

# Devil Town

by Milo Pittman

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# Prologue: Ruler of Everything

What's up?

The name's Surf, and I'll be telling you this story today. I felt like I had to.

For those who don't know, I'm the creator of Arcadia, the universe, Arcadium, the planet this story is on, and more specifically Devil Town, the incredibly... unique place I'll be telling you about. I'm also an anthropomorphic orca, but that's mainly a random detail that shouldn't affect your reading of this story too much. Orcas can tell stories just as well as humans, y'know?

If you need to give a friend a short summary of this whole thing before passing them this story, tell them this:

This is a story about a small town, a spooky festival, some heroes and villains, family bonds, mischievous gods and pure chaos.

# Chapter I: Devil Town

It was a warm autumn day, one of those ones that marks the end of the season and the beginning of the winter. Three friends were hanging out (there was another group of three hanging somewhere else, but for my sanity let's just focus on these ones.), relaxing under a tree with the last brown and orange leaves falling above their heads. It was a pretty relaxed and normal day in Devil Town, a small town in a small country on the ultimately small planet of Arcadium. It was a place with just a few shops, a place where gossip got around and drama was plentiful. It was also where my least favourite child, Spectre, spent their time. They were a demigod I made to take care of things on Arcadium when I was away taking care of other planets, or the afterlife, or the rest of the universe, but I've had to be rather watchful because they spend most of their time fucking with things and leaving me to fix 'em. (I'm thinking they do it for attention, but as if they'd admit it if I asked. Every once in a while they complain about having to deal with everything to do with Arcadium, so I help out wherever I can, even if some of the problems are caused by Spectre themselves. What are dads for?) Few years back they gave that other group of three (not that one under the tree) superpowers, just to see what would happen.

The issue with that already stupid act is that these two groups were siblings. And 'kindly' giving one of these groups superpowers was a surefire way to create the worst sibling rivalry I've ever seen. It changed the argument from 'I hate your friends' to 'I'm better than you, and you can't do anything about it!'

So basically the main drama in this small rural town is that three sets of siblings are destroying all sorts of things just to set each other straight.

But enough about the villains, they're not even here right now. Let's discuss our main three people. Their names are Zap, Era and Brew.

Zap had messy lightning yellow hair, a crown almost consistently on his head. His outfit was almost always the same; a yellow blazer over a checkerboard crop top, with black and yellow pants. Brew always teased them for dressing like a bee.

Brew is usually teased back for dressing like a green apple. They usually wear those sciency safety goggles, a tank top, and green pyjama pants.

Finally, Era has long wavy hair, the tips done a dark blue while the rest is done a light red.

They usually wear a blue blazer, a graphic shirt (usually of some game character or something they made at home), and jeans.

Anyway, this trio of colour-themed weirdos were relaxing under a tree, chatting about stuff like how weird the leaves falling is, how weird it is they haven't seen their siblings for a while (and by a while they mean for roughly two days, having all been annoyed by their siblings the day before yesterday) and what they were going to do to celebrate winter.

Zap spoke on the first topic, asking questions to the sky instead of to his friends. 'I get gravity and shit, but why should the leaves fall? And then they just get back up anyway after winter.'

The statement was so remarkably smart to begin, but stupid to end that the difference left the other two silent for a minute, partially pondering the question itself, and partially pondering their friendship with Zap. It was a while until Era replied.

‘Probably something to do with time. Gives the branches time to grow before the leaves come back.’

‘Pretty sure its new leaves growing in spring. The old ones just shrivel up and disappear in the snow.’ Brew, having a short spurt of brainpower was the last to say something, to which the other two simply nodded in agreement/curiosity.

So yeah, that’s the trio we’re dealing with for now.

## Chapter II: Dr Sunshine Is Dead

I'd just like to preface this chapter by saying that you mortals are pretty fucked up.

So basically, I kinda accidentally made a thing where Devil Town has no sunlight for four months of the year. See, this current version of the planet is the second version I've made. I'm sure you people can relate to that thing where you experiment and accidentally mess up a file or something and try and duplicate it to make another version, only to accidentally copy the glitch over? It was that kind of issue. And while some older civilisations here adapted to survive, hid when they could, that sorta thing... Devil Town decided to celebrate this time with a massive spooky-ass festival. They call it the 'Night of the Dying Sunshine'. To be fair, I'm supposed to not judge my own creations, so they can have their thing. Still pretty weird, though.

Tonight is the night of the festival, all sorts of flaming and glowing lights on display throughout the town square. Our friends are here, chilling and celebrating along with everyone else.

'Ooh, you guys think we're gonna go missing? Just like that kid that disappeared?' Brew was rather smug. He was talking about a case that happened a few years ago.

The Dr Sunshine case, as many people had called it, was a missing child case the town faced a few festivals ago. There were plenty of speculations on what had happened, the most popular being that some small child got mauled in the forest by wolves (a rather harsh thought to spread like wildfire), but it's still a mystery. The kid was some nobody, the only thing known about them was that they had no parents or carers, something considered weird by most (because this child was only around five years old).

'Oh shut up, you say this stupid shit every year. There's no missing kid, it was just some fake story made up to hype up this festival.' Zap sighed, shaking his head. 'As if someone would be dumb enough to go into the forest in the Dead Sunshine and not expect to go missing. There's dumb people in this town, but they're surely not that stupid.'

'You never know, maybe they didn't just walk in. Maybe they were lured in~' Era bought into the rumours, Zap the only one who wasn't a fan.

Zap sighed, holding a baseball bat as usual (albeit adorned in shimmering fairy lights for the occasion) and practice-swinging it at his friends for believing the stories of their childhood.

'Whatever. What food do we got around here?'

'Oi, ya wanna try some good ol' sweets?' A stranger yelled from a food truck, selling all sorts of pastries and desserts. They had fluffy purple hair, and had an outfit somewhat similar to Zap.

The trio all cheered and ran to the truck, each ordering a different treat. The Fluf Frozen Treat truck was almost a staple to the spooky festival, run by a somewhat shady family (some say they were part of a crime syndicate, but of course there ain't gonna be no investigation into the best part of Dying Sunshine) and selling the best tasting desserts in Arcadium.

Hands busy with tasty cold treats and minds off missing spirits, the gang walked through the spooky festival, the sun going down as everyone was buying glow sticks and lights to welcome the darkness.

Everyone seemed to quite enjoy the Night of the Dying Sunshine, and while there was a similar festival at the end of the four month period (appropriately named 'Day of the Sleeping Moonlight'), that one didn't have nearly the same attention as the Dying Sunshine. I suppose people just enjoy spooking each other and lighting up the nighttime.

The main event of the festival was the Ritual of the Dying Light. It was kinda cute watching it from above. Basically the whole town gathers in the town square, surrounded by all sorts of flames and artificial light and watches the sun go down as the sky gets darker and darker until the hundreds of thousands of stars are visible.

(This part's the sky god Itar's favourite; their delicate placement of the constellations and astronomical expertise is appreciated properly.)

