

LONDON

Blarion had either tripped on his way into the study, or simply let a healthy stack of tomes slam down onto the desk; regardless, it had done the job and woken Figment up. There was no start, no great gasp—the little dragon just opened his eyes, and there it all was, as he had left it. The library stretched ahead, its yawning shelves stifled with book upon book, millions upon millions of words, billions of letters therein, worlds within worlds. For a moment he lay there, safe and lazy, buried in against the seat of a large reading chair, as footsteps hastily thudded along wooded floors. There was no sign of the man, only the sounds of a welcomed ghost, come home.

Just as Figment's eyelids renewed their purchase, a voice cut in; reality slipped in through the opening if left, making him stir sluggishly to movement.

"You're never going to sleep again, if you sleep in too long."

A grin stole onto Figment's muzzle, the dragon's tail giving one solid, sleepy wag of acknowledgment. Even without sight of the man, it was enough just to hear his voice.

"I miss this chair," Figment sighed, snuffling into it, trying to fool himself into thinking its old, familiar smells would come. "And you, too, of course!"

Goodness, but his voice felt *huge*. The entire library and adjoining lab shook from it, but in hindsight, it made sense. Suddenly, the chair was a bit too small, and Figment could feel his sides ballooning warmly, almost *gladly* bigger, as his body bulged and swelled beyond it. He thumped his growing paws down to the floor and stretched, like a thick, scaly cat, giving off a pleased grunt as he blew up to fill the library itself, booming and broadening, bigger, stronger, happier, pushing furniture aside as his bulk mashed into the walls and shelves.

"I know you do, Figment," Blarion's voice answered, despite the way he overfilled the entire space, and kept inflating bigger, yet. "Seems you've gone and grown up considerably, haven't you?"

"Ah, well," Figment chuckled, suddenly blushing hot, even as his horned head pushed and swelled up bigger into the ceiling, the floor warping slightly under his unthinkable weight. "I suppose I've been abroad, seen a thing or two, yes! I never imagined I would be larger than you, though, truth be told. Is it terribly awkward?"

"Hardly! Just look at you! Imagination is made to expand and spread out. You're only doing what's natural. You...perhaps took it a *bit* literally, yes...but, I've no complaints. You're my own, and *you're* your own, too. Don't be afraid of where that leads."

"OH," Figment boomed, as he felt the walls crack and bow out against his bursting bulk, "THAT'S A RELIEF! I THOUGHT YOU WOULDN'T APPROVE...WHEN I BURST FREE, WILL THIS ALL REMAIN? I MEAN...IT'S A SILLY QUESITON, BUT...SURELY, YOU'LL REMAIN?"

A moment's unease slipped through, before his growing bulk shoved it back.

"When you open one, Figment, I do suggest you have others ready and open, as well. Chain them, as far out ahead as you can. Practice, and all that!"

"YOU THINK I SHOULD?"

Just as the walls of the entire Academy snapped and blew away, and just as Figment's unstoppable, ever-growing body burst through, he woke. There was no surprise to it, no dismay nor shock. This time, it felt correct, or at least, amicably acceptable, that he return. After all, it was only a dream. But, it was a *good* one.

8.

The trick had been not to open several portals simultaneously, as the dream had suggested. Rather, with some mulling and musing, he had concluded that a sequence of portals would be needed, in tandem, with each prior portal closing behind the new one, to save him much-needed energy. Sure, he had recalled the bag, after waking, and the candies had been inside—and sure, he could have taken more to regain power...but the idea was to safely *lose*, not gain. And if they kept his size up enough to allow further taxing and travel, then so much the better to conserve.

That meant the first portal would need to be positively *gargantuan*, big enough to allow Spyro's overgrown bulk to fit in, along with himself and Cynder. The very idea of a portal nearly as wide as Great Britain itself would have been horrifying to Figment, back in Spyro's world—but here, and now? He was becoming powerful enough to pull such a ludicrous stunt without so much trouble.

Doing portals the same size, over and over? That was still clearly impossible, he knew that much. So, after opening the 300-mile wide portal and going through, regardless of where they wound up, he could safely assume that he could open up a new one right away, that would only be big enough to accommodate whatever sizes they would be taxed down to. Then, repeat the process, again, and again, as much as possible. Figment had no idea how many he could manage, before being wiped out, but it would be interesting to find out.

The first stretch was about as difficult as a good, brief jog. After Figment crashed into the dunes of a vast, boundless desert, then adjusted, he had the next one up in seconds.

The second stretch left him winded, with a slight stitch in the side, but he persisted, only stopping to briefly enjoy the great span of countless tropical islands and bright skies above. He could actually lose part of his hands in the thick jungles below, meaning they must have lost a good chunk of size already.

The third stretch was a unique experience, as an entire futuristic city stretched out nearby, him having landed just shy of its borders. It would have fit perfectly as some book illustration from the library, and for a moment, Figment was sorely tempted to explore its miniature bounties—only he was still at least a mile or two in size, meaning another jump was the only real answer. Ah, well.

By the fifth stretch, Figment's vision was starting to blur, making any analysis of the new world rather troublesome. All he could tell was that it was blurry, red, and far too warm. *Pass*.

The sixth stretch left him teetering something fierce, and by the seventh, he put his foot down—in all applicable senses. His paws crashed down onto firmament, hard, shaking snow off of the surrounding treetops; these canopies made it all the way up to Figment's lower belly, and though he only had a minute before his vision blurred too far, and exhaustion set in, he figured he must have stood

roughly two hundred...no, two hundred and fifty feet! Success!

He wobbled against frigid winds, unprepared, and nearly toppled whatever it was that had been behind him—namely, a 90-foot Cynder. She gasped and pushed against his bulk, but at less than half the dragon's size, it was something of an uphill battle.

"Figment, stop," Cynder huffed, straining to keep her comrade upright. "That's enough world-hopping, for the moment, you're no good to anyone passed out!"

"SHE'S RIGHT, FIG," Spyro's far larger voice blasted from the skies, despite his hushed tone. "BESIDES, YOU DON'T HAVE TO TAKE *ALL* OF MY GAINS!"

Despite all the travel-taxing, Spyro still loomed incredibly large, overhead, over the both of them. The white-capped woodlands darkened dramatically beneath the dragon's shadow, as nearly 2 miles of muscle and scales hovered, proud and dominant.

"Right, right," Figment chuckled, keeping his good humor intact. "I suppose it'll have to do, won't it?"

"Where are we, this time?" Cynder murmured, suddenly aware of the great, looming quiet, bigger (and more intimidating) than all three of them.

"It's all quite still, isn't it," Figment sighed, rubbing his eyes. "At least we can move around comfortably enough, again!"

"I'M COMFORTABLE, AS IS, HEH," Spyro 'joked', as he stretched and popped his musclebound back. "SO. ANYONE UP FOR WANDERING ABOUT, UNTIL TROUBLE STARTS?"

"A *few* worlds have been calm," Cynder offered, dusting some fallen snow off of her breasts. "Maybe we'll get lucky, and have a smooth time here, until Figment feels well enough to try jumping again?"

"We could just relax here a moment, I shouldn't need much time," Figment said. "That sleep back in Toothless' world did a lot of overall good."

At that, Toothless rounded from behind Spyro's massive girth, grinning. The other dragons looked to him, wide-eyed, surprised that the black dragon had come when called—*across worlds*.

"Toothless!?" Cynder balked, as the 900-foot colossus thundered happily over, taking a very, very hefty seat beside both Cynder and Figment. Compared to Spyro, he wasn't much, but to the two of them, he was *huge*. "What...did he...did he follow us through?"

