

THE
OWENG JUICE TV
♦ ZINE ♦



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Mod Intros



ALPH ZEE
HOST/WRITER



I'm a longtime writer, MCYTber, and member of the juice café whos the type of person to do any and everything -- *eventually*. I discovered Owen after YouTube recommended me 21 hours of the most lifechanging angst ever. Been here ever since!



HAPPYRAINBOW2002



ALPHABETICAL_AZ



ALPHABETICAL-AZ



PIXIE
HEAD MOD/ILLUSTRATOR/FORMATTOR
(she/they)



Local fey being, Pixie first got into Owen when it decided to watch his Outsiders SMP series, and has been stuck in the maze ever since!

She enjoys tuning in to (and furking in) the Juiceathons, and is eagerly anticipating Pantfcon SMP.



SEVEREVOIDDAGON

Contributor Intros



BLUET
ILLUSTRATOR

(she/her)

Bluét is a multifandom artist and writer who spends her spare time thinking about block men. She discovered Owen in VSMP and fell in love with his storytelling style. She will absolutely put her favourite characters into Situations™



BLUETBLUISH



BLOOTBLUET



C.K. WELLS
WRITER

(he/they)

C.K. Wells is an aspiring filmmaker who writes short stories on the side.



CKWELLSNOVELIST



THEAMATEURFILMAKER



COPPER
ILLUSTRATOR

(he/star/paws)

Minecraft enthusiast, small time meyt. World's biggest post office S2 fan. We have been an Owen fan since about 2021!



DALLIE
ILLUSTRATOR

(they/she)

Still quite a newbie artist, big enjoyer of Minecraft and MCYT. Dabbled in Owen's Outsiders POV in 2022 and it was meant to be from there.



DALLIE



DALLIE



DALLIE



ELLIOTT

WRITER

(he/any)

Elliott spends far too much time in fandom events, drawing and writing about the various characters that infiltrate his brain! He's got far too many passions for one lifetime and could never choose just one favourite for anything.

ELLIOTTHEDUMB ELLIOTTHEDUMB



EVEREMM

WRITER

(they/she)

Author within the MCYT community. Big on angst. I discovered Owen in Empires, fell in love with NewLife, and have been watching ever since.

EVEREMME EVEREMM



FANDOM QUEEN

ILLUSTRATOR

(she/her)

Artist and meme/shitpost maker who spends most of her time daydreaming more than actually doing stuff she wants to do.

THE_FANDOM_QUEENXOX TTHE_FANDOM_QUEENXOX THE-FANDOM-QUEENXOX



HAL

WRITER

(they/them)

I'm a fanfic writer, a huge fan of MCYT, and a more recent fan of Owen after watching Outsiders & New Life last summer! I've been invested in his style of storytelling through roleplay ever since!

FEAST-OF-CROWS



JAMAZZIL

ILLUSTRATOR

(she/they)

Not just an artist but an actress and ttrpg avid players that found in Owen's characters and stories a lot of inspiration and admiration.

JAMAZZILBLOG



KODIE

ILLUSTRATOR

(it/they)

Hello gays theys and slays! I only discovered i can be in randoms like 3 or 4 years ago then was immediately hooked. Im also queer af lol

HOLLOWLAVV



LYN

ILLUSTRATOR

(they/any)

An artist who found Owen through New Life and has been here ever since, though you may not see me often. Big fan of birds, lore, and weird animals!

LINCORNISOVO LINCORNISOVO



MERCURY

ILLUSTRATOR

(any/all)

I'm an artist from Greece that has been obsessed with Minecraft for as long as I can remember. That's why I fell in love with Owen and POW's stories and have done so for a few years now.

MERCURYISINDEFINITE MERCURYISINDEFINITE MERCURY-IS-INDEFINITE



MIZZLEBLOOM

ILLUSTRATOR

(she/they)

Artist and animator in the MCYT community with a soft spot for angsty stories. Been a huge fan of Owen since discovering

Outsiders :D
 MIZZLEBLOOM MIZZLEBLOOM



MOR/MIKE

ILLUSTRATOR

(it/its)

Artist and Editor who's been enjoying Owen's content since the drop of outsiders on YouTube! Been on the ride ever since, and is a big enjoyer of tr!Owen, cowboys and Pirates!

MORUNDERScore MOREUNDERScore



NOWAH

WRITER

(any/all)

A (semi) newly fledged Aussie fanfic writer finally converted from solely original writing. I fell in love with Owen's work just after Rats I ended, with a soft spot for the especially mischievous - namely plOwen and the jester. If anyone makes a bingo card on what I write consider these freebies: fruitjuice, ficfire, aromanticism, platonicish spins on relationships, hurt/comfort, tragic bittersweet endings, and importance in names.

AFLASHINGINAPAN



OHKELPART

ILLUSTRATOR

(they/them)

I'm a fanartist for mainly Powercreations snps! I first discovered Owen from ratsmp, and since then have been along for the ride!

OHKELPART OHKELPART OHKELPART



REDSTONEBUG

ILLUSTRATOR

(they/any)

Local bug who cant stop drawing blockgame. Known for pile of vsmplOwens. The pile of llama!Owen has yet to be uncovered.

 REDSTONEBUG

 PRINCESSPONIES8



SCARLETFEISTY

ILLUSTRATOR

(she/her)

A multifandom fanartist who has been drawing in the POW space since Rats !! You can see her jumping between communities while being into many other things too (unbeatable being one of them!)

 TIRAMISUSLAYER



STEVIE

ILLUSTRATOR/FORMATTOR

(she/her)

Digital illustrator and character designer. She found Owen in 2022 and has since been devoted to his community and hardcore minecraft characters. You will often find her in chat making very funny and clever jokes no one else would think of, or posting her newest scifi owen redesign on social media.

 STEVIE_PANICS

 STEVIE_DONT_PANIC

 STEVIE_PANICS



SUNNY

ILLUSTRATOR

(any/all)

An artist who loves to draw anything that sticks inside my brain for months on end. Big fan of anything MCYT so of course Owen's stories caught my eye! And now I'm hooked on the storytelling and dynamics each story brings.

 SUNGLOOOW

 SUNGLOOOW



THEO

ILLUSTRATOR

(they/any)

A jack of all trades queer-Filipino artist and huge MCYT enthusiast! I've been keeping an eye out on Owen & POW related projects ever since Rats, and got particularly invested during VSMP & Bannerfall! Ever since then,

Owen's characters have been living rent free in my head

 ETHEORETICAL

 ETHEORETICAL



WHATABOUTNO

ILLUSTRATOR

(they/them)

Forever an outsiders smp fan and missing area
unknown every day

WHAT-ABOUTNO

WHATABOUTNO22



ZEPHYRUS

ILLUSTRATOR

(any/all)

Just a local Filipino MCYT lover, you won't see me often but I
draw and have fun. And scream in pain at the angst thrown at me
:')

THE-GENTLE-BREEZE



YOSHI

ILLUSTRATOR

(she/they)

Polish Illustrator, Writer and Minecraft Enthusiast. Big fan of angst,
gloom and story driven projects. Enjoying Owen's work since the big
year of 2023 starting with NewLife!

YOSHIINTHEWEB



WINTERBYN

ILLUSTRATOR

(he/they)

Local block game enjoyer and artist of many things. Especially
the block game... Ended up at the OwengejuiceTV doorstep
during Rats and have been here since!



THISTLE ONIONS

WRITER

(ae/aer/they)

Thistle is a disabled writer who spends a significant portion of aer
day thinking about little block guys.

CUBSBIGBANANA

THISTLEONIONS

Hardcore Si

By Alph

Again. Another world, another seed, another attempt. Again. Not in the traditional sense of a respawn, but something else entirely. A new beginning, another start. Fighting and fighting and eating and dying and thriving and dying and—

Death, death, death.

That ever-haunting story in this game.

“The days were short; there was much to do; and death was a temporary inconvenience.”

Temporary inconvenience, but it could mean anything from minutes to months; every footfall could be the end of a story with so much promise. Every time those ten red hearts fell to grey and the world was bathed in a crimson message

was one more petal of hope plucked from the lotus of determination, one more fragment of joy slowly withering away.

Withering— and that was the goal. It was one thing to taste death in all its most brutal forms. To push to survive in a hellscape of hostility, where even food was hard to acquire.

Survival was not quite something to strive towards, however, and Owen was nothing if not an achiever.

No, the goal was to live, to *thrive*, to overcome death in its purest form. Was that not the base idea of Hardcore? And what better way to represent that than to slay the Nether’s very own boss, The

Wither, the representation of

the decay that all beings must
one day face.

Again.

Another try in the world where
one can fly and live, in life
beyond what is reasonable.

Try and he tries—

Again.

The attempts keep going,
never once seeming any closer,
and suddenly what seemed so
achievable is far out of reach.
Hope is not all lost, but it is
desperate and it is lessened.
With every single failure
another attempt is made — the
goal becomes a Hydra of sheer
willpower.

Again.

To be first of your time to do
something is a special gift, and
there are a handful of people
cheering Owen on. They call
and are called to and their
energy is kindling to a dying
spark. It is true that the vessel
in this game is being powered
by one but there are many
standing behind, many whom

one cannot even see, and yet
there they are, one after the
other. Another try, another fail.

Try.

Again.

A new world is created, one
more time. No more falling to
the hands of the Brutes, to the
flames, to the Endermen, to the
rattle of bones. No.

Like a Phoenix, this time, there
is a rise from the ashes. The
battle continues, and the
people cheer on. “You cannot
give up!” Birdsong and
daylight are distant memories
now; still, with every step taken
backwards, the final goal
comes nearer.

Food has been acquired,
materials have been acquired,
and there is a return to the land
where one truly cannot die. Try
and try and try...

The Wither is unbeatable.

A voice comes from the most
obvious source, for of course
they would think of in a way
that is new.

"Can you make beds?"

And you can.

Again.

One last time, this time with a new strategy — a new hope. Try, in the world where you cannot die.

Success.

Go back to the world in which death is more than a temporary inconvenience, it is the end of everything that has been built up in this moment. It has been months. There is pressure, and there is weight, but there's more. There are people.

Everyone feels the palpable tension, yes, but more than that, there is another feeling. This is the last try.

The corridor project begins, and the corridor project is completed, and it all happens in the blink of an eye compared to everything that came before. Look onto the hallway that could be your gravestone, understand. There is no going back.

Three heads are placed atop a monument of sand, and the beginning of a story is decided.

One explosion. An arrow. Another explosion — expertly dodged. Death looks the world in the eyes and they say *try*.

Because of course, there have been too many tries now. And while death has claimed many, many worlds, it only takes one battle to win the war.

One bed. Two. Three.

Four... Five...

The trophy of victory goes up in flames but it matters not, because someone has succeeded in what nobody has done before.

This is not the end.

Quite the opposite, this is the Overworld, one never seen before, but will soon become the foundations of something larger than anyone could have ever imagined.

It is only natural, upon escape from the underworld, that one would want to stare at the stars. So, the first thing that is done is an observatory is built and from there a small town flourishes. Winning once was not enough. Creating once was not enough.

The End is entered but it is not the end. Not quite. Not yet.

We say hello to Dan, a loyal compatriot who will follow into every single victory. We must finish this story.

It is something special, to build a world. For at the heart of it all are not the blocks but the memories and stories created inside. Every single spoken word, every single moment lived, is another one that is special.

There is something about having only one chance, one life within the false pretenses of a dream, that allows you to truly understand the longer dream.

The world ends at the hand of an Enderman. A fitting close to a story.

But this is only the first chapter, barely even the first page.

For what has been built is not the defeat of death, or the creation of a place to watch the stars, or the reckless burning of riches. It is not a city, it is not a victory. It is a community. And what is so truly special about a community is that it can only ever grow.

The end of the First Hardcore World marks the end of the first chapter of a story that continues to be told. It all began with a dream that one had, and a few shared.

A familiar sight. The screen is bathed in crimson, hearts greyed, fallen the hands of a purple foe, one that has felled and been felled many a time in the depths of the Nether.

But the story cannot end here, not in the End. For now the dream is being shared with

more. And so, from the grave
of one, there comes another
world, another seed, another
attempt.

Something new to create, a
new goal to complete.

