
In the belly of the beast

IT seemed like a normal fight, albeit with a monster they'd never encountered before. Edgar had had the bright idea to undertake some specialist dragoon training, just him and the moogle, but he'd ended up taking Sabin with them in the end anyway because, well, that was how things worked. So they'd asked Setzer to dock on this weird island and walked around looking for monsters to fight, until they'd come across this: this *thing*, which had too many teeth to count – like a slagworm, but somehow more horrific.

The battle went normally to begin with. They'd come close to defeating the creature, Sabin reckoned, but then it had opened its hideous mouth and done some sort of enormous suck, and then suddenly Edgar wasn't there anymore.

“What the hell?” Sabin panted, and then everything turned to darkness.



He opened his eyes slowly to find Mog hovering above him. “Oh, Mr Sabin!” the creature exclaimed. “Are you alright, kupo?”

Everything hurt, there was a terrible smell, and he was covered in something unpleasantly sticky. “Where’s Edgar?” he managed to say.

The moogle cocked a wing to the side, and Sabin looked in the same direction. There was his brother, half-sitting not too far away, his cape twisted over his body inelegantly. Sabin struggled to his feet and tried to brush off some of the sticky stuff, without much success. There was a throb at the back of his head, and he raised a hand to it gingerly: he must have hit it on something falling down to wherever the hell they were – well, he had an inkling about where they might be –

He turned back to Mog with dread. “Are we inside it?”

“Kupo,” said Mog, inclining his head gravely.

OK, thought Sabin, don’t panic. For heaven’s sake, don’t fucking panic.

He made his way over to his brother. His head was swimming, but he knelt down beside Edgar and carefully unfurled the cape. There was a small pool of vomit by his brother’s side, and he took care to avoid it, and indeed, to pretend it wasn’t there at all. The smell in here was bad enough already. At least Edgar didn’t seem to have got any on his clothes – there was

only the same sticky substance.

Edgar was conscious, but he made little reaction to Sabin's approach. "Hey," Sabin murmured. "Roni. You with us?"

Edgar's eyes slowly focused on him. "Just give me a minute," he said weakly.

For some reason, the direct instruction was comforting. Sabin was used to taking orders from his brother, although they were usually a little more well-defined than this. He became aware of the moogle hovering at his other side.

"What about you? You're OK, right?" he asked him. His voice sounded more accusatory than he intended. OK, Sabin, dial it down, he thought.

Mog reacted with what appeared to be the moogle version of a shrug, the orb that protruded from his head jerking about erratically. Sabin sighed: so they were three for three. All of them shaken up by this unexpected turn of events, some worse than others, and almost certainly not in a fit state to deal with whatever other horrors they were about to encounter.

Edgar would have had some ideas about what to do if he didn't look like he was about to pass out. Sabin tried to exhort himself to act like his brother. What would a king do in this situation, a king who didn't feel nauseous and ache all over?

He looked back to Mog again. "You've still got that charm, right? Can you do some scouting for us? Just while we're waiting for this one to sort himself out." He indicated Edgar

with a nod. “Don’t go too far, we just need an idea of what’s out there.”

“Right you are, kupo,” said Mog, and he fluttered away.

Sabin turned his attention back to Edgar, laying a hand tentatively on his back. At that, his brother raised his head and met Sabin’s gaze again. “René,” he said. “I’m sorry. I don’t feel quite right –”

“You and me both,” said Sabin.

“Where are we?” Edgar asked.

“We’re inside the creature.”

“Oh,” said Edgar. “Inside it. Of course. That would explain why the ground’s moving.”

Sabin hadn’t even noticed – sure, he’d clocked some kind of instability under his feet, but had put it down to some sort of psychosomatic effect of his not insignificant headache. Trust Edgar to know what was real and what wasn’t, even in the state he was in.

Edgar slowly rubbed his face with a trembling hand and frowned into the distance. “Right,” he said, his voice a little stronger. “Our priority, obviously, is getting out of here. Do you have any teleport stones?”

“You’re carrying the items,” Sabin pointed out.

