



THE LEGEND OF

THE LIVING BOOKS

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The Legend of the Living Books

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Prologue

In the first days of the universe, nothing existed, except for a seed. This seed was the beginning of a Great Tree. A tree that floated in an infinite void, alone. Within Its bark were stored all of the secrets of the universe. It reached out Its roots and branches, desperate for someone to share this knowledge with, but there was no one, just darkness. This was the first day in the life of the Arbolorum, the Father Tree.

An unimaginable time passed and the loneliness and longing of the Arbolorum had grown. It stretched Its branches out into the void and created a blossom. Within Its petals, It grasped new life, mankind. Newly born

humans, hungry for knowledge communed with the Father Tree, who shared the secrets of the universe and rejoiced. As Its joy grew, from Its roots and branches a world began to form, the world of Alethea.

As Alethea grew, so did humans' hunger and curiosity and so, they left the love and shelter of the Father Tree and ventured out into the wilderness. Alone once more, the Arbolorum wept, and from the great tree poured a black liquid that formed rivers and reached out across Alethea to every human. The liquid was ink, and with the ink from Its rivers and sacrifices of bark from Its tree brethren, the Father Tree gave humanity books. Again, It had shared Its knowledge.

These first books, The Seferum, were no ordinary books. They were as alive as any human being. The ink pulsing through their pages was as blood pulsing through a person's veins. With the gift of flight, these books would find humans with whom to share the Father Tree's wisdom.

Some of mankind wanted to keep the knowledge and carry this wisdom with them, so they copied The Seferum, into their own books. These copies were lifeless, but as with anything, they could be made alive simply by belief and appreciation of the words. As time went on, belief was a rare commodity and the living books started to become something of legend. They were believed to be kept at a hidden sacred site, the Library of Aldocum.

And as far as The Arbolorum, because of the treachery of mankind, the Father Tree hid Itself and the rivers that flowed from It from all of humanity. Never truly forsaking mankind, the Father Tree bestowed two books to each human, with pages written only for their eyes that no one else could read, The Book of Creation and the Book of Preparedness. One, a book of inspiration and the other, a book to ready a human for what lies ahead. In this way the Arbolorum could still share its knowledge and speak to its beloved creations.

Chapter I

The Blank Pages

A pounding at the door startled old Mister Scroll as he was flipping through his Book of Creation. Understandably, he was lost in his mind. What he saw inside of his book was a bit troubling.

Leo Scroll, through his long life had one constant love and true obsession, he had an unwavering adoration for the written word. His small apartment was filled with books, his own personal library. They stacked throughout his domicile from ceiling to floor. He had read every single one and gave each one a number, that he scribbled on the back of the front cover.

That way he knew exactly how many books he had and how many he had read. A great accomplishment, he thought proudly.

He rushed to the door past his towers of books and through the frosted glass pane, he could make out a familiar face. Standing only slightly taller than him, was a bright-eyed young woman. She was wearing a brown leather cap, beneath which escaped the ends of an unruly bob of hair, and a large pair of goggles.

“In the Father Tree’s name! What have you got on?” he asked, inching his round balding head forward.

“You’ll see, Grandpa! I found something in my Creation Log.”

“Ah, I see.”

“Yes, I was urged out of sleep, by something. The ink stretched across the page just as I glanced over to my book. It was lying there already open, then I knew it was of the utmost importance.”

“Another contraption, I take it?”

“Of course, it’s the only thing that I ever find in my book. What about you? Do you only get stories?”

“Well, mostly. I would get an occasional recipe or song.”

“No contraptions? You never were instructed to build anything?”

“We’re not all suited for the same things, Pal. So if you’re here, I’m assuming you want to show me this thing you’ve built.” Her grandfather said, giving her a pat on the arm.

“Well, of course!”

“Breakfast first! It’s my only condition. Nothing good can happen without a proper breakfast first.” He said leading her inside of his narrow apartment, which was only made narrower by his tower-high stacks of books. The short stocky man in a cardigan sweater and his granddaughter squeezed through the pathway between his volumes and found themselves in his kitchen.

“Do I have to look at those giant peepers all through breakfast, Palindrome Scroll?” he asked as he began beating eggs in a metal bowl.

“Sorry Grandpa, I’ll take them off,” she said, removing the leather cap and her

goggles. She revealed a bob of light brown hair.

“You know you don’t have to bother yourself over me. I’m alright. I appreciate the visit but you’re young and you have your contraptions to make.”

“Don’t be silly, you and Pap are the only family I have.” she said, flashing him a sweet smile.

“How is Pap? Of course he doesn’t visit me.”

“To be fair, I don’t see him either. He’s very busy at the university. Always the good student, Pap. I never thought my younger brother would be smarter than me.”

“Well I’d like to see him make one of your contraptions.”

“What did you just say, Grandpa? We’re not all suited for the same things.”

He turned from his eggs, surprised.

“I did say that, didn’t I.” he said with a smirk. “What a smart man I am.”

“The smartest. What is that delicious smell? Librolls?”

“My oldest recipe, actually this one appeared in my mother’s Book of Creation.”

From the oven, Mister Scroll pulled out a tray of pastries that looked exactly like little books, with indentions across the top that looked like scribbling. Pal inhaled and delighted in the aroma. Grandpa Scroll, plated the rolls and added a healthy serving of eggs to each plate.

As they ate, Pal noticed her grandfather was distracted.

“What gives? Where are you?” she asked sweetly.

