

As a token of thanks to you and everyone else who helped make this exhibit possible, we are offering the prose portion of our story, *The Legend of En*, free-of-charge so you can read it at your leisure and share it with your loved ones. This prose is also available as a downloadable PDF at our website:

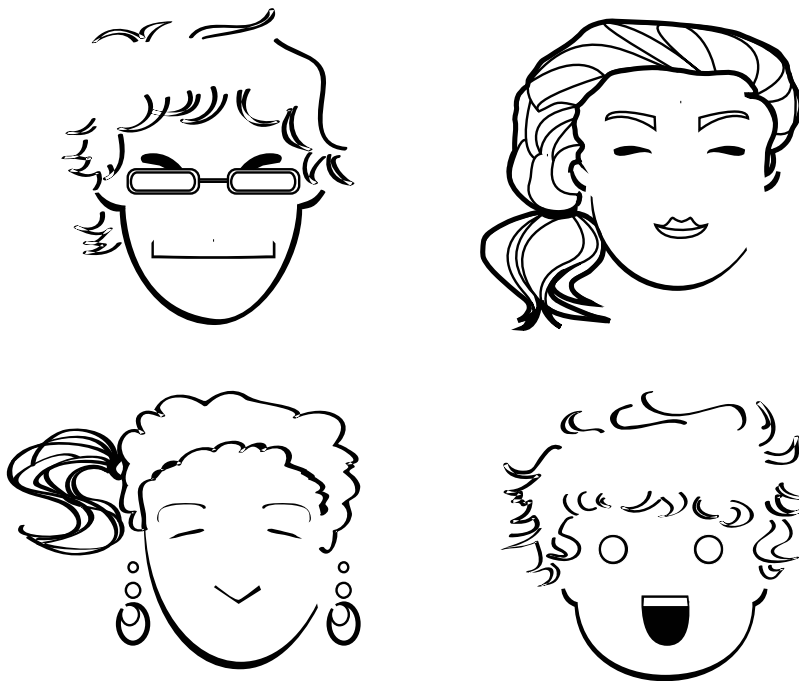
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Though our styles and approaches to visual art differ greatly from one another, each of us at Studio Sunday have been influenced by the art of storytelling. By making our story easily accessible to everyone, we hope that it'll help fuel the imagination of someone close to you and inspire them to imagine big, ridiculous, clever and creative changes for our world.

If you wish to support our future endeavors, please consider purchasing the fully-illustrated graphic novel of *The Legend of En*. It's prettier than this booklet, quite frankly, and will last much, much longer.

Thanks again for all of your support!

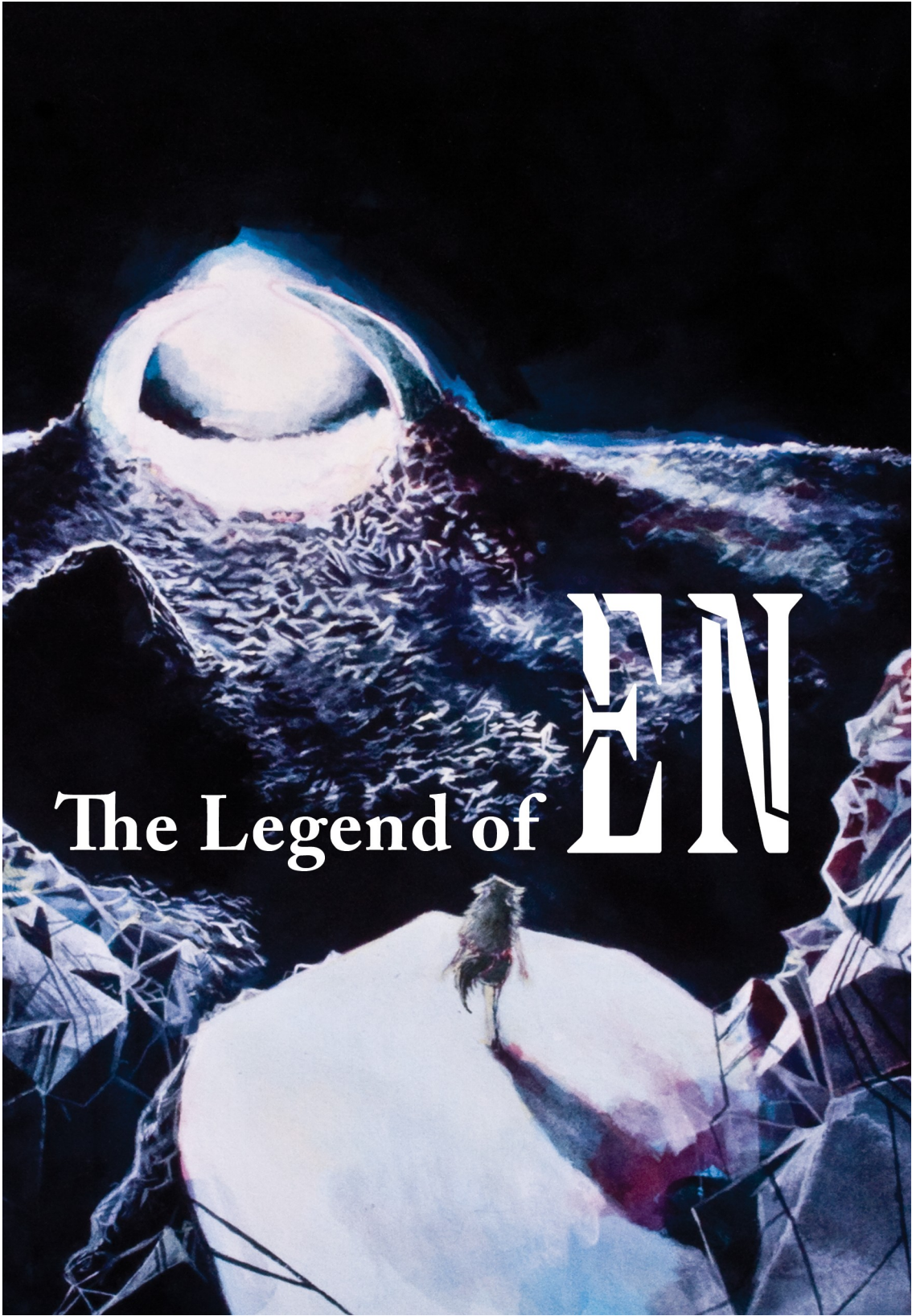
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The Legend of **EN**

I. THE MECHANICAL CURSE

Hidden high above the clouds, in an ancient and troubled land that was very different from our own, there was a secluded island that had long ago left its home on the sea. On this island, everything was beginning to die. It was a slow death that crept over the land, and it occurred slowly enough that none of the inhabitants took note of it until it had already consumed the forests.

It was no ordinary tragedy that befell the floating island. This creeping death was not a quick accident that leaves no time for the realization of what's happened, nor was it a death that is necessary or even desired at the end of a long and well-lived life. The death that consumed this place was a curse: it transformed every living thing into a twisted and synthetic shadow of itself, and encased everything in a mechanical half-life. The trees no longer swayed in the wind, and the animals no longer moved in a familiar or natural way. The souls of the island were each trapped in a mechanical form, doomed to an artificial imprisonment for eternity.

The last living creatures on the ill-fated island were a young human girl and an elder wolf. This elder wolf was larger than most wolves, and if you were to stumble across him in the woods, you would swear there was some sort of an ancient intelligence looking back at you through the deep lenses of those yellow eyes. His great silvery coat shimmered in the filtered light of the forest, allowing him to blend in with the lush foliage until he was little more than a shadow among the trees. Loping through the forest, he moved with a silent grace that no other creature could match. Wolf had been alive as long as anyone on the island could remember, and he guarded the forests of the floating island fervently.

