

"I can't believe Zaffre only gave us 50\$ for an amethyst eye!" Toxy complained as he entered the Tavern with a measly (for him) bag of gold coins, Julia following closely behind.

"Well maybe we would've gotten the opal eye you were pining for if you followed those Geo-dodos advice that a Jeweled Crown Cyclops teleports away if startled!" Julia remarks, arms crossed as they approached the front counter.

Toxy, in response, slammed his tiny bag onto the front counter to wake up the tavernkeeper, the lil guy half-waking in a dazed squinty-eyed state, a little bit of drool running down his chin, barely processing his surroundings. "Yeah hey here's this month's rent, it's 50\$" Toxy spoke casually to him, leaning in a little, the lil tavernkeeper starting to awkwardly count them anyway, clearly not being awake enough to hear him.

He rolled his eyes and gave his attention back to Julia, "You tried to harpoon the thing and then we had to go for a Jeweled Cyclops just to make sure that quest wasn't a complete bust!" he argued with a point.

"Last time I checked you said that you needed to do the thinking for me." she crossed her arms with a not-glare.

"I can't be right all the time, if I was wrong in this instance so are you for following my lead! You need to think a little more before you do things Pinky!

"Well I think you need to be a little more sympathetic sometimes! You just called those helpful cave birds a bunch of schemers!"

"They had beady lil jewel eyes I didn't know them!" he held his face, "You know, I bet I could have a lot more success if I didn't have a weapon happy cottontail following me around!" he waved his hands to exaggerate.

"Oh you bet?

"Yes I bet!"

"You bet what?" she leaned in, giving an actual glare this time.

". . . Uh . . . I bet . . . I bet~" he got a little nervous and started to look around, stopping as Flutter began to enter with a happy lil hum, grinning as he suddenly snagged his mail satchel.

"Hey!" the lil flying kit exclaimed.

"I bet you'll do an awful job at **THIS** quest and I do a fantastic job at **THIS** quest!" he shoved a random quest scroll into her face and then held up another random one for himself, smiling smugly in his confidence.

“Shouldn’t you two read what the quests are fir-Oooo!” Flutter was about to point out something, big adorable concerned eyes widening and glistening as Toxy without a word pulled out a chocolate chip cookie to mute the fox, with him quickly taking it and nibbling on it as he fluttered up the stairs to pin the rest.

Julia gave a pondering look and then smirked eagerly, “Well I bet the same!”

“What should we wager?” He leaned in with his smirk at her smirking face, mimicking her expression, “Perhaps errands? Some sort of embarrassing punishment for the loser? Becoming the others aide for a week?”

“. . . How about whoever wins . . . gets to throw a pizza party?” she put a finger up, keeping her cool grin as her eyes narrowed, as if trying to sound as sinister as he’s trying.

“. . .” Toxy’s smirk turned into a look of blunt annoyance, eyes half-lidding at her.

“And they can’t invite the loser!” she crossed her arms with a smirk.

“. . . Yeah . . . sure” he rolled his eyes with a blunt response, tucking the scroll into his satchel as she hugged hers to her chest.

“Oh this is going to be so much fun!”

“We were giving eachother death stares a minute ago, don’t ruin this for me!” Toxy yelled as they left the tavern, Scout sitting at the front desk, wobbling a little as he kept reaching to grab coins to drop them in a pile of coins to count them, not seeming to notice he’s finished already.

Julia’s screams grew less distant as a wide portal opened up in the grassy ground, a stone elevator popping out of it and flipping around in the air like a wheel, landing perfectly between two stone structures, Julia wobbling out, shaking her head a little before getting in a very ready pose, rolling the scroll out.

“Now if I typed in the right code this should be the-”

“Forest of Knowledge?” a nerdy voice finished her sentence.

“Oh yes actu-EEY!” she shot into a startled, wide-eyed position as infront of her was a giant tree, with a face. It had glowing teal green-leaves making it sort’ve resemble an alien willow, along with somewhat fat lips, a big pair of glasses showing off an unimpressed face and what could only be described as “mossy pimples”

"Are you the patronage?" it spoke in a lispy snotty voice (weird because it lacks a nose), and with its giant mouth Julia could see . . . bark braces?

"I'm Julia!" she greeted with a smile, holding her hand out for a shake.

"Of course you are." the tree replied, looking away before his vines reached out to emphasize the awe of her surroundings.

"We are the Trees of Knowledge, the most intelligent beings of the Forest of Knowledge!" he announced, Julia looking around to see a circle of about 8 trees, all equally nerdy looking in their own rights. "I am Salicaceae Salix, but you can call me Sal! And that's Laurales, Ginkgoaceae, Platanaceae, Pistacia, Quercus, Fraxinus and **Mulberry!**" he clenched a vine at the utter of such a name.