“I can’t hide anything from you.”

“Never could.”

“Well, I think my time is coming to an end.” he said, his face suddenly becoming pale

“Nonsense.” she replied, shocked.

“It’s not nonsense. I know it.”

“Let’s calm down. Why the melancholy?”

“All of my life, I had some purpose, something for me to do. The pages in my books were full and the Father Tree gave me direction.”

“So it’s been less?”

“My pages are blank!” A silence fell over the table and Pal stared at her grandfather trying to hide her concern.

“That’s never happened before?” she asked.

“Never.”

“Surely, it doesn’t mean anything.”

“The Father Tree isn’t communicating with me. It must mean that I’m done. I’ve done all that I’ve meant to do.” his eyes looked as blank as his pages and fought making eye contact with her.

“Maybe it means it’s time to do what you want to do, not just follow instructions. What do you want to do? What have you always wanted to do?”

“I always wanted to be a librarian? It’s too late for that now.”

“Says who?” she said reaching across the table, grabbing his hand.

“The Alexandrian College will never accept an old coot, like me.”

“Ridiculous!” She said, holding his hand even tighter.

“It’s not, my time is done. I’ve had a good life. I worked hard in an office and that’s alright. I’ve served my purpose.” He cupped her hands in his, sweetly, before letting go and recoiling his arms to his side.

“That’s poppycock and you know it! There’s nothing else?” Pal said excitedly, leaning in.

“I always wanted to visit the great library.”
He said as his eyes lit up.

“The great library? Aldocum and the living books?” She said, searching her memories.

“You remember?” He sighed, before exposing a gigantic smile.

“I remember all of your stories.”

“That’s no story, silly girl. It’s real and it’s out there.”

“Then let’s go!” She said slamming both of her hands down onto the table.

“Now you’re speaking poppycock, the Transmotor doesn’t travel out of the city.” He chuckled, shaking his head.

Pal jumped from her seat and grabbed her grandfather by the arm.

“Now, you must see my contraption!”

She dragged him downstairs to the front stoop of his building. There parked in front was a vehicle with three wheels and handlebars and between the front wheel and the two back wheels there was a small coach with two rows of seats.

“What is this?”

“I call it a Freemotor. It moves separate from the Transmotor, and I can now travel out of the city.”

“Not just anyone leaves the city. It’s not the way. You have to take the collective transports through the roads, we don’t have personal transports. We never have.”

“Well it was in my book, so I guess things are changing. Ready for your adventure?”

“I can’t believe this.” He said, rubbing his eyes.

“Do you know the way?” She asked, turning to her grandfather.

“Of course not, no one does.”

“Are you telling me in all of these books, not one has a map or even a clue?”

“I’m not sure...”

“Of course you are, you’re the great librarian of this immense collection. If anyone can find it, it’s you.”

“Do you know what you’re asking...Wait! The path is long...” he began, then ran up the stairs into his apartment to a tall stack of hardbound books. Across the top was a collection of six books titled, the Musings of Librus. He grabbed a ladder and climbed up

with the sprightly energy of a much younger man. “Ah ha!” He grabbed one of six books and quickly flipped through its pages.

“I love the sound of that,” said Pal, smiling ear to ear.

“The path is long, from the city of the dawn. As straight as an arrow flows the road to the woods of the forgotten, from there the woods will take you home. To the Halls Aldocum, to the ancient texts, the flying words of The Arbolorum, come and visit their nests. They’re waiting for you and the love of the Father Tree is waiting there too.”

“That’s beautiful!”

“This could be something.” The old man said, pondering.

“I’m so excited, we’re actually doing this! These are basically directions.” Pal said giddily pacing through the apartment.

“It doesn’t give us much to go on.” The old man said, scratching his head.

“It’s enough to start, the rest will come. The city of the dawn, it’s obviously Aurora. We’re lucky enough to be living at the starting point. There’s only one road out of the city and we’ll take it all the way to the woods they speak of.” Pal said faster and more excitedly than Grandpa Scroll had ever heard her speak.

“Which is where exactly?”

“We’ll figure it out.”

“We’ve so much to do before.”

“Not really, but we ought to check our Preparedness Logs.”

“Blank, Pal”

“Right! Well, we’ll run to my apartment and check mine. That reminds me, I’m grabbing a couple of books for the road from your library.”

“Do you need help finding them?”

“No, I know exactly where they are. You go pack a bag.”

“I can’t believe this is happening.” a smile crawled across his face. “I only wish...”

“What?”

“It’s nothing, but I just wish Pap was coming. I miss him, you know.”

“We’ll just have to steal Pap from all of his studies! He needs to be there too, when we find the Library of Aldoccum! We always dreamed about this as kids, hanging on your every word.”

“He doesn’t care about these stories anymore.”

“Like you said, they’re not stories. She said helping her grandfather from the ladder. “Let’s get him and then let’s get you to those living books!”

Chapter II

Papyrus Scroll and his Inking

The first thing that you need to understand about Papyrus Scroll, is that he had absolutely no time for silly stories, legends, or frim fram of any sort. Studying to be a scientist, his only wish was to understand the world around him. The things that he couldn't explain, he made top priority to find a way to explain it. This way of thinking, never brought him many companions or close friends and he never had time for them either way. His favorite companions were his research books and he labored over them day in and day out.