Our trio was with everyone else, watching as the true beauty of all the light could be fully absorbed. Bright coloured lights fill the air; lanterns, homemade lights strung from the higher buildings across the streets, glow sticks shaped in all sorts of unique ways in the hands of every child, neon lights of the most vibrant spectrums wherever they could be fit. Reds melding into greens, purples dancing in the sky, creating pyrotechnical rainbows for the whole town to see.

It was quite a sight. But of course, as much as I love lights... I'm much more interested in the real festivities of this wondrous night.

Once the sun goes down things turn into a sort of wholesome 'purge' (but with fun instead of murder). Everyone gets to party, get a little bit (a lot) drunk, and have the night of their lives. Since there's no real concept of when 'morning' comes (except for, y'know, clocks), people usually just party until they get tired, then start the next day whenever they wake up.

The whole night was filled with fireworks, drinks shared, and overall just having an awesome time. It was like New Years, but around the middle of the year.

Tonight, our group were taking advantage of the free food and drinks, hanging out in a playground decorated in bright lights, cheap petrol station fixtures quickly strung up by the kids themselves. They were enough to light up the area, but relatively dim to the rest of the city. Zap on a swingset, Brew on a slide, and Era sitting on top of some monkey bars. They were away from most of the group, because they bought themselves plenty of food and drinks to chill away from it all.

'Ahhh, best night of the year!' Era yelled, everyone else giving a 'woo' in agreement. All three of them shot a party popper in the air, confetti floating above like a rainbow of graceful birds before falling on top of them. The group were sharing alcohol, eating all sorts of sweets and treats and chatting about everything in the festival.

Everything was going chill, until there was a poof and someone floating appeared in front of them. Now normally this was concerning for people, but for this trio and most in the town, they knew who it was. Even in the dark, the figure with white fluffy hair, a big winter jacket and short denim shorts could be recognised pretty clearly. It was Spectre, my darling child who I'm fairly confident doesn't like me. I made Spectre to look over Arcadium, but lately out of spite they've been screwing things over. It's mostly minor things, like a younger sibling who messes up an older one's game out of curiosity and attention-seeking. Regardless, it always means I have to come down and adjust things, which lets me hang with the kiddo some more.

So anyway, Spectre appeared and spooked the triad, Era almost falling off the bars but holding on.

'The fuck, Spec?' Era was a bit angry at almost being injured.

'Hey, I wasn't trying to scare ya. I just wanted to say hi! And to ask something.'

'If this is another one of your experiments, we're probably gonna say no.' Zap shook his head, tossing a can he just finished towards Brew, who caught it and threw it back, starting a game of catch between the two while Spectre was talking.

'Look, I was just gonna offer you three superpowers, but if you don't want them, that's cool.' Spectre replied, looking to them all and smiling. (I imagine most of that somewhat sinister smile was directed at me.)

At the mention of superpowers the trio seemed a bit more interested, each of them leaning in and Brew even letting the can hit him square in the head, distracted and listening close.

'Powers, you say?' Zap smirked.

'Yeah, I'm feeling bored. Dad's off in Effervian so I might fuck around with this. Make your stupid little sibling rivalries a little fairer.'

'The sibling rivalries you intensified?' Brew looked to Spectre annoyed, not too upset with the powers but still unhappy.

I'm thinking based on your names, so... Electricity for Zap, potion making for Brew, and time changing for Era.' Spectre replied, shrugging.

'That's literally just the powers our siblings have.' Era muttered, but wasn't too against the idea.

'Ooh, lets do it!' Brew nodded, most eager of them all.

With Brew's excited enthusiasm, Spectre simply clicked their fingers and all three of them felt more powerful right away. Zap winced as he felt intense electric currents flow through his entire body, as if he'd walked into a power line. Brew felt changes in his bloodstream, the chemistry inside of his cells changing as his blood got thicker and his body adjusted to these shifts. Era's mind was overpowered, his nerves telling him he was feeling pain, heat and cold and his brain unable to deal with the sudden sensations in his body.

The three all felt sharp pains for a few minutes, their bodies learning to adjust as they went from human to superhuman.

(Spectre didn't even give them any drawbacks to the powers, which is kinda stupid in terms of gifting these sorts of things.)

‘Why don’t you guys call yourselves heroes? Your siblings already consider themselves villains, why not do the opposite?’ Spectre suggested a name for the group, one that they simply nodded at, taking the idea on board but not really using it as a description.

I think the idea of heroes is rather stupid for naming them. They’re very silly and goofy. Too silly and goofy to be having powers. Surprised Spectre gave em to these people, out of the whole town.

‘Alright, well... enjoy!’ The demigod shrugged, disappearing just as fast as they appeared. The trio kinda just looked at each other with confusion. Zap held onto the chains of the swing a little tighter and clenched his face, physically struggling to actually use any of that electricity he had allegedly been granted. The other two looked at their friend with a laugh. Zap was looking fine except for his hair looking slightly more electrocuted than usual, but that was more so from the sheer effort of trying to conjure power than anything.

‘Come on, I bet you guys saw that light up! I fuckin’ sent lightning through this whole swing, the sparks were coming outta my hands!’ Zap looked to everyone, proud of himself. He got sighs of ‘wow, this guy is a little bit stupid’ from both of his friends, and grumbled because of it.

Era pointed to the sky for a moment, clearly expecting something to happen and looking disappointed when nothing did.. Brew grabbed the can from earlier, trying to summon alcohol in it for another drink, then getting upset when he couldn’t to the point he threw the can far into the distance.

‘Clearly Spectre was lying to us.’ Era grumbled a bit, looking to his friends.

‘I didn’t know Surf made the goddamn fucking god of lying!’ Brew was particularly annoyed at the mishap, so much so that he decided it was called for to talk shit about me. (I considered striking him with lightning then and there, but I suppose that’d make me look worse.)

Zap was arguably the least annoyed at things. ‘Well that sucks. How bout we go get some snacks? My shout.’ He picked up his trusty ol’ bat and got ready to go. Everyone liked the idea, so they all made their way to the town’s grocery store, one of the big chain ones with loads of aisles and stuff.



## Chapter III: PRESSURE BOMB?!?!

Lucky for them everyone was too busy at the festival to be wasting time shopping, so the only people around were roughly one worker who was very much not paying attention at all and a security guard who was sleeping soundly. It created a rather spooky, liminal vibe to the place; aisles full of food but empty of people. Perfect spot to totally not shoplift (hey, even as an omnipotent god and an unreliable narrator, capitalism sucks). Zap found a bunch of snacks, a whole shelf of sweets and chocolates that could last him ages. Curious and looking to try again, they held their bat and swung it in the air, noticing the lights on it flicker quite a bit only for them to realise as they bring the bat back aside themselves that the fairy lights they used were pretty cheap and had flickering a bit all night.

Era was in the freezer section, looking at ice creams and taking them out of their boxes before holding them in his hands and trying to melt them by speeding up time. They were eager to try and make it work, but after a minute of nothing but incredibly cold ice cream in his hands Era decided it wasn't going too well. It didn't stop him trying it with other things in the freezers, of course. After some trial and error, he struggled before managing to time shift and disappear, returning after a few minutes. He made his way around to Zap, shifting around a bit as he returned to the group.