"Hello!" Mulberry greeted, being a notably scrawnier tree with his face closer to the base of his body for some reason, he had a lil leaf tie higher up on the trunk and his voice was a little more high-pitched.

"W-Wow!" Julia complimented, standing in awe.

"Yes we are a broad and highly intelligent commune! From the groves of the Forest of Knowledge we consume boundless queries of pure thought from a rich network of plants, animals, algae and fungi that all work in tandem to produce small trickles of intellect so that they may be processed through us so that we shall be the most sentient and wise in all of the forest!" Sal spoke with an air of broad importance as he announced this.

"So . . . what do you all do with so much brain power?" she asked curiously.

"We debate heavily on what bird is objectively the coolest!"

She blinked.

"Personally I think it is the Tan and Ripped Peacock, I mean look at that thing! It has gorgeous muscles and a pretty neat tail pattern!" he held out a branch with a small peacock coated in shades of tan orange and faint reds and yellows, it also bore sunglasses and a ripped bird torso.

"Nonsense Sal, clearly it is the Frog-Tongued Swallow!" another tree spoke, holding out a fat lil bird, suddenly shooting a long slimy frog tongue out of its break when a fly almost flew past it.

"Nonsense it is the Haren Eating Frog Eating Haren!" another tree spoke, holding a giant haren that held a giant frog in its mouth that also held a haren holding a frog in its mouth.

"I still think the chicken is pretty cool guys!" Mulberry shouted with a smile as he held up a chicken upside down, it wasn't moving.

“SHUT UP MULBERRY!” they all shouted in unison.

Julia covered her ears at the shout, one of Sal’s vines reaching out to her, “Alast! There is one thing threatening our way of life! You see our constant intake of knowledge is dependent on the ecosystem staying in balance! And something has messed up that balance, bringing our processing of vast new information from 98% to 92%!”

“ . . . Oh.” she was trying to wonder how that was bad.

“That might not seem like a lot but we’re pretty used to gaining a little more brain juice on a regular basis, we don’t exactly know what caused this as we’re trees and can’t move but we think you might just find whatever is causing it if you look hard enough!” he patted her back with a vine and then pushed her a little closer out of the circle. “Go now Pink *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, go now and restore the balance of the Forest of Knowledge!” Sal exclaimed as Julia began to walk ahead slowly.

When she was far enough, she began to talk to herself, “Gosh . . . this place is awful . . . brainy . . . I think I might have a hard time on this.” she spoke, looking around at the giant mushrooms and overgrown plants around her, even seeing some animals sporting lil glasses themselves, all under a starless night sky, did the clouds look like binary?

“Pffft! Oh Julia! You can do this!” she stopped, paws on her hips, “Just because Toxy states he’s the brains of the team doesn’t mean you can’t think on what to do next!” she says as she approaches a branching path, looking around and putting a paw under her chin.

She put her fingers on her temple and began to try to think very hard about this “Come on Julia . . . think on what’s the best appoa-”

“Go left!”

“ . . . Hm?” her ears shot up at the sound of a high-pitched happy-go-lucky voice.

“Go left Go left!”

She looked up and saw that just above her, was a brain with lil bug wings, scrawny black cartoon limbs, and a cute lil face.

“Hey there Julia! I’m your Inner-Thought-Process!” it fluttered down and greeted itself with a big smile.

“My what?”

“ . . . You’re thinking so hard right now that I’ve appeared to help you! You thought me up!” he answered, waving his arms about. “You think that you should go left!” he stated with a point.

“ . . . Do I?” her eyes narrowed curiously.

“Yes!”

“Good enough for me!” she shrugged with a smile and began to go down the left path. “So are you a hallucination?”

“Nope! I’m a visual metaphor for the process of intense thought patterns!”

“ . . . What?”

“Remember to look up! Who knows what dangers could come from above!” he advised, pointing upward with his pinky, giving a big smile the entire time.

“Oh yeah!” bright pink energy generated between her paws as she conjured an iron spear, readying herself, looking upward. “Thanks Inner-Thought-Process! I don’t know what I would’ve done if I kept looking down and got caught by surp-**EYES! EYES! EYES!**” she yelled, jumping back as when she glanced downward, she nearly fell into a giant pit full of sharp spikes, panting as she held her chest, eyes wide with panic.

She could’ve sworn she heard her Inner-Thought Process snap his fingers before he kept talking, “Whoops! Seems you got the wrong idea! Lets go the other way and see if we can stay nice and safe! Wouldn’t wanna kill ourselves would we?” he advised, keeping a cheery outlook as he kept talking in that squeaky friendly voice.