Toothless beamed wider, nodding rapidly. All eight head fins whipped up and down as he did so, before flicking out to attention as Figment stomped over, and waved.

"I...I suppose he must have! You really followed us all this way?"

Toothless puffed up, proud yet nonchalant, as though it were hardly a big deal (but worth mentioning, all the same). His enormous muscles twitched, polished and shining, even in the low light

of the snowy forests. He huffed out some frosty clouds, then nosed at all three of them, before pawing back at his own gigantic pectorals, eyes soft and trusting.

"YOU COULD HAVE STAYED LARGE AND IN CHARGE, IN YOUR OWN WORLD," Spyro rumbled, "BUT YOU DECIDED TO STICK WITH US? REALLY?"

Toothless looked up, then back down, blankly grinning, then shrugging his huge shoulders. The other dragons looked each other over, in silent council, before shrugging back.

"The more, the merrier," Cynder said, giving a crooked little grin.

"Well, glad to have you, Toothless," Figment declared, putting a welcoming hand out for the kind of shake he always saw humans do, more out of habit than planning. Toothless blinked a few times, before finally looking down at Figment's hand. He sniffed down at it, then nosed curiously past, snuffling the bag around Figment's belly and pectorals.

"WHEN HE PUTS IT THAT WAY...YEAH, I GET IT," Spyro admitted, nodding.

"I know you think about more than just candies," Cynder replied. "Pure good-faith."

"IT CAN'T BE PURE, IF YOU HAD TO SAY IT..."

"Well, then, business! The four of us are either moving along, or staying put," Cynder said, redirecting things back to where they needed to be. "What should it be?"

Figment reaffirmed that the bag was indeed closed, as he cleared his throat to reply. Still, Toothless kept watch on it, eyes cat-like and huge.

"This time, we landed together, and all stayed conscious. Other times, something would happen to force our involvement, so...I say we stay put, and just relax. This area seems awfully expansive, it's all wilderness. So, if we don't head out into any potential conflict, we should be able to *what in the world is that*—"

Toothless was already staring out to the East, and as he had spoken, Figment reflexively followed, to see the roof of a house approaching. At least, it looked as such. A smoking chimney and two shingled slats weaved and wobbled, creeping silently through the white woods in the distance. Cynder had to squeeze past the two to see it, and Spyro was so tall that he was the last to notice by an embarrassing margin.

"WAIT...IS THAT..."

"I think so," Cynder replied, cautiously. "A moving house, that high up?"

"We've seen stranger," Figment added. Spyro nodded knowingly.

"AND HOW."

The rooftop rose and fell, tilting, teetering, a drunken thing on unsure legs. When it cleared the trees directly before them, that very sentiment proved surprisingly accurate.

"I...might have to rescind that statement," Figment muttered, cocking a reptilian brow at the sight of a home, elevated clear up off the ground. They had surmised that much; what struck the party a bit more freshly was the pair of enormous bird's legs sprouting underneath its foundations.

Toothless snorted, looking the thing over, up and down.

Before anyone else could gather enough words to make hay out of, the door opened, and a great wind blasted at their backs, so powerful, so insistent, that even the four giants felt the ground abandon their feet. There was a looping rush, a spin (likely vertical), and the sound of a doorway slamming shut behind them, as Figment thumped and rolled onto a creaking floor.

"Right. At least this house didn't get bigger," Spyro coughed, from behind, his voice suddenly small and manageable once again. Candlelight sparked in a corner, and as the party stood up, they were indeed appointed to a small, rustic cottage interior.

"It is a bit more...*old-world* than the last one, isn't it?" Figment mused, as a large cauldron did its bubbling over an even larger stone hearth.

"I take it you two don't mean the Reluctant Dragon's cave," Cynder added, looking them all over. "This seems neater. It looks like we've been scaled down to proper guest-size, here..."

"You're still pretty big, where it counts," Spyro laughed, nudging Cynder's bulky shoulder with his own. "We've all kept the muscle, at least, so hey. Plus, Fig probably already knows: we'll likely get back our size when we leave, just like the other place—"

"There *are* no other places like this one!"

The voice filled the cabin, somehow sharp and shrill, yet crackling apart like old wax paper. All four of them froze, including the increasingly bewildered Toothless. The black dragon turned, cautiously, his fins raised, only to bark in shock as he bumped into an elderly woman, some humble variety of crone, who shoved right by the lot of dragons as she made for the cauldron.

"I didn't even hear a door," Spyro grunted, trying to play off the startling.

"We're awfully sorry to intrude, Miss," Figment started, when—

"You, intrude?" she snapped, bustling with tossing ingredients into the pot. "I bid you entry, you silly creature! Hoho, you intrude only by permission! Now, you all get warm, and do so quietly. I will see to you all after my current visitor."

"Current?" Cynder whispered, only for the old crone to snap two aged fingers, silencing her.

"Ah, geez, sorry," a small voice replied, as a tiny white bat appeared over the woman's shoulder, smiling apologetically. "Yeah, dat's me, there, she's talkin' about. Got here first, I guess. So, what're you fellas doin' here, seein' the great Baba Yaga for?"

Cynder made to answer, but nothing came out of her mouth. She covered it, then made a face at Figment, who met the same muted outcome, when he tried to speak.

"Feh, *quietly* means *quietly*, lizards," Baba Yaga snarked, not so much offended, as momentarily annoyed. "This tiny creature has pressing business! He is come on a quest, a noble one! Bartok the Magnificent, here, he is to save Prince Ivan from a terrible fate, one that should affect the entire country."

"Heh, aw, go on, then," Bartok chuckled, anxiously. "I-I'm not such a big bother—"

"No, no," Baba Yaga corrected. "You are the Magnificent one! I have heard the recent tales of your amazing works in the villages and cities! You were appointed to save the Prince! *Duly* appointed! What can I do, but help, in the face of such humbling power?"

Figment wrinkled his muzzle. He had been in the Academy halls long enough to detect a scholar's sarcasm at its peak.

While shrunken down enough, with all four dragons clumped together in a herd of muscles, they still took up a fair chunk of the sitting space near the doorway, where they waited in silence. Out of the corner of his eye, Figment could see Spyro stifling a laugh. He turned as much as his thick neck allowed, and raised his brows, and Spyro, still grinning, nodded over to Toothless. He was already asleep where he sat, casually napping, indifferent.

Cynder nudged them both back to attention. She may have been smiling, too.

"Alright," Baba Yaga cackled, proud of her own work. "This mixture will bring out whatever is inside of your heart, Bartok, ten-fold! We need only to let it cool a few moments. Then, you will fill this vial, and drink it, when the time presents itself. Understand?"

"Oh, yeah, sure, you bet," the little bat concurred, nodding up a storm. "Ten times, that uh...that oughta be plenty, and a half, yup. Real nice of you, there!"

A palpable panic caked Bartok's every word. Some older, yet younger part of Figment understood. He hugged the bag of candies tighter, and tighter still, without really meaning to.

"Now, as to you four reptiles," the witch began, turning away from them, rather than towards, and marching back into another room. "Wait here a moment longer, and do not crush those candies in your bag. You're in possession of a rather terrifying power, after all. Dangerous, but desperately necessary!"

How did she know that, Cynder mouthed.

Couldn't say, Figment mouthed back. He thought about it, then chuckled silently.

Oh, haha

"Candies, eh?" Bartok's voice interrupted, to the extent that silence could *be* interrupted. "Didn't know they made power-candy, dat's...dat's pretty neat, yeah."

"You'll do fine, with your quest," Cynder soothed, her voice having returned. "From the looks of it, you've got a powerful friend on your side. You'll rescue your Prince, for sure."

"Hah, yeah, yeah, fer sure I will, you betcha. Yup."

