

# THE SICKLY TREE

BY FRENZYSPAWN & OTHERS

*Once upon a time, humans set out on an expedition in hope to find the next discovery of the century. They traveled far and wide across land and ocean. They were trained to brave against mother nature's wrath and survive the harshest environments. Unlike one explorer among their ranks. One boy fell off from their ship while sailing through a storm. As much as his fellow members tried to rescue him, they failed miserably and could only grieve for their loss.*

*After the storm, the unlucky boy washed up on an island that looked otherworldly to anything he had seen before. The expedition team tracked the boy's location thanks to his chipped dog tag he kept dear. The team were in the same awe as when the boy found the island. "The discovery of the century", they claim it to be. They all harvested the island's resources and returned it back home for further research. It was that fateful day when Earth began to change. The Magic Era.*

*Magic spread forth across the world and intertwined with the earth. Civilization evolved with magic for the better. Fortunate humans are gifted to control magic in this era. As long as they follow the laws, they can use magic as they see fit. With these laws published, all between normal and magic were set in peace.*

*Ever since the Magic Era began a millennium ago, monsters were born on Earth. Like humans, they've gone through evolution over the years. It was only a matter of time before they gained intelligence. These types of monsters now live like and among people to this day. One monster is a beautiful example of this experience.*

*A tree in a manifestation of a woman. Her skin pale as white, a mixture between flesh and bark. Long, messy black hair with horns out of short white branches. Green emerald eyes that can glow in the dark with eyebags coated underneath. Fashioning in a black attire with a light coat in grey and an endearing purple scarf.*

*Her name is Naglfar. She's been alive for as long as she can remember, along with a disease she's been living with. From her knowledge, it's not contagious and the symptoms aren't a bother to her. However, it does cause her to sleep through long periods of time. Her own little time traveling gimmick. On one of her travels, she found a wide cave underneath the Earth's soils. Inside was an ominous, withered tree basking under sunlight from a hole above. Naglfar was captured with the romantic sight that she never wanted to leave. She made that place her home.*

*Eventually, she was acquainted with a 9 year old boy named Jeremy. He has a squirrel tail, loves climbing up trees, and is a bit more optimistic than the average child. The two of them met when Jeremy found the entrance in Naglfar's home. He made a playmate out of Naglfar. Over time, she grew to be comfortable around people and met many more from there on.*

*One day, Naglfar earned a job at Big City's Park, which was very close to her home. She's in charge of park ranger tasks and keeping the park safe from danger.*

*Today is a cause for celebration. Naglfar was invited to Jeremy's 10th birthday party at the park's event venue. All of Jeremy's family, friends and playmates are there. The party began with food and mingling among others while the children were playing in bounce houses. Games and entertainment were hosted at the party too. It'll be easy for a passerby to mistake the party as fair with all the*

*excitement and attractions going on. A few more hours into the party, everyone was called inside for the tradition of every birthday...*

***Happy Birthday to you~***

***Happy Birthday to you~***

***Happy Birthday, dear Jeremy~***

***Happy Birthday to you~***

*What lies before Jeremy on the table is a cake only master chefs can accomplish. A quadruple layered cake, decorated to look like a tree. Almost more than enough for the whole party to get a slice. The birthday boy makes his wish and blows out the candles. Everyone cheered.*

*Jeremy hops out his chair, going for the presents. "It's present time!"*

*His mother stopped him midway. "Just a few more pictures."*

*"But Mooom! I want to open the presents."*

*"Only a few more photos, I promise." Like every mother, Jeremy's is fond of capturing the growth of her kid.*

*"But, but...Dad?" Jeremy turns to his dad for help.*

*"For once, I'm taking your mom's side. We should take a few more with your cousins." Jeremy's dad made his choice.*

*Jeremy pouts. "That's not fair. Playmate 1, help me!"*

*Naglfar doesn't know what to say. The best she could do is side with the parents. "The presents aren't going anywhere." She says it with a little smile.*

*Jeremy gives up with his squirrely tail going down a few inches. "Okay..."*

*While they take some extra pictures, Naglfar drinks her ice tea with Jeremy's two other playmates.*

*"I can't believe how big this party is." Ezri takes another gander at the indoor venue as Spore mimics her.*

*Bawks looks envious. "That's what you get when a rich family throws a party."*

*Naglfar seems to disagree. "I wouldn't say rich. They're more...upper middle class. Sebastian works as a treasurer for a company and Liza works as a college professor."*

*"Basically they make more money than me." Bawks stares at the stack of unopened presents. "Hmm...the kid wouldn't miss a few presents, would he?"*

*Ezri gasps. "Bawks. How could you think about stealing Jeremy's presents?"*

*"I'm just sayin', the loot is wide open." Bawks rubs his paws together out of greed.*

*Naglfar silently glares at the pesky raccoon, intimidating the fella.*

*Bawks yield. "On second thought, I'll just chill on my chair..." Bawks morphs into his plush form. "...Just like this."*

*Naglfar nods. "Good. Jeremy deserves all the happiness today."*

*Ezri agrees. "You and Jeremy have been getting pretty close lately."*

*"Yeah, yeah." Naglfar nods. "I have you two to thank for that. I wouldn't have made it this far with him if he hadn't met the two of you."*

*"Awww." Ezri adored the appreciation. "You were doing most of the bonding all on your own. Bawks and I were the support."*

*Naglfar blushes. "No, no I..." Naglfar thinks about it, inverting her flusher back to a smile. "Y-Yeah. You're right."*

*Bawks is feeling hungry. With the lack of movement for 10 minutes in plush form, he calls for assistance. "Naglfar, can you get me a slice of cake?"*

*"Sure thing."*

*Everyone gathers around to get their slice. It took a bit, but Naglfar came back with their share.*

*“Here you go.” Naglfar places it in front of Bawks.*

*Just in time, Bawks reverts back to his fleshy raccoon self and dines on the cake.*

*After Jeremy opens his presents, he returns to Naglfar. “Playmate 1, can we go to your home for a minute? There’s something I want to tell you.”*

*Naglfar tilts her head. “What could it be? Alright, but first we’ll need to ask your parents.”*

*“Okay.” He waves at Ezri and Bawks. “Thanks for the gifts, Playmate 2 and 3!”*

*Naglfar and Jeremy walk off to meet the parents. “Sebastion, Liza. Will it be alright if Jeremy can play in my home for a bit?”*

*Liza encourages it. “Of course, go on ahead. Be sure to come back within an hour. The party is almost over.”*

*“We’ll be here if you need us. Be on your best behaviour, Jeremy.” Sebastian reminds his son to stay good.*

*With their permission granted, they begin their leave.*

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*The two of them arrive down in Naglfar’s hideaway home together.*

*Jeremy takes a deep breath of the air. “This is where we first met.”*

*“Indeed it is. I remember like it was yesterday.” Naglfar remembers it fondly. “Why did you ask to come here? Do you want to play more?”*

*“Not this time.” Jeremy makes a better appearance standing in front of his first playmate. “Playmate 1. I really, really, really like our time together. We have so much fun playing all sorts of things I want to do. Out of all the playmates, you’re really special to me. So...erm....”*

*“Jeremy? Is there something you want to say?”*

*Jeremy feels shy saying the next part. “I want you to be part of my family!”*

*Naglfar covers her mouth out of surprise.*

*“A week ago, a friend of mine was talking about his big sister coming back from college. He couldn’t stop talking about how cool she is. I felt jealous that he has such a cool sister. I don’t have any brothers and sisters. And...I thought about you. You’re a girl older than me and you treat me really nice. You’re close enough to a big sister than anyone. Can you join my family and be my big sister?”*

*Naglfar is petrified. All she can feel is her heart beating out of passion. Her recent life with Jeremy flashes before her eyes, leading up to the present.*

*“Ah...A family?” The tree woman finally spoke.*

*“Yeah. We can be a family. I’ll have to ask my Mom and Dad if you can be my big sister.”*

*“O-Oh my God.” Naglfar kneels down to Jeremy and hugs him. “Yes! I’d love to be your big sister.”*

*“H-Hey, are you crying? Are you sad?”*

*“I-I’m so happy.” She hugs him tighter. “I used to be so alone before we met and now I’m going into a family. Don’t worry. Big sis will forever be on your side.”*

*Jeremy isn’t old enough how people can cry when they’re happy, by the by, he smiles. “Pinky promise?”*

*“Pinky promise.”*

*Naglfar and Jeremy intertwined their pinkies in a twist. Their bond reaches further.*

*Naglfar wipes her tears and holds Jeremy’s hand. “Let’s bring the news to your parents.”*

*“Our parents.” Jemery corrects his big sis with a white smile.*

*Before leaving, Naglfar felt a rumble on the ground. “Did you feel that?”*

*“Felt what?”*

*The rumbling grows louder and violent. All of a sudden, the dirt underneath them breaks apart! The ground mushes together, collapsing like sand. The ominous tree begins to crack in two from the earthquake. Then...*

*CRUMBLE!*

*The soil gave out and deconstructed. The would-be siblings start to fall. Out of instinct, Naglfar grabs Jeremy in a lock together. She then grows roots out from her body to create a spheric barrier to protect them from a harsh landing.*

*They fall. Falling, deeper, darker, into a pitch black abyss where even the furthest sunlight can never reach.*

# CHAPTER I

*“Big sis...Big sis...!”*

*“Erm...”*

*Naglfar wakes up from the sound of Jeremy’s voice. Her eyes synchronously blink open. For a quick moment, she believed it was all a bad dream until she took a glimpse of her surroundings. The branchy barrier she created had been cracked open into pieces from the impact. Everything in her view is hardly visible in the pitch black. The only thing keeping light is the flashlight from Jeremy’s new phone.*

*Naglfar jolts up from the rubble roots and grabs Jeremy by the shoulders. “Are you okay? Are you hurt anywhere?” She checks for injuries.*

*“I’m not hurt anywhere. The fall knocked you out pretty bad. You’re a great big sister already.” Jeremy hugs his new sister.*

*“Mhm.” Naglfar embraces him. “How long was I out?”*

*Jeremy checks his phone for the time. “2 hours.”*

*Naglfar’s heart sank. “Uh oh! We should be with our parents by now! Did you call them?”*

*“I kept trying to call them, but they won’t pick up.”*

*“Let me try.”*

*Naglfar borrows Jeremy’s phone to make a call. “No reception...”*

*“What’s reception?”*

*Naglfar hands the phone back. “It’s not that they won’t pick up, it’s because they can’t. We don’t have any signal to reach them.”*

*“Oooooohhh...then let’s go find some!” Jeremy’s tail swings eagerly.*

*“I’ll go first. This place looks...” She can’t get a better judge of the place. “Dark and scary.”*



*Jeremy gives his phone back to Naglfar. "You should use this. I'll stay right behind ya." Despite the situation, Jeremy doesn't feel the slightest bit afraid with his big sis beside him.*

*Naglfar holds the phone in front of her with the flashlight on. Walking through the unending darkness, she pieces together where they are.*

*"It looks like we're in a rainforest." Naglfar confirms.*

*Jeremy looks around. "A Rainforest? Shouldn't rainforests have a lot of trees? I barely see any."*

*"It feels like a rainforest. Though the lack of wildlife is concerning." Naglfar can't even hear a bug. Just their footsteps.*

*"Then where did most of the trees go? Hey, what's that over there?" Jeremy points at something on his left.*

*The two of them walk close to it. In front of them is an 8 foot plant. The flower at the top is shining a well balanced light. Like a natural streetlight.*

*"How beautiful." Naglfar admires it.*

*"I can see so much better with this here. It looks like there's more up ahead." Jeremy acknowledges.*

*Knowing that they're not entirely in the dark helps Naglfar feel more secure. On the other side of the plant caused Naglfar to gasp.*

*A man in blue garbs lays limp on the floor and a spear beside him. His skin is pitch black as the darkness around them. From what Naglfar can tell...he's dead.*

*"Jeremy, look away!" Naglfar pushes Jeremy away from the corpses.*

*"I-Is he-?" Jeremy gets concerned.*

*"Shhh. Shh. Shh. I-It's okay. He's just..." Naglfar tries to think of a good cover up. "Hibernating for a...really long time."*

*Jeremy isn't sure what hibernation looks like, but he believes her. "Okay. It's best we don't wake him up." He stays where Naglfar wants him to be.*

*Naglfar inspects the corpse to find a hint as to what got him. There are minor injuries, but nothing physically lethal. However, he's holding a purple glowing pinecone in his deathgrip.*

*For further inspection, Naglfar pries open the grip and holds the pinecone. It felt soft. When she squeezed it...*

*"H-Hello? If anyone's listening to this, I've succumbed to Pildrish. I'm using the last of my strength to leave behind a message. If anyone's listening to this, pass it to the Chief. Chief...the both of us knew I didn't have much time left. You wanted me to stay in the village to ease the pain, but I said otherwise. I went out there to kill as many Parasites as I could. You wouldn't believe it, but I found a big one lurking out here. If it weren't for me, then it could've terrorized the village. That's one brave story to tell haha- \*bloodshot coughs\* O-Oh god... \*more coughing\* A-All I ask is to not mourn for me. I wanted to go out like a fighter. Help the weak and all that mumbo jumbo the church talks about. Be happy that...that...you turned my life around for the better while it lasted. O-One more thing. Tell Miso she bakes the best cookies in the village. They're enough to get an old man like me out of bed in the morning. It's a miracle cocoa beans still grow in this godforsaken place..."*

*The voice went more faint near the end before it went silent. The voice from the pinecone can be repeated with another squeeze.*

*"..." Naglfar struggles to make sense of it all. What she does know is there's a village somewhere. Whatever the "Parasites" the old man mentioned, doesn't sound friendly. "Come on, Jeremy. There should be someplace safe up ahead."*

*"Okay." Jeremy nods.*

*The two of them move on ahead from the last light plant. Naglfar's best guess is to follow the lights in hope to find sanctuary. What used to be a rainforest*

*is turned into a wasteland with barely any wildlife. Anyone can mistake it to be night if they weren't underground.*

*They've been traveling for about 20 minutes before they climb up a hill and find an area lit up with numerous light flowers. Houses and cabins for residence. Shop to find what you want to buy. A tall building that looks to be a church. Lastly, a colossal golden tree towering over the huddled village like a sun.*

*"Woooooow!" Jeremy is in awe.*

*"So people really do live down here." Naglfar takes note of that. "Huh?" She turns around to see something approaching from behind their backs. "...?!"*

*What stands there is a deformed, boney monstrosity on all four limbs as the size of a leopard. Skin as black as darkness, white sharp claws and nothing but a gaping mouth riddled with razor teeth.*

***RE...GRRRR...AAAAAAA!***

*Before the beast leaped forward on its prey, Naglfar grew her gauntlets in time to cork the beast's mouth with her fist. As it gawed on her impenetrable hand, Naglfar used her strength to use her free hand and drive a punch directly on the monster's head. When it staggered, Naglfar delivered another blow to its torso, knocking back the monster a few feet away.*

*"Jeremy, stay back!" Naglfar shouted behind her.*

***GGGAAAAA...!***

*The monster shouted a war cry. The scream allured a herd of more black monsters of all different shapes, sizes and features.*

*Naglfar challenges them one by one. Delivering death to every monster after the other. She switches between her knuckles and scythe simultaneously on which technique is more effective on each monster.*

*"Get away! Get away!" Naglfar roars at the senseless monsters.*

***BANG!***

*A surprising bomb of light blazed in the middle of the battle ground, blinding the monsters and shrieking in rage. Most of them scurried away from the light.*

*“HEEEY! Over here!”*

*A high feminine voice rang across Naglfar and Jeremy. A stranger in a brown hooded shawl and black coat waves their arms around. Her face is covered by a smooth wooden mask. A radiant lantern is attached to their hip.*

*“Don’t just stand there! Follow me!” The stranger screamed again.*

*Naglfar grabs Jeremy by the hand and starts running together with the stranger towards the village. They got a head start before the monsters started chasing them. Everyone was running as their life depended on it.*

*With willpower and determination, the three of them made it past a white, barely visible barrier and through the village’s gates.*

*The monsters however...*

*PING!*

*Crashed into the barrier. They hurdle all together to break it, but to no avail. The barrier is an invincible shield against their brute strength. They were quick to give up and flee the area. Everyone made it safe.*

*“Huh...Huh...Huh...” The stranger huffs and puffs after that burning run. “I’ve haven’t...huff...run like that for a long time.”*