“Uh . . . Y-Yeah! Whoo!” she wiped her brow and turned, “You need to think of some better ideas Julia!” she said to herself as she poked her head, starting to walk back, the brain fairy staying behind.

“**You sure do!**” he said, voice suddenly deeper and more sarcastic, rolling his eyes and groaning.

“What was that Inner-Thought Process?” she asked from afar, over-hearing him, but not enough to fully hear what he said.

“I said you look beautiful today!” the voice went back to cheery and friendly as it began to fly back to her, following her.

“AA” Toxy screamed as his stone elevator was dropping from the sky like a comet, landing with a loud **SLAM** between two shrine structures, at a weird angle as they were far apart and . . . odd? One was sticking out of the ground at a weird angle and the other was stuck to a wall as if blasted onto it from an explosion many many decades ago, Toxy had to climb out of it, rolling out of the ground and then dusting

himself as he complained loudly to himself

"Agh! I'm surprised The Equinox hasn't had nearly as many complaints about this travel system yet! Now if I'm correct this should be-"

"Welcoom to Schmooterville!" one of the many lil furnace looking guys spoke loudly in a thick exaggerated scandinavian accent, "We are de Schmooters!"

"Agh!" he jumped a little, "Uh . . . Yeah hey I'm To-Achck!" he began to cough into his fist, covering his mouth with his paw as he just realized the air was thick with smog, "Toxy! I'm Toxy and I'm here to do a job and get money!" he spoke loudly and clearly through his fist.

"Oh w're so surry!" they held out their fists and began to suck the smog out of the air, just enough to let him breath. "We are de Schmooters!"

"Yeah I got that! Ugh . . . what is this . . . place" he grew from annoyed to in awe as he looked up at an entire town made up of plants, factories and giant furnaces, all pumping out smog into the air and pollution into the streets, having full rivers of oil running through it.

"This is Schmooterville! Come let us sher yew arond!" the lead one spoke as Toxy began to follow them, wide eyes watching these lil furnace men burn fossil fuels and bump out smog at a break-neck pace, like a hellish industrialized paradise. "We de Schmooters are a plant-based species who have evolved to consoom co'ntless amounts of carbon dioxide to servive" he spoke as he held up the mask of his suit to show a lil yellow-eyed shrively finely aged dead tree looking creature underneath, leafless roots making up a lil mustache as he spoke.

"Oh yeah you guys must've came from the era where people still burnt fossil fuels to do . . . everything."

"Yes! We Schmooters grew so dependent on it that we have curated an entire city to pump out as much pollootion as possible so that we may servive! We plan to do it sew much that we will blow a hole into the ozone to continue to polloote even m're!"

"As if I needed to be reminded of my parents." Toxy spoke, not exactly listening completely as he looked back. "Listen I know you guys will die if you don't have enough of it but don't you think you have enough to stay alive for a good wh-" he stopped as the lead one held up a metallic finger to shush him for a moment.

"But der is one problem!" he spoke loudly, waving his other arm.

". . . What's the problem?" Toxy looked like his patience was thinning.

"De Dergen!" one yelled in the back of the group.

"A dragon?" he rose an eyebrow.

"NO YOU F'OOO! **DE DING DANG DERGEN!**" the lead one yelled, waving his arms about, trying to be taken seriously.

"Dragons breath fire and smook, they're very very good for 'er plans!" one explained as they held up a poster of a dragon, "De Dergen however, breaths clean air and contributes to an ecoosystem!" he held up a poster of a cute chubbier dragon-like thing surrounded by flowers, there was a rainbow above it in the poster.

"Oh gosh, how horrible for your plans of putting the entire planet behind progress." he said very very bluntly, being sarcastic about his worry.

"You must go intoo the abandoned merns and kill de dergen!"

"**KILL DE DERGEN!**" the others yelled, waving their arms like the lead.

"Okay okay! Where is this abandoned mine?"

"Right out there in de wasteland!" he pointed out to a gray desert on the outskirts of town, it looked like it was about 10 miles from there.

Toxy squinted as he looked ahead, putting his paw above his eyes, "Is it dangerous?"

"We will pay yew handsomely for yer contribution fer slaying de dergen!"

"Alright, fine but if I break a leg I'm gonna come back and snap some twigs!" he threatened as he began to venture out to the desert.

"Remember to kill de dergen!" the lead spoke again, waving its arm up as it yelled over to the skunk.

"Yeah I get it already!" he yelled back angrily.

