

The Legend of

V

- short stories -



The First 13 *The Legend of V – Short Stories Episodes*

NOTE: If you see a character's name **bolded** and underlined at the beginning of an episode (just after the episode's number and name), that means that character is the narrator for that episode. If there is no name at the beginning of an episode, then the main character, V, is the narrator.

Episode 1: V Loses His Favorite Doll

The crisp, San Francisco fog seeps in through my ajar window and tickles my nose. The resulting sneeze wakes me up. I sniff and rub my nose, jump out of bed, and find my favorite little red doll resting beside my–

HOLD ON.

“Where is it? Where is my doll?” It probably got stuck in the blanket again, as it usually does. I unfurl the blanket, waiting for my doll to plop onto the mattress.

It never does.

I can feel the sweat in my armpits. “Maybe he fell in the space between my bed and wall?” I get onto my knees and crawl under my hollow bedframe. No dice. The red doll is nowhere to be seen. “Great...”

– *What troubles you, V?* The Dark Spirit just woke up.

I groan. – *I lost the childhood toy I always sleep with. Do you mind helping me find it?*

– *Posthaste!* The Dark Spirit seems to be in a good mood today, fortunately. It flies out of my body, rushes through the door, and heads downstairs.

I carefully open my bedroom door and walk further down the second floor's hallway.

– *If my doll isn't immediately around my bed area, that means someone took it. I deduce. – I never, ever take it off my bed. But who would want to take it? And why?*

First, Griff's room. I doubt Candice took it. What business would Azilez's mom have with my toy?

I open the door to Griff's room and tiptoe to Griff's racecar bed, in hopes that he doesn't hear me, but since Griff's sensory abilities are stronger than anyone else in this house, including the Dark Spirit, Griff raises an eyebrow, opens one eye, and smirks.

"Is this really the stealth cover you have for trying to sneak into *my* room?"

"I'm not in the mood right now, Griff. I just lost my red doll."

"And you're looking in my room... why?"

"Well, I already tried my room."

"And you think it's in here?"

"No, not really. I just wanted you to help me look for it." I doubt Griff would take my doll. He'd ask me first.

"Oh, that's all? That shouldn't take too long. I've been dreaming about my morning tea anyway, so you caught me at a good time."

"Excellent. Let's get to work, Watson."

"No. Stop it."

"Sorry."

We enter D's bedroom, which is also my mom and dad's bedroom. What can I say? He's still eight. Plus, imagine the nightmares he has. He was only recently saved from the clutches of the Unbound Evil.

Oh! Maybe that's why D would want to take my doll. He wants something to hold while he sleeps at night, so the nightmares are easier to handle.

Since I've got Griff here by me, we don't even have to wake them up. We can just use Griff's sensory ability to see if anyone is holding anything.

– *Anything, buddy?*

– *Hmm... nope. D is cuddling your mom, not your doll.*

Well, that's a bust. That leaves two rooms left: Vizer and Z's, and Azilez's.

This should be the only time we have to cross the hallway to go into someone's room today. Like always, Vizer's side of the room is much more organized than Z's.

Please, please let it be Vizor who took it. I don't feel like digging through Z's pile of books, clothes, and hand-me-down golf clubs.

– *Anything in here, Griff?*

– *No. But I can feel it close by.*

– *What makes you say that?*

– *Let's just say we're not the only ones awake right now...* Griff's eyes veer toward Azilez's door. You can hear the faint clanking of cups coming from her room.

The two of us look at each other and nod.

We burst through the door.

"The jig is up, Azilez!" I point to the center of her room, where she sits in an overly small chair. There is a small tea set and table next to her. My doll is sitting on the opposite side of the table in a toy highchair.

"Aww, you're never up this early, V!" Azilez doesn't even try defending herself.

"Why'd you take the doll, Azilez?" Griff asks. "You had V worried."

"Oh, I didn't mean to do that." Um... too late? "I just needed some practice."

"Practice? For what?" I twirl my hair.

"This." Azilez pulls out a flyer from her large purse, which is practically a backpack. It seems to be an advertisement for some sort of cooking competition. It's titled 'Trials of Afternoon Tea.'

"It looks like it's later today." Griff crosses his arms.

"Yeah! It's kind of important, too. It's not just the competition victory I'm after. Remember this?" She pulls out a small piece of paper from her purse, unfurls it, and shoves it in our faces.

"How could we forget this?" I remark. "It's your Platinum Chef eligibility card."

"Right! 25 out of the 30 stamps are filled here. If I can fill five more, I'm automatically enrolled in the upcoming Platinum Chef challenge."

"Isn't that show coming up soon?"

"Yeah! Next month. And this is the second-to-last competition available to get more points for my card."

“So, what does it all mean?”

“Basically, to apply for this year’s Platinum Chef challenge, I have to win both today’s contest *and* the next one. If I don’t, I’ll have to wait another year.”

Oh man. That is urgent. I wish she just told us. I would’ve sat in that highchair.

Episode 2: The Legend of V Settles it in Smash

I walk into the tree house and am met with the invigorating smell of pizza. Not sure if Azilez baked it herself or not, but I still want it in my mouth.

I eye the box the smell is coming from. It is a plain, white box with the red letters "PIZZA" spelled across the surface. I flip it open, revealing one last slice of double cheese pizza.

I drool over the pizza, claiming it as my own before anyone else can.

Or, at least, I tried to. Griff closes the box before I can. "What do you think you're up to, V?"

"Just claiming my prize."

"For what? I don't recall you winning a basketball game recently."

"Hey, I got fouled on the last play of the game at the park and you know it."

"Riiiiiiight..."

"Hey, guys! What's all the ruckus?" Azilez appears from the kitchen. There are some breadcrumbs on her shirt.

"V thinks he can steal my pizza from me."

"There's pizza in the house?" Azilez lights up.

"It's one thing to not let me have it, buddy, but then accuse me of *stealing* it? It was out in the open! I don't see a name or a note on it."

"Yeah?" A rainbow hand extends between Griff and me, snagging the pizza box out of Griff's hands. "Well, I've got a stamp in my room. Later!" Azilez runs to the staircase, but Griff grabs her shirt collar before she can get away.

"Hold it." Griff goes for his pocket. "I've got a nice permanent red marker here. Keep up this charade any longer, and this box isn't the only thing that's gonna have my name on it."

I slide under my two friends, yanking the box out of Azilez's grasp. "Oh, man. Good idea, Griff. I'm gonna go find me one of those. *Then* I can drool on the pizza."

"V! Gross!"

