

Elpis was having a terrible day, likely the third worst day in her life. She was dead. Which wouldn't have been so bad if she was in hell with a bunch of other dead people, but no, it was pretty much just her. That Matry gal had said she was a 'zombie,' a rare type of 'basic aspect' with many benefits, but the only benefits Elpis had noted was constantly feeling a bit chilly and wondering when one of her numb limbs would decide to drop off.

That was bad, but not third-worst-day bad. Then she was separated from her group, this big-ass centaur lady had captured her and she was eaten by this cow bitch who was completely ignoring the well crafted tirade of insults she was currently hurling at her.

“What is your problem you vapid dairy dyke? You def? Can't get my words through that thick skull of yours? You fucking flabby butcher's bargain bin waste of space!” She could go on and on, especially considering she didn't seem to be running out of breath, probably something to do with the hole in her chest.

“You done?” The cow's smile slipped into a *so* self-satisfied smirk, “I saved you, you know.”

“Saved me from what? Any sense of possible personal autonomy in this glorified retirement home?” The cow just shook her head.

“Slavers. You get eaten and you just end up back here, go with them and you may be trapped in servitude for years, no matter what they say about limited terms.” Elpise's words died on her lips. “Glorified retirement home?” The cocky cow raised an eyebrow.

“Ah, you know, where humanity put ourselves to wither away and die?”

“We did not!” She cut herself off and massaged her forehead. “Yha, you know what? You're right.” She shook her head to herself, turned and started wading towards shore. A minute later she glanced back over her shoulder, at Elpis, who was wading after her, forced to use her arms to keep up. “You're following me.”

“Yes I am.”

“Why? I thought I was 'too dense a cunt to swim without my big ol' floaties.’” *So she had been paying attention!*

“Well I figured an old hat like you would know...” She broke out coughing lakewater that had managed to get into her lungs through that hole. “I figured you would know the best places to play bingo.”

“Bingo?”

“Yha, bingo! And cribbage and hearts and scrabble, and whatever other games people play in retirement homes.” That got a scowl.

“If you want entertainment go to Tartarus, open a bank account and sell yourself a few times to get some spending vite, spend it, end up in someone’s stomach, repeat.”

“But you're not going to Tartarus are you?”

“No, I’m going home, then I *am* going to Tartarus.” At that Elpis let silence rest. Glorified retirement home or not, this place sure was *something*. The landscape around the Lake of Rebirth was scarred by some kind of great battle, shattered fortifications provided lattices for leafy vines to climb. Craters, now the cities of ponds, dotted the landscape, providing water for various groves of alder and birch trees.

Elpis stumbled in the lake again, forcing her to cough more lake water. A chunk of goop flew from her mouth and merged with a thin layer of slime that – upon closer inspection – seemed to permeate the entire surface of the lake.

“Hey cow lady?”

“Silen.”

“Right, Silen. What's with the goop on the lake? Doesn't seem very sanitary.” Silen replied without looking down.

“It's Matry. Her services don’t come for free you know. Whenever you use her to travel you incur some debt to her, and when your cycle finally ends, she has you pay it back over and over again until you’re even and she lets you go.”

“Wait, so if the hivemind goop wanted, they could just stop people from coming back? Constantly eat everyone up over and over again?”

“Technically, we could. But we have rules about these things.” Elpis jumped, falling back into the water before coming up to the sight of the motherly form Matry usually took. Unlike most people, they didn't have any genitals, but the breasts, long ‘hair’ and welcoming curves certainly got the message across. They gave Elpis a warm smile and offered her a hand, helping her the short distance left to shore. “I am made up of about thirty-five hundred volunteers that had to be accepted by us. We don’t just let anyone join – as our main ethos must be preserved – so if I was going to make such a decision a great majority of us would have to agree to do so.” Elpis kept her mouth shut for once, suddenly nervous to be so close to such a powerful creature, no matter what she shaped herself as.

Matry swiveled their gaze over to Silen and cocked their head.

“Recruiting them early this time, Silen Cow-Eater?” Matry raised an eyebrow.

“I’m done with that now and you know it.” Silen growled.

“What? Your eating habits or trying to single handedly drain Clear Basin?” Matry said in a chiding tone.

“Both.” Silen said firmly, meeting Matry’s gaze square on.

“Ah yes, I see, I apologize, Silen, Shifter of Blackstone.” That last title seemed to physically impact Silen, forcing her to break eye contact.

“We’re going to the east of Summer, closest to Old-Growth you have.” Matry simply nodded and spread her arms as if preparing for an embrace. Silen walked into her without breaking stride and vanished, leaving Elpis alone. Feeling she knew less than when she first arrived, Elpis followed after her.

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Elpis let out a low whistle and it took a full *two seconds* to echo back. The cavern consisted of an open space with slightly elevated platforms heaped with boxes covered with canvas tarps. By the light of the lantern carried by Silen, Elpis could make out large handprints with claws in the stone, as if it had been kneaded into shape by hand.

