one way out of this mess… To fight Tentacleila in close-quarters combat. Brian and I will make a final stand for our lives as well as the lives of all the enslaved tralfamadorians.”

“You can’t go!” Sally ran to Brian’s side. “You’re my love interest. I can’t let you risk your life like this!”

Brian cupped Sally’s face in his hands and stared into her bright orange eyes.

“No matter what happens, Sally.” He said. “I’ll always be with you.”

Then Brian leaned in for a kiss.

Davesprite’s eyes widened. Jade was coming right for him, lips puckered, eyes closed tight. The script commanded them to kiss, of course. It made sense for Sally and Brian to share a final goodbye kiss. However, at the last second, Davesprite changed course and quickly embraced Jade in a hug.

“Wow! Thank goodness hugs equate to full make out sessions in the future, amiright?” Adlibbed
Davesprite, struggling to regain character. “Uh… Good luck, babe!”


“Come, Brian. There isn’t much time.” Wicard positioned himself on the teleporter pad and spoke his signature catchphrase as he and Brian teleported away: “It’s time to kick some ass, comet style!”

It was a statement so provocative and confusing that probably only Wicard knew what it actually meant. However, everyone else agreed that it was indeed a badass thing to say, so they went a long with it.

Lights flashed all the fuck over the place as Wicard and Brian teleported away, leaving Sally behind to protect the ship all on her lonesome. When everything settled once more, Wicard and Brian found themselves in the control room of the Tentacleila’s ship, surrounded by her tentacle minions.

“Freeze in the name of the- OH GOD MY STOMACH!” One minion tried to get fresh, but was immediately slashed apart with one swipe from Wicard’s mighty lasersword.

Wicard and Brian fought their way through the room, killing literally five’s of minions in their quest to face Tentacleila herself. After the final minion fell, and Wicard and Brian stood victorious momentarily, Tentacleila suddenly made her appearance from off-stage.

She glided in like a specter, wielding at least sixteen laserswords in her many tentacle arms. A high-pitched whine of laughter filled the space as she faced Wicard and Brian.

“You were foolish to have come here, captain.” She sang. “The tralfamadorians will never be free and you will not leave this ship alive!”

“We shall see!” Wicard countered.

As Wicard, Brian, and Tentacleila leapt into battle they began to sing:

‘Now all the masters knows that you need the glow,
You need the glow, the glow to grow.
If you love to live, you live to love,
Hah, you got to move to the upper level.
Cos When you got the glow, there ain’t no stopping,
What you want to do.
Hah, oh’

As Wicard dodged a swipe from Tentacleila and responded with his own jab, he continued:

‘To reach that upper level,
Your mind, body and soul must be one.
It's a sacrifice, it takes hard work,
It's a way of life!’

Brian cheered in agreement and joined in:

‘When you got the glow, you feel the one,
When you got the glow, Your body's gold,
So don't let go, of the power of elevation.’

They all clashed in a shower of sparks and light and Dirk, who was sitting in the front row of the audience, shed a tiny, ironic tear at just how fucking awesome this musical was. There was death,
love, sci-fi bullshit, and even sword fights. All of the things Dirk loved. When the show finally ended, like twenty-two acts later, everyone rushed outside to congratulate all the actors on their wonderful performance, with Dirk in the lead.

"Bro!" Gushed the sailor-ninja-pirate as he scooped Davesprite up in his arms. "That was the most radical thing I’ve ever fucking seen. You were the second best part! Who knew that you could play such a wonderful girl?"

"Heh. I sure didn’t." Davesprite didn’t really know how to react in the face of genuine compassion, but he did his best. "Th- Thanks for coming, Bro."

"Yeah, well. Thanks for letting me come."

Over his brother’s shoulder, Davesprite saw Jade walk away from the crowd by herself. He would talk to her later, but as for now. He had a brother to chill with, for the first time in as long as he could remember.

Inside the tent, backstage in the makeup department, Rose was sat in front of a vanity, studiously scrubbing the gross-green makeup from her cheeks. So distracted was she by her work, that she didn’t notice that she had company until a bouquet of flowers fell into her lap.

“What are these?” She asked with a small smirk, turning to find John.

“Just a little something for my leading lady.” Replied John, the epitome of suave. “You were amazing back there.”

“Thank you and I’d be remise if I didn’t compliment you on that rather glorious death scene. Truly the work of a natural-born actor.” Rose picked at her flowers idly. “Roses, huh? That’s cute. Where did you get these?”

“I won them at one of those carnival games just now.” John fingered the ring box in his pocket. “Among other things.”

He currently owed Jade twenty-one gold coins. Hell, he still does to this day, that little fucker. Anyways, Rose was all like:

“I’m impressed. I thought for sure that you’re gaming spirit would have been crushed by the harsh realities of carnival life.”

“Naw. You should know me better than that.” John leaned against the counter by her side. “Stalwart optimism through… something or other. I forgot the quote exactly.”

“Ha.” Rose laughed lightly and turned to face John fully. There was a dribble of blue blood dripping from the corner of his mouth, but she didn’t comment on it. She doubted that she looked much better either. “Listen, John. There’s something that I need to tell you.”

“Yeah. I’ve got something to say too.”

Rose swallowed hard. John did too. It was time to spill the beans.

“I might have been… cursed or something.” Said John, just as Rose said: “I’m pregnant.”

They blinked at one another and then John fainted.

“Whoa! You’re just going to leave it there? That’s bullshit.” Complained Rosie.
“Yeah, well. I’m about to fall asleep.” Dave shifted uncomfortably in his chair and checked his watch. “Damn, is it really almost morning? Rosie, we got to work out a better schedule if we’re going to keep doing this.”

“What do you mean? The schedule is fine. You just don’t know how to end a story.” Rosie snuggled up more warmly in her bed. “Is John going to be… I dunno, okay with Rose being pregnant and all.”

“You’ll have to wait and see.” Dave rose from his chair and made to exit. “Now go to sleep. Roxy is coming early in the morning to begin you first day of home-school witch lessons.”

Excitedly, Rosie rolled over as the lights went out. She was pumped as shit to start witch lessons with Aunt Roxy, but just as pumped to hear the rest of her father’s story. That being said, she didn’t get much sleep that night at all.

Chapter End Notes

Rest in peace, Monty Oum. You were such an inspiration to me and so many others. “Even brilliant lights will cease to burn” - This will be the day (RWBY)

Um... Yeah, Rose's pregnancy is something that will be addressed more fully later. I hope this chapter was just as mindlessly fun as the others.

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Chapter Twenty-Two: The Town with No Mayor

It was with mixed feelings that Rose and the gang boarded the Wizard Harvard Community College boneboat to continue their trek northward. On one hand, they were all pleased to be back on their way again as their quest was drawing towards its conclusion. But on the other hand: Davesprite had to bid farewell to his brother, Dirk, once again. The buzz from their spectacular musical performance faded away along with the festival. And most horribly, Rose, John, Davesprite, and Jade had no other option other than to face the issues they’d all been skirting around for the past few chapters.

As the boneboat pulled away from the shore, those festival-goers who had been a witness to “The Siege of Tralfmadore” waved and cheered after Chazz and his co-stars. Small children threw rose petals and rice grains, whilst young women (and maybe a few men) tossed their undergarments Chazz’s way, hoping to catch his attention.

“They love me!” Chazz beamed, waving at his new fans as they slowly grew smaller and smaller. “They really love me!”

“Of course they do, Chazz!” Said one of the wizard students, who’s parents probably hugged him too much. “You’re a star! A mastermind! You’re going places, man! I think your mom is attractive.”

“What?”

“Nothing.”

At the rear of the ship, Davesprite gazed back whence they came. If he squinted, he could almost see the mast of Dirk’s sailor-ninja-knight ship amongst the other vessels moored on the shore of the carnival. His goodbye with his brother had been brief, but heart-felt. Dirk had been impressed by Davesprite’s acting skills and, much to Davesprite’s pleasure, really seemed to respect his younger brother.

For the first time in a long time, Davesprite felt as if he had a family again. If only he didn’t have to say goodbye so soon.

“I know the feeling.” Said a soft voice by his side.

Davesprite turned to find the fiendishly attractive and fierce profile of one Weredog Jade Harley, who had apparently snuck up to him with supreme stealth. His ghostly heart softened perceptibly when he saw her, as it always did.

“What the hell are you spinning, Harley?” He asked, the epitome of cool.

“You miss being with your brother.” Jade replied with a small shrug. “He’s the only person in this fucked up world that you feel you really belong with. I felt the same when we were leaving
Wooftown."

“Really? Why? I mean, yeah that place was nice as hell and it was full of Weredogs, but…” Davesprite scratched his nose with forced nonchalance. “I thought we agreed that you belong with me- I mean us, Jade.”

“Of course I belong with you guys!” She elbowed him in his ghost ribs. “And you belong with us too. There’s no denying that. It’s just that, it’s nice to be around people who understand who and what you are basically because they’re just like you.”

“Hmmm.” Davesprite hummed. He did know what she was talking about. Dirk was his brother, but they might as well have been the same person. They were cut from the same cloth, one mind split into two radically cool dudes. “Do you… think you’ll go back to Wooftown when all of this is over?”

Jade sighed and looked up towards the sky. It was nearing night rapidly and the first sprinkle of stars were beginning to shine though the sparse clouds. Davesprite caught himself staring at her profile.

“That’s a good question.” She mused thoughtfully. “It sort of feels like I belong there, you know? But then again, I don’t know if I’m ready to hang up adventuring boots just yet.”

“Well if you’re going to be running through the hills, slaughtering orc bandits for the rest of your days, you’re going to need a wise-cracking sprite companion, amirite?” Davesprite smirked.

“Of course!” Jade bumped him again with her arm. “You’re always welcome in my party, Dave. Haha. At least until you settle down yourself, that is.”

“Oh yeah.” He snorted. “Just as soon as I find the perfect ghost babe and make all sorts of little ghost babies. We’ll be like the god-damn Winslow family, except with less feel-good moments and more terribly haunting, awkward family suppers.”

“You don’t have to be a sprite forever.” Replied Jade, a little quieter than before. “You could always… kiss your one true love. Just like Dirk said.”

Davesprite turned to look at the brave Weredog. Her emerald eyes shimmered in the evening light and her dark skin looked to be as smooth as velvet. It took all of his meager stores of self-control to resist mauling her with his mouth right then and there.

In the most romantic sense, of course.

“What are the odds of that through?” He asked, equally hushed, as if someone might intrude. “What person could ever love someone like me? I’m rude, loud, obnoxious, I have a ghost butt, I hate soft rock, I’m perverted, disrespectful, short-tempered…”

“Brave, loyal, cool.” Jade picked up. “Hilarious, clever, hot, and a million other good things that I can’t list because it would take too long.” She suddenly found herself very close to his ghostly face. “You’d be a catch for anyone, Dave.”

“Anyone?” He questioned, putting a tentative hand on her arm.

She smiled slightly and made no move to remove it.

“Anyone.” She affirmed. They were frozen there, two non-people, mere inches and words away from something that could possibly be the best thing that had ever happened to either of them and yet… “Why didn’t you kiss me during the play, Dave. It was just pretend.”
He swallowed hard, struggling to maintain his cool under the situation. It had been well over a thousand years since he’d been this close to someone so… amazing.

“I was… nervous.” He admitted finally.

“Awww. There’s no reason to be nervous around me.” She blushed slightly and stepped a fraction of an inch closer to him. “I would have been happy to be your first kiss in a thousand years.”

“It’s not that.” He shook his head furiously. “It’s- Fuh. Listen, I like you Jade. You’re a smoking hot WereDog babe with a tendency to kick total ass. I would kiss the shit out of you right now if… well, what if it doesn’t work?”

“What if I’m not your true love?” She simplified. “Dave, you’ll never know until you try.”

“I dunno if I could handle it if you weren’t.” He pulled away then, like an idiot. “What’s left of my ghost heart might break into a thousand pieces.”

“So what?” Jade snapped. “You’re just going to live the rest of your life not knowing? Just because you’re afraid?”

“I’m not afraid. I’m nervous. There’s a big difference.”

“No. You’re afraid.” She jabbed a stiff index finger into his orange chest. “Just like you were afraid to stand up to your brother, just like you’re afraid to open up to anyone about how you really feel.” Jade held her arms wide, as if to embrace the whole world. “I’m right here, Dave. I’ve always been right here. You don’t have to be afraid around me.”

“I’m not afraid of anything.” Davesprite replied stubbornly and stupidly and ignorantly. He extended his hand towards Jade. “I think we just need some time, you know? To make sure. Don’t tell me you won’t be disappointed if we kiss and nothing happens, and I just stay a dumb ol’ sprite for the rest of my life.”

Jade looked at his proffered hand and then pointedly ignored it. Folding her arms, she turned away.

“Have you ever thought there’s nothing wrong with being a dumb ol’ sprite, Dave?” She muttered as she stalked away across the deck, leaving him alone at the edge of the boneboat once more.

Sighing to himself, Davesprite rested his elbows on the railing of the ship and looked back out across the river. The boneboat belonging to Chazz and the rest of his classmates was making good time, cutting through the rapids of the Black Rock River to reach the Emerald City Port. They would probably be there within the hour. If Davesprite was going to talk to Jade again then, he was going to have to come up with something to say, and fast.

As one potential couple was dealing with one type of stupid drama, another well-established couple was dealing with another type of stupid drama below deck.

Rose sat on the edge of a small bunk, arms wrapped around her stomach, head swimming from the constant motion of the boat, and eyes shifting back and forth as she watched John pace frantically in front of her. The poor hero of Honey Town was in a right state. He wrung his hands anxiously as he paced, thinking back to the night of passion he and Rose shared together in the Fuchsia Kingdom.

“We- We were so careful though.” He said, turning to Rose momentarily. “I wore three condoms!”

“Oh, those? Yeah, I swiped those off when you weren’t paying attention.” Rose admitted sadly.
“What?! Why? How did you even do that?!”

“It’s rather easy actually. One merely requires sleight of hand. You just clench your…”

“Oh gods!” John threw his hands in the air, interrupting her. “Why would you do that, Rose? Why?”

“Condoms take the pleasure out of sex, you know this. I- I was a little drunk as well.” She wrapped her arms a little tighter around her middle, as John groaned and ran a shaky hand through his hair. “Are you… are you mad at me, John?”

Looking at his girlfriend, he saw just how small she looked, with her robes draped over the bed by her side and her shoulders tensed together. She was just as much of a wreck as John was, probably more. She just hid it better. John swallowed hard and answered honestly:

“No, Rose. Of course I’m not mad at you. There’s no way you could have known that this would happen.” John slumped onto the bunk by her side before his knees gave out. “It’s just… Babe, what do we do now?”

“I have a tentative plan laid out in my head.” She began slowly. “Once this boat arrives in the Emerald City, the first thing we’re going to do is find a warlock healer, knowledgeable with witch anatomy and pregnancy. After that, well, I suppose that I’ll bear our child and then face the Dragon Mistress when I’m in top form once more.”

John’s eyes widened slightly.

“Y- You’re still going to fight the Dragon Mistress?”

“Of course, John. I’m not going to let this child slow me down. As soon as I’ve popped it out, I’m going to have to begin training once more, preparing for my final showdown.” Rose shifted on the bed, tucking her legs underneath her and facing John fully. “I’ve thought long and hard about giving up on this quest, after what happened with the Bee Lord and just the way I’ve been feeling lately. However, now that I know what the issue is, I can focus on it and overcome it just as I’ve overcome so much before.”

There was the fire in her eyes again. It burned so intensely that John had to resist shielding his eyes from the roaring passion, which would surely eat him alive if he stared too long. He was conflicted, torn now between continuing on their adventure and wanting Rose and their new child to be safe.

Rising quickly from the bunk, he dropped to one knee and dug a swift hand into his pocket.

“I won this at the carnival.” He produced the glittering golden ring and offered it to her. “I- I want us to be a family, Rose. Not just because of the child, not just because I want you to be safe, but because I love you more than anything in this fucked up world.”

He swallowed hard. Rose’s stomach clenched with fear.

“Rose Lalonde.” John continued. “Will you marry me?”

“No.”

“No?”

