

Monster Hugger Tri
By: RaddaRaem

“You said no, right?” Chin tucked against her chest, uncertain growls reverberated within the Nargacuga's throat. “...Right?”

The knee high human before her wordlessly flipped down his helmet's visor in response.

“Jet!” Pointed ears flattened against her head, a bitter sigh tumbled out from the Flying Wyvern's maw. With a roll of her eyes she dropped to a crouch and pinched at the nape of the Hunter's neck.

Swallowing hard, Jet let his limbs go limp as he was lifted up into the air by the metal gorget wrapped around his throat. He could hear, he could feel, it compacting to putty between his behemoth beloved's clawed fingertips.

“Well?” Pronounced folds formed along the bands of crimson fur wrapped around the Nargacuga's eyes as her piercing gaze burrowed into her precious prey.

Dangling in front Nell's beak, Jet bunched his shoulders together while he shrank in on himself. “...I told her I'd think about it.” A sharp scoff immediately sent the humbled human violently swaying back and forth.

“When you said there was something you wanted to talk about this wasn't what I had in mind!” Cheeks puffed out, the Nargacuga irritably chirped.

“I... I know.”

Eyes clenched shut, Nell couldn't help but grumble. When her human had broached the topic of something he needed to discuss with her in private, after inviting her out for a seaside stroll, her imagination had leapt to, admittedly, much more romantic overtures.

“It's. You. Hmph.” Head tossed back, Nell squawked and stammered in fits and spurts before reluctantly setting Jet down upon the shifting sands.

Clutching at his wrist, Jet forfeited his case before he could so much as plead it. “I'll call it off then. That'll be that.”

“...That's not.” She hadn't come across that curt, that inflexible, had she? Eyes pressed against the sides of their sockets the Nargacuga grumpily flopped back against a sand dune. The grasses and reeds growing atop it compacted into cushioning, scratchy at that, beneath her.

“Nell?”

Growls steadily rose and fell within her throat as she failed to find the words she so desperately sought.

Shrugging his shoulders, the hunter opted to recline alongside the massive monster. In silence they drank in the rustle of palm fronds, the gentle crash of the receding waves, and the faint cheeps of Downy Crakes.

WHAP

Armor jostling, Jet curiously turned his head to the side.

FWAP

Nell's spiked tail impotently slapped at and kicked up clouds of sand every time she grudgingly inched closer towards her insignificant other.

FWUMP

Eyes half lidded, Jet acted none the wiser until, with a harrumph, she let her beak come to rest against him. As pitiful, yet longing, growls that rattled him to his bones came to fill the air the human couldn't resist reciprocating with a gentle boop of his fluted helmet.

Time passed. As the Nargacuga steadily soaked up copious amounts of sunshine and snuggles her heavy growls slowly transitioned into purrs. Interspersed among them were many sighs, swallows, and snorts.

Furred cheek resting atop him, pinning him in place, Jet had no choice but to patiently wait until Nell untied her tongue.

With a dejected whine the batcat finally deigned to speak. "...What can she teach you that I can't?"

"Nothing! Nell... I'll... I'll be training Alma not the other way around. Trying to, anyway."

"You say that now..." Nell pouted.

"I do say that, and mean that, now," Jet reassured her.

"Training is our thing though!" harrumphed the Nargacuga.

"And it still will be! Nell, if it bothers you that much I won't go through with it. I promise."

The Wyvern flared her nostrils and huffed. "It's just. I just." Eyes dipping low, her face positively radiated heat as a searing blush came to crease her black furred cheeks. "...This is stupid. I'm stupid."

Subdued chirps wafted out from Nell's beak when Jet clasped his hands against the sides of it. "Stop that! You're not! You're not."

Pangs of shame wracked the Nargacuga as she reluctantly nuzzled into her half-buried human. Even now, after all this time, Juneau's words bounced rent free around her skull. "Jus' sayin! It's his life to lead not yours," echoed the Jagras' husky voice. Hrfff. Nell stewed at the fact that the worst Trainer she knew had a point. "T-this is your life we're talking about here..." she mumbled aloud, "and I'm not the one who should be deciding it for you."

"It's my life, sure, but it's you... you know." Jet fanned himself as condensation collected along his visor and his heart caught in his throat. "One I want to share with you. S-so I care about what you think I should and shouldn't do with it."

POFF

No sooner did the hunter confess as such than did a hulking pair of scaled hands cup against his back. With a muffled hiss and whumpf Jet found himself skidding along and scooped out of the sand before being buried into Nell's bosom.

"That said..." Jet trailed off into the mounds of furred flesh that rivaled him in size. "Even if you were on board with it I... I doubt it would work out."

Biting at the inside of her cheek Nell hesitantly dared to press the matter further. "Why though? You made it sound like you wanted this."

A deep and heavy exhale, one drawn out from the pit of Jet's stomach, wafted out from between his lips. "I do and... I don't."

Arms tucked tightly against her chest, Nell thumbed lovingly at her bitty boyfriend's back while she waited for him to elaborate.

"On the one hand it's... it's incredible! A monster, a Slayer no less, wanting to learn the tools of the trade from me! Me of all people!" Nell struggled to hold back flustered chirps and giggles as the human excitedly wiggled around while he spoke. "...Me." Jet's tone and enthusiasm sank with his posture. "The wannabe playing pretend at being a Master Hunter. Tch, it's only because of that feral *thing* that I finally understood what it truly takes to be one. That and how big of a gap there is between where I am and where I want to be."

Nell's ears flicked attentively as she chewed on his words. "You're worried that you're not up to the task."

Jet silently nodded. "Going into this I thought, I hoped, that maybe teaching Alma would be exactly what I needed. A way to hone my knowledge and help her, help me, become a better Hunter in turn. The more I started thinking about it though I... the more I... I started to doubt myself." Noisy clanks sounded out as he impotently gestured at the air. "How can I teach someone how to fight like a Hunter if I'm still figuring it out for myself?"

The Nargacuga growled, mostly at herself, while she reluctantly tiptoed out of her comfort zone. She could be, she would be, supportive. "Well... what would you do if you were training me?"

Sighing heavily, Jet wiggled out from between the furred hills that lined his gargantuan girlfriend's chest. "Try not to embarrass myself for starters," he grimaced.

"I'm serious," Nell rumbled.

Resting against the Nargacuga's sternum, her words felt more than they were heard, the human scrunched his lips. "I mean." Impatient growls violently shook any and all traces of self-deprecation out of him. "I... I guess first and foremost I'd try to find out what weapon complements your fighting style."

Brows furrowed, the Wyvern let slip bassy chirps as she tossed her head back and invited Jet to scratch at her exposed neck. "Complement how?"

