

# The Soft Rain Still Falls...

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Submitted: March 8, 2004

Updated: March 8, 2004

*Gol and Maia are evil, true... but how did they become that way...? I need to do art for this. ~\_~*

# 1. The Soft Rain Still Falls...

~==~The Soft Rain Still Falls...~==~

The morning sun rose peaceful over the lab of the sage of dark eco, Gol Akaron, as he leant over a new experiment, his lips set in a tight line as he worked carefully with the dangerous energy. Behind him, he could hear his sister's cheerful humming as she went about her own daily duties.

"I should probably go to the market in Rock Village," she quipped, brushing back a few strands of long platinum hair. "Can I trust you to not work yourself to death and keep this place looking at least somewhat decent, Gol?"

Gol just chuckled, shaking his head before glancing over his shoulder at the petite woman. "I'll be fine, Maia. Just be careful when you go to Rock Village. The rainstorms have been getting heavier there, and the grass on some of the hills can be slick." Carefully pulling off his gloves, he turned to face the girl. "If you fall in the water, get out quick as you can, because there are lu--..."

Rolling her eyes, Maia interrupted with, "Lurker sharks. I know, brother." She gave a cheerful smile, walking over to the teleporter ring. "Please, Gol, don't worry so much. I'm perfectly fine on my own."

With that, she hopped through the teleporter ring and was gone. Gol smiled a little, turning back to his work. Maia was a good assistant, even if she sometimes was a little clumsy about her business. He and his sister had been together for longer than he could remember, and with being a sage while she was his apprentice, they both shared the lengthened lifespan the eco they studied blessed them.

Dark eco. The most dangerous force in the world. In truth, Gol was fascinated by it. Samos Hagai, the sage of green eco, had often warned him of the dangers the stuff could present, and he heeded the older sage's words dutifully. That did not mean, however, that he felt he should give up his studies entirely. Far on the contrary... in order to be safe from a deadly substance, one needed to understand it, and that was what Gol intended. He did not just want to study dark eco, but understand why it existed... why would the Precursors allow such a dangerous material have continued existence in their world? Was it to keep the delicate balance of nature? Or was it because there truly was no way to destroy it?

Sighing, he pulled on a fresh pair of gloves and set to work again. He had a lot to do today...

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"Hello, Cogan!" Maia greeted cheerfully as her feet touched solid ground on the other side of the teleporter ring. "How are you today?"

Cogan, the sage of blue eco, jumped slightly before smiling at the woman, waving at her. "Ah, Maia! It's always a pleasure to see your lovely face! Things are fine on my end... a bit shakey with the stronger storms as of late, but nothing too serious. How are you and your brother

these days?"

With a flick of her long hair, Maia smiled. "Gol is as busy as ever, but I'm just fine. He's finally decided to start teaching me the really serious things."

"He's always been quick to fall behind," snorted the blue sage. "Well, I shouldn't keep you. I've work to do, and I know you've a lot to do yourself!"

The woman smiled with a deep sigh. "I suppose you're right. If I leave Gol alone for too long, heaven knows what sort of trouble he'll get into!"

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What trouble indeed. At the moment Maia was making her way down to the market square, Gol was bent over yet another experiment, his entire form tense as a scared ottsel's tail. This experiment was dangerous. One thing done wrong and it could all go, and then, there wouldn't be a dark eco sage left to speak of. Maia certainly wasn't ready to take his position... and he wasn't ready to die, or leave his dear baby sister alone.

His dark blue eyes focused on the bubbling eco in front of him, moving slowly so as not to disturb the stuff too badly. Gently, his mind repeated. Gently.

A clap of thunder heralding a thunderstorm approaching made him jump, and before he could realize the severity of what he had done, the vial of dark eco in his hand crashed to the tabletop.

The sound of the shattering glass was nothing compared to the sudden hollow echo that overcame Gol's hearing. The dark eco exploded out of its confinement, seeming to almost grow as it splashed onto his skin. Trying desperately to get the stuff off, he staggered and clawed at his face, knocking over several more beakers and vials. All he succeeded in was covering himself more.

He screamed, as long and as loud as his breath would allow. The pain was excruciating. It was overcoming his senses. The cold, sharp burning in his skin seemed to pull at him, twisting his body and contorting it beyond recognition of sight or feeling. It was devouring him, and at the same time creating him. Blackness swept over his vision, but slowly, it was being replaced by a new, dark light.

Gol Akaron was not the man he used to be.

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When Maia first stepped through the teleporter back to she and her brother's hut, she did not notice the destruction that had taken place. It was almost as if her mind decided not to register it just then. "Gol, I'm home! Are you hungry? I can make lunch!"

