

Epics of Ghulu- Mosaic

Prologue

In the land of Ghulu, disaster is pending. The angry God Archimus has nearly broken a millennium-old seal created by the powerful wizard Sharashla long ago. He brings with him an army to descend upon Ghulu, for Archimus feels that the people in the land no longer respect the mighty Gods. While some of the kinder Gods have tried to convince Archimus otherwise, he's continued to press on against his people. Anyone who opposed him was thrown into the dungeons, including his brother Hendrik.

On the simple island of Gythro, the people do not practice magic like the rest of the people in Ghulu. In the past, strength was respected and those who did magic were cast away to sea, never to be seen again. The magicians got wind of this island and decided to use it to mine a very rare ore exclusive to the Ghulu islands. They enslaved the people of Ghulu. Sharashla was born and raised on this island. Being a young magician in this place was no paradise. She spent many months healing the people who were hurt in the mines or sick from the toxic fumes. Before she left the island, she destroyed the mines and freed the people of Gythro to live as they once did before they were enslaved by the magicians.

Since then, the people in Gythro have been through three generations of leaders. First was the mighty Jacob the Great. He ruled with an iron fist for all three days. When Sharashla freed the people and slain the powerful wizards, she neglected one. A young wizard by the name of Herbert had fled into the forest during the attack. Days later, he snuck back into the village and cursed Jacob the Great. Having the power to do so, Herbert escaped by turning himself into a fish. He swam into the ocean, never to be seen again.

After Jacob, the Great came his descendant, Samuel the First. He was as strong as three men combined. His might alone could shift mountains and move seas, or so the legend goes. During his time, the people were the happiest they had ever been. They were free and their way of life was relaxed. The farmers worked a mere five hours a day. The hunters would catch only what they needed and nothing more for gluttony was a serious punishment. The people of Gythro respect the earth and all its creatures. That is why it was shocking to learn that after six hundred years of rule, Samuel was hoarding food for himself. He was put to death by the council.

And so brought way to his successor, Samuel the Second. Though he rules to this day, he is not the strongest on the island by any means. In his younger days, he was fond of his magic powers but was quickly taught to cast that way aside by his father. Samuel the First would never say it, but he was embarrassed by his son. He was weak in his father's eyes. So, Samuel, the Second began to train vigorously to no avail. His body would not let him gain muscle. He never gained his father's respect.

Now the people of Gythro, though still living comfortably, are bored and droll. The rhythm of their day has finally made things tedious. There are more and more people every year and the people must work longer hours. They must also hunt more. An event that makes resources scarce on the island. If that wasn't the worst part, the people of Gythro are about to learn of a more pressing danger...

Chapter One- Eye of the Gythro

On my island, everything is peaceful. Nobody fights, and those who do it only to protect themselves. The people here are very strong. Including myself, I am Joaquin Fox but my friends call me Jo. I am a very strong hunter for my village, every day I go into the forest and gather food for my people. Lately, we've been having to go deeper and deeper into the bush to get food. The animals are little in number. And the berries are dying for some strange reason. The plants are giving up, our winters are getting colder and the summers more intense.

As I think about it more, I realize that my people are in demise, while others are in neglect.

Where I live, we are ruled by seven of the strongest people in the land. All of which shall not be named. Their identities are kept secret and only their commands are heard. The chieftain of the village, Samuel the Second, is a peaceful ruler with no responsibility. He stays in his high tower and watches over us, only flinching when the council nods. He, of all people, should understand the struggle of this island. He sees the suffering and does nothing. If his father were still around, things would not be this way. His father would save this land, wave his hand or something and everything would be better. He had his way of doing that, and that's why the people felt safer under his rule.

For now, my father tells me not to ask questions about the council. That our way of life is and always will be the same. He is one of the neglectful ones. He doesn't see things as I do. On the farms, everything is la-dee-da. Crops come in pretty steady, but with the rise in population, farmers work longer hours to cover the spread. My father loves it, farming is his passion. Hunting is mine. I am a stalker of sorts, I'm fast and stealthy so I attack fast. In the forest, I am calm. Every day I sink further into the trees, venturing past points where I've never been. I suppose that's where I'm coming from, the heart of the forest. I'm standing in front of a broken-down cave. Looks like an old mine shaft but the entrance is blocked in.

My mother's wisdom in my head says to stay away, but my hunter's intuition tells me to go inside and find out what lies within. But then again, my hunting partner behind me has a different idea.

"JO! There you are, I've been looking everywhere for you. It scares me when you disappear like that!"

"I'm sorry Marie. Look, I found an entrance to what looks like an old mine shaft."

