

The customary ten hours of sleep had done very little to take care of the distended gut he had been blessed with, though frankly, that was to be expected after what he did to get it in the first place. In fact, had Pololi woken up with his belly the way it used to be, it would've been seen as a portent of ill luck, a sign that the gods hadn't *truly* chosen him as their prophet of gluttony; with him having been the first true victor of the Games in what might very well have been centuries, such a state of affairs would be *terrible* for morale, perhaps even enough to justify grieving, as clearly the gods had abandoned them if that were the case. Thus, Pololi was determined to make sure this wouldn't happen to him, that he would serve the gods to the best of his ability and come out of an even fatter, rounder ogre because of it; that was his purpose, after all, his *fate* and destiny, the reason why he entered the Island Games to begin with! He'd always been on the larger side, and from an early age had been the subject of a great amount of speculation; their tribe's mystics had perhaps *too* much enthusiasm when it came to declaring someone an "aspirant", someone who might one day undertake the ritual to commune with the gods, to the point where they occasionally had to be reminded that there couldn't be multiple aspirants at the same time, in accordance with their own religious scripture. In Pololi's case, however, things weren't so simple that he could be dismissed, as not only did he grow much faster than the other younglings of his age, but his appetite was *ravenous* even by the tribe's own standards; his parents were lucky that the island they lived on was as bountiful as it was, for otherwise they might've had genuine issues keeping the poor lad fed! As it stood, however, the colossal isle of Akea gave the ogres everything they could ever possibly want, to the point where none were obligated to perform labor to keep the tribe fed; all it took was for them to walk into the jungle outside of their village and pluck whatever food they wanted from the trees or the bushes, knowing it would regrow within a few hours. Those who actually put in the time to hunt or fish were seen as performing the gods' work, taking time out of their lives to bring even *more* mouth-watering dishes onto the communal table; it was, after all, seen as rude for one to eat alone within the privacy of their own home, not when there was just *so much* to be shared, not when the very *concept* of gluttony was such a fundamental part of the tribe's belief system. For them, lunch time, dinner time, mid-afternoon snack time and the seven other points in the day where they all got together to eat en masse were *sacrosanct*, so much so that their mystics began each meal by blessing the food and the very ground upon which the banquet table sat. There, in the middle of their village, was where everyone congregated, each and every ogre bringing with them an armful of food of their own choosing to add to the potluck, with special spots of honours being reserved for meat and fish acquired since the last meal. In many respects, this was what the tribe's life revolved around, as the moment they were done with *one* meal they had to immediately start preparing the next one, and with endless quantities of food at their fingertips (even the wildlife seemed more interested in being easy targets than offering resistance or hiding), it became a constant cycling of emptying the communal table, cleaning it up, then promptly filling it back up again for the next feast. It was there that aspirants were truly confirmed, there that those whose innate qualities made them candidates for the gods' blessings were put to the test: could they out-eat everyone else? Could they devour so much food that it

was seen as legitimately impressive, even by their own tribe's incredibly high standards? If so, then this prospective aspirant might just be selected for their Island Games, a rather straightforward name for what was, effectively, an even *grander* eating competition: once every few years, the elders would get together and decide it was time to see if anyone in the tribe was *truly* blessed by their gluttonous gods, thus being worthy of the great ritual which would have them ascend to join with the rest of the pantheon, that they might gorge themselves on endless feasts for the rest of eternity. It had been so long since anyone rose to the challenge *and* managed to beat it that no one alive remembered the last time anyone was subjected to this ritual; there'd been plenty of Island Games, yet at no point did anyone manage to complete all the challenges and eat enough to qualify as the victor. The details of the ascension were thus committed solely to bricks of clay, carved an unimaginably long time ago, untouched by all except their mystics, who insisted on performing the Games with such incessant regularity that, once again, they had to be reminded to mind their manners and learn some patience. Preparing for the Games was, after all, an endeavour of such complexity and scale that it *dwarfed* even the greatest of feasts prepared during the tribe's holy days, enough so that the island actually looked *barren* after the ogres were done collecting all the food they needed... at least for a day or two, before everything sprouted back into place. The rules for the Games were quite simple: contestants would go through a series of eating contests where they were tasked to devour as much of a type of food as possible, with the catch being that they *must* go through every single recipe known to every single person alive in the tribe at the time. Naturally, this resulted in *hundreds* of individual contests with absolutely no room for rest in between them; the texts were quite clear when they said that a true aspirant should be capable of consuming several times their body weight without needing to take even a *second* to recuperate. This, inevitably, meant that very few ever had the opportunity to participate in even a fraction of the full Games; much as the ogres of the Akea tribe were huge, gluttonous and ever-famished, they had their physical limits to deal with, and most of them simply lacked the ability to pack on *that* much food, with the remainder always tapping out some time before the end once they practically stuffed their windpipe after their stomachs filled to capacity... that is, until Pololi came along. Just as his early development caused others to see him as a truly extraordinary specimen, so too did his puberty make it clear that he was several cuts above the rest; by the time he came of age, he was nearly five feet taller than the next person down on the height ladder, and several more feet *wider* than even the fattest of hedonistic gorgers. He was *immense*, and that was his default state, requiring no further nourishment; not that he could stay that way for long, as a body like his *required* a constant intake of food in order to function, only adding to the problem as he grew bigger and wider with every passing month. It was his presence that spurred the elders to call for the Island Games to be held, believing that, at long last, they had found someone worthy of the gods' blessings; and after months of preparation, months of gathering and hunting, months of preparing the banquet and using their magics to preserve the meals until they were ready, Pololi stepped forward and took his place at the contestant's table, along with twenty other aspiring young ones... and then proceeded to thoroughly blow away even the tribe's *sky-high* expectations by seeing each and

