

## Date #3 CJ

Just as he would have thought, he was feeling sluggish all day. The morning sun had this miraculous effect on him that made even the most well rested nights lead to the most sleep inducing days. Grink was hardly able to stay awake for most of his morning, not even noticing the guest at his stall.

“Yo.” The surprising greeting sent Grink looked up and around in shock, finding that CJ had come back again with a chipper attitude.

“Oh! Hi, CJ. I saw your note by the way and thanks for recommending more people from my booth. Business is kinda stagnating so it’s a major help!” Grink offered, smiling and slightly bowing to the gryphon as he stood before him. He noticed quickly that CJ was excitedly tapping his talons against the ground. Before he could even begin to ask what for, CJ spoke.

“I’m formally inviting you to my race! You can make it right? Great, come on let’s go, we’re gonna be late!” CJ screamed, dipping behind the lizard and lifting him onto his shoulders by headbutting him from behind. Grink had a few seconds to find his grip before CJ began sprinting back towards the city, waiting until the lizard was secured before taking off once more, much faster than previously. Grink was far too awestruck to question it all, hardly processing his own actions before they were already in the air and Grink realized just how tightly he had grabbed the gryphon’s feathers. What did he mean late? The wind was speeding past and was practically deafening, leading Grink to simply hide behind the head of the gryphon and squeeze his eyes shut. Grink soon realized that they were flying much further than the nest which CJ had taken him to before, now flying much farther for it and somehow gaining more speed. Grink dared to open his eyes and much to his surprise, there were other fliers dashing by, though CJ was soaring much faster than them all for some apparent reason. As well as that, there seemed to be a much larger set of buildings here, much bigger than Grink had ever been exposed to. Grink thought back on it, remembering how CJ vaguely mentioned inviting him to a race. Was that what this was? Was he racing right now? At this speed he’s surely in some kind of competition right now!

“Ok sweet, we made it on time!” CJ laughed in relief, suddenly landing on the balcony of some building next to the stadium. Grink looked around and found that they

were on solid ground for once. CJ was happily strutting over to a three headed guard dog, crossing his arms and glaring down at CJ with disappointment.

“You’re late. They already started warm ups. They were about to start without you, CJ.” The middle head growled. Although to varying degrees, the other heads seem to share the same sentiment of irritation that was lost on the gryphon.

“Great to see you guys too. I got my warm up by getting this guy, so if you could escort him to the VIP seating in time for the race that'd be great!” CJ laughed, clearly sharing no sense in urgency the three headed dogs seemed to.

“Ok sure but you have to be careful next time, the announcers went into sponsors early because of you.” The rightmost head scolded in exasperation. The other heads nodded along. CJ groaned and rolled his entire head, as though rolling his eyes weren’t good enough.

“Oh please. If I wasn’t here, neither would the audience. I’ll be up there soon though so just take Grink here and you guys’ll see me in the air!” CJ yipped as Grink allowed himself to fall off. The multi headed dog walked over and gestured briskly to guide Grink align the path as CJ looked over his shoulder at his guest.

“Just trust the guard dogs, they’re not as intimidating as they look!” CJ offered, running off after it was shared. The leftmost head sighed and muttered *‘It defeats the purpose if you tell people that’* though the monster didn’t stop moving forwards.

In the supposed VIP area Grink found himself in a secluded seating area elevated past the normal seating with full view of the racers, each with varying species and sizes. CJ sauntered between them all excitedly though they all basically kept to themselves. Grink saw that the entire stadium was empty and all of the audience was fully in the sun. Despite the mix of mammals, amphibians, avians and other creatures in the stands, they seemed enamored with the beings in the empty field before them. Grink joined them in awe and curiosity, seeing the collection of monsters joining together for this race. Being that it was hardly noon and CJ had just kidnapped him without a word, Grink had no idea just how long he’d be in the sun for, let alone what about this was meant to be a race. The only thing in the stadium was a ring in the middle of the floor painted bright red on the sand. Grink looked around in confusion. Much to Grink’s surprise, the 3 headed dog seemed to note his confusion. The middle head took a deep sigh before talking.