“Yes.”

“Yes?”
“NO.” Rose reached forward and took John by the collar, hauling up from the floor. “John, while I appreciate the sentiment and reciprocate one hundred percent, now is most certainly not the time for this type of crap.”

“What do you mean?” John sat down by her side once more, still clutching the ring dumbly. “I-you… we love each other, right? What’s the point in waiting? We’ve already done the do.”

“Yes, but think about this for a moment. I’ve never been in a situation like this before. I begin this quest, with the simple goal of being the best there is, and now I have a boyfriend and a child and now a potential fiancé???” Rose shook her head, but reached for John’s hands all the same. She held him tightly. “It’s all happening too fast. Neither of us are thinking clearly…”

“But I love you.”

“And I you, but…” She sighed. “I need time. Can you do that for me, John? Can you wait?”

John mulled over her words. It made sense, sort of, even to a doof like him. The simple answer to her question though was undoubtedly ‘yes’. John Egbert could wait, as long as he was waiting for Rose Lalonde.

“Yeah.” Agreed John. The two moved to meet in a kiss. “I can wait.”

So anyways, like half an hour later, the boneboat belonging to the traveling crew of Wizard Harvard Community College arrived outside the massive walls of the Emerald City. Disembarking from the vessel, Rose and the others walked from the shore all the way up to the shimmering, impressive gates to the largest city in all of Skaia.

The gates were heavy monsters of solid emerald, toughened to invulnerability with powerful enchantments. Nothing could penetrate these enormous guardians, not even the most powerful ‘penetration spell’.

Trust me on this. I’m a master of penetration.

…. I’m talking about sex.

“Greetings, mighty warriors!” Rose spoke to the captain of the guard, a large orc with a horned helm. There were like a billion guards out there, all tasked with making sure that nobody wishing to do the city harm made it inside. Why do they have this magical door and all these fucking guards? Beats me. Seems a little redundant, right?

Anyways, Rose was all like: “My name is Rose Lalonde and I am the greatest witch ever. My companions and I seek shelter from the elements beyond these glorious doors, as well as medical attention. You see, we’re on a quest to defeat the Dragon Mistress of the North.”

“Welp. Sorry, miss witch.” Said the head guard with a shrug. “The whole city is on lockdown after dragons were seen flying around the summit of the Northern Mountains. No one can come in or out of the Emerald City until we know that it’s safe.”

“What kind of bullshit reasoning is that?” Demanded Jade. “We obviously aren’t dragons. Opening the gates for five seconds to let us in won’t compromise the safety of the entire city!”

“So sorry, miss WereDoga.” The guardsman stood firm. “We have our orders.”

“But you don’t understand.” John nervously looked to Rose, then back to the guard. “We need to
speak to a doctor. Rose is, uh… with child.”

“Is that so?” The guard inspected Rose for a moment, who did her absolute best to look as pregnant as possible. “Well even if that’s true, I’m very sorry to say that I still can’t get these gates open, at least not with Dragons in the area. If you need help, I recommend sailing back down the river to Martindale. It’s the closest town.”

“Ugh. No. We can’t sail back the way we came. That’s just stupid.” Jade gave the guard her most sweet, pitiful look that she could muster. I’m talking serious puppy-dog eyes. “Can you pwwease open the doors, just for a second?”

“Naw.”

“Shit!”

Rose sighed and took Jade by the arm.

“Come on. Let’s get back to the river. Maybe if we’re quick, we can catch Chazz and the rest of the wizards before they leave.” She began to tug Jade backwards, leading the way away from the gates. “We will find no help here.”

With her attempts thwarted, a disappointed Jade allowed herself to be steered away. She had been looking forward to visiting the Emerald City for a long time, having heard tales of it’s splendor from Rose and other travelers all throughout their quest. As the sullen group trooped back towards the boneboat, Davesprite floated near John.

“That was quick thinking back there, John.” He said. “Lying about Rose being pregnant was a good idea. It just sucks that it didn’t work.”

John and Rose exchanged a quick glance.

“Screw them!” Jade snapped suddenly. “If we can’t get into the Emerald City, than what’s even the point of stopping? We’ve walked places before. I say we head towards the Dragon Mistress’s lair right now and slay her once and for all!”

John and Rose exchanged another, longer glance. There was no getting around it now.

“Listen up, you two.” Rose commandeered her party’s attention. “John wasn’t lying back there. Our night of intimacy back in the Fuchsia Kingdom appears to have bared fruit. I am truly with child.”

Jade’s eyes widened, Davesprite’s jaw dropped, and John felt an uncomfortable squirm in his belly.

“OH MY BABY RINGS!!!” Squealed Jade, propelling herself at Rose. “Congratulations, congratulations! This is so fucking awesome!” The Weredog knelt and pressed her ear to the other girl’s tummy. “Wow! I think I can hear him moving around in there!”

“You most certainly can not!” Rose smacked Jade away. “This baby is probably nothing more than a collection of magical energy and sex cells.”

“How did this happen?” Davesprite was still struggling to understand. “John, man. How many times have I told you: if you’re going to stick it in, you got to wrap it up.”

“It was an accident.” John dragged a tired hand down his face. “Besides that- that isn’t even important anymore. All that matters is that we get checked Rose checked out by a warlock as soon as possible.”
“I can’t believe this! I’m going to be an aunt!” Jade gushed, as the group continued back to the river. “If it’s a little boy, I’ll teach him how to hunt and wrestle and if it’s a girl…. OH MY GOSH! If it’s a girl, she’s going to be so friggin gorgeous and we’ll go on soooo many adventures together! It will be like another Rose! Except smaller and with the pudgiest little cheeks you ever did see…”

This went on for like two hours, long enough for the gang to return to the boat, for Rose to explain the situation to Chazz, for him to agree to sail them a ways back down river, and for them to actually get there. When the boneboat came to a stop, once more near the town of Martindale, Jade was still talking a mile a minute:

“Imagine him/her getting their first haircut! I would be the one to do it, of course, and- OH OH, John! Can I be the one to keep the hair?!? I’ll put it in a scrap book or something and you can look at it all you want. You just have to ask!”

“Fucking shit, Harley. For someone who never wants to settle down, you sure are having the baby fever right now. Shit.” Davesprite waved goodbye the Chazz and the other wizards of Wizard Harvard Community College before disembarking the boneboat for the last time, a chattering Jade in tow.

Before leaving themselves, Rose and John bid a final farewell to Chazz too.

“Take care of yourself, Limplewickle.” Said Rose. “That play of yours, although bizarre, is a classic in the making. I look forward to meeting you again once more down the road.”

The two shook hands.

“As do I, fair witch. Take care of yourself,” Chazz stooped and patted at Rose’s stomach. “And the little guy too, while you’re at it. Hehehe.”

As Rose and John exited the boat and followed Davesprite and Jade onto the shore, Rose leaned over and spoke into her boyfriend’s ear.

“I’ve only known that I was pregnant for a few days and this whole ‘stomach touching’ thing is beyond already wearing thin. If anyone attempts to touch me once more, they will not like the results. I promise you that.”

John chuckled.

“I’ll watch your back.” He vowed, then added: “And your front too, I suppose. In fact, throughout the entirety of your motherly ordeal, you can count on me to wait on your hand and foot! You won’t have to lift a finger as long as I’m around. Haha.”

“I don’t wish to be babied.” Rose hugged her stomach. That was starting to become a habit. “The fact that I’m having to put my quest on hold for this is enough humiliation already.” She continued before John could respond. “There, I think I see Martindale up ahead.”

Sure enough, through the foggy mist that hung over the marshy plain appeared a cluster of buildings, surrounded by a protective fence of wooden pikes. Martindale was a small community back then, roughly about the size of the City of Lakewater, if that comparison means anything to you. There was all of your customary buildings, a town hall, a cathedral, a barber’s, a hookah bar, a school, and most prevalent: an infirmary.

Rose and her friends entered the town unmolested and went straight to the front door of the resident, warlock healer. Rose knocked three times.
“Doctor Skullsman M.D., D.D.S., B.A.M.F.” Davesprite read the plaque fixed next to the door. “I’ve got a good feeling about this guy.”

A second later, the door opened to reveal a stout warlock. He wore a white doctor’s coat and rubber gloves and had a long, white beard that trailed all the way down to his pair of stride rite zips sneakers. He looked up at Rose and the gang through tinted glasses and let out a low whistle.

“Wow. Customers!” He grinned. “How wonderful to see you, sonovabitches. Come in this instant!” With a sweep of his arm, he guided our heroes into his office, which was a typical warlock examination chamber. “Take a seat on the bench, all of you. I’ll be with you in two skips of a moonstone.”

He scurried away into a side-door, leaving Rose, John, Jade, and Davesprite to take an uncomfortable seat on a long, steel bench in the center of the room. Doctor Skullsman returned a second later, bearing a stethoscope and several other frightening, medical tools.

“I just had to take my stethoscope out of the freezer.” Explained Skullsman, as he approached John and began to examine him: “Here, let me see. Young male, probably about twenty cycles old. Far from home no doubt! A little peaky, definitely diabetic, slight dust mite allergy and what’s this?!?!” Skullsman wrapped John on the forehead with his knuckle, hard. “A curse! One of utmost evil, just waiting to turn your life sour. Oh yes. How dreadful indeed.”

Everyone’s mood shifted from confusion to trepidation as Skullsman passed over John’s curse. In all the excitement about Rose’s impending motherhood, John’s dark affliction was all but forgotten. Rose mentally kicked herself for being so single-minded. Her brain appeared to be more muddled than ever now that she was looking out for two.

Skullsman moved onto Jade.

“A Weredog! How fan-diddfully-tastic! In perfect health too! Flawless teeth, zero heart worms, clear nasal passages. Just finished puberty, I see. That’s splendid. No one will have to get their brains bashed or fucked out today. Hoho!” Skullsman pulled a lollypop from his pocket and deposited it in Jade’s open mouth.

“What’s next here? Oh yes! A sprite!” Taking Davesprite by the head, Skullsman leaned in close and peered into the orange sunglasses obscuring the sprite’s eyes. “Old, no doubt about it. I’d say well over a thousand years! Loyal to the last breath, sprite’s are, particularly orange ones! You’ve got yourself a sure catch right here! HO!”

Lastly, Skullsman shifted his attention to Rose. He let out a mighty gasp and clutched at his chest, as if struck by a deadly blow.

“My dear.” The doctor breathed. “Could it be the greatest witch ever? Your magical reserves are none like I’ve ever seen. You, young witch, possess great untold power. The likes of which hold the authority to change the course of history itself! Hohoho!” Very slowly, almost hesitantly, Skullsman reached out and prodded at Rose’s belly, much to the witch’s distaste. “And… with child. My oh my, that child is going to be quite the power house, let me tell you.”

“Uh, thank you?” Rose hugged herself once more. “Tell me, Skullsman. I am unfamiliar with matters of pregnancy, specifically amongst witches of my caliber. I came here today to see if you can shed some light on my predicament.” She nodded to John. “As well as diagnose my… uh, mate’s curse.”

Pausing to think for a moment, Skullsman cleaned his glasses on his coat. Then he cleared his throat and began once more:
“Well, young witch. I must say that child-bearing is a difficult process for magical beings such as yourself. The pure amount of unkempt energy expelled by the child is enough to cause you serious sickness.” The doctor began to pace. “The child will grow quickly, much quicker than human children. You shall reach full term in a matter of weeks, I’d hazard a guess at two. In three months time, I wouldn’t be surprised if you’re ready to pop. Hoho!”

“Th- Three months?” Rose stammered. “That’s certainly quick.”

“Indeed it is. You’ll have wild mood swings, uncontrollable urges, and powerful magical expulsions during such time. I suggest you have yourself cleansed of mana at least once a week, so as to prevent yourself be completely ripped apart by mystical energies. HOHOheHOHA!!”

“Stop laughing like that, asshat!” Davesprite snapped. “This is serious. Rose is pregnant, John is cursed, and this new fucking baby is probably going to replace me completely- Oh god!”

Davesprite suddenly dropped his head into his hands, much to the surprise of nearly everyone in the room, save for Doctor Skullsman.

“There, there, sprite.” Skullsman shoved a lollypop in his mouth as well. “This baby won’t replace you. Magical tethers cannot be broken simply because the witch in question has a child! Her attention may be divided more, but you’ll always have a special place in her heart.”

Shaking his head, Davesprite looked to Rose.

“Is that true?” He asked.

“Of course, Davesprite.” Sighed Rose, wrapping a lose arm around her familiar. “You were here first, after all.”

“Okay, so we’ll just stay here in Martindale for a few months as Rose, um… cooks?” John scratched his head, unfamiliar with pregnancy terms and whatnot. “We’ll find an inn or something.”

“It appears we have no choice.” Agreed Rose. She turned to Skullsman once more. “Now what of John’s curse?”

“Hmmmm.” Skullsman hummed as he inspected John for the second time. After dabbing at his ears with his tongue, Skullsman flicked him on the nose, brining tears to John’s eyes. With a final sigh, the doctor wiped at his forehead with a cloth and began: “Your pal, John here, has been afflicted with an evil hex. It’s incredibly powerful and super fucking evil. Whoever did this was a real dick. Anyways, it’s an ancient curse, used to afflict men and women to ward them away from committing adultery on their partners.” He pointed to both John and Rose in turn. “As long as John shall live, he shall not love another person other than Rose. His heart has been set.”

“That doesn’t sound like much of a curse.” John piped up. “I’m happy loving Rose for the rest of my life.”

“The Fish Baron and his comrades meant to kill me.” Rose mused, rubbing her chin. “Doing so would have left you in a world without love, John. I’m happy more than ever to be rid of that dreadful, faux evil mage.”

“I recommend staying out of harm’s way then, my dear.” Chuckled Skullsman. “You have to stay alive now, not just for your sake, but for the babie’s and little John’s as well! I’ll set you little rascals up at the local inn. Follow me.”

With another sweep his arm Skullsman directed the group from his office and back out into the
“How much will this consultation cost us?” Asked Rose, digging in her satchel as she followed Skullsman.

“Free of charge!” Cheered the doctor. “After our town mayor kicked the bucket last year, the town of Martindale has pretty much been running itself! I haven’t had clients in many moons. Hoho! So take this one on me.”

“Your mayor died?” Jade asked. “That’s horrible! How can there be a town with no mayor?”

“It can happen. My old mayor back in Honey Town was pretty shit, hardly a mayor at all. In fact…” John thought back to his days in Honey Town. “We probably would have been better off without a mayor at all.”

“We get along okay.” Skullsman agreed. He brought our troop to a stop outside of wooden building labeled: Inn. “This is the inn, obviously. The rate is cheap, the food is cheaper, and you’ll rest comfortably enough throughout your pregnancy. You know where to find me! HohohoHO!”

And with that, Doctor Skullsman turned on his heel and merrily marched away, back towards his office. At the time, Rose and John didn’t know how to feel about Skullsman. He seemed about as loony as everyone else they’d met so far on their quest, although he did appear to know what he was talking about. Besides, what other sources of help did they have all the way out here? It would be up to Skullsman to coach Rose through her pregnancy and eventually deliver the little witch or wizard baby.

“I wish Janesprite was still with us.” John commented as they entered the inn. “I bet she’d know some magical healing stuff.”

“Healing spells are far from full-on medical treatments, John.” Rose responded. “It will take years of vigorous training before she’s ready to start working amongst the likes of Doctor Skullsman. It’s best for her to remain in the Fuchsia Kingdom, where she can learn the finer details of the warlock practice.”

The inn was managed by the innkeeper, no shit right? He was a kindly man, with a plump wife and four sons. The boy’s names were Skippy, Blippy, Tippy, and Kyle. And you’re never going to hear about any of them ever again.

Rose rented two adjacent rooms and the led the way upstairs to where her party would live for the foreseeable future. The rooms were furnished well enough, sporting a single bed and a few scattered chairs for furniture.

“Girls room!” Cheered Jade, steering Rose into the room on the left. “Sleep tight, boys. Don’t let the furbeetles bite!”

John wanted to object. He and Rose were in a relationship and that was his baby sloshing around in her guts, after all. But before he could even open his mouth, Jade had shut and locked the door, leaving John and Davesprite to share the final room.

