

Episode 1 Transcription: Barks & Beginnings.

Dungeon Master:

Welcome to Tale Craft, a unique D&D style tabletop podcast where each decision shapes the evolving story, a story not yet written. Our players have created unique characters, a man raised by dogs, a giant humanoid wombat, and a single mother on a quest. Their choices, combined with the roll of the dice, are woven into the narrative by ChatGPT, creating an ever changing realm.

I'm Aaron, your host and guide to what no doubt will be a chaotic mess as I try to help navigate our players' choices into the evolving story. Join us in a world where each decision influences this unfolding epic, and the path of our adventure is anyone's guess. Let's meet our characters.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

I'm Ben and I'm playing Grizzly Von Smooth Coat, a rugged human barbarian with a heart as wild as the dogs that raised him. Abandoned in a dark alley as a baby grizzly, Von Smooth coat was taken in by an unlikely family. A pack of tenacious Jack Russell terriers under the watchful eye of his adoptive mother. He grew up alongside his three brothers, Blade, Laser and Blazer and his sister Michelle.

Though human by birth, grizzlies' behavior is more canine than man. He barks in his sleep, lashes his teeth when provoked. Grizzly van smooth coat can often be found at the local tavern, guzzling ale and howling at the moon. Much to the amusement of the regulars, he is known for his uncanny ability to sniff out trouble.

Wombella:

I'm next. All right, all right. Um. I'm not Kia. Right? I'm not Kia. Um, I am Wombella. I have superpowers with all my mushrooms in the forest, and I will poop squares every 30 minutes, I poop squares.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

That's gonna make for something...

Wombella:

It's just whatever I am doing, I rush to the toilet, which is the normal thing in real life anyway. Oh, it's. Yeah, I'm not Kia and my name is Wombella.

Viola Screamblade:

Okay, I'm gonna go with Viola Screamblade and my baby Nova Screamblade. I'm a sexy warrior, single mum.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Whoa whoa whoa whoa, can we stop this for a second.

Viola Screamblade: and I am looking for the dad of said baby.

Wombella:

So how come you don't know the father? Where is the father? Don't you remember what you did?

Viola Screamblade:

Yeah, nah.

Dungeon Master:

Welcome to Golden Vale, a small village nestled at the edge of the mystical Eldritch Forest. Time here moves slowly, paced by the seasonal festivals and daily routines of the locals. The town, with its cobblestone streets and cozy thatched roof cottages, radiates a charm only found in places largely untouched by the hustle of larger cities. The center of the village is the Boar's Head Tavern, where residents and travelers share tales over a frothy ales. Golden Vale may not be on the map for grand heroes, but as residents are aware, the nearby forest holds dark secrets. As dawn breaks over the sleepy town, casting a golden glow over the fields. Our story begins at a modest stone cottage on the town's edge. This is the home of Grizzly Von Smooth Coat. A formidable yet kindhearted warrior known as much for his brawn as for his unyielding loyalty to his pack of four spirited Jack Russells.

As the first light of the morning seeps through the curtains of the small cottage, Grizzly is roused from his sleep not by the rising sun, but by the insistent nudging and soft whines of his four Jack Russells. With a growing Grizzly sits up, his head throbbing from last night's drinking at the tavern. Grizzlies' bedroom features a large bed covered with a patchwork quilt, surrounded by dog beds and scattered chew toys. A small wooden bedside table holds a couple of empty ale mugs and a faded photograph of his mother. Old weapons and shields hang on the walls, along with a few mounted game trophies. The room's small windows with curtains half drawn, lead in just enough morning light to brighten the cozy space. The familiar weight of a hangover presses down, but the eager eyes of his canine companions plead for breakfast.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Grizzly leans over and grabs the photo frame of his mother. He slowly paws at it. He puts it back down. Gets up as a big old stretch, and then proceeds to itch himself the fleas out of his coat.

Dungeon Master:

You're not a dog, are you?

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

I mean, I'm human, but I act as if... I've grown up all my life as a dog. Um. He then proceeds to get his, um, coat. He swings it around his neck and, um, calls for the his brothers and sister to go to the Boar's Head Tavern once again for a nice, hearty meal.

Dungeon Master:

Nice. And to be clear, your brothers and sisters are your four Jack Russells.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

That's correct.

Dungeon Master:

All right. The Boar's Head Tavern, dimly lit by smoky oil lamps, casts a warm glow over the patrons. The scent of roasting meat and stale ale fills the air. Early risers, mainly solitary farmers and chatting traders, populate the room.

Behind the bar. The robust tavern keeper efficiently serves porridge and meat, nodding to grizzlies as he enters with his dogs. At a corner table, local ruffians are already indulging in morning drinks. The tavern, decorated with hunting trophies and old weapons, is filled with well-worn wooden furniture. A young server, new but adept, approaches grizzly to take his order, while the tavern keeper places scraps for the dogs by Grizzlies usual spot.

Waitress (Dungeon Master):

Good morning grizzly. Just the usual for you and your crew. Or you feeling adventurous today and you'd like to try something new?

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Pint of ale and a leg of venison for my family. Thanks.

Dungeon Master:

I think this might be a love interest already.

