

# Backstory

Lunaga had always been unusually curious: Even as a young Noki growing up in Noki Bay on Isle Delfino her parents and peers always had to look after her, making sure she doesn't harm herself by accident or anything like that. The most serious incident at the time was when she wanted to get a good look at a fresh coconut growing on a palm tree: she managed to climb upwards, but when she analyzed the coconut she lost her footing and fell to the ground, causing a crack in her shell that hasn't healed since.

Her parents lived relatively simple lives: They both patrolled the surrounding ocean to ensure that nobody was disrupting the ocean's harmony. Her little brother, Solega, was similarly curious and they were often seen together.

When it came time to pursue higher education, Lunaga chose the field of marine biology at Shellendorf University, a common field for a Noki. She initially decided for it due to the ease of getting some hands-on experience since the ocean was right nearby, and it did satisfy her need for knowledge initially.

However, marine biology didn't stay her focus forever: She often skipped lectures in favor of reading up on other topics in the library. She was especially interested in plants growing in the desert: Vegetation had little issue growing near the ocean where she lived, but the different ways plantlife managed to survive in such arid locations fascinated her.

She wasn't the only one who was skipping lectures: Sabbia Bagna, a female Noki with a red shell, was often the only other person in the library. They talked when they had the opportunity, and Lunaga discovered that Sabbia was fascinated with the skies and especially what lies beyond them: space. She was fascinated by the seemingly infinite size and scale of it and wanted to find out what it's like to be outside of the realm of this world.

Soon, instead of studying on their own, they often spent the whole day just telling each other about their respective passion, and over a few months a deep bond of trust developed between them. They decided that they each want to help the other find out what they want to know, and they started with Lunaga's dream of seeing the desert, specifically Dry Dry Desert.

Preparing for their upcoming journey was difficult: They had to learn Mouser, the language spoken by most desert-dwellers, they had to calculate how much water they need to bring so that they don't dehydrate, which was especially important for a Noki, and they had to make a precise plan of what they wanted to observe there - water reserves were strict, so they had to be conscious about their time spent in the desert. Additionally, they had to be discreet about all that - they were sure that if somebody thought out, they'd try to stop them.

So, after a few more months of preparation, they were ready: They had enough water to last over a month in the desert, all stored in a Bag of Holding, as well as reserve water for one person each stored in another, smaller Bag of Holding that they always kept on-person. They had an intricate plan for what they wanted to do while in the desert. And, of course, they had enough parchment to contain all their findings and then some.

The first few weeks in the desert worked out fine: Sabbia herself had become fascinated with life in the desert after Lunaga told her so much about it, so it was a great time for both of

them. After dusk fell, they were already making plans for their next journeys - space was still an impossibility, but there were many other locations they could research in the meantime. About one week before their planned return, they were talking in the night, as usual, and Lunaga happily listened to Sabbia explaining to her some of the theories she had about how life in their land first blossomed.

However, while they were relaxing, a gang of Little Mousers attacked them, trying to steal their water resources. Sabbia tried to fend them off, but to no avail. She also lost her personal water reserve in the process. The bandits left them alive, but they only had enough water for one person left.

Both of them knew well enough that sharing the water wouldn't save both of them; in fact, it'd most likely lead to neither of them surviving. So, they had to decide on which of them should survive. Both of them knew that, but it took some time for the crucial realization to hit: If one of them survives, the other one has to be left behind to die. Neither of them wanted the other to die, but Sabbia kept arguing that since Lunaga's water reserve was left behind, she should use it to survive.

Before they parted ways for the last time, Sabbia asked only one thing of Lunaga: "Please, find out what it's like in space, for my sake." With that parting wish, Lunaga returned to her hometown, eager to fulfill Sabbia's will.

