
Distraction

THE detritus left behind by other, less fortunate summoner parties sometimes contained surprising elements. When Jecht returned from his comfort break, he found Braska sitting cross-legged on the ground – at least, he *assumed* the summoner was cross-legged under his robes – and twirling around an empty beer bottle that looked remarkably like those Jecht himself had once been so acquainted with.

“Some other heathen came this way already, then?” he remarked.

Braska looked down at the bottle and smiled. “Drinking in itself is no transgression – only if it leads to unruly behaviour. Forgive me, I was in need of – well, you know. Distraction.”

The word had hung in the air since the Calm Lands. Auron had taken to using it first, to describe anything that might succeed in taking their minds off what was to come: it had seemed apt. Now that they were halfway up Mount Gagazet, all three

were getting itchy. Anything that promised distraction was welcome.

“It’s remarkably satisfying to spin, though,” Braska murmured. “Reminds me of a game we used to play at Home.”

Jecht watched him suspiciously. “You – no way. You used to play spin the bottle?”

“It was more often bits of piping,” Braska explained. “You know it, then?”

“You sure we’re thinking of the same thing?” said Jecht.

“Each player takes a turn with it,” said Braska blithely, “and then has to kiss whomever it ends up pointing to. That’s it, yes?”

“Uh, yeah,” said Jecht, finding himself even more mystified. “But ... you played it at Home? You mean, with the Al Bhed? That was like, ten years ago, wasn’t it? Weren’t you already an adult?”

“Yes?” said Braska, echoing Jecht’s questioning tone. “Is that so hard to believe?”

“Uh,” said Jecht again, “I guess not? It’s just that ... in Zanarkand, it was like a kids’ game, you know? Horny teenagers gettin’ it all out in the open, that kind of thing.”

Braska smiled, not seeming to take offence. “I see,” he said. “Well, the Al Bhed attitude to these matters is ... singular. Or – that was an unfortunate choice of word, perhaps. It’s more that –” Carefully, he set the bottle upright. “You know they don’t believe in the summoning. Therefore, they believe it best

not to harbour regrets. And so, they are more ready to, er, share their affection than we might be.” His hands retreated into his sleeves; he was blushing a little.

“You mean, they’re all swingers?” Jecht said.

“No,” said Braska, now scowling slightly. “It’s just ... if an Al Bhed desires someone who is not his wife, he believes that the best course of action is to express that desire, swiftly and openly, to protect him from the regrets that may later form. And she may do the same, of course. It’s a tradition, Jecht – there’s no need to look so shocked.”

“Hey, I ain’t shocked,” said Jecht enthusiastically, “I’m ... this is great! So you guys used to play spin the bottle as an excuse to all get it on with each other so you wouldn’t turn into fiends, huh? That’s kinda neat, actually. How many of ’em did you get off with?”

“Jecht!” Braska exclaimed.

Auron appeared then, looking suspiciously between Braska, Jecht, and the bottle. “Is something the matter?” he said.

“Just *distracting* ourselves, Auron,” said Braska.

With an acquiescent nod, Auron sat down next to him.

“We were talkin’ about spin the bottle,” said Jecht. “You know it?”

Auron shook his head.

“Ah, man, you’re missin’ out,” said Jecht, giving Braska a wink. “Know what, we could play it now. Three ain’t many,

but we can still have some fun.”

Braska frowned, and reached for the bottle with an uncharacteristically sudden gesture, as if he was about to pick it up and throw it very far away.

“A *distraction*, right?” Jecht hissed at him before he could do so.

“There’s no doubt about that,” Braska muttered. He took the bottle carefully and offered it to Jecht. “You’ll go first, then?”

Jecht smirked. “I dunno. Maybe we should let Auron start, seeing as he ain’t played before.”

Taking the bottle from him, Auron said, “What is this, exactly?”

“You’ll see,” Jecht replied. “Put it on the ground – no, on its side. That’s it – now give it a good spin. See who it ends up pointin’ to.”

They watched as Auron did so; gradually, the bottle came to a stop, pointing squarely at Braska.

“Looks like it’s you, my lord,” said Auron, who had an occasional fondness for stating the obvious. “Now what?”

“Er,” said Braska, “well, you see –”

“You gotta kiss him,” said Jecht.