Viola Screamblade:

Just wait, buddy. I got something in store for you.

Dungeon Master:

Viola Scream Blade enters the tavern. Her weary appearance and the infant in her arms catch the attention of the patrons. Dressed in red warm clothes, she carefully holds her daughter, Nova, who is snugly wrapped and cradled against her.

Waitress (Dungeon Master):

Good morning. Welcome to the Boar's Head. Please find yourself a comfortable spot. May I get something for your little one? We've got some warm broth and fresh bread on the menu. Or perhaps there's something else you prefer.

Viola Screamblade:

And now I have a love interest with the waitress. And it turns into a sexy podcast.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Man. This waitress.

Viola Screamblade:

Just wait until Kia arrives. All right. Okay, I'm gonna go ahead and order some porridge for Nova.

Waitress (Dungeon Master):

One bottle of porridge coming right up.

Dungeon Master:

And she gives you a wink as she walks away. Viola, as you settle into the corner with your baby, the boisterous group from earlier, now emboldened by their morning drinks, begin to stir. Their loud laughter and rowdy demeanor filled the tavern as they make their way towards you. Leading the pack is Garrick, a large man notorious in town for his ruthless behavior.

Garrick (Dungeon Master):

And he says, well, what do we have here? A new face and a little one, too.

Viola Screamblade:

All right. I tell him to fuck off.

Garrick (Dungeon Master):

Oh, calm down, we're just being friendly.

Dungeon Master:

Garrick takes a step closer as the patrons watch the conflict unfold.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat sits there, intrigued. As he sips away, he grabs the bone and slowly flosses his teeth with it, and wants to assess what the next move will be from this maiden.

Viola Screamblade:

All right, I'm gonna get up. I'm gonna throw my chair at them. Yeah, well, I'm a single mom who hasn't slept. I'm pissed off.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Oh, just wanted to eat your porridge.

Viola Screamblade:

Can't eat my fucking porridge in peace? And flips my chair.

Dungeon Master:

Maddie, a strike of the chair is bludgeoning, which is a D4 plus a strength modifier if you've got one. Uh, so you're minus one.

Viola Screamblade:

Cool.

Dungeon Master:

So you're pretty weak, actually.

Viola Screamblade:

Good thing I just started a fight with five blokes. All right, so I'm rolling a D4.

Dungeon Master:

But I'm gonna say you hit him straight away because... you one?

Viola Screamblade:

Yeah

Dungeon Master:

Did you just say one? And your modifiers of minus one.

Viola Screamblade:

Yeah.

Dungeon Master:

Okay, so the chair literally just breaks over the top of him and there's nothing it's like, made out of made out of dead wood. Um.

Viola Screamblade:

Oops. Okay, so I just died. Ben takes my baby, and he's now single dad to a random baby.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Noooooooo! So are they about to attack her, Aaron?

Dungeon Master:

So, he's going to attempt to grapple with you. Um, so he's going to make his strength check against your athletics or acrobatics check. So, he's basically said he's stepping forward and he's going to try and grab you.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Can I quickly chime in now?

Dungeon Master:

Uh, in a minute. Ben. This is you. When we were. When we rolled initiative. That's when you can play. But. So he's got a plus two modifier, so he rolls a d20, and I need you to roll a d20. So he wrote an 8... a 16 plus 2, which is 18.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

So you need...

Viola Screamblade:

And what am I rolling for, D20 plus what, was it?

Dungeon Master:

Uh, so you can roll... acrobatics if you like to sort of... you're trying to, you're trying to dodge hits. Yeah. D20 plus 2.

Viola Screamblade:

Well, I got a 3 plus 2. So that's 5.

Dungeon Master:

All right.

Viola Screamblade:

Well, and I got it again.

Wombella:

Just kiss him. Then I wait to see what happens.

Viola Screamblade:

My child's there. Okay.

Wombella:

You don't know the father, huh?

Viola Screamblade:

Come here, boy. I need to get my baby a daddy.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

It might just work.

Dungeon Master:

Okay, well, Garrick says...

Garrick (Dungeon Master):

Oh, I wouldn't have done that if I was you.

Dungeon Master:

Enraged by the unexpected chair attack, Garrick seizes Viola with fury in his grasp. At that moment, Baby Nova begins to stir, sensing her mother's escalating danger. Viola's expression shifts from defiance to fear not for herself but for her daughter, Nova. Her body, tensing with untapped power, begins to cry, her uncontrolled magical abilities manifesting

as a shockwave that reverberates across the tavern. Patrons clutch their ears, grimacing as the cry overwhelms them. Overcome by the force of the scream, Garrick's grip loosens and he, along with his cronies, staggers back, disorientated and momentarily incapacitated.

Everyone needs to roll initiative.

Viola Screamblade:

Hey, 10.

Dungeon Master:

All right, so, Ben, you've actually got the highest initiative out of the group.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Grizzly Von Smooth coat looks at the commotion across from the room and he goes... Oi! What kind of dog does Dracula have? A bloodhound! And whips out his sword. Oh....

Dungeon Master:

I'll get you to roll intimidation.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Ah, is that D20 as well?