"So, what scheme got you in this much hot water?" Spyro asked, sincerely.

"Scheme?" Bartok repeated, acting out what he thought constituted moral outrage. "No schemes here, no sir! Like Baba Yaga said, there, I'm Bartok the Magnificent! The powers and such...I got 'em."

Figment just watched as the tiny creature fought back against a wave of fear. This wasn't some mighty sort, grown complacent with assured victories. This...heck, this was *him*.

"You'll do great, for sure," Figment offered, nodding. Bartok looked him over.

"Well, we aren't all beefed-up warrior-types, like yourself. Some of us, gotta get by on smarts!"

That thought was still so foreign to Figment, but from outside eyes, it made sense. He *had* blown up into something rather imposing, hadn't he? He didn't feel mighty. Well, he did, at that...at least, physically-speaking...

"Show us your powers, then, pal," Spyro 'suggested'. "Get in some practice, on those incredible abilities of yours!"

"Well, I *suppose* I could," Bartok said, laboriously, shifting his approach. "Just eh, keep yer eyes on me, here, okay?"

"Sure," Spyro replied, liking where this was going even more.

There was a small blast of red smoke, which blew out and obscured the bat. When it cleared, to no one's surprise, Bartok was still there, looking slightly winded.

"Whoa," Spyro laughed, mock-impressed. "All your fibs blow up on you, just then?"

"Don't discourage him," Cynder sighed.

"He's full of...smoke," Spyro balked. "He's a little liar, it's all over him! Even the old lady clearly knows he's a faker, so why enable him?"

"Easy," Figment started.

"I'm not gonna flip her table or anything, Fig, just—look at him, he's gonna get creamed! Lying right back at him isn't going to save his life, when it matters."

"It's not lying, it's just...supporting," he added, last second.

"He's gonna get creamed."

"Am not," Bartok shot back, still waving the smoke away.

"You're gonna get creamed! I'm the one warning you! Besides, you didn't do squat, anyhow!"

At that, Figment noticed it: the latch to the top flap of the bag had been undone. When had that happened?

"Hey, no, wait," Figment murmured, when the old crone glided right back into the living room; she strolled past Bartok, and looked the four of them over. She cut Toothless a little look, then tapped a foot on the floor. Toothless bolted upright, at full attention.

"So!" Baba Yaga rasped, rocking on her heels. "You...have come from very, very far away!"

"Ah," Figment fumbled, turning his attention to her. "Well, yes, we have..."

As they spoke, Bartok stole his way up to the rim of the cauldron, and tossed four swiped candies into the mixture, letting them melt down quickly. At last, he started to look as confident as he had been acting.

"Do you know why you were allowed to enter here, dragons?" she asked, leaning in, as they all leaned back. "Do you know why my dear house opened its doors to you, and let you in?"

The four dragons looked to one another, confounded. She pointed, moving the question from Figment to Cynder, then to Spyro, then to Toothless. From Figment to Cynder to Spyro, the replies followed:

"Well, no, but perhaps"

"No, ma'am"

*"I thought **you** knew"*

"...And you?" Baba Yaga asked, as Toothless cocked his head, then opted to let the tip of his tongue poke out cutely, in reply. "What, can you not speak?"

Toothless just snorted, then blithely groomed his bulky forearm.

"I see..."

Baba Yaga shoved one old hand into a hanging sleeve of her clothes, then pulled out a little green seed, showing it to Toothless, as the other three dragons watched.

"Silence belies wisdom, but communication remains crucial, especially among allies. Eat this seedling, and you shall find your voice. Use it with wisdom equal to the one in your silence."

She slapped the seed into Toothless' large black palm, the bulky dragon calmly letting her.

"To answer *my* question," the witch continued, clearing her throat, "this house is attuned to old, old magics, even intellects, to minds fantastic and unknowable, otherwise. You are here by design, even if it is only partially-revealed. Something older and much larger than yourselves commands the chain of events unfolding. Very interesting, indeed."

"Predestination?" Figment ventured, suddenly rapt. "Or, perhaps, some long-term causality sequence! Oh, I have read so much about these things!"

Surprisingly, Baba Yaga permitted a sly little grin.

"Perhaps, *fate*, if you prefer brevity," she answered. "A very, very powerful energy flows through you all, surrounds you, moves you, like a spirit-hand in the air. Yes. Even a single dragon appearing in these lands should be taken as quite an omen...but now we have not one dragon, but four, and all together. Four very...*healthy* dragons."

Spyro and Toothless gave each other bumps with their tails, celebrating. Cynder subtly managed to cover her humongous bosom with muscled arms, blushing. Figment was still goggle-eyed, a theoretical furnace blazing with possibilities.

"Have you been to other worlds, then?" Figment asked.

"I have."

"Perhaps you might know how to...navigate?"

"I do not. Not easily. Different energies permit such dangerous movements. This energy, this aura...is comparably immense. I cannot hope to corral it to my own whims. I believe that the house recognized you...because it was *under command to*."

Something about the way she said it made Figment's skin crawl back. Even Spyro shuddered.

"That...is a rather specific wording," Figment gulped.

"It is. And heed it, you ought. You, who damage, then repair. You, who is hurt, only to temper yourself and grow stronger. Conflict and resolution, repetition and change. You, powerless, yet god-like. A navigator with no map. Ruler, and guest. You are where you are, entirely by design. It is providence that we meet, yes. Providence, of a chance."

"My head's spinning," Spyro huffed. "So, you can't help us?"

Another snap of two fingers, and Spyro's voice vanished again. He opened his muzzle anyways, thought better of it, and slowly, grudgingly closed it.

"I can help. Assist with something of terrible importance to this world, and that help shall be yours. I cannot control the flow of the worlds you were meant to travel, but I can show you a point at which you might, with enough force, *divert* from the path. If you prove strong enough, I can show you where to go to free yourself of its will."

"Yes, of course, Miss Yaga," Figment agreed, balling his hands into enthusiastic fists. "What would we need to assist you with? Moving your house? Clearing the forest?"

"You will assist me, by assisting...him."

Bartok jumped, nearly falling into the mixture in the cauldron, as Baba Yaga pointed to him.

Spyro bit his lip, then nodded, as loudly as he could, as if to say, *I called it*. He had, at that.

"Me?" Bartok asked, stepping back along the rim of the pot. "Gosh, I mean...you know, if you wanna, hey. Far be it fer me to second-guess Baba Yaga. I guess a little help wouldn't slow me down!"

Spyro's eyes narrowed as he snorted a disapproving little burst of soot.

"Ah...certainly," Figment agreed, though Cynder shot him a completely different category of 'a look'. "I take it, you mean..."

"The Prince. Yes. He is held in a tower, at the far end of this country's capitol, the heart of the land. Return the boy to his seat on the throne, and right the course of this world, and I will help you."

"Figment," Cynder started. It had been long enough of a journey now, that hearing his full name felt a bit like a scolding. Still, he nodded assent.

"Consider it done, then."

"Very good," Baba Yaga said, smirking. "With your stride, it should be a very short journey, very simple. Consider it a vacation, in comparison to your previous adventures, yes?"

By this point, Spyro and Cynder bore the same expressions. Toothless poked at the green seed with a curious tongue, more interested in its taste than its potential.

"Take this, then, Bartok," she ordered, filling a small glass vial with the mixture, then handing it carefully to the tiny bat. "And good travels to you all. I will find you, when the time is correct. Until then, odd travelers!"

The sound of the door flying open cut through; there was another rush of air, an explosion of returned size, then the inevitable crash, as the four colossal dragons collided awkwardly with the outside world once more. A few moments later, Bartok's little body effortlessly flapped its way down, perching on Figment's massive muzzle.