“Don’t you worry, Rose.” Said Jade, once she was alone with her friend. The two girls threw their bags on the bed and then began to unpack. “These weeks are going to blow by, no problem. We’ll be here for you every step of the way and, before you know it, we’ll be back on our quest.”

“With a fifth party member in tow.” Rose added. She self-consciously touched her smooth stomach once more. In a matter of weeks, she’d be swollen with the beauty of motherhood. “Thanks for the
support, Jade. I really hope you’re right.”

To say that Rose’s pregnancy went off without a hitch would make you a complete and total dumbass. Like why would you even say that? You weren’t there, asshole. You didn’t have to put up with all the nagging, all the morning sickness, all the crying and the shouting and the sharp punches to the arm when you accidentally said something about how Rose looked like she swallowed a whole planet.

The first two weeks were fine enough, sure, as Lalonde swelled up to the approximate size and shape of a sit and bounce. However, when she started visiting Doctor Skullsman’s office for weekly drains of magical energy, things got rough.

“Hey there, sexy lady.” Said John one evening as he came up behind his girlfriend. Jade and Davesprite were out exploring Martindale for the night and John was hurting for some one-on-one interaction with Rose. “I’ve been meaning to…”

“I swear to all of the gods, John Egbert.” Rose snapped, wheeling to face him. “If you touch me right now, I will beat you with a chair leg until YOU PISS BLOOD!!!”

Later that same night, when Jade returned to her room it was to find Rose sobbing quietly in the bathroom.

“What’s wrong, Rose!” Cried the Weredog with distress. “Are you stuck inside your robes again?!”

“NO!” Shrieked Rose. “It- It’s just that… John doesn’t think I’m pretty anymore, does he?!?!”

Mood Swings.

“I want some chocolate cake.” Rose demanded one evening, as the team relaxed in the town park. “Davesprite, go get me some cake.”

“What? Right now?” Davesprite looked down at the table, where he and John were currently locked in a fierce game of fifty-two card pickup. “Naw. No way. We’re playing a game, Rose, and this town doesn’t even have a bakery.”

“I WANT CHOCOLATE FUCKING CAKE, YOU WORTHLESS FAMILIAR!!!”

Three hours later, when Davesprite returned from the next town over with a full-sized chocolate cake, it was to find that his quest had been in vain.

“Did I say chocolate cake?” Rose lazily built a house of cards on her large belly. “I meant wizard pizza. Go get me some wizard pizza.”

“Fuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu-“

Sudden Urges.

It all came to a head one night, nearly three months into Rose’s pregnancy. The witch herself slept like a fat, pregnant rock in the bed she usually shared with Jade. Recently the frequent kicking of the little JohnRose baby had ousted Jade from her spot and sent her crawling next door to the JohnDave fun house.

At the moment, John, Davesprite, and Jade lay in a row, staring up at the ceiling, unable to sleep due to the deep, quaking snores of the snoozing mother next door.
“I don’t know how much more of this I can take.” Jade breathed. Her eyes were rimmed red and her typically sleek, dark hair that Davesprite totally didn’t want to caress passionately had seen much better day. ‘This baby isn’t even here yet and it’s ruining our lives.’

“Heh. I remember you were excited for this, Jade.” John responded. He was equally haggard. More than once he’d awoken in the middle of the night to find Davesprite spooning him. Why the spritely fellow even got into bed with him was a mystery, as sprites don’t even need to sleep. But whatever.

“Yeah, well. I’m excited for the fun stuff! You’re the daddy, why don’t you go over there and hold her hair back when she’s puking.”

“I do that all the time.”

“You didn’t do it yesterday.”

“She didn’t want to see my face yesterday.” John sighed. “I- I’m scared, guys.”

“Don’t be.” Davesprite tried to reassure his friend. “Rose still loves you, you know that. Plus she’s tough as fucking nails. She’ll come out of this better than ever.”

“Yeah, no doubt about it. It’s just that…. I don’t know if I’m going to be a good dad or not.”

John’s self-conscious words echoed around the dark room for a moment. The issue had weighed on his mind for quite a while, over the past few months, all the way back to when he first heard the truth from Rose herself. He didn’t truly feel like he was prepared for the sudden curve ball thrown his way and it scared him to think that he might screw everything up somehow.

“I think you’ll be the greatest dad ever, John.” Said Jade tiredly. “Sure it won’t always be easy, but you aren’t alone in this. Just like with Rose, we’ve got your back all the way.”

“Ditto.” Agreed Davesprite sagely. “Now yall try to get some sleep, Rose is scheduled for another magical drain tomorrow at Skullsman’s and I am not going to be the one to take her.”

Groaning softly, John rolled onto his side and tried to get comfortable. The weekly magical drains had been tough, as the process usually consisted of Rose purging all magic from her system by casting incredibly powerful spells. Things got more and more dicey the further into her pregnancy Rose got, until it proved almost dangerous for anyone unlucky enough to accompany her to the doctor’s. Jade in particular was still missing half of an eyebrow from Rose’s last appointment, when a ‘waxing spell’ got out of hand.

The crew had just begun to drift off to sleep when:

“JJJJOOOOOOOHHHHNNNN!!!”

Faster than a speeding bullet spell, John leapt from his bed, charged out into the hallway, and then into Rose’s bedroom. The witch was sat against the headboard, clutching her swollen belly and screaming at the top of her lungs. Tears leaked from the corners of her eyes, magical sparks shot from her fingers, and disgusting puddle stained her bed sheets.

“Aw. Fucking sick!” Gagged John. “What is that?!”

“My water broke, what does it look like?!?” Rose reached for John. “I- I got to get to Skullsman.”

“No kidding.” John rushed forward and took his girlfriend under the arm, helping her out of bed. “Just, uh, try to breath. Remember those classes we took?”
“What do you mean we?! You feel asleep during most of them!” Rose winced. “Gah! I think that was a contraction. Shit. I’m having contractions!”

“I think you should speak up, Rose.” Said Davesprite as he lazily floated into the room. “I don’t think the people in Woofstown can hear you just yet.”

Rose opened her mouth to snap at him, but before she could get the chance, John was already barking orders:

“Davesprite! You have to get to Skullsman and let him know that we’re coming.”

“Aye aye, papa John!” Saluted the sprite, before he floated out of the window and disappeared.

“Jade, where are you?!” John shouted.

“Right here!” The Weredog bounced in, quickly shimmying into her pants. John just then noticed his own state of undress, but there was little that could be done about it now. Jade ran right up to Rose and sized her under the legs. “Let me see her.”

Rose let out another shriek as she was hoisted up into Jade’s arms. The Weredog wasted no time in carrying the struggling witch out of the room and down the hall, with John quick on her heels. They sprinted through the streets, as Rose continued to shout and scream with each magical contraction that wrecked her body, and eventually reached Doctor Skullsman’s office to find the good doctor awake, dressed in a long night gown, and ready to deliver the Lalonde-Egbert baby.

“Your little sprite familiar woke me up.” Explained Skullsman as he shepherded John, Jade, and Rose inside. “Take her into the back room and then come wait out here. It shouldn’t take long.”

Jade did as she was told, depositing Rose on a hospital bed in the operating room before joining John and Davesprite outside. Skullsman swept inside the room, leaving the three worried adventures alone as he quickly got to work… or at least tried to. He reappeared a second later to grab John by the sleeve of his nightshirt.

“Not you, idiot.” Snapped the doctor. “You come in here.”

John cast his friends a last nervous glance before he was tugged into the operating room. Rose lay on her back on the bed, her face screwed up in pain, her fists gripping the fabric of her night gown in a death grip. The witch had never looked so distraught and it was truly freaking John the fuck out.

“I’d comfort your girl, if I were you.” Said Skullsman as he moved in between Rose’s legs and flipped up her nightclothes to get at her gooey bits. He could clearly see that now was the time for the little magic baby to enter the world. It was time to make this happen. “Alright, miss witch. You’re going to have to push when I tell you to. In the meantime, remember to breathe.”

Whether or not Rose actually heard the doctor’s instructions is unknown to this day, because as John drew near his love interest, she suddenly lunged out, seized him by his bottom lip, and then did her best pull it up over his head and rip it off.

“You filthy son of a bitch.” She spat. “You fucking asshole.”

“I- I’m sorry.” John spluttered, hastily taking her hand in both of his and peeling it from his face. “Just breathe, Rose. You can do this.”

“John… I’m so fucking scared.” More tears leaked from her eyes. “Don’t you go anywhere, okay? Stay right here for god’s sake.”
“I’m here.”

“I’d push if I were you, miss Lalonde.” Said the Doctor.

And Rose did.

Just over an hour later, John stepped out of the operating room to find Davesprite and Jade waiting eagerly outside. Both of his friend’s looked as frazzled as he felt, yet they still rushed to him immediately.

“John!” Gasped Jade. “Is it over? How is she? How’s the baby? What happened to your face?!”

John winced as Jade lightly poked at the flesh of his cheek, where Rose’s nails had left a few deep gouges. Despite the pain, the hero of Honey Town smiled widely.

“She got a little angry for a while there.” Explained John sheepishly. “And scratchy, and shouty, and punchy, and… yeah. I think you guys should come back now.”

“Really?” Davesprite wrung his hands, completely uncool for the time being. “Is it safe?”

“Just come on.” Taking each of his friend’s by the hand, John guided them through the operating room doors.

Rose was still lying in the bed, covered in sweat, still leaking tears, but now with a tiny bundle of blankets in her thin arms. The new mother looked up as John and the other’s reentered and her face split into a small smile. John walked right up to his girlfriend’s side and took her free hand. Jade and Davesprite were a little more hesitant though, creeping up and peering curiously at the bundle in Rose’s arms.

“Fuck.” Breathed Davesprite. “She’s so small.”

And she was.

It was a gorgeous baby girl, with rosy cheeks, bright violet eyes, and the tiniest tuft of raven hair atop her little pink head. She snoozed soundly in Rose’s arms as our heroes crowded around her. For a moment, no one really knew what to say. They were all struck dumb by the brilliant production of new life.

Shit was intense.

With shining eyes, Rose craned her neck to look up at John. He looked back, grinning like an idiot.

“Ask me again.” Demanded the witch.

“Are you sure?” John knew what she meant. “You said ‘no’ last time.”

“Well I’ve changed my mind.” Sleepily, almost dream-like, Rose slipped her hand from John’s and raised it to his eye level.

Reaching into the pocket of his briefs, because yes he slept with a wedding ring in his pants, John produced the golden ring he won at the carnival and slipped it onto her finger.

“Will you marry me, Rose Lalonde?”

“Of course.”
And then they met in a long kiss, one that cemented them firmly as matrimony bound, together always, then and forever, as a family.

“Awwwww.” Rosie pretended to dab at her eyes as if she were crying. “That’s so sweet! Although I can’t help but wonder how Rose is going to defeat the Dragon Mistress now that she’s toting around some dumb baby.”

“Whoa there, hun. That baby was not dumb. She rocked ultimate.” Dave rose from his chair quickly. “And as for whether or not Rose is still going to kick the Dragon Mistress’s ass, you’ve just got to wait and see.”

“Hmmmm.” Rosie stroked her chin and yawned widely. She was tired after a long day of lessons with her new tutors, Roxy the Werecat and her own father, as they had truly been running her through her magical paces. The young girl’s mind was bursting at the seams with all sorts of new information, the likes of which she would have never learned in school. However, no matter how heavy her eyes got, she was anxious to hear more of her father’s story, as well as pester him for more delicious tidbits: “I never knew that Uncle John had a daughter.”

“Well he did. Now go to sleep.”

“No. No, wait.” Rosie resisted her father’s attempts to tuck her in. “Tell me a little bit more. Just a tincy-bit! I’m not tired yet.”

“Yeah, well. I’m pretty damn tired.” Dave moved to the door and paused just beyond the threshold. “I- uh… you know how this is our secret, right? Like you don’t talk to your mom about this story, right?”

“Of course!” The young girl flopped back onto her pillows. “She would be made if she knew you were telling me this story.”

“Yeah… I’m just making sure you remember.” Casting a final look at his daughter and a smile, Dave blew out the light and went to bed. “Good night, Rosie.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Chapter Twenty-Three: The Dragon Labyrinth of Champions

In the fog-ridden northern plains of Skaia, there traveled a brave adventurer. She marched under the full moon towards a lone steeple on a hill, surrounded by many gravestones. It was her task to raid this graveyard for untold magical treasure, as an old wizard in the nearest town had commissioned her so. Dangers lurked among the graves, unspeakable horrors of dark magic, but this young hero remained unafraid.

Coming to a stop just outside the graveyard, the traveler drew her short sword from its scabbard and examined it for a moment. She then placed the flat of the blade against her chest and ripped out the sickest air-guitar solo you ever did see.

“Doodily doodily doodily doooooo.” Riffed Roxy the motherfucking Werecat up and down her imaginary six string. “Oh yeah! I’m going to have to write that baby down.”

Suddenly, her moonstone began to buzz with energy. Reaching into her pocket, Roxy retrieved the stone and held it in the palm of her hand. The disembodied voice of an old wizard began to speak:

“Young Werecat! What in Skaia’s name are you doing? I did not hire you to mess around foolishly. You’re supposed to head to that graveyard and recover the treasure there, post haste!”

“Relax, gramps. I’m already here.” Roxy continued on the path up to the graves as she spoke. “And how do you even know what I’m doing right now? Can you see me?”

“That’s not entirely true!”

“Ugh. That’s so gross. I bet you use that to peep on people all the time, you sicko.”

“Of course I can see you. I see all in my magical mirror of all-seeing.”

“Th- That’s not entirely true!”

“Relax, gramps. I’m already here.” Roxy continued on the path up to the graves as she spoke. “And how do you even know what I’m doing right now? Can you see me?”

“Of course I can see you. I see all in my magical mirror of all-seeing.”

“Ugh. That’s so gross. I bet you use that to peep on people all the time, you sicko.”

“Th- That’s not entirely true!”

“Whatever. Just keep your crusty ol’ peepers off me, Radicast. I’ll be back there in no time with your stupid treasure.” Before the wizard could respond, Roxy switched off her moonstone and stowed it in her pocket once more.

After severing ties with Rose’s party back in chapter twelve, Roxy the Werecat had headed north just as she had promised. The trek was hard and she was in desperate need of rest and supplies when she finally reached the northern plains. However, to rent even the simplest of rooms at an inn or purchase food and supplies, you needed gold of course, which brought Roxy to where she was now:

In a haunted graveyard. At night. In the middle of nowhere. Far from where anyone could hear her pitiful screams.

“Let’s get this over with.” Said Roxy as she tiptoed through the graves. “Let’s see… What was that
asshole’s name? Jones? No. Headcleaver? No. Smitty Werbenjagermanjensen? Definitely not. Fuuuuck! This is going to take all night!”

After perusing the names of many deceased, Roxy finally found the one she was looking for in the very heart of the corpse garden. It was your average grave of dark stone, with the name “Seymour Anus” etched into it’s face. The only other thing that set this grave apart from the others, was the obvious fact that someone, other than Roxy, had been here recently to plunder it’s treasure.

“Shit.” Grumbled Roxy, as she looked down into the large hole. An uncovered and empty casket lay at the bottom. “That wizard is going to be sooo pissed when I come back empty-handed.”

Suddenly, a high-pitched voice rang out across the graves, chilling Roxy right to her core.

“Not as pissed as you’re going to be…” Began the hissing voice. Roxy turned and gasped at what she saw. “… When you realize that you’ve been surrounded by hundreds of icezombies!”

Sure enough, Roxy now saw that she had, quite unwittingly, found herself in the middle of a large mob of icezombies. They all laughed as one and converged on her, slashing with their icy claws and attempting to bite her with their frigid fangs.

Icezombies, for those of you that don’t know, are your typical zombie except that when they bite you, you instantly turn into a stupid snowman. The transmogrification is irreversible and permanent, meaning that you’ll have to stand around for six months until summer comes and you melt all over the place like… well, a snowman.