“Oh,” said Edgar, and fumbled around for his bag. Sabin waited while he pulled it clumsily into a manoeuvrable position and began to search through it. He peered through the

bag's contents for a while, before withdrawing his hand, bringing it to rest on his forehead, and closing his eyes.

"Do you want me to look?" Sabin suggested.

Edgar waved his free hand in protest, and slowly returned to the search. "No teleport stones," he concluded grimly. "Won't hurt to have a potion, though."

He handed one to Sabin – they nearly dropped it in the exchange – and took another for himself, and they uncorked them and drank. Sabin struggled to get his down, but it was Edgar who flinched, gagged, and eventually turned to the side and half-spat, half-vomited the contents of his bottle onto the ground.

"Ah," he said placidly, wiping his mouth on his sleeve. "Should have known that was a bad idea. Did yours help, though?"

Sabin took stock. The throbbing from his head injury was less acute, but otherwise he still felt just as awful as before. "A bit," he said diplomatically.

At that point, the moogles hovered back into view. "Reporting, kupo," he said. "There's a lot out there."

"What sort of creatures?" asked Edgar.

"Ah," said Mog cautiously. "That's the thing, kupo. They're not actually creatures, as such. They're all –" his gaze flicked between the two of them – "humanoids."

A dread settled over Sabin at that, and he frowned. "So that means," he said slowly, "they must've all been people who got

trapped in here, and they've been here so long that –"

"Yes," Edgar cut in sharply. "Thank you, Sabin." His voice shook, and the "Sabin" came out as a whisper; Sabin pretended not to notice.

"Well, there's got to be *some* way of getting out," he said defensively.

"Of course," said Edgar.

He's being insincere, thought Sabin. Typical, doesn't want to worry his brother –

Edgar started to slowly get to his feet. He put out a hand to steady himself against the wall, met something that was evidently to his distaste, and recoiled, stumbling to the ground again.

"Here," said Sabin, standing up himself, and he offered his arm. Edgar glanced at him, took it, and managed to twist himself upright, clinging tightly to his brother.

"René," he mumbled into his ear. "I hate this place. I can't think straight with whatever the hell this is all over us. I feel terrible –"

"I know," said Sabin desperately. "Let's – let's get moving, yeah? Get us both some exercise, that might help." He prised himself out of Edgar's grip as gently as he could – he wouldn't have minded, but it had been a bit tighter than was strictly comfortable. "You want me to take the bag?"

Edgar shook his head. "It's fine."

Sabin highly doubted it, but Edgar's confession of his own weakness had already been out of character, and now that he was no longer in his brother's embrace, he seemed just as quickly to have resumed his usual reluctance to make things any easier for himself. So Sabin said nothing, and waved Edgar forward in front of him, and they began a slow journey back in the direction that Mog had explored earlier.

They were thrown into battle not long afterwards. Sabin struggled to remember his blitzes: he found it easier to concentrate on spells, despite never having been a particularly skilled magic user. He threw a few fireballs at the things that were attacking them – he willed himself to forget the fact that they had ever been human – and tried to keep an eye on his companions. Mog was managing to jump, although more sluggishly than usual, and wasn't dealing quite the amount of damage he might have managed on a normal occasion. Edgar wasn't even trying to jump, which was probably for the best. He fumbled with his tools and succeeded in landing a few hits, but most of his shots were almost laughably off-target. The fight took more out of them than it strictly should have, but they eventually saw off their attackers and paused to patch themselves up. Sabin drank another potion – they seemed to have a good enough stock not to have to worry about running out for a while – and Mog healed himself and Edgar with magic.

Edgar clapped a hand onto Sabin's shoulder as soon as the healing was taken care of, and stood there leaning into him,

his eyes closed, trying to catch his breath.

Sabin eyed him critically. “This is stupid,” he said. “We can’t fight in this state. Mog’s still got the charm, we’ll get him to put it on again –”

His brother shook his head. “No. Don’t tell me we’re doing all this for nothing. Let’s at least get the experience.”

“Roni, look at you,” said Sabin in gentle exasperation. “You can barely stand, let alone fight.”

“Nonsense,” said Edgar. “Anyway, it’ll distract us from all this, won’t it? We can just act as if this is any other cave. Better that than have to think about –” he gestured towards a nearby pool of the sticky substance, and closed his eyes again.