"Whoo, boy, you four are *way* bigger out here," he observed, as Figment's house-sized muzzle lifted up off a cluster of smashed trees. "Well, shoot, this'll be a snap, in dat case! Hey, dat's great!"

By the time Figment was standing upright, Cynder and Spyro were waiting for him, arms folded. Toothless stretched his 900-foot body, behind them, before sneezing.

"Fig, really," Cynder groaned. "You could have asked. We're a group."

"Okay, fair," Figment started, easing in, "that is certainly true...but, Cynder, it's a way out! And it explains so much! You heard Baba Yaga! It explains why I couldn't jump back home, even when I concentrated on it. I can jump back to any place I've been to, that I can remember...but not there! Something doesn't want me going home!"

"WE HEARD, FIG," Spyro boomed, his voice once again grown to mammoth size, as he loomed over them all. "DOESN'T THAT BOTHER YOU? YOU SEEM EXCITED—"

"Only at the idea of being free of whatever is controlling our progress," he countered. "I mean, really, now...what alternative is there? Going through a hundred worlds? A thousand? Millions, even?"

"It's not that we disagree with getting this all under control," Cynder sighed. "Just...think about it, a moment longer. She felt the four of *us* were needed, to help Bartok here succeed. We're overpowered, individually, let alone as a unit. What could be *that* terrible a threat, up ahead?"

Figment did think on it. His resolve budged, but only slightly.

"Maybe she wanted to be one hundred percent sure of success, instead of ninety?"

"Gee, thanks," Bartok said, still there on Figment's huge snout.

"Ninety is a very good number!"

"EH, LET'S JUST GET THIS OVER WITH," Spyro rumbled, scratching his pectorals.

"Please, don't be mad, you two," Figment pleaded, his tail coiling up nervously. "I didn't mean to leave you out of the decision. Or you, Toothless."

"We're not going to split up or anything stupid, Figment," Cynder soothed (sort of). "We're sticking together. Just...keep us in the loop, alright? We're partners."

"YEAH, WE'LL JUST STAY AWKWARDLY CLOSE AND MAD AT EACH OTHER, LIKE REAL FRIENDS SHOULD."

"No offense, fellas," Bartok shouted, having to do so just to be heard at all. "But can we get goin' then? What, does it take you half a day just to agree to move? All dis talking!"

"We're going, we're going," Figment sighed, suddenly cowed. "If we didn't talk through things, you'd probably have no idea what's—"

"It's not dat hard to figure," Bartok retorted, as the five of them thudded off through yet another forest, shaking the landscape as they passed along. Most of it was Spyro, granted.

"So, dat's gotta be the tower, there, at the far end of the city. I've seen it before."

The old city was large, even to them. Finally, Figment confirmed the general time period of this world, as he spied numerous Byzantine spires and onion-shaped domes, as far as he could see.

"This is quite near my own time, back in London," Figment chirped, overtly impressed. "Look, that late-period Muscovite architecture, that style! This is Russia! Well, she *was* named Baba Yaga, after the famous folklore witch...I suppose that hadn't sunk in before, heh, silly me..."

"DO WHAT, NOW?" Spyro asked, confused.

"The city," Figment explained. "The style. It's Baroque."

"LOOKS FINE TO ME."

"Yeah, anyhow," Bartok shouted, his voice getting hoarse, by this point. "The Regent of the Prince, Mistress Ludmilla, she's the one who officially put me up to dis whole quest, to save Ivan...so, yeah, you just lemme do the talkin', when we arrive at the gates. Better still, you oughta stay back here a bit, unless you wanna scare everyone. I'll tell her dere's a threat, that someone in the royal family's secretly keeping Ivan prisoner, an' she'll know what to do."

"That's it? Baba Yaga gave you all that pep-talk and that fancy potion, and all you need to do is out the traitor and get the Prince out of the tower?" Cynder wondered aloud. "That...doesn't seem that difficult."

"Well, the Royal family, s'got a lot of armed guards and an army, so...I think she wanted you around as backup, y'know, in case things went South fer me."

"Like I said," she snorted, flicking her huge wings.

"It's plan A, okay? Lemme just try it first."

No one protested further, so off Bartok flapped, carrying the small vial with him, held by a sliver of thread, much like the strap on Figment's bag.

"I guess we wait, then," Figment sighed, shrugging his huge shoulders. He turned to the other two, then saw Toothless tonguing at the same green seed, playing with it, pushing it around on his open palm. "Say, Toothless, don't you want to talk? Why not swallow it?"

Toothless' tongue slipped back in as he looked to Figment, then back to the seed, cocking his head again.

"YEAH, WOULDN'T MIND ANOTHER DRAGON TO TALK BIG WITH," Spyro added.

"I think it's nice, the strong silent type," Cynder countered. "Very dignified."

"DIGNITY ISN'T EVERYTHING," Spyro rumbled. "BESIDES, THAT'S HOW A FEMALE SEES IT. YOU'RE TOO FLATTERING TO US MALES, HEH!"

"Is *that* what I was being?" she hummed, permitting a coy glance up at the vast dragon. Suddenly, Spyro's bravado fluttered lower, then lower, still.

"HE'S...YOU KNOW...THINKING DUMB STUFF, LIKE THE REST OF US, IS ALL."

"Hey," Figment groaned.

"...Do you think that breaking the pattern we're set on...do you think that's really wise?" Cynder asked, after a lengthy pause. "What if we're *supposed* to be set on it?"

"LIKE, WE'RE *MEANT* TO SPUTTER AROUND AT RANDOM, CAUSE TROUBLE, THEN FIX IT AGAIN? I MEAN, THE ONLY REAL UPSIDE IS, WE JUST KEEP ENDING UP BIGGER AND BETTER, HEH!"

"Spyro, I...okay, I *maybe* like growing, too...I mean, we're dragons, it's a given...but really, you know there's more to this than getting big and strong, and liking it. That's secondary, at best. I think this energy that got into the candies, that keeps going into us, then into the portals in exchange for movement...there must be a reason for it. Who benefits from our getting overpowered?"

"US, OF COURSE."

"The only real answer would have to be...it benefits whatever charts our course," Figment slowly concluded. "The moment Baba Yaga confirmed this was all by design, it became the only logical answer. At least, the only one I can come up with."

"Shoot. I was hoping you wound up with a different conclusion."

"I tried."

Any fears that Ludmilla wouldn't be available to see Bartok vanished with such speed that the bat's relief almost slipped into shock. He hadn't even been given the chance to find her—she found him.

"Mighty Bartok," an armed guardsman began, saluting, as at least four other men drew up behind. "You have returned to us!"

"*Magnificent*," Bartok started—

"Yes, indeed! Please, hero, the Regent Ludmilla demands your immediate presence! We are to escort you through Moscow at once! Come!"

The people of the city turned from their general serf activities to stare and murmur, gathering into human walls that wound the streets as the entourage hustled toward the castle. Bartok puffed himself up as best as he could; if only his old employer could see him now!

The doors to the Great Hall growled as they separated, throwing the fading daylight into its depths. The imposing sight of guards storming in from the light faded as those inside came to realize that it was five men carrying an albino bat. Interesting, it remained, but not so intimidating.

The human walls remained on either side of towering pillars as they entered, though the element had been upgraded from rabble to nobles and Lords. They stared about the same, though.

There, at the end of the Hall, buttressed against an oversized throne and silk curtains, sat Ludmilla, as though she had been born on it. A veil hung around the back of her head, netting blonde hair and a long braid, her demure dress and long skirt interrupted by a spiked breastplate. Slender and angular, she wore her beauty the same way one might brandish a great, gilded club: attractive, yet threatening. Suffice to say, when Ludmilla had put Bartok up to the task of rescue, it hadn't been a request. She hadn't even been smiling, so much as showing teeth.