Again.



HARDCORE SEASON 2



THE END OF AN AVENGE

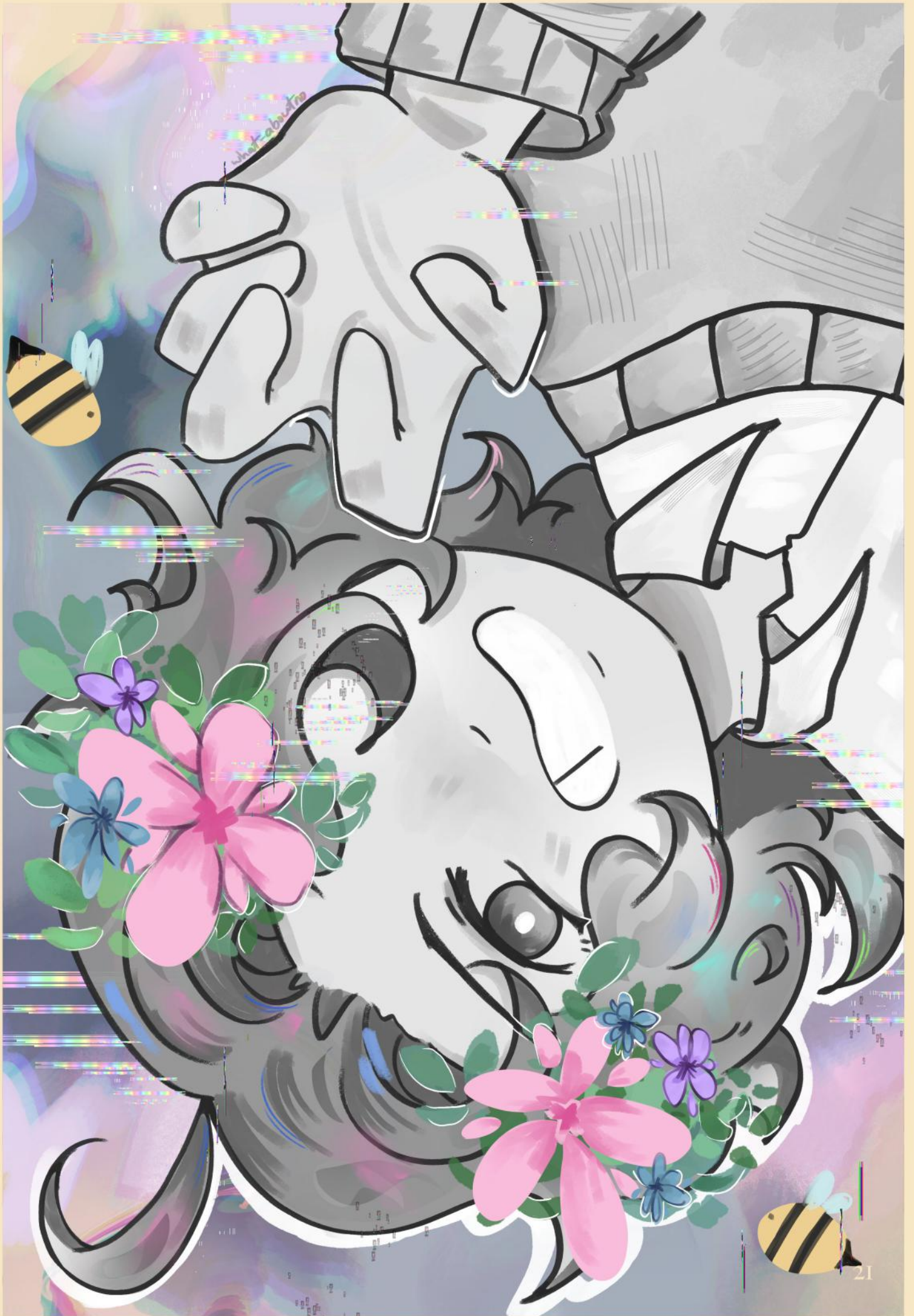
























22

Rats SMP

By Thistle Onions

Owen scurried across carpet and smooth wood, his bag weighing him down more than usual. He navigated his way through the walls, nimbly avoiding pitfalls and cobwebs to climb up and over. The other rats were out and about on their own business that day; he had a job to do.

Through the walls, he could hear voices—the humans of the household, with their big voices and big... well, everything. They were working, cleaning and cooking and any number of other household tasks. He wasn't worried about them right now. He made his way into the crawlspace, much more open than the tunnels the rats usually traversed, and from there, he arrived at his destination.

Owen crept quietly forward peering out from the wall. He couldn't see much from this angle, hidden behind a tall wooden shelf, but neither could he hear or smell much. That was good. That meant she was alone. He peered around the shelf into the room proper, taking in the soft yellow carpet spread across the floor, the neat and tidy furniture that decorated the room.

The old lady — Grandma, the rats had taken to calling her — sat in her rocking chair. Normally, she sat near the window, to use the natural light for her reading or various handicrafts. Now, though, her chair was on the opposite side of the room, as far from the window as she could get. Grandma wore a thick woolen sweater with an even thicker blanket spread over her lap.

She kept her hands tucked beneath the blanket, no book or knitting needles in hand today. She looked mighty uncomfortable, Owen thought. Well, that was why he was here today.

He didn't have to be too cautious around Grandma, but he couldn't be too reckless, either. He came out from around the shelf and waved to her, to let her know he was there, and then leapt on top of the bed, scrabbling up the blankets. From there, he jumped onto the bedside table, then onto a display shelf high up on the wall. He ran along the shelf, careful not to knock any of Grandma's keepsakes down with his tail, and jumped over to the windowsill.

The sill was normally decorated with myriad potted plants, soaking in the warmth of the sun, but now it was barren. A cold autumn breeze blew in from the crack in the glass, and Owen shivered. Poor Grandma, having to deal with this for so long. Well, he'd

fix it up for her straight away.

Grandma was watching him now. He could feel her eyes on him from across the room. He turned toward her, and he could read a question on her face. He knew she wouldn't be able to understand him—only a select few humans could, it seemed—but still he called to her,

"Hello! Sorry to barge in on you. I thought you'd like a little help with your window, here." He gestured to the window, and saw her follow the motion with her eyes. He thought he saw understanding in her expression. Her mouth twitched into something like a smile. Or as close to a true rat smile as a human could get.

Owen turned away and set to work. If anyone came in while he was here, he knew that Grandma would keep him safe. He rifled through his bag and began pulling out supplies: bits of wood and plastic he'd been stashing away, a roll of sticky tape, a tiny pot of glue. He withdrew a length of string

marked into sections with dark lines, and used it to measure out the size of the window crack.

He unfolded a thin sheet of plastic—the bulk of what had made his bag so unwieldy—and smoothed it out. It was a long piece of plastic, transparent but for a few dark smudges on the edge, and very clingy. Several times he had to go back over what he'd already laid out and smooth it out again, because it kept trying to follow him. But after a few minutes of frustration, he finally got it laying out flat.

Using the string, Owen traced out a portion of plastic just a smidge larger than that the crack in the window. With his teeth—very precise tools, they were—he carefully cut away the excess plastic... Which immediately tried to cling to him again. He kicked it away, shaking it off of him.

“Stupid thing,” he hissed under his breath. He shoved it back into his bag, not even bothering to fold it properly.

To the plastic he'd cut out, he began to tape some of the bits of wood and the thicker pieces of plastic. The wood he'd found in the attic or the walls, chipped off from the boards used to build the house, and had carefully trimmed and sanded. The plastic was mostly trash, in all honesty: milk jug caps and pieces of packaging, things the humans dropped without noticing. He'd cut them out into flat pieces before coming here today. The wood and plastic were thing enough to be lightweight and flexible, and should act as a decent insulation against the onslaught of autumn wind blowing through the window's cracks.

Carefully, Owen dragged the plastic-and-wood conglomeration to the window and, with some difficulty, began to attach it. He taped the shortest edge against the bottom, using strips of tape nearly as long as his forearm to hold it in place. Once he was certain it would hold, he began to work his way up, smoothing

the plastic against the glass as he went.

He could feel the difference it made even before he'd finished. The draft was still there—would still be an issue until the glass could be properly replaced, he was sure—but it was much less noticeable. An ice chip rather than a winter storm.

He was almost out of tape by the time he'd finished. He'd have to track down some more soon. It was useful stuff to have.

Owen stepped back to check over his handiwork once more. The mosaic of plastic looked out of place against the wide expanse of clear glass, but it looked... pretty, he thought. The light shone through some of the more colorful bits of plastic, lighting them up like stained glass. Maybe he should have gotten artsy with it. Made a picture out of the pieces. Oh, well. It didn't have to be fancy, as long as it did its job.

He turned back to the room and found Grandma watching him. She smiled at him again. A grateful smile, he thought. Maybe. Humans were hard to read, less expressive than rats.

She lifted her hands from beneath the blanket and beckoned him closer. Carefully, he jumped down from the windowsill and made his way over to her, stopping just in front of her feet. Grandma leaned down and held something out to him. A circular something, golden-brown with chunks of something dark in it—a cookie. A whole chocolate chip cookie! A rare treat, something he would be glad to share with the other rats. And it smelled divine. His whiskers twitched in appreciation as he accepted it.

"Thank you very much!" The cookie just barely fit into his bag, but he made it work. "I hope that window will hold up for a while. Make sure you tell that butler of yours about it soon though, okay? He

wouldn't be very happy to hear you've been suffering in silence for so long."

She didn't seem to understand him; of course she didn't. But that was okay. They had an understanding, the two of them.

Owen finished gathered up his things and scurried back the way he'd come. Before disappearing back behind the shelf, he turned and waved to Grandma once more. Then, feeling proud of himself and full of affection for at least one human, he zipped back into the crawlspace, and began his journey back to the attic.







Empires SMP

By Thistle Onions

Owen the former llama awoke that morning with a plan. It was a very good plan, he knew, because all of Owen's plans were very good.

He hopped out of bed, not bothering to smooth down the orange sheets—why would he?—and made his way out the door. He was getting very good at opening doors now. Might be one of his favorite hobbies, actually. Down the stairs into the tavern proper. He bypassed the counter where he normally worked and went out into Chromia, seeking Scott.

The sun was just rising over the distant mountains, painting everything in a soft golden hue. Birds twittered in the trees around him. The other llamas were singing their dawn chorus. And Owen broke that peacefulness with a shouted, "*Scott! Where are you?!*"

He already knew where Scott was, of course. In his house, which Owen had been barred from over a week ago, when he'd first been changed from a llama into something human-adjacent, and when Shelby couldn't come up with a potion to change him back.

Owen opened the door to Scott's house and entered. "Scott. I have a proposal for you."

Scott sat at the little table in his kitchen, a mug of something sitting in front of him, steaming. The human sighed, eyes falling closed. "You need to *close* the doors, too, Owen," he said.

"Why? I'm gonna leave again eventually."

"Yes, but you're letting in the chill and letting out the— never mind. What's your proposal?"

Owen climbed up on one of

the counters in Scott's kitchen and sat there, kicking his feet against the wooden door. "I'm going to be king for the day."

Scott blinked. Slowly. "...King for the day."

"Yeah, that's what I said."

"King of Chromia?"

"Where else? Not gonna be king of Tumble Town, now am I?"

"Owen. Why would I let you be king of Chromia? You don't even close the doors. How are you going to protect the residents or make improvements?"

"Don't have to do any of that, do I? Just have to make the rules."

Owen had been watching the other emperors over the past week, whenever they came by. He spoke with the other llamas, or with the emperors' mounts. He had drawn conclusions and knew by now exactly what went into being a ruler.

Scott made a noise and dropped his face into one hand. "That isn't—no, it's—" Another sigh. "You know what, Owen? Fine." He lifted his head and looked Owen in the eye. He had dark shadows under each eye. Owen wondered if that was a new style for humans to decorate with, because it did *not* look good. "You can be king for a day. Okay? Have fun. Try not to break things." Then he took a long drink from his steaming mug.

Owen was out the door before Scott had even finished speaking.