As soon as she got back home to Noki Bay, she wrote the following question on a small piece of parchment: "What does space look like?" She decided to carry this simple question, the essence of Sabbia's final request, with her at all times until she could find the answer. It was her motivation to move forward, but also a reminder of the things she already lost. She researched everything she could find out about space: First, she taught herself Luma, the language of the stars, so that she could read a wider range of literature. However, she soon realized that most of what she could find in scientific books were things she already knew from Sabbia. So, she turned to Luma folklore, hoping to find some leads there. Among them, she kept finding mentions of a so-called "Mother of the Stars", a being with an incredible influence that patrols the galaxies in order to protect them. She even found some connections with local stories about the Hero of Legend, leading her to be intrigued by this Mother of the Stars even further.

She decided to drop out of university and spent the entire next year researching this being, holding on to this one last strand of hope. She travelled to Luma settlements all over the land in search of any more hints about the Mother of the Stars. She was still not entirely convinced of her existence, so even if she could prove that she was nothing more than legend she would make progress in that she could follow another line of reasoning.

After piecing together multiple legends from all over the land, she finally found what she assumed to be a ritual to summon the Mother of the Stars.

Said ritual needed valuable materials from different parts of the realm: Snow from the highest peaks, minerals from hidden caves and even parts from dangerous monsters. She knew that finding all those would be incredibly risky, but she couldn't give up now.

Without her realizing it, the day she decided to embark on that journey was exactly one year after she left Sabbia to die in the desert. As she packed her things, she looked at the note she wrote herself one last time. But as she read it, she noticed that the letters became increasingly hard to read as time progressed. She snapped out of her focus and, in shock, realized that the whole room had become incredibly bright. After a few seconds, the

brightness returned to normal and she saw a figure that looked like a woman wearing a long dress, about twice as tall as her. Additionally, the figure before her didn't have skin or anything else like it: Her whole surface looked like the night sky, a dark blue with glittering dots on it. This was identical to the depictions of messengers of the Mother of the Stars she read about in various legends.

While Lunaga was still in shock, she could hear a voice, seemingly coming from inside her head: "You, who have spent one continuous rotation of your planet around the star looking for me, what do you wish for?" The words forced Lunaga out of her shock. This is what she's been waiting for! This is what she's been working towards! How does one address such a being? The legends never spoke of that, she had hoped to find that out before the summoning ritual! Would it be rude to look through her collection of legends now, or - while she was still thinking about that, the words practically stumbled out of her mouth. "I-I would like to see what space is like." The voice in her head replied. "Oh, that is trivial. Just look up at the sky, and you will see its infinite size before you."

Shocked at how hard it is to put such a simple wish into concrete words, she tried to correct herself. "Oh, um, no, I mean, I wish to see space from within space itself, outside of the bounds of this realm."

"Now that is a question better suited for someone like me. Well, after you spent such a long amount of time on solely the conquest of my being, that is something I can grant you. Do you want to see it now or at another time?"

Lunaga was almost shocked at how easy this seemed. She could just... see space? The wish she's been working towards, and she could just... get it granted? This is what she always wanted, and yet...

"Well, erm, there is one more thing, maybe, if I'm allowed to ask..."

"Oh, of course, go ahead."

In the end, going to space wasn't her wish. It was an inherited wish, one she tried to do her best to fulfill, but she could only ever fulfill it by proxy. Of course she wanted to see space, too, but the reason she devoted the last entire year to finding the Mother of the Stars, it was all because of her. So... is this really fair?

"Is it possible to see space with another person? To be more specific... a person that is no longer with me, a person that..." she swallowed, realizing that she never actually said what she was about to say. She's known it for so long now, it almost seemed natural to her, and yet she was having so much trouble putting it into concrete words.

"The person I want to see space with has died. Her name is Sabbia Bagna. She is dead and I got to live on instead of her. But now, I want to repay this to her. Please, if you can, I want you to bring back Sabbia and let me witness the true beauty of space together with her."