Blushing furiously, his outstretched arm pinched beneath and guided along by a single scaly

finger, Jet struggled to gather his thoughts. Torrents of steam poured out from the slits in the Hunter's visor as he tried, and failed, to string together even the simplest vowels and consonants. "Y-y-y-you said it yourself! There's no point fixing what ain't broken. So it... so it would have to be something that complements, that flows, with your tools of the trade."

Nell trembled at Jet's very touch. Eyes fluttering, she rolled her head to the side and not so subtly encouraged him to keep at it. Scaled digits pressed against the human's back, his heavily layered plate mail dimpling beneath them, the massive monster kneaded him into her thick fluffy neck. "Like what?"

Sliding his hands through her fur, the tufts of fluff erupting from between his fingers so thick Jet lost sight of his own limbs, the trepidatious teacher continued to think. How would he describe her fighting style?

Jet's mind, and muscles, wandered while he clenched his teeth and recalled his endless losing streak. It took little effort to imagine the Nargacuga lunging towards him with claws at the ready and a mindless bloodlust, always feigned, contorting her visage. In his mind's eye he slid beneath her, moss and mud caking against his back, before hopping up to his feet with Hammer at the ready. Whirling about on his heels he rushed towards her, so as to capitalize on his counter, only to be...

Shoulders sagging, Jet obediently scritch and scratched as he shrugged off an unconscious wince. With great reluctance he peeled back the curtain of his mind's eye once more only to be met with the sight, and deafening sound, of her mace of a tail clanging against the side of his helmet. Guh. How many carts had he earned that way? Even should her initial lunge and slashing swings fail to meet their marks Nell could be counted on to counter his counter in any number of ways. She could anchor her hands into the earth and, with a quick hop, slam her weaponized limb directly down upon the Hunter. Or, alternatively, she could sway and sashay those toned hips of hers and send him ragdolling with a sweep of her tail. Her strikes, swift and free flowing, blended into one another with ease. Which meant the Nargacuga's weapon of choice had to be able to match that breakneck pace...

"Hrmmm." Sliding down off of Nell's neck, Jet took to stroking at his own chin in thoughtful contemplation.

"Hmm?" Propping herself up against the sand dune, rending the flattened reeds upon it into pulp, Nell curiously regarded the pacing Hunter.

Jet continued to mumble to himself while his train of thought accelerated. "Something fast. Something light. Something that can be both drawn and sheathed at a moment's notice..."

Crimson bands of fur bunched against the undersides of the Nargacuga's eyes when she saw her human clank to a halt. Frozen in place, waves lapping at his greaves while the soft sand swallowed him up to his ankles, Nell's pointed ears steadily started to droop. "...Jet?" Ambling forward she dropped to a crouch and warily reached a hand out towards him.

Gasping, Jet jostled in place while he clapped his hands against the side of his helmeted head. "I'VE GOT IT!" he triumphantly screamed.

Squawking, the webbed wings that lined the startled Nargacuga's forearms unfurled when she stumbled back into the seashell pocked shoreline. As Nell rubbed at her bruising backside Jet raced up between her kicked out legs.

“Dual Blades!” he excitedly shouted.

FWAP

The human’s armor noisily crumpled when the Nargacuga playfully clapped her thunderous thighs together. As folds of furred flesh enveloped him up to his neck he impotently wiggled and gasped for air.

“Dual what now?” Nell asked with brows half-cocked while Jet feverishly tapped out.

“Whereas Alma...” Nell shuddered when she so much as uttered the Slayer’s name. She resented the thought of sharing her human, her Jet, with the Anjanath. Yet... the Flying Wyvern couldn’t help but shrink in on herself every time her jealousy flared. Had she always been this possessive of him?

“Right! Whereas Alma would be a better fit for a Sword and Shield,” Jet excitedly elaborated. “Given your approaches to defense are so wildly different your weapons of choice should reflect that!” Cupping a balled fist into his palm the Hunter beamed with newfound purpose and resolve. “You, on the one hand, pour on the pressure. Your attacks come so fast, so furious, that monsters and men alike barely have the time to think much less react! If Alma is all about trading blows, and coming out on top in each exchange, you’re more about never letting them come to pass in the first place!”

The Nargacuga forced a smile and nodded along as she and Jet slunk along the shoreline. Would her chest tighten and teeth clench if Taras pulled him aside for further training? Or Brook for that matter?

“Wait. What am I saying? I shouldn’t be the one telling you how you fight! You already damn well know all that!” Jet nervously laughed. Thrumming his fingers against his chin his bravado began to falter as he sharply inhaled through his teeth. “Really hope I’m not projecting here...”

Nell, ad nauseum, continued to nod. If, when, Jet attained his Master Rank would she protest against him seeking additional training elsewhere? Would she rankle and recoil at him consulting other Trainers? Other Hunters? Slamming her tail down into the sand, dragging clumps of seaweed and driftwood behind her, the Nargacuga stifled an embarrassed growl as she slouched forward and followed after her Hunter.

“By the Sapphire Star maybe I am...” Jet mumbled as he underwent a crisis of confidence. Coughing into his fist, he couldn’t help but note that Dual Blades, and in turn the humble Sword and Shield, were admittedly some of the smallest and simplest weapons within a Hunter’s arsenal. Meaning that they were, shamelessly, among the easiest options for him to try and scale up to more monstrous sizes. Oh Gods. Had he only latched onto those two because of that?

The Nargacuga papped at the sides of her beak. O-of course he could see other Trainers! Other Hunters! It... it was just... training had been what brought them together. What kept them together. What would they even be without it? As Nell trudged along the shore, sand giving way to rocky crags and slick stone, her shoulders sank.

Shaking his head, Jet reeled back his spiral into madness with a much needed reality check.

Hold on now. If he well and truly wanted to full-ass this he could just chop down a tree and call it an Insect Glaive. Right? So that meant his guiding, his Sapphire Star, clearly wasn't the path of least resistance!

Arms crossed about her chest, Nell's mind wandered. What would they be without it? Well they... they would still be friends. They would still sneak out to the Canteen every night. The fur lining the massive monster's cheeks puffed out as increasingly flushed thoughts flooded to the forefront of her mind. They would still go for walks together in the Ancient Forest. They would still rendezvous just outside the human settlement every morning to swap hopelessly size-mismatched smooches and snuggles. They would... they would still love each other.

Fists clenched, Jet knocked his knuckles together as he carefully hopped between the sharply angled and barnacle lined rocks jutting out from the base of the cliffs overlooking the ocean. No more second guessing! Even if he had come to wrong conclusions, for what weapon best suited what enormous monster woman, at least it was for the right reasons! Now... now all that remained was actually bringing these ideas, however misguided they may be, to life.