*“Are you alright?” Naglfar asks Jeremy.*

*“I’m okay. Spooked, but okay.” The brave squirrel boy proves he’s not hurt, putting Naglfar in relief.*

*The stranger catches their breath and confronts the two siblings. “What were you guys doing outside the village without a Night Bright? You could’ve been killed back there.”*

*“Ah, Ah...huh?” Naglfar is at a loss for words.*

*The stranger pauses themselves. “What a sec...you’re new here, aren’t you?”*

*“New?”*

*“I’ve never seen you guy’s faces before. Did you fall into a hole from the surface?”*

*That rings a bell for Naglfar. “Y-Yeah. We fell down here.”*

*“O-Oh my God! Really?” They sound surprised and delighted at the same time. “It’s a miracle you found your way to the village on your own. And without a Night Bright no less. Usually the scouts find newcomers rather than them finding this place.”*

*“Um...who are you?” Naglfar asks the stranger .*

*“Oops! I forgot to ask your names. Give me a second...”*

*The stranger takes off her wooden mask, pulls back the hood of her brown shawl and...*

*BOING!*

*Springs up the white bunny ears that were tucked under. The stranger reveals herself to be a bunny girl. Her hair is half purple and pink with a carrot hair pin attached. A hot pink hair bow tied to the back of her head. Under the black coat she takes off is a sleeveless button up top with pink tie attached, Lastly revealing a black skirt with cute shoes.*

*If anything, this girl is like a flower in a wasteland of doom and gloom.*

*“My name is Miso. And you are?” Her smile brims with cuteness.*

*“N-Naglfar...” The sight of Miso has the tree lady charmed. As if what transpired before is but a long memory away.*

*“I’m Jeremy. Big sis’ little brother.”*

*Miso looks around to see anyone else in proximity. “I guess I’m left to help you guys. We bring newcomers to the Chief. Follow me.”*

*The two newcomers follow Miso through the village. Keeping on trail while gazing at the sights.*

*“This whole place is under the Big City?” Naglfar asks.*

*Miso agrees. “Far, far below. I fell down here 6 months ago.”*

*Naglfar gasps. “6 months?! Is there a way out?”*

*“Erm... You best ask the Chief those kinds of questions.” Miso isn’t sure how to answer. “He runs the whole village and keeps everyone in check.”*

*Jeremy can’t help but admire the get-up Miso had on before introducing herself. “That was a cool outfit you wore back there.” Now he wants one of his own.*

*Miso giggles. “It’s my embodied shell of God. I crafted the whole thing myself. Who you’re looking at right now is God itself. The bombs I made are but a fraction of my power.”*

*“You make bombs?” Naglfar feels a bit nervous.*

*“I’ve learned how to make bombs ever since I fell underground.” Miso stops her tracks and remembers something. “You guys didn’t thank me for saving your butts back there.”*

*“Oh.” Naglfar begins with thanks. “So much happened at once that it didn’t occur to me. Thank you.”*

*Jeremy follows. “Thank you for saving us.”*

*“Mmmm....nope. You’re too late.” Miso smiles innocently. “Let’s see...what kind of punishment should I give you?” Her eyes shift upwards while her finger rests below her chin.*

*Jeremy whispers to Naglfar. “Is God going to punish us?”*

*“I don’t think she’s a-”*

*“I know! You’re going to help me bake cookies at my place.” Miso’s ears wiggled thinking about their company. “But first, we need to visit the Chief. Come on!”*

## CHAPTER II

*Without a moment to lose, the three of them arrive in Village Hall. The only symbolism of government they have in the village. The people inside look busy with their work. A few give the newcomers curious side eyes.*

*It's rare for Miso to visit the Chief's office and almost lose her way through the halls. With the help of directions, she found the place. She knocks on the door.*

*"It's open." Said a deep voice behind the door.*

*Though the door is the Chief's office, is a worn out man behind a desk in the middle of paperwork. By the judge of his grey skin and pointy ears, he's a traditional dark elf. A rare species in today's day of age underneath their mixed offsprings. His hair is black and long enough to reach the middle of his back. The dark elf's eyes expose a fade of amber and uncertainty. He wears an ancient black leather outfit with a heavy purple cloak over it. Overall, his expression almost looks deprived, but forces up an exhausted smile for his visitors.*

*"Ah. Hello, Miso. What brings you to my office?"*

*Miso shoves Naglfar and Jeremy in front of her. "We got two more new people. You know what to do. Thanks." She quickly leaves and shuts the door behind her.*

*"Hmmm...I see." The Chief grabs his dark wooden staff and hoists himself up from his chair like a walking cane. The orb on top of the staff glows brightly in white. "You two have questions, I'm sure. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is...Rthir. I'm the chief of this village."*

*"My name is Naglfar. This is my little brother Jeremy." Naglfar has a million questions flowing in her head. This place, the darkness, the monsters...*



*Rthir takes a deep breath to answer. "Allow me to start from the beginning. A long time ago, this place used to be a prosperous, wildlife underground where the light used to shine. Where the greenest grass grew, the trees produced mysterious resources and lakes so clear you can see the very bottom. All thanks to the Golden Tree you've seen on the way here."*

*For a moment, Rthir puts up a smile about the past and fades away for the next part. "But when there's light...there's always darkness. One day, a disease broke out from the south of the land, rotting everything it can get to. The trees, animals, lakes, even people too. That disease is what we call Pildrish. It plummeted our way of life in an endless darkness with monsters lurking in the dark we call Parasites. We now call this hell the Land of Decay."*

*Rthir grips his staff harder out of loss. "Us people adapted to live in the dark for years. It wasn't as luxurious as before, but it was tolerable until last year."*

*"What happened last year?" Naglfar asks.*

*"The Parasites heired a prince. Ever since then, the darkness has gotten stronger, the Parasites smarter and Pildrish has gotten terminal on some villagers. Lately, the decay is beginning to reach the surface and rot out holes anyone can fall in." Rthir lets out an exhausted sigh. "Anyone who sets foot in the Land of Decay is immediately infected with Pildrish. We all are. The disease is all over the air."*

*Naglfar takes a step back and in fear.*

*"But fret not. Thanks to the Golden Tree, we use its tree sap to concoct suppressants to keep the Pildrish from rotting you inside out. As for a cure, we don't have one yet. We've been trying to find one for years."*

*The sound of it all is overwhelming Jeremy. He takes Naglfar's hand and squeezes hold of it.*

*Naglfar asks the most important question. “Is there a way out of the Land of Decay?”*

*Regrettably, Rthir shakes his head. “N-Not yet...But I figured out a plan last year ever since the Prince created the 4 lords. The Lord of Fire. The Lord of Water. The Lord of Wind. And The Lord of Lightning. Each lord has an elemental core within them. From our research, we can use those elemental cores to power up the church’s summoning mechanism. It used to be a magical device for summoning spirits. It’s now modified to be a teleporter between the underground and the surface. It’ll need powerful, magical materials to activate it. We have to slay the 4 lords to get those elemental cores.”*

*Rthir takes a look at the two newcomers. “That’s the full story of it...Anyways, take these.” He hands them each a small bottle of glimmering, orange substance. “These are the suppressants. It’s very important you take them once a week. You can get more from the church. Drink it now.”*

*Naglfar and Jeremy take one last look at each other before drinking their share of suppressants. After that, they felt easier to breathe.*

*“Th-Thank you for your help, b-but...” Naglfar’s anxiety grows. “What do we do now? Our parents and friends are waiting for us above the surface. We can’t be trapped down here forever.”*

*“I-I know that b-but...” Rthir is feeling frustrated at himself. “We lack the firepower to slay the 4 lords for the elemental cores. The Pildrish weakened our state to fight. We’re not as strong as we used to.”*

*Rthir thinks about another newcomer who fell in the Land of Decay before Naglfar and Jeremy. “There is this one green lad who can absorb Parasites to grow stronger but...” He grumbled to himself. “He’s uncooperative. I’m afraid one of these days, he’ll turn against us.” He then changes the subject. “Before I forget, allow me to run a diagnosis which stage of Pildrish you two have.”*

*Rthir steps closer to Jeremy, hovering his hand over Jeremy's heart with a dim glowing blue. He analyzes the symptoms. "You have a common stage 1. Nothing too dangerous, thankfully. You won't have as much energy you did on the surface like the rest of us."*

*"Am I still strong enough to climb trees?" Jeremy asks.*

*"With caution." Rthir answered as he turned his attention to Naglfar. "Now you..." He does the same for Naglfar. "Hmm...hm?" He makes a repeat. "That can't be right."*

*"What's wrong?" Naglfar asks.*

*Rthir's eyes slowly widen as he delves deeper with the analysis. "W-Wait. This can't be..." He steps away from the tree lady, almost like he saw a ghost. "I-I don't believe it. You aren't inflicted with Pildrish. You're immune!"*

*Naglfar feels confused. "I'm immune?"*

*"You don't understand! You're the first person on the Land of Decay who isn't sick with the disease. Do you know what this means?" Hope begins to spark in Rthir's eyes. "You're the strongest one we have in the village. Without the sickness weakening you, you have a fighting chance against the 4 Lords. Hell, you can walk through the miasma protecting the Prince's castle. Y-You can fight right?"*

*Naglfar shyly nods her head.*

*"Ha...ha ha ha!" For the first time, Rthir feels excited. "This...this changes everything. F-Forgive me, I know you've just got here, but your immunity could be the key to escaping the Land of Decay. Can you help us? Please?"*

*Rthir's hope got contagious on Naglfar when she heard "Escape". "I'll do anything to get back home."*

*Rthir performs a quick bow of gratitude. "Thank you...thank you! If you excuse me, I must make preparations. Can I trust you to meet me tomorrow morning?"*

*Naglfar agrees.*

*Rthir continues. "There's an empty cabin at the east of the village. It has a blue flag and a chimney. You can't miss it. You two take as much rest as you can." He then goes back to his desk and moves his previous paperwork aside and whispers to himself. "I must send an urgent letter to Miri about this find. The more help the better."*

*The moment Naglfar and Jeremy leave the Chief's office, Miso intervenes in front of them.*

*Miso smirks with glee "Are ya all set and ready for your divine punishment?"*

*Naglfar nearly forgot she had to be occupied with this bunny girl. "W-We're ready."*

*Miso's ears wiggle. "Good answer. Let's head to my place."*

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*With no choice in the matter, Miso guided her two victims to her house by the river. She gives the front door knob a twist and doesn't budge an inch.*

*"Ah, shoot. It's locked." Miso sighs. "I guess I'll have to use my sacred powers to open it."*

*Jeremy looks eager to watch. "You have powers that open doors? Let me see."*

*"It only works when nobody is watching. Can you guys turn around? No peeking." Miso twirled her finger to give them the que.*

*"B-But how-"*

*"No buts! Turn around." Miso giggles.*

*As their "God" commanded, Naglfar and Jeremy turned around and closed their eyes. Welcomed into temporary darkness with nothing but white noise to occupy themselves. There's a strange sound of jingling metal, rubbing against each*

*other while Miso mumbles to herself. Naglfar can't make out what she's saying, but it sounds like Miso has some trouble with the door.*

*"Is everything alright?" Naglfar asks.*

*"No looking." Miso commanded.*

*SNAP!*

*A snapping metal sound chimed from the door. Miso clicked her tongue and the jingling sounds continued until they heard a door swing open.*

*"There we go. Come on right in."*

*Naglfar and Jeremy turned around and walked inside. It's an ordinary house with basic furniture, living room, kitchen, restroom and a bedroom or two.*

*Portraits of art are seen here and there around the house.*

*Miso hangs her outer village wear on a rack. "Hehe. Welcome to my humble abode."*

*Naglfar takes in the view. "I like it. It looks artsy."*

*"Thanks. Art is one of my hobbies. I'm more onto digital, but that was before I fell in the Land of Decay. But anyway, let's get to baking."*

*The three of them rushed to the kitchen. Miso opens drawers and cabinets to retrieve what they'll need to bake cookies. "Here are all the ingredients. Have you baked cookies before?"*

*Naglfar remembers her first bakesale. "Plenty of times."*

*"Great. Then you know what to do."*

*Miso leaves them to it while she jumps into the sofa and cracks open a novel with a bookmark from the last page she left off.*

*"Okay, then." Naglfar accepts her duty.*

*"Can I do the mixing? I love doing the mixing." Jeremy swings his tail.*

*Naglfar feels cheered up with her new little brother beside her. "Of course."*

*Their steps follow as usual. Naglfar studied her cookbook plenty of times to memorize how to make cookies. She starts with preheating the oven. Then puts the ingredients in order before measuring the amount.*

*“How many cookies should we make?” Naglfar shouts to the living room.*

*“As many as you can!” Miso answers and continues reading.*

*Naglfar goes back to measuring the amount of ingredients per bowl and pouring it all in.*

*In between ingredients, Jeremy mixes the bowl with a whisk. He remembers not to overdo it and make a mess like last time.*

*With the cookie dough done, the two of them take a scoop, roll them up into balls and place them separately on the baking pan.*

*Jeremy takes the pan and slides it in the oven. Naglfar closes the oven and cranks the heat appropriately.*

*“All that’s left is to wait.” Naglfar sits at the dining table.*

*Jeremy joins next to her. He stares out into the window at the sight of the rest of the village outside.*

*“Are you alright?” Naglfar checks Jeremy.*

*“I’m fine.”*

*Naglfar knowing Jeremy, he’s hiding his feelings again. “You can tell me.”*

*“...” Jeremy starts to look sad. “When are we going back home?”*

*Naglfar recalls what the Chief explained. “Rthir said something about a plan to leave with the elemental cores.”*

*“But Miso said she’s been here for six months. How long is it going to take?”*

*“W-Well...” Naglfar thinks. She too is worried if they’ll ever see the light of day again. As his big sister, she wants to be an influence that Jeremy can always*

rely on. "I'll make sure we'll go back home as soon as possible. Rthir will talk to me tomorrow about his plan."

"I sure hope so. Mom and Dad must be worried sick."

Naglfar then wonders how the others are doing on the surface. They should've investigated by now. Even if they did, would anyone go after them? Naglfar hopes not. She doesn't want any of her friends to get stuck like her. Before, she'd team up with her friends to face crises like this. Now it's just herself far from contact. More importantly, she has a little brother to protect.

Naglfar now wonders what the others would do in her place. One would heal the innocent and shield off the evil. One would prepare to fight the 4 Lords for their elemental cores. One would explore the Land of Decay on her broomstick. Overall, the rest of them would contribute in their own way. As for Naglfar...

"What would **I** do?"

The daydreaming tree woman slowly shakes her head and gets a better grip on her resolve. She asked herself a silly question. Of course she has something to do at the very least. It's right next to her as it's gazing out the window. But is there more she can do? She doesn't know for sure. All she can do now is wait for tomorrow morning and meet with the Chief. Surely he has something in mind now that Naglfar was tested to be immune against Pildrish.

"What the..." An unfamiliar voice.

A stranger approaches the kitchen. A woman with big curvy horns and long navy hair. Her eyes glow a similar amber like Rthir's, but with a mix of purple. Ears pointy as an elf's and a long demonic tail loosely standing. Fingertips are stained with black on her bright skin. Lastly, a blue wide ring that's representing a halo is floating over her head in a diangle. Aside from her distinguishing features, she wears a gothic attire with a breezy top, skirt, under leggings, high heels, a large jacket and a few belts wrapped around here and there.