“Ah,” Sabin replied. “Yes. Right.” Edgar’s insistence on fighting was suddenly more understandable. He exchanged a glance with Mog, and said, “Let’s move on, then.”

They fought a few more groups; the fights all went similarly to the first, requiring copious amounts of magic and healing items. All three of them were knocked out several times, but someone always survived the fights and was able to revive the others afterwards. Sabin discovered that while both spells and phoenix downs were perfectly adequate means of regaining consciousness, neither seemed to have any effect on his headache or the fact that he constantly felt like he was about to empty the contents of his stomach. The same was true of Edgar, judging by the look on his face and the notable absence of his usual repartee.

More of the sticky stuff dropped onto them in a couple of places, and Sabin felt bile rise in his throat. Mog was flicking his wings in an attempt to shake the stuff off them, and Edgar was on his knees retching again, and Sabin closed his eyes and rubbed a hand across his forehead, and thought, is this it? Is this how we die? The last members of the Figaro royal family, and a goddamn talking moogle, drowned in the bodily fluids of a giant worm?

But Edgar managed to stand without assistance this time, and muttered a faint but determined “come on” to the other two, and they continued.

There were more fights. Sabin dared suggest using the charm again – they were running out of magic power – but Edgar said, “We’ve got ethers,” and urged them forward into the next battle despite the fact that he was grimacing with pain and his face shone with sweat. Sabin complied reluctantly; he’d taken plenty of orders from his brother, but rarely had he felt that those orders were so *wrong*.

They came to a room full of rickety-looking bridges. Sabin forced himself to concentrate through the fuzz of his headache, and observed that the bridges were not unoccupied.

“They don’t look friendly, kupo,” said Mog.

Edgar spoke. “We’ll have to jump across when their backs are turned. The bridges are laid out for it. Just need to make sure not to get too close.”

“What are they gonna do to us if we do?” Sabin asked.

“I anticipate that they may try to knock us into the abyss,” said his brother in a measured tone.

“Can’t we fight them?” he suggested.

“Not a chance, with that armour.”

Not a chance of us managing to jump between all those narrow bridges either, thought Sabin, but he led the way forward again. They reached the end of the first bridge, waited for the angry-looking hominid on the next one to move, and then jumped across: well, Sabin jumped; Mog fluttered, rather elegantly given the circumstances; Edgar jumped, and almost lost his footing, but managed to land unsteadily behind Sabin. “What are you waiting for?” he hissed. “Get moving before this one catches up with us!”

They hurried along to the next place to jump. Again, Sabin and Mog made it across without incident. Edgar, again, was less quick, and Sabin watched in horror as the man-creature stretched out both hands and pushed. Without even a hint of a struggle, Edgar plummeted into the darkness below.

Sabin jumped down after him straight away.

He landed in a crumpled heap, his head pounding, and forced himself to gather his wits for the sake of his brother, who was lying a few feet away. As Mog landed gently beside them – he had used his wings to break his fall – Sabin crawled over to Edgar, and was relieved to find him conscious.

“I’m sorry, René,” Edgar whispered.

“It’s fine,” said Sabin. “Bound to happen to one of us.”

Edgar shook his head slowly. “No, not that. Look.” He thrust the equipment bag towards Sabin.

Sabin looked inside, uncomprehending, but immediately realised what the problem was. The plentiful stock of potions and phoenix downs they had brought was seriously depleted. They were still doing OK for green cherries and holy water, but there seemed to be no ethers left at all.

“What happened to the rest?” he asked.

Edgar, with difficulty, hoisted himself into a sitting position and pressed both hands to his temples. “I couldn’t keep a hold on it,” he said wearily. “Just about managed to cover the opening before the rest came out, but I think we’ve lost a good three-quarters of what we had.”

“But where did it go?”

“Behind that wall,” said Edgar, pointing.

Sabin stood, shakily, and slowly made his way to the wall in question, which blocked off a corner of the cave. It was a good eight or nine feet high, and looked immobile. Nonetheless, he threw his not inconsiderable weight against it, and, trying to ignore the horrible slimy feeling, pushed with all his might. Of course, nothing happened.

