

Agent Valasco's booted feet crushed grass under the shade of the arena. Agent Valasco chose to ignore the fact that shade could exist inside such a creature. The grassy fields splayed ahead of her boggled her, for while the serpentine monstrosity had gobbled plenty of farm and recreational land, all of that swallowed grass ending up in one place was a low-chance anomaly. So, Agent Valasco internalized that something else was at play in the creation of the pasture past the arena. While the grass was mostly flat, rises in elevation studded the plain, and plenty of consumed buildings kept line of sight from being straight and clear. She scanned all that she could see, but she found nothing that would trouble her. Agent Valasco moved forward.

Keeping her gun in her hand, Agent Valasco covered as much of the green space as she could. The walls of the digestive system were its side boundaries, and there was no end in her current sight. Agent Valasco made diagonal sweeps at first, trying to make her coverage efficient. In her early minutes, she saw nothing of note: no survivors, no otherworldly entities, no Rescue Alpha 16 members. Agent Valasco never expected hers to be an easy mission, but she had certainly taken less difficult ones. Agent Valasco strode over the ruins of one bedroom from a two-story, four-bedroom ranch twained vertically and horizontally. As she passed the connected bathroom, she glimpsed something green in the tub underneath all the white tiles. She reached down and freed the unidentified object from the cluttered bathtub. She knew not what she was holding in her hands. Its shape was if someone had scooped off the top half of a five-sided pyramid. It was made from a deeply black metal, and a green knob projected out from one of the five sides. Out of curiosity, Agent Valasco turned the unlabeled knob with her thumb. A green flame combusted out from the top indentation. Agent Valasco turned the knob farther, and the flame grew.

"Hm," Agent Valasco said out of mild interest.

She reset the knob, and the flame dissipated. The flame-creator was small enough that she could shove it into one of her coat's outer pockets, so she did. Agent Valasco continued onward.

Though the scenery would change, the environment would not. Rubble and grass plagued her view. She kicked at a globe across her path. She smacked a right-angled street sign. She meandered around a church that was mostly steeple. She hopped over the concrete barrier of an overpass to drop a distance about as high as her. Agent Valasco was wondering if she should retrace her steps and get more information out of those at the stadium when she spotted movement behind a hill ahead of her – movement which she had not seen before from the overpass. Agent Valasco stopped. More movement came, and something glittered behind that hill. Agent Valasco put her hand on her pistol.

Cresting the hill came a being very clearly lupine but with the build of a human, and a powerfully-built human at that. A naked one, too, with breasts that hurt Agent Valasco's spine just to look at and hindquarters she had only seen on ludicrous drawings on the Internet. This wolf woman had yellow, glittery fur, and Agent Valasco could not tell if it was blinding her to look at the entity. Her fur's texture looked to the agent like it should be restraining the lupine person's every movement, grinding and locking together, but the hill-crester was moving with ease. And to baffle Agent Valasco even further, she was moving with such ease despite the protruding gut that was moving.

The yellow wolf woman locked eyes on Agent Valasco and grinned a salivating grin that made the agent wonder if she had strode into her mission wearing a red hood. Agent Valasco drew her pistol and aimed it at the bestial otherworlder.

“Stay right where you are,” Agent Valasco said, flipping off the safety.

With a snort, the lupine lady ignored Agent Valasco, barreling down the hill an instant after the order was given, her belly not hindering her in the slightest. Her great leg muscles moved her fast and far with each clawed bound into the turf.

“I said stop!” Agent Valasco shouted.

Still, the on-rushing, glittery wolf sprinted towards her. Agent Valasco made the toughest choice any owner of a firearm could make. She fired her weapon. At the pull of the trigger, the hammer slammed into the .355-caliber (9mm as her metrically-inclined irritators would say) round sitting in the chamber of her pistol, activating the primer which caused one of the most lethal explosions ever concocted, sending the bullet down the barrel as the slide cocked back the hammer and allowed the spent case to eject out of the gun, the smell of lit gunpowder already chasing behind the cracking sound towards Agent Valasco’s senses. The bullet became free and pierced through the air, rotating after leaving its spiral launch tube. That bullet soared on a path not towards where the approaching wolf was, but where she was going to be. And that core of metal, tinged by fire and force, went true. It hit the quick aggressor square in her chest.

But, Virgo was right.

The bullet ricocheted off the lupine woman’s glittering yellow fur with a new sear – an embarrassment only felt by non-thinking missiles – and thudded into the ground, dented and used. Agent Valasco realized the uselessness of the shot almost immediately but gave herself no time to panic. She made that difficult decision three more times. Each bullet hit some limb or part of the unnatural beast, but no shot made an effect. The field-stalker was unfazed and unharmed. On a closer-to-even level, Agent Valasco could tell that the yellow wolf was a few feet taller than she, and the creature reminded the agent of the daylight version of a werewolf in a movie her second-cousin had suggested to her in the last two months. Agent Valasco took one

last shot – aiming for the right eye as the disobeying threat came within a terrifying distance of the federal agent. However, the wolf stretched out her arm, reaching for Agent Valasco’s neck, and in doing so, she accidentally blocked the shot meant for her eye. The case and the round fell spent to the ground as fingers softer than Agent Valasco would have expected wrapped around her throat.

The yellow wolf of a bright persuasion lifted the recovery agent up without a breath. It was in this moment that Agent Valasco allowed herself to panic. She tried bringing her gun right up to the monster’s face, but her weapon was wrenched out of her hands by a glittering hand. Jaws parted, bearing teeth duller than the wolf’s coat. Agent Valasco attempted to maneuver out of the hard grip, first by simple struggling and second by squirming out of her coat. Both methods failed. Agent Valasco was shoved headfirst into the saliva-buffered maw, and before she could come to terms with the fact that she was being swallowed whole, she was halfway down the lupine esophagus. No thrashing instinct was saving her, and no reflex was vomiting her. Agent Valasco was gulped down, down, and down. She was pushed by throat muscles into an already occupied stomach. Her panic blinded her from the fact that the other occupant had leporine ears and a sparkling disposition, and her arrival caused that other to panic more in kind.

So, the wolf woman of yellow with a twice-filled stomach ran back up the hill, hefting her gut up in satisfaction when she reached the mild peak. Then, she ran across the grass to find a place to digest in peace.

A celestial chime is heard.

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spent to the ground as fingers softer than Agent Valasco would have expected wrapped around her throat.

Almost as soon as she was lifted up by the yellow wolf, she was thrown back down onto the ground. Agent Valasco had the wind knocked out of her as she was slammed onto her back. She tried to breathe, tried to wheeze, tried to cough, but no amount of air passed in or out her throat. Her grip on her gun loosened, and the wolf woman with an amused grin standing over her kicked that gun out of the hand that still held onto it. Agent Valasco tried to make a verbal protest, but her breath had not yet returned to her. Agent Valasco tried lifting herself up, but her aggressor pushed her back down with a clawed foot. Agent Valasco expected the wolf woman to tear or bite into her. She was not expecting for the glittering wolf to turn around and spread her oversized buttocks. About the time the recovery agent was regaining her breath, the yellow wolf planted her butt down on Agent Valasco's head. To her surprise, there was no awful smell. What surprised her more was the anus of the unspeaking otherworlder opening for her head. With trained muscles, the wolf woman that glittered yellow sucked the agent into her bowels. Horror and shock wracked Agent Valasco. The confines of the bowels were too tight for her to properly panic, despite her regained breath. The insides of this unnatural lupine-esque behaved unlike the bright insides of both the bear and the serpent.

Agent Valasco's fake leather shoes were sucked inside, and the wolfen woman let her cheeks slap together. She jiggled her gut, two full organs. She ran off across the fields while her intestines carried her latest meal towards her stomach to be properly digested.

A celestial chime is heard.

Though the scenery would change, the environment would not. Rubble and grass plagued Agent Valasco's view. She kicked at a globe across her path. She smacked a right-angled street sign. She was going to meander around a church that was mostly steeple when she caught that the doorframe allowed enough room for her to enter. Feeling in a particularly detailing mood, Agent Valasco ducked her head under the half-collapsed headframe and entered the church. It was a small church: maybe Anglican, most likely Baptist or Lutheran. The bottom of the steeple was protruding downward, making a walk down the aisle between the wrecked pews a hazardous affair. Holes dotted the ceiling around the steeple. That small worship chamber contained little room for survivors, especially in its destructed state. After a quick study, Agent Valasco was ready to leave, but then she saw an object of interest on the church's pulpit, knocked around to face the pews by the events of gluttony. It was a white, jagged shape, and dots and flecks of blacks, grays, violets and greens left it ununiform. Agent Valasco felt herself drawn to this broken shape with edges that trailed off. Against all her ration, she reached out and touched the white shape.