The girl, who called herself En, belonged to a tribe of once-nomadic humans that had long ago settled on the island and made peace with the forest and its creatures. She was small for her age, and people often mistook her for being younger than she really was. Her deep brown hair fell down to her shoulders in waves, and her eyes were a brilliant green that left nothing in the world unnoticed. Her eye color, as well as her rich, brown skin, were common traits that she shared with her people. Her clothes

were plain, and they fit her slim body well. Unlike many of the other girls in her village, En felt that there were more important ways to spend her time and effort than worrying about her appearance, so she spent much of her youth helping the older men and women with their work in the forests, and she gained much wisdom and knowledge beyond that of her peers by doing so.

The cursed death came more swiftly to En's people than it did to the animals and forests around them, yet it remained a mystery as to why she was unaffected. She quietly watched her fellow tribesmen die one by one, and she soon found herself alone in the world. The elder wolf came to the girl to comfort her in her grief, and offered her a home in the forests. There, Wolf taught her the ways of the land and, in return, En aided the wolf in his efforts to help the dying animals while searching for the source of the mechanical curse. En and Wolf became close friends in this time of desperate need, determined to restore their home to its former state; unfortunately, their efforts were to no avail, and they could do nothing but watch life on the island slowly wither away.

Inevitably, the island's curse began to overtake the elder wolf's body. He knew that he no longer had the strength to escape to the world below the island, or even to continue being alive. His time on this earth had ended.

It was dusk when Wolf finally collapsed from exhaustion beneath the dark, mechanical form of the island's largest tree. It was painfully obvious that the elder wolf was being slowly poisoned by the curse and his flesh was beginning to harden and change. En settled next to Wolf, placing his great head in her lap as she stroked his fur in his final hours. She wept from the fear of being utterly alone, and her tears glistened in the light of the elder wolf's last sunset.

"I am afraid," En said quietly, her tearful voice barely piercing the oncoming night, "But I would do anything to save our home."

Wolf, who had been quietly contemplating his coming death, gazed up at the tears rolling down En's cheeks as she mourned the loss of her home, her people, and her friend. He understood the fear of being alone all too well, and had experienced that dreadful feeling a few times in his long life. En's

words touched his ancient heart and evoked memories of a time long passed when his passions had run more deeply than they did now. He took a deep breath, struggling to find the strength to remember, to speak. He needed to find a way to do what he understood must be done, as there may still have been a way to make things right.

"There is a green palace far to the west of here where one called the Onion Queen resides. She may know how to restore our home to its former beauty," Wolf whispered, "My body can no longer leave this island, but there may be a way I can take you there all the same. Do not despair, I will be with you."

With that, Wolf closed his eyes once more and breathed a long sigh of relief. As his final breath flowed from his lungs, En could feel his body lighten and begin dissipating, leaving behind only his pelt and head. En felt panic washing over her as Wolf's body disappeared, and she lifted his head to gaze into the eyes, not knowing what she would fear more: seeing the emptiness of death, or seeing life remaining inside.

Looking into his eyes was like looking into the darkness of the night sky. She felt as though the darkness was pulling her in, looking into the depths of her being as she sat helpless beneath its scrutiny. There was darkness behind those eyes, but it was a darkness with substance, a darkness that acted as a vessel for thought, emotion and power. Wolf's soul remained intact within his pelt, even though his body was dead.

As the sun lay to rest behind the horizon and the stars began to come into view one after one, En sat beneath the tree and considered her goal. She did not know how she would make it to the palace of the Onion Queen, as the elder wolf had suggested, but she trusted his judgment. She knew, somehow, that Wolf would guide her. She watched the darkening sky until the sun was just a memory that lay sleeping behind the earth. Eventually, exhaustion overtook her and she slept.

The memory of the previous evening caught up with her just as she was opening her eyes from her sleep. Dawn was beginning to break as she wrapped Wolf's pelt around her shoulders to shield

herself from the chill of the early morning. She held his hollowed head carefully in her hands as the line of the horizon began to glow with a new day. An eerie silence greeted the light, and another morning that should have been filled with life was once again silenced by the dreadful mechanical curse.

I am afraid, but I would do anything to save our home.

En lifted Wolf's head and placed it upon her own, prepared to do whatever it took to restore the floating island.

II. THE ONION QUEEN

When En placed the mask upon her head, she could feel the wolf's soul surround her and enter her mind. She felt as if her body was stretching out, becoming thinner and lighter as she was propelled over oceans and continents, forests and cities before finally feeling her feet settle at the edge of a vast white desert.

Despite the instantaneous travel that Wolf's spirit provided, it seemed he was unable to take her any farther into the queen's realm. Whether this was an indication of the limits of Wolf's power or a way for him to test her dedication to this quest, it did not matter – she only had one way to go. As she settled to the ground, En saw a desert littered with the corpses of once-great trees, half buried beneath dunes of white sand. It was a disturbing sight, but she continued forward, unshaken.

En gazed at the dead forest around her as she walked, awestruck by the enormity of the trees and unsure of what could have siphoned the life from such a large woodland. All around her and out to the horizon ahead of her, the skeletons of these ancient trees jutted out of the white sand and clawed at the sky like bony fingers. Their bark had been stripped away and the sapwood bleached white by the blistering sun. The roots of the forest were buried deep into the silky sand, but they had failed to find any further nourishment. In the distance there rose a huge, green behemoth of a tree that radiated unusual vigor and youth in the midst of the ancient arboreal graveyard. Windows, doors, balconies and buttresses were carved into the bark of the tree, showing hints of the dark, hollowed interior. This, the

only living tree in a long-deceased timberland, was the Onion Queen's tower.

"I wonder why she's called the Onion Queen..." En pondered as she made her way to the tower.

"There are many reasons," En let out a small yelp and looked around her as the familiar voice echoed inside of her head. She expected to see someone – or something – watching her from close by, but she found herself alone in this place, surrounded only by sand and dead trees.

"I told you, young one, that I would be with you." It was Wolf's voice, echoing once again within the confines of En's mind. He sounded amused by the fact that he had startled her.

"It takes much more than physical influence to dispose of a soul as old as mine." En began cautiously poking at Wolf's cowl, inspecting what remained of his legs and tail before raising her hands and gently feeling the soft fur on his lifeless muzzle. His spirit was apparently attached to the wolf cowl she now wore, though it didn't actually occupy it. Strange as it was, En found herself reassured by his invisible presence and was glad that he was still able to speak with her. En quietly continued on across the desert while Wolf waited patiently for her to absorb the concept of this new form of communication before he continued his explanation.

"Long ago, when this forest was still new, it was an abundant farmland for surrounding villages. One farmer in particular enjoyed raising onions. Some onions grew better than others, but that is a tale that will be told in its own time." Wolf's voice sounded almost bemused as he answered her earlier question, but En thought nothing of it. His answer satisfied her curiosity for the time being.

When En finally stood in front of the tower, the front gates were open, as though they had been awaiting her arrival. The sun shone with an unforgiving intensity and the cool darkness that waited for her inside of the tower seemed more welcoming than the sweltering white orb in the sky. Under normal circumstances, En might have been afraid of entering the ominous structure, but her need for cooler climes overcame that initial fear. When she entered the tower, she was greeted only by a still silence in the great halls of the Onion Queen – the corridors were dark, but the sun illuminated the surrounding area enough for En to see where she was going. Her echoing footsteps and the shifting shadows quickly

sapped her confidence, and En began to wonder if entering the Onion Queen's palace was a terrible mistake. Still, she moved forward one step at a time, comforted by the weight of Wolf's pelt on her back.