Arriving in a smaller chamber, Silen lit three more lanterns, revealing a small living space stocked with a thick rug, a long darkwood table stacked with jars, some very large armchairs and an elevated alcove off to the side stacked with plush blankets and pillows. Lining the walls of the opposite end was a row of tall cabinets.

“Elpis.” Elpis blurted.

“What?” Silen cracked open a cabinet and peaked inside.

“I just thought you should know the name of the person you abducted.” Silen stopped midway through swirling – what Elpid desperately hoped was milk – in a jar, and leveled a bemused expression at her.

“You’re the one who followed me.”

“Well you’re the one who let me, and now we’re in your underground secret bunker and I’m having second thoughts, so I thought you should at least know my name before whatever happens next.” She crossed her arms definitely.

“What do you think happens next?”

“Some freak shit.”

“And what do you want to happen next?”

“I want to know what the deal is with this place, then maybe I could get a job or internship or something, then I’ll go track down Gracie and her husband.” She tilted her head considering for a moment. “Before all that I *really* would like some clothes, and something to patch myself up before all my giblets fall out. Most of all I want to know what *you* want from *me*.”

“Why not just pester Matry?” She shook her head, “Never mind, they don’t provide information unless asked directly about it. You wouldn’t know what questions to ask... If you must know, I’m recently out of an occupation and am looking for perspective. I figured a fresh set of eyes could help out. Catch!” She selected one of the jars from the table and tossed it to Elpis. Elpis fumbled a bit but managed to hold it to her chest. She unscrewed the lid and sniffed it. *Thank god it’s milk*. She then eyed the *cow* lady still looking over the jars.

“I’m a midlife crisis puppy to you!” Silen scrunched her face up in a momentary grimace.

“Look, if you want my help, drink that jar and I’ll tell you the first rule of PIF.”

“Pif?”

“Drink.” Silen then followed her own orders and chugged down three jars in the time it took Elpis to drain her one. “Close your eyes. The Psychic Interface Field – or PIF – is this world. The first rule of PIF is *vite*, or, more simply, food. Everyone is made of it and everyone needs to eat this fill at least once every two weeks on average. Vite is life, you can use it to heal, make yourself grow bigger and modify yourself in accordance with your *aspect*. You’re a basic zombie aspect, so if you focus, you can *push* the warmth in your stomach into parts of your body to make them more zombie-ish.”

Elpis slowly nodded, she could feel the milk in her stomach like a light in her mind’s eye. She touched her stomach and imagined a ghostly hand grasping the light and moving it over to the hole in her chest. When she opened her eyes the hole was gone and her stomach felt a bit more empty.

Elpis opened her eyes to the sight of Silen towing a pale girl with a brown mushroom cap from one of the cupboards.

“What the fuck!”

“I told you to keep your eyes closed.”

“What the fuck! You keep people in your cupboards?”

“What is a people?” The mushroom girl asked in a voice vacant of emotion.

“The children of Sealey aren’t people – despite the efforts of the covens of Winter – they are what happens when a very advanced plant or fungus-type aspect tries to reproduce without a mind to put in the body.” Silen said, trying to sound soothing.

“It can talk!”

“Parrots could talk. This is called a questioner, its only function is to learn the answers to ever-more complicated questions, but they don't have any will of their own to do anything with the answers they get besides ask more questions.” Silen grabbed Elpise's hand and guided her to an uncarpeted section of the room and began pouring the contents of one of the jars on the body of the complacent fungus.

“If you want to know the answer to what it feels like to be covered in milk, you must rub this all over your body.” Upon Silen prompting it, it began rubbing the thick milk over every surface of its body. Elpise had a hard time looking away as it began massaging its hefty breasts using the milk.

“The second rule of PIF is *gnosis*: growth through knowledge. The process of gnosis is achieved when one aspect consumes another. This leads to the aspect either gaining another aspect or both aspects fuzeing into a more advanced aspect. This just means you can use your vite to modify yourself in new ways. The fuzion does not have any physical effects you do not wish it to have with a few odd exceptions.” Silen lectured on.

“You want me to eat her? I mean *it*.” Elpise was transfixed by the way it squeezed its thigh as it worked its way down its body with its hands. Elpise felt Silen lean over her shoulder and whisper in her ear.

“I want you to *devour* her.” Elpise shivered at the words and felt it. The vast desire that Silen was keeping in check, the mixing of all wants and needs within her towards one target. Elpise knew it, the knowledge that, in doing this, she would, for a brief time, share absolute intimacy with this creature and gain not just satiation, but all the other satisfactions a boby could want. She barely heard Silen's words over her stuttering undead heartbeat.

“Would you like to know what it is like inside a zombie's stomach?” Silen asked. The shroom-girl just nodded eagerly, pausing its self-marinadeing. Silen hooked a finger in Elpise's drooling mouth and pulled it open to show off. “Then come on in.”