Instantly, she was in the stadium, in front of guarding Gemini, on top of the breathless triangle. Agent Valasco's eyes went wide. Her breaths came fast and sharp. She twisted around, observing the area – knowing where she was but not how she got there. Gemini did not react. Virgo looked over at Agent Valasco with an "Oh!" of surprise. She sat down the brush on the easel. She stepped over to Agent Valasco and grabbed her by the shoulders.

"Calm down, Miss Agent," Virgo said, sweetness to her voice. "Calm down. You're fine."

"How did- how did- how did I... I was at-" Agent Valasco found herself unable to complete a sentence and barely a breath.



“You are okay. You must’ve found Australe.”

“What? Australe?” Agent Valasco’s breaths came slower, and her body movements less frantic.

“Triangulum Australe. The counterpart to this.” Virgo let go of Agent Valasco and pointed down at the absorbing triangle which the agent stood on and she did not. Agent Valasco looked down, and when she realized what she was standing on, she backed off it with suspicion and anxiety. She locked eyes with Virgo.

“Tri-triangle. There was no triangle. Only some... thing. It was white and edgy.” Virgo made a soft frown.

“Oh, that’s a shame. It sounds like Australe didn’t survive ingestion. Still... it sounds like it still works broken. The two space triangles are linked. You can go back and forth between the two.”

“Like... like some kind of teleporter?”

“Exactly!” Virgo’s expression returned to a soft, friendly one.

“Fuck.” Agent Valasco let out a long breath. “I wish I’d known that before I got curious.” She swiped her hands down over her eyes. “I wasn’t ready for that.”

“So, now we know there’s some give under that hard exterior.” Agent Valasco glared at Virgo. “You should lighten up, Miss Agent. You won’t last out there so straight-faced.”

“What, are you going to make me drink something gross to fix that, too?” Agent Valasco asked. Virgo laughed.

“No, no. I shouldn’t take up anymore of your time, and I have a painting to get back to.”

Virgo stepped away from Agent Valasco and towards the easel. Agent Valasco observed that a depiction of the segmented stadium graced the topmost part of the canvas, and a hue

hinting at green trailed below it. Agent Valasco remembered the odd artifact she had uncovered out in the fields. She took it out of her pocket and held it in plain view.

“Hey, does this object look familiar to you?” Agent Valasco called out to Virgo. Virgo stopped mid-stride and half-turned towards Agent Valasco. Her eyebrows raised with mild interest.

“Where, oh where did you find that?” Virgo asked, leaning her cheek against her right index finger.

“So you do recognize it.”

“I do. That would be Fornax. A simple, but ever-burning fire-starter.”

“What’s the best way to deal with it?” Agent Valasco was getting tired of holding out Fornax. Virgo’s eyes lit up.

“We can use it to restart Ara!” Virgo exclaimed, snapping.

Virgo ran past Agent Valasco, grabbing the green furnace on the way. Agent Valasco blinked, barely registering that burst of energy from Virgo. She snapped out of the daze and followed Virgo over to the wide dish set next to the table. Virgo got down on her knees and placed Fornax underneath the dish, Ara. Virgo twisted the knob, and Fornax’s flame alighted. Virgo stood up and dusted off her hands. To the recovery agent, the crystalline dish had by no means looked dull, but as the flame heated it from below, the dish gain a resplendence and light. Virgo smiled and looked at Agent Valasco.

“Neat,” Agent Valasco said. Virgo shook her head, still smiling.

“Does nothing impress you, Miss Agent?” Virgo asked.

“My paycheck does,” Agent Valasco said.

“In any case, Ara here broke during the fall. It’s original flame died out, and we couldn’t get it to relight. But Fornax’s flame does just fine. It’s practically the same.”

“What does it do?”

“Let me show you.”

Virgo reached somewhere into her dress, and she pulled out a uniform and white cross, equal at all points. She held it out towards Agent Valasco.

“Sorry, but it’s not Christmas or Easter,” Agent Valasco said.

“What?” Virgo asked, confused. “No, take it, and feed it to Ara.”

“You make it sound like Ara is something that needs to eat.”

“It’ll help you, I promise,” Virgo insisted, jostling the cross.

“Fine,” Agent Valasco said, taking the cross from Virgo rather roughly. “What do I do with it?”

“Just toss Crux into Ara.”

“What is going to happen?”

“Don’t be so suspicious, Miss Agent. Your goals will be achieved much easier if you do this.”

Agent Valasco thought about her options for several moments. Virgo had not given her any bad advice or false information thusfar, but Agent Valasco was extremely hesitant to perform an action she was unable to guess the outcome of. At the end of her thoughts, however, Agent Valasco gritted her teeth and dropped the cross into the bright dish. Before it could hit the dish proper, after passing rim-level, Crux vanished, and Agent Valasco felt a surge of energy go through her. Her clothes also grew slightly tighter in certain areas. Her gun felt different in its holster as well.

“What was that?” Agent Valasco asked, shaking off a tingle spreading over her skin.

Virgo smiled at her.

“You just made an offering to Ara, and so it gave you the boon of Crux,” Virgo explained. “It’s a slight boost to everything. I was going to save Crux for myself once I figured out how to relight Ara, but since you found Fornax and are the more proactive of us two, you deserved it.”

“Thank you...” Agent Valasco said, flexing her arm muscles and fingers.

“You’re welcome.”

“I feel... I feel like... I feel...”

“Like you just finished digesting a big meal?”

“Yes! I have all this energy that I could just burn off.” Agent Valasco pulled and pinched on her shirt and trousers in several spots. “Also, something feels wrong with my clothes, now.”

“Oh, your bust and butt grew, maybe hips too.”

“What?” Agent Valasco exclaimed. “It made my chest grow?”

“And your rump, yes. Hm, you don’t sound too happy.”

“It’s a bit hard to run when you’ve got large breasts wobbling around all over the place.”

“Eh, they didn’t grow that much. Crux gives you a *slight* boost, remember?”

“Listen, is there a way to undo that part of it?”

“Uh, no.”

“Goddamn it,” Agent Valasco grumbled. “I’m going to have to exercise even harder now.”

“Where I come from, no one has ever been upset at what Crux just gave you.”

“I don’t have time to imagine that.” Agent Valasco drew her sidearm to satisfy her recent curiosity. She noticed a new attachment on it. “A compensator? That’s handy, I guess.”

“I take it that wasn’t there before?” Virgo said.

“No.”

“I didn’t even know Crux could affect weaponry.”

“Have you ever heard of retroactive anxiety? That’s what you’re giving me about deciding to throw that secular crucifix into the bowl.” The gun on the whole seemed different in appearance to Agent Valasco. She took out the magazine to answer a questioning instinct of hers and observed that the magazine held ammunition that she had not loaded into it. “Are you kidding me? .45? It gave me .45s? So fucking weird.” Agent Valasco reinserted the magazine and cocked the slide. Agent Valasco holstered her gun. “Back to the grind.”

“Well, I hope you find more success,” Virgo said.

“Define ‘success’,” Agent Valasco said.

The agent and the virgin walked away from Ara, towards the entryway into the internal fields. Agent Valasco stopped between Triangulum and Gemini while Virgo returned to the easel, picking up the brush. Agent Valasco focused on the grass ahead, realizing that she would have to walk everything again. She cursed under her breath. She glanced over her shoulder at Triangulum, brow furrowing. She turned to Virgo.

“Can I use that thing to get back to where I was?” Agent Valasco asked her. “I don’t feel like walking all that again.”

“Presumably,” Virgo said without turning. “If Australe still works this way, I imagine you could use it to get back to that fragment. Just think about it and the location around it really hard. Otherwise, you might send yourself to every single piece. That could entail duplicates of

yourself, separated body parts, complete erasure of existence. You know, bad stuff. Focus hard, and none of that should happen.”

“I can’t believe I’m going to do this,” Agent Valasco grumbled, facing Triangulum.

With heavy feet, Agent Valasco stepped onto the mesmerizing triangle in the floor. She closed her eyes and thought about the church, the pulpit, and the piece of the other triangle. She squeezed her eyelids hard, and when she opened them, she was back in the church, the white fracture behind her. Agent Valasco let out a gasp of disbelief and relief.

Agent Valasco shook away her limiting emotions. She jogged out of the church and pressed onward, along the path she had been going, meandering around the church. Less than a few minutes later, She hopped over the concrete barrier of an overpass to drop a distance about as high as her. As she resolved the impact aches, Agent Valasco spotted movement behind a hill ahead of her – movement which she had not seen before from the overpass. Agent Valasco stopped. More movement came, and something glittered behind that hill. Agent Valasco put her hand on her pistol.