En was relieved when she reached the throne room of the palace, and the fear escaped her when she set foot into the brightly lit hall. Great brass columns lined the hall and disappeared into a ceiling that had been painstakingly carved out of the dark, moist wood of the giant tree. En was amazed by the craftsmanship that had been put into creating the Onion Queen's palace, and she could tell there were great stained glass windows lining the room that were masked by dark, frosted panels. En noted that there were figures in the glass and that the windows depicted a story, but she couldn't make out the images.

On the other end of the vast and room, where one might assume a throne should be, there was what appeared to be a great onion made of brass resting on a low pedestal. The brass onion once possessed a fine sheen, but was now covered in years worth of dust and patina, just like the rest of the palace. When En approached the machine, she saw a panel with a button beneath a sign that urged in gilded letters:

PRESS ME.

Despite all that had happened, En was still possessed with the curiosity of a young human and felt allured by the intrigue of big mysterious buttons. Since Wolf was silent through her ventures of the palace, she did not perceive any danger in doing as the button instructed, so En reached out with a slender and innocent finger and pressed it quickly.

She felt the floor shift and heard the sound of machinery slowly coming to life around her. The objects and mechanisms within the tower protested and whined before slowly inching into movement. Shadows that once hid in the corners and obscured details began to disappear as the dark frosted panels slid out of view to reveal the stained glass windows. The great brass onion began to move, its layers slowly blooming apart one petal at a time, in a mechanical ballet. It moved in near-silence, projecting

the sound of machinery that was well taken care of, and the motions of the brass onion revealed the being who could supposedly save En's home. En gasped as the light trickling in through the windows finally washed over the form of the Queen and revealed the origin of the monarch's title.

The figure inside was an elegant construct of electrical wires, mechanical armatures and rubber tubing. Some parts seemed to be made from random pieces of machinery and man-made objects. Her skirts, which were made of a once-fine fabric, had been ravaged by moths for hundreds of years and revealed gears and dusty machinery beneath her bustle. The Onion Queen's torso had been fashioned from a mannequin: the paint on her plastic form had begun to flake, revealing the aged wood beneath. A white onion, the queen's namesake, was attached to the neck of the torso, its top burgeoning with slender green leaves.

At first the Onion Queen was still, slumped forward like a neglected marionette with its strings cut. The heavy metallic sound of grinding gears and machinery struggling to come back to life echoed throughout the great hall, trying to recall what they had been constructed to do after so many years of dormancy. After a few struggled movements, the mechanisms began to rotate more smoothly and the echo-filled palace quickly began to rouse with ancient mechanical life.

The construct that composed the Onion Queen's throne began to hum softly and fluid began to fill the rubber tubes connected to her body. The wires that held her suspended snapped and crackled with electricity as they began to animate her inorganic form once again. Her limbs jerked and twitched with surges of electricity as the queen straightened her spine and lifted her head to look once more upon her court. A human-like face had sprouted on the onion, white and flawless as porcelain, and as cold as stone. Atop the mass of gears and machinery, her visage emitted a tired glow in the old sunlight of the palace, but the two slits where her eyes should have been were deeper and darker than the gaps between the stars. The queen turned to En and she felt the incredible power behind those lifeless voids. She was frightened of the queen, and began to slowly back away from her and the elaborate brass throne.

“Hello, my child,” the Onion Queen spoke softly through the motionless mask. “Who is it that seeks the Onion Queen's council?” Her voice was layered with a patience that only comes with many, many years of experience. Gears and balance springs pulsed beneath her throat, creating a distinctly mechanical, but strangely maternal voice.

En opened her mouth to speak, but she could not find her voice. She was in awe of the Onion Queen's form, and wondered to herself how something as mundane as an onion could become the ruler of an entire land. The Onion Queen smiled as though she could see the question on her face and gently spoke: “Ah... I see I must explain...” The queen lifted a hand to motion to the stained glass windows on the surrounding walls of the throne room. As she did so, she raised her beautiful face and began to tell the story that was depicted in the panes of glass. The Queen's voice echoed off the walls of the throne room like a silver bell as she began her story.

"Once, the forest and lands beyond the walls of this palace were as green and alive as any you have seen. The forest contained all manner of living things, including plants and animals beyond numbering. Food was plentiful and many wild onion patches grew across the forest floor. I was born in one of these patches, and I was the only one to grow roots deep enough to touch the artifact. I was able to wrap my roots around it and started to draw my life from its power."

The Onion Queen lowered her arm and returned her pitch-black gaze to the young girl standing before her. Her joints creaked as she demurely folded her hands in front of her mechanical torso.

"When I was large enough and had the strength to do so, I uprooted myself and began to search for my purpose. A passing farmer noticed me and brought me back to his village. He was convinced that I had been sent by his gods as a sign of good fortune, and he took me to show to his people. They worshiped me and made me their queen." A soft glow came from the depths of the an elaborate root system that had grown from the bottom of the onion to form her throat and her face held a sad expression.

"The villagers constructed this body for me and hollowed out the largest tree in our forest to

make the tower we are standing in now. The first years of my rule were prosperous and the surrounding villages thrived. Eventually I began to notice a change across the land... The world around me was fading away. Before I could find the reason for this plague, my forest, my subjects and eventually my entire kingdom had died or moved on. The forest around me became a desert and I now sit alone, waiting for the day when I must pass on as well." The queen lowered her head and closed her eyes. En thought she saw a small tear roll down the queen's cheek, and she tried not to wrinkle her nose when the pungent smell of onions filled her nose.

"Your majesty, this curse is not yours alone," Wolf chimed in as En searched for comforting words for the queen, *"Our home has undergone the same tragic changes as your kingdom."* En wasn't sure that the queen would hear the elder wolf's voice inside of her head, but the monarch had lifted her eyes to look upon the girl once again to acknowledge that she had heard the voice as well.

"We came here to seek your wise council, to see if there was anything you can do to help us."

The Onion Queen remained silent as she pondered Wolf's plea. The surrounding machinery seemed to whirl in time with her thoughts. En could feel a passing energy between Wolf and the Onion Queen, as though they were having a private conversation that she was unable to hear. It seemed like an eternity before the queen spoke once more.

"I... see. And you, En of the Floating Isle, you are determined to save your home?" The queen, in her wisdom, already knew the girl's answer. She simply wanted to hear En say it, as though giving voice to the desire would demonstrate her determination

"I would do anything to save our home," En's voice rang through the hall louder than she intended, her feelings evident in each echo off the walls of the throne room. The queen stared at her for a long moment before speaking once more.

"Very well," the Onion Queen whispered. En watched in horror as she lifted her arm and violently dug the fingers of her synthetic hand into the roots of her neck. With one swift movement, she wrenched them free, revealing an intricate network of machinery that supported the Onion Queen's

head, pulsing away with a synthetic beat. The whirring machinery in the throne room began to move noticeably slower, and the Onion Queen beckoned to the girl with her free hand.

"Quickly, child, I have a gift for you." She gently removed something from the void within her neck and held it out to En. The monarch's voice seemed raspier now with the influence of machinery more apparent now that the roots were gone.

En stepped forward quickly, though reluctantly, with her hands cupped in front of her to receive the gift. When she got close enough, the queen reached out and placed a small mass of roots into En's hand and closed her fingers. The roots were warm and pulsed gently within En's grasp, but she felt something smooth and cool within. She would have opened her hands to look at the object, had she not caught a glimpse of the queen's vacuous black eyes.

