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A Dangerous Monster

by Roddy Phillips

Snacks piled in bowls litter the table, like some strange offering to an ancient god hooked on artificial sugars; three bowls of crisps, one half-open packet of Oreos and two thirds of an icing-drowned homemade cake.

Also set up on the table is a vast gridded plastic sheet, framing it are pouches and trays of many-sided dice, as well as sheets and notebooks and pens, organised into piles clearly belonging to three different people. At the head of the table stands a three-faced screen, behind which sits an orange-haired young woman.

Her upper lip is pierced through with a pretty emerald gem, glittering against her pale skin, hair falling about her face as she turns back to the kitchen, her long, perfectly-painted mint-green fingernails tapping on the table.

“Vaughn, I swear to god if you’re covering my kitchen in pesto, I *will* kill you.”

Spinning around to face her, Vaughn made a face, their androgynous features pinching. “We’re not playing yet, you have no control over me!”

Opting not to admit she had no control anyway, Brina plucked a twenty-sided dice from the table in front of her and smiled over at her friend, rolling it between her fingers as she said, “Don’t I?”

Vaughn threw their hands up, turning back to the microwave.

“Alright! I’ll be careful with the pesto!”

The sound of the toilet flushing echoed through the small apartment, and a moment later Reece stepped into the main living area, glancing between the two. He pushed up his round wire-rimmed spectacles.

“Is Vaughn making a mess?”

“Yes.”

“No.”

Chuckling, Reece sat down before one of the piles of dice and paper, running his thumb and forefinger over his meticulously cared-for moustache.

The front door opened, a confusion of tail-wagging, ebony hair and swearing spilling into the apartment.

“*Hello, babyyy,*” Brina cooed, unclipping Boromir’s lead, “thanks for taking him out,” she said to Taran as she shut the front door.

“No problem,” she huffed back with a grin. Throwing herself into a chair beside Reece, she asked, “are we ready to start?”

Brina nodded towards the kitchen, “we’re just waiting for—“

“I’m ready!”

Tea towel wrapped around the steaming ceramic bowl in their hands, Vaughn hurried over to the table, sitting down and blowing on their pasta.

Ignoring Sabrina’s suspicious glare, Vaughn grinned, “Let’s start, then.” Rolling her eyes, Brina turned to look at them all.

From a speaker behind the screen, ominous fantasy music began. A strange sort of hush fell over the table, as though she had cast some sort of spell. Even Boromir’s tail stopped wagging momentarily as Sabrina opened her mouth:

“A dangerous being has been threatening the town...”