Brew on the other hand was looking through the shops small liquor section, simply trying to melt the security scanners at the exit of the store so he could steal some things without getting his ID out (which he had, of course, but wasn't bothered checking where it was in his bag).

There was no success on his end either, but he kept trying in the hopes that it would miraculously sort itself out.

Zap and Era both grabbed a whole bunch of snacks together, getting a few bags to put it all in and heading to the self serve checkouts. Zap held his bat, tapping it against the side of the machine softly (well, as softly as a bat can be tapped against something) as he helped Era scan everything.

Seeing something scan as way more expensive than he thought, Zap tapped the bat a bit rougher than before and his eyes lit a bright yellow as 10,000 milliamps flowed through him, conducted nicely through the bat and sent right into the self checkout machine. Luck had it that Era had just moved the shopping away to safety (thanks to Takdon, the god of luck who must've been paying attention for once), as the machine's screen glitched badly, Zap's hair looked incredibly frazzled, and the checkout begun billowing smoke. The duo looked at each other with concern and panic, Brew even looking over from the exit to see what had gone on. Era was very much against having to pay the store for damaging their shit, and the idea of owing money sent him into a spiral, muttering to himself, pacing around and freaking out. He walked around a bit longer before all of a sudden everyone felt themselves move back weirdly, a feeling similar to trying to fight a gale-force wind. In just a few seconds everyone was back where they were just before Zap gave the 'final blow', with the memory of everything.

'What the fuck just happened?' Zap looked at Era, this time holding his bat still.

‘I think I just time travelled. It felt really, really weird.’ Era muttered back, a crisis now averted.

‘We probably gotta get these powers in check, I don’t wanna be destroying things constantly.’ The lightning striker replied, to which Era nodded.

Just as Era and Zap were chatting, a loud fizzling noise filled the air, and they looked to Brew to find the security checkpoint had been melted into a puddle of acid. (Parts of the floor had been melted as well, but there was little effect except for the tiles being messed up.) The other two decided that this was definitely their sign to get the hell out of there, really not wanting to see if this destruction and noise would wake up the security guard. After grabbing all of their snacks (and then some more) they dashed out of the store with their free food.

After accidentally finding out what they could do, the group went back to the town square for a drink together and a chat with their snacks. They all sipped their drinks of choice (a diner-style milkshake for Era, a vodka and an energy drink for Zap, and a green tea for Brew). Brew and Zap were talking about how badass their ‘escape’ from the grocery shop was, while Era was just taking in the scenery; Devil Town looked purely lovely during Sunshine’s Death, lights strung up carefully across the buildings, floating lanterns in the sky next to the shining stars and neon lamps on all the buildings.

‘Ahh, this is so lovely. Such a sight, all the lights everywhere. I’d go back in time to watch this over and over again.’ The accidental rookie time traveller sat back in their seat, relaxing. ‘Lucky you don’t gotta, considering that this lasts for so long every dang year.’ Zap muttered, finishing their drink quick and ordering another one.

‘Zap, I’m surprised you haven’t already died from all of those damn drinks.’ Brew muttered, casually drinking his calming tea.

‘And I’m surprised you ain’t fallen asleep like an old lady, Brewsta!’ He replied quickly, knowing full well even one vodka/energy drink ‘concoction’ was terrible for him but quite enjoying his self-assured-destruction regardless.

Era just looked at both of them and rolled his eyes with a smile.

Unfortunately for the crew, their idyllic hangout was cut short by three rather pesky arrivals. Yep, its the other group I mentioned earlier but decided to not talk about. Each of these newly superpowered kids also had a sibling that had been given powers roughly three or four years before now, so they had the time to hone and work out their powers for maximum annoying sibling power. Through these years, this group had destroyed plenty of things (and been imprisoned for it), tormented their younger siblings, and had plenty of older sibling hangouts (mostly where they would get drunk and stoned and vandalise shit). In terms of relationships, there had always been slight sibling rivalries, but Spectre being an idiot meant that the occasional argument instead became something a little more physical; which, while Zap and Thunder had a relatively unchanged friendship (because they were both daredevils already), the other two pairs had gone from friends to rather spiteful enemies. (That being said, in the last two years Brew and Moonshine have occasionally shared a drink together at the bar before ending up in a barfight.)

Zap's sibling was Thunder, a guy who gave a grand total of zero fucks about anything ever. Thunder was the most chaotic of the three, taking fun in shocking things and starting fire with lightning (or scaring people with thunder, of course). His hair was messy, a bright electric yellow with a crown on top it almost always. His outfits were commonly consisted of a singlet and gym shorts, accessorised by a choker and some goofy pin on the singlet.

Era's sibling was Chrono, someone who's time travelled to the point of being changed physically. The most prominent change is cat ears atop his head, a matching blue to his hair. He has a bleached braid at the back of his hair. Like Moonshine, Era had bandages all over his hands as well, but more so from his own 'experimenting' (amputating things then travelling back in time to see if things would come back. They mostly did.) His outfits vary widely, his most common one a big fluffy coat and swimming shorts, trying to find outfits with contradictions whenever he could.

And last but not least, Brew's sibling was Moonshine, the only person in Arcadium with worse drinking habits than Zap. Brew was rather chaotic, doing all sorts of things dangerous with his power. He worked part-time at a bar and drank day and night, using his potion making powers to his advantage. He had long green hair that he had messily tied up with an old black scrunchie. They almost exclusively wore what could be described as sleepwear; a bright green hoodie with green sweatpants, and some custom-made green slipper boots. He wears a spiked choker that he probably doesn't know how to get off, and both his hands are covered in bandages due to him misusing his powers (and getting painful acid on his hands. His hands look badly burnt.)

Zap looked to Thunder, who promptly flipped him off. 'Ugh, what do you want?'

'We heard ya got superpowers, so why don't ya come see who's the better sibling, huh?'

Thunder summoned lightning in his hand, showing off.

Zap didn't want to admit that none of them had any control over their powers yet because he didn't want to seem weak, so instead he simply accepted whatever challenge their siblings had.

Chrono mumbled a bit, annoyed at having to see his bro. 'How about we do some good ol sibling on sibling fights? Winner is the best. I'll probably win quickly, so that's cool with me.'

All three of them talked amongst themselves, before turning to their siblings and nodding.

The three pairs proceeded to split up, so the fights didn't interrupt each other (and so I could conveniently describe them as separate chapters for easier reading).

## Chapter IV: Crazy = Genius

Who better to start off with than the two most insane of the bunch?

Before they fight, I might as well give a bit of an explainer of these kids. Powers or not, Zap and Thunder have always been two adrenaline junkies who almost always seek out the worst possible situations. Credit where it's due, Spectre made a good pick for these siblings.

Electricity seemed perfectly suited to them, because the most prominent things they do are put themselves in electrical dangers constantly. When they were kids, they both often stuck metal forks into electrical outlets, or walked outside in storms purposely trying to get hit with lightning (occasionally with success). Thunder had a three year gap above Zap, so as he got a bit older and more mature he did less of the trivial things and more dangerous things like stick multiple forks in outlets at the same time. Zap didn't have the slowdown that his older brother did, still being just as stupid as before (which is probably why he's a little bit/a lot stupid). The Devil Town hospital knew them both by name, and at all times had the burn treatments and help they needed ready just in the (often) case they came in from another injury.