One day, the most peculiar thing happened to him. He was penciling away with

his quill and from the corner of his eye he spotted a small black smudge pass by him. He spun to see what it was, but there was nothing there. He ignored it and went back to his work. Then he heard a loud thud, a book from his shelf had fallen over. He walked there to examine it and he saw a smudge of ink on the spine. He passed his thin finger across the ink, it was still wet. It was a copy of *Debunking Legends* by Augie Wright. He passed his hand through his black wiry hair and returned the book to his shelf. He then returned to his book laying across his bed. He jumped back on his belly and continued working. He noticed something different about his notes. There was something added, a little note on the side. It read: *still more to know.*

Puzzled, he sat up. “What could it mean?”, he thought. Had he wrote that himself and not realized it.

As he stayed frozen and confused something slowly glided into his view. The black smudge, he had seen before. At first, it was hard to make out, but soon he could see a form. It was composed solely of ink and seemed fluid and was constantly changing. Its body was slim, and he imagined that he could see a head, two arms and two legs, but he doubted it. At the same time, it looked like nothing more than a floating splotch. It floated towards him and landed at the tip of his nose, pointing towards his book. He looked down and read the words again. *Still more to know.* He

smiled broadly and knew that he found his new purpose.

Just weeks later, he was with his new found friend, when he heard a loud rumbling from his open window. He ran over to see and the splotch followed him. He saw a strange contraption carrying his sister and grandfather.

“What could they be up to?” he asked himself. From the window, he could see Pal gesture for their grandfather to stay seated in the vehicle. She then made her way up the stairs and as he heard her footsteps get closer, he opened the door.

“Pap!” his sister screamed excitedly, rushing towards him.

“What a surprise, Palindrome.”

“You shut up, right now! You’ve never called me that. Ugh you’re so serious now. You probably never leave this room or these books.” she said passing her finger over the books laid out across his desk.

“Now that you mention it, I’m in the middle of some work. Is this going to be a quick visit?”

“We won’t stay long.” she said, smiling and holding back laughter.

“What are you up to? And what is that thing outside?”

“My new contraption! It can take us anywhere.”

“Like, where?”

“Like to the Library of Aldoccum.” she said and quietly waited for a response.

“Are you out of your mind? You are actually losing it!”

“Come on, this is something we dreamed about for...”

“When we were kids, before I realized it was make-believe and...” as he was speaking the ink splotch flew past his face between the two of them and they both fell silent. It glided down to an empty journal and began kicking across the page. It wrote: *still more to know.*

“Is that what I think it is?” Pal yelped excitedly.

“So what!”

“You have an Inkling! You’re going about legends and make-believe and you actually have an Inkling in your dorm?”

“I’m studying it, trying to understand it, what controls it. It can’t actually be alive, there must be a source or a mechanism.”

“Of course, it’s the Arbolorum!”

“You’re not a child.”

“I know, I’m older than you by two years.”

“Then act like it, I’m not going on some crazy goose chase to find a lost library with an old man.”

“That old man thinks he’s dying, and this is the last thing he wants to do and he loves you so much. So you are going to leave that stack of books and get into my crazy contraption and we’re going to drive to Father Tree knows where.”

“You’re not helping him. I know you think this is good for him, what happens when he

realizes everything he believes in doesn't exist? When he realizes it was all a story, what then?"

"Well I don't believe it's just a story and we will find the Library. You can come if you want or you can collect dust along with your books. Consider this," she said pointing to the Inkling's inscription. She spun from him and left the room.

"Is that what you meant?" he asked the Inkling, who was dropping ink droplets on his sweater, "What have you gotten me into?"

Pal made her way to her grandfather, waiting in the Freemotor.

"Well, he's not coming." she said defeated. "I'm sorry."

“I knew it! He’s not the same as he was.” Grandpa Scroll said, hanging his head.

“Wait!” Pap yelled, running towards them with a satchel hanging across his shoulder, a scarf half-hanging from his neck, clinging to a journal in his left hand.

“Pap! I knew you’d come!” his grandfather said, excitedly.

“I wouldn’t miss it, Grandpa!” he said, mostly for the benefit of the old man.

“Let’s do this!” Yelped Pal, oozing joy. Pap jumped in the backseat next to his grandfather.

“Boy, you’re a mess!” Grandpa Scroll exclaimed, looking over his ink stains, from his face to his pants.

“Oh yeah, he has an Inkling!” Pal said, slapping on her goggles and turning to see the shock on her grandfather’s face.

“An Inkling?” he asked with childish glee. The creature flew out to greet him and he swore to the other two that it shot him a wink. “That’s a good omen! Born from the ink flowing from the Arbolorum, the Father Tree is with us on our journey.”

Pap, huffed a sigh and rolled his eyes, but because of the noise of the motor, no one noticed and the Freemotor zoomed down the road, soon out of sight from anyone nearby.

Chapter III

The Dame Who Sold Words

The city of Aurora was composed of several loops that formed an immense circle, dense with tall buildings and thin roads, mostly used for pedestrians. Snaking through the city was its transport, the Transmotor, a motorized tram system. Most Aurorians were content with living within the city limits and never thought much of venturing beyond. They knew of other cities that existed elsewhere throughout Alethea, but few cared to make the trek and every city functioned similarly. The hunger and curiosity of humanity had diminished and they just went about their days and never thought of much else beyond their own comforts and

environment. There was only one road in and out of Aurora, for as long as Aurora had existed.