*“What are you doing in my house?” She asks again with an interrogating squint.*

*“Y-Your house?” Naglfar repeats the question.*

*“Uh, yeah. What are you doing here?”*

*“B-But...this is Miso’s house.” Naglfar looks at the sofa to find Miso waving at the group with her novel still in hand.*

*“Oh is it now?” She stares at Miso.*

*Miso smiles. “Good morning, Lilith.” She checks the time. “...Is what I would say if you haven’t been sleeping ‘til 4pm. By the way, you might wanna fix your front door.”*

*“Whyyyy...?” Curious and hesitant, Lilith checks on her front door. It’s still in good condition, as for the lock... “Miso! Did you lockpick the door again?!”*

*“I did no such thing. I used my godly powers to unlock it.”*

*“And I just woke up...” Lilith pinches the base of her nose between her eyes. “I told you to stop lockpicking the door whenever you forget your keys. Ring the doorbell if you do and I’ll open it from inside.”*

*“And disturb your beauty sleep? How could I ever do such a thing?” Miso stays innocent.*

*“Now we have to replace the lock you broke with a new one.” Lilith feels tired just thinking about taking a trip to the smithy.*

*Naglfar interrupts the conversation. “I thought you said this is your house, Miso.”*

*“It is. Sort of.” Miso shrugs.*

*“She’s my freeloading roommate.” Lilith answered. “I take it you’re a friend of hers too? I haven’t seen the likes of you in the village before.” She calms down her stress to make herself look more approachable for the guests.*

*“My name is Naglfar and this is Jeremy.”*



*Jeremy stares at Lilith. "How long have you been down here?"*

*Lilith reminisces. "I was born here. It wasn't such a bad place until the Prince got incarnated. Back then, we had the internet."*

*"Does that mean I can't play games on your computer?"*

*"How do you know I have a computer?"*

*"You're wearing high heels." Jeremy points at Lilith's heels. "Anyone in high heels owns a computer. I learned it at my dad's job."*

*Lilith doesn't seem to follow the kid's logic, but goes along anyway. "You can still use the TV's VHS player to watch tapes."*

*"What's a VHS?" Jeremy discovers something new.*

*Now Lilith starts to feel old. "It's better if I show you."*

*Naglfar encourages Jeremy to follow this potential friend while she stays behind to watch the cookies.*

*Lilith and Jeremy walk upstairs to Lilith's room.*

*Naglfar continues waiting patiently for the cookies to be done. Looking around her surroundings to occupy her time. She finds something purple glowing on top of the refrigerator. Naglfar gets up from her seat and retrieves it with a simple reach over her head. It's another purple pinecone. She squeezes it.*

*"Alright, Miso. If you're going to live here, I'll need to ground you with rules. Number one, don't break anything in the house. Number two, don't hog up all the food. Number three, keep the toilet seat down. Number four...what are you looking at?"*

*"You got a nice collection of books here."*

*"Thank you, but let's stay focused. Number four, always knock before entering a door. Number 5, don't disturb my sleep unless it's an emergency. And...I think that's about it. I'll update the list if needed in the future. You got it?"*

*“Loud and clear, Lilith. Now let’s see here...Playhouse of Love, Asylum  
Scream, Gun Nun, Hell Fishing, Fairy Goth Mother, Birthwood...What’s this?  
Demolition’s Delights: A Guide for Alchemic Bombs. That looks like a fun read.”*

*The message ends there.*

*Miso overheard it all. “Was that a Phone Cone?” She comes over to Naglfar  
and takes one more listen to it. “Ohhh I remember that. It was when I first made  
myself home here. Lilith always made new rules whenever I did something she  
didn’t like.”*

*“Like?” Naglfar digs deeper into the matter.*

*“Like Number 13. No making bombs inside the house.”*

*“I-I see.” Naglfar takes a quick step back.*

*“But anyway, Phone Cones are used to preserve messages. Some of them go  
off on their own to record and some are meant to be passed onto their receiver. If  
you ever find one, be a pal and deliver a lost Phone Cone. Consider this a will of  
God.” Miso cutely chuckles and goes back on the sofa to read.*

*DING!*

*The cookies are done. Naglfar puts on her mitts and slides the freshly baked  
cookies out from the oven. The sweet ascending aroma fills the air.*

*With only a single whiff from upstairs, Jeremy comes running down with  
Lilith slowly following.*

*“Awe, yeah. It’s cookie time.”*

*“Ep, ep, ep!” Miso holds Jeremy off. “I gotta feed my little Souplings with  
these.”*

*“What are Souplings?” Naglfar asks another question.*

*“It’s what she calls the Villagers.” Lilith is used to Miso’s antics.*

*“You two did a mighty fine job taking your punishment to the face. For your devotion. I will give you one cookie.” Miso uses a tong to put two cookies aside on a plate. “Lilith, help me pack these up.”*

*“Nope. I need to fuel up before I start my day.” Lilith grabs a bowl of berries and marches back upstairs.*

*“Ignoring a whim of a God. Such a shame.” Miso turns her head to Jeremy and smiles. “You’ll have to take her place.”*

*“Yes, God.” Jeremy is willing to help.*

*Naglfar remembers the first Phone Cone she found and looks at the door. “I’ll be right back.”*

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*Naglfar leaves the house and goes straight to Village Hall. She remembers which way to go to the Chief’s office. She knocks before entering.*

*The unexpected company gives Rthir his attention. “Ah, Naglfar. Is something the matter?”*

*Naglfar puts the Phone Cone on his desk. “I found this off a dead man before I arrived in the village. It’s for you.”*

*Rthir gives the Phone Cone a gentle squeeze. He listens to it word for word, bringing in as acceptance. “I see...so that’s what happened to Bruce. He had terminal Pildrish and there was nothing we could do to cure him. It looks like he left home to give it his all against the Parasites rather than die on his deathbed. He was a retired mercenary, you know.” He tucks away the Phone Cone for safekeeping while forcing a tired smile. “Thank you for bringing closure to Bruce’s fate. I should reward you for your effort. Let me see what I have...” He goes rummaging through old stuff in the office and returns back behind his desk with a strange lantern in hand. “I assume you don’t have a Night Bright on you. Take my spare. You’ll need it for what you’ll do tomorrow.”*

*Naglfar takes the lantern into her hands and hooks it at the side of her hip. She shakes her hips a little to test its grip. "Thank you. Miso shouted at me for not having one."*

*"Mhm. Night Brights are lanterns used to keep the Parasites at bay while outside the village, except for the bigger ones. It runs on oil out of the sap from the Golden Tree. You can get more lamp oil from the church when needed."*

*"I'll put it to good use. I'll see you tomorrow."*

*Naglfar does a quick bow and makes for the exit.*

*For the rest of the day, Naglfar returned to Lilith's house. By then, the others were done packing up each cookie in a cute little wrapping. Miso roped Naglfar into another ordeal to tag along and pass out cookies to everyone. After that, Naglfar and Jeremy went to their new cabin to sleep for tonight. There's only one bed, but all the better. There's room to share for brother and sister.*

## CHAPTER III

*Naglfar wakes up just in time before her appointment with the Chief. She double checks everything. Clothes, Night Bright, Pildrish suppressants and gold oil. If anything, she feels prepared to survive the Land of Decay.*

*“Are you heading out already?” Jeremy rubs his eyes awake. “Can we have breakfast before you go?”*

*Naglfar pets Jeremy’s head. “We don’t have time to eat a meal together. How about you visit Miso and Lilith? I’m sure they’ll share a meal. Plus...” She eyes the empty barrels. “We don’t have food.”*

*“No food, huh? Then I’ll have to try twice as hard to convince them to feed me.” Jeremy builds up determination. “Dad says if I’m ever visiting someone’s house, I should bring over a gift.”*

*Naglfar cracks a warm smile. “I’m sure you’ll find something. Stay on your best behavior while I’m out.”*

*“See you later, big sis.”*

---

*Naglfar knocks on the Chief’s door and welcomes herself in.*

*Rthir she recognises, but two other women accompany him.*

*One is a grey skinned lady with pointy ears, long purple hair, red and black sclera. She’s wearing a black office suit with a skirt, leggings and high heels. If anything, she looks like a devious secretary.*

*The other is what appears to be an arachnid woman. Unlike a drider, she looks more human. She’s wearing a black silk thin dress with red strings wrapped around her waist, right leg and left thigh. There are four long spider limbs stretching from her back to reaching behind her legs, the gaps are coated with web.*

*An odd finding that she bears a wing with her own web sprung with it. The woman's skin is white while her arms are a decaying black with fading red fingers. Her hair is in a neat bob cut with short pigtails underneath and pink and black diamond shaped gems decorating her hair. Her eyes are a bright red behind her glasses. If circumstances were different, she's look as scary as the Parasites in the dark.*

*Naglfar is captivated by these two beauties before her. To think Lilith and Miso were the best things in the Land of Decay, these two are in leigh. Naglfar forgot the real reason why she's here in the first place.*

*"Ah, Naglfar. You arrived just in time." Rthir begins the introductions. "This grey lady is Serenity. She's a creature of darkness who keeps track of the 4 Lords' whereabouts. Recently, she's been on the case with that green fellow a few days ago." He turns his attention to the other. "That spider imp over there is Miri. She's known as the Demon of Fear who lives outside the village. Her job is taking out Parasites by harvesting their fears. These two have been living here as long as me before the Land of Decay came to be."*

*"Ooo, that rhymed. You're such a poet, Chief~" Serenity delights.*

*Miri puts her hand out to Naglfar. "You must be the one Rthir mentioned from the letter. It's nice to meet you."*

*Naglfar is still in her own little world.*

*Taking this as someone new, Miri brings back her hand. "You don't need to feel afraid of me. In fact, I don't smell any fear from you. Are you okay?"*

*Naglfar snaps back to reality. "I-I'm fine! My name is Naglfar." She can't stop blushing.*

*"Now let's get to the task at hand." Ethir presents the task. "As you're all aware, Naglfar is immune to Pildrish. She's stronger than all of us combined. Our goal here is to defeat the 4 Lords, harvest their cores, use them to enhance the*

portal and escape. The two of you will provide support for Naglfar.” Rthir lays out a map of the Land of Decay on his desk for everyone to see. “According to Serenity’s knowledge, the Lord of Wind is currently located in the swamp.” He points at the swamp marked on the map southern east from the village. “It’s an hour’s travel from here. There will be Parasites on the way. That shouldn’t be a problem with your Night Brights and prowess. The Lord of Wind is a formidable foe, but I believe we can take it down with Naglfar’s help. Remember to bring back the core after the fight.”

Serenity smirks deviously. “It’s about time we get back at those pesky Lords. Let’s hop to it.”

Rthir agrees. “Good luck.”

“One question.” Miri asks. “If Naglfar is immune, that means she can reach the Prince’s castle with no problem, correct?”

“That is indeed true but...” Rthir shows a grimace in his face. “I’ve had thoughts about it and decided to throw away that idea. Sending Naglfar alone to face the Prince is no different than dropping a lamb in a lion’s den. As much as I want to attack the source of the problem, it’s better we escape with our lives.”

“Mmm...fair. Boring, but fair.” Serenity shrugs it off.

“If that’s all, then it’s best to be on your way. Be careful out there.” Rthir wishes them luck once more.

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Naglfar, Miri and Serenity leave the village from the south and head off eastward to the Swamp.

It’s been a while since Naglfar felt this nervous in a group ever since she met Ezri.

Serenity notices this. “Awww. Look, Miri. The fresh meat is blushing.”

“E-Eh?!” Naglfar regains herself. “I’m sorry. I was dozing off.”

*“What’s on your mind?” Miri asked.*

*“It’s nothing. I’m fine.” Naglfar takes a deep breath.*

*Continuing the walk, Serenity eyes down Naglfar head to toe. “How exactly are you immune to Pildrish?”*

*As hard as Naglfar thinks, she has no specific answer. “Eh...I don’t know. I’m just a sick tree.”*

*“Sick with what?”*

*“I’m sick.”*

*“...Okay.” Serenity accepts it with a smile. “I like you. If you have any interesting desires clouding your mind, let me know.” She winks.*

*Meanwhile, Naglfar views the dark land around her. “What were your lives like before all this? Rthir said this was once a beautiful place.”*

*Miri puts some thought into her response. “It was as he said. It was beautiful. Though, my life before wasn’t exactly the warmest as it is now. I had to build the people’s trust to be considered as one of them.”*

*Naglfar’s eyes lit up. “That’s just like me! I had to gain people’s trust too.”*

*Serenity’s turn. “The land before the Land of Decay was nothing special to me. There weren’t many desires back then. But now, hehe. Everyone wants something.”*

*“I wish I were there to see it all.” Naglfar thinks about it.*

*Naglfar spots a Phone Cone in a puddle. “Hold on a minute, girls.” She picked it up and gave it a squeeze.*

*\*Dying Parasite noises\* Hmph. That wasn’t enough energy to my liking. All these monsters are too weak. I need something stronger. Hm? Who’s there?*

*\*Striking thunder sounds\**

*Heh...that one will do. I’m coming for ya!*

*The Phone Cone ends there.*



*Naglfar keeps it. "Okay, let's go."*

*The three of them continue to pass conversation one after the other to fill in the quiet. Eventually, it had to be cut short. They've arrived at the Swamp. It's dark like any other place, except for a few glowing plants.*

*"We're here." Miri announced. "The Lord of Wind should be around here. Stay on your guard." She gets serious.*

*Naglfar grows her scythe out and Serenity manifests a curved blade from her right hand and a monstrous claw on her left.*

*The three of them stick together while proceeding deeper in the swamp. A few Parasites watch them from afar, but no Lord in sight.*

*"Grrr...I'm losing my patience. I want to butcher something." Serenity eyes at some Parasites and grows a mischievous grin. "Will I? Should I? Can I?"*

*Miri being understandable to an uncontrolled desire, she humors Serenity. "Just keep a look out of the Lord of Wind."*

*Without a word, Serenity charges at the Parasites and starts fighting them.*

*"We can leave her be for now. Let's move on."*

*While pressing on, the Swamp begins to rain.*

*"Rain?" Naglfar gets surprised.*

*"Not exactly. Way above us, the moisture in the earth is pouring down all the way down here." Miri points up.*

*Naglfar leans her head up and closes her eyes. She's basking in as much rain as she can enjoy. Only for about a minute before getting back on track. Every step she takes makes a wet sound from the moist ground and splashes from the puddles. Still no trace of their target.*

*"What does the Lord of Wind look like?" Naglfar asks.*

*"It looks like a knight in black armor. Carries a big sword."*

*Miri moves her bangs up and reveals an extra set of 4 eyes to grab a better perspective of the area. "Is that...there it is!" She points in the direction. "Serenity, we found it." Then calls for Serenity.*

*Serenity is last seen choking the life out of a 4 armed Parasite. "About time!" Then crushes its throat, disintegrating the Parasite into black mist.*

*The three of them sneak closer to the Lord of Wind. As Miri said, it looks like a tall knight. Its armor shines a windy green sheen and a magnificent claymore pinched in the earth to hold it still. The Lord of Wind looks like it's resting on one knee.*

*"That's it, alright." Serenity grins. "Who gets the first blood?"*

*"Naglfar will take the lead. She will keep the Lord of Wind's attention while you follow up in the fight." Miri begins to stir some web. "I'll see what I can do to trap it and prepare a finishing blow."*

*Naglfar stares at the Lord of Wind and tightens her grip on her weapon. "I'm ready."*

*Without a moment to lose, Naglfar jumps out of hiding and Serenity follows along. The Lord of Wind lifts its helmeted head and catches sight of the two. It slowly stands itself back up, pulls up its claymore from the ground, then charges itself with magical wind within a snap. Pointing its weapon at Naglfar to prepare for battle.*

*Naglfar starts the fight with a heavy swing on the Lord of Wind and is blocked by its claymore. The two fighters then engage themselves in combat, trading blows and avoiding many incoming attacks as possible. Naglfar keeps on swinging her scythe on the Lord of Wind. She notices how ineffective the scythe is against its armor. To fix it, Naglfar switches to her gauntlets to break off the armor.*

*Serenity stays fast on her toes. Dashing across the Lord of Wind with a deadly strike. "Hahaha! Look at this oaf getting pushed around. Haha-"*

*The Lord of Wind uses his free left hand and punches Serenity in the gut in the middle of her next attack. The blow launched her a few feet away.*

*“Serenity!” Naglfar avenges her with a haymaker to the chestplate, trying to crack through its armor.*

*Serenity stands back up and brushes off the pain, feeling drops of blood sliding down her lip. She licks it tastefully and grins at the Lord of Wind. Serenity spaceships her right hand into an axe head and rushes forward. “Hey metal freak!”*

*The Lord turns back his attention on Serenity once again and prepares to plunge her with its claymore. Once it swung, it missed when Serenity bursted into a black mist and then manifesting herself back unleashed a heavy swing on the Lord.*

*With the Lord of Wind’s loss of balance, Naglfar delivers a barrage of plumbing pain on it and shattered a hole on the Lord of Wind’s chestplate. It then unleashed a shockwave of wind, hurting Naglfar for getting too close.*

*The wind the Lord conjured is covering the hole Naglfar made on its chestplate.*

*Serenity regroups with Naglfar. “You see that? It’s protecting something important. You thinkin’ what I’m thinkin’?”*

*Naglfar nods. “Aim for the chest.”*

*Serenity moves left and Naglfar moves right. Both surround the Lord of Wind.*

*Naglfar swaps back to her scythe and uses it to reap black tree roots upon the Lord of Wind.*