“The race is going to start soon. We can answer any questions of yours.” The middle head offered. Grink was sitting down on a heightened seat, the guard stood behind him near the door with a stern expression. The expressions between the three of them seemed to vary. The leftmost seemed a bit groggy and uninterested, not even looking at Grink as the other two watched him. The rightmost was more curious towards Grink and was paying him the most mind, almost inspecting him carefully. The middle head was more suited towards being a guard, glaring everywhere he looked and keeping his head high. Grink looked back at the baron field before looking back to ask the guard a question. He was already unaware about how these races worked, but he’d still want to understand how to truly cheer for CJ.

“I thought this was a race but I don’t see any... Race... Bits?” Grink asked, already feeling embarrassed over his lack of understanding. The rightmost head smiled and used one of the arms to uncross and point above the stadium. Following his point, Grink looked up and was shocked at how he hadn’t noticed it before. There were massive hoops being carried in the air by various other flying creatures at extreme heights. There were 3 segments of colors, clearly indicative of its height from the ground. While green was at the lowered hoops and only slightly above the stadium roof, yellow was much higher above that with red nearly breaching the clouds. Grink must’ve had his amazement clear on his face. He could hear one of the heads laughing softly behind him, turning to see the rightmost head.

“Yeah the hoops are extremely light to allow for other creatures to keep that at precise areas for prolonged periods of time. They’re unsurprisingly paid a large amount.” The rightmost head chimed in, happily explaining it to Grink. The middle head also spoke after him, “The racers don’t know where the hoops will be until the day of the race and they are meant to fly through every single one at their own discretion. If they forget one and land, they fail. If they touch another contestant or a hoop, they fail.” He explained it with the same expression he wore, stopping time for the announcers to begin introducing the players. Most were a few avians that Grink had no mind in remembering, though they each seemed to have their own fans based on cheers from the audience. The list was of a few 12 fliers, soon approaching the final two. The apparent ‘rivals’ of Se’Jae and Ignea. Ignea was a smaller subcategory of dragons known as a wurm. While she had no wings, she was covered in vibrant feathers, earning a booming reception from the audience, only beaten by the audience’s cheers for CJ. Upon the end of the introductions, each of the monsters got into a

stance ready to soar into the sky. A loud horn roared and in a second, each of the creatures had left the ground.

While CJ was quick to fly to the top of all of the hoops, going through on a few greens and a single yellow before making his way to the rival of his, the dragon wyrm was being much more deliberate in how she played, fluttering through a majority of the hoops on her way up, hanging close behind CJ before splitting to prioritize hoops. Once he was at the highest, CJ began allowing himself to fall, his wings collapsing and only opening to direct himself through the vertical hoops all the way down. He was getting all the rings on his way down, on the contrary of Ignea, who had made her way at the top and had much fewer rings to worry about as she swirled down like a leaf in a storm. It felt as though the speeds of the two monsters would knock any other monster out of the air. Understanding this, every other flier had completely avoided the two champions in their bout, leaving CJ to fall past the last hoop and slowly braced himself for landing, skidding across the red sand and making his mark obvious that he had clearly beaten the wyrm, who was only 2 seconds behind him and had much less difficulty slowing down. CJ then took the time to fly at a much more relaxed pace to circle the ring of the stadium, garnering applause from his fans as they reached out to catch his attention, which he most certainly didn't pay any mind to, only hearing how loud they were as he did so, soon floating back down to talk to the wyrm, who seemed a lot less excited by his winnings.

The last of the competitors finished their races and the scores were taken. None of the fliers had missed a hoop, so all of the competitors were in the same placements they finished with. CJ was quick to see his lizard, who was still processing all that he saw. In a breakroom, the three headed dog walked Grink in to see the Gryphon practically drown himself in water.