"How do you think will find whatever's messing with those nerd trees Inner-Thought Process? Cause right now this place looks pretty fine as far as forests go, besides the pit of spikes of course!" she asked as she walked around, playfully hopscotching over some rocks poking out of a shallow river.

"Will Julia, technically you're the brains here! And you think you should take in the scenery, maybe . . . sniff a flower?" he gestured to a giant flower resting between two big mushrooms.

"Oh hey good idea me!" she says, paws on her hips before she leans down and picks a flower, the head resembling an unfolded Icosahedron.

"No, no! You think you should smell **that** flower!" he flew over to her and stopped her, a hand on her shoulder as he gestured again to the giant flower.

She blinked and looked up at it, smiling before walking over to it, leaning upward to give it a sniff "Oh yeah! I mean after all, big flowers mean big smells! And if I smell something . . . funny~" her eyes widened as the "jaws" of the plant enlarged when she got closer to it, teeth like frills unveiling from the petals before it suddenly tried to snap around her lil head like a beartrap, she quickly jumped back, launching the spear at its peduncle, a green sappy substance bled out of it as it screeched, enlarging in size as vines shot out of the ground around it, they came at Julia as she quickly conjured a scythe, starting to slash at the vines.

"You think you should go and hug it! Hug it real tight!" The Brain Fairy suggested, dodging each vine skillfully as Julia fought to not have any of them entangle her.

"Inner-Thought Process I don't think that's a good idea!" she exclaimed, suddenly jumping to dodge a vine and then running along it, cutting any incoming ones before launching herself into the air, quickly shifting her weapon from a scythe into a giant pair of hedge clippers and then chopping the plants head off in one snip!

She landed with a huff, wiping her brow and making her weapon dissipate, the vines grew limp and the brain fairy fluttered over, "Oh gee! What a mess! I guess smelling that flower was a **bad idea!**" his voice got deeper on that last bit.

"Yeah I me- . . ." she looked at her metaphorical representation for her thought-patterns, "Inner-Thought Process are you talking through your teeth?" she looked concerned and confused.

"You're just stressed out that you almost died because of a mistake on your part! But don't Worry, you'll be Safe as Long as You follow M- . . ." he paused, eyes widening at something in the bushes, a few more brain fairies signaling for him to go back to character, hiding when Julia looked back.

"Your lead! Hehe!" he went back to sounding chipper and friendly, giving a fake giggle, "Maybe you're just hungry! Lets go get some honey from that Spelling Bee Nest!" He pointed ahead at a big nest with a college campus flag hanging off of it.

"Idunno, my ideas havn't really be-"

"You **really REALLY** think it's a good idea!" he got nose to lope with her, with her blinking and looking ahead, thinking for a moment, the brain's eye twitching.

"Well if you say so!" she say as she begins to walk towards it.

"Actually it's if **say** so Julia! Haha!" he let her walk ahead of him again, a few brain fairies quickly flying out of the branches of a tree, one in the middle looking directly at him with a very serious look and then pounding one lil black fist into another, signaling for him to get rid of her fast, he nodded

and then fled ahead as the others again hid.

Toxy was walking through the wasteland, despite the smog it was basically a desert still, the heat from the town making him have to rub an ice bomb along his forehead, "This really had to be the Quest I randomly picked wasn't it? Oh I bet she's having a time alright! Probably having a worse time than me because she decided to put too much trust in someone that offered it! Typical!"

"All I need is a plan, and my plan is to go to that mine, kill the **"Ding Dang Dergen"** and then get paid, simple as that. Getting emotionally attached has never helped anyone ever!" he spoke loudly to himself, groaning as he kept rubbing his forehead with the frost covered bomb, "I should've brought a drink or something . . . I didn't think a place so cloudy would be so humid! . . . heh! That's funny, I'm so hot that I feel like something's licking my ha-HEY!" his eyes widened and he jumped forehead with a turn, quickly tossing his bomb at whatever that was, in a bright blue puff of icy smoke, all that stands where he did is now a few giant icy spikes, empty.

" . . . "

He looked around with wide eyes, overlooking the ground for footsteps, ear twitching at the very faint sound of wings flapping.

" . . . Well I better keep going!" he spoke with a nervous smile as he turned and started to walk.

"Bawph!" a loud scratchy bark like noise was produced from an invisible creature.

"Yep! Going I'm going!" he began to walk faster, laughing nervously as he tried to ignore the flaps, but as he tried to walk faster, they sounded louder.

"STILLGOINGSTILLGOING!" he started to run now, "Just a jog I needed one anyway!" he yelled to himself, looking back, eyes widening at fat lil footsteps showing up in the sand, following along his as he started to yell.