The Nargacuga chirped proudly as she held tight to that simple truth. Rain or shine, training or no, her love for Jet would endure. They would find, hells they already had found, new ways to express as such! Shaking her head, Nell banished those fraught and poisonous feelings of jealousy from the forefront of her thoughts and gave her all to the task at hand. Which uhh... umm. Hum. Brows furrowed, Nell awkwardly stumbled from one crag to the next as boulders, crusted with salt crystals, pinched at her paws. ...What again were they doing out here?

"Jet?" Nell dared to ask. Webbed wings unfurled and arms tossed out spread eagle, the Wyvern let the wind catch beneath her as she uneasily tried to balance herself. "Where are you taking me?"

"You'll see!" Jet excitedly called back. With a hup he splashed down into a tidal pool and beckoned for the Nargacuga to follow. Paying little heed to the Escuregots panickedly wriggling about his ankles he raced around a rocky bend. In all of Astera there was but one place, one well kept secret among the humans, where such wild and outlandish dreams could be made real.

Nostrils flared, Nell harrumphed as she watched him disappear into a spray of white foam. Arms swinging at her sides, the Nargacuga gracelessly hurled herself forward. With a startled squawk, her leathery paws slipping and failing to gain any traction against the seaweed slicked stones beneath her, Nell fell back onto her broad behind.

Cape fluttering majestically behind him, Jet cleared his throat as he solemnly gestured towards priceless relics of a land long forgotten. "Feast your eyes, Nell! On the Old World's Epita-"

"AHHHHH!" Screeched Nell as she helplessly flapped her arms. Sliding past Jet, drenching him with a spray of salt water in the process, the Nargacuga crashed into the surf with explosive force.

Arms hanging limply at his sides, Jet meekly regarded the cresting waves kicked up by her careless cannonball.

SPLOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOSH

“Ungh...” Arms draped over the sides of the stony shoreline Nell pulled herself out of the shallows. With a grunt she plucked Jet free from a bubbling pile of seafoam and driftwood.

“W-w-wel-” Jet started before letting slip a series of wheezing coughs.

With a playful roll of her eyes the Nargacuga flicked up the Hunter’s visor and smirked at the steady stream of water and stray Whetfish that came pouring out from within his armor. “Well?”

Ptooting out seashells and seaweed alike Jet heaved as he gathered his breath. Weakly gesturing to his side, the human motioned for Nell to follow his gaze. “Welcome to uh...”

Beak hanging open, the Nargacuga’s words failed her. Tucked away into a cove, sunkissed and long-forgotten, lay what could only be described as floating fortresses. Their hulls, run aground and split open, allowed their wooden entrails to spill out onto the shifting sands.

“To the Old World’s Epitaph!” Jet managed in between blehs and coughs. “...Pretty cool, right?”

Nell’s eyes danced over the unfamiliar structures. These were of human make, no doubt, but... how? How did these even get here? How could something, someone, so small craft something so imposing? Ears perked to attention, water flicked off of her fuzzy features every time Nell attentively swiveled them towards the creaking constructs.

“...Nell?”

Hands cupped against her cheeks, Jet acking as he was allowed to flop to the stones below, the Nargacuga greedily drank in the sights and sounds of a world that was not her own.

“So the Elder’s tall tales are true? There really is another world beyond the horizon?” Nell excitedly chirped as she paced about a derelict deck. Her heart soared, and her stomach sank, at how the boards buckled and groaned beneath her paws. At how this floating nest rose and fell with the push and pull of the tide. At how the sun-bleached and tattered cloth hanging high overhead fluttered and flapped in the breeze.

Lips pulled flat, Jet tossed his head back as the target dummies and salvage he had dragged up from the lower decks went unloved and unnoticed. “Uhhh... sure? Look, Nell, this isn’t what I brought you here for.”

Stamping about in place, the warped wood molding to the contours of her toes, Nell’s barbed

tail wildly swung side to side as her mind raced. The railings along the sides of the ship, already cracking apart, exploded into clouds of splinters as the Nargacuga's spiked limb casually cleaved through them. "What's it like? What's it called?"

Jet responded with an emphatic shrug. "Unno! How am I supposed to know what the Old World's like? I was born and raised here just like everybody else." A frustrated grunt tumbled out from the Hunter's helmet when Nell responded with a pout and a clap of her hands against her hips. "Stop that!"

Nell impatiently tapped her broad paws and squawked. "You stop!" she snipped back. "I mean... just look at the size of this nest!" the Nargacuga boomed as she flailed wildly about. "You're telling me there's a whole world out there where humans live like this? How come you don't live in one of these?! This is the perfect size for us!"

"It's a ship..." Jet exasperatedly elaborated.

Nell's eyes sparkled at the clarification. "Humans have different names for different kinds of nests?"

"We. N-no, Nell, we don't live on-" The human paused when he grudgingly realized she was, in fact, technically correct. "...If you're sailing on the open ocean then yes, you kinda have to, but that's not-"

"See!" triumphantly squawked the Wyvern. To think! Stationary nests were called houses. Floating ones were called ships. Her mind reeled at the thought of just how many different kinds of human nests she still had yet to learn about! Squawking and growling giddily to herself she ambled towards a propped open hatch. Rusted away to nearly nothing, the flaking metal having become a brilliant kaleidoscope of greens and browns, it freely offered entry to those seeking entry into the bowels of the ship. Nell eagerly accepted its invitation and daintily stepped forth.

CRK K K K K

A cacophonous crash instantly sounded out the moment the Nargacuga allowed her soles to smoosh and spread wide across the wooden staircase leading down into the depths. At the faintest application of pressure the rotted steps simply fell away.

"...It's fine," Jet groaned. With a wave he motioned for the tensed Nargacuga to carry on.

Tail swishing nervously behind her, Nell hopped down into the lower decks. The whole of the ship shuddered, sliding perceptibly into the shallows, as the handrails to the stairs popped out of place and simply crashed down alongside her.

Wait. The Hunter's cheeks flushed beet red at the delayed realization. "Us?"

Dropping to a crouch, her neck and back bumping against the rafters, the Nargacuga's piercing yellow eyes cut through the darkness. The batcat's powerful form, scarcely illuminated by the beads of sunlight poking past the rusted cannons pointed out the porthole windows, skulked about. Crates. Tables. Hammocks. Much and more of these distinctly human crafts she recognized littered about the place. Even after being abandoned for Sapphire Star knows how long it still felt so lived in.