Using her natural agility, Roxy leapt atop the tombstones, hacking and slashing with her sword at every icezombie that drew too near. Frozen arms, heads, hands, and the tip of one icy dick, flew all the fuck over as she swung her mighty blade. Gradually, she worked her way towards the lone steeple and clambered up onto the roof, momentarily giving herself some breathing room.

The icezombies crowded around the base of the steeple, scrambling over each other to reach her. If the young, attractive, surprisingly single, brave, adventuring Werecat was going to get out of this un-snowman-ified, then she’d have to think quick.

As she wracked her brains for an escape plan, her moonstone buzzed in her pocket once again.

“Gods-dammit, you moldy old wizard! Now isn’t the time!” She barked into the magical device.

“Whoa, old wizard? Who do you think you’re talking to, Rox?”

Roxy blinked. She recognized that voice.

“Davesprite?”

“The one and only.” Smirked the orange familiar from miles upon miles away. “How are you doing, you fine-ass kitty-girl?”

“I’ve been good.” Roxy hacked at an icezombie that attempted to scale the wall towards her. They were starting to fashion grappling hooks. Roxy was running out of time. “How about you?”

“Aw, you know. Same old, same old. Hey, listen. I think we should meet up again. We’re set up in Martindale for the moment and we’re planning a final assault on the Dragon Mistress of the North. You should come, it’ll be a total blast.” Davesprite paused momentarily. “Also…. Uh, there’s someone we think you should meet.”
“I dunno. Martindale is a little out of the way for me. Also,” Roxy watched in horror as the icezombies began to construct a human pyramid. “I don’t know if John would be okay with us hanging out again.”

“Oh, psshh. That’s water under the bridge, Roxy. John’s moved on, you’ve obviously moved on. Everyone’s just moving along to that glorious beat of the warrior’s song.” Davesprite dropped a quick rap. “Just get your ass over here ASAP. I won’t take ‘no’ for an answer. See you soon, Roxy.”

Then Davesprite hung up, leaving Roxy alone with her thoughts, and the steadily approaching army of refrigerated undead.

If she met up with Davesprite and the others in Martindale, then she wouldn’t have to go back to that stupid wizard and get chewed out for not recovering the treasure. However, if she went to Martindale, she’d have to face John again and no one, no matter who you are, is going to leap at the chance to hang out with their bitter ex.

Roxy made a snap decision.

“Fuck it.” She growled and then transformed into a fully-fledged Werecat. Using her new, heightened strength, Roxy leapt into the night sky, over the army of icezombies, and then scampered away across the plains, Martindale-bound.

(cut to martindale)

Roxy arrived in Martindale shortly after that and was immediately greeted by Jade in the town square.

“Roxy!” Cried Jade as she rushed to hug her friend. “Oh shit. You look fantastic! I love what you’ve done with your hair!”

“Aw thanks, Jade.” Roxy fingered her blonde locks idly. “I figured I’d shake things up a bit. Where are the others? Davesprite said that you guys were planning a final assault on the Dragon Mistress.”

“Oh, you know it, girlfriend.” Taking Roxy by the arm, Jade pulled her towards the inn. “We’ve assembled all of our friends from all over Skaia. You’re the last one to arrive. Rose is itching to plot out the plan so that we can get on with the quest!”

“Alright, sounds good.” Roxy chewed the inside of her cheek nervously as she entered the inn. “I just better get a cut of some sweet dungeon loot when all of this is said in done. It’s common knowledge that dragons love gold.”

And it was.

Rumor had it that the Dragon Mistress had acquired thousands upon thousands of tons of gold up in her mountain lair. One merely needed to enter the mountain and slay her to achieve unimaginable wealth. No one had ever been attempted a raid though, until now.

Entering the inn, Roxy found the main hall to be absolutely packed with people. There was Dirk, accompanied by several sailor-ninja-knights. Grandpa Jake from Wooftown, with a pack of young Weredog warriors. Janesprite, who had been loaned several Owl Knights by the Empress of the Sea in the Fuchsia Kingdom. Chazz Limplewickle and his traveling cast of wizard/actors/professional crocheters. The Corpse Maiden, now leader of the army of Beemen. And last but not least, Rose, John, and Davesprite, in the heart of it all.

“Alright everyone, take your seats, take your seats.” Davesprite called for attention and everyone
gradually stopped their chatter. “You’ve all been gathered here today because you’re the baddest, the raddest, the meanest motherfuckers in all of Skaia and we need your help to kill the Dragon Mistress.”

“Whoa. Hold up a sec.” One of the Owl Knights of the Fuchsia Kingdom raised his owl hand. “We’re going to assault the home of the Dragon Mistress?”

“Yup.”

“Naw, man. Do you have any idea how dangerous that is? Super fuck this. I’m out.” Then the Owl Knight fluttered out the door, realized he was thousands of miles away from home, got lost, and slowly starved to death in the wilderness over the next two weeks.

Nobody cared.

“Anyways, as I was saying.” Davesprite continued. “The Dragon Mistress’s lair is guarded by a fuck-load of Dragon Knights and they’re really rude and tough. Not to mention that the inside of the Dragon Mistress’s mountain is actually a huge maze.”

“Yes. The Dragon Labyrinth of Champions.” Defined Dirk. He leaned against the wall, the epitome of cool. During the months of Rose’s pregnancy, Dirk and his pals had traveled southward to conduct ‘business’ and afterwards, had agreed to rejoin his brother for this final, awesome quest. “No one has ever attempted to navigate the labyrinth. Apparently it’s confusing and dangerous as hell.”

“Which is why you better bring some snacks and comfortable boots!” Added Janesprite. “I don’t need either because I don’t have feet… or the necessity for food to live…”

Everyone got depressed for a moment, then:

“Er, hello?” Piped up Grandpa Jake from Wooftown. “Why isn’t Rose explaining this? Isn’t she the young lass that will lead us to victory?”

Everyone murmured in agreement. They wanted Rose to speak.

Slowly, the witch rose from her chair to face the assembled crew. She was no longer swollen with child, but stood as fit and firmly toned as ever. By her side stood a smiling John and in her arms, slept the cooing baby that was the product of their undying love (or freak-nasty sex, whatever floats your boat).

Everyone, upon seeing the child, lost their fucking shit.

“Let me see her! Let me see her!” Shrieked Janesprite in excitement.

“Yo pass that baby this way!” Demanded Dirk with coolness.

“My stars! She’s magnificent!” Gasped Grandpa Jake.

“Look at her little hands!”

“She has her mommy’s eyes!”

“I just wanna eat her!”

“Not if I eat her first!”

“What’s her name?” Roxy’s quiet question rung out over the clamor, cutting through the frenzy with
honest curiosity.

Everyone stopped what they were doing and turned to Rose expectantly. The witch cradled her child to her chest and gave a nervous laugh.

“We- uh…” She looked to John, who looked equally anxious. “Haven’t decided on a name yet.”

“You haven’t?!”

“What the fuck!”

“She needs a name!”

“We’ll think of something! We’ll think of something!” John silenced the crowd again, as he flapped his hand furiously. He wrapped his arm around his fiancé’s shoulders and hugged his family to his chest. “Stop shouting for fuck’s sake you’re going to wake her up.”

“We plan on christening her upon the conclusion of our quest.” Explained Rose hastily. “It’s of my belief that the perfect name will reveal itself when the darkness of the Dragon Mistress’s power no longer reigns over the peaks of the northern mountains.”

“Then what are we waiting for?” Asked Chazz Limplewickle. “Let’s go show that sassy Dragon Bitch whose boss!”

“Yeah!” Cheered nearly everyone in unison.

“Then it’s settled.” Proclaimed Rose. “We march on the Dragon Mistress’s lair tomorrow at sunrise. Sleep well tonight, my friends. Fore tomorrow, we fight for glory!”

As everyone celebrated and flipped shit out of excitement, Roxy found a bottle of mead, a chair in the corner, and watched the festivities. In any other circumstances, she would be in the thick of the party, having the time of her life. However…

She wanted to be happy for Rose and John, she really did, and she would assist them in battle as any true friend would. It was just that the tiniest, smallest part of herself couldn’t help but stare up at Rose as she snuggled in John’s arms, with the young no-name against her breast, and picture herself in her place.

Not as a mother, not as a wife, but as the greatest goddamn witch who ever lived.

And it wasn’t a good feeling.

Later that evening, after everyone had retired to their own rooms for the rest of the evening, John and Rose snuggled together in their bed. In the weeks after no-name’s birth, the couple had grown closer than ever. Maybe it was because they were now officially engaged, or maybe it was because of the new baby Rose had popped out, however you wanna spin it, they were two regular peas in a pod.

“It’s good to see everyone again.” Said John with a deep yawn. “Even if we are marching them into a deadly maze tomorrow and all.”

“Indeed it is nice.” Rose responded. She had her eyes closed and her cheek smushed against John’s chest. “I wouldn’t worry about their well-being very much. They’re all tough within their own right. We’re all going to get out of this A-OK.”

“Heh. Since when were you the optimistic one?”
“I wouldn’t say optimistic. Confident more like.” Rose heaved a heavy sigh as she sank further into warm sheets. Although she had recovered quickly from childbirth, thanks to Doctor Skullsman and her remarkable magical powers, she still couldn’t help but feel drained of energy every whence and then. “I seem to vividly remember you fretting over every little thing on one occasion or another, and then me having to reassure you.”

John thought back to their past adventures. Had he really been a worry wart? It was hard to remember, so much other junk had happened. He was a different person now, braver, stronger, more of man than ever before.

He liked to think that his dad would be proud.

“Well, I suppose some things never change then.” John reached over and extinguished the torch on the nightstand, casting the room into darkness.

“They do sometimes.” In the sudden darkness, Rose’s fingers found his. “For the better.”

Then, with a final collective sigh, the witch and the hero molded together and began to drift off to sleep.

“WWWAAAAAHHHH!!!” Cried you know who.

“Fucking shit.” Grumbled Rose, throwing the sheets off of herself and moving to rise.

“No, no. Go to sleep. I got this.” John slipped quickly from the bed before Rose and hurried to the crib in the corner of the room. It was a shitty piece of furniture, built hastily from some spare lumber Jade found on the edge of town. In the basin, amongst a bundle of soft blankets, wept the little brat.

“Hey there, little girl. It’s okay. Daddy’s here.”

As John swept the infant into his arms, her wailing cries only increased in volume. Rose winced and smushed her head between the pillows of the bed, trying to drown out the shrill noise. On top of her physical exhaustion, the baby seemed hell-bent on making sure that the witch got as little sleep as possible.

Seriously, though. Come on. It’s not like Rose Lalonde was a great witch that needed all of her strength to battle an evil Dragon Mistress or anything, right? No. Of course not. Who would think such a thing?

Fucking babies man.

John bounced the baby on his hip awkwardly, trying to get it to shut the fuck up. However, little no-name was insistent, crying and beating at John’s chest with her tiny hands.

“Are you hungry?” John offered the baby some milk, which she fervently refused. “Did you pee your pants again?” A quick check proved that the baby was as clean as a whistle. “Fuck! What’s wrong with you?!”

A series of loud bangs beat against the wall of Rose and John’s room then, followed by a muffled voice:

“Hey! Shut that thing up! We’re trying to sleep in here!”

“Oh shit.” John whispered to his child. “I think that’s the Corpse Maiden. I really don’t want to piss her off. Do you think you could turn down the volume a little bit, no-name? Just for me?”
“WAAAHH!” Responded the baby, who was being a real dick at the moment.

“Giver her here, John.” Rose sat up in the bed and held her arms out for her child. Sheepishly, John handed the small girl over and almost instantaneously, the baby went silent in Rose’s arms. “There you go. She just wanted her mummy. Awwwww.” She gently tickled the no-name’s little tummy. “She’s a regular mommy’s girl. Haha.”

“Yeah. I guess so.” John sat on the edge of the bed and looked at his new family. This was the way most temper tantrums the baby threw turned out. John would do his best, fail miserably, and then Rose would swoop in to save the day, easing the baby into peaceful rest.

Rose noticed John’s frown.

“Oh don’t be like that, hun.” She said, reaching to place her free hand on his knee. “Children are known to be more attached to the mother as opposed to the father. She did come out of me, after all.”

“Mhmm.” John agreed, although he couldn’t shake the feeling like he was still doing something wrong. He stared hard at the snoozing baby, thinking hard about… something, some ineffable feeling that he couldn’t quite explain.

Not for the first time, John wished that things could be easy, simple, and straightforward. Instead of whatever the hell this shit was. With a heavy feeling in his chest, John moved up the bed to join Rose once more. With the baby still in her arms, the witch lay with John once more and together, the family drifted off to sleep.

For like two hours.

“Wake up, lovebirds!” Jade sang as she burst through the door shortly after first light. “Everyone’s up and ready, and that Dragon Mistress isn’t going to slay herself! Haha!”

“Fuh. Give us a few minutes.” Grumbled Rose. She looked down to see that no-name was still asleep in the crook of her elbow. They’d have to see how long they could keep her that way. Elbowing John awake as lovingly as possible, Rose set about starting the day. “We’ll meet you downstairs, Jade. Make sure that all of our supplies are packed and ready to go.”

“Aye, aye, captain!” Giggled Jade as she disappeared once more.

Moaning and cursing, like your average older couple, John and Rose prepared for what would hopefully their final and greatest adventure. Slipping into her dress, lacing up her boots, and fastening her robes under her chin once more, Rose examined herself in the mirror hung on the wall. She wasn’t much heavier than before the pregnancy, some would say that she was in peak form once more. However, some people would also be fucking fibbers.=. To say that she didn’t have a bit more padding would be a flat out lie.

She didn’t have time to piss about with her physical appearance though. As long as she could point a wand and cast a spell, then she was fine in her book.

John had just finished buckling his pants when Rose threw a harness-looking device in his direction.

“What’s this?” He asked, examining the bizarre contraption.

“It’s a baby sling.” Explained Rose. Lifting no-name from the crib once more, Rose carried her to John and then fitted her to his chest using the sling. “There. Now you can keep an eye on her while the rest of us fight in this awesome battle.”
John looked down at the baby now attached to him and the baby met his gaze. Almost immediately, no-name began to cry softly.

“Damn. I dunno if I can do this…” John blurted. “Rose. This baby doesn’t like me.”

“Sure she does. You just need to spend more time together.” Rose stood on her tiptoes to give John a quick kiss on the cheek. As she did, she gave the straps of the harness a quick check. “This will help. Now come on. Let’s get downstairs.”

After quickly reconvening down in the main hall of the inn, our party, now much larger than before, set out on the dusty trail once more. Rose led the large group through the streets of Martindale and out into the wilderness. The northern mountains towered ahead, looming monuments to the Dragon Mistress’s supposedly unstoppable power.

“I’d like to come back to Martindale one day.” Admitted Jade as the group walked across a grassy plain. “There’s no mayor to boss everyone around, people just sort of do their own thing, also everyone is really nice!”

“Maybe you could be the new mayor, Jade.” Offered Davesprite. He bumped the Weredog with his ghost elbow. “Or maybe you could just marry Martindale since you love it so much.”

“I would if I could!” She shot him a stiff middle finger. “Or maybe I could just kiss it and turn it into a human since, you know, true love’s kiss and all.”

“Daaaaaaammnn.” Said Dirk with a smirk. “Do you want a healing spell for that burn, bro?”

“That wasn’t even a good burn.” Davesprite snapped. “And Jade, don’t bring up personal topics in public. Can’t you tell that this is not the time nor place for this? My bro is standing right here for fuck’s sake.”

“So? Let him hear it. Let the whole world hear it!” Jade folded her arms. “It’s not like everyone doesn’t already know that you’re a huge pansy.”

“Double Daaaaaaammnnnnn.”

“Shut up, Dirk. You don’t get to weigh in on this topic. Also, John, man,” Davesprite wheeled on his friend next. “Can you get no-name to give it a rest? I dunno if I can handle her crying like that all the way to the fucking mountains.”

“I’m trying!” John bounced his child gently. “I’m telling you guys. I’m doing the best I can. She just isn’t happy.”

“Is she hungry?” Janesprite floated into the conversation. “When’s the last time you fed her?”

“Just this morning.”

“Did she pee her little baby pants?”

“ Nope.”

