Big Burly Birch

 Arminus drives through the winter season to Oxy Park, a popular small-town location that has a large grounds space, a giant playground set for any age, and a shopping mall. It was the weekend and Arminus didn’t want to spend his time at home. Arriving in the town of Oxy, he weaves the streets of slush and snow. The sky was blue with scattering clouds as Arminus arrives at Oxy Park. “Am… am I in the right spot?” Arminus questions himself and his phone’s GPS as he parks in a big but empty lot.

 Delicate snow dances down from the sky as Arminus gets out of the car with his phone, coat, wallet, and keys. The sidewalks weren’t shoveled, nor did they have foot prints either. The bustle of people, intercom music, and park space was vastly vacant. Arminus inspects past the fence where the large playground and snow areas were, but not even those spots showed any hints of people in the snow. “Well, guess I’m shopping today.” Crunching the snow beneath him he walks to the local stores near the mall with signs and lights showing ‘open’ yet no customers or employees were inside. “Ok, this is a little weird. Is everyone in the mall today?” The mall is large enough to hold the local stores, playground, and open field. If people are anywhere, they have to be in there.

 Arminus glares down the alleys as he makes his way to the mall. He starts reading things off in his head to pass time. “Pawn shop, dumpster alley, candle store, dumpster alley, snow gear, log alley, popcorn store, dumpst-” he stops thinking and walking. And repeats himself aloud. “Log alley. Log alley?” He walks between the snow gear and popcorn stores to reinspect what he just said and supposedly saw. And sure enough, down the top end of the T-shaped alley was a long log laying on its side covered in flakes. It wasn’t normal for him to see something like that, so he walks towards it for a better look.

 As he arrives at the top end of the T-shaped alleyway, he notices the texture of the log that reaches up to his shins. It’s skin wasn’t bark-like at all. Bending his knees to analyze it better, Arminus takes off his gloves and touches the snow on top of the log, only to feel fuzz and heat emit off it. “It’s kinda mossy. Or mayb-” VVVRRRMMM log shakes and grows itself. “Geez da hell is…” Arminus blurts and quickly steps back to defend himself, but it stops growing just as he was about to put his hands up to fight. As if that would solve the situation. The supposed log reaches up to Arminus’s knees and he notices the log wraps around both the left and right corners of the alleys.

 The mall leads down the right side of the alleyway. “If this ‘thing’ leads into the mall. I might find some answers on why this place is desolate.” Arminus confirms to himself and treads carefully alongside the right side of, whatever ‘it’ is. Though afraid to lose his arm, he tenderly brushes the snow off. And discovers that the ‘brown moss’ looks to be more like fur. And furtherly examining the ground closer, Arminus sees longer white fur attached to its base. “This is definitely a tail from an animal. I just reeeaaallllly hope it’s not Aaauuggffff!” The tail quickly shifts towards Arminus swiping his feet, face planting himself on the left side of the tail. “…snake.” Arminus finishes as he stands up and continues down the ally.

 He reaches the street, and his eyes track the tail curving left. It follows down the sidewalk into a smaller park. “This is longer than I thought.” Arminus speaks with surprise but carries onto the trail. The wind rushes more, tossing the snow on the ground and in air aimlessly hindering distant visibility. He reaches the park fence and finds more of the tail weaving through the parkland’s terrain but buried underneath snow. “This is waayyyyy longer than I thought.” Arminus could barely see the tail under the snow, so he brushes it off just to be sure he isn’t misled with fresh powder landing in his face.

The snow falls heavier and Arminus can’t see more than 20 feet in front of him, unless he found better height. VVVVRRRRMMMM He quickly backs away from the tail as it now grows up to his waist. Giving him an ingenious idea, “Don’t you dare move.” He commands to the tail, as if it could obey. He bunny-hops onto the tail and begins balance walking on it, like a beam used for a toddler gymnast. “Where do you… there!” Arminus glimpses at an exit fence about 20 yards away leading to the mall.

“How is this thing groOOWWWAAHHHHH!” The tail begins to shift again, but with more aggression than before. The thrashing force of the tail is almost relatable to a mechanical bucking bull, causing Arminus to surf sloppily on it. “SEERRIIOOOUUUSSLLLYYYYY?!” The tail brushes the snow, uproots the grass, and shovels the dirt around the park while tottering Arminus. Who is just trying to stay atop of it. “JuUUEESSTT stoOOAAHHPPP alreEEAAADYYYY!!!” And it did stop, abruptly. It whiplashes Arminus off rigorously into a muddy and grassy snowbank headfirst.