Jet fitfully shook his head side to side as she shooed away flustered thoughts of cohabitation. "A-a-anyway!" he called out. "The reason I brought you here was so we could salvage. Target dummies, practice weapons, raw supplies. If I'm going to craft you some Dual Blades, something even close to scale, we'll need all the help we can get!"

To the Hunter's relief... the Old World's Epitaph was more than capable of providing such. His predecessors, the grandparents he had never met, had left the Old World for reasons known only to them. They and their compatriots charted a voyage, with his infant parents in tow, uncertain if they would find succor or suffering beyond the endless ocean. Yet all the same they left with no intention of ever returning. Well before they could even be certain that this land or its peoples would accept them they purposefully beached the vessels that saw them to safety. Hell or high water they committed themselves wholly to what would become Astera.

"Just what it was about the Old World that could have compelled them to make such a reckless and desperate gamble?" Jet thought to himself. Those questions, among others, would retreat to the recesses of his mind as they had countless times before. Leaning over what little railing remained, the Hunter contented himself with drinking in the haunting yet soothing symphony that whistled through the wooden and waterlogged corpses that filled this graveyard. These ships, now skeletons, had been entrusted to the generations to come with the hope that they would be freely picked and plundered. To be the fertile ground from which dreams of another age could take root and flourish.

TATUNK

... That he may or may not have been presently desecrating. Hopefully his ancestors, long laid to rest, didn't think too poorly of his gigantic girlfriend using their last will and testament as a play place.

"Hmm? You say something, Jet?" Nell curiously rumbled.

"N-nothing important!" Jet nervously coughed to himself.

With a shrug Nell dropped to her stomach. Letting her chin come to rest upon her forearms she slowly crawled forward through the increasingly cramped corridors. Shoulders bunched, she casually elbowed aside furniture, and entire walls, all while happily chirping to herself.

"Just that when it comes to help we can't exactly look elsewhere for it," said the Hunter with a sigh. "We'll only have ourselves to rely on. I can't very well go and put in an order at the Smithy for something in your size..."

Struggling to keep her eyes open, the monster quietly soaked up the gentle sway of the ship and the muted crash of the waves against its hull as she passively nodded along.

“Given that would raise a whole lot of questions that I’d rather not answer,” Jet sharply inhaled through clenched teeth. Astera, as it was, remained standing only by the good graces of its monstrous neighbors. Its vaunted gates, while menacing, were decorative more than anything. The fact that Taras, and Nell, snuck past them to frequent the Canteen on a daily basis all but proved as such. Even though relations had begun to thaw, if not grow warm, between humans and monsters as of late... Jet sincerely doubted his proposal to arm the already all powerful locals would be enthusiastically received.

“Mrph. We’ll figure something out,” Nell purred. Nuzzling into the back of her scaled hands her breathing grew slow and heavy. It was a little cramped, sure, but this nest had a certain charm to it. It was serene, secure, silent...

“We will but It’ll definitely take some doing,” Jet trailed off. “Now think,” he mumbled aloud as he let a pair of wrought iron Dual Blades hang from his hips. Jostling side to side he hummed when the curved metal nicked at his armored knees and all but obscured the sides of his legs. Hum.

Jet tap tap tapped at the side of his helmet. Roughly speaking, these guesstimates of his bore out that the ideal Dual Blades should match the wielder’s leg in width and halve it in terms of length. Considering the fact he only came up to Nell’s knees, and her thighs alone eclipsed if not shamed him in size, that would mean that he himself was the perfect unit of measurement!

“A blade the size of a man...” The human froze in place when he uttered as such aloud. An epiphany, blinding and brilliant, nearly struck Jet down then and there on the spot. How had he not realized this sooner?! Great Swords, in her hands, would be but daggers! “Hey, Nell! Nell! I know exactly what-”

Snores, loud and pronounced, silenced the Hunter’s celebrations. The musty air, suffocating warmth, and rhythmic creaks had simply proved too much for her to resist.

“Of course,” Jet smirked. Eh. It wasn’t like he was in any hurry. Rubbing at the back of his neck the Hunter lazily sauntered towards the rusted open hatch and quietly dropped down to the decks below.

TUNK

With a chirp, Nell blearily creaked open an eye when her bitty beloved vaulted over a bicep and tucked himself close against her cheek. Hmph. Yawning, she lovingly nuzzled into him and blissfully purred as he took to scritchng at her beak. If this was how an emptied human nest made the Nargacuga feel... she couldn’t help but bashfully wonder how safe and inviting Jet’s own would feel in comparison. Someday, and soon, she hoped to find out.

Wringing his hands, Jet anxiously peppered Nell with one question after another. "Not too heavy?"

Chin tucked against her shoulder, the Nargacuga sashayed her hips side to side. The twin weapons slung over her shoulders barely registered against her thick fluffy back. "Nope!"

"Not too restrictive? Not too uncomfortable?" Circling Nell, the Hunter obsessively looked for any fault or failure in their slapdash setup.

"It's fine, Jet! Honest!" Chest puffed out, the wyvern proudly flaunted her hastily handmade vest. She was, admittedly, coming around on this whole endeavor as Jet continued to shower her with more and more human crafts to play with and even wear! Though suffice to say... her attire was filled with far more love than it was quality craftsmanship. The undersized article of clothing barely stretched down past the Nargacuga's breasts and it was absolutely pocked with pronounced rips and tears from which tufts of black fur peeked forth.

Jet struggled to peel his eyes off of Nell's heavily accentuated everything. Damn him and his lackluster handiwork! He had just wanted to give her something in which she could tuck her Dual Not So Great Swords into! The fool of a Hunter wasn't trying to emphasize the ripple of her muscles, the contours of her every curve, or the Nargabooba on his lovely and loomy Nargacuga. How was he supposed to know she'd pull off the look so well?!

Chirping thoughtfully to herself, Nell reached back and drew her blades. Fingers curled, the Nargacuga rumbled as the grips of the Great Swords disappeared into the wrinkles of her scaled palms.

"Weapons facing out!" Jet quickly clarified for her. Drawing his own set of Dual Blades, dull and worn, he pointed them down at his feet and motioned for Nell to follow along for herself.

Mimicking his motions, Nell tightened her grip as she looked down to her trainee turned teacher.

"Great! Then to put them away we..." Sheathing his blades into the faint slots of metal that jutted from the back of his plate mail, their hilts catching in place against them, Jet watched, with some pride, as Nell fumbled after him. Frustrated, then excited, growls tumbled out from her beak when her own weapons caught against the cracked leather holds woven into the back of her vest.