"It's mine!"

The three of us are caught in a tug of war for one slice of pizza. I get why Griff and I are fighting for it, but why Azilez? Can't she just materialize a pizza with the flick of her brush?

“Settle it in Smash!” Z’s head appears from the staircase. He disappears.

“You heard the man.” Azilez has her game face on.

“This is silly.” Griff proclaims. “That slice is as good as mine.”

“Not if I’ve got anything to say about it.”

The three of us plop onto the rug, GameCube controllers in hand. It’s time for Super Smash Bros. Ultimate!

Azilez picks Villager.

Griff picks Falco.

I pick Sonic.

“Any items for this occasion?” Azilez asks.

“No. This time, it’s personal.” Griff’s competitive spirit is surfacing.

“Dude, it’s just a slice of pizza...” I almost yawn. I could’ve bought pizza already. From Italy. AND brought it back.

“No items, one stock, Final Destination.”

Oh boy, here we go.

The battle starts and I’m spawned next to Griff, which is never where you want to be. Since Falco isn’t that fast, he always just goes for the fighter that’s closest to him. I anticipate his habit and spin dash under him, getting a nice little combo in the process.

Meanwhile, Azilez has already planted Villager’s tree.

Great, looks like I can’t be near EITHER of them now. One now has access to a murderous axe, and the other is still mad at me for trying to “steal” his pizza.

Well, that’s just fine. Contrary to his character’s origin and attitude, Sonic actually benefits from running away from any and all confrontation in Smash Ultimate.

This style of play is called “camping,” and as much as I hate to do it, I need that pizza.

“Catch me if you can!” If the cheap strategy isn’t getting Griff to boiling point, the taunt will.

Griff tries dashing into me with Falco’s side special, which I easily shield, making him a sitting duck. I grab him.

“Azilez, get ready!” I say as I pummel Falco.

“Yes, boss.” She jumps behind her tree and crouches, signaling that the axe is ready.

I press down on my control stick, throwing Griff in the exact right position to be hit by a falling tree.

“Timber!” Azilez shouts.

Falco is sent flying to the background.

“Ugh! You two are so annoying someti—”

The three of us get distracted by the sound of soft chewing near the kitchen.

Vizor already opened Griff’s pizza box and is eating the last slice as we speak.

Azilez spawns her hammer, I call my extreme form, and Griff cracks his knuckles.

“Uh-oh,” If there was a camera, Vizor would be looking straight into it right about now.

He dashes out of the tree house and flies away.

“You better be buying me a new pie, Vizor!” Azilez spawns her rainbow board and chases after him. Griff grabs onto the back of the board, and I fly on my own.

“Better yet, a pie for each of us.” Griff jumps off the board and collides with Vizor.

Now *this* is settling it in Smash.

Episode 3: Five More Minutes

Another day, another morning.

Nothing was particularly special about this day. It was another Saturday, and Azilez had planned an outing to Pier 39 with everyone. We were supposed to leave at 10 am, but someone wasn't up yet.

Oh, did I say someone? My bad. I meant me.

– Zzzzzz... zzzzzz...

– *V, please wake up.* The Dark Spirit tugs on my cheek.

– *No... this dream is so good.* I say as I jump over a tornado.

– *If you won't listen to me, I guess I'll have to gather reinforcements.* The Dark Spirit leaves my room and flies to the front door, where everyone is already dressed and waiting. Azilez is pouting.

"Where is V?" She stomps. Even I felt that one. Any more forceful and it the plates in the kitchen would've shattered.

The Dark Spirit explains the situation.

Griff jogs back upstairs, heading for my room. He opens the door and sees that I'm still asleep.

Vizor needs to see for himself. He shakes his head when he enters the doorway. "What do we need to do?"

The Dark Spirit recalls the time where Azilez, Griff, and I were comatose during our second adventure. He wants everyone to get inside my head and force me out of my own dream. How mean!

Griff asks exactly how they're going to transfer their spirits into V's body, and the Dark Spirit says It can be of assistance.

Griff, Azilez, Vizor, Z, and D hold hands. The Dark Spirit enters all their bodies and in a cloud of purple smoke, they downsize into their spirit forms, and enter my dreams.

"V?" D shouts over the tornado's winds.

The tornado grows a pair of eyes and a jagged mouth. It spots my friends and family and forces its way over to them.

I've been trying to find a way to fight this thing, but all I can do is run from it. I mean, I generally fight with fire, but wind and fire don't exactly mix. If anything, I'll just burn myself with my own energy.

What to do...?

"Brace yourselves!" Everyone enters their extreme forms. Bad idea. They'll get hurt!

I guess I have no choice. I wake up.

Everyone is booted out of my head and back into their bodies.

"Why'd you do that?" Azilez asks. "We could've beaten that thing, no problem!"

"Not with fire, you won't." Everyone realizes where I'm going with this. "See? That's why I took so long to wake up: I couldn't find a way to beat this thing. I was coming up with something, but I don't think I could communicate it with any of you fast enough. The winds were too loud."

"Well then, o' mighty meteorologist V, what was your plan?" Griff puts his hands behind his back and bows in sarcasm.

"It was something along the lines of asking Azilez to spawn a mountain. That's a tornado's greatest enemy: massive land structures. The winds can't sustain themselves in that kind of environment."

"Can you tell us the rest on the way to Pier 39?" Azilez is practically begging at this point.

"Yeah, of course. Sorry I kept you waiting for so long."

And with that, our Saturday outing commences.

Our first order of business is to stop by the small donut shack named Trish's and pick up a bucket of mini donuts to share between the six of us. Of course, we'll be dusting our bucket in cinnamon sugar. It'd be a crime not to do so.

And that's when my dream came to life.

"What is THAT?" Vizor's jar is on the wooden floor.

A waterspout, practically a water tornado, is in San Francisco Bay!

Then, out from beneath the ocean floor, a mountain emerges, splashing everyone on Pier 39. I go into my extreme form momentarily to dry myself off.

The waterspout impacts the mountain and dissipates.

I look to my left, where Azilez has her brush lifted high into the sky. "You're right, V. Mountains make quick work of those things!"

Episode 4: Fetch, Vizor, Fetch

Vizor

“Where is it? Where is it? Where is it?” Z rummages through his golf bag, tossing all its pocketed contents onto the already filthy floor.

“Z, it’s eight in the morning. On a Sunday, no less. Go back to sleep...” I roll over.

“You don’t get it, Vizor!” Z’s panic turns into yelling. “I lost it.”

“It? Lost what?”