Dungeon Master:

Uh, yeah, it's a D20 plus your modifier.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Uh, 19.

Dungeon Master:

Garrick, still reeling from the unexpected display of magic from the infant, takes a cautious step back, his usual bravado dampened by confusion and fear.

Garrick (Dungeon Master):

What sorcery is this from a baby?

Dungeon Master:

Recognising the serious threat and the unknown powers at play, Garrick makes a tactical decision to retreat with a wary glance at Nova still nestled in her mother's arms, he signals

to his followers and they withdraw from the tavern, leaving a tense but quiet atmosphere in their wake. Meanwhile, Viola gently soothes Nova, calming the infant's turbulent emotions.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Uh, so what about Garrick? He's an old red rover from the past. Better off hanging out with the cats.

Viola Screamblade:

Viola looks at Grizzly in disgust because he's covered in fleas, like ooh! But I'm appreciative that he just saved us. And then I need to feed my baby the porridge. So, I'm like, cool, bye bye. And then maybe eats the porridge. It's like cold now.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat then reaches behind the ear and then goes labracadabrador! And whips... Gives her a gold piece and it goes "it's on me"... I am Grizzly Von Smooth Coat. You can call me Grizz, Big G, Mad Ris, and my mom calls me Mr. Smooth Coat.

Dungeon Master:

The waitress, looking particularly worn and uneasy from the earlier disruption, approaches their table with firm steps. Her voice, carrying a mix of apology and resolve, breaks through the murmur of the tavern.

Waitress (Dungeon Master):

You need to leave, that's grim. It's too much. We can't have things like that scaring off our customers. You need to leave now.

Viola Screamblade:

Viola looks down, smashes the bowl of porridge on the floor, and then I storm out.

Waitress (Dungeon Master):

You too Grizzly! Miss Agatha says it's a 3 week ban for you.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Grizzly responds and says, I'm just still waiting on the breadsticks that didn't come.

Waitress (Dungeon Master):

Three weeks, Grizzly. And another thing. Stay clear of that woman. Those powers, they're not to be messed with. I've seen enough trouble come through those doors and mark my words. That kind of magic putting is nothing but bad news.

Dungeon Master:

As Grizzly steps out of the dimly lit tavern, he blinks against the sharp brightness of the morning sun. His eyes quickly adjust to the daylight, and he scans the bustling streets for Viola, spotting her a short distance away, navigating through the morning crowd with Nova securely in her arms. He hastens his step to catch up with a determined stride. Grizzly weaves through the townsfolk, his mind replaying the waitress's stern warning.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Listen, lady, I've got a bone to pick with you. You just got kicked out of my favorite pub for three weeks. Tell me what that demon child is.

Viola Screamblade:

Viola turns around and looks at Grizzly. I say, I can't tell you, but I'll show you and you'll have to come with me.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Uh. Woof. I mean, bark. I mean, what did you have to start a ruckus like that?

Viola Screamblade:

I don't have time for pleasantries. I need a warrior by my side on my journey to the Echoing Highlands. We fight all, or you cow with your tail between your legs.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Grizzly stands there, puzzled. But he is also intrigued. So, um. Grizzly turns to his fellow canine companions. Uh, is it worth the trouble? Should we just stay here and enjoy the scraps under the table? (BARKS). With a couple of barks and excited yips, we all kind of hurry along.

Dungeon Master:

Grizzlies curiosity was now a palpable force, drawing him irresistibly towards Viola in the mysterious aura surrounding her and her child. As they moved through the town, he felt the weight of every whispering, murmur and sidelong glance from the townspeople, each one echoing the deepening mystery and his need to unravel it. They walked briskly. Viola leading with a quiet determination.

Nova cradled securely against her. Grizzly, usually a familiar figure in town, now felt like a stranger in his own land, part of a spectacle that drew wary eyes from every corner. The rumors swirling around the demon child seemed to amplify as they passed the term whispered with a mix of fear and fascination.

Despite the undercurrent of superstition, Grizzly found himself driven by an overpowering need to understand, to protect, and perhaps to prove something to himself. He followed closely behind Viola, each step taking them closer to the town's edge and the shadowy threshold of the Eldritch Forest. As they reach the outskirts of the town, their path is abruptly halted by a town guard. The guard, recognized and grisly as a familiar local, looks more puzzled than concerned. He steps forward, blocking their way with a raised hand. His expression, inquisitive, yet stern.

Guard (Dungeon Master):

Grizzly. Where do you think you're off to this fine morning?

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Grizzly goes... I'm onward to glory and hopefully some tasty treats along the way.

Dungeon Master:

The guard scrutinizes them for a moment longer, his gaze lingering on Nova.

Viola Screamblade:

Like, oh well, just passing through and kind of like nudging as I, like, rush past, like to keep going because I just don't have time for that shit.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

All right, Grizzly responds. Uh, we're in this together, loud baby and all.

Guard (Dungeon Master):

Just remember, the woods aren't kind to all Grizzly. Keep your eyes open and your wits about you. We've seen stranger creatures than usual. Squaring its edges these past few nights. If you're headed into the woods, keep sharp and don't stray from the known paths.