"Whoa you must be thirsty!" Grink laughed, seeing the display before him as CJ tore his head from the fountain, looking back at Grink with a smile.

"What? Oh no, no I just do this to cool down! I felt so light! Did you notice how I did a countdown? I usually play it by ear but I was able to do it now cause I got inspired by that list you put me on!" CJ boasted proudly. Grink wanted to act insulted by the snooping of his notes but he wanted to respond to the part that caught his attention more.

“What do you mean countdown?” He asked, taking a seat on one of the cushions set up in the room. CJ smiled, clearly waiting for Grink to ask him about it before standing in front of him, ready to tell the story.

“So! I was looking up there and I was all like ‘wow that’s a lot! Plus they like, put them practically on top of one another to make it harder to get back to back, I need to do something!’ And then I remembered that list you made and I was like, what would Grink do? And then I like, counted all the hoops and I made a plan thing, where I got a couple hoops on the way up, that way on the way down it was like 3 reds, 6 yellows, and 10 greens, instead of trying to rush to all of them. Plus I thought about how you did that lil thing you did where you did the thing and I was like, why not just let myself fall, and just do small stuff to make it work! I probably should have practiced it sooner cause I almost let Ignea catch up to me! Man, it was such a great race! See how fast I was going? I can’t wait for the long distance ones! You seen the track for that one? Oh yeah! I’m not doing the weighted ascension race so I’m totally free right now! We should eat!” CJ was bouncing back and forth as if Grink would somehow follow it more if he moved his body along with the story. Grink was astonished at how his involvement had anything to do with CJ counting his way down, though he figured he knew about as much as CJ would.

“That’s great! I’m glad I could help in some way for you. I had no idea it was even like this?” Grink admitted, imagining a circular track, simply above the ground. CJ smiled and laid down next to Grink lazily.

“Oh yeah this is my main event! I’m fast and light so a lot of this stuff comes easy to me, but long distance is actually something I have problems with cause I just wanna get it over with, you know? Ugh and I nearly crushed my coach trying to do weighted ascension and don’t even get me started on tag... Anyway, I’m glad you enjoyed this though, Grink! I wanted to invite you earlier than just today but you weren’t at your booth so I just had to settle for today. To be honest, it meant alot that you even wanted to come!” CJ chirped, his wet face soaking the seat. Grink debated reminding him that he basically had no choice in the matter. In all honesty, he was enjoying himself. He hadn’t been to one of these before and the atmosphere was so much more than he thought. Even though he would’ve never been interested in this kind of thing before, seeing it in person, watching the fliers be just out of arm's reach and gliding at such speeds Grink could only imagine traveling. It was such a fascinating experience that Grink didn’t think he was even missing out on.

“Yeah I wouldn’t mind seeing you do this more often. You said you had free time, right? Let’s go do that!” Grink said. Cj seemed to have already forgotten the offer, looking around before suddenly leaping up and lowering his back for Grink to climb onto again. With Grink already getting used to climbing onto his back, the process finished a lot smoother and Grink saw that the guard dogs had been standing at the door the entire time.

“Great! I can show you my favorite food spots! It’ll be great and plus we could-”

“Where are you even going to go?” The leftmost head asked the question irritably, one of his eyebrows thrown up high as he did so. The middle one spoke up as well. “We can book a room or a table for you two and retrieve you when you’re about to start?” He offered. CJ seems to think about it, walking out the room with them following close behind. Suddenly, CJ took off, much faster than his guard could keep up with and not offering Grink any warning as he suddenly clutched the feathers tightly.