"This is what I have learned: There are two other artifacts like this one, though I only know the location of one. They change the world around them in strange ways and thus they are likely to be guarded by creatures that will not forfeit them as easily as I. Once you have all three pieces, you must return to your home and follow the elder wolf's instructions."

En could not pull her gaze away from the Onion Queen's eyes as the darkness within them began to shift and change. She saw images within and somehow knew that they depicted the location of the next artifact.

"The artifact can be found in an ivory tea ceremony, deep within a dark obsidian cave. I have not seen it for many, many years and I pray that the environment there has not been so ravaged as my kingdom has been."

The Onion Queen's gaze was broken by the sound of scraping metal. En looked at the ceiling and noticed cracks starting to spread, streams of dust and debris beginning to fall from the fissures. The queen stayed where she was, the task of moving becoming more difficult for her as her tower began to crumble.

"Hurry! The artifact I have given you is the source of both my power and the remaining life in

this tower. Retrieve the remaining artifacts before your home is condemned to the same fate as my kingdom. There is no time left to explain all that must be done, but with Wolf's help I am sure you will be able to discover the secrets in time. Now leave while you can!"

En turned on her heels and ran as fast as she could to the entrance of the tower as large chunks of debris began crashing to the floor. She wanted to help the Onion Queen, but knew that she could not save her home if she was trapped inside of the crumbling tower. Beneath the roaring collapse of the building, En thought she could hear the faint whisper of brass petals closing shut once more as her feet carried her father away from the center of the tower, but she had no time to look back and see if the queen was safe. When En finally exited the construct, she felt the elder wolf's spirit consume her body again and take her away from the desert. Just before her vision faded, she could see the last of the Onion Queen's palace deteriorate and collapse into the sand.

III. AN IVORY TEA CEREMONY IN AN OBSIDIAN CAVE

It might have been several minutes or an hour before she reached her destination, En could no longer tell. The dark was so pervasive that she could not tell if she was still moving until she felt herself land clumsily onto cold, bare rock. As she tried to regain her footing in the utter black, Wolf spoke into her mind again.

"We are now far below the furthest reaches of the sun. There is strange life here, child... Be careful with yourself". Something in the elder wolf's voice made En nervous. She knew few humans had come to this place, and unease was evident in her steps. The atmosphere felt wrong and unwelcoming, like a cold hand that was trying to choke the happiness from the world. En took slow, deep breaths as she began to feel her way through the dark, struggling to keep calm as she navigated through the inky blackness.

As she moved along, En felt the air moving against her skin and noticed a faint light beginning to bloom into existence in the darkness ahead of her. She assumed her eyes were becoming accustomed to this place, for as she continued to walk, she could see the outline of her hands begin to take shape in

the darkness and the definition of the walls slowly becoming clearer. As she progressed further forward, En saw light spilling from an opening in the wall ahead and made her way to the source as quickly as she could, rounding a corner and stopping abruptly as a strange and fantastic landscape came into view. En had found herself in a vast underground cavern, the ceiling of which was so high that most of it was lost in dark mist, and the opposite wall seemed impossibly far away. Even with everything that had happened so far, this place was far beyond anything she could have imagined.

“So we arrive at the labyrinth...” Wolf muttered within the confines of En's mind.

The terrain ahead was made of a complex network of jagged obsidian rocks that were divided by stark, black cracks. The clefts in the rock seemed to form paths and turns, making the way forward difficult to discern from En's position in the cave. A point of light hovered high in the center of the cavern, shining with a bright white light that was swallowed by the black rocks that surrounded it. On either side of the light rose two massive ivory pillars, growing from the chaos below like massive, curved elephant tusks. The light floated delicately between the two structures, and when En squinted her eyes, she could see that it was suspended from cables attached to the tips of the tusks.

“The light at the center, this is the Ivory Tea Ceremony,” Wolf explained, *“According to legend, the entire city was formed from the bones of a great fallen god and that this god would protect the faithful until the end of time. When that time comes, the city would fall into the the great god's mouth, and all the true believers would be chosen to survive and begin a new race. That is where we must go.”*

It seemed a very long and difficult climb, and the mythical history of the Ivory Tea Ceremony made En uneasy. Wolf had not led her astray thus far, so En gathered her courage and ventured into the labyrinth despite her fear.

The going was difficult. The rocks had grown together at impossible angles, and they were slick and cold. The wind around En grew stronger as she approached the floating city, making it more difficult to find her grip on the rocks. This was unlike the labyrinths she had heard of in stories that the elders of her tribe would tell her when she was young. She could see where she needed to go, but she

had no more clue how to get there than if there were walls between her and her destination. The narrow paths wound parallel and perpendicular to one another, etched in perfect angles into the rocks, but between them were deep and treacherous chasms. Occasionally she heard evil sounds in their depths and saw things scurrying just beyond her vision. She prayed she would never learn their source, and yet she had expected to see more life in the caves.

“There is enough life in this cave, child,” said Wolf, *“We just haven’t met it yet. If luck is with us, we wont.”*

After hours of cautiously picking her way amongst the paths, En made it to the base of the nearest massive tusk-like structure. En hadn’t been sure of the authenticity of the sensation of the earth rising and falling beneath her feet until she had reached the tusk. Now that they were closer to the center of the labyrinth it was obvious the ground was indeed moving, and the winds were rising and falling with the pulse of the rocks. She could now see that that the two colossal white structures were on opposite sides of a great pit. Now that she was near the center of the labyrinth, En could see the origin of the winds and the moving land. The labyrinth was alive. As she looked down into the pit she could see the rock giving way to leathery tissues and jagged white teeth, eventually descending to depths that even the glowing star above could not reveal.

“Disgusting,” said Wolf with an obvious sneer in his voice, *“Climb carefully, En. I will do what I can to protect you.”*

En looked up at the glowing structure between the spires. It was clear to her now that there were hills and trees growing in the white light, but it appeared they were growing at unnatural angles, some even growing upside down from the base of the city. The sky was full of circling, misty white clouds that floated gracefully down into the vacuum below. She could almost see a path meandering through the hills and trees, but it was too far above her to be sure. She had to squint her eyes and look away as the light burned spots into her vision.

The base of the white pillar was just level enough to begin climbing towards the peak without

trouble. The material was smooth to the touch but she had enough traction to navigate it far more easily than the slick maze below. The winds upon the spire were far heavier than those of the labyrinth, and the higher she climbed the more she could see into the depths of the gaping maw below the city that was ready to consume her should she slip.

The angle of the ivory pillar became steeper as she continued to ascend, and she began to find hand and foot holds carved into the bone. En struggled to keep her grip and continued her upward trek as the winds battered her viciously from all sides. As he promised, Wolf protected her as best he could by wrapping his spirit around her body to steady her frantically-beating heart, his calm whispers giving her the strength to keep moving. She soon came within sight of the massive ropes that wound about the pillar and stretched down to suspend the Ivory Tea Ceremony. En raised herself to her feet and gripped the nearest rope, hesitating before the marvelous Ivory Tea Ceremony as she caught sight of the plunge beneath her. En did not typically find heights to be frightening, but she had never been so impossibly high before, and her body froze with fear. Doubt began to grip menacingly at her heart as she stared at the length of cable before her that served as the only path to her destination.