"NONONONOSTAYAWAYSTAYAWAYSTAYAWAYSTAYWAY!" he yelled in a panic, starting to toss ice bombs from his satchel, he left more icy craters but none of them caught whatever was chasing him, the creature producing other loud "Bawph"s as it followed him, dodging the bombs as if they were playing.

Toxy wobbled as he got into the mine, almost falling off of a rickety bridge built over a chasm at the very entrance, looking back and starting to carefully but quickly walk across it, the creature's silhouette appearing in the entrance of the mine for a moment before it latched onto the walls like a gecko and then turned invisible again, he could hear it shuffling along walls, with him having to squeeze through a very narrow passage just to make it into the interior of the mine.

"Oh come on!" the light from the entrance was gone in this part, bonking himself into a wall facefirst, he shuffled around his bag until he felt what he needed.

"Ah ha! This is what planning ahead is just for!" he flicked on his battery-powdered flashlight, a confident grin on his face before his eyes bulged out at the sound of whatever it was grunting as it tried to squeeze through the passage.

"NONONONONONO! STAY AWAY!" he yelled as he started running along mining rails, going deeper into the the caves to evade the creature.

"AA" his screams echoed as he heard the monster start to flap towards him again.

"It was sure nice of those college bees to give me some of their honey Inner-Thought Process!" she spoke gladly as she walked with a big cartoon honey pot, licking a lil honey stirrer.

"**Yeah~**" the brain fairy was just flying along slowly, face in his palm as he again, failed.

"Who knew they liked visitors from out of the forest! I'd give you some but you can't eat, you're a metaforical represent!" she said, blurring her words a little at the end, licking, smiling at how sweet the honey was.

"**Yeah~**" he again replied, rubbing his forelope with his little hands, blinking as he tried to think on what to do, smacking his "cheeks" a little even.

"Are you okay? You seem frustrated." she stopped and turned to him. "Is it about the honey?"

"I . . ." he looked up, big eyes blinking at something ahead of them, then smiling and growing more energetic, "You're just tired! Rest here! Preserve your energy!" he encouraged, "Maybe on that **Bubble Vine** over there!" he pointed.

"Bubble Vine?" she looked ahead and saw a giant green vine bent downward from where it was planted, coated in dark blue tentacle-like leaves, each one sporting a sort've glowing green "bubble" at the end.

"It looks fun, don't it? Those're plant bubbles! You bet they don't even pop! What would an unpoppable bubble feel like?" it encouraged, zipping closer to it.

"That does sound fun! Alright! Good idea as always Inner-Thought Process!" she said as she walked over to it, the brain fairy giving a little evil "**hehe**" when she passed him, eyes squinting as his hands rubbed together.

She got just in front of it and then leaned against the bubbles, sighing for a moment, "Hey these things feel . . . sticky?" she sighed in relief and then took note of how odd they felt, trying to lean forward a little but being unable to.

". . . **EEP!**" as it suddenly animated, the vine wrapping around her and then "rolling" her towards the base, having her spin slowly, her little body squirming fruitlessly, having even dropped the pot of college honey when it started to wrap around her, stopping when she was nice and stuck near the base.

"YES! GOD FINALLY I DID IT! GUYS I DID IT! COME OUT GUYS I FINALLY DID IT!" he yelled out loudly as suddenly a swarm of brain fairies started to come out of the woodworks of the forest, all cheering for him, some clapping even and congratulating him.

"Uh . . . Inner-Thought Process? What's going on?" she asked, blinking widely at all the lil brain fairies.

"I'm not a visual representation of your head-gears turning you **dolt!** I'm a Brain Fairy!" he spoke loudly and obnoxiously, doing all he can to rub it in.

"B-But I thought you were trying to help me?"

"I was trying to **kill** you with bad advice! But I've done it! You're stopped and we can keep sticking it to those so-called Trees of Knowledge!" he spoke with an air of mocking them, making a stuck-up face.

"Those guys have been uptight for way too long!" One brain spoke from the crowd, "They never let us debate with them!", "They claim we're all too "puny" in brain power to join in, how dare they!" others spoke.

"You see we're Knowledge Parasites, normally we just suck the thought juice from them like aphids when they sweat it out, y'know before they'd . . . swat us away." he spoke, shivering at the last bit.

"But after all these years we've accumulated enough knowledge and foresight to come up with a very good idea on how to get some of that delicious brain power!" The flies all gestured to a giant glowing mushroom with a pipe sticking out of its stem, a large bucket full of an orange liquid under it. "A pipe and a bucket!" he exclaimed, arms going up in a cheer as the others followed.

"Oh man tools! You guys have gotten smart!" she yelled, squirming still, kicking at the ground as she still couldn't get free.