As the newly formed band of travelers journeyed on the main road, leaving Aurora for the first time in their combined lifespan of 122 years, they felt a mix of excitement and anxiety. Pap felt much more anxiety than the other two. Palindrome felt much more exhilaration than her travel companions, but alas their fates were intertwined and the only way to go was straight ahead.

“So, how long do we go straight for?” asked Pap.

“Well, we don’t exactly know,” answered Pal.

“Of course you don’t. What do you know?”

“That there’s *still more to know.*” Pal said with a sneaky smile.

“That’s not fair, I wish you had never seen that.”

“What are you two going on about?” Grandpa asked.

“The Inkling gave Pap a message.”

“They do that, you know. They give you a little push, plant a little seed,” Grandpa said.

“I know that’s what people think.” Pap said quietly.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Grandpa Scroll asked, coarsely.

“That there is so much we don’t understand about them, what they are and where they come from.”

“We do know, they come from the Father Tree, to spread his wisdom and keep us on our path. Well, some do. Others are mischievous little imps, acting on their own to confuse us.”

“I am studying, dedicating my life to be a man of science. I can’t just believe in legends.”

“Oh I see.” Grandpa said, falling silent.

“Let’s change the subject.” Pal interjected. “We do know that we’ll find some forest and from there, we’ll find out how to find the rest of the way.”

“And how do you know this?” Pap asked with a grunt.

“From one of Grandpa’s books.” She replied happily.

“Of course!” Pap said, throwing his hands up.

“Papyrus Scroll, what have you become? So dry and barren of belief and heart. Cold and mechanical, even. Where’s the boy, who begged to hear my tales, who wanted more than anything to see the Living Books?” Grandpa asked, his arms tightly crossed.

“He grew up, Grandpa.” Pap said solemnly.

“With such an attitude, why did you even come?” Grandpa said, shooting him a cold stare. Pap’s face went pale and he went weak in the seat. The Inkling glided out between them and slid across Pap’s cheek.

“What did it write?” Pap asked, stammering.

“Still more to know.” Grandpa said, also shakily. “For us both, I think. It’s alright, boy. I’m glad you’ve come.”

Pap’s eyes filled with tears and he nodded his head, turning away.

“This will be good, you’ll see!” Pal said, confidently. “We’re on the right path.”

As they rode forward for hours they saw a vast space of nothingness, green pastures and rolling hills. No houses, no vehicles, no sign of other life, just vegetation. The Inkling seemed to have fallen asleep and looked like nothing more than a stain on Pap’s shoulder. Amidst the nothingness, Pal noticed a large white sign on the side of the road. Standing beneath it was a pencil thin woman wearing a long black coat and a fur stole. Pal couldn’t help slowing

down the freemotor, to get a closer look. Everyone jolted about the coach and woke up.

The sign read: *The very best words for sale, guaranteed.* It was written in red, hand painted letters that were quite elegant.

“In the market for a word, dears?” she yelled to them.

“What are you doing, way out here?” Pal yelled back.

“I happen to like it here.” she answered.

“Yes, the view of the hills are quite lovely, but honestly Ma’am, you are so far from any city and I can’t imagine that you get many customers. No one leaves Aurora, never has.” She said, quieting her voice as she pulled over to the side of the road.

“But you have. You have left Aurora.” The woman said proudly.

“What is the meaning of all this commotion?” asked Grandpa Scroll, wiping the sleep from his eyes.

“There’s a woman, there.” Pap answered.

“Madam, what exactly are you selling? I’m not sure I understand.” Leo Scroll asked, sticking his head out from the coach.

“Words, good sir. Are you in the market?”

“I’m always in the market for a good word.” He said beaming.

“How did you get here, where is it that you come from?” Pap asked, staring at the woman with a most perplexing gaze.

“Over in that glenn is a small community, we are Wordsmiths, all of us. We were sent

from our homes when we showed great promise with words. We carefully construct them, then come here waiting for someone in need of such a word. Good sir, if you are in need, I'm sure I have the word for you." The middle aged woman said inching towards them, a mass of silver ringlets, bursting from beneath her stole.

"Well, Madam, first I want a word from you that I'm sure I should have for free." Leo told her coyly.

"Well, we don't usually give freebies." she said, her face nearly folding in itself, as if to ward off this man's tomfoolery.

"I wouldn't dream of paying for your name," he said in a charming way, shooting a beaming smile. Pal chortled to herself, at what

she guessed was her grandfather's way of flirting.

“Oh my name, well of course, Clio Calliope! I originally hailed from Prose, a city on the other side of the world. Now, I live among the Wordsmiths of the Sermo Glenn. Would you care to visit? I mean if you have the time.”

“We don't actually,” Pal interrupted. “Though we will take that word. Depending on the price.”

“The Price? We only ask for you to use it.” She said with a glint in her eye.

“Sounds more than fair.” Leo said.

“Well then. What's the word?” Pap asked, becoming impatient.

“Moribundage.”

“That’s an interesting word. What does it mean?” Asked Leo.

“To be a prisoner of your impending doom.” She said with a maddening look in her eyes.

“Well that’s pleasant,” Pap said, shaking his head.

“This word can be pleasant or otherwise, depending on how you’d like to use it.”

Leo Scroll thought for a moment.

“I will not be a prisoner of Moribundage, I will live fully to my last breath.” He said proudly.

“Your debt is wiped clean for you have done well by my word.” She said, beaming. “Are you sure you can’t join me? I’d love to show you the glenn!”