“Well, how about you let me see her?” Janesprite reached forward and plucked no-name out of John’s harness. Immediately, the baby fell silent. “Huh. Well, will you look at that?”

As Janesprite delicately clutched the docile no-name in her ghost arms, John felt that heavy feeling in his gut again. He suspicions were starting to look more and more likely each second and he did not
like it. Davesprite wasn’t helping much either:

“Oh shit, Ebert.” Davesprite gasped. “I think your kid hates you.”

“She most certainly does not! She loves him just like any other kid would.” Jade instantaneously leapt to John’s defense. “Don’t go saying things like that Davesprite. It’s incredibly rude.”

“I just call it as I see it. Don’t make me out to be the bad guy.”

“Well you won’t let me make out with you any other way. Or wait- that came out wrong.”

“Christ, Jade. Why can’t you just leave well enough alone?”

“That was an accident!”

As they squabbled, John continued to stare at his child, being carried by Janesprite. He had to agree partially with Davesprite. His ghostly friend was on the right track, just looking in the wrong direction. It was then, as the group walked through the breeze-ridden grass, that John truly recognized the extent of his curse.

He did not love his own child.

And the baby could feel his indifference in the way he held her, in the way he spoke to her, as he looked into her tiny, violet eyes. That heavy feeling in John’s gut finally hit home with a solid thunk and nearly brought tears to his eyes. He was totally fucked thanks to Yahtzee, the evil woodland witch.

He was doomed to be a shitty father from the start.

“John, are you okay?” Janesprite asked. “You look like you’ve just seen an entire ghost orgy.”

“I – uh, I’m fine.” John lied. He had to think quickly. “Listen, Janesprite. Do you think that you could watch no-name for me? At least for a little while? I want to have Rose’s back when we get to the labyrinth and I don’t want to put my child, that I love so very much with every fiber of my being, in harm’s way.”

“Sure! No problem.” Happy to be of help, Janesprite nuzzled the cooing baby lovingly. “This is the perfect opportunity for this little gal to spend some quality time with her favorite aunty Janesprite. Isn’t that right, little no-name? Awww. You’re so cute.”

Janesprite’s doting made John’s stomach churn, somehow more than it already was. He knew, looking ahead towards the marching Rose, that he should tell his girlfriend what he’d discovered. It was the right thing to do, the smart thing to do. You’d have thought that he’d have learned by then that being honest was the best way to go.

However, John was very nervous, and very frightened, and very sad. With each step, the northern mountains drew closer and closer, bringing with them Rose’s ultimate destiny. In John’s mind, he couldn’t ruin this for Rose, not yet. More than anything else, this curse was his problem and he would have to deal with it on his own.

If he no longer had love to give, then that was fine. Just as long as everyone else was happy.

Call it what you want, but John made the selfish decision then and there to hide his true feelings for the foreseeable future, so as to keep the peace. He would care for his daughter whether they loved each other or not, because he loved Rose and because that was the right thing to do.
He just wished things didn’t have to be so fucking complicated.

Blissfully ignorant of John’s inner turmoil, Rose led the large group to the base of the northern mountain range. They were impressive mountains, towering miles above our heroes’ heads and threatening to scrape the sky with their snowy peaks. Directly ahead, carved into the base of an enormous rocky wall, was an ancient archway, much like the entrance to Virgo’s Keep (the lair of the Vampire Queen).

The arch was lined with intricate and badass designs: dragons riding motorcycles, taking rips off of bongs shaped like shotguns, having sex in the bathroom stall of an airplane, you fucking name it. One needed only to look at these mystical pictograms to know that the Mistress of GD Dragons resided somewhere within this mountain.

Rose drew her wands.

“This is it, my friends.” She spoke to the group. “The entrance to the dragon labyrinth of champions. If we’re going to make it through in one piece and reach the Dragon Mistress, then we’re going to have to work together. Stay in formation, don’t wander off, and most importantly: never look back.” Rose motioned for her friends to follow. “Come on. Let’s make this happen.”

One by one, the group descended into darkness, leaving behind the comforting light of day. Rose led the way, of course, using a flashlight spell to light the way ahead. The tunnel twisted and turned, loop de looped, and figure-eighted, all in an attempt to discombobulate the heroes. Not only that, but the temperature steadily declined the further they traveled. Everyone shivered with the chill, save for little no-name, who was swathed in toasty blankets in Janesprite’s arms.

“Fuck my ass, it’s cold as hell down here.” Gasped Roxy, her breath coming out in icy bursts. “You’d think that out of everyone, dragons would keep a few fires lying around, right?”

“The dragons do not live down here.” Rose responded. “This is merely a gauntlet used to dissuade interlopers such as us. Come on. We should be nearing the innermost sanctum soon.”

As they continued onward, they passed numerous side-passages and steel doors, all of which they ignored, despite the curiosity urging them to explore. Carved into the stone walls were more pictures and short, messy scrawls. One simply reading: “Freddy Kruger is here” caught Jade’s attention and sent more shivers down her spine.

“How do you know where to go exactly?” Asked Davesprite after they passed yet another auxiliary corridor.

“Wizard GPS.” Explained Rose simply, pausing to show Davesprite the new app she installed on her wands. “It’s surprisingly useful, considering that these tunnels are centuries old. Here, I think we’ve just entered the inner sanctum now.”

Sure enough, the tunnel opened up into a cavernous room, whose ceiling and walls were shrouded in shadow. The group came to a halt in the very center of the hollow mountain and Rose lifted her wands above her head, trying to see beyond their glow to where they should head next.

“There’s supposed to be some kind of staircase here.” She explained. “One that will lead us up through the mountain and to the Dragon Mistress’s tower. Does anyone see anything?”

“No staircases.” Reported Jade. “At least not from what I can see. Although there are some neat-looking stalagmites.”

“No kidding!” Roxy pointed to one. “That stalagmite looks like Lou Reed.”
“Ha! It really does!” Suddenly, in the darkness, a low **scuttling** sound could be heard across the rock floor. Jade let out a shrill shriek and leapt behind Rose. “Shit! That fucking sounded like Freddy.”

Double suddenly, flames erupted from the edges of our heroes’ vision, lighting up the entirety of the massive cavern in one mighty blast. Rose noticed several things at once. Firstly, that stalagmite totally did look like Lou Reed, rest his soul. Secondly, there was a spiral staircase built into the walls of the cavern leading upwards. And thirdly, the whole group was now surrounded by well over two hundred Dragon Knights.

“Greeting’s Rose Lalonde.” Hissed one Dragon Knight, probably the leader. He was larger than his counterpart, with bright red scales and a large broadsword. “You’ve come a long way, but I’m afraid that it was all in vain. You will **never** reach the Dragon Mistress!”

“Like hell I won’t!” Rose twirled her wands as all of her friends readied their weapons. “I’ll give you all one chance to leave with your lives, Dragon Knights.”

“One chance?” Questioned a second Dragon Knight. “Is that like… what chance for all two hundred of us? Or just one chance for the whole lot?”

“One chance for all of you, dumbass.”

“That’s not fair! What If I change my mind?!”

“Shut up, Rick!” The lead Dragon Knight slapped his concerned friend on the back of the head, silencing him, and then pointed forward with his sword at Rose. “Come on, boys and gals! Let’s slay these interlopers!”

The dark cavern, which had once been spooky and silent was now alight with all the sights and sounds of a fierce battle. Dragon Knights descended upon our group, breathing fire, shooting arrows, and swinging powerful swords and axes. Rose’s team responded in kind, meeting the Dragon Mistress’s minions with their own attacks. The Corpse Maiden ordered her Beemen army into battle and almost all of them were instantly wrecked. Bees plus fire-breathing dragons, equals a lot of dead fucking bees.

It was a frenzy of blood, guts, and magic.

Dirk and his sailor-ninja-knights were an effect fighting group, of course, having spent years pillaging on the high seas. They got together and used their signature fighting formation, which combined line-dancing with sword play, to kill dozens of Dragon Knights.

Chazz Limplewickle and the other wizards from the Wizard Harvard Community College cast spells and summoned familiars to aid them in the battle. One wizard cast an untamed lion familiar, which proved to be huge mistake when the lion turned and ate one of the Owl Knights.

“Come on! We have to push for the staircase!” Shouted Rose as she literally blasted a Dragon Knight into the next century with a time travel spell.

Grandpa Jake, mayor of Wooftown, heard Rose’s commands and led his troop of loyal Weredogs towards the staircase, cleaving an effective path through the army of Dragon Knights and allowing Rose, John, Davesprite, Jade, Roxy, and Janesprite to rush forward and begin the ascent.

It was slow going, made even worse by the fact that Dragon Knights can totally fly. The dastardly minions buzzed by Rose and the stair-climbing group, throwing rocks or breathing fire or just shouting really, really hurtful things.
“This is for Super Wings!” Screamed one Dragon Knight. She descended from the sky and swung her sword right at John’s head.

The hero of Honey Town barely dodged the swipe and then regarded the Dragon Knight with surprise.

“Whoa! Super Wings? Talk about a callback.” John said. “I’m sorry about that you husband died all the way back in Honey Town, ma’am. But he waaaaas going to kill me.”

“You didn’t have to kill him though.” Spat the furious dragon in response. “He was just following orders!”

“Yeah, but just because someone tells you to do something evil doesn’t mean you’re excused from the moral repercussions of doing it.” John appealed to the dragon knight. “Listen. I don’t think that your husband was that bad of a guy. He was actually pretty nice to me for a little bit. However, you have to admit that he got what was coming to him. He did sign up with the Dragon Mistress, after all.”

“Silence, creten! You will not lecture me so!” The Dragon Mistress raised her sword again to deal a killing blow. “You will pay for leaving my child fatherless!”

There was a flash of light, then abruptly, the murderous Dragon Knight fell dead on the stairs at John’s feet.

“Parentless.” Corrected Rose as she blew smoke off the ends of her wands.

Talk about a cold hearted bitch, amirite? Anyways, after that horrifying display, Rose and the rest of the group ascended the stairs, fighting off more Dragon Knights all the while. Eventually though, they reached the top of the staircase and found that it led to a set of large wooden doors. Etched into the ancient wood was a picture of a dragon giving the viewer a pair of upside-down middle fingers.


“Not yet, you haven’t!” Called a fiendish voice.

Everyone turned to see that the leader of the Dragon Knights was bearing down upon them. Before anyone could react, the leader of the Dragon Knights fired a powerful bust of flame from his jaws that flew overhead, luckily missed everyone, but unluckily struck the roof of the cave. Rocks began to rain down on the group as the ceiling started to crumble.

“Through the doors!” Shouted Rose as she fired spells blindly towards where the leader of the Dragon Knights once was. “Come on!”

Jade rushed forward and shoved through the doorway, followed closely by Davesprite, John, and Rose. Roxy and Janesprite tried to follow by found their path quickly blocked by falling debris. The entire archway above the doors collapsed, splitting the group effectively in two and trapping Rose, John, Davesprite, and Jade on the other side of the doors.

“Janesprite!” Rose called through the rubble. “Is no-name alright? Are you hurt?”

“Everyone’s fine over here!” Called back Janesprite. “This little gal is even still asleep. Haha! I think you hit that Dragon Knight with a spell, Rose. Good work.”

“Good.” Rose turned from the rubble to her friends, who were trapped here with her, then she looked further into the cave. A set of steps led upwards, through the mountain’s peak into the
Dragon Mistress’s tower. “Go help the others and then come back to clear this rubble.” Commanded Rose to Janesprite. The witch twirled her wands once more. “We’re going to end this.”

When Dave finished the night’s tale it was to find Rosie thoroughly disappointed.

“You’re just going to end it right there?!” Gasped the young girl. “Daddy, that’s no place to stop! How in Skaia’s name am I going to sleep tonight with that cliffhanger over my head?”

“What are you talking about cliffhanger?” Responded Dave incoherently. He was incredibly tired after a long day’s work. “That’s the end, baby girl. Good night.”

Dave rose from his chair and made to leave, but his daughter called him back.

“What do you mean that’s the end? You’re going to finish the story tomorrow, right?”

“Rosie…” Dave sighed and turned back. “I think I’ve had enough of this. These last few nights it’s been getting harder and harder to get through these tales and… I don’t think the end is all that worth telling. If you wanted to know what happened then: Rose beat the Dragon Mistress.”

“That’s it?” Rosie was flabbergasted. “You’re going to spend hours upon hours telling me useless shit about musicals and crappy parties, but you aren’t going to tell me anything about the final showdown? What about all these characters I’ve grown to know and love? Dad, you have to finish!”

“I don’t know if I can.” Dave leaned against the wall. His wife’s misgivings about the tale were starting to make more sense to him now the further he got into the story. Now, with the end all but nigh, he would be forced to relive the ends events over again. “Rosie, I know I make this look easy, but telling stories is hard. Why don’t we switch this up a bit and read something else tomorrow? How about that new Marry Totter book?”

“Ugh. Not a chance.” Rosie pleaded with her dad. “Pwwwweeeeeease?! I really want- No- I need to know what happens. Leaving this story unfinished is cruel and unusual punishment.”

Rubbing his eyes under his shades, Dave made a snap decision. As wary of a guy he was, he could not resist his daughter’s wishes. Not only that, but... there were some things that she deserved to know.

“I’ll think about it.” Dave promised as he stepped outside and shut the door.

Chapter End Notes

The final two chapters, "The Dragon Mistress of the North" plus an Epilogue, should be posted this Friday. So be on the lookout for that if you're interested.

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Chapter Twenty-Four: The Dragon Mistress of the North

On a Moonsday night, just like every other night, the whole Strider family sat down for a family dinner. Jade had prepared a glorious meal from her garden, succulent squash, tubular tomatoes, and even bodacious broccoli was spread all across the table. Dave, Rosie, and even Roxy the Werecat were in attendance, all to share in the merry-making tradition of home-cooked, love-ridden meals.

“Rosie is really coming along in her lessons.” Said Roxy happily, as she munched on some delicious tuna fish crackers. She had brought her own meal, not out of disrespect to Jade’s hard work, but simply because as a Werecat Roxy was adverse to eating veggies. “Today we were practicing bullet spells outside Mr. McGuffin’s farm. She’s almost got it down!”

“Bullet spells?” Questioned Jade. “Isn’t that a little… advanced?”

“Dangerous too.” Added Roxy. “But I’m telling you, Rosie is a natural. One hundred percent pure badass witch over here. I’m talking unadulterated magic bomb dot com.”

Jade and Dave exchanged a quick glance as Roxy chattered on. They had always known that Rosie was cut out for witchcraft. Anyone with an eighth of a quarter of a half of a brain could see that. Without the imaginary chains of rigid schooling though, her powers were accelerating in magnitude at an alarming rate.

The little girl in question was digging into her meal, happier than she had ever been before with her new educational arrangements. She beamed under her teacher’s praiseful words and was quick to jump into the discussion when she could.

“I think I’m pretty much ready for my own wand!” She said, turning to her father. “What do you think, Daddy? Could I get my very own wand?”

“Eh, maybe.” Dave carefully wiped his mouth with his napkin. “Wands are expensive, you know, especially good ones. You have to be very careful with them. Maybe next year on your birthday.”

“Awwww. Okay.” Rosie sank back into her chair and, quite subconsciously, let out a long yawn.

“Oh. Looks like someone’s all tuckered out.” Jade nodded to her daughter. “Why don’t you get ready for bed, Rosie? You’ve had a long day.”

“But I’m not tired!”

“Yes you are. Now get going. I’ll be there soon to tuck you in.”

Rosie slouched out of her chair and made to leave, but not without turning back one more time.
“Can dad tuck me in?” She asked, shooting her father a knowing glance.

Dave swallowed. He knew what she wanted, a conclusion to the tale of the greatest witch ever. He’d done a moderate job to avoid dishing the goods so far, skipping a few night’s stories to buy himself some time. However, now he was out of excuses. The more he denied his daughter, the more anxious she became. Was tonight really the night?

“Well that’s up to him, isn’t it?” Answered Jade. She turned to her husband. “Do you mind?”

“Er, not at all.” Dave dragged a swift hand through his hair. “I’ll be there in a second.”

“Rock n’ roll, good times!” Sang Rosie, as she turned on her heel and raced to her room.