“I’ll be back in time but you guys need a break anyway so I’ll see you later ok bye bye now!” CJ hardly left any time for the guard dogs to hear the full sentence before he was already out of the building and flying away, this time at a much slower speed, comparable to when he was riding with Grink on the first night. Grink gripped the feathers tightly, still fearful of the possibility of somehow flying off his back and soaring on his own. Luckily enough, CJ was much more careful with him, carrying him successfully to a more lavish restaurant in an elevated tower, almost meeting the clouds. It was extremely open with only a few pillars to support the roof with distant curtains to block the sun, almost all of the patrons there being capable of flight with wings of some kind, many of them being larger than even Vekar while most were just around CJs size. The gyphon happily trotted along until he was met with a high seat made from the leveled branch that was big enough to dwarf Grink’s booth. CJ basically tossed Grink onto the cushions before plopping himself on his own, sprawling out his limbs in relaxation as a fast approaching elemental showed up. They were a winding whirl of wind that came beside the two of us. Many elementals use their own shape to try and mimic expressions and body parts to communicate but as wind, there isn’t much to use when compared to earth. This leads many wind elementals like wind to simply have objects they have within them that they use to shape, similar to how rocks are used in snowmen for faces. This elemental seemed to use flower petals to shift within its winds to form two eyes and a smile, offering a notepad and pencil with a demonstrative nod, looking to the both of us curiously. Grink started by looking at me with a smile before talking to the elemental.

“Ok we can start with some melted cheese and goblin bread with Rylian chestnuts and some green apple slices! Oh, and some juiced fruit mix for drinks.” CJ started, looking to Grink to see if anything could be added to their order. Being that Grink hadn’t seen a menu anywhere and hadn’t been here at all in his life, he had no idea what to ask for, so he just shook his head with a gentle smile. The Elemental used its petals to tilt forwards, signaling a nod of some kind before fluttering away swiftly.

“You didn’t wanna order any food? I can pay for it, you know.” CJ laughed, dismissively swatting at the lizard with a light smile.

“How did you know what to order? I didn’t remember getting a menu?” Grink asked, looking around as if it weren’t already too late.

“Oh! Yeah I forgot! Yeah you can just order whatever. They have basically everything shipped here and it’s like, *super* high standard so if they don’t have something then some rich guy or something will just sponsor them to serve it. I know for a fact that they have a lot of non-meat options. Are you a carnivore? I guess I didn’t ask that beforehand, huh?” CJ asks himself as he looks at the decorative curtains as though they would tell him what Grink’s diet is like.

“Oh lizards like me are omnivores. We can basically eat anything so long as it’s edible.” Grink simplified, trying to remember a case of him being picky with food. He doesn’t even remember a time in his family where someone had an allergic reaction to something.

“Oh thank goodness! I was worried you’d be a hardcore carnivore or something! Gryphons are the same way. Most of us, at least. In my family are omnivores as well with most of my family leaning to the meat side of the diet. I just like fruits too much!” CJ laughs. Grink debated mentioning that you could still have a lot of fruits while still eating meat but he decided not to humor that anymore than he needed to, instead chasing the more pressing question.

“What’s your favorite fruit?”

“My favorite fruit? Aw I like so many though... How do I narrow that down...? Oh I got it! I like... Grapes the most. Yeah, grapes! Especially the purple ones!” He laughed, attracting some attention from the other patrons, though none of them seemed especially unnerved by it at all. CJ hadn’t gained any idea of the passing glares and instead looked back at Grink. “What’s yours?”

“Oh uhm... I think pears are my favorite. Yeah I like those a lot.” Grink smiled, remembering his answer from back when he and Torin talked in his garden.

“We can like, *totally* order those as well! I wasn’t gonna get anything heavy cause I have to go back in like... Maybe 20 minutes?” CJ asked himself, shrugging as though it weren’t important.

“Oh yeah so what did you even want to do here then?” Grink asked this while exclusively scanning the crowd, seeing all the monsters much larger than him with much rarer species than him.