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The Agent shot the glittery wolf-like three more times: once in the engorged stomach and twice by her throat. Each shot caused the wolf woman to pause or stutter in her prolonged pounce on Agent Valasco, and the federal agent could see the woman tiring. Agent Valasco fired a sixth time (keeping careful track of how many rounds in the magazine she had), and that bullet struck the wolf woman straight between the eyes. She stopped, longer than usual, rubbing her

that shot spot. She let out a heavy heave, her gut moving furiously. She shook her head and raised her arms, a leap away from Agent Valasco.

The wolf of faux-gold jumped at Agent Valasco. The recovery agent let out a held breath and fired, dodging a half-second later. The bullet shot up into the open mouth of the yellow wolf, and the curvaceous lupine fell belly-first onto the ground. Agent Valasco sighed, and wiped sweat off her forehead, keeping her gun one-handed trained on the dead woman – just in case. A gurgling sound rose from the fallen wolf's throat, and Agent Valasco regained a two-handed grip on her firearm. The wolf woman's belly began flattening, a bulge travelling up her throat. To Agent Valasco's complex emotions, a leporine-esque woman with tall ears shining white and cloud-looking tail practically jumped out of the dead wolf's mouth. She wore a green bodysuit, hiding subtle curves. She was shorter than Agent Valasco. She glanced down at her former devourer and looked back up at Agent Valasco. Before Agent Valasco could react, the rabbit-evoking woman kissed Agent Valasco on the mouth and proceeded to scamper off. Agent Valasco blinked. Then, she wiped her mouth off with her sleeve.

“I hate this place,” Agent Valasco said, holstering her gun.

Agent Valasco hiked up the hill and got a view of more of the same environment she had been trekking through. Uniquely, she spotted a man at the base of the hill, and she wondered how he had avoided the wolf woman's passing. Agent Valasco walked down the hill towards the unassuming man, hoping to get more information one way or another. Before she reached the halfway point to him, she observed that he wore a marble-esque white himation over a sand-colored chiton and brown sandals, and his hair was a magnificent steel color. She guessed that he was another of the unwanted visitors to her world. His hands were on his hips, and he was



scanning the area. As Agent Valasco neared him, he turned towards her, and she pulled out her badge.

“Lo, stranger,” the man said.

“Federal Recovery Agent Valasco,” Agent Valasco gave her common greeting. “Mind if I ask you a few questions?”

“Not at all, agent,” the man said. Agent Valasco put away her badge. “My name is Boötes, and I was looking for my dogs. But I can spare the time to help you.”

“Boötes,” Agent Valasco echoed. “The girl back at the stadium mentioned you.”

“Ha, ha, heh,” Boötes said. “Virgo would. She thinks I’m very wise, but I just happen to have known the right people.”

“Let’s hope you knew the right ones for me. I’m looking for the president’s daughter, Vivienne Anderson. She was reported to have been swallowed by this beast. Another team was sent in to retrieve her, but they appear to have failed. Can you offer any information on her whereabouts?”

“Lots of missing children,” Boötes murmured. He cleared his throat. “I haven’t heard of such a girl, but then again, our news media covered different people.” He chuckled. “I hate to send you to another person, but Equuleus might know something. She’s very up to date on stuff like that – she and the rest of the Minors. Children, I mean. Not necessarily actual children, but the offspring of a parent. If you’re looking for a daughter of a democratic, then finding one of them would be best. And Equuleus is nearby, I know.”

“Well, thanks,” Agent Valasco. “Also, have you seen anymore survivors? The kind from around here, or that rescue team I mentioned.”

“Actually, I did see one person with a lot of tactical gear by some kind of stable. It was a bit west from here.” A sliver of hope settled through Agent Valasco.

“Were they alive?” she asked.

“Last I saw, yes,” Boötes said. “They were running into the stable, so I doubt they were dead.” He chuckled.

“Your information is appreciated,” Agent Valasco said. She remembered Cepheus’ request. “You wouldn’t have happened to see a different girl around? And a... monster?” Boötes grew serious.

“Oh, you must mean Cassiopeia,” he said. “Yes, I’d heard she’d been kidnapped by Cetus. I wish I could help you there, too, but I’m afraid I haven’t seen her either. Cetus does prefer water, though, so if you find any large bodies of water, you might want to check around for that terror.”

“There’s water in here?” Agent Valasco asked.

“More than you would think. Hm. Before I forget...” Boötes reached back and under his robe and pulled out a diamond arrow, holding it out to Agent Valasco. “Can you deliver this to Sagittarius? If he’s still in that wrecked arena. I think it’s one of his.”

“Mm, sure,” Agent Valasco said, taking the arrow, but growing annoyed at her growing busywork. She stuffed the arrow in her jacket, feeling a sensation of warmth emanating from the primitive missile.

“My gratitude,” Boötes said, giving her a half-bow.

“Are you planning on staying out here all exposed like this?” Agent Valasco asked.

“Oh, don’t worry about me,” Boötes said.

“All right then,” Agent Valasco, turning towards the direction Boötes had indicated as west. She began walking away.

“Goodbye, agent!” Boötes called. “And if you see my dogs, do send them my way. You can’t miss them!”

Agent Valasco held out her right thumb for him.

The recovery agent continued on her way through the internalized environment, wondering if she was ever going to see anything new. Just as she was having those thoughts, walking through a relatively clear, fallen-over, lopped-off top of a skyscraper, Agent Valasco punched out a fractured window to see the most beautiful river she had ever seen in front of her. She stopped in awe at its crystalline clearness and the lovely reflections. It stretched across the grass in either direction, the rise of hills and urban debris cutting off her view of its entire beauty. This river was a safe width of five water fountains. Its water gave a soft warble more akin to the trickling of a stream. Her comfortable daze was broken by the thudding sounds of a hammer on wood. Her eyes fell upon the source in frustration, and to her left, she saw a man hammering away on a dock-like bridge of various wooden junk spanning the width of the striking river. He wore a long toga, all brown, and his hair and hands shone gold and blue. Next to him, on one of the dock’s posts, another of those white shards drew one’s vision.

Needing all the information she could, Agent Valasco strode towards the dock-building man, pulling out her badge. The man grumbled and gruffed under his breath, his movements frustrated. When Agent Valasco’s shadow fell on him and his dock, before she could speak, the man pounded harder on a nail.

“What do you want, woman?” the man asked. Agent Valasco stopped and frowned.

“Federal Recovery Agent Valasco,” she told him as was her required introduction.

“Gah,” the man said, returning to his normal hammering pace. “Name’s Auriga.”

“I’ve been sent in here to rescue-”

“Are you with those foolhardy idiots in all black?”

“No, but they are part of the reason I’m here. I’m also here to-”

“Whatever it is, you’re going to fail at it.”

“If you interrupt me one more time, I’m legally able to penalize you.” Agent Valasco put away her badge.

“Go ahead.” Auriga gave her a dismissive raise of his right shoulder. “Don’t got much of anything left.” His words left Agent Valasco mildly stunned.

“Are you really asking me for assisted suicide?”

“Wouldn’t mind it. When fucking long-scales sent me into her gut, I lost my chariot. Gods-damned snake. It’s in pieces before you ask. Part of it’s in this bridge. I don’t have anything else in life, ‘sides these tools.” Auriga gestured at a bucket full of a myriad of tools next to him. “And my clothes, I suppose.”

“If you’re done with life, why are you building this ugly piece of shit?” Agent Valasco asked.

“Because I’ve got to occupy my hands, woman! I don’t care if I die, but I’m not going to seek it out. If I fell off this right now and drowned, so be it. But I’m not going to throw myself over. If I’m not dead, I’ve got to work.”

“You aren’t going to help me at all, are you?”

“Nope.”

“If I helped you somehow, would you help me then?”

“Maybe.”

“This is ridiculous. But I’ve been chasing ghost answers anyway. You need something to keep your hands from being idle? That shouldn’t be too hard.”

“Good chances.”

Agent Valasco looked up from Auriga and stared across the bridge. She looked down at him again.

“Is this safe to cross?” she asked.

“Probably,” Auriga said.

“Just know that I can make a straight shot falling.”

“That’d be a sight,” Auriga said in his steady tone.

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Valasco took aim as the lance narrowly passed her, but the centaur woman defied the agent's expectations and turned right instead of running past Agent Valasco, her back half coming towards the agent. Foregoing firing, Agent Valasco leapt backwards, but her leap was too late. Weighty armor and flank slammed into the agent, knocking her off her feet and her gun from her grip. Agent Valasco lay dazed on her rear end, strawberries staining her jacket.