Arminus uses his feet to pull himself out of the snow, with some earth in his mouth. “(Spits) St-stupid tail. You do-don’t even realize yo-your da-damage out here.” Arminus complains with frozen fidgets, but the bushy brown tail lays there with no response. “I’m talki-kinng t-to a tail… Geez th-this isss just me-messed up.” Arminus recollects himself. It was easier to see the tail, so he continues his, hopefully, short journey. But with the recent fiasco, he’s now damp and cold with wind roaring against him. But that doesn’t cease his curiosity, he plans on solving this weird mystery.

 Finally reaching the exit end of the park and spots the mall through the snowfall. “Huuuuuh, good. Just ne-need to g-get insi-side.” Arminus boosts his confidence as he notices the tail enter the main mall doors. But the sliding doors continuously open and close onto the tail, with it being on a pressure mat. Arminus trudges beside the tail VVVVVVRRRRRMMMMM as it now grows up to his torso and pushes Arminus aside too. But he didn’t topple over, “Th-This just keeps ge-getting weird-der and we-weirder.” He remarks as he traces his hand alongside the tail to the mall’s entrance.

 Learning from his previous mistake, Arminus quickly leaps over the tail without grazing it. Afraid that it might give him another surfing lesson. He views multiple types of recliners, side tables, and couches. Arminus just assumes he’s in some furniture store section of the mall. With an invasive tail that has toppled furniture or is resting on it. “P-Pl-Please end he-here.” Arminus irks as he pursues. The only good news is that it didn’t snow in the building, but the building didn’t have any heat running. And the emergency lights were on, illuminating dim sections of the store.

Arminus honestly thinks it might be warmer outside in the upstarting blizzard. Nonetheless, Arminus maneuvers between the furniture and tail in the chilling space. “Brrrrr, da-damn it all. I’d kill fo-for a and he-heat wa-warmer or UGHMFFF!” He trips over a hidden coffee table and onto the tail face first. His upper torso lands on the side of the tail while his legs catch him kneeling.

 “Stupid coffee tab… Wow. This is…” Arminus is somewhat speechless at the tail’s texture. The fur fluffs around his head as it caught him. “This warmth was… welcoming and… whimsical” He thinks to himself. He didn’t receive any pain from falling onto it either, if anything it broke his fall. “Mmmm. No! Don’t get distracted.” Arminus reminds himself as he pushes against the tail to stand up. However, his hands sink deeper into the flourishing fuzz. He can feel each strand of hair not only comforting his palms but expel a hibernating heat too. “Ahhhh, it’s like wool mittens on top of a heater… Damnit! Focus!” He shouts to himself and stands up. With his hands having feeling again and his blood running, he advances through the cold store.

 After some ducking and climbing, he spots a door sized hole in the wall with some music supplies scattered inside the furniture store. And the culprit tail is passing right through it. “This thing must have started in the music room.” VVVVVVRRRRRRMMMMMM the tail begins to expand again with the brown hair growing thicker and the white hair beneath extending its length more. “Now to just fit in the gap.” Arminus wishes as it ceases its growth yet again, with its new size being up to Arminus’s chest. He skinnies himself between the tail and broken wall to slip into the music room. When entering, he can barely see inside the store. The emergency lights were out or flickering, there weren’t many windows, and heavy blizzard outside nearly blacks out the store and brings the temperature down even more.

 “Guess I’ll just follow by touch.” Arminus comments and places his left hand on the tail. He continues to walk and shiver while brushing the fantastic fur beside him. He would walk over books, or bump into instruments with his feet while touching the tail. The further he walks away from the hole in the wall, the darker and trickery it was for him to navigate with his eyes. He bumps into the shelf face first and places his hands on his face to feel if he was bleeding, “Ow ow ow, that hu-hurt… wait, wh-where’s th-the tail?” Arminus begins to stick his left hand out, then extends his arm farther out. He can’t find it, so he sticks both arms out, but bumps into another shelf, a couple of instruments, and slams his shin into a snare drum. “Gaahhhdd fukin… where’s m-my ph-phone?” He reaches into his pants pocket.

CREAK

Arminus doesn’t move, trying to confirm what he heard. But nothing happens during his inspecting. He check his phone settings for his flashlight.

CREEAAKKK

 Arminus refocuses on the sound again, he turns his phone home screen around to use as a slim light. Arminus centers himself between two shelves with open space around him for safely. He scans his front, sides of the shelves, and behind him. Nothing. He dimly lights the ceiling to view hanging string decorations on a fat vent pipe balancing on the two shelves. “Who’s there?” Arminus calls out while staying in place.

CRREEEAAAKKK

 “Hey, I heard that. Show yourself.” Arminus announces, but nothing. He gets to his flashlight setting and uses it. He rescans his front, the shelves, and back.

CCCRRREEEEAAAAKKK

 Arminus shoots his attention above him, and gulps in fear. The vent above him string decorations moved. And with better light, Arminus realizes it’s the same tail with longer white under hair hanging above him. VVVVVVVRRRRRRRMMMMMMM The tail enlarges again and stops. But it’s putting the shelves’ strength to their limit.