Dungeon Master:

Grizzly and Viola step into the Eldritch Forest and felled by a canopy so thick that daylight strains to pierce through, casting intricate lace like shadows across the mossy earth. The air, heavy with the musky of ancient bark and damp foliage, carries a symphony of whispers from hidden creatures above the tree's tower like ancient giants. Their trunks twisted roots sprawling across the forest floor in a complex, dense flecks of sunlight flicker through the leaves, illuminating patches of iridescent mushrooms and small, vivid flowers, creating a tapestry of light and dark that plays across their path into the heart of the mystical woods.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Alright, piss break, lifts his leg. If a dog is a man's best friend, is a baby like your pet?

Viola Screamblade:

And I'm so done with this already.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

That tree is mine now.

Viola Screamblade:

And she just kind of looks at him like... ok, and keeps walking.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

And it goes, right...

Viola Screamblade:

I don't have much to work with you, all right? It's some random dude that thinks he's a dog.

Okay, now, what's the deal with these dogs, huh?

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Oh. that's my family. Three brothers, one sister. What's your story? You got any cool nicknames?

Viola Screamblade:

I prefer to keep to myself. And I keep walking.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Uh, too close to home. I get it. So what's in Echoing Highlands? It's the daddy there?

Dungeon Master:

Suddenly, grizzlies Jack Russells shattered the awkward silence, startling as they race ahead, their shot box echoing through the dense undergrowth. Grizzly and Viola exchanged quick, alarmed looks before hurrying after the dogs, who seemed to have picked up an unfamiliar scent, pushing through a thick curtain ferns and vines, they burst into a clearing and are momentarily taken aback by the sight before them in the center of the clearing.

A massive, two meter tall wombat is caught in the midst of nature's call. The imposing form of the wombat, Wombella, is hunched over in a squatting position. The texture of a thick, coarse fur glistens slightly in patches of dappled sunlight, highlighting the natural hues of browns and grays that camouflage her well in the forest floor. Her broad, rounded back faces them. She turns her head over her shoulder with an expression of mild annoyance and surprise of the sudden intrusion. The dog's still tense and alert circle around her, barking at this unexpected figure.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Viola, get behind me! Grizzly calls out for his pack and he goes, jacks, formation!

Wombella:

Stop it! Stop! It led me to my shit. These bloody dogs are not allowing me to poop square, as I should be doing. And then I stand up. I stand up full two meters, I stop pooping. I just stand up full two meters.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Viola!

Viola Screamblade:

It's good to, like, kind of grab Grizzly and pull him back and be like, I read about these wombats when I was studying forbidden magic at the Tower of Eldritch Law. They're not our enemy, they are our friend.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

But what in burrows' name is happening here?

Wombella:

Ah! crazy snuggle wombat creature. We are coming to East. Oh, no. Why? What are you doing here, mate? What's happening? Why are you disturbing me taking my shit?

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Viola, I'll let you handle this one.

Wombella:

(Inaudible) no time.. Come to my burrow. Let's... let's share some meal together.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Uh, all us canines tilt our head in confusion.

Wombella:

Come on, friends, come to my burrow! I have something interesting to share with you. I haven't seen people in a long time. So come with me...

Dungeon Master:

Overwhelmed by curiosity and intrigued by the friendly demeanor of such a mythical creature. Grizzly and Viola find themselves unable to resist Wombella's invitation to visit her dwelling, as the initial awkwardness of their meeting dissipates. Wombella, with a gesture that's both welcoming and a bit mischievous, leads them toward her home, navigating through a less trodden path draped in thick moss and overhung with intertwining branches. They soon arrive at the entrance of Wombella's burrow.

The doorway and artfully arched opening in the base of an enormous ancient tree seems to blend seamlessly with its natural surroundings. The burrows entrance is framed by a variety of ferns and wildflowers, adding a touch of wild beauty to the rustic threshold. As they approached the doorway. The cool, earthy aroma of the burrow wafts out, inviting them into a world beneath the forest floor.

Both Grizzly and Viola, accustomed to more human centric environments of towns and clearings, share a look of astonishment mixed with excitement. They're about to enter the home of a creature spoken of in whispers and fairy tales.

Wombella:

Welcome to my safe place. This is my sacred place. I have something warm and special to offer you. It's my mushroom tea. You need to drink it before entering the burrow.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Hey Viola! I am definitely getting weird vibes.

Viola Screamblade:

Yeah, let's ditch this wombat and get the fuck out of here.

Dungeon Master:

Wombella sips her tea with relaxed ease, breaking down their reservations slightly with a shrug that signals a blend of resignation and curiosity. Grizzly brings the cup to his lips and takes a cautious sip. The tea is surprisingly pleasant, with a rich, earthy flavor that carries a hint of the forest essence. Encouraged by Grizzlies acceptance, Viola follows her initial skepticism fading as the warm liquid suits her. Stepping into the burrow, they are enveloped by its surprisingly spacious interior. The walls are smoothly carved from the earth and roots,

creating a natural organic living space. Soft bioluminescent mushrooms embedded in the walls provide a gentle ambient light. Wombella leads them to a particular cozy nook, lined with soft moss and dried leaves, perfect for Nova to rest. Viola carefully lays Nova down, the little one, already lulled by the rhythm of the walk and the warmth of her mother's arms. The child curls up comfortably. Her breathing steady and peaceful amidst the bars quietude as Grizzly and Viola settle down.