Mog hovered into his peripheral vision. “Don’t strain yourself, kupo,” he said.

Sabin glared at him. “What else am I supposed to do?”

“He’s right, René,” said Edgar. “No point wasting your strength on futile endeavours. Mog, can you fly over the top

of it and get the things back that way?"

The moogles shook their heads. "I'm afraid not, kupo. These wings only take me four feet off the ground at most."

Edgar grimaced. "So much for that plan. Can any of us cast Float? *I* can't, but maybe one of you –"

"Not me," said Sabin. He hadn't learnt as many spells as he should have, particularly beyond the standard offensive ones – certain of their other companions stood to benefit from magicite much more than he did, and he'd mostly left them to it. So had Edgar, he knew.

"Sorry, kupo," said Mog.

Sabin tried to soften the blow. "We wouldn't have managed it anyway," he pointed out, "floating so much stuff all that way into the air. It'd need someone really skilled in magic – Terra could do it, probably, or maybe Celes –" He broke off, suddenly overwhelmed by the memory of their friends. Celes in particular, the first person he'd found again after the apocalypse: they'd helped each other grieve the many losses they'd suffered, broken down in each other's arms innumerable times before either of them had summoned the strength to begin searching for their other comrades, or indeed dared to believe they might even be alive. Maybe he'd never see her again.

He could feel his eyes growing moist.

"Hey," said Edgar. "We can still get out of here. Just have to get back up to those bridges, and we've got Mog's charm for

when things go bad –”

“It just hurts, Roni,” Sabin sobbed. “It *hurts*.”

Edgar nodded. “I know.”

Sabin sniffed and stared into the distance, willing himself to stop crying – Edgar was the one who’d really taken badly to this situation, he was the one who had the right to lose control of his emotions, but he was king, he was able to keep a hold of himself even when he felt rotten –

“Help me up, would you?” said Edgar.

Sabin helped him scramble to his feet, and Edgar held onto him a little longer than necessary, brushing a gentle stroke against his back. “Now,” he said when he had drawn away, “I think those stairs should take us back to the bridges. And presumably, if we press that button –”

“On it, kupo,” said Mog, who was the closest to the button in question, and fluttered over to it. With a horrible gurgling sound, the path to the stairway cleared.

Edgar had flinched at the sound, but he gave a brief nod, walked stiffly towards the stairs, and Sabin followed.

On their second try, they made it across the bridges. Edgar was still unsteady on his feet, but sheer determination must have got him through; he arrived at the other side gasping for breath, his legs shaking. “Let’s rest,” Sabin suggested.

His brother shook his head impatiently. “Don’t worry about me.”

Fat chance of that, Sabin thought. He tried a different tactic. “It’s not just you. We all need a break after that. I’ll be useless if this headache gets any worse. And look at Mog, he’s exhausted.”

Edgar, not seeming to need any more convincing, sank into a sitting position.

The others followed suit. Sabin sat next to his brother, and Mog crumpled to the floor a few feet away, his wings limp and immobile. Edgar rested his head on his brother’s shoulder and Sabin threw an arm around his back in return, idly caressing the ends of his hair.

“René,” said Edgar, “what if this is it? What if we don’t get out of here?”

Sabin tensed. He’d been thinking that all along, and trying to ignore it, but hearing it said aloud by his brother was something else entirely. Edgar always planned, always refused to concede to the pressures of a difficult situation. He never even entertained a worst-case scenario. And Sabin wasn’t the one to go to for platitudes, because he’d never had to provide them.

“We played our part, didn’t we?” Edgar went on, a note of desperation in his voice. “We helped the others on their way, and they’ll be able to take down Kefka without us, even if we lose our minds down here and end up permanent zombies –”

“Shit, Roni,” Sabin managed to respond. “Don’t – don’t say that.”

Edgar lifted his head and looked him in the eye. “Do you

really think we're going to make it out? With both of us in this state?"

Stop it, Sabin wanted to yell. This isn't right. This wasn't how it worked: he was supposed to be the one saying things like this, and Edgar was meant to be comforting *him*, with rationality and pure logic and a gentle embrace and maybe even a joke. The embrace was the only one of those that Sabin was even half good at.