That was to be expected, though. Royalty and the like, they had to be like that. Probably.

"Bartok, the Magnificent," Ludmilla announced, with a florid flourish. "So good that you have

returned to us, and in such *haste*, no less! To see the treacherous witch, the mighty Baba Yaga, and to return...in perfect health...is truly no small feat! You've my congratulations, and Moscow's thanks. Yet, ah...where is the Prince?"

She took the bother of actually scanning the hall, looking for him. Whispers among the nobles became contagious. Bartok cleared his throat as the five guards all bowed to the Regent, and spread out to the pillars.

"The Prince...never left the city," Bartok declared, hands to his little hips. Ludmilla's eyes, formerly so set on him, flickered the tiniest bit.

"...What?"

"Oh, yeah. Yeah, he didn't get taken off anywhere, dat ol' witch, she didn't kidnap him, like you said. I mean, heh, not to contradict."

Ludmilla wound back up into a painfully tight ball of control, then settled internally between nodding and shaking her head, as the whispers around Bartok increased.

"I see...How terrible! Then, Bartok, where is he, exactly?"

"Prince Ivan...is in the tower!"

Ludmilla pursed her lips into nonexistence, as the chatter among the nobles exploded.

"The tower?"

"Well, yeah, the tower—that...you know, that big one, right outside. Someone within the Royal system had to have done it, if he never left, y'know? Got him where he lived, an' such. I think, eh, if you go and search the tower, you'll find he's been hidden there."

"A conspiracy, then, you say," Ludmilla spoke, slowly, laying tracks down quickly. "Well! A charge this vile, this serious, must be attended immediately! Captain Vol, you will accompany Bartok and I to the tower, at once, and this matter shall be resolved!"

A large bearded guard behind the throne nodded, taking up his spear.

"Ah, don't worry," Bartok boasted, feeling his oats a little more, every moment. "Dat spear won't be necessary. If the kidnapper has any foul plans waiting in the tower, there, I'll tell you, I can handle 'em."

"Really?" Ludmilla asked, an eyebrow raising, despite merciless training.

"Oh, yeah, you bet. Dis here vial I got, yeah, a gift from Baba Yaga—powerful as I already am, and all, if'n I wanna increase my power even further, I can just take dis here, and whammo! Ten times whatever you are, on the inside! So ah, don't worry about any last-minute twists or threats!"

The audience went from chattering to clapping, and Bartok took every bit of it in.

"Well! A gift from the witch, herself!" Ludmilla chirped, her many angles in motion as she rose from the throne. "I assure you, dear little bat...I remain entirely un-threatened."

That seemed reassuring enough.

"Yeah, let's go, then, sure! Off to restore the sovereignty of Moscow, folks, step aside!"

The claps and cheers followed Bartok as Ludmilla, the Regent herself, walked ahead, beckoning Captain Vol along with them. She and the bat bore satisfied smiles throughout; when the great doors shut behind them, only Bartok kept his.

The cheers vanished, and icy winds whipped into the castle and its snow-saddled Bailey, leaving only crunching steps and stony silence. Something settled in Bartok's little stomach, weighing him down.

"This tower, here?" Ludmilla asked, showing teeth. Bartok lost his voice somewhere in a patch of snow, and nodded instead.

The march up the cyclonic steps was somehow even worse. Whatever it was that nested in Bartok's insides stirred unpleasantly, warning, pleading, pulling back.

"I certainly do hope it's all as you say it is, Great Bartok," Ludmilla finally said, sharp enough to cast a slight echo off darkened tower walls. "Think of it...my returning to the Great Hall, empty handed...you, accused of fraud, after all of Russia's hopes were set to soar. With the Prince safe and secure, mercifully, there would be no need for repercussions."

"Beg pardon?" Bartok squeaked, suddenly frozen.

"Well, punishment *is* an ugly constant, for those in power. Necessary, but ugly. Dealing with liars and fakes especially. I can't tell you how refreshing it is, to have dealings with an honest, true hero. It makes my job so much...*easier*, really. I just wanted you to understand, before the celebration and accolades, so that you better grasp my...trepidation. I am eager for *resolution* to such issues."

"Sure, yeah. Makes sense."

The thought of Figment or Cynder ripping the whole tower up off its foundations and shaking the Prince out for them went from silly to desperately appealing, and as the party lighted on the last step that mounting panic surged, nearly forcing Bartok to fly off there and then.

"Well. This is it," Ludmilla said, motioning at a large wooden door, padlocked and under-lit by torchlight. Bartok fought with all he had to convince himself she had been referring to it, and not to him, instead. "Captain Vol."

"Yes, ma'am," he replied, selecting the correct key on a large ring, and opening the lock, then the creaking door. Paltry as the torch was, outside the chamber, it proved enough to send a column of light into the sheer blackness within.

Had the sight at the end of that column not gotten in the way, Bartok's heart would have flown. His relief at being right meant that he was saved, but it came at the cost of seeing the good Prince there,

caged in a huge ball of iron strips and spikes, curled into a ball of his own.

He glanced up at the others, hoping maybe their relief would bolster his own, but neither party reacted. Well, not the same way he was expecting.

"Goodness," Ludmilla said, with a hollow gasp. "Who could have done this!? Captain, see to Prince Ivan, immediately!"

"Y-yes," Vol stammered, fumbling for the correct key, as he approached the cage.

The young Prince stirred at the sounds, then looked up.

"...Bartok?"

"Yer majesty! Yeah, it's me!" the bat affirmed, flapping over to a smaller round cage, suspended by an overhead chain. "Don't sound so shocked, kid! Remember a few days ago, on the city streets? Told you I could pull off anything, didn't I? What, did you think it was just a part of my act?"

"I knew you could do it," Ivan laughed, coughing a bit.

"We're all just so relieved that you were never harmed, my Prince," Ludmilla interjected, rubbing (then squeezing) her hands together. "We'll have you freed, right away!"

"So, eh, who nabbed you, Prince Ivan?" Bartok pressed.

"We had presumed Baba Yaga," Ludmilla started.

"It was someone dressed as her," Ivan said, trying to clear a dry throat. "I don't know who."

"So, like I thought, a frame-up," Bartok sighed, shaking his head. "What kinda devious serpent would pull somethin' so rotten?"

"The kidnapper shall be dealt with, swiftly," Ludmilla asserted, as Vol opened the cage door, then stepped inside, to undo the Prince's shackles and fetters. "Not to worry."

At that, Ludmilla's surprisingly terrible grip found Bartok. The little bat easily fit in her iron grip as she snatched him with one hand, stepped nearer to the Prince's cage, and kicked the door shut, locking it with her free hand. Out the keys went from the lock, and in Bartok went, shoved callously into the smaller, hanging cage.

"Ah, what the heck, there—"

"You flea-choked little rat," Ludmilla all but hissed, turning away from the lot of them, until she silhouetted like a stack of daggers in a dress between the door frame. "This couldn't have been any simpler. It really couldn't! And you, Vol! Really! I said to get the boy out of the way!"

Locked within the same cage as the Prince, an equally stunned Vol gawked.

"Yes, and I...I mean, I took him to the tallest tower and locked him away! How much more *out*

of the way could I get him?"

"Dead, you dolt, I meant *kill* him. What are you for, if you can't manage a clean little assassination, in the dark? What kind of guard are you?"

Vol shrank back as Ludmilla pivoted, glaring all kinds of cold death at Bartok.

"I sent you on an impossible quest—you, a performer, a *charlatan*, some preening little idiot barely managing a hack magic show on the streets! Yet, here you are! Returned! With *all* the answers!"