Marie approached the mine shaft where I stood. Her long legs were in stride. Marie was a masterpiece of a girl, just my kind of woman. Strong, smart, and a damn fine cook to boot. Her blonde hair came down to her huge shoulders. Marie was Hercules-sized. Again, just my kind of woman. As big as she was, Marie was a scaredy-cat. She approached the mine shaft cautiously.

"I've heard rumors of mine shafts on the island! But I thought it was just old wives' tales. Do you think we should go inside?" she whispered.

I stood there and pondered her question, while Marie wasted no time. She began to move boulder after boulder out of the way. I decided not to argue or reason with her and began to help her dig out the mine shaft. Once cleared, we could see clearly into the cavern. The lights were there but turned off, Marie cracked one of her Gythro glow sticks. They were made of tree bark and the light from a firefly. A remarkable invention blessed upon us by the Gods.

We marched through the damp tunnels. Passing spiders and beetles of all kinds in the process. If Marie was nervous even once, she would not be half the woman I think she is. Little things did not scare Marie, it was the bigger ones that got to her. Tigers were her worst fear. When Marie was young, she witnessed her father get attacked by a twelve-foot jungle cat. He won the fight, but the wounds he sustained were too much. Marie grew that day, but her fear of tigers is a heavy imprint on her kindred spirit.

We were walking for a time when suddenly the track just ceased to exist and a wall made of rocks and rubble stood before us. There were markings on the wall that resembled the ones on the outside of the chieftain's tower. Nobody in our village could read these markings as they're meanings have been lost over generations.

"The cave is empty. Let's get out of here Jo," Marie spoke, looking toward me.

I turned around and began to walk the other way, but stopped and took one last look around. My eye caught the light reflecting off a rusty old box sitting propped up on a musty rock. I picked it up and tucked it neatly in my hunter's pouch. A nifty little bag that I carried with me everywhere. It was convenient for just times like this.

We stepped out of the cave and back into the thick forest. Hunting was our job in the village. Marie and I worked very well together as a team, she trapped the animals with her net and I killed them with my trusty javelin. As big as my javelin was, it could not pierce through hard things. I've tried things like rocks and steel but the javelin just breaks or bends at the tip. I've been through a lot of javelins but this one is unbreakable. I take the weapon everywhere I go and I've dubbed it Lance. We saw a wild boar nearby and began to pursue our target. Marie ran a few feet in front of me and hid behind a berry bush. She did not disturb the branches because she was slyer than a fox. She came out from under the bush and surprised the boar. She launched her sling at hit it right in the legs.

I came out from concealed behind a large rock and attacked. Just as I was about to throw my javelin when just then an arrow pierced the boar through the heart. It let out a swan song and fell, blood spilling delicately on the leaf-covered ground. Another of the hunters came out from behind the shrubs. His name is Jeffrey Spikes. He's the best archer in the village, which is why I don't understand why he didn't strike the boar in the head.

"He's not going to die peacefully, Jeffrey! Put it out of its misery."

He took the arrow out of the pig's torso and stabbed it through its skull.

"There you go, happy now."

"No. But you should be."

We glared at each other for a moment before Jeffrey picked up the boar and walked away.

"Gotta be faster than that Jo, we had that one in the bag." Marie joked.

I smiled and picked my javelin up from off the ground.

"Come on Marie, let's head back to the village," I replied. Marie nodded in agreement and we made our way back down the trail.

When we got back to the village that evening the cooks approached us with rather grim looks on their faces. The head chef, the largest spoke:

"It doesn't look like the catch was very good today."

He looked at the small amount we managed to catch today and looked more concerned than before.

"The chieftain of the village has called a meeting Jo, he wants everyone to meet in the town circle at sunset." The head chef continued.

He and the rest of his cooking team strutted away, spoon in hand. Marie followed and made her way to the far side of the village. She sat on a log bench and began skinning her catch when a large Neanderthal by the name of Cain Quintali made his way over to her and kissed her cheek. An action that I never was able to wrap my mind around. Cain did not deserve Marie. Cain did not deserve much. He was a village guard, it was his job to lay around the village and do nothing all day while he kept everyone "protected"... as if we couldn't do that on our own.

I ignored their ignorant display of affection and took refuge in my little hut. It was nothing special, but this place was home to me. Inside were all of my things; a bed, which sat on the ground to the back of the hut; my work table, where I did all my plucking and trimming and skinning and so on; and my prized golden tiki statue. His name was Dennis and he brought me good luck. This statue was a relic passed down by many generations. Though I have no son, I hope to one day be able to pass this down as my father did me. In my tribe, it is a coming-of-age ceremony in which a family treasure is passed down to signify the transition from boy to man. My statue is my manhood and so shall it stay by my side.