The centaurette did not face Agent Valasco. Instead, she backed up towards the recovery agent. Her tail moved aside, and to the agent's horror, the centaur dropped her hindquarters onto Agent Valasco's head. Agent Valasco popped through that puckered ring, her entire upper body immersed into rectum and lower intestine. The rest of her was sucked inside the centaur's intestines, and the centaur stood, her backside covered in red juice. She moved her tail back and started trotting away, her underside swaying. Drips of pre-cum leaked from her penis, and the centaur knew with whom she could appease her stimulation while the recovery agent was absorbed into her intestines.

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Agent Valasco settled into the compact, sweltering stomach of the centaur lancer, giving the latter quite the spherical stomach bulge. The one who had not been swallowed patted her stomach with a dutiful expression and trotted off of the strawberry court. That stomach did little more than dissolve the clothes off panicked Agent Valasco’s body in a few dozen minutes, and after she had been rendered naked, the digestive system transferred her from the compact upper stomach to the slightly wider lower stomach. As the centaurette strode around, her underbelly swayed as it digested Agent Valasco in full, her member pressing against that full, drooping bulge, eliciting an erection and precum out of that self-titillation.

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The galloping slowed to clopping. Her jacket fell on the ground in front of her. A shadow came upon her. She heard the scrape of the lance on asphalt, and then, her trousers and underwear were split down the back by a cold point. Agent Valasco scowled. The centaur's lance scooped beneath her, and then, it raised her onto her knees, even colder against her bare flesh. Four legs surrounded her, and the lance moved out from under her.

“Don't you dare,” Agent Valasco growled.

Her gruff insistence was ignored, and the agent felt a fleshy force split her big lower cheeks apart. Agent Valasco gasped then bit her lip as the centaur's shaft penetrated her anus. The fallen agent understood in that moment what Virgo had meant by “stretchy”, as the centaur's penis filled up her intestines more than she thought possible, the centaur's testicles flopping against her exposed backside. With downward thrusts, the centaur woman's pleased herself with Agent Valasco's butt. Agent Valasco gritted her teeth and tried crawling away, but the lance came down by the agent's neck. The recovery agent did not move again. After a lost count of thrusts, the centaur gave one last thrust, her hardest, down into Agent Valasco. A tremble passed from the penis into Agent Valasco. The centaur ejaculated into the agent's bowels. Her cum filled up those intestines. Agent Valasco's newfound stretch limit was tested when her belly started expanding from the sheer amount of semen pumped into her colon. Soon, the centaur's heavy breaths and spewing seed ended, and the dual creature pulled her cock out of Agent Valasco's anus, leaving it to dribble jizm and to recover from its gape. Agent Valasco's lower half collapsed on the ground, and she used her willpower to ignore the pleasure centers attempting to compromise her brain.

“I've had worse rumps,” the centaur woman said, backing up a few steps. “Now, I'm going to need all that back.”

“What...” Agent Valasco forced the question out of her throat. “... do you fucking mean by that?”

Agent Valasco felt a warmness, a slickness around her feet. The warmness travelled up her legs. She glanced over her back to see, to her horror, that the centaur’s penis was sucking up her legs. Agent Valasco had no words but plenty of facial expressions. As her hips entered the member, Agent Valasco reached out for her gun, just few hand-lengths out of her reach. However, she failed, the centaur adding insult to injury by knocking the gun farther with her lance tip. The centaur’s rod was at Agent Valasco’s ribs, her body shape forming a distinct bulge in the shaft and the testicles where she was – for a reason that spat at her understanding of anatomy – being sent into. After a few more failed protests, the centaur woman sucked all of Agent Valasco inside her penis, then sack. Agent Valasco was surrounded by the thinnest among of semen in her sexual prison, still trying to come to terms with her predicament – and the heat was rising, the texture moistening.

The centaur’s penis became semi-flaccid, and she set her lance on her shoulder. With the interloper in her testicles, she travelled to a base of living inside the mighty serpent, hoping to find someone there to help her release the new cum forming inside her. As she trotted, on the lookout for more danger, the struggles in her balls ceased, the lumps rounding out. She reached her temporary residence, the green of Hole 2 of a golf course, on which a bench, a bird fountain, and a snooker table had come to be. Sitting on the bench was a leporine woman in a green bodysuit. She smiled at the centaur as the lance-bearer approached, and the centaur smiled an aroused smile back. The rabbit-esque woman’s eyes drifted down to the centaur’s sac, now the size of two watermelons. She licked her lips.

The rabbit woman unzipped her bodysuit down the front, and she slid the one-piece clothing down around her ankles. She beckoned the centaur with a finger. The centaur strode up to the bench, impaling her lance in the green for holding purposes. She reared up on her back legs and placed her two front legs on the snooker table that was behind the bench. With a cry of lust, broken was her composure, the centaurette plunged her thick shaft into the vagina of the leporine, and the latter reciprocated with a similar cry of excitement. Within moments, their orgasms came in unison, and the belly of the woman on the bench expanded greatly into the size of a small beanbag chair with the seed that once was Agent Valasco. Panting, the centaur woman withdrew from her lover, placing her hooves on the ground. The rabbit woman attempted to zip up her bodysuit, but her belly prevented a full zip; so her top torso was left exposed. The centaur lancer lowered her upper half to nuzzle with the leporine-esque woman.

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The bank was in symmetrical disarray, and the vault door, too, was split in two. Agent Valasco made note of her conversations with Boötes and Auriga on her phone while she ambled



through the bank towards the vault. Agent Valasco stepped into the vault. Some of the valuables-containing storage drawers were open, and some were closed. Now useless bills and expensive trinkets were exposed. However, it was not the loose cash and karats that drew her attention. Another of those white shards rested in one compartment, priceless compared to anything else the vault contained.

Deciding it was time for her to make another round at the stadium, Agent Valasco touched the shard, still feeling some hesitation to do so. In a blink of the eye, Agent Valasco was back in front of Gemini. She looked over at Virgo, whose painting now showed the beginnings of the perfect river. Virgo glanced over at Agent Valasco and gave her a smile. Agent Valasco turned around and strode into the seating area. She climbed up the steps and hopped the railing onto the second concourse. She walked into Sagittarius' room to find the centaur eating a mixture of different flavored corn chips out of a bowl much too nice for the snacks. The emptied bags were on the floor next to him. He gave the recovery agent a welcoming smile.

“Hello, good agent,” Sagittarius greeted. “Come to ask me more questions?”

“Obviously,” Agent Valasco said. She retrieved the diamond-tipped arrow Boötes had given her. “Is this one of yours?” Sagittarius looked over at his quiver, resting on a shelf of sponsored gear. He looked back at her. “Yes, I believe so,” he replied with a humored smile.

“Don't mock me,” Agent Valasco said.

“It's just a jest,” Sagittarius said, eating another chip. “It was a fair question for you to ask. Indus uses similar arrows. Where did you find one of my missiles?”

“That Boötes gave it to me,” Agent Valasco replied. “Asked me to return it to you.”

“Ahh, Boötes,” Sagittarius said. “The stellar biologist's helper. The first of us. He's always so helpful.”

“So, you were made?” Agent Valasco said.

“Everything is made,” Sagittarius said. Agent Valasco glared at him. “But to be more precise, we were crafted. Most of us from scratch. Some of us are singular entities. Some of us are multiples, like Gemini or the arrows. Some of us contain untraditional components.”

“I don’t know if that helps me,” Agent Valasco said. “But that is interesting.”

“I’m glad you think so, not to be vain,” Sagittarius said. Agent Valasco handed the arrow towards him, but he shook his head. “Keep it. Use it to create something brighter, better.”

“How?”

“Ask around. We all have our talents.”

“Look, asking around is part of my job, but it’s not the part of it I’m always thrilled to do.”

“We all have necessary slogging to do. Oh, and if you find anymore of my arrows, feel free to keep them. I have plenty.”

“All right.” Agent Valasco tucked the arrow into one of her outside coat pockets. “I’ll be back later, possibly.”

“I am looking forward to our next conversation, Agent Valasco.”

The recovery agent left the hunting centaur to his bowl of chips and made her way down the steps back into the lower concourse. As she stepped into the concourse, a loud exclamation came from the right end of the corridor.

“Get the fuck away from me!” shouted the voice of the crestfallen cheerleader, drawing the attention of Virgo, too. Gemini remained motionless.

There was a loud *clang*. Agent Valasco deliberated if she wanted to check out the commotion. However, the apparent source of Erica’s shouting came skipping into view. It was

the rabbit woman who had come out of the belly of the wolf woman when Agent Valasco had killed the latter. The recovery agent instinctively covered her lips with her right hand. The rabbit-esque woman's eyes sparked with recognition, and she bounded up to Agent Valasco. The federal agent took one step backwards.