After that, the messenger fell quiet for a few seconds. She wasn't sure what it was thinking, but she somehow felt relieved finally getting those words out of her mind and out into the world, even if no other person has heard them.

"Well now, that is a wish more fitting for someone like the Mother of the Stars. Before I get ahead of myself: Yes, it is in my power to bring back the Noki Sabbia Bagna who has lost her life in the desert and who is now no longer residing within this world. However, I will not be able to grant such a wish if I get nothing in return."

Lunaga's eyes lit up. "So, it is possible? What do you need?" Actually, what does a seemingly omnipotent being like her need? Is it really anything she could offer?

“Of course it is something you can offer me. In fact, it is something only you can offer me. You see, I keep watch of all the planets in all of space. The small ones, the big ones made of gas, any planet. However, this macroscopic view makes me unable to truly appreciate the finer details of these planets. The things that excite you... the plantlife, the people, the culture, I am interested in all these things and yet I am unable to ever know them myself, for seeing these things means not seeing the whole picture. So, I can truly only experience these by proxy. And that proxy, in the case of this planet... could be you.”

“I... uh... what?”

“You see, what I want you to do is experience everything this land has to offer. If you do so, I will also experience all these details, albeit not directly.”

“So, should I... keep a journal?” Uncommon for her, Lunaga spoke before she could think about what to say. This was all just moving so fast, there was no way for her to process this in time.

“Oh, no, a journal is not necessary. You see, if we agree to this little trade, then I will automatically gain all the knowledge that you have, and so I will be able to gain all the experiences I need. On the other hand, my presence in your mind will also give you powers beyond human understanding. You will need those, for experiencing everything also means experiencing the greatest dangers this world has to offer. In return, I will bring the Noki called Sabbia Bagna back to this world, and let the both of you experience space first-hand. Now then, do you agree to those conditions?”

She should probably think about this. The messenger even said that it's going to be dangerous. And yet, even the mention of Sabbia's name and the promise the Mother of the Stars made...

“Yes, I agree.”

“Very good. In order to channel the special powers you gain, please use this.”

The messenger then started shrinking and kept getting smaller. Soon, it was smaller than her, but it kept decreasing in size. Finally, it turned into a perfect sphere, fitting comfortably into her fist. It seemed to be made of the same material as the messenger itself, as little dots sparkled inside of the orb laying before her. Cautiously, she picked it up and investigated it. On further inspection, there were even more dots than she initially saw. Hundreds, maybe even thousands of small points of concentrated light, all shining inside this ball.

“Now then, the form that you refer to as ‘messenger’ is no longer necessary. I can comfortably contact you like this now that you agreed to our trade.”

After that, the realization of what just happened finally hit her, it hit her so hard even that she collapsed to the ground. In the span of these last few minutes, she got closer to fulfilling Sabbia's wish than she ever got in the year before.

“Oh, that is not necessarily true. Were it not for the long journey towards summoning me, these past moments would not have happened.”

Lunaga was initially shocked at the Mother of the Stars' ability to read her thoughts, but then she realized that it was perfectly natural, given the circumstances: According to her, the Mother inhabited her head now, so of course she could read her thoughts.

“Indeed. Now then, I am impressed at the knowledge you already gained. This is going to make the rest of the gathering much easier.”

One thing was still not clear to Lunaga, however: Why would there be this complicated procedure of summoning her when that is not actually the way to summon her?

“Oh, that is trivial. You see, try recalling the time you and the Noki called Solega Lassia went on a journey through the woods next to the home you occupied in your childhood in order to find a weird animal that was described to you by a classmate. On the way there, you learned a lot about the ecosystem of this forest, including how one can accidentally anger certain animals and which ones definitely not to anger, right?”

Lunaga could almost feel the wounds again. Back then, she cursed her big shell and how inconvenient it made exploring, but she might have gotten genuinely hurt if it weren't for this piece of natural armor.