I remembered the box I had picked up earlier from the cave. I took it from my bag and placed it gently on my

work table. The lock was old and rusted as was the box it locked. Took my smasher and tapped the lock ever so gently. The lock broke right off, no problem. I slowly opened the box and revealed the contents inside. A light shined in my face and I was blown away by what was inside, for it would change our way of life forever...

Chapter Two- At Dusk We Riot

I closed the box again. I did so very slowly to not tear the delicate rusted metal. We are a very strong people after all. We must bow to the crippling strength we have. The light from the box disappeared just as my best friend walked through the veil door.

Bronco Dore or Brix as I call him, was a short and very thin man. Very rare for our people, but Brix makes due with his physique. As a child, he quickly realized he was no warrior and pursued a career in the healing arts. He was a very gifted doctor of magical medicine and one heck of a wizard to boot. In the olden days, someone would have been condemned for this, but now that magicians and brutes have found peace, they are much more welcome. Especially those of Brix's stature. He spoke in his deep and somehow very manly voice:

"You coming, Jo? The meeting starts in five minutes you know."

"Yeah, I'm coming Brix! Just finishing up my work for today."

"Well hurry, the gang is waiting!"

I made my way into the center of the village and stood behind the large crowd of people now formed around Samuel's tower. They were murmuring and whispering amongst each other. Their cries were of most concern and wonder. Though everyone had gathered in the square that evening, no one knew the purpose of the meeting or why they were there. I took a spot in the semi-circle the fore mentioned 'gang' were standing. We were small in numbers, but everyone played an important part in our little team. Brix was the brains. I was the muscle. Mel was the cunning of the group. Her tiny physique and nimble strides made it easy for her to get out of nearly any situation. She was an abrasive liar, always had been and always will be. Another trait that made life easier for her. She and her twin brother Mike were opposites, besides their similar appearance of course. Mike was the satirical, do-gooder of the family. He was the first one to help if you needed it or the first one to crack an inappropriate joke or two. Mike was a one-of-a-kind guy, just the type that belonged in the group. We were all chit-chatting together when we heard the horn being sound. That horn meant that Samuel was beginning his speech.

Samuel climbed to the top of the railing that stood over the crowd of people below. He did not speak or even flinch for that matter. He spread his arms out to the sides of his body and slowly toppled over the side of the railing. He plummeted down fifty feet to his imminent death, but when he hit the ground it made no sound. Samuel was nowhere to be seen at all. He just disappeared. The crowd gathered around in disbelief. Then the large bell sounded. I saw Cain standing away from the crowd with a suspicious look on his face and decided to pursue him. He fled around the corner of a building. When I headed around the same corner, Cain had disappeared as well. Everything was happening so fast that I could not capture everything. But this did remind me of one thing, the box. My observations in the box foretold exactly the events that happened here tonight. A fallen king, a shadowy figure, and a great disaster. But wait... there had been no great disaster, not yet anyway.

“Jo! The bell has rung, the counselors are sure to meet on this night.” Brix said rather grimly.

I nodded in agreement and made my way out of the mob of people standing in confusion. Samuel did not hit the ground, but he is nowhere. It is not uncommon for somebody in a world of magic to disappear into thin air. But why would Samuel call a meeting to commit suicide in front of his people? All of this was not adding up in my mind. I would speak to Brix on this matter later. I wanted nothing more than to return to the box and investigate its mystery deeper. The light inside spoke to me, it told me of impending disasters and the leaders dethroned. I did not realize this would happen so soon. The box spoke the truth and I wanted to know more, but for now, I needed to keep it a secret.

When I returned to my hut, Marie was waiting, sitting quietly on the bed. She stood up in attention when I entered.

“Marie, what are you doing here?” I questioned.

“Oh, I was just wondering if you have seen Cain. I have not been able to find him since the rally. People speak of revolt Jo! Some are planning to overthrow the counsel at their spot of meeting tonight.”

I remembered chasing Cain around the corner of the building and him vanishing into thin air. Though I had seen Cain that night I decided it would be best to keep this from Marie. To avoid further suspicion, and for my gain of course.

“No Marie, I haven’t seen Cain tonight. Perhaps he’s left and gone somewhere else.”

“No way Jo. Cain would never just leave, he’s not like that.”

“Then what is he like?” I said, the tone in my voice getting lower.

“It’s complicated Jo, you wouldn’t understand.”

Marie got up and stormed out of the room. She left me there to collect what little pieces were left. As torn as I was, I never took my mind off the box. It was my only concern now. I made my way over to my workstation where I had left the box and it was gone. I looked around the table, under the table, under my bed, everywhere. The box was nowhere, just gone. My bedroom was a mess. My mom would say it looked like a tornado had gone through it, but I would call it a stressful search gone wrong.