His first order of business as King of Chromia was to replace all the empire's banners with more appropriate ones. The Chromia banner was... well, it was interesting, Owen supposed. Blues and pinks and a white circle in the center. But Owen knew how to make it better, and he knew everyone would agree with him once they saw it. Because why wouldn't they? Owen's ideas were always the best.

He rummaged through Scott's chests until he found what he needed and carried it over to the looms. It was much easier to make things with hands instead of hooves, Owen had come to reluctantly accept.

After just a few minutes of work, Owen had a stack of his new and improved Chromia banners. The design was simple: Orange. No shapes or patterns that would distract from the main attraction. Just lots and lots of orange dye. Perfect.

Once he'd replaced all of Scott's banners with the new ones, the empire was already looking much improved. Ha! And Scott thought he couldn't do it.

What next? Oh! He should go confer with the other llamas. He could take all their demands and make them rules for the empire. Rule-making was the most important part of being king, after all.

*

"More wheat," bleated one

llama.

"No, more sugar," another protested.

"Honestly, I'd just like to get out of this garden and fight that fish," a third llama spat, peering over the garden wall and into the Chromia fountain. "He's always saying really gross things to me. Like 'glub' and 'blub blub.'"

"Oh, ew," said the first llama.

"Yeah. What's that guy's problem?"

They all spat in agreement.

*

The demand of more wheat was hard to solve, honestly. Owen had figured out very quickly how to harvest wheat, and could gather up loads of it at a time—but he had yet to figure out how "planting" wheat worked. Usually, he just left that to Scott.

"Maybe if I just bury the wheat in the dirt?" Owen tried that. He picked up a single sprig of

wheat and, with great sorrow, placed it on the farmland and covered it with dirt.

Nothing happened.

He sighed loudly, laying back on the grass and staring up at the sky. Oh, well. He still had almost nine stacks of wheat to share with the other llamas. They'd appreciate it. He was a great king of Chromia!

*

Owen led the other llamas through the garden gates. "Okay, so, over here is the fountain—yeah, Evangeline, you can fight the fish. I'm not gonna tell. And over here is the storage room. It's got basically anything you could ever want in it. Yeah, Scott just lets me do whatever. Well—I let me do whatever. Because I'm the king of Chromia now."

"Is there sugar in there?"

Owen spat excitedly. "*Is there sugar in there*." Silly question. Follow me."

He started to lead them to the

storage room.

"Evangeline is drowning."

"Aw, she'll be fine."

*

Ten llamas and an ex-llama made it into the storage room. Owen began opening each chest so the other llamas could investigate what was inside.

"Yeah, no, this one's just a bunch of rocks. Who even needs rocks, right?"

"No, don't eat that. It's apparently called bread, and it's made from wheat. I know, right? Why would you waste perfectly good wheat like that?!"

"See, this is a crafting table and you can make things out of other things. It's much easier with hands. No, I don't know what most of these things are."

"Those green rocks are used to buy stuff from the weird hairless humans that live here. I don't know why they want them, either. They don't taste

very good.”

After making a mess of the storage room, they went back outside. Evangeline had evidently given up her battle with the fish and was now standing at the edge of the fountain, dripping wet and spitting vitriol at the creature. She rejoined the llama train as Owen led them next to the tavern.

“Come on in, this is where I work when I’m not being the greatest king in Chromia. I’ll get you each a complimentary drink. What do you want? There’s no menu, by the way.”

“I’ll take a cup of spit.”

“Spit, please.”

“Yeah, let’s go with spit.”

Owen nodded and slipped behind the counter. “Eleven cups of spit, comin’ right up! You all have *excellent*’ taste.”

*

As the sun began to set behind Stratos in the distance, Owen

began his final act as king for the day: he went to go find Scott.

Scott had been conspicuously absent during the day. Probably hiding, too scared of seeing how great of a king Owen was, how well he ran Chromia. It was understandable, really; Owen would tremble in his boots, too, were he in Scott’s place.

But as he made his way closer to Scott’s house, Owen could see smoke rising from the chimney. Wherever Scott had been, he was home now.

Owen opened the door. “Scott. Wait ‘til you hear everything I did today. You’ll be astonished, truly.”

Scott was sitting at his kitchen table, just as he was when Owen had found him at the beginning of the day. There was a mug of something steaming sitting in front of him, and a bunch of papers spread out across the table. He looked up at Owen, eyes tired.

"Hm? Oh, right. Because you were king for the day." He turned his attention back to the papers, writing something with a quill pen. "How did that go?"

Owen sat on the table, crinkling several papers under him. He ignored Scott's sigh. "Really great. Everyone was so impressed by my leadership. Did you see the new banners? Much nicer than the old ones, right?"

"The solid orange banners. Yep. I seen them." Scott wrote something else, then reached out and grabbed one of the papers Owen had sat on, tugging it out from beneath him. "Good for you. I spent the day brokering trade deals with Glimmer Grove and the Evermoore."

"Sounds boring. Bet you wish you'd been here all day, don't you?"

"Sure, Owen. Oh, well. Maybe next time."

"Next time? You mean I can be king again?"

"Yeah. Why not?" Scott stacked the papers together and set them aside, finally turning his full attention to Owen. "Maybe first I should teach you how to replant a wheat field though, hm?"

"Psshhh. I know how to replant a wheat field, Scott." He stood and turned to him, hands on his hips in that way he saw humans stand when they were acting high and mighty. "But you know what? Since you're being so considerate, maybe I'll let you show me how you do it sometime."

"Deal." Scott sipped his drink. "Now why don't you go to bed, *Your Majesty*? You have a long day of being king tomorrow, don't you?"

Wow. Owen had done such a good job of looking over Chromia that Scott was just *giving* him the title.

King Owen of Chromia. That had a pretty good ring to it.





PowMini

By Nowahsblue

It was a new day. The sun was bright overhead when Oun made his way to the odd job board in the middle of town. The worn dirt path chuffed under boot as he stopped under the awning that really needed redoing. He'd have to talk to Hōne the tinsmith later about working to fix it together. A smattering of leaflets decorated the board, his handiwork from four summers ago. Unfortunately all the options blurred together in his disinterest. But he needed coin to eat and good favour with his village. Fencework seemed too much to take on for such a flat day, and he didn't have the nails spare for a door in his workshop. Sam's kid was moving out and there was a request for a going-away creepie stool.

He sighed.

That really was all he could manage.

The torn notice fluttered in the breeze running across the river, threatening to escape his grasp. Oun's walks over the years had worn a desire path straight to his cottage and shed. The area around was neatly felled and half a dozen almost finished projects littered the clearing until the sparse treeline. He kicked a stool gently to the side as he made his way to the staggering stack of logs under cover of his tin workshop roof.

No wood on the pile called to him so he picked a piece at random. One hand gripped the base of the axe, the other snugged against the head. He swung it up over his head. It arced down, top hand sliding

down to meet the bottom.

CRACK!

The giant badger's head cleaved in two and the beast fell dead, spurting black blood.

Olive shrieked, "OUN!!" A claw cast a shadow over their paling face.

"Over here!" he roared at the enemy about to make another attack on Olive. A faint glow grew from his chest and he felt his heart thundering in excitement.

It pivoted, drool and blood dripping from bared fangs. Faster than Oun could blink, it lunged at him. Practice from felling trees for years and various enemies over the past months made his next move easy. He leveled his felling axe forward and swung right into the path of the furry beast. It cut through its leg as smooth as butter. The giant badger crashed into the ground.

"I see it!" Sausage cried from a tree above. The branch he sat

on swayed and his invisibility flickered.

"Go!!" Kara yelled in reply, slinging a burst of green poison at a lurking giant badger. "We'll be behind you when we can."

Oun heard but didn't see Sausage's nod and smirk as he bounded through the trees after the bright and fleeing couatl.

When Sausage returned with the feathered serpent nested in his arms, the party was panting in pools of blood — their own and the dogged creatures.

"Great job team!" Sausage said. "Especially me."

Kara shook her head but Olive smiled. Sausage's smirk called to him and Oun heaved himself up to wrap Sausage in a hug, careful not to crush their prize.

Thwacking echoed through the trees. Birds called from branches far from the lonely cottage. The log finally halved, ready to be split. Later, though.

Oun stood his axe against the

chopping block. Clovers flattened underfoot as he trudged inside. He left his boots at the door, passing by the hay broom that sat against the wall. His morning porridge was still warm over the coals in the fireplace. It was getting thick so he poured some well water in and stirred.

Sitting down gave his aching back a break. His wooden spoon clattered onto the table as he sat back to admire the view from his window. It was the same as always. Those two trees made a cat shaped gap to the sky. That knot looked like a small heart. It matched the dented handle of his broom. The trunk of that one tree had holes from the woodpeckers.

His porridge didn't taste like much. It hadn't for a while. But it filled his belly and it was easy to make. Maybe for dinner he could have some meat on the side. His snares had been successful lately. He needed to check them. Again. And then he'd have to set them. Again.

He rinsed his bowl out and tipped the water onto the bed of flowers he was trying to grow. Ngaio in the village said it was good for attracting wasps that could attack termites. He wasn't having much success, however. He kept forgetting to water them and hadn't asked for manure to feed them yet. Every time he remembered he emptied his dishwater on them but that wasn't often enough. There were barely any green shoots poking out of the ground.

Returning to splitting logs, Oun had to stop once he couldn't reach the top of his pile. People would come to him in the winter but for now he had projects to work on. Surplus could be built up more later.

Picking out a rough hewn plank, he sat on his drawhorse and began work at the bark and uneven planes. It was soothing, methodical, pulling back the drawknife over and over in rhythm with the growing chorus of crickets.

The sun sank below the horizon, bathing the forest in blood red light. It would be too dark to work soon, so Oun took his leave. He was content with a day well done. His forearms and biceps were starting to ache. Winter was coming and there was carving he would have to do; the burn would wane then as he used the arduous finer hand tools. For now he lay in bed, closing his eyes and letting his heart slow.

Heart thundering, Oun cut through the wolf. He remembered the first time he killed one in Oakhurst's forest. He followed the stuck up pig's orders but now he gladly followed his friends. Though, the pig scientist was right; now wolves were as easy to cut through as trees.

So caught up in reminiscing and watching his friends fight beside him, Oun almost missed a wolf leaping towards him. He was too late to parry the attack so he ducked.

Olive, however, was quick on the draw. They angled their outstretched hands down. The smell of ozone filled the air. Lighting cracked down from the clear sky and, with weighty divine energy, smote the wolf into a pile of ash.

"Nice one!" Oun said.

Olive grinned.

Over their shoulder, Oun saw Sausage loading his overengineered crossbow with three bolts. He aimed it across a writhing section of wolves and loosed.

One arrow went wide. It thunked into a tree, catching a few strands of Kara's hair on the way.

"Watch it!" she snapped.

Sausage didn't wince as she threw a potion once into the air, for flair, then launched it in his direction. Its aim was true as it soared towards him. Arcing up and over his shoulder it hit squarely on the snout of a wolf. Yelping, the beast was thrown

backwards as its form was licked by green flame.

Oun sliced through the throat of the last offending wolf. The village outskirts were finally cleared. He panted from the fight and wiped a drop of blood from his brow before it reached his eye. His heart quieted down again and his smile grew as he saw his party recovering.

Kara brushed off fur and dirt from her black skirts. Any lingering blood blended in with the red already there or disappeared into the black. Olive's head lifted to the heavens while their lips moved silently. Sensing Oun's gaze they looked back and smiled at him, eyes glinting brighter than their golden pauldrons. The shink of Sausage's blade sheathing caught Oun's ear. Oun turned to see Sausage grinning and lifting a wolf over his shoulders. He put a hand under the paw and jiggled it up and down in a faux wave. Oun wrinkled his nose but smiled nonetheless. Fondness mingled

with satisfaction in his chest as he admired their job well done.

The charcoal lines were smudging where Oun checked the work done with his carving axe. His new broadaxe handle was shaping up nicely. Fire crackled in the corner of the room. The flames licking the fireplace stones sometimes stole his attention from working, but otherwise it made for constant and comforting background noise.