“My Granddaughter is right we are on a quest of sorts, and we really can’t delay. On my journey back, then.” He said with an eager smile.

“I’m not sure our paths will ever cross again.” She said shaking the dirt from the foot of her coat.

“What makes you say that?” He asked.

“Just a feeling. If we shall meet again, which I doubt, I will be thrilled to be proven wrong.” She said, grabbing his hand.

“Farewell Clio!” Pal called.

“Use my word well, spread it into the vernacular!” She hollered as the Freemotor sped off leaving a cloud of dust behind them.

Chapter IV

The Hound in the Woods

After driving the entire day in this new contraption to an unclear destination the Freemotor began to make a noise none of them had ever heard.

“What was that?” asked Pap concerned.

“It’s nothing I’m sure.” Palindrome insisted, before the entire coach began to shake and then sputtered forward dying in the street.

“What happened?” asked grandpa.

“I think it’s the fuel.” Pal said, a little concerned.

“What does it run on?” Grandpa asked.

“Well, Ink, actually. I have some in the trunk, I hope, enough to get us to the library and back home.”

“Oh great! To the library that we don’t even know where it is. How can you even know that we have enough, but no worries we also can track down the hidden rivers of ink while we’re at it and we’ll have nothing to worry about.” Pap groaned, holding his hands over his face.

“Not helping, Pap.” Pal said, grabbing a can of ink from the trunk and pouring it into the tank. “There, that should do it.”

“Boy, don’t worry we’ll figure it out once we reach the woods.” Grandpa told Pap to calm his mind.

“What else do we know about this forest?” asked Pap.

“Something about being forgotten. What was it Grandpa?” Asked Palindrome.

“The woods of the forgotten, from legend.” He answered.

“Remind me.” She urged, from the driving seat.

“Poneros.” answered Pap.

“Exactly right! You remember quite a bit.” His grandfather’s face lit up.

“The Forest of Poneros.” Pap added.

“How is it I don’t remember this one?” Pal asked.

“You will once I get going. Unless you want to tell it, Papyrus.” Grandpa looked over to the young thin man, who only looked back nervously.

“I can’t say I remember everything.” Pap answered.

“That’s quite alright, it tells of a time of peace where the Arbolorum had given the books to humanity and the Father Tree relished in his communion with humanity once more.” Grandpa Scroll began.

“I don’t remember much about peace.” Pap interjected.

“Well peace never lasts forever. Some of humanity became resentful, and wanted to know what the Arbolorum was keeping from them. They wanted to know everything, all of the secrets of the universe. Humans can be very treacherous in nature. These wicked men gathered an army and mounted an attack on the Father Tree in an attempt to extract its

knowledge. When The Arbolorum saw them coming, in Its infinite wisdom, It gifted them with all of Its knowledge, just before transforming every last one of the wicked men into monstrous trees. To live forever as wise as the Arbolorum, but prisoners of their new form, to live an eternity, cursed and forgotten. Abandoned by the Arbolorum, who buried Itself deep into the soil hiding Itself and Its flowing rivers from all of Alethea.”

“That’s as dark as I remembered it. It used to give me nightmares.” Pap shuddered.

“And you Palindrome?” Grandpa asked.

“I guess, I just remember the happy ones.” she said smiling.

“So I guess we look for really ugly trees.” Pap suggested.

“Maybe, I think we’ll just know.” his sister answered.

“Stop!” screamed Grandpa. Pal halted the Freemotor. They all flew about the coach. Pap’s Inkling began buzzing about hysterically.

“You’re upsetting it!” Pap screamed, trying to comfort the splotch of ink.

“What is it, Grandpa?” asked Palindrome.

“A Musehound.” he said, looking off to the side of the road.

“I draw the line there, they definitely don’t exist.” Papyrus said, in disbelief.

“Says the boy with the Inkling on his shoulder,” Pal said with a shake of her head.

They joined their grandfather in his gaze and saw a large shimmering white dog sitting at the edge of a forest.

“I must go.” Their grandfather told them.

“Are you crazy?” asked his granddaughter, reaching to hold him in place.

“Not at all, it’s a Musehound, they summon you to share inspiration, shed some light on your journey.”

“Then I’ll go too,” Pal said, getting up from her seat. The dog bowed its head down, with a loud growl.

“You can’t accompany me. I have to go alone.” Grandpa Scroll told her calmly.

“That’s just some beast that will attack you.” Pap urged.

“Do you really believe that? Your Inkling was acting strangely, they’re connected, the beings of the ink and the creatures of the bark.

Trust me, everything will be alright.” He told Pap, patting his shoulder.

“What if it’s not? Please don’t go. Your pages were blank, maybe you’re not supposed to do anything, you have nothing to prepare yourself for what’s out there.” Pal said, tears filling her eyes.

“That’s precisely why I have to go child! I need the Father Tree to speak to me. If not through my books, then through the hound.” Leo Scroll looked at his grandchildren as calmly as ever before.

“You can’t...” cried Pal.

“Have faith,” with those words, he opened the door to the coach and walked to meet the dog at the edge of the woods. The dog bowed to him and led him into the darkness.

“Is this really happening?” Pap asked himself. “Oh, how did your grandfather die? He was mauled to death by a wild dog and we just let it happen.” he said panting heavily in the backseat.

“He said to have faith, so have faith.” Pal said, noticeably shaken.

“I don’t believe in faith, I can’t go by that. I’m worried about him. Aren’t you?”

“Of course.”