"Try as you might lil rabbit, but you're caught now and there's nothing you can do about it? You're left to our devices now!" he spoke sinisterly, getting face to face with her again.

"You guys are gonna suck out my brains with a big metal straw too!?" she yelled in worry, eyes wide.

"Pffft no! You couldn't pay me to try to siphon what little I could get out of that stump!"

"Hey!" she yelled back in offense.

"No you see, this is a sundew, over the next few days you're gonna slowly digest while seeing us keep getting smarter and smarterer! Oh how funny it'll be to watch you try to break free as your bones dissolve! Haha!" he laughs loudly before he flies ahead, arms up, "**CHEERS FOR THE BRAIN FAIRIES!**"

"**HIP HIP HURRAY!**" they all loudly began to cheer, one of them pulling out a turkey baster and sucking up a little bit of brain juice. "Slight increases in thought power all around!" the brain fairy exclaimed, starting to squirt lil bouts onto brains that lined up, their heads swelling slightly as they gleefully took in the increase of their processing power.

Julia meanwhile kept squirming, huffing afterward, ears going down, "Oh no! I'm gonna melt like a jawbreaker while those knowledge leeches keep getting smarter and smarter! If only I thought ahead for . . . myself." her ears shot up and she looked around, taking in how far up the brain fairies were flying and how they were preoccupied with celebrating and passing around brain juice via one big turkey baster.

Her eyes squinted as she hung a foot out, in a slow pink sparkle, an iron boot was conjured around it, the front of the boot then starting to grow longer and longer, slowly going under the brain fairies noses until just under the handle of the bucket.

"Now we gotta be careful, if one of us gets too much knowledge, we could swell up and become immobile!" the brain passing around the juice spoke concerningly as Julia glanced up, listening closely as her boot suddenly curled into a "hook" like shape, catching the bucket and slowly picking it off the ground, making sure to be very careful as she started to reduce the length of her boot to bring it back to her.

"So you guys wanna get smart huh?" she asked loudly, letting the one that tricked her turn back with an obnoxious smirk.

"Well du-" it was about to scoff at her, freezing up as she held up the bucket with her foot, she grinned, looking like she was about to spill it into the grass. "**GUYS LOOK!**" he yelled in a panic, all of them gasped and then started to fly at her in a single swarm.

"Gotcha~" she spoke under her breath with a smirk before suddenly kicking the bucket upwards when they were close enough, drenching them all.

They gasped and suddenly began to fatten and swell with pure knowledge, groaning as they turned into plump brain orbs, insect wings flapping fruitlessly as they couldn't get off the ground, let alone stand up.

"Now how would I get out . . ." she questioned outloud with a squint.

"Oh yeah!" she smiled, the "hook" of her boot growing longer and shifting to resemble an oddly shaped saw, slowly cutting herself and then breaking free, landing with a stretch.

"Well you guys enjoy being literal fatheads!" she saluted them and then began to venture back to where the trees were, the brain bugs groaning and squirming in defeat.

"Relax guys! We might be weak lil plump bugs, but this is a step in the right direction for us! Our excess brain power makes us too fat to walk, but our children's children's children should develop muscles strong enough to accommodate for such bulk! All we need to do is meet some girls!" the brain fairy who tricked Julia announced, waving his arms about with confidence.

The Brain Fairies started to cheer loudly to themselves.

. . .

They soon stopped upon realizing something and one in the crowd asked "What girls?"

Toxy huffed, running out of steam as he found himself in a part of the mines with a sky light, a deadend, groaning as he put his paws to his head, looking around for any means of escape, "Oh come o-"

"Bawph! Bawph!"

He looked back and ran into the center of the room, pulling out a fire bomb, "St-Stand back! I'm warning you!" he yelled as he shook the bomb in his hand, he heard it scuddle around along the walls and then screamed as he started to throw bombs in random directions.

There was an explosion there and there, loud booms rumbling through the caverns and shaking the entire mine, he ended up hitting a spot with a few cracks in it, actually breaking big chunks of the wall that flew at him, making him scream as he jumped back to dodge, huffing afterwards,.

Lil chunks of coal started to spill from the crater he made in the wall, one falling into the spotlight.

"Bawph! Bawph!" the creature barked as it suddenly appeared, jumping like an excited dog, a fat lil pink dragon-like thing with lil wings, it first hooked into the piece of coal with its jaws and then tossed it up, big mouth chomping around it and swallowing it.

"Oh . . . Oh you're the . . . the Dergen." Toxy spoke, processing the situation and wiping his sweated brow, ". . . You were just playing with me . . . embarrassing." he criticized himself out loud while rolling his eyes at what an idiot he's been, face in his paw.