Someone had stolen the box, but whom?

High above the chieftain’s tower, amongst the godly height of the clouds, seven cloaked members of the council sat around a round table. They each had different color hoods. The door to the room was opened by a cloaked figure in red, holding a rusty old box in hand. The red one set the box down gently on the table and opened it. The light shone onto all of the counsel and they gazed upon its flash with awe. The cloaked one in black took off his hood to reveal the face of Cain.

He stared at the box and was enticed by its secrets. Then he looked at his counsel and nodded. He looked at the red one and spoke:

"You've done an excellent job Red. You will be rewarded for your loyalty. You will choose one to come with us."

The one in red simply nodded in acknowledgment.

"I understand Sir, I am forever grateful." The red one turned and left the room, closing the door tight...

Chapter Three- Nightshade and Light

Maybe I was crazy, or someone knocked me out last night. But I woke up on a lovely bedspread in a room with quilted sheets. My eyes had never seen and my hands had never touched such beauty. I rubbed the sheets on my face and rolled in the ecstasy of it. Perhaps a little too much, for a man in fancy dresses had been standing at the door for too long, watching me rather confused.

"Did you sleep well?" he asked. "The chieftain will see you now."

I followed him down the corridor. I was barefoot and the stone floor was very cold on the soles of my feet, but I digress. We entered a hall and at the end of the table sat Samuel the Second, casually eating the large breakfast that had been presented before him.

"Joaquin! Come here my boy, have a seat next to me."

I took the smallest seat beside him to not make him feel inferior in any way. I was much bigger than Samuel was after all. The powers he possessed, however, were legendary. Only a fool would challenge Samuel. That is why he's our leader.

"Joaquin..." he began-

"Jo." I interrupted. "Call me Jo, please."

"Okay, Jo... What is it you do for our village boy?"

"I-I'm a hunter sir." I nervously replied.

"Ah yes! A hunter, you roam the jungle in search of wild things and such. I wouldn't have the stomach for such things. I don't even like the squish of a bug under my foot."

I laughed half-heartedly at his joke. Though it was a forced laugh, I understood the humor in a cowardly ruler.

"Upon your excursions, have you ever come into contact with caves and such?"

My eyes glazed slightly. He was onto me, he knew about the box and the cave, he must.

"You see it has come to my attention that somewhere in that forest lies the key to our survival on this island. I must find it! I've heard whispers that the council has found the key to the tombs of Gythro."

All of this information was shocking. Why was he telling me this, how was I involved? Somehow, he must have needed me here.

"Son, I know you were seen carrying a strange box the other day. Let's say a little bird told me. That box has more secrets than you know. Where is the box now?"

I looked around nervously again. I tried changing the subject. "Hey, didn't you die last night?"

He shot backward. He was not expecting me to ask such questions though he should have. Considering he staged an act like that, you would think I deserve an explanation after all. However, Samuel did not.

"I ask the questions around here boy. Where is the box?" he said rather impatiently.

"I don't have it. Somebody stole it."

“My goodness, then they already have it.” He threw the napkin on his lap onto the table and left the room in a hurry.

Although I was alone, I figured I would not waste this opportunity. I grabbed the first edible thing I could find and shoved it into my mouth. I did so for the next thing and the next until I could eat no more. I waddled my way out of the room and looked out the window. We were on the beach, comfortably kept inside a hut made of stone, perhaps one of Samuel’s condos. He and his butler were discussing things on the beach, away from me. I snuck out the back of the hut and ran back toward the village.

I was nearly back to the foot of the village when Samuel grabbed my arm.

“You don’t understand boy! You can’t go back, they are looking for you.” He warned.

“Who are you?” I replied.

“The council! They know that you had the box. They will want to question you, I’m sure.”

I had no idea why, but I went back with Samuel. He seemed to know what he talking about after all. We returned to the hut on the beach where it would be safe. According to Samuel, the hut was covered by a veil. Once inside, he could cloak the hut. He built this place for just this very moment. He explained that the council is not what we think they are. They are a conspiring agency that considers all the people as pawns in their game. They’ve been searching secretly for centuries, looking for the tombs of Gythro. It is said that deep within these tombs lies an age-old secret kept by the magicians who enslaved this island long ago. Samuel believes that the secret is a cataclysm of devastating proportions. The island will shake furious for three whole minutes, then nothing for three days. On the morning of the third day, a wave will emerge. One so large, it will wipe out the islands of Ghulu forever.

This news as you can imagine was very shocking. There were still several questions left unanswered. Samuel assured that once the door opened a spirit would be released, one that would be key in the revival of the Gods.