"Yeah, well, I was still right, wasn't I!" Bartok shot back, pushing all his courage to the front, regardless of how fake it was. "And when you go back empty-handed—"

"What? I'll be in trouble? We're the only ones who know what's going on! I'll say you tricked us all, tricked all of trusting Moscow! You were working with Vol, the true kidnapper, all along! But you double-crossed him, using your knowledge to get close enough to steal the poor Prince away, for your own ransom! Yes, all those *great magical powers* were too much for Vol! And I alone will bear the burden of justice for Russia's beloved Prince! You see that, Bartok the Magnificent? It's easy to lie. Maybe you'll rest well here, knowing that a kindred spirit understands you."

Through her monologuing, Bartok was already at work on the vial, trying to force its snap-on top off. *Man, Baba Yaga had put this one on, tight!*

"And as for *this*—"

Ludmilla's steel trap of a hand snapped into Bartok's cage, snatching the vial away cleanly.

"Hey!"

"I'll take this," the Regent purred, as she made for the door. On the way, her free hand took hold of a long iron lever, and pulled it down. "Dasvidaniya."

The support mechanisms below cracked, then snapped away, before the floor collapsed to bits, splashing in fragments into black waters. Bartok's cage remained steady, but the Prince's cage heaved down, snapping back into a rough sway as the larger chain caught, then twisted and swung in the open air. Down beneath yawned the unlit maw of a vast and terrible stone well.

"Poor Bartok," Ludmilla sneered, from above, standing in the relative safety of the opened door. "After coming so far, and doing so much, you'll only be remembered by Russia as a *liar*. Too bad."

"You can't seriously—"

The door slammed shut, intentionally, ending the moment with an exclamation, in a period's stead. Its echoes took their time in losing the awful power of their originator, and the silence that crept in after was somehow even worse.

"Are you okay, Ivan?" Bartok finally asked, once the larger cage had settled into stillness.

"I...I'm alright," Ivan's voice answered, bouncing its way up along stone walls. "I'm so sorry you

were pulled into this mess, Bartok..."

"Ah, I'm not really worried about the whole *indefinite imprisonment* thing, yer highness."

"You're not?"

"Really?" Vol balked, his voice joining in.

"Nah...I mean, okay, I got a little residual upset goin' on, sure, but I got friends outside dat she doesn't know about. Yeah, I got me a big contingency plan, there. Dat's my plan B."

"When will they come, then? Ludmilla has all of Russia's army at her call, now! I...wait, plan B? W...what's plan A, then?"

"This," Bartok answered, searching through his white fur with pink hands. "I mean, you can't really see it from down dere, yeah, but I got somethin'..."

He undid a thin string, tied so tightly about his midsection that his fur covered it completely, and he pulled out another vial, filled with a swirling blue-green mixture. He almost bragged about how he was even smaller and thinner than he looked, sans fur, but opted not to embarrass himself, and clammed up.

"Whatever it is, if it gets us free, I say do it," Prince Ivan said. "I saw you performing in the streets...I know you can do *real* magic!"

"Just, please, do whatever you're going to do, bat!" Vol added. "Why hesitate?"

"Eh, because this'll probably hurt a pretty good bit, here...s'why," Bartok muttered, looking the well-built steel bands of his cage over glumly. "Knew I shoulda taken dis back before dat door opened..."

He fussed with the snap-top, until it popped off, and gulped, readying to drink it all.

"Ten times," Ludmilla pondered smugly, as she stood outside the chamber door, looking the vial over. "Times times more powerful than I already am...ten times more *beautiful*..."

Her eyes lit up at that part. The temptation much too great, she took the vial and easily snapped the top off, tossing it carelessly aside.

"Ten times more persuasive, more compelling, too...I could sell the public on anything. How devilishly perfect!"

The vial arced up to Ludmilla's lips, and she downed the green-gold mixture with one astonishingly-sustained gulp. Away the vial went, empty, and down the stairs she moved, waiting for it—waiting for that feeling, the increase, the power. A glow, an aura, lightning from the fingertips, any variety would do.

What came, instead, was a profound tingle, from within, one so strong that it near-instantly

tumbled into a violent, rumbling doom.

"At work for me, already, is it?" she hummed, despite a restrained flicker of panic. It too was squelched as she descended, control momentarily upheld. "I *do* suppose I have a lot to work with—"

BUMPH

The sound of her ascension came, not with the heralding trumpets of cherubs, not with the sound and fury of some god in the flesh, but with a bounce. What was bouncing nearly caused her to tumble over, for two reasons. One of them was the sudden burst of size her breasts undertook, and the other was the momentum of the burst, enough to cause her to pitch forward and correct at the last moment. Raw panic might have been a third, but there wasn't time to consider anything further, as her breastplate blasted off with a metallic ping.

"What—"

Her bosom hung out ahead of her like a new entity, eager to explore the world, and dragging her forward with it. Any frontal sight of her hips vanished as both mounds bulged further, stretching her overtaxed bra like a prisoner on a rack (which, *Spyro might have maintained*, it was). Those same neglected hips, as though jealous, violently ballooned out after, booming so wide that her skirt caught, then stretched, then *split* mid-seam.

"—is—"

Her roughening skin darkened, dropping from pale beige to a surprisingly menacing flavor of pink. Creases formed into networks, which latticed into deepening scales; her feet billowed too large, stretching both shoes into bulges, then bursting through them, claws jutting out of swelling toes. She pitched back, mid-step, her lithe and graceful arms darkening as they bulked from twigs to logs, her hands inflating into two thick, monstrous pink paws. Both slammed with alarming power into the side walls as Ludmilla steadied herself, only to shudder and blow up even larger.

"—h-happen...ing!?"

Even her voice, so dainty and shrill, dropped low, skipping several bothersome octaves, and going right from a demonic growl. Her bust began to even out with her body as a reptilian belly rapidly swelled out, pushing her head and breasts higher, just as her neck began to elongate. A round, hefty midsection surged out, bouncing her chest up against her thickening neck, as the bondage of her tortured dress ripped away, letting great bulges of pink scales inflate into the open.

All the while, Ludmilla forced her changing body down, down, her size steadily climbing higher and wider, to the point where she had to squeeze herself back out of the tower's double-doors. As she strained, her neck pushed out even longer still, and even her humanoid face did the same, as a lengthy muzzle crept out from where her nose had been, growing into a full-on snout. Two strip-patterned horns poked out from behind her head, her teeth curving into hooked knives as she grit them.

"GAH!"

The front molding to the tower door blew apart, sending a shower out onto the snowy walkways of the Bailey. One thick foot slammed down onto it, then another. By the time the latter arrived, both

feet had already swollen larger. In fact, all of Ludmilla's transformation was capped by one alarming factor: no matter what kept changing, she was *growing*.

"A...t-TRICK..."

Her voice rattled in her swelling throat like a muffled explosion, the newly-minted dragoness stomping forward, then wobbling and adjusting, only to readjust as her twenty-foot tall body trembled, then blew up to thirty, in one hot, throbbing burst of growth.

"A SCHEMING...VICIOUS...TRIIIIHICK!"

Her muzzle went skyward as Ludmilla's rage boiled and gathered, then gushed forth, blasting out in a great streak of hellfire. Even as she vented, the pressure only seemed to build, and fast, as her entire body shook, then blew up bigger, yet again; her draconic haunches pumped wider, her breasts tearing away the last strips of resistance, casting her shredded clothing to nil as the flame continued to spew, and she continued to grow. 50 feet lopsidedly expanded to 60, her neck suddenly blowing out wider, stronger. Her shoulders mounded into boulders, fresh clusters of cliques of muscle joining as her biceps uncontrollably exploded, her triceps outpacing them in twin eruptions of raw power. Her back scales stretched audibly from the stress of containing the bursting shoulder blades, as her hips swelled even wider, still. Her calves boom-boomed out, out, larger and thicker and stronger, and by the time Ludmilla finally finished blowing out fire, she stood a terrifying 70 feet tall.