!CRACK!

 The shelves give way and the tail drops quickly onto Arminus. He veers left to escape it’s speedy decent. “AAWWWW-” THRUMP. But the tail lands on his front, leaving only his head, left side of his body, and phone free. With his right torso and legs were trapped underneath. The white dense under hair blankets across the floor and Arminus. The sudden pressure knocks the wind out of him as he feels his body under the massive tail. “(Coughs) Piece a (coughs).” Trying to catch his breath, Arminus sets his phone to the side and tires to push off the tail. Yet again, his hands bury themselves into the fur. “Come on. Just a little…” He begins to swivel his body to free himself of the tail but makes little progress.

 He continues to shake himself, but begins to feel pressure on his lower body. “Crap, if I don’t get out of this...” He doesn’t finish his sentence as he tries harder to escape. The pressure around his legs make its way to his waist, torso, and right arm. “Come on!” Arminus says as he uses more energy to free himself. “I need to… I need… I… feel… warm?” He judges oddly. He starts to feel a thermos radiate his legs and body. While the white hair on his left free side begins to have an eloquent sensation from each individual strand. “It’s like a… a… weighted heat blanket.” Arminus jumbles his statement from the pleasure and comfort of the tail. “And hair so heavenly to the touch, it can melt away any problem…” He begins to drift into drowsiness. “GAAAHHHHHH WAKE UP!!” Arminus screams to break his trance.

 He rapidly swivels himself to free his right side and then uses his arms to lift out his lower half. Standing next to the tail, it reaches up to Arminus’s head after having its previous growth spurt. Fear of being overcome by the tantalizing tail shot his adrenaline through the roof. After freeing himself, he grabs his phone. “Too close. Any longer down there in that colossal, cramp, cozy, comfortable, ki- (shakes his head vigorously) never mind.” He distracts himself and walks with his phone out and light on. He angles his phone’s light to easily track the tail resting on the ground and through a double doorway.

 Arminus inspects the left side, but the hair squishes around the metal doorframe tightly. Against his better judgement, he climbs the tail and scans the top door frame. Rather having more hair or simply being a larger portion, the tail is more tender and tepid to the touch. Arminus isn’t complaining though, if anything he’s trying to not be so distracted by it. He finishes his scan on top of the tail and hops down to scan the right too, but no luck in finding a gap. “Well, this sucks. And there isn’t a door or hallway on the left side of his tail either. And this wall is made of bricks.”

 Arminus contemplates his thoughts. He can’t shimmy left or right of it, he can’t squeeze above it, and crawling under it is… out of the question. His moment in thought was interrupted with the howling snowstorm outside, that for some reason just keeps growing and growing louder any time he tried to think. Adding to the growing cold, minimal light, and near crushing experience; he’s at his limit of patience. He begins to react erratically, “Fantastic! I’m nearly frozen to the bone, AGAIN. It’s damn near impossible to walk outside, the blizzard has probably buried my car and the time is…” He looks at his phone to see 6% battery life left when originally checking the time. “… fucking almost dark, and all because of some lousy lumpy limb. Huummpphh PHUMPT. Ouch, son of a…” Arminus strikes the tail with his foot hurting himself, but it also stirs up the tail.

 The tail begins to whip around within the music store from Arminus’s action. Thankfully Arminus was near the doorway where the tail is stuck, so it couldn’t bend to hit him. But he didn’t escape the tail’s wrath unscathed. SMACK “Uuggffff, Oowww.” A foam ceiling tile breaks over his head and Arminus looks up to see the hole in the ceiling which gives him an idea. “This… this could work.” Placing his phone back in his pocket. Arminus waits for the tail’s fury to end and carefully climbs it again. Using its height, he reaches the ceiling tiles above and begins to climb himself into the rafters. After bringing himself up, he begins army crawling with a foot of space between the ceiling he is on, and a bunch of pipes and electric cords above him.

 “Guess letting my anger get the best of me is a blessing in disguise. A hurtful disguise, but still a blessing.” Arminus murmurs as he continues in the tight corridor. He disperses his weight on the rafters beams more than the foam ceiling tiles, to avoid falling through. Minutes pass as Arminus keeps shimmying above the ceiling. “(Pants) ok-kay, small br-break.” He chitters as the chills are reaching him again. “This bu-building ne-needs new li-lights, hea-heaters…” FWOOOMM. Arminus hears the wind around him. “Gr-Great, I’m too cl-close to the ro-roof th-that the co-cold is se-seeping in.”