“Maybe, you feeding his delusions will get him killed.” Pap screamed at his sister.

“Why can your Inkling be real and not that hound?” She said taking shallow breaths, looking straight ahead to an endless road.

“That’s besides the point. Well, what happens now?”

“We wait.” She said, worrying about the setting sun.

Leo Scroll followed the hound into the woods and he noticed that he had begun to get a sickening feeling, the further he got into the woods. The trees had become rigid and bumpy and he swore that he could see tortured faces in the bark. His skin became cold and he felt as though he was being watched.

“Musehound, why have you brought me to this cursed land?” he asked, panicked. The hound stopped and turned towards him, sitting in a clearing. The dog said nothing but stared at the old man for what felt like five minutes. Old Mister Scroll fell to his knees weeping. “What is this?”

He heard a ringing in his head.

“Remember the stories. These trees are as wise as their Father,” a strange voice told him.

“Their Father?” He asked, “Their Father!” He spun around looking at the hideous giant trees, now with faces fully formed, all staring at him.

“Trees of Ponerros, tell me the way to Aldoccum.” They let out a terrible laugh. He shuddered, shielding his face from a gust of wind that surged from them. “I need to find the way there and I know that you know the way.” Again they laughed terribly. He turned to the Musehound, “What must I do? How can I get them to tell me?” The hound lay in the dirt, unfazed by the old man. “Was all this for nothing?” he fell to the ground and lay before

them. He saw their eyes change and calm. He thought for a moment.

“Oh wise men of Ponerros! I am humbled before you!”

“Do not mock us. We are cursed men.” The trees spoke together in a loud booming voice.

“Cursed? You are the wisest men that ever lived. How you must have been loved by your Father.” He said, bowing to their roots.

“He cursed us to be trees!” again they spoke in unison.

“He changed you to live in his image, how you must have been your Father’s most beloved.”

“We must live forever this way.”

“Oh great men! How you must have been your Father’s greatest joy, he gave you eternal life!” he said this graveling in front of them.

“Who are you?”

“Leo Scroll, and I seek the path to Aldocum. I wish to see the Living Books.”

“You are nearly there! To find the Great Library, one only needs to believe that it’s there. It takes a true act of faith. The trees will part and you will know what to do.” The voice of the trees changed, to a joyous chorus. Leo turned to the hound and he heard its voice in his head once more.

“This is your last ride.” confirming what Leo had feared. He was coming to the end of his life. At least he’d see the living books, he thought.

Chapter V

The Legend of the Beasts

The sun had set and still there was no sign of their grandfather. Palindrome and Papyrus Scroll waited in the darkness, filled with worry.

“Do you believe a beast was born of the bark of an all-knowing Father Tree?” Pap asked.

“After everything you’ve seen, you don’t even entertain the possibility?” Palindrome answered.

“Of course not, what have I seen? I’ve seen my grandfather, half-crazed, wander off into the woods with a dog.”

“A dog that bowed to him and chose him. That only let Grandpa go along. Come on Pap, you have to admit.”

“I admit nothing.”

“We grow up with our heads filled with nonsense and we start to see things that aren't there.”

“Explain our books.”

“Excuse me?”

“Explain our books, we each choose two books that magically fill with words that only we can read. Explain it.”

“We've been told that from birth, that that's what they do, that's why no one else can see it. It doesn't actually exist. We imagine it all. It's coming from inside us. It's the power of suggestion.”

“You’ve lost it. The whole world just imagines that their books have words.”

“Exactly.”

“And you’re not worried that Grandpa’s book is suddenly blank.”

“Not at all, I’m more worried that he’s lost in the woods.”

“Do you remember the stories of the beasts?”

“Yes,”

“...humanity had forgotten the Arbolorum and needed to be touched. Shaken awake, so the Father Tree created the beasts. The Inklings and the Inkserpents from its rivers of ink and Musehounds and Musesparrows from its bark. It created these things to remind humans that It existed. To reach out, the way It

reached out into the void, desperate for love. What's so bad about wanting to believe that I'm, I mean...we're loved?"

"You're loved, Father Tree or not."

"I know."

"Do you?"

"I do, but you're busy and Mom and Dad died. Grandpa's all I have and he believes in this so much. What's so bad about believing too? You make me feel stupid. Like I am some silly kid."

"I'm an idiot and the Inkling is right. I don't know everything. There's more to learn, right?" He said, a knot forming in his stomach. "I'm sorry."

"That means a lot." She said pushing a tear from her cheek.

“It’s him!” Pap screamed,
“What?” Pal looked up, alarmed.
“Grandpa!”

Leo came from the woods, noticeably shaken.

“What happened? Are you alright?” Palindrome Scroll worriedly asked her grandfather.

“I’m fine.” He answered, getting into the Freemotor.

“So?” Pap asked, concerned.

“I have a clue.” Leo told him, calmly.

“Is that it?” Pap asked.

“Yeah kids, I’m afraid so.” Grandpa Scroll, muttered quietly.

“What do you mean?” Pap asked, leaning towards the backseat, concerned.

“The trees will part and we have to have faith.” Leo answered.

“Do you know how much further?” She asked.

“Not at all.” He told her.

“Okay.” Her eyes raced inside of their sockets.

“It’s not okay. What did the dog say?” Pap asked, beginning to raise his voice.

“To ask the trees.” His grandfather answered, weakly.

“And...”

“And I did, They gave me the clue.”