Time flew by, the night growing steadily closer. Oun opened his eyes wide, a growing headache making him realise he'd spent the last hours squinting through the dimness at his work. He was well practiced with his small drawknife and knew the amount of pressure to apply when pulling ash wood without going too far and hitting his chin. But he had to make sure the axe head fit the handle and he didn't want to drop it on his foot. He hadn't missed hammering to fit the pieces together with inertia yet,

but there was a first time for everything Retrieving a candle, Oun gladly sat down to continue shaping the wood. The handle fit snugly but was no trouble for him to get out.

He sawed the top for the axe down the shaft to fit the wedge later and got out his chisels and gouges. His last broadaxe handle had served him well for many years so he wanted something nice to look at and hold while he did his harder work. Maybe he would carve some bottlebrush flowers or ferns, depending on how confident he was feeling. Whatever he made it would be good activity as the nights grew longer and steadily colder. An owl hooted outside, echoing through the night as Owen started chipping away.

It was harder and made for a rougher end product to hand carve planks instead of planing them for Sausage's shield. Oun wouldn't give up the convenience for the world. It was a joy to laugh and joke at the end of a long day of travel

by the fire with his friends.

They weren't anyone's first pick for a job at this point but they'd gotten finally grown a reputation as The Rambunctious. Despite the mayhem they did good work. It made for half decent money, too. It wasn't as stable as Oakhurst but they didn't go hungry often — Sausage was a good hunter between his sharp shooting, misty steps, and ability to turn invisible — eating deer and other game when they couldn't afford stew at the inns where they picked up jobs.

They had been successful enough recently to afford to gear up. They'd bought a handful of nails in town. Sausage also brought home a handful of nails he smuggled into unknowing Oun's pocket. They were short, stubby things, but they would fix the old bronze buckler from Olive's paladin friend to the wood of the shield.

Oun tossed the last plank,

carved thin and light, to Olive who sat on the ground with charcoal on string ready to draw the guiding circle on the wood for Sausage's new shield.

Sausage himself was exuberantly recounting a story embellished with enough innuendos to make a sailor blush. He was using old leather wrapping from a belt as a prop. It was fated to be the rim for the shield but had one last story to tell before the morning. He wrapped it around an unused clapboard in lieu of a live subject. He yanked the wood closer to him.

"And then I put my—" Sausage cut himself off upon seeing Oun raising his eyebrow's "—knife in the brigand's back, saving the town! They shouted my praises almost as loud as my family's name."

"Anyone else have tall tales to tell around this lovely campfire?" Kara asked. Her eyes glinted like a fox, redder than the eyeshine should have been, and the flames leapt

towards the stars before settling back down.

Sausage was too indignant to be phased by the display. He protested, "Wh- hey! I am a very honourable and celebrated adventurer."

"Then why did you ask the pig for money, fame, and power?"

"And then join us adventuring after that?" chimed in Oun. He set down the penultimate plank.

Sausage pouted but mischief flitted across his expression. "Maybe I just wanted to share my glory. I'm the most generous man ever, after all."

"Oh, oh, I've got one!" said Olive, looking up from studying the ground.

Kara was quick to move to their side, almost losing a flower from her hair in the process. "What? A mushroom?"

"Noo, a story. That is super true. Just like Sausage's," Olive said, smirking.

Oun was the only one to laugh openly, voice echoing across their campsite. But Kara and Sausage couldn't hide their smiles or the way they leaned in closer to hear despite themselves.

Of course, Olive spun a tale about their god Lythander. The little green creature that could multiply and turn coal into gold was imaginative, though. When the spiky purple creature showed up and joined forces against Lythander, the clearing erupted into gasps. The half glued together shield was easily forgotten as Oun turned all his attention to Olive, their story, and his enraptured friends.

The fire was dwindling to embers as Oun sat back and stared at the stars. He snorted, remembering an afternoon the week prior.

"What?" asked Olive. Despite lying in their bedroll they still sounded wide awake.

Oun pushed the drying shield

to the side. The leather wrapped around it but the buckler for the centre would be attached in the morning so the joints wouldn't separate if a hammer blow went askew. "Just remembering something that happened recently."

Ever the busy body, Sausage leaned in and lay on his stomach. "Don't keep it to yourself." He kicked his feet leisurely behind him.

"Kara finished talking about the deal she made at Longsaddle. The trip away from the road reminded me," Oun continued vaguely.

Sausage blinked and stared at the fire. Oun could see him thinking but couldn't let him interject before he revealed the story to the others.

Smirking, Oun said, "I had to do some rescuing. It was very exciting."

The bed roll crumpled underneath Sausage as he shot up. "Don't! You said you wouldn't tell them."

Oun chuckled. "I said I wouldn't tell them when we met up later that day. I didn't say anything about another night."

From her snuggled up spot by the dying fire, Kara clapped. "You're learning so well! I may be able to take you to the Feywilds yet."

Sausage groaned into his arms, collapsing half into the dirt and half on his roll.

Sitting back, Oun began, "It was when we went to the merchant's guild to trade in the bounty. We got lost on the way. He took over leading when I found the butcher street for the third time. I wish those cities weren't so big. Or had signs that were easier to read. I could carve them some with pictures. But we got there eventually, and with some nice meat pies. The building was too big as well. I'm sure it had more sides than a wizard's tower. But I stopped watching Sausage while trying to find the door inside."

"Rookie mistake," Kara jeered.

Sausage grumbled more but looked up when Olive nudged him with their foot. He smiled wanly.

"I heard a scuffle. Then a yell. And more yelling. There was metal on metal and then leather on wood. I ran as fast as I can around the corner. There Sausage is in a headlock by one of the guild's guards. He's holding a short sword so tightly his knuckles are white. Some guards are coming out of the building with gauntlets on. They were going for the sword and missed the knife in his boot."

"Did you see them, though," whined Sausage. "The knives were silver, I swear. And the rubies glittering on the hilt! They were begging to come with me."

Olive tsked. "Greedy, greedy Sausage. One 'liberated' knife wasn't enough?"

"You were lucky they don't know the shape of your shoes. I

think they would have shaken you upside down. who knows what would have fallen out then. But they didn't so I charged in. I used the blunt side of my axe and knocked the guard holding him up the head. That one collapsed and I grabbed Sausage. But the one that was going for the sword grabbed his foot. I didn't notice so I kept pulling. The gauntlet and the boot dropped to the ground and the knife fell out. Sausage reached for it faster than the guard. But he stood up holding the glove instead."

Kara hooted with laughter and Olive poked Sausage until he joined in too, though quietly.

"I grabbed his boot with one hand and pushed through all the guards with the other. Sausage dragged behind me. He had to hold onto my elbow and stumbled as we ran. I did a lap of the street and came back to the door. There was no one in front so we just walked in."

"Who needs invisibility?" Kara

said and jabbed Sausage's side.

"I took the payment because we know what happened last time. When we got back out the guards were back. And they were angry. So I picked Sausage up onto my shoulders and ran."

"So that's why he was up there," said Kara.

Olive looked disappointed. "I really thought you were trying to reach a flag."

Oun waited for Sausage to pitch in again. The fireside stayed silent.

"He did hit one. It almost smacked him in the face."

Kara yawned. "He probably deserved it."

"Nah," said Oun, matching her yawn with his own. "He's not that bad. He's just what the barkeep back at Oakhurst would call 'sticky fingered.'"

"Mm," Olive hummed.
"Goodnight."

"Goodnight," said Oun. He

sighed and smiled at the stars
shining brightly overhead. "I
can't wait for tomorrow."



New Life

By Alph

What does it mean to be you
Is this the answer you seek?
While others search for
something new
You search for inherent
mystique

It is not enough to soar above
Can discovery not be a joy?
No, become those things you
love
Your form is just one to destroy
How do machines think and feel
When are those not your own?
This change isn't something real
Your mind is no longer your
home

Who is this final creation
Who has given you one more
chance?

The blue has its own fixation
You do not question its dance

Will you ever answer these
questions

When will it be just what you
need?