Samuel went out to the beach and looked out at the setting sun. I looked out and called to him but just as he turned around the ground began to shake slowly. Samuel started running towards me as fast as he could. He yelled in my direction:

“WE MUST GO TO THE CAVES NOW!”

I ran towards the hut to grab my things but as I got to the door the ground shook harder and harder. The sand on the beach opened up and Samuel fell into the fissure. I wanted to yell his name, but it was already too late. Samuel had been swallowed up by the land. Although the ground continued to shake even harder, I knew I had to collect myself. I grabbed my things from Samuel’s hut and made my way breakneck towards the village.

I had almost made it when the ground stopped shaking. Those were the longest three minutes of my life, I thought to myself. The damage had already been done, the village was destroyed. Mel was the first to approach me with a look of despair on her face.

“Jo, it’s your father he-“She just stopped and looked to the ground, she need say no more. I knew my father was gone...

Chapter Four- What’s Yours is Mine

My hut was gone. Only rubble was left. Wood boards and the fabric from my bed. The only thing that stood was my golden statue. Its eyes glowed with an amber glow that got brighter the closer I got. I touched the face of the statue and an image shot out of its eyes. The glow took the shape of a cloaked woman who spoke softly:

“Descendant of Fox. The time has come for you to rise as the hero of legend. Inside the head of the statue lies the key to a chamber deep within the ore mines. Inside the chamber lies a deity with enough power to destroy

the island. Under proper control, this deity could be a valuable asset. There is trouble on the mainland. The Gods are furious with the mainlanders for turning their backs on them. They no longer believe. For that, all of Ghulu will suffer unless something is done. You are a key in the fight for Ghulu, but as the key, to be useful you must unlock your true potential.”

The figure vanished into nothing. As shocked as I was, I understood the orders given to me. I smashed open the statue and sure enough, an old rusty key lay inside. I turned around and Brix was standing behind me, maybe a little too close.

“There you are, me and the twins were looking for you. Did you hear about your dad? I’m so sorry Jo-“

“You don’t have to be sorry Brix, he will not die in vain. I have a key to a chamber deep in the mines. I’m going there now and I’m going to save the island.”

“Save it from what?” Brix asked with a nervous look.

“I don’t know yet,” I said and Brix let out a sigh.

“I’ll get Mike and Mel and we’ll go into the forest-“

“You’re going into the forest?” a voice said behind us. It was Marie she had all her hunting gear including her hunter’s knife that she carried in the case on her belt. “I’m going with you then.” She stated.

I could not deny Marie’s request, although I did not know the dangers that lie within the mine. I pondered these thoughts back to the village but was interrupted by the shouts of Brix.

“Can I see the key Jo?” he shouted in my ear.

“AH! No, I’m keeping it safe in my pouch.”

“Come on show us.” Mike pouted.

I reached into my pouch and pulled out the rusty old key. It was about sixteen inches long and weighed about ten pounds or as the people of Gythro call it, a paperweight. I put the key back into my pouch and couldn’t help but notice Brix eyeing the key oddly.

“Is there something wrong Brix?” I asked inquisitively.

“No, nothing. I’m just wondering how after all these years, nobody has ever found that key inside the statue. Why is it meant for you, what makes you so special?”

“I don’t know Brix, but I do know that I have a job to do and I’m going to do it. I have to save Gythro.”

We ventured deep into the forest. We had just been in the mines yesterday so it was easy for me to remember the path we took. We got within view of the cave opening when Mike noticed something strange.

“Uhh, Jo. Your bag is glowing.”

I looked down and sure enough, my pouch was emitting a weird greenish-yellow glow. I unzipped the pouch and the key flew out like it had been confined for years and just now escaped. It flew into the cavern so we wasted no time running after it.

It lead us to the back of the cave where the markings I noticed yesterday were inscribed on the wall. The key was hovering in front of the wall idly, still shining an eerie glow that got brighter in the dimness of the mines. I reached for the key but as I did, we heard a crack form in the wall.

The entire mine began to shake slightly and the wall in front of us lit up with a golden bright light. The mechanics began to kick in and the wall opened up into a large hall with a pit of lava in the center. Besides the

pit, the room was empty but gigantic nonetheless. The only other thing in the room were the two giant gargoyle statues guarding the entrance. We made our way around the lava pit and in through the doors on the other side with no hinge.

"Wow, I thought for sure those were going to come to life and attack us or something," Mel said nervously.

"I'm sure the one-time masters of Gythro would not do something that cliché," I chirped back to her.

The next room we entered was much smaller than the first. On the opposing wall were written the words:

"Tread not this land if ye be cold. Light the Torches if ye be bold."