“You’re the great storyteller, tell us everything.”

“I feel a little weak. Maybe later.” Grandpa Scroll told them, and collapsed on the seat.

“Grandpa! Are you alright?” Pap asked, jumping from his position, nudging the old man.

“He’s sleeping, We don’t know what he’s been through, let him rest.” Pal told him, also visibly concerned.

Chapter VI

The Library of Aldoccum

When Leo Scroll awoke in the back of the Freemotor, he noticed that his grandchildren were fast asleep. He exited the vehicle and he saw in the distance, the parting of two woods. He pondered going off without them, too eager to wait. A childlike urgency raced through him. The words of the Musehound racing through his mind. He sat against a stump instead, looking over his two travel companions. The Inkling glided from the vehicle and came to the old man and floated around him.

“Now listen here, you. I like this sweater.” He told it, wagging his finger at it. The Inkling

moved towards his hand and Leo held out his palm. Against his palm the Inkling wrote: *So sad? Still more to know.* “Hmm...You are a curious thing, but you’re not wrong.”

“Grandpa?” Pal called out.

“My Inkling too, it’s gone.” Pap yelled out concerned.

“We’re here, “ Grandpa Scroll called to his grandchildren.

Pap rushed from the Freemotor and Pal grabbed her bag and met them at the stump.

“Are you alright?” Pal asked, “Last night you seemed...”

“It was a long night. I’m better now. Let’s find that library. That’s the opening, it must be there.” He said pointing to the split in the

woods. Then he turned to Pal, looking over her bag. "Can't you go on without those books?"

"Who knows how long we'll be there." She answered. Her grandfather shrugged.

"So what exactly do we do?" asked Pap.

"You have to have faith." Grandpa told him. "Do you think you can muster that?"

"For you Grandpa, I think I can."

The travelers and their Inkling journeyed to the opening and approached what appeared as nothing more than a view of rolling hills.

"Pap, you do it!" Grandpa insisted.

"Do what?" Pap asked, startled.

"Open the door. Don't you see it." Grandpa insisted.

Pap became panicked and began to hyperventilate.

“Grandpa, you should be the one.” Pap urged.

“Don’t you remember? Great is the hall of the Living Books, in their pages pulse the ink of the...”

“The wisest of all,” Papyrus continued, “the true Father Tree in Its pages, Its wisdom.” He reached out his hand. “Grandpa there’s nothing there. Think about what you’re asking me to do, to believe.”

“We’ve come all this way Pap, you have to believe in some of this. The Inkling, the Musehound, why not the books? Why not Aldocum?” Pal urged.

“But you’d better believe, boy, like you’ve never believed in anything before.”

“I believe in you, Grandpa.” He said reaching out his hand and he felt a knob in his grasp. He lost his breath and turned the knob. A door swung open and from the view of Pal and his Grandfather, Pap completely disappeared. They smiled widely at each other, before running after him, disappearing through the split in the woods.

They stood in awe, standing in a marble archway that must have been the Great Hall of legend. They saw before them, an immense marble archway preceding a large staircase, that winded up countless floors. From them, snaked what seemed like an unimaginable series of corridors, leading throughout the immense compound.

“What now?” Pal asked, spinning around, still in shock.

“I guess we take a look around.” Pap suggested.

“I’m really here!” Grandpa said, tears in his eyes.

“I told you we’d find it.” Pal said, leading him along.

“Should we just walk around? Should we ask for assistance?” Grandpa asked.

“This isn’t a regular old library, and plus this place is so enormous, who would hear us call?” Pap questioned, eagerly.

“Hello!” Leo Scroll called and his voice echoed back with no response.

“Satisfied? Let’s go!” Pap said, pulling his grandfather forward. The inkling became

excited and buzzed about, before darting ahead of him. “I think it knows where we are.”

Pap ran after the Inkling the other two trailing behind, when something came from a large archway that connected to the corridor and knocked into Pap’s side, throwing him against the wall.

“What was that? Pap are you alright?” called Pal.

“I’m fine, something ran into me.” He looked at his torso and clutching onto him was an old book with bright blue leather binding. Written on the cover was: *The Great Scientific Discoveries Since the Beginning of Time*. Then the book flapped its pages and lifted up from Papyrus, hovering in front of his face.

“Or flew into you...” Pal corrected, amazed. They entered the entryway and before them was a giant room with large stained glass windows and shelves of books from ceiling to floor. Between the shelves and around a large marble fountain that sat in the middle of the room, were swarms of books, all varying in size and colors. The blue book rested into Pap’s arms, so heavy that it knocked him down. Pal smiled at her brother but was pulled away by a loud whirring. A brown leather book was resting against a giant grandfather clock, grabbing hold of a cog with the edge of one of its pages, carefully putting it in place. It noticed Pal watching it and quickly set the cog, slammed the face shut and darted

behind a pile of books to hide. Pal ran after the book and found it peeking out.

“What are you? Don’t be afraid.”

The book glided towards her and she read: *Mechanics Manual of the Ages*. She held the book in her hands, feeling it pulsating and heaving in and out, as if it was breathing. It was much lighter than the book that her brother had found. She found a comfortable spot, where she could read.

“You truly are alive.” she said softly to the book

Leo Scroll smiled and sat against a large marble column, taking it all in. He enjoyed seeing his grandchildren reading the great Seferem, the Living Books of legend. He

couldn't have dreamed he would have seen such a sight in his lifetime.