Z says that every time he goes to play an important round of golf, he always takes his lucky golf ball with him. It’s the first prize he ever won for winning a golf tournament at the wee age of six. And now, as you can see, he can’t find it.

Also, tomorrow, he’s scheduled to go for a round of match play with a friend he hasn’t seen in a long time.

“I mean,” Z regains his composure, “I probably won’t *need* luck tomorrow, but it’s a nice cushion to have.”

“Right...” You’re not going to throw that fit under the rug that easily, friend. Mess with Z’s golf gear, and his confidence follows. Good to know for the next time all of us play cards.

“Where do you think you dropped it?”

“Dropped it?” Z towers over me, but then coughs and stands normally. “Oh, probably at the course I’m playing at tomorrow. I went there yesterday to practice.”

I ask where the course is, and Z says that it’s closer to Oakland. He gives me an address and the course’s name: Fickle Pines.

“Excellent. You keep searching the house, and I’ll search the course.”

“Thanks, bud.”

The second I close the door to our bedroom, I can hear the sound of clutter hitting the floor again.

At any rate, I haven’t had breakfast yet. Let’s see what Azilez is cooking up. It smells euphoric down there.

I descend the windy staircase and enter the kitchen.

“Oh, Vizor! Just in time. I’m making pancakes.”

“Pan cakes?” I don’t believe I’ve ever heard of those.

“You’ve never had a pancake? You’re in for a treat, then! Sit down. Take a load off. It’s Sunday.”

“I see you have a chef’s hat on today to go with your apron.” I note.

“Oh, this?” She looks up. “Yeah, I sometimes wear it. I don’t like hats a whole lot, but this is the exception I make.”

“It looks like an explosive just detonated on your head.”

She laughs. “Yeah? Yeah! It kinda does look like that. I would’ve never thought of that.”

“Did I hear pancakes?” V’s head pops into the hollowed entryway.

“Don’t lie, V. You smelled them!”

“Guilty as charged. What’s up, Vizor?”

“V. Glad you could join me. You’re up early.”

“After yesterday, I better be. How late did I sleep in that day?”

“Too late.” Azilez’s smile flattens.

I chuckle. “So, what are pan cakes?”

“It’s exactly what it sounds like: you know how cakes are usually baked in an oven?”

Azilez flips her spatula.

“Yes?”

“Well, the batter for pancakes and cakes are rather similar. You just cook pancakes... well... on a pan!”

“Sometimes, the tops get a little crispy, but the insides always stay airy, dense, and sugar-packed.”

“Sounds delightful. How big are they?” Azilez shows me the pan she’s cooking in. They seem about as big as hockey pucks. “Is that considered big for a pancake?”

“No, not really. I like making them smaller.”

“Give me five then.”

“Comin’ right up!”

I chat with V about my activities for today.

“So, Z is making you play fetch with his favorite golf ball?”

“Essentially.” I also note that golf balls don’t have essences, so hopefully, it won’t be too hard to find. Thankfully, the ball is distinctly colored. It’s not white like most golf balls. It radiates a brilliant pink. It also has a picture of a trophy on it.

“Well, if you don’t end up finding it, you can always tell me, Vizor,” Azilez starts. “If you can describe exactly what it looks like, I can paint it.”

“Busted.” Z appears behind Azilez, causing her to jump. The pancake she had her spatula on slaps her in the face. The cake appeared to be a tad raw too.

“Busted for what? Wanting to help you out?”

“Good morning to you to, Azilez.” Z bows and smirks.

Azilez flicks the pancake stuck on her face onto Z’s. “Want some pancakes?”

“Preferably cooked first, but yeah. If you’ve got extra batter, I’ll take some.” Z takes a seat by us.

“Any luck?” I ask.

Z’s searched the entire top floor but couldn’t find anything. He is almost certain he dropped it at Fickle Pines. He says he hasn’t checked the bottom floor of the house yet, however.

I scarf down the pancakes that Azilez lays on the dining room table and head out. You’re supposed to eat them with a substance V called ‘maple syrup,’ but I wanted to make sure that I was out of the house quick. I was already stalling by talking to both V and Azilez. Besides, how good can tree sap be?

Now, to look for that golf course... I have a map in my hand, but I’m still not too familiar with the areas around San Francisco. I’m not accustomed to traveling above the planet’s crust for day-to-day activities, but it seems similar enough to Treah. In fact, this map is exactly like Treah’s. I’d say the only difference is that all these cities are above the crust.

But a golf course? Those didn’t exist on Treah. I’ve seen a couple already though, as Z’s caddy. So, I can spot one when I see it.

Speaking of which, I think I found it. I approach a large, golden plaque with cursive writing on it. Perfect. This is Fickle Pines.

First, before I turn the course upside down, I should check with the receptionist. I ring the bell in the clubhouse counter.

“Yessshh?” The receptionist looks up from his newspaper. He has way too many pieces of gum in his mouth. I can barely understand him, but I think he tried saying ‘yes.’

“Um, my friend lost a pink golf ball here yesterday. Has anyone found an item like that?”

“Losssshhht and fowwwwnd.”

“Excuse me?” Those are just random noises strung together.

He takes the gum out of his mouth and sticks the multi-colored pile onto his cap. “Lost and found.”

“You mean you have it?”

“No, wise guy. That means check lost and found.”

“What’s a ‘lost and found?’”

“You haven’t heard of a lost and found? Then go back to grade school.” I don’t know what this ‘grade school’ is, but I’m rather sure he just insulted me.

I look through the large window behind the receptionist and into the vast expanse that is Fickle Pines.

You know what? I’m not getting anywhere with this ungrateful boy. Wordlessly, I run outside. “Hey! You gotta pay to get on the course.”

It’s not like any common security guard can stand a chance against me, so I disregard the comment.

Hole one is empty. It’s difficult to search through as well, considering the number of geese on the hole.

Hole two is a similar story, except replace the geese with their droppings.

Hole three is the worst yet. All the trees just shed their leaves on this hole, so I had to use my blades to blow them away. I didn’t see a pink golf ball in the resulting gale.

By hole four, security catches up with me.

Hey, wait... They’re magnets from Zaptropolis. They confront me, and their black dot eyes droop. “Vizor? They called security on *Vizor*?” The magnets know as well as I do that they can’t contain me.

“Yes, sorry for the trouble. Z lost his golf ball, and he thinks it’s on this course somewhere.”

“Oh! I found a ball recently.” One of the security magnets rushes back into the clubhouse, grabs something, and flies back. “Is this the one?” He reveals the pink golf ball.