Then, it hit her. The sacks she carried hit the floor with dull thuds as she stared around the room, wide-eyed and startled. Everything was in disarray. Beakers, vials, and test tubes were shattered. Tables turned over, chairs destroyed, windows shattered, the walls clawed as if a wild lurker had busted in and attacked.

A shudder ran down her spine as she stepped forward carefully. "Gol?" she called, her voice

barely coming out as a whisper. "...Gol, are you okay?" With each step she took, daintily avoiding the pools of dark eco, her voice became stronger. Worry had started to take hold. Where was her brother? Had a lurker gotten to him? "Gol?! Gol, answer me! It's Maia!" She shook again, tears coming to her eyes. "...This isn't funny anymore...! Please, answer me...!"

Something moved in her brother's room, and concern and fear gripped her again. Whatever had attacked Gol might still be in there.

Grabbing a piece of a destroyed chair as a feeble defense against whatever the thing could be, she slipped forward. "Gol?" she called again. "Are you in there?"

A split second and a hideous growl later, Maia found herself pinned to a wall in a corner and staring into a face that held no familiarity to her. Terrified, she fought to find her voice, wondering who this was and what they had done with her brother.

That was when she recognized his eyes. Shocked, she opened her mouth, just barely managing to breathe out, "Brother..."

A grin slowly formed on that strange, mutated face. "Yes... that would be me. Whatever is the matter, Maia? You seem frightened."

"What... happened to you...?" the girl finally forced out. "Your face..." She brought up her hands, touching her brother's cheeks lightly with her fingertips. "You... everything. You look so different. What in the world did you do?"

Gol shrugged slightly, keeping Maia pinned where she was. "An accident. I dropped a vial of dark eco and it splashed on me. So desperate was I to get it off, that I knocked over a few more vials and beakers, only succeeding in covering myself more." At Maia's terrified expression, he just shook his head. "It only hurt briefly, my dear sister. But look what it has done to me! No longer the feeble-bodied man, showing his age and forced to realize just how weak our race truly is. I am strong now... strong and powerful!" A wicked grin crossed his face. "Don't you want to share that sort of power, Maia...?"

Quickly, she shook her head, trying to squirm away. "You've lost your mind! Come on, we'll get you to Samos... he might be able to help you! Please, Gol, for your own sake... you can't stay like this!"

His grip on her arms tightened and she gave a short cry, wincing. "The old fool was wrong, Maia, I can see that now. Dark eco isn't a curse, it's a blessing! You'll see when you become like I am... it will open your eyes as it has mine." He turned from the corner, still holding tight enough to his sister to keep her from getting away. "I believe I've at least a vial or so left that I have not destroyed. Just wait, Maia. Soon, you will know the same sort of power and strength that I have been granted."

"No!" Maia squirmed harder, kicking out at Gol and trying to force him to release her. "Gol, get ahold of yourself! Think about what you're doing! It's \*dark eco\*, Gol! It's dangerous! Destructive! You've studied it almost your whole life, and you don't realize this?! Gol!"

Gol didn't respond to her. He kept that wicked grin, walking forward with purpose, towards his experiment table where a few large beakers of dark eco had escaped his earlier rage when the pain had consumed him. Forcefully, he sat her down on the tabletop, keeping her pinned with

one hand on her shoulder. Maia had never experienced fear like this... what would happen to her, when the dark eco touched her? Would it do to her what it had done to her brother? Or would it kill her? Devour her like it had others?

All thought stopped when the burning came. Gol had emptied the entire beaker over her head, and the cool pain was slipping over her face and neck and down. She shrieked as the full pain took hold, and in what rational part of her mind remained, she wondered if this was what it felt like to be mutilated and tossed into flames.

Long minutes passed, and when the pain subsided, a much changed Maia collapsed into her brother's arms. Ruby eyes opened, and that same dark light restored her vision as had her brother's prior to her return. "...I feel... strong..."

"It's wonderful, isn't it, my dear sister?" He sat the girl back on her feet, watching as she looked at her own hands and down at her body. "You can feel the power... the strength... the undying raw energy that now makes us superior."

Slowly, the girl smiled. "I should never have doubted you, Gol. I see now what you meant. Dark eco... the old fool was wrong, wasn't he? We could use it... we could use it to reshape the world, to make everyone see what you have shown me."

,br> Brilliant minds corrupted, power and life granted, Gol and Maia instantly took to their planning. They shut off the warp gate that very day to their lab, restricting access by any of the other sages.

All the while outside, the soft rain continued to fall.

~==End~==