 PUUUUFFFFFF FWOOOOMMM The cold is getting to him, but the sound of the gale isn’t above him. “Wait, it’s beneath me?” Arminus lays his ear to the ceiling tile PUUUUFFFFF FWOOOOMMM PUUUUFFFFF FWOOOMMM where the sound becomes clearer. “Why is the air chan-” CRACK Arminus falls through the ceiling screaming “Waahhhhhh!” BWAMPS and lands face first onto the floor. “Why di-did I do tha-that? The st-stupid tiles c-can’t even hold up a pu-puppy.” He is in an empty black abyss. Not even the white tile ceiling can be seen above him. He begins to register the felt floor on his face. “Guess I’m i-in a ca-carpet st-store.” As he assumes, he pushes himself off the carpet, but his hands sponge into the delicate doughiness. “Or a ma-mattress sto-store.” PUUUUUUFFFFFFFF FFWWWOOOOOOMMMMMM PUUUUUUUFFFFFFFF FFWWWOOOOOOMMMMMMM.

 The mattress expands and shrinks from the air beneath him “Guess it’s a new air mattress.” Arminus assures himself and attempts to stand. “Guess the tail broke through the outside, would explain the sound and arctic air.” Arminus only gets to his knees as his arms feel the same fleece blankets around him. Possibly piles of them as he pushes against their firmness lifting himself up to his feet. PUUUUUFFFFFF FFWWWWOOOOMMMM PUUUUUFFFFFF FFWWOOOOMMMM. The same expanding and shrinking motion happens again, but Arminus pays no mind to the air mattress he’s on. “How many (grunts) blankets does one (grunts) mattress need?” Arminus is pushing the chest high fuzz away like foliage in a jungle. PUUUUFFFFF FFWWWOOOOMMMMMM PUUUUFFFFFFF FFWWOOOOOOMMMMMMM. The same rising and fall motion repeats itself, leaving Arminus more concerned. “How long is this bed?”

 Arminus reaches for his phone to use for a flashlight again GRUMPT “Whoah!” A sudden ground quake flings him in the air by surprise. Arminus clenches his phone in his right hand while trying to grab onto whatever he can with his left. He can’t tell where he is, and his anxiety is overloading to find something to land on or grab onto. His rocketing momentum has come to a halt, meaning gravity is now taking over. “Crap. Crap! CRAP!” he shouts as he desperately flares his left arm to grab something as he falls. “CRAP! CRAP! CRAP! YEESSSSS!” Arminus shrills with glee while grasping onto the same fleece strings he had felt before. Though he slams into a bristly brick wall. He is aching a bit from the impact but is overall relieved he is okay.

“(Pants) Ooohhhh tha-thank you. Thank yo-you. (Pants) Now I j-j-ust ne-need a li-light.” He celebrates briefly, only to see his phone battery at 2%. “Crap. Us-Using the light n-now, it’ll on-only last for a mo-moment.” He shudders in the cold still. PUUUUUFFFFFFF FFWWWOOMMMMMRRRRRRRGGGGGGGGGG. The wind that was beneath Arminus begins to vibrate, bringing tremors to the wall he was against and the string he was holding onto. “Did the tail move or something?” GGGGGHHHHRRRRMRMMMMMMM. The sound came out again but louder, and Arminus could feel a growl shake his body.

“Sc-Screw it.” Arminus puts his phone on flashlight mode while dangling on the hair. He notices a brown fuzzy floor with white spikes off the ground afar. Between the spikes and him are two thin circular beams with a smaller beam connecting them together. And the center of the two side-by-side circular beams wasn’t hollow, each had bending glass shining back the light Arminus was producing. “Am I i-in an op-optometry sto-store?” Two large spherical lights nearly matching his size light up behind him. Their shine gave color to the familiar white hair Arminus was holding onto and displayed the glasses that were ahead of Arminus. Turing around, he sees each light had a warping white outer layer, a gorgeous green layer within, and a black center encapsulating pupil. The lights were eyes, and the grueling gale was the breath of the slumbering creature Arminus had been searching for, and now found.

The eyes home in on Arminus hanging by white strands of hair, who is speechless and paralyzed. “*Battery is low, please find a suitable charging station.”* Arminus didn’t even notice the dead battery alert in his right hand, or that he didn’t breathe while its eyes focused on him. The pupils became smaller as the lime irises became larger. “Uuuhhhh, hi.” Arminus attempts to speak to the, hopefully, peaceful beast. “GRUMALSK UMDERFUCH LOADNI.” The beast bellows something extremely foreign to Arminus, damn near demonic sounding too. Arminus begins to shudder a bit from the deep response and the bitter cold. “I… I do-don’t ge-get it.” Arminus’s small voice responds back to the monster, which causes it to cover its eyes with its big brows. Arminus knows all too well to understand, it wasn’t happy.