*The Lord of Wind dodges it by leaping into the air, using the wind to keep itself afloat for a while.*

*Serenity knows what’s going to happen next. “Watch out! It’s gonna-!”*

*The Lord of Wind aims its sight on Naglfar and flies down towards her with speed, preparing to slam into her with wind magic.*

*Naglfar reaped even more black roots to barrier herself from the incoming attack.*

*The Lord of Wind collided its fist with the crooked barrier out of black roots and shattered it as if it were twigs.*

*“Now!” Miri screamed.*

*Miri jumps out of hiding from the top of a tree carrying a wide blanket of web with her. She throws the web trap over the Lord of Wind.*

*Serenity went to quick thinking. She picks up whatever broken black roots were on the ground and stabs them on every corner of the web trap. Keeping the Lord of Wind pinned on the ground with the web pressuring him.*

*“Finish it, Naglfar!” Serenity cheered.*

*Naglfar transforms her scythe back to gauntlets. She jumps on top of the pinned Lord of Wind. With one punch followed with another, and another and another before she made it into a lethal barrage of fisting pain. The Lord of Wind’s armor strips off piece by piece revealing a figure made of wind.*

*As the finishing blow, Naglfar cupped her hands together and threw them down as hard as she could on the Lord of Wind’s chest.*

*The Lord of Wind performs one last groan before it pops into thin air. The Lord of Wind is defeated.*

*Naglfar huffs and puff after putting all her energy into her attack while Miri and Serenity stand back in awe. No sound can be heard except for the rain showering the swamp.*

*“You... You did it. You defeated the Lord of Wind.” Miri couldn’t believe it. One of the 4 Lords that have been terrorizing the Land of Decay is slain by a fresh face.*

*Serenity looks at Naglfar with admiration. “Well what do you know? The Chief was right about you.”*

*Naglfar gets her breath back and withdraws her tree barked gauntlets. “I’m glad that it’s over. I felt like I was going to black out.*

*Miri rushes to Naglfar’s aid. “Do you need a potion?” She hands her a basic healing potion.*

*“Th-Thank you.” Naglfar accepts the help. She twists the cork and drinks the potion like water. She feels her inquiries going away, but not all of them.*

*Naglfar picks up a smooth glowing green orb from the Lord of Wind’s remains. Swirls of wind can be seen on the inside.*

*“Bingo!” Serenity snapped her fingers. “We got the Wind Core. Let’s get back to the Village.”*

*Miri is joyed with their accomplishment. “Everyone is going to be so happy once we bring the good news.”*

*“...” Naglfar takes a look at the claymore left behind by her enemy. She picks up the weapon for further inspection.*

*It’s a claymore with a sturdy hilt and a girthy blade thick enough to cut down enemies in pieces. Enchanted with wind magic, it practically feels as light as Naglfar’s scythe.*

*Miri looks over Naglfar’s shoulder. “Are you going to take it?”*

*Naglfar thinks about it. “I never used a claymore before. It feels weird holding it.”*

*“Well it is one of the weapons of the 4 Lords. I think you should keep it.” Miri encourages the idea.*

*Naglfar decides to keep the claymore as her new weapon. She hunches it over her back for safe keeping.*

*With all said and done, the three brave women start their return to the village.*

*“Not so fast!” a masculine voice shouted out.*

*Out of nowhere, an individual hiding from a tree jumped down in front of the three women’s path to the village.*

*A young adult of white skin, pink eyes and short green hair reaching half to the neck. He’s wearing a black v-neck shirt under his red over shirt. His waist is wrapped around in a long red sash with a strange emblem hooked to the right side of his hip. His pants are dark green and shoes matching the colors of his top fit.*

*Serenity recognizes him and expresses a playful smile. “Well, well, well. Look who dropped by to visit little ol’ me. Are my charms finally seeping into your cold heart?”*

*The green guy frowns harder at Serenity. “I’m not here for you.” He then points at Naglfar. “You. The Lord of Wind was **my** mark. Its power mine for the taking until you came along with those weaklings and killed it.”*

*“Hm?” Naglfar gets a bad feeling about this guy and sets her guard up.*

*“I’ve seen the way you fought that Lord. You’re the first strongest person I’ve seen since I fell down this hell hole.” The green guy clenches his fists. The skin on his arms begins to glow as green as his hair. “I’m going to give you two options. One, you hand over the Wind Core. Two, you die keeping it from me.”*

*Serenity looks back and forth between the green guy and tree woman. “So that’s what you desire, huh? Sorry to break your bubble, greenie. Someone else wants it first.”*

*“I’m NOT talking to you.” The green guy makes that clear.*

*Miri gets defensive. “What do you want with the Wind Core?”*

*“That’s none of your business.” The green guy gets ready to seize the Wind Core. “I’m done waiting for an answer. Here I come!”*

*Naglfar pockets the Wind Core and engages into combat against the green guy.*

*As the green guy charged towards Naglfar and reached out his glowing green hand and grew vines with mouths, reaching ahead of him.*

*Naglfar grows her scythe and starts slicing them before they could reach her.*

*Then the green guy applied more magic to his arms and spewed more vines. The overwhelming number of them wrapped a hold of the scythe and then...*

***ZAP!***

*Emitted the vines with a painful electric shock. Naglfar screamed in pain and collapsed on her back to the moist ground.*

*As soon as the green guy was going to grab her, Serenity intervened for an incoming scratch of her claw. The green guy sees it a mile away and grabs her wrist from his face.*

*“Heh. You’ve gotten stronger, greenie.” Serenity stays snarky.*

*The wrist the green guy held tight then shapeshifted into a pole of crooked spikes.*

*“Gah!” The green guy jumps a few meters back with a few gaping holes in his hand.*

*Miri comes to Naglfar’s aid and helps her up while staying close behind Serenity.*

*Serenity acknowledges the sparks flying off from the green guy’s right arm.*

*“Nice new trick you got there. Be a pal and tell me how it works.”*

*“Get out of my way!” The green guy threatened.*

*As soon as the green guy regenerated his hand injuries, he sticks both his hands out and strikes chains of lightning towards his three opponents.*

*The three of them barely moved out of the way with a few scrapes from the lightning.*

*“We can’t get close to him like this.” Miri pointed out. “We need to retreat.”*

*“Haha! Now where’s the fun of that?” Serenity ignores Miri’s warning and continues fighting the green guy up close and personal.*

*Irritated by Serenity's ignorance, Miri stays out of it.*

*“What do we do now?” Naglfar asks herself for answers. From what it looks like, direct contact with the green guy could end with another shock. She then remembers the claymore she’s carrying on her back. “Wind. I wonder...”*

*Naglfar grabs the claymore with one hand and concentrates, physically recalling how the Lord of Wind wielded it.*

*Miri looks at the tree lady with a baffle. “What are you-”*

*Suddenly, spirals of wind dance along on the blade.*

*“Hmph!” Naglfar aims the claymore at the green guy and fires a cannon of rippling wind.*

*“What the-?!” In the middle of the fight, the green guy spots the wind and jumps high enough to dodge it. Mid air, he points a sharp look on Naglfar with a hint of excitement. “Heh. This got a little interesting.”*

*As the green guy begins to fall, he uses his magical vines to grab onto the closest tree and starts swinging himself while shooting spikes of lightning towards Naglfar.*

*Naglfar runs in a circle avoiding the projectiles. Keeping nimble, Naglfar swings the claymore, waving blades of wind to cut the green guy.*

*The green guy uses his last swing to gain momentum. Upon release, he hurled towards Naglfar with a long rod of lightning. Looking to slice her in two.*

*Naglfar charges forward to the green guy’s direction and readies her weapon in hand to do the same.*

*The two of them clinched blade and lightning. Each of them pushing their all, expanding their growing magic to break through each other’s defences.*



*“Grrr!” The green guy grits his teeth while reaching his limit.*

*“...” Naglfar gives her opponent the death glare, she stomps her foot forward, breaks through the rod of lightning and...*

*“AAAHHHH!” Gashes a gouging slice across the green guy’s torso. He jumps away to avoid any further injuries.*

*Miri and Serenity unite with Naglfar for anything that’ll come next.*

*The green guy stands still, inspecting his new wound. A red mist seeps out from the wound and reveals a visible view of an orb with yellow lightning sparking within him.*

*“...?!” Serenity points at it. “So that’s your trick. How did a loner like you get your hands on the Lightning Core?”*

*Miri darts her eyes on the Lightning Core within the green guy. “He has the Lightning Core? That would mean-”*

*“Yep. It’s what it looks like.” The green guy’s gaping wound closes back up with small vines, regenerating himself at the cost of his energy. He loses some of his breath in the process. “I slaughtered the Lord of Lightning with my own two hands and absorbed its core. The Lord of Wind was my next challenge until you bitches ruined it.” He then grins at Naglfar. “I gotta say. The thought of ripping the Wind Core out of your wooden hands is more exciting than killing a Lord. Keep it safe for me until I take it back.”*

*Naglfar frowns at her mocking rival.*

*“And you.” The green guy looks at Serenity. “Follow me again and I’ll kill you on the spot.”*

*“Well, aren’t you a flirt.” Serenity winks at him.*

*“Hmph.” The green guy uses his vines to away, disappearing into the darkness.*

*Miri accepts the situation. “This isn’t good. We need to go back to the village as soon as...Naglfar, are you okay?”*

*Miri holds Naglfar from falling to the ground.*

*“I-I’m fine...just tired.” Naglfar struggles to stand firm. “He’s strong.”*

*“We can talk more about it with the Chief.” Miri leads the way back.*

## CHAPTER IV

*The three ladies returned to the village and reported in with Rthir. Bringing in good news, Rthir was beginning to see hope after they accomplished to retrieve the Wind Core. As for the bad news...*

*"Is this true?" Rthir asks one last time.*

*"It is what it is. He got himself a new toy to play with." Serenity checks her nails while reporting. "As far as we know, he got to the Lord of Lightning before we did. All by himself."*

*"But that's...that bastard! What would he want with the cores?" Rthir stares down at his desk angrily.*

*"Power." Serenity answered. "From all the sweet time we shared, I know he's doing this to grow stronger."*

*"So he's absorbing the Lords now, is that it?" Miri mentions.*

*"Hmm..." Rthir calms down and thinks. "From what you said about that fight, he's close to par with Naglfar. Strong enou-"*

*"Oooo~ another rhyme. Poetic as ever, Chief." Serenity interrupted.*

*"..." As Rthir was saying... "Strong enough to rival against an immune. We'll need to be careful when he'll attack you again and take back the Lightning Core from him."*

*Naglfar brings up a question. "Who is he?"*

*The others in the office look at each other without an answer.*

*Miri speaks first. "All we know is he fell into the Land of Decay a few days before you did. He never bothered to set foot into the village."*

*Serenity hummed a bit. "His survival in the darkness alone is enough to stir my attention. Hm hm hm~"*

*“You three did a fantastic job. Reward yourselves with rest before you hunt the next Lord tomorrow.”*

*Rthir concludes the meeting by sending them on their merry way.*

*The three leave Village Hall and decide what to do next.*

*“What to do, what to do?” Serenity wonders. “I already had my fill of Greenie for today. I guess I’ll talk to the folks around.”*

*Miri yawns. “I need to pick up the fertilizer the florist left for me. It was nice meeting you, Naglfar.”*

*“Mhm. It was nice meeting you too.” Naglfar nods.*

*“The feeling’s mutual, fresh meat. See you all tomorrow.” Serenity is the first to leave.*

*Miri also makes her departure.*

*Naglfar stands alone. “I guess I should check up on Jeremy.”*

*Speaking of the devil, Jeremy arrives. “Big sis!”*

*Naglfar smiles at his presence. “Hello, Jeremy. I’m back.”*

*“I heard lots of people are talking about you.” Jeremy explains. “They said you came back with a Wind Core. What’s a Wind Core?”*

*Naglfar is surprised by how fast the word of her deed spreads in the village.*

*“The Wind Core is one of the 4 Elemental Cores we need to leave this place.”*

*“Ooooo! Just three more to go and we can see mom and dad again.”*

*“Y-Yeah. Mom and dad.” Naglfar is pleasantly getting used to viewing Sebastian and Liza as her parents.*

*“So, anyway. God lent me some materials to trade at the markets. She said I could get myself a toy with these.”*

*“We’ll go to the markets together. I’ll hold your hand.”*

*“What? I’m too old to be hand holding...” Jeremy looks at Naglfar’s hand and notices something. “What’s wrong with your fingers?”*

*Naglfar checks them for herself. She just noticed how sharp and pointy they've gotten. Her finger nails aren't visible either. "This is new. They've gotten sharp. I wouldn't want to hurt your hands."*

---

*As the two walked to the markets, Jeremy shared how his morning went at Lilith's house. Jeremy brought in a cool stick he picked off from a tree as a gift. His breakfast was a berry salad. It took a lot of convincing to eat his greens, but he liked it. If only it could be complimented with Jeremy's favorite brand of apple juice.*

*The two of them began shopping as soon as they arrived at the market area. Upon going vendor to vendor, they eventually stopped close by at the florist. A human man with a wooden prosthetic left arm runs it. Beside him is a deadpan girl about Jeremy's age. Long white hair, orange eyes and dark skin in a purple dress. She bares a cold expression on her face. The girl has lenient werewolf ears and a steady tail.*

*"And here you go. Two sacks of fertilizer for the demon next door. Or spider imp? What do you usually go by?" The florist asks.*

*"Whichever is easier. Here's a little something for the little one."*

*Miri crouches down to the little girl and tangles a peculiar pink flower in her hair.*

*"Thank you." The little girl doesn't seem to be bothered with the gift.*

*"Are you sure you don't need any help carrying all that?" The florist offers to help.*

*"I got it all on my own. See you next time."*

*Miri picks up the two tacks of fertilizer with her arachnid arms from her back and leaves.*

*Naglfar and Jeremy walk to the stand. She starts browsing the wares.*

*“You two must be the new faces from yesterday. I’m Igawa, the florist of the village. This is my niece, Daiva.”*

*Daiva stares at Jeremy’s tail. “Cool tail.”*

*Jeremy feels complimented. “Thanks. I’m part squirrel. I wish I had the ears for it like yours.”*

*“I’m a werewolf. I’m guaranteed to have them.”*

*Jeremy asks another question. “Does that mean you hate vampires?”*

*“No.” Daiva shakes her head.*

*“There was a movie about werewolves and vampires fighting each other. It looked so cool. Playmate 4 showed it to me on VHS.”*

*“What’s a VHS?”*

*“That’s what I said.” Jeremy laughs. “You’re cool. Do you want to climb a tree with me? I found this really tall one this morning.”*

*“Okay.” Daiva then turns to her uncle for his permission.*

*“You can go play. Make it back before night time.” Igawa approves.*

*“Jeremy, what about getting a new toy?”*

*“I changed my mind. I’ll be back when I’m done playing.”*

*Jeremy and Daiva leave the market to find that tall tree Jeremy mentioned.*

*Igawa looks happy to see Daiva off. “That kid is pretty friendly. Most kids are afraid of her.”*

*“How come? Is it because she’s a werewolf?” Naglfar asks.*

*“Nothing like that. She naturally looks angry and doesn’t talk much. It kinda rubs others the wrong way to think she hates them.” Igawa goes back to business.*

*“What are you looking to buy?”*

*“We came here looking for a toy but...”*

*“We don’t sell toys here, ma’am.” Igawa cracked himself a chuckle. “Let me say thank you for slaying the Lord of Wind. It really eases our burden here.”*

*Naglfar nods for the commitment. "It was in order to get the Wind Core. I'm happy I can get the chance to help people."*

*"Here, here." Igawa's mind starts to drift. "Which Lord are you going for next?"*

*"Hm?" Naglfar never thought of a specific one. "Uh...no particular one."*

*"Hmmm..." This gives Igawa food for thought. "Since you're strong, can you go after the Lord of Water next?"*

*"Any particular reason?"*

*Igawa begins to think about Daiva, but keeps the matter personnel from Naglfar. "It'll help some of us know that thing is gone for good. Can you do that? I'll happily reward you."*

*"Y-You don't have to pay me. I'll do it if it'll make you feel happy."*

*Igawa looks thankful to Naglfar. "Thank you. But you won't stop me from rewarding you when you get the job done."*

*Coming from the left approaching the florist is Miri. She makes a little wave at Naglfar as a greeting.*

