

Customer #3 (Dolok)

Vekar had the kindness in his heart to escort Grink back to his booth the following morning, though much too early for Vekar's liking. Soon enough, Grink was back to his booth and awaiting customers as normal. To think that he had such a bountiful array of potential masters! He could function as a pet for either of them. Both have their benefits, though they also both come with their disadvantages. While no one was around, Grink brought out a notepad and a pencil to better jot down his dilemma.

Pros for Calan	Cons for Calan		Pros for Vekar	Cons for Vekar
Nice :)	nocturnal		<u>RICH DRAGON</u>	Can be rude
gentle	Just the two of us		<u>DRAGON</u>	Multiple other pets
Relatively low maintenance	Very soft spoken and to himself		Potentially similar care routine as me	Dad is kinda scary
Just the two of us			Multiple other pets	

The list didn't help him as much as he thought. Though while writing it down, he found that the number of pets brought him both comfort and worry. Being just him and Calan would lead to a deeper connection between the two of them, but it would always help to potentially have a support system. Grink wasn't familiar with the species of Calan, so he had no idea if they were very close knit or made packs with other families. As well as that, the nocturnal part also played into the diet. Being that Calan would now need to hunt for two people, Grink would be extremely tied to whatever it is Calan would hunt at the time. Being his bone structure, claws and fangs, it is easy to assume that he is a predator, and thus a carnivore. Grink's lizard species were omnivores, so none of that was an obstacle for survival and more an aspect of taste. As for Vekar, the number of pets and the fact that he would be surviving an up and coming dragon had more than enough bonuses attached. Just thinking about the possibility of serving a powerful dragon, feared and adored by all and kind to all of his pets, though few. Grink smiled to himself at the fantasy. He was so caught up in the idea that he hadn't noticed the looming shadow over him. He nearly jumped out of

his skin when he saw the massive werewolf simply standing over the booth without a word. Grink picked himself up and patted his chest, ensuring that his heart was still beating.

“H-hi! Uhm... I hope you weren’t waiting too long... How can I help you?” Grink asked. The werewolf tilted his head before opening his mouth slowly to speak.

“Oh! May I speak now?” He asked. His face was covered in missing patches of fur made from deep and long aged scars, the wounds on his body causing a scattered pattern across his whole body, his own tail now reduced to a stub. Curiously, Grink nodded his head. He had never interacted with a werewolf before now and the experience already raised a few questions.

“Oh ok! I am Dolok, I am the 4 year winner of our annual tournament! It’s nice to meet you, Monster Cleaning Service!” The werewolf cheered, slamming his chest so hard Grink thought it would burst. Before Grink could ask where he pulled the odd title from, he realized that the werewolf was simply reading off the sign above his booth.

“Alright...? My name is Grink, are you here for a grooming session? Do you already know what you want?” As Grink posed the question, he already started planning how to treat the werewolf properly, with its fur, fangs and skin too.

“Oh was I supposed to? My pack just told me to come here after a friend of ours recommended you! Did I need to know what I wanted beforehand?” He asked while tilting his head again. Grink had no real idea what to do. He hadn’t treated a werewolf before and the wolf was giving contradictory feelings to Grink. While the voice was booming and his body wounded from every angle, he also had very soft mannerism. His eyes were kind and he didn’t seem to have any malice or aggression while he talked to Grink.

“Well *ideally*, yeah. But I can also just recommend some treatments to you if that’s easier?” Grink proposed, now thinking on his feet after Dolok gave him nothing to work off of. The wolf nodded, following behind Grink and soon sitting on the rug that was left out overnight. Grink was confused, he thought werewolves were hardened warriors that never went somewhere without their family or a plan, yet here this one was with neither. The wolf ahead of him was bipedal, a decent shift from what Grink was used to, but more similar to him. Not a fault, but certainly a change.

Unsure of where to start, Grink instead patted along the fur of the werewolf, wanting to see if anything was especially bothering him. He knew how a werewolf was supposed to feel and look based on stories from his family and other lizards of his species. The werewolf was still, blankly looking around as Grink felt the fur. It was in horrible shape, the fur of his

being dirty all over with dried blood tying end and roots together. His skin was heavily mistreated, under the fur were countless other wounds, some extremely recent and others somehow looking older than he was. The claws of the werewolf followed a similar vein. They had some of the same features of Calan, dulled and hardly keeping their intended shape, seemingly not even capable of functioning like claws anymore. One thing in Dolok's favor was that his body seemed well nourished and he seemed content with his several conditions. It was admittedly a wonder on how Dolok was even standing with the dozens of scars in and out of the fur. Eventually, Grink had to sit down across from the wolf in order to properly work out what would happen. Being that he came early in the day, unlike his previous two customers, Dolok had all the time in the day to get his body cared for.

