

Pilot episode for a cartoon short story: **Neurodivergent Fantasy High**

I palmed the amulet I had bought from the antique store on my way home. Nothing like buying something to take away your sadness (but not really). I thought of my meeting at school. It was a team project, and I felt that I was really Viking with everyone for once, that we were on the same page. Yet today, we started the meeting with what we had been doing. And I heard them all say the amazing and wonderful, not really also they were pretty mundane, tasks they had been doing. Yet I was there, without a single task done. First, I felt a sense of betrayal. We hadn't said that we were going to do anything before this meeting, how was I supposed to know? Then questioning - we knew there were general tasks to do and people in charge of them, so of course the right thing to do would be to proactively work on them. Finally, the shame, always the shame. I didn't do any tasks because there's something wrong with me, I should have known to do something, they're all disappointed, think I'm lazy and hate me. I thought briefly about working for several hours straight as a demonstration of my ability to my teammates, then decided I was too tired. I wished having ADHD didn't have to feel like I was a pile of undercooked potatoes. I rubbed the ridges of the amulet in my hands, which looked way more gaudy than it needed to be, but in a cheesy over the top way I enjoyed, like it was out of a fantasy novel. If only I lived in a different, potentially fantasy, world, then my ADHD would be something to behold...

And then the amulet glowed once, and I felt like I was a piece of boba being sucked through a normally sized straw, and I seemed to be pulled into the amulet all at once. Pop! The boba (me) got pulled through whatever this was and it was like I was car sick

as I was spun around and traveled through some sort of goop way too quickly. I was forcefully birthed/rocketed/your word of choice back through into a field. I hit the ground softer than I would have expected, and saw I was on a thick layer of pink moss before I collapsed. My head hurt like hell and I was physically covered in some of the goop I thought I had imagined. I rested there for a moment, then wobbled on my legs like a newborn giraffe (I had gotten a growth spurt recently and was ridiculously tall, so that didn't feel too far off). I walked through the moss, squishing down almost a foot with every step. Finally I got to the edge, a narrow strip of forest in front of me. I could see a building through it.

I walked through the trees, putting my hands on one of them to lean for support. It grunted at me. IT GRUNTED AT ME? I jumped backwards, and on wobbly legs promptly fell over. The tree stayed in the same place, and for all intents and purposes, looked like a normal tree, which was incredibly rude. I stood back up and pressed my hand into it. Again, it grunted, this one more specifically like a groan of someone who climbed up too many stairs. I giggled with some amount of glee, and felt like I was in elementary school, rather than 11th grade. I walked through the forest again, this time intentionally pressing on each tree I passed, hearing a groan, huff, or some similar noise of annoyance from each. I was almost crying with laughter by the time I reached the clearing with the building. The forest of grumps, I named it in my head.

The building was moderately tall, with swirling stone pathways around it, similar to cobblestone except there was no clear pattern or rectangular-ness to the stones. Two

pillars stood towards the front, like a gateway, or an invitation. It leaned approximately 10 degrees to the right, yet looked sturdy as if it was intended so. It was also turquoise blue with orange highlights on its many windows. A bell rang inside and a number of what appeared to be high school kids, all in uniforms (though not all worn the same) started rushing out. Yet, some of them had long ears, had the head of a bird, tusks, spikes, were made of jelly, the list went on and on. Maybe most surprisingly, one of them looked like a first year with a completely grown beard, that looked nice and stylized and not at all patchy. The swarm of excited teens were making their way towards me, and I promptly moved to the side as much as I could, near one of the pillars. I heard someone with goat eyes and horns, that were decoratively adorned with shiny gold jewelry, say "Oh my gosh, I'm so excited for matching day. What familiar do you hope you get?"

Someone with almost entirely human features turned towards them, though I could see the hint of tusks sticking from their mouth and noticed pointy ears. They wore a bright red tie with their uniform. "Oh I really hope I get a dog.. I know a lot of people get dog-bears, crow griffins, but I think it would be really neat to just have a dog. Maybe a golden retriever." They cupped their round face and smiled.

Me, standing directly near them, and staring without thinking, drew their attention. I felt self conscious all at once - *what a weirdo*. Bright red tie smiled wider seeing me. "Are you a new student? That's so exciting! You better hurry with us though, matching day is starting soon."

“Oh, uh yeah, of course! Thank you.” I stepped in stride with them. “So this matching day.. I’m new to everything.. being a transfer and just moving here and all..” I tried to think of a more elaborate cover story, but gave up. “So how does it work? Is there anything I need to do?”

Shiny goat horns baaaed mixed with a laugh, which was actually kind of adorable. I tried not to smile too big, in case that was rude. They made knowing eye contact with red tie, though I was unsure about what. I interpreted as “new kids, am I right?”. The crowd turned before the forest, taking one of the paths towards a ring of circular purple stones. Shiny horns turned back towards me. “No worries, newbie! It’s nothing you need to practice for! Matching day is about finding the familiar that’s right for you, a companion animal to assist with your magic and daily life. My brother and his familiar are actually awesome, they make such a good pair. I used to have to wake him all the time, and he’d grumble and snap at me, and I was like geez. But he’s so much happier with his watch-dog, it’s great since he has time flow M.O.S.S. type so he knows when to move on from a task he engaged with. And his magic is so cool, he has time manipulation and flames that-”

“Darla, you know I love to hear you talk about magic accessibility-” Darla gave a smile to red tie. “Can I cut you off for a second to go over the basics?” Darla nodded, slightly sheepishly (ha). Red tie held up their fist and started counting on their fingers. “Let’s see. First, the purple stone portal will glow when the 2nd moon is in alignment. Second,

the bridge will be made to the familiar realm. Third, each student will go one by one to the portal. Fourth, they'll think of special interests, hyperfixations, any of the key parts of themselves that they enjoy. Finally, they'll think of things they wish for help on, and ask Cerkerborous, the great familiar, to guide them and swear friendship and devotion to their familiar. After that, your familiar will appear from the portal and your bond will be made. We're going to have classes on caretaking following this, so that'll explain most of it! it's a good thing you arrived today."