We all stared up at the mysterious words on the wall and progressed to look around the room at the dozens of torches present on the wall.

"I didn't bring any matches." Mel sighed.

"Allow ME!" Brix bragged pulling out his wand. "Infernus" he cast.

The sparks didn't just shoot out of his wand, they exploded. I had never seen a spell so powerful cast with my own eyes. Typically, the only magic our people saw was the minor healing or disappearing spell. Never could I imagine such raw power as this. The sparks lit every torch accordingly. A ferocious wind began to howl extinguishing the torches immediately but the southern wall of the room opened up and what was behind was a man dressed in a green cloak. But something was wrong. Marie stepped back a bit:

"Jo, I sense evil coming from that figure."

The green cloaked man spoke: "There's not much time Jo! You have to bring me the key."

I took a few steps back. How did he know my name and more importantly, how did he enter the chamber without the key? Is that why he wanted it now? The green man reiterated his previous request.

"The key! Bring it over now! He's not far behind you!"

"Who is?" Mike asked.

"You mean that you guys haven't figured it out yet? It's him, the man in black. It's--"

The green-cloaked man was sent flying back by an explosive orange blast. The hood fell off his head to reveal his face.

"That's the head chef from the village! But what's he doing down here?" Marie questioned.

"He was being a filthy traitor!" A voice from behind us spoke. It was another two cloaked figures. One of them wore a red cloak while the other wore a pitch black cloak that loomed with dark clouds all around it. He reached up and snapped his fingers, Mel reached and grabbed onto my pouch, ripping it off my torso in the process. She took the key out from inside it and threw it over to the red-cloaked man and ran by their side.

"Excellent work Melanie, you've served me well young beauty." The man in black said.

"Anything for you handsome" she replied, lust in her eyes.

The black-cloaked man waved his hands over his head and teleported the three of them to the opposite side of the room where lay the locked box. He turned to my group; Marie, Brix, Mike, and myself. We all stood in shock at our defeat. The cloaked man in black chuckled.

"I had no idea it would be this easy. You fools hand delivered the key to me, you even distracted that old cook long enough for me to take him out. Now, nothing can stop me."

That voice. It sounded all too familiar. I looked over to Marie and I know she knew it too. The man took off his hood to show the face of Cain Quintali. As if there was ever any doubt. He continued to laugh while the man in red just stay silent beside him. Marie's face was both horror and sadness. She approached Cain as he was all wrapped up in the hysteria.

"Cain, what are you doing? Why are you doing this to our island?" she pleaded, tears running down her face.

"Please Marie, you are the most naïve of all the people on this island. To think, you didn't know that it was me running the island all this time. It was me that told Samuel to jump and it will be me, who will bring a new world order! I will seize the mainland and I will use the power locked inside this box to do it! When I open this box, the power of an ancient deity will force itself into my body and I will possess the strength of eighty men. The wind, the fires, and the oceans themselves will bow to my power as will all the people of Gythro when I enslave the Gods. I will make them do my bidding and as for this island... I will wipe it from the face of the planet."

My face fell back into shock. He wasn't just going to flood the island, he was going to destroy it. Mel jumped for joy beside Cain: "OOO, is this the part where we destroy them, my love?"

"Ah yes, I almost forgot!" Cain put the key in the lock and opened the box. "GET READY! HERE I COME!"

Chapter Five- My Fair Deity

The deity rose out of the box and its ghostly figure swirled around the room ferociously. Cain let out a maniacal laugh as the phantom swooshed from the cusp of the ceiling and into his body. Cain's clothes ripped and tore into nothing as his skin started to get hairy. He was growing exponentially fast and started to take the shape of a monster. His legs grew huge and his arms also began to take the shape of legs. His body became much longer but grew ten times in size while his head split into three. It wasn't until his ears were shaped and the rings on his tail began to show that I realized that Cain had taken shape of a tiger. In his form, he had three heads all of which had the face of different jungle cats. The one on the right had a panther's face, the middle one a lion, and the left was a cougar. The body was of a tiger but his tail was a cheetah. Cain let out a ferocious roar. He grabbed the red-cloaked man with his paw. His hood flew off and I recognized the hunter Jeffrey Spikes. Cain opened his lion's mouth wide and seemed to suck the essence out of Jeffrey. He dropped him to the floor, and Jeffrey lay motionless on the ground.

"Hahaha. I grow stronger with every soul I obtain. Shall I do you all next?" Cain spoke, all three heads simultaneously. "You my dear have the richest soul of all." He turned to Mel and preceded to drain her soul as he did Jeffrey. Cain grew to double the size he already was and his eyes began to glow red. He shot beam after beam out of his eyes straight towards the ceiling cracking the concrete wall.