"There you are," the woman in the bodysuit said to Agent Valasco. "I've been looking everywhere for you."

"Why?" Agent Valasco said through her fingers.

"To tell you 'thanks!' for saving me," the rabbit woman said. "I was panicky, so I kind of rushed off without saying anything."

"I don't need any more of your thanks," Agent Valasco said.

"Don't be silly! Before I got caught by that terrible wolf, I've been exploring this side of Hydra. I could give you directions for any place you might be looking for."

"Hmm... Fine. First, have you seen a redhead, slutty, young woman, goes by the name Vivienne?"

"Um..." The rabbit woman tapped her cheek in thought. "No."

"Fantastic," Agent Valasco huffed. "Second, I came here from a bank that was in two pieces? Do you know if there's a barn anywhere around there?"

"I've seen a few stables, but one near a barn... Oh! Yes! I have. If you keep the vault on your right, it should be straight ahead by a few minutes. But wait... that's where Centaur patrols lately. Oh, um, don't leave just yet. I might need to talk to her. She's very protective of me. I can't imagine she'll be happy either when she learns that Lupus got me, but at least that big, bad wolf is dead now."

"Oh, Lupus is dead?" Virgo asked.

“Yeah. Also, hi Virgo!”

“Hey, Lepus,” Virgo said. She chuckled.

“At least I know I was going in the right direction,” Agent Valasco said to herself.

“Thanks for the intel,” she told Lepus.

“You are so welcome,” Lepus responded. “I’m going to talk with Centaur now.” She waved at Agent Valasco and Virgo. “Bye, my savior. Bye, Virgo.”

“Bye, Lepus,” Virgo said. Lepus waved at Gemini.

“Bye, Gemini,” Lepus said.

Gemini did not move.

Lepus hopped onto the inset triangle and disappeared. Agent Valasco shook her head about the encounter. Virgo went back to painting, and Agent Valasco was about to leave when more footsteps came from the left wing of the concourse. She turned around to see Cepheus moseying towards them. Agent Valasco grumble-sighed. Cepheus’ pace increased as his eyes locked onto Agent Valasco.

“Oh good, you’re still here, good lady,” Cepheus said. His cheeks were still red from crying, but they were dry.

“Suddenly think of something that could help me?” Agent Valasco hoped.

Cepheus steps stuttered, and he said. “N-no.” He coughed, and came to a stop in front of her. “But I do have some other way to help you.” From his kingly robes, Cepheus pulled out a chisel. It looked like a normal chisel for all intents and purposes, except its edge was made of light. “I used to carve the most marvelous statues and edifices in my spare time. Before I-” He sniffed. “- I had a family. I even helped form some of the last ones of us.”

“Neat,” Agent Valasco said without an ounce of emotion.

“Well, I was thinking that maybe I could help carve your equipment into something better, a better tool to help you against our kind.”

“With a chisel?”

“I’d take him up on that offer,” Virgo advised. “He’s quite the sculptor, and that’s no ordinary chisel.”

“I can see that,” the federal agent said, bitingly.

“All I need is some raw material to carve into the item like, like, like...” Cepheus said. His eyes fell upon the arrow sticking out of Agent Valasco’s pocket. “That!” Agent Valasco looked down at the arrow.

“You’re going to carve this arrow into something of mine with a magic chisel?”

“It’s by no means magic. Look, look, I can show you. Saggy’s arrows are fantastic for this process. Their deadly nature is well-suited to the carving process.”

Agent Valasco was skeptical. However, after the fight with Lupus, she had learned that she needed all the power she could get. So, Agent Valasco took out the arrow and took out her gun. She put both in his free hand. Cepheus gave her a helpful smile, and then, he went to work.

While keeping both the arrow and the pistol in his hand, he chipped at them with the chisel. Flashes of light popped at each impact, each strike. Cepheus’ hand moved with steadiness, patience, and experience. Soon, the flashes of light grew so large and so frequent that Agent Valasco had to shield her eyes with her hand even while wearing sunglasses. The lights stopped after another minute, and Agent Valasco uncovered her eyes. Cepheus was holding her pistol out towards her in both hands, the arrow gone and the chisel supposedly stowed away. Agent Valasco took the gun from King Cepheus, feeling its new weight, its new balance. Its frame was different, and its magazine and well were longer. Agent Valasco took out the

magazine and examined the rounds. As they had changed after sacrificing Crux to Ara, so too had they changed after Cepheus' chiseling. They were now .357 cartridges, full-metal jacketed, and where once there had been fourteen per clip, now the pistol's magazine held sixteen. Agent Valasco nodded in approval, though her understanding of the process remained null. She placed her gun in its holster.

"Yeah, that'll work," Agent Valasco told Cepheus.

"What'd I tell you?" Virgo said over her shoulder.

"Oh, I'm glad you're happy," Cepheus said. "And, I hope some of those missiles will find their way into the heart of that foul Cetus!" Cepheus' expression became aggressive. Agent Valasco had to smile at his change in tone.

"I'll see what I can do," Agent Valasco said.

"My increasing appreciation to you, good lady Valasco," Cepheus said, bowing.

"Yeah."

Agent Valasco spun around and stepped onto the voided triangle. In an instant, she was back in the vault. Agent Valasco went to leave, when she spotted another peculiar object in a different compartment. Pulling out the drawer a bit farther to better access the shining thing, Agent Valasco retrieved an obvious octant of orange glass and brass. It's measurements held unfamiliar markings instead of the numerals she was familiar with. Agent Valasco pocketed the octant, wondering where luck became convenience became triteness. The federal recovery agent left the twained bank, continuing on her previous path.

Two minutes later, Agent Valasco passed onto the mashed remains of a basketball court and a strawberry field. Hoops dangled off of bent backboards, and plenty of juice stained the ground. Past the berried court, a row of hedges as tall as some of the hoops stood upright but

unrooted. Agent Valasco saw nothing of interest there, so she walked through the court of strawberries, pushing through the hedges. Coming out the other side, she almost tripped on the remains of a ship. Correcting herself, Agent Valasco studied the beached ship. The recovery agent had visited plenty of ports, shipyards, and navy outposts to know that she was looking at the hull and keel of a ship, though she noticed that the sails and its back part was missing. As well, the ship parts appeared to be made out of wood an abnormal gold and white, and instead of barnacles, the ship was studded with ice and spherical rocks.

Agent Valasco made a mental note of the stranded ship parts and navigated around them, heading forward. She walked for another twenty minutes. Agent Valasco was itching for a cup of coffee or any caffeinated beverage, but she pushed those needs away, mentally flagellating herself for growing a bit weary that early into her mission, citing other missions to herself when she had gone longer without rest, caffeine, or sleep. After walking through a small camping store, an eighteen-wheeler lay in her way, past which a cellphone tower protruded upwards, its signals lost forevermore. Agent Valasco circled around the rectangular vehicle, and finally, past the cellphone tower, she saw a red barn, nearly intact. Agent Valasco smiled a professionally arrogant smile. Some of her energy was restored, and the recover agent jogged towards the barn.

She passed the cellphone tower, creaking from whatever miniscule, sub-fields reverberations came from the digestive walls of the cities-dwarfing snake. Then, the barn doors burst open, and Agent Valasco put her hand on her gun. Out from the barn, a glowing young woman with the aesthetics of a horse and a member of Rescue Alpha 16 ran into the grassy space between it and the truck. The Rescue Alpha 16 member was running backwards, shotgun aimed into the barn. Agent Valasco drew her gun on instinct. Before she could address the Rescue Alpha 16 member – or the horse woman – the barn exploded.

Whether from behind or from within the barn, a colossal bull of a woman – which the recovery agent recognized as an oxymoron – burst from the barn, shattering it into pieces with her frame. Her horns were taller than Agent Valasco, and they were a silvery black, whereas her hooves were a reddish-black. The recovery agent wondered how the laws of physics could allow for anyone to be such a height (forgetting where she was with the excitement) – or to have such a massive bust and backside. The agent was getting tired of all the nudity. Looking at her long enough, Agent Valasco realized that there would have been no possible way for the horned woman to fit inside the barn at her height and muscly girth.