Auron drew back in horror. “What? What kind of reprehensible game is this? I knew I shouldn’t have agreed to –”

“Well, let that be a lesson to ya,” said Jecht. “Are you gonna kiss him or not?”

“Of course not!” Auron snapped. “I mean –” He looked towards Braska, visibly confused. “Unless he wants me to, that is –”

“Well,” said Braska slowly, “we did say we’d play this game, Auron. It is ... the rule.”

“Is that ... an order, my lord?” Auron asked, his voice slightly strangled.

“I suppose it is,” said Braska, sounding equally hesitant.

“On the mouth,” Jecht added hastily. “Just to make it clear.”

Auron frowned, and then shuffled across the ground until he was directly facing Braska. Slowly and with great solemnity, he moved his face towards the summoner’s, leant forward in a kind of bow, and briefly pressed a minute, chaste kiss to his lips before moving back quickly.

“Hey, hang on!” Jecht roared. “What the hell was that?”

Auron shrugged. “Well,” he said, “you know I’m a monk, Jecht. I don’t have much experience in kissing.”

“Bullshit,” said Jecht. “*Warrior* monks ain’t the same as the normal kind – you told me that enough times. You grew up in the barracks with all those other kids, right? Don’t tell me you never ...”

Auron gave him an elliptical look.

Jecht had always found Auron both attractive and enraging, somehow; over time, those two components of his person had waxed and waned, but at this moment, both seemed to be rapidly heading off the scale. Jecht needed a distraction, after

all. As Auron sat there looking very much like he was trying to hide a great deal of smugness, the need to find out what he was really like as a kisser made itself known in Jecht's mind before quickly gaining increasing urgency. At last, no longer able to withhold his curiosity, Jecht scrambled forward and went for him.

There was a muffled sound of surprise, but afterwards, Auron relaxed into it impressively quickly, even reaching for the back of Jecht's head. He was a *good* kisser, and he had been lying. Jecht should have expected both, he reflected, while exploring Auron's frankly delicious mouth with his tongue.

"You fuckin' liar," he said, once they had broken apart.

"Sorry," said Auron cheerfully.

Jecht looked daggers at him for a moment, and then glanced back at Braska, noting with a smirk that he was slightly wide-eyed. "Enjoyed that, did ya?" he said.

"Um," said Braska, "well ..." He fiddled with his headdress. "I don't think that was very sporting, Jecht. You hadn't even spun it. You're not supposed to choose the, er, the target yourself."

"Fair," said Jecht.

"I think Auron and I should both get an extra turn after that," Braska went on.

Jecht grinned. "Yeah?"

"Oh yes," said Braska solemnly. "And we should be allowed to choose as well. That ought to balance things out."

“Well,” said Jecht, spreading his arms wide, “your turn next, then. Go ahead – who’s gonna be the lucky guy?”

Braska looked between Auron and Jecht, and his face fell a little. “Oh ...”

“Braska,” said Jecht calmly. “I know you wanna pick Auron. You don’t gotta feel guilty about it.” On his other side, Auron seemed to have lost most of his previous composure: his face was impressively flushed.

“That’s very kind,” Braska murmured, “but, you see, the thing is ...” He leant forward then, pressed a hand to Jecht’s cheek, and moved in to kiss him.

Jecht just about managed not to bite Braska’s lip in surprise. His kiss was softer and slower than Auron’s, more tender. It was a very different experience, but that didn’t mean Braska was any less good a kisser than Auron was: it stood to reason when he had practised with all those Al Bhed. For a horrifying moment, Jecht wondered whether *he* was the inexperienced one.

“Not to presume, my lord,” said Auron once the kiss was over, “but I was of the same opinion as Jecht. Why did you ...”

Braska smiled to himself. “Ah,” he said. “Forgive me, Auron – I was merely thinking ahead. If I hadn’t kissed Jecht, he might never have had his turn with me. And – well, it’s yours next, and I was fairly certain that you’d –”

“Ah,” said Auron. “I see.”

Jecht chuckled. “Go ahead, then, Auron. He’s all yours.”

“And a *proper* kiss would be nice this time, Auron,” Braska murmured.

Auron’s face somehow turned even more red. “I wouldn’t dream of disobeying you, sir,” he stammered out, before moving forward and cupping Braska’s face in both hands.

Jecht sighed with pleasure as he watched; this was very distracting indeed. And after the first go, he thought triumphantly, they hadn’t even needed the bottle.