“Well... Now that you ask...” CJ started, poorly hiding a smile under his talons as he demonstratively scratched at his cheek as though he were in thought. “Have you gotten any closer to deciding who you’re gonna serve? Cause I’d love to show you these places a bunch more! Plus I could totally do that whole sponsor thing in case you ever wanted, like, a specific pear or whatever.” CJ offered, broadly gesturing to the extravagant surroundings. Grink’s second nature almost kicked in, though something had stopped him. Could he just keep turning them down? He’d hate to run them out of their patience for him, especially being how unimpressive he may as well be to their lives.

“I’ve actually been planning on setting a day aside to pick one. I uh... I’ve been getting pretty overwhelmed with the choices to say the least so I kinda want this whole thing to end soon.” Grink said, though to be honest he hadn’t given himself a due date until just now. Though as he spoke it into existence, he realized just how much of an idea it was. It would help a lot with his stress if he gave himself a due date. CJ seemed to light up upon hearing this, shifting in his seat with stifled chirps as he soon readied himself to speak.

“Ok ok ok, so! Am I... In your top 3? Like for potential masters and stuff?” CJ asked, clearly excited and even earning a few more glares from the patrons as he did so. Grink tried his best to match his tone on a lower scale, laughing with his arms up defensively as though he were being accused of something.

“I honestly don’t know? I haven’t given it that much thought? Everyone I’ve been considering has their own pros and cons and I’m not sure I can really... Rank that? Does that make sense?” Grink’s nonspecific response seemed to calm CJ down, though now he seemed distracted. In his silence, the lizard could see the gryphon working something out in his mind. Fearful of what he could possibly be giving this much thought to, Grink decided to intervene. He needed to do something to tear CJ’s thoughts away from his next scheme and back onto something else. Based on what he was saying, he was only taking Grink to this



high end place or show off, so Grink would much prefer if the gryphon ended up being a lot more tame with his date ideas. But just what could Grink do?

“Oh hey our food is here.” Grink laughed, saved by the wind elemental dropping off a decorative tray of soft loaves of bread, presumably the goblin bread that CJ had ordered, though Grink had no idea what was so special about it. The 5 loaves of bread surrounded the wooden tray with a set of clean cut apple slices lining the inside of the tray on one half with the other half being a load of variously sized walnuts, already opened. Much to Grink’s surprise, there were also the casings to the chestnuts set aside neatly. In the middle of the assortment was a short bowl of molten cheese. Grink looked in awe at the visually pleasing array before being further surprised by the wind elemental dropping two cups, lifting off the caps over both and revealing a fruity smell that reminded Grink of what exactly CJ had just ordered.

“Thank you!” CJ happily chirped, not wasting a second and lifting one of the loaves with his talons and tearing into it, revealing that the loafs of bread actually had cheese and some meat chunks inside of it. Grink hadn’t really had goblin food before but he had heard of their habit of stuffing foods in other foods. CJ quickly took notice of Grink’s lack of eating, gesturing to a loaf closest to the lizard and nudging it closer while finishing his own and reaching for another. Grink realized that he had just been watching the gryphon scarf down the bread with no real regard and that he wasn’t just a spectator to this. Following CJ’s lead, he grabs a loaf with both hands and tries his best to bite the head of the loaf in one try, being met with what felt like a slow wave of cheese washing over his snout as he did so, trying to bite it all quickly before realizing the cheese was much *much* hotter than the bread. Quickly setting the loaded bread loaf down, Grink took deep breaths with his mouth open, hoping to air out the temperature so that he could actually enjoy this. From what little he could taste at the moment, it was delicious.

“Ha!” CJ unceremoniously saw the unflattering display, openly laughing at the lizard as he finished his second one, demonstrating his tolerance for such a treat. CJ found himself now chucking walnuts in the air just to catch them as Grink rushed to lift the bread off the makeshift table, seeing how the cheese was already leaking out and slowly spreading into a mess.

“That heat is how you know it’s good! I didn’t think you would have such trouble with this!” CJ continued to laugh at the lizard with some of the walnuts getting a casing of cheese ovetop of them before CJ tossed them up all the same. Although he was barely

paying attention to the process, he had yet to miss one. Grink was thinking back on how most avians hunt, rationalizing this odd talent of the gryphon.