So, of course, these two got some crazy dangerous powers. I'm surprised that Thunder hadn't accidentally destroyed the town, and I was rather concerned how Zap would deal with his new powers.

Anyway, Zap and Thunder made their way to a wide open park where the main thing they would hurt is each other. They looked to each other, super happy to be doing dangerous things.

'You ready ta go, bro?' Thunder looked to his brother, using his powers to bring dark stormy clouds to the sky and rain to the air.

'Hell yeah! I gotta warn ya though, I'm still new to all this!'

'All good, means I'll beat ya!'

The pair stood together, then walked ten paces away from each other as if it was a duel, before Zap accidentally struck a tree near Thunder with lightning, lighting it on fire and making it fall down, his sibling rolling out of the way just in time.

'Wow, you're accidentally really good at this, huh?' Thunder dusted himself off, before striking lightning right from the sky at Zap, just barely missing him, the air getting incredibly hot as the younger sibling recouped himself.

'Fuck, this is gonna be pretty rough... Try getting better aim next time!' Zap stayed cocky, trying again to strike Thunder, this time actually hitting him hard. The older brother gained the marks of being scorched by the electricity, but none of the pain. Apparently these powers gave some resistance to dying to them. So by Takdon again, these two are lucky enough their insanity doesn't send them to Effervian. Thunder takes a minute to think before striking Zap right back twice as hard. The two follow a similar routine for a while; one strikes the other, the other recovers a bit from the shock, and hits the first back even harder.

In the process of destroying each other, they destroy a shockingly large amount of the greenery, shrubs and trees around them, starting fires that are probably problems. (Oh, nevermind. I can see Oktos, god of the land standing by to douse the fires. And presumably create a sinkhole under the brothers' house.)

Their fight, something that certainly would've killed anyone who wasn't resistant within a few minutes, lasted around four hours, during which time Zap was honing his powers impressively well. The only reason they finished was because everything was lit on fire (something they weren't immune to) and as such they decided to avoid actually dying. The two fighters simply decided that they were both equally strong (and stupid), and made their way back to the cafe they were just sitting at.

## Chapter V: that was fun, goodbye.

While Zap and Thunder went off to a park, Era and Chrono agreed to head to a lake on the outskirts of town. It was somewhere they went to quite a bit as kids, often trying to push each other in the water before resorting to both jumping in and swimming. When they were younger, the two would go camping monthly at the lake, setting up tents and a picnic blanket, where they would eat dinner and stargaze at night, each of them seeing who could stay up longer. (It was usually Chrono, being older he would find ways to get Era to sleep. When he initially learnt to control his powers, he would cheat by travelling backward in time and sleeping while Era gathered firewood, meaning he could have more energy to stay up.) Era liked more of the setup of camping, enjoying going into nature and getting firewood, finding food for them both, while Chrono was more interested in what happened once they were all set up; cooking dinners, making hot chocolate, setting up beds for when they fell asleep.

The lake had so many memories to them, so it was a good choice to come back to.

Now, its important to note that I'd hardly describe this as a 'fight', just some petty 'why're you hitting yourself' things. Also, if anyone has any questions on how time travel works, just remember that I'm just an orca, you're just a human (I assume) and there's just some things in this world that people will just never know.

Anyway, the two walked together and talked about all the memories they shared with the place, neither of them actually deciding to come back here but more so they just walked where it felt right, where their feet knew where to take them. They got to the water, standing at a dock adorned with oil lanterns hanging off the edges and both of them went to push each other right in. When they failed, they both chuckled a bit.

'Huh, just like old times?' Era smiled softly.

'Yeah, just like old times.'

Chrono seemed to get an idea and disappeared for a second before returning, Era being pushed by what looked like an invisible force right into the water. He fumbled around a bit, spitting out the water he accidentally drank.

'Dude, what the fuck just happened?' Era got out of the water, shaking himself dry like a dog and wetting Chrono on purpose.

'I used time travel. Just went back a little bit, pushed you, then came back.' The older brother recoiled, huffing at being splashed.

'Huh, that's pretty neat. How do I do that?'

'Oh, easy. You just visualise a time in your head, picture it clearly, then basically wish yourself there.'

Era took a second before disappearing and reappearing, crossing his arms proudly as Chrono was pushed into the water.

'See? There ya go!'

The older brother was impressed, getting out of the water and splashing Era like he splashed them.

‘Huh, I’m pretty good! This time travelling stuff is super fun.’

The brothers, now both soaking wet, went to sit down at a bench, wanting to terrorise each other with their powers a bit more, taking some time to relax and recharge first.

‘Can I show you why my powers are better than yours?’ Chrono smirked smugly, wanting to flex on his bro.

‘Yeah, go on. What makes yours better?’ Era looked over, crossing his arms expectantly.

Chrono sighed deeply, summoning a wave of flowers that hit Era softly, surrounding him with a variety of delicate, pastel colours and petals that enveloped him before disappearing in a wind and flying away past him.

‘What does pollen have to do with time?’

‘They’re seasonal powers, obviously. It’s spring, so I can summon flowers. Pretty cool, huh?’

Era paused a bit, looking at the flowers. ‘Okay, that’s pretty cool. How did you find out you could do this kind of thing?’

‘It actually happened a few springtimes ago, I was laying near the lake and sighing, thinking about hanging out like we had. How you’d always find some flowers to pick, you know? And as I was laying on the ground I noticed there were all sorts of colourful flowers growing all around me.’

‘You were thinking about us hanging out? Why didn’t you mention that to me?’

Chrono sighed, thinking before he spoke again. ‘Well, y’know, we barely ever see each other. If we do it’s because I’ve been pranking you and your friends, because Thunder and Moon tell me to.’

‘I would’ve hung out if you asked me too, I’ve been thinking about going on another camp for ages!’

The pair looked to each other, sighing in resolution and laid down next to each other on the grass near the lake for a while.

‘Anyway, weren’t we supposed to be proving who was better or something? I think we kind of failed in that regard...’

‘Hm? Oh, yeah. Wanna just say we’re both equally good and move on? I’m hungry again and I’d love to head back and eat.’

‘Sounds like a plan.’

And after what couldn’t be declared a fight at all, the pair made their way back to the town square to meet up with everyone else.

## Chapter VI: Toxic

Finally, Brew and Moonshine looked to each other and headed into a nearby bar, sitting together on the stools.

‘So... powers, huh?’ Moonshine looked to his younger bro, ordering two vodka cruisers.

‘Yeah, pretty awesome. I think we should test it out, you down?’

‘Fuck yeah, dude.’

Once their drinks were delivered, they both drank quickly, finishing them nearly instantly.

They both looked into space for a while after finishing the full bottle, Brew shaking his head.

‘Spectre can have the powers back.’

‘The fuck?’