“The Ivory Tea Ceremony is there,” Wolf uttered, *“We must walk down the rope and make our way through the gates.”* Wolf continued speaking as though answering En’s questions before she had time to think the words *“I do not know how we will get inside unnoticed, or manage to steal the artifact within. We cannot stay up here like this, child. It is likely whomever inhabits the Ceremony has already seen us.”*

With a nod, En began to scale the rope towards the ivory city, her confidence restored by the sound of Wolf’s voice echoing within her mind. The rope below her was easily wide enough to walk on, but bowed and danced in the wake of the great mouth’s breath. Once more, Wolf’s spirit did a great deal of the work in keeping her body steady and gave her strength to continue. At one point, the rope swung viciously under En, throwing her off her feet and to the edge. After a moment of panic, she slid to a near-stop, but continued to slide down the curve of the great cable. Digging her fingers in, she

pulled herself to an uneasy stop and slowly inched on her hands and knees back to the top, vowing to be more careful with her footing. En pressed on until she came to the end of the rope buried in the ground of the island, disappearing peacefully into the soil as though it had grown from that spot. She gratefully stepped onto the firm surface of the suspended city and looked around her. As her eyes adjusted to the ubiquitous light around her, the details of what En had seen from the labyrinth were now visible to her. She could see the undersides of massive trees swaying below the edges of the suspended city, and small indications of civilization living in a confused and inverted world were scattered about. Looming before her, a great ivory gate basked everything in view with a dim, off white glow. Elaborate carvings were embedded in the door and around the frame, extending out along the walls until they faded into shallow, half-finished figures several feet from the edge of the gate. Many of the carvings depicted strange creatures and lands unknown to En and the elder wolf.

As En approached the gates, a deep, rumbling sound and the scraping of wood across the ground signaled the slow opening of the door, as if their approach had been expected. Waiting patiently inside was a short, masked man who was concealed in heavy robes.

“We don't often have pilgrims visit our city anymore. You have come to join the Ceremony, I take it?” the man asked, his voice barely rising above the low howl of the winds. En nodded slowly, not knowing how else to answer the strange question, and followed the unusual little man through the portal. The gate closed slowly behind her, shutting out the noise of the dangerous winds. She did not notice anyone operating the great gate, making it seem as though it moved entirely of its own will. There were massive trees growing at every angle around her and various paths carved out of the luminous white ground wove up and down the low hills and terraces. En realized that the ground and many of the buildings appeared to be carved from the same material that made up the tusks, lending reason to the city's name.

The robed man beckoned En forward and began to descend into the structure. She could see the mouth of the demon stretched wide below the city and past its awkwardly angled trees, and became

overwhelmed by the realization that it was aware of her. The demon below was aware of everyone who lived in this city, and it seemed to be waiting eagerly for the day that the ivory structure and its inhabitants would fall helplessly into its gaping maw.

En was led to a wooden temple she had seen during her trek across the massive cable that held the city aloft. When the masked man quietly opened the temple doors, she was immediately aware of a sensation of power that felt very much like what she had felt in the Onion Queen's eyes. The fully opened doors revealed several more robed beings, all seated and reverently facing an altar that housed a glowing green object. En's eyes widened and her pupils dilated with eagerness when she realized that this object before her was the second artifact. She didn't know if she was to ask for the artifact, like she did with the Onion Queen, or if she was supposed to take it from the altar and leave as fast as she could; Wolf had fallen silent from the moment she stepped foot into the ivory city. As the temple doors closed quietly behind her, En decided to wait for some kind of cue from Wolf before taking any decisive action. The masked man who escorted her to this place walked forward into the temple, beckoning for En to continue following him.

A thin, tranquil stream of water trickled from the altar into an overflowing ivory basin that rested in the center of the temple. A small tea tree grew from the side of the basin, its roots clinging firmly to the ivory walls of the container so it could obtain nourishment from its depths. En's guide stepped forward and took a bowl from the floor, filling it with the clear, peaceful water of the basin, and he plucked a single leaf from the temple's tea tree. After placing the leaf into the bowl, the masked man walked slowly back to En and handed it to her ceremoniously before he spoke.

“Drink.”

The leaf had dissolved into the water, resulting in a tea that glowed a soft green color. En hesitated, taking a moment to gently inhale the earthy aroma of the tea before raising the bowl to her lips and taking a small sip. Its flavor reminded her of the bitter medicines the apothecaries of her tribe would give her when she fell ill as a child, and the memory of her forsaken people caused her heart to

swell with loneliness. En lowered the bowl as a tear trickled down her cheek, and she could now see that the green glow of her tea seemed to emanate from nearly every surface in the room. With the temple doors closed, she could now see a faint green aura around the creatures before her that matched the glow of the water.

“En, time grows short for all things. We must take this artifact now,” Wolf said cautiously within En's mind. She looked at the masked forms sitting silently, their full attention directed to the artifact that rested solemnly upon the altar. Some were chanting quietly, others were sipping the same liquid that filled her bowl. En hesitated, apprehensive of the consequences that might follow. She was severely outnumbered by the people in this room, and there was no easy route of escape from of the temple. Wolf, sensing more questions in her mind added, *“Yes, the artifact gives power to these people; it brings the water they drink and nourishes them. It supports this entire structure. These men are the guardians of the artifact, and when you take it from them, they will die.”*

“Please drink the tea, and be filled with the power of the Pixel Demon. Tradition says that all pilgrims must drink of His essence. If you do not, He will deliver His wrath upon you and you may spend the rest of your days in the depths of His hell,” the man stated, as if he were reciting directly from a religious text. With that, he turned and sat down with the others, staring at the altar as if waiting for some signal or event.

“En, they will not stop you. They do not dare think it possible to touch the altar or the artifact without falling into the demon's mouth. I will protect you just as I always have, but we must take the artifact now.” Wolf urged.

En walked forward cautiously, keeping an eye on each of the robed figures in turn, but none moved or appeared to pay her any mind. When she came close to the altar, she could see that the artifact had grown deep into the ivory; or, perhaps, the altar had grown around it. It would be difficult to remove with her bare hands and she had no idea how she would free it. If she was unable to get it loose, the guardians would take this as a sign of heresy and things could get complicated. As she

pondered how to free the relic, En could feel Wolf's spirit reach out and claw his way into the ivory. The ivory of the altar peeled back like leaves in a fire, and as En reached out and placed a hand on the artifact, she could feel the Ivory Tea Ceremony begin to shake around her. Wolf hammered away at the ivory with his magic, and with each swipe of his ethereal claws, the structure began to fall apart around her. At the first signs of disturbance, the creatures in the temple had turned to look at one another, but did nothing more. En's back was turned to them, and she was fairly sure they could not see what was happening. The room began to shift, and the floor shattered, forming a massive hole. With barely a reaction, the worshipers fell through the newly created chasm. What terrified En was not so much that they fell to their doom, but rather that none of them protested at their irreversible fate. She could hear a few screams in the distance, but for the most part they all fell silently to their destiny as though this had been their intention all along.

When the artifact finally came loose into her hands from the altar, she felt the ground begin to drop beneath her feet. She heard the sickening sound of the support ropes snapping free, and the entire Ceremony began to fall. She gripped the artifact tightly in her arms as she frantically looked around, and she could see everything falling apart as though some invisible force had knocked over a child's stack of blocks. En tumbled through the air among the trees and pieces of ivory stairs towards the mouth of the pixel demon below.

As En raced toward the abysmal darkness inside of the demon's mouth, she could hear Wolf begin to chant in a strange language. It was a chant that no mortal throat could possibly produce, and it resonated through the air in a verse that sounded as old as the sky. En clutched the relic closely to her chest as she vanished again into the mists, and the last thing she saw was a ghostly and terrifying shadow of the creatures teeth climb the walls of the cavern as the light of the Ivory Tea Ceremony fell into oblivion.