To push past these subtle
suggestions
You don't want to spread the
seed

New life, old form, reborn
Return once again what you
were

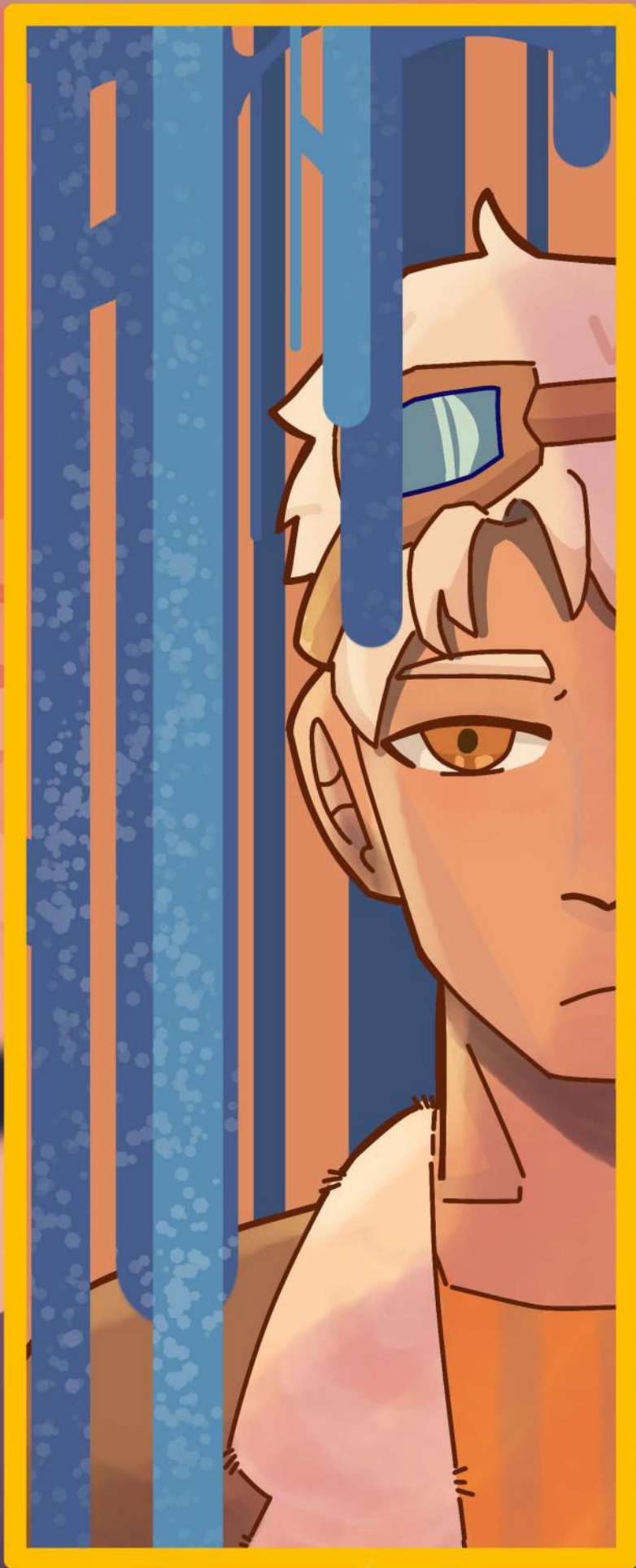
Not dreams, not right, not
mourned

Unique how the world would
prefer

This is not the time for guilt and
shame

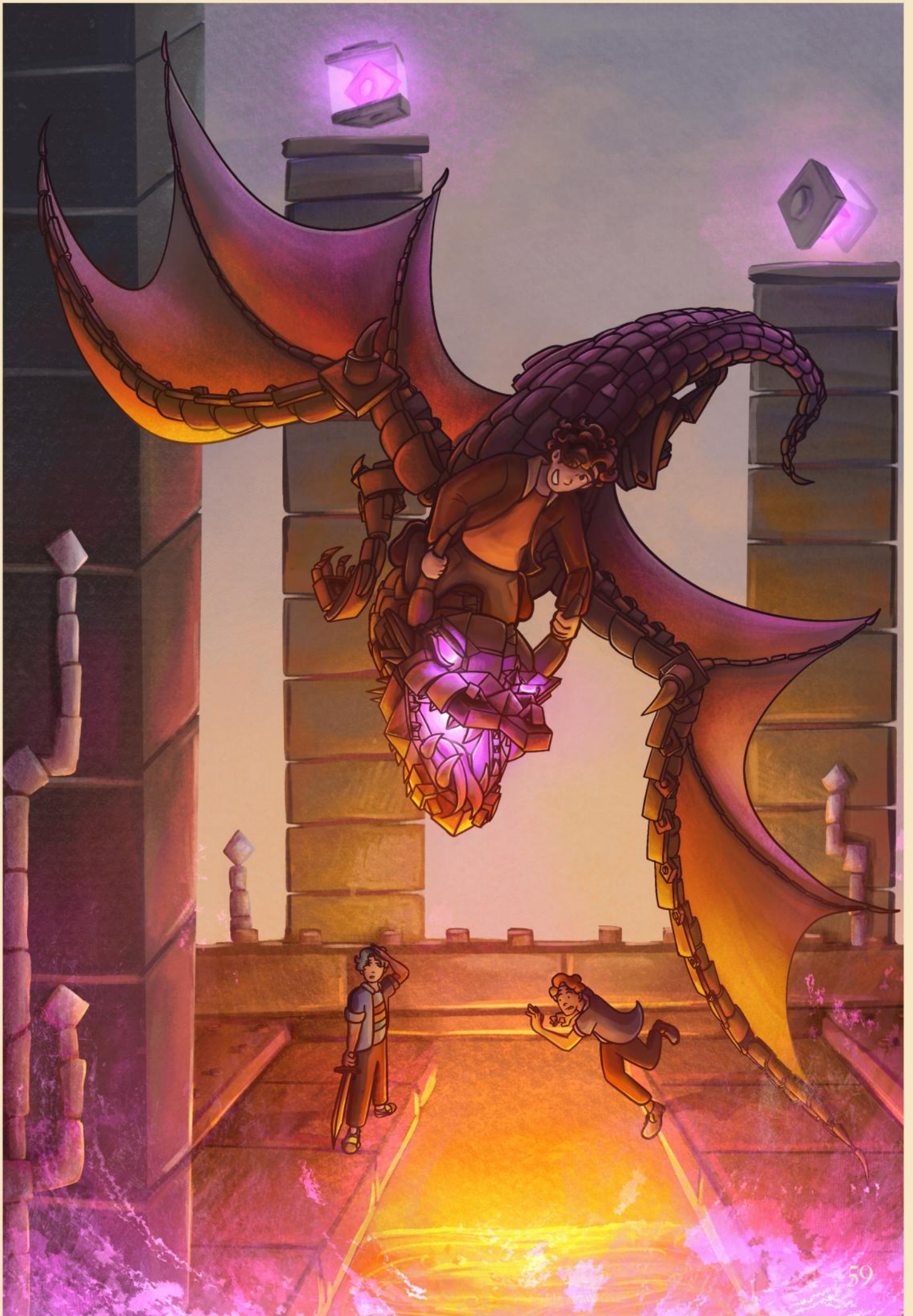
You are free to ask anew
The end and beginning are one
and the same —
What does it mean to be you?

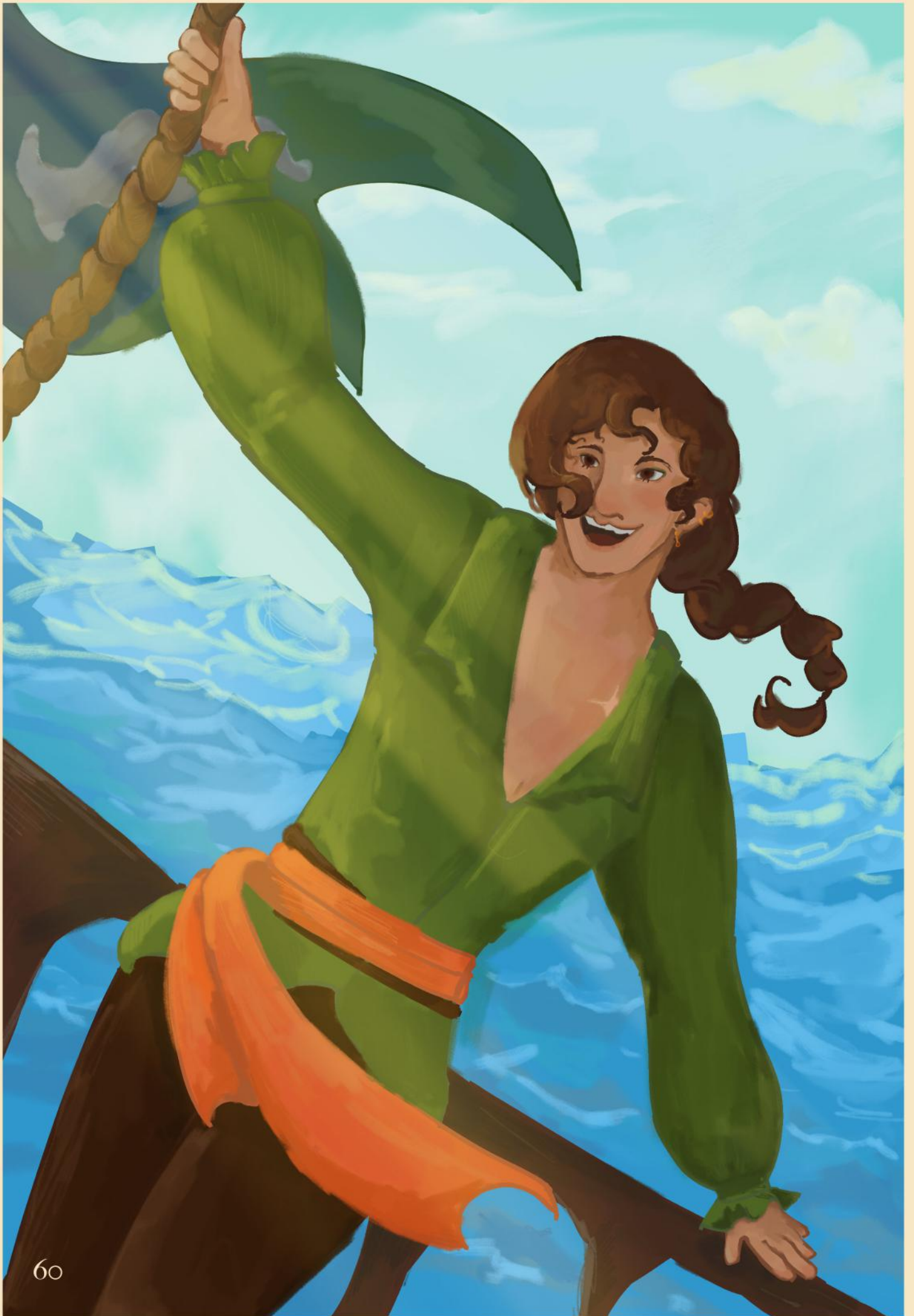
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Minecraft SOS

By C.K Wells

The Jungle was not a place for the weak minded. With nothing but orange robes and a sword fashioned from the bone of an unnatural magical animal Owen was not as he had been in the past. SOS was not for the weak minded.

Owen tracked through the lush wilderness, heading out to spawn. He knew noone. He recognized none of them from any past lives. Except the blue haired elf from one he had been an aviation pilot long ago. Though he had never really spoken to the man.

He had built a gladiator ring. That was his mere contribution to spawn. He had promised the fates. Promised the fates something important at the begging of the series, *when the dust settles, I will*

be standing victorious here at spawn. And I don't much care if that means I have to stand here alone. And that was a promise he intended to keep.

Had he not fully intended to murder innocents in cold blood when he made that message. Yes. He wanted friends. In this multiverse rebirth thing he couldn't seem to find many. And friends were worth finding. He thought of this. He thought of this many nights pondering it. Sending messages through the communication link he had strapped to his arm.

OwengeJuiceTV: Anyone wanna grab a bite to eat?

Silence

OwengeJuiceTV: Guys I'm in a

bit of a pickle with the jungle fairies! I'd appreciate some help!

Yet no one came

He laid down at night wondering if these people would ever consider him a friend. When will that day come? He longed for it. No matter what he had ever said to the fates.

OwengeJuiceTV: What is your favorite Ice Cream Flavor?

And this time he felt the beep come from his communicator

Smallishbeans: Oh, Salted Caramel

Smallishbeans: How 'Bout You?

OwengeJuiceTV: Vanilla

Smallishbeans: EW! You revolt me!

Smallishbeans: Wait! Are you that one guy who built the fighting ring?

OwengeJuiceTV: Yes

Finally a person who appreciated his work. The place he had built to show the ways of the fates. He wanted friends...but he had promised violence.

Smallishbeans: Meet me there

Were people in this dimension really gonna fight over ice cream? It seemed quite odd, but maybe death was a way of making friends. Sliding a fate coin into his pocket he began his trek to the ring.

Why were an angel and a devil always the conflicting sides of a coin, why was that what the deities of the multiverse choose for the internal conflict of one's dramatic brain. And why did the stupid fates or watchers or whatever deity you believed have to create such horrible conflict inside and out. And so as Owen was walking through the jungle he found himself to have an angel and a devil of his likeness sitting on his shoulders.

"Curious, violence is a result of

ice cream, how fascinating!”
The Devil looked to Owen.
Owen tried ignoring him. He
saw these two quite often in his
journeys.

“Curious! There’s nothing
curious about it! We were
merely trying to make friends!
And this bean wants to go to
war with us!” The angel
scolded the devil, scowling.

“Oh Mr. Beans does not want
to go to war, it’s merely a little
sword fight. Lighten up a
little!” The devil said, smiling
slyly.

“Will both of you just shut up!”
Owen screamed.

Owen then continued down
the path. Stepping one foot in
front of the other, twirling his
sword. And he wondered.
What really was the point of all
this...

Joel’s sword came down upon
him. He was in the arena now.
Three minutes he had been
fighting. Three minutes he had
been slowly draining his
energy. Joel’s shield blocked

every blow Owen sent upon
him. Owen’s bloodied and cut
arms did not provide the same
support. What would they look
like? The fates he meant.
Would they stand tall flipping a
coin. Or would they be a
thought. Like the breeze of the
wind. Untouchable.

“Salted Caramel forever!” Joel
spat on Owen and then put the
sword straight through him.
And that was when Owen
entered the void.

For when the coin was flicked.
He was no longer there.





WELCOME



CAPTAIN



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14



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The Realm

By Hal

Laughter. The only noise that the Jester hears on top of the tinnitus-like ringing is laughter. It's crazed, manic, yet undoubtedly jovial. Most importantly, it originates from the depths of his very own diaphragm.

In this moment, who wouldn't be happy?

A crown, gold, gaudy, and glorious, firmly grasped in his hands—the priceless jewels of Swordsborn—the king's blood dripping down the side. The Jester's eyes bore into it. A most wonderful retribution indeed.

And of course, the backdrop only serves to sweeten the scene: the throne beneath him, the body of the king discarded to the side, and the court of

nobles (ah, the way their cheer turned to anguish in just a mere couple seconds upon their realization that 'twas not but a jest—he'll be reliving that moment for years) slaughtered without a second thought. The Jester pauses his laughter as he turns to face them again, after twisting his body to face his audience, only to see—

There is nothing there.

The Jester tightens his grip on the crown.

There is nothing *anywhere*.

Somehow, an applause finds itself to him. Clapping hands, roses at his feet, the call for an encore... The Jester bows to the dark void, and places the crown firmly on his head.

As he rises from the bow, a voice calls out, "A show most

entertaining! And a job well done.”

The Jester turns toward where the voice seemed to be coming from, but the vast emptiness doesn't change. There's no one.

“Hello?” he asks the void.

“Hello,” it responds.

Again, the voice echoes out from behind him. This time, when he turns to face it, the Jester is met with a hooded figure that was not there before. The Jester's mask serves its purpose well, obscuring his now widening eyes from view. Though the figure is too close for comfort, he does not take a step back.

“Who are you?” asks the Jester.

The figure does not respond for a moment, awaiting the swell of an awkward silence. It's reminiscent of Swordsborn's attempts to leave him floundering.

Then, they answer, “A fan of your work.” They don't move when they speak, nor do they

seem to breathe. Or move at all. “You may call me Stultus for now.”

Stultus moves backwards—without moving any part of his body, including his legs, mind you—and begins to explain, “You may be wondering where you are, what this place is, and why you're here, Jester, and some of those questions may be answered in due time.”