"Oh can I ask a question?" The werewolf had suddenly asked with a tilted head, snapping Grink out of his thoughts. Unsurely, Grink nodded again. The wolf smiled and with the small remnant of his tail, the thumping of it wagging became known.

"I think I should get my alpha here! She'd know what to do! I can go get her if you like? Probably? I don't actually know if she'll be at the den... Wait nevermind... Also what kind of lizard are you? You're not a dragon, right? Those have wings, I think? I've never seen a dragon, have you? Unless you are a dragon? In that case have you seen a lizard? Wait, dragons are lizards. Do you think dragons are cool? I've always wanted to meet one, cause they can fly and stuff! I don't have wings, but I'd like to have them! Birds are nice too, but they can't fight, so I wouldn't want to be like them. My alpha can fight! She's so cool! I can go get her if you like? Wait, I don't actually know if she'll be at the den... Wait, did you say if you're a dragon or not?" The werewolf rambled on and on and on until he caught himself in the loop he's put himself on. Grink used the time in his ramble to plan out his course of action.

"So, Dolok, was it? I think a nice bath is a great way to solve multiple problems at once! How many recent scars do you have and can you point them out, I'd rather not get anything contaminated, alright?" Grink asked, fetching the materials from under his booth. There was deep fur shampoo, brush themed after a tongue, collapsible bathtub, and some big towels to help after the fact. The tongue brush was advertised to be a comfort to mammals and replicate the feeling of grooming. Being that werewolves are pack animals, it seemed like the right choice. Dolok nodded, following Grink as he retrieved the items from his booth.

“Oh, I have one behind this ear... I also have one on my inner thigh? I got cut there two days ago, is that recent? I mean I guess it could be? I actually forgot when exactly I got this one behind my shoulder but every now and then it bleeds, does that mean it’s recent?” He asked, briskly following behind the lizard with a paw raised to his chin. As the position was completely set up, Grink fetched a bucket from the well. With assistance from the werewolf, buckets of water now fill the tub with the water. His body, though coated in wounds, kept a hefty amount of muscle beneath the scarce fur. With the tub that Grink set up being extremely convenient, it also carried the breath of a dragon, allowing it to heat itself and keep water warm for a long while. Eventually, the water was warm and the soap was well enough mixed in. In the meantime, Grink brushed the werewolf slowly. The fur was rough and had horrible patches of an odd crusty texture.

Grink couldn’t help but see this as an opportunity as well. As little as he knew about werewolves, he knew that Dolok wouldn’t be the ideal creature to draw conclusions from. His bizarre mannerisms and enigmatically functional body, none of it seemed like the hierarchical wolf family that Grink knew about... Wait, it’s hierarchical! That means that generally parents are leaders with the mother being the highest along the pack and the youngest male is bound to be the least respected! Grink suddenly felt a lot more pity for the werewolf. That is assuming that his idea isn’t outdated and completely wrong. Admittedly Grink was already wrong about wolves in the past with a ‘study’ that came out years ago and spread a bunch of misinformation about their pack positions and such. It only muddied the truth about their pack behind actually meeting one in real life. He figured it best not to ask about it in case it were a sensitive subject, he clearly didn’t have enough information anyway and it could be seen as intrusive.

Soon enough, Dolok was ridden of the shedded fur that was trapped under his summer coat and he got into the warm tub, splashing the bubbles around playfully as Grink continued to rub in the shampoo, making sure to wash out the bleeding wound he was talking about and patch it up with a security aid kit he had behind the booth. He made sure to keep the patch small, as to not bother Dolok while still being adhesive enough to withstand another fight. Though as he worked, it seemed as though Dolok didn’t even notice, simply splashing about without a care. He was able to enjoy himself despite having a smaller lizard often chase after him with a brush in hand. Soon enough the water was overrun with dirty brown fur and the majority of the soap had been rinsed off. Grink

trudged through the dirty water and jogged over to a few towels that he pulled to the side. Dolok awkwardly followed behind, shaking his body violently and sending countless droplets across the area, even sending a few clinging strands of fur out as well.