‘If I can’t feel the drunk, I don’t want to live.’

‘Fair enough. You get used to it, though.’ Moonshine muttered, turning to the bartender again. ‘Hey, can we get some absinthe?’

The request got a bit of confusion from the owner. ‘You want it... in something, or just straight? I know you can handle it, but you sure your bro can?’

Moonshine leaned in closer, whispering to him in response. ‘Look, if its what gets me drunk with immunity, then maybe it’ll get ‘im hammered enough I can just send him home to bed or somethin’ like the baby he is.’

This led to a shrug from the bartender who went to grab the drink as he was asked.

‘What’s absinthe?’ Brew asked curiously, never hearing the word before.

‘Seventy-four percent alcohol content, thas’ what. Usually would kill someone. You up for it? Either ya gotta go to hospital for severe alcohol poisonin’ or ya learn you’re an absolute badass.’ Moonshine smirked, and the bartender came up with two shot glasses of a poison green substance.

‘Let’s do it, dude.’ Brew looked hesitantly at his sibling, trusting him somewhat.

The siblings took a deep breath, grabbed the shot glass (Brew with shaky hands, slightly afraid he would die from this) and downed it quickly.

It burned down their throats, something that Brew had felt but wasn’t expecting in such intensity. He choked it down, Moonshine simply watching in a mix of astonishment and slight concern.

‘I didn’t say you should actually die, dumbass. Ya alright?’

Brew took a solid minute to actually respond, simply giving a thumbs up as he finally gained his composure and sighed happily, a weak smile on his face. ‘Yep, I can certainly feel that.

Brings me plenty of comfort knowin’ I can just drink hand sanitiser next time I want a buzz.’

‘Oh, if you’re going to do that get the citrusy ones, they always taste the best.’

The younger brother sighed, looking to Moonshine with disappointment. ‘Have you actually drank hand sanitiser?’

‘Look, would you rather pay expensive prices for a bottle of absinthe straight or pay around five dollars for a big bottle of hand sanitiser. And a bonus, it makes you look like a psychopath if you do it in public.’



Brew simply nodded, calling the bartender over and asking for another shot. There was relief in his eyes, happy this wasn't an elaborate plan from Moonshine to kill his younger brother.

Starting with the absinthe, the brothers went a few more shots before ordering other things. They had fruity cocktails, martinis, vodka cruisers, beers, just whatever they thought tasted tolerable.

Most of the time neither of them were getting any drunker, if anything sobering up as the power of the absinthe waned as they sat in the bar. Eventually, the older brother told the bartender to put the drinks on his tab and they both walked out back to the town square where they had just split up from, shocked to find Zap, Thunder, Era and Chrono already waiting right there for them.

'Ya had a tough bar fight in there, huh?' Zap looked to his mate Brew, who shook his head. 'Nope, no fighting happening in there. We were just drinking to see what we could handle, heh. Apparently the answer is absinthe.'

'Huh, good on ya.' Zap seemed impressed, clapping.

'We should get some food to celebrate us.' Era suggested, everyone kind of agreeing.

'Yeah, we don't gotta fight or anythin'!' Thunder shared the sentiment everyone was feeling, and with that they looked at the town square's small variety of shops and fought over what they would eat.

## Chapter VII: Enter: A Beginner's Guide

See, now, if this was some short story published in some magazine, that would probably be the end. A goofy joke about the group fighting each other, some chat about what friendships they made and a little bit more on where they ended up, but that's in.

Of course, I'm the best kind of narrator (a slightly obsessive one, only slightly better than the unreliable narrator), and stopping there would be missing the absolute best part of this story. Sure, some arguing siblings make a lovely story but you know what else makes a good story? That's right, surprise entrances! Read on, dear reader, for something that'll keep you invested for another five chapters and an epilogue!

It started a few hours after the group recouped, where the superpowered six were relaxing in the town square. Enjoying pizza together, chatting about their arguments, using their powers to show off, all that good stuff. They had been emptying their wallets over all the different restaurants in the square (going from ice cream to burgers to pasta to pizza) due to their lack of decision making skills.

Everyone was just about to head home and head to bed or something boring like that, when a zipper appeared on the town's fountain, a cartoonishly oversized clothing zipper just materialising against the side of the concrete. It was a classic metallic silver, much larger than a natural one as if the fountain was a massive pocket suddenly.

'Huh. That wasn't there before.' Brew pointed it out in between mouthfuls, Moonshine slapping him so hard at the back of the head he started choking.

'Wow, really? No way, I thought the mayor just started installing random zipper. I know it's not a hard race, but since when were you the dumbest in the family?'

Before Brew could check the sheer audacity such an insult would take, the zipper begun opening itself, a dark black devil's tail poking out as some otherworldly thing was coming out of it.

The group were frozen in awestruck curiosity, watching this creature come out of this mysterious portal. Whatever was escaping this zipper grabbed the sides to pull themselves out; the tail was followed by two big leather boots almost up to the knees, the emerging creature getting its two feet on the ground and using the edge of the zipper to pull themselves out. Now, standing in front of this mysterious portal (which disappeared promptly with a snap of the stranger's clawed fingers) was a being I could best describe as pure chaos. It was human enough to look not too unfamiliar to the rest but animalistic and monstrous enough to show there was no mistake in assuming it was an external force being dealt with.

The new arrival was wearing black and white clothes; black boots, baggy white pants, a torn black singlet and knife earrings that had sharpened blades. The tips of his fingers and ears were a dark, almost void-like black, and he was panting heavily as if out of breath from something.

'Finally, I'm back. This fuckin' town's the first to go once I'm in charge! And that won't be long, if Nia's right~' The stranger gave his intro to the town's festive air, totally ruining the vibe.

‘Dude. What even are you?’ Zap asked the beast, confused why they were getting evil villains introduced right after they finished fighting.

‘The name’s Axel. I’m your worst nightmare. Your new demigod. You pathetic bastards know nothing of what’s coming to your weak town~’

‘I thought the last town crazy disappeared, you sound bloody insane.’

‘Town crazy? I’m here to save this stained world and bring peace to it all!’ Axel admittedly looked absolutely insane, the ways in which his body slightly contorted in places (in ways that showed some sort of physical shaping caused by psychological damage) fitting the ways he spoke. He really looked like a physical embodiment of chaos. I bet the god of chaos himself has something to do with this, but it’s not like he’d tell me if he was intervening divinely or whatever you readers call it.

‘Bring peace? Yeah, all good, thanks. Everything seems kinda tolerable right now.’ Zap replied once again, really pushing his luck.

‘Yeah, I mean sure there’s corrupt rulers and food shortages and imbalances of power, but right here, right now,’ Moonshine paused to take a big bite of the quickly cooling pepperoni pizza sitting in front of him. ‘everything seems pretty... alright.’

‘Oh, so you think all of those things are okay? Ya really think that inaction is the best option against the horrors of the world? The constant imperfections, the ridiculous rules, it all has to fucking go! And if no one’s going to take the role of being a proper ruler,’ The intruder looked directly to the sky, where he assumed I was. ‘then I guess I gotta take the stage!’

