

## 53 — Trouble Brewing?

Yopi had trouble brewing. It was no surprise, given how he was currently on the back of his Master, flying vertically up into the sky, while his tools fastened to the enormous beast's back were threatening to tear themselves loose. Still, it was tough doing a gravity drip while horizontal.

But he was a veteran Barista, who had travelled the world and dealt with many hardships, so he could handle something like this without too much fuss. Then again, this was his seventh time doing such a manoeuvre. Regardless, he needed to keep brewing, because he knew his Master would be upset when they eventually settled down and the dark liquid Yopi was concocting was the only thing that could quell His fury.

“You levelled up again!” Popi suddenly remarked in his ear. She then began telling him his new status:

**Name:** *Yopi*

**Occupation:** *Personal Barista of the Hydra-Goose*

**Species:** *White Elf*

**Level:** *33/100*

**Alignment:** *Resigned-to-his-new-lot-in-life-but-absurdly-optimistic-despite-it-all*

**Faction:** *Court of the God-King of Geese*

“Don't you find it weird that just being around Master has enabled me to gain twice the amount of levels I gained from years of travelling in a fraction of the time?”

“It's not so strange,” Popi shouted back.

Yes, they were still flying vertically and the wind at their immense height was making it hard to carry a normal conversation. They had both grown used to this fact of life however.

She continued, “In times of strife and war, even the most lowly of fighters advance at many times their normal rate.”

“...Thanks.”

The brew was finished, so, while his body remained horizontal, he did his best to pour off the distilled elixir into an empty thermos pulled from one of the pouches strapped to the enormous beast's back.

“Your ‘Master’ is like a tornado of trouble, and, let’s be honest, you’re able to perform acrobatic feats of quite some skill now, thanks to all this practice of brewing in awkward situations. Case and point: look at what you just managed to do. I remember how you once struggled to brew while stationary.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Yopi replied, placing the thermos back into the pouch. It was the eighth one he had made. It would barely be enough to slake his Master’s unquenchable thirst. “My abs feel like they’re made of flexible silver and my hand-eye coordination is such that I’m sure I could brew twenty-four cups without spilling a single drop, while blindfolded and upside-down.”

Sometime later, the enormous Hydra-Goose evened out and coasted through the air, just above a layer of dense clouds. Yopi had no idea just how far up they were, but the air here was thin and it was punishingly cold. Fortunately, his Master used one of his heads, the fire-breathing one, to create a bubble of heat around itself, as well as imbuing its body and feathers with a toasty temperature that felt *just right* when contrasting the frigid winds at this altitude.

It wasn’t long before Yopi dozed off, his brewing task done for now.

“We’ll have to find more beans,” he mumbled as he dozed off.

Yopi awoke the following evening to the sensation of his stomach being pulled up through his chest, as the Hydra-Goose was making a rapid descent back down to earth.

With sleepy blinking eyes, he stared at the new part of the world they had come to. For some reason, his Master kept moving further and further away from the strange town and its forest where Yopi had encountered him. It was as if the Hydra-Goose was *running*.

He shook his head. He figured he was still tired if he could imagine something so preposterous. His Master was the strongest entity in the known world. Even bygone Calamities and Dark Elf Dictators had not even gotten to half his level. In fact, Yopi had the uncanny feeling that if the Hydra-Goose continued to evolve, he would eventually ascend into Godhood. The servants of the Divine Pantheon were trying very hard to prevent such a thing, but thus far they had all just been fodder to aid in his Master’s rise in power.

Yopi let out a sigh of relief as their descent slowed and they began gliding slowly downwards in a lazy spiral to a town hidden at the heart of a forest full of auburn-coloured trees. Then he blinked in surprise.

“We’re going towards a White Elf town!” Popi exclaimed, a mixture of excitement and dread in her voice.

“Master!” Yopi yelled to the great creature he was strapped to the back of. “Please do not kill too many of them or destroy all their buildings, we need to get more coffee and this is the perfect place for it. It is in your best interest to keep them alive! I promise you!”

Following the arrival of the God-King of Geese to the White Elf town in the forest, Yopi had his hands full as an ambassador on his Master's behalf to the community who lived in the forest, not to mention that his Master's temper was solely his responsibility, as he knew that his eight thermoses of brewed coffee would only hold its hatred of all living things (except baristas) at bay for a couple hours at most.

