

Dilly is a little goblin who lives in a little village in a little forest a long way to the north.

She loves to run, jump, climb, and explore, just like all goblin children.

But one day, while sat atop her favorite rock, playing her favorite game, she heard a terrible sound.

It was an alarm! A very special sound with a very important message. Dilly knew she had to run and hide.

Sometimes the village would play the sound just for practice, even if nothing terrible was happening.

Dilly wasn't sure if this time was just for practice or not, but she knew it was important to mind the alarm *no matter what*.

She scooped her toys into her batpack, leapt down from her rock, and landed safely in a big pile of leaves.

Leaves weren't a very good hiding place though, so out she popped in a shower of foliage and off she went, as fast as her little legs could run.

She jumped from stone to stone to cross the stream, and crawled carefully through the thorny bushes.

Dilly waded through the big mud puddle, resisting the urge to stomp and splash even though she knew it would be a lot of fun.

One more twist and two more turns past familiar roots and burrows led Dilly to her very favorite hiding place; the *Great Troll Tree*.

The druids said that an especially clever troll had watched an elf hide from the rain by carrying a big leaf over their head.

The troll had tried to copy the idea, picking up a whole tree to hide themselves from the sun.

But just because an idea is good doesn't mean that it will work, and as sunlight passed through the leaves and branches, the troll was turned to stone.

The tree was stubborn and strong. It kept growing, even in the stone troll's arms.

Its roots were long and resilient, reaching down and around the troll to find the soil below.

Dilly nimbly shuffled from root to knee to root again, swinging expertly up to the stone troll's shoulder.

She stopped briefly to whisper to the troll, looking all around to make sure nobody could see her before telling the statue not to tell anyone where she was hiding.

Then, remembering not to look down, Dilly scurried up to her favorite branch with the deep hollow and squeezed down out of sight.

Even though she was sorely tempted to play with her toys, Dilly was a very good hider, so she waited and waited and waited some more.

But then her nose twitched, and the air tickled and burned all the same. It was a smell she knew, a smell that meant danger! Dilly smelled smoke.

She wriggled out of the hollow and looked down the great Troll Tree. The sun was fading, and she suddenly felt very cold.

Smoke meant fire, and Dilly didn't want to wait any more. She wanted to go home. And home was just a short run from here.

She put her batpack on and stepped out onto a branch to start climbing down, when she heard a familiar voice saying a familiar thing in her mind.

“When you're in trouble, hiding, or lost, you must stay put. Don't panic, and don't wander. It is easier to find someone who stays in one place. And we will always come to find you, little Dilly.”

She could see Ranger-Dad's sad eye smiling at her as she recalled the memory. The forest was sometimes a very dangerous place, and Ranger-Dad taught many lessons to keep her safe. More than Dilly could count.

She took a deep breath, and nodded firmly to no one in particular. Dilly decided to stay and wait, just like she had been taught.

She passed the time playing simple games with twigs and leaves. Even when the smell of smoke got stronger, and she started to fidget, Dilly stayed put.

She knew Ranger-Dad would be proud, and she loved it when he told her she was brave. She hoped he would call her brave this time too.

But then Dilly heard something moving in the tree below. The branches shook, the leaves rustled, and she felt a thump, thump, thump through the trunk.

If this visitor wasn't friendly, Dilly needed to be prepared! She pulled a special wooden stick out of her batpack, bit her lip, and got ready to swing.

If she smacked the tip against something hard, it would make a very sudden, very bright light. And very few things liked very sudden, very bright light.

When a great black shadow belonging to a great black beast with glowing golden eyes suddenly appeared before her, she closed her eyes and swung the stick hard!

But there was no smack, and no bright light. The stick wasn't even in her hands anymore! Dilly peeked out through squinched eyelids and saw the stick dangling in a big furry tentacle.

A deep, powerful voice said "Found you, little goblin." [black page with just text?]

Dilly opened her eyes, and saw a sleek, muscular black panther sitting like a rather princely cat, with four tentacles that danced like snakes sprouting from its back.

That same voice spoke again, "You did well to stay in one place. Your father will be pleased."

The creature lifted Dilly in its jaws, using its tentacles to navigate down the troll tree while she dangled in the air and tried very hard not to look down.

"Kuga, you scared me!" Dilly said as she folded her arms and tried to give the most disappointed look she could conjure.

When Kuga didn't respond, Dilly kept talking. She explained how she had heard the alarm, and that she had smelled smoke, and how she had thought about going home.

"And then I heard something climbing the tree, and then you were there, and I almost accidentally bonked-" she suddenly stopped as an orange and yellow light lit up her face.