By the time Grink had finished his one loaf, his snout was a cheezy mess and so were his claws. CJ had been busy taking almost all of the tray for himself in the process, joyfully watching Grink before asking him if he wanted the last loaf remaining. Grink felt his stomach drop, realizing that the difference in size between the two led to a difference in how filling such a thing would be. Leaving the last loaf for CJ, Grink moved to the much easier to consume apple slices, though CJ seemed to catch onto something.

“Grink?” CJ asked, finishing the loaf once more and leaning forwards a bit, looking down at Grink in confusion. Grink was more than confused, looking at the apple slices as if he had done something wrong. CJ laughed again before hopping off his cushion, wasling over and lifting a talon to slowly slick off some of the cheese along his cheek that his tongue couldn’t reach. CJ smiled at the lizard as he licked off the cheese. “You’re an absolute mess!” CJ laughed again, sharing no regard for the physical contact. Then again, Grink had already touched his wings before even with him being a professional racer, so it may as well be fair game.

“Is there a fountain nearby?” Grink asked, suddenly very insecure about his face, not even noticing the cheese on his face until it was gone, suddenly feeling around for more cheese, though CJ beat him to the punch, continuing to slide off the cheese without much of another word, even lifting his cushion next to the lizard to get more comfort.

“I mean, we’re in the sky so... No? Unless it like, rained or whatever. Ignea is pretty good with telling the weather though so I wouldn’t worry about that... Oh you meant to clean yourself off? Oh yeah no don’t worry I got you.” CJ laughed, now ridding the lizard of the cheese with even more vigor than before though it seemed to end too quickly for him, now just laying down next to the lizard and watching him carefully. Grink was initially confused on the sudden halt, but seeing CJ resting his head on the cushion and looking at him was enough to slow him down.

“Are you done?” Grink asked, seeing how the gryphon wasn’t close to the tray anymore and there were a lot of apple slices left, as well as both of their drinks not yet being empty.

“Eh, I was just thinking. Wanna go back now?” CJ asked, lifting himself from the seat with a stretch. “I’ll pay and you can take the rest of this stuff back to the stadium. I still

have a few more events and I don't want those three in my business anymore than they already are." CJ sighed, rolling his eyes as the three headed dog crossed his mind once more.

"Oh yeah what are their names by the way? I don't remember asking."

"Oh yeah uhm... It's Hyrin, Fyrin, Kyrin. But not in that order. Be right back." CJ chirped, hopping off to chase one of the workers to pay for the tray. While his gryphon was off paying for the food, Grink tried to find a proper way to bundle all of the apple slices together. But then there were the nuts. Could he just pack them all into his mouth? It's unsightly but it would be an efficient way to carry it. A downside would be that he couldn't talk to CJ effectively anymore. Oh wait he also couldn't hold onto CJ anymore if he's busy holding the apple slices as well. He didn't carry a bag or anything with him, so he couldn't simply store it somewhere. But he can't simply waste this food! Especially with how expensive it may as well be. CJ wouldn't likely pressure him to take it all but it would still make Grink feel bad if he wasted it all. It was also really good so Grink would likely be wanting to have this later and regret it if he didn't take it with him. What to do?

"You want a box?" CJ asked, suddenly appearing over the lizard with a foldable box in one of his talons. This certainly made things easier.