*"Miri. Back so soon?" Igawa asked.*

*"I came back to check up on you. How's your life going?" Miri takes a step closer to Igawa.*

*"Pretty fine considering the Wind Core is in the village's hands."*

*"Good, good. How about Daiva?"*

*Igawa thinks about Jeremy. "She may have found a new friend."*

*Miri claps. "That's wonderful news. Daiva deserves all the friends she can get. Speaking of..." Miri smiles gently into Igawa's eyes. "It must be tough being a single uncle. Work all day while watching over your niece. It would be nice if Daiva had an Auntie to rely on, no?"*

*Miri then gently places her hand on Igawa's good arm and rubs it slowly.*  
*"My, gosh. Were you always this strong? I regret not noticing sooner."*

*"Uh. Um..." Igawa feels paralyzed from what's happening. "Y-Yes. I've been doing some farm work on the side. I guess the benefits are showing."*

*"Mmm-hmm~" Miri now cuddles up close to him. She now looks at Naglfar.*  
*"Naglfar. Don't you think we look cute together like this?"*

*Naglfar looks as confused as Igawa.*

*Igawa tries to pull back, but Miri grips tighter. "What's gotten into you?"*

*"I can't wait anymore, Igawa." Miri confesses. "It gets really lonely at home without anyone to share it with. You're lonely at night too, aren't you?"*

*"W-Well..." Igawa chooses his words carefully and stutters a little... "Y-Yes."*

*Miri makes a seductive look at Igawa. "How about we close up shop, go back to your place and make an Auntie out of me?"*

*Composing himself, Igawa has no idea what to say next. He never got this close to Miri like this before, let alone a promising customer. Igawa stares at the spider imp embracing him with a face full of red blush.*

*Suddenly... "Igawa. I forgot to ask. How long will it take for your tulips to...grow?" Miri shows up with her two sacks of fertilizer.*

*"Eh? Eh?" Igawa looks back and forth at the two Miri.*

*"There's two of them?!" Naglfar doesn't know if she should be freaked out or blessed.*

*"Shit." Miri lets go of Igawa and laughs. "You really know how to ruin the fun, Miri."*

*The strange Miri begins to take shape into something else, reverting back to Serenity.*

*"Serenity?!" Now Naglfar is even more confused.*

*Miri pouts at Serenity. "Were you shapeshifting as me again?"*



*“Take it as a compliment. It’s fun being you.”*

*Igawa changes the subject drastically. “Miri. You mentioned tulips, yes? They’ll be ready to bloom in about 3 days.”*

*Miri is thankful to hear that. “Thank you and be careful with Serenity’s tricks next time.” She goes back on her way.*

*Igawa sighs. “Why are you messing with me?”*

*“We can keep going, you know.” Serenity shapeshifts back to Miri. “Maybe with some different traits?” She then shapeshifted a pair of cat ears and a tail. Serenity stunts a cute cat pose. “Nya~ Is this what you desire, Master?”*

*Igawa’s blush skyrocket to a brighter red. “Get the hell outta here!”*

*Serenity playfully laughs and disappears into whatever darkness there is.*

*“Oh?” Naglfar spots a fresh new Phone Cone from a tree above her. With a quick jump, she grabs it and squeezes the cone.*

*Miri. Back so soon?*

*I came back to check up on you. How’s your life going?*

*Pretty fine considering the Wind Core is in the village’s hands.*

*Good, good. How about Daiva?*

*She may have found a new friend.*

*That’s wonderful news. Daiva deserves all the friends she can get. Speaking of...It must be tough being a single uncle. Work all day while watching over your niece. It would be nice if Daiva had an Auntie to rely on, no? My, gosh. Were you always this strong? I regret not noticing sooner.*

*Uh. Um...Y-Yes. I’ve been doing some farm work on the side. I guess the benefits are showing.*

*Mmm-hmm~ Naglfar. Don’t you think we look cute together like this?*

*What’s gotten into you?*

*I can't wait anymore, Igawa. It gets really lonely at home without anyone to share it with. You're lonely at night too, aren't you?*

*W-Well...Y-Yes.*

*How about we close up shop, go back to your place and make an Auntie out of me?*

*The Phone Cone ends there.*

*"Seriously? It picked up THAT?" Igawa gets flustered. "Do me a favor and get rid of it. I don't want anyone in the village to know what happened here."*

*"Okay."*

*"No, wait. I-I changed my mind. I'll take care of it myself." Igawa puts a sack of seeds on the table. "I'll trade this for you, actually. You can plant these to grow this type of flower." He then presents Naglfar the same pink flower Daiva had in her hair. "Miri grows them at her place. They don't have a name, but she says they represent optimism in the darkest times. I have too many seeds than I already should. So how about it?"*

*With a love for nature, Naglfar is eager to trade. "Sure. Thank you."*

*After the exchange, Naglfar departs from the florist to continue her day.*

*Igawa privately listens to the Phone Cone. Feeling charmed, guilt and shame for keeping it for himself. "Damn you, Serenity."*

## CHAPTER V

Another morning arrives far below in the Land of Decay. Naglfar gets out of bed and reaches for her long coat.

“...?” Naglfar catches a glimpse of her reflection on a mirror. She takes a closer look and touches her hair. What used to be long hair is now withered to a short, messy length. Rather than being shocked with the change, she calmly accepts it.

“Nice hair cut, big sis.” Jeremy admires Naglfar’s new look.

“T-Thanks, but this happened on its own.” Naglfar comes up with a theory. “I think this has something to do with me as a tree. Normally, I grow flowers from my horns and hair. One time I grew cherry blossoms in the Yokai Realm. But this...” She stares at her new claws. “This is different. Perhaps it has something to do with the Land of Decay rotting away wildlife.”

The thought of Naglfar rotting away gives Jeremy a spook. “Are you feeling okay?”

“I feel fine. Stronger, actually.” Naglfar feels confident. “This is good. I have a good feeling the Lord of Water will be quick work.”

Jeremy hops out of bed and stretches. “Good luck beating up the bad guys. I’m gonna go eat and play.”

“Take care. I’ll be back later today.”

Naglfar is the first to leave.

“Hmm...” Jeremy goes through his pocket of tradable materials he kept from yesterday. “I wonder if this is enough to get breakfast.”

Jeremy rushed to the line of markets down at the village. He aimed to be first to keep himself from waiting in lines. Luckily, the area isn't as busy as yesterday. Jeremy went upfront to a market selling fruit. He traded 2 rare yellow twigs for 6 pears.

"Breakfast is served. Thanks, God."

Jeremy spends his time eating two pears before he feels nourished. After eating, he returns to the tree he played at yesterday and climbs to a high branch. He kept his feet on that strong branch and scouted the area like a foreign ranger. Jeremy is trying to find something interesting.

"Hey, is that..." Jeremy squints closer to who appears to be Daiva. "It's her."

Jeremy climbs back down and meets up with Daiva. "Hi, there."

"It's you." Daiva acknowledges. "What is it?"

"I had a lot of fun playing with you yesterday. Do you want to play some more?"

Daiva shakes her head. "No. I have training."

"Training? What for?" Jeremy grows curious.

"I want to grow up strong. Training helps me make it there."

"Caaaaaan I come?"

Daiva stares at Jeremy with her unchanging cold expression. She never made a friend who's exactly her age before. The thought of it feels a little welcoming.

"Okay." Daiva continues on her path.

Jeremy follows behind her.

---

The two kids walked to the village's training area for combat. Daiva hops over the fence to enter while Jeremy stays behind it to watch the action.

Daiva approaches a lifeless wooden golem in the middle of the arena. She gives a rub on the gem embedded in its torso. Upon touch, it awakens and ready to be given a command.

“Advanced combat training: unarmed.” Daiva ordered.

The two of them stand in position and begin their duel.

Jeremy watches the fight unfold, rooting for Daiva. “Go, Daive, go! Hit ‘em in the knee! Go for the left! Use your special attack!”

Daiva slips up and takes a punch to the shoulder. Despite the golem being twice her size, Daiva stays strong. She uppercuts the golem’s jaw, knocking its head off. The rest of the golem’s body decapitates and dies. A new inactive golem grows in the field for reuse.

Daiva leaves the training arena to talk to Jeremy. “Your shouting distracted me.”

“That wasn’t a distraction. I was cheering for you.” Jeremy corrects her.

Daiva crosses her arms. “...You distracted me.”

Daiva’s left shoulder leaked a drop of blood sliding down her arm.

“You’re bleeding.” Jeremy looks at the cut.

“It happens. Wooden golems can be sharp sometimes.” Daiva licks her cut.

“Ew. What are you doing?”

“Treating my cut.” Daiva continues.

“Not like that.” Jeremy rummages in one of his pockets and takes out a box of band-aids. “I’m going to use one on you.”

Jeremy opens a band-aid from its ceiling and sticks it over Daiva’s cut.

“There you go.”

“Oh.” Daiva stares at her band-aid. “Do you carry those things on you all the time?”

“I use band-aids in case I get hurt from climbing up a tree. Tree bark and sticks are sometimes pointy.” Jeremy thinks more about Daiva. “So why do you want to be strong?”

“I need to be strong if I want to fight well.”

“Who are you trying to fight?”

Daiva gives it some thought. “Nobody specific. My mom and dad always taught me the things I need to learn if I want to be a strong alpha of the pack.”

“Oh yeeeaah. Werewolves have packs.” Jeremy remembers that fact. “If you’re next in line, then that makes you a princess! That’s so cool.”

“I guess so. We aren’t royalty. We’re just strong warriors who help keep the village safe. But...” Daiva considers her next words. “They all retired to watch over me.”

“That’s so cool, Princess. Can I meet them? I want to see if they have white hair just like you.”

“Okay.” Daiva calmly nods.

---

The kids went down the road and arrived at the village’s church with the towering Golden Tree behind it. The children went to the left yard of the village and stopped at a specific spot.

“Oh. Are they...” Jeremy beholds the tombstones before him.

“They’re not.” Daiva shakes her head. “Their spirits only departed from their bodies. My pack lives on with me in spirit. They help each other to watch me grow up now.”

Jeremy can’t help but feel sad for Daiva. From the look of her face, she looks like isn’t bothered by it one bit. Her cold facial expression stays the same. From Jeremy’s knowledge from the surface, her pack is considered dead.

“I don’t know what to say, princess. I’m sorry for your loss.” Jeremy sends his condolences.

“It’s not a loss. Just change.” Daiva corrects him in that same deadpan voice of hers.

“A change. Okay.” Jeremy makes sure he remembers that. “When did they change?”

Daiva recalls the event from her memories. “It happened when the Prince was born and created the four lords. The Lord of Water attacked our village when it got close. My pack was all that was left to protect the village while I stayed within the barrier for my safety. They were victories to drive out the Lord of Water. But it came with a cost.” She looks at the tombstones. “The pack left me behind because I was weak. That’s going to change. I’ll show my pack how far I’ve come from that day and make them proud.”

Jeremy takes her words to heart, but something doesn’t feel right. “You said they left you behind because you’re weak right? Doesn’t that mean they care about you?”

“What do you mean?”

“Big sis once had to go to fight a lot of evil plants from the restricted forest a long time ago. She told me to wait outside the forest because she didn’t want me getting hurt. I really wanted to see her fight, but she said my safety was more important.” Jeremy smiles. “So yeah. Your pack cares so much about you that they don’t want to see you hurt.”

Daiva shows doubt. “I don’t know. My family is a strict bunch.”

“My mom is strict too and she cares about me. Strict isn’t always mean.” Jeremy feels smart from what he learned from his parents.

“Strict isn’t always mean...” Daiva recited. “Okay. I think they do care that much about me.”

Jeremy has something to confess. “It felt good putting a band-aid on your cut. Can I do it again if you get hurt again?”

“Okay. You can be my healer.”

“What’s a healer?”

“Healers are people who take care of the wounded. They stay away from fighting to focus on support.”

Jeremy thinks about it. “That sounds like my kind of style. I don’t like getting into fights.”

A shadow lurks behind the two kids. “Here comes...MISO!” Miso appears with a playful spook.

“Don’t scare the kids.” Lilith catches up.

“Hi God. Hi Playmate 4.” Jeremy waves at them both.

“Are you trying to do some graverobbing?” Miso looks interested.

“God, how do I be a healer?” Jeremy asks.

“Oh that’s easy. Just use some healing magic on someone.” Miso makes it sound easy. “There was this one time on the surface, a stranger helped me out of a Grey Goblin trap and used healing magic to heal my ankle.”

“And how exactly did ‘god’ get in that trap?” Lilith questions.

“I was in my mortal form, duh.” Miso smugs. “Are you going to ask to see my true form? Too bad, souplings. My radiance will melt your eyes.”

Lilith ignores Miso for now. “So, Jeremy. You want to be a healer?”

“You bet I do. I got this good feeling since I put a band-aid on Princess.” Jeremy feels happier thinking about it. “I want to do more of that.”

Lilith can’t help but smile for the squirrel boy’s innocence. “Hm. Alright. An attitude like that is a great start for a healer. The best way to earn a title as a healer is learning from the church. They worship the Golden Tree and train students to become priests and clerics under their religion.”



“Then what are we waiting for? Let’s turn me into a healer.”

Miso is on board. “Jeremy’s right. Let’s help him fit in.”

Before Miso runs off in the church with Jeremy, Lilith grabs her. “We’re only here to pick up our weekly prescription of suppressants. After that, we’ll get our new lock from the smithy and then you can start your chores around the house.”

“It’s a chore day?” Miso complained. “I’d rather we help Jeremy.”

“And I’d rather you start your chores before you pretend to forget them.” Lilith tries reasoning with her. “Look. I don’t like arguing with you, but the least you can do is help around the house. Otherwise, I’d kick you out.”

Miso feels threatened. “You wouldn’t.”

Lilith raises an eyebrow. “Would I? Do you want to take that chance?”

Miso turns around with her arms crossed and puts up a very grumpy face.

“That’s what I thought.”

Miso thumped her foot on the ground.

Daiva stares at Miso. “What is she doing?”

Lilith is used to this behaviour. “Miso does this every time she’s angry. She’ll look as angry as she can, give you the silent treatment and thumps when she feels like it.”

Miso makes another thump, continuing her tantrum.

The group agreed to go inside the church together. Miso and Lilith soon departed after they obtained their suppressants.