Axel took a deep breath and pulled at part of the group. He created a zipper, opening it quickly and bringing with it an incredibly strong wind pulling everything around it, including the group, into it quickly. ‘Now, before I get any more stupid remarks, I think you should all zip it and listen to what I have to say.’

The oddly powerful stranger fell into the wormhole he summoned along with the six who were watching his ramble, zipping it behind him.

And with that, just as quickly as it had come, the evil had left Devil Town. But its damage had merely just begun.

## Chapter VIII: Turn The Lights Off

Our group of six, the self claimed heroes and villains, were all floating in a void, unable to ground themselves anywhere. The only thing they could see was a glowing starry sky full of faint and bright lights surrounding them. It was a lot like the city they were just in, but the absence of any other light, save for the few sources around them, made everything feel displacing and made the lack of grounding feel much worse. A particularly bright star hung over Axel and the whole group, making him look a lot like a looming anglerfish. The group's capturer, Axel, had enlarged himself to the size of a giant to show what he could do, but also to look like a cliché movie villain. To make everything much scarier/annoying, Axel was laughing maniacally. Clearly he learnt his techniques from someone super good at being evil.

'Don't you fuckers understand? I am Dr Sunshine, I'm the missing festival kid! You don't even know a quarter of the shit I've been through!'

Chrono sighed a bit, looking to Axel with annoyance where there should've been fear. 'Okay, well I'm glad you tripped over a rock as a child or went through something stupid, but we really, really aren't interested in your oh so dumb life.'

'I bet you all think you're top shit, but you got your brand new flashy powers from some pathetic demigod. You think I got mine from Spectre?' (Really didn't appreciate the shit talking of my darling child, but this ain't about my feelings.) 'You're all idiots. Has no one wondered what truly happened that fateful night, that missing kid at the festival all those years ago?'

Almost the entire group shook their head, Zap shrugging in a sort of 'well if you're offering an explanation' way.

'Ugh. It was a busy festival that night, full of bumbling weirdos getting too drunk for their own sanity, and I got lost in that forest just down near Berry Hill. I kept walking for ages, not sure how to get out or where I was. A fuckin' child walking through a forest with no escape.' The story was interrupted by a loud yelling from Zap, who Axel had struck with some sort of monster that was biting at his torso.

'Agh, what the fuck?' Zap tried electrocuting the creature or at least pull it away from him, but it persisted in biting at his chest and face.

'Just making sure you're paying attention, ass. Anyway, I walked for what felt like hours, then some hand just grabbed me and pulled me behind a rock. And I saw Usnia.'

That got a shocked response from everyone. A few 'what's, a 'fuck off' with immense distrust in the villain, and I'm pretty sure I heard Era say he saw it coming. I definitely wasn't expecting the god of chaos himself to be fucking around on Arcadium. I mean sure, everyone gets bored occasionally, but I usually buy a puzzle to do, not corrupt some mortals. I made a strict agreement with the gods when I made them all that they'd stay out of mortal business unless they had to. Maybe he thought he had to interfere? Doubt it. Probably just felt like causing chaos. Which, sure, was his job, but still-

Shut the fuck up, Surf.

Oh, I forgot all the gods were omnipotent. Stay out of my shit, Usnia, I'm telling a story. Alright, back to it.

‘Yep, the god of chaos himself. He just smiled the whole time, told me he was enlightening me with power, and it just felt like a snap before I accidentally summoned a wormhole.’

‘Oh, neat. I’m thinking you kinda glossed over the whole ‘god of chaos thing, bud. What do you mean enlightened you?’

‘Well he gave me my powers, obviously. I couldn’t see a whole lot, but I could feel changes. It was weird, almost as if I could feel the power in my body. But yeah, I stayed away from Devil Town because Usnia told me to, instead working on summoning a variety of things. Snacks, pets, whatever dumb things a small child could want ever. After just a little bit of experimenting, I found out I could summon just about anything, y’know?’

‘So anyway, my god Usnia made me realise that if I wanted to I could live in my own world, a place of whatever I could possibly want or need. Away from the terrible things of the world.’

Axel smiled a bit, seeming to relax as he explained his story. ‘As I was saying, I opened a wormhole and this time I jumped in. I found this lovely utopia, full of wide green plains and a quaint town centre and a whole world to myself. But just past the vista was some weird... corrupted part. It was some pitch black area, like a portal I hadn’t made.’

‘My gods, this entire interaction has just been you talking.’ Brew groaned out, looking at Axel annoyed.

Instead of getting pissed at yet another interruption, Axel was now eager to change the subject. ‘Fine, fine. I’ll get to tha point you’ve been waiting for. Inside that fucked up area were monsters I had pushed back for ages. Creatures I’d made from the worst parts of my mind and tried desperately to ignore.’

Another zipper was summoned and pulled, and a gigantic monster with claws and spikes all over their body and sharp rows of teeth and all sorts of things a child would find terrifying flew out of the hole and floated at the villain’s side. It let out a loud roar and scared everyone, getting a reaction from not only the group but also Axel, who flinched as if he hadn’t seen his creation in a while.

‘This one’s Spiny, he’s my first negative creation. Make sure you don’t make him upset, he’ll bite real hard.’ He nuzzled his head against ‘Spiny’, like one would to their pet.

‘Well this is definitely a bit weird. How’d ya go from bein’ all scared and shit to treatin’ that... thin’ like a pet?’ Zap tilted his head as if it’d give him a better look at the scenario in front of him.

‘Oh, that was what I was getting to before Brew rudely interrupted.’

‘How’d you know my name- nope, nevermind.’

‘Yeah, anyway. So I walked into this shady area, deeper and deeper, and it was like my mind was... changing. Being enlightened. The further I went into this dark area, the more I could see. The more I could understand.’

‘Right, right. So you’re fuckin’ insane. Got it.’ Thunder muttered, promptly getting cut with one of the creature’s massive claws on the arm, eliciting a scream from them.

‘What is this thing anyway? Not lookin’ for an injury, but it looks like somethin’ a kid came up with.’ Zap interjected, Axel shrugging in response.

‘It was a creation from my emotions back then, back when I entered that space.’

‘You some four year old or something? Ooh, scary claws and scary looking teeth, blah.’

‘Well, I was six, so you’re close.’

Zap seemed to take a second before his jaw dropped, everyone else having pretty much the same reaction. ‘You were... what? Tha’ means...’

‘Yep. I was a tiny kid when I was lost that fateful night. How’s that realisation feel? Knowing I wasn’t some edgy teen getting lost. I was a child. I had potential. I could’ve been as annoying as every one of you, but I lost that childhood to some fuckin’ darkness.’ Axel was breathing a bit deeper now, in the way people do when they’re stopping themselves from tearing up. He took a bit to regain his composure and sighed happily. ‘Alright, alright. I opened up, so now I’ve got to kill all six of you so not another soul hears about that little story. Sound good?’