The initial awkwardness of their arrival gives way to a surreal sense of tranquility. The burrow feels like a world apart. A hidden gem beneath the forest floor where time in the outside worries seemed to dissolve. The mushroom tea begins to work, its subtle magic easing their minds and deepening the sense of connection to this strange, yet oddly welcoming underground haven.

Wombella:

I like dogs and people alike. I'm open to all experiences

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Some weird orgy invite?

Viola Screamblade:

Mate, she said she hasn't seen anyone in a long time. She's alone

Dungeon Master:

Grizzly and Viola, I'll get you guys to roll constitution for the mushroom tea you're drinking.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

I got 15 plus 1.

Viola Screamblade:

Yeah, I got an 8 plus 1, 9.

Dungeon Master:

As the effects of the mushroom tea deepened, Viola begins to experience a distressing shift in perception. The cozy confines of Wombella's burrow transformed before her eyes. The walls pulsating and shadows twisting into eerie forms. In contrast, Grizzly, accustomed to the effects of various substances from his tavern days, feels only a mild buzz and remains grounded. Viola's trip intensifies quickly. Her surroundings seemed to warp dramatically, plunging her into a state of panic. The gentle environment of the burrow becomes a vivid tableau of her fears and unseen futures overwhelming her senses.

Wombella:

Come to my safe place, this is my sacred place.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

What? Hey Viola... look at all these bones...

Wombella:

Are you ok?

We need to take you to the river and wash yourself out.

Viola Screamblade:

What the fuck is happening right now?

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Let's go for a swim.

Wombella:

You want to go for a swim?

Viola Screamblade:

She's gonna drown me in the river, isn't she?

Wombella:

Viola wants to go to the river.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

We go skinny dipping?

Wombella:

Skinny dipping in the river, at zero degrees, at night.

Dungeon Master:

As the remnants of the harrowing trip linger, Viola's sense of reality becomes tenuous, fading in and out like the ebb and flow of a distant tide. Her surroundings blur into a dreamlike sequence as she finds herself walking, almost floating toward a river. The moon casts a silvery glow over the water, transferring its surface into a shimmering mirror that reflects the night's enigmatic beauty.

The riverbank is quiet, except for the gentle rustling of clothes laid out on the shore, as if discarded in haste or as an invitation to the water's cooling embrace. The sounds of the water being disturbed to weave through the air, soft splashes and the playful murmurs of waves lapping against the bank. Amidst the serene yet surreal scene, a silhouette emerges in the moonlight, the massive, gentle form of a giant wombat, Wombella, wading quietly in the shallow waters.

The side is strangely alluring, blending the mysterious with the sensual as the moonlight dances across one pillar's fur and the water ripples around her. Viola, caught between awe and exhaustion, feels the last threads of their consciousness slip away as the scene before her fades into darkness. The world spins one last time and everything goes dark as she comes to the overwhelming sensations, her body and mind surrendering to the tranquil lull of the river's song.

As Viola awakens in the dim, quiet confines of Wombella's burrow, the air is cool and earthy. The immediate realization hits her, Nova isn't beside her. Panic surges through her veins as she scrambles out of the makeshift bed. Her heart pounding with a protective ferocity. Without a moment's hesitation, she dashes out the burrow, propelled by mother's instinct to protect her child at all costs. The early morning air is crisp, the sky just beginning to lighten with the dawn. Her eyes, sharp and accusing, quickly lock onto the scene before her around a small morning fire, Grizzly is sitting, holding Nova in his arms, chatting quietly with Wombella.

The sight of someone else holding her daughter, no matter how benign the setting, ignites a fierce anger in Viola.

Viola Screamblade:

I don't understand what happened last night. I'm going to kind of go, like, right up to where they are and be like, what the hell was that about last night? Like, what did you do to us? Like, what is this that we've been given or something? I'm kind of like, stomp on the fire because I'm, like, filled with rage. And I snatch Nova out and I'm like, what the hell just happened?

Wombella:

Chill, mate. Chill. We just want you to have a good experience.

Viola Screamblade:

Yeah, but you just drugged me.

Wombella:

Yeah. I just wanted you to feel good. I didn't know you were going to have a bad trip. That's not my problem... That's your business. Is maybe because your conscious is not in the best headspace. That's why you had a bad trip

Viola Screamblade:

How can I chill? Like, what did you guys do to me last night? Like, what did you give me? And then I'm going to, like, cut and take a few steps back and, like, kind of head off in a way, because I'm like, done with these two

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Grizzly runs over to Viola and just tries to calm her down and explain what had happened. Um, and he also, uh, he goes. Don't worry, wombat is more bark than it's bite. It's okay.

Wombella:

Don't leave me Viola, don't leave me viola. Stay. Stay. Don't go. Wait for me. I like you Viola. I just want you to have a good trip. It's not my responsibility that you've had a bad trip. And we need to eat, we need to eat... you can't go before eating. We need to go. Come, come and eat something.