The Jester waits for Stultus to continue, but they do not.

Grip tightening on the bloodied crown of Swordsborn, the Jester asks, “Why am I here?”

Despite not having a visible face or mouth, Stultus almost seems to smile.

“I don't lie when I say I'm a fan of yours.” His head moves to make it seem like he looks toward the crown. “If I allow you to return as you are... I'm afraid that your mind and talent to your calling would be lost. That would be most unfortunate.”

Stultus pauses momentarily, and before the two of them appears an axe. His axe, the one he used mere moments ago, now bathed in viscera.

“Kingdoms rise and fall across millennia, and with them do Kings.” The axe twitches on the ground, then floating upwards and toward the Jester. “Another show of yours would be most enjoyed. Need not worry about the intricacies, I can be your production. I believe you know your role, and know it well.”

The Jester considers for a moment Stultus’ words, and grins as he places the bloodied crown on his head, and takes his weapon in his hands.

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The walls of the dungeon beneath the quiet and unaware kingdom of Quicksilver fade into nothing around him as the Jester takes his golden prize. Well, golden with a bit of red, liquid iron.

The Jester is met with an

applause, roses, and even a stuffed animal is thrown toward him. He takes it all in pride, and bows before his unseen audience.

Some of the clapping hands are louder than the rest, and continue on as the rest of the applause dissipates.

Stultus appears as the Jester looks toward the noise.

“Another magnificent show. It doesn’t seem to get old, does it?” Stultus’ head tilts down, ever so slightly. “The script is changed slightly, and some actors swapped for others, yet you can’t help from watching it all the same.”

The Jester places the crown of the King of Quicksilver atop his head. It vanishes right into his collection. “I feel the same—this role was made for me. It would be a shame to stop a show with such appraise.”

Again, the axe appears on the ground between them, and floats up.

"I warn you, the crew of the Kingdom of Jamalia, in time, will grow to be rather erratic. Improvising is a skill you possess, maybe you'll make use of it. If things go too off-script.. well, the show must go on, as they say."

The Jester considers Stultus' words for a moment.

He reaches for the axe regardless of the warning. It would be foolish to quit now, especially for a calling—no, a passion—such as this one. A shame, to give up on his life's work.

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This time, the world is nearly falling apart around him as it fades—the blaring ring of tinnitus doesn't seem to go away as everything else does.

Still, at the Jester's bloodied figure, the sound of the applause persists, and roses are tossed. Of course, he bows. Blood and other gore that has attached itself to his form falls to the ground with this act, and

the cheer of the audience erupts even louder.

The Jester stands upright, and holds his prize, the crown, between his fingers. If he didn't know it, the fact that it used to be gold would be a shock. The Jester laughs.

And laughs.

And laughs.

Crimson drips, but doesn't seem to land.

"What a show, truly," Stultus' voice echoes out from behind him, "It didn't go as you had planned, but in all honesty, taking a more active role in the production was quite delightful."

The Jester hums in acknowledgement, but not agreement.

"Do you disagree? I thought the action was exhilarating," remarks Stultus, "Maybe I could make an appearance in the next show as—"

"This is my show," the Jester

snarls, "Though I appreciate your help this time, a co-star of your like is not what this performance needs."

Stultus doesn't respond. Not with words, and definitely not by action. It's difficult to tell what he thinks. A disgruntled frown makes its way onto the Jester's face, but he doesn't say anything more.

"Do not worry, dear Jester," Stultus states, no emotion, compassion, in his voice despite his words, "Unless you call for me, I won't interfere again."

The Jester allows the words to hang in the vacuum of space for a moment longer, and then snatches the axe.

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Even the hairbrush in his hand vanishes with the rest of the world. No, everything aside from his person and his prize disappears.

The Jester casts an uncertain, yet unseen gaze upon the

crown. Not a single drop of blood in sight. His head hangs.

Applause. Roses. Bow. The whole thing.

"A bittersweet tale," Stultus remarks, "But most entertaining nonetheless."

Forever thankful for the mask upon his face, the Jester is glad it conceals his current expression. This last performance was... conflicting, if anything. The grandest of joys, a deep sorrow, sparks of pride and disappointment.

"In spite of any other redeeming qualities," the Jester speaks aloud, "A monarch is a monarch." He places his hand upon his mask, ensuring its place on his face. For it to drop, especially now of all times... it would be a tragedy. "This fact rung true, even for Corsfire."

"Indeed, indeed," Stultus says, "Truly quite a show. The king truly was promising, but the shattering of your heart as he failed your trials... It was spectacular."

The Jester does not reply to this statement.

Usually, something like this wouldn't phase him, and the Jester would simply riff off Stultus right back—He's a performer, after all. But this time, his mask isn't as impenetrable.

It stings.

Beneath his mask, unseen to the audience, the Jester's eye twitches.

With a brief pause, Stultus hums. "Hmm." Stultus' body moves forward. "As entertaining as that was... a little more action would be fun, wouldn't it?"

Finally, something that the Jester can agree with. Hopefully, this next show will be... still dramatic, but with less sentiment. Feelings, things like that... They tend to drag.

"It would be an honor," the Jester says.

Before him, a familiar object appears. He takes the axe.

× × ×

The walls around him fade into nothing, and with them do his companions in this act: Lukey, Pangi, and Bad. The Jester wouldn't quite refer to them as co-stars, but certainly phenomenal supporting actors in this performance. It was a unique experience, like in the way that old folk stories always change as they are told time after time.

Still, the small crown of King Foolish remains on his head. Another king felled by his hand.

As the Jester is graced with roses and applause, the smirk that he wears on his face is unmatched when he notices Stultus is part of his audience.

The Jester bows.

The applause begins to fade.

"This truly is some of your best work yet, Jester. Roses, roses to you." An arm stretches out from Stultus's form, grasped in his hand is a bouquet of roses.

The Jester takes it from Stultus with a nod. "I wasn't expecting any other Keepers to be present at this time. I'm glad you were amicable to my assistance this time."

"This stage had many more actors than a typical job, without your assistance here, I'm not sure I could have kept up with all of the moving parts on my own," the Jester admits, "Though, I'm shocked the use of Ros's name wasn't as powerful as it could have been. Maybe that's a trick to try again in a future performance."

Stultus, despite being entirely obscured by his robes, seems a little hesitant. There is a moment of silence that hangs between them.

"Due to the nature of The Realm, and its relationship to my being, I do have some ties to wrap up in this place," Stultus says, a near regretful tone in his voice, "I am uncertain how this will affect the temporal anomalies that lie within this space."

Temporal anomalies? The Jester supposes that he's never thought too hard about what this place is. A small moment of respite as he moves from place to place, sure, but long stretches of time—nearly 500 years in total—seem to pass in what only feels like a few moments.

"As long as there is no one keeping this space—the role that I have filled for a very long time—I imagine that your perception of the passage of time here will be altered." Stultus almost seems to laugh. "I wonder if you would age?" he muses, "Regardless, I have a gift for you."

Before the Jester appears an instrument. A lute, how very fitting an instrument for a jester. He recalls having played one in a distant past, though he doesn't know how much of that skill remains.

"Thank you for this, Stultus."

"Well, if I am correct about the way time will be altered, you

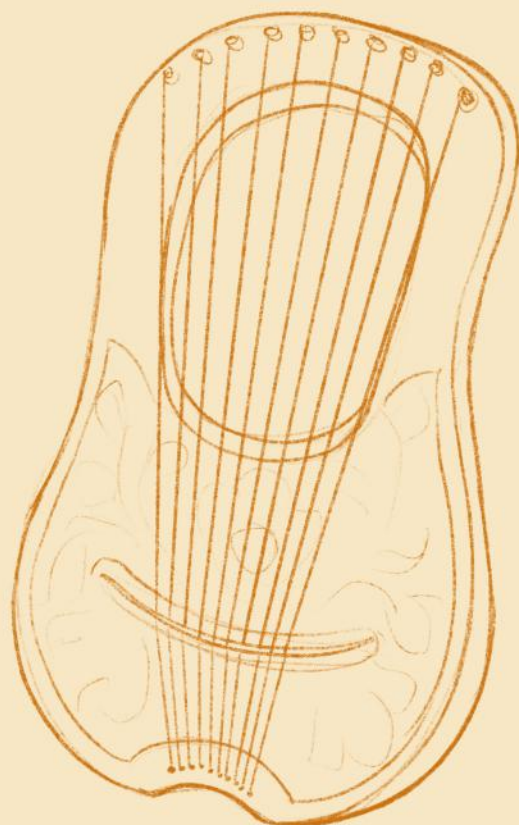
will surely need some way of entertaining yourself. Though, I am sure you would be able to do that much without my help—" Stultus's cloak appears to swish as if a breeze had passed through, as if air was something that existed in this place—"Still. You're welcome."

The Jester gently takes the neck of the lute into his hands, and stares down into the instrument. Though it appeared in a similar manner as the axe, it certainly did not have the same properties. For one, the 'world' around him did not seem to vanish.

"Stultus, I was wondering—"

But Stultus was gone, vanished from the very spot the Jester last saw him. And, until he returned, this is where the Jester would wait.

Until a slayer of Kings is needed once more.





Cowboys SMP

By Everemm

"Did you really kill that guy, Owen?"

Owen glanced down at Luanne in surprise. "What're you bringing that up for?"

"It's just," she sighed all proper, short and soft. "I can't imagine you doing somethin' like that. Lie an' hurt an' steal, yeah, but not kill." She tilted her head back, eyes flitting across his face before turning her gaze back to the book they were meant to be studying. "Your soul is too soft."

"Too soft?!" Owen exclaimed, a wicked grin twisting his lips. "Only 'cause of you! Teaching me to read and all of your fancy manners and propert—propi—propriety! Now, I was a conflict hardened criminal and don't you doubt that."

Luanne giggled, turning the page.

Owen groaned internally. Reading was a long and tedious task, and while it seemed to come so naturally to Luanne, Owen couldn't quite get some words, much less sound them in a smooth, continuous ribbon like she could. In a frantic attempt to keep them talking, he blurted, "So what if I didn't *mean* to kill him. What if...what if it was a lost finger on the trigger?"

"Hm?" A quiet effect came over her voice, and though he couldn't see her face, he knew she was listening intently.

"I never said it was truth." He paused. "It was crazy that day, you remember. Fire and smoke everywhere. People runnin' to and fro. Wasn't a damned level

head there. I...I saw. I saw what Shep was doin'. I caught a glimpse of him and I went looking for Billy. To tame him. But I couldn't get it out of my head,"

"Get what out of your head?"

"Well, I couldn't describe it to you, little missy. You don't like the violence."

"I'd like to hear it. Just this once." Her voice, so gentle, rang with a strange sincerity, one he didn't often recall from their years together.

A breath escaped him as he searched for the words.

...

Owen ran through the town, heedlessly shoving people out of the way. Moving like this, he couldn't feel the tremors that shook his body when he saw Shep. When he saw the child and the mother. That damn revolver, the one Billy gave him.

He ran. Squinting into the smoke and sweating from the

heat, mask clinging to his face and billowing with his heaving breaths. Billy, Billy, Billy. He'd be doing the job, grabbing the loot and high-tailing it out like they were supposed to do. In the chaos, the bank would be free. Of course.

Gasping for air, he plunged deeper into the stampede of darkness and tumbling bodies, bursting out the other side and glancing around wildly. Gosh, his back was like a pan, burning him up.

"Billy! Billy!" His voice hardly made a dent in the clamor and confusion and he tried to head somewhere quieter, somewhere closer to the money. But still, the people in disarray carried him away. Growling and shoving damp skin and warm fabric, he caught sight of a horse up ahead. *Perfect*.

Riding the wave, he took shelter at the horse's flank, people moving around the rather unurgent beast.

"Hey!" he shouted to the person, strangely enough, riding the horse with her legs off the side. "Hey, you!"

She turned, staring with big eyes. Her skin, unlike the company he was used to, was free of dirt or muck, almost as if she'd taken a shower before fleeing. He shook off the momentary distraction, jogging to catch up with the horse.

"I can help you get out of this mess if you give me a ride," he yelled over the noise.