"Baw-PHGH!" it coughed up a little cloud of green mist, upon coming into contact with the ground, lil patches of grass and flora started to spawn there in the mine, it then sat down and looked up at Toxy while panting like a dog.

"You . . . do contribute to an ecosystem don't you? . . . well guess this'll be easier said than done, you certainly don't look like the vicious type, if not annoying. This won't hurt for long." he pulled out an ice bomb and held it up, getting in a tossing position as the Dergen watched him . . . and then rolled over for belly-rubs.

". . ." he fell to his knees and sighed, "I can't do it to something like you! That'd be . . . evil!" he said sympathetically, "But those Schmooter guys would probably do it themselves if they found I lied . . ." he blinked and looked back before getting a pondering look.

"Hey uh, do you turn invisible or do you blend into your environment like an octopus?"

"Bawph!" he barked and suddenly shifted in hue to match the colors and texture of the ground for a moment.

"Awesome, I have an idea on how to make sure you survive and I get paid!"

The Dergen tilted his head curiously, much like a dog also.

"Hey guys! So I stopped what was hogging brain juice!" she greeted as she came back into the circle of Nerd Trees.

"Marvelous The Forest of Knowledge is saved!" Sal exclaimed in a monotone voice, vines raising upward in a cheer. "Please tell us Pink Oryctolagus, what was causing such trouble?"

"Oh a bunch of Brain Fairies." she answered bluntly.

"Those lil cerebral vermin? How?" one tree asked.

"They stuck a pipe in a mushroom and were letting sap leak out."

"Oh." most of them said in unison.

"That's kinda simple when you think about it." Mulberry stated.

"Yeah we get it **MULBERRY**, because they're dumb lil brain bugs, it's been established!" A tree yelled.

"Every day we wish you weren't in the same soil as us!" another yelled.

"Aaaaw~" Mulberry looked down to the ground as he was insulted, Julia gave a sympathetic look and patted his trunk.

"Anyway here is your payment from us The Trees of Knowledge" Sal spoke as he pulled out a big sack and plopped it in front of Julia.

"Oh wow! Usually rewards for my tavern are a lot small- . . . er" she opened the sack and it was full of books on birds. "Where's the money?"

"What money? We're trees. Those're outdated books on cool bird facts, they're irrelevant to us now, they're all from the last 5 decades. We recently got a purchase of some from the last decade so we thought gifting them to some adventurer who was willing to help us would be a good trade." Sal explained. "I mean it's all in the scroll, you did read all of it right?"

". . ." Julia took a deep breath in and then sighed, "Well . . . at least I got rid of your bug problem, take care!" she said as she took the sack of books and then went to their Elevator Shrine to go home, "Thanks for the . . . books I guess." she says very awkwardly.

"You're welcome!" Sal said as the trees waved goodbye.

"We The Trees of Knowledge hope to see you again someday Oryctolagus, when we need some errands done."

"Okay great!" she waved goodbye as she got into her magical stone elevator and let it reverse flip in the air and then sink into a portal in the ground.

Toxy was walking back into Schmooterville with the Dergen, it looked exactly the same save for a change in hue, pink scales and claws to red, to make it look like a dragon.

"Welcoom back to Schmooterville Skoonk! Did you kill de dergen?" The Lead Schmooter asked, still having a group of schmooters behind him.

"Yes I did, and look what I found! A dragon!" he gestured to the Dergen as it sat and panted.

". . . That's a dragon?" he asked, eyes narrowing a little at how smaller and chubby it looked in comparison to the poster, "But we thought dey-"

"Breathes fire? It does, but it uh . . . needs y'know . . . fuel! So do you guys by any chance have a coal plant?" Toxy asked sarcastically.

"One on ev'ree street!" he replied, waving his arms as they started to lead him to the nearest one, "it

is sew good to know de dergen is dead! Now we will have no prooblem in blasting a hole in de ozoone to continue to polloote even m're! Especially with this new dragon!" he said excitedly as he opened the door to the coal plant.

"Yeah, yeah but uh, hey listen, he's a little shy and hard to get to eat, can only do it alone, unless he's with me, so could you guys leave us alone for a minute or two? Y'know, to get him used to his surroundings." Toxy explained.

"Of curse! Come Schmooters, let us celebrate by curating m're pollootion!" The Lead Schmooter announced to the other Schmooters, they all began to walk away, singing "**DE DERGEN IS DEAD! WEHEW WEHEW!**" on the way, Toxy rolled his eyes and walks in with the Dergen before closing the door.