Both Roxy and Jade smiled after her, finding her excitement endearing, whilst Dave looked sadly at his plate. The man had dug himself into an inescapable hole, one whose treacherous depths were now closer than ever. If he went through with his tale tonight then his daughter’s life would probably be changed forever, for the better or worse still stood to be decided.

However, his daughter was old enough, he reasoned. If he held off any longer, then the outcome might not be as favorable as one might hope. Matters such as this were best dealt with quickly in his mind.

You just gotta rip that shit off, like a wizard band-aid.

Rising from his chair, and promising to meet Jade and Roxy in the living room for coffee later, Dave made his way down the hall to his daughter’s room. Rosie was already in bed, with her desk chair pushed into its customary position by her bedside, waiting for him to take a seat.

“Yall ready for this?” Asked Dave, in his best Space Jam voice as he shut the door behind him.

“More than anything in the world!” Responded Rosie, with barely-suppressed excitement. “Lay it on me, pops. Let’s finish this shit!”

“Alright.” Shaking his head, Dave took his seat. After pausing for a moment to rub at his eyes and jog his memory, he began once more: “So, anyways, the ceiling had collapsed and now Rose, John, Davesprite, and Jade were trapped on the other side, with no path other than the one directly ahead. With resolve like steel, Rose led the way up the stone steps and into the Dragon Mistress’s tower…”

“I think I read somewhere that dragon meat is the most tender meat in all the land.” Said Jade with a watering mouth. “I hope we get the chance to roast some of these assholes before we head out on the next quest.”

“The next quest?” Questioned John. He chuckled. “I dunno, Jade. After this one, I think we might be all quested-out.”

“What?” Jade turned to Rose quickly. “You guys can’t be done! I mean, yeah, you have a little bitty kid now and everything, but she’ll probably be game for most any quest you guys decide to take!”

“Oh of course she’d be game. She’s a baby. She doesn’t understand the concept of most things yet.” Rose rolled her eyes, but with only half of her usual snark. “And I’m afraid John might be right on this one, Jade. After I slay the Dragon Mistress of the North, my questing days may have reached their denouement.” With a small smile, the witch looked to her partner. “Who knows? Perhaps starting a family will be my ultimate quest in of itself.”
“Laaaammmme.” Jeered Davesprite, as the group reached the top of the stairs. “You’re too great of a witch to give up questing. I’ll believe you’re finished when Jade decides to grow a garden and eat vegetables.”

“Ha! Good one, Dave.” Giggled Jade. “That will never happen.”

And she was right, all the way up until she decided to grow a garden and eat vegetables. Something about motherhood convinced Jade to take better care of herself, more veggies, less red meat, maybe lemonade instead of mead, all that jazz. Not to say that the lovely Weredog wouldn’t indulge in a seventy-two ounce ox steak every whence and then.

At the top of the stairs, Rose and the others found themselves in an elegant corridor of pure marble. The walls and ceiling were decorated with many scorch marks and scratches, lending yet more proof that this place was nothing if not bursting at the seams with numerous dragons. Carefully, with the skill of a well-practiced team, our heroes made their way down the corridor towards a shimmering light across the way.

“Do you mean it?” John whispered to Rose as they crept. “Are you really willing to give up all the danger and glory of adventure for… well, for me?”

“You and our daughter.” Rose corrected. She turned her head slightly and set her gaze on John. “And I meant every word. All my life I’ve been searching for my true calling, and no, I’m not saying that I’ll be your little housewife, Egbert. Far from it. But I do truly believe that I belong with you and no-name. I’ve never been so sure of anything before.”

“Th- That’s good to hear.” John didn’t know what to say to that, other than: “I love you, Rose.”

“I love you too.”

A sitcom-esque ‘awwww’ filled the air at that and no one’s heart strings were not pulled.

At the end of the corridor was the source of the mysterious, shimmering light. It was a beautiful door composed out of dark stone, like obsidian or something equally magical-looking. Set into the door was a perfectly round orb of crystal, which glowed with ethereal light and was surrounded by a trio of small keyholes.

From her satchel, Rose produced the Three Keys of Fate. One by one, she inserted the Bronze, Silver, and Gold key into their respective housings and gave each a quick twist. With a dull thunk the light of the crystal orb went out and the doors swung open.

Stepping inside, they found themselves in the blinding light of a large dome. Beyond the curved crystal which comprised the structure, was open sky and swirling snow, supervised by the watchful Skaian sun. They had reached the very top of the mountain and the Dragon Mistress’s tower to find her domain and, for a moment, they were struck dumb by it’s spectacular beauty.

Until…

“Hey! What the fuck are you guys doing up here?” Demanded a firm voice.

Rose looked towards the center of the throne room to find, of all the crazy things, a throne. It was composed out of crystal, just like the rest of the tower, and dominated by none other than the Dragon Mistress herself. She was a pretty lady, no doubt about it, garbed in bright red robes and wearing a pair of red-tinted spectacles on the end of her pointed nose. Atop her head, amidst a swath of dark hair and two sharp horns, sat a crown of jewel-encrusted dragon bone and in her hand was a fancy-looking cane, also built from dragon bone.
The frightening Dragon Mistress rose from her throne and spoke again:

“Huuuulllllooo??? I’m talking to you, assholes. You guys can’t be up here. This is my private lair, if you haven’t noticed that already.”

“Speak not, foul mage!” Barked Rose. “I have traveled long and far to reach you here. I have killed the Crab King of the East, slayed the Vampire Queen of the West, and sorta-kinda bested the Bee Lord of the South! Now, it’s your turn. The darkness of your oppression will no longer taint this land!”

“Well, well, well.” The Dragon Mistress clapped slowly, sarcastically. “How noble of you, Rose Lalonde. Fore it is you, of course, that stands before me. Why do you care so much for my blood? So what if I command an army of dragons and crush all those who oppose me? I don’t burn down the Emerald City or pillage the Fuchsia Kingdom. I mind my own damn business up here. Is there really a need for any of this?”

“Indeed there is.” Rose stepped forward, wands clenched tight in her fists. “Fore while you allow the major cities of my homeland to stand in fear, you pay no mind to the tiny towns and villages that suffer under your whim. Was it not you, who sent Dragon Knights to kill me and destroy the town of Honey?”

“Well, yeah, but that’s only because you were getting a little too big-headed, weren’t you?” The Dragon Mistress stepped down from her throne to face Rose, clacking her cane against the hard ground as she walked. “Gallivanting all over the place, winning wizard duels left and right, raiding my abandoned dungeons which I leave abandoned to create an overall mood and effect to this fantasy land, again and again and enough already!” The evil mage rubbed at her temple. “I couldn’t stand it anymore, someone had to knock you down a few pegs.”

“Well you made a grave mistake, Dragon Mistress.” Rose drew herself to her full height, an impressive four feet, ten inches. “I challenge thee to a Duel of Wizardly Strife!”

“I agree on these terms.” The Dragon Mistress counted on her fingers. “No familiars, no deus ex machina spells, no krumping spells, and…” She paused for dramatic effect. “loser gets banished to the shadow realm!!! hehehehehehe!!!”

Rose, Jade, and Davesprite all gasped with horror, whilst John just stood there and looked confused.

“What’s the Shadow Realm?” He asked, leaning close to Davesprite.

“I agree to these terms.” Said Rose finally. She didn’t have much of a choice in the matter anyways. The second she challenged the Dragon Mistress, she was bound to duel. All she had to do, for her family’s sake as well as her’s, was not lose. Then everything would be A-OK.
“Very well then.” The Dragon Mistress began doing high kicks. “Just let me warm up a bit, do some stretches, dust off the old cane sword...” Suddenly she leapt at Rose, drawing her hidden cane sword in one smooth motion. “AND LAUNCH A SURPRISE SNEAK ATTACK!!! HEHEHEHE!”

Rose gasped as she dodged the swift attack. The Dragon Mistress truly was the most crafty and dangerous of all of her foes. John, Davesprite, and Jade backed away towards the wall of the crystal dome as the two sorceresses began to duel, a dizzying display of sword play and wand work.

Rose attempted to cast an ironskin spell on herself, to protect her from damage, but the Dragon Mistress intervened with a kick to the ribs before the hex could be completed.

“Dammit!” Cursed Rose, clutching at her abdomen. “I can only cast that spell every thirty minutes!”

“Don’t cool-downs suck?” Snarled the Dragon Mistress, as she advanced once more.

“They do. Almost as much as being stomped in the gut three or so odd weeks after giving birth!”

The Mistress of Dragons halted her attack momentarily.

“Whoa. You were preggers?”

“Yes!”

“And after popping out the kid, you still came to fight me?”

“Of course.”

“What the hell is wrong with you?” The Dragon Mistress was stunned. “You didn’t- you didn’t bring the baby here with you, right?”

“So what if I did?”

“Who does that!??! It’s a child! You can’t take it with you into a dungeon!”

“Don’t lecture me!” Barked Rose and she leapt into battle once more.

As the two powerful magicians dueled, the rest of our band of heroes stood off to the side and fretted nervously (John), resisted joining the fray (Jade), and checked their wizard emails (Davesprite).

“Holy shit. How do hell do I unsubscribe to this newsletter. I swear I get like five wizard emails a day from these assholes.” Grumbled Davesprite as he tapped at his moonstone.

“How can you do that at a time like this?” Grey hair was sprouting like weeds on John’s head as he watched the duel. “This is Rose’s ultimate battle. We traveled soooooooo far to see this and…” He watched as Rose back flipped over a fire spell. “Oh gods that was close.”

“Don’t worry, John.” Assured Jade. She had been watching the battle closely thus far and calculated that Rose stood a fifty-four percent chance of winning. “Rose can handle her own. See!”

She pointed and both John and Davesprite looked to see Rose perform a spectacular move. The witch ducked under a swipe from the Dragon Mistress and jabbed at the villain’s wrist with one of her wands. The sword flew from the evil mage’s hand and she was disarmed! However, Rose wasn’t done yet. She twirled and fired a spell directly into the Dragon Mistress’s stupid face.

“OH GOD MY EYES!!?” Shrieked the Dragon Mistress as she fell to her knees. Her hands scrabbled at her face and peeled off her glasses to reveal that the eyes beneath were now stained
blood-red. “I can’t see! I can’t see!”

“No shit, dumbass. I hit you with a blind-spell.” Rose raised her wands to strike a killing blow. “Any last words, you filthy mage?”

The Dragon Mistress looked up at Rose, albeit a little off to the side, as she was now blind. Anyways, a wide grin split her face, displaying numerous sharp teeth.

“Just one.” She growled and then a swath of red smoke engulfed her. Magical lightening crackled, sparks flew, and if you listened closely you could almost hear the riff to ‘Smoke on the Water’ play in the background. When the smoke disappeared it was revealed that THE DRAGON MISTRESS HAD TRANSFORMED INTO A REAL MOTHERFUCKING DRAGON!!!

“Get fucked!” Roared the Dragon Mistress, not fully realizing that she’d actually said two words instead of one. I’ll give her a pass on that though, as she was now a fucking dragon.

“Oh my dragon rings.” Breathed Rose. “I d- won’t believe it!”

“Believe it, bitch.” Then the Dragon Mistress breathed a plume of scorching hot fire directly at Rose. The poor witch would have been easily incinerated, were it not for the flash of dark fur that tackled her out of the way.

Yeah, motherfuckers, you guessed it. Jade the booty-popping Weredog charged forward and saved Rose from certain death, not a moment too soon either. The two girls slid across the floor, carried by Jade’s momentum, and out of harm’s way.

The Dragon Mistress, still blinded, turned on the spot and searched for her quarry.

“You can’t run from me, Rose Lalonde! I can still smell your fear!!! Also the type of wizard shampoo you use, that too.”

Disentangling herself from Jade, Rose bounced quickly to her feet. She needed to think fast. After blinding the Dragon Mistress, she’d all but assured victory for herself, although her foe’s sudden transformation had swept the metaphorical victory rug right out from under her feet before success could be claimed. The wizard strife had been decided and nullified in the span of about ten seconds. Were the magical laws tied to the terms still in place? Or were they starting from a clean slate?

Rose had no idea, as she had never been in a situation like this before. One thing she did know though, was that defeating this Dragon Mistress would take more than her brute magical strength.

It required teamwork.

“Davesprite!” She yelled, getting her familiar’s attention. “Run a distraction!”

“Finally. I get something to do.” Pocketing his moonstone, Davesprite took to the skies and flew towards the Dragon Mistress’s large, sort of sexy, blind, smoking dragon head. “Hey there, dragon bitch! Come and get me. I’m a delicious sprite with just the juiciest, tastiest little sprite innards.”

“Hmmmmm. I dunno.” The Dragon Mistress mused. “This seems a whole lot like a distraction to me…”

“No! It totally isn’t. I swear on my mouth-watering sprite bones that this one hundred percent genuine.”
“Well, alright then. You better run, sprite-boy! Here I come!”

As the Dragon Mistress chased Davesprite around the tower’s domed peak, Rose consulted with John and Jade.

“Here’s what I’m thinking.” Rose outlined her plan quickly. “The Dragon Mistress’s new scaly armor is much too tough for most of my spells to penetrate it. We have to create a weak spot before I can deal the killing blow.” She turned to John. “That’s when you come in. I need you to sneak up to her and strike her with your hammer. Just under the rib cage should be nice. From there I could get a clean shot right into her heart.”

John swallowed hard.

“You expect me to run over there and hit her with my hammer? Rose, that doesn’t seem safe at all, let alone effective.” He turned to Jade. “Why don’t you hit her with your Weredog claws? That might do the trick.”

“No.” Answered Rose before Jade could speak. “It has to be you, John. You can do this. I know you can.” As John scrambled to think of a coherent response, one that would swiftly and accurately convince Rose otherwise, the witch took his hammer from his belt and tapped it repeatedly with her wand. The weapon glowed for a second before turning back to normal. “There, that should help. I placed a temporary enchantment on your hammer. It should last long enough for you to put a dent in her hide.”

“R-Rose.” John was trembling with fear as she shoved the hammer into his arms. “What if this doesn’t work???”

“It will.” Seizing her boyfriend/fiancé/love interest by the front of his shirt, Rose pressed her lips passionately to his. Oh, how John would have liked to had stayed there, meshed with Rose, as Weredog Jade stood awkwardly nearby, and as Davesprite dueled the dragon, for the rest of eternity. However, there was work to be done and little time to be smooching. Rose pulled away again. “I trust you, John, and I love you.”

“I- I love you too.” He responded. He could feel warmth from her kiss beginning to flow into his veins.

“Good.” Rose turned him towards the monstrous Dragon Mistress and gave him a slap on the ass. “Now go get ‘em, tiger.”

“Right. Got it.” John steeled himself. It was time to be the hero he always sort of aspired to be, in a mildly interested, half-assed sort of way. The fiery strength bestowed upon him by Rose’s final kiss urged him to dash forward, towards the mighty evil mage.

Davesprite was buzzing around the ceiling of the dome like a trapped fly as the Dragon Mistress reached up for him with her dragon hands. The dome was much too small for her to spread her massive wings and she couldn’t quite reach Davesprite from the floor, so overall she was beginning to get vaguely frustrated.

“Dammit, sprite! Get down here! I promise that I won’t eat you!” The Dragon Mistress pleaded. “I just… wanna talk. You know? Get to know each other!”

Unbeknownst to her, John dashed betwixt her large dragon feet and ran up right to her large dragon belly. The red scales gleamed at him with supposed impenetrability. Raising his hammer above his head, John gritted his teeth, focused all of his power, and prayed that Rose was right about this.
Then, with a mighty yell, he struck.

“AH! SONOVABITCH!” Cried the Dragon Mistress. She twisted and looked down to find none other than John Egbert beneath her. He had succeeded in smacking one of her scales free and now held the red plate inconspicuously in his hands. “Are you joshing me right now?!” The evil mage demanded furiously. “That’s it! EAT SHIT, INTERLOPER!!!”

She swiped at John with her claw and he quickly blocked the attack with her own scale. However, he was still sent him flipping through the air like a poorly-made paper airplane that you try to throw, but just ends up flopping around feebly until it lands in a trashcan or something. That’s basically what John did, albeit when he connected with the wall of the crystal dome, it was with a sharp *crack* that caused everyone in the vicinity to wince horribly.