"We have to get out of here!" Brix shouted near the door. Marie and I headed towards the door but Mike stayed where he was standing.

"I can't leave Mel behind." He said sorrowfully.

Marie interjected; "Mike if we don't go now, we're all going to die, the cave the collapsing. We have no choice. A good-sized boulder landed nearly five feet from Brix and he ran towards the door.

Mike only thought for a second before he darted at the door with us. We made it out of the large room and into the smaller room. The heat from the pit of lava made it impossible to see the other side of the room, but it looked like someone was standing in front of the door. He held a stick or some kind of staff in his hand judging by his outline. We ran around to the other side and the shadow vanished from sight. A moment that would have been puzzling had it not been ruined by the sound of Cain knocking the wall down.

“YOU CAN RUN! BUT YOU CAN’T HIDE. I WILL HAVE ALL OF YOUR SOULS.” Cain spoke with a purr in his voice.

Marie just stood in fear. She feared jungle cats most of all, her traumatized past could never be repressed in her mind. I realized that she would be of no help to us so I turned to Mike to instruct him:

“Get Marie out of here and warn the villagers, we’ll hold off Cain while everyone gets safe.”

He nodded in acknowledgment and they fled through the door. Brix and I stood together on the adjacent side of the pit to where Cain stood. I looked over at him a little bit nervously.

“Do you know any battle spells?” I asked.

“A few.” He replied. “None that will take down something that big.”

“We have to try our best right?”

“For the village.” He said with a fire in his eye.

With no doubt in his mind, Brix was a strong wizard. The fact that he doubted his strength was truly saying something about his character.

“Give me a distraction,” I yelled over to him.

“Miracle Beam,” Brix spoke. Light of all different colors shone onto Cain. He blinded the three cats for a moment. It was all I needed. I pounced in with my javelin but as I hit him, the wood handle snapped in half. The spearhead fell to the ground in front of him and Cain laughed. He swung his paw and connected well with my legs. He sent me flying to the ground near the lava pit. The beam ceased to shoot from Brix’s wand. He tried to cast again but instead, he shot the beams into his own eyes.

“Nice going Merlin,” I said sarcastically.

Cain laughed a purr-like laugh as he approached me. I looked over the edge and down into the pit below.

“You see, even if you think you can be a hero, you are nothing compared to true power. I am true power and when I take over Gythro I’ll remember how you were the one who hand-delivered the Key of Sharashla.”

He raised his paw and I closed my eyes to embrace a final blow when from behind me I heard another man begin to speak.

“Third in the bloodline summons Ishaki the Dragon!”

I looked to the other side of the pit and saw that Samuel had been standing there with his scepter. He raised it in the air and a green light was shining out of the ball. Cain hit me off the cliff and into the pit and had not heard Samuel. The lava below began to boil as I got closer to it and just before I hit a large green dragon shot out of the boiling pit. He caught me and set me down gently on the ground. Ishaki was a long snake-like dragon. He had wings and arms but no legs. His scales were a shiny emerald green and his belly was a sparkling white. He shot out of molten rock and made a dazzling entrance to boot.

“Cain Quintali this charade has gone on long enough. Release the spirit of the God Hendrik at once or face my wrath.”

“I’m not afraid of you! I am immortal, I will face anyone who opposes me understand?” Cain said with his three heads.

The dragon rolled his eyes *“Understood.”* He began to fly around the air in circles until he took the shape of a doughnut. The hole in the middle showed a cosmic image for only a few seconds before bright white light shot out of the void. Cain recoiled back but could not escape the light. He began to hiss and fight but could resist no more. The Spirit of Hendrik flew around the room once more while Cain took back his original form. Samuel

lifted his scepter in the air and the spirit flew into the orb on top. The scepter contained the deity but Samuel could not hold it in his hand. He dropped it to the ground without breaking the orb. Brix rubbed the bright flash out of his eyes.

"Is it over, did we win?" I couldn't help but laugh at him. "We sure did buddy, we sure did."

Chapter Six- The New World

Samuel tried to pick up the staff again. The orb shone bright and the touch burned his hand anew. He smirked in astonishment. "Just as I thought," he sighed. He approached Ishaki and they spoke together for some time before coming over to me.

"You fought bravely young villager. Though your efforts are valiant, you are not yet ready to face the likes of the Gods, you have much to learn. Over there lies a normal staff, well it was normal until the deity of the God Hendrik. In the wrong hands, this deity grants the wishes of evil but none of the good. Cain Quintali is a truly evil spirit. He was able to control Hendrik because of all the pain he's caused. As the only remaining heir of Sharashla, you are destined to tame this spirit and teach it the ways of good once more."