Viola Screamblade:

Yeah. I really don't want that wombat near my kid. Viola's furious. She storms off into the forest. Glances back at the guys and just walks off. She's done

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Wombella, we have to follow Viola. It's dangerous in this forest by herself. Paws down, that baby has special powers. We must help.

Wombella:

Do you want me to pack up some food and get a picnic after all together? The baby needs food and the mother as well.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Yes. Pack a couple treats and we'll go find Viola.

Viola Screamblade:

Viola, storming through the forest. Absolutely pissed off about just what happened last night. No explanation from grizzly or Wombella. I look at Nova and I'm like, thank fuck we

got rid of those guys. We don't need them. We can do this ourselves. And I storm off through the forest. Just absolutely done with grizzly and Wombella.

Dungeon Master:

Viola, her emotions swirling with frustration and a fierce need for solitude, strides deeper into the Eldritch forest. Her steps quick and determined. The familiar worn path of their journey soon gives way to less trodden ground as she ventures into an area dense with undergrowth and tangled vines. As Viola pushes forward, the comforting rustle of leaves underfoot is replaced by the sounds of branches snapping and the rustling of thick foliage brushing against her.

Each step forward requires more effort; she has to use her hands to pop the thick underbrush that increasingly encroaches on her path. The deeper she goes, the more the forest seems to close in around her. The light dimming as the canopy grows denser overhead. The whispers of the forest, usually a soft background, murmur, rise in intensity with her deepening intrusion. They seem to swirl around her almost in warning. With every step, the path becomes less discernible, the forest floor more cluttered with fallen branches and unseen obstacles.

Viola, roll perception.

Viola Screamblade:

All right. Got a 17 plus 2, so 19.

Dungeon Master:

Suddenly, an icy spike of terror holds Viola in her tracks, just inches before her face. Suspended between two ancient trees is a massive, glistening web. Its threads find yet incredibly strong shimmer with a dewy, sinister sheen in the dappled morning light. Her heart thuds loudly in her chest as she realizes how close she came to walking straight into it, potentially alerting the monstrous inhabitant of this part of the forest. Viola's breath comes in short, sharp gasps as she slowly backs away from the web.

Her eyes scan the surrounding trees, searching for the creature she knows must be lurking nearby. The forest seems to hold its breath with her. The usual sounds of wildlife, eerily absent. Then, with a soft rustle that sends a shiver down her spine, a shadow shifts in the periphery of her vision. The giant spider arachnid of Eldritch shade, emerges slowly from its hiding place. Its many eyes focusing intently on Viola. Its legs move with deliberate, predatory grace, each step calculated in quiet against the leafy forest floor.

Viola, roll for initiative.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Oh, Viola is going into combat, son.

Viola Screamblade:

All right. I got a 16. Spider up!

Dungeon Master:

What are you up?

Viola Screamblade:

16.

Dungeon Master:

Damn! Arachnid rolled a 17.

Viola Screamblade:

Fuck!

Dungeon Master:

But before Viola can react, the air is sliced by a strand of webbing, shooting towards her, striking with unerring accuracy. The sticky filament wraps around her in an instant, binding her arms to her sides and pulling her off her feet. The web is incredibly strong, and Viola's instinctive struggles only serve to entangle her further. The material adheres to her clothing and skin tightening with every moment as she fights against her bonds. A shadow looms above arachnids. The giant spider descending from the canopy with horrifying grace. With a terrifying precision, arachnid approaches the ensnared Viola, its multiple eyes gleaming with a cold intelligence.

The spider positions itself above her and with a swift motion. It injects a potent venom into her through its fangs. The poison spreads quickly, its effect immediate and terrifying. Violas muscles stiffen, and a numbing cold washes over her body, sapping her strength and locking her limbs in place. Paralysis takes hold, leaving her helplessly aware but unable to move or scream. Meanwhile, nestled securely in her wraps, baby Nova remains unusually calm, untouched by the chaos and danger unfolding around her.

With Viola incapacitated, arachnids begins the methodical process of cocooning her and Nova in layers of silk. The spider works quickly, spinning a dense, enclosing web around them. Viola can only watch in horror, her eyes darting frantically as she sees the layers of webbing envelop her and her baby, sealing them in a tight shroud.

Viola Screamblade:

Cool! I'm here all alone. I'm about to get killed by a fucking spider. This is how it ends. Hello, kind spider sir. Don't eat me!

Dungeon Master:

Viola, as the silk wraps tighter around you, your mind, triggered by the enclosing darkness, spirals into a flashback of the night before a night shrouded in fragments of memory you can't fully grasp. Your eyes fluttering between moments of consciousness and darkness. Replay fleeting images being cradled and carried through the forest by the large, fur like creature.

You recall the comforting touch of Wombella's thick fur brushing against you with each steady step through the underbrush. The memory shifts, and you see yourself being gently laid down in the cozy confines of the burrow. A blanket, soft and warm, is placed over you, tucking you in against the chill of the night air. In this haze of half remembered moments, you realize you were cared for even in your most vulnerable state. Protected from the cold and dangers of the night by your new unlikely friends. Back in the present. Encased in the spider's silk. You're laid on the forest floor.