“Yes! Where did you find it?”

It explains that during maintenance last night, one of the geese was about to swallow it. So, to save both the goose and the ball, the guard swooped in and kept it in the clubhouse.

“The ball looked pricey! It would’ve been a shame to see it go out like that.”

“I’ll be sure to give Z the good news. Thank you!”

Episode 5: Red Stitches

It's a wet one in San Francisco today...

Oh, screw it. I can't do this. It's more than just a wet one. It's horrible. Just atrocious.

I'm outside the treehouse, arms crossed, eyes to my knees. The rain pours on my curly hair, but I can barely feel it. No one's home today. They have other things to do.

I peer over my kneecaps, spotting a yellow something in the muddy grass below.

"Hey, V? Is that you?" Azilez has a yellow poncho on.

I mutter out something indecipherable, even to me. She climbs up the ladder and sees the state I'm in. I don't bother hiding it from her. There's no reason to. She's one of my best friends. Even if I tried, she'd notice.

"Is everything okay?" Her palm rests on my back. I reveal what's in my right hand. It's my red doll... torn in two. "Oh no... what happened?"

"I don't know," I tilt my head up. My eyes are red. "I woke up and he was like that."

She takes my doll's head and body. A raindrop falls on my doll's tummy from the ceiling railing. Wordlessly, she runs up to her room after leaving her boots outside.

The rain is finally starting to get to my scalp. It's cold. Absolutely unforgiving. What could've caused my doll to tear so cleanly like that? It was almost calculated. I mean, I doubt anyone in the treehouse would willingly do that, but still... I don't know. I'm too much of a mess to really analyze it.

Or to realize who I showed my broken doll to.

"Here," She says. Azilez is in a much more casual outfit. She doesn't come out to the edge of the front porch, but she holds out my repaired doll. You can see the stitches on his neck. They look like little hearts.

"How did you—"

"Everyone needs to be stitched back up once in a while, right?"

I hug her with all I have.

And I grasp my doll with even more.

Episode 6: It's the Unbound Evil!

I'm looking for something to do on this boring Tuesday. It's foggy outside, so I can't really play basketball. I mean, I could just transform into Extreme V, fly outside, and absorb most of the fog...

...but I'm lazy. It's one of those days.

That's when the "G" in the Ghirardelli Square's "Ghirardelli" sign flies in through the roof. Not getting pleasant flashbacks.

So much for being lazy. I fly up and investigate. Griff and Z join me.

"What was that?" Z asks.

"It's here, V. Can you feel it?"

I nod.

"I'm back, baby!" The fog in the center of the city clears with a purple shockwave. Luckily, Azilez is out shopping, and using her extreme form, she shields the civilians.

Vizor understands the situation and summons the same purple sphere he used to kidnap my family all those years ago. This time, though, it's here to help.

He gathers anyone that was in the downtown area and sets them down on a farm somewhere in Nevada. Then, as quickly as he left, he's back at Azilez's side. The three of us meet them.

The infernal phoenix in the sky thuds on the street below. "Time to cause some damage!"

All of us ignite into our extreme forms with Azilez. Time to get down and dirty!

The Evil's pointy feathers dig into the street to carve out a giant boulder, which it shatters, sending bullet-fast pebbles in every direction.

Griff hops out in front and punches the ground to create a geyser of flame, which melts any sediment coming our way. In the meantime, Azilez charges up power in her brush.

Vizor whips out the grappling hook in his hair and attaches one of his hair blades to it. He hurls one end at the Unbound Evil. It flies up. I follow it and get locked in a battle of legs and wings. That time I spend occupying the Unbound Evil gives Azilez all the time she needs to finish charging up.

And with one swift axe kick, I send the Unbound Evil straight into Azilez's rainbow shot. But then I remembered what the Unbound Evil told us when we fought Vizor's mom.

– *Dark Spirit!*

– *What is it?*

– *This is going to sound mad, but... I need you to heal the Unbound Evil.*

– *What? Why?*

– *Remember! Its core gets stronger if the weaker versions are destroyed.*

– *Oh, heavens! You're right.* The Dark Spirit flies out of my body and shields Its brother from total destruction.

"What's going on? Why is the Unbound Evil not being destroyed?" Azilez is pouring more energy into her blast.

"That's the last thing we want, Azilez." I land next to her. "Stop the blast!"

"...Are you Evil V or something?" She obeys, but then points her brush at me.

"No, no, no! Don't shoot. Do NOT shoot," I nudge the brush with my finger toward the street. "I just told the Dark Spirit too. Remember, Its core gets stronger if we destroy Its weaker copies. It'll absorb our energy and transfer them!"

"I..." Azilez lowers her brush completely, "I'd totally forgotten that."

"Hey, it has been a while since we've last seen It."

The Dark Spirit lowers the healed, but still panting, Unbound Evil to the street. "How dare you mock Me with your charity!"

"Z?" I step aside.

"On it." He winds up his on-fire driver and clobbers the Evil enough to knock It out.

Episode 7: Console Crisis

Griff

I grab a caramel milk chocolate square from the freezer and take a snappy bite out of it, almost like a turtle. Hey, when caramel hardens, it's tough stuff to tear through with your teeth.

"Griff," Vizor walks up to me, "is there any more of Azilez's cake in there? I've been thinking about it all morning."

"Oh, let me check," I ruffle through the many, many fridge contents in search of some yellow-colored frosting. "Ah, here we are." I toss the plate to Vizor.

"Much obliged." He unwraps it and sits down in the kitchen bar area. "By the way, have you seen V around?"

Hmm... now that he mentions it, "No, I haven't. I just assumed he was with one of you." Now that I'm paying attention to my powers, I can sense his presence upstairs, but no one else's. Has he been in his room all day? "I'll go check on him." I jog out of the kitchen and up the stairs. I knock on V's door. "Hey. You in here, V?" I enter. V is flat on the floor, face-first. A controller is about to fall out of his hand. I can see him moving, but at the speed of a sloth.

This ought to be good.

"Mrrrgh..." I hear him utter.

"Everything okay?"

"Grrgghhh..."

"This ain't caveman times, ol' pal. C'mon. We have words for a reason."

"Mmmrrrrrrhhh..."

"Fine, if you won't tell me..." I take the controller from his hand, but he doesn't even try and stop me.

Now I know something's wrong.

I check around the room to make sure everything is in order. Nothing seems out of the ordinary. His sheets are a mess, the red doll is on his bed, and the console by the TV is... oh. Oh. Ohhhhhhhh.