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She aimed her pistol up and shot at the bull woman's eyes, but her aim was too low, plinking into the neck of the colossal threat. The horned woman smirked down at Agent Valasco and the Alpha 16 member. She raised a hoof and brought it down at Agent Valasco. The agent dodged out of the way, but the impact stunned her. Meanwhile, the Alpha 16 shotgunner fired at the giant leg. The leg twitched as each cluster of shot hit it, but the colossus did not buckle. The horned woman bent her knees and reached down at Agent Valasco. The recovery agent snapped out of her stun before the hand could swipe at her, and she fired twice at the hand coming towards her. The hand twinged, the face of the massive woman flinching. Agent Valasco danced backwards. The Alpha 16 member fired at the hand now closer to them, and the bovine woman howled as her hand bled from the consecutive damage.



She straightened up, and swept her left leg at the two in anger with a twist on her right heel. Agent Valasco dodged out of the way, but the specialist got struck hard, sent flying. Agent Valasco's adrenaline pounded, and she fired two more shots up at the left armpit of the intimidating enemy. The eyes of the bovine berserker flicked down at Agent Valasco from the kicked-aside Alpha 16 member. The former raised her hoof and brought it down brutally into the soil. Against everything Agent Valasco knew about physics, cracks barreled towards her through the ground, until they carved out a chunk beneath her that cartoonishly angled upwards with the force to rocket her upwards. She flew high into the air, higher than the aggressive bull woman, and to her dismay, the woman with horns opened her mouth. A sensible thought ran through Agent Valasco's panicking mind, and she aimed down at the exposed maw. Agent Valasco fired, but she aimed too high. The bullet struck the bovine woman's upper jaw, and the recovery agent plummeted into the open maw.

The lips close around Agent Valasco, and the wide tongue began folding around her, blanketing her, tossing her around. Agent Valasco tried to fire, but she lost her gun in the confusion. After a minute of playing with her catch, the cow-esque woman swallowed down the recovery agent, tracing the descent with her fingers. Agent Valasco landed in the first of multiple stomachs, where she would be digested in stages.

A celestial chime is heard.

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recovery agent. When she stood to continue her attack at the shotgun-using specialist, Agent Valasco was nowhere in sight, but past those outrageous cheeks, a pair of legs were sucked into the bowels of the woman with the features of cattle.

A celestial chime is heard.

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head lurched. Agent Valasco, subsequently, avoided the open mouth, glanced off the chin, and landed on the left breast, sinking partially before springing up.

Agent Valasco took one moment to get her bearings, yet she took one second too long, For the hearty right hand of the bull woman grabbed her before Agent Valasco could make a leap of escape. With a deft flick of her thumb, the bull woman disarmed Agent Valasco. She grinned down at the government agent. With a smack of her lips, the cattle colossus shoved Agent Valasco into her left nipple, whereupon Agent Valasco became awashed in an excess of milk in the left breast – milk that began sloshing her clothes away. Agent Valasco was at a loss for words, and her skin was beginning to tingle.

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Agent Valasco took a swift moment to get her bearings, and she observed a hand coming towards her. Agent Valasco leapt onto the other breast as the hand pawed at the left, making it shake with impossible ripples. The agent fired at the hand, and it twitched. Agent Valasco switched tactics, looking up and to the side. Agent Valasco fired twice intentionally at the neck, and from that closer distance, her bullets did more damage. The cow woman gasped and gurgled in her throat. The recovery agent bounded as best she could on the soft surface over to the neck, and she pressed her gun straight into the sturdy throat. Agent Valasco fired three more times, and the cattle woman let out a blood-speckled scream of pain. The cattle woman reached out and clung to the cellphone tower to steady herself. Deciding it was time to get to a safer position, Agent Valasco also moved herself onto one of the horizontal beams of the cellphone tower. She turned back, holding her pistol in one hand to see if she could get a good shot at one of the bull woman's eyes.

"Ha, ha!" came a voice from above. Agent Valasco and the cow woman looked up to see a naked man wielding a large club, standing freely at the tip of the cellphone tower. From her position, she got a good yet unwanted view of his well-shaped penis and chiseled buttocks. His hair was curly, brown, and exceptional. His teeth were a bright white. The irises of his eyes were



a glowing gold. Agent Valasco grimaced and looked partially away. “Your time is at an end, Taurus!”

Without an ounce of fear, he leapt off the tower. He fell at the head of the bovine behemoth, and he swung his hefty club directly between her horns. With a thunderous *crack* at the strike, the man laughed again, and the bull of a giant woman fell backwards. Both of them hit the ground, sending up a spray of loose dirt. Agent Valasco decided to that she should climb down the tower, so she did. When she reached the bottom, she jogged over to where the Alpha 16 member was getting to his feet, instead of the man with the club who perched on the brow of the bovine-esque corpse. At the same time, the horse-like woman crawled out from beneath the truck and made her way towards Agent Valasco and the Alpha 16 member. Agent Valasco took out her badge to show to the specialist soldier, while holstering her gun.

“Federal Recovery Agent Valasco,” she introduced as she brandished her badge something similar to a smile creeping across her face. The Alpha 16 member took off his helmet, revealing a buzz cut of black hair and hazel eyes. “And you have no idea how pleased I am to see one of you.”

“I could say the same,” the Alpha 16 member said, holding his shotgun in a more relaxed grip in his right hand, pointed at the ground. Agent Valasco put away her badge. “Lieutenant Newton. Let me guess: You’re here for the President’s kid?”

“Correct,” Agent Valasco said.

“Hate to burst your bubble, but I haven’t seen her.”

“I’ve gotten that answer a lot.”

“I bet, but you Recovery Agents don’t really get sent places with easy answers, do you?”

“Unfortunately. What happened to the rest of your squad?” Before Lieutenant Newton answered, the horse woman came up beside them.

“Great, you’re alive,” Lieutenant Newton said to her. She nodded.

“Thanks to you two,” the youthful horse woman said. She was dressed in a denim skirt and a red croptop, bare-hooved and horse-tailed, that tail made of glowing white strands. She glanced over at the naked man, strolling towards them. “And him, I suppose.”

“He robbed you,” Lieutenant Newton said to Agent Valasco. She shrugged.

“You can’t cash in glory at the bank,” Agent Valasco replied. “Federal Agent Valasco,” she told the horse woman.

“I overheard,” the equine woman said. She smiled a cheerful smile, placing her hands on her bare waist. “I’m Equuleus. Nice to meet you.” Agent Valasco did not reciprocate the smile. Equuleus’ mouth levelled into an uncertain line.

“Don’t worry about her,” Lieutenant Newton told Equuleus. “Recovery Agents don’t know how to smile.”

“And you Alpha 16 members don’t know how to tie your shoes,” Agent Valasco retorted. The lieutenant laughed.

“No, you’re thinking of marines,” Lieutenant Newton said.

“Oh right, my bad.”

“In any case, we got split up not long after we came into this cesspit. We did find survivors. Actually got a sizeable group, but then, a whole bunch of shit went down. All kinds of monsters got the ambush on us. The civvies scattered in the panic, and we each had to deal with our own glowy fuckers.” He sighed, and rubbed the dark circles under his eyes. “I haven’t slept in days.”

“He found me yesterday,” Equuleus said.

“That’s right. It was out near the shore.”

“I was collecting interesting debris for an art project.”

“You mean by the river?” Agent Valasco asked.

“Not by Eridanus,” Equuleus said. “By the Sea.”

“Fantastic,” Agent Valasco murmured.

“But, that’s also about the time she found us,” Lieutenant Newton said, gesturing with his shoulder at the fallen bovine woman. “Some of you are relentless,” he said to Equuleus.

“Blame it on our creator,” Equuleus said, shrugging with palms up.

“And rid ourselves of freewill?” the man said. “Nay, we make our own choices, take our own actions.”

“Hello, Heracles,” Equuleus said.

“No shit?” Agent Valasco and Lieutenant Newton said.

“Greetings, little horse,” the warrior said, patting the vibrant horse on her shoulder. “I’m pleased to see you survived. But I don’t deserve the honor of that name just yet, so please, I’d ask you to call me Alcaeus.” He let go of Equuleus and looked at the two governmental specialists. “You did fine work facing that beast, fellow warriors, but I thought I might make the final blow to end your struggle.”

“Can you please put some clothes on?” Agent Valasco requested.

“Yeah man, we all like to freeball, but this is too much,” Lieutenant Newton said. Agent Valasco gave the lieutenant a glance. Alcaeus laughed.

“There is nothing better than fighting with naught but your skin and your weapon,” Alcaeus said. “No other joy can match it.”

“Whatever you say,” Agent Valasco said. “Have you seen a slutty redhead with too much influence?”

“Nay,” Alcaeus said.

“Your democratic liege’s daughter?” Equuleus asked. Agent Valasco gave a sharp nod. “I have seen her.” Agent Valasco’s day got much better.

“Kid, you just became my favorite person in this snake,” Agent Valasco said with a hint of a smile.