The rest of the day flew by relatively quickly, CJ only having a few more events to join in on with the guard dogs explaining it before and during them. Grink still wasn't confident enough to ask which head was named what, so he just avoided it the entire day. CJ was very fast, as expected. In most of the events he was in, it was reliant on speed and easy mobility. The competitions varied on what they were but most of the podiums consisted of CJ and the wyrm dragon that he mentioned before. According to the guard dogs, she used to be the reigning champion before CJ randomly lept past her and she hasn't moved up since. Judging by the way she moves, she is a very controlled flier, not having as much raw power or speed but able to maneuver the wind well regardless, despite her not even having wings. It was a spectacular sight, watching the feathered drake whip around and dash in seemingly random directions before realizing that her positioning was meticulous. Grink couldn't imagine how much of her efforts had gone unnoticed by him due to him not knowing how the sport is naturally played. As the sun was going down, the other competitors continued as CJ retreated back to his lizard.

“You did great!... Wow, are you ok?” Grink wanted to congratulate after not seeing him fully since the restaurant but he flopped onto the cushions once more, not even bothering to dunk his face in the water like he had done earlier today.

“Ahh I’m so tired of smiling and flying and ahh... I want to sleep already but I have all those after-game showdowns with Ignea. Ugh! Why can’t I just melt, it’d be so much easier!” CJ whined, rolling over on his cushion and hardly hiding the very obvious tantrum he was throwing.

“Well I don’t think gryphons are meant to melt. Also do you have the energy to tell me what exactly an after-game showdown is?” Grink took a seat gingerly by the avian’s head, watching as he slowly rolled his eyes before laying down properly on the cushion.

“It’s the way they get us competitors to cool down after a game. Usually it’s stuff like questions from fans, trivia, some really boring stuff. I think it happened a couple hundred thousand bajillion years ago that a race was so intense that a bunch of them just demolished a bar or something. It’s not like it even counts towards anything anyway!” CJ groaned.

“Actually it’s a relatively new system that they’re still testing because it was a little over 2 years ago.” The centermost head explained, reminding the two of them that he was there once more. The rightmost chimed in as well. “Also it wasn’t just one bar, the racers went bar hopping and ruined a whole line of establishments and their fans were right behind them. It was actually pretty bad and a majority of them got disqualified for unruly behavior.” They both explained. While Grink was nodding his head after not hearing the full story. He remembered there was some stampede or something in the city but he just assumed it had something to do with an actual problem, not over sports fans with too much energy.

“Well I’m not to blame for that! Why do I gotta go and toss bean bags in holes with Ignea? Or... Or I don’t know what else do we do there?” CJ asked, apparently only thinking of one downside to the night.

“Respond to fans, humor some journalists, engage with lighthearted games meant for pups, and maybe even have some shaved ice with food coloring. How will you ever survive?” The leftmost head groaned with an irritated eye roll, followed by the other two heads nodding and laughing along to his sarcasm.

“Oh come one! I don’t see you two being blindfolded and tryna hit some bag!”

“Well, we are your bodyguard. If someone hits you while they’re blindfolded, *then* we intervene. Otherwise this has nothing to do with us.” The centermost head laughed with a shrug while still keeping the arms crossed. CJ rolled over some more, leaving Grink to bask

in the odd display of CJ and his mannerisms. Despite trying to show off with the restaurant that seemed to be all he would do to play up his reputation. Pouting over playing harmless games certainly wasn't the most flattering thing for a Gryphon. Though this same transparency was fun. Not having to read too into it all too much and simply enjoy the space he was in with the company he was with.

"Hey Grink, honestly this is pretty wack and all. You think you should just go and I'll meet you at my nest? They can call a transport or someone." CJ offered, briskly flicking a talon to the three headed bodyguard, who each had their own reactions to his sudden request. The gryphon didn't seem to be enthralled with the events here and based on what was said, it didn't seem like too much fun to simply watch.

"Yeah I guess. Think you can be brave and withstand these horrible trials?" Grink laughed, playfully tapping the top of the gryphons head. With a brief scoff, he nods.

"I'll try but only cause I'll have to tell you how many I win!" CJ smiles and Grink shares the gesture, not yet taking his claws from the feathers.