“Indeed, that is the way of evolution. There is always a reason behind these things you call ‘weird’: It is merely the most optimal way. So, as I was saying, after all that, you finally found the weird animal you were looking for, right?”

Lunaga had to think for a few seconds before she remembered. In the end, it was just a stray animal that some pranksters covered in glue.

“But in the end, the takeaway you had from that journey was not that some kids take out their aggressions on relatively helpless animals, it was the discoveries about the local wildlife, was it not?”

Lunaga nodded, realizing how foolish that action was immediately afterwards - nobody was there to nod towards.

“So, what I am trying to say is that for any journey, what's the most important from the perspective of knowledge isn't the result but the journey itself. The conquest for knowledge will always birth more knowledge, and that's precisely what you did. In the end, your preparation for the summoning ritual was the summoning ritual.”

With that, the voice fell quiet for a bit, leaving Lunaga to look back on all that has happened so far. She finally had a lead on how to get to space, and bring back Sabbia in the process. And, she was also chosen by such an important being, the Mother of the Stars-

“Sorry to intervene, but... you're actually not all that special. I've currently got similar deals with 11037 other gatherers.”

Lunaga was taken aback by that number. Eleven thousand and thirty-seven. Such a huge amount of people, all on a similar journey. What was their motivation? Did they, too, lose someone important to them? And... will they succeed?

Even though it's not necessary for her pact, Lunaga record everything she encounters into a personal journal. She plans to show it to Sabbia when they get reunited.

## Important People in her life

### Solaga Lassia

male Noki, 19 y/o, currently studying anthropology at Greatfin University, Delfino Plaza.

In their childhood, Lunaga and Solaga often explored the surroundings of Noki Bay together. As they grew older, Solaga showed more of an interest in the field of anthropology, but they still remained close siblings. Although they don't see each other too often now that they're going to different universities, they still trust each other a whole lot.

In fact, Solaga is the only one to whom Lunaga told the whole story behind Sabbia's death.

He also proved rather helpful in pointing Lunaga towards good places to research Luma mythology and played a vital role in Lunaga's search for the Mother of the Stars.

## Satella and Astero Lassia

Satella and Astero Lassia are the parents of Lunaga and Solaga. They both work humble jobs in the coast guard of Noki Bay, overseeing the bay and making sure nobody mistreats the ecosystem.

They've been supportive of their children for their whole lives, but after Sabbia's death Lunaga cut off almost all contact with her parents: she didn't want to risk them finding out about what happened in Dry Dry Desert.

## Luario

Luario is a Luma who works as a researcher of space at a research lab on the Shooting Star Summit. When approached by Lunaga about Luma folklore, he was impressed by her knowledge and decided to allow her to help in the lab and help Lunaga with her research in return as well as give her a place to stay while she's in the area.

He's one of the few people she told about her deal with the Mother of the Stars, although she didn't tell him the reason for seeking the Mother out in the first place.

Luario's research lab was the place where she first met the Mother - she initially came to the lab in order to stock up on some materials for her quest. As such, she had to explain why she didn't set off on her search after all, and he told her about her meeting with the Mother. Together, they spent the first weeks after her deal testing out the bounds of her new powers, which also led to some collateral damage to the lab.

## Sabbia's guardian(s)

Although Sabbia never mentioned anything about them, Lunaga assumes that Sabbia still has parents or some other kind of guardian. However, she's really afraid of finding out their identity - it's easier to just see them as this abstract identity.

Lunaga and Sabbia didn't tell anybody about their trip to Dry Dry Desert, so Sabbia's parents probably don't know about what happened to her.

## Mother of the Stars

A legendary entity with connections to the Hero of Legend, the Mother of the Stars forms pacts with thousands of mortals all over existence in order to widen her knowledge of the details of various planets. Said mortals gain a small fraction of her powers in order to aid them on their journey for knowledge.

Although not evil, it seems that the Mother is unable to understand the worries of mortal folk on a conceptual level, showing a disregard for said issues.