She blinked, lips parted in a perfect o. He didn't have time for surprise, every second was a moment wasted. Thankfully, she spoke before he did.

"What's your name?"

He gaped, fighting the urge to gesture wildly to the surrounding mayhem. "Look, little missy, I'm offering you safety and you'd best take it. I do you a favor, you do me one."

She nodded, but repeated, "What do I call you?"

He stammered for a moment before landing on "Bunny." *Bunny?* What a silly name!

"Well if you're Bunny, then I suppose I can be...Missy."

"Missy, great. Now, would you mind if I got on?"

She edged closer toward the rump of the beast, leaving room for him to ride. He hauled himself up, winding the bridle around his hands and squeezing its flank. The horse responded slowly, shifting sideways before responding to his prompting.

Once clear of the crowd, Temper, the horse's name according to the little missy in the back, agreed to be spurred into a vaguely urgent trot.

The sun made the top half of the bank glow with near ethereal light, everything else cast in shadow a flat, plain portrait. He almost missed the guards, too blinded by the sun to see the limp bodies, the stain of death. Had Shep gotten to him first? Or maybe Sausage in

his careless excitement?

“Billy!” Owen called. “Billy!”

Temper snorted, shaking her head. A figure appeared in the doorway, broad shoulders hunched under the weight of a large sack. For a moment fear coursed through his veins, a bloodied Shep dragging Billy, perhaps? Or some intangible creature come to collect? He swatted the thoughts away, scowling as Billy emerged.

“Owen!” His gaze turned to Missy. “And a friend. Is it time to go already?”

Owen paused. “Billy, I...I wanted to talk to you about somethin’ that’s been on my mind. I just saw—we had a way of doin’ things until Shep—”

He heard the crunch of boots too late, turned, revolver in hand a hair’s breath after Billy, aiming for the arm or the hand.

A shot rang out and the man fell, dead, sheriff’s hat toppling to the ground and gently rocking in the dust. Behind him Missy uttered a quiet cry,

turning her head away from the scene. Owen looked at the man, the blood seeping into his tunic right over his heart, at Billy with his lips curved in a smile of satisfaction. He felt as though Billy had shot him instead, lung perforated, wheezing through the copper tang of blood.

His lips moved in a silent accusation. *Fatherkiller*. His revolver weighed heavier than a sack of loot, the weight of a body in his palm.

“Billy—Billy, you—you killed him.”

“Yeah? He was gonna kill us.” He sheathed his gun, pulling out his tin of tobacco and packing it in his cheek.

“This has gone too far. We don’t *kill*, Billy. We don’t burn the houses of innocent people. This all started when Shep showed up. We were bandits, yes, but we had morals, and now when I look around I see you all shootin’ and Sausage hollerin’ his head off as he

throws firebombs and Martyn planning more 'n more crazy adventures and Shep's prodding you all along and you don't even see it happening."

"Now let me stop you there, Owen." A grim - had taken over the easy smirk and his voice was deadly serious. "We had morals, yes, but where did morals ever get us?"

"It meant we were *respectfu—* *respectable*. We're no common criminals, we have pride! We used to, at least."

Billy set down the bag with a heavy *thump*. "If it's too much for you to stomach, you're free to leave."

Owen's breath stopped, terror freezing his heart.

"I raised you like my own little brother and if you can't—"

"Now you can't be serious," Owen scoffed. "I was one of the first Kids in your band. I've been here longer than Martyn or Sausage or Shep and I'm not scared of a little blood. I just

don't like the way we're going about it, is all. I like what we had and I think we ought to get back to that."

For a moment it looked like Billy was considering it and the seconds ticked by in a breathless silence.

Billy burst out laughing. "Oh, Owen. You're too sentimental. There ain't no way you're going to stand up to me and tell me what to do."

He took off his hat, bemused smile still resting on his face as he bent it back to shape. That smile vanished at the click of a hammer.

"Now, that's a dangerous game you're playing Owen. I'm the—"

"Fastest draw in the west, I know. But no draw is fast enough to fight a gun already pointed at your head."

"Now, do you really want to do this? I'm your brother, the man who took you in when nobody else wanted you."

His chest constricted painfully,

his perception of Billy wavering like the distance behind heat. He could hardly bear to hear it, much less imagine dragging anybody else along to listen as well.

Pursing his lips, Owen muttered to Missy, "Close your ears for me, would you?" and watched to make sure she did before speaking to Billy.

They met no resistance riding out of town, not that Bunny ever let up to enjoy it. From what he'd seen, some of the others got rounded up and he sure as hell wouldn't be one of them.

...

"But if they got out, how come they were all in Pity when we were?"

"Likely looking for some gold. What with the mayor advertising the gold mines, they probably thought they could pinch some."

"Is that what you thought?"

"Huh?"

"Is that why you led us to Pity?"

"Led us to—naw, I stopped my thievery when we left that town. I ain't picked a single pocket nor an unattended bag since Armadillo Springs."

Luanne sighed, leaning heavily into his chest. He moved his arm to wrap around her shoulders and pull her closer. When she sighed, a strand of her hair flew up into the air and drifted back down like the gentlest feather.

"Do you...miss them?"

"Oh, what? I don't miss it at all."

"Well, that's a lie. I see you sighing wistfully all over the place." She turned around, digging her hand into his thigh in the process. He yelped and squirmed away, but when they settled down again Luanne was looking at him with grave eyes. "They're your family, Owen."

His breath caught for a

moment, the simple truth of her statement catching him off guard.

"They may have been a family, but they sure didn't act like it. Everyone was too wrapped up in their own problems to bother with taking care of each other. We were all in it for the money, not the, uh,"

"Community," Luanne offered.

"Yeah, that. I was the only one brought in, the rest wanted to. They had their own, uh, reasons for it."

Luanne shook her head. "You know I'll always love you, right, Owen? You don't gotta lie to me."

"Lyin'! What lying?"

"All of it. I seen the coins you pilfer when you think nobody's watchin'. You stopped for a while, and I didn't want to bring it up in case you felt guilty, but after Pity-Owen, I see you taking things around the house, snatching up cutlery and silver and putting it back

like you're practicing for something. Owen, I don't want you going back!" Her voice had built up into a cry, the space between her eyebrows furrowed. "I don't want you to feel like—I don't want you goin' back," she whispered.

Now Owen was worried. How much had Missy seen? Did she know about the box in the attic? Principle for a loan, but she wouldn't know or approve especially if she knew where it came from. Who it came from.

"It's not—not what you think it is," he forced out, hurt and taken aback by her outburst. "It's not stealing."

"I don't care if it's stealing, Owen. I told ya, I'd stick by you no matter what. I care that you aren't happy."

Owen frowned, confusion overtaking worry.

"You know what I see in you?" She reached out to cup his face, expression heartbreakingly tender. "I see that boy in Armadillo Springs."

Concerned, lookin' for a way to fix what went wrong. I see somebody who's not afraid to speak up for his morals, his values." Her palm slid from his cheek to his chest, resting over his heart. "I see a boy who was only taught how to hurt, but didn't want to. An' I worry you're slipping again."

His chest seized painfully. "That's not—" She didn't get it. How could she know, a woman from such fine upbringing, know the bond between people formed through trial by fire? "There—there's a bond, you see," he tried, but couldn't find the words. How could he explain it, that comradeship, knowing that no matter what somebody had your back. They'd kill for you, die for you, and they'd be happy to do it. Everybody wanted everybody to continue on, but it was more than that. It was—it was souls. It was twin souls but all of them. It was one campfire they were all a part of, a mess of burning and pain that tethered them together.

"Take your time," Luanne offered, rubbing his shoulder. He realized there was moisture in his eyes.

"It was just a campfire," he tried again, but that made no sense. He took a breath that burned. "We were brothers. *Brothers*."

"I know."

"*No*. We were all *hurt*'. In some way. An' we thought we could run."

"I *know*. Bunny. They're your family and they...helped."

Owen swallowed his protest. She didn't *get* it.

"You felt like it was all right, what you guys were doing. And you could forget. I ain't blind. When I saw you in that camp.."

...

It was breathtaking, the change. Luanne knew immediately that these people wouldn't surrender. Even with Cherri and some of the town, they wouldn't stand down from

their mountain. Across all of the faces visible, the same expression sang: electrifying defiance; fierce conviction; joy. This was a dangerous game they'd played before, and they sure didn't expect this to be the last. And Bunny, oh Bunny, he fit like a cog in a watch, slotting into this mishap gang so perfectly Missy almost feared that the Bunny she knew wasn't the same.

Voices rang across the snow, breaths fogging in the air. Luanne pulled her coat tighter, glad when the town finally surrendered. She didn't want to be here anymore, seeing the difference, standing under Bunny's translucent gaze. He looked at her like a stranger. Like they hadn't laughed under the stars and exclaimed when Temper (rightfully) bit him and he'd caught her jumping down so many times she'd trust him to catch her from the bottom of a ravine. But now he was this.

This...person. He wasn't the Bunny she knew from their time together, not the boy she'd

found back home either. This was somebody predating that. And it scared her.

...

"I'm worried you want to be that person again. Hide behind the thrill and adventure of a bandit when I'm right here. There's no need to be doin' that anymore. You have an honest job an' we built this sturdy house. Together. Missy and Bunny."

"I..." The words dried up in his throat. His mouth felt like a desert. He swallowed. "You're right. I...I miss them terribly. I miss that life terribly. But I promise you this, I will never go back. I have you, and I have this life and I swear it on my pa—may he rest in peace—that I won't take this for granted."

"Look I...the loneliness...it sticks to me like a shroud. An' I don't know how to get rid of it, but I hope with time, and with you, it'll pass."

Luanne took his hands from where they twisted in his lap.

“An’ I know I’m hard on you about the thieving, but I promise you I will always be here for you when you need me.” A small smile graced her face. “This diamond isn’t just for show.”

Owen choked out a wet laugh, reaching up to wipe the wetness from his face. “Alright, alright. Enough of this feelings stuff. C’mon, it’s nearly dinner. You’re helping me.”

“I’m always helping,” she teased, a smile audible in her voice as she followed him into their kitchen.



THE T-RRIFIC
DINO RAWR



Vampires SMP

By Elliott

They're two separate forces that bite back against each other at every turn. Legundo, a man that many would call crazy, filled with rage and hatred towards nobody really but himself. Owen, someone that would be outcast from society because nobody knows or cares to understand what's going on inside his head—simply brimming with anger that craves to be let out.

The two of them, together? A meeting that should never have happened.

The placement of the note was not coincidental. Obviously not—it was meant for Owen to see— but Legundo knows the man too well. Right out there in the water, oak planks that'll catch Owen's eye... Legs knows Owen too well.

He's still not trusting of it, though, not by any means. Owen lurks within the bushes around the clearing, off to the side and behind a large tree which covers his movement. He can still see the vague figures of the landscape and how they whisper in the light breeze that makes Owen shiver just slightly when he shifts around too much.

"Are you there?" A voice shouts out into the darkness. Legs has arrived. Owen can feel it—his anger that's hiding underneath that bloodstained white coat, and the way his voice no longer shakes. There's people around, probably Legundo's friends from the town, equipped with holy water and a passion to survive. He finds it almost amusing, the way they stick together like it'll save them.

Owen doesn't want to talk like this, not when others are around. They could listen in, or simply go and kill him... either way, he doesn't trust it.

"Not while they're here." He states, voice low. "I see them on the hill."

"Of course you do." Legundo responds with the sort of tone that suggests something softer, less angered, hides behind his words. Something affectionate; whatever it is, it cuts into Owen, giving him a feeling he doesn't really like.

"I'll be at Ren's." Owen tries.

He wants to leave, go somewhere where the shadows are simply darkness and not his enemies lying in wait to hear his pain. In another world, somewhere where things aren't as dark as they are, the others would laugh over it. Martyn would have a field trip hearing about the things Owen and Legundo have spoken about over time, probably making fun

of the two of them and their 'drama'.

Whatever was in Legundo's voice just before is gone and he's back to the anger. "No, no, no- you- stand here and you talk to me." He pauses, and just as Owen's about to respond with a statement that undoubtedly argues against Legs, he continues. "You're *killing* people now!"