"We'll call someone to be here shortly. CJ, you have about 5 minutes before you need to get down there to say your goodbyes now." With that, the bodyguard stepped out and closed the door. As soon as the door closed CJ slowly stretched and went to duck his head into the water, blowing a few bubbles before rising once more as he suddenly realized something. Grink could see the thoughts forming in his head before CJ suddenly whipped around with a much more urgent expression.

"Oh yeah it's getting way way too late! Remember that list of potential masters I made for you? Yeah I kinda went ahead and got an appointment made *for* you and he'll be at my nest in the morning to pick you up!" CJ hurried through the series of thoughts as Grink processed it at half the speed.

"Wait, you got an appointment made in my place? What if I had plans tomorrow? Wait, what if I have a customer tomorrow? Didn't you think to tell me about that?" Grink could feel his sudden shift in mood retroactively ruin the leftover apple slices he had earlier.

"... Please don't be mad?"

"That's not how this works! Who even is it, the morph? Manticore?"

"Oh no, no! It's a whole other one!" CJ remarked it with pride, even raising his head and lifting a talon to his chest as he announced it.

"So you're telling me I have no information at all on this person I apparently am being handed to?" Grink glared up at the gryphon with a deep and disapproving glare.

Despite the height difference between the two, CJ could feel himself lower into the cushion and look away as if Grink had posed some danger to him.

“I-I could tell you right now! That way it’s less awkward! Uhhh... He’s a dad, a huge *huge* dragon. Uh I’m pretty sure you met his kid before. It’s like. Vacker or something? Uhm... Wait what’s his name? Oh he also has a lot of scares and stuff and is super scary but honestly just don’t think about it and it goes away!” CJ tried, chirping with a smile as he tried to recollect his thoughts before the lizard.

“Was his name by chance, *Torin*?” Grink asked. With an immediate reaction by the gryphon, Grink knew he had landed on the right dragon fitting those parameters. It was mainly the note about being scary, but that’s besides the point.

“Oh you heard of him? Great so then this isn’t a problem! Haha! It all works out, see!” CJ happily chips, now standing back at his full height, upturning his chin and raising his talons back to his chest boisterously. Grink sighed realizing that he had already met *Torin* before and that he was thankful for it. If he had to be forced in a room with that threatening figure he may have just perished. Luckily Grink realized after meeting him that he wasn’t actually going to raze the continent and is instead a gardener dad, so hopefully he can enjoy his company.

“Don’t get too excited. I’m still upset with you for even signing me up to this and just now bringing it up to me.” Grink reaffirmed, immediately shutting down the gryphon, though before he could retort, the door opened and the guard dog opened the door slowly.

“CJ got down there already. You, come on. Your ride is here to take you to CJ’s nest. I already paid them.” Without another word, the dog’s shoulders disappeared past the door frame. CJ’s head instantly fell as he dragged his feet out. Grink offered a reassuring pat on his shoulders as they walked out.

Outside of the building were two large avians, both with harnesses around their chests wrapped around a slim dome sort of room, presumably for more carriage or for those who didn’t want to deal with the air of travel. Despite the rocky start, once the two birds got going it became a relatively smooth ride. Once he had gotten to the similar tree trunk as before, he looked around and found that next to the next was a hammock of smooth fabric a bit above the nest. Did... Did he add this in as a reaction to Grink’s note? Climbing along the wall led Grink to land in the nestled in dent made from what he assumed were the previous times CJ had slept in this. It felt new, all things considered and he could feel just

how soft it was, as if the entire thing was made from invaluable pillows. Curling into place and finding himself sleeping with two things on his mind. For one, the very obvious smell of both new bedding material as well as CJ's scent which hadn't fully sank in yet. Secondly, he was spiraling at what *the* Torin would want with him. It feels a bit much to request an entire meeting behind his back to invite him back to his mansion, so it's likely not the option. Could they be traveling far off somewhere? How long until he gets back to his booth? Did anyone leave any more mail for him? With an uneasy shrug, he decides to leave that for his future self, nothing he can do about it now.