It curiously stuck a hand in Elpise's mouth. It tasted *devine*, so earthy and creamy, juicy plump flesh that begged to be gobbled up. Before Elpise could make a move it stuck its other hand inside and pushed. Elpise's first thought was her gag reflex, but her body had other instincts; it greedily gulped down the long arms of the mushroom girl in a few quick swallows, causing the mushroom girl to topple to the floor on top of her. That didn't stop it, as it ducked his head and shoved itself down her throat with its thick legs braced on either side of Elpise. Her body quacked at the sensation of becoming *complete*, the mushroom-girl filling a deep pit she didn't know she had inside herself.

Before she knew it, she was nearly down to its plump ass. Her tongue automatically played along the taut stomach, and, after another gulp, found something *else*. Her tongue plunged into its salty folds, adding new dimensions to its flavor and reminding Elpise of her own heat in her loins. She could feel it stirring in her stomach, reacting to her teasing, sending her to new heights. She barely needed to touch her own clit before an orgasum rocked her body, her cock spraying seed onto the cheeks of the shroom-girl before she swallowed them down too.

She bit teasingly at the thighs before they retracted inside in a momentous *slurp*, and she found herself alone again in the room with Silen.

“I, I can still feel her moving inside.” Elpis gasped. Silen came over and started kneading at her bloated stomach, feeling the form of the food held within.

“She is food now, vite, you could put her to use right now if you wanted.” Silen crooned.

“I want, I want to sleep.” Elpis replied grogely. Silen just nodded, she remembered her first time and she wasn't much better off. She crouched down and with a huff used her recently improved muscles to pick Elpis up and carry over to the area full of bedding. She set her down gently and arranged the pillows to be comfortable before tip-toeing back over to the other side of the room.

Her turn. She opened a cabinet, and, without words, immediately stuffed the head and cap of the blinking red mushroom inside into her maw. With a couple gulps, Silen had the leverage to lift her head back and bounce her legs once, letting gravity carry the food to its final resting place. Almost as soon as her stomach distended, it shrank back down, vite going towards preventing her tits from leaking milk, core strength and making her horns look like less of a joke.

Just like that she was hungry again. She threw open another cupboard and stuffed herself with the twin pair of fuzed black-gray mushrooms inside. They sang a harmonic melody on repeat as they went down. She let them stay to keep the full feeling. It wasn't enough, another cupboard was opened. This one was introduced to her hungry cock and was swinging between her legs moments later. It wasn't enough. Maybe one more for the stomach? She opened the next cupboard and found it empty.

Silens eyes drifted over to the sleeping form of Elpis lying on the bed, stomach still shifting as its occupant explored its new home. She started across the room, long practice and improved legs easily managing the extra weight. By the time she got there her stomach was flat again, must have accidentally reduced them to vite in her hunger. Oh well. There was always more food to be had.

Elpis shifted in her sleep, pushing the blanket form on top of her. She was thin, yes, but robust, like jerky. Silen could just imagine the satisfying bundle she would make in her stomach... No, what was she thinking? She flopped down next to Elpis and let the one in her balls dissolve into vite as well. It wouldn't hurt to get a little sleep herself.

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Matry looked out over the Lake of Regrets. It was aptly named, they truly wished it didn't have to exist. Periodically various humanoid forms would make impressions against the layer of oil-slick slime on top of the lake before dissolving.

“I do not like that we must meet here. This place... unnerves me.” The voice sounded from all around the cavern. *Query: response? Vote passed: placate then press issues at hand. End of Query.*

“I apologize it must be this way. Next time we can meet somewhere else, I just needed to ensure, this time especially, that we were not overheard.” Matry gestured to the roof of the cavern. “But there are bigger problems brewing in the outside world, what has upset you?”

“It comes, the End of Cycles.” The voice responded. *Query: Run and hide in a small hole? Vote Failed. End of query.* “You, you do not seem to be taking the proper steps to prepare, to claim the origin and face the enemy.” *Query: [redundant query]. Vote failed. End of query.*

“I am well aware of the danger that approaches and I, as the highest of aspects, am taking the proper steps for the good of humanity.” Matry responded in the same pleasant voice she always used, designed to calm those who heard it.

“I am not here to remind you. I am here to inform you that I have decided to tell all of what must be done. In one weeks time. I will hear no words on this, for I am sure you could sway me, this is my purpose and I am resolved to have it fulfilled. Goodbye.” The voice grew quiet and the presence vanished, leaving the wet sounds of struggling under the slime.

Query: Initiate preparations to carry out contingency 21048? Vote passed:

Initiate Query_Name: Boil Clear Basin?

Initiate Query_Name: False Equinox?

Initiate Query_Name: Preemptive Medicine?

Initiate Query_Name: Smoke in the Burrow?

Initiate Query_Name: Storm at Eilean Mor?

“I won't be made to go back.”