IV. THE ELECTRIC SEA

En found herself falling once again, her arms aching furiously from tightly clutching the warm,

smooth artifact that she had stolen from the Ivory Tea Ceremony. She tried for a while to keep her eyes open and see where she was going, but the cold wind rushing past her falling body filled her eyes with stinging tears. En closed her eyes and fell blindly into the abyss, continuing to hang onto the object with the hope that Wolf would guide her to a safe place.

Eventually, she became aware of the smell of salt water and of a feeling of cold mist in the air. En opened her eyes against the wind and saw an expansive body of water beneath her, giving her barely enough time to take a short breath before splashing heavily into its depths. The shock of the landing made her gasp, causing water to flow into her mouth and nostrils. With one arm still clutching the artifact, En kicked her legs and climbed through the water before briefly braking through the surface, sputtering and coughing and gasping for air. It was not long before she felt the weight of her wet clothes and wolf cowl pulling her down.

As her head sank below the water once again, she felt a strong hand grab at her clothes and haul her up by the neck of her shirt. Breaking back through the surface and feeling totally out of control, she was thrown up and back onto a hard, uneven surface. A gravelly voice spoke up behind her as she struggled to fill her lungs with air once again.

“You're okay now kiddo. Just lay still until you catch your breath.”

Feeling overwhelmed and not inclined to argue, En laid where she had fallen, now realizing that the person who had fished her from the water had hauled her into a boat, and she remained still as she tried to calm her thoughts.

“This is Samuel,” Wolf said after En caught her breath, *“Most people know him as the God of Fishing. He is wise, but can be unpredictable. Be cautious with him.”*

En nodded pulled herself into a seated position so she could tuck the newest artifact into a pocket that had mysteriously appeared inside of Wolf's pelt. When she made sure that the Onion Queen's artifact had safely found its way into that pocket as well, and turned to look around her. She was in the bottom of a small boat, laying in a loose pile of disorganized equipment that she recognized

as fishing gear. An old man knelt purposefully at the bow of the boat, wearing loose clothing and a huge straw hat. His head was down and En was unable to see anything but his beard as he worked on removing a fishing hook from the mouth of a strange, glowing creature.

“Curse these blasted paper fish! They keep spreading farther out from the evil... s'getting harder to find any decent sport out here.” he growled around the long driftwood pipe in his mouth.

Looking up at her, his tone turned slightly more playful: “You're the most useful thing I've pulled out of this worthless piece of ocean today, and so far all you're good for is talking at. You nearly sank me, appearing out of nowhere like that. I won't ask where you came from or why you dropped in on my fishing grounds, as I have seen too many things to question fate.”

When En got a glance at the old man's face, she noticed that his right eye was a white orb that shone with the same iridescence that could be found inside of a seashell. His left eye was a perfectly normal shade of dusty brown that was focused entirely on her.

“My name is En...” her voice was weaker than she had intended. Her throat was sore and she could still feel some fluid in her breath. It slowly dawned on her that this was the first time she had spoken aloud since she had met the Onion queen. She had become so used to her wordless communication with Wolf that she had not thought about it before now. “Uh... thank you for saving me. What can I call you?”

The fishing god laughed out loud and appeared to think about it briefly before speaking: “Many men have thought up many names for me throughout the years. My time in this job is growing short, however, and the formalities of this Fishing God business are getting tiresome.” The fisherman lifted an old, weathered hand to support the bowl of his wooden pipe as he took a long, thoughtful draw of smoke into his lungs. “They called me Sam, back when I was a mortal. Would be good to hear that name again.”

Puzzled, En sat up from her prone position on the deck of the boat and did her best to ignore the wave of nausea that had suddenly struck her stomach. “Err... Sam? What do you mean by 'your time is

growing short?" Sam had finished pulling his hook from the paper fish's gaping mouth and threw the unfortunate creature into a small pile near the side of the boat. The fish landed with a strange and unsettling metallic *thunk*.

"Some men call me the God of Fishing. It has been my duty to spend the remainder of my life caring for the sea and protecting it as I can." His voice took on a scholarly tone, as though he was reciting a lesson from a book. "Each man serves as God in turn, and when his time is through, he finds another to serve in his stead. A God of Fishing is chosen from those who give themselves to the sea. The God's last duty is to save his successor and pass on the vision before giving himself to the sea once more." Sam took a moment to thoughtfully scratch his beard before continuing, "When you crashed down, I thought this might be it. Alas... You're a young lady and there can be no Goddess of Fishing, so I think my reign will continue for a bit longer." En felt strangely guilty at having disappointed the seafaring sage. Searching for a way to change the subject, she turned her eyes to the strange, glowing fish laying lifeless at her feet.

"What kind of fish are these?" En reached out in an attempt to grasp one of the fish, but she pulled her hand away quickly as it snapped at her, and just in the nick of time to save her fingers from an unfortunate fate.

Sam snorted as he glowered at the pile of mechanical flotsam; "These here? These are paper fish, m'dear. They used to be proper fish before the curse started taking over the sea." He reached down and picked one up-- En noticed that the fish did not snap its sharp teeth at Sam as he did so.

"I have the power to calm the waves, girl! I can bring a fog to confuse ships trying to invade my fishing grounds, and I can bring a storm to destroy those who defy my will... but I have no power to bring these creatures back to the natural world or to lift the curse from my sea." Sam dropped the fish back onto the pile from whence it came, puffing angrily on his pipe. En remained quiet while she listened to him speak, watching as the iridescent colors of his right eye changed into a swirling, stormy gray.

The waves crashed about the small boat, threatening to knock its small crew into the abyss. It was as if the sea were reflecting Sam's mood, and En gripped the side of the boat with white knuckles and eyes clamped shut, waiting for things to settle down again. Looking over, she could see the fishing god gathering up his line and getting ready to cast it out again.

En saw that the fish at her feet had strange stiff jaws and glowing bellies. The source of the metallic noise was now obvious, as the bodies and fins of the fish seemed to be made of metal.

“Just like the forest.” En whispered under her breath. She swallowed hard and looked down at the planks of the boat, trying to fight back another wave of sadness.

The god turned as though she had shouted her words, “Like the forest?” he asked. “Child, have you seen this before?” Sam grabbed both of her arms and pulled En to her feet to face him. Her sadness was immediately replaced with awe when she saw the color of his right eye begin to swirl with even darker shades of gray as he grilled her further, “Do you know what causes this?”

Sam's mortal eye lifted to gaze upon the wolf head that covered En's face, and he drew her nearer so he could gaze into its yellow eyes. After a few moments of silence, the God of Fishing suddenly recognized Wolf's remaining presence and released his grip on En's shoulders.

“Ah... So I see there IS more to you than what there seems.” Sam said before turning away to continue preparing for a second cast of his fishing rod. En rubbed her arm where he had grabbed her, and realized that she'd probably have light bruises where his fingers dug into her flesh.

“My home has suffered the same curse as your sea.” En said quietly, still taken aback by Sam's sudden reaction, “I'm on a quest to destroy the power that's poisoning the life in these places. I have already collected most of what I need, and it sounds like you know where the next artifact is kept hidden.”

“I apologize, m'dear,” Sam was noticeably calmer now as he lifted his head to address her once again. “I have been seeking an answer for a very long time and sometimes my passions get the better of me. I can take you to where it started, in the electric sea. This is the center of the curse and my powers

are at their weakest there. I will take you to it, but I will be unable to help you any further than that.”

With that, he discontinued the work on his fishing rod and began raising a crude canvas sail. The fabric filled almost instantly with the wind and the boat surged ahead against choppy gray waves. As they sped along, the fishing god told her of what lay ahead.