"Masterfully done!" Jet beamed. Hand held out before him, thumb raised, he drowned the Nargacuga with positive reinforcement. "Next... we'll need to make sure that all this extra equip load isn't messing with your movement."

Head cocked to the side, Nell's barbed tail attentively flicked to and fro. Their stomping grounds, having lain dormant and untouched for weeks following the near disaster with the feral Tigrex, were unrecognizable. Without the daily wear and tear of their training veritable sheets of ivy, Scatternuts, and Redpits had all but swallowed up the clearing.

Retreating into the shade of the surrounding forest Jet wrapped his arms around and awkwardly dragged a large wooden something back out into the sweltering sunlight. Blocky, and barely humanoid in shape, the Hunter panted as he propped up a target dummy before Nell. With a smirk he slapped at the back of its square head. “Ready?”

Dropping to her hands, hackles raised and tail swaying menacingly behind her, the behemoth batcat nodded in the affirmative.

Jogging back some ways the Hunter drew in deeply of the humid and pollen tinged air. “Quest... Begin!” he shouted.

Snarling, Nell lunged forth at Jet’s wooden facsimile. Sailing just over its head, the target dummy’s skull found itself sanded down by Nell’s toned abdominals.

Jet shuddered as uncomfortable feelings of envy towards his lifeless likeness bounced within his brain.

While wood chips collected at the mannequin’s base the Nargacuga’s already short sleeves rolled up past her bulky shoulders as she skidded forward through thickets of ivy. The fibrous vines, catching against her powerful wrists, were torn apart with ease when Nell sank her clawed fingers into a thicket of moss. Arms tensed, she whirled about her grassy grip like a pivot. Swirling in place, spikes jutting from her tail, she slammed her morning star of a limb into the target dummy. With a sickening crack it exploded into shrapnel and splinters.

“That’s a cart!” Nell proudly growled as she stumbled to her feet and flexed. Flashing a toothy grin she teasingly bapped and tapped at Jet with her tail while he readied yet another target dummy.

“Once more from the...” the Hunter grunted at the pronounced yet playful boops that assailed him from all sides. Swatting back to no avail the Hunter yelped when he suddenly found himself hoisted up into the air as Nell’s tail curled around him. Arms hanging limply over its sides he could but sigh and chuckle as she brought him in close for a snuggle and a smooch. “What was it again you used to say?” he taunted in between nuzzles.

Nell snorted and rolled her eyes as she buried him between her barely clothed breasts for a crushing hug.

“Oh that’s right!” Clearing his throat, Jet tried to muster up the raspiest voice he could manage. “I’m not seeing the appeal...”

“I do not sound like that,” the Nargacuga sassed. Arms tucked tight against her chest she all but suffocated him between her sweater muffins. Eyes half-lidded she lowered him back to the ground only when she felt his body go limp.

Doubled over, Jet gasped for breath. “Once more... once more from the top,” he sputtered as he

leaned into the soon to be demolished hunk of wood.

Forked tongue peeking out from between his lips Taras clenched his eyes shut tight. "M-m-maybe I'm jusst not looking hard enough," the Tobi-Kadachi unconvincingly reassured himself.

Standing before a massive tree, the Great Tree, that towered over all else at the heart of the Ancient Forest, Taras hoped against hope. For a new student, a new Hunter, a new friend to call his own! As he creaked open his crimson peepers, pining for the sight of a Scoutfly crawling forth from the wrinkled bark, the monster found himself greeted with an all too familiar nothing.

"...Sssame ass it ever wasss," Taras tiredly hissed. Arms tucked close, and scarred tail wrapped around his ankles, the Tobi-Kadachi sighed sadly. His cartoonish likeness, carved into the base of well... the Trainer's base of operations, still had yet to attract any takers. Even over the long course of his recovery not a single Rookie Hunter had seen fit to inquire, to express interest, about laboring under the fanged wyvern's tutelage.

His shoulders, and spirits, sagged at the sight of the countless Scoutflies that swarmed around Juneau's caricature in comparison. Nestled in among the bark of the tree, drinking liberally from its sap, there they would remain until agitated by the Great Jagras. At her prompting they would return to their respective Hunters, relaying that the monster was accepting new trainees, and from there she would take them under her wide wing.

The serpentine squirrel closed his eyes once more. "T-t-there hasss to sssomething! Anything! Pleasse!" he quietly pleaded. Taras' eyes fluttured open and this time... this time his forced smile finally faltered. The insects, and the applications they represented, clustered around the likeness of literally every Rookie Trainer save his own.

A low and pitiful whine rumbled within Taras' throat. As he brushed at his snout and stifled a snuffle his vision grew increasingly blurry. "Who am I kidding," he choked out as he struggled to take in the sheer number of crossed out, and still active, Hunter caricatures bunched up alongside his much more popular counterparts. "Nobody wantsss to train with me. Not with my reputation..."

Head hanging low, the Tobi-Kadachi forced down a strained swallow. His eyes reluctantly swiveled up towards his lonely likeness as he brushed a monstrous hand against it. At least Brook's, and Jet's, carvings had yet to completely fade from alongside his own. The only humans he had ever trained. The only friends he had come to know.

Growling, the fanged wyvern impotently kicked at the stray tufts of grass that sprouted from between the Great Tree's gnarled roots. "What am I sssupossed to do?" he whined. Brook had since finally returned to the Astera settlement and, tempted as he was, he couldn't very well sneak into the human habitation in broad daylight. B-b-besides... as much as he missed her he knew better than to smother her. Not after she had worn herself down to nearly nothing tending to him and his injuries for weeks on end. The Huntress had her own life, her own job, to return to. "Wisssh I could sssay the

ssame,” he wistfully mumbled. Turning his tail on the Great Tree Taras bid it a bitter farewell.

Hmph. As the Tobi-Kadachi dejectedly lost himself in the Ancient Forest’s undergrowth his thoughts began to drift. With his recovery, and Brook’s own, Jet’s welfare visits had understandably tapered off before halting altogether. "M-m-maybe he and Nell have resssumed training as a resssult?" he pondered. The Tobi-Kadachi’s souring mood lifted, if only slightly, at the thought of cheering the human on.

CRSHHHHH

Arcs of electricity crackled along Taras' spine as he neared Nell’s training grounds. His heavy footfalls, plodding up to now, accelerated to a jog.

“That’s how many carts now?” Nell’s familiar and bassy voice boasted. “Again!”

“S-s-ssshoot! Hold on, Jet! You haven’t lossst thiss yet!” Taras hissed under his breath. Elbowing trees aside, his ankles crashing through mushroom crusted logs as he went, the stacy serpent stumbled out onto the edge of the clearing.