The console is cracked! I press the power button in front of the console, but nothing happens. It's totally dead.

And, what's worse, Azilez is going to be gone all day. I can't just have my best friend lie down like this for that long! I guess I either go find Azilez, or an alternative way to fix this thing. Hmm... wait! Wasn't Vizor's race, the Omoh sapiens, known for their supremely advanced technology? Maybe he'll know how to fix this.

I unplug V's broken console, take the controller out of his hand, and walk back downstairs.

"I still sense him motionless on the floor in his room," Vizor starts. "Is he alright?"

"No, he isn't. Take a look." I place the broken tech on the kitchen bar.

"Is that V's console?" Vizor's eyes pop. "How did this happen?"

"Not sure. I was just up there, and it was like that. And V's not really in the mood to talk about it." I'm going to assume that means V didn't rage hard enough to throw something at his own console.

Yes, people are crazy enough to do that sometimes.

Vizor inspects the damaged device. "I... have a bit of a confession." He blushes.

"Yeah?"

"I barely know anything about tech. My father never let me tinker with much, so what little I know, I had to teach myself. So, I barely know anything about my own planet's technology. Let alone Earth's. I'm sorry, but I can't help." He slumps on the stool.

I pat him on the shoulder. "That's okay. I appreciate the honesty. Mainly because every time I hear a lie, my powers pinch me."

"Really? Mine just nudge me."

Vizor and I then conclude that trying to get Azilez's help would probably be the best course of action. After all, why would we go to a shop and have this thing fixed for a cost when Azilez can, and is willing, to do it for free? She's repaired whole city blocks in a matter of minutes. Imagine how fast she could fix this one device! I get goosebumps just thinking about it.

She left a note on where she was going to be today. Vizor and I search her room for it. To our peril. We walk out of her room the moment we walk in and return with wooden clips around our noses. Whew... much better.

Vizor and I dive into Azilez's dirty laundry to try and find one scrap of paper. No dice. For fun, we pretended Vizor's hair blades were rowboats, and our fingers were castaways lost at sea, sinking into the abyss. Even after all that though, no note.

We head back downstairs for some water because we can taste the stink coming into our mouths. Only to realize that the note was attached to the fridge.

Right... she was at a homeless shelter today, making a ton of sandwiches for the local people who need it.

"Mmmrrrrggg..." I hear from upstairs.

It couldn't hurt to try and ask her, right? She'll probably have a break at some point, and if we don't try, we're just going to hear V whine all day. Worst case, V has some earplugs I can borrow.

Kidding, obviously. I'd warm up some microwavable pizza bites and eat with him.

Episode 8: A Day and a Stroll

It's been hectic here for the last couple of days. So, Griff, Azilez, Vizor, Z, D, and I have all decided to take a simple stroll through San Francisco today.

No direction, no aim, no plan. Just a walk. Everyone needs to calm down every once in a while, right?

We jump out of our treehouse and take to the sloped streets.

Griff brought some chocolate squares with him for everyone to share.

"Should we wait for the end of the walk to have these? I don't want chocolate all over my face and fingers." Azilez points out.

Griff looks up to the sky. It's overcast, but still rather warm. It's almost like the entire city of San Francisco is a sauna. "I'm worried what this weather will do to them in my backpack..."

"I'm not." I say as my entire lower face is brown. "They won't even be in your backpack for very long if I have anything to say about it."

"I still want one, V! I just don't know when."

"Doesn't that brush of yours clean you up in, like, a couple seconds?" Z asks Azilez.

"Yeah, but I decided not to bring it. The whole 'simple stroll' thing we promised each other? Remember? That means no powers."

I lick my fingers clean, then try licking my lower face clean.

Vizor chuckles. He says that even when we're trying to go on a simple stroll through the city, there's always a reason for antics.

The citizens of San Francisco pass by and stare in awe at the heroic team that saved their city.

– *That is NOT why they're staring, V.*

– *Huh?*

I look a little closer and realize most of them are chuckling under their breath. "What's so funny?"

"So embarrassing..." Azilez covers her face with her hands.

Ohhhh. I think everyone's getting a laugh out of me trying to lick my face. I realize that those theatrics were for nothing, as the shirt I'm wearing is black. I use the sleeve as a napkin. "All better."

Azilez splits her fingers so her left eye can see my face. She comes out of hiding, her face still pink. "Never do that again."

"Never do that again in public. Got it." I smile and nod.

"That's not what I said..." She slumps. "Anyway, now that V got that out of his system, how is everyone doing?"

Finally, what we meant to go out on this walk for.

Vizor is still learning the ins and outs of being a golf caddy. Z says he's a fast learner and is impressed with how far Vizor's come in such a short time.

"Most people train years to become a caddy." Z starts. "I mean, you've saved a couple of my rounds already. That's something a novice caddy almost never does, at least in my experience."

Vizor seizes his chance. "Well, I am caddying *you*, so... you make it easy." That could've been a compliment or an insult, but I think the emphasis on "you" sold it as an insult.

Because that's how Z took it. "Looks like my golfing knowledge isn't the only thing that's rubbing off on him."

"Dear God... there's two of them now." Azilez covers her eyes with her hand and shakes her head.

Z and Vizor turn to each other and laugh.

D's greenhouse behind the living room is finally yielding results. Pretty soon, we'll have fresh tomatoes and lemons, something Azilez is looking forward to.

Speaking of Azilez, her latest cooking adventure has been something called a quiche, which I have never heard of. She explains that it's a veggie custard stuffed in a pie shell.

I want to meet the person who thought, "Hey, let's put veggies in our pie," and smack them until they start thinking clearly. I mean, I'm not a huge pie fan, but quiche is an insult to dessert enthusiasts everywhere.

Griff's latest race ended in a 3rd place finish for the man out of 100 racers. Not bad, but Griff is working out the final kinks for his ride with the PC in his room. I wish this was something I could help out on, but I'm pretty sure I couldn't even screw my own brain back on with a wrench, so I can't imagine what I'll do to his racecar. I sling my arm around his shoulder and wish him good luck.

That just leaves me, I guess. What can I say? I always enjoy the downtime in between our many calls to adventure. This time around, I've been reconnecting with my idol, Sonic the Hedgehog, a lot. I don't know how many hours I've spent in my room. I've dashed through Sonic 1, 2, 3, Adventure, and Adventure 2 in the span of two weeks. Honestly, I'm not sure I have any other Sonic games to play anymore! I'd have to buy a new console for that, and I don't think my mom would be very happy to hear that...