“Strange things are filling the sea. Often you will find mindless creatures wandering the water, going through the motions of living, but without any sign of life.” The old man was rigging his sails and steering the small rudder without looking. For a time it was almost hard to discern where the man left off and god began. En felt that the boat would have gone wherever Sam wanted it to, even without wind or sails. “There used to be a temple in the depths. A group of men built it long ago to worship the evil they found there, but their race has long since vanished, and the temple with them. The steps should still be there, and you should be able to make your way to the bottom just fine.”

They continued to travel on and, after a time, En began to tell him of her adventures so far and of the places she has seen. Samuel sat quietly as she talked, but seemed to show interest in her encounter at the Ivory Tea ceremony. “I had heard of this living cavern from others long ago, but I had imagined it well gone by now. It was an evil place... good riddance.”

They traveled for what seemed to be hours, but the light waves and steady wind eventually gave way to gusts from every direction with unpredictable currents. An ominous dark area appeared in the ocean ahead as Sam pulled out oars and slid them into place on the gunwales of the boat. He called to her over the rising wind: “The stairs are straight ahead of the boat!” He wrenched on the oars and kept the boat on course amid the waves as he slowly negotiated the edge of the darkness.

“Where? I don’t see them!” En shouted back, squinting her eyes against the spraying sea foam as she searched the waves.

Pointing over the edge, he yelled, “Look down!”

En turned her searching gaze toward the riotous sea and what lay beneath its thunderous surface. The stairs came into view, sitting right on the edge of the deep hole that had somehow been

carved into the sea. The hole was easily wide enough to swallow the whole of her island with room to spare. As they neared the stairs, the boat bumped into them with an unexpected lightness.

Holding the boat to the low dock, the old man looked around sadly and, in a quiet voice that somehow carried to her, said, “Be careful m'dear, this is a most evil place for a child to be entering. Have strength and fear nothing. The spirit with you is strong and will help protect you. I must go now.”

En lowered her body down to the waiting stairs carefully, but nonetheless slipped on the algae-covered step and almost fell straight into the dark water that flung itself in cold waves about her feet. She waved an arm at the old man as he rowed away, shouting a thanks that was immediately swallowed by the chaotic noises of the sea. She suddenly wished she were back on the boat with Sam as she turned her attention to the task she was now obligated to do: there was no way to back out now.

She tried her best to keep her feet from sliding off the stairs as she went, but that was no easy task. The stairs became less slick as they angled down and away from the waves, spiraling into the eerie green of the descending column of air. The stairs took her further and further down, winding around the outside of the column; the wall of water that she passed was as calm as the surface of a still pond, and gently undulated next to her. She reached out and passed her hand through the water, and droplets fell from her hand down to the impossible reaches of the abyss.

As En became more confident on the narrow stairs, and despite the fear that gripped her inside, she began to look around with a growing sense curiosity. Strange creatures flitted through the air and dashed here to there as if still in the water. Most emitted a symphony of clicks and metallic buzzing noises and glowed with a dim green light from their mechanical bodies. As she followed the steps down, the light from the world above seemed to dissolve into an eerie greenish gray. En shuddered from the thought of what she would finally find at the bottom of this horrid gap in the sea.

The stairs finally brought her to the bottom of the hole in the sea. She looked up to see a pinhole of light: it was the world above, which she desperately wanted to return to. The sandy bottom was level except for some ruins of a wall and a large, but only slightly raised, mound that took up half of

the open sea floor. Next to the mound lay a loose pile of roundish capsules that emitted a sickly yellow green and the light flickered as if something were alive inside of them.

“This is it, child. You will find the final artifact hidden amongst these orbs,” Wolf said, quietly, *“But you must be very careful and move slowly.”*

En picked up the heavy orbs and set them down as lightly as she could, considering their weight. Each time she picked one up it felt unusually heavy for its size and made a quiet whirring sound. She gingerly stepped through the mass of orbs, moving them around as she searched for the relic in the sand. En took a moment to gaze into the next glowing orb, and she nearly dropped it when she saw a small creature moving inside. Upon closer inspection, she realized that the small creature inside of the orb was a tiny mechanical fish, though it looked underdeveloped in comparison to the other creatures she had seen in this electric sea. En put the orb back into the sand where she found it, though she was decidedly more gentle now that she realized that these glowing orbs were, in fact, mechanical fish eggs. She continued to search for the next artifact, moving as though she were walking on glass for fear of provoking the wrath of whatever had laid those eggs.

When En came to the middle of the clutch, she picked up another whirring ball and beneath it, half buried in sand, was the artifact she had come to collect. A weak smile opened upon her face as she pulled it from the sand and carefully secured it in her bag. The ground rumbled and shook as she retraced her steps through the path she made through the orbs and ran toward the stairs. En could see that the sandy mound that lay across most of the sea floor had started to move as though it were alive, and this inspired her to run faster. Wet sand caked her shoes as she started climbing the steps.

With the removal of the relic, the sand on the floor began to saturate with water, and En saw that the smooth wall of water that surrounded her was beginning to flow downward like a swift waterfall. She began to ascend as fast as she could, stairs pounding beneath her feet as the water level on the sea floor continued to rise. The sandy earth and stairs shook heavily again and she stumbled on the steps, falling to her knees. En looked down upon the shape of a great fish struggling to release itself

from the mound of sand that camouflaged it. The great fish's body made metallic crunching and screeching sounds as it finally freed itself. En could hear gears starting to turn and the abyss was filled with mechanical clanking noises as the massive fish slowly circled its brood of eggs as if searching for something. Fear gripped En as she realized that the fish would come after her when it realized she had stolen the artifact, but she gathered her wits and sprinted up the staircase toward the surface.

At the sound of feet on the steps, the fish slowly started to turn upwards, glowing bright yellow and green as it began to head for her. Its slow, stiff movements gradually became more fluid as sand and rust were forced from its body. Water began to fill the abyss more rapidly, surrounding the mechanical fish that once before flew so freely through the air. Panic flooded through En as the fish and the swelling sea were quickly gaining on her. Tears began to wet her face as she realized she could not outrun this monster or the roaring waters, but she continued to press forward with the hope that Wolf would send her away from this place before she was met with a terrible fate.

The water flowed upward and swallowed the mechanical fish, silencing the terrible screeches of its mechanical parts. A second later En could feel the cold, wet sea quickly enveloping her legs. She cried out as Wolf's magic grabbed her and threw her up and away from the water, into the grayness that she had associated with their travel. The gray turned to black as exhaustion gripped her body, and the sound of roaring water was suddenly silenced.

When En returned to consciousness, she found herself lying on a hard dirt floor, looking up at the familiar metal trees of her floating island forest. Her legs were still wet from the sea that had almost swallowed her up.

V. RETURN TO THE FLOATING ISLAND

Blinking slowly, En rolled over and marveled at the feeling of still being alive. She coughed, bringing the taste of sea water back into her mouth, and shuddered slightly as she pushed herself to her feet.

Wolf's voice once again drifted into her head: *"We have one task left, En... we must go to the*

Thousand-Eyed Temple in the center of the forest. Quickly, now!"

Wearily, En turned toward the center of the island and started walking. The farther she walked, the more her mood lightened. She encouraged herself with the thought that this whole ordeal would be over soon, and that the forest would be restored. As she traveled, she took note of the eerie quiet that she had come to associate with the mechanical forest, but she was no longer saddened by it.

After a surprisingly short walk, a man-made structure began to come into view through the gaps in the trees. Wolf came into her mind again and confirmed that this was indeed the temple they had been seeking, and that she should move forward with caution. Making her way through the remaining bushes, she came across an ancient, overgrown path that led to the entrance of the temple, and as she followed it En noticed that the land became abruptly more alien and mechanical. She immediately became more aware of her surroundings, since she had learned that the artifacts changed the land and created mechanical creatures that may or may not have been happy to see her.