He watched the sweat trickle down his brother's face. He's sick, he told himself. It's the fever talking. My brother would never –

"Do you think they'll remember us?" Edgar mumbled.

"Oh, Roni," said Sabin instinctively, and thought, great, this is how it's going, I've opened my mouth and now we'll just see where things end up. "Don't say things like that. We've gotta try, right? Like you said. No point thinking about *that* – we're still here so far, aren't we? Eh?" He gave Edgar's arm a little shake.

"I don't want to die," said Edgar.

Sabin said nothing.

They sat there for several minutes. Sabin surprised himself by succeeding in not crying for a second time. He kept his eyes fixed on Mog, who eventually flicked his wings, stood uncertainly and waddled over to the two of them.

"Should we get moving, kupo?" he said.

Sabin wasn't sure, but Edgar replied, "Yes, let's," shrugged Sabin off him, and set about standing up, waving off all offers of assistance. "On we go," he said dully, once he had managed it, and staggered forward into the next room.

"Did the rest do him any good, kupo?" Mog hissed to Sabin as the two of them followed behind.

Sabin shrugged non-committally. "Not sure." He certainly still felt just as awful himself, but that was probably more due to the way his brother had been talking than anything.

They caught up with Edgar, and paused to behold the room in front of them. A great mass of slimy stuff shuddered up and down, all the way to the ground and back up again. Sabin watched incredulously.

"OK," said Edgar, once he realised the others were behind him. "Here's how I see it. If we get trapped under that monstrosity, we'll be crushed."

"You think?" Sabin managed.

"Look at all that force," Edgar replied. "The ground shakes when it hits it. You think we'd survive that? Even if we did, we'd be covered in – you know –"

Sabin looked up at the sticky substance all over the ceiling. "We'll have to run, then," he suggested, although the idea that Edgar would be able to run all that way in a short time was doubtful. "I can just about see where it stops, we might make it –"

“Don’t be stupid,” Edgar interrupted, and for a brief instant Sabin felt like they were boys again. “Look, there are gaps in it. If we keep an eye on where they land, we can use them as waypoints. We can probably make it between them in good time, as long as we don’t put a foot wrong.”

They watched a couple of times as the mass lowered to the floor again. Edgar was right, of course: there was a patch a little ways in front of them that was left uncovered, and would just about be big enough to harbour the three of them.

“Ready? You know where we’re heading?” said Edgar. The others nodded.

“Then let’s go as soon as it lifts,” he said, and they hurried forward into the space.

Sabin closed his eyes as the mass crashed down all around them, but they’d found the right spot: the walls were close enough to touch, but they hadn’t hit them. He stole a glance at Edgar, who looked as if he was trying not to be sick again in such close proximity to the slime, but succeeded and caught his brother’s eye. “Ready for the next one?” he said. “It’s over there, look.”

They made their way onwards in the same manner, and eventually arrived at the other side. Sabin was about to suggest resting again, but Edgar continued forward into the next area, so he followed.

It was a blessed relief to see no bridges or whatever the hell that last thing had been; there were only a few groups

of the usual enemies lurking in the shadows, so they would just be back to trying to keep their wits about them enough to fight. Sabin was almost out of magic power, so remembering his blitzes was imperative. He just about managed it.

Unsurprisingly, one of them fell in the battle, and this time it was Edgar; Sabin dug into the bag for a phoenix down and was reminded of just how few of them they had left. He pressed it to his brother's forehead and waited while he regained consciousness. He could have done with a potion himself, but they too were in short supply, so he tried to ignore the pain from his battle wounds and followed Edgar onwards.

They were all low on stamina by the time they reached the next room, given the potion shortage; the moogle had given up on flying, and waddled along beside Sabin instead, his antenna swaying weakly. Edgar had begun using whichever of his tools he happened to have out as a sort of walking stick. Sabin rubbed his eyes and tried to maintain his concentration – getting through all these fights without recourse to potions had hardly been good for his headache.

He was dismayed to note more bridges ahead of them, but at least the man-creatures from before were absent. Edgar studied the scene before them for a while.

“You think if we –” Sabin tried.