Of course, no one wanted to be killed for this, so they got ready for a fight. Axel made sure to deliver, absolutely whooping ass (for lack of better terms) and summoning all sorts of monsters to get an unfair advantage over the team. The creatures seemed to change with his emotions; the first one more childish but as he got more passionate in the fight his monsters got bigger, scarier, sharper. It wasn’t long before our heroes and villains were rather beaten and bruised, struggling without the powers they had only just gotten used to using together.

## Chapter IX: Borderline

Sorry for glossing over this part of the fight, it's just so monumentally boring. Plenty of struggling around with no gravity, some punching, some monsters clawing, blah. The more interesting part comes around ten minutes later, all six heroes and villains were tired out, nearly dead and gone. But then Axel, in pure idiot villain fashion, looked down at them and refused to deliver the final blow. Instead, he smirked and started laughing.

'Alright, town weirdo. You gonna kill us so we can stop looking at yer ugly face?' Zap growled, long past trying to resist death.

'Fuck off. I'm just thinking of how peaceful Devil Town is going to be with you six gone and me in charge. Mind if I show ya?'

'Show us? I mean sure, its not like we'll have anything better to think of after you get rid of us.' Brew chimed in, a similar view to Zap but more so of annoyance than anything.

Axel summoned a zipper in midair and it sucked all of them in with the same force that brought them in here initially.

They sprung out of it onto a dilapidated car, all of them landing on the bonnet to find their surroundings. Axel was sitting in the car itself, watching everyone look around.

Around them was the town they knew and loved, as if they'd been brought back to normal, just like they'd left it. All lit up, a somewhat familiar smell of smoke in the air, the senses being satisfied for just a split second before realisation hit properly. The light throughout the town was not of neon and sparkling fairy lights but of flames and ashes, the buildings all around them aflame, some precariously burning and near falling to the floor. The comforting smoke of street food was poorly replicated by the hostile plumes of destroyed stalls, the amount of smoke in the air giving everything a darker, nearly monochromatic look.

'Welcome to the new Devil Town, my dear rivals. Population: two.'

'This is peaceful? You must use some pretty fuckin' outdated dictionary. I'd call this many things, but definitely not peaceful. And what do ya mean, two? I don't see a soul in this dump!' Era looked like he was straining, almost as if he was trying to use his newfound abilities to take things back in time.

'Well why don't we take a walk? Explore this home you love so much. I'm certain you'll find peace soon enough.' Axel got out of the car, leading the way. Everyone else looked to each other as they cemented the ideas they had of Axel before deciding to follow him in case he led to a way out.

Instead, he led to a weird sight. In the middle of the chaos and destruction, between two buildings barely on their foundations, was a bench where two people sat. One of them was a taller man, long white hair covering his face and baggy clothes making it hard to discern him too much.

And the other was Axel. A parallel version of him, at least. He was covered in soot and ash, pinning him as the cause of everything. The current Axel stood in front of the group, watching the interaction, while everyone else was super confused.

'Oh great, there's two of the fuckers.' Thunder muttered, Axel slapping him harshly.

‘Shut up, I wanna hear this.’

‘You proud of me? I did this for us.’ The other Axel spoke, looking up to the figure next to him with a big toothy smile as he dusted his hands off.

‘Of course I am, son. The proudest I’ve ever been.’ The figure had a gruff voice, one that sounded like it had been through plenty of life’s issues. Like a father. No one in the group recognised the man, although Era felt a faint déjà vu in seeing his face. He often perused older newspapers and could swear he remembered seeing the stranger before, but why it was in a news article puzzled him too much to mention.

‘I’ll fix up the world soon, how’s that sound?’

‘Well that’d be lovely, wouldn’t it? Means we can have all the father-son bonding time you want.’

(Present) Axel looked rather emotional watching this, while everyone just looked to him with concern.

‘Dude. You have daddy issues? That’s such... a minor thing.’ Chrono sighed, patting Axel’s shoulder and getting a sharp stare back.

‘It’s more so guardian issues in general. Bit of a pain to realise I went missing and not even my own parents cared for me. How would you fucking feel knowing that you had no friends, no enemies, no people, no parents to care about you? You just had to face the world at the nice, innocent age of five because your parents cared so much more about anything but their children? Knowing you weren’t meant to exist, you were just some throwaway child?’ Axel was sobbing, his words sharp as blades as he desperately tried defending his actions.

‘At least if I get rid of you six, and everyone else in this dumb town I can do whatever I want!’

Everyone looked to Axel, who at this point looked like an absolute mess. Instead of anger, or concern for their safety, they seemed really empathetic. They realised that their assumptions were fully wrong.

‘I think... you made up this parental guardian in this universe.’ Era muttered, connecting the dots in his mind. ‘You remember your dad, and you’re holding onto him.’

‘Uh- well, yeah. But where did he go? He didn’t care about me at all! Mum left me too, but she always seemed to hate me.’

‘Your dad... if I can remember right... there was a newspaper article, he disappeared just like you did. It was a super big search, but no one could find a trace of your parents.’

There was a long pause before anyone continued, letting the new information sink in properly.

‘I think you need therapy, not to use the town as a massive smash room-’ Zap tried quipping to raise the mood, and was swiftly punished by a monster of Axel’s summoning pinning him against the remains of a brick wall, sharp teeth threatening to kill him quickly.



## Chapter XI: BlackBoxWarrior

Axel looked at the group and a twisted smirk slowly appeared like it was in hiding, the monster holding Zap against the wall not attacking any further.

‘I’m a little bit sick of hurting you guys physically for now, so how ‘bout I take a different approach? Maybe I should spill everyone’s little secrets~’ The villain looked to them all, considering where to begin.

‘I highly doubt there’s anything we don’t already know about each other.’ Era shrugged, ready for whatever there was.

‘Oh, you sure that everyone knows that you trapped someone in a time loop while you were trying your powers?’

Everyone looked to Era with a bit of concern.

‘And that you don’t regret it?’ That elicited even more concern towards their so-called ally. Era put his hands up, looking around. His voice was more high pitched as he defended his actions. ‘Look, it was a bad person! They deserved it, they were hurting people and they deserved it!’

Zap took a deep breath and sighed. ‘If ya had good intentions, then there’s no fuss. Axel’s obviously just tryna turn us against us, just fuckin’ ignore-’ Zap was slammed harshly against the wall, effectively destroying it as the monster holding him gripped tighter.

Axel walked over to Zap, smirking as he had been. ‘As if you don’t have any secrets, lover killer?’

He grit his teeth as he looked at the villain, muttering a sharp ‘Don’t.’ as he looked at the group.

‘Don’t what? Tell Thunder what really happened to their childhood sweetheart?’ Axel patted Zap’s shoulder, walking over to Thunder.

‘What did ya do, bro? Tell me right now what this psycho insomniac is yappin’ about.’ The older lightning sibling was tearing up already.

‘Okay, you know that Candi was bad for ya, before I start.’ Zap begun, starting to explain before being interrupted.

‘What did you do?’

‘They were going behind your back, they were shaggin’ everyone, they were horrible, okay? I’m your lil bro but you know I was there for you, yeah?’

‘Zap, tell me what you did now.’

He took a deep breath, sighing. ‘Ya know that power plant we used ta play around as kids? Where the workers always had to make sure we were staying out but we all went in through a hole in tha fence anyway?’