As she returned from her meltdown, dark smoke curling from the edges of her toothy scowl, the crowd of nobles and Lords and Ladies all clambered outside, to see what the tremoring and fuss was about; the answer came, and was sent back, as the entire group bellowed in shock and dismay, turning screaming to flee the courtyard.

"N...NO! MY PEOPLE--"

Another torrent of fire erupted, almost belched out, melting the snow and leaving a telltale row of clean, steaming stonework below. She felt her throat over, and scowled so hard, it made the previous one look like a happy little grin. Even then, she was still growing, her scaled musculature and chest blowing out even further, packing more startling mass onto an 80-foot body.

"BAR...TOK!"

As the populace moved out into the city, Ludmilla turned back to the tower, her wrath in tow. One colossal scaly fist bashed into the tower's side, then the other, again and again; with every thump, each fist swelled bigger, heavier, shaking the outer structure more and more. The more her anger rose, the larger her body rose, with it, 100 feet of enraged female reptile shuddering and bloating up to 110, then 120, pushing nearer to the top of the tower, itself.

"YOU MISERABLE, LYING, LITTLE CHEAT!"

Both cages began a pendulous dance, swaying uneasily over oblivion, as the entire tower began to shake and rattle, as though some passing storm was battering it indiscriminately. Bartok's hesitation finally lost out, and throughout the passing moments he had been forcing the mixture down his throat, gulp by gulp; at his size, a full vial's worth of fluid was nearly the same as drinking half his own body, so...it took a few minutes.

"Ah, almost got it," the tiny bat panted, gulping one extra time, before catching his breath. "Stuff's pretty good, but geez, it's thick, boy..."

The last of it went down, grudgingly, as movement below stirred the larger cage.

"How's it going up there, Bartok?" Ivan asked, just as the bat finished.

"Can't rush not-choking," Bartok coughed, before sighing in relief, his belly fuller than he ever had dreamed it could get. Thoughts of not ever needing (or wanting) to eat ever again were knocked back, however, as his stomach rumbled, and rumbled *bad*.

"Oh, whoo, okay," Bartok muttered, nervous enough as it was.

"Any luck, up there?" Vol asked.

"Hey, hold yer horses, you'll know when I—"

The growth spurt all-but attacked Bartok as it blew his tiny body up in a frantic explosion of fur and bulk. His sides mashed directly against the cage, booming out into multiple bulges that forced the bands further apart. The nub of his tail extended out, shuddering, swelling, then shooting out into a lengthy reptile tail, still caking in white fur. Pink spikes popped out in a row down its span, before it grew again, flopping out of the now-struggling cage.

Ivan and Vol both backed away in their own cage, watching in morbid fascination as the smaller cage above started to warp and snap, bands of metal ping-pong loose, then curling away as the quaking mass of Bartok's body roared up even bigger, bunching and inflating forth from any opening it could find.

"What's happening?" Ivan gasped. Vol simply shook his head at varying speeds.

"HHHPH GHHHHZ," Bartok wailed, or tried to, groaning and grunting as the cage partially contained his growth, making his furred chest blow up against his lengthening muzzle, burying his muzzle between two swelling pectorals. His backside billowed uncontrollably, blowing out the back of the cage, making the now-lopsided thing tilt right. His growing bulk sagged towards it, more and more muscle and white fluff and spikes pushing angrily free, so much so that he nearly tumbled out.

"He's...oh, he's getting...huge," Ivan gulped, backing further away, as Bartok's clumped-up bulk shook, wobbled, then ballooned massively in size, exploding out of the remainder of the cage, his curled mass easily outgrowing not only his former cage, but the Prince's as well!

"H-he's going to stop, right?" Vol rightly asked, just as Bartok unfurled free, his muscled arms lashing out for balance, uselessly flapping two monstrous, sail-sized wings, as he revealed his now-draconic body.

"Hah, G-GEEZ!" Bartok growled, his teeth growing and growing into thick white daggers, his muzzle keeping the pink blot of color that used to be his bat-nose, at the end of a slender, rather lovely snout. His large ears remained, even as two dark-pink horns pushed out from behind his head.

Given the size of the cage (that remained), versus the width available to them, the diameter of the well had to have been roughly 30 feet, across. Bartok was filling that, and way too fast. He snorted and flicked his big pink tongue as his arms struck out, one big, pink, clawed hand thumping on each wall. Even as he held himself in place, Bartok closed his eyes and rumbled worse, hissing and blowing up even bigger, faster! His elbows and wings bumped the walls, then his belly, which surged hotly in against them, wedging the furry dragon tightly, damming the well with his growing bulk. Thankfully, he had sagged from sheer weight, and had skidded down enough to where he grew, underneath Ivan's cage; this forced the cage to rest up atop Bartok's surprisingly massive, bulging chest, giving Ivan and a terrified Vol full view of his gigantic muzzle, between the bars.

"Bartok, that's incredible!" Ivan shouted, as Bartok's pectorals boomed up, up, up, rising like dough over his chin. The dragon snorted hard, buffeting them with air, and when his pink eyes opened, they were each bigger than Ivan...no, Vol!

"YEAH, WELL...T-THANKS A BUNCH, YER MAJESTY, THAT'S...THAT'S, AH, REAL GOOD OF YA TO SAY...HUH, HUUUAHHH, I J-JUST..."

"What?"

"I EH...I CAN FEEL...HO-BOY, YEAH, I'M GONNA...GET...*B-BUH-BIIIIIGGG*—"

The shaking from outside was immediately put out of mind, as Bartok's own quaking outpaced it. The 50-foot tall colossus of a fur-dragon was already damming up the well so much that his quaking growth spurt traveled through every bit of the tower, making brick and mortar split and shift as he rolled his eyes back and whimpered, then...THEN...

Outside, Ludmilla raged on, now over 150 feet tall. With a final, frustrated snarl, she headbutted the tower exterior, pulling back only because of the webbing cracks forming along it. She grinning cruelly, imagining her attacks were getting strong enough to bear fruit. After all, what else could it have been?

"HAH! BETTER! I'LL CRUSH YOU INTO DUST, YOU FRAIL, LITTLE—"

All the terrible dragoness managed to see was something furry exploding out of the tower, decimating it with no trouble. A great wall of white fur attacked, shoving the gigantic female back, before swelling clear-up and over her, smothering her into the ground as she bellowed frantically—or, tried to.

"DID WE EVEN AGREE ON A SIGNAL?" Spyro wondered aloud, making the other three dragons look up, up at him. "I MEAN, IT'S BEEN A BIT, RIGHT?"

"I was kind of hoping to wait, in good faith," Cynder replied, rubbing up at her thick, bulky neck. "Do you think things went...South?"

"DON'T THEY ALWAYS?"

"Maybe we should give him another minute," Figment offered, shrugging. "See if there are any celebratory fireworks, and the like?"

Toothless was asleep again, having curled up against the side of a tall cliff. His chest swelled in and out as he absently snored, grinning wide.

"HE GOT CREAMED, I BET."

"Another minute!" Figment countered.

"*CREAMED.*"

Out at the back districts of Moscow, a single *boom* rang, alarming, yet uninformative. The three of them whipped to attention as a spire of smoke blew up into the air, over the city, only to be followed by a rushing, vertical lurch of...something. Something *white*.

"What...what is that?" Cynder asked, squinting.