The path eventually brought her to what seemed to be an entrance to the building. Pushing her way past a thicket of wiry metal vines in the doorway, she slid into the gloomy shadows of the temple. Ancient symbols and scripts adorned the walls of this place, layered with countless years of dust and dirt. It felt to En as though she had entered a tomb.

After following a series of corridors, En came to a cavernous room deep within the structure, lit only by sunlight that streamed in from a far-away hole in the ceiling. There was a large platform in the center of the room that held a strange, altar-like block. Even from the entrance of the room, she could see there were chips and holes in the altar, as though someone had tried to break it apart. As En entered the room and cautiously approached the altar, she could feel a latent power radiating outward from the block. When she stood before the altar, she realized that there was a hole in the top that would easily fit the artifact that she recovered from the Electric Sea.

Wolf was silent throughout her investigation, but she could sense his intense interest in this place and what she was doing. When she examined the altar, she could see other holes that might fit the

remaining relics that she had gone through so much trouble to retrieve. As En slowly slid the first artifact into place, she could feel a distant vibration rumbling somewhere deep beneath the chamber she was in. She was unable to see where it came from, but a dim glow began to emanate from the altar as if in response to the rumbling.

En continued to place the artifacts in their respective places, and each time she did so the altar's glow grew more intense. The distant vibration beneath her feet turned into a low thrumming that shook her to the core, and just before she placed the last artifact, Wolf came into her mind.

“En, when you place the last artifact, the temple will come alive. This will be our chance to destroy the curse once and for all.” En could feel the urgency in his instructions as he spoke.

“How do I destroy it?” she asked. A familiar sense of fear was beginning to rise into her throat, making it difficult to speak above a whisper.

“We need to get to the control room and bring the machine's energies to bear back upon itself. I will guide you then when you're done here.”

En stood up and placed the last artifact into its hole with a determined resolve. The moment it was in place, the hall was filled with a great noise and the floor lurched violently beneath her. With Wolf's direction, she began to run from the chamber and, following his dim recollections, she began to make her way to the control room of the temple.

It felt as though the temple's tremors were getting stronger with each passing moment. After making her way through the temple's corridors, she arrived in a smaller chamber. Unlike the other rooms of the temple, the walls were lined with strange things that glowed and beeped. Wolf confirmed that this was the place, and she walked over to a great chair in front of a huge, smooth panel to sit down. She tried to ignore her instinctual urge to run and hide when the elder wolf directed En to flip several switches and to pull a large lever set into the floor next to the chair.

Everything in the room came alive. The panel in front of her slid into the walls and revealed a large window with a view of the outside world. From this vantage point, she could see that she was

above the tree line, and the trees appeared to be moving.

“Quickly now, before it reaches the edge of the island!” said Wolf, *“We need to turn its power upon itself. That’s the only way we can destroy the object and its curse!”* Her hands seemed to move almost of their own will as Wolf explained the buttons and commands she had to send into the machine. As she flipped the last switch, all the screens in the room displayed a cryptic error message and the sounds around her took on a tortured quality.

“You must run!” exclaimed Wolf, *“The machine will soon destroy itself and you must leave before that happens. I still have some influence on the material world, so I will stay here and slow the machine’s destruction until you’re away.”*

At the realization that she would have to leave Wolf’s pelt and spirit behind in the temple, En began to panic once more. She would not have gotten this far without his help, and she was unsure of her ability to go any further without him. As if in response to her uneasiness, she felt a warm, comfortable feeling surround her like a soft summer breeze.

“The island and her forest will come alive again because of you, En. I must stay behind to ensure that future,” Wolf’s voice was comforting, almost fatherly as his words gave En the confidence to continue forward, *“Go, child. You have done well.”*

En removed the wolf head and skin and placed it lovingly on the great chair. She turned away, suddenly feeling very alone, and ran from the room as fast as she could. She hurried through the winding passages of the temple, and when she came to the arch leading to the outside, she saw that she was now floating past the tops of the trees. En could see that she was too high off the ground to jump to safety, and she frantically searched her surroundings for a way to escape the moving temple. The rumbling and thumping from below her faltered as she searched, and En panicked as the temple and the floor she stood on began to drop towards the island. Seizing this opportunity to escape, En sighted a clearing and jumped for it. She fell heavily to the ground, but managed to immediately scramble to her feet, and saw that the temple had raised itself upon spindly legs of metal that walked across the land

like a spider prowling its web.

The temple lurched to one side and several of its legs began to buckle. Just when she thought the whole thing would crash, it seemed to catch itself. It stood still for a moment as a shudder visibly shook the entire structure, and En heard a low, far off hum that quickly turned into a high-pitched whine. The building began caving in on itself, looking for all the world as though someone was pulling a thread and puckering in the walls. All of the temple-creature's motions stopped before it began to slowly tilt forward and finally fell to the ground in a great spray of dirt and broken trees.

After the acrid smoke of the temple's destruction cleared and the last of the metallic leaves and branches had fallen to the ground, En cautiously wandered over to where the temple-creature had collapsed to see what became of everything. Using one of the crumpled legs as a makeshift ramp, she carefully climbed back into the now silent temple.

Everything was quiet once again. No lights were shining and no sounds could be heard. The floor was tilted at angles that were bothersome to walk on, and some hallways had been crushed, making it difficult to find her way back to the control room. Black markings stained every wall of the temple's remains, and was all that remained of the fire that flowed through the halls, ravaging everything inside.

Finally, after much wandering and retracing her path, she came upon the proper hallway. She discovered that door to the control room was jammed, so she used the weight of her body to force it open with a deep, metallic scraping noise. En cautiously poked her head inside to see if there was any danger, but the eminent silence let her know that it was safe. It was almost completely dark and smelled unhealthy, and she could see that the command chair had been ripped from its mounting and tossed violently aside. She looked all around, moving piles of rubble and clearing hopeful looking patches of floor, but she was unable to find any remnant of Wolf.

Dirty, tired and sad, En climbed from the wreckage and threw herself down at the base of a nearby tree. "Oh Wolf," she thought, "What do we do now?"

Finally, after everything she had done, tears began to flow freely down her cheeks. Her body shuddered violently, unable to control this display of emotion. As she lay crying on the forest floor, she heard a noise in the forest behind her. When she lifted her head to see the source of the noise, she thought she saw a large gray shadow dart just out of view. En climbed back to her feet, wiped the tears away, and walked into the forest where she had seen the shadow. En looked around, but she could see nothing unusual. A flicker in the corner of her eye made her turn once again to see what was moving so quickly in the lifeless forest. She began to run after the gray shadow that was always just out of reach, blindly following where it led despite not being able to catch a clear glimpse.

En ran until her vision started to blur and her breath was a harsh rasp in her throat. She stopped when she could no longer see the dark figure and caught her breath; the shadow had eluded her. When she observed her surroundings more closely, En realized that she had been led back to the old forest where Wolf has comforted her in her grief when the last of her tribesmen had died. Surrounding her were the mechanical shells of the oldest trees on the island, rising far above her head disappearing into the sky. Despite being surrounded by victims of the mechanical curse, something felt different here. It was like the air after a hard rain, or early in the morning before the dew has evaporated. At her feet, she saw a small sprout emerging from the soil. When En looked closer, she saw that these sprouts were all over the glade she was standing in, pushing through the dead branches and old metallic growth.

Leaning over and touching the tender new leaves, En knew that things were going to be different now. Nature would claim the land again and the animals would return. Things would be wonderfully, beautifully, vibrantly different.