“John!” Rose cried, watching her lover slump the ground. She tried to run to his side, but Jade caught her by the arm.

“Rose!” She shook the witch. “We need to finish this!”

“I- He… You’re right.” Rose narrowed her eyes and set her sights on the Dragon Mistress, more importantly, the unguarded portion of her belly. Twirling her wands, Rose gave a final command. “Jade… You. Me. Fastball special.”

“Coming right up!”

Then Jade grabbed Rose by the robes, lifted the smaller woman off of her feet, and then spun around three times. On the third turn, Jade released Rose and hurled her through the air like a human-javelin, which is essentially what she was. Rose aimed her wands as she flew. She’d only get one shot at this.

The Dragon Mistress’s eyes widened comically as Rose sailed towards her. This was honestly one of the *last* things she ever expected to happen. In a split-second, the evil mage put together the pieces of Rose’s plan. It was too late for her to shield herself from the powerful blast of magic that Rose fired at her exposed belly, but maybe it wasn’t too late to do a little damage of her own…

She swiped at Rose with her tail, just as Rose’s spell connected with the chink in her dragon armor. The magical bolt flew straight and true, through the Dragon Mistress and up into her heart, just as Rose was swatted out of the air like a pesky mosquito by the Dragon Mistress’s powerful tail.

The two sorceresses fell as one.

Rose slammed into the ground in a crumpled heap and slid over next to John, while Dragon Mistress of the North tumbled onto her side. Her large dragon body disintegrated before Davesprite and Jade’s eyes and black, evil spirits floated up from her corpse to drift through the ceiling and out of sight, going who the fuck knows where.

Finally, the last of the Four Evil Mages of Skaia had been slain.

But at what cost?

Davesprite and Jade floated/ran to their friends as quickly as they could and descended upon them.

“I’m fine.” John croaked feebly, as Davesprite shook him gently. “I just think my arm is broken. Ch-Check on Rose. Is she…”

Jade inspected the greatest witch ever. Her head had been split open upon contact with the ground
and gross magic blood was leaking all over the place. However, upon closer inspection, Jade found
that the witch was still breathing barely.

“She’s alive, John.” Scooping her friend into her arms, Jade set her sights on the large doors. “I’m
taking her to Janesprite right now. Dave, you have to help John up, okay?”

“Got it.” Responded the sprite as Jade quickly dashed from the tower.

She was the fastest and strongest out of the group, so it made sense for her to go ahead with the
wounded Rose, as they would need to act fast if they were to save her life. Within a minute’s time,
Jade returned to the collapsed hallway where she and her friends had been separated from the rest of
the group. Hope blossomed in her chest when she saw that most of the rocks had been cleared and
that Janesprite, Roxy, Dirk, Grandpa Jake, and of course little no-name waited there.

“Jade!” Cheered Grandpa Jake. “How was the final battle? Is that dastardly Dragon Mistress dead?
And what of your reward? Did you find any sweet dungeon loot? We found a treasure trove of gold
and rubies back there! It’s so grand, you’ve got to see….. Oh shit. What happened to Rose?”

“She was tail-whipped by the Dragon Mistress.” Jade explained quickly as she gently lowered Rose
to the ground. “Janesprite, you’ve got to help her!”

Janesprite inspected Rose for herself and a deep frown settled itself on her ghost face when she
noticed the gash on the witch’s head.

“Oh geez. This looks bad.” Janesprite said. “This wound is deep. There might be damage to her
brain.”

“But you can fix that right?” Asked Jade. She could feel tears welling in her eyes.

“I- I dunno. It will take a lot of healing magic and… she might not be the same afterwards. I’m
talking personality changes, memory loss, shifts in sexual orientation. Performing magic on the brain
is tricky stuff, Jade.”

“You’ll try though, right?” Jade pleaded. “If you can save her life… dammit, Janesprite, you have to
try!”

With a heavy heart, Janesprite summoned blue sparks of healing magic to her ghost finger tips.

“I’ll do my best.”

Then Janesprite gently felt around Rose’s wound, sending the blue sparks of magic inside to do their
work. The sparks rebuilt the damaged portions of Rose’s brain, cemented pieces of her head bone
back into place, and then knitted the skin of her scalp together once more. A scar across her head
would remain, but her headband would hide it well.

Not that that mattered anyways, as all of Jade’s worries evaporated once Rose’s violet eyes flicked
open.

“Rose!” Jade gasped with joy, happy tears leaking from her eyes. “I- oh gods. How are you feeling?
Do you know who I am?!”

A few minutes later, Davesprite arrived, hauling a weak John behind him. The Hero of Honey town
was in a lot of pain, as it turns out that more than his arm was broken in his nasty fall. He wasn’t
about to bitch out. There was no time to rest. He needed to see that Rose was okay.
The first thing the two men saw when they finally reached the group was Jade. She was standing in the center of the crowd, her shoulders quaking with uncontrolled sobs.

“Jade?” John stumbled, with Davesprite’s help, to her side. “Jade, what’s wrong? Where’s Rose?”

The Weredog looked to John, quickly wiping her eyes on the back of her hands.

“J- John…” She spluttered. “Rose… Janesprite healed her and… she just started freaking out! She didn’t know who any of us were. She attacked us and ran away. She went down the mountain. John… she doesn’t remember anything!”

“No.” John gasped, confused and frustrated that Jade would pull this kind of prank in a time like this. “That’s stupid. That’s bullshit. Where is she?”

“She’s telling the truth, John.” Said Dirk, respectfully regal for once in his life. “Rose took off.”

“And you didn’t go after her!?” John struggled away from Davesprite and tried to walk, but fell. “Jade- Help me! If we’re quick. We can catch her. I just need to talk to her.”

Without hesitation, Jade grabbed John and helped him to his feet. The pair descended down through the mountain once more, with Davesprite and the rest of the group at their heels. They went through the labyrinth once more, following Rose’s path through the labyrinth, and tracked her all the way out of the mountain and into the northern plains.

However, it was all for naught. The greatest witch ever was never seen again.

There was silence in the bedroom as Dave finished his tale. Rosie sat on the edge of her bed, her blankets and stuffed toys forgotten, as she stared at her father with an open mouth and wide eyes. Dave sat in his chair, eyes heavy, chest tight, and mouth drawn up into a thin line.


“Yeah.” Said Dave.

“What about everyone else!? What happened next?!!?”

“The Corpse Maiden, who had helped Rose and her friends through the dragon labyrinth of champions, sent her Beemen minions all over Skaia in search of Rose, but they always came back empty handed or not at all. Eventually the Corpse Maiden just gave up. Grandpa Jake went back to Wooftown with his Weredog pals, but not before building a statue in the northern plains outside of the Dragon Mistress’s mountain as a memorial to Rose and her adventures.” Dave waved his hand vaguely. He always hated that stupid statue. “Ummm… Janesprite went back to the Fuchsia Kingdom and became head warlock healer of the infirmary. Dirk and his sailor-pirate-ninjas gave up their pillaging ways and worked to rebuild some of the towns destroyed by the Dragon Mistress’s dragon minions. And Chazz Limplewickle and the wizards of Wizard Harvard Community College got together and created the Young Witch’s Academy.”

“What about Roxy and Uncle John and you and Mom and…” Rosie’s eyes widened. “What about the baby?!!?”

Dave’s hands wrestled in his lap as he continued.

“Uh, your mom and I started dating and well… we kissed and did some other stuff (sex) and, as it
“Turns out, she was my one true love and the curse was reversed.” Dave motioned to himself. “Obviously. Anyways we settled in Martindale where Chazz was building the Young Witch’s Academy. Your mom became town mayor, as you well know, and I opened up the first DJ wizard radio station in all of Skaia.”

“And???” Prompted Rosie.

“And well, John went back to Honey Town. He wasn’t… in a good place for a long while. Roxy sort of looked after him. I suppose she still liked him a little bit. They dated briefly, a couple years after the Dragon Mistress died. John never got over Rose though, he couldn’t, you see? He was incapable of loving anyone else and I think that sort of got to Roxy.” Dave cast a glance towards the door, from where Roxy and Jade laughed and chatted in the living room. “She did the smart thing and broke up with him after about a year or so. There was nothing in that relationship for her. I suppose she went out adventuring again, your mom and I didn’t see her for many years, until recently…”

“And what about the baby?!” Rosie was practically falling out of her bed at this point. “All the times we’ve gone to visit Uncle John, he’s never mentioned having a kid. Hell, no one has!”

“Well, you see….” Dave wiped a line of sweat off his brow. “J- John couldn’t care for the kid, not on his own, not without Rose. He… He had to give her up.”

“That’s horrible! What happened to her?”

“She, uh… You see, Rosie. You’re… uh.”

Dave swallowed hard and pressed on:

“You’re adopted.”

Chapter End Notes

And there it is: the plot twist that you in all reality should have seen coming! The next and final chapter is the epilogue.

Thanks for reading.
- Mike
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

Thanks to everyone who has ever read or reviewed this story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Epilogue

Rosie Strider’s brain had ceased to function.

She sat on the edge of her bed, clothed in her nightgown, clutching her stuffed murkmonk, and staring at her father with dead eyes. The words that he’d just said had been audible, understandable, coherent and yet none of the above. She had seen his lips move, felt the momentary **snap** of understanding and then…

Dave was equally motionless. He watched his daughter, hidden behind his tinted glasses, and waited with a tight chest for her to respond. Anything from a feverish denial to furious cursing would do, anything besides the pained confusion resonating from her slack jaw that seemed to break Dave’s heart a fraction more with every second that passed.

“I- uh…” Rosie tried.

It all made sense, in a backwards, convoluted sort of way. Rosie didn’t look much of anything like her parents. Sure, her hair was dark like Jade’s and her skin was pale like Dave’s, but her nose was much too small, her cheekbones were much too high, and her violet eyes were, of course, nothing like the shining emeralds or rubies set into her “parents” heroic visages.

There was also the fact that Rosie was a natural-born magic-user, unlike her parents. Rosie was also a single child, whereas Weredogs tended to have litters of pups ranging anywhere in numbers from six to twelve kids a pop. Not to mention the fact that humans turned sprites turned humans were typically infertile. Anyone, who hadn’t been lied to their entire lives, probably could have figured out that Rosie was an apple far from the DaveJade tree, hell, she was probably from the next god-damn orchard.

It all made sense and it **hurt**.

“So… that’s the whole story then? You can wrap it up in two words.” Rosie swallowed hard and quoted her father: “**You’re adopted.**”

“Er, Yeah. I guess so. Although, you have to admit,” Dave smirked slightly. “The story was pretty fucking awesome in itself. What kind of father/teacher/story-teller would I be if I didn’t heighten the big reveal with twenty four chapters of nonsensical ramblings?”

“I guess not much of one at all.” Rosie answered. She looked down at her hands, small and delicate, and picked idly at one of her nails. She was oddly calm about it all, maybe because none of this really felt real. “I- I have a lot of questions.”

Dave nodded.
“Well, yeah. No shit. I’d be freaked out if you didn’t have questions. But maybe…” He cast a glance towards the door and the people beyond. “Maybe it would be best if I didn’t answer them alone.”

“Mom’s going to be pissed.” Rosie muttered. “She didn’t want me to know at all, did she?”

“No, she didn’t. But now you do know and there can’t be a damn thing done about that.” Rising from his chair, Dave extended his hand towards his daughter. “Come on. Let’s go.”

Rosie stared at his proffered hand. It was warm and familiar. She’d spent days wandering the streets, clutching that hand for guidance, looking towards it for a gratifying fist-bump and never really realized what it all was until now.

A big old lie.

And yet, she took the hand anyway and allowed herself to be steered from her bedroom, because she knew, that no matter how angry or hurt or sad she felt, Dave and Jade were probably feeling the same thing. They’d probably felt the same way for the past ten years, as they raised her. And they’d probably feel the same way until the very day they died, probably in a fierce battle with a savage pack of bandit orcs or something.

Also, Rosie wanted answers, and she wasn’t going to get them by being an asshole. For now, she’d have to cooperate.

“Hey, you two.” Jade grinned brightly when she saw her family step out of the hall. She was sitting on edge of the sofa, whilst Roxy the sexy Werecat occupied the other. They were deep in conversation about one boring adult topic or another. “I thought you were going to bed, Rosie.”

“We had a talk instead.” Dave answered. His fingers tightened perceptibly around Rosie’s. “I, uh… told Rosie the truth about her being adopted and everything.”

There was silence for a long moment, and then Jade’s eyes narrowed.

The room grew colder, the walls slanted inwards, the lights dimmed, and demons from the depths of hell seemed to claw their way up from their pits of fire, into Jade’s absolutely livid gaze, focused solely on Dave Fucking Strider. A little piss may or may not have leaked out of Dave in that moment, as he was faced with the unadulterated bulk of Jade’s ‘mom-stare’, which for those of you who don’t know, is some of the most brutal and dangerous magic to ever exist.

“I better go.” Said Roxy as she GTFO.

The Werecat absconded from the home, scurried through the streets of Martindale, and retreated to her cozy, little cottage on the far side of town. However, it wasn’t enough to distance herself from the furious screams of one Jade Harley-Strider.

“I better go.” Said Roxy as she GTFO.

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“Dave Strider!!!” Jade bellowed. “YOU HAVE GOT TO BE FUCKING KIDDING ME!!! We agreed that we’d handle this together, as a family! It’s a really, really delicate topic and- OH MY GOLDEN RINGS! You’ve been telling her ‘the greatest witch ever’ haven’t you? Ugh! I knew it. I knew you were going behind my back! How dare you, Dave! How dare you betray my trust like that!!!”

“S- She was going to find out eventually.” Dave spluttered, as Jade towered over him. “I just thought…”

“That’d you spice up the big reveal with a seriously age-inappropriate story?!!” Jade threw her hands into the air. “For fuck’s sake! Do you think about the repercussions of anything that you do?!
Imagine how Rosie must feel now, to know that we aren’t even her real parents and…”

Jade trailed off. In her blind fury she’d all but forgotten about the young girl that had been standing awkwardly, yet fearfully, by her father’s side this entire time. With wide eyes, Jade crouched before the child and took her gently by the shoulders.

“Oh, Rosie. I’m so sorry.” She gasped. “I have no idea what you’re feeling right now. Oh gods. You must be so angry with us. We’re sorry. After Rose disappeared, John couldn’t… not with the curse…” Her voice broke. “I’m so sorry.”

“Mom.” Rosie thumped Jade on the forehead as the woman started to cry. “Mom. Get a grip. It’s okay. I don’t hate you. If anything, I should probably be thanking you for taking care of me all these years.” The young girl looked up to meet her father’s shaded gaze. “You two are the only parents I’ve ever known, after all!”

A small smirk quirked Dave’s face. Stooping, he took each of his girls by the arms and guided them towards the sofa.

“Come on, guys. I believe a family meeting is in order.” Together, the Strider family took a seat and breathed a collective sigh. Tears were still leaking from Jade’s face at an alarming rate, dripping into Rosie’s raven hair, who was clutched tightly in the mother’s lap. “So, Rosie.” Dave continued. He was much more relaxed now that Jade wasn’t screaming. Hopefully he could keep it that way. “You said that you had some questions for us.”

“Well, yeah. Of course I do!” Twisting in Jade’s grip, Rosie regarded her parents fully. “First of all, I want to know what happened to Rose, er, my mom. You say that she disappeared but… I mean, someone must have seen her since.”

Jade took a moment to dab at her eyes with the sleeves of her sweater.

“There have been… rumors, of course.” She began after a moment. “People all across Skaia, from the eastern coast to the western plateaus, have claimed to see her at one point or another. In the months, even years, after she disappeared, John searched for her wherever there was a supposed sighting. But it was always just some impersonator or an oddly-shaped stalagmite. No one has ever had real proof that they’ve seen her in years.”

“That’s so stupid though! I mean, yeah, she lost her memory. So what? The Rose you guys knew wasn’t one to go into hiding, was she? She seemed like the type of witch who loved the glory and fame that came with being a great adventurer! Even if she didn’t remember you guys, why would she just hide like that?”