The quiet around you as oppressive, a heavy silence punctuated only by the soft rustle of leaves and the eerie, distant whispers of the forest. Your world, once open and filled with paths to tread, has narrowed to the tight, dark space around you, bound and immobilized, you wait helplessly, your mind clinging to the fleeting warmth of last night's memories, bracing for what might come next.

Viola Screamblade:

But Grizzly and Wombella are, like, on their way to me, aren't they?

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Okay, pack extra chicken traits and we'll go find Viola.

Wombella:

We need to get food and get food through the forest. But I'm going to pack up something because not everything is in the forest. Sometimes I go to the city, take a few stuff from people's houses (inaudible).

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Wait, do you go to Golden Vale? Because I live there.

Wombella:

Every now and then at night before sleeping. Because the wombats do their stuff at night. So, I go at night and take food from people, and that's how I keep my food top up.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Ok, extra mushroom tea, dry chicken jerky, and I guess some porridge for the baby.

Wombella:

Yeah, I got the instant one, don't you worry!

Dungeon Master:

Alright, are you two done?

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Maybe. Grizzly goes. Can you smell that? That's trouble. Viola is in trouble.

Wombella:

Oh, I told you we needed to leave earlier. You went and pissed on all those trees and I told you to stop doing that. It's your fault that Viola is in danger.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Let's see Wombella, it is all the mushroom tea that you gave me. I need to flush my system. And also, I like the real estate here.

Wombella:

Talk to me, trees. Where is Viola? I know that she's in danger. Tell me. Tell me more.

Dungeon Master:

Um. Okay. Uh, Kia, can you roll wisdom?

Wombella:

20

Dungeon Master:

A D20 what?

Viola Screamblade:

A NATTY 20!?

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

NATTY 20 BABY!

Dungeon Master:

As the tension mounts one, Wombella pauses and places her palms against the rough bark of a nearby tree, closing her eyes in concentration. She whispers a plea, asking the trees to guide her to Viola. The leaves rustle softly and response, the branches swaying as if nodding. Slowly, a gentle breeze picks up and the trees begin to guide her, their limbs subtly pointing the way. Trusting in the wisdom of the forest. Wombella opens her eyes, nods to grizzly, and follows the natural path indicated by the trees.

Wombella:

Hurry up, hurry up! She's not that far from here. We need to catch her.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

This wombat knows this forest.

Dungeon Master:

As Wombella and Grizzly make their way through the dense foliage of the Eldritch Forest, they suddenly come upon a disturbing sight, Viola lying motionless on the forest floor, wrapped tightly in spider silk. The massive form of arachnids hovers over her. Adjusting the webbing with meticulous care.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Viola! Viola!

Wombella:

Oh, I can see her! A spider is eating her out.

Dungeon Master:

All right... That's not what..... That's not what... That doesn't mean what you think it means.

Wombella:

Hold on, Hold on tide. I'll save you from the clutches of this eight ledged menace.

Viola Screamblade:

Save me from the spider eating me out please!

Wombella:

We need to run quickly towards Viola. We need to hurry up the pace.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

All right. Grizzly is going to whip out his ranger's longbow, which does one D8 of piercing damage, and he aims it straight at the spider. Let's squash this bug. Yeah!

Dungeon Master:

Rolling attack 14. As the giant spider hovers over Viola, poised to feast, Grizzly swiftly releases an arrow. It whizzes past the spider's head, narrowly missing as the creature prepares to strike. Startled, the spider's gaze shoots upwards. Locking on to Grizzly and Wombella. With Wombella charging forward, the spider is now aware of the new threat halting its imminent attack on Viola.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

That was a practice. Alright, so, Grizzly gets on all fours and runs to, um, protect Viola.

Wombella:

Run away spider, I'm coming for you.

Dungeon Master:

In a fierce clash reminiscent of Titanic battles, Wombella charges at the large spider with a determined roar, she grabs two of the spider's massive legs, holding them back as they face off. The spider struggles against her grip, its body thrashing to free itself, but Wombella stands firm, muscles tensed in a battle of strength and will.

The arachnid is going to roll an attack - 12 plus five, it's gonna hit with a one D8 plus 3, piercing damage.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Hold on Aaron, Grizzly says. I wish I had eight middle fingers to give that spark.

Dungeon Master:

In the heat of the fierce struggle, the giant spider manages to maneuver one of its deadly fangs into position with a swift, vicious motion. It sinks its fang deep into Wombella, delivering a venomous, crippling blow. The color immediately drains from Wombella's face as the potent toxin spreads through her veins. Her grip on the spider's legs weakens, her eyes widen in shock, and then dim as the strength seeps out of her body. With a final shudder, she goes limp..

Wombella:

I am dead!

Dungeon Master:

Collapsing to the forest floor in a haunting, silent defeat, Grizzly watches in horror...

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Wombella...

Dungeon Master:

The scene unfolding with brutal swiftness. His heart pounds with a mix of fear and rage, but he channels his shock into action. Determined not to let Viola suffer the same fate, he turns his attention to the thick webbing that ensnares her. With a renewed sense of urgency, Grizzly grabs hold of the sticky strands, his hands working quickly and forcefully. He tears at the webbing, pulling it apart with raw strength, each strand snapping and peeling away under his determined grip. His focus is laser sharp, driven by the need to free Viola before the spider can turn its attention to her, his actions a desperate race against time.