Bounding along on all fours Nell roared as the muscles within her wrists and ankles tensed. A shockwave, colored by upturned dirt and rent apart leaves, rippled and pulsed out from beneath her when she leapt into the air. What thickets of ivy lined the ground simply vaporized into a pulpy mist as the Nargacuga somersaulted forward.

SHHHHK

The satisfying hiss of metal scraping against metal rang through the clearing when Nell drew her Dual Great Swords mid twirl. As the blur of black descended the Wyvern’s barbed tail flicked up and sent a cloud of dirt and tangled roots billowing up behind her.

THOOOM

Skidding forward, the Nargacuga bent her knees and dipped low while she buried the Great Sword clutched murderously tight within her left claw deep into the earth. Biceps bulging she squeezed the blade’s grip for everything it was worth, the heated metal molding perfectly to the contours and wrinkles of her palm through friction alone, as she used it like a pivot to swing back towards the kicked up smokescreen. Right arm held out before her Nell effortlessly sliced through and parted the cloud itself in half. As she completed her rotation her broad paws punted the base of the target dummy up into the air before suddenly, with a crack and a lash, her barbed tail whipped back and annihilated every last trace of its helplessly flailing form from this world.

“...Promise me you’re not going to hit me with that when we resume my Master Rank training,” Jet worriedly gulped. “Right, Nell?”

Rising to her feet the Nargacuga proudly puffed out her chest as she sheathed her weapons.

“NELL?”

Jaw agape, the vertical slits that were Taras’ pupils dilated into saucers.

Arms crossed about her chest, Nell playfully hummed and hawed as she danced around the question. “Maybe I will and maybe I won’t,” she teased with a sing-song chirp.

“Oh yeah? Well maybe I will and maybe I won’t remember to sneak you some breakfast from the Canteen tomorrow,” Jet promptly sassed back.

A squawk caught in Nell’s throat as she started sweating bullets. “You wouldn’t!” she pitifully pleaded.

“What. Wasss. That?” the utterly transfixed Tob-Kadachi muttered to himself. Blinking repeatedly, Taras struggled to shake himself out of his stupor as he watched Jet punch at Nell’s calves. Eyes bobbing to and fro they intently followed the knee-high human who, with a shake of his head, brandished his comparatively dinky Dual Blades and slowly snicked, slashed, and stabbed at the air. Nodding along, Nell drew forth the dirt caked swords slung over her back and pantomimed the motions with him.

Hands cupped to his cheeks Taras couldn’t help but blep and manically wiggle. Jet was a Trainer now? H-how? S-s-since when? Pacing in place, stomping out the fires his crackling sparks had started, the Tobi-Kadachi’s thoughts raced. “Are humansss even allowed to do that?” Taras hissed to himself. A sharp gasp filled the air when the fanged wyvern came to a psyche-shattering realization. “W-w-wait! If humansss can be Trainersss then doesss... doesss thiss mean monstersss can be Huntersss?!”

Eyes a twinkle, ozone seeped off of the serpent as electricity smoldered along the tips of the keratin spines jutting from his tail. Never had he ever dared to dream, to fathom, that such a thing was possible!

“Annd that about covers the basics,” Jet sheepishly concluded as he tucked away his Dual Blades. “Now with all that said... I... I have to ask.”

Beak clacking together, Nell hummed thoughtfully as her Hunter moseyed out of the clearing to retrieve the last of the target dummies. “Ask what?”

“As a Trainer what do you uh... what do you think of my curriculum?” Shoulders straining, Jet grunted as the blocky base of the mannequin caught against a tangle of vines. “Like. Like...” The exhausted human sighed as he leaned onto the dummy’s shoulder for support.

Nell's ears flicked to attention, swiveling this way and that, as she wordlessly regarded not only Jet's cry for critique but a distant and frantic rustling.

The Hunter gently smacked the back of his gauntlets against the wooden construct's cheek. "What I'm getting at is did you, you know, learn anything?"

"Uhhh... Jet?" Brows arched, Nell politely rumbled for his attention as hers was drawn elsewhere.

"Like I never realized how much work goes into this!" Jet whewed as he locked gazes with the mannequin's featureless face. "Did the topics flow well into one another? Did they make any sense? Does this format even work?"

"Jet," the Nargacuga ahemed pronouncedly louder.

"The Dual Blades aren't even my weapon of choice, you know? Neither are the Sword and Shield for that matter! Part of me feels like I shouldn't be trying to teach something I'm not even an expert-"

"JET."

"What?" Jet tersely replied. Whirling about on his heels, twisting the dummy's square head upon its torso so that it could stare at Nell alongside him for good measure, the human's expression promptly fell flat at the sight that greeted him.

Eyes half lidded, Nell brought a balled up fist to her beak and coughed into it. "All I'm going to say is that you must be doing something right. Since, well..."

Towering before him, an uprooted and stripped bare tree clutched tight within his scaled grasp, stood Taras. Shuffling one paw over the other the squirrely serpent meekly hissed out a request. "S-s-sssay, Jet? You wouldn't happen to be offering any coursssesss on the Insssect Glaive would you? I-I've come prepared!" A nervous laugh tumbled out from his toothy maw as he shook his pitiful attempt at a polearm. If nobody wanted him as their Trainer... maybe, hopefully, somebody would want him as their trainee?

Nell flashed a grin as she nudged at the Tobi-Koadachi. "Would you look at that? You already have prospective students clamoring to meet you!"

Bags accumulated under Jet's eyes at the dread realization he was suffering from, of all things, success. As the Hunter stammered out half-formed thoughts and excuses, inarticulately bemoaning how his means to an end had become anything but, whatever reservations he had crumbled when confronted with the pleading yet hopeful smile that creased Taras' snout. Aw hells. "I am now I guess!" he grudgingly volunteered.

“Ohhhhhh thank you, thank you, thank you!” Stomping happily in place, arcs of electricity gleefully exploded off the tufts of fur lining Taras’ back. His forked tongue furiously fluttered as he bashfully bumped shoulders with his fellow Trainer, and now fellow Hunter, Nell.

Leaning into the excitable snake the Nargacuga’s heart lifted at the realization, the recognition, that she was actually willing to share! ...With Taras, at any rate. Maybe she really could do this. Maybe she really could stomach Alma training and spending time with her bitty beloved.

“W-w-when do we ssstart, Trainer Jet?” Taras asked.

“Don’t call me that,” Jet grimaced. Slouched forward, he offered no resistance whatsoever when a pair of Nargacuga hands wrapped around his torso. The harried human irritably groaned at the, loathe as he was to admit it, fortuitous series of events. Seeing as how there were no quick and easy answers for how to scale up weapons to Alma or Taras’ size he may as well embrace the opportunity that had presented itself.