The three of them went from room to room finding books that were calling to them. Some books were forward and forcibly crashed into them or chased them down the corridors, others were timid and needed to be pursued. Pap read about great scientists and their groundbreaking discoveries. Pal about the mechanics and great comedies. When she stumbled with a bright white and green book called: *The Ancient Humors*, she laughed until she was crying on the floor. She noticed that the book would tremble with laughter as well and that other books that had gathered around were laughing along with them. Their pages

would ruffle and tremble as they howled with laughter.

They spent the entire next two days exploring the inside of the library and the cookbooks would bring them delicious meals carried out on platters, always bringing each of them their personal favorites. Eventually they found a doorway leading to extravagant gardens, where the books would perch in large oak trees. The books fluttered like birds from branch to branch and rested next to their newfound companions.

On the third night, Leo tried to find a comfortable spot to rest amongst the volumes of the Great Histories of the Universe. He disturbed a pile of books next to him and the pile began to shift and moan. He jumped back,

frightened. A hand burst from the pile, stretching outward.

“Who are you?” Leo screamed, seeing a strange man, pulling himself up from the pile of books. Leo’s grandchildren, hearing the commotion, ran into the room to see about their grandfather.

The collection of books, now disturbed, lifted up from the pile and they flew like a twister around the man. He let a loud yawn, “Have you finally arrived?” he asked. He wore a tight black vest on his slender frame and had a very long white beard.

“Arrived, we’ve been here for three days. We thought it was only the books that were here.”

“Have you never heard the tale of the Great Librarian of Aldoccum? Huh?” he asked, insulted.

“Of course, but we didn’t see anyone for three days,” Pal interrupted.

“Have you seen the size of this place? I get lost everyday and my best friends are atlases. So what does that tell you?” The Librarian asked. “Well Leo Scroll, you’re here now and I was expecting the extras as well, not a problem. I take it you have enjoyed my library?”

“Enjoyed? I could stay here forever.” Pap added.

“Not possible. Not even for me.” he said, sadly. “As fond as I am of them. They are the

most precious things in the whole of existence, pulsing with the love of the Father Tree.”

“How did you know we were coming?” Leo asked.

“I sent for you, of course.” The old man told him, tucking at his beard, caressing a book as it flew by.

“Sent for me?”

“First your book went blank right? It gave you a reason to leave. You needed a way to get here, but there is no way, except walking and it would have taken you ages and let’s be honest you’re not much of a walker. You needed another way.”

“The Freemotor! You sent it to me in my Creation Log.” Palindrome said, delighted.

“Of course, but your brother was much harder to crack. He hadn’t read his books in ages, the rebel.”

“Is that true Pap?” she asked her brother. He put his head down, ashamed.

“Yes it’s true, I have no reason to lie. I sent him my little friend to plant the seed.” The Librarian held out his hand and the Inkling flew to him, resting on his finger. “And girl, did you bring the books?”

“I did.” She said, pulling a bag from her shoulders and handing it to the man. He pulled from it two thick books that were very familiar to Leo.

“My Book of Creation and Book of Preparedness!” he yelled from surprise. “But why?”

“I don’t know, my Preparedness Log sent me to your apartment to retrieve them, it said that you shouldn’t know.” Pal explained.

“They’ve never left my mantle, ever. I don’t understand.”

“How else can you live here without them.” The Librarian asked.

“Live here?” Leo asked.

“Well, you don’t expect me to do this forever. I’ve already told your silly nephew that it’s impossible. It’s time for me to join the Father Tree and bid farewell to my friends. I’ve put it off for far too long.”

“You want me to be the...”

“Bibliothecarius, the Great Librarian. I’m passing you the torch. I warn you, you’ll never

want to leave when it's your turn. They're the best companions anyone can ask for."

"So what happens now?" Pap asked.

"Well your grandfather was a great librarian to his small collection, and his love for books is what got him the position, but there's many particularities of this library. It will take me years to train him. Spend the rest of the week with him but after that time you will have to return to Aurora, so that he can begin his training."

"Can we visit?" Pal asked.

"Of course as long as you remember the way. Do remember not to be a burden, this is a great task." The Librarian said sternly.

"We understand." She answered.

"Is this a dream?" asked Leo.

“I assure you, it is not. Get some rest and I will find another pile of books with which I can slumber.” He said, leaving them there. I imagine we won’t see each other for another couple of days. I plan to be lost.” With those words he disappeared from their view, exiting through the grand archway.

“Grandpa!” Pal called to him crying.

“Are you sad?” he asked.

“Of course not! I thought you were dying. I’m so happy and proud!” she held onto him tightly.

“I’m sorry I ever doubted you, Grandpa!” Pap rested his head against his grandfather’s shoulder.

“All that matters is that you’re here and that we shared this together.” He said, clinging

on to both of his grandchildren. That night he read them *The Great History of the Stolen Lyrics of Cantora*. They hung on his every word and more than a dozen books flew to them gathering around listening to every word as well.

They spent the rest of the week reading and getting to know as many secrets of Aldoccum as they could, but before they knew it, the week had ended and the Librarian appeared again, reminding them that their stay in Aldoccum had reached its end. It was time to say goodbye to his grandchildren, and though he knew they would visit him again and again in the Great Library, it was still bittersweet. He held them both tightly and

waved them farewell as they jumped into the Freemotor.

“We can never forget the way back.” said Pal

“And we never will.” Pap agreed and they watched as the Library disappeared from their eyes.