Arminus descends to the brown fuzzy floor he assumes is the nose. “Shit, not good.” Arminus thinks to himself as he begins concocting a plan. He touches the nozzle and begins running away from the eyes. “HOILSK MOFTI!” The same low voice rings Arminus’s ears and rumbles his body to the floor. He sits up to question. “Why a-are you an-angry with m-me?” He asks. “MOFTI GHOPALISH” is its rattling response. Arminus couldn’t comprehend anything it’s saying, but they both seem to take turns speaking and listening. “What th-the hell do I ev-even…” gravity shifts beneath Arminus flattening him on the snout as he feels a burst of heaviness, quickly followed by lightness. “MOFTI GHOPALISH!” The vibrant voice speaks again, but with more of an echo behind it.

“What?” Arminus was shaken from his own voice being louder. It reverberates the dark space like a steep cliff down into a canyon. “Oh, don’t te-tell me.” Arminus says to himself and begins to piece together the sudden gravity shift and echoes. This creature stood up, and probably at a height Arminus can’t survive to land. If he can see anything in dark space he’s in. “Just… just get aw-away from m-me.” Arminus begins backing up slowly passing the glasses on the monsters nose. “MOFTI GHOPALISH!!” The beast blares louder with the same frowning brow. “Wh-Wh-at are yo-you doing?” Arminus responds and keeps walking backwards while keeping eye contact, tracing his every step with the utmost delicacy. “MOFTI GHOPALISH!!”

“Mo-Mofti Gho-Ghopalish? What do-does that me-mean?” Arminus asks but sees a reflection in the glasses he passed. The reflection shows three sharp staffs above him. They grow larger and longer until the brown fuzz reveals itself from the darkness. It was the monster’s fingers. Arminus quickly turns around and ducks under the timbering talons about to pinch him. “G-get away fr-from me!” Arminus yells while running from the terrifying talons. He hobbles away from the deathly beast’s grip but is met with white spikes at the end of its nose and a blank copious cavern of night below him. While lingering towards him, are the same talons. “MOFTI GHOPALISH!!!” The creature drearily demands.

Arminus is stuck. He can’t dodge under or around the talons without getting caught. But he has no more space behind him to run because of the nose spikes blocking his path and view. He only has two options: Jump or be grabbed. “MOFTI GHOPALISH!!!” the colossus commands as it’s nails open to snag Arminus. Options are limited with the knowing danger ahead versus the unknown below. “FUCK IT!” He leaps off the right side of the nozzle as the talons were about to grab him. He vanishes into the blackout void, in hopes that he would reach the ground soon. “Where is it!?! WHERE’S THE GROUND?!!??!?” His head races to find an answer, but what good would that do in a sizable space he can’t see in. Even if he miraculously survives the fall, how will he survive the beast within the walls.

“UMGGFFFFF!” Arminus lands face first on a pad unexpectedly. The touch is leathery with gentle heat emitting off it. Besides the shaken surprise, he brings himself up with no pain. “Finally, the…” He pauses his sentence as he touches the familiar flourishing fur that he first encountered. “…ground?” Green dim lights from the creature above reveals its open paw palm. The palm matches a king bed, with textures of fanciful fuzz, big beans, and its plushy palm pad. Something looms over Arminus before he realizes it. The talons of the other hand touched and shoved Arminus into the palm he is laying on. “Get off me! Stop it!!” Struggle as he may, his flailing gestures are useless.

The beast leans its head down behind his hands close to Arminus and murmurs softly. “Mofti… Ghopalish.” A quiet low tone that doesn’t shake the room ceases Arminus’s struggling. He can feel the pressure of the talon hold him, not crush him. His heart is racing, but gradually breathes slow and long to calm himself. “Yojnere.” The beast says and raises it’s talon off Arminus. He assumes it said “Thank you” as he turns around to sit up again. He stares at the eyes which somewhat show its face, but the black room is still hiding the rest of the creature. “So, wh-what now?” He stutters from the cold and some fear. The beast glares away from Arminus, it’s eyes partially illuminate the floor. Arminus traces the light moving across the floor left and far. And there laid a random book.

“Chijecty Wegasv Bertoj Qolvulch.” The monster exclaims as it stares back at Arminus then back at the book. Arminus puts two and two together. “Th-that thing. Over th-there?” Arminus asks while looking at it and points to the book. “Chijecty Wegasv Bertoj Qolvulch.” It repeats again. “Ok su-sure.” Arminus attempts to walk off the paw with hair puffing everywhere and curled talons over his head. He takes a step onto the hair FWIFT and slides between the creature’s two digits. He isn’t harmed, thankfully. “Geez almost had a heart attack. Damn hair everywhere I couldn’t…couldn’t… oooohhhhhh.” Arminus looses his train of thought while being doused between delightful downy digits. Serene simmering softness engulfs him in everywhere except his face. Two fingers keep Arminus from moving on his own. He has space but fluff this fantastic is hard to escape.