And with that, our stroll comes to a close.

Griff unzips his backpack. "Aw, man! The rest of the chocolate melted."

"Cool! I can temper it now." I think that's a cooking term Azilez just used.

"I'll show you who has a temper...!" Griff chases her with mushy mini chocolates in his hands.

Episode 9: The Pepper Mill

Azilez

After a long day, doesn't a juicy steak sound like pure bliss?

I'm glad I could help out at the homeless shelter and all, but making that many PB&J's from dawn till dusk really takes it out of me by the end.

"Hello?" I open the front door. Huh, no answer. I guess I'm the only one here.

I take out my two pieces of filet mignon resting in the fridge. I unwrap their packaging and lay them to rest on a plate. Next, I season them with salt and pepp-

Huh... is the pepper mill not working or something? There's no pepper coming out of it! I unscrew the top lid to find that it's totally out of pepper. That's a rare occurrence. Do you know how much pepper can fit in a pepper mill?

Well, no worries, I'll just head to the pantry and refill it with some peppercorns. ...Oh. Wow. We're out of peppercorns too?

How about that. This house is completely robbed of pepper. I could spawn more with my brush, but I have a better idea.

Instead of using my brush to spawn black peppercorns, I can use my rainbow board to fly to Tellicherry, India, otherwise known as the home of the best peppercorns in the world.

I am a little tired, though, so I'll rest for a moment or two before I head out.

I rummage through the pantry to find a half-open bag of sour cream and onion potato chips and lay down on the couch. After eating through most of the bag, I take a nap, one leg sticking off the couch.

I feel like a million bucks now! It's nighttime in San Francisco, so in India, it's morning. Perfect.

As I land on the southwestern coast of India, I realize I have no idea where to go or who to seek out for the famous pepper. I wander about for what seems like hours, but I don't know for sure. I don't have my phone or a watch with me. These crowded streets make me feel claustrophobic too. The smell of the animals isn't really doing me any favors either.

“Oof!” I accidentally bump into an ox, tipping it. It was pulling a cart with a man on it. He falls over too. There were several other carts behind him. They don’t notice him in time to stop. Most of them crash.

I whistle and walk away, hoping no one saw the initial domino that fell.

I head to the Arabian Sea to dunk my feet in. Calm down... it was just one mistake. Nothing to overanalyze. I could just take things a little slower. Besides, think about how good that steak will be.

I throw my back onto the small wooden pier and look up at the sky. I wonder if that’s why I go and volunteer at the homeless shelter: life moves a lot slower there than it does at the tree house. In a moment’s notice, we can be called to adventure, without warning, but at the shelter, we make PB&Js all day with nothing else to do. By the 100th sandwich, it almost becomes rhythmic. There is something soothing about moving slower than you need to.

An ox head blocks the sun. I sit up again.

Oh man... it’s the guy I tipped over in the streets today. I hope he doesn’t recognize me.

Maybe if I change my shirt, he won’t be able to! I flick my brush, and my attire changes to that of a businesswoman. I forgot that my feet were still in the water, though. So, my pants are already wet.

The man is staring at me. He chuckles. “You are quite strong, you know that? Knocking over my ox so effortlessly.”

What am I thinking? Trying to hide that commotion I caused... “Oh my God, I am so sorry...”

He chuckles again. “Sorry? For what?”

“I knocked you over. And your poor ox...”

“If I had a rupee for every person I’ve knocked over on the streets, I wouldn’t have to lug my ox around everywhere anymore. I wouldn’t have to do anything. Haha!”

“What do you mean?”

“You opened my eyes today. The Indian streets are unforgiving. Life moves at breakneck speed. If you cannot keep up, the animals will stomp on you. And for the most part, that’s what happens. But not today.” I tilt my head and finally face the man. “Your stunt is all over the local

news! To have the strength to tip over an ox and cause that much ruckus... your internal balance... your soul... it's strong. Very strong."

"I... umm..." What do I even say to that? Thank you? I could've hurt him!

"Tell me, strange woman, what is it you seek in India?"

"How do you know I'm not from here?"

"I've travelled that same street for decades, and this is the first time we've crossed paths. Plus, your rainbow shirt is the craziest thing I've ever seen. No one I have met wears it."

I change back to my tank top with the flick of my brush. Thank goodness... I was starting to sweat in the business suit.

I tell him what I seek: the Tellicherry peppercorns.

Turns out, the man I tipped over is a vendor for that exact product. When I tipped him over, I spilled some of the stock over, and he was just going to the water to clean them.

"Let me take them off your hands. I can clean and return them to you in no time."

The man places the dirtied pepper in my palms and closes my fingers. "You won't need to return them."

"No... don't just give them to me! Let me pay you back somehow."

"Well, I won't accept money from you. You gave me something far more valuable today."

I finally realize something. "Mind if I join you at the market? I can help make up for your lost time, I promise." Cooking isn't about the finished product; it's about the journey you take to get there.

That night, I had the best steak I ever cooked.

Episode 10: Nightriders

Griff

“Okay, guys! I’m ready when you are.” I’m itching with excitement as I call out to the top floor. “The moon’s not gonna get any fuller. C’mon!” At this point, I’m trying to calm myself down. I can’t contain it anymore! It’s been forever since, V, Azilez, and I have done this.

“Geez, Griff! Exercise some patience.” Smell that? ...No, it’s not the apple pie in Z’s mouth. It’s hypocrisy. Practically a mountain of it.

Since when has Azilez exercised an ounce of patience, except in the kitchen? I’d count her canvas and other art related projects, but lately, she’s been finishing those so quickly that you’d think she’s training for a marathon. Art marathons... do those even exist?

Finally! They made it down. With V and Azilez behind me, I spin my car keys around my index finger.

“Someone’s excited tonight,” V lets out a smirk.

“What? You aren’t?” I tease him back.

“Play nice, you two,” Azilez acts like our mom. “We’re not even at our spot yet.”

She has a point, and it looks like V agrees because he nods. Azilez and V hop into the backseat of my convertible hovercar. They tumble in their seats when I deploy the wheels and hood and set the car down on the actual road.

I turn around to face them. “We’re gonna rock it like we always have. Sound good?”

My best friends smile.

I turn to the wheel and take it easy. There’s no reason to rush to where we’re headed. It’s not like we’re on a tight schedule or world-ending mission this time.

“Oh! Oh! Look at that.” Azilez points out the Golden Gate’s lights. They bounce off the water, leaving a twinkle in my friends’ eyes.