As Grink began dragging the several towels across his body, Dolok ended up rambling. Though Grink was a bit distracted nonetheless. This entire thing was to see where his potential master may be and he never processed the idea of a werewolf. The pack mentality would play an interesting role in Grink's life. Even then, most lone wolves became pets rather than a wolf becoming a master. When Dolok came in, he mentioned that he was recommended here by a friend, which Grink could only think was Calan. Was Calan part of the pack? He wasn't a werewolf, but he certainly wasn't just a feline. Grink ran in circles about his internal debate on whether or not Calan is a feline or canine again before he heard his name being called.

"Grink? Oh, were you not listening? I do that sometimes too." Dolok remarked absentmindedly. Grink had been toweling down his back and neck for the past few minutes before being called out. He skittered over to Dolok's front as he sat and began drying off his chest now.

"I'm sorry, I was a bit distracted is all. Was something wrong?" Grink asked through strokes, not wanting to halt his work for a conversation. Dolok didn't seem to mind, almost acting as if Grink wasn't there and talking normally.

"Oh I was asking if lizards only needed dragons as masters. I know my alpha would love a little guy like you to be a part of our pack. She's just really nice like that! She can fight too, so if you wanted, she could hunt for you and stuff too. Oh wait, I can also hunt for you! Wow you can be hunted for from like... 2 different people! Oh wait there's the rest of the pack too... How many people would that be? Do you hunt for yourself too? If that's the case, then it'd be plus one, but I don't know how many people are there... There's my 3 brothers, 2 sisters, my oldest sister has a mate and they have 4 kids and counting... Oh yeah we'd be hunting for them too... Oh, this is a complicated math problem..."

"W-wait what?" Grink mentioned, stopping his work to engage the rambling wolf. He seemed to catch on himself, looking at the small lizard with a paw on his chin.

"Oh I just know that if you joined our pack, we could all be like your masters and stuff. Are lizards ok with that? I know it's a super important decision and stuff so I don't want to intrude. Unless it isn't all that important. I think it should be. Unless it is, cause then I agree. Do you think it's important? I do. I think a lot of things are impor-"

“D-Dolok!” Grink felt as if he had to raise his voice at the werewolf simply to catch his attention. It worked and the wolf tilted his head at the lizard, hardly even noticing his train of thought going off the rails. Grink caught his breath, tired simply from trying to follow the wolf’s words in his mind. Dolok, not knowing what to do, mirrored the behavior and also took a deep breath. “Dolok, I appreciate the thought, but I don’t think I can just do that. I would need to do a lot of research before doing that and I’m not sure how well that’d work for me...” Grink had to bend the truth a bit. He had been thinking about it to himself, though he didn’t think it’d be such an apparent option. Usually wolves had to go through a whole process to even be considered to join a pack. To think Dolok was just haphazardly inviting him seemed too good to be true. On the other hand, assuming that Dolok had that authority to begin with, a community like that doesn’t seem so bad. He would be well protected and well fed, and being that the wolves aren’t fully involved in the pet culture like dragons are, the expectations are null and the standards are low. Let alone the light workload, Calan would also be nearby and Grink already smiled at the thought of being able to have friends outside of the pack. As he went through the thought process, DOlok spoke up again, this time short and almost sounding in tune with Grink’s thoughts.

“I’m the eldest in my family and my mom is the alpha... I’m sorry, you just seemed like you needed to hear something, so I said something random. Usually when I do that it either starts a fight or an epiphany. Which one was it this time?” The werewolf still had a paw raised to his chin, his head tilted. If his mom were the alpha and he were the oldest, then that would almost certainly be enough authority. Being how he talks about her, it seems like they’re on good terms as well.

“If you’re that close to the alpha, then why are you in such poor shape?” Grink asked, thinking that he was the lowest in rank and suddenly hearing that he’s only a few steps down from the top was a harsh whiplash to catch onto. Dolok didn’t seem to be phased by the question, only tilting his head to the other side now.

“Because I like fighting? Why? Is something wrong with my body?” He posed the question without a thought behind the words. Just in time as well, Grink had finished drying him off.

“Oh, you should come with us! You didn’t give me an answer earlier, so I hope this will help! Oh, I just know my alpha will love you!” Dolok cheered at the idea that he gave himself, lifting Grink under his arms and beginning to walk off. For a second, Grink thought himself comparable to a stuffed toy, being picked up with such ease before he

registered what was happening. Though as he opened his mouth to object, he quickly shut it, not wanting to snap his tongue off as Dolok began sprinting into the distant woods, still holding Grink all the same. Though with the running, it would certainly help with frying him off even more, being that Grink wasn't able to finish him in time before being taken away from his booth once more.