“I don’t think a heating blanket could top this.” Arminus muddles, but the hand lifts off him breaking his daze. “Chijecty Wegasv Bertoj Qolvulch!” The monster grumpily repeats again. “Ok, Ok. I’m going.” Arminus puts his hands up to show an apology as he walks to the book with the beast glaring at him. He picks up the torso sized thick leather woven bounded book with a cover tie string on the front. As he walks it back, he observes the crest on the front cover. There’s a burnt outline of a dragon’s head and a burnt bare tree with fives limbs within the head. “Talk about D&D.” Arminus compliments quietly. He stands between two giant paws, it speaks again. “Lioj rhabick.” It states while nodding its head at the book. Arminus assumes and opens the book and is dumbfounded but the text inside, not even the sketches were common to him.

“Utrop Momvi.” It twirls its left talon at Arminus to turn the book around for it to see. And Arminus does so like a human podium. The beast uses it nail carefully to turn a couple pages. It taps a page a couple times. “SUNLOWDA!” It bellows and a yellow sphere conjures itself from the book SSHHHEEEEUUUUUUUUU BAM it hits the ceiling and shines the entire room like daytime. Arminus squints but refocuses his eyes to see a spectacle. A humongous 80ft dragon laying like a sphynx in front of him. Ferocious fangs almost touch its white puffy chest as its white hair hangs long from it’s head spreading across the floor. It also has white grown behind its paws too. But the main color for this dragon is a brilliant bronze. The neck, face, ears, and paws all bare a beautiful brown.

But the rest of it didn’t show because the dragon was stuck. It’s forearms where tucked under its shoulders while pressing against the wall and it back was bumping into the ceiling because it’s belly covered the entire floor. Arminus is now connecting the dots more with the light in this large empty vacant strip store. “H-How did th-this happen?” Arminus asks still cold, but realizes his question fell to non-linguistic ears. The dragon hears Arminus, but only brings its left paw to the book. Arminus lifts the book and the dragon shuffles through the pages. It went forward then backwards, and tapped a page again like last time it found the light spell. “VOSHCAL LEINGWESKIT!” It announces and the pages flutter uncontrollably in the book, shaking Arminus as he holds it too.

“Uhhhh, whatcha do-doing?” Arminus questions as he feels the book becomes harder to hold from its vibrations. FWWOOOOSSHHHH it flies out of Arminus’s hands and to the ceiling. While open, it begins to spin in place as white dust shimmers down from the pages. Almost like snow, each sparkle graciously floats down on to Arminus and the dragon. Arminus puts his right hand out to feel the dust land and slightly tingle. “Wugchim” The dragon calls Arminus to pay attention as it sticks it’s tongue out for the sparkles to land on. Arminus copies the dragon too but is met with little crackles and stings on his tongue. “OW OW OW, it’s like glass flavored pop rocks!” Arminus bickers. “What are pop rocks?” The dragon asks. “It’s a candy that pops in your… wait what?” Arminus realizes he can understand the dragon, and vice versa.

 “I’m happy you can understand to me. But I am in need at the moment.” The dragon exclaims. Arminus is blown away from the conversation he is having. “Uhhh, I’m A-Arminus.” He replies baffled. “Well, I am Birch. It’s nice to meet you, even though the circumstances are…” he attempts to shimmy himself out, but to no vail “… restricted.” Questions and glee swell inside Arminus as he is conversating with a dragon WWHHAAAAMMMMM “EEAAHH!!!” Arminus yelps as he hears the book slam onto the floor behind him. “GAAAHHHHH!!” Brich roars, VVVVVRRRRRMMMMM and begins to expand. The ivory horns on Birch’s head grow back while the pallid nose horns rise taller from his snout. The alabaster fangs seem to have grown too, with more glimmer than before.

 The growing stopped, and Birch was calm and collected again. “Not again, this is the fourth time that you’ve seen me grown.” Birch complains. “Wait, y-you could se-sense me?” Arminus asked still cold. “It’s my tail little one, I know when anything, or anyone…” he gives Arminus an eyebrow stare “…touches it.” And big he was, his head alone is a size of a construction dump truck when being in the light close to Arminus. He felt somewhat insulted about his size but brushes it off. “Well with-th your bo-book here, ju-just do a shri-shrinking spell and yo-you’ll b-be alri-right.” Arminus states while picking up the book. “It doesn’t work like that. The tome won’t help me shrink.” And there it is again with the tiny taunts, but Arminus just breathes.