## CHAPTER VI

*A victory is won at a dead forest northeast from the village. A huge serpent known as the Lord of Water loses consciousness on the ground and soon bursts into thin air, leaving behind the Water Core and a mythical staff themed as an ocean.*

*The three ladies secure the winnings.*

*Miri takes the Water Core. “Another Lord defeated.” She smiles at the shining core, watching the water gush inside.*

*Serenity peeks over Naglfar’s shoulder. “Looks like you got yourself a new toy.”*

*Naglfar holds the staff firmly. “I wonder how this one works.” She waves it in the air a little for any kind of reaction. From nothing happening, she instead lifted it in the air and the staff glowed blue.*

*Droplets of water flow around Naglfar and heal whatever wounds she had in her fight at a slow rate.*

*“Mmmmm~” Naglfar purrs in relaxation and comfort to feel watered. “This feels really good.” In her moment, she felt something from her lower back. “Eh?”*

*A long, slender branch springs out from Naglfar’s lower back with a few leaves of its own. It wiggles like a tail.*

*“...” Naglfar speechlessly stares at it her new tail*

*“...” Miri covers her mouth out of surprise.*

*“...” Serenity is biting her lip. “Short hair, natural claws and now a tail? You’re turning out to be sweet eye candy.”*

*Naglfar is bewildered to grow an extra limb. “I’ll need to get used to this.”*

*Serenity zooms close to Naglfar. "Look at you, you look like a lost puppy." She then scratches the top of Naglfar's head."*

*"H-Hey..." Naglfar resists.*

*"Who's a good girl~" Serenity scratches behind the horns.*

*Miri inspects the tail further. "I wonder if we should snap it off."*

*"NO!" Naglfar backs away.*

*Miri retraces back her steps. "I-I wasn't being serious. I would never...never..." Miri's eyes slightly dilated after a few sniffs from the air.*

*"Naglfar. Are you afraid of me breaking off a limb? I can smell it." She ominously smiles at Naglfar's head. "Your fear is giving off an exquisite flavor. You wouldn't mind if I take a quick nibble, right? What am I saying? Of course you wouldn't. Hold still."*

*"Wait, stop! Don't bite me." Naglfar backs away from Miri.*

*Serenity shakes her head. "It's futile. Once the Demon of Fear acts up, it's near impossible to change her mind."*

*Everything is happening fast. Naglfar was just using her new staff to a demon desiring to snack off of her fear. "I-Is it going to hurt?" Naglfar is suggesting the offer.*

*Miri giggles. "It's teeth biting down on your skull, draining out your fear. Of course it's going to hurt. I'll be quick with it." She now grabs a hold of her victim.*

*"Don't worry. It won't be enough to turn you into a hallowed husk. Just. A. Nibble."*

*Naglfar forfeits her resistance. She gives in knowing it's better to quell the demon's hunger before it gets worse. "Okay."*

*With the O.K., Miri gets behind Naglfar and brushes her hair out of the way for a clear bite. When she found a good spot...*

**CHOMP**

*“Ghn-” Naglfar shuts her eyes tight and grits her teeth through the pain. After the bite, she feels her thoughts slipping from her mind like drops of water dripping out of a faucet. The pain starts to ease the more she doesn’t think about it.*

*Miri lets go and licks her lips afterwards. “That was good enough to call it a delicacy. Thanks for the treat, Naglfar.”*

*Naglfar feels dizzy, but can still stand. “Happy to help.” She smiles back.*

*The green guy walks out from hiding with a confused expression. “What the hell are you girls doing?” He grabs the ladies’ attention.*

*Serenity calls the green guy out on snooping. “Fancy seeing you again, greenie. Are you here for another thrashing or just a womanly show?”*

*“I was waiting for you all to kill that snake freak and then...all that happened.” The green guy points out every one of them. “She grew a tail, you started petting her like a dog, and then that one bit you on the head. Are you all drunk?”*

*Naglfar looked left and right at her friends, then back to the green guy. “We were just being women.”*

*“Women being women.” Serenity encouraged the behavior.*

*“Yeah, yeah. Women.” Miri agrees.*

*The green guy makes a face palms. “I’m trying to be serious here. I came back to settle the score with that girl you call ‘Naglfar’. I’m after the cores as much as you are.” He makes a rivaling grin at Naglfar. On his left hand, he conducts lightning. On his right, he lit up fire. “You see? I absorbed two cores. I’m the one you’re after. Our last battle had me aching for another. You’re worthy to be called an equal. So how about a little wager?”*

*“Hm?” Naglfar frowns.*

*The green guy explains the wager. “If you win, I’ll give up my cores. If I win, I’ll take yours. Fair deal, yeah?”*

*Naglfar clutches her fist. “Do you think this is a game? The Elemental Cores aren’t a toy to be fought over. I need all four of them to leave the Land of Decay with my little brother. Equals? Don’t you compare me to someone power hungry as you. We’re different.” Naglfar grows her scythe this time. She rejects the green guy’s wager.*

*The green guy clicks his tongue and his arms begin to glow green. He gets serious too. “Different goals, equal strength. I’ll just kill you and get this over with.”*

*“Miri. Serenity. He’s mine.” Naglfar glares at them to not interfere.*

*Naglfar swings her scythe at the green guy at every angle possible as he dodges.*

*The green guy counters with a hand full of fire into a fist. Knocking Naglfar off balance, he wraps her in his vines and starts swinging her. The green guy launches Naglfar towards a tree.*

*Naglfar regained her balance midair and used her two feet to land on the bark of the tree and dropped to the ground rather than crashing into it. She starts charging back towards him.*

*The green guy shoots a barrage of fireballs one after another.*

*Naglfar dodges the fireballs and throws her scythe towards the green guy. Once he gets interrupted, Naglfar switches to her gauntlets and begins punching.*

*The two of them are brawling hand to hand.*

*The green guy grabs Naglfar’s left gauntlet, keeping it from impacting his face. “You got a lot to fight for. Too bad you won’t live when I’m done with you.” He then dismantled that gauntlet with fire.*

*Naglfar used her free hand to equip her claymore fast enough to slice the green guy's arm off.*

*The green guy distanced himself with a yell and grew back a new one. He took a deep breath and jumped back in the fight.*

*Serenity watches the green guy closely. "Is it me or is he a little slower?"*

*Miri looks at the green guy.*

*"The greenie I know wouldn't make a careless mistake like that. Unless..."*

*Serenity grins. "NAGLFAR! Keep ripping him apart! He can't regenerate forever!"*

*"Son of a bitch." The green guy whispered behind gritted teeth.*

*Naglfar takes the advice at heart. She drops the claymore and goes with her natural new claws.*

*Keeping his guard up, the green guy focuses on evading Naglfar's scratches. "Get back!" He emits a shockwave of lightning on her.*

*The pain only fueled Naglfar's anger and adrenaline. "You won't stand in my way!"*

*Naglfar powers through and keeps attacking the green guy. Moving slightly faster than him to cut wounds.*

*With every regeneration the green guy causes, another injury is replaced with another. He coughed up a gush of black liquid. "N-No...not now!" Using his quick reflexes, he grabs Naglfar by the throat, keeping her still. "I need more...energy." He squeezes tighter to absorb some energy from Naglfar, but he breaks into a coughing fit and spills more black liquid from the mouth.*

*"I have you now...." Naglfar breaks off from the green guy's grip, pulls back both her hands and...*

*"AAAAAAHHH!"*

*The green guy screamed as Naglfar plunges two of her claws in his torso and rips out the Fire Core and the Lightning Core.*

*The green guy collapses on the floor trying to regenerate his gaping hole, but to no avail and gets in a coughing fit. “N-Not b-bad...If only I had a little more...”*

*Miri rushes over to the green guy. “It’s just as Serenity thought. He has a bad stage of Pildrish.”*

*“I knew there was something up with greenie.” Serenity pats Naglfar on the back. “Great work out there, killer.”*

*Miri takes out her supply of suppressants. “Drink this now. Fast.”*

*The green guy pushes it away. He doesn’t trust her.*

*Miri insists further. “Listen to me! You’re a bastard, but nobody deserves to suffer from this disease. Don’t you want to live?”*

*At the brink of death, the green guy’s life flashes before his eyes. His sole reason to grow stronger than everyone else.*

*Miri pours the vial of fast acting suppressant down the green guy’s mouth and drinks it. The medicine does its work and stops the Pildrish from getting worse. However, the green guy lacks the energy to further regenerate and is slightly about to pass out.*

*Miri then holds him over her shoulder to keep the green guy standing. “We’re going back to the village. He needs help.”*

*Serenity objects at first, but welcomes the idea. “You know what? Yeah. Let’s see what kind of punishment the village will give him.” She smiles just thinking about it.*

## CHAPTER VII

*The green guy lifts his weighted eyelids from unconsciousness. As he was waking up, he felt his body resting on something soft.*

*“What the...” The green guy turns his head to find himself in a gothic, decorated room. He sees himself lying in bed. When he looked up...*

*“Good morning.” Miri greeted with a smile, lending her lap as a pillow for the green guy’s head.*

*“...!” The green guy tries to move his body, but remains motionless. “What did you do to me?”*

*“It’s okay. I’m not going to hurt you.” Miri tries to calm him down. “I only paralyzed you from the neck down with my venom. We’re at my place in the guest room. It’s hard to believe this house used to be a cemetery home.”*

*The green guy frowns at Miri. “Let go of me or I’ll make you regret it.”*

*“Even if I did, what would you do?”*

*“I’d-” The green guy shuts up. “Damn it.”*

*“It must’ve been a rough few days for you. Take this time to relax. You’re safe here.” Miri patted the green guy’s head. “You had a bad case of Pildrish. The two cores in your body accelerated the disease to kill you. We rushed you back to the village for further treatment. All you need is a weekly dosage of suppressants and you should be fine.” Miri continues. “You’ve been asleep for almost a day here under my supervision. We figured it was best to keep you away from the village while they use the Elemental Cores to create our way to the surface.”*

*The green guy is feeling bored of Miri’s talk. “If I’m such a problem, then why haven’t you killed me?”*

*“Is that what you would’ve wanted?”*



*“Hell no! I’m pointing out the most logical solution that a weakling, like you and the rest of them, couldn’t do then and there.” The green guy feels determined. “I’ll just come back and slit your heads off while you all wallow in regret for making the poor choice in sparring me. Your mercy is what makes you weak.”*

*Miri smiles and shakes her head. “The others wanted you dead, but I didn’t. It took a lot of convincing to keep you alive.” Before Miri spoke, she reminisced about her past life before the Land of Decay came to be. “Mortals are the world’s greatest gift. I don’t have the words to explain it, but from the heart, I cherish them. You can say they’re like small animals. To me, you’re like an angry little puppy who never received a helping hand.”*

*The green guy grumped. “Your point?”*

*“I didn’t want to see another mortal die down here. Especially from Pildrish.” Miri pats the green guy’s head once more.*

*The green guy scoffs. “You’re one strange demon.”*

*Miri giggles. “You never told us about yourself since the day you met Serenity at the ruins. My name is Miri, the Demon of Fear. What’s yours?”*

*“...” The green guy thinks about trusting Miri. “Cabbage.”*

*“So then, Cabbage. What were you up to in the Land of Decay?”*

*“Figuring a way out of this dump. My best lead was to absorb all the Elemental Cores and use that power to break out underground. Or at least what I’d assume was possible.”*

*Miri imagines it. “Maybe you could, but we’ve seen what happened to you with just two Elemental Cores.”*

*Cabbage knows that well. Ever since he absorbed the Fire Core, he’d been feeling sick. The further energy he absorbed only delayed the inevitable.*

*“Why did you choose to be alone? The village offered you a place to stay, but you antagonized us in return.”*

*Cabbage knows why. "That village was too weak and needy for my liking. They'd only slow me down on my goal to grow strong."*

*"Goal? What does that entail?"*

*"That's none of your business." Cabbage shuns Miri's curiosity. "That Naglfar girl. Who is she?"*

*"She's the one who didn't antagonize the village and stayed to help us." Miri said it with a grain of salt. "She's also the first being immune to Pildrish. That's why she's naturally stronger than all of us."*

*"She's worthy of my respect, I'll give her that. I had to keep absorbing energy while it kept depleting overtime." Cabbage is making up his mind on something. "Alright, fine. I won't fight you guys anymore. If you already found a way back to the surface, then I'll take it."*

*Miri is delighted. "Great. That way Naglfar won't have to kick your ass again."*

*"Don't rub it in. If the village wants a share of my respect, then they should start learning to muscle up against the monsters."*

*Miri takes a vial of purple liquid in her hands. "I'm going to give you this antidote now. I trust you enough you're on our side."*

*Cabbage grins. "About time. I was getting bored lying around here."*

*Miri feeds the paralysis antidote to Cabbage.*

*Cabbage gets a kick of energy throughout his body and stands back on his two feet with a few stretches.*

*"Try not to overdo yourself while walking. You're still recovering." Miri gave Cabbage a heads up of his status. "Let's check on the progress of our escape at the Village. It's only a nice walk away."*

*The two of them begin to make tracks.*

*Meanwhile at Lilith's place...*

*"So if I just grind this and then..." Jeremy plops two plants on a mortar and crushes them together with a pestle.*

*Lilith is watching over Jeremy's progress. "It's better to hold the pestle at a 90 degree angle." She holds Jeremy's hand to guide him. "Like this."*

*"Okay." Jeremy finishes up the grinding faster with Lilith's guidance. He shakes out the grinded plants from the mortar and into the kitchen pot out of boiled water with lavender petals dancing within. Jeremy gives a few good stirs with a wooden spoon and turns off the stove. "I'm done. Did I do it right?"*

*Lilith scoops a portion of the brew with a glass cup and examines it. "Yep. Looks like a poison antidote to me. Great job, kid."*

*The squirrel boy makes a big smile, snatches the cup and runs to the living room. "Big sis! God! I made a potion."*

*Naglfar and Miso stop their conversation to give Jeremy attention.*

*"Big sis is really proud of you." Naglfar pets Jeremy's head.*

*Miso stands proud. "Congratulations, Jeremy. You are now a full fledged Golden Tree Cleric."*

*Lilith stops her right there. "Don't get his hopes up. Jeremy did a great job on this assignment, don't get me wrong, but he still has a long way to go to be a Golden Tree Cleric."*

*Jeremy is ready to proceed. "Then I have a lot of work to do. What's next?"*

*"This is the part where you turn it into one of the nuns at the church, but..." Lilith thinks about today's circumstances. "The church's doors are closed until they're finished with that warp gate thing."*

*"Awww..." Jeremy feels disappointed that he'll have to wait. The feeling was short lived until he took a quick look at the potion. "Can I at least give this to Princess? If she ever gets poisoned, she can drink this."*

*Lilith agrees. "Yeah. Let me just..." She takes the cup back and pours it into a small clay bottle she had next to the pot and corks it. She hands it back to Jeremy. "Here you go."*

*"Thanks, Playmate 4." Jeremy pockets the potion and his backpack with plants he scavenged and a book containing the Golden Tree's teachings. "I'll just go over to Princess' place. I know the way."*

*And with that, he leaves in a jiffy.*

*Naglfar admires Jeremy's dedication. "I've never seen him this focused on anything before. He's growing up fast."*

*Lilith scratches her head. "Is there any reason why he calls me Playmate 4?"*

*"He's never good with names. Just nicknames." Naglfar answers.*

*Miso wonders. "What do you mean? He says my name perfectly fine."*

*Naglfar turns to Miso. "Just because he calls you God doesn't mean-"*

*"Just leave her be. There's no changing her delusions." Lilith sounds defeated.*

*"Hmph" Miso pouts at Lilith. "You still doubt what's in front of you. That's bad for your health, you know." She changes the subject. "So who are the other three playmates?"*

*Naglfar felt a sense of nostalgia from the mention of them, smiles, and a little tail waggle. "The first playmate was me when we met. He promoted me to big sis. The second one is Ezri. She's a precious girl who grows mushrooms on her head. In fact, I have one of them on me." Naglfar shows a mushroom with white polka dots. "Eating this one won't do anything. It only tastes like cotton candy." Naglfar puts it away again. "The third one is Bawks. He became Playmate 3 the same time as Ezri. He's a bit of a trickster, but he's a good raccoon." She rethinks that. "Most of the time."*

*“And then there’s me.” Lilith spoke. “He must have a lot of friends on the surface.”*

*“He’s cherished by many. He had a big birthday party before we fell underground. Jeremy’s 10 now.” Naglfar still remembers the party.*

*There’s knocking coming from the door.*

*“Coming.” Lilith answers it and opens the door. She’s delighted with the company. “Hi, you two.”*

*Miri and Serenity greeted the others while coming in.*

*“Hello, everybody~” Serenity playfully sings.*

*“Good afternoon.” Miri politely greeted. “We heard from Jeremy you were all hanging out here. I guess now’s a better time than any since everyone is here.” She turns her head to the door. “Aren’t you going to introduce yourself?”*

*From the empty doorway appears an unamused Cabbage. “I’m here.”*

*Naglfar frowns at him.*

*“Who dat?” Miso asks.*

*“The green guy.” Naglfar stares at him.*

*Cabbage grumped. “Okay, first of all, I have a name. Second, I’m not here to hurt you unless you strike first.” He walks close to Naglfar. “The name’s Cabbage. I don’t like you that much either, but you have my respect for fighting strong to leave this place. And for that, I’ll leave you be...until we get out of here.” Cabbage smirks thinking about this ambition. “You only got the upper hand because you’re immune to Pildrish. Let’s have an even match on the surface to get some closure out of this.”*

*Naglfar takes some time to think. She doesn’t like Cabbage either, but since he’s offering a chance to start over... “I guess we were both on the wrong foot. The two of us were doing what we could to survive and escape the Land of Decay. I’ll agree to your match on one condition.”*

*“Oh?” Cabbage tilts his head.*

*“Apologize to me and my friends for making the Elemental Cores more difficult to obtain than it should’ve.” Naglfar laid down the terms.*

*“Yeah, I’m not gonna do that.” Cabbage disagrees. “If anything, they should feel sorry for themselves. They had all this time to kill the Lords and I did it in a mere few days.”*

*“So it’s an apology you want, huh?” Serenity shapeshifts into Cabbage and gets on his news in front of Naglfar. “Dearest, Naglfar. I am so sorry for being an inconvenience. All I wanted to do was leave like you guys, but I’m just too afraid to open up to such beautiful women!”*