Owen doesn't want to think about this. Legundo is too much—he knows things, he can understand things, he's so much smarter than any of the others—his words and his stare dig into Owen, the truth that hides behind them poking at his defences and trying to get him to open up.

"You're- you're setting your posse on me now, I can see-"

"No, I'm not. I asked for *defence* because you- Scott's already cut me down once today. How many more scars am I gonna have to take?"

Can't Legs just take the hint,

already? Owen's not particularly wanting to talk, and at the very least not here. Legundo's too stubborn to let that go, though. What does he even *want*? There must be something. At this point, it's not worth meeting up for no reason—the risk too high, reward too low. There's something Legundo wants, and Owen's not willing to consider the fact it might not just be for information.

"What did you wanna tell me?" Owen says after a long pause. "What is this little *note* you've left?"

It's barely a question—more of a stab at the other man, meant to be aggressive more than searching for any particular answer. The note's important, but not enough to be information that Owen couldn't have guessed, or figured out himself eventually.

Unless it's some sort of sentimental message Legundo wants to pass on... which Owen isn't interested in, either.

The latter was right; Legundo takes a breath in to start a monologue, which Owen rolls his eyes from the dark over.

"I've seen humans who were monsters and vampires who are more human. What you are doesn't define you, it's what you choose to do. And if you're gonna just start- running around and killing people and just- burning it all down like you said," He takes a long pause, and the silence echoes through the almost-empty woods.

Owen chooses this moment to prompt him, just as the man continues. "Then what?" he asks in an annoyed tone.

"Then what is it you *want*?" Legundo says it not as a question, but as a statement—telling Owen to not answer but to think. Consider it, because God knows that Legundo knows more about the man than he knows about himself.

"What is it you want?!" He repeats, this time in a higher

pitch and with more energy behind it. "Being a vampire didn't turn you into something of rage—it didn't make you *hateful*."

And there it is—another pause. Dramatic effect, maybe. Waiting for a reaction, a response, from Owen before he continues, perhaps.

Owen asks a simple question. It doesn't particularly answer Legs' statement, but the conversation as a whole didn't either. How can you help me? How can this human doctor who's forced himself into Owen's life help this vampire?

The sigh that Legundo lets out is loud. It sends a shiver through Owen—there's emotion behind it, a lot more than either of them really want to unpack. At least, for now.

"I'm a monster, too. Everything I've done, everything I.. carry with me, *that's* what makes me a monster. Not what I am, not what you are." His voice shakes through the words. Hints of

his trauma spill out through each syllable, making Owen squirm in discomfort. It's too... much.

"I asked them for help because you- something's changed. You're all getting... aggressive. You're lashing out. And... I don't know why."

Owen's almost sorry for Legundo. Underneath all that pent up anger and frustration, there's a part of him that still wants to comfort the man—sit him down on the hill, talk it out, and rest. Legs' voice is too shaky, too quiet... it shouldn't be. He's a doctor, for God's sake—he's supposed to be louder and more assertive. Isn't saving lives a job that's not for the weak?

Owen shuffles behind his bush, turning slightly so he can get a clearer view of Legundo. The doc stands out, looking around at the forest for any traces of Owen as he speaks. The sign planted in the water bobs up and down as the water laps at its edges.

"Why."

There's a tremor in Owen's voice that's not dissimilar to the doc's. The pitch raises slightly and it sounds too vulnerable, too open, for Owen. He urges it to stop before he sounds too much like Legs with his monologues.

"I really thought you would be different." He says, referring to something Legundo knows little about.

The way Legundo responds is almost casual. "Different from what? I said I was here to help people. I'm here to help people."

"You have the option of real *change* in front of you." Owen starts. He's fed up with this—the doc could do so much more and yet he stays here... being fed the same fate as Owen's been shoved into.

"*I don't deserve eternity.*" Legundo raises his voice almost to a shout, the aggression showing through loudly. He looks around

frantically, eyes searching for something to place the blame on.

"I did my *damage*. I repair it and—" The doc paces around, hands flying out around him. The gestures he makes are nothing but those of anger and a sudden outburst. "I die. And the world will be better for it."

"Very well." Owen states. He masks the shock in his voice and forces it down to a low monotone like he's been doing for the past while.

"I just thought maybe if you were willing to accept it, you could be like—"

"There's a lot of things I'm willing to accept, but the world doesn't need me around forever." Anyone else could have said that and it would have been hurtful—would have made their voice crack in painful realisation, or something of the sorts, but Legundo is too far numb to full process what he's saying. He's accepted his fate, Owen can

tell, and he won't hear anything else. Not even Owen

can save him, and that's unfortunately the way that it's been since the start.

Owen's not really the best at the whole... sentimental thing that Legundo tends to go about with. Sure, he can be rather dramatic at times—but it's nowhere near as often as Legs does it. It's difficult to get information out of the man when every second sentence he says is meant for a movie poster quote.

"What is this? What happened? You all are... mobilising a lot more, spreading around the area. What's changed?" He just needs information, for god's sake. Legundo got him here for something, and Owen just needs to know it and get out. None of this.. other stuff.

Legundo's voice hardens slightly when he speaks again. Obviously he's sick of this. "We were true to each other. We

were honest.. it's not human versus vampire. It's not."

"I agree there-" Owen starts, then grunts quietly as Legs continues overtop him. He turns himself invisible in order to duck out from behind his tree and walk towards Legundo silently. The man doesn't notice as he continues talking.

"It's those of us that look at each other as people worth saving, and those of us who look at each other as a meal."

Owen appears in front of him. Whatever the other man's done to make him so steely, it's working—he barely flinches. There's a flicker of terror in his eyes but it passes so quickly that Owen thinks he must have hallucinated it.

Fog hangs heavy over the area. It's smothering, just like the silence that falls between the two. They look at each other, eyes filled with emotions that there's no English words to describe, but don't react.

Seconds pass long and hard.

Legundo breaks the silence.
"Which are you?"

When Owen speaks, it's quieter. "I don't see you as a meal."

"And what about the others?"

"I don't *care* what the others want. I want them dead just as much as anybody else does."

Legundo almost laughs at Owen—a chuckle escapes from his lips before he pulls it back in. "See, you say this. You say this! You're being a *hypocrite*! You give Avid.. so much *flack* about judging people for just what they are and you let people—" he shakes his head around frantically, spinning in a half-circle out of frustration. "you let people *show* you what they are."

"And you don't... *care*."

Owen looks away. His eyes prick up with tears that he blinks away and again, his voice goes quiet. Legundo's getting far too close to home

for all of this.

"I don't owe anyone anything. They certainly haven't given me anything of value." Owen spits out. He looks straight into the Doctor's eyes and watches as they soften, a concerned sort of expression communicating a sadness that words couldn't quite place.

"-known these people for a few weeks." The pain in his voice suggests that he's not quite believing it—that Owen knows these people and what they're like. Legundo clearly is ready to give them all a second chance. Even the worst of the worst have something good in them, surely.

Owen glares at the Doctor for a moment. "And in that time.. they've made their colours abundantly clear." He turns away, but feels the eyes that are trained on his back, watching and studying his every move. It's not enough to simply twist your head to look at something else, he needs to leave. Legundo's getting into this

topic far deeper than he's wanting it.

He takes a few steps, quick and sharp, away from Legundo. Off to the side, around the lake.

Legs continues, because of course he does.

"And that's why they're standing together, shoulder to shoulder, human and vampire, to defend each other."

Owen sighs to himself and turns around. "What's it you want? What? Why did you- why did you leave the note?"

"Cause it's not what you are that defines you, Owen.... it's what you're *doing*." At this, Legundo steps forward to catch up with the vampire. He looks, eyes half-dead and devoid of hope, straight at Owen. The eye contact makes him squirm-

"And if. If you're going to follow Scott on his murderous little outburst again, that's not what makes you-" Legundo stops and looks down, then

turns away. For whatever reason, it's too much for him too.

"...I'm not following Scott on anything." Owen whispers, barely audible, and it hurts his ears when Legundo shouts back.

"REALLY? Really? *That's* why you've killed Pearl-"

"That was *my idea*."

"That's why you've killed Pearl? That's why you've killed Sausage?"

"These were *MY IDEAS*."

"Rrreally?-" The Doctor stretches the 'r', the sarcasm of his words cutting deep.

"-Because Scott seems to think he's the one in charge of *everything* right now."

Owen and Legundo. They should never have known each other—it was never going to end well, right from the start. They're too similar, too different, too much and too little. Whatever Owen did to

deserve knowing this man, he regrets it all. Legundo brought nothing but pain and hatred, no matter what good he thinks he's done for the world. Owen can't bear to hear him talk anymore. It's agitating, how he simply *doesn't understand*.

Owen's *sick of it*.

"Get out Doctor. One final chance."

Owen hesitates for barely a second before he approaches on the Doctor and strikes him across the face with his fist. Blood pours out of his nose, dripping down onto the already-stained coat and making it darker. Owen instantly sees how Legundo takes damage, life falling out of his eyes before he can even go for a second punch.

Legundo steps back. His legs give out and he struggles to stay upright, but manages to shuffle away to get out of the way of Owen. Unfortunately, the vampire's much stronger than him, and isn't hindered by

physical damage at that moment.

"Get out. You don't *deserve* to say his name. You don't know what I've been through." Owen grits out through more blows. Legundo stays silent, the only sound a quiet but sharp intake of breath to cope with the pain.

"I don't want to lose him, and I'm not going to lose THIS."

The doctor slumps to the ground in a sudden heap. Owen's hand is still in the air, frozen for a few seconds before gravity takes hold and brings it down to his side.

He looks—at Legundo's eyes, which are lifeless, and at his hands, which are still shaking, and at his mouth, which is hanging half open with blood spilling from the lip.

Owen says nothing. He holds back a sob, swallows, and turns away. Legundo will come back, he's sure of it. He doesn't want to be there to see it.







Thanks

"Thank you for making me cry consistently with your storytelling!
How dare you, sir" -Thistle

"SOS was the first series of Owen's I watched and it has forever
left me with a lasting impression. Thank you for these great years
of content!" -Carter

"Thank you for all the joy and inspiration you've provided -- after
all, every single person who participated in this dream of a project
united under a shared appreciation of one streamer! It takes a lot to
be able to build a community full of so many kind and welcoming
people, even as you grow; I hope this zine reflects that :)" -Alph

"I've been here since new life, and though I've never really been
active in the community, your content has been something that has
brought me a lot of joy and has inspired me a lot with my own
projects and art! I met my closest friends because of Rats ce, and
that's something I can't thank you enough for!" -Lyncornis

"Thanks Owen, for sparking creativity throughout the community
with the stories you tell!" -Winter

"Thank you Owen, for inspiring me and many other people in
countless ways :)" -Mercury

"Thank you for your hard work! Catching the latest series is
always a delight!" -Yoshi

"Thank you for being such a wonderful creator and storyteller,
Owen! Your content and stories are always such a delight to see
and I can't wait to see more of them in the future!" -ScarletFeisty

"Thank You for being such an inspiring individual and sharing
your stories with the world!" -Jamazzil

"Thank you for bringing us all these amazing series and this wonderful community!" -Zara

"Firm believer joining this amazing community has improved my various art skills Forever thankful I found this corner of the internet Heres to many more 🍷🍷🍷🍷" -Dallie

"Thank you Owen for curating a safe space where creatives can thrive! <3" -Theo

"Thanks so much for all you do!! Your videos/streams are a highlight of my week and I look forward to any future projects you do !! <3" -Bluet

"Thank you for being such a huge inspiration to me! Keep up the amazing work!" -Mor/Mike

"Thank you for having such fun characters no matter how big of a role, they bring so much joy! It is amazing to follow your storylines, thank you <3" -Sunny

"Thank you to Owen for all the SMPs and for the most egregious "cowboy" accent to translate into writing." -Emmett

"Owen, you have twisted my heart in ways I have never thought possible. Your characters and stories are WONDERFUL! So loveable, and so...Personal. I have truly fallen in love with the stories you create. <3" -Zephyr

"Thank you Owen for sparking my creativity again over the years. You've been the greatest constant since I found you just after Rats SMP" -Noah

"Thank you for creating some of my favorite minecraft videos and streams, like, ever, you are such an inspiration as a creator!" -Hal/Foehn