“Oh, that’s...” Equuleus became flustered. “... good. I, erm, saw her out in the Sea. She’s the one with art on her back, yes?”

“The tattoo, yes.”

“I think I saw her with Delphinus. Delphy was helping her get across the islands.”

“Great, that’s great,” Agent Valasco said. “I’m fucking excited to deal with that.”

“Have no fear, cherry-breathed amazon,” Alcaeus said, running his hand through his hair. “If you have endured this far, I believe you can best whatever more challenges this serpent holds. Now, I must be off! I have more trials of my own to face. Farewell.” Alcaeus strode off with a pronounced gait, chest protruding and chin high.

“Bye, Alcaeus,” Equuleus called.

“That sounds like a good idea, actually,” Lieutenant Newton said. “I think I’m going to go find a place to rest.”

“There’s this football-” Agent Valasco said.

“Yeah, I know,” Lieutenant Newton cut her off. “That’s where I was headed.” Agent Valasco was a bit miffed at the interruption. Lieutenant Newton looked down at his shotgun.

Then, he shoved it into Agent Valasco's hands, to her surprise. "Here. I'm not planning on fighting anymore today. You'll make better use of it."

"Uh, thanks," Agent Valasco said. She did allow some appreciation to show.

"You agents know how to use big guns right?" Lieutenant Newton asked with a coy smile, handing her his ammunition belt pouch.

"The biggest," Agent Valasco said, using the strap of the shotgun to loop the weapon onto her back and attaching the pouch next to where she kept her pistol ammunition. With the obstacles encountered so far, Agent Valasco was glad to have a different upgrade in firepower.

"I'll see you around, Agent Valasco," Lieutenant Newton. "Come see me whenever you need." He looked at Equuleus. "You coming?"

"Yeah," Equuleus said.

"Before you go, I did find another from your team," Agent Valasco told him. He perked up. "But she died not long after I met her." His shoulders slumped.

"Damn," Lieutenant Newton said. "What'd she look like?"

"Dirty blonde. Brown eyes."

"Webley. Damn. She was a good soldier, and a good friend. Where was she?"

"Not too far from the arena. Actually, just through a hotel connecting the two."

"Strange," Lieutenant Newton said, scratching his chin, flecked with untrimmed facial hair. "I could have sworn she was heading the other way, towards that Sea."

"Before she died, she gave me this," Agent Valasco pulled the green circles out of her pocket. "Know what it is?"

"Nah, can't say I do," Lieutenant Newton said.

"Boötes might know," Equuleus remarked.

“I saw him not long ago,” Agent Valasco said. “I doubt he’s in the same place, though.”

“He likes people, so you’re bound to see him again.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

Agent Valasco and Lieutenant Newton with the post-teenage Equuleus parted ways, the agent continuing “westward” out of habit’s sake. Agent Valasco logged her conversation with the lieutenant into her phone. As she moved past the rubble of the bull-broken barn, she came across a mast and cloudy orange sails sticking out the ground. She recognized it as belonging to the heel of the boat she had seen earlier. Nailed to the mast by a ruby-tipped arrow was a compass. Agent Valasco took both from the mast. She pondered whether Cepheus could do anything with the arrow that looked similar to Sagittarius’ arrows. She also was gathering an idea of who might be interested in that broken ship.

For another twenty minutes, Agent Valasco kept going in same direction, finding little of interest. No people (especially no survivors) and no out-of-place objects. However, as she walked on, one side of the magnanimous snake finally came into view. She approached the pinkish-red, dripping, towering wall of digestive flesh. The aroma wafting off the wall was sickly sweet and sour. Agent Valasco’s curiosity tempted her into reaching out, but before she could touch the mass of gut meat, a voice to the side stopped her.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” the voice suggested. Agent Valasco’s hand snapped down to her side, and she turned her head to the right to see a well-equipped woman striding towards her. Wielding a composite bow with bronze arrows and an iron kopis, the woman was dressed in a white chiton, a brown and gray linothorax, and a yellow chlamys, with black calf-high sandals. She had bright green and golden locks of hair, which peaked out from a bronze Boeotian helmet, and her eyes were a bright green. The belt holding her linothorax and chiton to

her waist was studded with three bluish-white gems that shone like stars. Agent Valasco knew who she was examining from the belt alone. “Not unless you want to be absorbed faster than you can blink.”

“Thanks for the warning,” Agent Valasco said. “I take it you’re Orion?”

“That I am,” Orion said, smiling. “What gave it away?” Her eyes flicked down at her belt for a quarter-second. Agent Valasco reached into her coat to take out her badge.

“You’re that agent that’s been coming around, aren’t you?” Agent Valasco stopped and pulled her hand out, nodding.

“*Federal Agent Valasco.*”

“Thought so. You’ve been causing a stir. Took out Lupus and put a dent in Taurus before Alcaeus stole your thunder. On a quest to save civilians and a democratic’s daughter.”

“That’s me all right.”

“A noble quest. I’d help you slay some beasts, but I’m out looking for my dogs.” Agent Valasco snorted.

“You and Boötes?”

“Yes, but they aren’t actually dogs per se. I’m trying to find mine before they run into each other. Those two pairs’ feud is deep. Also, I kind of need my shield back. I gave it to Minor, but it would be mighty helpful to have it back in the future.”

“Well, since I’m already looking for the other pair, I’ll tell you if I run into yours. Also, you’re not what I was expecting.”

“Our creator wanted to mix things up,” Orion explained, with a slight shrug. “I’m surprise a lot of the men of us stayed that way from legend, given how prevalent estrogen is in our creator’s home. But, I really must be going. Ta-ta.”

Orion walked away with assured steps. Agent Valasco was left with more questions. However, she kept them submerged in her mind for the moment, and she retraced her steps to the barn, curiosity more than abated. From the barn, she navigated her way to the bank, where she touched the shard and returned to the arena, where Virgo was still painting (a depiction of the barn now showed on the portrait) and Gemini was still guarding. Agent Valasco showed the octant and the compass to Virgo, but she did not think of them as too important. Rather than throwing them away, Agent Valasco placed the two instruments onto the table next to Ara.

Agent Valasco walked down to the right end of the under-arena, where Erica was twiddling her thumbs and flicking through a magazine procured from a nearby fan paraphernalia stand. Erica did not look up at Agent Valasco.

“Still not going for safety?” Agent Valasco asked.

“Nope,” Erica said, thumbing a page over.

“Well, there’s two less ‘freaks’ out there for you to worry about.” Erica paused. She looked up at Agent Valasco.

“Really? Good. Still not going to move, though. There’s a fucking load more than that, for sure.”

“Undoubtedly.”

Agent Valasco walked away from the cheerleader, heading towards to the other end of the concourse. Cepheus was tapping condiment dispensers as she approached, staring wide-eyed at how they spurted out ketchup and mustard and relish. As the federal agent came closer, he stopped playing with the pumps in a frenzy and took a large step away, straightening his crown. Agent Valasco pulled out the ruby arrow.

“What can you do with this?” Agent Valasco asked. Cepheus took the arrow from her.



“Hm, this looks like one of Indus’s arrows. I can’t make better your gun with this,” Agent Valasco raised an eyebrow, “but I can make better your uniform.”

“Whatever,” Agent Valasco said. “Just don’t get handsy.”

“My touch will be lighter than air,” Cepheus promised, pulling out the chisel. “Now, be as still as a statue.”

Agent Valasco preemptively closed her eyes as Cepheus began his work. She did barely feel him as he carved and implemented. Even through her eyelids, the flashes of artful creation were bright. After less than a minute, the flashes stopped, and Agent Valasco opened her eyes. Cepheus was tucking his chisel into his robes. Polyethylene pads were now strapped to her elbows and knees, and her long coat was lined with leather patches. Her suit components underneath bore a tighter knit with more layers of padding fabric. Her sunglasses felt sturdier, too. On top of the more protective clothing, Agent Valasco could sense that her chest and buttocks had expanded. Rather than berate the meek king, the recovery agent internalized her displeasure and stalked away.

Agent Valasco walked onto Triangulum and thought of the bridge over the fabulous river, Eridanus. She appeared next to Auriga, who was using a wrench on that mostly wooden bridge. He grunted a greeting at her shadow.

“You were looking for stuff to do, right?” Agent Valasco asked. “How would you feel about boat-repair?”

“I could do it,” Auriga said. “Just another vehicle. Why you ask?”

“I’ve found some sails and a hull out there. Though you might be interested.”

“I bet you it’s the Argo. Fucking thing breaks apart at the weakest breeze. Where are they?”

“One’s out by a basketball court, and another’s just behind a barn.” Agent Valasco pointed to the west.