Viola Screamblade:

Grizzly!

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Grizzly opens up the web. Viola! Take Wombella out of here. I'll handle this spider. And he turns around and ready to fight.

Dungeon Master:

As the poison subsides, Viola finds the strength to scramble to her feet, clutching over close. Grizzly turns to face the looming spider. The creature towers over him, its many eyes gleaming with a predatory glint. Grizzly grips his sword tightly, planting his feet firmly on the forest floor, ready to face what might be his final battle. His heart pounds in his chest, but his resolve is unbreakable.

He's determined to buy Viola and Nova the time they need to escape. The spider rears up, preparing to deliver a deadly strike. Grizzly steadies himself, bracing for the impact when suddenly the air vibrates with the piercing cry of baby Nova. The sound, filled with the raw power of her uncontrolled abilities, erupts into a massive shockwave. The force of the cry hits the spider like a physical blow, its massive body shaking as it becomes disorientated. Confusion mars the spider's movements and in a frantic moment it stumbles backward. The shock wave pushing it further away from Grizzly.

The creature's legs flail as it tries to regain its bearings, but the continuing echoes of Nova's cry drive it deeper into the forest, away from the clearing. Grizzly watches in awe as the spider retreats. The immediate danger averted by Nova's unexpected intervention. His body relaxes slightly. Relief flooding through him, though his grip on his sword remains firm. Viola, now regaining her full strength, wasting no time. She quickly dashes to where Wombella lies motionless on the floor. Her heart races with a mix of dread and hope as she approaches her fallen friend, whose formidable form now lies eerily still.

Viola Screamblade:

Viola grabs Wombella by the scruff of the neck. Let's get it back to the burrow quickly. There must be something in there that can help her. Come on. Trying to pull, Viola is trying to pull Wombella, she is trying. Just trying to pull Wombella but I can't get her, I can't even move a centimeter. This is too heavy. I break down in tears.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Viola, first I would like to say a couple of words. We knew this wombat thing for one night. She gave us some free drugs. It was a good time.

Wombella:

(Inaudible) ... I am dead.

Viola Screamblade:

Grizzly, Grizzly, help me get this wombat back to her burrow. Please, help me. We need to save her. Please help me! Grizzly, please get your Jack back. We need to get her back to the burrow. We need to save her now.

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Viola, Viola! She is gone...

Viola Screamblade:

No, she is not... Grizzly, we need to get her back. We need to save her. We need to help her now. Please.

Dungeon Master:

Viola kneels beside Wombella, her hands trembling as she gently touches the still form of her friend. Tears streamed down her face. Each drop, a testament to the sense of defeat washing over her. She feels powerless, her sobs breaking the heavy silence of the forest as she cradles Nova close, the baby, feeling the weight of her mother's sorrow, witnesses these profound emotions for the first time. Suddenly, an ethereal glow begins to emanate

from Nova. The light, pure and bright, starts to fill the darkened forest, casting long shadows and turning the night into day.

As Viola's tears continue to fall, some landing softly on Nova, the light intensifies, becoming almost blinding. Magic stirs in the air, a tangible force weaving through the trees. Wombella's wounds start to close, the torn flesh mending before Viola's eyes. Her chest remains still for a moment longer, before suddenly, with a deep, gasping breath, it rises, her heart kickstarting as if sheltered by an unseen defibrillator. Air fills her lungs, her eyes flutter open and life flows back into her once lifeless form.

Grizzly, standing a few feet away, watches in utter amazement. His eyes wide with wonder as Wombella slowly sits up, confusion and awe mingling on her features. The light from Nova begins to dim, leaving a serene glow that lingers. Viola, tears of relief, now mixing with those of despair, embraces Wombella, overjoyed and overwhelmed by the miraculous recovery.

Wombella:

My friends, you saved me!

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

Oh damn... This baby's... This baby's got some powers.

Viola Screamblade:

Baby got power, bitch!

Wombella:

How can I thank you?

Viola Screamblade:

You can repay me by sticking with me. I need to get to the Echoing Highlands. Like we can stick together now. Like the three of us were unstoppable. Bitch!

Grizzly Von Smooth Coat:

I've never seen such power from anything in my life. I will follow you to the end. I shall not fail you. Your safety and that of your child are now my sworn duty. Bitch!

Dungeon Master:

As our heroes prepare to continue their journey, the forest around them seems almost alive with whispered warnings and secrets. The danger they face tonight is but a prelude to the myriad challenges that lie ahead, as they venture deeper into the wild and enigmatic depths of the Eldritch Forest. With its ever shifting paths and hidden threats, the Echoing Highlands as their ultimate destination, they step forward with cautious optimism. Each step is measured, aware that every corner of this ancient forest could hold new dangers or wondrous discoveries. The path is uncertain. The stakes are high, but the trio is ready to face whatever comes their way. Driven by their quest to uncover the mysteries of Nova's powers.