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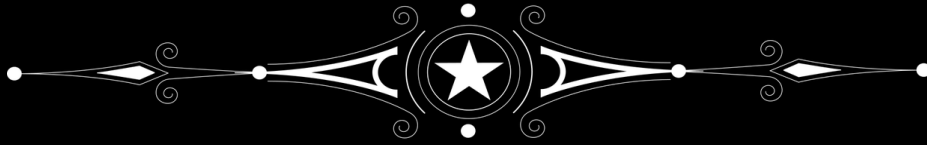
A crowdfunded story

By

Desmond Fallout

The following contains: Humanoids into feral chocobo TFs, weight gain, minor macro

Read at your own discretion.



Gridania lay nestled among the tall forest trees as a lively nest for many Eorzean races. Shops roared with the bartering for fresh seasonal produce. Workshops clang to the tune of apprentices using new tools. And, of course, there was no shortage of budding adventurers at the Roost business hub clambering in excitement for their next paid job.

Not a single soul in this city knew how close they had been to total annihilation.

Again.

By the grace of primals. How much time had passed since the warrior of light last stopped by this woodland region? Fighting ancient terrors in far off lands was one thing. Visiting an entirely different realm suddenly threw wobbly-wobbly time distortion math into the mix. Two years in the First realm probably amounted to an afternoon lunch for the source where the warrior of light called home.

All the more reason teleporting in via the Aetheryte plaza was a bit jarring for a few minutes. The white-haired lalafell was just one of many people blinking in and out across existence in their near-instant travels across Eorzea's ether. Yet, she blinked her eyes, one dull gray, the other bright blue, pausing to slowly observe the activity around her. Pointed ears covered in a feathery fluff twitched on the sides of her head as they adjusted to the drowning rumble of various conversations pooling together into white noise. People she hadn't seen in a lifetime were still here, possibly going about the same business as the day she had last visited them. Nothing had changed; like stepping back into a perfect portrait of normality.

Somehow, it made Tatanu Tanu's return all the more depressing.

Soon as the usual disorientation passed, she moved in a flurry so practiced it barely took conscious thought. Her right hand, covered in a black glove up to her shoulder, brought the tome hanging off her belt to bare. The other hand waved gathering ether, focusing for several seconds on an intense ritual. The spell completed with a snap of release, making a four-legged foxlike creature jump into existence before her. It greeted her with a friendly yip before falling in line at their side. Radiant blue light of its supernaturally colored coat added just a bit more gleam to the metals of her adventuring robes.

"I wonder if legendary warriors can retire?" Tatanu said to the carbuncle avatar, giving a heavy chuckle. The tiny woman's childish pitch starkly contrasted her melancholy stare. Like most lalafell her general appearance might be easily mistaken for a bright-faced child at a distance.

Unlike most other Lalafell, Tatanu dispelled this illusion through the naturally wide curvature of her hips and exceptionally pronounced swell of her bust. Both of which stretched out the fabric of summoner's robes measured for the average adventurer to a tight degree. It was actually a rarity she was quite proud of, since it made races that loomed over her two-foot-nine hourglass form jealous. Her comrades among the Sion's of the Seventh dawn would often jest she held both records for being the realms shortest and widest champion.

She also knew that's not why some curious people broke from their daily monotony to glance over while she strode from the plaza with a carbuncle in tow. An overly shapely adventurer was still just another adventurer. There were enough of the cat-like miqo'te people running around for killing that curiosity. Nope. Despite facing death twice in the past month Tatanu needed all her mental fortitude not to grab at the giant white bull horns jutting out of her cranium every time someone looked. They weren't exactly easy to pass off like the crown of feathers growing out the back of her head in a fan pattern. People just assumed those were part of her usual class attire instead of actually growing out her skull.

Both were a side effect from the second attempt on her life during adventures in the first realm. There were others but at least those could be better hidden from a passive eye. Still, just thinking about it made Tatanu grip her gloved arm to stop its trembling.

With no real goal or destination in mind, she pivoted on short legs in a dignified waddle over to Gridania's older districts. Specifically, Tatanu hoped some window shopping through the market would help take her mind off curses and saving millions of lives from another calamity. It was even nostalgic passing through the stands for fresh adventuring supplies. Seeing new sets of leather armors and steel swords brought a smile to the Lalafell's tired face as she silently reminisced about her first adventures arriving in this city.

"Wow. I've never seen someone look that pensive over a dagger before. Sorry! Didn't mean to scare you."

The voice may have been friendly but it came so sudden and loud behind Tatanu that reflexes couldn't help taking over. With a small scream, the little woman whirled in place expertly counter balancing the swing of her body curves. One chubby little hand had her grimoire yanked off its belt hook and open ready for an attack spell on whatever creature dared sneak up on her. Carbuncle even picked up on this and dropped its front legs preparing to make a strike.

Okay. Technically the miqo'te across the market hall was standing, not sneaking in the slightest. Today's crowd of shoppers just happened to have thinned out enough that voices carried better in the expansive interior for a moment. That's what Tatanu rationalized how the voice could have sounded directly next to her pointed ear tip, anyway. She wasn't all that confident this shopkeeper's shoddy looking stand had even been there this whole time. Its splint wood and bent nails suggested someone lacked

the basic knowledge for construction. And that was amazing in a city with a carpenter's guild.

"Easy there, tiger!" the young cat girl said, looking more amused by Tatanu's combat response than anything else. Bright pink animal ears flicked about in a bushel of shaggy green hair as she raised both tanned skinned hands trying to appear harmless. "When I say my curios are a steal, I don't mean they're literal crimes."

"O-oh!" Tatanu's wits slowly returned only for her face to burn a bright pink. She quickly returned the spell book back onto her belt hook, unable to maintain eye contact with the cheery miqu'te. "Sorry...I kind of lost my head for a second."

TO BE CONTINUED...

This story is a crowdfunded project made possible through the support of my [Patreon](#) and [Ko-fi](#). Every \$20 milestone in donations towards this project gets another 1000 words added.

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Afterward

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SPECIAL THANKS!

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