Dave and Jade exchanged a quick glance. They’d had many discussions such as this amongst themselves in the past and the only solid answer that they could come up with was the possibility that not all of Rose’s memory had been erased by the procedure. A small part of the new Rose, the one who traveled with Jade, fell in love with John, and put up with Davesprite’s shit, was probably still rattling around in there somewhere. When Dave and Jade brought this idea up to Rosie, the young girl will still no less confused.

“So, what? You’re saying that her time with you guys taught her modesty or something equally stupid?” Rosie shook her head. “No. Maybe she was confused by the large blank space in her memory, but would she really hide herself away just so she could figure it all out on her own?”

“Well what other reason is there?” Dave asked. “It’s either that or she’s dead.”
“And we… don’t really want to believe that.” Jade continued. “At least not yet, not until we know for sure.” Jade gnawed anxiously on the inside of her cheek. “I’m sorry that she isn’t here, Rosie. I really am.”

“It’s okay.” The girl sighed and sank deeper into Jade’s arms. “It sucks but… it’s okay. You were a good mom, Jade. Even though you never really wanted to be one in the first place.”

The house descended into a horribly awkward silence then. Jade held her daughter, like she had so many times before, and yet it was so much more different. The young witch was rigid in her arms and it was obvious to her, as she gazed down at the curve of Rosie’s cheek, just how different the two of them really looked. In the end, it was Rosie once more who broke the silence with a small cough:

“So… uh. I guess you guys decided to name me after my mom then, huh? That makes sense.”

“It was John actually.” Corrected Dave. “It was really important to him, even though we sort of did our best to talk him out of it. In the end, we respected his wishes.”

“John.” Rosie repeated the name, as if testing the weight of it on her tongue for the first time ever. “I need to go talk to him.”

Now it was Jade’s turn to stiffen against her daughter. A small fire blossomed in the Werewolf’s chest and, if you listened closely, you could hear the sound of her sharp, canine teeth grinding together.

“Why?” She asked of her daughter. “Why in the name of Grimstein would you need to talk to John?”

“Because he’s my dad, of course!” Rosie struggled from Jade’s grip and positioned herself before her parents. She was at eye level with them now, with the pair of them sitting down. “I have as much questions for him as I do for you guys, probably more! I’ve visited with John back when he was just my uncle lots of times. There’s no reason for you to flip out now.”

“There’s every reason!” Jade made to rise from the sofa, but Dave stopped her with a firm hand on her knee. Casting her husband a scathing glance, Jade turned back to Rosie, but reluctantly kept her seat. “If you come to John now and confront him with this, it’ll be nothing but trouble. He’s in no frame of mind to deal with this. Hell, he’s spent the past ten years trying to forget about all of it. He’s not your father, Rosie, not really. He never was! You’re just going to get hurt if you go to him…”

“Mom. Mom!” Rosie had to shout to be heard over Jade’s tirade. “Stop! That’s not what this is about. I’m not dumb enough to think that he’ll take me back or that he’d have a good explanation for anything, but dammit, I deserve to hear from him what I can.” Suddenly Rosie leapt forward and seized both of her parents in a tight hug. “You are the greatest parents ever! No doubt about it! And I love you both with all of my heart,” She pulled back then, so that she could look at each of them in the eye. “But I need to talk to Uncle John. I need to hear what he has to say. You, dad, trusted me enough to tell me the truth, so trust me to do this. I’ll be careful, I promise. I just need to talk to him.”

Jade opened her mouth to object again, but Dave was quicker:

“Let her go, Jade.” He said, comforting his wife with a one-armed hug. “Let her go talk to him. It won’t do any harm.”

“It will do hella harm!”

“No it won’t.”
“Yes, it will!” Jade cried. “There’s no time to take her all the way to Honey Town! We each have responsibilities here and… Fuck! Why is this so hard!”

She buried her face in her hands then. The stress was becoming too much for the Weredog mother/mayor. In a matter of minutes it felt as if her whole world had been turned upside-down. Carefully, as if scared she might trigger another shouting spell, Rosie peeled her mother’s fingers away from her face.

“I’m going.” Said Rosie, once Jade’s eyes were visible once more. “There’s nothing that can be done about that. I just need you to promise me one thing mom.”

“What?”

“That you’ll be here when I get back.”

And then, with a furious nod, and yet more tears, Jade crushed her daughter to her chest once more and cherished every second that they spent together. All the while, Dave watched and felt that familiar tingle of sadness stir in his gut. His daughter was all grown up now practically and a small part of him knew, as he watched her get squeezed to death by Jade, that their nights spent swapping stories were dead and gone for good.

The next morning, Rosie Strider woke up bright and early, packed a suitcase, bid her parents farewell, and boarded the first bonetrain to Honey Town. Dave and Jade had been wary, of course, about sending Rosie off on this quest by her lonesome, but then again, she was of legal adventuring age and they had already agreed to let her go, so there were little excuses they could use to back out now.

"She'll come back." Assured Dave, as he and his wife stood on the platform and watched Rosie's small form disappear aboard the bonetrain. "A few hours alone with John and she'll be begging to come home. Don't you worry about that."

"I hope you're right." Sighed Jade. "We put too much work into her for her to just run off."

"Yeah, well. Now's the chance for all that hard work to pay off." Gently, Dave tugged his wife away. "Come on, babe. Let's go home."

And they did.

After finding a vacant carriage about the bonetrain, Rosie stowed her bag under her seat and spent the rest of the ride tugging at the collar of her traveling cloak and fretting about what exactly she was going to say when she came face to face with her biological father once more.

In the past, she’d spent sparse time in her 'Uncle John's' company. She, Dave, and Jade would travel to Honey Town to visit him during holidays or just spontaneously to check in, but Uncle John had never made the trip to Martindale though. Hell, as far as Rosie knew he had never left his shit town for anything ever in the past ten years. She'd always just considered him something of a recluse, a kindly man who enjoyed the comforts of home a little too much. However, now that she thought about it, she didn’t really know much about the new John Egbert at all.

"Ladies and Gentlemen!" Buzzed a disembodied voice from the wizard intercom. "We will be arriving at our destination in less than ten minutes. I hope you've enjoyed your ride with us and that you enjoy your stay here even more, although that seems unlikely! May I suggest that you visit the Skaia famous "Jared's Peanut Gallery" while you're in town, as that's probably the only thing worth seeing in this shit-hole. Seriously, there's nothing here. It's like ten buildings and most of them don't
have running water or a door. Why did you come here? You should just stay aboard and ride the rest of the way to the City of Lakewater. That place is waaaaay cooler than Honey Town. There isn't even any honey here, so if you came for that, sorry bro."

Collecting her things, Rose handed her ticket over to the conductor for a final stamp and stepped off the bonetrain into the town square. The conductor was right about this place, of course. I mean, why would he lie about that? Honey Town was still a veritable cesspool of misery.

The streets were unpaved, store fronts sported faded paint and cracked windows, and the mud statue that was supposed to look like burnt Mayor Buzzles more resembled a clump of mud some obligated villager had half-heartedly slapped together. Which, oddly enough, is exactly what it was.

Rosie confidentially made her way through the streets to Uncle John’s shitty hut on the edge of town. It was small and crappy, built from rocks and logs and some rubber bands that John found in the garbage bin behind the town library. On the side, Rosie could see some yellowing stains that was most likely egg yolk and an ugly piece of graffiti that read: “The Hero of Honey Town” in blue letters, accompanied by a crude picture of an stout knight with the head of a donkey in place of a normal human head.

It was an abstract piece, the likes of which gave Rosie pause.

“Hey! Get away from there, you rascal!” Called a frustrated voice.

Rosie turned to see that none other than Uncle John had suddenly rounded the corner of the hut. He wore dark pants and a work shirt, complete with suspenders. A bow tie was knotted around his neck below his magnificent beard, a bright-red rose was pinned to his lapel, and a woodcutter’s axe was propped up on his shoulder. His face softened and then split into a wide grin when he recognized Rosie.

“Rosie!” He cheered, throwing his axe aside to greet her. “What in Skaia’s name are you doing here? Where’s Dave and Jade? You didn’t come all this way by yourself did you? I was just chopping some logs up to make a new roof for Miss Fireburst and…”

“Uncle John.” Rosie cut off the man mid-rant. He didn’t get many visitors and it showed in the swiftness of his speech and the wrinkles of his smile. “I did come by myself, yeah, but it’s cool with my parents. They bought me a ticket and everything.”

“Oh.” John scratched his beard. “Well I would have cleaned up a bit if I’d known someone was coming.” His eyes flashed momentarily to the graffiti, then back to Rose. “Uh. Do you wanna come in? Here, let me take your bag.”

Rosie took an involuntary step back as John made to move forward.

During the trip here, Rosie had planned out this whole interaction in her head. She’d be real polite and courteous to Uncle John. She’d ease him into the deep end by putting herself on his side, assuring him that she wasn’t angry or depressed. He would answer all of her questions honestly and then they’d hug and be best friends forever!

However, right then, as she stood opposite the scruffy man, with his thick glasses and wide grin, she felt a certain tightness in her chest. Her fists clenched around her pack and her teeth ground together painfully. Here she was, with the bitter truth weighing on her shoulders, as he stood there and smiled and laughed and acted like everything was just A-OK.

He didn’t know. He didn’t know that she knew.
And Rosie wanted him to know.

“I’d rather stay out here if it’s all the same to you.” Rosie was just as surprised as John to hear her voice waver slightly.

“Rosie?” John questioned, face full of concern. “Are you alright? What’s wrong?”

“Y- You’re my dad.” Hot tears stung her eyes, the same tears that she’d neglected the shed the night previous, but she refused to wipe them away. “I know that you are. My dad- Dave, told me that you were. You’re my dad.”

Just like Rosie had seized up upon hearing the news the first time, so did John. He stood, mid-step, with his mouth agape and his hand outstretched to comfort Rosie. He struggled to comprehend what was happening. Never, in all of his many years, had he expected to be faced with the past like this, out of the clear blue.

He was waaaaay too sober for this shit.

“Rosie…” He began, but the young girl beat him to it:

“Why?” She demanded, crying openly now. “You left me! You passed me off to your friends like I was just another burden. So what if you couldn’t love me? People take care of each other all the time without loving each other. You didn’t have to throw me away. You didn’t have to lie to me all my life! You didn’t have to come back to this shit town, where every hates you!” Out of anger, the young witch pitched her bag at John’s head. Luckily for him though, her aim was off and the bag sailed away to land in the dirt harmlessly. “You could have been there for me! You weren’t there when I broke my arm when I was six or when I got accepted into the Young Witches Academy! Not loving is one thing, but I don’t think you ever even liked me, did you!?!?”

It was John’s saving grace that he lived so far away from any of his neighbors, or else someone probably would have come to investigate the commotion. Rosie didn’t show any signs of stopping any time soon either. In fact, she seemed hell-bent on blaming John for every bad thing that had ever happened in her life, from the death of her pet furbeetle to the rainstorm that canceled her birthday party last year. By the time the girl ran out of breath, her eyes were red, her nose was streaming, and John was almost near tears himself.

The pair of them stood there, feet apart, simply looking at each other for a second or two.

John swallowed hard.

“D- Do you… wanna come inside?” He repeatedly hoarsely.

Silently, Rosie nodded and followed him around the hut to the door, pausing only to grab her discarded bag. Once inside, John put the kettle on the fire and made a couple glasses of warm tea. Then the two sat opposite one another, Rosie on the shitty bed and John on a lone chair.

The chair was made out of painwood, a special kind of wood composed entirely out of splinters.

Just thought you should know that.

Anyways, over ten minutes passed in uncomfortable silence as Rosie sipped her tea and dabbed at her eyes with her cloak.

“I’m sorry.” She said eventually. “I- I didn’t mean any of that stuff. I know it’s not your fault.”
“It’s okay.” John responded, almost immediately. “I deserve it.”

“No you don’t. The curse…”

“The curse didn’t say anything about being an awful uncle.” With a heavy sigh, John rubbed the back of his neck. “You’re right, Rosie. I should have been there for you and I wasn’t.”

“Why?”

“Because- I couldn’t…” John struggled with his words. “You- You have her eyes.”

“That’s it?”

“You sound like her a bit too. When you laugh.” A healthy swig of tea burnt John’s throat, but he pressed on despite the pain. “I was never cut out to be a dad, Rosie.”

“Oh, but Dave and Jade were?”

That brings a small smile to his lips.

“They saw me struggling and they knew that they could do better. They maybe didn’t want to be parents, but they sure wanted to be heroes.” Suddenly, John leaned forward in his chair, to look at Rosie seriously. “They saved you, Rosie. You may feel like I threw you away, but I didn’t. I… I gave you up.”

“You didn’t have to.”

“Yeah, I did. You said that people can care for each other without love, but honestly that’s a silly thing to say. You get to make those wild claims because you grew up with love, Rosie. Dave and Jade made sure of that.” Behind the thick rims of his glasses, John’s blue eyes grew a little distant. “You don’t know what it’s like to live without love. It- it’s not something I’d ever wish on anyone.”

“Roxy loved you. Even when you didn’t.”

“Fuuuuuh. Roxy.” Another small smile quirked John’s lips, before he exhaled heavily. “She was so stubborn. I told her about the curse, but she never listened. Not until it became obvious, at least. I haven’t seen her in years.”

“She’s teaching me magic now. Her and my dad.”

“I thought you were going to the Young Witches Academy.”

“Got expelled for an illegal peanut transmogrification spell.”

“Haha!” A bark of a laugh tore itself from John’s lips and he struggled not to spew tea all over the dusty floor. “Holy shit. That’s so awesome. No one’s done a spell like that since…”

“My mother? Yeah, I know.” Rosie was able to perceive the sharp decline in mood once more as those words left her lips. John, who had been smiling before, shrunk in on himself. His eyes grew glassy and the lines of his face sunk in deeper than ever. Fingering the rim of her mug, Rosie continued regardless: “Uncle John or Dad or whatever I’m supposed to call you now… why don’t you come with me? Come back to Martindale. You can live with your friends. You won’t be ridiculed or lonely or poor. Roxy lives there, maybe you guys can hang out again and…”

“I can’t leave Honey Town.” John shook his head feverishly. “I need to stay here.”
“Why? It’s so awful. This town doesn’t need a hero anymore. No town does thanks to what you, my parents, and Rose did.” Rosie pleaded with him. “Please, Uncle John. Listen to me.”

“Rose is still out there.” He stated plainly.

“So? If you think that’s true then you shouldn’t be hiding away here. Uncle John, that makes no sense.” The young girl shifted closer to the edge of the bed. “Also… I hate to be that gal, but it’s been over a decade since anyone’s seen her, right? She might be dead.”

“No. She’s alive. I’d know if she wasn’t.” With trembling fingers, John scratched absentmindedly at his chest. “I have to stay here in Honey Town.”

“But why?”

“Because—Because Rose is still out there somewhere and I…” John swallowed hard as his voice shook. He started over. “One day she’ll remember and I have to be somewhere where she can find me.”

Rosie knew then that her Uncle John was a lost cause.

Rising from the bed, she moved over and hugged him tightly. She may have still harbored some anger towards the poor man, but he was family after all and it’s difficult to stay mad at family for long. So yeah. Maybe Uncle John couldn’t love her, but she could sure love him. And if he needed someone to stand by his side while he waited, then why couldn’t it be her?

Who knows? Maybe Rosie wouldn’t be all that opposed to waiting with him either.

THE END.

Chapter End Notes

Well that’s the end of that shit. If you leave a comment, I’d love to hear not just your opinions on the ending, but the story as a whole! Tell me what you liked, what you didn't like, all that jazz. I'll really appreciate it and I'll respond to any questions you have, mostly.

I liked this story mostly, basically because I never felt any pressure to take it seriously. I was never worried about being deep or profound or angsty. It was just silly bullshit, full of references and off-color humor. I had a lot of fun with it and if you, reading this, had a fraction of that fun, then I'd consider this story to be well worth the time I put into it. I dunno what I plan on doing next, but you can always send me prompts to my tumblr: mlp-mike. Chances are good that I'll write it. Until next time...

Thanks for reading.
- Mike

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!