 “Ok, th-then what wi-will?” Arminus incites. Brich sighs as he prepares an answer. “From my realm Pyrrhia, I acquired a device that can change my size. A ‘size-ray’ so to speak.” Arminus indulges. “And it’s wh-where?” Birch answers. “I seem to have, ‘misplaced it’ behind me somewhere. When I arrived here with my satchel, I was greeted by you humans. While using my tome to translate, without warning I began to grow. I quickly tried to transcribe my Vocal Linguist spell, but my growth changed my tone bringing out a blizzard instead. Which scared the humans more causing them to flee.” Come to think of it, the weather didn’t say anything about snow. And Arminus is just coming to terms to this as well.

 Birch continues, “I concurred that my ray must have malfunctioned because once my satchel snapped off, I stopped growing. I tried to reach back and grab it, but I began to grow again. And every attempt I made; I kept expanding as you have seen. I’m afraid if I try again, I could damage this building or the ray itself. Keeping me stuck at this size.” As Birch finishes his claim, Arminus chimes in. “So, y-you want m-me to go a-and grab it?” Birch smiles and answers. “Yes please, you’re small enough to squeeze through. It’s the best option I can think of.” Birch begs benignantly. Arminus surveys Brich’s right side to see if it was possible and there was a small opening above his right shoulder. “Can you repair this place and remove the blizzard first?” Arminus negotiates. “I can’t at this size…” Birch says regretfully. “… the book is too small to read now. But I will once I’m back to normal. By my Dragon’s Dignity.” Birch solidifies.

 Arminus needed to get warmth anyway, and his vehicle is buried in snow. He has to do this. “Ok, ju-just hold sti-still…I gu-guess.” Arminus instructs. “You realize I can’t move, right?” Birch reminds him. “Oh, ye-yeah.” Impishly replying, Arminus makes his way on top of Birch’s right paw. He begins to grab Brich’s fur. “Sorry-ry if th-this hurts.” Arminus apologizes in advance. “I’ll be find, but please be careful.” Birch incites him. Arminus climbs up Birch’s shoulder and onto his back. “Hey, I ca-can almo-most touch th-the ceili-lling.” VVVVVRRRRRMMMMM Brich begins to grow again out of nowhere, forcing Arminus to duck. The growth was quick and thankfully stopped before Arminus was pressed into the ceiling. “Arminus, are you alright?” Birch calls him. “Ye-yeah, yeah. I’m go-good.” Arminus shivers out his answer.

 Even being on top of Brich, Arminus feels the frozen tundra brisk by him. Arminus notices four copper wings folded in and snug tightly begins Birch’s back. It’s textures are a leather webbing with feathers stemming out on the four main limbs. A delicacy to see and even more so when they expand, but he shuffles on Birches back to make his way to the hip. Heaps of homey hair graze against Arminus’s chest helping him tolerate the cold. As he reaches close to the hip, he feels Brich begins to tremor. “He, he, he, he.” “Bir-Birch, what’s go-going on?!?” Arminus calls to him. “You’re tickling me.” He laughs back. Arminus rolls his eyes and keeps going, adapting to the Brich’s tremors or giggles. Arminus steps onto the to of Birch’s hip and looks over to the wall it presses against.

 “Welp, I go-got to ge-get closer-ser.” Arminus encourages himself, as he leaps down between the hip and wall. “Oh, Arminus are you there?” Birch reacts to the Arminus pressing against his hip. “I’m fi-fine, just getting-ing closer-er.” He answers back. His feet are on the wall as his body is against Birch’s hip. Closer inspection shows Brich’s brown fur having a black patch. It’s rougher compared to his the brown and white hair as he trails from the front of the hip to the back of the hip. But he can’t find anything. “Anything?” Birch’s question is a little muffled. “No, I can’t… wait.” Arminus accidentally brushes into something sharp poking into his back. “Birch do you have horns on you hips?” Arminus interrogates Birch. “No, why?” Arminus uses his right hand to reach behind to grab what seems like a handle.

 “Good no-now to-” VVVVVRRRRRMMMMM The ray activates “Well shiIhhhmmMMM.” Arminus remarks before being hip checked into the wall as he accidentally activated the size-ray to grow. “Arminus, what’s going on?” Birch shouts to him as he feels the effects of the ray, and his hips growing wide and spread on the side walls with flourishing floof and growing girth. “Oh no, no, no, no. I can’t stop growing.” Slowly Brich breaks the ceiling with his head and back and begins to feel his tail breaking the doorframe, along with the rest of his tail cracking walls and collapsing anything it is resting on. “Arminus.” He breaks the ceiling above him. “Arminus!” His fangs begin to piece the floor. “Arminus!?!?” His sides start cracking the walls.

 Birch was going to wreck the entire mall at this rate, and Arminus too. Birch did everything he can to relieve his hefty hips off Arminus, but he didn’t have enough space. He is growing past 100ft in height, and the building can’t take much more of it either. “Arminus!?! Arminus do something!!!”