"HOLY SMOKES! NO WAY!" Spyro barked, shaking the forests with just his thick voice.

"What?" Figment asked. "W-what in the world is that?"

A massive cluster of bulging ivory muscles and wind-wavered fur ballooned up over the streets and rooftops, and when it blew up yet again, surging hotly beyond 300 feet, then 400, then 500, and just kept on rising higher and higher, still, they realized it.

"HAHAHAHA!" Spyro cackled, terribly amused. "I LOVE IT! HE WENT FULL DRAGON ON US! ALRIGHT, BARTOK! THAT'S MORE LIKE IT!"

True enough, when the massive beast roared into the skies and unfurled a set of white wings with brilliant pink insides, and when two humongous, adorable bat-ears popped up on either side of thick, ever-swelling ram horns, they could see who it was, who it *had* to have been. A streak of bright pink splashed up over his muzzle-tip, where his former nose had been. Two massive clawed dragon feet thudded down on the panicked streets, bulldozing whole rows of factories and houses, leaving ant-sized dots of very confused, very clinging citizens clutching to his growing fur and scales.

"The potion...worked *THAT* well!?" Figment gasped, as he and Cynder suddenly had to look up, and up, from far away in the forests. "He's...getting...huge!"

Bartok, the dragon, swelled with incalculable oceans of pure muscle, his neck and shoulders bulging so thick and monstrous that they bumped and pressed into each other, even as his groaning lats burst wider and heavier, lifting his bulky arms higher. A massive tail whipped into a high loop, before helplessly slamming down, casting a tall cloud up behind his 600-foot body.

"***AH, FER C...C-CRYIN' OUT LOUD!***" Bartok boomed, his voice shaking the landscape, as he panted and strained, then blew up even bigger, and bigger, and bigger, and bigger. Row after row of evacuated buildings were caught under his rump and thighs as he expanded higher and higher, still, his biceps pulsing with absolute power, his thick pectorals swelling out with every breath, yet never receding back to humility. His neck ballooned out into a massive pillar as he grunted and moaned, then burst so much bigger that the entire block vanished under his growing, throbbing mass.

"I...don't think he meant to get this big," Cynder gulped, looking higher and higher up.

"Agreed!" Figment sighed, looking up to Spyro. "I think he needs assistance, Spyro! We had better get absorbing, before he gets any larger!"

"JUST SO YOU BOTH KNOW, I WAITED TO MAKE SURE AND HEAR YOU SAY IT!" Spyro bellowed, grinning wide overhead. "I *CAN* HOLD OFF, THANK YOU!"

"Hah, okay, okay, point taken!" Cynder ceded, as the violet mountain of a dragon stood back up to his 2-mile size. "You were very good!"

"I WAS THINKING, *DIGNIFIED*. WATCH OUT, HERE I GO!"

Still considerate enough, despite his bravado, Spyro motioned for them to move aside, before his colossal feet boomed out across the landscape. Over then thousand feet tall, it was simple enough for him to make good time into the outer rim of the city, and by the time he got there, to his own shock, Bartok was already nearly half his size, sitting down.

"LOOKING FINE, BAT!" Spyro laughed, wagging his enormously muscled tail. "I ADMIT IT, YOU MAKE A GREAT DRAGON! HOW'D YOU LIKE A HAND?"

"G-GET BACK," Bartok huffed, groaning loudly, as another wave of growth bulged against his body, from within. "AH, I'M G-GONNA EXPLODE, HERE!"

"HUH? OH, NAH, I GOT YOU, BUDDY, HERE..."

Spyro's massive paws thumped against Bartok's huge chest, and the panting bat-dragon watched, his confusion mounting—until Spyro erupted bigger, instead of him.

"GEEZ!" he boomed, pink eyes wide, as the dragon's body and bulk erupted larger, pumping him so massive in just one flowing gush that he loomed three times larger, now six miles in size, leaving Bartok gasping for air, at a meager one. "**GEEZ!!**"

"HEHE, RIIIIIGHT? WATCH THIS!"

With less and less to investigate, otherwise, Bartok did indeed watch. The next rumbling building up within him suddenly vanished, leaping into Spyro, his paws ballooning even bigger, and bigger, thickening fingers and curling claws gently covering more and more of the stunned dragon's bulky body. Spyro's toothy grin vanished behind the sheer wall of his pectorals as they stretched and grew, the musclebound male bursting with a snort of complete delight up to 8 miles, then 10!

Two purple feet swelled out bigger and wider, smashing over the forests and snowy hilltops, toes bigger than castles booming even larger, spreading out on either side of the great city's walls as Spyro shuddered, pressing his growing warm palms tighter to Bartok, and grunting as he inflated all the way up to 13 miles, taking and taking and taking.

"He's really getting good at that," Figment observed, watching as Spyro's hulking body stretched and bulged, getting even bigger still, pouring out larger and stronger over the landscape, until

half of Moscow was in his shadow.

"I'll make sure not to tell him you said so," Cynder sighed, turning back around and thumping heavily over to Toothless, even as Spyro swelled up once again into the clouds in the distance, huffing and licking his muzzle over, not bothering at all to hide his joy. "His head's big enough."

Just as she reached out to touch Toothless, to tap on his bulk and wake him, a quake hit, and the earth itself seemed to shudder. A rolling vibration swept underfoot, shaking the snow off of the forests, and quaking the mountains. Even Spyro wobbled a bit, the 30-mile tall dragon thudding heavily back, leaving the mile-tall Bartok atop Moscow. All the fuss and panic and confusion preceding shrank back into a trembling quiet as the still world rested, then quaked again, harder.

"WHAT DE—" Bartok started, when the streets snapped and cracked, segments of rock splitting and rising, carrying entire neighborhoods and businesses and churches and banks off with them as Moscow—the city of Moscow, itself—lurched into the air.

Spyro watched on, slack-jawed, as a thick wave of scales burst up, and up, and up, and up, and up, and up, forever seeming to birth out of the city, out of the earth itself. The highest sections of Moscow broke off and slid back, revealing a city-sized lump, which only stretched and blew up bigger, still, separating the city districts like they were mere lilies on some disturbed pond.

"Gracious!" Figment shouted, Toothless fluttering awake, Cynder staring out with them over the hills and valleys, seeing Moscow shatter to bits...as a dragoness crashed out into the skies themselves, looming so titanic, so massive, that Bartok found himself yelping as he clung to a rising single breast, holding on like a small bird. "Who on Earth—"

Beyond the immense bust and swollen nipples, up past a neck so large it was partly lost to the clouds beyond, a horrible roar blasted forth. Below the clouds, her overgrown breasts swelled even larger, heavier and fuller, as a vast scaly belly ballooned out, forcing the topside higher and higher. A set of monumental hips burst up, further spreading the cratered gouge in the world, snapping the valleys apart as they relentlessly grew and grew.

Chunks of city that would have taken a horse ten minutes to gallop across fell like bits of dirt, getting lost between the creases in each scale, as the dark-pink dragon continually emerged. A hand bigger than a mountain bashed down, shaking the terrain, flattening part of a range with no trouble, only for its thick fingers to swell over the ruins they created, still growing on and on.

A completely humongous muzzle dipped slowly, blowing the clouds away below. The math came quick, and for Figment, the numbers weren't what he would have liked, at all. She had to have been over 50 miles, easily, from belly to muzzle, and that was with her huge neck craned down. Unbelievable muscles exploded bigger and bigger, straining her tight scaly hide, as she closed her huge eyes, trembled lewdly, then *doubled* in size, and *DOUBLED* again.

"B...BBBBBAAAAAAAAAR....T-T-T...OOOOOOOOOOOOK!!!"