every last one of his competitors leave before he even bothered to think about complaining of being full. In fact, *hours* after the Games began, when there was just him and another male left, when Pololi had eaten so much that not only was he several contests ahead *but* had also bloated to nearly fifty times his regular size (mostly in belly weight), all he had to do was look to the side, pat himself a couple of times, and utter four words: “Could go for seconds!” This was more than enough to let his fellow competitors know they were thoroughly outmatched, prompting them to throw in their support behind him and join the ever-growing crowd cheering Pololi’s name; of course, this didn’t ensure victory, as the Games only truly ended when either everyone quit, or someone *finished*. So... he did. Pololi kept eating, even past the point where he physically couldn’t feed himself any longer and thus required the whole village to step up and help him out; there was a moment of trepidation when he stopped reaching for the food, as he’d already become *colossal*, making it a disappointment of literally epic proportions if he’d given up just then... that is, until he burped, his whole form seemed to shrink a couple of inches, and the ogre colossus promptly asked for someone to pass him the next meal. He was a titan of blubber, a blob of such colossal proportions that several other smaller ogres were actually caught in the folds of his gigantic belly, requiring assistance not to just become lost in there; it was a trek to get to his head, practically melted into a neck so flabby that it had turned into a bowl of sorts, with Pololi’s head at the bottom where food could more easily be shovelled down. It was as if his very biology was working to transform him into an eating machine, someone who couldn’t quite eat by himself, but could certainly command enough respect to have others feed them, not to mention one possessed of a stomach so deep it might as well be bottomless... which, just so coincidentally, matched perfectly with the tribe’s notion of how their gods looked like. They weren’t stupid, they *knew* that their bodies should be unable to grow *that* much, which could only mean that their ability to do so *must* be divine in nature, and seeing as gluttony was so important to them, *and* they lived on the bountiful Akea, then surely it made sense that those feasting for eternity in the heavens should be a reflection of their endless hunger. In fact, this alone convinced the elders that Pololi *had* to be a true aspirant, for no matter how much he ate, no matter how much he bloated, the ogre *always* demanded more; he seemed to be hungrier when he was done than when he started, and if not for the fact that he was stuck and incapable of even so much as moving a single muscle thanks to all the weight on him, the giant most likely would’ve devoured the whole island several times over. Instead, he was lulled into a ritualistic sleep through the spellweaving of the tribe’s mystics, in preparation for the ritual to be performed the following day; it had been so long that even the most fanatical of the faith had to take some time to read the instructions, especially when it came to the incantations themselves. It was designed, at least in theory, to allow one lucky ogre to commune directly with their tribe’s gods themselves, the spirits of gluttony who determined the fates and wove the very fabric of reality; technically speaking, *anyone* could try and do so, but it was accepted knowledge that only those worthy of ascending could accomplish this without having their souls burned from their bodies from the strain of contacting the divine. Thus it had happened before, as the mystics were well aware that all members of their pantheon but one were all once mortals, just like them, who had

ascended to become something *greater* by virtue of their own endless gluttony and hedonistic self-indulgence; so it was that Pololi would, hopefully, become one as well, under the auspices of the Great Father, the one who kept the divine feasting table stocked with literally infinite quantities of food, each piece so delicious and filling that it would keep their tribe alive for hundreds of years with only a single bite. Thus it was decreed and thus it was decided... the problem being how to *get* Pololi out to sea, which was where the ritual was supposed to be performed. It'd be one thing to just do it where he sat, and indeed it would be *very* convenient, but the clay tablets were quite clear when it came to that point: the aspirant would need to be placed on a raft and sailed off to sea, where the ritual, once complete, would have them commune with the gods themselves. The construction work required for this was such that whole chunks of the jungle had to be cleared out; if not for the fact that the trees would grow back within a few days at most, it would've been a genuine loss. Alas, it was necessary, even if it would offend the spirits of the land, for an opportunity like that one simply *did not* present itself with any kind of regularity; Pololi was an aspirant, of this the mystics and elders were certain after communing with Akea during the preparatory ceremonies, and they weren't going to let go of this one chance to have a member of their tribe become a literal *god* through ascension by gluttony. No, the trees were a small sacrifice to make, and surely the spirits wouldn't mind it *too* much if the proper care was taken; thus it was that most of the village worked through the night, chopping down and carrying log after log towards the beach, where the greatest raft ever created by ogrekind was assembled under the supervision of their fishers, the only people there who even slightly understood the principles of navigating on water. Thankfully, the raft itself wouldn't need to be controlled, just pushed in one direction and swept away by the tides, as for whatever reason, the currents always seemed to pull *away* from Akea; it made fishing a dangerous profession, hence the respect paid to those who embarked upon it, and it would make Pololi's departure even more complicated, as all it would take would be a stray wave for him to be tipped over, especially with how much weight would be on that thing. It wouldn't *just* be Pololi, but also several offerings of food as well, nearly as massive as the aspirant ogre himself, and according to the tablets, not a single *crumb* could be wasted; to resolve this, the tribe's fishers agreed to bring their own ships, tie them to the raft, and then guide it out to sea, before retreating back to a safe distance. It was unorthodox, and probably not in the spirit of the ritual... but there was nothing in the *letter* of it that forbid them, so why not? Might as well try something that had a chance of succeeding than a method guaranteed to fail, so after some re-reading, the mystics agreed to the proposal, and the grand raft project was suddenly even grander than before. Now all they needed was to bring Pololi himself over, which was, to put it lightly, far easier said than done; the ogre was already big by default, even without his usual gorging, so him winning the Island Games had left the guy in... quite a state.