(Silence)

 Birch stops growing from his final call for help. He has definitely damaged the interior, but thankfully didn’t destroy any pillars holding the mall up. “I’ve stopped. Oh thank goodness I stopped! Wait, Arminus!!” And on cue, Birch begins to shrink. He hasn’t felt this effect before, but he assumes it’s from the size-ray. Slowly and surely, Brich frees his arms and feels his tail unclogging from the doorway. Along with his horns and fangs reverting to normal. He is now skinny enough to turn his body around and find Arminus on an enormous, cracked wall from Birch’s right hip. The now 6ft dragon trots over to Arminus. “How did you do it?” Birch asks. But Arminus is out cold from the pressure he just received but has the size-ray in his right hand. Birch examines the rap and observes the switch behind the trigger. Arminus’s thumb set the ray from ‘grow’ to ‘shrink’ before he was pancaked into the wall.

 “Let’s get you down.” Brich loosens Arminus’s legs first, then arms, and finally his head and body. He removes the ray first, and then removes Arminus off the wall. “Dear me, you’re cold to the touch. I need to stop this blizzard quickly.” Laying Arminus on the ground, Birch gets to his tome and finds the page natural weather. “Volcano, floods, tornados… ahh blizzards. Ahem. NEIGATCHE BHLIZAEROS!” The grueling gale outside the mall stops, and the snow ceases its fall. “Good now to fix the mall.” As Brich checks the wall Arminus was stuck in, he notices Arminus isn’t getting any warmer. “His skin isn’t thick enough to contain heat. And his breath is becoming faint.” Birch begins to worry, he has spells in the tome to aid for warmth. But only to his own kind, he’s afraid anything he conjures up might be too much for Arminus.

 “Uhhh, what should I do? What can I do?” While struggling to find an answer VVVVVRRRRRMMMMM he begins got grow. “Ohhh, not again!” He freaks out as the room yet again begins to shrink in front of him. Birch isn’t only growing, but it’s happening at an alarming rate. Not even five seconds in and Arminus is the size of Brich’s right arm. His nails grow longer and curl as the color becomes a deeper dark brown. And his horns and fangs elongate with the a shinier coat of white than before. If he wasn’t stressing about his grown, his features are a complimentary sight for any onlooker. “Where is it?” he searches in haste but is now too long to turn around in the room he was trapped in and will be trapped in again soon. His tail is stuck again in the doorway and braking its frame. Then Birch feels a familiar pointed object under his left foot. “I need to grab it, quickly!” He enforces himself, though it’s easier said than done.

 Birch cannot lift his feet because his torso is holding him down. And he can’t raise his torso because it is jamming itself and Birches wings into the ceiling. Arminus is now the size of Birch’s palm again as Birch continues to grow even further than last time. “Nnrrrmmffff it’s getting tighter.” He warns himself as he hears the ceiling begin to crumble. Pebble sized debris fall in front of Brich, but those boulders are the size of couches to Arminus. And they were dropping straight on him. “Arminus!!!” He quickly shields Arminus with his growing right paw from the debris. Brich’s wings break through the ceiling as his sides start to break the walls out. He can’t stop the growing. “Oh my… this going to be messy.” He gently grabs Arminus with his two ferocious fingers and braces for the worst.

 Birch’s wings break through the roof, followed by his back, and finally his head. His hips and arms break the outer walls of the mall. Dust and dross scatter across Birch’s fur and the parking lot surrounding the mall. After devastating the mall with his sheet monster mass, Birch is able to lift his foot off the size-ray. It finally ceases him from growing, but not without the excessive damage to the mall. “This will take some work, but I can fix this with my…” Birch looks down for his tome but cannot find it. “…tome. Maybe it’s here?” He uses his left paw to try and search for it in his fluffy forest of a chest but isn’t having any luck with his nails being too large. “This is problematic, I’ll just grab the size-ray first.” While carefully holding Arminus in his right paw, Brich turns around to search for the ray. But when her moves his foot, rubble from the wreckage fills the space. Which buries the ray heavily.

 “Huh, there’s always something.” He brings his right paw up to his face as he observes the still unconscious Arminus between his two furry fingers. “I guess I’ll need your help again Arminus…” Birch notices the darkening dusk. “…But we’ll search tomorrow.” Birch moves his right paw over his and places Arminus under his massive white mane. “For now, we rest.” Birch lowers himself to the floor elegantly, just to make sure he doesn’t knock Arminus off. After getting his body comfortable and feels Arminus safely on his dome, big burly Birch falls asleep. Thought KO’d, Arminus’s subconscious feels the same inviting warmth and comfort as Birch’s hair blankets over him. Even while out cold, Brich’s luxury softness will keep him from the cold.