They ran for a while, just now realizing just how far the wolf pack apparently was, a massive distance from both his booth and Vekar's palace. Eventually, the wolf slowed down, easing into a trot as he was met with dozens of other wolves who practically tackled him and showered him with affection as though he'd been gone for months. Dolok towered over most of them and none of them had half as many scars as him, proving further that Dolok is a reckless fighter, even by werewolf standards. Grink almost felt forgotten before he was raised high above Dolok's head and heard his voice boom from beneath him.

"I'm bringing this guy to the alpha, so move out the way! I'll be back though!" He yelled. The wolves seemed to understand, beginning to give him room while their attention was now on Grink as he was carried. A handful of werewolves whispered to themselves, wondering what type of reptilian could be so small and if he was simply kidnapped by one of Dolok's whims. Grink smiled at the thought of Dolok randomly trying to adopt more people into his pack, but he shook the thought from his head. He still needs to find a master. As fun of a detour this all is, he can't settle too quickly. He needs to make it known that he's still deciding on things and can't make such a quick decision. Soon enough, Dolok marched into a den with a dark black wolf resting against the cave walls. Her fur was completely different from Dolok's in both fur color and texture. Excitedly, Dolok lifted the lizard to the black wolf, who slowly stood to her full height, looming far over Grink and even taller than Dolok. One of her cheeks was torn, a gaping hole revealing her sharp fangs as he smiled softly.

"I hope this companion of yours actually *wants* to be here, Dolok." She warned lightly. Dolok happily shook his head, finally setting the lizard down proudly as he explained himself. Grink was listening, though most of what he said was a tangent unrelated to anything. In footnotes, he mentioned how he overheard Calan mentioning the cleaning booth to his alpha and he decided to investigate first. On this cue, Grink introduced himself to the alpha wolf, utilizing Dolok as an elevation tool to try and shake the alpha's hand, though her right paw was reduced to a stub, the lack of fur revealing a

connection of stitched lines. Grink awkwardly took his hand back before the alpha pulled him into a one armed hug.

“No need for that, I’ve already heard a lot about you! You’re the one who got Calan asleep! He’s always had such problems going to sleep so I just have to thank you for that.” She kept her grip on the lizard soft, clearly holding back the majority of her strength and keeping a soft tone of voice. Up close, Grink was able to confirm that their fur texture was completely different, though mostly due to the alpha’s care in her fur.

“I’m Reign, the alpha of this wolf pack. Lizards like you need a master, right? I may not be your first choice, but I can still take care of you all the same. Even if Dolok makes his fair share of work for you!” She laughed. Grink couldn’t help but laugh as well, understanding how battle ready he is at almost any time. Grink shook his head once more, getting caught up in the ideal communal lifestyle that the werewolves would provide for him.

“I-I can’t! Nothing against you or your pack of course, but I just... Ummm... I can’t make this kind of decision so quickly...” Grink sighed slowly. To think that he’s had so many opportunities for masters and had to turn down each one out of fear of a better master around the corner. He started to feel as though he’s being rude, to be so picky when he has such little power or much of anything to provide for a master...

“Well surely you can still help Calan. He isn’t an official part of our pack, but he means a lot to us. Now it’s getting pretty late. I understand that most reptiles are cold blooded, would you like to stay here for the night? We can be a lot, but we still know how to keep a creature warm. You’re welcome to stay here with me.” Grink tried his hardest but couldn’t keep a smile off his face as he nodded excitedly. Before he could even say any affirmation, Dolok lifted the lizard off the ground and hugged him a tight embrace, much tighter than Reign but still holding back the strength his muscles demonstrated through the bath. Dolok quickly leaned against one of the walls with Grink on his chest, his arms lightly laid over him. Dolok nudged Grink with his nose as he leaned down, a smile still brightly plastered over his face. Grink nudged closer as well, surprisingly comfortable after being held like a doll for what felt like half a day. Slowly, Reign slid in as well, laying next to Dolok silently.

“HEY ARE WE SLEEPING NOW?”

“Hey, why’d no one tell me about the dog pile?!”

“Oh finally, this is my favorite part of the day!”

A flurry of various voices charged in and found their place in the den, some resting on top of Dolok and next to Grink, others positioned themselves open to DOlok and invited him to lay on them, to which he obliged. By the end of the mass reorganization, Grink had been tossed around and carried off in a completely different werewolf's arms, half of his body laying over the thigh of a different one and his body constantly being tickled by one of the nearby wolves who managed to find sleep right next to him. Although it was bizarre, being surrounded by so many nonviolent yet still battle ready creatures, all asleep and together. Grink could be a part of this... At the very least, he knew he could get some sleep in the den with the other wolves.

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