Brix rushed over and knelt by my side near the pit. He waves his wands cautiously over my legs and healed my wounds with no problem. I suppose that was the other benefit of having a wizard as a best friend. I stood up although I was still a bit shaky, the only downside to healing with magic. I approached the staff and nervously touched the wooden handle.

I was transported to a place I had never been before. I still held the staff, but as I was being transported, it turned it a magic spear. All around were tall castle-like buildings in white. A man dressed in black was standing directly behind me.

"SO!" he shouted. I jumped out of my skin and fell to the ground. "You are supposed to be my new master now. Geez, it's been a busy week. What makes you think you can control me?"

My body started to feel weird and out of my head popped out a blue shadow. As the shadow took shape, it began to glow with a golden light. The man dressed in black took a few steps back in astonishment. He almost looked like he was seeing a ghost, and then he spoke nervously:

"No... It's impossible, I... I thought I would never see you again."

He fell to his knees and began to sob. The golden light of the shadow faded and the shadow turned into a solid being. It was a woman, she was beautiful. Though all her features were blue, her skin was soft and her eyes were piercing and mysterious. She walked over to the man and touched his back.

"It is true Hendrik. I'm back, but only in this world. I can use the strength of the mortal to take a physical form. The mortal, err Joaquin, is essential to the survival of our people. You once sided with us Hendrik, you can help us end this war once and for all... You can go home."

The man in black stood up. He was much taller in comparison to the shadow. He hugged her as tight as he could. Then he peeled off and brushed himself off.

"I will help the mortal. But not for the people, I'll do it for you. When this is over, you must come live with me in my palace."

"We'll see," she said with a smile and a wink. As she did so, she began to fade from view.

It was only Hendrik and me who left in the village. He glared over at me and then turned and began to walk away.

“Call me if you need me, mortal. Just touch the spearhead and I’ll bring you here.”

He snapped his fingers twice.

I found myself back in the same room I was in before I was transported. I surveyed the room and realized everyone still discussing things amongst themselves. They were having the same conversation. Brix was in the same position he was before I touched the staff.

“Did you guys see that?” I asked, a little puzzled.

“See what?” Brix questioned back, a little puzzled himself.

“Never mind,” I stated back.

I decided to keep this to myself for now. I knew very little of what Hendrik could do and I wouldn’t share the knowledge that I spoke with him until I find out more about him. The blue woman spoke to me in my head:

“Your journey is not over mortal. Though Hendrik has been put at bay, for now, the real danger lies within a much darker place. If he is not stopped before the next Giant moon, he will bring a wave upon this island so large, it will wipe out life here as you know it. Sail west young soul, but tread not alone, the road is dangerous and the seas are harsh.”

I stood up and knew that there was no time to waste. The next Giant moon was only three moons away. We had to stop whatever it is, otherwise who knows what it could do? First the island, then the mainland? Everyone could be in danger.

I filled everyone in on the details. But I told them nothing of Hendrik. I told them of the blue woman in my head and her warnings. Ishaki seemed the most concerned.

“Though it is not my duty, I will watch over this village in your absence King Samuel. Your village is safe as long as I’m here.” He howled.

“And as long as we can stop the cataclysm,” Samuel interjected.

Brix Samuel and I were making our way towards the door when suddenly we heard a faint yell from across the pit and could see Cain standing wand in hand.

“Romidus!”

A green flash shot through the smoke and hit Brix right on. Ishaki shot across the room and grabbed Cain with his tail and flew him thirty feet in the air before dropping him in the lava pit.

A rushed over to Brix to see if he was okay, but he was already standing with a smile.

“Good thing that guy is gone. What a jerk.” He said sarcastically.

“Are you all right Brix?” I asked a little concerned.

“Yeah. Uhh, that was just a disarming spell. I’m good.” he said as he laughed it off, though his laugh seemed forced.

Ishaki flew us all back to the village. We insisted he didn’t because he scared all the local elderly half to death. The children loved him, however, once they found out he wasn’t an evil monster descending upon the village. Samuel called me aside from the group of intrigued villagers asking about my adventure in the cave.

“I want to show you something.” He said, guiding me through the nearby woods.

He took me back to his hut on the beach and stood on the patio. He flipped over one of the decorative flower pots and hit a secret button underneath. Suddenly, the Cliffside began to open up slowly.

"Come." He stated again to instruct me to follow.

We walked the beach for a near mile before coming to a small grotto on the Cliffside. The tunnel went for a mere twelve feet or so but what was inside was amazing. Inside was a dock, and tied to that dock was the most amazing ship I had ever seen.

"Assemble your crew, Captain Joaquin. For tomorrow we set sail."