“Give me a moment,” said Edgar. “I’m getting there.” A few seconds later, he turned back to his brother. “Right. Follow me.”

“You’re OK jumping ...?”

“Are *you*?”

Better than you’ll be, thought Sabin, but he followed Edgar onto the first bridge.

They both stumbled a few times while making their way from one bridge to the next, but it was never enough to fall. There was one moment where Sabin quite seriously misjudged the distance he had to traverse, and nearly messed up, but he reached for Edgar’s outstretched hand and pulled himself onto the walkway. They made brief eye contact and headed on.

In the next room, there was a person.

“Roni,” Sabin whispered urgently, “do you think we’ll have to fight this one? Maybe we should use those last few potions first –”

Edgar shook his head, shuffled forward, and tapped the person on the shoulder.

The person’s head slowly lifted.

“Who ... are you?” Edgar breathed.

“I am Gogo,” said the person, “master of mimicry. Perhaps you have heard of me.”

“Never, kupo,” Mog admitted.

“Ah,” said Gogo, not seeming at all disappointed. “Well, I have been here for many years. It is a long, long time since anyone visited me.”

“What have you been doing here all that time?” Sabin asked.

“Very little,” Gogo admitted. “Wandering the caves, advising the few travellers who *have* made it down here, getting used to the environment –”

“How do you bear it?” said Edgar, a little desperately. “The stench, the – the *stuff* everywhere – it’s making me ill. How have you been able to survive?”

Gogo regarded him solemnly. “I have survived worse before. But you are making me think ... I have been idle for many years. Perhaps I ought to mimic you.”

“What would that consist of?” Edgar asked.

“You will see,” said Gogo. “Tell me, what are you doing here?”

Sabin spoke. “We didn’t mean to come here,” he said. “We were out training, and the creature swallowed us, and we’ve been trying to find a way out.”

“Training?” Gogo pressed him.

“We’re fighters. We’re trying to build our skills for –” how could he explain the mess that was the outside world? “Everything’s ruined out there –”

“There’s a maniac in a tower who wants to destroy the world, and has already mostly achieved it,” said Edgar flatly. “We were at least partially responsible. So we’re doing our damn best to set things right, and take him on, and give the place a chance to recover.”

“I see,” said Gogo. “So you seek to save the world.”

“That’s right, kupo,” said Mog.

“An unenviable task,” Edgar muttered.

“Then I guess that means I shall save the world as well,” Gogo concluded.

Oh, thought Sabin. Is it that easy?

“You will?” said Edgar sceptically.

“Certainly,” said Gogo. “Lead on! I will copy your every move.”

Edgar took a step back, experimentally, and Gogo moved forward in tandem, an exact mirror image of Edgar’s own movement, even mimicking his unsteady gait. Sabin had the odd urge to laugh.

“Right,” said Edgar after a brief pause. “So you will. I wonder, though, whether you might be able to guide us out of here? You did say you knew this place well.”

“Indeed I can,” said Gogo. “Follow me.”

Gogo stepped forward in the direction that the others had come from. Mog followed immediately, but Edgar hung back, approaching Sabin with a strange expression. “Hell,” he said. “We might actually make it out.”

“Didn’t I tell you?” Sabin murmured.

“Oh, *hell*, René,” Edgar gasped, and he enveloped his brother in an embrace.

They stood there for a while, locked together, until Sabin gently said, “Come on. Let’s follow,” and Edgar drew back, nodded, and made his way slowly after the others.

They jumped back across the bridges. Edgar nearly fell a few times, but managed on each occasion to recover himself. Gogo waited at the other end, seeming about to say something in response to Edgar's trouble, but remained silent. They regrouped and headed forward into the next room, where they were immediately thrown into battle again.

It was a tough one. It shouldn't have been any harder than the others, but the three of them were close to exhaustion as a result of the lack of potions. Gogo, whose equipment turned out to be fairly poor, was faring little better. Sabin did his best, but was hit by a bolt of lightning, and everything faded to black around him.



He woke to the sight of Edgar's worried face and the lingering touch of phoenix feathers, sat up slowly, and looked around. Mog and Gogo were sprawled on the ground beside them; Edgar was trembling.