“All right,” Auriga said. “Thanks. It’s something to work on besides this piece of shit. I’ll get to work on it. Tell me if you find any more parts.”

“Will do.”

Agent Valasco left Auriga to his bridge-building and eventual ship-repair. She searched along the east bank of the immaculate river, heading “north.” She passed more amassed cities-wreckage, unnatural hills, and no survivors. She yawned. The federal recovery agent passed through a small grocery store. A brief scrape of the store gave her a can of cherries preserved in syrup. As she snacked on the cherries, with the occasional squirt from a canister of whipped cream, she eyed another of the white shards of *Triangulum Australis* sticking out of a cash register. Half of the grocery store’s roof was caved inwards.

After finishing the cherries and using the rest of the whipped cream can for target practice, Agent Valasco reloaded her pistol and left the store by way of the imploded manager’s office, which had merged into a wet locker room. Agent Valasco stepped over discarded day and swim clothes. She kicked down the loose door, finding herself in a small waterpark which had merged with an estuary from which Eridanus emerged. Past the estuary, a brackish sea overtook the environment of the innards. Half-sunken buildings and amassed islands of garbage, soil, and rubble were like buoys and ocean platforms in the glut of water.

However, the aquatic obstacle was the least important thing in Agent Valasco’s line of sight, for a monstrosity clung blocked her way. Clinging to a series of boulders and one of the larger and longer waterslides while half-dipped in the estuary, a female of an unnatural variety swayed and splashed and slapped. Visages of whales, dragons, krakens, and starfish lay in the

design of this woeful woman with pale green and black scales and greener skin with shades of silver. Her teeth were sharp, and her smooth tentacles were many, oozing some kind of viscous pink fluid. Beyond the tentacles, she had four finned arms, each ending in six clawed, webbed fingers. A flat tail with hooked tips made waves with each movement. Her breasts were wide and pendulous. She had five curved, black horns on her head and one long yellow fin. Her abdomen was seamed down the middle. The skin of her abdomen was translucent, and through it, Agent Valasco could make out the most basic of organs. Inside a lower one, the agent could make out a nude woman whose exuberant prettiness was apparent even through the mire and distance. Her stomach was bloated, mismatched with the rest of her proportions. Eyes of a pure, consuming black swiveled towards Agent Valasco. The monstrous sea woman let out a roar, and Agent Valasco pulled out her handgun. Her battle with Cetus began.

Agent Valasco ran forward as the first tentacle spiked forward. It barely passed over her head, missing her due to a poorly-timed angle. Agent Valasco aimed up and fired. The tentacle bled a purplish blood as the bullet passed through it. The tentacle retracted. Agent Valasco fired twice at Cetus' chest, but the bullets did little harm to the sea monster. Two more tentacles slammed down at Agent Valasco, and she shot them in quick succession. They splattered to the side and slithered back into the water. Agent Valasco was running out of unobstructed concrete, so she started running up the metal steps of one of the mangled waterslides, hoping as well that Cetus would have more difficulty threading her tentacles through the bars and posts. Agent Valasco stopped, supported her pistol on one of the crossbars, and fired again at the sea monster's face, but her shot missed handily. Agent Valasco huffed out annoyance and kept running up.

Tentacles slapped and prodded at the structure, shaking it, but as Agent Valasco had predicted, it was taking more time for Cetus to reach her. However, when Agent Valasco reached the top of the attraction, she realized her mistake. She shot at the top of Cetus' head, and that time, the bullet struck center. Cetus roared, and used one of her arms to swipe and smash the lower half of that waterslide structure. As it started to collapse without a base and with nowhere else to go, Agent Valasco holstered her pistol and went down the slide. Without explanation, water was still being pumped into the slide, and she was going to regret the wet clothes later. Agent Valasco pulled around her shotgun to keep it from inhibiting her slide on the collapsing slide. She went around a bend, and four tentacles slapped down in front of her. With fast hands and eyes, Agent Valasco pumped the shotgun and blasted the tentacles with 20-gauge shots. The agent was starting to understand how the Alpha 16 team had not fared well if Lieutenant Newton had come in with a 20-gauge shotgun. However, the tentacles did burst, and what was left of them slithered out of the slide, spewing purple and pink. Agent Valasco could see the end of the slide coming into view, which emptied into the estuary, so before she wound up in the imbalanced aquain, she used the momentum of the slide to cast herself out of the side onto a different part of the water park, rolling so as to reduce injury.

As the sabotaged waterslide tumbled into the water behind her, Agent Valasco found herself closer to the slide around which Cetus was enwrapped. Cetus raised two of her leftside fists, and first, she brought the top one down. Agent Valasco darted to the side as the mighty webbed hand cracked the ground where she had stood. The lower fist came down, and once more the agent dodged to the side. That time, Agent Valasco shot the fist, which flinched from the pellets. Cetus retracted her hands. Agent Valasco fired at Cetus face, although knowing that the

shot would do little to the powerful monster at that range. Another tentacle came at her, and the recovery agent blasted it like a disk.

Agent Valasco ran up to the next water slide, which was accessed by a ladder instead of stairs. Placing the shotgun on her back and pulling out her pistol, Agent Valasco climbed the ladder one-handed. Cetus sent yet another tentacle at her, and Agent Valasco barely managed to shoot it. While her the boost from Crux had allowed her to handle that original gun upgrade, the latest one felt more uncontrollable while using only one hand, especially while she focusing her attention on climbing. She reached the top of the slide and dropped down it before Cetus could make another attack. That slide was more straightforward – a simple sloped drop that ended in a ramp to launch park patrons into a smaller pool. Agent Valasco did her best to slow herself down, so she could leap out of the slide instead of plunging into the clear-ish water. She jumped off at her last chance and landed next to the pool, but she hit the ground at a strange angle and misjudged her landing. She fell to her knees and her free hand, trying to hasten her breath back into her body.

Yet, before she could recover, three of Cetus' tentacles blindsided her and wrapped around her. A fourth stole her guns away. Cetus dragged horrified Agent Valasco towards her seam. Cetus' front split open along the seam, and Agent Valasco was pushed into a gelatinous womb, next to the attractive woman. The abdomen resealed, and her vision was shaded. Her clothes started to dissolve in the substance, yet the same gel allowed her to breathe when she could no longer hold her breath. A tentacle slipped up from below and penetrated her vagina, like the one next to her, wriggling its way right up against her cervix. Immediately, it began pumping that pink goo into her womb, and her belly expanded as her womb filled, looking more than

heavily pregnant. Cetus made herself comfortable on her new home, waiting for her weak seed to impregnate one of the captives and hoping that more lost persons would encounter her domain.

A celestial chime is heard.

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Agent Valasco switched to her shotgun, since she was not counting her handgun rounds, and loaded two shells. She was right next to the main waterslide now. Cetus leaned her head close to Agent Valasco. The agent fired at Cetus' face, and while the shot did little beside irritate Cetus, it gave Agent Valasco time to maneuver away from the top-right fist heading towards her. Agent Valasco shot the fist. Cetus opened her mouth, and a splurge of tentacles protruded out of her maw, heading for Agent Valasco. The recovery agent fired three shots in succession, reducing the mouth tentacles to mush. The dripped into the water or were sucked back into Cetus' mouth as the sea monster shrieked. Agent Valasco quickly loaded two more shells, and



she fired directly at the aquatic nightmare's chest. Purple blood and a translucent green fluid sprayed out. Cetus screamed again.

Cetus raised herself far out of the water as if to intimidate. Her tail splashed and scooped waves. She splayed the fingers on her lower-right hand, and she swept that arm across the concrete at Agent Valasco. The recovery agent jumped up on a whim, higher than she would have expected. Midair, she shot directly at the sea monster's face, and purple blood leaked out from Cetus as she was blinded. Her arm crashed in her waterslide perch, and the weakened structure began falling apart. As the waterslide crumbled into the estuary and onto Cetus, Agent Valasco decided to add some flair as soon as she landed. She took her shotgun in her right hand, bracing it hard against her shoulder, and her handgun in her left. She pulled both triggers, shooting directly at the sea monster's chest. Cetus howled, head battered and chest riddled. Her lower half dipped beneath the water, and her upper half fell onto the concrete among the unsunken waterslide parts. Her abdomen split open, and her organs spilled forth, breaking without her body utilities to hold them together. They dissolved and split, and from the viscous womb, the beautiful woman came sliding out, stopping in front of Agent Valasco. A tentacle popped out of the woman's vagina. Agent Valasco put away her guns.

Federal Recovery Agent Sara Valasco smiled with the recovery of at least one lost daughter, validating herself for once that day.