*“What the hell?!” Cabbage is taken aback the most.*

*“Hahaha!” Lilith laughs.*

*Serenity continues. “I promise I’ll be a good boy from now on. I’ll prepare meals for you, do your laundry, anything for validation from you, Naglfar.”*

*“O-Oh my...” Naglfar blushes, daydreaming how willing “Cabbage” is to go far.*

*“You piece of shit!” Cabbage is enraged from the mockery.*

*Miri tries to calm him down. “Wait, Cabbage. Don’t-”*

*It was too late. Cabbage threw a heavy punch and launched Serenity to the otherside of the wall. She goes limp.*

*“Hey, don’t break anything!” Lilith went to check for any damages.*

*Serenity, disguised as Cabbage, dissolves her body into something peculiar. She shapeshifted into a cabbage with 4 limbs and a face.*

*Cabbage stands paralyzed with what he’s seeing.*

*Serenity acts surprised. “Oh no! I ran out of energy and my true form is revealed. Now everybody knows I’m just a vulnerable cabbage who hides behind a human form. Woe is me!”*

*Everyone is bewildered if Serenity is speaking the truth or not.*

*“Y-You...!” Cabbage is blushing with anger. “You were supposed to keep that a secret!”*

*That confirms it.*

*“Oh I did, didn’t I? Oh well.” Serenity then morphs into Naglfar and puts her arms out for a hug. “Don’t worry. I forgive you after all you’ve done. Come here and give me a tight hug, my lovely vegetable.”*

*“AAARRGGHHH!!” Cabbage screams. Coming here was a mistake! You hear me?! A big fat fucking mistake!”*

*Cabbage leaves the front door and slams it behind him.*

*Miri stares at Serenity in disappointment. “Why do you always do this? We were supposed to all get along.”*

*Serenity morphs back to her regular self. “Because teasing people is fun. Especially boys, hehehe~” She giggles in delight. “Speaking of, I think the Village’s florist has a little crush on the Demon of Fear.”*

*“Don’t change the subject. I’m frustrated you couldn’t leave your mischief aside for a moment like this.” Miri doesn’t want Serenity to corrupt Igawa any further from his wholesomeness.*

*Miso is entertained by the performance. “Hehe. His name is Cabbage.”*

*“You’re named after a soup.” Naglfar points out.*

*“Mmmm~ Miso cabbage soup.” Now Miso is daydreaming about food with some ear wiggles. “I haven’t had soup in 6 months.”*

*“We should have some together on the surface.” Naglfar didn’t hesitate before suggesting the offer.*

*Miso likes the sound of that. “That’s a great idea! All of us should go together for some soup once the portal to the surface is ready. Your God demands it, everybody!”*

*The group looks at each others' expressions on the idea.*

*"As long as Cabbage is buying." Serenity nods.*

*"Yeah. That seems like a good punishment." Miri suggests it.*

*"Do you know any good places for it?" Lilith asks Miso and Naglfar.*

*One place comes to Naglfar's mind. "I do know one place if the owner has it on the menu."*

*Witnessing her new friends among herself, Naglfar feels hopeful for the future. So many things they can do together on the surface. But why limit it just with them? If the opportunity arises, Naglfar can introduce them to Ezri on a Woman Wednesday. Naglfar's other friends must've heard the news of her absence by now and are worried sick. Luckily, they won't have to be worried anymore in the next few-*

*"AAAAHHH-" A scream was cut off from outside.*

*Everyone ran outside to find where it came from. On their left is a Parasite devouring a dead villager.*

*"...?!" Naglfar zoned in on the Parasite and killed it by slicing its head off with her claymore.*

*"Was that a Parasite in the Village?" Lilith's eyes widened?*

*Miri checks the status of the poor villager. She regrets to confirm they're dead. "How did this happen?"*

*"Uhhh, guys?" Miri points at what she's witnessing.*

*The Parasites breached a hole through the barrier. The breach is growing bigger with how many parasites are passing through.*

*Serenity puts her guard up. "What's happening?"*

*"The parasites broke through!" Miri panics and thinks fast what to do.*

*"We'll figure out what happened later. We need to protect the villagers. Split up!"*

*In instincts, Miri is the first to split up.*



*Naglfar gravely remembered Jeremy is still out and about in the village.*  
*“JEREMY!” She runs off.*  
*“Grrrr...stupid Parasites!” Serenity charges into the fray.*  
*“Let’s kick their asses!” Before Miso left, Lilith yanks her.*  
*“Like hell you are! Leave the fighting to them. We need to barricade ourselves!” Lilith pulls Miso back into the house.*  
*“Owowowow! Not the ears!”*

## CHAPTER VIII

*Sometime earlier...*

*Jeremy excitedly made it to Daiva's humble home. He knocks on the door fast and loud.*

*Igawa answers the door. "Oh you're..." He tries to remember the name.*

*"Jeremy, right?"*

*"Is Princess here?" Jeremy asks.*

*"Princess? Are you talking about Daiva?"*

*"That's what I said, yeah. Is she here?"*

*Igawa looks back in his house. "She's in her room. Wait inside while I go get her."*

*Jeremy does as Igawa says and waits standing next to a lamp inside.*

*Soon, Daiva alone shows up to Jeremy's call.*

*"Princess. Guess what I have behind my back."*

*Daiva tilts her head to try to sneak a peek. "I can't think of anything."*

*"It doesn't have to be right. Guess anything."*

*"A mole." Davia spoke right out of her mind.*

*"Nope."*

*"Mud."*

*"Guess again."*

*"Rabbit. Plate. Seeds. Soap. Book. Hammer. Umbrella. Potion-"*

*"Correct!" Jeremy plops the poison antidote in Daiva's hands. "I made my first ever poison antidote. It's all yours now."*

*Daiva looks at it with her deadpan face. "You made this for me?"*

*"Of course I did. I'm your healer." Jeremy reminds Daiva his role.*

*“Oh. You’re really serious about this.” Daiva remembers what Jeremy said at that time before he made up his mind to be a healer. “If you’re going to be serious, then so will I. I’ll be your fighter while you stay behind me to do your healing stuff.”*

*“We can be serious together.” Jeremy laughs. “We should make a pinky promise.”*

*“I heard if we break a pinky promise, we’ll lose our pinky.”*

*Jeremy is shocked. “We could lose our pinky?”*

*Daiva shrugs. “That’s what my big brother told me.”*

*“I never heard of pinky promises like those before.” Jeremy shakes his head. “The ones I know keep your pinky forever. Like this...” He sticks his pinky out. “I’m going to work hard to be a Golden Tree Cleric at your side and heal anyone who’s hurt.”*

*Daiva follows Jeremy’s lead. At first, she only wanted to grow strong. With Jeremy beside her, she makes up her mind on what she wants. “I’m going to work hard to become a Werewolf Warrior at your side and expand my pack.”*

*The two kids intertwined their pinkies together and forged a promise to each other to live by and witness each other’s.*

*Daiva stares at her pinky and back to Jeremy’s eyes. “What do we do now?”*

*“Now we...we uh...” Jeremy tries to think about what comes next. “Oh yeah. We’ll start training together. Don’t you do training now?”*

*“I do.” Daiva nods. “If I get hurt, you’ll heal me.” Daiva’s ear twitches and spotted her uncle hiding upstairs. “Uncle, why are you spying on me?”*

*Igawa embarrassingly walks back down stairs. “Forgive an uncle for watching his niece maturing?”*

*“That’s embarrassing.” Somehow Daiva’s dull face gets duller.*

*Igawa looks at the time from his wrist watch. "Well it's about time I start opening shop today. Jeremy. You wouldn't mind helping me carry something with me, will ya? Just a favor before you kids run off and play."*

*"No problem!"*

---

*Igawa, Daiva and Jeremy carried supplies of fresh herbs to Igawa's florist shop.*

*"And that's about it. Thanks, you two." Igawa wipes the sweat from his forehead. "Who would've thought a box of herbs can weigh that much?"*

*"I'm a werewolf. That was light work." Daiva begs to differ.*

*"And I helped." Jeremy feels helpful.*

*"Remember, Daiva. Make sure you come back before-"*

*"RRRUUNNN!" Igawa was interrupted by a man running to the church's direction in fear. "THE PARASITES ARE COMING! RING THE BELL!"*

*Igawa looks confused. "Huh...?"*

***RRROOAAHHH!***

*From the sight of the pair of Parasites on the roof, Igawa grabbed the kids and ducked down behind the florist stand and hid with its tent behind them.*

*Igawa covers the kids' mouths to not let a peep escape. He then peeks out from the stand trying to keep a steady breath. He watches the two Parasites chase after the other villagers running away. He's baffled how Parasites got their way into the village. More importantly, where should they go for safety?*

*"Kids. Listen to me carefully." Igawa explains at a pace that even they can understand. "The church is the safest place in the village for crises like these. Our house is too far to risk retreating there."*

*"I'll carve a path." Daiva is ready to fight.*

*“NO!” Igawa silently shouted. “I know how strong you are and I don’t want to lose you if the Parasites outnumber us. We need to escape to the church. You two understand?”*

*The kids nod.*

*Igawa takes one more look before coming out of cover. The coast is clear. He grabs his machete and holds Daiva’s hand as Jeremy holds hers. “Come on, come on!”*

*The three of them run desperately and sneak through any hiding possible from the Parasites. The screams of terror and death fill their poor ears. The guards desperately stand their ground to protect the weak and some die trying.*

*“Stand your ground, men! Don’t let a single one of them prey on us!”*

*“Help! I need help over here!”*

*“Mom! Mom, where are you?!”*

*“Get out of the way! I need to live!”*

*Igawa stays focused and keeps the noise out of his head. “Wh-Where almost there!” He can see the church in sight. However...a gathering of Parasites are swarmed around the church, trying to break through its last invincible barrier.*

*“No! We can’t get in with the Parasites in the way!” Igawa stares at them.*

***GRRRAARRR!***

*A couple of Parasites spotted the three survivors.*

*“Run, run, run!” With adrenalin, He picks up the two kids in one arm each and starts bolting away.*

*The Parasites chase after them with killing intent.*

*The three of them find themselves at a dead end against the Parasites behind them.*

*“No...NO!” Igawa shouted. He puts the kids down and pulls out his machete.*

*“Looks like we do have to fight.” Daiva frowns at the monsters. “Jeremy. Stay put while we clear a path.”*

*Jeremy hides behind the two of them.*

*Before Daiva and Igawa could do anything, Cabbage comes plunging down and beats up the three Parasites in mere seconds and absorbs their energy afterwards.*

*Cabbage stares at the three villagers backed in a corner and sighs. “I guess this is the part where I protect you?” Cabbage scoffs. “Alright, stay close to me and I’ll take you guys to the church. Lots of people are going there.”*

*“But the church is crowded with Parasites. We won’t make it through.” Igawa informed his mysterious savior.*

*“A crowd, you say?” Cabbage sinisterly smiles. “That won’t be a problem. Let’s get to it.”*

*Igawa, Daiva and Jeremy follow Cabbage back to the church where the Golden Tree resides.*

*They make it to the church and Cabbage is amused.*

*Cabbage cracks his knuckles. “Wait until I give the signal to cross.”*

*Glowing green from both his arms, Cabbage barges in with the mix of Parasites with beautiful vines growing from his arms. He thrashes, thrusts, crumbles, clobbers every parasite he can get on one by one. With every Parasite he quickly absorbs, the stronger he gets before his Pildrish slowly depletes it over time. From the look of the slaughter, he made an opening to the church.*

*“NOW! Come on- AAAHHHH!” Cabbage gets stabbed by a flying, crooked sword and disintegrated from his chest.*

*The group stopped midway with their escape from the shock.*

*Cabbage stands back on his two feet and regenerates the wound back to health. “What now?”*

*From a distance closing in between by walking is a glowing white figure with a black clape flailing from its back. Revealing black hollow eyes without a mouth and black hair with its ends floating around.*

***HYET ILWL LAL IED.***

*“Who the hell are you?” Cabbage intimidates the adversary.*

*Igawa couldn't believe what he's seeing. “That's...The Prince....!”*

*“The Prince? These monsters have a leader?” Cabbage never thought the Parasites followed a monarchy.*

***OUY...LDKILE NSDIFER..*** The Prince summons more floating swords at its disposal. ***EARBK OUY...KILE OUY...KOBRE HMTE.***

*Cabbage shouts at the three weaklings. “Don't just stand there! Get inside! This one's mine!”*

*Jeremy, Igawa and Daiva run through the church's barrier and through its doors safely.*

*Cabbage makes the first move.*

---

*Naglfar fights through the Parasites and reaches Igawa's house. “Jeremy! Jeremy?!” She runs around inside, hoping for a response and only finds more Parasites. After making quick work with them, Jeremy wasn't in sight. Thankfully, no corpses were left behind.*

*Naglfar runs out of the house and looks around where Jeremy could be. “Serenity!” She found Serenity offing a Parasite. “Have you seen Jeremy?”*

*“No, I haven't seen Jeremy! He went missing!” Serenity points out the obvious. “Your best bet is the church. Everyone's going there for safety.”*

*“The church. Got it!”*

*Naglfar rushes to the church with haste. Jumping over small houses and ignoring the chaos for Jeremy's aid. Once she arrived...*

**LEFE...AETH YHTE TLFE.** *The Prince is choking the life out of Cabbage.*

*"Ggnnn..." Cabbage struggles to break free.*

*Naglfar swoops by with her scythe and strikes the Prince's back, causing Cabbage to be broken free from their grasp.*

*Naglfar and Cabbage stand side by side.*

*"I owe you one!" Cabbage thanks his equal. "Someone said that thing's the Prince."*

*"The Prince?" Naglfar looks at the Prince for the first time. "You...You're the reason why I'm stuck here."*

**RUDERRME FO NDIEFRS...LAL EONLA...TLSCAE YPTME.**

*"This guy ain't no pushover." Cabbage glows back to green. "I'm only going to help you out this once. Let's take him down together."*

*Naglfar equips her gauntlets and grits her teeth out of malice. "Let's."*

*The two of them fight the Prince together.*

*Naglfar rushes in for a first strike.*

*The Prince blocks it instantly with a manifested shield.*

*Cabbage jumps up and comes down for a plunging blow.*

*The Prince was onto Cabbage's attack. It dodges back and summons more floating swords.*

*"Take cover!" Cabbage shouted.*

*Naglfar quickly uses her scythe and reaps black roots to build a wall for themselves.*

*The Prince fires away at the rooted wall while Naglfar uses her staff to heal herself and Cabbage.*

*The wall is tearing up piece by piece and won't stay standing for long.*

*Naglfar and Cabbage split each other from left and right to attack the Prince on both sides at the same time.*



**TWSAE FO EIMT.**

The Prince uses its magic to halt Naglfar and Cabbage right before they could deliver damage. The two of them are engulfed with a black aura.

“I can’t move!” Cabbage shouted.

The Prince walks to the church's barrier. **GIRBN EM AKBC RHEIT EHTRAS.** It pushes its hands on the barrier. The longer it pushes, the barrier begins to crack.

“No! It’s trying to get inside!” Naglfar tries all her might to break free.

Cabbage and Naglfar feel loosened every second while they’re struggling to escape.

However, they were too late. The Prince shattered the barrier and broke down the doors next.

Rthir, holding his staff tight, stands between the Prince and the teleporter field along with the innocent villagers.

Golden Tree Clerics and Priests are in arms to defend their hope for escape.

Rthir tightens his grip knowing it’s the Prince in the flesh. “I knew you’d show up eventually. It’s no doubt how something powerful as you could break our barriers.”

The Prince catches an eye on the teleporter’s colorful glowing parts. **OYU IKLELD YM IENFRDS. BBOEDR ETIRH REATSH. LAL RFO A OTOL OT BACONNAD EM NI OELLNESSIN.** The Prince charges up and floats in the midair. **FI M’I OT FFSURE ONLAE, UYO LAL ILWL FFSURE THWI EM!** The Prince fires a powerful black beam from its right hand.

“Shields!” Rthir summons a golden shield along with his allies doing the same. Together, they’re blocking off the Prince’s attack.

Jeremy in the back holds Igawa and Daiva tight. Scared for what could happen if the Prince got through the last line of defense.