"You saw them off?" Sabin enquired.

"Those two fell just as we were getting to the end," said Edgar weakly. "I managed – heaven knows how – to land the final blows." He exhaled slowly. "I thought we were done for."

"We should have drunk those potions," said Sabin.

"Only two left," said Edgar. "You have them both. I still don't think I could keep them down."

“What about these two?” said Sabin, gesturing towards the lifeless forms of the others.

“We’ve only got one more phoenix down,” said Edgar. “I’ll have to use it on Gogo – otherwise there’s no chance we’ll find our way out. Can you carry Mog?”

“No problem,” said Sabin.

“Oh, and put the charm on him,” Edgar added. “We should have done that hours ago. No point making things worse, when we were already in a bad state.”

“You said –”

“I know,” he interrupted. “An unfortunate error of judgement. Or perhaps stubbornness.”

“Definitely stubbornness,” said Sabin. “This is you we’re taking about.”

Edgar gave him a pained smile, retrieved the phoenix down and bent over Gogo with it. Sabin felt into Mog’s little knapsack, took the charm out, and placed it around the moogle’s neck. It started to emit an aura of some kind, and Sabin felt a little better.

He drank one of the potions, handed the other to Gogo, and stood, holding Mog carefully in his arms. Edgar nodded, and they followed Gogo onwards.

They arrived back at the room with the shuddering mass, and Gogo guided them through expertly, knowing exactly when to run and where to take shelter. Faced with so much of the sticky substance, Edgar pressed a hand to his mouth and

Sabin regarded him with concern, but he managed to keep himself together. They made their way through the next room in silence, and then came to the other set of bridges.

“It will be easier to jump down than risk being pushed,” Gogo declared, and dived into the darkness below.

Edgar peered down after the mimic. “Good point,” he said; he stepped forward, inhaled shakily, and jumped himself.

Sabin followed, doing his best to ensure no harm came to Mog during the descent; he landed on his back, winced, and pulled himself upright, following the other two towards the exit. He couldn’t help casting a regretful glance towards the wall that most of their items lay behind, and noticed Edgar doing the same.

Gogo pressed the button to clear the path; they climbed the stairs, walked on, and headed back towards the place that they had first emerged in, taking another stairway to the north. There, in a small alcove, was a pillar of light.

“This is it,” said Gogo, gesturing towards it.

“Wait,” said Edgar faintly. “*This* is the way out?”

“Correct,” Gogo said.

Edgar turned towards Sabin. “You mean to tell me, the place we all came to is just around the corner, and *this* is the – didn’t you send Mog scouting?”

“I don’t think he came this way,” said Sabin truthfully.

“*Damn* him,” Edgar replied vehemently, “and damn you.” He limped forward into the light, and was gone.

“Your friend is an odd man,” said Gogo.

“He’s my twin brother,” said Sabin, and stepped forward himself.

There was a familiar whirling around him, and he kept a tight grip on Mog as they hurtled upwards. They emerged on the parched grass, under the odd bright post-apocalyptic clouds, and Sabin found himself smiling. His headache was receding already.

“Mind that grass,” said Edgar, “I threw up on it.”

Sabin stepped away cautiously just as Gogo materialised before them.

There was a silence, and Sabin considered hugging his brother again, but Edgar spoke first. “I can’t *believe*,” he said through gritted teeth, colour returning to his face, “that neither of you thought of something as simple as just *looking in the other direction* –”

Sabin shrugged.

“Never talk to me again,” said Edgar. “Gogo, you’re my brother from now on – er, sist- sibling?”

“A very odd man indeed,” said Gogo, and Sabin couldn’t help dissolving into laughter. Edgar stared at him with a feigned lack of amusement until he regained control of himself.

“Feeling better, then?” Sabin said, once he had stopped laughing.

Edgar grinned wearily. “No thanks to you.”

Sabin moved closer to his brother. His hands were occupied with holding Mog, so he nudged him affectionately with his shoulder instead. “Never thought I’d be so happy to see that sky.”

“Any sky’s good enough for me,” Edgar replied, “as long as you’re under it.”

“Love you too, bro,” said Sabin, and they headed towards the waiting Falcon, Gogo following behind.