Flopped over the sides of Nell’s thick fingers Jet reluctantly readied a reply while his loomy lover hugged him close. “Iunno! Tomorrow, I guess?” he mumbled as Taras gently noogied his helmeted head. Even though he hadn’t given Alma a set in stone timeline for when he would get back to her... he’d rather not keep her waiting.

“Daybreak I take it? As per our usual?” Nell rumbled.

Well-meaning, and infectious, giggles rumbled out from the serpent’s chest every time Jet tried to slap his hands away. “Ooh ooh ooh! Asss assspiring Hunterssss are we finally allowed to eat at the Canteen?” Taras excitedly asked. “Doesss thiss mean we won’t have to sssneak in anymore?”

Snorting, Jet couldn’t help but wryly laugh as delighted chirps and hisses filled the air. “How bout we don’t press our luck? That said...I’ll see what I can do,” he bashfully acquiesced.

“Mreow maow mrow?” Whiskers twitching, countless Palicos crowded around Jet as they sized up his cooking.

The Canteen, shrouded in twilit shadow, roared to life while Astera still slumbered. Aromatic plumes of smoke and clouds of steam billowed forth from its countless ovens as its tireless chefs, human and feline alike, toiled to ensure no one within the settlement would go hungry. Or, as was Jet’s case, without.

“Yes, I sourced my own ingredients,” Jet matter of factly tutted back. As he bantered with the Palicos he hurriedly scanned the grounds for a certain Huntress.

“Meow maowwww...” Clambering up onto the counter, its flailing paws scratching against the jagged stone, a tortoiseshell Palico took to stirring a bowl of egg yolks with marked suspicion.

“Meow mrow?”

“No, I haven’t forgotten!” Adjusting his bandanna with one hand Jet beeped the Palico’s button nose with the other. “I’ll season them after the fact.”

“Mrow mrow maow mao meow!” Vigorously shaking its head, the tortoiseshell would have none of it! Scooping up a handful of shakers the feline liberally seasoned the would-be serving of scrambled eggs with a concoction of spices.

“Oh come on! It all ends up in the same place!” Leaning back into his workspace, arms crossed about his chest, Jet cocked a brow and with one last look-see he bore out Brook's absence. Phew. He still had time to shake out how he would break the topic of training, of Alma, to her.

Judgmental and disapproving meows rose from the waist high crowd gathered around the apron-clad Hunter.

“It cannot make that big of a difference!” Jet retorted with a swish of his whisk for emphasis. “So what if it’s ON the eggs as opposed to IN them?”

The speckled orange and black feline disdainfully merped and snorted. “Meow mrow mraow mow mew!”

Arms hanging limply at his sides, Jet self-consciously wrung his wrists. “W-what do you mean what’s wrong with my batter?”

“Maow mao! Mow meow mraow mow meow!” Paws held out before it the Palico gestured furiously at the sad and lumpless mix of flour, milk, and eggs.

“Oh come on! So my biscuits might turn out flat and rubbery. Nell and Taras won’t know any better!”

WHUMPF

Hands held up before him, Jet wailed as he was assailed with a barrage of chef hats and oven mitts.

“Meow mrow mao maeow mow maow meeeow!” the Palicos harangued him in a near chorus. If anyone chowed down on the Canteen’s culinary creations they could confidently expect only the very best that Astera had to offer! It mattered not if their customers were monstrous, ill-mannered, or ungrateful. Quality was quality and the meowster chefs that ran this place would tolerate nothing less!

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry! It’s just I didn’t bring enough ingredients to-” A cacophony of meows drowned out Jet’s protests as they salvaged what they could of his cooking. Swarming around him they

shared what little soda ash and salt they had to spare.

Stammering, Jet struggled to keep pace with the flurry of fix-its they proposed. "Don't you think you're asking a bit much of me?" he complained.

As Palicos clambered atop the human's head and shoulders, meowing and mrowling out instructions, they refused to entertain his excuses. "Mrow maow meow mow!"

Sighing heavily, sweat staining his apron and bandana, Jet found himself buoyed by their critical yet unconditional confidence in him. They knew he could do better and... they were right.

The Hunter allowed a shy smile to crease his lips while he splashed the skillet sizzling in front of him with heaping helpings of butter and oil. First Alma, then Taras, and now this? Heh. When had he become the kind of person that others could entrust their hopes and aspirations to?

"Mreowwwwww!"

"OWW. HEY HEY HEY. I heard you the first time!" Jet shouted as he punted the Palicos clawing at his thighs.

Hrmmmming, Taras squinted as he pinched at Nell's tattered and fraying vest. Back and forth he rolled the unspooling threads betwixt his massive digits. "Sssee I've always thought they were more like the Temnoceransss," he mused. "Jusst look! They weave and ssspin all sssortsss of thingsss!"

Nell vigorously shook her head in disagreement. He thought humans, her Jet, had more in common with those arachnoids? Really? "I still say they're more like the Neopterons," she defensively chirped. "Armor? Psh. That's just a carapace by another name."

The tufts of fur lining the fanged wyvern's back swayed as static washed over them. This daffy batcat thought his Brook was akin to a beetle? Seriously? "Sssince when do Neopterons take off and put back on their ssskeletonsss?" Taras dismissively hissed.

Tail fwacking behind her Nell bopped her beak against Taras' scaly snout. "Since when do Temnocerans... uh... umm... wait a minute. I can say the same for you!"

"No you... can. Heck."

Sitting cross legged before the Astera gates, their knees knocking against each other, the Nargacuga and Tobi-Kadachi thoughtfully hummed.

"Lynianssss, maybe?" Taras weakly offered.

“Nuh uh. Nowhere near fluffy enough,” Nell disappointedly retorted.

“Truuuuue.” Scratching at the back of his neck Taras worked himself up into a blush. “The lack of it iss part of their appeal after all...” he bashfully hissed as he tapped his fingers together.

Husky chirps rumbled within the Nargacuga’s chest at the thought of Jet’s smooth skin brushing up against her fur. Blushing something fierce herself the winged monster scritchd at her cheeks. “Maybe humans are just... humans?” Nell uncertainly opined.

“There’s got to be sssomething like them out there...” the Tobi-Kadachi growled. In silence the duo continued to contemplate the true nature of their beloved and bitty friends.

CRKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKK

Eyes swiveling within their sockets, the wyverns turned their gaze towards massive slabs of wood, reinforced with pikes, swinging open along their hinges. Smoke, hanging low to the ground, billowed out from beyond Astera's gates.