"Now you'll be well fed in here but stay low in profile and don't get caught making clean air! I guarantee they got enough smog around here that they'll barely notice!" Toxy instructed as they went deeper into the entrance, towers of coal around them circling a giant furnace, conveyor belts all around to make more and more smog. He then got on his knees, petted the chubby lil thing on the head and left, covering his mouth as he got outside, to protect his lungs from their celebration.

The Dergen watched him leave quietly and turned to look upon the stacks ontop of stacks of fossil fuels, licking its lips.

Toxy was now walking back to his Elevator Shrine, mouth covered as he was carrying a lil bag of gold, he looked disappointed but pleased with himself. Some Schmooters were following him.

"Oh yew must celebrate with us! It is a glurious celebration!"

"Yeah I'm good."

"Oh please!? It'll be sew so much foon!"

"Really I'm good, I killed your Dergen so I'd rather go back home and-" the ground suddenly shook, he wobbled as the entire city began to shake, from the plant he left the Dergen in, it began to rumble, smog production seeping from the chimney going to a feeble stop as what bursted out of it was a **giant pink dergen, far taller then any building in town.**

The Lead Schmooter gasped, "**D-De Dergen!** We got thought yew killed it!" he yelled at Toxy in a panic, arms flailing.

". . . Those things grow?" he said with wide eyes.

"**SCHMOOTERS! RUN FOR YEW LUUUUUUVES!**" he screamed at his fellow men, arms flailing, as they all started to run around.

The Dergen became to stomp ahead, colossal size making the ground shake as they gripped onto another plant, jaw curling around the chimney, sucking out the smog and then turning it to suckle at its lil oil spewing pipes, then dropping the entire building and holding its gut, chin raised.

It started to cough, swaying as large clouds of green mist started to spew from its mouth onto the city below, lustrous green fauna growing over streets and buildings, any Schmooter caught in the clouds would suddenly freeze up, plant into the ground and have their suits break apart as their lil shriveled up bodies became covered in foliage and life, killing them.

"B A W P H" The Dergen roared as it kept waddling with a shake of the earth per step, sucking up smog from the sky and shaking entire mountains of coal out of factories to continue to feed itself, growing larger and larger as it kept consuming, as it did this, the air became cleaner and the sun's light began to shine through to the town for the first time in a decades.

Toxy was frozen for a second, watching in awe at this display of destructive reforestation, having dropped his bag of gold. He then shook his head, coming back to his senses and picking the gold back up, he looked upon the Dergen doing his job and saluted him, climbing back into the Stone Elevator to launch into the sky as Schmooterville grew quieter and greener with each minute.

It was late dusk in Aries Town, the sky was a melancholy blue and the street lights were on, Julia was dragging her sack of books along towards the tavern, the atmosphere felt cozy despite the chill, she saw Toxy near the entrance, a small bag of gold in his paws.

"Geez, how much did you get?" he asked.

"None, these are all books." she said with a huff, slumping it down and opening the sack to show him.

He reaches in and picks one up, "The Love of Doves by David Dovelove?" he rose an eyebrow as he said the title outloud.

"Ugh, lets never take a quest from the Forest of Knowledge unless it sounds actually like they're in danger." she groaned as she rubbed her temple, "What did you get?"

"About 35\$, you'd be surprised how much that was to who I helped, apparently they were going through some sort of inflation." he explained.

"So . . . I guess you win?"

"I guess I do."

"Enjoy the Pizza Party~" she congratulated tiredly before passing him, starting to go inside to sleep

for the rest of the night.

Toxy blinked, looking a little . . . odd about how he won, "Hey~" he called out to her.

. . . She stopped and looked to him, "You were . . . not entirely wrong about me, being on edge all the time can be . . . unneeded." he said.

". . . Planning was really useful honestly, Thanks for telling me that earlier." she complimented with a smile.

". . . Wanna watch some movies and order a pizza or three?" he asked, a paw behind his head.

"Can we get stuffed crust?" her smile grew brighter.

"Only if we can also get mushrooms." he said with a smirk as he walked in with her.

"I was surrounded by mushrooms all day though! Hey did you know there are plants with lil bubbles that curl around you and then melt you like a jawbreaker?" she asked, passing by the counter where Scout was sleeping, a pool of drool under his face as there was still a lil pile of gold next to him.

"I didn't until now!" Toxy answered as he went into the lounge to order and Julia jogged up the stairs to put away her sack of bird books, the sound of her stair-jogging waking Scout up for a moment, blinking tiredly and looking down at the pile of gold coins . . . he yawned into his paw and slowly pushed the pile into the lil baggy he got them out of, then getting down from his stool and going into the room behind his counter, going in, several locks being heard from behind it.