*Outside from the church is Naglfar still captivated in the black aura. Through the broken doors of the church, she saw something she never wanted to see with her own eyes.*

*Jeremy closes his eyes and tears come running down. Crying. “BIG SIS! SAVE ME!”*

*“...!” Something snapped from within Naglfar from the sight of her little brother. Her eyes glow white, her tree fissures from her skin start to ooze black liquid, her mouth disappears underneath her softly bark skin, clothes burning off from the intense power. “RRRAAAAA....!” Her scream echoes across the village.*

*The Prince’s powerful beam breaches through the golden shields. Shooting to aim on the villagers. As it almost got to Jeremy...*

### **WARP**

*Naglfar blocks the beam and deflects it skyward.*

*Jeremy opens his eyes and sees someone standing in front of him.*

*A glowing black feminine figure with white tree fissures. White horns. White eyes. White hair. White tail. Lastly, a pair of white wings.*

*“B-Big sis...?” Jeremy recognizes her.*

*“...” Naglfar warps to the Prince and punches it from the church to outside.*

*The Prince felt a level of pain and regained his balance.*

*Naglfar catches up to the Prince. They stare at each other, eye to eye as they stay afloat in midair.*

*Cabbage stares at what he’s seeing. “Is that...Naglfar?”*

*“...” Naglfar stays silent.*

***VOYER FIFDNERET MFRO OPELPE...FIFDNERET MFRO SV...** The Prince summons a black sword in his right hand. **ENDRFI RWRE ILAPSCE OT EM...NLKEIU YM KBCLA ILVERFA.***

*“...” Naglfar summons her scythe, but this time, it’s glowing white.*

*The Prince and Naglfar begin to duel with their weapons. Flying and crashing into each other as a fight. Black and white colors spark above the village. It almost looks like a firework show.*

---

*From Lilith's house, Miso and Lilith throw bombs from above on their roof at the Parasites.*

*"Take this! And that! And more of these!" Miso throws precisely.*

*Lilith spots a small Parasite climbing to get to them. "Get off of my house!" Lilith swung at it with her bat and disappeared. Not another Parasite in the area. "I'm too tired for this..." She then looks up. "What's going on over there?"*

*Lilith and Miso watch Naglfar and the Prince fight.*

*"I know that weird tail anywhere! That's Naglfar!"*

*"That's Naglfar?!" Lilith didn't recognize her. "Not only that, she's up against the Prince."*

*Miso jumps up and down with cheer. "Make God proud, Naglfar!"*

*"Show it no mercy!" Lilith joins the cheer.*

---

*From the south side of the village, Miri helps bind some villagers' wounds with her web to keep the blood from pouring out.*

*"Drink this and try not to move too much." Miri offers a villager a healing potion due to being in the worst condition.*

*With all this fear plaguing the village, it's getting harder for Miri to fight the urge to feast on villagers. "Grrr...stay calm, stay calm...everyone needs your help." Miri pep talks to herself.*

*Miri catches the unfolding event in the sky with her eyes. "The Prince? And..." She uses all her six eyes to increase her senses. "Naglfar?"*

*The demon's hunger for fear slowly fades away from the sight of the fight. She holds her hand over her heart.*

*"Don't give up, Naglfar. You're helping us all." Miri joins the cheer.*

---

*From the east gate of the Village, Serenity is killing Parasites, fueling her bloodlust.*

*Serenity pins an armless Parasite to the floor and kills it off with a shapeshifted sledgehammer for a hand. "Hahaha. That never gets old."*

*The flashing lights shined brighter for a brief moment. Bright enough to bring Serenity's attention.*

*Serenity smiles to see who's up in the sky. "Well hello there, angel wannabe. Desiring to keep all the glory to yourself?" She laughs. "Make that desire come true, Naglfar." Serenity joins the cheer*

---

*From the front yard of the church, Cabbage is free from his hold against the black aura.*

*Cabbage watches to fight in the sky. "Heh...you never cease to amaze me, do you?" He looks at the palm of his hand. "I guess I'll have to try twice as hard for our match on the surface."*

*He then thrusts his fist in the air. "So don't you die on me just yet, Naglfar!" Cabbage joins the cheer.*

---

*The Prince shoots magic missiles at Naglfar.*

*Naglfar maneuvers around them. She then charges at the Prince with her scythe.*

*Scythe and sword clinched together with their users pushing force to break through each other's defense.*

“...”

**UYO NADST NI YM YWA FO ENCAEEVNG...**

The Prince flies away to make distance. **STIH SI RUWHEE UYO EDI!**

The prince charges up and fires another, powerful black beam.

Naglfar holds the end of the beam with her two hands, pushing back the of its power. “...” She stares at The Prince angrily and fully deflects the beam. After doing so, she warps in front of the Prince and grabs him. She skydives to the center of the Village with the Prince in hand and crashes it to the ground. Destroying the fountain.

“...” With the prince in a vulnerable state, Naglfar steps back and uses her left hand to summon a white circle underneath the Prince and then when she closes her fist...

The Prince was penetrated with white spikes from underneath. Numerous spikes built holes through the Prince as it lay atop of the pit motionless.

**OS ISTH SI WOH TI LAL DESH...ON EOMR EDFIRS...LAL NLOEA NI HET RADK...MGNAOTS...YM LEVI...SEFIALVR...**

The Prince slowly dissolves into mist in the air, leaving behind its cape. The Prince is no more.

“...” Naglfar turns her back on the spikes and warps at a blink of an eye in front of Jeremy, inside the church.

“Gah-!” Jeremy got spooked. “Y-You scared me...is that really you, Big sis?”

“...” Naglfar kneels down to Jeremy’s level and cups his face. She squints her eyes to look like she’s smiling.

Jeremy jumps in, hugging Naglfar. “I knew you’d save me.”

“...” Naglfar hugs Jeremy back. Closing her wings around each other.

*Naglfar's glow begins to dim, reverting back to her tree self. Pale barkish skin. Short black hair. Normal green eyes. Tree horns. Tree tail. Lastly, tree wings. "It's what a Big sis does best."*

*Rthir approaches the siblings. "Unbelievable...you defeated the Prince! Y-You've done it! You've freed us from-"*

*Naglfar stood up to face Rthir. However...*

*"Goodness me, you're indecent!" Rthir inverts his eyes away at the naked tree lady.*

*"O-Oh..." Naglfar looks at herself. Her body doesn't resemble crucial biological details, but this doesn't excuse her. She calmly curls up into a ball with her chest pressing to her knees.*

*"A-Allow me." Igawa picks up a random priest cloak from the floor and wraps it around Naglfar. "Better?"*

*Naglfar fits into it and covers herself. "Better. I feel like I was born again."*

*"No kidding." Igawa scratches the back of his head with his wooden arm. "What was all that about? With the wings, and the...you know."*

*"You looked like an angel." Daiva points at Naglfar.*

*Rthir brings some order. "I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation for that." He looks at his surroundings of the rubble and the villagers crowding the place. "Villagers! The Prince plotted to destroy our warp gate at our most vulnerable moment. Naglfar stood up to the challenge with an unforeseen power. We don't know what it is, but what we do know, it's a miracle from the Golden Tree itself!" Rthir proudly monologues before his people. "Naglfar descended from the heavens to the Land of Decay with an immunity of Pildrish. She quested to slay the 4 Lords and retrieved half of the cores. Half she did. The other from an adversary with a new conscience. The Prince perished in its conquest to rid us for good! A miracle indeed!" Rthir gets teary eyes with joy. "Thank you, Naglfar."*

*Outside emits a shining light. When everyone came out of the church to look, they couldn't believe what they were seeing. The darkness that engulfed the Land of Decay is disappearing and revealing light. It was like rain clouds dissolving to present the sun after a terrible storm.*

*The Parasites begin to perish into mist, like how the Prince met its end. The people of the Village felt a mythical pressure from their bodies wither away in a heartbeat. They felt healthier than before. A breath of fresh air. Sunlight. The cure for Pildrish is sunlight. That thing in the sky, replicating the sun, cured the Pildrish away.*

*The Land of Decay is no longer in rot. Instead, it is a chance to grow from the decay. A chance for the land to be reborn.*

## EPILOGUE

*A few days later at 9 Moons Bar, Kotsa cleans the tables in her icy kimono. Preparing to close up the bar with her older sister.*

*The front door opens with its bell on top jingling.*

*Kotsa gets irritated by the bell “Hey! We’re closed!” She notices who it is. “Oh it’s you.” Kotsa scoffs. “If you’re here for Senpai, she just went home.”*

*“That’s a shame, but I’m here for something else.” Naglfar was hoping to catch Katty too. “I was wondering if there’s still time to eat here.”*

*“We’re closing up. Get lost.” Kotsa gets back to cleaning.*

*“Now, now, Kotsa. Is that any way to treat a respectable customer?” Madam Miyoko makes her entrance with a sway in her tail and a restful smile. “Especially one who went missing for roughly a week. Welcome back, Naglfar. Nice new look you have on yourself.”*

*Naglfar blushes. “These are features that grew on me in the Land of Decay, like how I grew cherry blossoms from the Yokai Realm. I should be back to my old self by tomorrow night.”*

*“The Land of Decay? Now that’s a tale you must share.” Madam Miyoko is interested.*

*“A-Actually...if it’s not too much trouble...” Naglfar builds up the courage to ask. “Can you make the time now for 6 servings of miso soup? Do you serve that here?”*

*“Hmm...” Madam Miyoko holds her chin with her fingers. “I don’t serve miso soup here. However, 9 Moons Bar never backs out on a challenge.” The fiery kitsune uses her magic to make a red double of herself. “Kotsa. Be a good little*



*sister and help my double prepare miso soup. I remember we have just the ingredients for it."*

*"But we're already closing." Kotsa complained and hisses. "I hate this stupid job."*

*Kotsa and Madam Miyoko's double go to the kitchen.*

*Madam Miyoko's attention returns to Naglfar. "Is the order for you and the usual bunch?"*

*"No." Naglfar turns around to the door and smiles. "They're for my new friends."*

*Without a second to waste, Miso is the first to walk inside. Followed by the others one by one.*

*"So this is the place where I can eat soup? I like it." Miso's ears wiggled.*

*"Wow! This bar is prettier inside." Miri doesn't stop looking in every direction.*

*"This soup better be worth my while." Cabbage stretches his arms from the trop here.*

*Serenity slaps Cabbage behind the shoulder. "Cheer up, greenie. Feel grateful you're surrounded by beautiful girls tonight." She teasingly smiles at him.*

*"It looks like we have the night for ourselves. We won't have any drunkards spoiling our fun." Lilith already takes a seat and feels sleepy.*

*Madam Miyoko is delighted to see new customers. "Feel free to have a seat. Your meals will be ready soon. For now, let your burdens go and enjoy the night."*

*Everyone takes a seat together, Madam Miyoko included. "So tell me, Naglfar. Where have you been?"*

*"I'll start from the beginning..."*

*Naglfar starts from the top and explains everything in order. Of how she fell to the Land of Decay and how she escaped. She now begins what transpired after:*

*“Since the Land of Decay is gone, we gave it a new name. Terra Renata. After that, we used the warp gate to leave the Land of Decay and ended up at an abandoned church on the surface. Jeremy and I went back home to our parents. There aren't words to describe their relief that her son and adoptive daughter came back.”*

*“Adoptive, you say?” Madam Miyoko raises an eyebrow.*

*“Y-Yes. They’ve adopted me into Jeremy's family.” Naglfar smiles back. “Jeremy had a confession to make to mom and dad. Since the Land of- erm...Terra Renata is perfectly safe, Jeremy wanted to live there while learning to be a Golden Tree Cleric. Our parents said no at first, but it was Jeremy’s dedication and promise to Daiva that changed their minds.”*

*Lilith takes over. “He lives under my roof now. Not only is he learning the Golden Tree’s teachings, but he's continuing his elementary education in Terra Renata.” Lilith mentions the setback of it all. “Now he calls me Auntie Goth and it makes me feel old. At least the internet is back underground.”*

*Miri continues the story. “Ever since Naglfar defeated the Prince, The village is recording Naglfar and Cabbage to the Golden Tree’s history. Two powerful beings sent by the Golden Tree to liberate the darkness from underground and bring light to us all. That’s the short version of it.”*

*Serenity follows it up. “The miasma protecting the Prince’s castle vanished and the castle is left in a dysfunctional state. No more Parasites left to run the place.”*

*“It serves the Prince right for trying to kill us.” Miso is glad that the Prince is gone. “I originally came to Big City for tourism before I fell in a big hole. I’ve been down for 6 months.”*

*“You said you were leaving for home soon.” Naglfar is going to miss Miso.*

*“Worry not, my nature friend.” Miso cheers Naglfar up with a smile. “You have God’s phone number.”*

*“I came to the city to find something strong to absorb.” Cabbage announced. “Don’t you girls take this the wrong way, but...I decided to stay at Terra Renata for the time being.”*

*Miri smiles warmly at Cabbage. “You’re opening up to us.”*

*“Nothing close to that!” Cabbage shouted before he could blush. “It’s the castle, dumbass. I’ve been there myself and they have these portals that put me through trials. It’s got strong monsters in there I can absorb. Beating ‘em up is the fun part. Speaking off...” Cabbage smirks at Naglfar. “Naglfar may be the strongest in Terra Renata, but she couldn’t measure up on the surface.” He brags.*

*“Pfft. You beat a girl once and call yourself a champion.” Lilith sprouted a side comment.*

*Naglfar resumes. “I went to Ezri and Bawks after I visited my parents. Bawks was going to send help, but Ezri told her there was no need for that. Instead, Ezri believed in me. She believed I would come back someday.” Naglfar holds her hands together on her lap. Looking on her lap while blushing. Wagging her tail like a happy puppy. “Ezri always believes in me.”*

*Madam Miyoko is pleased to hear the news from Naglfar. “So what will you do now?”*

*Naglfar hadn’t put much thought into it. “Nothing much. Just continue my life. This time as a big sister and more friends at my side.”*

*“Fufu~ You’ve earned it, Naglfar.” Madam Miyoko reminds them of their order. “The miso soup should be ready in several minutes now. Since your orders got in before closing time, you still have to pay.”*

*Serenity saves her hand around. “That’s no problem. Cabbage is buying.”*

*Cabbage jerked his head to Serenity. “Like hell I am.”*

*“Wait, did nobody tell him?” Miri asked the others. “Cabbage, we decided it’d be the best punishment to buy us dinner.”*

*“Since when did that happen?!” Cabbage shouted.*

*Lilith explains it. “Since you became a jerk of the village before Naglfar showed up.”*

*“Serves you right for being a big meanie.” Miso crosses her arms.*

*Cabbage isn’t accepting it. “Say whatever you want, I ain’t paying.”*

*“Oh?” Madam Miyoko looks at Cabbage. “If you don’t have the money, then I have every right to use you.”*

*“I ain’t an animal to be contained either, you red kitsune.”*

*“Feisty too. I’m beginning to like you~” Madam Miyoko grins like the cunning kitsune she is while placing her fingers under her chin. “Kotsa has been getting bored sparring with Kiown of late. You’ll take his place for the next week starting tomorrow.”*

*“Sparring, huh?” Cabbage does indeed like the idea of fighting someone. “As long as she can keep up with me.”*

*Madam Miyoko chuckles. “You’ll be up against a former emperor’s retainer with centuries of combat experience. You won’t be bored.”*

*Cabbage agrees to spar with Kotsa tomorrow.*

*Eventually, Kotsa and Madam Miyoko’s double come back with the orders of miso soup. The group enjoys the rest of the night with a tasty meal and chats with one another. Naglfar’s cheeks start to hurt for how long she’s been smiling. How could she stop when she feels like the happiest tree alive? A little more happiness wouldn’t kill her. She’s tougher than that.*

THE END

## WORD FROM THE AUTHOR:

*Hey, guys. FrenzySpawn here. This story was dedicated to the sweet [NaglfarDreams](#). No special occasion or anything. I just wanted to have some fun expanding this crossover series and crack a few smiles if I could. Allow me to feature some old and new people who took part in this story...*

[Ezri](#) as Ezri

[Bawks](#) as Bawks

[Miso Buns](#) as Miso

[Shleepy Lilith](#) as Lilith

[Sethy Virus](#) as Serenity

[MiriArachnia](#) as Miri

[MaximumCabbage](#) as Cabbage

*Thank you newcomers for being part of Naglfar's journey in the Land of Decay!*

*This story is inspired by Ender Lilies and Nier: Replicant. It was a lot of fun writing it all out.*

*You may have noticed the Prince was speaking gibberish that nobody understood. Could you decipher every word of it?*

*If you're interested in my writing or this Crossover series, you can read more of it in [Library Abyss](#). Thank you for reading!*