Head tilted back, Nell wafted the cloying cloud up towards her. Sniffing emphatically, drool trickling out along the sides of her beak, the Nargacuga’s eyes went wide. “Is that what I think it is?” she happily wiggled side to side.

Footsteps, noisily shuffling along the dirt and gravel path, accompanied a low yet persistent hiss.

Serpentine jaw stretched wide, Taras’s pupils contracted into razor-thin slits while rivers of saliva poured forth past his teeth.

As the rising sun dawned over Astera, bathing the haze that surrounded it in pinks and yellows, a silhouette came into focus. Standing tall, with what looked to be Sisyphean boulders perched upon its shoulders, it trudged forward.

THOOM

THOOOM

THOOOOM

Biting down on his lip, Jet wheezed while he hauled out two monster sized breakfast platters. With every spine straining footfall his vertebrae threatened to collapse in on themselves.

Hands clasped around their ankles, Nell and Taras furiously swished their tails as they leaned forward in anticipation.

THOOOOOOOOOM

Hurling their platters forward, pebbles rippling out from beneath the shield sized ceramic plates that crashed to the earth, Jet heaved out a breathless request. “Nell, Taras... you two have a bit of a... a bit of a reputation so I was forced to put down a deposit on those plates. So promise... promise me that you’ll try not to-”

HROMF

“Never mind,” Jet grimaced as he flopped back onto the beaten path.

Sinking his sword-sized teeth into the plate itself the Tobi-Kadachi ravenously inhaled his meal and the ceramic it was served on. The biscuits, layered thick with honey and sprinkled with a faint yet earthy Gloamgrass varnish, caked the ribbed roof of Taras’ mouth while spice-laden streams of saliva and churned chunks of Blissbill omelettes coursed between his teeth.

Nell, biting into her platter, ecstatically moaned as chunks of roasted pineapple and lengths of Mosswine sausages scraped along her tongue. Her fur puffed out, and wings unfurled, at the delightful crunch of the plate between her beak.

What had taken Jet hours of effort vanished in a matter of seconds. Hands cupped over his eyes, he defeatedly groaned as the monstrous duo noisily forced down their meals with throat straining swallows before sucking their fingers clean. “Why again do I do this to myself?”

WHUMPF

Tails, one fluffy and one scaled, coiled around him as Jet found himself hoisted into the air. Smothered close into Taras’s torso, then Nell’s, the monsters took turns showering him with love and affection. “Now I remember,” the human sheepishly mumbled to himself.

“Ohhhhhhhhhh I’m sssso exsssited!” Taras gasped. “I-I get my own armor! My own weapon! E-e-even my own mealsss! Gossssssh I wonder what Brook will sssay!”

Limbs gone limp, Jet huffed while Taras violently wiggled him side to side. “About thaaaat. Uhhh... maaaaaaaaybe... maybe we keep this to ourselves for now?” Jet nervously laughed.

“Why’sss that?” Head cocked to the side, the Tobi-Kadachi curiously tugged Jet closer with his tail. Taras’ expression faltered not only at the sight of Jet’s guilty demeanor but Nell’s impassive one. “Isss sssomething wrong?”

Nell turned up her beak as Jet rubbed at his wrists. "Well you see Taras..." the human began.

"I get to train with Alma?!" Taras all but screamed with glee. Hands bunched up against his cheeks he giddily hissed as sparks erupted off of him with such fury that the sand surrounding him turned to molten glass.

"Not so loud!" Jet said as he frantically tried to shush the snake.

Chin tucked against his chest a bone rattling growl reverberated within the Tobi-Kadachi's throat. "Thiss isss amazsssing!" The nosy noodle triumphantly declared as he flopped back onto the beach and excitedly kicked his legs. "Now I have to tell Brook!"

"N-no you don't!" the human clarified. Running his hands through his hair Jet groaned as seagulls and Blissbills crooned overhead. "I-I mean think about it. Brook doesn't hold Slayers in the highest esteem. They haven't given her much reason to and neither... neither has Alma."

Scaly brows arched, the Taras blepped his forked tongue in confusion. "Sssince when?"

"Since... you... you know! The whole Tigrex thing. The whole stealing her Charge Blade thing."

"Oh that?" Swatting a hand, Taras dismissively raspberried. "Alma already exsssplained and apologizsssed! We're all good! Although..." Tapping at his chin, Taras couldn't help but hum. "Brook wasss wondering why you never mentioned that when you returned it to her."

Tilting her head to the side Nell roughly nudged Jet with her beak. "She what now? You what now? When exactly were you planning to share this with me?" the Nargacuga pointedly asked.

"When you asked me," Jet meekly answered.

WHUMPF

Rolling over onto her side, Nell grumpily chirped as she buried her boyfriend beneath her breakfast filled belly.

"It'ssss fine!" Taras reassured her. "Brook and I... we..." The Tobi-Kadachi pulled himself up into a sitting position as he thoughtfully hissed. "Ssshe may not like Alma but, after everything ssshe'sss done for usss, Brook doesss ressspect her. Ssshe doesss trussst her."

"Hmph," Nell squawked. Shuffling in place, toes curling as the beginnings of her muffin top pancaked Jet flat, the Nargacuga sighed. If even Brook was willing to give the Anjanath a chance...

FWUMPH

The human, freed from his prison of plush, peeled himself out of the him shaped crater in the sand. Shaking seashells out of his hair, Jet turned to Taras. "So... she's okay with this?"

"Ssshe won't be happy about it," the snake warily confessed. "But... I think ssshe'd be willing to give it a chansse. I'll know for sssure when I assk her!"

"As will I next time I swing by the Canteen," the Hunter promised. Oh he was not looking forward to the verbal ass-beating that was waiting for him. Dusting himself off, Jet rose to his feet regardless and motioned for Nell and Taras both to follow.

Rising to her feet with an urf, stomach still sloshing, Nell stomped after the knee-high human. Tail swishing behind her she playfully, and repeatedly, bumped him into the surf in spite of his protests. Not one to be left behind, Taras excitedly gave chase. His enormous clawed toes practically scraped against Jet's heels as he clung to the Hunter like he was his shadow.

"Say, Taras?" Nell asked in between bouts of bullying her boyfriend.

"Hum?"

"Why are you so dead set on the Insect Glaive anyway?"

Wrinkles formed along the Tobi-Kadachi's scaled forehead as his answer, dripping with profound insight, danced upon his tongue. "Becaussse it looksss coooool," he shyly hissed.

"Oh for-"

With a salt stained breeze whistling at their backs the mix of monsters and men jostled and joked among themselves as they tread towards the rising sun. Towards a new day, a new dawn, where adventures beyond their imagining would slowly but surely unfold.