‘Appreciate the exposition, but just get to tha point, Zap. Why is overdue hair appointment over there callin’ ya a lover killer?’

‘One night I invited Candi into the place, then took em up to a ledge right above all the active power lines, and I pushed em right into em. Burnt to a crisp.’

There was an immensely long pause in the entire group. They all stepped a bit away from Zap, who simply grumbled.

‘Yeah, I was a murderer. But it was for a good cause, hey?’

‘You still fucking killed someone, dude!’ Moonshine looked to Zap with a distinct fear in his eyes.

‘Something you’d be familiar with, huh Moonie?’ Axel joined in, getting punched square in the gut.

‘Don’t you dare give me a nickname, stain. What the fuck do ya mean about that?’

‘Ain’t you a killer too? Oh, that’s right. You haven’t been caught yet~’

Moonshine sighed, smiling a bit. ‘Oh, ha ha. You talkin’ about those accusations some alchos made against my bar saying they were poisoned?’

‘Mhm, they were just alchos. Until they actually died, hey? Then the families were crazy too, hm?’

This conversation was concerning everyone much more than the other ones, mainly because of how Moonshine replied. He wasn’t apologetic at all, simply crossing his arms as if he was waiting for Axel to get to a point. ‘Okay, yeah. I might’ve killed people. Bad era. We evidently all do bad things, huh? I mean come on, Brew, our eldest bro runs a fuckin’ drug ring.’

Everyone had shifted away from Moonshine, even Axel looking to him as if he was the real villain.

Moon clapped slowly, looking at Axel like a tiger looks to its next meal. ‘Congrats, you fuckin’ bastard. If only you had a fuckin’ dad I could blame this inherited manipulation technique on.’

‘Bro, I don’t think we’re on the same side right now.’ Brew muttered, looking to his brother with concern.

‘I don’t care, honestly. I’m on the side against Axel. If you guys think a fucked past is more important than having no god damn future then that’s entirely a you problem. What are you guys picking?’

Everyone looked to each other, taking a nearly synchronised deep breath before turning to Axel, ready to fight.

## Chapter XII: Chemical Overreaction

To Axel's credit, it's interesting to see how someone strategises in a fight when their eyes are full of tears and their words full of edge.

By no means am I siding with a psychopath with twisted morals, but I'm sure I could agree with the group who had an air of regret in fighting someone who was clearly at their core dishevelled.

Unfortunately for Axel, he did hit the group first. And he was trying to destroy the world. So friend code and priorities won out, and yet another fight broke out. But this time was different. Moonshine went to punch Axel in the face, and a sharp sizzling noise filled the air. Followed by a screech. Followed by Moon muttering 'No way.'

Now, this group weren't the brightest bunch, but this sequence had them click on almost instantly. Their powers were working.

Naturally, Moonshine went once again to grab at Axel, creating acid with his hands in an effort to hurt Axel as much as he could. He was quickly grabbed and forced away by a shadowy creature, another amalgamation clearly made in an attempt to save himself. It had sketchy edges, as if it was like a drawing Axel had done himself in a rush.

Thunder and Zap had a go, both launching at Axel and summoning lightning to attack with. Zap was still getting the hang of things, his hair frizzing out as he channelled the energy through him, Axel convulsing as he was shocked. It took him a decent bit longer this time to recover, but he fought back with yet another sketched monster, attacks fierce as normal but severely weakened from the lack of depth the creatures had.

'This'd be so much better if you weren't the type of person who doesn't go down without a fight. Please, I heavily encourage you to go down fightless.' Era muttered, clearly trying to rewind time to little success.

'And why the fuck should I do that? I'm not stopping until I physically have to, got that? You guys are all burdens on this world and I'll be getting rid of you as soon as I get the chance.' Axel summoned a few smaller monsters from zippers created against a wall, mouse-sized creatures that launched at everyone with sharp claws that tried, almost desperately, to hurt as much as they could.

But these beasts, all the ones with sketchy edges made with the remaining love Axel had in him were weak. They were easily flung away, killed, finished off. The villain didn't bother creating more. He fought physically, but stopped trying to summon things as his breaths became panting and his confident speeches became struggling words in between gasps for air. Everyone got a go at fighting Axel, who (to his credit) fought back as much as he could, despite the fact that he was clearly dying.

There was no blow that took him out right away, instead each gradual hit knocked Axel further and further down until eventually he laid on the ground.

‘You guys are still terrible people, you understand that? How’re you getting back home without me getting you there?’

‘Huh, fair point. If we spare yer sorry ass can you take us home?’ Zap muttered, charging an attack in case the answer was no.

Axel considered for a minute, sighing. ‘What’s stopping me from just doing all of this again?’

‘Dude, are you seriously considering this again? You learnt nothing at all?’ Thunder muttered, charging an attack as well.

‘Abso-fucking-lutely not. But at the very least I’ve ever so slightly learnt that you pathetic blights are maybe not the problem. And chaos might not be right. And all that other wholesome positive bullshit.’ Axel paused and thought for a moment. ‘

‘Wholesome positive bullshit? I’m with ya on that one! Hi-five, my new favourite loser!’ Brew smiled, putting a hand up for Axel.

They looked up at Brew with concern and slight anger. ‘Excuse me? Loser? What kind of insult is that to someone you’re trying to neutralise?’

‘Oh, lighten up. We’re a big group of losers, and you can consider this an invitation into the group. As long as you don’t try and kill us again, ya fuckin’ got that?’ He got a bit sterner at the end, still holding his hand up in offer of a high five. Axel looked up and thought for a bit, using his hand to get up slowly (which took the alcoholic by surprise, stumbling a bit as he helped him up).

‘Tell ya what. If you guys would be friends with me after all this chaos, then I would promise to never pull this again.’

The group considered it for a moment, shrugging.

‘Yeah, alright. You have tolerable fashion sense and a cool personality. Take us home and we can have a bit of a party.’ Zap smiled, patting Axel on the back. The ex-villain pulled a zipper on the bonnet of the car they initially came from, and it pulled them all in, this time all of them hitting something hard and blacking out.

## Epilogue: Me and Your Mama

The group awoke in a pitch black darkness, the only light a large circle of hastily placed string lights around them. The ground was covered in dead leaves and branches from the tall, foresty trees surrounding them all. A few people woke up, Zap and Brew looking around and then at each other. They tried speaking, but their voices were replaced with a croaky emptiness, as if they'd been taken from their home in each of their chests so someone else could use them.

Crickets filled the air with their chirping, the only other noise a distinct, previously unheard voice coming from the trees. I swear I could recognise it, though, and as Axel woke they perked up as much as I did watching this.

‘Soon, the sun’ll rise. The Dying Sunshine’s over, but you’ve all got long lives left to fill with chaos. Just for tonight, my job is done. Dr Sunshine has found the light.’

And with a cryptic as fuck message, this story ends. A story I had to tell, one that reveals some important points of human psychology, a study for all the readers but also a study I needed. A survey of sorts; a way to see how you people work. All the sick, twisted, lovely, unique things.