Not that I would be able to physically see that! I keep my eyes on the road like a good driver. ...Tell me that spilled trash can in the rear-view mirror wasn’t my doing. Well, I don’t see any cops stopping me, so I either didn’t do it, or was lucky tonight.

“That was a close one, Griff.” V wipes the sweat off his forehead. I guess the trash can was me.

“Lighten up, V! It’s not like the cops can realistically do anything, even if they do catch us.” Azilez rests her hands on the back of her head and crosses her legs.

“Whatever happened to rocking it like we always have, aka no powers allowed tonight?”

Azilez stammers initially, but manages to reply with, “That’s considered an emergency, right? We agreed to use our powers in those instances.”

“Oh, come on, Azilez. Don’t throw Griff into jail that easily.”

I tilt my head. “I will turn this ship around.” Azilez and V sit like soldiers. “Much better.” I grin.

The rest of the ride goes about how you’d expect it to, but my sanity is still inside me, so I can’t complain. V grabs the blanket from the trunk, and Azilez balances an assortment of Tupperware in her arms. You can’t even see her face anymore. I take some of them off her hands once I lock the car.

Where are we? Like we’d tell you! Do you have any idea how much our parents would ground us if they found out we snuck out of the house? And drove off?

Well, I guess with our powers we could do this at any time, but as it’s probably clear by now, the three of us did this well before we experienced the prophecies’ powers.

What can we say? We like each other. In theory. I think. ...I hope. You never quite know with those two. I wish you could see the silly grin plastered on my face right now.

I can’t even recognize some of the food Azilez brought for us. She outdoes herself every time, though. We scarf down all of it. Is driving while you’re this full considered to be DUI?

Well, it’s not like it matters because there’s plenty of conversation to allow for digestion.

“So... a little birdie at the Ghirardelli factory told me that Bessie has a crush on one of her co-workers!”

“Aw, that’s cute! Who is it?” V leans in.

“If I knew, would I be keeping you in suspense?”

“Yes.” V and I both reply, independent of each other’s thoughts.

Azilez’s shoulders slump and she pouts. “You two are such buzzkills! If I had my brush right now, I’d—”

“Be too slow to do anything about it.” V slaps Azilez in the shins and makes a break for it.

“Hey! Get back here.” She gives chase, but V doesn’t even need to activate his powers to get away from Azilez. Without her brush, Azilez can’t even access them. It’s refreshing to see them run at a normal human speed for once. It strangely doesn’t look too slow.

Once the cat and mouse simmer down, it’s my turn to spill the tea. “Yeah... one of my pit crew members is having a pretty miserable time at school, and he’s not sure what to do about it.”

“Miserable time... how?”

“He wouldn’t say exactly, but it’s something about a teacher and how the email system in school is totally busted.”

“That just sounds like he overslept, if you ask me.”

“You sound like you speak from experience,” V’s devilish smirk is back.”

“You’re gonna wake up in the middle of the ocean tomorrow.” Azilez threatens. Her tone is almost robotic. It caught V so off guard that he physically scooted away from her.

What were you expecting out of this night ride? A couple of rebellious teenagers? Maybe some illegal substances? Nope! That ain’t how we roll, even though Azilez did try drinking wine one time...

Oh, no! How did I let that slip?

Episode 11: Farm to Fork

D

This is it... this is what I created the greenhouse for! Well, not really, but it's still a fantastic use for it.

I stand as poised as a flagpole on the dirt. I stare at my watch. 3:57 pm. She'll be bursting down the door any minute now. Why am I so nervous? I've brought fruits and veggies for dinner before. What's different now?

The door flings open. The hinges nearly fly off.

"Everything ready for tonight, D?" Azilez has her hands on her hips.

"Yes, ma'am!" Ma'am? She's not your boss! Calm down, D. Deep breaths. In... and out... in... and out.

"Then why is everything not in your hands?" She tilts her head.

"What are you talking abo—" Ohhhhh... that's what I forgot to do. I was so paranoid about giving her the right fruits and veggies that I forgot to pick them.

And worst of all, I made AZILEZ mad now. Here comes the hammer.

"Not to worry." She grins and rests her hand on my shoulder. "I've been in tighter jams than this. And a part of me suspected this."

"What do you mean?" I look up.

"How... Y'know what? I'm not gonna tell you. I think you'll figure it out by tonight." She lets go of me and explains her plan. We're going to need to collaborate with each other for dinner to work, but we're a whole room apart from each other. It wouldn't be very effective to have either of us go back and forth from the greenhouse to the kitchen. So, Azilez is setting up two liaisons, one by the greenhouse door, and one by the kitchen entrance. Seems a little redundant to set up two of them, but she doesn't want the liaisons walking either. The less moving around everyone has to do, the more effective it'll be for her.

"Are you sure you don't just want me to rush to the store and get you everything you need?" I ask. "It'd be way more effective than asking two others to just wait around all afternoon."

She walks onto the mud, picks a tomato off the vine, slices off a sliver, and takes a bite. "After tasting this? I'm never buying tomatoes again. The extra loops and hurdles are worth it."

I'm not totally convinced, but she is the master chef around here, so I trust her opinion. "Okay... let's do it." That could've sounded more enthusiastic.

The two liaisons end up being Griff and V. Griff is positioned by me, while V is by the kitchen. Azilez barks out an order, V relays it to Griff, and Griff passes it on to me. When I finally hear it, I harvest the appropriate item and hand it to Griff. He tosses it to V, who hands it to Azilez.

Eventually, Azilez asks for multiple things at once. They become a tad difficult for me to remember, so I rush into my mom and dad's room, find some pen and paper, and write down whatever Griff asks me to find. This machine Azilez built is so well-oiled that even when I tripped and dropped the basket of goods I had, she was able to tell me from across the bottom floor that she can simply wash the dirt off in the kitchen. Was she able to tell what happened to me based on the sound alone? With all those other sounds coming from the kitchen? If that's not the sign of a seasoned pro, I'm not sure what is.

"Okay, everyone! Dig in." Azilez has laid out a spread on the dinner table tonight. Two different kinds of salads, a vat full of tomato sauce, some freshly boiled pasta, four different kinds of shaved cheeses, roasted eggplants, and is that a quiche? When did she even find the time to make that in the middle of everything else?

While everyone chows down, I scoot over to Azilez. "Color me impressed, Azilez. It looks, and is, delicious. You saved the day today."

"That saying always confused me: 'Color me impressed.' I mean, 'impressed' isn't even a color." We laugh together. A shower thought is the last thing I expected out of Azilez. But she's the gift that keeps on giving. Always full of surprises today, it seems.