Dilly saw other rangers wearing cloaks just like her dad's, carrying buckets of water, and shouting. She saw crackling flames licking at trees. And she found that her voice had left her.

They passed the fire quickly, and as they got close to home Kuga gently sat her down and walked beside her instead. "Thank you Kuga," Dilly said quietly, gripping one of his tentacles tightly in her hand.

When she saw her little village, Dilly momentarily forgot the alarm and the fire and hurried toward her home.

She dashed through the gate, ducked between the legs of the watchman, and dodged a little grey pony hitched to a little brown cart full of little green plants in little clay pots.

Dilly recognized the Pony, and Dilly knew that meant someone special was visiting! She gleefully followed a trail of soft wildflowers growing in the footpath into the village center.

There she spotted a tall woman dressed in furs, with feathers and flowers woven into her braids, and a great big bearskin cloak that Dilly knew was just the coziest place to take a nap on a cold winter day.

She saw that the woman was making very serious grown-up faces and talking in a very serious grown-up tone. And she was talking to Ranger-Dad!

Dilly reminded herself that it was important not to interrupt, and decided she should wait. But then Kuga caught up to her and gave her a firm but gentle nudge toward their house.

He reminded her to take off her muddy boots and wash her hands, because Ranger-Dad would come inside soon, and then they would eat together.

Dilly suddenly felt both very tired and very hungry, and as she looked at her cozy bed by the window, she wondered if she even had the energy to eat.

Soon, her dad and the flower-woman both came inside. Dilly saw that her dad was covered in ash, and holding something black, round, and shiny.

Suddenly remembering the fire and the alarm from earlier, she jumped to her feet. “Hi Dad! Hi Miss Perska!” she exclaimed, “Kuga came and found me! I heard an alarm! What was it for? Was it the fire? Did anyone get hurt?”

“Woah there kiddo.” said Ranger-Dad, in his calming voice. “What’s important right now is that you’re okay. Remember; we don’t share bad news before bedtime. But I promise we’ll talk about it tomorrow.”

They sat down to eat, and Dilly hungrily reached for her stew. Ranger-Dad only ever made it when company was coming to visit, and it was one of her favorite meals.

Ranger-Dad asked her what she had done today, patiently listening as Dilly recounted all of the details between bites. When she finished, he hugged her and told her that she was very brave, and that he was proud of her.

He told Dilly that because she had done such a good job today, now that they had finished dinner he and Miss

Persika had some good news they wanted to share with her.

Ranger-Dad went to the hearth and picked up the shiny black round thing, placing it very gently onto the table. Dilly watched the firelight dance and flicker on the scaly black surface. It was an egg!

Miss Persika and Ranger-Dad let her feel the egg, explaining that someday soon it would hatch, and that there would be a new member of the family! The egg felt warm to Dilly's fingers, and the scales were very smooth.

Dilly tried to listen very carefully as Ranger-Dad and Miss Persika told her how she would be a big sister, but soon her eyes were just too heavy to be a good listener. Miss Persika gave her a hug and said it must be bedtime.

Dilly cleaned up her bowl, brushed her teeth, picked out her favorite stuffy, and climbed into bed, watching the black scales glow in the firelight.

After a goodnight kiss and a wish for sweet dreams, Dilly's eyes closed, and soon she found her mind full of thoughts about what the egg might possibly hatch into.

Finally drifting off to sleep, Dilly imagined herself atop her very own pet dragon, excitedly soaring through the forest on her way to her next adventure.

*THE END*

**ILLUSTRATION NOTE:** Consider having Arrow present in some of the later panels, or in any illustrations that aren't focused on where Dilly is *right now*

Character Design Notes: (can be moved to a different document/design bible later)

- Dilly
  - Grey eyes
  - “Batpack”
    - A small knitted backpack shaped like a bat
  - Flail head(s)
    - When she acquires her flail, the flail heads will represent specific animals/toys that Magpie has used/swung
- Kuga
  - Male “Phase Cat” (there are other Phase Cats, like Lions, Tigers, etc)
    - Panther body
  - Blue-black fur
  - Golden eyes
  - Four tentacles
  - Stoic, Regal, Calm, In-Control
- Arrow
  - Male Pygmy Falcon
  - Competitive, Spunky/Feisty, Restless,
- Ranger-dad
  - Eyepatch
    - Left eye
    - Brown leather
  - Carries a kukri knife on right hip
  - Green cloak
  - [Visual Personality?]
    - Melancholy behind a smile, commanding presence, loves to put his feet up
- Miss Persika
  - Big/oversized bearskin cloak
  - Flowers and feathers woven into her hair
  - Leaves a trail of wildflowers wherever she walks
  - [Visual Personality?]