I was stunned. Had the amulet brought me to a neurodivergent ADHD friendly fantasy world? Every time they talked so openly, I thought 'someone is definitely going to be weirded out or judge us for this conversation' yet it was clear that they had no hold-ups at all. I also wasn't even sure what all those words meant. What was the difference between hyperfixations and special interests again? It probably wasn't important right now.

Darla thumped me on the back "Don't hurt your brain there! It'll be just fine, newbie, you'll be with us."

Red tie nodded. "I can re-instruct if necessary."

I smiled, trying my best to not look nervous. "Thank you! I appreciate it, I really do."

All the students had spread around the circle of stones now, murmuring excitedly and waiting. Someone who appeared much older, likely a teacher, with folded golden wings and red neck frills stood towards the center of the circle warmly smiling.

And then, I could tell it was starting. The sky darkened just a little, and I could see the hint of a blue-ish moon peeking out of the clouds. I was surprised by how visible it was with the sun still shining above.

The golden winged teacher held their hand up. "Matching ceremony time!" The students cheered. "Okay Bevel, you're up first, if you're still feeling okay with that."

Bevel, I assumed, a teen with fluffy hair and four arms stood forward. "Yes, I'm ready." I could see them focusing and muttering to themselves a bit. Several minutes passed, and then, out popped a red stingray like creature, yet it floated on the air and had three tails.

As they were called up, each student went and focused before a creature appeared. There were crow griffins and dog-bears just like red tie had said, and one person got a tortoise that had a sapling growing from its back. Then, Darla was called up. Before she started, she went up to the teacher and said "Oh also there's a newbie with us! The one without the uniform by Higgins." She pointed towards red tie and I.

Golden wings nodded. “Thanks for letting me know, they can go after you if they’re ready.”

Darla then went towards the center of the circle and closed their eyes. We waited a long time, it seemed perhaps longer than most, as perhaps they went on a long winded explanation of all the things they enjoyed and wanted. Then, they opened their eyes and smiled. What appeared to be a squishy blocky human shaped figure with three eyes stepped through. It was taller and wider than Darla. It opened its arms and they hugged for a moment, before they walked back towards us. We parted slightly to make room. Higgins, who I had referred to as red tie before, smiled wide enough to show the length of their tusks. “Wow Darla, your familiar seems really nice and well suited to you.”

Darla said “Yeah, they’re awesome!! I can’t wait to introduce y’all. Newbie, are you ready? You can also go later if you want.”

“No, I think I got this. Thank you!” I took a deep breath. Don’t mess up, everyone’s watching you, and it’s like a presentation you didn’t prepare for, but also it’s fine. Everything is fine. Just chill, and don’t embarrass yourself. I started walking forward nervously clenching and unclenching my fists.

Golden wings held an arm out towards my shoulder. “Hello, it’s nice to meet you. I’m head of familiar caretaking here. My name is Fangs.” Internally, I was amused by the name, but I did my best serious face. “Nice to meet you too. I’m Rose.”

Fangs said “Just relax, it’s perfectly normal to be nervous. I’m not sure where you’re from, but no one is going to judge you here. Our head of social skills and support has done their best to encourage everyone to have open hearts and minds. When you’re ready, step into the center of the circle and focus on what you’d like in your familiar.”

I stepped towards the center, and took a deep breath. I tried to think of my interests. I did lots of school work, sure. So maybe robotics or biology or something? But rarely did they spark pure joy, it was more anxiety than anything. Before high school, I remembered that I would read all the time, to the point that I would have an open book while I walked hallways and dodged people without looking up. Books about magical fantasy worlds, like this one. Talking animals, quests, magic, missing home.. I didn’t want to think about that part yet. Though none of those had neurodivergent characters. But I saw myself in them, in their joy for magic and trusting in friendships and general silliness. So I put my mind back to familiars, this time thinking clearly that I was interested in magic and learning all I could from this world. That I loved animals and silliness and would do my best to embrace it. I wasn’t sure what I wanted in terms of a familiar fully. Someone that would help me understand and accustom myself to this world, and to work through my anxieties of failure like not doing the right thing for group projects. And I definitely wanted a soft creature. I hoped that was enough thoughts, and finally I tried to thank sir borkeous? Cerbous? cerborkeous? The great familiar. I opened my eyes and and looked up. The purple moon shone and a shadow started to pass over. Then I realized, that wasn’t a shadow! A black cat with bat wings and glowing

golden eyes swooped down and landed on my shoulder, it's tail curling around my neck. I reached up tentatively to touch it and felt that it was the softest creature ever. I beamed and walked to the edge of the circle, to my new friends congratulating me.

Then the rest of the students went, including Higgins. They did in fact get their dog, though it was a yellow lab, and I wondered if that was a mistake by the familiar god or if Higgins didn't know what breeds of dogs were. They were beaming and petting their dog, so it didn't seem like it mattered much. Then everyone headed back towards the school, for our first caretaking class with Fangs. I was excited, I really was. I should at some point figure out what getting home was like, but I wasn't one to look a fantasy portal gift horse in the mouth. People cared for each other here. I could openly have ADHD and have support and practice magic that was based on my interests and everything.

Inspiration:

[The Owl House](#)

[Percy Jackson and the Olympians](#)

[Phantom Toll Booth](#)

[Little Witch Academia](#)

[Pokemon](#)