Speaking of surprises... "Even after all this, I still don't know what you were gonna say to me earlier. What was it?"

She leans in and whispers, "How do you think I felt when I was going to first share the food I created with others?"

Episode 12: My Favorite Tree

I finish eating my plate of rubbery scrambled eggs and set my plate into the kitchen sink. Maybe I should remind myself to get Z how to teach me to make a proper scrambled egg... I know Azilez is technically a better cook, but even she concedes to Z on scrambled eggs. I don't know how he does it.

Despite my squeaky breakfast, I couldn't be more zen today. No one made any plans with me, so I'm heading to the park to hang out. Maybe I'll catch a basketball game or two. Honestly, though, I don't even plan on that.

I arrive at the park and head to my favorite spot: a small tree surrounded by bricks. What, were you expecting me to say the basketball court? Nope. This tree and I are practically family. I've ran around it so many times that I get dizzy just thinking about it.

Heck, I've been friends with this tree since I could start walking. My mama told me that this is even where I took my first steps! But even beyond that, this tree means the world to me.

One time, when I was running around the brick lining, I tripped and fell on said brick lining, breaking my nose. Mama freaked out and called an ambulance, but then, a leaf fell from the tree onto my nose, forcing a sneeze out of me. My nose fixed itself as a result! It's almost like the tree apologized. Even when the ambulance came by, they said my nose looked fine. Though, they did end up giving me a face mask.

Oh! This is also where Griff and I hung out with Azilez the for the first time after we met her. I'll never forget how Azilez got lost inside the picnic blanket and couldn't find her way out until the two of us helped her. She's such a klutz sometimes...

But probably the touchstone memory I have of this place... is when my family got kidnapped. Right after that happened, as the police were cleaning and assessing the damage, I ran to this tree, hugged it as tight as I could, and cried for what seemed like days. I didn't want to go back. Ever. I didn't have the heart to even check if Griff was okay. I was already shattered. If I went back and saw Griff was gone too, the shattered pieces of my soul would've been smashed into dust, blown away by the wind.

This tree has always been here, through the best and worst of it all. And today... I'm just going to sit, lean on it, and take a nap.

Episode 13: Castles, Knights, and Blizzards

Okay, so get this. It rarely happens in San Francisco, but a nasty snowstorm hit today. And I mean a truly nasty one. I can't even see the Ghirardelli sign from the treehouse anymore. Initially, we thought to just take to the skies, use our flaming prophetic powers, and bring the Sun back to the sky, but Griff had a better idea.

Around the time Griff and I met Azilez, we'd sometimes go over to her house, and she'd bust out her toy castles and figurines. We'd spend all day outfitting them and fighting at the top of each castle until Azilez eventually hammered us into submission. This was around the time Azilez had already hit puberty, but Griff and I still hadn't. She was a lot stronger than we were. And taller. So even if we were about to win, she'd just hold her figurine as high as she could, and we couldn't reach it.

So, how does that relate to what we thought of for today? Well...

"The castle's cannons opened fire! Turn back!" Griff throws down his helmet's visor and darts in the other direction.

Yeah... we brought the game to life. We figured a blizzard would give the perfect atmosphere for it.

"Hahahaha! You'll never take me down. Never!" Azilez taunts from her castle's top balcony, cackling while walking back inside. She's wearing a frilly pink dress, long yellow gloves, and dons a crown.

Griff retreats to behind a boulder, where Vizor has been strategizing.

"How'd it go?" Vizor asks.

Griff tilts his visor back up. "It looks like the cannons surround the castle completely."

"Could you get a visual from where the cannons were firing?"

"Sadly, no. The blizzard's too thick. And if I used my powers to clear my field of vision, Azilez could've seen me."

"Fair point... wait. Wasn't V with you?"

Well, at least someone finally noticed.

I pop my head from the powdered ground, just outside the castle's imposing door. I could go and scout the surroundings to see where the best point of entry is, but...

“You’re saying he’s still out there?” Vizor puts his helmet on.

“I just assumed he was behind me! Who would willingly step into that torrential barrage?”

The castle door explodes in the distance. The two of them look at each other, slam their visors down, grab their swords, and dash off.

“Azilez! Your reign of terror is over.” I announce as I place my dragoon’s lance at my side.

“You’ll have to get to me first!” I can hear her, but I can’t see her. Out of the ground, she summons dummy rainbow spear soldiers. They pile on me, but I stick my weapon in the ground in time. I grab it with both hands and run in circles. Once I get enough speed, I jump, and the resulting whirlwind knocks all the guards out of the castle.

I take to the highest floor, where Azilez waits for me. Griff and Vizor aren’t far behind.

“Aw, man. You made it up already?” Azilez wails her arms and kicks her throne.

“Give up, princess! We’ve got you now.” Vizor points his hair blades at Azilez.

“Never! Not while I’ve still got my black and white knights at my side.” Azilez snaps. Z, dressed in black, and D, dressed in white, jump out from behind the throne.

“Remind me again why I’m the black knight.” Z asks.

Everyone ignores Z’s question and dukes it out. Vizor crosses his blades with Z’s clubs. Both careen into opposite walls. They get up and the six of us are in each other’s’ faces. D calls a tree from the ground, sending Griff into the sky. I grab him with my lance before Z gets to him. Vizor chops the tree down and grabs one end with his grappling hook. He spins and throws it at Azilez. She smacks it with her hammer, destroying the tree. Z sends his flurry of golf balls in our direction. Vizor gets in front and twirls his hair blades so that the golf balls slice in half on contact. I launch my lance forward, aimed at Z’s hands.

But I break Azilez’s throne instead. She grinds her teeth.

“What? I suck at aiming a weapon. You know that!” In hindsight, that could’ve come off as sarcasm, but I swear it wasn’t.

Too late to explain that to Azilez though as she’s already smacking away with her hammer. I get a good bruising going on, but she does eventually smack me next to my lance. I

pick it up. Her hammer collides with my lance's head. I'll admit, even today, she's still stronger than I am.

But I've picked up a trick or two in the past couple of years.

Her hammer does force my lance into the ground, but that's where I like it anyway. I perform the same trick I used against the guards, except instead of summoning a whirlwind, I run on the throne room's wall. Azilez gets dizzy and my armor melts from the flames on my body.

I tackle her to the ground, forcing her hammer out of her hand and forcing her crown off her head. She goes for both, but I step on the crown, breaking it.

"Game over." I smirk.

"Best two out of three!" She says.