“You don't understand!” he implored the chief of the town. “My Master will quite literally trample and devour you all if he doesn't get more coffee.”

The old White Elf in front of him, who carried the same ageless quality as his entire race and was only distinguishable as 'old' thanks to a bit of stubble on his chin, regarded the Hydra-Goose calmly.

“It doesn't look hostile to me,” he said.

“That's because coffee makes him calm down!” Yopi repeated for the fifth time.

“They're not gonna understand unless they truly *see* his strength,” Popi commented from where she lounged on Yopi's shoulder. “Old man, does anyone in your town have Appraisal?”

“Why yes, my son-in-law is thus gifted,” the chief said.

“Bring him here and have him report what he sees to you,” Popi told him.

“How can this be!?” the old White Elf remarked dreadfully after hearing the exact number of levels that the Hydra-Goose had.

“You'd better bring out the big vats for the amount of coffee we'll need to brew,” Yopi told him.

“Of course, I understand the urgency now,” the man said and sent his retinue of men and women off to rouse the townsfolk and get everyone together.

“I think we just managed to prevent a massacre,” Popi remarked.

“Good thinking about the Appraisal,” he told her.

“We'd have been screwed if they didn't have someone with the ability,” she replied. “But, Yopi, you know we can't keep going like this... His appetite for coffee is impossible for you to deal with by yourself. I mean, for Light's sake, you spend every waking moment brewing!”

“That's not true,” Yopi argued, while he was setting up all his tools to make every type of coffee he knew how to make.

Disaster had been diverted for now, but, as Yopi and the townsfolk of exclusively White Elves watched the enormous Hydra-Goose guzzling down vat after enormous vat of brewed coffee, he could not help feel a sense of impending doom. Popi was right, it was only a matter of time before he failed to keep up with his Master's insane demand and then it was sure to all be over in a second.

But Yopi wanted to live and right now he saw no way out of this, because running was surely folly, given the vast distances the beast could cover by just an hour of flying.

Suddenly the Hydra-Goose stirred from its enraptured stare at the vats of coffee presented before it. Yopi's blood turned to ice in his veins as a voice announced, "We finally found you, Pete!"

"What do we do now?" asked the companion of the first speaker.

"We bring it with us, obviously."

"That seems inadvisable."

"Don't you be the voice of reason now!" retorted the first voice. "Alright, lute-boy, do your thing."

Then a third voice spoke: "♪ *Nobody struggle! Everyone just be calm!* ♪" The way his voice seemed to make the ground shake put Yopi into fight-or-flight mode. A moment later, it was like a massive shadow grew from under Yopi's Master and, for reasons he could not explain, he ran to his side, just as the world fell away below them.

He saw nothing but an inky darkness before feeling as though a warm mouth slowly regurgitated him back into reality.

Dense stone met his knees as the inky black magic fell away from him in dripping chunks. Next to him was his Master, nearly on the verge of a psychotic break, except, there was a strange expression on its five heads: fear.

"**Finally,**" said a human voice, belonging to a massively-tall and chiselled specimen of a human, who was covered in shining emerald scales and had glowing green eyes. Something like bone grew from the brow of his face and looked very much like a crown, and luscious amber-red hair ran from his scalp and down his back.

Yopi tried to stand, so that he could defend his Master from this obviously powerful entity, but then the strange musical voice said, "♪ *Freeze!* ♪" He suddenly couldn't move his body, and even the enormous Hydra-Goose was affected.

The entire hall, a throne-room Yopi realised belatedly, reverberated with the echoes of the singing voice, while the heavy steps of the giant man came closer and closer. Eventually he stopped before the Hydra-Goose and Yopi thought that he would slay his Master, but then he simply put a hand on the Goose<sup>5</sup>'s belly.

**“Oooh, you’re so soft! Who’s the softest mass-murderer in the world!? You are!”**

A chubby little dark-skinned boy came over. Yopi immediately recognise him as the one who’d taken him and his previous Master, Tabby, to the Guild Office, where they’d found the quest that had led him to his current circumstances.

“I’m gonna need your help with keeping this insane murder-goose in check,” the boy said to Yopi. “Think you can handle that?”

“You’re not gonna hurt him, are you?”

The chubby boy sighed deeply. “No. Apparently we’re ‘*keeping it*’, whatever *that* means...”